

Filling the youth shaped hole

SHIRAZ DURRANI, SELMA IBRAHIM, CATHERINE LUSTED, DAVE PERCIVAL, EMILY SOWTER and CLARE STALKER-BOOTH put their heads and experience together to write about the role and impact of the Quality Leaders Project – Youth.

An overview of the Quality Leaders Project–Youth
Shiraz Durrani

Public libraries face major challenges in meeting the needs of young people. Fulfilling their Potential sees the need for “nothing less than a fundamental change in focus for libraries”. That is precisely what the Quality Leaders Project –Youth (QLP-Y) aims for.¹ Its central tenet is “management development through service development”. Pitcher, Eastwood-Krah and O’Neill (2007) sum up its approach: “The QLP-Y project is designed to address social exclusion of young people from libraries and other services, through developing partnership between library services, youth services and community groups. Its aim is to create opportunities for young people to participate in society and to develop their creativity, reading and life skills, through developing staff skills and innovative services responsive to the needs of young people.”

Quality Leaders Project – Youth (2006) provides background to the QLP aims: “QLP-Y... demands shifts in thinking and requires acting outside local government boxes... in the rapidly changing world of today, it provides a useful model that has the potential to meet today’s challenges.”

But the challenges are not easy to meet. Historical imbalance in the provision of services to young people is compounded by a lack of strategic approach to address the imbalance. This has resulted in what a participant in QLP-Y describes as a “youth shaped hole in most of our libraries”.² While there is no doubt that there are many examples of good practice in providing innovative services, these remain as pockets of excellence. An overall vision, which includes the provision of relevant, creative and effective services to meet unmet and new needs of young people, has not yet been developed and implemented.

Pitcher, Eastwood-Krah and O’Neill (2007) sum up the real need: “The challenge will be to mainstream these activities and to change the culture in the longer term, so that young people are involved as a matter of course in developing services.”

QLP-Y attempts to mainstream services to young people in an innovative way.

Academic base

The contributors to this article are Quality Leaders working with the project. They provide examples of service development and reflect below on their own development. It is interesting to see them making the crucial connection between theory and practice and moving from operational to strategic issues. The project has given them opportunities not only to understand the dynamics of organisational change but to become active agents of change. In this, the project is helping to develop effective leadership skills.

The project gains from being based in an academic institution. It is not an isolated project “doing its own thing” within the Department of Applied Social Sciences; it is linked closely



Young people working on the QLP-Y programme in Haringey took pictures of the Tottenham Carnival as part of a digital photography project

with various modules being taught within the School of Information Management.

One issue addressed in the teaching programme is that of reflective learning in modules and projects, another is: “...developing an appropriate learning culture among students even as they develop their knowledge, skills, and awareness. This is given greater seriousness by three linked challenges facing British society and the workplace today at a social-economic, pedagogical, and workforce development level.” (Durrani, 2007).

QLP-Y brings together ideas and experiences from teaching within the department as well as from the Management Research Centre. The contributions below provide evidence of the achievement and challenges facing not only QLP-Y but public libraries as a whole in their attempt to find new social relevance in a fast changing, globalised world.

Emerging results

Those behind QLP-Y are aware that it is not solely their own assessment of the project that matters. It will be the ultimate beneficiaries of the project who will decide on this – they are the young people themselves, as well as the Quality Leaders and their teams. Independent, external evaluators will provide their own assessment of the project; their final report in due in December 2007. In-depth insight will be provided by a case study of the Barnet experience, which will examine the process of change and assess those aspects of the projects that contribute to meaningful change.

However, it is already possible to see some initial results at this stage. Pitcher, Eastwood-Krah and O’Neill (2007) say: “...impacts of the project are evident already. Participating

Continued on page 8

staff noted their personal development as a result of engaging in project activities at local level... The project has also raised the profile of work with young people in libraries.

To varying degrees, the QLP-Y initiative has started to involve young people who were previously non-library users in activities and drawn them into the library. Interest in continuing use of the libraries has also increased as a result of the activities. Young people participating in the project are also seen to have developed personally, for example in terms of their levels of confidence. There has been some impact on service provision in some of the areas, although it is still too early to assess the impact of QLP-Y generally on services or on wider organisational cultures."

The following reports by Quality Leaders are part of a process of documenting and assessing the impact of activities on the ground. They should provide useful insight for planners, policy makers, managers and staff.

QLP-Y and policy: responding and influencing Emily Sowter

In developing the services provided by libraries and staff for young people, QLP-Y addresses key youth and library policies. These include Hear By Right,³ Every Child Matters,⁴ Youth Matters,⁵ National Youth Agency's Strategic Framework,⁶ and Youth Work ethics⁷ as well as responding to libraries policies and initiatives such as Framework for the Future,⁸ Start with the Child⁹ and Fulfilling their Potential.¹⁰

It is a critical part of QLP-Y to make Quality Leaders aware of these current policies and initiatives and ensure that they inform youth consulting and audience development workshops.

QLP-Y believes that this national policy framework provides an outline of Government aims and also a framework for ethical and equality objectives. Through QLP-Y, there is potential to engage youth and library services and connect them to individual projects. We have created a policy 'checklist' for authorities, aimed at getting them to consider criteria they should be trying to meet in their projects with young people, linked to national agendas. We also keep authorities and individuals informed via *Youth Policy Review*.¹¹

As a way of addressing key policies, QLP-Y has its own model designed to change and influence policy in the workplace by developing staff and helping them deliver a better service to various excluded groups and communities.

From the interim *QLP-Y Evaluation Report* (February 2007),¹² we have been able to assess the impact QLP-Y is having in the participating authorities. In some authorities the interest in QLP-Y stretches beyond youth and library services to other council services, such as Education and Children's Services in Barnet. However, the extent to which the QLP model has had an impact on organisational change is yet to be fully evaluated.

QLP in Barnet: lights, cameras, action!

Catherine Lusted

Barnet has just completed its first set of QLP workshops. To meet the consultation aim of the scheme, we ran a film-making project to find out young people's views of Barnet Libraries.

The technical workshops were run by a specialist trainer. He ensured that young people had plenty of time to practice using the equipment. Filming workshops were run in a youth club, a school and at the library. We interviewed a broad sample of about 30 young people, some of them from a local charity that works with disabled young people. We were delighted with the quality of questions they asked. For example: "If you were the manager of the library, what would you change?" and "Do you think a successful library service

should be the responsibility of librarians or society at large?"

The final film, *I'm Lovin' the Library*, shows the library from young people's point of view. It includes criticisms, such as the lack of services for their age group, the old fashioned look and the smell. However, overall it is incredibly positive.

Comments include:

- "Well it's quiet so it's a good place to work and study."
- "I like the different sections... and places to sit."
- "It's especially a good place to relax and read...I like to come in here and go on the computer, read a book and magazines."

To launch the film and to celebrate the young people's success we held a premiere attended by more than 30 people, including the young people and their families and friends. Two local councillors, the Director of Education, the Director of Children's Service and the Head of Youth & Connexions were also present. The Head of Libraries led proceedings and the directors introduced the film. Young people were presented with library certificates and the directors were given Duke of Edinburgh awards and 'Best Director' statuettes. The young people were really proud of their achievements. Senior council staff and parents also gave us very positive feedback.

Results, analysis, impact: The results of an evaluation of the project were very positive. At least one of the young people joined the library as a result of the project and two renewed their membership. 75% said they would use the library more regularly and 50% said they would tell their friends about our services. One of our targets was to train young people to develop their video production skills. All of the young people felt they had learnt new skills.

The young people developed strong relationships with the Quality Leader and the youth worker attached to the project. Most of them are now keen and confident enough to pass on comments about stock and facilities and many want to be involved in future events. By seeing young people enjoying themselves while doing something productive, library staff are more welcoming of this client group.

Young people's comments included:

- "I really enjoyed being part of the project. I love having more knowledge about film making and editing and using movie. This was the first time [I was] doing a project out of school and since I had a great time I feel that I wouldn't mind doing something in the future."
- "I really enjoyed my time spent on this project. I liked filming and I learnt a lot using the editing equipment."
- "Working on the film project has allowed me to develop my negotiating and budgeting skills – to persuade people to be involved and to chase people up when they don't deliver on promises. By working alongside colleagues at Youth & Connexions, I have learnt skills needed to engage with young people."

Coming soon: Working again with Youth & Connexions, we will be holding a PlayStation competition across the borough. The winner of each game will be invited to a grand final where prizes will be presented. Finalists will be invited to our suppliers to choose PlayStation stock for our loan collections, thus continuing our consultation objective. Working with us is a group of young people from the film project, hence continuing their development opportunities through QLP-Y.

Haringey - Tottenham Carnival digital photo project
Selma Ibrahim and Clare Stalker-Booth
When the Quality Leaders came on board with the project, they carried out a survey of young people of Haringey to ascertain their interests and expectations from the library service. The analysis of the survey showed that the main areas of interest were around creative arts and ICT.

The Quality Leaders were therefore keen to link the arts and ICT together. Following discussions, we decided on a digital photo project, documenting the Tottenham Carnival from young people's perspectives. A group of young people would be given digital cameras to take as many photos as they wished of images which they felt captured the essence of the carnival for them. They would then attend digital photo workshops in libraries to develop and present the photos both as a personal portfolio and for display in libraries.

The Quality Leaders worked in partnership with local youth centres in order to recruit young people. This was building on previous partnership working, when we had carried out surveys.

A meeting was held with the young people to discuss the project and to give them an opportunity to become familiar with the cameras before the carnival started.

During the Carnival a Quality Leader and a youth worker were on hand at Bruce Castle Park as a contact point for the young people who spent four hours enjoying the carnival while taking their photos.

Four digital photo workshops took place in Wood Green and Marcus Garvey libraries on 17, 24 and 31 March 2007. The courses were attended by 25 young people from diverse ethnic backgrounds and were very popular. The general consensus was that this was the kind of services they would like to see in libraries and "could we have some more please!" Some attendees were pleasantly surprised that "libraries ran such courses."

These workshops also contributed to the objectives of *Every Child Matters*,¹⁹ especially "Enjoy and Achieve"; "Make a positive contribution"; and "Achieve economic well-being" by developing new skills.

The library service now has the capability to sustain and run further digital photo workshops for young people. It has also enabled the Quality Leaders to build a mutually beneficial relationship with Haringey Adult Learning Service as they will provide qualified tutors to run these workshops.

Although only a small number of young people were involved in taking the actual photos, many more were reached through the workshops. The photo workshops were oversubscribed due to limited equipment. However, the huge response highlights that digital photography is of great interest to young people. It was inspirational to see young people working together to get the project completed.

The attendance at these workshops showed that interest in ICT based projects is strong. Those who have taken part have expressed interest in being involved in the Web Design workshops that will be run over the summer period.

Strategic issues and challenges: Some issues of a strategic nature that affected the delivery of the project included the changing nature of the youth service, which meant that they could not support us in the way that we had first envisaged. This was due to a number of factors:

- Bruce Grove Youth Centre had to move premises while their building was being redeveloped and this meant that we had to change approach and liaise with Wood Green Youth Centre.
- One of the youth workers involved with the venture left mid-project and we had to establish new contacts with youth workers. Young people are an under-represented group in terms of using library services. We attempted to address this issue by tailoring the publicity to target them through schools, youth centres and libraries. This produced very positive results, as our workshops were very popular and over subscribed.

Some challenges which needed to be addressed by the Quality Leaders to ensure that the project was completed successfully included:

- The first workshop provider pulled out of the project and a new

provider had to be found. However, this meant we developed a new relationship with the Haringey Adult Learning Service

- Keeping the young people informed of the project's progress was sometimes problematic, especially when the youth worker was on long term absence.

Future Developments: In conclusion, there have been many positive outcomes arising from this project, some of which are:

- The QLP has equipped libraries with the necessary hardware and software to run future digital workshops, thus enabling us to contribute to one of the requirements of Framework for the Future – Digital Citizenship.
- The involvement of the Youth librarian in this project has enhanced her skills and confidence, enabling her to run similar workshops at no additional cost.
- Delivering this project has contributed to the professional development of one of the senior librarians as it has provided invaluable learning experience in terms of delivering youth projects in libraries.
- This project has helped expand our existing relationship with Haringey Adult Learning Services, delivering digital youth workshops in libraries for the first time. We are confident that we can now strengthen and build on this partnership.
- Two senior staff members have been heavily involved in developing youth services across the borough as a result of this project. This has had the additional benefit of contributing to Haringey libraries' Social Inclusion Agenda.

The Tottenham Carnival digital photo project has been very popular. It is proposed that it be expanded into a Borough-wide competition as part of the Carnival. This will entail building new partnerships with the carnival organisers to gain support and funding; a challenge that the Quality Leaders plan to address in the very near future.

Portsmouth – artwork project

Dave Percival

Over the course of the summer holidays last year, young people in residential care in Portsmouth were given materials to create artwork of their own choice. This activity emerged from the first consultation phase of QLP-Y, and to achieve this the library service worked in partnership with Social Services. A member of staff in one of the units, Monica Porter, was instrumental in facilitating the production of the work, as well as taking on much of the logistical responsibilities.

At the end of the project, 26 paintings were exhibited in the Central Library to wide acclaim. A special opening event was held at the library in September to which the artists, foster carers and staff from social services were invited. The Executive Member for Culture wrote an individual letter of congratulations to all the young people who participated. The exhibition also featured in the *Portsmouth Evening News* on 25 September. Columnist Jim Riordan wrote that the paintings were a welcome challenge to the dominant, negative media representations of young people.

The artwork will be handed over to the artists after further exhibition in the branch libraries nearest their homes. The young people who took part are now library members and have experienced at first hand the wide variety of materials and services that are available in libraries, some of it used during the art project to provide them with inspiration.

We are currently working with an ethnically diverse group of young people, who are interested in publishing a magazine. We will be running workshops to support the young people, providing them with the skills they need. In another partner-

Continued on page 10

ship with social services, we are also working on a drama project based on the concept of "liberation", to coincide with the 200th anniversary of the abolition of slavery.

There have been a number of strategic issues for Portsmouth. We have undergone major review and restructuring, not always an environment that best encourages the development of new and innovative working practices. The library service is currently engaged in a "development process", while the youth service has been under considerable pressure and has not always been able to support us in the way the project demanded. Therefore, we have had to make creative links with colleagues in other departments in order to successfully plan and deliver projects.

One of the benefits of participation in QLP-Y is that it gives the participants much-needed space for creative thought around the strategic issues of library service provision to young people. Whilst the money available for audience development projects is not insignificant, it is the processes leading to the activities that are almost as important as the outcome. By learning reflectively we can judge the effectiveness of practices current and historical, good and bad.

The Quality Leaders Project also brings a welcome dose of politics into librarianship. There is a certain tendency in the profession to regard itself as neutral and this is learned in many library schools and is often perpetuated by managers. Of course, this neutrality is a myth – if we were truly apolitical and were all things to all communities we would not be addressing the issues around social exclusion!

The neutrality myth often has currency amongst service users. In January, I took some members of our Teen Reading Group to London Metropolitan University, where we met Nick Jones, a librarian who works in a branch library in Varby, Stockholm. It is one thing to react to a policy document *vis a vis* social exclusion but another thing entirely to analyse, discuss and create correcting strategies around these issues. The young people who met with Nick had their eyes opened by the

capacity of libraries to change the lives of their communities.

Library services are also beginning to wake up to the realisation that if they are to successfully engage (and continue to attract) young people, they will not achieve this in isolation. It is quite clear that one of the main barriers to library usage is that of increasingly low literacy levels. Britain is in the unique position of being one of the few nations in the so-called developed world where the adult population is more literate than young people. We need to look at creative, innovative methodologies to address this information poverty in our communities. As information professionals we are duty bound to combat this inequality. All this is necessarily political and a failure to engage politically will lead to a failure of library services.

All library services are aware at a strategic level that they must engage with young people, but this awareness must be demonstrated in the actions of frontline staff. Those staff who may be reluctant for whatever reason to work with young people need the support of managers to deliver the level of service that young people deserve. Identifying this need, with the support of our QLP-Y sponsor (the authority's Head of Culture), a "working with young people" course has been delivered to all frontline library workers.

We also need to seriously address the extent to which service providers are engaging with socially excluded young people. There is a danger that a small handful of visible young people are singled out as "the community", whilst the most needy remain unnoticed.

Information

Shiraz Durrani is Senior Lecturer in Information Management, London Metropolitan University. s.durrani@londonmet.ac.uk

Selma Ibrahim is Social Exclusion Librarian, Marcus Garvey Library. Selma.Ibrahim@haringey.gov.uk

Catherine Lusted is Area Children & Youth Librarian, Chipping Barnet Library, Barnet Libraries. Catherine.Lusted@barnet.gov.uk

Dave Percival is Librarian - Young Adults and Looked After Children, Portsea Library John Pounds Community Centre. David.Percival@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

Emily Sowter is Lecturer in Youth Policy, Department of Applied Social Sciences, London Metropolitan University. E.Sowter@londonmet.ac.uk

Clare Stalker-Booth is Senior Librarian Children's, Marcus Garvey Library, Haringey. Claire.Stalker-Booth@haringey.gov.uk

References

1 Further information about the Quality Leaders Project:

www.seapn.org.uk/qlp.html

2 Pitcher, Eastwood-Krah and O'Neill (2007).

3 www.nya.org.uk/hearbyright/home.asp?cid=180&cats=215

(National Youth Agency 2005).

4 www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/ (November 2004)

5 www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/youthmatters/ (July 2005)

6 www.nya.org.uk/Templates/interal.asp?NodeID=92985 (2006-2007)

7 www.nya.org.uk/shared_asp_files/uploadedfiles/%7B27C93696-B064-4503-9629-69F670112D1A%7D_ethicsbooklet.pdf (October 1999)

8 [www.mla.gov.uk/webdav/harmonise?Page/@id=73&Document/@id=18382&Section\[@stateid_eq_left_hand_root\]/@id=4332](http://www.mla.gov.uk/webdav/harmonise?Page/@id=73&Document/@id=18382&Section[@stateid_eq_left_hand_root]/@id=4332) (2003).

9 www.cilip.org.uk/professionalguidance/sectors/youngpeople/startwiththechild/ (October 2002).

10 *Fulfilling their Potential: a National Development Programme for Young People and Libraries.*

http://docs.google.com/View?docID=ddph8gnx_19gxpqcx&revision=_latest

[Accessed: 28 April 2007].

11 An electronic copy of *Youth Policy Review* (No. 1, February 2007) is available at www.londonmet.ac.uk/londonmet/library/s44117_3.pdf

[Accessed: 28 April 2007].

12 The interim Evaluation is available at: www.londonmet.ac.uk/londonmet/library/i29617_3.pdf [Accessed: 28 April 2007].

13 www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

Durrani, Shiraz (2006-07). 'Incorporating Reflective Learning: rationale and initiatives in a programme on information management'. *Investigations*. Vol. 4(i) Autumn 2006-07. pp.74-79. ISSN 1740-5106. (Forthcoming).

Durrani, Shiraz (2007). 'Learning By Doing: lifelong learning through innovations projects at DASS'. *ASLIB Proceedings*. Vol. 59(2) March. pp.187-200.

Framework for the Future: libraries, learning and information in the next decade. DCMS 2003.

Fulfilling Their Potential: a national development programme for young people and libraries.

http://docs.google.com/View?docID=ddph8gnx_19gxpqcx&revision=_latest.

[Accessed: 28 April 2007].

Pitcher, Jane; Eastwood-Krah, Mary; and O'Neill, Maggie (2007). *Evaluation of Quality Leaders Project (Youth) Initiative. Interim report*. www.londonmet.ac.uk/londonmet/library/i29617_3.pdf.

[Accessed: 28 April 2007].

Quality Leaders Project – Youth (2006). *QLP-Y Report No. 4 [to PHF]*. May 2006-November 2006. Part 1: Main Report.

www.seapn.org.uk/qlp.html#reports [Accessed: 29 April 2007].

Start With the Child: Report of the CILIP working group on library provision for children and young people. CILIP.

www.cilip.org.uk/professionalguidance/sectors/youngpeople/startwiththechild/.

[Accessed: 29 April 2007].