

Young people in control

The Quality Leaders Project - Youth Strand is changing library services for young people with young people. SHIRAZ DURRANI and DEAN BARTLETT chart the progress.

The Public Library Service in Britain needs a major shift in its very mindset. It is sometimes assumed that the role of the public library never changes and remains the same as it has done for over 150 years. Whether the current service is relevant to meet current needs is an issue that requires urgent resolve. Questions such as: "What are libraries for?" "Who do they serve" "What services are needed?" "What is the best way of providing these services?"... are increasingly raised by policy makers and people on whose behalf services are provided. The questions have become even more urgent in the context of rapid changes in information and communications technologies and the tremendous rate of change in every aspect of our lives.

The Secretary of State (Jowell, 2004) recently made it clear that she wants change in public libraries, so that they "...become, once again, central points in local communities." There is also an increasing desire to improve services to young people of all classes, races and gender, and to address other factors that have resulted in young people being excluded from an 'equal' share of public service. There has been definite support from the government for improving public services, with an increasing focus on services to young people. These changes have affected education, youth service, health and social services; they are now reaching the public library field. Recent policy developments have placed new focus on providing services for young people that actively involve young people themselves.

A recent report commissioned by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) (The Reading Agency, 2004) sums up this changing environment:

"The relationship between local and central government is very different from ten years ago; there have been fundamental changes to political structures, planning regimes and methods of assessing performance... A rapidly changing policy scene challenges library services to re-examine their services for young people."

It is in this context that the Quality Leaders Project (QLP) needs to be assessed. QLP seeks to provide a relevant model of library service to meet the needs of people and thereby connect people to their libraries.

The QLP-Y approach

While most libraries provide a reasonably satisfactory service for children, many fail when it comes to providing imaginative and relevant services to those between the ages of 13-24. Boagey (2003) poses an important challenge to the profession: "Young people need to be at the heart of transforming libraries."

This is the very area in which the Quality Leaders Project - Youth (QLP-Y) fills an important gap. The model provides a

way of making young people active partners in developing a new service that meets their needs. In the process it ensures partnership working with youth and other services.

QLP is a programme of "management development through service development". It provides a balanced approach that develops staff and improves their skills as part of developing services. The learning and service development aspects of the QLP are inherently intertwined in the structure of the programme. This structure follows a fixed scheme consisting of six key areas in a specific order: QLP induction, project management, consultation, best value and performance, service design and service implementation planning.

Embedded within the formal learning structure are a number of new modules that bring an awareness of essential requirements that often get ignored in other learning experiences. These are "combating racism / managing equality" and "managing youth service".

The former aims at equipping participants with awareness of issues of racism and equality, both from a theoretical and a legal point of view, as well as giving examples of practical approaches to mainstreaming equality in all aspects of local authority work.

The latter - "managing youth service", was introduced specifically for the youth strand of QLP. It brings the best aspects of youth work, as required by the National Youth Agency and recent legislation on working with young people. Again, a practical approach is taken and the example of creative partnership between libraries and youth service is used. Added to the above, are lessons and experiences of working with young refugees and asylum seekers.

A significant part of the underlying philosophy behind the QLP is that the person being developed would be given a number of opportunities to interact with much more senior decision-makers in their organisation. This would be done in a highly visible way within both their own organisations and also within the socially excluded partnership communities with whom they work. This is ensuring a social identity approach to personal development, while at the same time engaging local communities in the development of 'their' services.

The key propositions of QLP are that the meeting of unrecognised or under-recognised needs requires new or enhanced services, and new and enhanced services require new skills and know-how (including new management know-how). Acquisition of these new skills will create a level playing field for staff who have not previously been able to reach management positions.

The QLP approach involves consulting local communities, establishing what their new or unmet needs are and then developing proposals for a new service that addresses these needs. Users and potential users are included in the consultation exercise. The programme looks at providing services in new and different ways, so as to attract and reach people who have not been reached before. It emphasises the need to work in partner-

ship with other Council departments as well as with community groups.

QLP challenges important aspects of current public library ethos: content of library service, the quality of service provided, the method of delivery and who decides what services are needed. In essence, it redefines what a library service is all about and encourages organisational change in order to provide a new service in a new way.

Foundations and funding

The QLP steering group decided, at the start of the QLP-Y programme, that improvements in service to young people have to take a partnership approach if the needs of young people are to be satisfied. The key partners they identified were Youth and Library Services in the local authority context. It was also necessary to explore innovative ways of service delivery to young people, as the 'traditional' approach has not met fully the needs of this segment of society.

QLP-Y takes as its starting point the agenda set by two key initiatives that drive youth and library services today. Firstly, the comprehensive programme provided by the National Youth Agency and secondly, the guidelines in Framework for the Future (DCMS, 2003). Framework has been strengthened recently with a very useful and important initiative for developing services to young people – the Fulfilling their Potential programme (The Reading Agency, 2004).

The funding for QLP-Y comes from two sources. The Partners in Innovations programme (PIN) of the National Youth Agency funds phase one, which involves developing the skills of participating leaders and their teams and culminates in the production of a youth service development proposal. The second phase, the implementation of the project proposal, is funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, which supports innovation and change in public library service for young people and also focuses on meeting the needs of excluded groups.

The driving force for QLP comes from the QLP Steering Group, which provides the overall direction for the programme and ensures that it meets the vision it set out with. QLP moves away from the 'wants-driven' service that guides many library services, to a 'needs-based' service (Smallwood, 2002) that takes on board new or unmet needs of local populations – in this case the needs of young people.

Phase one: management development

The development project takes six months and is located within a formal project management framework. The person in charge of managing this project is the 'Quality Leader', who is responsible for establishing, convening and leading a part-time project team charged with the development of a new service based upon the results of a consultation process with the community. The role of this 'Development Team' is to carry out such activities as may be specified by the Quality Leader in consultation

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with team members. In order for this process to work in the context of the pressured realities of organisational life and the demands being made upon potential members of the project team, it is essential that each Quality Leader is supported by two key people from within his or her organisation (a Project sponsor and a mentor).

The aim is to develop an idea for a new service that is based upon thorough consultation with the community and involves planning operational processes, resources and implementation steps, as well as the development of a formal proposal for the new service.

The first phase of the QLP-Y programme took place from January to July 2004. Six authorities are taking part: Birmingham, Gloucestershire, Haringey, Liverpool, Merton, and Swansea. Liverpool's Quality Leader is from their Youth Service, while the others are from the Library Service. The Quality Leaders presented their proposals on 26 July, and the successful ones will be awarded a University Diploma in work-based learning.

Phase 2: Implementation stage

The next stage of QLP-Y is the implementation phase and this will last for two years, starting in September 2004. The QLP Steering group, under the QLP co-ordinator, will discuss with each participating authority how the service development proposal developed by the Quality Leaders will be implemented in their authority.

The final shape of what activities take place will depend on the outcome of consultation with young people and what the service development plans recommend. However, it is likely to take the form of various workshop activities.

These workshop sessions are perhaps the most innovative part of the application. The sessions are programmed to reflect the specific aspects that the young people themselves decide meet their needs. They will therefore be flexible in order to be tailored to local requirements. They will also enable young people themselves to be the providers of such sessions, rather than

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being merely passive recipients of a service provided by an ‘outsider’. At the same time, the programme will support outside skills, ideas and expertise being brought into the local youth communities, thereby injecting new and different ideas.

Funding provided by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation will enable activities such as: presentations from writers, poets, film makers, media and other professionals, music workshops, book and newsletter production sessions, broadcast workshops, film making modules, various informal learning experiences, ICT-related activities, the opportunity to meet guest speakers from different communities and fields, and ‘audience development’ activities.

The QLP approach identifies two aspects under the term ‘audience development’. The first is to increase the reach of libraries and youth services to meet the needs of all young people, particularly refugees and asylum seekers. The second expands on what has come to be known as ‘reader development’, however, ‘audience development’ is preferred to that particular phrase and is considered as being a more inclusive term. It includes people who may not be literate, either in English, or in their own languages, and involves all the senses, rather than being focused on the use of just one. It also allows for people to be connected to the ‘reading experience’ through non-print media, such as arts, cinema, music, drama and other cultural activities.

The ‘audience development’ approach to library and youth work develops areas of service provision that a ‘traditional’ library may not have provided as mainstream activities. Over a period of time, this approach will help to develop a new model of joined-up library/youth services.

QLP-Y service development proposals

While the final details of the plans have still to be worked out, and at the time of writing an outline of Haringey’s plans were unavailable (they are being developed by Nazma Parveen and are based upon a citizen rights awareness programme for young people), the following are ‘likely’ projects for each authority (details provided by the Quality Leaders themselves):

● Birmingham – Quality Leader: Saleem Ayub

Project: Multi-media Workshop, Birchfield Library

The workshop would have a project worker developing activities encompassing a variety of cultures, with importance given to activities that promote reading, creative writing, and the learning experience.

The new service would incorporate a reading club and other current library initiatives at Birchfield Library. It will promote local talent, creating opportunities for young people to express themselves in a variety of ways. Their writing would be catalogued and incorporated into the current service. A young person will be selected as a ‘library guide’ and support and assist the project worker in developing a newsletter that will act as a link between the library and local schools, the workshop, and other partners. They will also attend staff meetings and contribute to the shaping of service provision for young people in communicating the concerns and views of those they represent. The ‘guides’ would have rewards and some type of accreditation for their work.

There will also be a variety of other creative activities on offer for both young people, including refugees/asylum seekers, with some activities being interlinked with other partners.

● Gloucestershire – Quality Leader: Ros Armstrong

Project: Youth work tool-kit and activities

The service development proposal for Gloucestershire is a tool kit of strategies, events and activities using ICT to actively engage and encourage young people into the library. This is the main thrust, but the Quality Leader is also proposing developments in relation to staff training: (1) How to exploit the tool kit, and (2) Customer care in relation to young people.

The involvement of young people in the staff recruitment process and the establishment of a partnership to provide a space for young people in Gloucester city centre are also proposed.

● Liverpool – Quality Leader: June Barron

Project: Social inclusion programmes

The proposal is to develop a creative arts project supporting literacy and using library resources. It is a partnership programme involving Youth Service, Alternative Education, Social Inclusion and Leisure, ConneXions and Youth Offender Services – all of whom are part of the Project Steering Group. Some aspects of the proposal had been planned before the QLP-Y programme started, but QLP-Y will introduce new and creative aspects to this proposal.

The young people targeted include those being referred to the Youth Service. Project participants are referred through the pupil provider panels of Liverpool Education. These young people are hard to reach, at risk of exclusion, absent from school with personal relationship and educational difficulties. Many have fallen through a number of nets and education

alternatives. It is accepted that it requires considerable skills to engage young people, to build relationships and to establish communication links with them. A number of visits would be made to their homes and links forged with parents. It is emphasised that the programme is a voluntary engagement and young people will choose to participate or not.

It is likely that a programme of activities for young people will be launched and will include sessions on team building, problem solving, communication 'ready steady cook' and healthy lifestyles (including one-to-one 'health' sessions); sports and music workshops.

● **Merton – Quality Leader: Anthony Hopkins**

Project: Creative Connections

Merton Library and Heritage Service (MLHS) are looking to develop a program of creative writing workshops, entitled 'Creative Connections,' in each of their seven libraries within a 16-month period. This was identified as a need within the youth community from an extensive consultation with over 500 young people. The target audience is young people aged between 11 and 24 years old. There will be performance indicators to monitor participation in the workshops from all sections of the youth community. The project aims to:

- Increase library reach to those who have traditionally not used libraries.
- Promote social cohesion.
- Encourage informal learning, participation and teamwork within the youth community.
- Increase staff skills in working with young people through the provision of training.
- Bring in staff with new skills (e.g. youth workers, creative writing experts) that add value to the service.
- Empower young people through the production of their work in magazines, displays, on the Internet and in book form.
- Promote literacy and assist with government targets to increase the levels of literacy amongst young people.

● **Swansea – Quality Leader: Emma Rees**

Service Development Proposal: Rethinking Gorseinon Library

The service development proposal for The City and County of Swansea is to make the library in Gorseinon relevant for young people in the area and to get them using the library! The proposal includes creating space for young people in the library, which will be designed by young people themselves. The space will be used to hold activities and events shaped by young people. This will be an approach that has never before been tried locally and will cost several thousand pounds to maintain.

To uncharted territory...

QLP-Youth is an important way of achieving meaningful change. Jon Boagey (2003) makes an uncompromising demand for change:

"Their (young people's) active involvement in shaping the service will make their libraries into places where the customer leads, not the staff. If libraries want to find a place for young people that isn't just an awkward spot between the bean bags, there needs to be a radical shift in the way users are involved in the service. Now is the time to make it happen."

QLP-Y offers a unique opportunity in actively involving young people to shape the service they need – and develops staff skills to ensure that new services are delivered in practice.

Information

Further information about QLP is available at: www.seapn.org.uk/qlp.html

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