

Appendix 14 - Testimonials of Manchester Libraries customers given at the Libraries 175 Conference at Manchester Central Library in October 2025, to celebrate the 175th anniversary of the Public Libraries Act

First we hear from Frances Bradley, who attends the Central Library Digital Drop-In Centre and explains how she has personally, and financially, benefitted from the service.

To start with, I care passionately about the drop-in centre and I have been attending for a number of years because when I started computing I had, I started from a very low base and had no skills whatsoever and quickly found after my husband died that I needed to actually access my pension and then access other things as we moved on. And in the early days I was really scared about having my ID stolen and my tutors gave me the confidence and if you like the protection to handle that. And then over the years I've obviously started online banking and have an Amazon account and can deal with the likes of Scottish Power and Sky and HMRC, and David, my beloved tutor, has actually helped me save hundreds of pounds. I care passionately that people of my age group, the 70 year olds, especially women, need to be, have social inclusion and empowerment and instead of being at home scared to death about what life is going to, if you like, throw at them because we are becoming more and more digitised as it were and we are having to face up to these issues and without the drop-in centre I would have actually been at home quite terrified.

So that is how I feel about the drop-in centre. It has given me an ability to live my life, as it were, to the full.

Second, we hear from Emily, who is now a Literacy Champion volunteer with Read Manchester and she speaks about how libraries such as Withington and Didsbury have helped and inspired both her and her children.

Withington Library had previously been a place where I would sit and attempt to do my university work while endlessly procrastinating.

However, jumping forward to 2019, I'd seen advertised that they had a story time for babies and toddlers. It was free and we thought that we'd give it a try. This weekly story time turned into a regular Wednesday slot for us.

My daughter would love the stories, puppets and bubbles and I would sit and very cautiously hum along to the nursery rhymes that were being sung. But it wasn't just about story time and the bubbles, it was a chance to meet other local parents. Chatting to another adult over maternity leave always put a spring in my step.

It was nice to chat again to those same people later in the week when you would see them in the local play park. Quickly the library then became a place where we'd go on other days of the week too. It was important for me to be about out and about, and my daughter needed space to first crawl and then run around with me chasing after her. We are very lucky in Withington Library there's a play tent and comfortable toys.

It is important that people have somewhere warm, comfortable, accessible and free to go on a cold wet day. Two years later in 2021 we were joined on our library visits by my second daughter. A lot of this time caring for two young children is very much a blur, but I have photos on my phone of both my children at Withington Library in their double pram so apparently it did happen.

This huge double pram would also just about fit on the bus so we would find ourselves in Didsbury and Chorlton Library too as their libraries were on different days of the week. As my children have got older into their preschool years, borrowing books at the library then became a fun way of getting them into reading. They both have now have their own library cards.

My youngest daughter always opted for anything with a dinosaur or a cat on the cover. My eldest daughter, who at one time loved 'A Tiger Who Came To Tea' and 'Mog', now hunts down chapter books that transport us from the Manchester Libraries to worlds far away.

More recently we've become regular members of the library Lego clubs. We can head to Burnage or Didsbury Library on a Saturday morning and make our own Lego creations with a vast amount of Lego on offer. As with story time from a few years ago this is a place where we can be warm, comfortable, my children are entertained and I'm out and about chatting to new people. I'm now a literacy champion for Read Manchester.

And lastly, we hear from local businessmen and global entrepreneur Ricky Leung, who talks about the world class experience he has received through the BIPC services at Central Library.

This is Ricky and I'm a global trader of food and also a restaurant operator in different parts of the world. Manchester is actually the latest initiative for me, which is a startup restaurant here with Malaysian inspired cuisine. It is great to have the help of the Build A Business team of the Central Library here. After a workshop I felt so fascinated about the support and then it has been a very nice occasion for me to learn about the resources that the Central Library can give us as a startup business entrepreneur and in knowing more about the market and also about our customers in Manchester.

I also joined the pop-up market organised by the Build A Business team as well and I got the chance to talk to my end customers and know more about the market. Especially I want to thank the build a business team really, especially Mr Jonathan Ebbs for his support and also his team for his support and organisation of different events. That has been really helpful to me, and I feel like Manchester and the Central Library has the best support to startup business in the world.

I mean it because I have never experienced something like this before in other parts of the world in my adventure.
