

Appendix 9 - Supporting Health and Wellbeing

Libraries offer a wide range of health and well-being activities that have a primary effect on improving people's health and also have a broader impact on well-being for the individual and the wider community. Libraries are also key for residents receiving accurate health information, through digital access, health information and books on prescription and reading well collections such as Reading Well for Dementia and Reading Well for Mental Health. As community venues, libraries are also used by partner organisations to deliver health promotion sessions.

Social isolation, loneliness and mental health support

Loneliness and social isolation are now recognised as having significant impacts on people's physical, as well as mental health. The latest Public Library User Survey in 2023 showed that 80% of customers who feel lonely regularly, feel less lonely because of using the library. People of all ages feel lonely but can feel as a sense of belonging in libraries – this is the case for many young people. For older people, loneliness and social isolation can be chronic issues - according to Age UK, more than a million older people go for over a month without speaking to a friend, neighbour or family member. Being socially isolated is a key risk factor for older people in terms of dementia and other mental health conditions, and libraries can offer safe spaces for older people to meet others, and either engage in activities, or just have a chat and a natter. We have an Age Friendly hour and an Age Friendly space at all libraries to provide a friendly accessible space, and social activities for older people.

Making Manchester Fairer

Libraries play a key role in the Making Manchester Fairer programme to reduce health inequalities in the city. As free, welcoming, non-judgemental spaces, libraries are recognised as community venues that are crucial to supporting the aims of this programme. Libraries play a key role in all the Making Manchester Fairer projects – Libraries are crucial to the Making Manchester Fairer Anti-Poverty Strategy, and have delivered a commissioned project to reduce digital exclusion with parents at flying start schools, and older people.

Warm spaces

As in previous winters, during the winter months of 25/26 all libraries across the city have acted as warm spaces. All libraries provide somewhere warm and a free hot drink for people who may be struggling with the cost of heating at home. Free hot drink provision, which this year included City Library, lasts from October to February. This benefits health by helping keep people warm and socially active.

Cool Spaces

For the first time this summer our libraries became Cool Spaces to give people sanctuary from excessive heat during periods of hot weather. Working with the Council's communications team, libraries were promoted as places to stay cool, take a seat and to receive free drinks of cold water

Digital Health Hubs

Supporting health is a key element of the Digital Inclusion Action Plan managed by the libraries team. Digitally excluded people may be unable to access information and services relating to health. To help overcome these we have developed a Digital Health Hubs initiative. This is now in existence in Wythenshawe, Crumpsall, Cheetham Hill and Harpurhey, and will be rolled out to different areas 2026. Residents are provided with relevant NHS app training in community venues including libraries, on the NHS App and MfT app. We created promotional materials that outline exactly what offers are available from those centres, which are then displayed in GP surgeries. This initiative is a great demonstration of libraries supporting residents with their health and wellbeing.

Package for Val

We know that women and girls in our communities are facing period poverty. According to a representative survey of 1,000 girls and young women aged 14-21 by Plan International UK, in the UK, 1 in 10 girls can't afford to buy menstrual products, while 1 in 7 have struggled to afford them. Package for Val was rolled out across 18 of our neighbourhood and community libraries in 2024 and continues to provide sanitary products to those who need them.

Dry January

An example of a health initiative the Manchester Libraries have taken part in is Dry January. Working with Manchester Metropolitan University, we have purchased books and hosting events at Central Library to promote libraries as warm, safe, alcohol-free spaces, that can be seen as a supportive first step for many in changing damaging habits.

Other organisations delivering services from libraries

Multiple organisations deliver health related services to residents in libraries across the city. Sessions include Big Life Health sessions, Yoga, Real Food Real Health, Bread and Butter Thing, Narcotics Anonymous, smoking cessation, bereavement groups and flu vaccines.

Age Friendly Libraries

Libraries continue to offer a diverse range of Age Friendly activities and events for older people, including weekly coffee times.

Events for older people include:

A recent event at North City Library which included a 'Play Your Cards Right' session and a Silent Disco! Headphones for the Silent Disco were hired from Stockport Libraries as part of a 'try before we buy' trial with a view to buying our own silent disco set which could be used for a range of events including as part of our Dementia Project.

We have worked in partnership with Equal Arts, a creative ageing charity based in Newcastle who have been developing their [Reading with Dementia](https://www.equalarts.org.uk/dementia-friendly-reading) programme to support people living with dementia to continue reading for enjoyment. We have ordered some of the books recommended to trial in several libraries.

<https://www.equalarts.org.uk/dementia-friendly-reading>

Libraries are currently developing a Dementia Friendly Resource Pack, to be available in all libraries, which includes Large Print - jigsaws, crossword puzzles, colouring books & pens and playing cards.

The Age Friendly Library standards will be reviewed later this year and Libraries are also in the process of refreshing Dementia Friends training for all staff.

Kneelers and steps have been purchased for library staff after feedback from staff who said they were struggling to reach the bottom shelves and often finding it difficult to kneel or crouch asked if we could provide a stool or kneeler - so we did! They are now available for staff to use in all Manchester Libraries.

Libraries offer digital support in libraries and telephone support via the digital inclusion team and their digital champions. This support is well accessed by older people. The telephone support is promoted via the Age Friendly Manchester E-Bulletin which goes to 12,000 recipients.