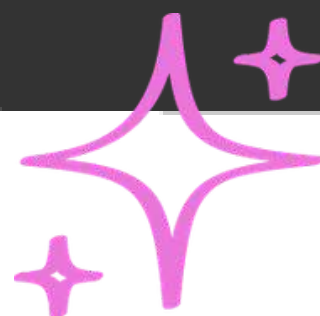


Libraries Rising Youth Engagement Network

Manchester Libraries

Study written and published by Libraries Rising /
Manchester Libraries



Introduction

“(Something I didn’t know before)... libraries have a lot more than just books.”

“(Something I’m inspired to do is)... be open to share ideas.”

Young people, Manchester Libraries

Manchester Libraries are community hubs serving the people of Manchester through their 21 community and neighbourhood libraries and their Central Library in the heart of the city. They are committed to offering creative, supportive, inclusive services and spaces for the people they serve.

Libraries Rising’s Youth Engagement Network supports the voices of all children and young people including from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, who identify as LGBTQIA+ and disabled and D/deaf children and young people, ensuring they are represented in libraries across England.

In this second phase, 13 library services tested co-creative approaches with young people aged 11-16, to engage them with the library and give them the opportunity for their thoughts and ideas to be heard.



Aims

The Youth Engagement Network programme:



Ensures young people have power in libraries

By giving young people a genuine opportunity to influence their local library's services, they build confidence, self-esteem and have fun. Libraries benefit from their insight and ideas.



Makes opportunities to co-create

Young people co-create activities and shape the services on offer at their local library. They have the opportunity to co-create the national network and influence sector policy and decision-making across the country.



Gives chances to learn something new

Young people have the opportunity to learn new skills and gain understanding about working in a library. Library teams learn new skills in co-creation and youth engagement, and how to tailor their services to meet the needs of the young people in their community.



Supports libraries across the country

The national network builds positive relationships between libraries and young people across the country, where open dialogue, continual cyclic feedback and a genuinely inclusive approach are embedded. The libraries taking part were also part of a network, which offered support, ideas-exchange and opportunity to reflect.

Youth Engagement: Longsight Library

Longsight Library is situated in the heart of Manchester's most diverse neighbourhood, approximately three miles south-east of the city centre. The area has a population of just over 16,000. The programme was led in the library by Helen Beesley, Manchester Libraries Service Development Coordinator, in the Children and Access team. She and her team wanted to give young people who were young carers the opportunity to influence the development and design of the services and spaces that impacted them, and to explore (and challenge) perceptions of the library.



Creative beginnings

At the first session with the young people, the library team invited them to 'think big', sharing ideas about what they'd do to create their ideal library services and spaces. The library team were transparent and communicative about what could be achieved, while putting the young people at the heart of the decision-making process.



Exploring libraries

Some of the young people were unfamiliar with Manchester's libraries. The team arranged visits to Manchester Central Library and the historic John Rylands Library. The children and young people offered feedback about 'what was hot and what was not', focusing on a range of aspects such as signage, accessibility and the location of the teen stock.



Working in partnership

The library team worked with a local school and partners to bring knowledge and expertise to the group sessions. These partners offered creative input and opened up further opportunities for the young people.



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Supporting ambitions

The children and young people wanted to develop and deliver an event in the library. Co-creatively, they developed the concept of a MAD (Manchester Activity Day) event. They used further sessions to refine their plans, with support from the library team.

Impacting decisions

The children and young people were also invited to take an in-depth role in Manchester Libraries' Youth Consultation, and led the work updating the Youth-Friendly Standards documentation, reviewing the language and feeding back on the content.

Considerations

To make the experience as positive as possible for the young people, the librarians:

- Worked closely with colleagues to develop a more holistic experience for the young people
- Focused on familiarising the young people with libraries
- Ensured there were plenty of opportunities for young people to work co-creatively in different ways
- Supported the young people in developing their empathy skills, creating a safe, comfortable environment for them to work together as a team and respect each other's contributions

Impact- Successes

The library team had

7

sessions with the group

- All the young people said they had a good time being part of the Youth Engagement Network
- Many said they were going to visit their local library more than they had done in the past
- All young people said they felt their ideas, opinions and thoughts were listened to
- All young people said they felt more welcome at the library than they did before
- The young people learned about different types of library, different roles and volunteering
- The young people showed evidence of growing in confidence as the sessions progressed

“I like that we get to have a say in the library and want to see what happens next.”

Young person, Manchester Libraries

Impact- Challenges



The MAD event (co-created by children and young people) had to be postponed, due to bus strikes across the city limiting attendance. This, in addition to school exams, made it challenging at times to maintain regular contact. The library team operated flexibly, recognising that this work is about relationship-building and creating opportunities for children and young people, not ‘completing work to a deadline’.



While working with a local school made it easier to initially connect with the children and young people, only meeting during school hours was restrictive. During school holidays, it was far harder to coordinate sessions.



“This project has given us greater understanding of co-production and when looking at activities, our first question is – what do the young people want to do?”

Library team member, Manchester Libraries

Recommendations



Think ahead

With the children and young people, plan how often you'll meet, and what times work best for everyone involved. Factor in events such as school exams and holidays, which may mean the children and young people are unable to attend.



Build trust

Consider what you can do to make the children and young people feel welcome, safe and heard. Games and other fun activities can help break the ice. Active listening is also important. When children and young people share their thoughts and ideas with you, they want to know that you're listening and that you'll act on what they tell you, where possible.



Introduce them to your library

Children and young people may be interested to learn more about how a library works and why it's important within its community. It's important to share information about how they can volunteer too, if they're keen to be more involved.



Share the power

A key part of this is supporting the equitable redistribution of power. Children and young people are often unused to being heard, and for their ideas to be acted on. Right from the start, make sure they know that the power is theirs to create events and activities in the library, and bring about meaningful change.