“Governors should lead an approach to get prisoners reading for “pleasure, purpose and rehabilitation”. This needs an ambitious strategy to improve prisoners’ reading skills, the use of prison libraries and better systems to assess, monitor and share information on prisoners’ reading ability and progress”. – Prison Education – A Review of Reading in Prisons, Ofsted, March 2022

This document is a strategic framework to help prison library providers and prison library staff to develop, deliver and promote prison library services.

The document examines some of the key characteristics of a good prison library service and the outcomes that they support.

Every prison library is different and not all of these recommendations will be applicable or appropriate in all situations. However, they will provide a framework from which to develop an outstanding service relevant to the needs of the prison community.

CILIP Prison Libraries Group, 2023
Email: prlg@cilip.org.uk

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“The importance of the prison library, that lo-fi, old-school means of broadening our horizons, cannot be overstated. Government policy makers, prison governors and staff, but also we prisoners ourselves, we forget this at our peril“ – Library user, HMP Wormwood Scrubs

I became a prison librarian in 1985. At the time, I was the first librarian to be appointed to work in a prison full time, although others quickly followed. Those of us who were around in the early days had little guidance – my knowledge of prisons was limited to reading Jimmy Boyle’s books and watching Porridge on TV. However, what we did have was our knowledge of public library services and a passionate belief in the role that libraries can play in the lives of individuals.

The 1980s and 1990s saw a rapid expansion of prison libraries, largely due to the vision of Arthur Pearson, Deputy Chief Education Officer at the Home Office, who felt that every prison should have a library soundly based on public library principles. That's not to say it was easy – running a prison library is not for the faint-hearted. More than thirty years on, access to the library is still a problem in many prisons and some establishments are struggling to provide services in inadequate accommodation.

In more recent years, the development of prison libraries has taken place against a landscape of change in both public libraries and the Prison Service. New library providers have emerged, and new working practices have been introduced in prisons. Although funding for prison libraries has been relatively stable, huge cuts in public library budgets have had their effect.

The one thing that has remained constant is the commitment and enthusiasm of prison library staff. I think that’s because we see very graphically in a prison library the positive effect that libraries have on an individual. Everyone who has ever worked in a prison library will have memories of those moments that made it all worthwhile. It might be the prisoner who, after years of struggling to read borrows his first book. It might be an animated but good-natured discussion in the prison reading group. It might simply be the prisoner who says, “thanks for getting me that book – I loved it.”

Prison libraries really do change lives – not in earth-shattering ways, but simply by doing what public libraries do best. Providing a comfortable, neutral space, being non-judgemental, enabling people to discover, democratising knowledge, giving emotional enrichment. Simple things, but things which have a greater significance within the bleak landscape of a prison sentence.

I hope that prison library staff reading this framework will find it a source of inspiration, encouragement and aspiration. For others, I hope it will give an insight into the world of prison libraries and the potential that the prison library has to make a positive impact on the lives of those in prison.

Sue Wilkinson FCLIP MBE FRSA
Chair, CILIP Prison Libraries Group
October 2018
Physical Space

“Libraries are havens. Their walls provide peace and safety. Their books provide stimulation and escape. They are places of solitude and community, self-development and support. In prison, they are a window to the outside world. They are a taste of normality. A respite from the turmoil. They are humane, and their importance cannot be overstated.” – Simon, HMP Thameside

Recommendations

- The library space should be fit for purpose and in a good state of repair and decoration. It should be large enough to accommodate different usages and should have space for prisoners to study at tables and informal seating for those who want to sit and read. There should be enough space to accommodate the level of stock required.
- The design of the space should be non-institutional and should be done in consultation with library professionals.
- There should be adequate space for storage and space for staff to work comfortably.

Why is this good?

A properly designed and equipped prison library will provide a warm and welcoming space where prisoners can feel safe. This type of space can be similar to a public library space, giving prisoners confidence to use public libraries on their release. The prison library can, in effect, be a public library in a prison setting. Appropriate fixtures, fittings and furniture enable the library to provide key public library activities – space for browsing, access to information, space to study and space for relaxation. The prison library is a space where prisoners can interact socially in a positive manner. Research has shown that it can also have a normalising effect on behaviour.1

How can this success be measured?

Usage levels of library
Low levels of damage can indicate respect for the service
Prisoner surveys

Management and Staffing

“Almost everything I am I owe to libraries”
– Stephen Fry, Broadcaster

Recommendations

- Prison library providers should have proven experience of running a public library with professionally qualified staff to undertake the strategic management of the service.
- Prison library staff should have the appropriate professional qualifications and experience to manage the service on a day to day basis and to undertake service development.
- Prison library staff should be a visible part of the library provider’s staffing structure.
- Where appropriate a designated library officer should be appointed to facilitate library access and support the library team.
- Library orderlies should be employed to do routine work in the library. They should receive training, and, where possible, have the chance to do accredited learning.
- The library provider and governor should formulate a service level agreement which clearly outlines expectations and obligations. This should be a live document which is regularly reviewed.
- Staff should have the opportunity and be encouraged to undertake appropriate CPD activities.

Why is this good?

An experienced library provider will have knowledge and understanding of public library trends and initiatives and will be aware of the wider potential of the prison library and how this can be linked with the wider library community both locally and nationally.²

Working in a prison library is challenging. Library staff who have the appropriate qualifications or experience for the size and scope of the prison library are able to work confidently which in turn will lead to more focussed service development.

Prison libraries with library officers have fewer access problems than those without.³

Library orderlies can act as ambassadors for the library and promote the library on the wings. By doing routine tasks, they can free up library staff to concentrate on service development. Work done in the library can contribute to evidence portfolios for wider learning and potentially enhance employment prospects and develop employability skills.

A robust SLA ensures that everyone understands the expectations and actions required to deliver a first-class service.⁴

How can this success be measured?

Library visits
Low level of library cancellations
Inspection reports
Retention of staff
Wider professional recognition of prison library staff through national and local award schemes
Diversity of prisoners using the library

² Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals Report to Justice Committee 2016
³ CILIP Prison Libraries Group Big Question Report 2015
⁴
The library at HMP Ford, an open prison in West Sussex, was one of 10 libraries of all types shortlisted for the Bookseller Library of the Year 2018 award. The library was managed by Linda Collins. In Linda's first two years the library visits had doubled to 1,000 per month. Linda achieved this by increasing the library opening hours and bringing stock selection under the control of library staff. She also increased the range of newspapers and magazines stocked and worked to make the library more welcoming. Prisoners were very much involved in this process – one helped to design and paint a book wall display and another inscribed the words “the journey of a lifetime starts with the turning of a page” above the library counter. Linda also started a reading group and literacy classes in the library.

One of the aims of the library is to enhance links with the local community. A joint reading group session took place between the prison reading group and a local community reading group. This was very well received by all involved. The library also aims to hold monthly events, such as author visits, local history talks and poetry workshops.
“I knew right there in prison that reading had changed forever the course of my life.”

- Malcolm X

**Recommendations**

- All prisoners should have weekly timetabled access to the library. Regime constraints should not routinely impact adversely on this access.

- Prisoners need to have access to the full range of library resources. Wing libraries should be considered as a last resort as they cannot provide an adequate level of provision. The exceptions to this are areas such as first night centres and in-patient health care units, where prisoners are physically unable to get to the library.

- The library should be housed in a central location to enable easy escorted access from wings and to facilitate independent access if allowed.

- The library should be accessible to prisoners with disabilities.

**Why is this good?**

Regular and easy access ensures that prisoners can enjoy the benefits of a well-stocked and well-staffed prison library.

When library visits are included in the prison timetable this ensures that clashes with other activities are kept to a minimum and helps prisoners to plan their activity.

Access to a central library resource means that all prisoners can have access to the full range of resources.

A central library resource delivers better value for money as it reduces duplication of stock and makes better use of staff time.

**How can success be measured?**

Library attendance figures

Monitoring of complaints

User surveys
“You literally don’t know the journey you can begin just by opening a single book.”
– Egerton, former prisoner, now City Business Analyst

Recommendations

- Stock for the prison library should be selected by knowledgeable library staff who are aware of the particular needs and interests of prisoners
- The volume of stock should be sufficient to meet the information, recreation, cultural and education needs of the prisoners and offer a wide range of choice. The agreed minimum level of stock, proportionate to the establishment’s population and levels of usage, should be set out in the SLA
- Stock should be available in a variety of formats and, where needed, in community languages
- Prisoners should be able to make stock selections
- The library should hold regular stock promotions and use face-on display to highlight stock.

Why is this good?

The library can provide resources that can help prisoners to change their lives – learn a new skill, set up a business, learn a language, improve their health and fitness.

The needs of the prison community are varied and complex and often do not mirror those of the community “outside.” Selection by someone who is knowledgeable about the prison community and about trends in publishing/new releases will ensure a relevant and vibrant stock.4

The library is one of the few areas in which a prisoner can exercise freedom of choice. A wide and varied stock will encourage prisoners to explore reading and learning.

Stock in other formats and languages ensures equality of access.

Face-on display and stock promotions encourage prisoners to make new reading choices and to read more widely.

How can this success be measured?

Issue figures
Book requests
Comments from users
“Reading has helped fill the void created by boredom and has reduced my anxiety and frustrations. Reading has become a top coping mechanism for me.” – Library user, HMP Swaleside

Recommendations

- A wide range of literary resources to cater for all reading levels and interests, displayed in an engaging way
- Library staff should have appropriate experience to enable them to support prisoners’ information needs and to help prisoners to develop information literacy skills
- Good customer engagement from experienced staff who are confident in making prisoners feel at ease choosing, discussing and enjoying books, supporting low-level and emergent readers to progress
- Activities to promote reading in the whole prison, to engage prisoners and prison staff, to encourage an understanding of the benefits of readings.

Why is this good?

Reading has been shown to improve brain connectivity and increase vocabulary and comprehension. Improving reading, improves prisoners’ prospects on release and may contribute to a reduction in reoffending.

Prisoners can get anxious and frustrated when they are bored or unstimulated, which can have a detrimental effect on their behaviour. Reading has been shown to reduce stress, and lower blood pressure and heart rate. A prison library with good stock can contribute to a calmer environment on the wings.

Reading has been proven to encourage and improve empathy with others, a useful skill to develop and one that could encourage more self-knowledge and lower the risks of violence, or reoffending on release.

Studies have shown that reading helps people get to sleep, and can contribute to reducing depression symptoms. These benefits are not just beneficial to the individual, but to the prison as a whole in helping prisoners cope.

How can success be measured?

Library usage

User comments

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5 Information literacy is the ability to think critically and make balanced judgements about any information we find and use. It empowers us as citizens to develop informed views and to engage fully with society. (CILIP 2018)
Information

“I have gathered information to do with my case here in the library, this has been a massive help to me and I would like to thank the staff for their help.” – Library user, HMP Swaleside

Recommendations

- A wide range of information resources should be held to enable prisoners to have independent access to information
- Library staff should have appropriate experience to enable them to support prisoners’ information needs and to help prisoners to develop information literacy skills
- Prison library staff should have internet access to enable them to deal with enquiries without having to go off-site.

Why is this good?

Prisoners are cut off from most of the sources of information available to those “outside.” They may also lack the necessary information literacy skills to find and assess information. The prison library can give them independent or supported access to information. The library is also trusted by prisoners.

Prisoners can get anxious and frustrated when they cannot access information, which can have a detrimental effect on their behaviour. A prison library with good information services can take pressure off wing staff and contribute to a calmer environment.

Library staff are fundamental in helping prisoners to locate, retrieve, understand and communicate information. This is an important and transferrable skill.

The vast majority of library enquiries are now answered using on-line resources. Library staff need to be able to do this on-site so that they can operate an efficient enquiry service. As well as providing a more timely service, it is more economically efficient for library staff to be able to do this on-site.

How can success be measured?

- Enquiry statistics
- User comments

Information literacy is the ability to think critically and make balanced judgements about any information we find and use. It empowers us as citizens to develop informed views and to engage fully with society. (CILIP 2018)
“Reading is a torch in the night and a skyscraper view of the world, as well as a piercing mirror and a comfort in the cold. All these elements are more valuable inside and will be remembered when I get out.”
– Peter, prison reading group member

Recommendations

- The library should offer a range of activities to encourage prisoners to engage with reading, learning and information
- The library should actively promote reading as a source of pleasure and empowerment
- Where appropriate, prison libraries should deliver or support family reading projects, such as Storybook mums/dads
- The prison library should hold a range of arts and cultural events such as author visits, writing workshops and performances.

Why is this good?

Reading builds knowledge, supports learning, grows understanding and provides an important escape route and release valve. It can also connect people, create supportive networks, build social capital and improve quality of life. Reading is also emerging as a powerful and versatile health and well-being tool. Taking part in activities such as reading groups helps prisoners to develop communication, reasoning and listening skills.

Reading is an activity that can be done anywhere. In prison, it is an important way of enabling prisoners to be positively occupied during their time in cell. Studies have shown that reading can reduce stress levels.

Family reading projects, such as Storybook Dads/Mums can help prisoners to maintain family links.

Engagement with cultural and arts events can broaden prisoners’ horizons, improve their skills and encourage them to explore their own creativity. This type of engagement can make people feel valued and can increase self-esteem.

How can this success be measured?

Number of activities
Numbers attending
User surveys

7 Storybook Dads - www.storybookdads.org.uk
8 Prison Reading Groups Family Days report 2015. www.prison-reading-groups.org.uk
Reading for pleasure increases relaxation and can reduce stress. It is also a safe way in which to explore and understand human relationships. Many prison libraries run reading groups. Unlike an “outside” reading group, prison reading groups consist of people who would never have come together but for the fact that they are in prison. Reading groups help prisoners to develop articulacy and communication skills, help them to understand other points of view and enable them to form and express opinions. A member of the reading group at HMP Ford said: “Obtaining a library card seems to be on top of my to do list when I first get out... I am now more confident with my interactions with other people, and that added confidence will stand me in good stead in my future outside of prison.”

Prison Reading Groups (PRG) was established in 1999 to help set up, fund and support reading groups. We now have over 50 in prisons nationwide. The groups are voluntary and as unlike a class as possible – no tests, no right or wrong answers, just a chance to get together for sociable book talk. – “It’s the most grownup discussion I have in prison.”

Becoming a reader is about choice and where possible PRG groups choose the books they read. New copies are provided for members to keep or pass on to others, and they can help create a wider book buzz on the wing.

Books encourage empathy, a sense of connection with characters we have nothing in common with. And reading groups are all about connection: with books, with other people and with the wider world. – “This reading group is a wonderful thing because I would never have read such a book on the outside and it’s changed my point of view completely.”

PRG is part of registered charity Give a Book.
The National Literacy Trust has run a series of events in association with several prison libraries, to promote literacy through the creative writing process. The project was originally designed to address the serious, and specific, needs of younger adults in prisons around literacy through Q&A style events and workshops led by authors with lived experience of the criminal justice system. Since 2022, the project has also had a more specific focus on creative writing with the aim of inspiring people in secure settings to raise aspirations, improve wellbeing, find their voice and tell their story. The project has run in eight custodial settings since 2018, and in 2022 alone, reached 213 prisoners directly through workshops, plus an additional 19 through regular writing groups.

HMP Brixton Library were part of the project and successfully ran three events over a six-month period. The aim was to promote literacy and creative writing in conjunction with authors with a wide range of styles, with the workshops aiming to engage with offenders in a library setting.

The project expanded to include the Education team, who collaborated with them for the final event, and students in two classes with low literacy levels took part. The author was able to use plain-speak to engage them, and with the assistance of the class tutors, was able to support the students in writing their personal stories using ‘their own voices’. In addition to the classroom-based event, there was an event in the library with another group of prisoners.

Over the three events at HMP Brixton approximately 30 prisoners took part, all of whom participated in the creation of the anthology. Students in the Education classes particularly enjoyed and engaged with the events, creating a worthwhile partnership between the Library and Education. One of the students said of the event – “I really liked this event cuz it was the first time I had ever tried to write poetry about the things that have happened in my life”.

In December 2022 The New Chapters Anthology 2022 was published, showcasing the talent from that year’s workshops. 1000 copies were printed and were distributed to prisons around the country, libraries and story-telling festivals, as well as two copies being given to each of the contributors to the anthology.

https://literacytrust.org.uk/blog/new-chapters-creative-writing-from-the-criminal-justice-system/
“It’s a bit of a risk – being linked into the internet – but the bigger risk is sending people out who are not able to cope and who cannot find gainful employment.” – Prisoner

Recommendations

- Computers should be available in the library, where appropriate, to support prisoners in the development of basic IT skills, and to provide resettlement activities, such as learning driving test theory
- Where security conditions permit, the library should have a firewalled IT system to enable prisoners to access relevant documents and information
- Library staff should have appropriate IT systems to enable them to run an efficient service
- Library staff should be able to access the library provider’s IT system and have full internet access.

Why is this good?

The prison library can support prisoners in the development of digital skills. The digital divide between those in prison and people outside is widening rapidly. Digital skills are an essential tool for rehabilitation.9

If library staff have access to their employer’s system, they will be able to run the service efficiently and spend less time off site.

Full internet access for library staff will enable them to deal with prisoners’ enquiries more efficiently.

How can success be measured?

- Usage levels
- Enquiry statistics

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9 Champion, Nina & Kimmett, Edgar Through the Gateway: how computers can reform rehabilitation. Prison Education Trust & Prison Reform Trust 2013
Case study
Introduction of In-cell technology at HMP Swaleside

In July 2022 prisoners at HMP Swaleside were provided with laptops in their cells. From a library perspective this has been very positive development. Post-covid, Swaleside was still severely restricted due to a staffing crisis, so library access had not been possible since the start of covid restrictions in March 2020. Library visits are the ultimate aim, but library staff had been running a remote service throughout this time, ensuring that the men knew that they could access stock remotely, but it was the introduction of in-cell technology that had a huge impact on remote access.

Applications for stock, information, and other library services are emailed to the library by the individual from their laptop. Prisoners can also be contacted directly to request the return of overdue stock, to answer questions about what they are looking for, and to seek feedback on the service and stock. This has opened up more instant and responsive communication channels, and has vastly increased library usage. In the first month of digital access, library applications increased tenfold. The benefit of having this communication channel is that men are more aware and engaged with library services, feel they have more control and are more engaged, and are gaining digital skills by using the platform to access services throughout the prison. The digital skills they are gaining will increase their digital confidence, something that is vital in the world they will be released into.

Although a remote service can never be as good as or replace a library visit, the laptops have opened up new possibilities for library access. The use of digital technology has improved the opportunities for promoting reading and improving literacy, and the library area on the intranet is stocked with good quality resources to improve and encourage reading, that the men can access at any time.

Swaleside library staff won the national Libraries Connected Reader Award in 2023 for their outstanding use of technology to connect with readers.
The Library Management System in Kent prison libraries have been set up to mimic that of the public libraries they are part of. Library staff have access to the library management system, Microsoft Office and the full Kent Libraries network, allowing them to do all their work on-site and fully connect with the authority libraries. This creates a strong link with the public library service, and promotes a high standard of service. Staff can search the catalogue and reserve stock from other branches, for delivery to the prison weekly, and can effectively manage library processes. Because staff are able to spend all of their contracted hours in the prison library, this makes for a more efficient use of their time.

Prisoner library orderlies are also able to use restricted versions of Kent Prison Libraries’ computers that only have access to the Library Management System, allowing them to acquire transferrable skills, perform a responsible and meaningful role, and learn digital skills.

In April 2023, Kent Prison Libraries will be trialling access to an online catalogue for customers to browse in the library. This will enable customers to request stock from the entire Kent library network, provide an opportunity to make choices, and improve their digital skills in the process.
Learning Support

“The library is brilliant; the library has improved my language and knowledge. I believe by the time I’m out of prison it will help with job interviews and communicating.”
– HMP Maidstone (FN prisoner)

Recommendations

- The library should stock an adequate range of resources to support prisoners in education. These should be selected by library staff in consultation with education staff.
- The library should stock a range of materials to encourage and support independent learners.
- The library should stock appropriate materials to support new and emergent readers and ESOL students.
- The library should actively engage with organisations such as the Shannon Trust and the Reading Agency which deliver schemes to support prisoners to improve their reading skills.

Why is this good?

The library can support the learning process by helping students to find books for further reading relevant to their course and provide materials to help prisoners develop study skills and information literacy skills.

The library is accessible to all and can provide independent learning opportunities for prisoners who are unable to attend classes due to security issues, or those who are reluctant to engage with formal learning.

Literacy is a vital skill which enables full participation in society and is essential for academic and economic success. Prison libraries can work with prisoners of all abilities and help and encourage them to improve their skills.

National schemes such as the Shannon Reading Plan\(^{10}\) and Reading Ahead\(^{11}\) are well established and have proven outcomes in prisons.

How can success be measured?

- Participation levels in schemes
- Success levels in schemes
- Numbers using library for learning purposes

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\(^{10}\) Hopkins, Tom & Kendall, Alex – Turning Pages, Saving Lives: an evaluation of the Shannon Trust Reading Plan Turning Pages
\(^{11}\) Reading Agency – Reading Ahead 2016-2017 evaluation report
Case study

Egerton’s Story

Egerton is a former prisoner whose aspirations changed when he found a book on finance in the prison library. He became interested in finance and business and read everything he could find in the library. In 2015, he applied to the Prison Education Trust to take an OU course. Despite the challenges of learning in prison, he was able to gain qualifications. Once he was released, he spoke to as many people in finance as possible in the hope of getting a job. He felt that having qualifications demonstrated that he had not wasted his time inside. He was initially offered an unpaid work placement, but this soon led to a paid job as a business analyst. Egerton uses his experience to inspire other young people. He says: “If I was to give a message to people in prison, it would be to just believe they can do it – look for something to study connected to what you want to do, even if it’s loosely related. You literally don’t know the journey you can begin just by opening a single book.”
Case study
L. J. Flanders

Former prisoner L. J. Flanders is now well-known as the author of Cell Workout, a book of exercises in a confined space. He was inspired to write his book by using the prison library and undertook distance learning courses whilst inside to enable him to achieve his goal. Since his release, the book has been published and he has worked as a personal trainer for a large fitness company. He also visits prisons to talk to other prisoners about his own experience and the importance of learning. His advice to prisoners is “you may not write a book, do fitness or set up a business, but make the most of your time in jail and achieve something.”
Partnerships

“I can fully see the importance of prison libraries and projects like this that help to connect people who have been separated through circumstances connected to their communities. Ultimately this must help to reduce re-offending.”

– Community participant in prison library/local community reading project

Recommendations

- The prison librarian/library manager should be seen as a manager in his/her own right and should be invited to all relevant meetings in the prison
- The library should establish an active partnership with the Education Department to support prisoner learning and should seek to work in partnership with other prison departments
- The library should engage with relevant organisations and groups in the local community
- The library should seek to make creative partnerships with local, regional and national arts and cultural organisations.

Why is this good?
The prison library can work collaboratively with other departments of the prison to help to deliver key targets and outcomes and support the rehabilitation and reducing re-offending agendas.

An active engagement with the education department will support and enhance prisoner learning opportunities.

Engagement with local community organisations will help the prison to deliver the HMPPS priority of creating a more connected prison service. This type of activity can also enable people outside to have a greater understanding of people in prison.

Partnership working with arts organisations can enable prison libraries to deliver a programme of arts and cultural activities in the library. Many prisoners have never attended any sort of cultural event and activities such as author visits, poetry workshops or performances can broaden their horizons and increase their self-esteem. Libraries may also be able to access local and national arts funding streams to support activities.

How can success be measured?

- Number of activities
- Numbers attending
- Comments collected at events
- National awards made to prison libraries and staff
Case study
Books Unlocked (Staffordshire prison libraries)

Working with the National Literacy Trust, Alan Smith, Prison Library Service Advisor, Staffordshire Libraries developed a unique community model of Books Unlocked (a national Literacy Trust project which supports people in prison to read for pleasure) which would ultimately see involvement across seven Staffordshire prisons, four public libraries and local schools. The various reading groups involved read three titles and then exchanged their views on the books. This proved to be a real learning experience for all of them. The Assistant Head Teacher at one of the schools involved said: “This is a subject which really struck home with our students. A lot of them were shocked to learn that you could go to prison so young. It made them realise how lucky they have been with their friendship groups and their support, and perhaps has even made them reflect on the environment we try to create in school to help them to excel. I think the work of people like Alan and Books Unlocked should be shouted about. It makes such a difference and to take it out to schools and the wider community is really good thinking.”

A member of one of the community reading groups found the project a bit of an eye-opener: “Books Unlocked has given me an insight into the valuable work that goes on in prisons and YOI’s across Staffordshire which I didn’t know before. I can fully see the importance of prison libraries and projects like this that help to connect people who have been separated through circumstances connected to their communities. Ultimately this must help to reduce re-offending.”

The prisoners involved gained confidence and a real feeling of self-worth by participating in this project and engaging with the wider local community. One of them said: “What a joy to be asked to take part in a project that reaches the local community. I can’t put in to words how important that is for us inside.”

This project won the 2017 CILIP Prison Libraries Group Excellence in Prison Libraries Award.
Further reading on Prison Libraries:

*Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners* – International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), 2022


*Prison Education – A review of Reading in Prisons*, Ofsted, March 2022

*What is the role of the prison library? The development of a theoretical framework.*

*Staff perspectives of providing prison library services in the United Kingdom.*

Chartered Institute of Libraries and Information Professionals, Prison Libraries Group

The Prison Libraries Group work to support those concerned with the provision of library services to prison communities. The group is committed to improving the quality of the service whilst raising the profile of prison libraries.

For more information, please see our website – www.cilip.org.uk (special interest groups/prison libraries group)

**Committee:**

Chair – Victoria Barnett, Kent Prison Libraries
Treasurer – Tracy Coombes, HMP Wormwood Scrubs
Secretary – Julie Shannon, Isle of Wight Prison Libraries
Beverley Davies – HMP Wandsworth
Abibat Olulode – HMP Brixton
Shan Cooper – HMP Berwyn
The Prison Library

There is a light in the darkest of places,
Worlds of wonder for our mental spaces.
Fact, fiction and fantasy, dreams made real,
Mystery, mirth, malfeasance and mayhem,
A well-spring of thought where ideas stem.
Music to soothe the most savage of beasts,
Discs of delight, truly an audible feast.
For those who puzzle, your needs are met,

The heart of a prison, a place full of dreams,
Words of wisdom on a million reams.
Escapes for the mind, freedom for the soul,
Worlds of wonder, no charge and no toll.
Music and puzzles, books full of the law,
Browse at your leisure and find so much more.
The library is our port in this storm,
There for advice, sometimes help and inform.
Making the Difference

An excellence framework for prison libraries