

Leading Libraries Strategic Challenge Case Study

Service: Buckinghamshire

1. Strategic Challenge Focus

Identify ways to maximise the value and impact of the Micklefield library in the community.

2. Rationale and Context

The Micklefield community is a deprived and diverse community. The library there has meeting spaces and good facilities but is under used by the community. The strategic challenge sought to make the library at Micklefield a community hub, a central focal point for the local community and a safe space where people can learn, engage and be inspired.

3. Approach and Activity

Engaging with the community

The first stage was to identify the community need and to create a local network and getting as many people in the community to volunteer to be part of it.

A collaborative approach was taken including working with local schools, the planning centre, police, local businesses, and places of worship. There was a good appetite to work together. We got the manager responsible for planning and running community events and with support of input from the network.

Finding a strategic partner

Attempts were made to find a local strategic partner who could rent some of the upstairs space in the library.

Harnessing existing partnerships

Public Health was one local partner who ran a garden project in the garden at the back of the library. This involved showing the people in the community how to grow crops themselves.

Building a robust volunteer pool

Some people have volunteered to help run the library and efforts are underway to re-establish the local Friends group to build the pool of volunteers and also encourage more people in the community to use the library.

Installing a defibrillator

A defibrillator was installed on the front to the building which made people notice the space was open and doing something positive in the community.

Improving the library space

The Library Manager improved the layout the library. This included putting in new furniture in and redesigned the space including moving the children's library to the front to make it more appealing.

Running events

Events were staged to assist with community engagement. These included:

- An orchestra playing themes to films and allowing visitors to try the instruments
- A theatre production in the inner space
- A community event where lots of different stakeholders in the community including the police and various organisations came along and invited the public to come along and use the library to network
- A Christmas flowerpot activity
- An artist demo in the inner space
- Running a Lego club
- Hosting weekly bounce and rhyme sessions
- The Polish school using the space on a weekly basic
- The local genealogy group using space on a monthly basis
- Using the space as a vaccination centre

4. Examples of outcomes and impact to date

The strategic challenge has resulted in wider impacts including:

- Membership has increased
- Visitor numbers increased
- Positive feedback from the community
- Increased the volunteer pool

5. Next Steps

There are a range of future activities planned. These include:

- Plans are in progress to consult the community on opening hours to increase the hours of the library or make it more flexible. This will involve surveying the community and whether fine tuning the opening hours can increase usage.
- Engaging a strategic partner to rent space upstairs in the library.
- Actively recruiting more volunteers
- Getting volunteers to continue running the garden project in the future
- Hosting more events to appeal to different audiences and cultures.

6. Lessons learned

"You can put a lot of resource around a library and a community and engage and talk about strategic partners and quantum leaps and all sorts of things but at the

end of the day actually moving these things forward, is really, really hard and takes a lot of work"

Ample time and resource needs to be dedicated to the challenge, more than we thought. All colleagues need to know about the project, so they understand why it is being done and how it is supporting the service. Patience is key as building working relationships and trust takes a lot of time. Managing the differing community, stakeholders, partners and library service priorities was challenging. Finding common objectives helped us to engage more productively with certain partners. We found word of mouth the best method of communication when engaging with the local community.

Key community partners had their own agenda, and this caused certain work to stall, but we continued the engagement piece and some have come around to our way of working. The project has become part of the way the service is delivered in the community. We expanded our challenge and included the local manager. This has meant community links and the value the library service was hoping to build is happening.

7. How the Leading Libraries Programme contributed to the delivery of the Strategic Challenge

The Leading Libraries Programme has contributed to delivering the Strategic Challenge in a number of ways including:

Career development

"Personally, I've learned a lot from the programme, to the point where I've actually now got a new job".

Networking

"Been great in the networking in between everyone has been fantastic".

New empowering ways of working

"What was really profound for me, is the challenge that you have when you get a group of people and take them outside of their day jobs and try and develop a different way of working, it's more inclusive and empowering".

Building trust and developing relationships

"We used some skills we learned from the leading libraries, projects, around dialogue, and inclusion to bring people on board and build relationships"