

# Leading Libraries Strategic Challenge Case Study

## Service: London Borough of Redbridge

### 1. Strategic Challenge Focus

How can we improve young people's mental health and engagement with the library service?

### 2. Rationale and Context

Redbridge had strong programme of engagement with events and activities for adults and young children but had less engagement with young people aged 14 to 21. The service wanted to address issues that young people face today. A key priority was supporting this part of community with their mental health. The Covid-19 pandemic has added further challenges to young peoples' mental health. The service drew on research that showed that during the pandemic some of the main issues that young people faced were depression and anxiety and fears for the future, including family, social isolation and mental health and well being.

The strategic challenge explored four key topics:

- What are young people's current thoughts about the library service?
- How do they currently engage with the library?
- What are young people's key priorities for the borough?
- How can the library service impact the wider community?

### 3. Approach and Activity

#### *Harnessing existing partnerships*

The service had made considerable progress over recent years in reaching out to the local community by providing different activities and services that facilitate many of their needs. As a result, rapport and good relationships were established with a range of organisations and partners including Work Redbridge and Mind.

#### *Engaging and researching to understand the views of young people*

Consultation with young people was an essential aspect of the strategic challenge. This included:

A *Library and Culture Influencers* focus group was formed which comprised of 12 young people aged between 14 and 18 years from across Redbridge. The group met several times over a three month period and provided an opportunity to have informal and in depth discussions on young people's needs and impressions of the library service. Some of the key findings were:

- The general consensus was that young people considered the library to be a safe and welcoming space and appreciated the print and electronic resources.
- Staff learned that a good way to communicate things to young people was through the Youth Council and the Youth Ambassadors.

- Young people still look at posters in schools and this is a very effective way of advertising events.
- There are a lot of local youth groups that have WhatsApp groups, and they are happy to share information about activities or events that are happening.
- Connecting with a local influencer helped to ensure that any activities run by the library would remain present social media channels.

*Consultation with the Youth Council was undertaken.* Members of the Youth Council is comprised of young people aged 11 to 19 in Redbridge were surveyed to get their views. Key findings were:

- Delivering events that combat social isolation and encouraged creativity was a high priority.
- Events around topics such as history, business, social issues, mental health, disability awareness and environmental courses were desired.
- A mixture of face to face and online events were preferred.

*Presentation at the External Scrutiny Panel.* In November 2020, young people presented at the external scrutiny panel and identified that black history, the environment and mental health were areas they considered to be important.

The consultation provided valuable information for the library service and highlighted the following points:

- Some of the young people were already engaged with the library service.
- The library service was already doing many things that young people are interested in but that many young people were not aware of what was on offer. As a result, marketing and communication to young people has become a key priority for Redbridge library service.
- Young people would also like to have their own area of the website and they would actually like to participate in creating and contributing to the development of content.
- Young people would like to assist in reaching out to other young people to increase library use
- Young people also requested encouragement for students to research black history.
- Young people like events and exhibitions in Redbridge to bring people together throughout the year, not just during celebratory programmes.
- Young people were keen to explore opportunities to volunteer within the library service.

### **Building new partnerships and finding out more about young people's needs**

To widen the fact-finding process Redbridge decided to strengthen partnerships with some key partners. These included:

- The UNICEF Child Friendly Redbridge Programme. This brings together several groups from within the community as well as counsellors. This provides young people with a direct channel to advise decision makers in the borough to make changes. <https://www.redbridge.gov.uk/childfriendly/>

- Redbridge CVS. This is a voluntary service which surveyed their youth advisors and found that mental health well-being services, welfare support, social action, the environment, personal development, and creative spaces were priorities for young people within the borough. <https://www.redbridgecvs.net/>
- Red Bridge Youth Hub. An online hub that provides links and signposts young people to information on education, employment, managing money, health and well-being services and community support services. <https://www.redbridge.gov.uk/young-people/redbridge-youth-hub/>

#### 4. Examples of outcomes and impact to date

The strategic challenge has resulted in a range of exciting outcomes. These include:

*Staff members based within the library specifically working on a programme of workshops targeted at young people.*

*Updates to the library space.* Some sections of the library space have been updated to ensure that it is open and welcoming for young people.

*Updates to library resources.* The designated Teen Choice section includes fiction and non-fiction books has been updated. This has included improving the information provided about books and how they are displayed to make them more appealing to young people. The range of authors have been expanded and efforts have been taken to ensure that books are more relevant to what young people have said they are interested in. It also includes the Reading Well books which support young people's mental health as well as study guides and books on future learning. <https://reading-well.org.uk/> There is also easy access and active promotion of Redbridge Youth Hub, an online platform that signposts young people to services that provide assistance with employment, education and training opportunities.

*Providing volunteering opportunities for young people.* Two new roles: Special Events Assistant and Lab Tech Assistant were created to provide volunteering opportunities for young people. This allows young people to gain valuable skills that can be added to their CV and their UCAS applications, as well as giving them a chance to socialise with like-minded individuals. <https://visionrcl.org.uk/libraries-heritage-culture/labcentral/lab-central-clubs/>

*Refreshing events provision.* The service has worked to provide a range of events in response to the needs of young people. Examples include creative events such as:

- a decision-making workshop delivered through a mixture of comic book and acting <https://penificent.com/product/deaniis-descent/>
- a spoken word masterclass <https://applesandsnakes.org/>
- pop and paint workshop involving creating artwork to music. <https://www.instagram.com/popnpaintuk/?hl=en>

The strategic challenge has resulted in wider impacts including:

- The library service is being embedded into the community as a space not only for young people to use to study and to get information, but also as a creative space

and a place where young people who feel vulnerable can go and request further assistance.

- The library service provides spaces to host events for young people. Recently it hosted the launch of the Child Friendly Redbridge Programme, which was attended by over 800 young people and their families and it hosted the youth elections.

## 5. Next Steps

Plans are in progress to work with a local artist The Fandango Kid to create public art through which young people can talk about subjects that may seem taboo and are affecting them in their life as a way to address mental health issues. <https://www.fandangoekid.com/>

The service is also working on a youth takeover day in the summer of 2022, which will involve working with various partner organisations who will come to the library and provide an activity for young people to participate in.

## 6. Lessons learned

The strategic challenge has enabled the library service to learn valuable lessons about engaging with young people in the community and that getting feedback and encouraging dialog is important:

*We have learned to constantly evaluate, fact find, and be flexible - young people's opinions are ever changing, so we need to provide a route for them to be able to express their opinions.*

To assist with ongoing fact finding the service has:

- provided a QR code linking to a feedback survey which is distributed at events
- inviting library culture influencers to have a table at events and talk to the other young people.
- developing life cafes, which will be groups or areas where people can go and discuss various issues to do with well being.

## 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:

Developing resilience:

*One key word that I've taken from that is resilience. The way the project has progressed over the last two years has shown me a lot about myself, when dealing*

*with different people, change, unpredictable situations, and in our library service in our library services and general life. And it's given me skills and tools to develop, adapt, persevere and thrive through tough times.*

#### Putting theory into practice

*I've just found it really fantastic. The way that at the beginning of this project, everything that we spoke about was theory, and it didn't actually seem like we were going to be able to do what we wanted to do because of the pandemic. So to actually to be at the other side of it now and actually implementing things I think is just fantastic. So I've really enjoyed this project.*

#### Contact details

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