Presentation of findings

Evaluation of the Libraries: Opportunities for Everyone innovation fund

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Image credit: Little Red Book Photography, Plymouth
Introduction

- **Aims of the evaluation were to:**
  - Provide an overview of activities and highlight major themes;
  - Provide an understanding of the differences these made to participants, libraries and local communities (project impacts);
  - Draw out main learning from approaches taken by projects;

- **Mixed method approach** that incorporated elements of self-evaluation.

- Evaluation grouped projects into **5 clusters:**
  - Arts & culture
  - Digital
  - Families & Wellbeing
  - Literature & creative expression
  - Makerspaces

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Main findings: outcomes

The available evidence suggests that the LOFE fund provided people with opportunities to reduce their experience of disadvantage.

- Engagement in co-design and co-production
- Increased awareness of opportunities
- Developed skills and confidence
Main findings: outcomes

The available evidence suggests that library services have developed innovative practices through the fund

- Developed spaces
- Improved digital confidence & skills among library staff
- Improved understanding among library staff
- Transformed service offers
Main findings: outcomes

Wider impacts on libraries

- Improvements in staff morale
- Transformation of library environments
- Improved perceptions of library services
- Improved relationships with local organisations

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Participant voices

“I’d have to say that Storysmash helped me find my love for coding again and it’s definitely helped me be more social, even if it was daunting at first. Having a group project has been really fun and inspiring!”

Participant from Storysmash

In **Hampshire**, 75% of participants said that the project had enabled them to improve contact with friends and family and 17% said that activities had helped them connect with new people.

In **Staffordshire**, 83% of participants in co-production sessions and focus groups were resident in postcode areas which experience high social-economic deprivation.

“I have a reason to leave the house.”
Participant, Shared reading group
Participant voices

From one reading group in the **SW Region of Readers**, 63% of participants reported that their confidence had increased since joining and several participants commented that the group had either inspired them to read more or to start reading again.

63%

“**I am using my iPad every day now (I'm beginning to show off...) - it’s not shut in a drawer any more. It’s magic!”**

Participant (82)

“**It has been the best thing I have done for my mental health and confidence.”**

Participant, Shared reading group

In **Barnsley**, 71% of participants reported feeling very confident using a tablet device after taking part in the course.

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Participant voices

“I’m more mindful to [take] a few minutes of quiet to listen to my child playing; allowing her to just make [things], even if it’s not what I thought or wanted. I don’t need to control the situation, just enjoy the process with her.”

Families and wellbeing activity

In Manchester Libraries, 96% of participants increased their knowledge about digital tools

93% of self-reflection sheets collected in Staffordshire Libraries show that the co-production sessions improved participants' knowledge on how to support child development
Main findings: enablers and challenges

**Enablers**
- In-kind contributions
- Getting staff on board
- Funding coordinator posts

**Staffing**
- Raising profile
- Engaging vulnerable & marginalised groups
- Informing design and delivery

**Partnerships**
- Tailored approaches
- Co-design and co-production
- Convening multidisciplinary steering groups

**Engaging participants**
- Embedding evaluation from project start

**Project mgmt & delivery**
Main findings: enablers and challenges

Challenges:
- Overstretched staff
- Saturated volunteer market
- Variable reliability of volunteers
- Variable reliability of organisations
- Competing demands
- Clashes of working styles
- Facing behaviours that may challenge
- Communicating new activities
- Procurement delays
- Infrastructure
- Steering group priorities

Solutions:
- Involve non-frontline staff
- Dedicated project officer
- Resourcing plan
- Regular monitoring
- Governance
- Back-up plan
- Build partnerships
- Taster sessions
- Risk register
- Involve key stakeholders early on

For further information on potential challenges and how to best overcome them, see chapter 4 of the evaluation report.
Lessons Learned: supporting libraries

Project leads made a range of suggestions as to how DCMS and other organisations could support the funding of future projects:

- Small grants can make a big difference to services
- Provide clear communication and flexible support
- Embed coordinated evaluation in grant awards
- Grant recipients value opportunities to share ideas, challenges and lessons learned
Lessons Learned: recommended approaches to achieving outcomes

The report proposes approaches to help achieve each of the following funder aims:

- How to build confidence of library staff in working with service users whose behaviours may challenge
- How to develop new ways of engaging vulnerable and marginalised groups who do not traditionally engage with library services
- How to engage staff and service users in activities that are new to them
- How to build confidence and skills among service users
- How to improve confidence of people with special educational needs and learning disability in engaging with literature
- How to improve digital literacy among people experiencing deprivation or isolation

To read the recommended approaches in full, see chapter 5 of the evaluation report.
The following recommendations have emerged from the delivery and evaluation of the LOFE fund:

- **Award funding in a way that focuses library activities on specific audiences and outcomes**
- **Build in evaluation from the start of a project**
- **Give libraries flexibility around their use of funding**
- **Encourage (or require) libraries to reach out to local partners in order to deliver projects**
- **Use programmes like this as a vehicle for building networks and learning across the sector**
Thank you.