london libraries development agency
LLDA
adding value to London's libraries

'Get a cat and read Keats'

What do homeless and vulnerably housed people want from library services?

1. Introduction

London Libraries Development Agency (LLDA) is working with a group of homelessness organisations and public library services to examine critically the public library 'offer' to homeless and vulnerably housed people, and to determine:

- scope for improving the existing offer
- involving and including homeless people as service users, in design and delivery
- how to market library services more effectively to homeless and vulnerably housed people
- effective means of evaluating improved take up

A key part of developing this project is user involvement and consultation. We intend to move into a user-led service design approach, so understanding where we were starting from was very important. We interviewed over 60 service users with a range of needs. We talked to them about their experiences of using libraries, including whether they were a member, what they did when visiting a library, what they would like to see libraries offer and how easy they found it to use libraries. At first, we talked to low and medium support needs users where we found a high degree of awareness and use of *some* library services. Later, interviews and discussions with higher support needs users pointed to a much lower level of use and awareness. In all cases, we found a need for libraries to improve marketing of services and to consult more widely with homeless and vulnerably housed people on what they want from public library services and how to make it easier for them to access the service, particularly with regard to requirements to prove identification. On the plus side, most users find the joining process easy and staff to be helpful and supportive.

2. Low and medium support needs

We commissioned Brent Homeless User Group (B-HUG) to do some peer research into what use homeless and vulnerably housed people make of library services, and how the libraries ‘offer’ to homeless people could be improved to interest more in using services.

Peer interviews were carried out face-to-face with service users in Brent and Camden who are receiving low and medium support. The aim was to garner views from a variety of homeless settings. Interviews were carried out with service users from twelve different service providers (hostels, temporary supported accommodation, homeless day centre) in the two boroughs. Interviewees were chosen randomly and were not pre-selected on age, ethnic origin nor any other criteria. Not all surveys were returned with a completed equal opportunities monitoring form, but those that were returned showed that a wide variety of service users completed the questionnaires. It is worth noting that the majority of respondents were male. This is due to the fact that the make up of the homeless population and those vulnerably housed is predominantly male. (10-25% of single homeless people on the streets and in hostels are women. Source: Crisis, March 2006.) This should be reflected in any project design that follows.

The objective was to meet the number of interviews required whilst making sure of capturing views from a variety of users with regard to gender and ethnicity. There was an imbalance of male and female respondents, but this to some extent reflects the nature of service users/residents in general (and certainly on the day of the interviews) and therefore we did not want to turn away any male interviewees.

In total, 36 questionnaires were completed. We questioned a sample of users and it is coincidental that half turned out to be existing library members and half did not (though some of the non-members were library users). 18 were library members and 21 people were regular library users.

2.1 Summary of findings

Library membership and usage among the homeless and vulnerably housed people interviewed for this survey was higher than the national average – 50% of the sample were library members and 58% were active library users (the discrepancy is accounted for as you do not need to join the library to use some of its services and facilities, eg reference materials, newspapers, and not all require membership for internet access/computer use). Nationally, around 46% of the adult population are active library users.

We wanted to find out about patterns of use among those who were library members or users; experiences within the library of homeless people, eg customer care; and reasons for non-use and barriers that homeless people find against use.

We asked those who were not library members why they had not joined. A number of suggestions were given, but the majority had individual and specific reasons for not being in library membership. In some cases lack of time or 'haven't got round to it' were cited; two respondents said they were just moving or about to join, and a couple of people said that the library had no relevance for them.

Those who are library users – the majority of respondents in our survey – use the library frequently, with around half visiting weekly or more often.

Most who joined (72% of those who did) found it easy to do so, and received help and support from library staff, and 82% of joiners found the help they received to be good or very good. No one said the help was poor. 16 library members said the felt comfortable asking for help from staff although two (11%) did not. However, we should bear in mind that this is a subset of a very small sample.

People use libraries for a variety of reasons, and homeless people reflect the same diversity of need, interest and usage as the general population. Little surprise then, that the most popular library service among the users in this group was borrowing books, followed by getting information, looking for information about training and courses, and having a quiet place to read or study. Even where people did not use services, there was appreciation. For example, 21 respondents, 58% of the survey (including some who did not use libraries at all) said that they did not use the internet but that it was a good service. 13 of our 21 users did make use of the internet, 62% of the users in the sample. Some of the 'other' (non-prompted) uses for libraries among homeless people included 'space to sit down'.

All of our respondents, including the current non-users, responded to what they would like to see the library provide in future. The biggest response was for leisure based classes and activities, with over 80% asking for these; there was strong support from more than half the sample for government, local authority and local voluntary organisations to provide information, advice and contact through libraries. Less than half the sample was interested in provision of reading/information/cultural materials in other languages or cultural contacts, although there was still significant interest. Around a third of respondents wanted to see support for jobseekers in libraries. It should be noted that we provided a range of suggestions for respondents to think around. Their interpretations of

these may vary, and further work should be done to examine what homeless and vulnerably housed people would genuinely find useful, and would use, before any services are commissioned.

Almost all our respondents agreed that library services should be available to all homeless people, and that the need to produce ID could prove to be a barrier to usage. However, a couple of respondents told us that they had concerns either about antisocial behaviour among their peers or security of the library, and for that reason they thought some sort of ID check should be retained. 88% of respondents knew that you have to produce some form of ID to join a library, and thought they knew what items were acceptable. However the inaccurate or vague nature of their responses suggests that if libraries do not abolish the ID requirement entirely, they need to ensure much better publicity/understanding of what is required. Several respondents suggested ways that joining could be made easier – including allowing a letter from hostel manager or keyworker to be accepted as proof. 15 of our sample (83% of library members or 42% of the total survey) felt that joining the library was easy enough already, but several of these commented they thought it was more difficult for others, or that it would have been difficult if they had not had support.

Getting proof of ID did not appear to be an insurmountable problem, as all respondents could produce one of the items we suggested (most could produce several), although utility bills appear to be unpopular. Libraries that wish to retain ID requirements should, as a minimum, review them to ensure they give users the widest range of options in terms of the ID they may produce.

We asked users to consider why homeless people in general might not use libraries. The most common reason suggested, out of a list we provided, was that homeless people did not know what the library service had to offer – suggested by 70% of our survey – or that homeless people did not think the library could help them (67%) or they do not know how to join (64%). This suggests that libraries have a lot to do to demonstrate that homeless people can easily use, benefit from and find relevance in, the modern public library service.

We suggested some ways of improving this situation and invited comment. 64% of respondents said we need to make it easier for people to get a library card (cf 69% who said that ID was a barrier to use). Improving library liaison with homelessness organisations would clearly help here, and people also asked that ID requirements should be ‘flexible’ and ‘easy to meet’. Many felt there should be more information on what was required by way of proof (14 respondents) but a greater number (23) felt that there should be more information on what the library offers in general. To attract more users, there was strong support for leaflets being placed in hostels and day centres, visits by library staff to homeless people’s facilities, and open days at the library specifically

targeting homeless people. Other ideas included providing better street signposting, posters in hostels and more information within the library that targets the needs of homeless people.

Many respondents are clearly ‘library enthusiasts’ who encourage others to use the library – 14 people said they did so, 38% of our sample or two-thirds of library users. If this is reflected in the wider population, it suggests that homeless people who use libraries feel they derive tangible benefits from doing so. Libraries should consider how they can harness this potential enthusiasm, perhaps through targeted loyalty schemes, friends groups or some sort of ‘ambassador’ network. Working with homeless people as volunteers should also be explored, possibly linked into volunteers helping with library provision in homeless people’s accommodation.

Full details of responses from this group is provided in appendix 1.

3. Higher support needs users

Having discovered a widespread understanding of the public library ‘offer’ as well as some areas for further development with low and medium support needs users, we wanted to get the views of higher support needs users whom we thought would be less likely to make use of libraries or understand how libraries would be relevant for them. These views were gathered by means of 1:1 surveying at Look Ahead’s Aldgate and Victoria hostels, and a focus group at a hostel in King’s Cross carried out by a Homeless Link worker. A total of 26 service users were involved.

Our approach was dictated by the client group, which was less likely to be using libraries or to know what libraries have to offer, and more concerned with immediate problems such as securing accommodation for the night and finding healthcare and advice worker support. We therefore tailored our approach to fit the circumstances. In some instances questionnaires were completed by the respondants themselves (which led to some inconsistencies in the responses) while in King’s Cross, we talked to residents in an informal grouping, using the questionnaire as the basis for a conversation.

We found some similarities with the lower support needs users’ responses, particularly around the uptake of existing library services, helpfulness of staff and barriers to access. For higher support needs users, they were less likely to be library members or users – 7 out of 11 at Aldgate were members and 4 out of 15 at King’s Cross had used a library in the past year, though none of these had library cards. This gives a total of 42% as active library users, though membership levels are lower and many

commented that either knowing what ID to produce, or being able to produce it, was a barrier to use. (However, one service user who said he could not join a library because he did not have any of the right ID ‘at the moment’ had encouraged a friend to join!)

The most popular services for these users are books, internet access and information about courses, followed by newspapers/magazines, posters/leaflets, educational materials to use themselves and a quiet space to read or study. No one used the library to access choice-based lettings, LOCATA or other homeless-specific online services, although King’s Cross residents reacted postively to the idea they could use a library as an access point.

In comparison with lower support needs users, these respondants were less likely to suggest new services that libraries could offer unprompted, and the users who completed the questionnaires unassisted left this section blank in many cases. However, from the limited responses we received, and the lively (facilitated discussion at King’s Cross) we suggest that there is plenty of scope to develop services if users are involved in their design, and they are specifically aimed at homeless and vulnerably housed people. These might include:

- leisure based courses and training
- basic computer skills, including peer educators and worker support
- help with job-seeking
- local street team contact details, information to help with referrals, emergency hotline numbers and other specific services
- volunteering and work experience opportunities

Using the internet is a critical area where libraries could support this group. They are unlikely to have access elsewhere (or on very limited terms) and do not feel confident in using the internet, but could benefit from it in multiple ways. Libraries could help bridge this digital gap by ensuring that homeless people can access services that are relevant to them, eg choice-based lettings where internet access may provide a distinct advantage, as well as more general applications such as support to jobseeking. During our research we were told by one service user of how library staff had helped her make contact with a sibling she had lost touch with for 10 years by means of sites such as Friends Reunited.

While there is a basic skills need among some homeless people, our respondants played this down in comparison with the need for ICT skills. Indeed, more than one service user made clear that we should not treat homeless people as all in need of basic skills as

many are educated to level 2 or degree standard or beyond, and are just as likely to demand a copy of Shakespeare or Keats as any other library user.

As with lower support needs users, there is universal agreement that library services should be open to all, but we found that there was a slightly higher perception of barriers among this group. At Look Ahead's hostels, one-third of respondants said the requirement for proof of ID was a barrier to using libraries while none of the King's Cross residents was a library member, although several suggested inventive ways of overcoming barriers, such as staying in the library all day to continue reading a book, or asking the staff to keep a book at the counter for them to return to later.

It was impressive to note in the focus group discussion at King's Cross that there was a broad interest in what libraries could do, and how they could improve their 'offer' to homeless people. As with the other respondants, all agreed that more outreach work, creating a better understanding of the range of services and activities on offer at the library – by bringing the library into hostels and other centres through leaflets and drop-in visits, would help raise awareness and use. Other suggestions included creative writing and poetry groups, developing a community café as an employment/training initiative, and providing 'dog creches' so that owners would feel more happy at spending longer in the library. Indeed, one resident suggested libraries could provide people with information on where to get a pet as this is often an important emotional outlet.

Appendix 2 details responses from Look Ahead hostels at Aldgate and Victoria
Appendix 3 is a summary of the focus group session at King's Cross

Finally, we examined the views of a sample of library staff at two sites. In general, library staff seem to be aware of homeless people as a specific user group, and aware that they may have particular needs. There is a desire to define and improve the offer libraries make to homeless and vulnerably housed people, but also some (understandable) confusion about what this should actually be, and concerns about stigmatising or giving offence. However, there was a clear view that we can and should work to ensure library services are relevant and accessible for homeless people.

Appendix 4 is the facilitator's summaries of sessions at Swiss Cottage (Camden) and Willesden Green (Brent) libraries.

Appendix 1: low and medium support needs users

1. Experiences of libraries and library staff

Are you a member of a library? (response 100%)

YES: 18

NO: 18

If no, why not:

Don't know where 4 (22%)
Library can't help 2 (11%)
Don't know how to join 4 (22%)
Don't feel comfortable 4 (22%)
Other 11
Was a member of a library
How can they help?
I've got my own flat in Euston now so will be joining the library there
Islington library – college-related
Do not need library – no relevance
Currently in process of registration
Only moved into area
Just moved
My eyesight is not good
I haven't got time, I'm depressed
Membership expired
Haven't got round to it

How often do you visit the library and use its services? (totals exceed no of respondents with membership as some respondents used library services for which membership is not required)

Never 4
Monthly 7 (33% of those who use)
Weekly 6 (28.5%)
More than once a week 5 (24%)
Other 3 (14%)
Depends if the library has Chinese books or not
Have done in past while studying
Up to two years ago, twice a week

Was it easy to join? (response: 100% of those with membership)

YES: 13 (72%)

NO: 5 (28%)

NOT SURE: 0

If not easy, why:
Not enough ID ie passport, utility bill
ID problems [x2]

Did the library staff assist you in joining? (response: 100% of those with membership)

Yes – by giving information 12 (66%)

Yes – by giving help with application form 7 (39%)
Yes – by explaining procedures and services to me 8 (44%)
Yes – other 0
No 1 (5.5%)
Not sure 0

How was the help you got from staff? (17 out of 18 responses – 94.5%)

Very good 7 (41%)
Good 7 (41%)
OK 3 (18%)
Not very good 0
Other 0

Can the information given be improved? (15 out of 18 - 83%)

YES: 3 (20%)

NO: 12 (80%)

If yes, how?

Info in other languages 3
Explanation in other languages 1
Explanation in English
Written more clearly
Other

Did you feel comfortable asking the staff for help? (response: 100% of those with membership)

YES: 16 (89%)

NO: 2 (11%)

If no, why
Shy and don’t know them

2. What do you use the library for?

	I use this[1]	I don't use this	I don't use, but in general this is good[2]	Not needed
1) Entertainment: a) To borrow books	19 (90%)	1	15 (42%)	
b) To borrow CDs, DVDs, videos	14 (67%)	3	17 (47%)	
c) To read newspapers	11 (52%)	3	16 (44%)	1
2) Access to Internet	13 (62%)	3	21 (58%)	1
3) To get information:				
a) From reference book	17 (81%)	2	13 (36%)	
b) From newspapers / magazines	15 (71%)	3	15 (42%)	1
c) From staff	16 (76%)	3	12 (33%)	
d) From posters / leaflets	16 (76%)	1	12 (33%)	1
e) From the internet	10 (48%)	3	15 (42%)	
4) To secure accommodation				
a) hostel or private rented	4 (19%)	6	16 (44%)	2
b) To look at local authority housing (Locata, Homes connections)	10 (48%)	4	14 (39%)	2
5) Training / self development:				
a) To find out about courses / training	14 (67%)	2	15 (42%)	1
b) To teach myself	15 (71%)	3	12 (33%)	1
6) To meet people	11 (52%)	3	14 (39%)	4
7) To have a quiet place to work or read.	15 (71%)	4	13 (36%)	1
8) Other (please specify) • Local info on Camden; what's on; being able to meet	6			

Camden councillors • A bit of space, quality time • I would like to know how to use a computer properly • To access archive material, old newspapers • A nice place to have a sleep, have a wash, nobody bothers you • To relax, chill, sit down				

The figures in this table do not tally directly with the number of library members, users or non-members as some non-users indicated services they did not use but appreciated

[1] Percentages given as of total respondents who said they used libraries (21)

[2] Percentages given as of total respondents (36)

What services would you like to see on offer in libraries? (Response rate = 100%)

To find out about training / courses / events	
For leisure use / hobbies / interests (e.g. book, music, drawing clubs, etc.)	29 (80.5%)
Pre-employment information	24 (67%)
To find courses / training for employment	21 (58%)
To get help & support	
Government services Job centre/one stop shop DWP[x2] NHS Benefit entitlements Health Not sure	16 (44%)

Government pensions Employment/DWP Transport Education, youth projects, youth funding Day centres	
Local council services Legal rights for homeless people Housing benefit, council tax benefit Furnishing; housing and employment rights Local social services Housing dept [x2] Ratio ethnic groups in employment in my area Housing for vulnerable people Accommodation in Brent Forms to fill in for housing Security, crime, environment Housing availability Council surgeries	20 (55.5%)
Local organisations / groups Anything on horse racing Groups for young Irish men How to get a social life For people like me with a history of alcohol problems Cycling Recovering from injuries and would possibly like info on local physio, massage services etc Housing, clubs History Homeless organisations Travel opportunities Other Somali women	21 (58%)

Walking groups, sports etc For over 50s	
Help to get a job	13 (36%)
To get referred to organisations if needed People who help young people who are homeless Where to access drugs and alcohol agencies Yes, a library gives access Charitable hostels [x2] Referral to physiotherapy and massage services Gambling Traditional music/folk dancing – Irish, Welsh, Scots People who don't drink any more to socialise Information about job referral Yes – look them up CAT team	19 (52%)
Language / cultural services	
Borrow books / DVDs in other languages If so, which ones? Any Somali [x3] Polish Kosovan Bulgarian Arabic [x2] Italian Tamil Hindi Irish Hebrew Urdu Filipino	16 (44%)

Portugese Too many to say Books on Iran in English	
ESOL classes	9 (25%)
Cultural organisations If so, which ones? Any Not sure Irish [x2] Every culture should have its own organisation Asian Caribbean Somali [x2] Arabic Filipino Portugese	13 (36%)
Other The library should be more like a community centre For young runaways to tell their story, somebody to help get them back home! Would like to meet English people to learn culture	3 (8%)

Do you think that library services should be open to all homeless people? (Response = 97%)

ALL HOMELESS: 30 (86%)

NOT ALL HOMELESS: 3 (8.5%)

DON’T KNOW: 2 (5.5%)
Maybe they haven’t got transport

DIDN’T SAY: 1

Do you know what documents you are required to present in order to be able to access the local library/get a library card? (Response = 88%)

(nb respondents recorded as ‘yes’ or ‘no’ according to their response, regardless of whether the documentation quoted as examples were correct)

YES: 25 (78%)

(WHICH?): Passport
Proof of address [x7]
Proof of address/photo ID/utility bill
Bank statement/student card
Proof of address/letter from DWP/bank statement
Passport/utility bill/driving licence [x2]
Two forms of ID
Proof of address/photo ID
Passport/bill
Passport/birth certificate/home address ID
ID address – gas bill/passport/driving licence
ID birth certificate/passport/medical card
ID with current address
Birth certificate
ID
Normal ID – tenancy details etc
Tenancy agreement
Letter with current address

NO: 5 (15%)

DON’T KNOW: 2 (6%)

Do you think the need for proof of ID is a barrier for homeless people to use the library? (Response = 100%)

Respondents were read the proof requirements of Brent or Camden as appropriate.

YES: 25 (69%)

NO: 8 (22%)
They should have some ID on them

DON’T KNOW: 3 (8%)

Which of the following documents would you be able to present for registration in the library? (Response = 100%)

Respondents were asked to indicate all that they had available. There were no ‘nil’ responses

Passport 24 (66%)
Benefit book 28 (77%)
NHS letter 21 (58%)
Driving licence 14 (39%)
Utility bill 10 (28%)
Bank statement 26 (72%)

3.5 Application form problems

Yes – if alone 21
Yes – if not in other langs 23

Yes – other reason 8
Application form too long
Some people can't read or write [x3]
People with mental health problems
I get a bit confused with the questions, too many
Bad eyesight
Dyslexia

No 4
Don't know

3.6 Reasons for not using (may add to more than total number of respondents as more than one response possible)

Difficult to get card 21
Do not know how to join 23
Do not understand service offer 25
Do not think library can help 24
Scared 20
Not interested 21
Do not know where library is 13
Not comfortable 21
Other 10
They cannot afford the bus fare
Not sure
Strangers to the area
They have little need for library services
They can't read
Might not have any ID
Can't read the small print; might be observed being homeless
Depends on motivation
May be drunk and incapable
Too busy

Lack of information

3.7 Ideas for improving

Easier to get a library card 23

A letter from keyworker/hostel [x2]
Be able to use hostel temporary agreements signed by hostel worker
Letter from job centre
More mobile libraries
Like a prize draw
The requirement for joining should not be complicated and hard to meet
Flexible on ID requirements
Applications in hostels
Homeless groups should be able to apply on their behalf
Special card for homeless people [nb said by respondent who raised concern in 3.6 about being observed homeless]
Advertise in Big Issue
First to get information
Less forms – one type [of] ID
Less ID
Scrap ID [x2]
Drop utility bills
More publicity
More information
Provide area for homeless

More info on proof required 14

ID is just another hurdle

More info on what library offers 23

Easy enough already 15

I found it easy (said by a respondent who believed it was difficult for others) [x4]

[Using the library is easy enough] with assistance

Other 6
More posters on homeless, drugs and alcohol agencies
Don't like being indoors, like to be out travelling
I need help – how do I find the information I need? It's not easy to use the internet
Promote the library by having open days in the library
Home visits/mobile library
More signposting on the street

3.8 What can library do to attract more homeless people?

Send leaflets 29
Staff visits 28
Open day 27
Other 5
A nice cup of tea or coffee in the library for homeless people
To use library without having to join, read newspapers
Give people a card for the open day
Should visit day centres once a month
Posters in hostels/day centres

3.9 Do you encourage others to use library?

NO: 18

YES: 14

IF YES, HOW MANY? 64 (5 respondents did not specify a figure; 1 respondent specified 30 people and 1 said 20 people)
Most of my friends
Son and daughter
Everybody I meet in hostels and day centres

3.10 Other comments

- Never been to a library since school. I'd like to go back but need a push
- I hope some improvements can be made with these questionnaires, I've done loads in the past and nothing seems to happen
- Not open late enough
- Great what they do, they do well
- It's peaceful
- More different language and traditions such as Chinese
- The library I use in Harlesden has a limited amount of books ie Stephen King novels
- Enough information already included on the form
- More books and variety
- It's a good service
- The open day is a good idea – food and advice on homelessness
- [Library is] adequate for my needs
- The library was a great place when I was homeless to get off the streets and have a sleep and a wash
- [Respondent did not want to make it easier to get a library card] you have to ensure the security of the library
- They just don't do enough with their resources and the premises for the upcoming youths [nb respondent was a member/user aged 20-29]
- On the basis of the interview, I may go up and join
- Good
- Shame local library in Cotleigh Road has closed
- These services are excellent and the staff are extremely helpful
- The library service has much improved since I joined in the 50s eg access to the internet and training in computer skills

5.1 Male **28** Female **5** Not stated **2**

5.3 What is your age group?

15-19 **1** 20-29 **8** 30-39 **6** 40-49 **10** 50-59 **5** Over 60 **4** Not stated **1**

5.3 Ethnic Groups

In order to make sure that everyone has equal access to services we would also like to collect information about your ethnic background. Please indicate which group you feel that you most belong to:

White		**Black or Black British**	
British	16	Caribbean	4
Irish	5	African	4
Other European _____		Any other Black Back Background	
Any other White Background			
Mixed		**Other Groups**	
White & Black Caribbean		Chinese	1
White & Black African			
White & Asian	1		
Any other mixed background			
Asian or Asian British	1	Any other ethnic Group	1
Indian			
Pakistani			
Bangladeshi			
Any other Asian Background	1		

		Not stated	2

General comments

- Information in Polish, Kosovan and Bulgarian requested
- Library should not give access to those with a drink problem
- Not been lately, not felt like it
- [Library staff should] go round hostels, chat to people, explain what library service is
- [by a respondent who was suffering depression] I don't have a bus pass so it's not easy [to use the library]
- Library staff to come to this hostel, give info where it [library] is, what to do
- [On staff] very polite

Appendix 2: higher support needs users at Aldgate and Victoria

1. Experiences of libraries and library staff

Are you a member of a library? (response 100%)

YES: 7

NO: 4

If no, why not:

Don't know where 2 (18% of total)
Library can't help 1
Don't know how to join 1
Don't feel comfortable
Other 2
Difficult to join
Don't want to

How often do you visit the library and use its services? (totals exceed no of respondents with membership as some respondents used library services for which membership is not required)

Never 2
Monthly 5 (71% of members)
Weekly 1
More than once a week 2
Other 0

Was it easy to join? (response: 100% of those with membership)

YES: 6

NO: 1

NOT SURE: 0

If not easy, why:

Did the library staff assist you in joining? (response: 100% of those with membership)

Yes – by giving information 2
Yes – by giving help with application form 1
Yes – by explaining procedures and services to me 6
Yes – other 0
No 1
Not sure 0

How was the help you got from staff? (17 out of 18 responses – 94.5%)

Very good 2
Good 4
OK 2
Not very good 0
Other 0

Can the information given be improved?

YES: 0

NO: 5

If yes, how?

Did you feel comfortable asking the staff for help? (response: 8 out of 11 = 73%)

YES: 8

NO: 0

If no, why

2. What do you use the library for?

	I use this[1]	I don't use this	I don't use, but in general this is good[2]	Not needed
9) Entertainment: a) To borrow books	6 (86%)	2		
b) To borrow CDs, DVDs, videos	3 (43%)	2		
c) To read newspapers	5 (71%)	1	1 (9%)	
10) Access to Internet	6 (86%)	1	1 (9%)	
11) To get information:				
a) From reference book	4 (57%)	1	1 (9%)	
b) From newspapers / magazines	4 (57%)	1		
c) From staff	2 (29%)	1	1 (9%)	
d) From posters / leaflets	3 (43%)	1		
e) From the internet	5 (71%)	1		
12) To secure accommodation				
a) hostel or private rented		2	2 (18%)	
b) To look at local authority housing (Locata, Homes connections)		2	3 (27%)	
13) Training / self development:				
a) To find out about courses / training	5 (71%)	3		
b) To teach myself	3 (43%)	1	3 (27%)	
14) To meet people	1 (14%)	2	2 (18%)	1
15) To have a quiet place to work or read.	3 (43%)	2	3 (27%)	
Other (please specify)				

The figures in this table do not tally directly with the number of library members, users or non-members as some non-users indicated services they did not use but appreciated

[1] Percentages given as of total respondents who said they are library members (7)

[2] Percentages given as of total respondents (11)

What services would you like to see on offer in libraries? (Response rate = 6 out of 11 = 55%)

To find out about training / courses / events	
For leisure use / hobbies / interests (e.g. book, music, drawing clubs, etc.)	5
Pre-employment information	2
To find courses / training for employment	5
To get help & support	
Government services	0
Local council services	1
Local organisations / groups	0
Help to get a job	5
To get referred to organisations if needed	0
Language / cultural services	
Borrow books / DVDs in other languages	0
ESOL classes	1
Cultural organisations If so, which ones?	0

Do you think that library services should be open to all homeless people? (Response = 100%)

ALL HOMELESS: 11

NOT ALL HOMELESS: 0

DON'T KNOW: 0

Do you know what documents you are required to present in order to be able to access the local library/get a library card?

(nb respondents recorded as 'yes' or 'no' according to their response, regardless of whether the documentation quoted as examples were correct)

YES: 7

NO: 4

Do you think the need for proof of ID is a barrier for homeless people to use the library? (Response = 82%)

Respondents were shown the proof requirements of Brent or Camden as appropriate.

YES: 3

NO: 3

DON'T KNOW: 3

Which of the following documents would you be able to present for registration in the library? (Response = 100%)

Respondents were asked to indicate all that they had available. There was one ‘nil response’ – ‘none at the moment’.

Passport 2
Benefit book 8
NHS letter 4
Driving licence 1
Utility bill 3
Bank statement 6

3.5 Application form problems

Yes – if alone 1
Yes – if not in other langs 1
Yes – other reason 1
If you cannot read or write

No 7
Don’t know 0

3.6 Reasons for not using (may add to more than total number of respondents as more than one response possible)

Difficult to get card 5
Do not know how to join 2
Do not understand service offer 3
Do not think library can help 3
Scared 2
Not interested 7

Do not know where library is 6
Not comfortable 2
Other 1
Communications barrier

3.7 Ideas for improving

Easier to get a library card 4
Should be able to join at the hostel

More info on proof required 2
Fewer proofs if you want to borrow less
No ID

More info on what library offers 4
More info on libraries in hostels

Easy enough already 2

Other 5
Should ask non-users

3.8 What can library do to attract more homeless people?

Send leaflets 7
Staff visits 6
Open day 77
Other 1
Install more comfortable chairs

3.9 Do you encourage others to use library?

NO: 7

YES: 4

5.1 Male **10** Female **1**

5.4 What is your age group?

15-19 **0** 20-29 **5** 30-39 **4** 40-49 **2** 50-59 **0** Over 60 **0** Not stated **0**

5.4 Ethnic Groups

In order to make sure that everyone has equal access to services we would also like to collect information about your ethnic background. Please indicate which group you feel that you most belong to:

White		**Black or Black British**	
British	6	Caribbean	1
Irish	1	African	1
Other European _____		Any other Black Back Background	1
Any other White Background			
Mixed		**Other Groups**	
White & Black Caribbean		Chinese	

White & Black African			
White & Asian			
Any other mixed background			
Asian or Asian British		Any other ethnic Group	1
Indian			
Pakistani			
Bangladeshi			
Any other Asian Background			
		Not stated	2

Appendix 3: Discussion group with higher support needs users at King's Cross

Facilitated and noted by Caitriona Carney, Homeless Link

Feedback From Dennis Hand field House
Library Research

"Get a cat and read Keats"

Client Interviews

Total of 15 clients were interviewed. All residents were positive about libraries and saw them as positive for the local communities. Comments such as Library give people **"choice"** were stated.

Questions asked?
The focus groups concentrated on three main questions with similar questions been asked pending the outcome of original questions.

- **When was the last time you visited a library and why?**
- **What do you think of libraries? Do you feel comfortable to turn up and access a service?**
- **What changes would you make to a library and why?**

4 clients out of 15 had visited a library within the last year. 8 clients had ad-hoc visited within the last year. 3 clients had not visited in over 5 years.

Service users predominately used the library to access books, however none had a library card. They accessed the library by using it during the day, and read the books on site.

Where is your local library?
All clients knew where their local library was

- accessing libraries in Camden and Islington.

Identification for a membership
8 of 15 residents knew what identification was required to join the library. Its was mixed reaction all agreeing that two forms of ID been a challenge because the difficulty in accessing identification.
One suggestion was requesting 1 from of ID instead of two, which would allow more vulnerable people to access the service.
Residents also felt, it was important for library staff to understand why they stayed the day. **"No library card and wanting to finish the book"**
2 clients stated that at times they had **"overstayed their welcome".**

Library Staff
Overwhelming all residents had found all library staff to be extremely helpful and approachable. Comment such as **"pleasant and approachable"** All agreed they would be liked to be **"treated the same"** with workers understanding their basic support issues. Residents however were concerned that they may be judged by personal appearance e.g. **"unclean " "unkept"**.
One resident spoke how one library staff had helped her find her sister after 10 years.

A group discussion outlined the following

- Staff training around Homelessness
- Staff awareness around alcohol and drug issues.

Security staff were recognised as a barrier due to residents feeling they **"lacked understanding"**.

Changes to services
All agreed that all services must be accessible for all.

Below is the **outcome to the new services** and what new services could be implemented.

- Basic Internet support, possibly information on classes or a worker who could support basic support. All clients felt that they were not confident in accessing the Internet. All however were enthusiastic about learning.
- Basic computer skills.
- Local Street services team contact details.
- Referral forms for library workers to make a referral.
- Emergency information hotlines.
- Benefit information
- Daycentre contact details.
- Housing information and local HPU services.
- LOCATA [**choice based lettings Local authority housing**] information and support to access.
- Hostel vacancies information
- Night shelter information.
- Free food information. This could be achieved by having daycentre information.
- Information on accessing free clothes etc. This could be achieved by having daycentre information.
- Benefit information
- Legal information
- Missing person information
- Educational information.
- Sourcing information on family trees.
- Creative writing
- Poetry groups
- Newspapers
- Magazines

- Community Café

Other suggestions were that a mobile unit should visit the hostel.

Pets
Two residents in the hostel have animals and one was happy to leave the dog at the hostel whilst another suggested having some libraries that were animal friendly.

Appendix 4: library staff group discussions – Brent and Camden

Notes from discussion group produced from verbatim recordings by Anita Silberbauer

Focus Group Discussion Guide for Library Staff

Location:	**CAMDEN COUNCIL. Kilburn High Road Library Centre**
Date of focus group:	**1 August 2006**
Facilitator:	**Anita Silberbauer**
Participants:	**2 Site Librarians (Kilburn, Kentish Town)** **3 Library Service Assistants (Swiss Cottage, St Pancras)** **Home Library Service (Highgate)** **Assistant Library Manager (Swiss Cottage)** **(7)**

1.1 What does your home mean to you?
1.1.1 What functions does a home have?

Secure place, provides stability, offers refuge, roof over one's head, base for all other functions

1.2 What do you understand as 'homelessness'?

Rough sleepers come to mind first
People who stay with relatives, friends

1.2.1 What types of homelessness do you think there are?

Rough sleepers come to mind first
People who stay with relatives, friends

1.2.2 What do you think are the reasons for homelessness?

Relationship breakdowns, Leaving home / care, not having a social net
migrants

1.2.3 What do you think are the effects of homelessness on people?

Health problems, having no identity,

1.3 When is a person referred to as 'vulnerable'?

Discussed that difficulty of finding a definition as anyone can be vulnerable.

1.4 What do you know about your council's homeless strategy?

Government guidelines followed by the council. Participants were not aware of the key elements of the strategy.

1.5 What is the uptake of library services by homeless people? How often do homeless people visit the library?

You see regulars, all participants had at some point contact with homeless service users, they use it a s a safe place, libraries are the only public place where people can spend time; sometimes other library users make comments about homeless people regarding personal hygiene.

1.6.1 What assistance / help do you provide when vulnerable people join the library?

Library staff can refer people on to other services, there is a catalogue but they often just find the numbers and phone up, refer to Citizens Advice Bureaus or Homeless Persons Unit

1.6.2 **Do you think homeless people feel comfortable asking for help and support from** staff?

Staff need to make an effort, try and make them feel comfortable, treat library as non-judgemental place

If No, why is that?
Homeless people might have been turned down in other places / institutions, they might fear that negative interactions could lead to them losing the library as a secure place,

1.6.3 How helpful do you think is assistance you provide to homeless service users?

It varies, but in general staff are trying to be helpful.

1.7.1 What information do you give out?

Library guide (includes info on location of libraries, how many books allowed to take out etc.) & verbal explanation of all services available

1.7.2 Can the information you give out be improved? If yes, how?

Need to be careful not to give out too much information, make aware of CINDEX

Section 2 – Services

2.1 What do you think homeless people use the library for?

Secure place, toilet facilities (there are more now than before because less public toilets), read for entertainment (newspapers), feeling connected with the world

2.3 What services do you think homeless people would like to see on offer in libraries?

Libraries now offer free coffee; CINEX is available on all pc terminals – might be useful, see library as a place for referrals.
Home library service is taking books to hostels. They are facing the problem that often the books are not returned? Solution: use donated, older books; however, need to be careful not to just offer rejects to homeless people which would make them feel that they are not worth new books. Need to be realistic that some books might not get returned.

Section 3 – Barriers

3.1 Do you think library services should be available to all homeless people? Why & why not?

Yes. Library services need to be flexible and adaptable. Maybe offer limited membership, i.e. limited to just a few months or limited to amount of books available to take out. Homeless people might not have a safe place to keep books – offer to leave books in library (already done but only limited space in some libraries).

3.2 What forms of ID are required to gain access to a library card? (read information from website)

Yes, although exceptions are being made on an individual basis by library staff, i.e. a letter from the hostel confirming how long a person is staying there or a letter and ID of someone a homeless person is staying is enough.
Possibility of corporate membership: This used to be available more widely and is still happening with children's groups. Make hostels join the library and assume some responsibility for the books taken out.

3.3 Do you think the proof of ID is a barrier for homeless people to join the library? If so, why?

Policy varies from borough to borough. Make a uniform policy regarding ID. Some homeless people might not know that they can join without the standard ID requirements.
Offer 'membership light' offered already, which does allow access to pc but not to take out books. Maybe extend this scheme.

3.4. Do you think that filling in an application form might be a problem for some people? If so, what could be done to make it easier?

If people have literacy problems or language issues. But library staff will assist with filling in the form. Application forms are very basic.

3.4 Why do you think some homeless people do not use the library?

The library is underselling its services. Need to advertise their services more.

3.5 Do you have any ideas how access to the library could be made easier / to overcome barriers?

3.6 What can be done to make more homeless people use the library? (How can homeless people be better reached to inform them about library services?)

- Outreach / engage more with homeless people: arrange visits to hostels or invite people to library for open day.
- Partnership working: work with other organisations e.g. homeless persons' unit, job centre, CAB etc. Advertise library services more.
- Reach out and draw people in
- Make a personal connection

- Better publicise library service: Make sure not so obvious services are well publicised.
- Show what the library does: Inform service users and hostel staff about library services.
- Offer help on where to find relevant information
- Provide more info on training courses (often people don't know that they are free)
- Signposting
- More onsite courses in libraries (library staff already teach computer skills)
- Good customer service

3.6 Do you have any other comments?

Focus Group Discussion Guide for Library Staff

Location:	**BRENT COUNCIL. Willesden Green Library Centre**
Date of focus group:	**7 August 2006**
Facilitator:	**Anita Silberbauer**
Participants:	**Deputy Assistant Library Manger** **Outreach Library Service (Mobile Service)** **2 Librarians** **Customer Services Officer** **Library Manager** **Reader Developer & Marketing Manager** **Senior Librarian** **Library Assistant** **(9 from Willesden Green, Sudbury, Harlesden, Kensal Rise, Kilburn, outreach team)**

1.5 What does your home mean to you?
1.5.1 What functions does a home have?

Shelter, comfort, security, meeting point, safety, stability, a place to raise a family

1.6 What do you understand as 'homelessness'?

Rough sleepers, someone with no permanent residents, no stable life, travellers, hostel

1.6.1 What types of homelessness do you think there are?

Rough sleepers, runaways, travellers, people with no place to stay

1.6.2 What do you think are the reasons for homelessness?

Financial problems, family / relationship break downs, evictions, health problems

1.6.3 What do you think are the effects of homelessness on people?

Demoralising, mentally tortured, insecure, stress, inferiority (which can lead to substance abuse)

1.7 When is a person referred to as 'vulnerable'?

No definition was found. Summary that everyone can be vulnerable for a period of time.

1.8 What do you know about your council's homeless strategy?

Most participants did not know it existed. One person though it was written by the housing section of the council, nobody knew what it included.

1.5 What is the uptake of library services by homeless people? How often do homeless people visit the library?

It depends on the location of the library, some with hostels nearby see more residents coming in (mainly to read the papers), people could come in anything from on average of 1 / week to every day to take shelter

1.6.4 What assistance / help do you provide when vulnerable people join the library?

It was felt that libraries do not make it easy for homeless people to join the library especially with regard to membership forms, ID). Staff offer to make referrals / signposting. Staff offer the same assistance that everyone else can expect. In case of language issues, other staff are asked to interpret otherwise applicants will need to take the form with them to have it translated by friends/ family.

1.6.5 **Do you think homeless people feel comfortable asking for help and support from staff?**

Yes, but it does depend on the area and how many staff are available, how big the area is and the general 'feel' of the library.

If No, why is that?
It was mentioned that some research had been carried out amongst visitors of a library regarding the thought process when entering the library form taking out a book. There are a lot of barriers (proof of address being one of them).

1.6.6 How helpful do you think is assistance you provide to homeless service users?

It is not too good but also not too bad. Staff will give their best.

1.7.1 What information do you give out?

Membership form to be filled in and opening hours and Welcome to Brent Library Service booklet.

1.7.2 Can the information you give out be improved?
If yes, how?

The information is always looked at if it is still relevant and if it needs updating by library staff. Staff need are aware that there can be too much information sometimes.

Section 2 – Services

2.1 What do you think homeless people use the library for?

Newspapers, internet, shelter / keep warm, for company, to use toilets / facilities

2.4 What services do you think homeless people would like to see on offer in libraries?

- Being able to borrow for (entertainment & information), i.e. getting a library card
- Information on advice / ESOL sessions (in some libraries ESOL and computer skills courses are being held already) and they should be available in all libraries) – no membership required to attend these courses
- Drop in sessions (e.g. for people with any problems)
- Citizenship classes
- There has got to be more community reach & community engagement from libraries
- As the publicity is limited libraries need to give out publicity material to inform people that services are free and what is available.

Section 3 – Barriers

3.1 Do you think library services should be available to all homeless people? Why & why not?

Yes, was the overall answer because it is a public service and should be available to all. However, concerns were voiced regarding what happens if people become abusive, if there are hygiene issues or people's general mental state. It was felt library staff needed to know more about how to deal with issues homeless people are facing.

3.2 What forms of ID are required to gain access to a library card? (read information from website)

One item of proof of address (e.g. utility bill) + filled in application form

Staff commented that for people without a permanent address a letter from someone they are staying with (who can provide ID), a letter from the hostel, or a medical card is enough.

3.3 Do you think the proof of ID is a barrier for homeless people to join the library? If so, why?

- The question of usefulness / purpose of having proof of address was raised (e.g. people move around a lot, can keep their old library cards and use them but they don't live at that address anymore)
- Suggestion was made to register the hostel as the library member. All books taken out will be registered with the hostel which is responsible for the return of the items. The hostel would in turn keep a list of which hostel residents they are lending the books to and will chase return of items with residents.
- It was also mentioned that other councils have scrapped the proof of ID requirements and that loss of stock has not increased significantly. Library staff thought it might be a possibility to leave books behind the counter for safekeeping but were concerned that not all libraries have enough space.

3.4. Do you think that filling in an application form might be a problem for some people? If so, what could be done to make it easier?

Staff thought that the forms were very long but said that the information was necessary for statistical purposes. Staff offer support if needed to fill in the form.

3.5 Why do you think some homeless people do not use the library?

- ID requirements
- people may think there is a cost involved,
- language barrier
  perception that libraries are a white middle class establishment – work on social inclusion
- homeless people might feel threatened – hence do more outreach
- fear of authority
- what services are available - more info might be needed

- library image in the long germ – the design of libraries, look of buildings
- Leaflets

3.6 Do you have any ideas how access to the library could be made easier / to overcome barriers?

- Scrap any ID requirements; one solution might be to introduce limited membership (either time limitations or limitations on how many items can be taken out) for people with no or not permanent address
- Temporary membership – risk is limited if the entitlement is abused
- Library tours – give more publicity to libraries, some libraries have open days but only once per year, although they are usually quite successful
- Consult with local voluntary groups / other homeless organisations to find out what is the best way to break down barriers

3.7 What can be done to make more homeless people use the library? (How can homeless people be better reached to inform them about library services?)

- Outreach work – work in partnership with other organisations from the voluntary sector or housing providers
- Voluntary organisations to arrange for homeless people to visit libraries and library staff to visit hostels
- Reciprocal approach: hostel staff and library staff to work together (comments made on high turnover of hostel staff)
- Staff training – it was felt especially front line staff (full / part-time and temporary staff) would benefit from training on how to deal with vulnerable people, awareness to homeless issues, refugees
- Create more awareness around libraries

3.8 Do you have any other comments?

Staff commented that they hoped the involvement with the LLDA would increase the libraries' image and what they do to that they can serve the community better.

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