

# Learning in Libraries



June 2010

No 8

Welcome to this issue of **Learning in Libraries**, our newsletter for learning providers and partners: keeping you informed about learning initiatives and events in Hertfordshire's libraries and archives.

In this issue: partnership working with West Herts College, Family Fun Day at Stevenage Library, a prize-winning competition entry, volunteering at the county archive, Adult Learners Week, Family Learning Festival, a Six Book Challenge update and Litfest 2010

## **Computer Courses in Libraries – Partnership with West Herts College**

*Andrew Bignell, Head of Information Services & Lifelong Learning writes...*

West Herts College has worked with the library service since 2005 to deliver computer courses in libraries in Watford and Three Rivers. The success of this partnership is celebrated in a new case study, which was presented to the Informal Adult Learning Planning Group in April.

The case study sets out how the partnership developed, starting with the delivery of short computer courses to 100 learners in North Watford and Oxhey Libraries in 2005/6 and has steadily expanded. In 2008 a 10 PC learning suite was opened at Croxley Green Library, jointly funded by the college and the library service. In 2009, the new Oxhey Library opened including a 16 PC learning suite, funded by the Big Lottery Fund. In the first two terms of the current academic year, 413 learners have enrolled for courses at Watford, North Watford, Croxley Green and Oxhey libraries. The courses cover computing for beginners, intermediate and advanced, Internet and e-mail, touch-typing and digital photography.

The informal learning environment of the library is popular with learners who have been out of formal education for many years (more than 50% learners are over 60) and the visibility of people learning in libraries also motivates reluctant learners to take their first steps in developing IT skills, and many progress to take up further learning.

## **Family Fun Day at Stevenage Library**

*Pamela Hutson, Lifelong Learning & Local Studies Librarian for North Herts and Stevenage writes...*

In March a Family Fun Day was held at Stevenage Library organised by Hertfordshire Adult & Family learning Service (HALFS) and the library service. The aim of the event was to promote services provided by HALFS and the library service as well as partner organisations which support families, such as Children's Centres and local colleges. The Fire Service also came along to promote the use of smoke alarms and fire safety.

The target audience for the day was parents and young children. Activities included card making for Mother's Day, Baby Rhyme Time sessions with Bookstart Bear, visits to the fire engine and mobile library, IT sessions and displays by local organisations.

The Family Fun Day was a success: it attracted over 300 extra visitors to the library and organisations taking part were pleased with the promotion of their services. It was the latest in a series of events which have been held in libraries including Oxhey and Borehamwood.

## **Winning with Watford Quick Reads book group**

*Fiona McDonald, Lifelong Learning Development Librarian writes...*

In February, Quick Reads reached their fifth birthday. To celebrate, they ran a competition in which people were invited to answer the question "How have Quick Reads made a difference to your life?" Members of the Watford Quick Reads book group (run by the library service in partnership with the Local Learning Partnership) sent in entries. The group were later surprised and delighted to hear that one of them had won a prize.

Beverley Small from the library service attended the Adult Learners Week awards ceremony in May with the winner to see her receive her prize – a signed set of Quick Reads presented by author Peter James. She said, "It was lovely to go to the awards and hear the winners' stories, but so much nicer when it is one of our own group who has really benefited from the Quick Reads Book Group."



Here are excerpts from the winning entry:

Quick Reads have given me a sunnier outlook on life.... I now read more quickly and with confidence.....I always look forward to my next Quick Read, my window on a new world!

## **Volunteering at Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS)**

*Llinos Thomas, County Local Studies Librarian writes...*



HALS run an active programme of opportunities for volunteers to learn new skills. This includes activities such as palaeography (reading old handwriting), web design, box-listing accessions, typing and data entry, preservation, packaging and document cleaning, as well as research and outreach. Volunteers are increasingly getting involved in developing community archives. In Hertfordshire, about 50 volunteers are already engaged in community archives through the Making Memories project (2009-2011) and over 40 volunteers are working at the archive centre.

Volunteering is open to all, and no previous archives experience is required. No matter what their background, age or individual needs, volunteers bring a diverse mix of skills, qualities and experience to working with archives. They give their time and skills free, but in return they can benefit from a sense of achievement, learn new skills, gain experience, develop confidence, overcome social exclusion and enjoy new opportunities. Volunteers are never used as an alternative to paid staff or to maintain the delivery of core customer services. Their work brings added value to the organisation, especially through the development of online resources, which are increasingly demanded and expected by customers, and other tasks beyond the capacity of paid staff.

Individuals approach the archive centre for a variety of reasons. These include social reasons, to improve their mental wellbeing or confidence, to aid a return to work after a period of illness or redundancy. People who have an active interest in history, conservation, or want to work with historical documents have also volunteered.

Projects people are currently working on include indexing tithe awards of the 1830s, listing churchwardens accounts of the 1700s and indexing the names of individuals from the Union Workhouse Admission and Discharge books. This is of value to academics, local historians and genealogists. 14,303 names from the Hatfield and Hertford workhouses have been added to Hertfordshire Names Online (HNO), an online database

*“The work at HALS has given me a sense of purpose and the opportunity to contribute something interesting and worthwhile. It has also filled what would have been a large gap in my life, along the way I have met and been able to work with some very nice people. In short it has been a very positive experience.”* Male Volunteer (65 or over)

## **Adult Learner’s Week May 2010**

*Fiona McDonald, Lifelong Learning Development Librarian writes...*

Adult Learner’s Week is over for another year and again our programme of events attracted learners to libraries to try out new skills or “brush up” on existing talents. 28 events took place in libraries across the county including How to start a book group; an origami workshop; a silver surfer’s Internet workshop and Retro Herts, a 1950s and 1960s open day

Comments from participants included:

“More confident in using the websites”

“It motivated me to take up knitting”

A more detailed report will appear in the next edition of Learning in Libraries

## **Family Learning Festival – October 2010**

*Andrew Bignell, Head of Information Services & Lifelong Learning writes...*

In recent years, Hertfordshire libraries have mounted a broad programme of learning activities during the annual Family Learning Festival. In 2010/11 we will be replacing our library computer system, which requires every member of library staff to undertake a concentrated training programme during October and November 2010. For this reason, and for this year only, we have reluctantly decided not to run Family Learning Festival events in libraries this year. Libraries will, of course, be happy to promote other family learning activities in their local communities.

## Six Book Challenge update

*Fiona McDonald, Lifelong Learning Development Librarian writes...*

As the Six Book Challenge nears the national closing date, I am pleased to report record numbers participating this year. 73 people signed up to take part in libraries across the county plus 18 prisoners at the Mount Prison in Bovingdon, making a total of 91 – over 100% increase on last year's numbers. To date, 20 people have read all six books and completed the Challenge. These names will be entered in the national prize draw taking place at the end of June.

One Challenge completer said:

"I like this challenge, because of this I read six books quickly. And now I like reading books. Before this I'm lazy to read ... Now I enjoy reading and thanks everyone to make me a reader"

A fuller report will appear in the next edition of Learning in Libraries.

## Litfest 10

*Shirley Overall, National Year of Reading Legacy Officer, writes...*

Litfest 10 was organised by Hertfordshire Libraries in partnership with Transworld Publishers and Random House Children's Books. A series of events were held in libraries throughout Hertfordshire. Around 800 people attended 22 events over the four weeks.

Events included:

- Mike Perham, who at 16 sailed around the world alone; Mike gave a really inspirational talk at his local library in Potters Bar.
- Best selling author Lee Child at Welwyn Garden City. An audience of 165 people were treated to a fantastic evening with the author talking about his life and work and answering questions from the audience.
- Paul Sussman and Nick Drake at Hemel Hempstead Library. These two authors gave an absolutely fantastic talk about writing novels based in Ancient Egypt.
- John O'Farrell at Welwyn Garden City Library giving his own slant on the history of modern Britain; it was like being in a comedy club everyone laughed so much.
- Jack Sheffield at Letchworth Library telling stories of being a primary school teacher; a highly amusing event.
- Joanne Harris at St Albans Library talking about her latest novel Blue eyed boy; another author who could have been a stand-up comedian!



We are hoping to organise another bigger and better festival in 2011.

Learning in Libraries is edited by Lifelong Learning Development Librarians Fiona McDonald and Sue Bloomfield. The next issue will appear in the autumn term.

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