

Case Study
The Reading Agency
September 2012

LOVE
LIBRARIES

LOVE
VOLUNTEERING

Summer Reading Challenge volunteering in 13 London authorities as part of the GLA Team London project

Abstract

This year The Reading Agency worked with 13 partner library services to develop library-linked volunteering as part of the GLA Team London project, Love Libraries Love Volunteering. The project encompassed helping build staff and volunteer capacity, engagement with the library as a community hub, and digital skills. A key strand of this work focused on the Summer Reading Challenge, which is coordinated by The Reading Agency and run in 97% of UK public libraries. The Reading Agency supported 13 library services to develop best practice engagement of young volunteers, providing capacity for the Challenge, along with the chance for young people to develop new skills and learning which could open up employment opportunities.

The issue / background

Volunteering has shown that libraries and reading can offer valuable opportunities for young people to get involved in their local communities and lead on library services for other young people.

Summer Reading Challenge Volunteering has been developed in response to:

- Library services need for support during the Summer Reading Challenge
- Evidence from The Reading Agency's programmes that libraries and reading offer valuable opportunities for young people to get involved in their local communities
- A pressing need for opportunities for young people to acquire skills and accreditation as youth unemployment reaches a record high, along with increasing pressure on university places and cuts to youth opportunity funds.

The Summer Reading Challenge provides an opportunity for library services new to volunteering to be supported through a recognised scheme.

Partners and funding

The key partner library authorities were:

- Barnet
- Bromley/Bexley
- Croydon
- Ealing
- Enfield
- Hackney
- Hammersmith & Fulham
- Havering
- Kensington & Chelsea
- Merton
- Redbridge
- Waltham Forest
- Westminster

As key partners, library services did the following:

- Contributed to the development of the Team London Love libraries Love Volunteering Project
- Received training which focused on how volunteers can produce digital content to promote libraries and reading, building their digital and social media skills
- Ran training sessions for the volunteers before the Challenge started. The sessions outlined the summer ahead and introduced the roles for the volunteers
- Provided roles for volunteers who wanted to develop particular skills. Provided accreditation opportunities where possible and supported links to accreditation schemes such as ASDAN or Duke of Edinburgh
- Encouraged year-round volunteering, and offered volunteers opportunities in the library after the Challenge finished

What we did

The programme aimed to:

- Improve volunteer skills and confidence
- Increase young people's awareness and usage of libraries
- Increase accreditation opportunities for young people

The Reading Agency ran free training days for participating Summer Reading Challenge volunteering authorities as well as additional training for those taking part in the GLA Team London project. The training aimed to provide libraries with advice and guidance on establishing a volunteering strategy and working with young people. As well as the resources available from Team London, the Reading Agency provided authorities with specialist resources and materials to support reading initiatives and volunteering.

Data and evidence

Numbers of volunteers aged 11-25 are shown below:

| Authority | Number aged 11-25 volunteering | Number who had volunteered before | Total number of volunteering hours |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| Barnet | 34 | 12 | 247 |
| Bromley/Bexley | 74 | 19 | Bromley 598, Bexley 2611 |
| Croydon | NA | NA | NA |
| Ealing | NA | NA | Only older volunteers |
| Enfield | 30 | 30 | 1107.5 |
| Hackney | Pending data | Pending data | Pending data |
| Havering | Pending data | Pending data | Pending data |
| Redbridge | 85 | Approx. 20 | 2705 |
| Westminster | 50 | No data | 1598 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 14 | No data | 332 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | No data | No data | No data |
| Waltham Forest | 10 | No data | No data |
| Merton | 71 | 36 | 2755.15 |
| TOTAL | 368 | 117 (251 new volunteers) | 11953.65 hours |

"It's hard to say what I like the most about volunteering in the library because I've always loved books and libraries but what I like the most about this experience is the fact that I've made so many new friends and learnt so many new things that I probably wouldn't have known before and explore the library a bit more." Volunteer, Redbridge

"I enjoyed it so much and even though I have been volunteering for a short amount of time, I would still like to carry on volunteering for the years to come."
Volunteer, Redbridge

"I have really gained a lot from this experience that will really help me on a daily basis." Volunteer, Merton

"I really enjoyed my volunteering experience, the staff were very friendly and approachable and I feel that it has really boosted my confidence."
Volunteer, Westminster

A video on volunteers' experiences at Westminster is available at <http://readingagency.org.uk/young-people/004-get-involved/003-volunteering/summer-reading-challenge-volunteering.html>

Impact

Our work with libraries using Summer Reading Challenge volunteers has shown the following outcomes:

- Improved volunteer skills and confidence
- Increased young people's awareness and usage of libraries
- More young people encouraged to read more
- Increased accreditation opportunities for young people

The programme has been embedded as an important model that adds capacity for libraries, alongside tangible benefits for young people and participating children.

Key Learning Points

Key learning from the programme will be available in the Summer Reading Challenge report in November 2013 from: <http://readingagency.org.uk/children/004-impact/002-research/>

Future Plans

- The Team London project is now rolling into next year with the aim of increasing the sustainability of the programme.
- The model is also being extended to other areas of The Reading Agency's Universal Reading Offer, with a volunteering strategy being developed to support a year round volunteering offer.

Further information:

For further information, please contact Miranda McKearney at miranda.mckearney@readingagency.org.uk and visit www.readingagency.org.uk

Love Libraries Love Volunteering
<http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/policylobbying/culturetourismand2012/lovelibraries/>