



LIBRARIES - AN ESSENTIAL PART OF LOCAL RECOVERY & RENEWAL



Libraries Unlimited delivers public libraries across Devon and Torbay, providing a trusted network of community hubs. Our services and programmes connect communities, support wellbeing, secure digital inclusion and access for all, offer learning, exploration and skills, reach children and young people and enable business startups. We believe Libraries Unlimited is strongly placed to act as an 'anchor organisation', building on the role of the library as a trusted community asset.

The ambition of Team Devon that 'no community is left behind' resonates with us, and we seek to work in partnership to maximise our reach into rural and coastal communities, the city and market towns through our network of 54 libraries and mobile libraries.

53 libraries have already reopened their doors. Our role in rebuilding confidence in the high street has been a priority for us. We were one of the first library services in the country to reopen for book browsing and computer use, and many customers reported that we were the first place they visited after many months in lockdown.

Nationally we have been involved in a number of conversations, from how to reopen buildings safely with DCMS to what the future library service looks like. I am more convinced than ever that the library service has a significant role to play in three areas that, whilst they are at the core to who we are and our service, are not generally associated with libraries by the majority of the public or funders:

- Economic growth
- Individual wellbeing
- Community regeneration

This document outlines how we will deliver our five strategic objectives to support recovery and renewal of communities and the economy throughout and post COVID-19.

Alex Kittow, Chief Executive, Libraries Unlimited

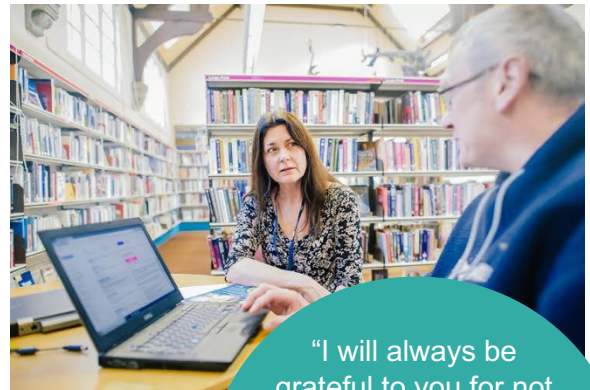
Libraries Unlimited will support unemployed people and those starting small businesses in order to help the economy of Devon and Torbay recover from the crisis

The need... The number of people claiming unemployment benefits rose in May 2020 to 2.8 million, according to the ONS. Between March and May, there has been an increase of 1.6 million claimants. This figure is expected to rise as furlough schemes come to an end in October.

How libraries can help...

Employment Support and Training Libraries provide facilities and support to help job seekers to find work and improve their employment skills, including:

- Access to computers and WiFi
- Support for the unemployed to get online
- Support job-searching online
- Help with CV writing
- Support to improve IT skills
- Volunteering opportunities



"I will always be grateful to you for not shutting me out. I don't think I would still be alive, if you hadn't listened and got me the help I needed."

Work Clubs Our five library Work Clubs support over 600 people a year in welcoming, informal spaces providing direct support, training and signposting to other services.

During lockdown our Bideford and Barnstaple Work Clubs offered support and information about job opportunities, training schemes, practical advocacy and mock interviews. We supported people to secure work during the lockdown including jobs as kitchen assistants, administrators, nurses, care workers, sale assistants and as local coronavirus response volunteers.

Business and Entrepreneur Support Our Business and Intellectual Property Centres (BIPC) in Exeter and Barnstaple are physical hubs providing access to free and low-cost information and support in developing a business idea. The service includes:

- Free access to high-quality UK and global market intelligence, customer insights and company data (worth over £5m) and intellectual property information and guidance
- One-to-one support, mentoring and training delivered by the British Library and private/public sector business experts and partners
- Inspirational networking events, featuring role model entrepreneurs
- Welcoming spaces with computers, desks and WiFi.

55% of new business owners supported by the BIPC network are women (national average 20%) Over a third are from a BAME background (less than 5% nationally)

British Library

"Without the BIPC I could never have afforded to see the reports. I have zero budget for those things and yet they are vital lifelines for small businesses."



Thanks to funding from the DCMS we will launch **new Business & IP Centres in Paignton, Newton Abbot** and other locations, significantly expanding our business information offer via libraries and from home, including grantfinder and financial workshops.

Libraries are hubs for community development and regeneration in Devon and Torbay

The need... Lockdown has damaged communities by breaking community bonds and forcing people into isolation. Physical distancing means that many community spaces, cultural events and other venues where people came together will be restricted for some time to come.

How libraries can help... Reopening libraries to visitors, offering COVID secure spaces, has signaled the beginning of a return to normal; helping high streets, shops and community facilities to recover from lockdown.

Digital offer – We hear first-hand the challenges faced by those without digital technology at home and support people to get online to access the services and help they need; through staff support, IT volunteers, and partnerships.

Health and wellbeing – Supporting the immediate and long-term health and wellbeing of our communities, listening to and being responsive to their changing needs.

Social prescribing – Raising awareness of the local support that is available by connecting people to community groups and services and working with a range of local partners.

Community cohesion – Bringing people together and connecting communities through events, activities and experiences.

Support for those with special needs or disabilities – Providing support and connections for individuals and their carers through autism-friendly libraries, visually impaired reading groups and sensory equipment.

Mobile libraries and home delivery services – Providing a key source of social interaction for those who have difficulty leaving their homes.

The digital divide is 'fast becoming a defining social justice issue of this crisis.'

Polly Neate, Shelter

554,000 computer and WiFi hours

used across Devon and Torbay in 2019/2020

"I didn't have access to emails or online services during lockdown – I walked for 2 hours to use the library when it reopened"

Over **3 million visitors** a year

198,280 people attended 11,117 events

"I miss using the library space. – it's warm and caring. Where I live is cold, dark and damp, so I use the library as much as I can."



'Libraries allow for social mobility; they are places of possibility, opening doors for many people.'

Darren Henley, Arts Council

Libraries Unlimited will support disadvantaged children and families in Devon and Torbay to reduce educational inequalities resulting from the pandemic

The need... The disruption to education caused by the pandemic is hitting disadvantaged children hardest. Studies suggest the pandemic has already set back progress in reducing educational inequality by ten years. All children and young people have been disadvantaged to some degree by the pandemic and lockdown.

'During lockdown, one fifth of pupils – over two million children - did no schoolwork at home, or less than an hour a day'
LLAKES

How libraries can help... We offer activities and programmes that benefit all children and young people, and we will identify groups that will benefit from targeted promotion.

Through lockdown we moved our regular activities to online. Through recovery we will offer a blended approach for families with activities taking place in library spaces, in the community and online.

'20% of those on free school meals had no access to a computer at home' LLAKES

Bounce and Rhyme – To encourage parent and child bonding and the development of early language skills.

Book Track and Book Quest – Programmes that reward children for reading.

FabLab Digital Making, Lego Clubs and Code Clubs – Activities to encourage creativity and early technical skills.

Promoting reading – Children have access to quality books and resources that will encourage them to read for pleasure.

Bookstart – The gift of reading for every baby and 3 year old through our partnership with BookTrust and local agencies.

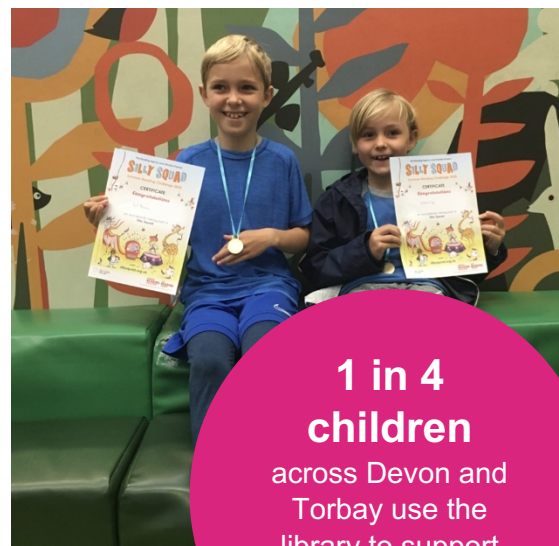
Bookstart Corner courses – With children's centres we deliver sessions to increase confidence in families that struggle to share books and stories with their children.

eBooks – Free ebooks and audiobooks for children and young people.

Universal library membership – Every family registering the birth of a new baby in Devon receives library membership.

Children in Care – With the Virtual School we provide all children new into care with library membership and a book token.

Working with schools – To support families as they transition back into school life and promote reading.



1 in 4 children

across Devon and Torbay use the library to support their reading and learning

'Reading for pleasure is more important for children's cognitive development than their parents' level of education and is a more powerful factor in life achievement than socio-economic background.' TRA

40 young people from Exeter Primary Schools (Thomas Ward/Pupil-Premium Funding) will learn digital making skills with FabLab Devon 3DIGNITE thanks to a Ward Funding Grant.

Libraries Unlimited is a trusted source of information for the people of Devon and Torbay

"Just a brief look at the information you supplied and it's better than Google."

The need... In times of crisis and recovery, people need a trusted source of information to help them and their families to cope with financial, social and medical insecurity and to live safely and well.

How libraries can help... Build on our role as a trusted source we will expand the scope and reach of our services. During lockdown we have seen an explosion in the use of our high quality information which is available from home, including:

Newspapers and eMagazines – Providing unlimited access to thousands of newspapers online, newly introduced during lockdown. 24/7 access to digital magazines from the New Scientist to Women's Health.

eBooks and eAudiobooks – Borrow anywhere, anytime from our range of reading apps and expanded collections during 2020.

Business information – Including over a thousand small business factsheets, guides and sector-specific reports.

Reference – Offering a large online reference library of subject dictionaries and encyclopaedias.

Family History – Ancestry Library Edition has been temporarily extended to library members at home, courtesy of ProQuest.

Consumer information – Consumer product reports and advice guides.

Reading Well collections Books recommended by health professionals to support:

- mental health
- children
- young people
- dementia
- long-term health conditions

"I'm listening to the audiobook *Queer Intentions*. You have made my life better. You are a brilliant educator."



New for lockdown

3,487
free newspapers
downloaded
during August

'Libraries are a non-stigmatised space that is both welcoming and empowering for people seeking support.'

'Libraries have long been places where people have sought answers and comfort; Reading Well combines the safe space of the library with inspiring children and families to read for pleasure and wellbeing' Reading Well

Libraries Unlimited will provide support to people in Devon and Torbay who have been affected by COVID-19 and/or by lockdown

The need... Loneliness was already recognised as one of the greatest public health challenges of our time, when the government launched its loneliness strategy in 2018. It has been linked to early deaths and an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, depression and cognitive decline.

'22% of those without prior mental health problems said that their mental health was poor or very poor during lockdown' Mind

How libraries can help... Libraries are well positioned to support individuals recover from COVID-19 and lockdown. We have a broad reach through our libraries and mobile libraries, an increasing digital presence, and an established programme supporting health and wellbeing including:

Shared Reading Groups – Promoting positive mental health.

Death Cafes – Giving safe space for the discussion of

otherwise taboo areas.

"Mood-boosting" Books – For adults, teens and younger readers.

ESOL and Language Cafes – Increasing connections between local people speaking languages other than English.

Community Initiatives – Collection points for donated sanitary products and hygiene products, winter clothing rails and suspended coffees for individuals that are homeless and/or in need.

We had a positive impact by offering many of our services and groups digitally when lockdown restrictions were at their tightest.

We recognise the limitations of a digital space when tackling loneliness, poor mental health and trying to inspire people to fulfil their potential. Digital spaces can completely exclude some individuals and cause additional negative impact (e.g. toxic social media) on others. We will use physical and digital spaces to ensure the greatest and most effective reach. Libraries support people in need and help them through this crisis and beyond by:

- Expanding the scope and reach of our services, outside of our walls as well as inside.
- Growing our reach through partnerships, providing spaces and support for partners to deliver services.
- Focusing efforts on reducing isolation and supporting positive mental health.
- Supporting isolated individuals to access services digitally through our computers and WiFi.
- Delivering varied empathy sessions with partners, allowing the sharing of experiences, access to specialist advice and promoting peer support.
- Responding to localised need through our ongoing work with communities.

'65% of adults and 75% of 13-24 year olds with a pre-existing mental health problem said it had become worse during lockdown'
Mind



19% of readers say that reading stops them from feeling lonely
University of Liverpool

1,500
online
events
hosted during
Lockdown

75,000 followers
over 110 social media
accounts

Information and online
events reaching
communities across
Devon and Torbay

Contact us about our recovery and renewal work

Tabitha Witherick, Head of Library Service and Customer Experience

tabitha.witherick@librariesunlimited.org.uk

07976 584697

Find out more

librariesunlimited.org.uk



Our **Annual Report** is coming soon...



Registered Charity Number: 1170092

Registered Company Number (England and Wales): 9822597

Registered Office: Exeter Library, Castle Street, Exeter, Devon EX4 3PQ