

A photograph of a group of people outdoors. In the center, an older man with a beard and white hair is laughing heartily, his mouth wide open. He is wearing a dark polo shirt. To his left, another person's arm and shoulder are visible, wearing a grey sweatshirt. To his right, a person's arm and shoulder are visible, wearing a light blue shirt. The background is blurred green foliage.

**Libraries  
Unlimited**

ENRICHING LIVES,  
BUILDING COMMUNITIES

**Impact Report 2021-22**



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# MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR



The past 12 months has been a period of recovery. It has been a delight to fully open the doors of our library buildings, and to witness the incredible resilience of our staff and volunteers who have continued to rapidly respond to a changing and uncertain environment. We have seen the loyalty and trust of our customers, who have greatly valued our services throughout the lockdowns, and who were so grateful to be able to come back and see us in person. The messages and gratitude expressed by them has meant so much to our staff.

We have made excellent strides to boost all our figures back to pre-Covid levels. The stand out success has been eAudiobooks, which have surged to 201,662 downloads, compared to 162,135 last year. Our number of active users has also shown a healthy recovery; currently 52,217 compared to 25,417 last year at the height of the pandemic. We still have a way to go to reach the 59,277 of 2018-19, but we are on track and, according to Libraries Connected, broadly in line with national trends.

The way we have adapted over the past two years will set the pattern for the future. The extreme circumstances meant that we were able to create and test drive many new services such as running online events and expanding our range of eBooks and eMagazines. This past year has seen an intense period of work in scoping out our approach for the next five years. Details of that strategy are in this report and we have an exciting time ahead.

We have put considerable financial commitment into welcoming people back to the libraries and developing services. We have also brought in new initiatives like our Work:Spaces which will support local businesses and generate some much-needed income. We have begun to upgrade our IT infrastructure which will continue this year. We went into the year in a healthy financial position having saved on costs and gained through fundraising.

The Board of Trustees has approved the budget going ahead for this financial year, based on forecasted strong reserves. This is important because it will help us to manage a precarious financial environment. It also puts us in a strong position to roll out some

ambitious projects over the coming year that help us enrich lives and build communities. These inclusive and inspiring initiatives range from community fridges and debt advice sessions to helping people through the cost of living crisis, new groups and events to combat loneliness, and continued investment in physical and online book stock, particularly to help children with their literacy.

There are of course challenges ahead. In common with every other industry, we are finding recruitment and retention harder than it used to be. That will take some of our focus in the coming months. We also have a busy winter campaign ahead, helping communities through extremely challenging financial times with initiatives to help with budgeting, food planning, health and wellbeing, digital access, loneliness and job and business opportunities.

We end the year in a place where we can be extremely proud of how we have worked together as a team, not only to overcome challenges but to embrace them. It has been a privilege for me to serve our communities with my fellow Board members, staff and volunteers. Thank you for everything you have done. I would also like to take this opportunity of thanking all our customers and supporters. I look forward to working with you in the year ahead.



**PROFESSOR WILL HARVEY**

Chair of the Board of Trustees

1st September 2022



# MESSAGE FROM OUR CHIEF EXECUTIVE

**A collection of books in a building is not a library. A library is the people who come to discover those books, who use them to develop their businesses, who bring their children to learn to love them.**

A library is not just part of a community, it is a community. And this year as we've supported the people of Devon and Torbay in their Covid recovery, we've shown more than ever how libraries play such a vital role in community life.

We started the year still in lockdown from Covid with our buildings closed. Our efforts were focused on providing our Choose and Collect service for book borrowing and a huge

range of online support. Once restrictions were lifted we welcomed people back in to our buildings. Our wonderful staff went full steam ahead in restarting in-person events and much-loved annual activities such as the Summer Reading Challenge. And it worked. Combined physical and digital borrowing overtook pre-pandemic levels.

But there was a shift away from DVD and CD borrowing. We took the difficult decision to stop buying in new DVDs and CDs and phase out loans, selling off our stock and ploughing this money into expanding our book and digital buying.

ALEX KITTOW

Chief Executive  
Libraries Unlimited

1st September 2022



The University of Bedfordshire did research showing that lockdowns, school closures and home learning during Covid had a negative effect on the literacy levels of 90% of primary school children across the UK. Our Secret Book Quest launched in November to help children discover a love of reading and to recover literacy levels. In the first two months over 500 children signed up to read their 50 books and get their stickers and certificates.

Around the libraries it was also time for a facelift. Some of the work was done during lockdown closures but we have also drawn up an ambitious programme of upgrades for six library buildings for 2022 – 23. And we welcomed our new mobile library which will serve rural communities in the South Hams and West Devon.

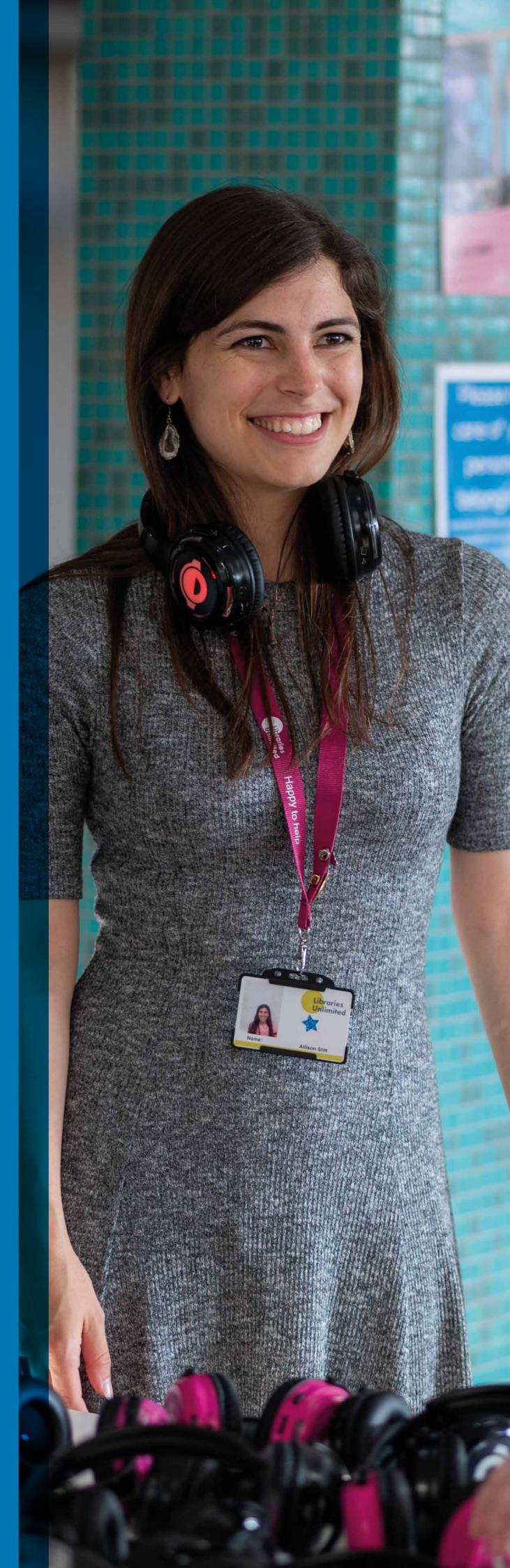
The Arts Council pinpointed that job seekers on average make up 39% of library users. Our Business & IP Centres, Job Club and Kickstart programmes acted as calm, safe, neutral, free spaces with support and digital resources that proved crucial to the lives of those seeking work or developing their own business.

Covid changed many things for us, kicking off numerous online ways of working that we will embrace in our future services. Coupled with our sixth anniversary, it was the perfect point for us to develop a new strategy. We simplified our brand this year and rolled out our fresh, ambitious new look across our library buildings and website.

As we move into 2022 – 23 we will continue to focus on enriching lives and building communities, not only to be a destination of choice but to be an inclusive and inspiring employer of choice. Having an impact on children's literacy remains a priority, along with lifting the number of active customers who borrow books and attend events. We will put renewed emphasis on diversifying our funding, establishing partnerships to generate income, and packaging some of our most successful products to sell to other library services.

Our new strategy also considers the environment that we must all cherish and protect. Our community fridges are already playing their part in cutting food waste and this year we'll aim to install more. And we'll take a deep dive into our internal infrastructure with a new IT strategy and continued refurbishment.

It's an exciting year ahead. And we won't rest in delivering our mission as articulated in our strapline: to enrich lives and build communities.



# ANNUAL REPORT

## KEY STATISTICS 2021/22



**1,544,000**  
visits to our libraries

**£8,900,000**  
turnover

number of events  
**5,100** 

event attendance  
**123,400**

WiFi sessions  
**124,700**



number of active users  
**112,935**



books borrowed  
**1,317,039**



**115,660**  
public computer sessions



large print loans  
**52,217**



media loans (DVDs, CDs, language courses)  
**15,831**



dvd loans  
**12,883**



cd loans  
**2,948**



digital magazine downloads  
**119,357**

# A ROUND UP OF KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2021 – 22

Despite the restrictions with Covid, which were ongoing through the first part of the year, there were over 1.3 million books borrowed in 2021 – 22 and over 30,000 audiobooks. Downloads for eAudiobooks (202k), eBooks (245k) and eMagazines (119k) continue in popularity. We welcomed 113,000 active users across our services, with over 1.5 million visits throughout the year, and scheduled 5,100 events. And our free WiFi (125k uses) and computer access (116k uses) show that libraries remain a vital hub in the lives of our communities.

## This year's customer survey shows:

**88%** of customers were either **extremely satisfied or satisfied** with libraries and many were regular users

**51%** used the library **within the last week**.

over **30%** of our customers said we helped them feel significantly less isolated

and **38%** said it improved their sense of wellbeing.



Read the following pages to see some of our **key achievements** within the focus of our **six core purposes**



## COVID

Covid dominated these last 12 months for the second year in a row. In March 2021 we announced our own four-step roadmap for reopening, carefully following the map set down by the Government, with the aim of keeping customers, staff and volunteers safe. This began at the end of March with Choose and Collect restarting and some essential booked computer access, followed by phased reopening for book browsing. In April our mobile libraries returned to the road, and outdoor cafe spaces at The Hayridge and Exeter Library also reopened. Indoor cafes and meeting rooms for small groups of six followed in June, and after a Government delay of a month on 19th July, in-person services, events and meeting rooms for bigger groups were finally brought back.

Those suffering isolation and loneliness remained a priority, alongside children whose literacy skills were impacted. We added more children's books, both physical and digital, and continued our popular Choose and Collect service which enabled children and adults to pick up bundles of books they'd ordered. For those with transport issues, we'd drop them at their front door.

We're delighted to say that after that final hurdle it didn't take long for combined physical and digital borrows to overtake pre-pandemic levels. Digital borrowing has grown from 12% of all borrowing in February 2020, to 21% of all borrowing in February 2022.

# Promoting and encouraging a love of reading

## New mobile library

A new mobile library was launched at the start of 2022 to continue bringing books to rural communities in the South Hams and West Devon. We bought the vehicle second-hand with the help of £15,000 from Devon County Council, and launched a successful fundraising campaign for a similar amount to refurbish it.

The six-year-old mobile library is now making 80 stops across 200 miles each week, joining the rest of the Libraries Unlimited fleet. It brings 2,000 books for customers to browse or order, along with a smile, a chat, a chance to talk to other local people, and contact with the wider world.

## The Secret Book Quest

Recent research by the University of Bedfordshire, in partnership with Schoolreaders, showed that Covid lockdowns, school closures and the switch to home-learning have impacted the literacy levels of 90% of primary school children across the UK. 78% of the schools flagged reading as an area for concern.

The Secret Book Quest was this year's stand-out success in helping over-fives with their reading. From the launch in November 2021 until March 2022, over 2,750 children signed up. Acclaimed illustrator Emily Fox created our wonderful free Secret Quest booklet with Pip, Zena and Libro the cat inviting kids on a reading adventure through ten themed zones in their local library. Along the way they read 50 books to collect stickers, decipher the code, win a finisher special prize and enter our free prize draw.

As of June 2022, 222 children had reached their 50-book target with seven book-loving youngsters storming their way through 100. Combined with our annual Summer Reading Challenge, we believe the Secret Book Quest played a significant role in boosting children's book borrowing to pre-pandemic levels.



## Summer Reading Challenge and children's book issues

Covid-driven delays in reopening meant our annual Summer Reading Challenge had to be initially rolled out online. But that didn't stop it taking off, with 7,765 children signing up for 2021's Challenge, and 4,215 reaching their reading goals (54%).

The Summer Reading Challenge, which has been run by the Reading Agency for many years, has never been more important. Getting children back to progressing with their reading after the pandemic was of key importance, on top of the regular summer dip in reading skills when children get out of their regular habit. Devon County Council gave extra support to this year's Challenge, enabling us to offer a prize draw for Samsung tablets, book tokens and tickets for family days out for any children reading six books.



# Promoting **free access to information** to help people in their everyday lives



## Business & IP Centres

Covid saw employment and lifestyle changes that drove people to reassess their working lives. With many new 'bedroom' businesses blooming, our Business & IP Centres in Barnstaple and Exeter were there to help. And this year they were joined by a brand new centre at Paignton. Offering a wealth of free information and resources to help develop businesses, we welcomed 1,091 people to our 287 events and workshops, both in person and online. Overall we helped with 296 business start-up enquiries.

Next year we'll be launching new hubs in Seaton and Okehampton, and seeking new sustainable funding from central government.

## Reaching those experiencing domestic abuse

A new initiative to support those experiencing domestic violence and abuse was launched across the four libraries in Torbay. Books and information on domestic abuse are stocked, staff specially trained, and a safe space offered with support and guidance. A grant of £300 for the project was donated by the Torbay Community Development Trust on behalf of Torbay Council as part of its Community Grants fund.

Visitors to the library who are in need of information and support can now get assistance from library staff by using the key code word 'ANI' (pronounced 'Annie') which stands for Assistance Needed Immediately. Trained staff will then take the person to a separate, private area, where they can look through specialist publications, and leaflets that give support and guidance. Information can also be accessed via library computers, free of charge.



## Work:Spaces

Our support for businesses across Devon and Torbay received a further boost this year with the opening of our new Work:Spaces at Newton Abbot and Teignmouth libraries. They're aimed at creating a thriving, supportive community of professionals by offering day hot-desking or ongoing office space starting for £10 a day and £100 a month.

Customers receive free WiFi, access to bike storage and showers, tea and coffee making facilities and benefit from opportunities for networking and collaboration. There are eight desk spaces in Newton Abbot and six in Teignmouth along with meeting spaces and private offices. They're open during office hours, and convenient for the town centres.



Newton Abbott

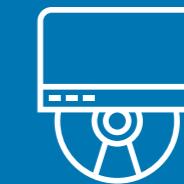


Teignmouth

## Goodbye to DVDs and CDs

This year we announced an increase in spending on popular books and eBooks and the end to CD and DVD borrowing. eBook issues were up 85% on the previous year, at the same time as CD and DVD demand dropped by 25%, reflecting a global cultural shift in the way people access music and film having moved towards streaming services.

The CD and DVD collection was phased out from the end of the financial year, giving customers the opportunity to buy the stock.



total dvd loans

**12,883**



total cd loans

**2,948**



eBook downloads

**245,379**

# Inspiring people of all ages to **learn, imagine, create, succeed** and realise their potential

## Work Clubs

Libraries Unlimited Work Clubs offer one-to-one mentoring and support with CV writing, job searching and online application forms. They run in five libraries on a regular basis and Libraries Unlimited hosts two additional work clubs delivered by partner organisations. Work Clubs in Bideford and Barnstaple are externally funded via the Petroc College Community Grants programme.



## Impact story

Robbie used the services of Bideford Library Work Club to help him into employment. He has a learning disability and was struggling to find work after being made redundant from a factory job he'd done for 15 years.

**Iain Harris, Libraries Unlimited Work Club Coordinator, said:**

"There's no doubt that there are extra challenges in finding work for people like Robbie. But with the right support, as in this case, the opportunities are out there and the result can be life-changing. Robbie was feeling depressed and anxious about his situation, and it's been great to see his self-esteem grow, alongside his financial independence."



## Volunteering

Volunteers continue to enhance our offer in hundreds of different ways. This year more than 500 volunteers gave over 7,000 hours of service. From our dedicated Home Library Service volunteers who deliver books to customers' homes, to those who run LibraryExtra sessions to extend our opening hours, alongside those who help with events such as Bounce & Rhyme sessions or Code Clubs, to those who support the daily running of their library by shelving, greeting customers or keeping our gardens tidy. Each and every one makes a huge difference to what Libraries Unlimited is able to offer and achieve.

We are also grateful for the invaluable support from our many active Friends Groups, working closely with their libraries to ensure communities continue to benefit from high quality library services.



Nusaybah



## Impact story

**Nusaybah's volunteering grows her skills and confidence**

Volunteering at Exeter Library for her Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) award was such an enjoyable experience for Nusaybah that she has continued for two years! Sixteen year old Nusaybah attends school in Torquay but lives in Exeter. Nusaybah usually volunteers in the children's and teen sections of the library, shelving books, tidying up and sorting out displays. Nusaybah was jointly awarded the Young Volunteer Award in our new Volunteers Awards in 2022 recognising the contribution she has made to her local community.

**"I think that volunteering has helped me a lot. It's grown my confidence in my skills and abilities. I've learnt how to work well with others and collaborate with ideas. I've also learned how to work independently and be responsible for the work I do. I've gained communication skills in providing services to the public. I've gained experience on working with children and how to best help them with their literacy skills. I've been able to work with and meet some wonderful people and I've really enjoyed my time at Exeter Library."**

# Offering a welcoming space to **meet, socialise, learn** and **enjoy new experiences**

## Upgrades and fresh looks

There was a new look for many of our libraries this year, and we're planning an extensive upgrade for half a dozen more in the year ahead.

### Honiton...

unveiled a fun jungle-themed new look in the children's section last April, along with upgrades in the staff and office areas and a new carpet. The work was carried out during the time the building was shut for lockdown with money from the Friends and the Battishorne Trust.

### Totnes'...

turn came in February 2022, again with a new children's section and carpets. The work was funded with the help of the town's Rotary club and fundraising from staff.

### Holsworthy...

reopened in March with new flooring and frontage to the 1970s building.

### Seaton...

enjoyed new flooring and paintwork and was selected to welcome the next Business & IP Centre in Devon under its roof, which will launch in the autumn.

### Kingsbridge...

used a £10,000 National Lottery Fund grant and generous donations from other local funders to open a new meeting space. Those flocking to enjoy the new space included a children's after-school craft club, a history study group, coding clubs, a free legal clinic, the Kingsbridge in Bloom volunteer group and the Chamber of Commerce.

### Crediton's...

community garden won a Britain in Bloom Award. The garden, which has been transformed and maintained by volunteers, attained 'Level 4 – Thriving' in the Britain in Bloom South West's 'It's Your Neighbourhood' section. The development of the garden with decking, fencing and a bug hotel started in 2020.

This coming year we'll also be undertaking extensive refurbishments across six of our libraries, ensuring our 54 buildings remain warm, safe and welcoming spaces.

## Safe and welcoming spaces for everyone

The forthcoming winter will be challenging for many, not just with recovery from Covid but negotiating cost of living rises and economic hardship. Torbay is already ranked the 38th most deprived upper tier local authority out of 151 (2019 figures), and the most deprived in the South West. It's been that way since 2007 and we want to help make changes.

We know that many of our customers come to us to access our free WiFi and computers because we are the only place they can go to have this connection with the outside world. Libraries will also be there to offer welcoming spaces as well as support in everything from debt advice to community fridges, seed exchanges to clothes racks, help with job seeking to free online courses. We'll achieve this with even more partnerships across our communities.



# Guiding people to explore and connect to the wider world

## Kickstart

Libraries play an essential role in improving employment outcomes for jobseekers according to the Arts Council. Jobseekers make up a large proportion of library users at 39% - that's 7% more than the general population. Libraries offer a calm, safe, neutral space to work and have access to face-to-face support, and free digital and learning resources.

In order to offer more to people looking for work, this year we participated in the Government's Kickstart scheme in Barnstaple, Bideford, Exeter, Exmouth, Ivybridge, Newton Abbot, Tavistock, Tiverton, and Torquay libraries.

Kickstarters were employed by Libraries Unlimited for six months, with Government funding. They received one-to-one mentoring on weekly Zoom sessions, help to develop their CVs, and signposting to support and training. They got involved in Libraries Unlimited activities including the Summer Reading Challenge, video editing and social media, creating posters and other opportunities. Four Kickstarters now work permanently for Libraries Unlimited and four more have been enrolled on courses and training from their Personal Development Funds.

### **Joe said of his Kickstart experience:**

**"The Kickstart scheme offered by Libraries Unlimited has been a fantastic opportunity for developing my skills and creating a clearer idea for a career. Creativity, books, and community work have always interested me as a career path, so working for the library seemed a logical choice. Libraries Unlimited were very welcoming and I was able to comfortably settle into my role quickly."**



## Impact story

### Five decades of loving books

Patricia Yeo, 93, has notched up over 50 years of enjoying the library service in Devon. The former French teacher moved to Uffculme in 1960 and has visited the library at least once a fortnight ever since. Her love of languages has been fed by borrowing books in French, Spanish, Italian and occasionally Russian.

"I studied French and Linguistics at University and have always loved reading in different languages. I used to go to Exeter where they have a good choice of foreign language books. Nowadays I borrow a couple of books at a time from Cullompton, where they have a special little box of foreign language reading that they order in and keep just for me! Reading or speaking another language opens up a whole new world to you. It is one of the great pleasures of my life. There are two things about buying books - one is the cost but the other is the storage. So the library is the perfect solution."



# Supporting the **health and wellbeing** of individuals and communities

## Exploring grief

Anyone going through grief and loss was invited to gather with others to share their feelings and have their stories captured in poignant music and words in the Finding Connection Through Loss sessions, which were funded by Arts Council England.

The first sessions featured music, chat and fun and were led by musician Hugh Nankivell in Paignton. Further sessions with artist Amy Shelton and Honeyscribe in Holsworthy and Okehampton libraries gave participants a chance to enjoy creativity with flower pressing sessions.



## New baby weighing facility

Parents and carers are now able to weigh their babies in 14 libraries thanks to a new partnership between Libraries Unlimited and Devon Public Health Nursing. The free self-weigh facilities have been created in private areas of the libraries during the popular free baby and toddler Bounce & Rhyme sessions.

Along with the scales, changing mat and wipes, there's advice on plotting baby and child growth and other aspects of childcare. Library staff can also signpost parents and carers to a host of other services if they have concerns or issues they're experiencing. The scheme has been funded by Devon Public Health Nursing.



## Impact story

### Walk and Talk group boosts Barbara's wellbeing

The weekly Walk and Talk group at Torrington Library helped Barbara Barton get over a period of anxiety and depression, and settle in her new home town after she and her husband moved from Lancashire to Devon.

#### Barbara said:

*"I'd found lockdown extremely hard. We'd only moved here in August 2020. It was a long-awaited dream to come to Devon, but not being able to go out and meet people was difficult. I've really enjoyed the walks and made some nice friends. It gets me out, it gets me walking, you're with like-minded people and even if you're feeling a bit anxious or maybe have some physical problems, you know you're safe and everyone is there to support you. It gives you a reason to get up and get out, and makes me feel better for the rest of the day. I feel like I belong now. It's done me the power of good and has been a saving grace."*





# EVOLVE – CREATIVE EVENTS FOR ALL

Supported by the Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation funding, Evolve events achieved a 95% enjoyment rate for participants this year. 90% of participants of Lost Librarian, our interactive escape room, said they would recommend it to others. As one Bideford resident said: **"Amazing quality event for a small town. We need this!"**

We've achieved a national reputation for our audience development strategies, shared as best practice at Libraries Connected & National Rural Touring Forum conferences, and been featured in The Bookseller & Wired Magazine.

[librariesevolve.org.uk](http://librariesevolve.org.uk)

Some highlights of our dynamic range of events this year include:



## WHAT IF YOU SPOKE?

A series of ten online writing masterclasses giving expert advice to young people from literary prize winners and award-winning illustrators. The project is led by Libraries Unlimited in partnership with Pen to Print, University of Exeter, Africa Writes & Literature Works as part of Exeter UNESCO City of Literature. The classes were accessed online 14,430 times.



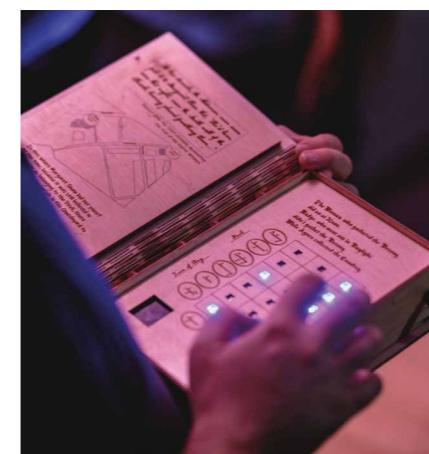
## FINDING YOUR VOICE

Alongside the What If You Spoke? masterclasses, 15 to 25-year-olds who were resident in Devon could enter a competition for their poetry, journalism and comic-book illustration. The work of both the ten winners and runners up were featured over two issues of Pen to Print's Write On magazine which has a readership of over 55,000 users from 178 countries.



## DISCOVERY SCREENS

Eleven libraries held film screenings in March 2022. The programme included Oscar and BAFTA Award-winners, British and international films, comedies, dramas, vintage and recent titles.



## THE LOST LIBRARIAN

A ground-breaking escape room for inquisitive explorers of all ages. Using interactive mechanical books, groups of up to six people experienced a 60-minute journey, uncovering a fantastical tale of the last known witches in the UK and the legacy that they have left behind. The tour included Exeter, Cullompton, Tavistock, Okehampton and Paignton libraries.



## UNLOCKING THE CAGE

Locked in what's known as 'the Cage', an 800-strong collection of books features only eight written by women. Researched, written and narrated by first female James Bond author Kim Sherwood, this augmented reality installation brought Exeter Library's special collections below the library floor to life.



## THE GLASS ROOM EXHIBITION

This award-winning exhibition, curated by Berlin based Tactile Tech, toured Exeter, Barnstaple and Paignton libraries, tackling online misinformation, from deepfakes to addictive phone design. Visitors were invited to explore the consequences of our increasing reliance on social media and the web for the majority of our information.



Funded by:



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**ARTS COUNCIL  
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LIVE BETTER**



## Impact story

### Joanie's Secret Book Quest

The Secret Book Quest not only boosted seven-year-old Joanie Chapman's reading skills, but also helped her grow in confidence.

Joanie describes herself as 'proudly autistic' and is educated at home by her mum, Angela. She loves chatting one-to-one with people she knows, can be anxious, and is extremely sensitive to noise.

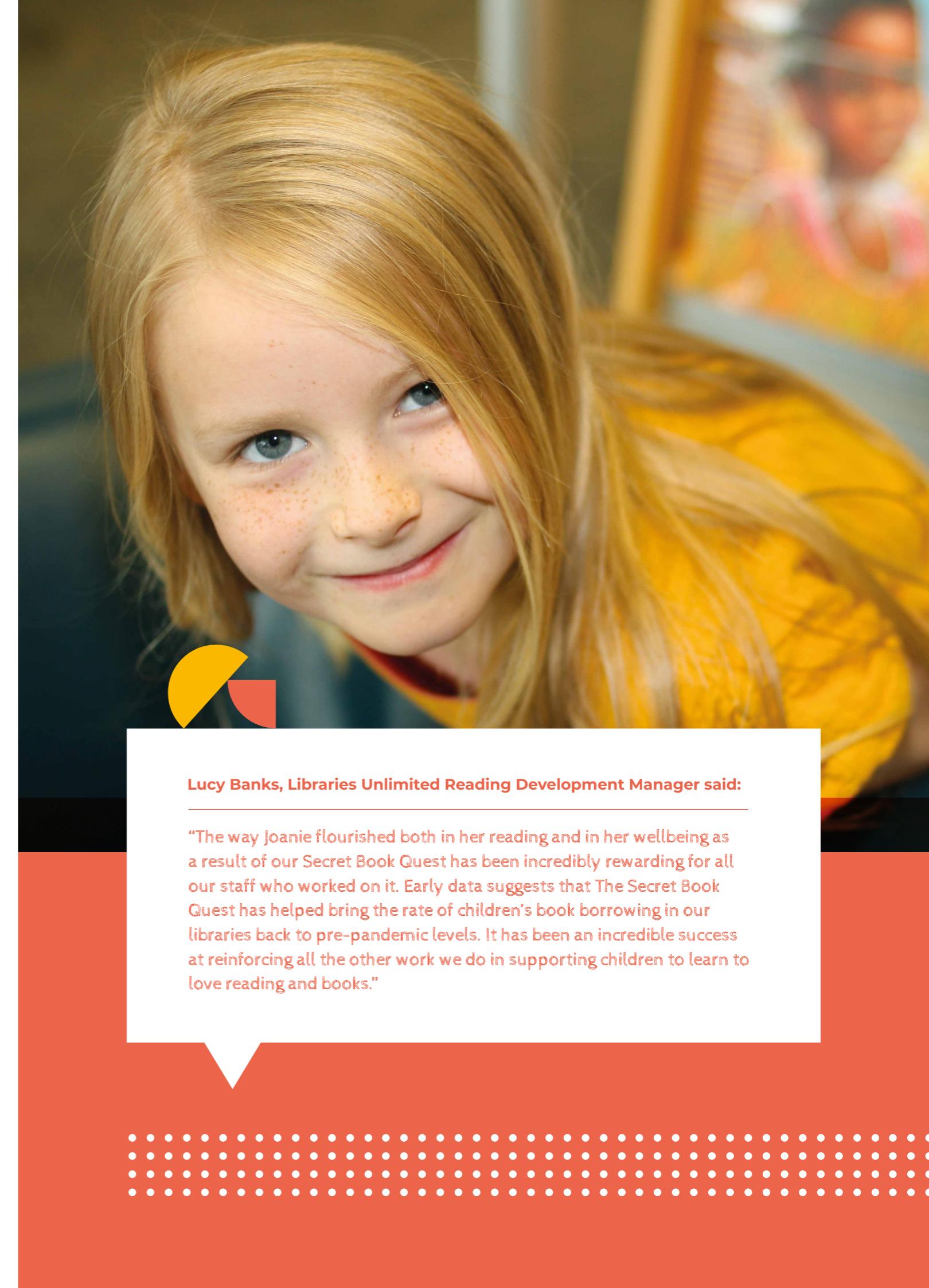
Her parents have been taking Joanie to libraries since she was a toddler and she is an enthusiastic reader. Favourites include Enid Blyton's Magic Faraway Tree series, and the Titchy Witch books by Rose Impey. When the family moved to South Brent they joined Ivybridge Library and took along Joanie, who was three at the time. She loved the books but lacked confidence in speaking to library staff. That was until she started Libraries Unlimited's Secret Book Quest.

"I would actually say it was inspiring," says Angela. "She loved the structure and it really motivated her. Each time she completed a 'zone' in the book she got a sticker with a picture of a lock on it which would unlock a piece of code to move towards the finish. There was a certificate at the mid-way point and she also really enjoyed rating the books."

The Secret Book Quest takes children through several subject 'zones' in the library – Joanie's favourite was the jungle zone. Children decipher the clues and receive a special prize when they finish the 50-book challenge. There are then supplementary worksheets with which they can continue their reading.

"I was so impressed by the effort Ivybridge Library staff put in to building a rapport with her and welcoming her by name through The Secret Book Quest," said Angela. "As a home educator there are not many other people interested in her learning and progress apart from me and her dad and grandparents. So having the staff, in particular Ros, affirm her milestones was lovely for me as well as Joanie. She began to talk to them about her learning and the books, and it was fantastic to see her confidence grow in making conversation with people outside the home. She now actually looks for two members of staff so she can chat to them. Her reading level went up as well – at one point she was reading five books a day!"

**Joanie has continued her reading and is now starting on The Secret Book Quest continuation sheets for more inspiration.**



**Lucy Banks, Libraries Unlimited Reading Development Manager said:**

**"The way Joanie flourished both in her reading and in her wellbeing as a result of our Secret Book Quest has been incredibly rewarding for all our staff who worked on it. Early data suggests that The Secret Book Quest has helped bring the rate of children's book borrowing in our libraries back to pre-pandemic levels. It has been an incredible success at reinforcing all the other work we do in supporting children to learn to love reading and books."**

**Events - Unlocking the Cage:**

**John Matthias and Declan Daly**

**Kim Sherwood**

**Pre-event drinks**

**Family events:**

**Family workshop at Newton Abbot Library**

**Harry Potter Book Night at Exeter Library**

**Sensory story time at Tiverton Library**

**Welcoming spaces:**

**Ivybridge mobile library**

**Totnes teen library**

**Ilfracombe children's library**

**Wellbeing:**

**Baby weighing facilities**

**Knit & Natter at Ivybridge Library**

**Glass Room exhibition**



# A WORD FROM OUR LIBRARIES

We could write an entire Annual Report about each and every one of our 54 libraries. **Here's just a flavour of their highlights this year.**

Find out the highlights for your local library



## Dynamic Partnerships

### Shaking it up in Tavy

Tavistock Library's Shake the Shelves community music event was run with the help of the local Youth Café. Young people worked to organise the event and show off their musical talents.

### Banking on it in Teignmouth

A partnership with the Natwest Mobile Bank gave customers a chance to do their banking in the library. The town has lost all but one of its banks, and visitors were delighted to be able to conveniently use banking services in a new location.

### Loving Books And Reading

### Dylan the duck listens at St Thomas

Young readers got the chance to read books to a duck! Dylan belongs to Customer Service Assistant Shelley and sat quietly listening to the stories in her basket, only quacking when the reading was finished. Monthly visits from Dylan are now scheduled.

### Chagford children sign up

Almost a third of children aged between five and 12 signed up for the Secret Book Quest in Chagford. They've been enjoying working towards their 50-book target, cracking the clues and filling out their free sticker book.

### Libraries Make Life Better

### Backpacks for young nature fans in Sidmouth

Free backpack kits containing magnifiers, specimen pots and information about local nature were loaned to children at Sidmouth Library. The backpacks encourage children to get out and explore the local area with their families.

### Zine writing for Bideford youngsters

Young people from the Space Youth Centre found their way with words in a series of 'What if you spoke?' masterclasses. The confidence-building sessions over five weeks produced writing and artwork that was put together in a zine. Library staff still visit Space once a month for creative writing, storytelling and zine-making sessions.

## Impact story

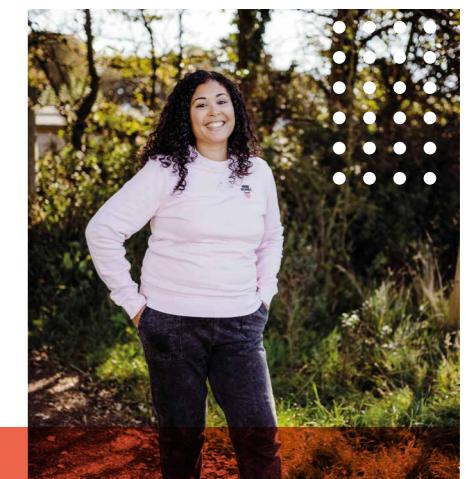
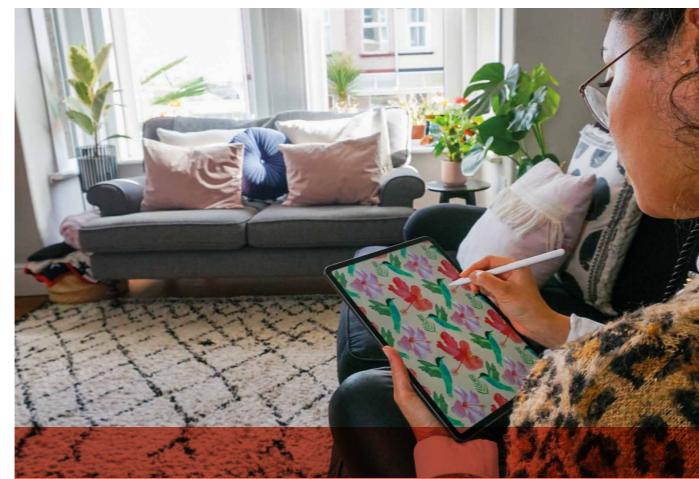
### Business & IP Centre boost for Mayajoy

Maya Lawrence designs colourful, bright and modern homeware, stationery and gifts under the name Mayajoy. She had worked for many years as an interior designer for Laura Ashley, then took time out to start a family. She decided to follow her dreams and launch her own brand after facing redundancy. She struggled with her confidence in promoting her work, worried that people wouldn't like it. **But with help from BIPC Devon, Mayajoy is now going from strength to strength.**

"I knew that for me to move forward, I needed to connect with other female-led businesses and I joined the Women in Business Course with BIPC Devon. I learned new things and built on past knowledge of subjects such as copyright, growth mindset and branding. It gave me a huge confidence boost. Both my mentor, course leaders and peers were able to see value in what I was doing and this encouraged me to keep going. It also offered accountability because once I commit, I don't like to give up!"

"Without this course, I would have still been trying to navigate what to do next. It provided a natural timeline and pushed me to do things which I had never done before. The best thing about this course was the free mentoring and lifelong connections I have made. From day one I couldn't believe that this was a free course. The standard of the course providers and presentations was very high and the women at BIPC were all friendly and happy to answer any questions I had."

"BIPC Devon's networking sessions showed me that networking doesn't have to be about pitching, they don't need to be formal or stuffy, they can be welcoming and inspiring. Don't let nerves stop you from being where you want to be. Surround yourself with likeminded people and take full advantage of opportunities that arise. You never know, you might be lucky enough to meet a bunch of people who inspire you!"



# HISTORY OF LIBRARIES UNLIMITED

How far have we come?



# OUR NEW FIVE YEAR STRATEGY (2022-27)

32



The next chapter for Libraries Unlimited is beginning, and developing our ambitious new strategy has been a key piece of work that we've undertaken this year.

In our quest to continue to bring ideas, imagination, creativity and knowledge to enrich lives and build thriving communities, this strategic vision will take us through to 2027. We're accelerating ahead in the aftermath of Covid at the same time as the cost of living crisis looks set to present more need for our free and low-cost services. We're focusing on building a sustainable future for libraries, demonstrating again that all that we provide remains crucial in a changing world.

Never more have we been needed to foster wellbeing and resilience. Communities need somewhere to go for reliable, in-person information. Our libraries connect people, reduce isolation, work to combat inequality and discrimination. They empower people to take part in the digital world, and inspire ideas, exploration and creativity.

Focusing on the Strategic Pillars sets the course for us to adapt and grow over the next five years, delivering our belief in the unlimited potential of library services to make a positive difference to people's lives.

A shared love of reading, and access to high quality information and welcoming spaces, will always remain at our core. But here is a taste of how our Pillars will support what we aim to achieve over the next five years.

Our new **Strategic Pillars** focus on:

People | Community | Diversification | Environment | Infrastructure

## PEOPLE

### WE WANT TO:

- Develop a community of 500 engaged volunteers
- Increase job applications from diverse backgrounds and better reflect our communities
- Lead by example as an anti-racist charity
- Deepen our partnerships and collaborations locally and strategically
- Play our part in ensuring everyone in Devon over 11 years old can read



## COMMUNITY

### WE WANT TO:

- Increase book issues back to 2019 levels by mid 2023 and increase visits year on year
- Grow children's issues by 30% (above 2019 level) over five years
- Measure ourselves better and aim to be in the top 10% of similar organisations nationally
- Support 20 new business start-ups a year
- Support 500 individuals into work a year
- Offer services that will measurably reduce loneliness and improve wellbeing



## DIVERSIFICATION

### WE WANT TO:

- Grow our total consolidated income by 35% to £11.5m by 2027
- Develop Libraries Unlimited Enterprises to generate £150k surplus per year by 2027
- Develop strategic partnerships to generate recurrent income of £250k by 2027
- Establish a supporter scheme for regular donations
- Run pilot projects looking at our retailing both online and in buildings
- Develop products we can sell to other library services - from reading incentives to activities



## ENVIRONMENT

### WE WANT TO:

- Reduce carbon emissions by 25% by 2027
- Increase biodiversity around local library sites and in their communities
- Add eight more community fridges to those already operating
- Increase use of our spaces by the community out of hours
- Consider launching a 'library of things'
- Develop events that champion education and inspiration towards sustainable living



## INFRASTRUCTURE

### WE WANT TO:

- Upgrade our self-service systems in libraries
- Review and update our IT infrastructure
- Bid for capital funding for a major refurbishment programme throughout our buildings
- Retender for our utilities contract, considering environmental impact and savings
- Ensure our online and physical spaces are all accessible and inclusive
- Ensure investment in digital technology so it keeps up with people's changing needs and expectations



To underpin our new strategy we've reviewed key ways in which we operate, and have implemented changes to improve efficiencies. We implemented a brand restructure which will grow Libraries Unlimited, removing the Devon Libraries and Torbay Libraries sub-brands, and give our individual libraries extra prominence. Refreshed branding is being rolled out across all our platforms, and our library buildings are having smart new signage installed, giving them a fresh and welcoming look.

We believe this strategy will ensure no one is left behind. By diversifying our services and our income streams we seek to secure longer term financial sustainability and a greater impact. We have set a high bar, and are confident, with the help of our staff, volunteers and Trustees, as well as the communities we serve, that we will be meeting it.

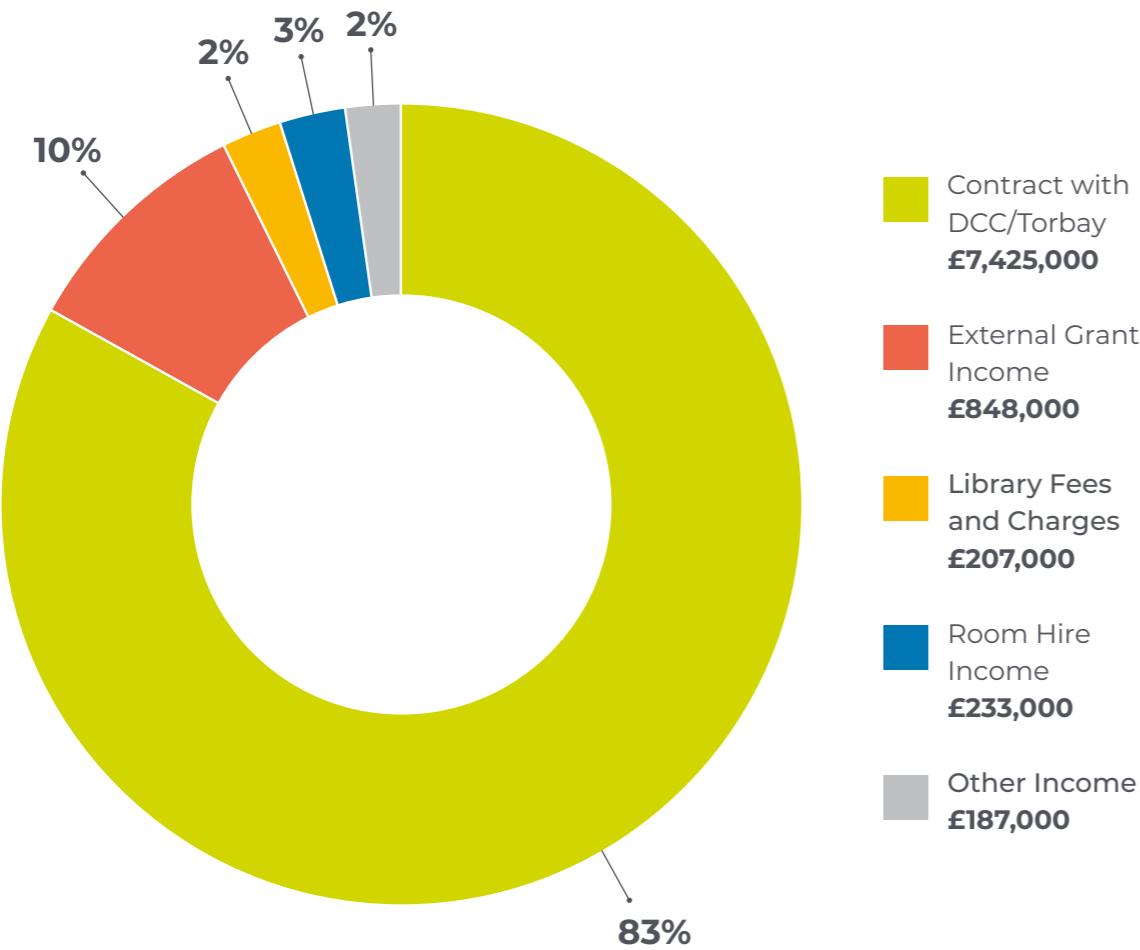
You can read our strategy here:



# FINANCIAL REPORT

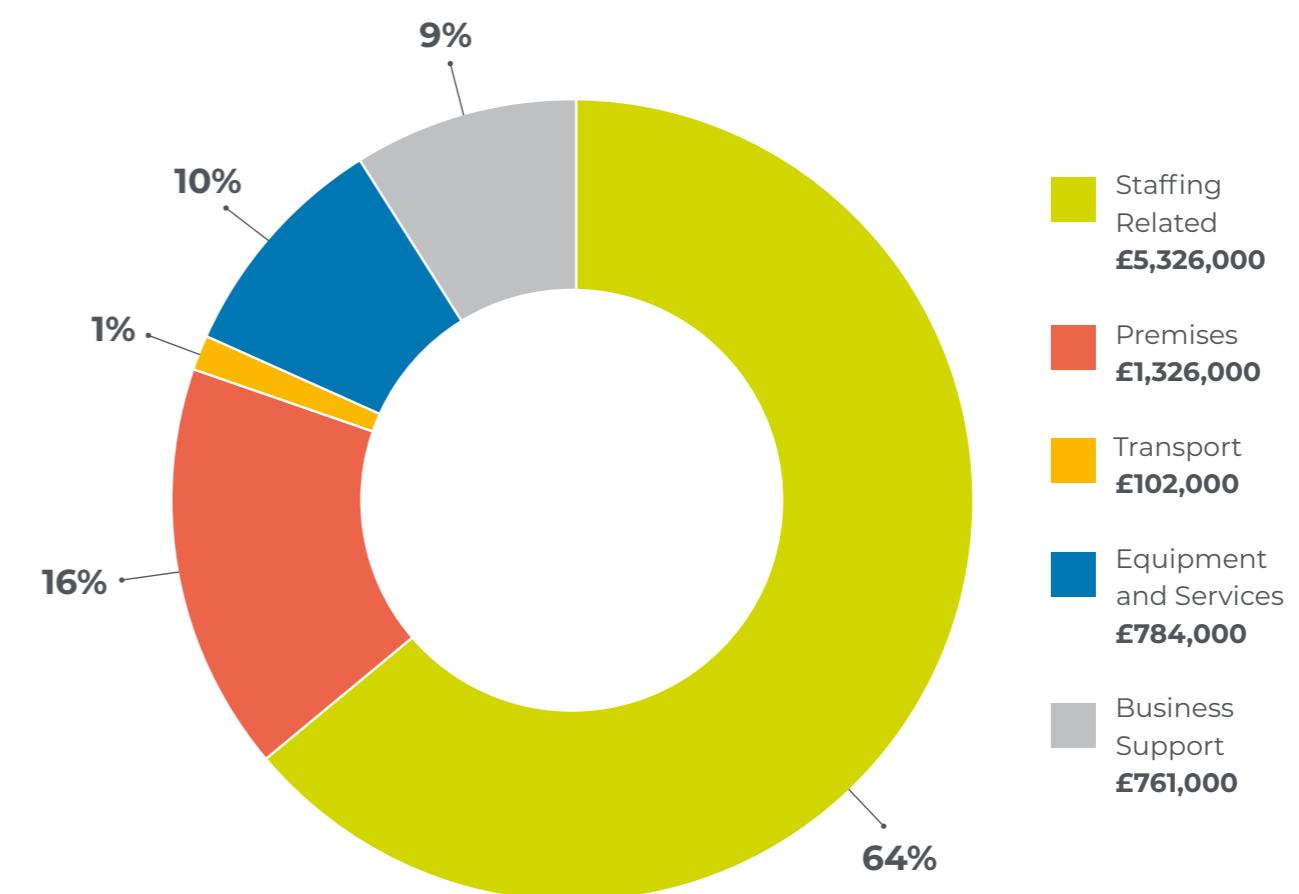
Where our money **comes from**

**£8,900,000**



How we **spend** our money

**£8,299,000**



## NOTES:

Spending on new stock resources for libraries is excluded from the below. Libraries Unlimited manages these budgets under an Agency agreement with Devon County Council and Torbay Council, and expenditure is disclosed within the Local Authority's accounts.

Expenditure analysis excludes capital spending.

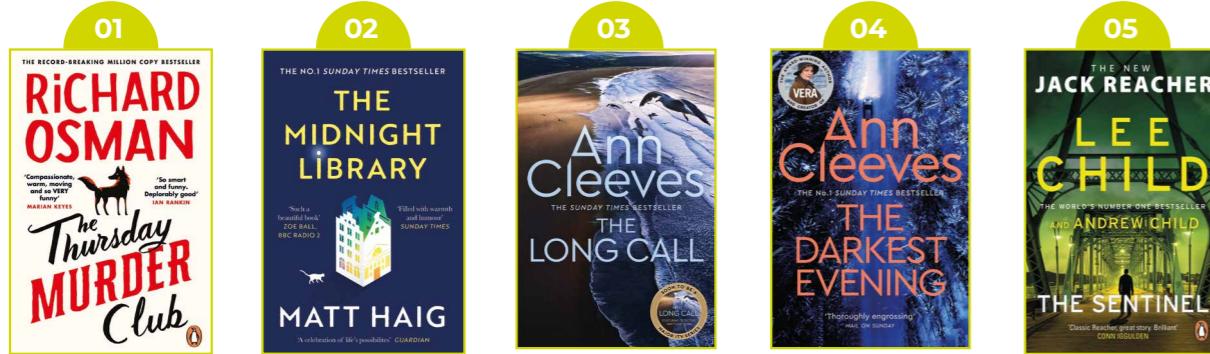
# POPULAR BOOK TITLES

We're delighted that one of this year's Top 5 books is about a library! Matt Haig's The Midnight Library was the life-affirming novel that many people turned to after the challenges of two Covid years. Every year we encourage people to indulge and develop their love of reading by stocking not only the latest and most popular reads, but also a vast back-catalogue of favourites. Here are the most popular titles of the year across Devon and Torbay for readers of all ages.

Find out the  
most-borrowed  
books from  
each library



## Adult fiction top 5



## Adult non-fiction top 5



## Junior top 5



# Libraries Unlimited

Libraries Unlimited, an independent charity, runs the public library service in Devon and Torbay, including 54 libraries and 4 mobile libraries.

## Libraries Unlimited also runs:

### FABLAB Devon



### Business & IP Centre Devon



## Libraries Unlimited Board of Trustees 2021/22:

- Professor William Harvey | Chair of the Board of Trustees, Independent Trustee
- Marie Chadwick | Deputy Chair, Independent Trustee
- Crystal Carter | Independent Trustee
- Tom Glanville | Independent Trustee
- George Lossius | Independent Trustee
- Morgen Witzel | Independent Trustee
- Sue Simmons | Community Trustee
- Andrew Prince | Community Trustee
- Chloe Reynolds | Staff Trustee
- Zoë Woodbridge | Staff Trustee
- Alex Kittow | Ex Officio Trustee

## With special thanks to the Trustees who stood down:

- Richard Watts, Independent Trustee
- Alasdair Anderson, Community Trustee

**THANK YOU** It's been a year of much change and exciting developments. We would like to thank our staff, volunteers, Friends Groups, Trustees, suppliers, partners, collaborators, commissioners, funders, landlords and tenants for their help, support and commitment.

# Libraries Unlimited



Registered with  
**FUNDRAISING  
REGULATOR**

Registered Charity Number: 11170092  
Registered Company Number  
(England and Wales): 9822597  
Registered Office: Exeter Library,  
Castle Street, Exeter, Devon EX4 3PQ

As a registered charity, Libraries  
Unlimited is legally required to  
produce an Annual Report.

Printed on 100% recycled paper. For  
alternative formats of this report,  
please contact Libraries Unlimited.

[librariesunlimited.org.uk](http://librariesunlimited.org.uk)

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