

Powys Library Service WPLS return 201617: case studies

1. Impact of poetry group

“Until I was invited to join the poetry group in Brecon Library, I hadn’t written poetry for many years – or attempted such. Whether or not what I write now is poetry is a moot point, but I have started trying again. I get so much from it, and enjoy trying to keep my brain ticking over. It is also good to share other people’s poetry in the group, and also their life experiences which often inspire their writing. I think that, for many of us, it is a cathartic experience, as well as being a literary exchange and a beverage-and-biccies session.

The group doesn’t take itself too seriously, and people can make of it what they want – there’s something for everyone. Some people write their own verse, while others bring pieces of other poets’ work that they have found, or sometimes favourite song lyrics. Some of the poetry is “serious” poetry, while some is of the more light or humorous variety; there is no intense angst or literary snobbery about the group. It is very much writings being shared rather than offered for judgement. I think everyone is in the same boat, and appreciates and respects what goes into the act of writing at any level.

The poetry group is well run and chaired by Del, who manages to balance out the different styles and approaches, so that the atmosphere is relaxed, and readings and conversations flow effortlessly. Del is indefatigable in her efforts for the group, and generous with her spare time. We all owe her, and Brecon library, a huge vote of thanks for starting and maintaining this group.

We are looking forward to an exhibition of our work in Brecon Library in the spring, and I hope that the group will continue for many years as a literary and social exchange.”

2. Syrian refugee families

Syrian Refugee Settlement Programme and Ystradgynlais Library

Ystradgynlais and Newtown were selected as the two areas within Powys to receive Syrian families from the government resettlement scheme. Ystradgynlais was allocated six families, which arrived between July and September, 2016.

Prior to the arrival of the first families, a member of Ystradgynlais Library staff (Janet Mulready) was delegated as the member of staff who would overview how the Branch would particularly assist the Syrian refugees, and she attended a series of meetings organised for public and voluntary bodies, and individuals, who would be working with the families. She also attended a training course on how to deal sensitively with the issues they might face; however, in the event this dealt exclusively with an explanation of Islam, and so was not as useful as it could have been.

At the meetings, contact was made with representatives of the agency contracted to support the families, and these were taken to the library and shown what we could provide, such as free access to computers and internet, rooms to hire, and information about local services; as the support workers were not local, they found it useful to know where they could find this information.

Registration

The first two families to arrive came to the library on their own to register. While they soon overcame their nervousness of being in a strange environment, we did experience language

issues. The support worker had rejected the proposal that each family should be given an Arabic/English dictionary, thinking this would delay their learning of English. They wanted to register for wifi and library computer use, but the only English word they had was “wifi”, so it was quite a challenge to explain what we meant by password, and we inadvertently registered an entire family under the first name of one of the children! Also, the families did not know their address, and obviously did not have any proof of address. It would be useful if the new families in Newtown were given an official letter stating their names and addresses, and this suggestion has been made to PAVO at a meeting held to discuss how the resettlement was progressing. The Brecon, Hay and Talgarth Refugee Group kindly donated the Collins Arabic-English dictionary (ISBN 978-0-87779-860-6) and the DK Visual Arabic-English Bilingual Dictionary (ISBN 978-0-2411-9916-9) to the library and to each family, and these, together with google translate, have been very useful.

Children’s events

The support worker wanted to encourage the Syrian children to attend the summer children’s activities, so we emailed him a list of our activities and arranged that some children who live near the families would “look after them” if they came. The Syrian children have so far not attended any of our events, however, and while they have been registered for library use, they are not borrowing books. We need to be more pro-active in finding out if they have understood fully what we can offer, or if there are reasons why the services we are offering do not appeal to them. Of course, we have ensured that our children’s events are inclusive, and one of the staff is supporting a local school network which is developing the teaching of global issues in local schools, in obtaining a list of supportive books which deal with issues regarding asylum and resettlement, and we have access to these books should we need them for our events.

Language classes

As the Syrians were comfortable in the library, one of the library rooms was hired for the interim English languages classes which were put on by volunteers until the official classes started. These proved very successful, with a good attendance. As a result of these classes, the ladies joined the Library knitting group, and another local craft group, where they had a great welcome and made new acquaintances in the area.

Meeting space

Amel, the families’ new support worker, uses the library regularly to meet with her clients and help them with paperwork. She says that as well as finding the free access to computers and the quiet use of a table useful, the Syrians like to meet in the library as the atmosphere is secure and comfortable, and staff make them feel welcome. The library has also been an unofficial “distribution centre” for people dropping off essential goods to be distributed at the English classes, and Christmas gifts.

In Ystradgynlais Library, we feel that we have provided a friendly face and ensured that our new neighbours have had a secure place to visit and meet people. However, we feel that we can improve our efforts in encouraging the Syrian children to use our services, once their parents are more confident in using English.

Janet Mulready
21.12.2016

3. Impact of an author visit on a reluctant readers and writers:

A Year 5 pupil from a primary school in Powys was inspired to write a story after meeting and listening to a children's author

9 year old Billy Francis joined his fellow class mates on a trip recently to see children's popular author Andy Briggs, as part of the Welsh Government's 'Every Child a Library Member' (ECaLM) campaign. Over 4,200 pupils attended events with the author across the county, aiming at encouraging the pupils to join their local library.

Beth Williams, a literacy co-ordinator from Maesyrrhandir Primary school, explained how pleased she was with the event she had attended with the school and the surprise she had the next day.

"Andy spoke in a way that connected with the pupils and really captured their imaginations whilst also having great fun. You can't imagine how pleased I was the day after our fantastic afternoon, when Billy - a Y5 pupil with a great imagination, but who is often reluctant to put pen to paper - brought in his story 'The Iron Dog' to share. I was speechless, it was obvious how much he had been inspired by the library event, especially to go home and to write straight away after school - all thanks to Andy!"

"We wanted an author that could engage well with a young audience and show them how writing about adventure can be exciting and fun. As a library service, we want to inspire young people - to make them think "I would really like to do that!." Children's Librarian, Trish Thomas.

Andy Briggs, who is also a script writer, was in Cannes at the film festival that week when he heard about Billy. He was pleased to take the time to read the story and was impressed, saying:-

"Wow! IRON DOG! Love it. And I love the line "his great iron tongue came out" - Splitting it into chapters is genius - and "LOOKING FOR NOSE" as a chapter header was brilliant - made me smile! Billy did a great job!"

4. Use of local studies resources to develop research and information skills amongst primary school children

Ninety pupils from years 3 and 4 at Penygloddfa Primary school staged a friendly invasion of Newtown Library over three days to work on their World War 2 topic. The pupils banded together in groups and got involved in researching historical material that documented local aspects of World War 2.

The visits were planned around three activities, a quiz, use of the microfilms and a discussion table with books and items from a memory box (on loan from Brecon Museum), and was prepared by Assistant Branch Librarian, Kate McCaffrey.

"Having an invasion of Penygloddfa School was the perfect way of sharing our local studies resources. Using microfilm, newspapers, books and staff, existence for locals and evacuees in Newtown during WWII was brought to life for the 90 pupils. The enthusiasm and interest of the children created a wonderful buzz in the library over the week." Said Kate McCaffrey.

The quiz for the first group focussed on a local man who attended Penygloddfa primary school as a child, but was sadly killed during the war. Newspaper articles were used along with reproduced clippings from the Cenotaph book, along with a 1941 map of Newtown.

"The children found it all very interesting especially as it was about a local person who participated in WW2." Said visiting teacher, Mr Thomas

The library set a quiz asking them to find out information and identify where they happened on the map.

"The second group used an edition of the Newtonian Journal which reported on personal accounts of evacuees who came to Newtown." said Trish Thomas, Reader Development Librarian.

"The accounts were made by children who were the same age as the pupils. Many found they empathised with the evacuees and their plight as they were sent away from their families to live with strangers for the first time".

Pupils researched clippings taken from the article and were asked to find answers to questions. They also had to use a local map from the war, a Microfilm reader with newspaper accounts from the beginning and end of the conflict. At the end of the session children were asked to link their answers to a huge map on display.

"We know there is a need in schools to explore information literacy and libraries are a great place to do this by using their local history resources. It helps pupils with the way they do research - gathering evidence that they can use to back up their work or lead them to more information. The library staff are great facilitators and the pupils really enjoyed this approach." Cllr. Graham Brown.

Mrs Latham, a Teacher from Penygloddfa school also commented along with her pupils:-

"It was very informative and the activities engaged the children. Thank you to all the staff at the Library."

Brian "I got a lot of knowledge and it was interesting."

Ethan "The newspapers were my favourite way to find out things!"

Gwennie "It was good to learn more about WW2."