

2014

# Impact of public libraries on the lives of older people

A perspective by the Society of Chief Librarians (Wales)

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## SCL Wales

### Public Libraries: Impact on Older People in Wales

#### Foreword by the Chair and Vice-Chair

The Society of Chief Librarians (Wales) is an association made up of the head librarian (or equivalent) of each public library authority in Wales. Our key aim is to influence decisions at national level and provide leadership and future direction in relation to the development of public libraries in Wales.

Our purpose in this report is to demonstrate to you the role that public libraries have and can have in relation to older people.

We are pleased to see that the role of public libraries in relation to older people in society is recognised in some national strategies and plans, as seen, for example, in the recent report '*The Importance and Impact of Community Services in Wales*' by the Older People's Commissioner for Wales. However, we believe the role public library services have in relation to older people is still often overlooked by decision makers.

In a country where AgeUK statistics (August 2014) show that 11% of older people describe their life as very poor, poor or neither good nor poor, Library services are uniquely placed to offer services which can help to improve life for all ages, without excluding those of older generations.

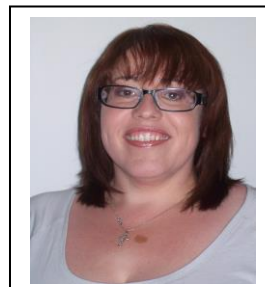
Public libraries provide a range of learning, health, wellbeing, social and financial benefits and opportunities. Libraries bring people together. They are a safe, free and friendly place for older people to visit and use. They are also vital in reaching out to more hard to reach and vulnerable people, for example to those who are housebound and to those who are less able to afford to pay for services.

Comments and stories provided by our users show that our public libraries in Wales have had a powerful and positive impact on the lives of older people. Some of them are summarised in this report.

We hope you enjoy reading this report



Ann Jones  
Chair of SCL Wales



Jane Sellwood  
Vice-Chair of SCL Wales

## Introduction

The Society of Chief Librarians (Wales<sup>1</sup>) has prepared this report in order to highlight the role public libraries have in relation to older people.

Older people are one of our higher user groups if divided by age. More older people are visiting libraries than in previous years and with the number of people aged 60 or over predicted to rise the number wanting to use public library services will inevitably increase.

We are pleased to see the importance of public libraries recognised in the recent report by the Older People's Commissioner in Wales '*The Importance and Impact of Community Services in Wales*' (2014) <sup>2</sup>

Libraries play a significant role in the lives of older people across Wales, providing physical spaces in which to interact .....The local library provides a social and civic role within communities, contributing towards people's sense of social wellbeing. 'Bibliotherapy', for example, can make a considerable difference to an individual's health and wellbeing. Libraries play a central role in our communities and contribute to our social, educational, cultural and economic wellbeing. Libraries help bring people together.

*"The Importance and Impact of Community Services in Wales"* (2014)

The Strategy for Older People in Wales 2013-2023 underlines the importance of older people being full participants in society at a time when many older people are able to participate in the community, learn new skills or take up new activities. However, many older people come up against barriers that prevent their participation, and what should be an enjoyable stage of life can become a time of loneliness and isolation. Public libraries have a key role to play here as they provide an invaluable learning and social resource for many older people.

Public libraries also have a key role to play in relation to national policy agendas which are important to older people in the areas of:

- Social Care and Older People

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<sup>1</sup> The Society of Chief Librarians ( Wales) is an organization consisting of the heads of library services ( or equivalent) of all 22 local authorities in Wales.

<sup>2</sup> "The Importance and Impact of Community Services in Wales" Older People's Commissioner in Wales (2014)

- Health and Well-being
- Equality and Diversity
- Digital Inclusion
- Reading and Literacy
- Lifelong Learning and Re-skilling.

As part of the Welsh Public Library Standards Framework (CyMAL- a division of the Welsh Government dealing with museums, archives and libraries), libraries have standards of service and performance indicators directly linked to the delivery of the above key current national policy agendas.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

- √ **More older people are visiting libraries in the UK. 43% of adults aged 65 – 74 visited the library in 2010/11 compared to 39% in 2009/10**
- √ **37% of people over 75 visited the library in 2010/11 compared to 33% in 09/10**
- √ **The number of people aged 60 or over in the UK is predicted to rise by more than 50 percent in the next 25 years**

While libraries contribute to all of the agendas mentioned, they have a particular strength in building community cohesion, social inclusion and contributing to the individual health and well-being of older people in Wales. Libraries play a huge and positive role in the lives of older people and other age groups across Wales. Libraries give older people physical spaces (particularly important in rural areas with few alternatives) in which to socialise and interact and a role within communities thus contributing towards people’s sense of social wellbeing.

SCL Wales believe the potential of library and information services in relation to older people requires greater recognition and exploitation within national and regional strategies and priorities.

**The benefits are substantial:**

Libraries help:

- Reduce isolation amongst the elderly
- Support older people to live independent lives

- Provide Lifelong Learning opportunities
- Provide Digital Inclusion opportunities
- Encourage healthy lifestyles
- Support care and recovery
- Provide carers with respite
- Provide a network of easily accessible, non-threatening, inclusive environments
- Empower people to access reading opportunities and use information
- Provide **free** access to the internet and information resources
- Support literacy, information literacy, digital literacy and health literacy
- Provide social and community links to people who may otherwise find it difficult to socialise
- Reach out to those who are usually hard to reach
- Reduce stress levels (for example, there is much evidence to show that reading reduces stress levels)
- Help people escape from their problems through reading, reading groups, community activities etc.

A reduction in library services would seriously impact on older people's ability to engage in social, cultural and educational activities (e.g. lifelong learning), and may inhibit the learning of new skills such as digital technology. It would also lead to an increase in isolation and loneliness for older people, and affect their ability to participate fully in society.

### **Brief description of public library services for older people**

Public libraries provide:

- **Books** of all formats, genres, levels, fact and fiction. Specifically, libraries provide:
  - Large Print Books
  - Audio Books on tape / CD/MP3
  - E-books and E-zines (electronic books and magazines)
  - Books and resources in the Welsh Language

Although these are available to borrow by anyone there is a higher dependency on these materials for over 50s due to generally failing sight.

- **Local Studies and Family History materials**

A higher proportion of over 50s use these services than other age range.

- **Talks**

A varied range of talks are provided by library services for example, in relation to local cultural history and events. Many of the talks are requested by groups predominantly made up of the over 50s.

- **IT support and equipment**

Specific support is given to older people regarding ICT support either via library staff or through partner organisations such as Communities 2.0. Recent examples have been the *BBC First Click* initiative, *IT for the terrified* sessions and specific support in the use of tablet and e-book devices. Many users gain their first e-mail accounts through library staff support and many take their first steps into the world of social media. Both these services help tackle isolation and are invaluable to those whose families have moved farther afield. Libraries also provide some form of support in relation to assisted technology and staff will try and accommodate everyone's needs where possible.

- **Reminiscing/memory boxes**

Many libraries work with the Museums service in supporting the reminiscence boxes through local studies materials.

- **Home Library/Housebound service**

An individual delivery service to customers who cannot leave their homes due to medical conditions. Most of these have age related problems and so this is a vital service for these people. Again the vast majority are over 50.

- **Story and rhyme-times**

More and more grandparents are taking on the responsibility regarding childcare and so many of our sessions now encompass over 50s. This not only gives them the opportunity to support their grandchildren but also allows them to meet and engage with a wider representation of the community.

- **Information services**

Libraries provide an excellent information service that gives access to community news and information and answers enquiries on a diverse range of topics. The service also helps with government campaigns that are targeted at appropriate age ranges. Examples include information and referral regarding the recent Digital TV Changeover, enquiries about winter heating allowances and questions from regular users who just need an answer for their latest crossword puzzle! Many enquiries are also received in relation to medical conditions and wherever possible staff will refer to appropriate resources either hard copy or digital resources, to provide customers with authoritative content.

- **Wider learning opportunities**

Many older people decide to return to learning after they retire. The stock that libraries hold support both formal and informal learning opportunities. Some libraries are also used as venues for learning either supported internally via library staff (Local studies and ICT are good examples) or through partner organisations such as U3A, the University of the Third Age. Many of these

courses are free. One of the library services' greatest treasures is the range of stock it holds or can access from other library partners.

- **Group social activities**

Many group activities for over 50s are delivered through library services including reading groups, coffee mornings, craft clubs, art clubs, writing groups, knitting clubs, yoga classes and so much more...

- **Social environments**

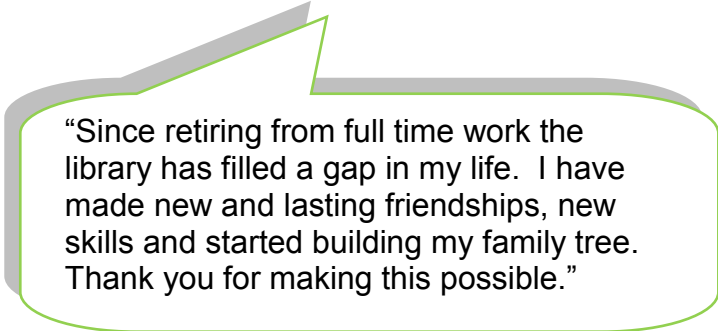
Provide social and community links to people who may otherwise find it difficult to socialise.

*Please note: This is just a brief overview. There are many other examples of specific activities at each library setting.*

## Lifelong Learning benefits

Libraries are an important educational resource, and are vitally important places where older people can access books, reference materials, information sources and computer technology. Libraries therefore have an important role in promoting learning, literacy, social inclusion and digital inclusion.

With an ageing population, more older people will be unable to afford retirement and will need to work longer. They will need opportunities to learn, re-learn and acquire new skills.



“Since retiring from full time work the library has filled a gap in my life. I have made new and lasting friendships, new skills and started building my family tree. Thank you for making this possible.”

For older people who have retired, being able to access ongoing opportunities to develop and learn new skills is an essential element of maintaining their independence, health and wellbeing. In addition, many older people engage in adult learning for social contact and interaction and libraries provide them with somewhere to go to do this. Learning keeps the mind active and also increases confidence, personal development and self-esteem.



“Going to the library is like visiting a long standing friend, where all the family drop in. Young children, always eager to see what is happening, adults popping in and out or on the computers, older folk with more time to chat. When I was studying for a degree it was not always possible to travel to the university library. ‘NO PROBLEM’ if I needed a book the ladies at my local libraries without fail would track down the books I needed. Always with a smile and encouragement. P.S. I graduated last year with a BA in Social Studies. Not bad at 76 years old.”

The importance of lifelong learning for older people cannot be underestimated. Engagement in learning has many benefits in later life, including health improvements (there is ongoing research on how learning can help delay the onset of dementia for example), social inclusion, life satisfaction and lengthening working life for those who want to stay within the workforce or volunteer.

Enabling social interaction and lifelong learning opportunities is central to promoting positive mental health and can help to reduce the need for intensive health and social care support. Research from NIACE (3) provides evidence of the importance of learning for older people, reporting that there are real benefits in terms not only of personal enjoyment, but also for physical and mental health, social engagement and ability to manage their lives.

As detailed in the **NIACE report:**

‘There are also cost benefits of investing in learning in later life; research suggests that by investing in learning provision, older people’s independence and capacity to look after themselves is strengthened, leading to a delay of going into permanent care. If this is just one month it could save £1.8 million in Wales per year<sup>3</sup>. Research also suggests that participating in adult education can increase wellbeing, and that this improvement in subjective wellbeing is equivalent to an increase in annual household income of between £2500 and £5100’<sup>4</sup>.

Lifelong learning can produce a range of health benefits for older people, whilst new skills can increase income and social inclusion. As outlined in the Welsh Government’s Strategy for Older People, we need to increase the number of older people able to access adult community learning, and the variety of learning opportunities available to older people. Public libraries could provide this. Older people recognise the need for creative and innovative approaches, including flexibility regarding venues for adult learning for example, public libraries.

<sup>3</sup> <http://shop.niace.org.uk/ifll-learningthroughlife.html>

<sup>4</sup> [http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/f/i/file\\_1\\_50.pdf](http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/f/i/file_1_50.pdf)

## Digital Inclusion benefits

Digital inclusion is also key to the continued participation of older people in lifelong learning. Research in 2012 found a shift from public to private learning.

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

- √ **Since 2005, despite a significant decline in those learning at college or university, there was a 12% rise of those aged 50 and over learning online.**

As there are ICT facilities and free internet access in all libraries in Wales, the role of public libraries in relation to digital inclusion is significant.

Public libraries not only provide ICT facilities, they also offer taster and training sessions or work with partners to provide this training in libraries. Informal learning opportunities such as a computer class in a library are often the first access older people have to digital technologies. By joining with others to pick up new skills in libraries learners can become more confident and socially mobile and they become more likely to begin using ICT for their own benefit.

Public libraries also provide localised support for learners who may otherwise be working in isolation thus providing essential referral points for remote learners who may otherwise be both digitally and socially excluded.

Anecdotal evidence suggests the ICT taster sessions delivered through public libraries appeal to older, less ICT literate users who are comfortable coming to a neutral location where they are more likely to be in the company of similar 'beginners' (and this could also apply to being with others of a similar age.) ie the familiarity factor! In addition the work of academics has shown that engagement in learning, including ICT learning, in later life contributes to mental health and well being, reduces social exclusion and improves self confidence.

"Next year I will reach the big 70! I really wanted to be a Silver Surfer (just to keep up with the six grandchildren originally!) so I enrolled at the library. I do not have a computer at home so I love going down to Brynhyfryd Library – where the staff are brilliant, very helpful, and very patient, always helping out with a problem. Besides being an avid reader, I love sending e-mails to family and friends - Oh yes! I love my library!"

“I have been coming to the library for taster sessions on how to use the Internet. I was so nervous, I was a complete beginner, didn't know where to start. As I am a carer, it has been great to be able to come for the session when it suits me. I would never be able to commit to a class. Within a couple of weeks, I have been able to research advice and support groups for my daughter's disability. I have been able to contact other parents with similar problems. This has helped me cope with things. It is an enjoyable hour and a nice break for me to come to the library”



Lilian Williams using an iPad.

She may be 93 — but one Llanelli pensioner has proven it is never too late to learn a new skill.

Sheltered housing complex resident Lilian Williams, recently attended an iPad course at the library, and hopes others her age will follow her lead.

The course was delivered by Carmarthenshire Council's Communities 2.0 team.”

Read more:

<http://www.llanellistar.co.uk/Llanelli-93-year-old-proves-s-old-learn-new-skill/story-21745050-detail/story.html#ixzz3AB0NQvAG>

She said: "By now it's pretty obvious that this technology is the future and even at this advanced age I feel we must all try and move with the times."

The provision of assisted online services provided through libraries could provide considerable cost savings to partners such as health and social care services.



### **DID YOU KNOW?**

- √ **Public Libraries in Wales have helped over 2 million users who had never used the internet (or never used it confidently) to go online in the last 2 years - more than any other group or organization in Wales.**

With an increasing number of financial and other services only being delivered digitally, it is crucial that older people are comfortable using digital technologies and are digitally literate to help with their daily lives. Not being able to access digital services can discriminate against older people; paying utility bills or for other services online, for example can be cheaper than over the phone or in person.

Levels of IT literacy amongst older people in Wales are critically low; only 17% of people aged over 70 have access to the internet at home<sup>5</sup>, whilst 309,000 people aged over 65 have never surfed the internet<sup>6</sup>. This has led to an information gap, with older people increasingly unable to access information or services.

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

- √ **Households offline miss out on savings of £560 per year from shopping and paying bills online. For 3.6 million low income households this is equivalent to savings of over £1bn a year being lost from shopping and paying bills online.**
- √ **It estimated that nearly 400,000 older people are digitally, and therefore financially, excluded in Wales.**

Older people are nearly twice as likely not to use the internet as younger people, and not being unable to participate in digital services means that many older people are paying the price.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.independentage.org/media/9425/gulbenkiannewreport.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Older people and the internet, Age Cymru (2011)



“My library is a great meeting place. The staff are friendly and are always wanting to help. I have become a **silver surfer** and really enjoy researching my family tree and seeking information through Google. I hope I will be able to carry on for many years.”

Public libraries have a key role to play in relation to digital inclusion. They provide free computer use and internet access throughout the network of public libraries in Wales. In addition, many public libraries provide IT facilities on their mobile library services and as part of their housebound service, therefore reaching this opportunity out to the wider community.

“Public libraries have a vital role to play in supporting the ambition to secure a truly networked nation in the UK. They are not only digital hubs which provide people with access to free or low cost PCs but also have a role in supporting people to get online and explore all the benefits that being online brings.”

**Martha Lane Fox, UK Digital Champion**

## Social Inclusion benefits

Public spaces such as libraries where people can meet and take part in community activities are vitally important. Such opportunities are greatly valued by many older people and can help to prevent isolation, loneliness and health decline. Increasing opportunities to take part locally can do much to boost independence and combat loneliness.

“The Library is an absolute lifeline for me, without it I don’t know what I’d do”  
**(Quote provided to the National Assembly of Wales’ Inquiry into Public Libraries, 10<sup>th</sup> January 2014).**

In addition to the core service which includes free access to books and computers, public libraries provide many social opportunities for older people and people of all ages. Group activities for over 50s are often based around improving skills, socialising and enjoyment and they may include reading groups, coffee mornings, craft clubs, art clubs, writing groups, knitting clubs, yoga classes and so much more...

“I come to the library nearly every day. I’ve lost my husband and get quite lonely at times. It’s so good to have somewhere to come and sit and read the paper, go to a class or just to have a chat with people”

“I think it’s good for Colin to get out of the care home and have some time away, to himself.”

Carer of a blind man with learning difficulties, talking about a VIP Shared Reading session

For example, Flintshire Libraries and Arts Services, with contributions from Leisure Services, ran a Summer Wellbeing Week for adults in June 2014. Ten events were held in libraries and leisure centres, along with walks, spa sessions and ten pin bowling - all provided free. Another event was the Story of Colour - exploring the use of colour in painting.

“It was very enjoyable, felt better with a laugh and a singsong”.

"Great session with Jan Gardner today. Well worth the visit and the workshop was truly inspirational"

“The library has always been a part of my life. As a young girl, a place of wonder surrounded by so many books. As a teenager, a place to learn and read about romance. As a mother, a place to introduce my son to the pleasure of reading. As a grandmother, a place to relive the pleasures of motherhood. And now, in retirement, a place to join a readers’ group where I can enjoy discussion, chatting with friends and the chance to meet authors”.

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

- ✓ **High concentrations of social and economic deprivation mean that there are relatively low levels of mobility particularly for the 65+ age group**
- ✓ **Through libraries, older people are able to access information and support closer to home**
- ✓ **There is an increase in the number of older people using libraries now compared to 2009/10**

Libraries play a central role in our communities, and contribute to our social, educational, cultural and economic wellbeing. Libraries help bring people together.

“Since becoming partially sighted, finding large print books to read in the library has improved my disposition – having been depressed about it before-hand. I was always an avid reader and thought I had lost that pleasure”.

“As a senior citizen and living on my own, visiting a library gives me the opportunity of meeting people even if it’s a ‘good day’ and a smile from a librarian, otherwise I may not converse with anyone from week to week”

▶ A key action in the Programme for Government, Chapter 4: 21<sup>st</sup> century healthcare is to *'continue to improve access to care in rural areas through innovation such as telemedicine, mobile outreach services and building a community ownership and initiatives in line with the rural health plan'*

Public libraries are an ideal partner for the health and social care sectors to work with to reach out to local communities, particularly to those who may be difficult to reach in other ways, such as older people. Indeed, health agencies can find it difficult to reach out to all areas and some groups may be at risk as a result.

We have always found the travelling library and the librarians of the greatest benefit. Now that I am alone in this isolated position, unable to drive or walk very far, the travelling library and the librarian are even more of a help in keeping me in touch with books, so essential to my mental health."

"Many thanks for the efforts you made to help us. You came to us when the weather was appalling and you were always so pleasant. We looked forward to your visits very much"

"I do not have a computer and am hard of hearing. I first started using the mobile library...then later when I became incapacitated I used the Home Library Service. I have been and continue to be very grateful for the kind helpful way in which the librarians deliver the books - they feel like friends. It must be about 39 years that I have had their help".

Public libraries provide an inclusive service and proactively support people who have disabilities to use the service. Books, resources and equipment are available such as large print, audio, special computer software etc.

"As I am disabled, the library is life enhancing. Staff are very helpful and know my likes. My widowed sister also comes with us. We select approximately 10 books, on each visit and it keeps us motivated and happy."

"As a visually impaired customer, the library is a life-line for using the internet to research my interests, watching rugby and football, increasing the size of fonts so that I can see text more clearly and connecting me with the relevant council departments that can help with my daily requirements"



Public libraries provide a network of community-based services, and mobile libraries to more rural locations and services for people who are housebound. In other examples of work with older people the Vale of Glamorgan has recently launched a Pop-Up Library service in partnership with Barry Town Council to visits residential homes in Barry with collections of books. These are taken into the homes for residents to choose from.

Housebound and home-link library services take books to people who are unable to leave their own homes. The combination of personal contact and reading material addresses social isolation and contributes to the wellbeing of older people unable to visit their local library. The combination of personal contact and some good reading material can be a life line to people in this situation.

“I first joined the library when I was 7 years old. I am now 97 and due to arthritis am totally housebound. But thanks to the home library service I can still enjoy my reading and would be lost without it.”

“I have been visiting this library for 25 years. It serves not only me but my housebound husband. The support to myself and the community is paramount. Without the library I feel there would be a loss of social support especially for the more vulnerable in society, the young, the elderly, and the unemployed.”

Many libraries run innovative services to groups such as older people. For example, the BookLink service run by Bridgend Library and Information Services which targets housebound customers. Also, the OneClick Digital service has been particularly successful at Bridgend. The aim of this project was to promote use of OneClick Digital service to housebound members of Bridgend Library and Information Service’s Booklink library who are partially-sighted and blind. OneClick is a subscription whereby library users can download audiobooks to their PC or other device and listen back via their computer or MP3 player

“Please allow me to state my immense gratitude for and satisfaction with, your Booklink service. Currently, my 'bad days' far outnumber my 'good days', and so I am reluctantly consigned to the confines of my home for the majority of the time. The Booklink service has added much that is positive to my way of living and P\*\*\*, who makes the deliveries, takes much trouble in order to obtain the reading material which is pleasing to me. Such an impressive service and surely, much needed by many”

The Booklink library at Bridgend is a key service that directly helps over 300 individuals continue to enjoy access to library services, even when health issues and infirmity make it impossible for them to continue to visit their local library. The e-audiobooks service goes one step further; it enables housebound readers to take full advantage of the sort of new technology that is often assumed to be beyond their reach; it improves their quality of life and makes a contribution to them being able to continue living fulfilling, independent lives.

So libraries go out to hard to reach people such as to those who are housebound. In addition libraries bring people together. Libraries provide support, company, enjoyment and interaction to many people. This important aspect of the library service is often overlooked but the public value it. Libraries also encourage **intergenerational activities** thus putting older people in touch with younger people and vice versa. This has social benefits for all age groups who learn from and inspire one another.



This Monmouth Library customer is reading up on extra information from a new book about evacuees for his talk to local children about his experiences during World War 2.

In addition libraries run reading groups to encourage interaction as well as reading activity. This includes shared reading activities which is proven to have a positive impact on wellbeing, confidence and social interaction. The actual act of reading out aloud and hearing the sound of your own voice can be very empowering. Reading aloud together within a group can help somebody express him/herself. Also, reading sessions bring people together, making it easier to communicate and feel part of something. Reading aloud together can be an enjoyable experience for the majority of people but is particularly beneficial for older people who have little contact with others. It also benefits those who have lost their confidence or ability to communicate.

“I lost my confidence to go out since my husband died but since I got to know the other ladies in this group I’ve been going out with them. Now, as well as the reading group I am out several days a week.”

**From a regular at a group run in a sheltered housing complex,**

“We have noticed a difference in several residents since the group has been going. In particular, one lady who can never relax or settle, has astonished us by sitting still and concentrating on the reading for a full hour.”

**From the manager of an Elderly Person’s home.**

*For further information about social benefits please see our SCL Wales Report ‘ Public Libraries: Health, Wellbeing and Social Benefits (2012)*

## Financial benefits

Compared with other cultural facilities, libraries are used by a higher percentage of people from deprived areas (39%) and this is an important driver in this is the current economic climate. Public libraries are more vital in difficult economic times as the core public library offer is free to all people.

For older people living in poverty, the free resources provided by libraries are indispensable. Library users can save on hundreds of pounds, for example by loaning books rather than purchasing them.

"I am a senior citizen, living alone. I have always been an avid reader preferring it to watching T.V. I could not possibly afford to buy regularly but by using the library I have a source of a great variety at no cost. I can also try to widen my choice of authors aware that if I find a book unreadable – very seldom – I can return it and select another. Going to the library is an incentive to get out."

"Early retirement meant less money but more time for reading! To economise I joined Clydach Library in Oct 2011, and to satisfy my inner 'super-scrimper' I made a note of the cover price of each book borrowed. **My total 'spend' since joining the library has now reached £1000!"**

Potential partners should and do recognize the economic benefits as well as the social benefits to be had from collaborating with public libraries in Wales.

Libraries are free. Libraries offer value for money.

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

- ✓ **Libraries cost just 5p per person/per day to run, on average.**
- ✓ **The cost is 35p per week/per person: less than a bag of crisps or a pint of milk.**

Despite being so cost effective the public library network of services in Wales is at serious risk of being downsized which would result in a diminished service for the people of Wales.

Local authorities have a statutory duty however to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964<sup>7</sup> and to abide by the Equalities Act. Local authorities have a legal obligation to provide library services that mean so much to older people and indeed all other age groups.

## Health and Wellbeing benefits

According to the NHS's 5 year vision *Together for Health* (NHS, 2011) there are major pressures on the health service. Within two decades it is estimated that almost one in three people in Wales will be aged 60 or over with older people requiring more health care than any other age group.

The changing nature of society with an increasing older population, the greater demand on and expense to be met by the NHS and social care providers within the current economic climate means that the NHS faces a tough financial future. It is more important than ever that the NHS, social care providers and local authorities collaborate to contribute to the health and wellbeing of older people in Wales.

In addition to the emphasis on health promotion, health awareness and "upstream" health prevention activity to reduce the need for costly intervention further down the line, there is also a growing emphasis on self help. In addition, it is now recognized that health is as much about emotional and psychological wellbeing as it is about physical health matters.

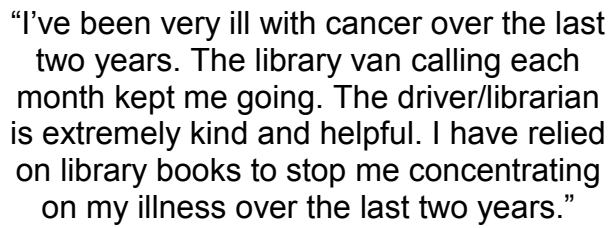
Future health demands are therefore likely to be different from past decades with a greater emphasis on emotional and psychological wellbeing, self help and self learning and against a backdrop of an ageing population.

There is a clear role for libraries here. Libraries are information providers and library staff are information facilitators, helping and guiding people to access and understand the information they require. Take away this understanding and ability to use health information (health literacy) and the individual's ability to make informed decisions will be seriously impaired. Libraries also provide reliable and trustworthy health information, self-help books, self-learning and through the resources and services on offer also improve emotional and psychological wellbeing.

**Bibliotherapy** offered through libraries can make a considerable difference to an individual's health and wellbeing. Bibliotherapy can include reading for pleasure and enjoyment as well as using self help and information resources. People who enjoy reading benefit from bibliotherapy. People who are looking for answers to health questions can benefit from bibliotherapy.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.assemblywales.org/lco-ld7557-em-e.pdf>



“I’ve been very ill with cancer over the last two years. The library van calling each month kept me going. The driver/librarian is extremely kind and helpful. I have relied on library books to stop me concentrating on my illness over the last two years.”

The study ‘*An investigation into the therapeutic benefits of reading in relation to depression and wellbeing*’ (a partnership between The University of Liverpool, Liverpool Primary Care Trust and The Reader Organisation, 2010)<sup>8</sup> revealed significant improvements in the mental health of depressed patients during the 12-month period in which they had attended reading groups. The study found that shared reading helps people who suffer from depression in terms of their social well-being, their personal confidence, their mental well-being and their emotional and psychological well-being.

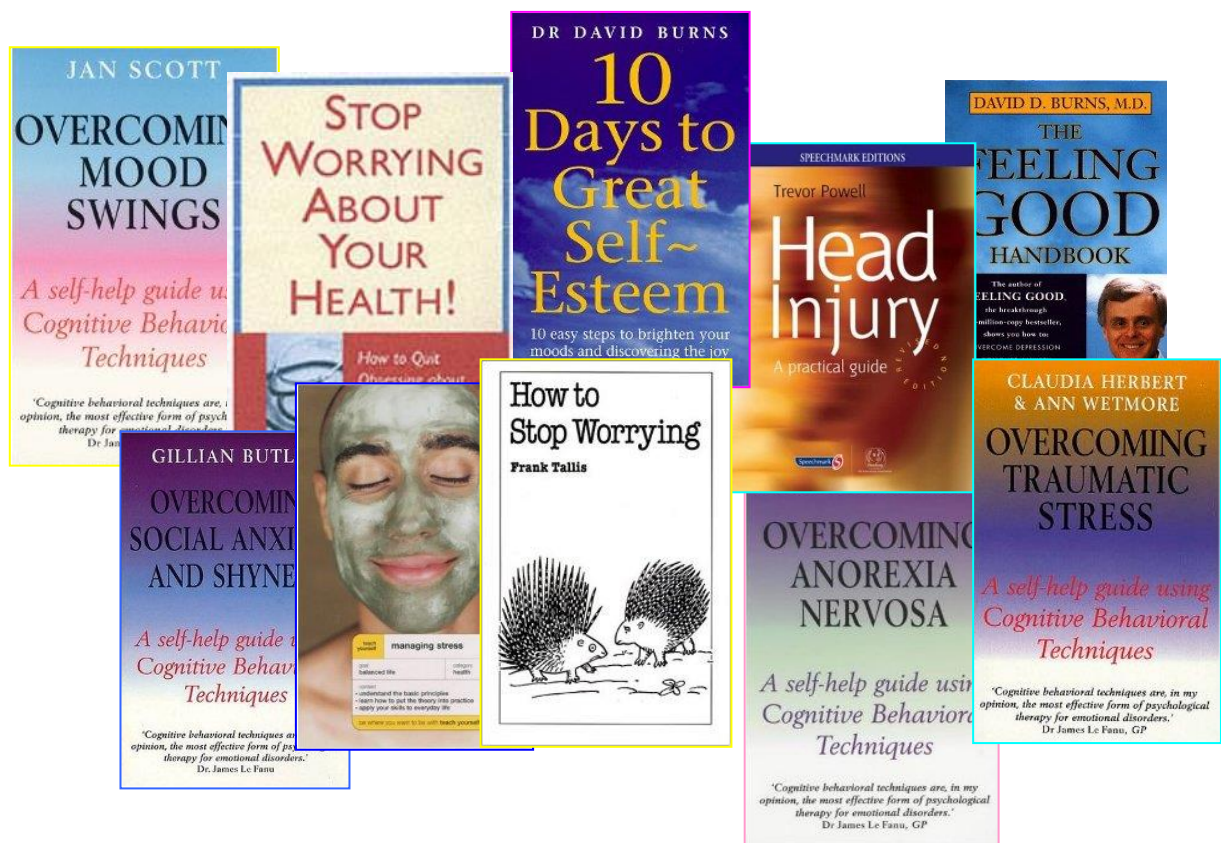
Worth highlighting is the 2005 Welsh Government funded ‘*Book Prescription Wales Scheme*’ (BPW) which is a partnership between the National Health Service and public libraries in Wales. The BPW Scheme helps patients with mild to moderate psychological problems and research shows that effective “self help” books can assist them to overcome a range of emotional problems including anxiety, panic, stress and depression.

There is an abundance of evidence to show that the schemes (self help or general reading for pleasure) are making a considerable difference to people and their health and wellbeing. Professor Neil Frude, (consultant clinical psychologist, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board), who first developed the Books on Prescription Scheme, states the following advantages over medication:

- Higher patient acceptability
- More immediate effects than some medication
- No rebound effect at the end of treatment
- Tendency for continued improvement over time
- Lower relapse rates
- No appreciable adverse side effects as with medication
- No danger of overdose

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<sup>8</sup> The Reader Organisation is a nationally recognised centre for the promotion of reading and positive mental health.



Professor Neil Frude, also states:

“Evidence for the effectiveness of bibliotherapy continues to mount and there is no doubt that the book prescription strategy using the public library service makes this way of delivering psychological therapy extremely cost effective. For minimal cost, patients can follow an intervention process that is based on impressive research evidence and is devised by leading clinicians in the field.

I've come to realize that it's not just the book prescription scheme that enables libraries to contribute to the mental health and well-being of those who use libraries. Both in their 'core business' of lending books and other media, and through the various general and health focused activities that take place on a regular basis, libraries provide an invaluable resource.”

**Professor Neil Frude**

“When I first had cancer I couldn’t face the facts and couldn’t bear to read about it, I just took out books to keep me positive. Since my operation I’ve read about the cancer I had and I’ve been using the library to find books on how to stay healthy.”

“When I visit the library the staff are always helpful and friendly. I have found very informative books on Bipolar Disorder, with which I have recently been diagnosed, which have helped me to come to terms with my illness. ....It also gave me confidence about going into places. It is spacious, modern, light and airy, always room for privacy in a corner, and always a pleasure to visit.”

The Book Prescription Wales scheme was considered a landmark initiative when it was introduced in 2005. Since the introduction of the scheme, it has spread significantly. There is now a national scheme in England and schemes are also running in Ireland, Scotland and New Zealand. Wales led the way here and all of these schemes acknowledge the fact that they are based on the idea that originated in Wales.

Significantly, the BPW scheme is included within the Welsh Government’s **Mental Health strategy**.

Someone living with a diagnosis such as dementia may worry about how they and their family will cope as their illness progresses. Dedicated books on dementia from Book Prescription Wales give more detailed advice on such matters.

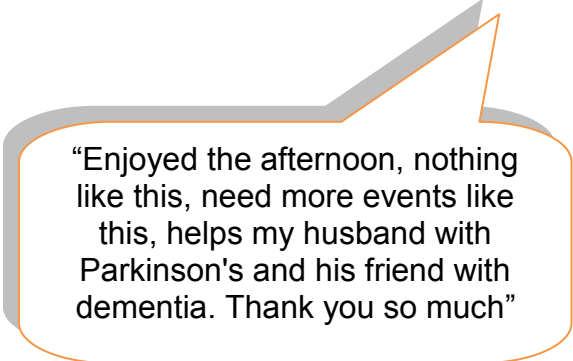
**All Wales Mental Health Strategy.**

### **Alzheimer’s and other dementias**

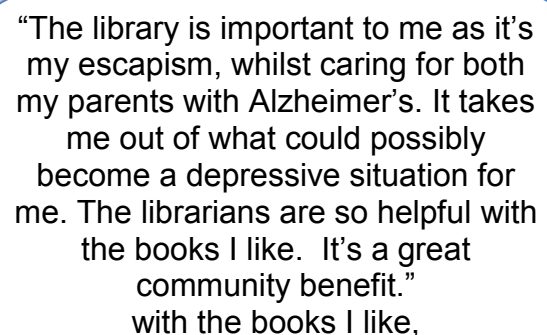
As stated in the All Wales Mental Health Strategy, the Book Prescription Wales scheme includes books about dementia. Public libraries are increasingly getting more involved in providing services aimed to help people with dementia and their carers.

As well as providing books and information about Alzheimer’s and other dementias many public libraries offer other activities and services. We have already mentioned Shared Reading sessions. People with Alzheimer’s or dementia find these particularly useful. Many public libraries across Wales run Shared Reading sessions and some of these, for example at Newport and the Vale of Glamorgan are targeted towards people with Alzheimer’s and other dementias.

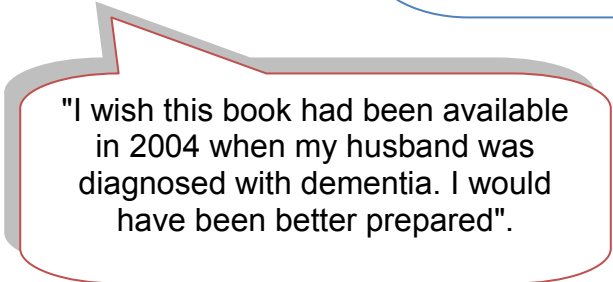
There are many other activities also. For example, Vale of Glamorgan libraries collaborated recently with the South Wales Literature Development Initiative to produce a poetry book from memories of those visiting Ty Hapus in Barry. Monmouthshire libraries hold board games groups, fashion reminiscence events, memory book collections and dementia friends information sessions. Torfaen libraries have set up 'The Memory Café' with the Alzheimer's Society. Caerphilly libraries have a collection of books for carers to use with people suffering memory loss. "Pictures to Share" is a collection of books with mainly pictures and small amounts of text to prompt conversation and memories. Some libraries provide 'Dementia Awareness' days such as the very successful ones held recently in Swansea libraries and Flintshire libraries.



"Enjoyed the afternoon, nothing like this, need more events like this, helps my husband with Parkinson's and his friend with dementia. Thank you so much"



"The library is important to me as it's my escapism, whilst caring for both my parents with Alzheimer's. It takes me out of what could possibly become a depressive situation for me. The librarians are so helpful with the books I like. It's a great community benefit." with the books I like,



"I wish this book had been available in 2004 when my husband was diagnosed with dementia. I would have been better prepared".

*For further information about health and wellbeing benefits please see our SCL Wales Report ' Public Libraries: Health, Wellbeing and Social Benefits ' (2012)*



## Conclusions

Our intention is to demonstrate the significant impact public libraries have on the lives of older people in Wales.

Within this report we have highlighted:

- The learning benefits
- The digital inclusion benefits
- The social inclusion benefits
- The economic benefits
- The health and wellbeing benefits

The many comments and stories staff receive from people who use library services demonstrate how libraries impact on the lives of older people in Wales. Libraries can change lives. The comments included in this report are just a small selection of those received from older people who tell us every day how much they value our service and the difference their library makes to them.

However, we also realise that we can not do this alone. Public libraries recognise the importance of collaborating with others and the need to continue to build on existing partnerships. Public libraries in Wales have an excellent track record of partnership working, and by easing the burden of social care services, education and NHS care, libraries can reduce isolation, empower people to access free information, learning opportunities and provide social and community links.

The benefits are substantial.

For public libraries in Wales to continue making a difference to the lives of older people, decision makers and stakeholders (as well as users) need to recognize that public libraries require support. With the correct level of recognition, support and investment public libraries in Wales could do so much more.

In an age of austerity, free public libraries are needed more than ever by older people and other age groups.

“Should local authorities continue with proposals to close libraries, then they have a legal obligation to provide library services, which mean so much to older people and other age groups”.

*‘The Importance and Impact of Community Services in Wales’*  
Older People’s Commissioner in Wales (2014)

## Comments from our older public library users in Wales

“This library has helped me to deal with my personal (family) problems by providing me access to books and information. I have found this a great help in my recovery.”

**Isle of Anglesey**

“I lost my wife 3 months ago and since I have been coming to my local library it has made a big difference to my life and the staff are excellent.”

**Blaenau Gwent**

“My doctor sent me to the library, recommending a book to help with my stress and anxiety. The books have been a great help, since then I have started reading for pleasure again, - this is helping me relax in the evenings”

**Blaenau Gwent**

“Please allow me to state my immense gratitude for and satisfaction with, your Booklink service. Currently, my 'bad days' far outnumber my 'good days', and so I am reluctantly consigned to the confines of my home for the majority of the time. The Booklink service has added much that is positive to my way of living and Phil, who makes the deliveries, takes much trouble in order to obtain the reading material which is pleasing to me. Such an impressive service and surely, much needed by many”

**Bridgend Library & Information Service**

“When I visit the library the staff are always helpful and friendly. I have found very informative books on Bipolar Disorder, with which I have recently been diagnosed, which have helped me to come to terms with my illness. I have also had books out on art and painting, which have helped me develop my talents. Today when I came in there were children, happily drawing, and I stopped to admire their work and chat to them, which also gave me confidence about going into places. It is spacious, modern, light and airy, always room for privacy in a corner, and always a pleasure to visit “

**Caerphilly**

“Although I am 76 my attitude to life is there is always something new to learn and reading a variety of subject matter helps to keep the mind active.”

**Cardiff**

“As a retired lecturer, a senior citizen and living on my own, visiting a library gives me the opportunity of meeting people even if it's a 'good day' and a smile from a librarian, otherwise I may not converse with anyone from week to week” **Carmarthenshire**

“The [mobile] service is invaluable to our household as my husband is disabled and would not be able to get to the library in town, with the van calling here he is able to choose his own entertainment and looks forward to chatting with the library man, I think that makes his day. I enjoy the

convenience of the service. It enables me to enjoy a lot of books as I don't have to carry them far. Thank you!!" **Ceredigion**

"The library makes such a positive difference to my elderly parents' lives."  
**Ceredigion**

"I am very pleased with the service. I like the talking books that I am brought. Due to illness there have been periods when I have not been able to get out. During these times in particular the talking books are a god send to me. Just listening to them feels like company to me, as it can be very lonely when you are stuck in alone. Sometimes the library lady is the only person I see each month and I really look forward to her visits. Long may the service continue!"  
**Conwy**

"The present personal delivery service is a godsend, since I am virtually housebound with chronic arthritis and lupus, plus other aged-related disabilities (I'm 91). The human factor is in the form of the friendly and extremely helpful ladies who select and deliver the books..... I live alone, am an avid reader, and the monthly delivery date is to be a "red letter day" and so appreciated"  
**Conwy**

"I sincerely hope this service never stops. I couldn't manage without it"  
**Conwy**

"Enjoyed the afternoon, nothing like this, need more events like this, helps my husband with Parkinson's and his friend with dementia. Thank you so much."  
**Flintshire**

"Really nice afternoon, enjoyed ourselves, nice to sing old songs from our youth. Thank you very much"  
**Flintshire**

"Enjoyed the afternoon, met a good friend."  
**Flintshire**

"Libraries have been a constant part of my life for many years and the one here in Blaenau Ffestiniog is the best I have used between 1943 and 2013" .  
85 year old male user  
**Gwynedd**

"Very helpful and informed staff. Improvements? Only that the library is never closed down, it is a vital place". 93 year old male user  
**Gwynedd**

"This library offers an essential service to very many people in many ways. I, for one, could not manage without it."  
**Gwynedd**

"I have been using the library for many years and always enjoy the visits very much. Not being a great TV watcher, reading is my main form of entertainment, especially during the evenings. Our grandchildren and their parents are also readers".

**Gwynedd**

"Glad you have a good selection of Large Print novels. I have enough reference books to open a shop! I am a retired Wellcome Foundation Senior Scientist - Deaf - but not daft!"

**Gwynedd**

"I enjoy my visits here very much. It's bright and vibrant. I love to see children's work up on the walls".

**Gwynedd**

"A very pleasant and helpful staff very friendly to those in need of friendship"

**Gwynedd**

"After retiring 2 years ago I felt a little lonely so I joined the computer class and I love coming here to meet my friends and also learn new things. I am not afraid of the computer anymore and will try new things on the computer. I also spend a happy time looking through the books and it has started me back reading."

**Merthyr Tydfil**

"Ill health has suspended my working life. The library saves times for busy people, but fills time for people like me who have active minds but a body that is letting them down."

**Merthyr Tydfil**

"My arthritis is a problem but when I come to these sessions I go away feeling wonderful" said a regular at the Abergavenny Library session who, as well as the arthritis, is still recovering from a recent stroke.

**Monmouthshire**

"We have noticed a difference in several residents since the group has been going. In particular, one lady who can never relax or settle, has astonished us by sitting still and concentrating on the reading for a full hour."

**Monmouthshire (from the manager at an Elderly Person's home).**

"I am a wheelchair user and due to my illness I find it hard to hold a book for long, so I use the talking books which I enjoy and it helps me to relax. The staff are all very friendly and extremely helpful. It makes my trip to the library very enjoyable."

**Neath Port Talbot**

"As I can not see well enough to read it is brilliant to be able to listen to the audio books as I used to enjoy reading so much"

**Newport**

"I never felt comfortable or confident enough to use computers or any other kind of technology but these are so easy to use"

**Newport**

"These stories and poems we read every week...they cover so many aspects of life really don't they? The poems are quite philosophical sometimes aren't they? and it's good to have something to think about I don't want to be just sat in a corner and feel forgotten."

**Newport**

"I would like to take that story home if I may; my family take an interest in what I have done when I come here"

**Newport**

"I have always enjoyed coming to the library and often bring my great- grand children in. The staff are polite and helpful and very patient with the children".

**Powys**

"I love the library. Using mobile and Newtown Library. I would be lost without my books. I do not watch television or read papers."

**Powys**

"I have always found the staff at the library very, very helpful. They gave me the confidence to work on the computer because I know I can call on their help if get into difficulty. It is always a pleasure coming in."

**Powys**

"I really couldn't enjoy life if I couldn't visit and take out my books. At the moment I am 85 and dread to think what would happen if I became disabled and couldn't visit."

**Powys**

"I have used this library for many, many years. I use it for everything from research to a reading haven during the famous Welsh summers! I would be very sad if I were to lose this library as it is the best place to hide with a book during cold and wet days."

**Powys**

"This library is a God send. My father loves reading and it helps him cope now my mum has died. The staff are welcoming and helpful which makes it easy for him to use the library. We had job persuading him to come and now we can't keep him away. Thank you! "

**Powys**

"I am fortunate in having a travelling library so I get a regular visitor and wide choice of books. I also enjoy a chat about local and world affairs which brings me insights into how younger people view what is happening. As I live alone and am disabled I would be very unhappy to lose this service."

**Pembrokeshire**

“I like to check on the computer my e-mails and see purchases I make, read some local papers and take the odd book back to read. I like to have a talking book for the weekend to relax with and the friendly staff. Instead of being alone at home it’s nice to have access to all these things and have company too.”

**Rhondda Cynon Taf**

“I had to take early retirement due to ill health in 2000. I was very depressed as my work had been both challenging and mentally stimulating. I was unable to do anything else except read. I rediscovered my local library. Helpful staff, new books and time put me back on track. My health is still poor but library visits help cheer me enormously. I can’t imagine life without the library.”

**Swansea**

“This is the only chance I get to see my friends” (after a weekly tea time club for over 65s) **Swansea**

“I’ve bought an I-pad and I’m doing my shopping on-line”. Response to Digital Friday Sessions. **Swansea**

“Thank you for suggesting the spoken word. It has helped my mother who is beginning to lose her eyesight”.

Family History / Local Study workshops” **Swansea**

“Great!. More please to keep OAPs up to date with technology, phones, computers and related devices”. **Swansea**

“The Library is an absolute lifeline for me, without it I don’t know what I’d do” (quote given to the National Assembly of Wales’ Inquiry into Public Libraries, 10<sup>th</sup> January 2014). **Swansea**

“I’m 91 and partially sighted. I can’t watch TV much except for quiz programmes, and then I can’t see the contestants’ faces. So the talking books are wonderful for me.”

**Torfaen**

“I’m unable to walk so the Library at Home Service is a great benefit to me.”

**Torfaen**

“The Library at Home Service is great. Because of ill health I spend lots of time reading.”

**Torfaen**

“I come to the library nearly every day. I’ve lost my husband and get quite lonely at times. It’s so good to have somewhere to come to sit and read the paper, go to a class or just to have a chat with people.”

**Vale of Glamorgan**

"I wish this book had been available in 2004 when my husband was diagnosed with dementia. I would have been better prepared". **Member of the Ty Avow Carers Forum, Wrexham**

"Offers some very good advice to relatives" **Home manager of a Care Home, Wrexham**