

Why libraries matter to young people

Alex Lea

14th February 2017

My name is Alex Lea. I am 11 years old and in my first year at Ralph Allen School. I would like to talk to you about the importance of libraries to young people.

I love Bath Central Library. It is a wide open and welcoming space, perfect for inspiration and broadening horizons. It has an excellent selection of books for all ages of children.

My brother, sister and I are regular library users. According to our loans history on LibrariesWest we borrowed 225 books in the six months before we heard about the library move. We browse in the library and we order books online.

Online ordering works if you are computer literate, know which books you want and have time to wait for them to arrive. But having a wide selection of books on shelves is essential. How else do we find what interests us amidst all the crowds of books online? We need books to flip through and first pages to read. And our homework projects are due in long before online orders would arrive.

My nine year old sister Izzy has significant learning difficulties. She is easily discouraged and needs books that look inviting. She judges books by their pages as well as their covers and she can't do that online. Izzy struggles enormously with her reading but she perseveres because she loves books. Reading and being read to has a huge impact on her cognitive ability and we have the library to thank for that.

Children need to choose books for themselves and need the freedom to browse the shelves. Bath Central Library is one room with one exit. As long as a parent can see the exit if they need to, they know their children are safe. A library over three floors with lifts, stairs and an exit spilling onto a busy road would be a nightmare for parents of young children and those with additional needs.

Reading books makes us better people. I can give anyone who is interested a page of references to research that shows all the benefits of reading for pleasure from academic progress to mental health. Young people who use libraries read more and enjoy books more, so they get those benefits. I have learned so much from books and will always be grateful to Bath Central Library and its librarians for that.

I am shocked by the fact that the Council is moving and changing the library without any meaningful consultation or any assessment of what our community needs. Bath has 'entrenched problems with literacy' according to research published last week by The Literacy Trust and Experian. If this tells us anything, it is that Bath needs a well-stocked library and knowledgeable librarians more than ever.

I would like to present the Council with our petition to save Bath Central Library. Our campaign group is full of interesting, articulate, creative, and committed people who got that way by reading books. Please delay your decision to move the library and engage with us – we have lots of ideas about how we can protect our great library, make it greater still and address the Council's need to cut costs.

Thank you.

Research references for: Why libraries matter to young people

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Social inequalities in cognitive scores at age 16: The role of reading
Centre for Longitudinal Studies, Institute of Education, University College London,
September 2013

Children who read for pleasure are likely to do significantly better at school than their peers. Reading for pleasure during secondary school had the biggest effect, with books judged to be more important to children's development at an older age than the influence of their parents. The combined effect on children's progress of reading books often, going to the library regularly and reading newspapers at 16 was four times greater than the advantage children gained from having a parent with a degree.

<http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1473708/>

http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/news/5560_study_provides_evidence_that_reading_for_pleasure_boosts_children_s_academic_performance

Literature Review: The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment

The Reading Agency, June 2015

Children reading for pleasure - the main outcomes reported were enjoyment, knowledge of the self and other people, social interaction, social and cultural capital, imagination, focus and flow, relaxation and mood regulation. Improvements in young children's communication abilities and longer-term education outcomes were also reported for early years children.

https://readingagency.org.uk/news/The_Impact_of_Reading_for_Pleasure_and_Empowerment.pdf

Research evidence on reading for pleasure

Department of Education, May 2012.

Research evidence on reading for pleasure from domestic and international literature.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/284286/reading_for_pleasure.pdf

Public libraries and Literacy

National Literacy Trust, February 2011

Young people that use their public library are nearly twice as likely to be reading outside of class every day. Public library users are nearly twice as likely to say that they enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot. Of the 43.8% of pupils who do use the library, the most common reason, cited by over half of all pupils, was that the library had interesting reading materials.

http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0000/7424/Public_libraries_literacy_2011.pdf

Identifying the places with the greatest literacy need

National Literacy Trust and Experian, February 2017

Bath is one of the constituencies with 'entrenched problems with literacy' i.e. where at least one ward with significant literacy need. 212 constituencies (40% of the total of 533) have a higher literacy score than Bath.

http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0003/7673/Constituency_literacy_score_table_-_by_rank_-_FINAL.pdf

<https://www.experianplc.com/media/news/2017/86-of-english-constituencies-have-entrenched-problems-with-literacy>