

## Introduction

The following comments provide an overview of the impact that libraries have had on the health and wellbeing of their communities, resulting in more resilient and healthier communities, particularly post pandemic. The comments are just a selection of those submitted as part of a national survey of library users carried out in October 2023 which received over 15,000 responses. Over a third of respondents said that using the library had led to healthier behaviours or habits and almost 40% said it had reduced their feelings of loneliness and isolation. The Collective Force for Wellbeing Action Plan has been pivotal in creating the partnerships needed to signpost library users to the right support and to provide vital training for library staff.

## Social Isolation and Mental Health

*Last year I was diagnosed with depression and felt utterly lost and useless. I brought the children to the library each week but was unable to read. The staff member suggested Audiobooks. When I felt better I started to read and the staff sources books with large print text. I am back to full health and feel very thankful for the role the library and this staff member played in my journey.*

*I was struggling with depression a year ago and found a wide variety of self help books available within the library to help me learn new techniques to help deal with the symptoms. I would never have been able to access these books otherwise and am now in a much more positive place than I may have been.*

*It is always a welcoming place to visit - to have contact with other people - improve wellbeing, mental health and feeling of loneliness and isolation. I read a lot, at least a book a day and it gives me access to so many books- new and old, I wouldn't be able to buy. It's a sourced information when needed and there's access to printing/photocopying and have had help with these issues. It was a real source of improvement to mental health and wellbeing last winter having a warm hub and also during lockdown being able to access books.*

*I went through a really tough few years battling mental illness. The library was always a positive place to go to. Books for free and a feeling of being connected to the wider world. To be honest I still leave a library feeling better for it even today with better mental health than those dark years.*

*Discovered books that have had a hugely positive effect on my mental and physical health. Without the library I wouldn't have discovered these books and couldn't have afforded them anyway. The library has been a hugely beneficial part of my life post-pandemic.*

*They support our reading group. They provide doorstep delivery & include my hearing aid batteries . Both of these support my wellbeing /mental health & lessen loneliness & isolation.*

*Meeting other people at the "Words for Wellbeing " sessions greatly helps my mental health.*

*I use reading as way to cope with CPTSD and going to the library every week ensures that I get out and do something that makes me feel good. My local library has literally saved my life.*

*I suffer from SAD in the winter, and the library helped me stay mentally healthy during this time- I really appreciated it.*

*The library helps me head turn over something new and serves me well enough to switch off from my usual daily routines. I think it is a place to become healthy like a gym.*

### **Post Natal Depression**

*I had pretty bad post-natal depressions when my daughter was born. I started coming to the library on a regular basis and honestly it gave me such a shining bright light in a period of darkness. I felt much less alone, there were amazing members of staff, Bookbug for my daughter, a safe space. I bring my daughter now every other week and she adores it and has such a fondness for stories.*

*When I was suffering from postnatal depression, the library was one of the places I went to be in a safe, calming and relaxed environment. I was able to attend Bookbug sessions, stay with my baby and look at books or play with the toys. It also helped me go out of the house and mix with other mums (some who were experiencing the same thing) I wasn't required to pay for any of the sessions or materials I used (one of the few places where you can do this) and I felt supported and welcomed by the staff. These spaces played a huge part in my recovery and now I am able to visit, look at books with my children and form great memories.*

*I would attend my local library in Balloch to attend Bookbug with my daughter. I suffered from post-natal depression and didn't go out much. This group was a lifeline for me, I was able to gain confidence and meet some new people. Just getting out the house was a benefit to my health.*

## **Dementia/ Alzheimer's Support**

*My Partner of 49 years together had to go into permanent residential care due to him having dementia. He has been in care for a year, the library has greatly helped me come to terms with my new situation of being on my own and contributed to my partner's acceptance of being in care in that: 1: I have borrowed audio books for him to listen to 2: By browsing the library shelves I have had many of my interests rekindled. 3: The library purchased a book for carers coping with dementia dependents. That changed my outlook on coping with the situation: FOR THE GOOD. 4: I have borrowed books which have specifically helped me re-start art and design studies which I had to shelve for several years. What an asset this place is!*

*Library staff are always very helpful, happy to discuss new ideas for authors etc. The charity I manage works closely with the library staff to run reminiscence activities for older people including those living with dementia. They also provide us with a warm, free space with Internet connectivity to run our free IT classes for older people. Libraries have taken over as the community centre in many villages/towns, and I think they are a great resource!*

*I brought my husband who was suffering from dementia to a New Tricks event. This allowed us both to get out and enjoy something together.*

*I come to a knitting class as I have dementia and Parkinson's, I also lost my husband and felt very lonely. By coming here each week I get to meet new people and it gets me out.*

*I meet regularly with other carers for Alzheimer's Scotland coffee times- mutual support is a great need in times of stress.*

*Eaglesham Library have help support me enormously through my journey with my mum and her Alzheimer's and provided me with many ideas for help I could get.*

*My husband was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and was finding it difficult to carry on with his interests and hobbies. I was fortunate to find out about the regular deliveries of books, based on individual interests, the library made to anyone who requested it. This has proved a valuable service for us as it is an activity he can do independently or one which we can do together, often provoking a lot of discussion and recalling memories from the past. It's a very valuable resource to have and it's free too.*

## **Parkinson's**

*I have Parkinson's disease and use a powered wheelchair. The library has been a life saver for me, a sanctuary, meeting and talking with like-minded people. Because of the encouragement of library staff, I have published two books on Amazon with a third on the way, poetry, short stories. The staff motivate me and advise me, also I have rediscovered the joy of reading.*

*Always an avid reader I used the Library regularly. I was Diagnosed with Parkinsons Disease & as it progressed & I became non verbal & had to give up all outdoor activities, the library was my life-line!!When I could no longer get into the Library I used the mobile library& it was the highlight of my week. The staff were always so kind & went out of their way to help me. Unfortunately, we have now moved from the Stirling area to a Care Village in Lanark but I feel Libraries are a vital asset to improve the quality of life of people with long term health problems& disabilities.*

## **Cancer**

*I had cancer and during recovery, going to the library was part of my ritual towards recovery. Finding books about my illness as well as fiction to fill my hours of recuperation, helped me heal. I got to know all the library staff and gained a real sense of community and friendship.*

*I recently was diagnosed with cancer; I used the online services to reserve books and access online publications. When I went to pick up book the librarian asked how I was as she hadn't seen me in a while- I felt as though I was part of the community and a valued person.*

*To escape with a book during cancer treatment is wonderful. The library during this time is an absolute blessing.*

*I needed support as I had been diagnosed with cancer. The local library informed me of the meeting times that I could attend. A staff member directed me to written materials and offered me a warm and relaxing space during this challenging period.*

*Following my cancer diagnosis, I volunteered to man the Macmillan information & Support Drop In service. Got me out of the house and gave me purpose to be a listening ear and provide help & support for local cancer patients & their families.*

*My son has recently been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, support group within the library is invaluable. Also great for mental health as staff are absolutely brilliant.*

## **Case Studies - Collective Force Pathfinder Projects**

The following case studies provide more detail of the impact that the Collective Force Pathway projects have had on communities and in ensuring that library staff are equipped with the training they need to support them.

## Enriching lives through libraries | SLIC Collective Force Case Study

### Tell us what you did.

#### **What we did:**

Falkirk Libraries received funding from the **Scottish Government Public Library Covid Relief Fund - Route B** to create the Libraries for Wellbeing project. Libraries for Wellbeing carried out a wide-ranging training programme for staff, created new fortnightly Words for Wellbeing (bibliotherapy) groups, and ran outreach sessions to connect more deeply with our communities and encourage the use of libraries as welcoming safe spaces for everyone.

### The impact you made.



*During lockdown I saw nobody for many months because I live on my own. After my yearly review with the doctor I was told about this group. It has made a great difference to me just being with others, meeting new people, hearing other people's point of views, having a laugh helping to dispel loneliness (G, Words for Wellbeing attendee in their 70s)*

The following outcomes were met as part of the initial project:

- 2348 people attended full day outreach sessions
- 8 Words for wellbeing groups were established with 6-12 regularly attending each group
- 19 partnerships developed with local service providers, 13 of which were new
- 49 staff attended a half day mental health awareness training
- 18 staff attended two days of mental health first aid training.
- 25 staff attended Bibliotherapy Training

The Libraries for Wellbeing project has made a huge difference to our libraries, changing the ethos to one where the wellbeing of our staff and communities is at the heart of our service. The fortnightly Words for Wellbeing groups that are running in all 8 of our branches have continued after the project ended and are now a core part of our library offer. The groups provide much needed meeting places for socially isolated people and have brought in non-library users as well as those who were already regular users. Libraries for Wellbeing has also developed and strengthened our partnerships with local NHS and Health and Social Care Partnership services, with further projects having been developed (e.g. free condom pilot, NHS stress reduction training). The project was recognised with a COSLA Excellence Award for the exemplary work taking place to tackle inequalities and improve health and wellbeing across communities.

## The lessons you learned.

This type of work needs very careful and targeted promotion, so that potential attendees find out about the sessions but are not put off coming by potentially stigmatising messages.

Staff need to be fully onboard with why these sessions are important. Staff also need to feel empowered to carefully facilitate sessions. Having a staff member work to set up groups with trained staff, and then gradually ease back so the sessions are run solely by staff from that library was very successful.

These groups take time to get going, with very low numbers to start with. It's important to persevere and to continue promoting them across the community. If numbers stay low, then consider changing the timings.

## Enriching lives through libraries | SLIC Collective Force Study

### Tell us what you did.

In October 2022, Dundee Libraries partnered with Diabetes Scotland/UK to make information about diabetes freely available in Central, Broughty Ferry, Blackness and Lochee Libraries. The information hubs would provide access to resources which would help in the self-management of diabetes, as well as the prevention/remission of type 2 diabetes. All library staff were encouraged to undertake the relevant staff training identified by Diabetes Scotland (Learning Zone) and the locations with information hubs were directed towards the longer, CDP course.

An appropriate space was identified at each location and a selection of resources (leaflets, booklets, recipe cards etc.) were ordered from the Diabetes UK website to accompany the library's health and wellbeing books. Library staff/volunteers were also on hand to help customers access the online resources provided by Diabetes UK such as Learning Zone and the Know Your Risk tool which enables you to check your risk of developing type 2 diabetes. The new information hubs were promoted in the local press, on social media and via printed posters/flyers.

In October 2023, 2 additional community libraries (Arthurstone and Coldsides) set up diabetes information areas at their locations. At Central Library, we also have a diabetes information hub volunteer, who helps with events and activities such as World Diabetes Day, Know Your Risk sessions etc

### The impact you made.



*HbA1c (blood sugar) testing at World Diabetes Day 2023 event*

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*“Really handy to have in the library, especially as it is difficult to get doctors’ appointments these days”.*

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*“Staff couldn't have been any more helpful. Provided leaflets and books on food and cooking. And also information on a support group.”*

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All library diabetes information resources are open to all and freely available to take away. The information hubs help people living with diabetes to self-manage, live well with the condition and make their own choices about their health and wellbeing. The uptake of resources has been good, with Dundee Libraries ordering nearly 4,000 information leaflets from Diabetes UK website since Oct 2022. Library book issues on diabetes have more than doubled year on year since the formation of the hubs.

The pathfinder project and Diabetes Scotland, have also helped us forge links with local NHS diabetes professionals such as the Programme Manager at Prevention & Remission of Type 2 Diabetes NHS Tayside. This has enabled us to collaborate to promote awareness in the community. To mark World Diabetes Day, NHS Tayside joined us in highlighting the importance of knowing your risk.

Our volunteer guided customers through the ‘Know Your Risk’ tool. Weight and height measurements were also taken at this stage and a risk score was generated. Customers were then directed to the NHS team who conducted HbA1c (blood sugar) testing and offered expert advice, answered questions and provided guidance on diabetes prevention. The session was a great success with around 30 people undergoing testing and receiving advice. All involved are keen to repeat the session in the future. The NHS Type 2 Diabetes Remission group are also now holding their quarterly meetings in Central Library which helps to strengthen links further.

## The lessons you learned



The links we have made with NHS Tayside (via Diabetes Scotland) have been invaluable. Bringing resources, events, group meetings into the library environment has helped to raise awareness of diabetes prevention and self-management. The most challenging part of setting up the information hubs has been on a practical level, namely a lack of leaflet stands and equipment to display the diabetes UK resources. It would have really helped with the promotion of the hubs if branded display equipment had been provided, especially in our branch libraries. Linking library events with national awareness days, such as Diabetes Prevention Week and World Diabetes Day, has worked well and we hope to replicate with local diabetes partners in the future.

*Volunteer at the Diabetes Information Hub on World Diabetes Day 2023:*



## Enriching lives through libraries | SLIC Project Case Study

### Tell us what you did.

Orkney Library got involved with the Collective Force for Wellbeing initiatives by establishing ourselves as a NearMe Hub in both Kirkwall and Stromness branches. This means that people can call into the libraries and receive support and assistance to make sure they can attend their virtual conference calls, with library staff providing the necessary equipment and expertise to those who are not sure of the whole process.

We received an iPad and wireless headphones from SLIC for our first Hub in Kirkwall, which has been operational since August of 2022. We then rolled the Hub out to our Stromness Branch from October 2022, using existing equipment in the branch.

Both sites already had room booking procedures established, so once quiet/confidential areas had been identified, the NearMe Hub spaces were added to the list of bookable spaces, and a procedure was written up as a guide for all staff to follow.

The Hubs were then advertised on the library social media accounts, in the local press, and via communications from NHS Orkney.

### The impact you made.



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*"I am not a fan of travelling and my NearMe appointment has saved me a stressful trip from Orkney to Aberdeen. I am not a techy person, so the library staff being able to help me attend this appointment is wonderful."*

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There are a lot of residents in Orkney, on the Mainland and on the outer isles, who do not have access to the internet, have poor connectivity, or no access to devices which would allow them to attend a NearMe appointment.

It can be very stressful wondering how you will attend such an appointment when people have historically been used to meeting in person, and in most cases, the NearMe appointments have been for medical purposes, so people were anxious not to miss their consultations.

Generally, it has been older Orkney residents who have accessed the NearMe Hub, and they have had mobility issues, as well as technical queries, so they have found it incredibly helpful to be able to organise coming into the library to get assistance to attend their appointment.

Library staff follow the procedure to get the person settled into the meeting space, as well as get them into the correct virtual waiting room, checking they can hear through the headphones etc.

From August 2022 to July 2024 there have been 21 people making use of the Hub so far, and they have all been very thankful and grateful for the service provided. We have had people returning to attend more appointments which shows staff that it is a very worthwhile service to offer.

## The lessons you learned.

It has become clear to library staff that a lot of NearMe appointments get cancelled or rearranged at short notice. Staff need to be flexible when taking the bookings, asking customers to let us know if the appointment gets cancelled so that we do not set everything up for nothing.

There hasn't been any take up in the Stromness branch, people seem to prefer coming to the main library in Kirkwall.

We have also learned that some people who are not sure of the iPad and headphones will press buttons and end up out of the virtual waiting room that staff have got them in to. Staff have learned to explain that like in person appointments, the appointments can run late and so to be patient and stay in the virtual waiting room.

The procedure set up for staff taking bookings works well, but people do not always bring their appointment letter with them, and this gives staff the unique URL needed to get them into the correct virtual waiting room. Staff now re-emphasise the importance of bringing the letter at the time of making the booking. However, staff have also got in contact with the relevant hospital department on occasions to get the URL when the letter has not been brought, and the customers have been very grateful for this extra assistance.