

Ideas and innovations in public libraries

Introduction

Each post includes checking the media for mentions of new ideas in the public library world. This is stuff that strikes me as unusual: it may be something that a particular public library has been doing for decades. So have a look down the list and see if there is something your local library could benefit from. And if you want something added to the list (with full credit to yourself) please contact me at ianlibrarian@live.co.uk

Computers not books

Providing access to computers, wifi or something else IT related, including wifi.

- **iPad lending scheme**. – Suffolk (July 2015)
- **Self-publishing platforms via public libraries** – January 2015
- **Beacons** – small transmitters that push information to users in a small area (e.g. story time information to those entering the children's library) and pull information about visitors (e.g. to track who moves where in a library). January 2015. See also **Lending out Wifi hotspots** Dec 2014. See also **Wireless mesh network providing open e-book access** – November 2014
- **Mobile workplace** – St Paul, USA.
- **Digital hubs** – *An all-inclusive maker space including 3D printer, web/graphic design, videogame design, VHS converter.*
- **Software lending** – Loan of MS Office, Photoshop etc in Kansas pilot.
- **Use Tor as library browser** – Improve Tor speeds and improve privacy of library users.

Technology training

These are schemes to teach people about computers and aspects of them.

- **Raspberry Pi workshops** – [Huddersfield Library](#). February 2015
- **Digital career days** – [Gateshead runs them with software and computer hardware companies.](#)
- **Coding and other digital futures** – Sue Lawson's presentation to IFLA. October 2014
- **Online courses leading to "blended learning" with tutored sessions** (Germany)
- **Technology petting zoo** – Could be used for arranging e-reader / iPad training sessions etc. See also [Digital Tuesdays](#).
- **Mobile digital lab** – Missouri, USA.
- Using **Articulate Storyline for showing users how to use library technology** – [website here](#).

- **Repair cafes** – “Repair Cafés are free meeting places and they’re all about repairing things (together). The types of items that can be repaired and reused include clothes, furniture, electrical appliances, bicycles, crockery, appliances and toys.”
- **Online safety lessons delivered to schoolchildren** – Kent. April 2015.
- **Google Digital Garages**

Technology to encourage reading or library use

- **QR codes to encourage children reading** – October 2014
- **Stackscore books** – Use library data to work out most popular items, avoiding data protection issues. October 2014
- **Library card operated book returns box.** September 2014
- **BookMatch** – Personally tailored reading lists that will be publicly shared.
- **Seats 2 Meet** – connect library users in real time..
- **Barcode on your phone not on your library card** – January 2015
- **Online book club, with e-book available on webpage for library members** – USA. February 2015
- **Record author talks and events as podcasts** – January 2015
- **Battle of the books: online contest to find best/funniest book.**
- **Renewing automatically** – Ohio Metropolitan Library will automatically renew loans of users (and email them to let them know they’ve done it) unless they are reserved by someone else.
- **eReading Rooms** – USA.
- **Monthly poetry meet – with online forum and publishing on library website** – Washington DC, USA.
- **NFC tags on shelves to give more information and to show what is on loan** – Japan.
- **Extend opening access via self-service and card-only entry** in Denmark assisted by a national library agency and a national RFID standard for libraries.
- **Self-publishing machine** – provide printed books on demand almost covering costs.

Lending out stuff libraries just basically don’t normally lend out

- **Library of things** – loaning power drills etc (KickStarter project in London). June 2015. See also **Library of things** – loaning of items people vote for, including cameras, sewing machines, board games, bike repair. March 2015. See also **Public vote on Library of Things** – Public suggestions on items libraries should lend out e.g. sewing machines, wearable fitness trackers. October 2014. See also **STEAM loans etc e.g. telescopes and tools** – August 2014
- **Film-making equipment**
- **Kitchen equipment**
- **Lend cooking utensils** – January 2015
- **Toy hire** – Charge for as many toys as wanted for three weeks.
- **Seed libraries** – but make sure the Department of Agriculture is OK with it.
- **Litter picking equipment provided via mobile library**

- **Kitchens for the public** – for demonstrations and public use, healthy eating, etc.
- **Mobile Maker Spaces** – **Mobile library fab lab in the Netherlands** – See this [PLN Page for a full treatment](#) of plain old library-based Maker Spaces..

Promoting health and wellbeing

- **Dementia information service** – first in country opens in Dundee. May 2015. See also **Dementia Awareness**
- **Partner with local NHS for bookfund** – pain management books in Dundee. March 2015
- **Social and health care workers as housebound book deliverers.** – May 2015
- **Open library 24/7 for homeless** March 2015 and **Encourage the homeless in** – Halifax, Canada. January 2015.
- **Design library in association with Alzheimer’s Society.** March 2015
- **Cancer teenage support groups** – Northamptonshire. January 2015
- **Donate World Book Night free books to Food Banks, with leaflet explaining what public library can do for them** – Idea discussed at Time To Read meeting. January 2015
- **Vouchers for free/discounted leisure sessions given out with issued books** – Dec 2014
- **HIV awareness display** – Speaking Volumes. October 2014.
- **Combining health, cookery and literacy.**
- **Yoga storytimes** – Yoga stretches and movement will be woven into the story for a fun, interactive experience blending early literacy and health.
- **Reading spas and Book Years** – One-to-one bibliotherapy sessions and tailored book recommendations, sort of.
- **Reading groups for blind and visually impaired.**
- **Health information and advice in libraries, in association with GPs**
- **3D printer used to help readers with additional needs**, produce items for reminiscence packs, etc.
- **Kurling, boccia and table tennis tasters** – January 2015
- **Book packs in neonatal hospital wards**

Assisting the unemployed, homeless and those on lower incomes

- **Credit union collection points** – Derbyshire.
- **Donations for food bank instead of fines** – St Helens
- Food parcels being given out at libraries.
- **Job application / video interview kiosk** – USA.
- **Free Fridays** – Free computer usage and assistance for unemployed (Devon).
- **Movies clubs for the homeless**

Displays and shelving innovations

- **“Blind books” display** – books wrapped in plain white packaging with only the first line of the story and the genre of book for readers to see. – April 2015
- **Awesome boxes** – Customer puts the library book they loved in a special box when returned in branch or online. February 2015
- **Hovermarks** – Downloadable copyright-free bookmark that points towards the spine, not cover, allowing the bookmark to be read when books is shelved and not on display. February 2015
- **Poetry and other material, open for public interaction.** – January 2015
- **Mix up fiction and non-fiction by subject interest and double your usage**
- **Personal “shop” area for each customer group type**
- **Remove Dewey, shelve by subject:** put fiction and non-fiction together for each customer type.
- **A whiteboard so users can say what services/books/courses they want**
- **Spine labels of books on stair cases** – Seriously, why aren't more libraries doing this?
- **Encourage leaving notes in books**
- **CSI “Name of your town”** – Invite a crime writer and a forensic investigator from your local police force.
- **Book for Summer** – **Multiple copies of book promoted over Summer, in partnership with publishers** (Devon)
- **Philosophy cafes** – **Aberdeenshire.** “vibrant street level discussion on the issues of the day”.
- **Comic conventions** – October 2014
- **Book sculptures** – Child-shaped statues made of books.

Children’s and Teenage

- **Create own picture books for sale / publicity.**– February 2015
- **Storytelling games** – April 2015
- **“Play stations” at story times** – Provide toys, with play activities and “play tips”, integral to programme. February 2015
- **Closing the library specifically for children’s storytime.** March 2015
- **Using lego to make money** – Carillion Libraries will charge for weekly lego club, class visits including lego, lego parties and business teambuilding events. July 2015. See also **Using Lego Mindstorm and Scratch in partnership with local schools.** See also this **full page on lego in libraries.**
- **Lego Storystarter** – use lego in story sessions, with everything planned out for you (**or use Minecraft Lego**). April 2015. See also **Technocamps** – Neath Port Talbot – The activities enable children aged 7 to 11 to develop their enthusiasm for STEM skills by learning computer coding and creating projects using LEGO’s Mindstorm robots.
- **LiberTea** – **Encourage young people to debate politics in libraries.** June 2015.
- **Bilingual Library Programs for Children and Families**
<https://www.tsl.texas.gov/ldn/youthservices/spanish>
- **Summer Reading Challenge to include all forms of reading (inc internet) not just books** – New York. April 2015.

- **City-wide young adult book reading challenge** – Dec 2014
- **School programmes and resources to be available on public library computers** – Dec 2014
- **25 mini-adventures in the library** – some lovely ideas for children in public libraries. October 2014
- **Igloo reading nook in children’s library made out of plastic bottles** (Australia).
- **Panini sticker swap.**
- **Summer Reading Challenge treasure hunt in local bookstore**
- **Homago area for teens** – “Hang out, mess around, geek out” area, USA.
- **Teddy bear sleepover, with pictures** – Edinburgh.
- **Suspended net for children to read on** – Spain.
- **Letters to Santa** – At all Neath Port Talbot libraries.
- **Pantomime storytimes** – Get pantomime groups to do storytimes in libraries.
- **Motivate children to read with wild challenges** – for example, if 300 join, librarian will read to a live alligator (!).
- **Library pig** – micro-pig used as mascot and as reading therapy. Dec 2014
See also **Paws to Read”: Guide dogs as reading dogs** – ask visually impaired library users if library can have their guide dog for children to read to (safe animal, improve literacy, improve understanding of disability). See also **Hug a puppy** – USA.

Unusual co-locations

- **Crime reporting** – [train staff to deal with victims of crime who do not wish to go to the police.](#)
- **Convert a historic ship into a “floating library”.**
- **Use spare library space to offer to an artist as a residency** – Idea from Arts in Libraries conference. March 2015.
- Library becoming **home to a community choir** (Australia).
- **Community cinema** – Lend out film-related books at same time. September 2014
- **Open offices in Sweden** – where companies set up office in library and do lectures/presentations.

Publicity and outreach

- **Hold a day in the life** – to sustain funding. May 2015
- **Set a world record for your library** – even for stuff like “most pencils laid end to end in a library”. March 2015
- **Make a music video to promote your library**
- **Lending out Little Free Libraries** – January 2015 see also **Use Little Free Libraries to promote public libraries** – Wandsworth.
- **Bookswap on Stagecoach buses** – July 2015. See also **Taxi libraries.**
- **Lending out books to commuters** – “ In early 2013, she took 20 copies of Sheryl Sandberg’s *Lean In* to the train platform and lent them out. During a one-month period, those books circulated 75 times, leading up to an evening discussion at a bar near the railroad. In comparison,”
- **Books on buses** – (also seen in Columbus, Ohio). July 2015.

- **Free library book shelves at train stations** – Sutton.
- **Talking books available at lorry distribution centres** – Denmark.
- **Google map what's being read by area** – easy to do, makes the national news. November 2014
- **Photospheres** – *Such as this one in Essex*. See also **Google Street View** – in 10 US branches.
- **Hiding books** – *Littlehampton Literary Anarchists*. Feb 2015.
- **“The most valuable card in your wallet” advertising campaign** – January 2015
- **Humorous Twitter account as publicity tool** – Dec 2014
- **Ice cream carts for books**. See also *this*. Dec 2014
- **Literacy hub** – including all organisations interested in literacy in an area including libraries. – November 2014
- **Use the Library A to Z letters in your Twitter profile or publicity material** – November 2014
- **Book Bikes** – Promote public libraries in the community, temporary tattoo users, blow bubbles when someone joins. October 2014
- **Flash Libraries** –
- **Promote library online/digital offer in community fairs** – *Lewisham shows off Oculus Rift etc.*
- **Publicise heavy users** – Suffolk publicise two children, one of which – and eight year old boy – has loaned 1200 books,
- **Education by stealth** – encouraging new users in via music/arts events and then retaining their membership.
- **Put staff names and photos on publicity materials** – Children will then come in and ask staff to autograph them.
- **Photo booth for library users to show how they use the library** – Wiltshire.
- **Using Google Hangouts for library conferences** – March 2015. See also **Broadcast seminars** November 2014
- **Streetlife** – A social media site that encourages local communities and can provide free advertising for libraries. November 2014
- **Helpouts** – Librarians via Skype etc put people in touch with experts (concept). See *Google Helpouts*.
- **Specific LGBT services section**
- **Using raffles and contests to gain customer feedback**
- **Humorous signs on library vans** – such as “Dr Jekyll’s Pharmacy” (Thanks to Stephen Heywood for this link – do email ianlibrarian@live.co.uk if you spot other good ideas that need publicising).
- **Storymob** – Like a flashmob but story-related, including dressing like the characters.

Income generation or saving money

- **Buying books from the public** – proven bad idea. March 2015.
- **“Library Guardians”** – One-off or monthly donations in return for premium service – Northamptonshire. February 2015
- **Library as wedding venue** – *Manchester Central Library*. February 2015
- **Library-blend coffee** – fundraising idea. January 2015

- **Libraries are “marketing channels”** – that should be funded for recommending things. March 2015
- **Partner with Nintendo** – January 2015
- Renting out parking space in library car parks – Barnet. – November 2014
- **Co-location spaces** – Hiring out rooms, 24/7. October 2014
- **Library card as debit card** – Assisting users without bank cards, improve income and business connections. September 2014
- **Business loyalty card for library customers and community shops** – Aldeburgh Library, Suffolk.
- **Selling “library boxes”** – Somewhere for library users to keep their books at home so as they don’t lose them.
- **Advertising on back of mobile libraries** – [Cambridgeshire offer space for £200 per month.](#)
- **Crowdfunding for children’s library “story time nook”.**
- **Putting company logos on staff uniforms to raise income**
- **Community-owned bookshop within library**
- **Leaving money to library in will** – and should libraries pro-actively encourage this?
- **Using Linux on public PCs** – cheaper, multi-user, multilingual, familiar. September 2014
- See also a lot of the list on **[this whole page on income generation in libraries.](#)**