Speaking Volumes: the impact of public libraries on wellbeing
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The Carnegie UK Trust was set up to promote the wellbeing of the people of the UK and Ireland, and we believe that public libraries have enormous potential to improve wellbeing in four broad areas of public policy: social, economic, cultural and education.

Our analysis of wellbeing shows that there are a number of so-called ‘domains of wellbeing’ which can be measured or monitored to explore the overall levels of individual wellbeing. Many countries use different sets of domains to measure wellbeing, but there is a huge amount of overlap. These are some of the key domains which libraries can have an impact on:

- Income
- Employment
- Education and learning
- Health
- Social connections
- Civic engagement
- Environment

The poster inside this leaflet contains many examples of how libraries have an impact on wellbeing. We have grouped the examples into four areas of public policy, showing the potential which exists for public libraries to really make a difference to the wellbeing of their communities.

These examples have been selected from a database of examples of good practice which we have drawn together from across the UK and Ireland. You can look at the examples which sit behind the poster on our website at bit.ly/speakingvols

This material has been drawn together by the Carnegie UK Trust to support all those who are making the case for the potential of public libraries in the 21st century.

Public libraries are safe spaces at the heart of our communities, providing completely free access to huge resources of information, knowledge and technology. They have dedicated staff and are well linked with other local services.

To respond to the changing needs of the 21st century, libraries are changing and must continue to change. Libraries must be brave, innovative and show how they are doing things which really make a difference to their community. It is also important to sell this story to those who hold the purse strings – to show how in the long term the library service can help save money.

The Challenge
The challenge which public libraries face is to continue to be the kind of places which Andrew Carnegie wanted when he funded libraries

- places that give people a chance, a second chance and even a third chance
- places that improve the communities they are based in
- places that respond to the needs of local people, giving them the opportunity to live fuller lives, make more of what they have, discover new worlds, and aspire to greater things
Libraries at the heart of strong communities

Libraries can be key partners in tackling the problems of social isolation, inequality, disadvantage, fractured communities, and ill health.

Libraries can connect communities and change lives. They provide safe spaces in the heart of their communities, and provide many services targeting people who are living on a low income, people who are lonely, unemployed, or elderly, and people with long term medical conditions or disabilities.

They can provide a single point of access to a wide range of public services. Mobile libraries can help tackle rural isolation and social exclusion, while services to older people in care homes or to people who are housebound provide important social contact for those people.

Libraries can provide information about health and health services, as well as books on prescription, while they can also be safe spaces for voluntary sector organisations to provide health information and advice.

Libraries as cultural centres

Libraries can inspire people through books and literature, music, film and theatre.

Libraries are spaces in which people can be creative, where groups can meet to pursue a shared interest in arts and crafts, or where they can explore new ways of communicating, using new technology, music or other art forms. They can be venues for concerts, exhibitions or performances, attracting new audiences. They support self-expression in places where there are no other options. Their local history collections are at the heart of communities defining themselves.

Outcomes

In all these ways libraries contribute to government goals of

- safer and stronger communities
- thriving neighbourhoods
- a strong, shared community
- tackling poverty and social exclusion
- longer, healthier lives
- reduced health inequalities
- tackling disadvantage

Outcomes

Through the kind of activities described in the poster, libraries can help governments achieve their goals of

- enriching the lives of individuals and communities
- placing art and culture at the heart of regeneration
- promoting the social and economic role of arts and culture
- creating a vibrant creative economy
Libraries supporting learning

Public libraries support learning at all stages of life, offering support for everyone from babies and small children to older people.

Library staff can help people understand and act on information which can make a real difference to their wellbeing – whether that is about their financial situation, their health or about new technology.

Governments throughout the UK and Ireland are committed to tackling the things which stop people from reaching their full potential – things like

- illiteracy
- lack of skills
- the digital divide.

These problems make it harder for people to make the most of their lives, to find work and to enjoy life. They can also increase inequality, for example when people are not able to make the most of opportunities which are only available online, such as cheaper goods and services or access to public services.

They can do this by encouraging reading for pleasure, introducing young families to books and reading, running English language classes for new citizens, and creating supportive environments for children after school.

Libraries promoting economic wellbeing

Public libraries can be agencies for economic wellbeing in their communities.

Libraries help jobseekers find opportunities and prepare themselves for interview. They offer courses and digital skills training which enable people to seek work. They can offer advice and support for the development of small businesses. At the same time, they can help people make the most of the income they have.

Libraries will provide essential support for people applying for welfare benefits in the digital future.

Examples on the poster show how libraries can play a key role in achieving the outcomes which governments are seeking in this area – such as

- creating opportunities
- tackling disadvantage
- creating smarter citizens
- helping everyone to reach their potential
- making opportunity more equal
- investing in the future
- improving skills for employment

Libraries as digital hubs can help overcome the digital divide.

Income and employment are important indicators of wellbeing. Libraries can be key partners in addressing poverty and unemployment, helping governments to achieve their goals of

- growth and sustainable jobs
- a wealthier and fairer country
- enabling business to create jobs
- creating sustainable economic growth
Library as **social hub**

- Tackling isolation
  - Services for older people, homeless people, and disabled people
- Outreach to prisons and care homes
- Services for disadvantaged families
- Services for people suffering domestic abuse

Library as **community hub**

- Information about services
- Access to public services

Library as **cultural centre**

- Promoting literature
  - Author talks and book groups
  - Book festivals
  - Writer in residence
  - Support for self-publishing

Library as **learning hub**

- Supporting literacy
  - Reading for pleasure
  - Summer Reading Challenge
  - Breakfast clubs for hostel dwellers
  - Support for dyslexia

Library as **economic enabler**

- Maximising income
  - Benefits information and support
  - Make the most of your income
  - CAB services in library
  - Smart meters

- Encouraging enterprise
  - Advice and support for small businesses
  - Business resources in libraries
  - Support for social enterprises
  - Providing co-working spaces
  - Maker spaces in libraries

- Access to employment
  - Job clubs
  - Support for online job applications
  - Access to computers and Wi-Fi
  - Supporting digital skills
The Carnegie UK Trust works to improve the lives of people throughout the UK and Ireland, by changing minds through influencing policy, and by changing lives through innovative practice and partnership work. The Carnegie UK Trust was established by Scots-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1913.

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