



**An overview of our journey to establish
Gillingham and Weymouth Libraries as
community cultural venues**

May 2018 – July 2020



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Libraries as Cultural Hubs

Achievements



86

artists employed



8250

participants at events



84

staff training days



21

new commissions



123

days of employment
for artists



756

exhibitions/
performance days



1745

live audience



17

children achieved or
are working towards
an Arts Award Discover



3

children achieved an
Arts Award Explore

Libraries as Cultural Hubs is a two-year Arts Council England National Lottery funded cultural development programme for two Dorset libraries in Gillingham and Weymouth – both lacking in arts infrastructure and identified through research as wanting an improved community-led cultural offer. The programme is being delivered by Dorset Library Service and our partner The Arts Development Company. Together with the local communities in Gillingham and Weymouth, we are working to enhance the cultural offer as well as looking to create a sustainable arts model more closely connected to communities. The funded programme ran from May 2018 to July 2020 and included Artist in Residence programmes for children and adults as well as a range of author, music, arts, digital and dance events.

This brochure shares highlights of the Artists in Residence and events hosted over the last two years at Gillingham and Weymouth Libraries and captures our achievements, outcomes, learning and next steps in the evolving journey of Libraries as Cultural Hubs.



Libraries as Cultural Hubs



Libraries as Cultural Hubs has enabled us to:

- ⇒ deliver the Dorset Council Plan and the Dorset Cultural Strategy outcomes by increasing reading and literacy, improving digital access, enabling cultural and creative enrichment and happier and healthier lives.
- ⇒ develop the concept of libraries as a community space for performance and we are now being approached by artists who wish to work with us and use the space.
- ⇒ form a relationship with *Artsreach Dorset* and trial two professional theatre events and three children's activities.
- ⇒ develop new work with *Activate Performing Arts* and introduce *Dorset Youth Dance*, *The Remix* and their wider network to use libraries as a performance space.
- ⇒ have a focus on health and wellbeing and the benefits of creativity and culture.
- ⇒ form a relationship with *Weymouth and Portland Community Mental Health Team* who participated in the *Rewriting your Script* workshops.
- ⇒ deliver arts events for specific community groups; adults living with dementia, adults experiencing loneliness and isolation and / or mental illness.
- ⇒ explore the impact of Artists in Residence and one-off events and begin to share the learning with other library services in the South West.
- ⇒ develop relationships with artists and community organisations to enable them to host and run events such as *Fun Palaces* in libraries.
- ⇒ develop our collaborative relationship with *The Friends of Weymouth Library* who hosted events.
- ⇒ continue the process of recruiting events volunteers for Gillingham Library.
- ⇒ test business models for pricing events and commence collating some pricing options for artists and communities to use the library space.
- ⇒ develop social media and marketing skills – 62% of library staff at Gillingham and Weymouth are now promoting events via social media and 87% are engaging in advertising and marketing.
- ⇒ test a range of training programmes and upskill staff in event planning, hosting, evaluation and using Eventbrite.
- ⇒ demonstrate that events can attract new audiences as 40% of the attendees at a musical concert were non-library members.

Key Learning:

- ⇒ good communication is essential to engage buy-in.
- ⇒ this was an ambitious programme and was a steep creative learning curve for staff.
- ⇒ training programme for staff needs to be flexible and ongoing to embed good practice and capitalise on hidden talents.
- ⇒ important to have a robust evaluation programme in place which can capture qualitative and quantitative data as appropriate.
- ⇒ crucial to have event volunteers to co-host and organise events.
- ⇒ the creation of a sustainable business model requires measured risk in ticket pricing and the creation of hire terms for artists and communities using the space.
- ⇒ the importance of social media, brochures, face to face promotion, e-newsletters, web pages and Eventbrite to promote events and ticket sales.
- ⇒ the major contribution of partnership working between libraries and partners, like the Arts Development Company, for networking, challenge, ideas exchange and mentoring.
- ⇒ two years is the minimum amount of time to create a culture shift in libraries and their communities and embed the learning.
- ⇒ once arts providers experience delivering in a library environment they are keen to explore future options for collaborative working.
- ⇒ enabling the community to use the space can lead to greater engagement in community festivals and events.
- ⇒ grant funding is essential to enable innovation.
- ⇒ libraries as cultural venues are valued by local communities and galleries for hanging artwork and community spaces for events are vital. Given this it is important to invest in rolling bookstacks and staging to accommodate events.
- ⇒ COVID-19 does not need to stop the arts, it has led to adaptation and using digital media as trialled for the final author and photographic events.





Hart of the Forest, Gillingham
Julian Stocks
July – September 2018

This community art project was designed to engage with young people and investigate the links between the natural world and our imaginative culture using the library as the primary resource for research.

Key Achievements:

- 10 art workshops outside in the forest and in the library
- A giant forest mind map was created and displayed in the library capturing how the natural world is represented in cultural forms
- A community forest alphabet created with printmaker Sally Cutler
- 100% of customers benefited from creative art skills
- Participants included 3 with chronic illnesses, 1 “at risk adult”, 2 young adults on the “Face Forward Programme”
- Kennings were fashioned – a type of circumlocution, a compound that employs figurative language in place of a concrete single-word noun.



Stem the Tide, Weymouth
Peter Margerum
July – September 2018

With a focus on capturing identity and a sense of place the family workshops took a creative look at waste, plastic, recycled materials and the environment. Practical sessions enabled young people to experiment with making 3D artworks from reclaimed and found materials. This included using power tools to sculpt plastic materials into installations.

Key Achievements:

- Large tree sculpture, created by the artist from reclaimed materials during the residency, used to display the sculptures created in workshops by young people
- Porthole artworks created by young people and displayed in the library as a project legacy
- 3D sculptures
- Luggage Tree installation with customers recording their memories of Weymouth on luggage tags and tying them to the tree for everyone to read
- 18 sessions with over 131 young people and families attending including 1 evening workshop on Weymouth seafront
- 99% positive response from participating children.

“I’ve learnt a whole new way of drawing trees today ... I can look and see the detail that I didn’t see before.”

“Happy that we can reuse plastic and to do something new and creative.”

Artists in Residence

Children and young people and their families



To Infinity!, Gillingham James Price July – September 2019

A series of space themed workshops to create an animated film-short using simple techniques, produced by the artist as a final piece.

Key Achievements:

- 20 workshop sessions on creating the story, drawing, designing, sound effects and music
- 130 young people took part in the creative workshops
- The animated film, "To Infinity!", premièred in the library to an audience of 60 young people.
[youtube.com/watch?v=_vKM4GN0vpw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_vKM4GN0vpw)



ArtSpace, Weymouth Darrell Wakelam July – September 2019

ArtSpace was a creative paper sculpture themed around outer space using books as a 'life-source' for ideas and inspiration. A mixture of workshops allowed children to make pieces to take home and to contribute towards larger space sculptures for display in the library.

Key Achievements:

- 14 library sessions with 218 people attending
- 4 outreach sessions in Weymouth schools
- 1 session on Weymouth Beach
- Several large space/book sculptures created and a mural for the children's area.

"I didn't think my boys would enjoy it, but I have been really surprised at how engaged they were."

Mother of two autistic boys who came back several times



"The library is really the only place I've seen offering these kinds of events, it's great."

Adults Writers in Residence



This Library is Yours, Gillingham **Alan Ward** **January – March 2019**

A series of creative writing workshops and mentoring sessions celebrating people's participation in libraries. Alan helped customers explore their relationship with libraries, drawing on their memories of libraries and seeking out hidden stories for their writing inspiration.

Key Achievements:

- 1 meet and greet event, 7 workshops and 4 mentoring sessions
- 66% of attendees were over 60 years old
- 100% of attendees at the mentoring sessions felt they had more confidence as a result of working with Alan
- 70% felt more ambitious and more able to express themselves
- Created a book trail installation showcasing participants' work
- Created a Library Memories Book collating visitors' memories and stories about the library and any library experience.



Weymouth-on-Sea, Weymouth **Sarah Acton** **January – March 2019**

A series of writing workshops, reading café and 1-2-1 mentoring sessions focusing on Weymouth Library celebrating its maritime connections, and how people living and visiting the town feel about being by the seaside.

Key Achievements:

- A *Writers' Corner*, a curated space with free writing materials, and inspiration within it to write and think creatively
- Weymouth Museum provided a complementary collection of souvenir china and lifeboat models celebrating the 150th Anniversary of the RNLI providing further inspiration for memories to be stirred
- Customers created 16 poems and filled in 72 postcards about their memories and reflections of Weymouth or the seaside and extracts were used to create a community poem
- 9 participants aged 17-72 years attended mentoring sessions and all felt happier and more able to express themselves as a result.

Participants feedback illustrated that they

"...found new techniques for descriptive writing", that they learned "...just to get going with a random idea" and "... how to use memories."

"This has made a big difference to me. Did I tell you I've been very ill? I don't think of any of that when I come and see you, you've really encouraged me and given me hope with my poems."

Adults Writers in Residence



Rewriting Your Script, Weymouth Chris Jury September – December 2019

Transformative creative writing workshops aimed at people suffering a lack of mental wellbeing and those suffering from diagnosed mental health conditions. The programme was evaluated using a self-assessment questionnaire based on the Short Warwick-Edinburgh-Mental Wellbeing Scale at the start and at the end of the project.

Key Achievements:

- The course was supported by Weymouth and Portland Community Mental Health team who provided a practitioner for every session to support participants
- 29 people booked onto the workshops, 25 people attended 1 or more workshops and 14 people went on to complete the full course
- 93% of participants underwent a statistically significant positive change in their mental wellbeing
- 14% went from low mental wellbeing to high mental wellbeing
- 57% were lifted from low mental wellbeing to moderate mental wellbeing.

"The script technique that Chris takes you through enables you to step out of your locked-in way of thinking, out of repeated patterns of thought and behaviours...and galvanises you into DOING. Through the doing of the script you begin doing the changes that transform your life."



"The support from the rest of the group and their perspective ... has been incredibly liberating and therapeutic. And the teaching which has been extraordinarily stimulating has changed so much of my perspective in an amazing way."

Artists in Residence Adults



Making Theatre, Weymouth **Gemma Alldred** **October 2019 – January 2020**

Making Theatre gave the experience of the theatre process and taught basic theatre skills to participants as a confidence and communication boosting tool.

Key Achievements:

- A short performance made in and for the library space
- Working as a small group enabled participants to become their own support network
- Participant feedback showed respondents felt happier and more creative after the sessions with everyone benefiting from learning new creative art and performing skills
- Participants all reported improved confidence and self-esteem.



Totems: Your Story Matters, Gillingham **Grace Dalglish** **November 2019 – January 2020**

Participants created self-portraits and mandala collages about their lives and Gillingham.

Key Achievements:

- A totem installation about the town and its people, shaped by the community, was displayed in the library
- Self-portrait and mandala collages created
- Outreach sessions for 33 people living with dementia took place in care homes
- Engagement with other groups included young men with mental health disabilities who enjoyed it so much they returned for another session.



"Grace was great at helping me to think creatively (not something I am used to doing). I enjoyed using the mandala to bring back memories of my life."

"Meeting people, making friends, depression eased."

Delivering with the Community

Encouraging members of the local community, promoting and showcasing their work within the library setting. During the two years a wide range of sessions took place including:



Creating Drama with Local History

Local actors used the library space and dramatic narrative to immerse customers in extracts from three historical plays written by Sue Ashby and Tony Bengt.



Fun Palaces a combination of arts, craft, science, digital, heritage and sports activities. Led by local people for local people, sharing their own passions and skills with active participation for all ages. Held in Gillingham and Weymouth a combination of 1152 visitors took part in over 18 different activities.

Here we Come A-Wassaling

performed by Gillingham Arts Workshop featuring carols, readings and a Mummers' play.



Story Time with Mama G

An interactive story time session for younger children and their parents with a panto dame as the storyteller. The stories focus on being who you are and loving who you want. This event linked up with the local LGBT community for the start of the first Weymouth & Portland Pride event. The Gillingham event was timed to coincide with Gillingham Carnival.

Fairy Tale characters appeared at local library events. This was a Weymouth business improvement scheme in partnership with Weymouth Town council and new local businesses.



Friends of Weymouth Library

supported the programming by organising and hosting regular public talks with local speakers and authors. Highlights of their collaborative working included:

- Local author Andy Miller on his book 'Weymouth, The Naples of England'
- Gordon LePard, with tales of the most important drink in the history of the world - tea
- Tales from the *County Gaol*, a talk by local historian Brian Bates
- Paul Atterbury spoke about his *Life in Canals and Railways*
- John Stockley described growing up in Weymouth as an African American adoptee
- Local historian Geoff Kirby explored the hidden gems of Weymouth and Portland.

"Mama G was the best day of our holiday!"

"Great event very enjoyable bringing stories to life!"

Delivering with Arts Organisations

Delivering with local arts organisations facilitated increased access to the arts and enabled the community to experience the library as a cultural hub. Organisations included:



Angel Exit Theatre

Book Club for Super Spies, an interactive storytelling performance and mystery for the whole family to solve.



Landance

Commissioning professional artists to create live dance in atmospheric spaces. Weymouth Library was the setting for a romantic duet, performed by two dancers and inspired by the experience of young couples during World War 1.



Ridgeway Singers and Band

A community choir led by Tim Laycock and Phil Humphries playing traditional West Gallery carols in the Dorset tradition.

Dorset Youth Dance and Remix

Workshops and performances promoting World Book Day were postponed due to Covid-19.

Working in partnership with **Artsreach**, a charity that brings high quality performances of live theatre to the heart of rural communities has enabled Gillingham Library to host:



The Story Boat

Interactive storytelling sessions for children with traditional wooden boatbuilder Gail McGarva. Held inside an upturned and converted boat, activities included making a memory stick and how to rivet a piece of wood.



Ragged Trousered Philanthropists

An Edwardian magic show with projected animation, political conjuring tricks, and live music and song.



The Big Blind

Storytelling and music bringing to life ancient full-blooded fairy tales for the modern audience.

Lost Stories

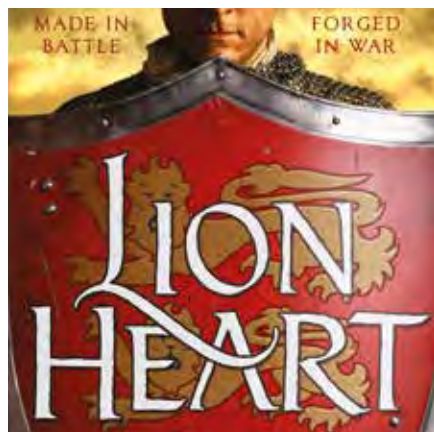
Lively storytelling performance featuring traditional folktales about the plants and animals within the *Lost Words* book followed by a creative workshop.

*"Terrific piece of theatre,
more events here please."*



Digital Events

Going digital to enable us to embrace the present and the future



Virtual Author Event with Ben Kane

Online author event with historical fiction writer and Sunday Times Best Seller. Open to audiences worldwide to listen online and ask questions and over 70 individuals signed up to hear Ben's talk.



Wildlife Wonder Films

Photographer Iain Green produced a series of short films showing how best to observe and record nature. His exploration covered: using different perspectives, light, texture and colour and tips on how to find wildlife. The films were released online enabling customers to access at their convenience.



Animation with James Price

Family media arts workshop where children created their own plasticine figures and then took part in stop motion animation to create a collaborative animation film. Children taking part went on to achieve Arts Award Discover.

"Thank you so much, have read his books but this was the first time I've had the opportunity to hear him speak."



Creative Events

Discovering new perspectives and skills

Image: Lara Jane Thorpe



Have a Go – Creative Sessions

Workshops provided families, adults and children with an opportunity to try a new craft or cultural experience in a safe and welcoming environment. Activities ranged from making clay sunflowers and bunnies, puppets, snow globes and sushi!



In Conversation with... Author Events

A series of events where bestselling and local authors shared their experiences, contributing to the development of writing and literary interest in the community. Highlights included best-selling authors Libby Page and Rosanna Ley.



"Fantastic time last night with @LibbyPageWrites in Gillingham Dorset. A good conversation and a good catch up. Can't wait to read book number two."

Next steps

Libraries as Cultural Hubs has **enabled the communities** in Gillingham and Weymouth to actively collaborate with the Library Service and **plan integrated community events**. Gillingham Library plan to participate in Gillingham Green Week and Gillingham Walking Festival and our relationship with the Weymouth LGBT community was strengthened by the library service hosting *Storytime with Mama G* as part of Weymouth's inaugural Gay Pride event. Developing the concept of **libraries as a community space** for performance, we are now being approached by artists who wish to use the space, as well as arts organisations such as Activate Performing Arts. We plan to host community workshops to support the Inside Out Dorset Festival *Sense of Unity* in 2021.



Having held successful adult and children's events at Gillingham Library we would like to explore the concept of using other rural libraries as venues for **touring performers**. We will continue to **build networks with health partners** and agencies to offer a range of **arts and health programmes** with appropriate professional support. We are currently delivering arts programmes as one of the partners for *My Creative Life*, a pilot project to deliver adult day care differently.



Let's Create (Arts Council England's new 10-year Strategy 2020-2030) declares that public libraries provide "a vital resource for the development of creativity and the promotion of culture..." and we look forward to **developing the Libraries as Cultural Hubs offer** in collaboration with our local communities, potential partners and Friend's Groups across our network of 23 rural and town libraries. We recognise that the cultural offer would be different for each library, but a collaborative approach will **enable us to contribute to cultural communities** and offer opportunities for individuals to develop and express creativity. We will look to work with education providers to **offer young people access** to a range of cultural activities and continue to help build stronger happier communities, develop readers and writers, promote digital literacy and support social prescribing.



As we continue to create libraries that inspire us, we welcome conversations from artists and communities who would like to use the library space for events, stage shows and exhibitions.

For enquiries:

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DorsetLibraries



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