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YOUNG PEOPLE AND LIBRARIES: CONFERENCE SHINES LIGHT ON NEW FUTURE

A landmark conference this week heralded a new era for libraries±work with young people. A new Youth Libraries Offer was launched, along with innovative models of shaping and delivering library services *with* their young users.

Aiming High: the library offer to young people was organised by The Reading Agency, the independent charity working to get more reading to more people, and the Local Government Association (29 January, London).

Miranda McKearney, Director of The Reading Agency, opened the conference with a challenge for policy makers to sit up and take notice of libraries±changing and dynamic work with young people. She said: ***“Libraries are thinking big and modernising their services for young people through a national change programme, new tools, and prototype HeadSpace services. We need to fast forward the work, and build on success- for the third year running children’s book issues are up. We need policy makers to integrate libraries fully in the government’s Aiming High strategy for positive activities and local authrotiy partners to see them as serious partners in delivering the young people’s policy agenda.”***

Several other clarion calls were made at the conference. Keynote speaker David Bell talked about reading as the vital foundation for children’s learning. He said: ***“We know that some children and young people are missing out at present and we need to do more to help them benefit from the opportunities available. National Year of Reading has an important part to play in re-energising the national reading culture and public libraries make a crucial contribution by providing creative reading activities, safe spaces, homework support and other positive activities outside of school.”***

Shaheen Mogradia and Khadija Ugradar, young HeadSpace volunteers at High Street Library in Bolton, challenged librarians to: ***“find some local young people and work with them, share ideas and see what a big difference they can make to their library service.”*** They added: ***“We used to get bored and now, through our involvement with HeadSpace we are reading more, making new friends and feel more confident.”*** Headspace is a brand new approach for 11 to 19 year-olds, with Big Lottery Funding. It is lead by The Reading Agency, working with 20 local authority partners.

Sue Wilkinson, Director of Policy and Advocacy, Museums, Libraries and Archives Council talked about the powerful work of the new National Youth Libraries Board, and launched the new national Library Offer to Young People, outlining what young people have a right to expect from their library. She said: ***“This is a short, simple, but very significant statement designed to help all councils ensure that the local library is a free, safe and welcoming space where young people can meet and access relevant and up-to-date books and other information.”*** (Please see Notes to editors for more information.)

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Overall the conference outlined what young people aged 11 to 19 years want from library services and what difference libraries can make to their life chances. It also highlighted the role that libraries can play in delivering national and local government's ambitions for young people, particularly the socially excluded and hard to reach.

“We need to think about radical new ways of delivering public services. We need to remove barriers to engagement, understand our communities and have a clear vision of purpose. The Library Youth Offer can deliver on all these points and make an important contribution to the building of sustainable communities. But it’s not just what we say about libraries that’s important, it’s who we say it to,” said Chris White, Chair of the Local Government Association Culture, Tourism and Sport Board who spoke at the conference on how libraries and culture can support local authorities in meeting the challenge.

Other keynote participants were Nicky Parker, Head of Libraries and Information Services; Subnum Harrif, Team Librarian, Bolton Central Library and Malorie Blackman, award winning young people's author.

As the National Year of Reading gathers momentum the conference provided an opportunity for key figures to explore the potential of reading work by libraries to inspire and engage young people in shaping public services. The audience included delegates involved with young people's services in the public and voluntary sectors, policy makers, government officers, chief librarians and elected members.

The Reading Agency will be publishing a ~~the~~ New Thinking paper in March which draws together key challenges from the conference. Information will be available on The Reading Agency's website www.readingagency.org.uk

For further media information and to book your free place please contact

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Notes to editors:

- Founded in 2002, The Reading Agency is an independent charity and reading development agency. It aims to get more reading to more people and is passionate about everyone having an equal chance to become a reader. For more general information, please visit: www.readingagency.org.uk
- The Local Government Association (LGA) exists to promote better local government. It promotes the interests of English and Welsh local authorities - a total of just under 500. These represent over 50 million people and spend around £74 billion a year on local services. The LGA works with and for member authorities to realise a shared vision of local government that enables local people to shape a distinctive and better future for their locality and its communities. It aims to put local councils at the heart of the drive to improve public services and to work with government to ensure that the policy, legislative and financial context in which they operate, supports that objective. For more general information, please visit: www.lga.gov.uk

- The National Youth Libraries Board is chaired by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and is managed by The Reading Agency. Other members are: the Society of Chief Librarians, MLA Yorkshire, the Local Government Association, the Department for Children, Schools and Families; the Department for Culture, Media and Sport; the National Youth Agency; the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians; the Head of Community Learning and Development at Norfolk Children's Services. The National Youth Libraries Board has also consulted the UK Youth Parliament in the English regions.
- The new national Library Offer to Young People, outlines what young people have a right to expect from their library This includes participation in shaping the future of library services; volunteering opportunities; a place to develop citizenship skills and community engagement; free, safe and welcoming spaces; formal and informal learning support; the provision of inspiring books and reading materials supported by positive activities, and information on education, training and careers. More information about the Library Offer to Young People and work of the National Youth Libraries Board is available at <http://digbig.com/4wfbv> More information about the work of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council is available at: www.mla.gov.uk
- More information about the Fulfilling their Potential national libraries change programme for young people and about the HeadSpace project is available at www.readingagency.org.uk

It's time to stop reading. It's time to get someone else to start.