Volunteer Reader Development Training

Evaluation Report

November 2017

Introduction

A review carried out by SCL in 2016 found that 78% of library services are using volunteers to support reading yet many library services have no or only a very short induction training for volunteers in reader development and existing reader development training was not pitched at the right level for volunteers.

Leicestershire Library Service proposed that a solution to this issue could be to co-create a training package that could be delivered by volunteers.

Leicestershire Library Service agreed to work with SCL and lead on developing and delivering a co-created volunteer training package. Library staff and library volunteers would work together to ensure the training package used the right language and approaches to engage volunteers and it would be designed with the intention that volunteers could use it with a minimal amount of input and guidance.

An initial meeting between Leicestershire Library staff and SCL took place in February 2017 where the project brief was agreed. It was also agreed that the training package would be piloted with a small number of library services and the libraries and volunteers involved in the pilot would evaluate the training.

Developing the Training

Leicestershire Library Service establish a task group made up of a Community Managed Library (CML) Support Officer, CML Trainer, Locality Librarian and Library Supervisor who would contribute to the training. This group then formed a consultation group of volunteers working in their community led libraries who had expressed an interest in helping to develop the reader development training package.

In March 2017 the working group made up of a Community Managed Library (CML) Support Officer, Locality Librarian and the consultation group of volunteers held a meeting to discuss what the term 'reader development' means and agree the scope and format for a volunteer training package. The volunteers identified four main areas they felt the training should cover:
1. The customer experience
2. Talking to customers
3. Maintaining good stock
4. Promotions

It also become clear that any package for volunteers needed to be:
- Adaptable
- In Word document format
- Without jargon
- Contain pictures

Using their experience and knowledge of reader development library staff created a draft training package which the volunteers named 'Making the Most of Your Library'. The training package had four modules one for each area the volunteers had identified. The draft modules were then shared with the volunteers and a second meeting took place to give the consultation group an opportunity to comment and suggest changes to the draft.

The Pilot

The way community libraries have been established and are managed varies across England and so SCL were keen to pilot the training package in a small number of different library services to see how transferable it would be. To this end Warwickshire and Staffordshire library services were approached and invited to pilot the training package with their library volunteers in addition to Leicestershire.

The training package was shared with a lead member of library staff from each library service for comment and then a final version of the package was created which the group felt would relate to the way their volunteer led libraries worked.

Leicestershire has 30 Community Managed Libraries (CMLs). The rolling transition programme commenced in July 2015 and when complete will result in a network of 34 libraries. The majority of groups managing the libraries are charitable incorporated organisations (CIOs) whilst several come under the umbrella of their local parish council. The CMLs currently receive a tapering financial support package from Leicestershire County Council (LCC) comprising in-kind and grant funding. Support is also provided in the form of book stock and IT provision with access to a locked-down version of the library management system. There are three dedicated phone lines which link to "hubs" for day-to-day operational support and two community managed libraries support officers who visit the libraries and liaise between the CMLs and LCC departments. In addition two trainers provide training prior to transfer and an ongoing programme of development and refresher training.

Warwickshire has 12 Community Managed Libraries (CMLs) which have been operating since 2011. All 12 are self-funded and managed using a variety of operating models ranging from social enterprises and charitable trusts to less formal enterprises operating under the auspices of the local parish council. Each library receives support from Warwickshire County Council (WCC) in the form of book stock, provision of staff side computers and access to a dedicated form of the library management system, and some specialist staff support in the form of a dedicated support line and quarterly library staff visits to support stock management and maintain good communications.

Staffordshire currently have 18 volunteer led libraries. There is a rolling programme of transition taking place which began in April 2016 and there are plans for there to be a total of 23 community led libraries by the end of the process. There are two different relationship models in operation with eight libraries being managed by an NHS foundation trust who liaise with the volunteers while the other libraries are managed by community groups who have a direct relationship with Staffordshire County Council. The community managed libraries are being supported by Community Support Officers and Stock Services and Activity Officers and form part of the statutory library service.

Library volunteers were asked to use the package and feedback their comments and experiences.

Leicestershire asked the volunteers who had helped develop the package to use the finished package in their libraries. In order to make this possible each of the lead volunteers was sent an electronic draft version of the training package to pilot in their own community managed library. Each asked their own library volunteers to work through the training materials at their own pace and feedback any comments. In total five volunteer led libraries were invited to take part in the pilot with the support of the Community Support Officer.

In Warwickshire all 12 CMLs were invited to participate and five teams offered to take part in the pilot following a presentation given to them at the 2017 CML forum. Participation was entirely voluntary and given the very different structures at each library, each were asked to use the training in the most appropriate way for their teams. To help with this each team was sent the training materials electronically as well as being sent a number of pre-printed packs to use with their volunteers.

In Staffordshire the Community Capacity Manager suggested libraries to participate and the Community Support Officers contacted the libraries to ask if they wanted to take part in the pilot and five libraries agreed to participate. The volunteers used the paper version of the training package. They found this easier to use as they could have it to hand while walking around the library and they could make notes on it.

Volunteer Feedback

Leicestershire and Warwickshire both struggled to get feedback from the volunteers who had piloted the training. Of the five teams that offered to undertake the training in Warwickshire only 3 returned any evaluation material and then only after much prompting. Staffordshire were able to gather feedback from all five libraries.

Having invested time in developing the package the CMLs in Leicestershire struggled to find capacity to pilot the training in their libraries. One library placed the training package at the counter and encouraged volunteers to access it at their convenience which several volunteers did. There was no formal feedback or evaluation but anecdotal evidence suggested that the customer experience module and the promotions module were considered the most useful. As a result displays in this library were improved and new internal and external signage was purchased.

To date, none of the libraries in Warwickshire have returned the lead volunteer questionnaire but informal feedback has indicated that many of the local volunteers are not comfortable with using computers for training and so we may need to consider alternative ways of supporting this cohort, it is also interesting to note that two out of the three libraries that returned their evaluation did so as a hard copy rather than electronic responses. Feedback from volunteers based at the largest of the three libraries showed a more marked increase in confidence as a result of the training whereas at the smaller library the feedback was less conclusive. Comments showed that in some of the very small CMLs the volunteers felt that opportunities for inputting into stock management or displays was very limited and so those modules were of limited use to them.

Volunteers from Staffordshire feedback on each of the modules (see appendix 1) here is a summary of their comments:

- Making the most of your library - All libraries felt that this module was useful and thought provoking and made them look at their libraries in a different light, and specifically from the viewpoint of library users. However there was a recognition that without funding some changes would be difficult to achieve in the short term.

- Talking to Customers about books and reading - Volunteers had vastly different experiences when starting this module. Some were extremely confident when talking to customers while others very uncertain about how to do this. While this helped most of the volunteers who were not confident for many of them this is still very much a work in progress. This has helped us to identify an area where further training would be beneficial in the future.

- Maintaining good stock - Volunteers found this module useful as it provided them with a good insight into a specialist area that they had little knowledge and experience of. It also made us think about how we would like Community Managed Libraries to work with us on stock management in the future. As a direct result of this module we have done further training with some libraries on Collection HQ and further training on other aspects of stock management is planned.

- Promotions, making the most of books - This module was universally well received and enjoyed by the volunteers. They particularly liked the ideas and have gone on to produce their own eye catching displays.

Silverdale rearranged their library after completing the training. To provide more space for events in the library the stock was rearranged to make it more easily accessible and create space to enable more face on display. Following the reorganisation a customer commented, *"It's lovely in here, nice and bright and lots of space"*.

Silverdale Library before the stock/ layout reorganisation inspired by the modules in the toolkit.

Silverdale library following the stock reorganisation

Here are some of the displays created by volunteers as part of the training

Brewood Library

This display is changed every week. The volunteers are finding that the display is catching the eye of customers as they walk to the desk. They are stopping to read the quotations too!


Holmcroft Library

This is being changed once a fortnight on a theme tied into national events. They have noticed people browsing more than usual in this area.

To evaluate how successful the modules had been volunteers were also asked to complete a pre and post training questionnaire to gauge their confidence in the key areas targeted by the training (1 being not confident and 5 being very confident). Most of the questionnaires showed an increase in confidence as a result of the training and only a few showed no improvement.

Graph 1 and 2 show the collective confidence ratings given in the pre and post questionnaires and it is clear to see that there is a higher percentage of volunteers saying that their confidence levels are 4 and 5 (confident and very confident) after the training with no one rating themselves as 1 (not confident) in the post training questionnaire. The graphs also show that the modules covering 'maintaining good stock' and 'promotions' were the topics where volunteers felt less confident pre-training and these modules had most impact with the largest increase in confidence post-training.

Graph 1
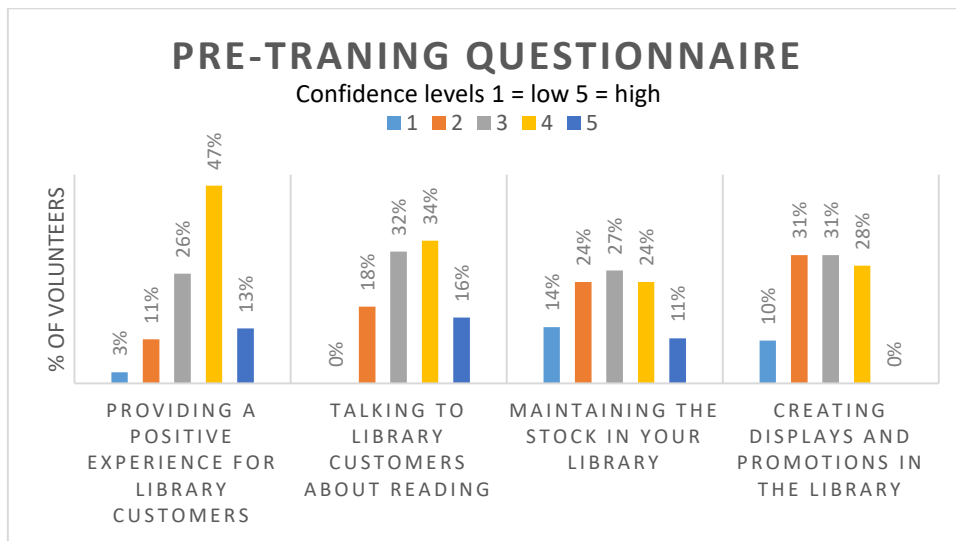
Graph 2
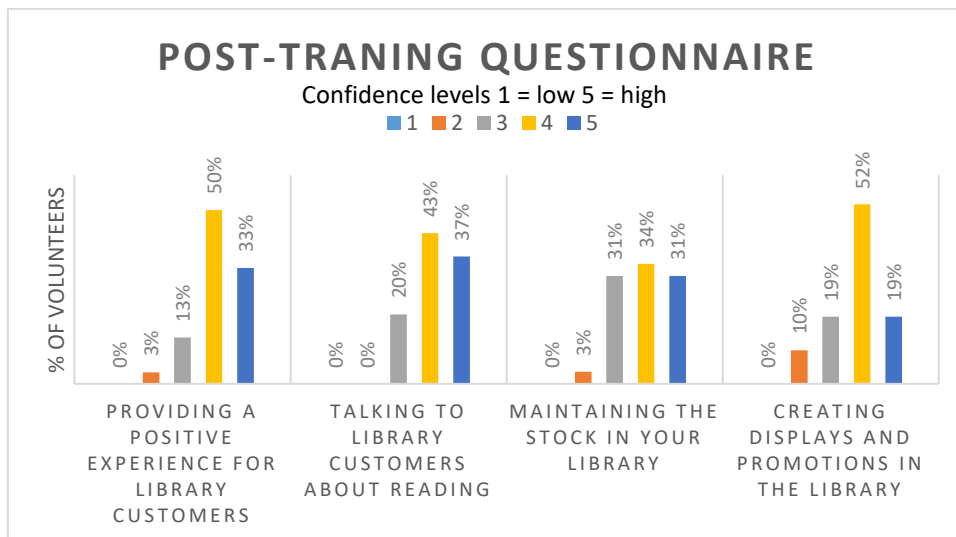
Here are some comments from volunteers in all three library services about the overall training,

> "It is a good idea to have these modules, I really appreciate that someone has thought to put this together for library volunteers."

> "It was a little daunting at first, as there seemed a lot to read and do, but it was ok when you broke it down into smaller parts."

> "I have enjoyed doing the tasks and it has made me look at the library with new eyes. I feel that more of the volunteers could now have a go themselves and not wait for permission!"

> "We have enjoyed and learned from all of it."

"Thoroughly useful and enjoyable!"

"The modules were written in quite understandable language and highlighted a lot of points we hadn't thought of."

"Talking to customers has some good ideas. The remaining activities are more for groups rather than individuals and require a 'leader'. There is no discussion on getting readers into the library in the first place. I don't think that this set of modules is of general use in training but has some good specific ideas."

Library Service Feedback

Library staff felt that the modules had helped volunteers develop their skills and improved their confidence in the topics covered. Staffordshire also found that this in turn has had a positive effect on the delivery of the library service in Community Managed Libraries especially in terms of the presentation of the stock in those libraries.

The training was simple and cost effective to roll out and provided a valuable supplement to other support offered to the volunteers. Feedback from volunteers about the training also helped library services to understand the skills and knowledge of their volunteers and to identify further training needs.

Both Warwickshire and Staffordshire said that they felt the training might work better with some kind of face to face introduction from a staff member and regular contact with the libraries and volunteers while they are doing the training would have been beneficial in order to provide direction and support where needed. In Warwickshire library staff were unsure sure how the training had been 'sold' to local volunteers and the felt that some of the comments seem to indicate that the participants' expectations were different to those they had intended. However, logistically having more staff involvement might be difficult for library services and would undermine the aim that the training should require a minimal amount of input and guidance it could also risk making the programme unviable.

The pilot has highlighted that when planning training with volunteers it is important to give as much notice as possible so that those who want to participate are able to do so. It is also important to choose an appropriate time within the library calendar to deliver the training and we had chosen a time when volunteers were prioritising the Summer Reading Challenge which led to a reduction in numbers taking part.

Library services also reported that measuring any value-added element or return for investment with volunteer training is extremely difficult as the relationship is such that library staff can't compel a response and 'nagging' can put a delicate relationship at risk so has to be done cautiously. This difficultly has resulted in minimal feedback from both Leicestershire and Warwickshire. Warwickshire did suggest that some kind of reward scheme might have helped and Staffordshire are considering how to support/reward the five CMLs who participated.

Volunteer Feedback about the collaboration process

Feedback from Leicestershire volunteers indicated they had appreciated the opportunity to be involved in developing this training package, of particular value was being able to represent the views of volunteers at "grass roots" level and to identity any potential challenges and barriers relating to the future delivery of the training. They also found it beneficial to work with representatives from other CMLs as everyone brought with them different experiences and perspectives.

The volunteers felt they were able to comment as "non-experts" on the clarity of the package and could highlight the use of terminology that would not necessarily be understood by a front line volunteers. It was suggested that more time spent at the beginning of the process would have been beneficial in clarifying what was needed. However, whilst it was difficult to know precisely how the package would be used at the start, the resulting module was felt to be a useful confidence building tool that was flexible enough to be adapted to the individual needs of each CML.

Having the opportunity to work alongside a professional organisation such as SCL and library staff they wouldn't usually have contact with was also cited by several volunteers as a positive experience as it broadened their knowledge of libraries outside of their individual CMLs and made them feel part of a wider team.

Library service feedback about the collaboration process

Leicestershire library staff found it really useful to speak to the volunteers before starting to put together the training package and ask what they understood by the term 'Reader Development Training'. It became clear that the volunteers had very little understanding of the term but once asked for ideas about what it might actually meant came up with lots of good answers.

Working together with the volunteers highlighted the different skills sets that they have and their different training needs. Library staff also found that volunteers preferred to work in a less structured way so it was important that the training and language remained as simple and user friendly as possible.

Due to the volunteers differing levels of computer skill the preferred training method was to work from a basic Word Document that they could print out as a paper version enabling them to dip in and out of the modules in their own time.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Overall feedback from volunteers and library services showed that the modules had helped volunteers develop their skills and improved their confidence in the topics covered and comments showed that they had found the training enjoyable. Volunteers appreciated the opportunity to be involved in creating the training and that the package been developed specifically for them.

The training package was cost effective and simple to roll out. Printing the modules and using paper copies while working in the library seemed to work well for the volunteers in Staffordshire and Leicestershire and this eliminated the issues around limited IT skills.

The pre and post questionnaires showed that the training had been successful at increasing the volunteers' confidence, particularly the modules covering 'maintaining good stock' and 'promotions' which were the topics volunteers had felt less confident about pre training.

Working with volunteers to co-create the training helped library staff choose the topics that were of most importance to the volunteers and ensured that the modules were pitch it at the right level eliminating any library jargon. This co-creation method worked well and would be recommended as a way to develop future training packages for volunteers covering other topics.

The pilot highlighted that delivering training to volunteers is challenging as the relationship is very different to that with staff. Library services can offer training but volunteers' participation and engagement will vary and can't be coherst. Volunteers' responses to requests for feedback will also be significantly lower than when working with a group of library staff.

The training has been designed in such a way that they can be easily shared with other library services and volunteers. Feedback suggested that the training would work better if library staff introduced the package to volunteers and so it would be recommended that the training be shared with library services for them to pass to their volunteers rather than direct to the volunteer libraries. The modules have been designed not to be specific to any one library service's practices so by sharing the package with library staff first this would also allow them the opportunity to tweak the modules to reflect the way they work locally and link to any other training library volunteers have received.

The recommendations are that this reader development package be shared wider so that others are able to benefit from it and that co-creating packages with volunteers is considered when developing training for volunteers in the future.

Appendix 1

Feedback on the training modules from Staffordshire library volunteers

Making the most of your library

Library 1
All the volunteers thought that this module was delivered at the correct level, it was thought provoking and easy to understand without being patronising.

This made the volunteers look at the library from a different angle, from the perspective of a customer and they hadn't thought of doing this before. They felt that it stopped them from making assumptions about their library space. They felt that "it is easy to forget to look at the library".

They now want to create a floorplan to be displayed in the library to help people. It was suggested that they use the existing Autism Friendly library map. As a result of this they are now also looking at all the autism friendly library information.

They discussed making a signpost to put at the entrance to the library.

The biggest impact this made on them was looking at the library from the outside. They are now looking at how to improve the external signage so that the building can be seen from the road.
They are also considering how to improve the external look of the building.
This was very thought provoking for them and sparked discussion about who could help them locally to bring about the improvements.

Library 3
The volunteers all felt more confident about this after doing the module. They would like to look at changing the layout of the library in the future as a result of doing this.

Library 4
The volunteers felt that they would like to improve the signage within and outside of the library after doing this module. They would like the external signs to give more information about what the library offers e.g. wifi. It really made them think about the first impression the library made.

Library 5
The volunteer felt that this was really good for taking a step back and looking at the library with fresh eyes. They came up with ideas for a new layout for the library as a result. Also identified that the opening hours need to be clearer, as you have to walk right up to the

library before you can see the sign. A What's On in the Library board would also be useful near to the road / car park.

We need to limit the number of notices on the windows as people don't read them – fewer and larger would be better.

The internal signage is outdated and needs to be more eye catching so customers can find relevant areas.

A comfy sofa for parents / children in the children's section would be nice as there is nowhere for them to sit together. An information board for local children's events would be good in the children's area.

Talking to customers about books and reading

Library 1
The volunteers were all very happy with the module.
They found the suggested websites and particularly Fantastic Fiction useful.
They thought the volunteers meetings and book in a bag were really good ideas.

Library 2
The prompts were particularly useful, there are some volunteers who are not confident and this is a good starting point to improve this.

Library 3
Some volunteers still felt less confident about talking to customers about reading, especially about starting the conversation. They felt more confident if a customer asked. They liked the suggested websites.

Library 4
Not all volunteers are confident about talking to customers about reading, although the module had given them ideas. Others are very confident at this already.

Library 5
The volunteer felt confident in this and the module had given further ideas such as

- Need to print off these websites and put on the counter as not all volunteers know about them.

- I would like the volunteers to bring in their favourite book to start a discussion at the next volunteer meeting.

- I would like to ask customers to give me information about their favourite authors and also recommendations, and then could use as a basis for a display.

Maintaining good stock

Library 1
They found the photos very useful as all had previously been concerned about removing any stock from the shelves. This gave them the confidence to make a decision about stock.

They asked for further training as a result of this, collection HQ and withdrawing stock.

Library 2
The volunteers were really happy with this module as it has given them the confidence to take some autonomy and make more decisions about their own stock. It has enabled them to make space on the shelves when they need to and create more face on display.

Library 3
The volunteers felt that they already had a good grasp of this, but the module strengthened what they already knew.

Library 4
The volunteers felt that they would still need some training and support from their Stock Services and Activities Officer to explain some of the more local arrangements in Staffordshire.

Library 5
The volunteer felt that the module was interesting and useful, and it gave her an insight into how this was managed, but another volunteer deals with the stock maintenance at the library as she is a former librarian.

Some of us go through the books moving stock along the shelves so that they are not packed too tight.

Silverdale Library before the stock/ layout reorganisation inspired by the modules in the toolkit.

Silverdale library following the stock reorganisation. As well as providing more space for events in the library the stock was rearranged to make it more easily accessible and create space to enable more face on display.

Customer comment following the reorganisation
"It's lovely in here, nice and bright and lots of space"

The group running the library and library staff worked together to organise the stock and the space to meet the requirements of the community managed library. The group took part confidently in the stock editing and had clear ideas about what they wanted to achieve.

Silverdale volunteer working on stock maintenance

Promotions – making the most of your books

Library 1
They found this module very informative, they particularly liked the illustrations, the end cap displays and the 'Don't judge a book by it's cover' idea.

The group want to pilot an Autumn Reading Challenge for adults to promote their stock. The winner will be chosen from the best book review. We discussed the best way to do this and advised how they might go about requesting and gathering book reviews. There were some really good opportunities to share best practice from other libraries.

Library 2
The volunteers have really benefited from this part of the package and have really taken on the promotion of the library. Some of the posters are now being created by volunteers.

This part of the toolkit has encouraged them to think of and embrace different promotions e.g. Roald Dahl promotion. They're using it as a guide to help them see what things could look like.

Library 3
The volunteers found the ideas for displays really valuable and enjoyed this part of the course.

Library 4
The volunteers thought the ideas for displays and the hints and tips were really valuable. They have already started to do a fortnightly display on a theme, related to nation offers / events. They have noticed that people have been browsing that area more than previously, thought they have now added a notice to say "please borrow the books from this display" in case people think they cannot be taken out.

Library 5
The volunteer felt more confident about planning and creating displays after doing this module. They talked about how to coordinate this across a large number of volunteers, which can be an issue. They liked the ideas from other libraries.

They have done several displays after doing these modules, one with quotes about books and reading and that has drawn attention from customers who have been reading them, and they have said they liked the display.

They are going to do a lucky dip book selection, covering the books with plain paper.

They did a Going Veggie section, as there is an abundance of vegetables being grown and, also printed off recipes for customers to take.

They created a rainbow of children's books – books on a display arranged by colour.

Hednesford Library

Brewood Library

This display is changed every week. The volunteers are finding that the display is catching the eye of customers as they walk to the desk. They are stopping to read the quotations too!

Brewood Library
Rainbow of children's books

Classics promotion at Audley Library

Holmcroft Library

This is being changed once a fortnight on a theme tied into national events. They have noticed people browsing more than usual in this area.

Summer reads promotion at Silverdale Library

Promotion of local stock at Audley Library

Promotion of new stock at Silverdale Library