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Effective Public Library Outreach to Homeless People

Abstract

Purpose To identify good practice in conducting outreach for homeless people, and hence to provide recommendations for future library outreach projects.

Design/methodology/approach Examination of four case studies taken from the library literature, and six semi-structured interviews with outreach and/or inclusion librarians from library authorities in South and West Yorkshire.

Findings The recommendations include: developing partnerships with relevant organisations; removing proof-of-identity requirements for joining the library; disseminating the results obtained in projects; using book deposits and mobile library stops; training library staff to ensure that they are aware of relevant issues; building trust in the target audience; ensuring that outreach is tailored to the specific needs of different groups of homeless people; and using a range of methods to evaluate project effectiveness.

Originality/value We are not aware of any recommendations for such projects in the UK

Keywords

Homeless people, Inclusion, Outreach, Public libraries, Yorkshire

Type of contribution

Research paper

1. Introduction

The publication of the influential report *Open to All?* (Muddiman *et al.*, 2000) led to an increased emphasis on outreach for excluded groups in society. The report highlighted homeless people as a group that was, too often, not considered a priority by libraries, despite the fact that “homelessness is an isolating and destructive experience and homeless people are some of the most vulnerable and socially excluded in our society” (Crisis, 2010). It is estimated that there are at least 400,000 people in the country who are homeless, the legal definition of which includes not just those living on the street, but also people staying in a hostel or refuge, living in a squat or bed-and-breakfast accommodation, or living temporarily with friends or relatives because they have nowhere else to go (Crisis, 2010; Shelter, 2010). Being homeless brings many obvious disadvantages that lead to social isolation, such as the negative effects on health and personal safety, increased difficulty in gaining education and

employment, and damaged social and family relationships. Less obviously, homelessness can also have a catastrophic effect on an individual's general mental well-being, as it affects their self-image, self-confidence and their sense of hope (Crisis, 2010; Daly, 1996).

There is a huge literature relating to homelessness in general (e.g., Klinker and Fitzpatrick, 2000; Nieto *et al.*, 2008; Pleace and Quilgars, 2003). Here, we focus on the many services that public libraries can offer homeless people (e.g., Ayers, 2006; Cohen, 1998; Flagg, 2000). Most obviously, they can provide information on employment, education, finances, child care, relationships, transportation, and health, as well as referring people to other public services. Libraries can also provide non-fictional and educational materials that can help homeless people improve their literacy, knowledge and skills, and they can provide internet and computer access, which can be used to improve IT skills and hence to search and apply for employment. Furthermore, libraries can supply recreational materials for relaxation and enjoyment, and can provide social interactions, both face-to-face and electronically.

There are, however, barriers that can prevent homeless people using libraries, these barriers arising both from institutional policies and from the views of the staff who work in them. Institutional barriers, such as fining for overdue materials and requiring identification and proof-of-address in order to get library membership, can significantly reduce the number of homeless people who are able to use public libraries (Ayers, 2006; Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 1999; Harris and Simon, 2009; Working Together Project, 2008). Molyneux (2004) argues that such barriers can combine with some homeless people's low self-esteem to create a self-perception that they do not belong in public libraries. This perception can be exacerbated by suggestions that homeless library users may cause problems for other users, e.g., by intimidating them in some cases (Bullard, 2002; Warnica, 2010). Murphy (1999) highlights a number of texts from the 1980s and 1990s that take a markedly negative view of homeless library users; and Future Librarians for Intellectual Freedom (2010) note policies in some USA libraries that are clearly targeted at, and discriminatory to, homeless people, such as excluding users who have bad body odours or who have large backpacks or bedrolls. The attitudes of library staff can also be a barrier to use (Harris & Simon, 2009; Hersberger, 2005; Molyneux, 2004; Muddiman *et al.*, 2000). Hersberger (2005) criticises the tendency of some librarians to class homeless users as 'problem patrons', noting that such discriminatory stereotyping can lead to action, or inaction, that excludes homeless people. The Working Together Project (2008: 22) points out that "staff cannot assess the barriers to library services faced by socially excluded people because they are not themselves socially excluded".

Significant problems hence need to be addressed if a public library is to run a successful outreach programme for homeless people. This paper seeks to identify good practice for the design and implementation of such programmes, based on published case studies and interviews with library staff in South and West Yorkshire. The next section summarises the research methodology; the third and fourth sections present the principal results of the case studies and interviews, respectively; and the final section summarises our results by a set of recommendations for use in future outreach projects.

2. Methodology

We have used both interviews and published case studies. In both cases, the resulting data were coded thematically in order to identify meaningful similarities, differences and patterns that formed the basis for the discussion in the next two sections of this paper.

The primary data was collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with individuals, lasting from 30 minutes to one hour. The interviews were recorded, with subsequent transcription to enable full analysis of the responses. The target population was professional librarians from South and West Yorkshire whose job role involved inclusion and/or outreach. In practical terms, potential interviewees were identified through the local council websites for each area and, where insufficient information was given on these websites, through the library enquiry services. There were six interviews, conducted with representatives from the public library authorities of Barnsley, Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds, and Sheffield (with the authorities and interviewees hereafter variously denoted by A-F). The interviewees' job titles indicate the range of roles that may involve outreach, with the titles including reader development officer, service development manager, neighbourhood renewal manager, development manager, early years development officer, and access and inclusion librarian. Two sets of questions were created to address the two potential types of interviewee, i.e., those who were currently involved in outreach directed at homeless people, and those who were not so involved. However during the interview process, it was found that it was sometimes difficult to make a clear distinction (as discussed in Section 4), and individuals were thus often asked questions from both sets of question.

The published case studies of public library outreach projects aimed at homeless people were selected according to the following criteria: the literature must be reporting real-life activity that was organised or assisted by one or more public libraries; the activity must be explicitly aimed at homeless or vulnerably housed people (but could also be aimed at other groups as

well); and the activity must have taken place in the UK within the last decade. Four case studies were identified that met these criteria. These are Friends at Christmas (Middleton, 2003), Your Choice Books (Molyneux, 2004), The Play and Learning Project (Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council, 2006), and Outside Story (Heffernan, 2009; Outside Story, 2009). They are summarized briefly in the following paragraph.

Friends at Christmas project was organised by Gloucestershire County Libraries & Information Service in 2002. It was a one-off, two-day project over the Christmas period that took computers with internet access into a homeless shelter, and provided outreach librarians to help facilitate the use of the computers. Your Choice Books was run by Warrington Library, Museum and Archives Service in 2003, initially as a three month trial, but then continuing until 2008. Its aim was to “create awareness amongst homeless people in the area of the education, recreational and leisure benefits available to them [...] and encourage active membership” (Molyneux, 2004: 15); it tried to achieve this by housing a collection of stock in a local YMCA centre. The Play and Learning Project was organised by Tameside Libraries and was aimed at homeless families, and particularly the children of those families. The project ran from 2003 to 2008 and involved providing the children with individual book and information packs, leaving a collection of stock at the Homeless Persons Unit, and running events and activity sessions at Tameside public libraries and at the Unit. Outside Story ran from September 2008 to October 2009. The project was primarily organised by Brent Libraries, Arts and Heritage, with the involvement of six other London library boroughs - Bromley, Camden, Greenwich, Hackney, Lambeth, and Lewisham – and aimed to “improve access to reading, learning and information services” for homeless people by means of multiple activities across the collaborating boroughs (Outside Story, 2009).

3. The case studies

The thematic analysis of the published descriptions (Heffernan, 2009; Middleton, 2003; Molyneux, 2004; Outside Story, 2009; Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council, 2006) of the four projects identified three principal strands: actions taken as preliminary work; actions taken during the outreach; and the post-outreach evaluation.

3.1 Preliminary work

Three principal themes emerged from the case studies relating to decisions and activities which needed to take place before an outreach project could begin: the setting of aims and objectives for the outreach; the specification of the target group for the outreach; and consultation with that group.

Friends at Christmas was the only one of the case studies not to make clear what the objectives of the project had been. This was the briefest and most loosely structured of the accounts, as well as being the shortest-lived project. The other three studies all have explicit aims and objectives, with the latter comprising both abstract and measurable objectives. Outside Story, for instance, had the intangible objective of seeking “to ensure that library services are available for homeless people in a way that is appropriate and meets the needs of service users” (Outside Story, 2009); however, it also sought to “increase the use of libraries by homeless and vulnerably housed people” and “improve the satisfaction with library services for [homeless people]” (Heffernan, 2009: 6), both of which are potentially measurable. The potential value of using quantifiable objectives combined with more general aims became apparent, to some extent, when the case studies began evaluating their outreach, and when they discussed their results and outcomes. For example, Your Choice Books partly evaluated its success by the fact that “several visitors to the YMCA eventually became registered library users” (Molyneux, 2004: 21), thus fulfilling its stated objective of encouraging active library membership. Again, Play and Learning Project’s outcomes included the statement “improvements in literacy and numeracy have been recognised by children’s parents, carers and teachers”, which related to the objective “to raise literacy levels” (Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council, 2006); that said, the case study merely asserts that the improvements had been “recognised”, without any mention of how, or whether, the improvements had been quantified.

All of the case studies mention the needs of their target group. For example, Heffernan (2009) mentions literacy (as a skill, but also for future pleasure and recreation), social interaction, recreation, learning and information as all being needs of homeless people that public libraries, and in particular the Outside Story project, can help fulfil. Similar comments are made by Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council (2006), who note that the Play and Learning project can help meet needs for homeless children and their parents, such as health (including, physical, emotional and developmental health), self-esteem, literacy, information literacy, and parenting skills. Friends at Christmas was again somewhat of an exception, in that the needs were more often implied and interwoven with a narrative and personal account of one homeless man’s participation in the project, rather than being stated explicitly. Thus, “Alfie starts talking about a health problem”, he “is suddenly more confident”, “he can’t remember the last time anyone asked him for his opinion” (Middleton, 2003: 5-6), these quotes being indicative of needs related to health, self-esteem, and perhaps social interaction. Interestingly, the projects were all aiming to fulfil slightly different needs;

it is not clear whether a comparison took place in any of the projects of the many possible needs in order to decide which to address.

Outside Story and Your Choice Books both made detailed attempts to consult with the target audience. Heffernan (2009) makes clear that consultation was vital for the success of the project, noting that communication between library staff and library users can lead to both groups learning more about each other, and that it can train the groups how to positively interact. Molyneux (2004) also stresses the benefits of consultation: she points out that it can help “confirm requirements, access current practice and help develop how these needs could best be met”, and considers consultation “critical to the project’s success”. Indeed, the emphasis that was placed on consultation is evident in the project’s title of Your Choice Books.

Both of these projects employed multiple methods for consultation. Outside Story initially used a survey to gauge homeless people’s current opinions on libraries and their hopes for future improvement, and then followed this with face-to-face casual interaction in centres and shelters to gain on-going feedback on any emerging problems. Your Choice Books used regular focus groups for the selection of stock, and also participant observation, casual visits to the YMCA, and questionnaires. The other two studies do not explicitly mention target audience consultation, though Middleton (2003: 5) does give an example of the utility of communication with homeless people when discussing how to improve Friends at Christmas in the future: a suggestion for improvement emerges from her interactions with homeless people “a photocopier would be useful. More than one person showed me documents they kept safe [...] which were now dog-eared or faded”.

3.2 During the outreach

The four projects mention a range of decisions, actions and problems occurring during the outreach. One theme common to all is the involvement of collaborating organisations, although the extent of the collaboration varies considerably. No specific information is given as to Friends at Christmas’ partner(s), but the fact that the outreach took place within a homeless shelter indicates that the project had help, if nothing more than permission to host the project. Play and Learning was run in partnership with the New Charter Housing Trust, the Health Visitor, and “other agencies”, yet the only reason that the website cites for working in partnership is to “best achieve our aims” (Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council, 2006). Outside Story involved not just the seven collaborating London library authorities, but also hostels, council housing departments, and six homelessness charities

(Brent Homeless User Group, Homeless Link, Look Ahead, St Mungo's, Crisis, and Quaker Homeless Action). Heffernan (2009) gives several examples of the practical help that partner organisations provided, and notes that their expertise from working in different areas can help to adapt and customise the service for these different areas. Your Choice Books was partnered with the Warrington branch of the YMCA, Warrington Borough Council's Policy and Research Unit, and the Millennium Volunteers. Benefits from the collaboration included being able to deposit a book collection in the YMCA centre, the provision of volunteer 'book buddies' from the Millennium Volunteers, and being put in contact with other relevant organisations. In brief, the case studies all advocate partnership working, with a range of positive benefits, and no negative effects, being mentioned.

Perhaps surprisingly, the case studies offer little advice as to project implementation. However, Molyneux (2004) notes that the implementation strategy used by Your Choice Books was based on the Libraries for All report which advised a six point process "identifying the audience, assessing current practice, developing objectives, developing services, implementing those services and evaluating outcomes" (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 1999). Heffernan (2009) offers two pieces of advice which emerged from Outside Story. The first is to build up the relationship between the outreach librarians and homeless people through casual and regular visits and interaction, thus encouraging mutual trust and confidence. The second is to offer incentives to attend library events (or, to look at it another way, to remove the possible barriers to attendance) such as transport, money for fares or rewards. These pieces of advice are not context specific and would hence be applicable to other outreach projects aimed at homeless people.

A range of problems was encountered by the projects. Your Choice Books' survey of staff attitudes highlighted some negative opinions about homeless people's use of library resources, which might clearly reduce the effectiveness of outreach work (Molyneux, 2004). In like vein, Outside Story points out that "visiting hostels can be daunting for library staff" (Heffernan, 2009: 7) and suggests that training courses on assertiveness, setting boundaries, and cultural awareness can lessen such problems. The attitudes of homeless people also need to be considered. Both Your Choice Books and Outside Story state that the self-perceptions of some homeless people could prevent them from participating in the outreach project: they do not feel that they belong in a library due to a lack of self-esteem and confidence, feelings that may not be helped by the intimidating impression that some libraries can give. Funding will always be a problem, especially for what some might consider non-core library activities, especially in the current financial climate. However,

Your Choice Books demonstrates that outreach to homeless people can be carried out very cheaply, since it used existing stock and support from volunteers. Finally, Outside Story noted that even though the need for proof-of-identity to join libraries was relaxed, some participating libraries still insisted that homeless people should provide letters from temporary accommodation, or provided reduced services if such proof was not available.

3.3 Evaluation

All of the case studies involved some degree of post-outreach evaluation, using both quantitative and qualitative performance indicators. Thus, Play and Learning Project used the Every Child Matters targets (Department for Education, 2003), while Your Choice Books complemented statistics such as visit, registration and issue figures with a qualitative case study that demonstrated to Warrington Borough Council's Antipoverty and Social Exclusion Forum the effect that the outreach had had on an individual. Play and Learning Project also combined both types of data for evaluation purposes, measuring new library registrations and numbers of outreach sessions, and writing case studies on the children involved in the project using targets set by The Children's Fund, who were funding the project.

4. The interviews

The first question in each interview was whether the interviewee's library authority was currently running an outreach project aimed specifically at homeless people. No less than four of the six interviewees thought that this was not the case, but it became apparent that all of the authorities were involved in at least some activities that could be classed as outreach. The confusion arose from two main reasons: some of these activities were on a very small scale (e.g., book deposit schemes); and some of the interviewees perceived homeless people as being only those who were living rough or in hostels (whereas, as noted in Section 1, there are many other types of individual who are commonly classified as being homeless). There was also confusion, in the sense of an almost complete lack of awareness, as to the extent of ongoing projects elsewhere. Specifically, all but one of the interviewees were unaware of analogous outreach schemes being run in other authorities (either in Yorkshire or elsewhere), with the sole exception being one interviewee who was aware of an outreach scheme aimed at travellers, a client group facing many of the problems that characterise homeless people.

The interviews revealed the following range of activities. A, C and D all deposit book collections with hostels and refuges; and B, D, E and F all have mobile library stops at hostels, travellers' sites or refugee and asylum seeker centres. Both B and E help to distribute Bookstart packs to refuges and hostels for homeless children, with E also

organising related library activities for the children. As part of a national outreach programme, the Six Book Challenge (2011), F has regular contacts with a homelessness drop-in centre, and also makes regular visits to an asylum seeker and refugee club to promote library services. Lastly, E runs 'Studio 12', a digital multimedia suite which provides access to, and training and qualifications in, various creative technologies: through working with other organisations, E has ensured that homeless people have been able to utilise this service. E has also previously collaborated with *The Big Issue* to gain work placements in branch libraries for homeless people.

The principal themes emerging from the interviews are summarised below: these are barriers to providing outreach for homeless people; and ways of overcoming these barriers and of running successful projects.

4.1 Barriers to providing outreach for homeless people

B, D and E suggest that one barrier is the lack of participation in outreach by homeless people themselves. This can be due to some (but not all) homeless people's perceptions of libraries: "they feel that perhaps the place is not for them"; and groups such as travellers may be "quite suspicious" of council-run bodies such as libraries. E and F also mention the uncertainty of schedule or life that many homeless people experience; this can be a bar to participating as "ongoing commitment to something can be difficult", or can mean that as homeless people can "live quite chaotic lives, it may be difficult to remember to bring books back". Another homeless group, those living in refuges, may be unwilling (or even unable) to attend library events outside the refuge. It is clear that without the participation of homeless people, an outreach project could not be successful and would not continue.

Institutional barriers often reinforce the negative perceptions of homeless people, with A, C and E all agreeing that membership requirements of identification ("the fact that they may be asked to show some kind of identification") can be unwelcoming for potential homeless users.

A major barrier is that of resources. Library budgets are often limited, as A, B, D and E all point out. This is especially true in the current recession, when homeless people are just one of many excluded groups, all of whom have special needs that can be difficult to support when time and resources are limited.

A further problem is the need for libraries to achieve high number of issues (and other similar performance indicators): “what we are looking for is to increase library usage”, “we would hope that that would lead on to issues”, “the main aim was getting as many people as possible coming into the library”. Unfortunately, despite the potential human benefit, outreach to homeless people may not result in high numbers of new registrations even if the homeless nature is recorded explicitly in the statistics (which is often not the case). A further problem relating to library policy, and one mentioned in five of the interviews, is that what can be done will be influenced by the particular priorities of the local council. These priorities will differ from council to council: “we work with the bigger council to support what their priorities are”, “it’s part of the whole inclusion agenda of the whole council”. Supporting council policies is politically sensible and ensures that libraries become valued and visible, but can mean that some socially excluded groups can be overlooked. The government is committed to preventing and stopping homelessness (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010), but this is not the same thing as alleviating the social exclusion of homeless people, let alone affecting policy at the local level.

Effective outreach requires that people be tasked with doing it as part of their job, which means that homeless people could be overlooked if they are not specifically included in anybody’s remit. For example, A noted that they had not done any past outreach to homeless people because “there wasn’t anybody in position who could have done so”.

One might expect that the inclusion of homeless people in library plans would suggest a focus on work in this area, but the largest amounts of relevant outreach were not carried out by either of the two authorities where the library plans specifically mentioned homeless people. More generally, the plans had higher-level equality and diversity policies that arguably subsume particular client groups: “the council has policies about equality and diversity and I suppose that’s our underpinning”, “We’ve got equal opportunities policy, which is a very, we’re very hot on. It doesn’t specifically mention homeless people”. Perhaps the presence or absence of specific mentions is not a problem since, as A noted, “we need to be doing rather than making policies”.

A, C, D and F mentioned the problem of losing library stock, though most were accepting of the risk in return for the benefits of doing the outreach: “if we lose a few, then the benefit of getting all those extra people...”, “with the understanding that this material may go missing, because of, so people move on, don’t they?”. However in some cases, where loss of resources is extensive, this risk can affect the continuation of projects: “at one bit, we

wouldn't let people join from hostels, 'cos we had so many problems with losing material", "it was to such an extent that really we couldn't sustain the service".

Several of the interviewees commented on the many types of homelessness that people may suffer, with the different types often requiring different approaches to be developed if the outreach is to be successful: "I think asylum seekers and refugees are very different [to travellers]"; "different people have very different needs, don't they? Different wants, never mind needs"; and "the definition of homelessness is quite broad, isn't it, because there's people who're literally living on the street [...] but then there's people who are having to share homes to the detriment of the health of the families". A related problem in developing outreach is the extent of the problem since all of the interviewees were fairly uncertain about the extent of homelessness in their area. This is hardly surprising given the many different types of people under this heading and given that homeless people often do not show up in standard statistics: "people who are quite transient, and suspicious of authority as well, it's very, very difficult to get firm numbers [...] we tend to get a feel of things that are happening through the health visitors [...] just by anecdotal evidence"; "there will be figures but I don't think anyone really knows how accurate they are sometimes [...] it's a kind of moving thing as well". Taking these two factors together, it is clearly difficult to develop carefully targeted programmes if there is doubt as to the nature and the extent of the target population.

4.2 Overcoming the barriers and conducting successful projects

Some of the problems described above are very difficult to address, but it may be possible to solve, or at least alleviate, others, with partnership being mentioned repeatedly during the interviews. Partners can be helpful when resources are limited, either by sharing the financial load or by providing funding and resources in exchange for services: "we haven't got any money to actually distribute those packs so we rely on partners", "we use those vans for free, so that's fantastic", "the amount of funding we receive from partners". Partners who already work with homeless people can provide advice and guidance to overcome some homeless people's negative perceptions of libraries or of themselves: "if you're going to work with people who are homeless, ask for advice from people who do work with them", "you probably get some kind of trust if you're recommended by another organisation". In time, of course, one would hope that the library would be able to build up their own relationships: "if we had a regular presence there, they felt that, that it would, the travellers would start accessing the service", "it's probably about three years it's taken to actually get there, to be trusted". Potential partners that were mentioned in the interviews included council education departments, hostels, refuge and refugee centres, organisations involved in

Bookstart, homelessness charities, and health visitors. Drawing on their expertise means that you “have a better idea of what people’s needs are”, “you can sound people out about new ideas” and you can gain “their experience [...] another viewpoint on things”. The use of partners can, of course, result in communication problems but the overwhelming view was summed up by B: “the positives definitely outweigh the negatives”.

The membership requirement for identification can be overcome by accepting letters from hostels, refuges and centres rather than formal identification documents (as done by B and C) or by removing the requirement completely (as done by D and F). An intermediate approach, operated by A, B and E, is to accept temporary membership without proof-of-identity, but to allow only a limited number of items to be loaned.

The heterogeneity of homelessness can be tackled by adapting library services to each group to ensure that their particular needs are met: “you’ve got to adapt to what they want”, “we usually give it a few months. With the travellers it might take a bit longer”, “you have to be sensitive to the travellers’ different...”, “for homeless people [...] we’ll approach that differently”. This can be achieved by adequate trialling of outreach projects before proceeding to a full implementation, e.g., “if we identify a need, we investigate how, and do some pilots somewhere” and consequently “learn lessons from it and roll it out in other areas”. That said, little formal evaluation appears to have been carried out, with usage statistics being the most common indicator of success (although this is hardly ideal, as noted previously).

Outreach can be useful for promoting the library more generally. For example, F uses its visits to an asylum seekers’ club to promote the central library, whilst B, D and E all suggest using relevant organisations and partners to promote their outreach: “I would promote through partnerships”, “you do reach the right target audience through other people “we’ve got a contact there. We can send information directly to them” so “promoting each other’s services”.

5. Conclusions

It will be realised that there was a fair degree of commonality in the findings from the case studies and from the interviews, although topics were investigated at a much greater level of detail in the interviews, and we hence conclude by providing the following recommendations for outreach projects:

- Develop partnerships with relevant organisations (hostels, homelessness charities, appropriate council departments, etc) in order to reduce several barriers and to achieve the most effective outreach.
- Remove proof-of-identity requirements for joining the library. If, for whatever reason, this is not possible then accept letters from hostels and refuges, etc, in place of such proof, or by allowing limited temporary membership for people unable to provide the necessary documentation.
- Share reports of one's own successful outreach and ideas for good practice through professional literature and regional networks, in order to increase others' awareness of outreach possibilities.
- Develop cheaper and sustainable outreach through simple activities such as book deposits and mobile library stops, drawing on partnerships to support larger scale projects.
- Train staff in awareness and skills (possibly through partners) in order to ensure staff have a knowledge of relevant issues.
- Build up trust among that target audience by developing a dependable relationship through regular visits and a regular presence.
- Ensure that the outreach is adapted to meet the particular needs of different homeless groups and different situations by trialling, evaluating and then refining projects.
- Combine different evaluative techniques, for instance both quantitative and qualitative data, to fully represent the outcomes of the outreach.

There are, of course, many limitations in this work. First, and most obviously, what is presented here is the librarians' view, without consideration of the views of the homeless people (both library users and non-users) at whom the various projects are aimed. Such work is however quite difficult and beyond the scope of the MA dissertation on which this article is based. Second, only six interviews were carried out, and those who were interviewed were all self-selected and were all working in the same part of the country. None the less, it is noticeable that several of our recommendations are in line with previous studies that have advocated, e.g., forming partnerships with appropriate organisations (Muddiman *et al.*, 2000; Vincent, 2005) and relaxing proof-of-identity requirements (Ayers, 2006; Harris and Simon, 2009), and we hence believe that the recommendations above can usefully be employed by any public library authority that is considering the development of an outreach project for homeless people.

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