

Caring with Books in the West Midlands Evaluation report

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1. Background and introduction

This report contains the findings of the evaluation of the value and impact of Caring with Books in the West Midlands, an initiative funded by the DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund in 2001-2002 as part of the recent Government focus on reader development work in public libraries.

Over a twelve-month period beginning in September 2001, ten local authorities worked as a consortium and in three regional 'cluster groups', coordinated by independent consultant Christine Blowman, in partnership with West Midlands Arts and The Libraries Partnership-West Midlands¹. Their primary objective was to obtain the training, support and skills required to work more effectively with young people and their foster and public carers, and Social Services and Education Departments, across the West Midlands region. As the original funding application stated², the project aimed:

'...to increase these children's access to books and to show adults the important role they can play in encouraging children to enjoy reading. This work effectively supports individual local authority social inclusion plans.'

Membership of the three cluster groups was as follows:

Cluster	Participating local authorities
One	<input type="checkbox"/> Coventry <input type="checkbox"/> Solihull <input type="checkbox"/> Warwickshire
Two	<input type="checkbox"/> Herefordshire <input type="checkbox"/> Shropshire <input type="checkbox"/> Worcestershire
	<input type="checkbox"/> Dudley

¹ Project management in kind was also provided by Book Communications Ltd., Birmingham

² West Midlands Arts (2001) Caring with Books in the West Midlands: funding application to DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund, p.1.

Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❑ Staffordshire❑ Stoke-on-Trent❑ Wolverhampton
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1.1 The evaluation of the initiative

The project evaluation was conducted by Briony Train, on behalf of the Centre for Information Research (CIRT) at the University of Central England in Birmingham (UCE). The main focus of the evaluation was 'to evaluate the impact of the project on library staff development', and within that aim there were two specific objectives:

- To evaluate the extent to which the project achieves its aims and objectives and to identify factors critical to its success or failure.
- To contribute to a body of knowledge of good practice in conducting reader development initiatives with young people in public care and their carers.

N.B. All quotations included within this report are anonymous, although for ease of reference the terms '*Library staff*', '*Project manager*' or '*Partner*' have been used to indicate whether the comments originated from one of the ten participating library authorities, one of the non-library members of the project management group or one of the Social Services or Education Department partner organisations.

2. Achievement of objectives

In order to evaluate the impact of the Caring with Books in the West Midlands project on participating library staff, it was first necessary to examine overall project objectives, and to consider to what extent these had been achieved. Overall project objectives as cited in the original funding application were as follows:

- 1. To work with up to 50 public library staff, dispersed across 3 regional clusters between September 2001 and June 2002, giving them the training, support and skills required.*
- 2. To focus the TLP-WM "Developing together through Literature" promotion funds for 2001/2 to support this Wolfson project and provide appropriate training and dissemination of the projects progress across all 14 regional library services.*
- 3. To raise the awareness of foster families and public carers of the range of services libraries offer locally through the production of a leaflet distributed by Social Services Departments and specially tailored library visits. To build new partnerships with other agencies and strengthen the fragile infrastructure which is needed to effectively bring books and reading to young people and their foster families and public carers across the West Midlands.*
- 4. To encourage children in public care and their carers to visit libraries through the purchase of stock and giving them an incentive (possibly goody bag). To examine joining procedures to ensure they do not discriminate against children in temporary care. All proposed activities will be focussed on raising literacy attainment levels through encouraging access to reading for pleasure and information.*
- 5. To pro-actively exploit and disseminate recent learning outcomes from Coventry and Warwickshire's pilot initiative with a Youth reader Development Worker.*
- 6. To identify and develop a regional network of public library staff with enhanced reader development skills to reach foster families and children in public care. Partnerships/pairings to be established between staff in libraries and appropriate agencies.*

It was felt to be of interest to the evaluation to compare project-based and individual objectives, as there may have been differences that needed to be investigated. For example, in the first interviews in December 2001, participating library staff were asked to look at the project objectives - as listed in the original project proposal³ - and to state how realistic they were. A number of interviewees felt that too much was expected of them within the timescale, and made comments such as:

'[There are] too many authorities and an expectation to do too much with too many service points.' [Library staff]

However, when asked during the same interview to state their individual, authority-based objectives, interviewees demonstrated ambition and a good deal of confidence. In almost all cases they provided a clear outline of intentions concerning their work with both young people and their carers, in terms of the range of services they planned to provide, the extent to which they would involve their staff in this work, and the partnerships they hoped to develop. An example of such a comment was provided by one librarian who talked of 'uncovering the barriers that exist, preventing us from reaching these groups':

'...we are looking at the whole area of social inclusion, and are doing work currently on membership fees and charges, so this work will hopefully show that we are trying to meet a need in this area.' [Library staff]

Why was there such a considerable difference between the two comments, made *by the same person* and *at the same time*? As this interview was conducted at a relatively early stage of the project, it could be suggested that the interviewee did not yet feel sufficient 'ownership' of the overall project, perhaps did not feel confident of the potential of the overall initiative to produce tangible, measurable outcomes.

³ West Midlands Arts (2001) *Caring with Books in the West Midlands: funding application to DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund*, pp.1-2.

It is therefore possible to improve the quality of data collected by approaching the questions of the research in more than one way.

2.1 The initial interview

As mentioned above, in December 2001 library staff and members of the project management group were asked to state whether they felt that the project objectives were realistic, in other words whether those objectives outlined in the original funding application could reasonably be achieved during the period of the project.

Perhaps the first point to make is that representatives from both local authorities and the project management group felt that the fact that the project had begun at all was a positive step towards achieving the intended outcomes:

'Funding is often awarded to a project to 'kick start' or 'boost' activities or work, usually in response to a need being identified.'
[Project manager]

'We are on the road to achieving sustainable change.' [Library staff]

One member of the project management group suggested that the objectives were perhaps not sufficiently clear:

'We needed to have harder outcomes: none of them are very measured. I would like to have some tangible outcomes.' [Project manager]

A second claimed that the project was perhaps too ambitious in its objectives:

'[There are] too many authorities and an expectation to do too much with too many service points.' [Project manager]

However, the same person felt that despite the written objectives all parties probably expected that 'the outcomes of the project would be fairly limited.'

Other parties supported this view, stating that they expected that any change would be slowly achieved, given the limited amount of research and preparation before the project began due to the brief overall timescale. For example, when asked how they expected library staff to respond to the project, comments made by both librarians and members of the project management group were cautious:

'There are some things we can change quite easily, but...we have to tread quite carefully...' [Library staff]

'It's the same as in any sector - some will [change their attitude towards services to children in public care], and some won't. In my opinion, the senior managers are more likely to change, as they have to justify policy, they have to carry out certain actions, to tick certain boxes. For people on the ground, it takes longer to change.' [Project manager]

Furthermore, almost all parties felt that reaching the target group of Caring with Books was one of the key challenges of the project, and that objectives within this area must be realistic. Comments made included the following:

'This is a difficult project: it's all about communication, changing opinion, marketing libraries in a positive way to young people.' [Project manager]

'...this is a difficult group to work with.' [Project manager]

'One of the most difficult things is setting up the relationships with the children...' [Project manager]

2.2 Objectives of individual authorities

The evaluator felt that it would be a useful exercise to ask the participating library authorities to comment not only on the original project objectives but

to summarise their own anticipated outcomes, what they as an individual authority would like to have achieved by the end of the funded period of Caring with Books. As might have been expected, many common themes emerged in their responses, although there were also a number of objectives peculiar to individual authorities.

2.2.1 Common themes

A priority of all library staff questioned was unsurprisingly to establish and maintain contact with the target group and its carers:

Young people:

'We have a responsibility to children in public care, so we have taken on this project, and they are our major target group.' [Library staff]

'This group is hard to target: we want to develop contact points, with the departments and with the children themselves.' [Library staff]

'Different ways to get them [children in public care] to borrow books and use the library.' [Library staff]

'...sustained support for children in care.' [Library staff]

'...letting [young] people know what services are provided by the library.' [Library staff]

Carers:

'Looking at foster carers - we need to know what they want. We need to get to the carers, they are a bit of a barrier.' [Library staff]

'...finding out what the foster carers would like from the library service.' [Library staff]

'...[to have] more foster families using the libraries and with a better understanding of the service.' [Library staff]

Participating library staff also hoped to raise the awareness of their colleagues at all levels of the organisation in terms of working with young people in public care. This awareness raising could be developed simply through participation in the project, or more specifically through training programmes:

'Providing us with information and developing the skills of our staff.' [Library staff]

'Looking at staff attitudes towards the young people.' [Library staff]

'To obtain training for library staff to raise awareness.' [Library staff]

'[There is a] training need...so the staff can receive help in how to handle the situations, in talking to the young people and passing on what they've said [to other staff].' [Library staff]

A key point to be made concerning the training element of the initiative is that the focus of training programmes was determined by the members of the cluster groups. Working with the project coordinator, they identified training needs for themselves and their colleagues, and in a number of cases suggested suitable trainers and/or ideas for training sessions.

A third theme commonly raised was that of developing partnerships through Caring with Books. In most cases authorities had developed partnerships with other relevant agencies prior to the project, but all agreed that these could be improved in order to be sustained:

'I would like to improve partnerships on the periphery, to develop better relations with Social Services and Education. We could be working together more.' [Library staff]

'I will be happy if [by the end of the project] we are making some impact, and providing support to other organisations.' [Library staff]

'Building up partnerships in developing the Social Services link; we have had partnerships in the past with Education and Youth Services, but not

with Social Services...I recognise that Social Services are understaffed, and working under pressure, but this project should be useful for them too, as we will be able to develop sustainable partnerships.' [Library staff]

A fourth key objective was to use the project as a means of increasing social inclusion. For example, one librarian simply wanted 'to improve social inclusion'; a second hoped that the project could be used 'to overcome the rurality of the authority', and a third talked of 'uncovering the barriers that exist, preventing us from reaching these groups':

'...we are looking at the whole area of social inclusion, and are doing work currently on membership fees and charges, so this work will hopefully show that we are trying to meet a need in this area.' [Library staff]

2.3 The transferability of individual objectives

Additional objectives that were stated by individual respondents could be usefully applied to other participating authorities:

- *Publicity for individual authorities, containing 'specific things to say to children in particular authorities.'*
- *To produce materials not only within the library but to 'get materials into the home.'*
- *Tangible outcomes - talking of having 'a reward' for children, and making the project 'fun.'*
- *One respondent stated that she would like the young people to be given a book via the project: 'book ownership is very important.'*
- *'Reading friends' schemes.'*
- *'To find potential projects to launch the project in February.'*

2.4 The second interview

In July 2002, towards the end of the originally funded period, library staff and members of the project management group were again asked to give their views of the extent to which project objectives had been achieved.

Positively, one member of the project management group stated that 'we have exceeded our targets', and a second felt that the greatest achievement of the project was that a large number of library staff had been involved in the training element of the initiative:

'We initially anticipated that 50 librarians would be skilled up as a result of the project; that appears from my perspective to have happened...There are a good number of public librarians being freed up to get involved.' [Project manager]

A third gave a more cautious response, noting the difficulty of developing and sustaining cross-sectoral partnerships:

'This has been going reasonably well: it's incredibly hard to maintain the partnerships. That's the nature of this sort of work, isn't it? There was definitely a difficulty with starting the Social Services partnerships: they have lots of job vacancies, and are currently re-structuring their service. That's the nature of it.' [Project manager]

For the library staff, the development of partnerships was of the greatest concern. The general view was that partnerships had taken longer to develop than they had perhaps anticipated, and that as a result fewer young people had been directly contacted than they had originally hoped:

'That's a difficult question: at the beginning of the project you're not quite sure who your contacts are going to be...So I would say 'yes' but qualify it. We haven't done as many of the things we would have wanted to. We're actually now meeting people...we're reaching some of the target audience.' [Library staff]

'...as regards the target audience, they've been elusive. So far I've not actually got to grips with a single child! I'm sure this will come in time, but first of all you have to make the partnership, and then you have to meet the parents and the social workers, and only then do you get access to the children. So it's all taking much longer than any of us thought it might.' [Library staff]

'Most of it, yes...I've reached Social Services and foster carers...I'm hoping to, but I haven't actually talked to the children themselves...'
[Library staff]

'It's been quite slow getting going, but I'm not worried: I know we have to do a drip-drip approach. We have had some open evenings with no attendance. We haven't reached as big an audience as we would have hoped - that we know of! Children have come in to the library, on an individual basis, but they would probably have come in in any case.'
[Library staff]

Overall, library staff felt that despite a perceived lack of tangible, calculable outcomes, participation in the project had prepared the way for future achievement:

'Yes, it's all taking slightly longer than anticipated...but we're pretty confident about the links that we've made, especially with Social Services, who've been very helpful...we're setting a solid foundation. I'm happy with the way things are developing in terms of making the long-term strategy work...I don't see a brick wall, I just think it's something that will develop over a period of time.' [Library staff]

'...we didn't have a relationship before with some of these key people in Social Services particularly, so now we do know people and we've had lots of conversations, and the networking's much better...that can only get better...so we're pleased about that.' [Library staff]

'It's been slow to start, but I feel that we've got a grip on it now and it's starting to move. It's an ever-changing thing, [but] we've now got good contacts with Education and Social Services...' [Library staff]

3. The impact of the initiative on library staff

As the focus of the evaluation of the Caring with Books in the West Midlands initiative was on the impact of participation on the library staff, this section was crucial. In order to ensure both quality and quantity of data, interviews were conducted with a wide range of stakeholders.

3.1 Dissemination of the initiative

It was felt to be necessary to investigate the extent to which project management group members, librarians and social workers perceived that the project had permeated the local authority. This information was collected in order to determine what each stakeholder understood by the term 'cascading', whether they felt it to be the simple relaying of information about a project, or whether it is more wide scale, involving other staff in training programmes and receiving sufficient resources to involve them in its day-to-day operation.

The general view of the library staff was that their colleagues were aware of the initiative, but it was very unlikely that they had been involved in the work:

'Not largely [involved in the day-to-day running], no. We're a select little band!' [Library staff]

'Everybody has known about it, but probably haven't been involved in the day-to-day running.' [Library staff]

'Other library staff have been briefed about the project.' [Library staff]

'Reasonably aware...we have regular briefings here which are for all our team leaders.' [Library staff]

'Hopefully everybody has heard of the project...it's been about awareness raising.' [Library staff]

'...it has opened all our eyes, has developed an awareness and an understanding.' [Library staff]

Members of the project management group gave a similarly cautious response:

'I'm not sure that it's been cascaded sufficiently...the primary agents of change [i.e. the principal project representatives] have taken a little time to get to grips with the basic principles of the project. It's not clear yet [i.e. in July 2002] how that is to be shared with a wider range of librarians.' [Project manager]

'The children's staff are aware of it, and staff in places where there might be a children's home. The Chiefs are fairly closely involved now, but it has taken a lot of work to get to this stage.' [Project manager]

For a third project management group representative, the extent to which project information was disseminated varied according to the project management skills of the staff involved:

'I think that it has been varied, probably due to the experience of the people involved, as well as the time available...some library staff have made it clear that they are not used to managing projects internally, so they may find that networking and disseminating information internally is not a natural part of their normal work. I think others have excelled in cascading, and I think once they could actually see a structure and how it fitted together, they ran with it.' [Project manager]

The Caring with Books in the West Midlands initiative offered training to representatives from each of the participating local authorities, but in almost all cases additional training was provided within the individual library services. The nature and extent of this training varied considerably, as the following examples illustrate:

'We've...got a training day planned which will be Social Services and librarian...' [Library staff]

'They are fully aware, all have been involved in training days, have been involved in planning on rotation, have been to meetings with the area foster teams.' [Library staff]

Library staff referred to three difficulties involved in including colleagues in training, in terms of staffing difficulties, geographical limitations and a lack of motivation due to 'saturation':

'I think we've been disappointed that more staff haven't attended training days. I don't think it's necessarily been inertia, or disinterest, I think it's just that there are so few staff anyway, and we still have single staff branches here...' [Library staff]

'...we are such a huge rural spread that you can't get staff together. They can't be let out off the enquiry desk...so at the moment I would say it's not good [awareness].' [Library staff]

'...it's hard to reach all staff. The training was available to all staff, but probably a dozen attended each [session]...another problem is that [authority] is geographically so spread out.' [Library staff]

'If all else fails, everybody has a half-hour training slot...we have foster carers and Social Services coming, we have asked for volunteer staff to attend. I have said that anybody working with children or young people ought to come along. It's hard work, though, because of the overkill with training. Staff are reaching saturation point.' [Library staff]

3.2 Perceived changes in confidence and attitude

A clear message to emerge from the evaluator's contact with the participating library staff has been that parties expected that change as a result of Caring with Books in the West Midlands would be achieved slowly, both in terms of the response of the target group to the work of the project, and in terms of the response of the staff themselves to the need, and even the relevance, of this piece of work. To repeat an earlier comment (2.1) made by a project manager:

'This is a difficult project: it's all about communication, changing opinion, marketing libraries in a positive way to young people.'

One of the key areas of interest to the evaluator was the investigation of staff confidence levels: have they altered as a result of work on the Caring with Books in the West Midlands project? An example of changing confidence levels

can be taken from the findings of the second Caring with Books in the West Midlands staff training day in April 2002. Of the 37 delegates who completed the evaluation forms, when asked to state whether they now felt 'more' or 'less' confident working with young people aged 13-19 years, the results were that thirty felt more confident, nobody felt less confident, and just seven felt that their confidence levels had remained unchanged.

One librarian participant reported that as a result of the training she had received she had learned techniques of being:

'More confident and not to be frightened of making a fool of myself.'
[Library staff]

Two of the library staff interviewed in July 2002 felt that working on the project had not led to any particular increase in confidence in delivering a service to the target group:

'I don't think so yet, no...it's a tough area, and staff do find it tough, and there aren't enough young faces in libraries.' [Library staff]

'...as a general rule, no.' [Library staff]

All other interviewees gave a more positive response, four stating for example that their staff had already been confident, but nonetheless benefited from additional training and involvement in work of this nature:

'I would hope that they were confident before the project started - but it's about how they've changed it [the service].' [Library staff]

'Generally, I don't think they weren't confident before, I'm fairly confident about my staff being quite happy...there's always the odd person, but on the whole I would say the staff are pretty good.' [Library staff]

'...the people who've got involved in the project were reasonably confident working with young people anyway...but some of the

particular issues about children in public care, and the fact that you can't generalise about things like educational attainment [i.e. that children in public care will inevitably be 'low achievers' at school], that's been quite interesting for people.' [Library staff]

'I didn't ever feel that they were under-confident. There are lots of examples of good practice to be found, and they have lots of experience working with socially excluded groups. We already had to be adaptable, we just had to adapt to the new target group.' [Library staff]

Perhaps inevitably, the general opinion was that only those members of staff directly involved were more confident, and that changes throughout the service were hoped for the future:

'...for general library staff, unless they're personally involved it's difficult for them to realise what it's like to be in care, but a couple of them have been relating really well to the children.' [Library staff]

'...I think we've still got some training to put in, and I think we will achieve it...' [Library staff]

'Those who have been on the training are [more confident]...I still think that there are staff who can't deal with children being in libraries! There are a lot of obstacles to get over or round, but we're not going to give up.' [Library staff]

In order to detect change in confidence or attitude on the part of the library staff, it is clearly necessary to obtain the opinions not only of the participants in question, but also to assess how others perceive them:

- Did others involved in the Caring with Books in the West Midlands initiative detect changes in confidence or attitude on the part of the participating library staff?
- Did they feel that young people in public care and their carers were now being offered an improved level of service?

It was the view of the project partners that library staff confidence levels had increased. In one case, this was attributed to the cluster group working structure of the Caring with Books initiative:

'...from [my] personal contact with cluster members, their attitude... definitely seems more confident: they're more on target, they feel that they have the knowledge now to talk to social workers...they realise that there's something to learn [about the sector] all the time...they feel better equipped to deal with it now...' [Partner]

'Absolutely yes: if some of the submissions of practice at the Caring with Books conference [28th June 2002] are anything to go by, if they are representative of what's happening all over the project, there has been a real increase in confidence. There is also a group ethos: they are inspiring each other, and are spurred on, each to try to learn from each other. The cluster group is a good model, it works well.' [Partner]

Although Social Services representatives felt that the Caring with Books initiative had not yet reached significant numbers of the target group, they did acknowledge that the library staff were now more confident and more aware of issues concerning young people in public care:

'It [the project] has made them [the library staff] think a little bit differently about the young people.' [Partner]

'Undoubtedly, they are now far more aware of the children, of what's happening in Solihull. They have a heightened awareness. However, it's early days. It's about obtaining information. They [the library staff] can have a lack of confidence that's due to their ignorance, to not knowing people's needs.' [Partner]

'Four or five library staff come to us for meetings, and I've seen the change in them, because I have seen the enthusiasm, and they wanted to have some input, so that's been very positive, so I'm hoping that that will infiltrate to other members of staff.' [Partner]

In response to a question concerning their own raised awareness (and that of the young people and their carers) as a result of the work of the library staff, Social Services representatives made the following comments:

'I think that it's too early to say...later, though, we can talk to foster carers and say 'Did you use the library? Did you use the activities that were set up?'' [Partner]

'...foster carers have come away from meeting the librarians saying 'I didn't know that!'' [Partner]

'I would think so, but we're still very much towards the beginning of the process...we've got input into the news letters and to the key social workers, and there have been some special events at the libraries as well, which some of them have gone to, not great numbers, and this is the difficulty when you're asking people to come out...I think the Social Services themselves who are dealing with the foster carers certainly will be much more aware after the project.' [Partner]

3.2.1 Commitment

Interestingly, the project partners made the majority of comments concerning suggested ways in which library staff could contribute to the overall success of the project. They recognized the need for staff at all levels of the organizational structure to be committed to its continuation:

'The same difficulties always come up when you try to work regionally: you can get the chiefs to sign up, but getting people to realise what that means in terms of commitment is very difficult. After a short time you can see that the impetus is disappearing, for example due to staff changes at the operational end.' [Partner]

In addition to the need for commitment to work conducted during the funded period of the project, partners also underlined the need to commit to working beyond that time:

'In terms of after the first year, ultimately [the] library authorities are going to have to make cases for part of the budget for work with that community group, to look for funding from NOF or other...lottery resources.' [Partner]

'In terms of making it sustainable, we need to get to a point where the libraries are doing it themselves.' [Partner]

Individuals from both library authorities and project partnerships felt that commitment to the project period and beyond would lead to attitudinal change on the part of those involved:

'[We] hope that involvement with residential units and foster carers means that the intrinsic value of story and reading is recognized and that they will encourage and support the young people in their care in the use of libraries for story, information and multi-media.' [Library staff]

'There is no reason why it [Caring with Books] shouldn't be sustainable, but it depends on people's motivation, on how much effort they are prepared to put into making things last. If they can see and understand the deeper reason of reading with young people, that would be more sustainable, rather than organising isolated events...This underlines the difference between reader development and simply promotional activities.' [Partner]

It is also notable that the library staff interviewed by the evaluator have confirmed that where barriers are being removed, for example in terms of library membership procedures, the confidence of staff in providing a service to the target group is also increasing:

'I would hope that they were confident before the project started - but it's about how they've changed it [the service]...We have raised awareness... As a result of this project we are now more aware.' [Library staff]

3.3 The extent of senior management support

In investigating the extent to which participants felt that senior managers had supported the initiative, a distinction was made between support offered verbally and that which is more 'tangible', for example in terms of providing resources, releasing staff to work on a project, asking for regular updates and expecting to be involved as the project progresses.

Interviewed in July 2002, members of the project management group were generally positive, suggesting that senior managers were involved to at least some extent. However, two interviewees recognised the difficulty of obtaining *sustained* management support, support that goes beyond the initial contract signing:

'I think the project has worked both top-down and bottom-up...obviously senior management had to agree to the project initially, so the commitment was there to a certain extent, whether they realised exactly how much it would influence and take over so much of the work that that person was going to do, I just don't know.' [Project manager]

'From the outset there has been an element of signing up, but in terms of value I hope they are not planning to leave just one or two individuals working on it [after September]...Very often with this kind of project they start with a burst of energy and enthusiasm and then move on to the next initiative.' [Project manager]

At the same time, it was felt that as the Caring with Books initiative had developed, it had become sufficiently significant to attract the attention of senior managers, and had convinced them of its value to their organisation and its impact on the target group:

'...certainly Caring with Books as it has gathered momentum...cannot fail to come to the attention of senior managers...the conference [June 28th] was all part of securing that support.' [Project manager]

'The Chiefs are fairly closely involved now, but it has taken a lot of work to get to this stage. The 28th June [conference] was an important day; you could see that the project was beginning to have sufficient status in their eyes. You have to do things to raise the profile.' [Project manager]

With only one exception, all participating library staff felt that they had received the support of their senior managers throughout their work on the Caring with Books initiative. However, it is interesting that where the most support was given, interviewees suggested that it would have been available if

the project had not existed, that it was part of the culture that already existed within the local authority:

'We've talked about our Social Inclusion action plan: it's not very clearly defined, but I think it was a feeling from the start that this was a project that would help us to address some of that for a particular client group.' [Library staff]

'Our library management team has been very positive about the membership and joining issues, and there weren't any real problems with getting that changed. Our county librarian is very keen on the project and sees it as a very important thing anyway, so whether it's because of the social inclusion agenda or whether it isn't, they're still being very supportive.' [Library staff]

In the remaining cases, verbal support was felt to be present, and more tangible support available 'on request', although resources were limited:

'There's a shortage of staff, the usual problems really. Even though we've had the [project] funding, it has still been a problem to do everything. But the support is there.' [Library staff]

'I would have liked more of their time...they've released me one day per week from my normal duties, I have had five other possible people who could help but they weren't released from their duties to do it, so they're finding it a little bit more difficult...within the conflicts and constraints, I think they've done what they could.' [Library staff]

'...if you have a project, you run it! There's not a lot of feedback. They're not going to stand in the way, and when it comes to removing barriers, the commitment is there - the system is set up to cope with that.' [Library staff]

'The support would have been there had we wanted more support.' [Library staff]

4. Monitoring the impact on the target group

Although the focus of the evaluation of Caring with Books was on the participating library staff, a key objective of an initiative involving the provision of services to young people in public care is to determine the impact of those services on that target group. The original project proposal stated that there were 7,000 young people in care in the West Midlands, although did not cite a target number to be reached. Consequently, there were no statistics available to quantify the number of young people reached by the project.

Participants were nonetheless hopeful of measuring the impact on the target group. As one librarian commented at an early stage of the project:

'I would also like to find out long-term what had happened to these children, what impact the project had on their lives.' [Library staff]

Individuals from both library authorities and project partnerships felt, however, that evidence of such an impact would be difficult or even impossible to obtain:

'The difficulty will be tracking whether the project has been a success.' [Library staff]

'It's a bit like saying how effective is your marketing? You can't measure that.' [Partner]

They also underlined a potential complication in terms of monitoring the impact of an initiative involving this particular target group, namely that it may not be possible to identify individuals reached by the project. One librarian predicted that one of the two target locations would be easier to reach - and to monitor - than the other:

'Homes are easier to target than foster families: we always have to think about the data protection problem with families.' [Library staff]

A second asked:

'How do you know if children in care have come to an event?' [Library staff]

Could you ask members of an audience at an event to state whether they were in public care, for monitoring purposes? One librarian reported that within her authority this issue of data protection had led to concern regarding the promotion of the project:

'[The] concern expressed now is confidentiality. This may be a future problem and [may] reflect the way events can be reported in the media.' [Library staff]

Although both project partners and authority representatives were concerned that it would not perhaps be reasonable to expect members of the target group to identify themselves as participants in project initiatives, others felt that this was too cautious. One librarian said, for example, that in her experience:

'Children in classrooms are quite happy to talk about being in a single parent family, or from broken homes etc.' [Library staff]

A second agreed, suggesting that the problem lay not in asking young people to identify themselves as being 'in care', but in expecting them to live or behave in a certain way, simply because of their background:

'What I tend to find is that quite often people identify themselves, but don't like being labelled.' [Library staff]

It was generally felt that evaluating the impact of individual library services on the target group would be problematic:

'...tracking is very difficult: the numbers could be quite small, it will be difficult to make perceptible change to enquiries or visits or issues.'
[Library staff]

However, one project partner suggested a potential means of reducing the difficulty:

'We can just keep a close eye on who we are in contact with throughout the project.' [Partner]

A second librarian thought that a more direct way to monitor the impact on the target audience would be to contact other local government departments:

'Provided that Social Services and Education are OK with it, they can tell us who the children in care are.' [Library staff]

She then thought that it would be possible to consult library membership records in order to send a direct mail shot to potentially interested parties.

A further point to be made here is that the Caring with Books team did not only focus on young people in public care as one body, but recognised and identified the needs of particular groups within the overall target group with, for example:

- The Leavers' Group - 14 to 16 year olds
- The Carers' training needs - libraries providing books to support their training as a carer.

As a member of the project management group observed:

'...the project has identified the additional needs of the sector and has taken them on board to think about future development.'

In July 2002, three representatives from such local government departments (Social Services and Education) gave their views regarding the extent to which

young people had been reached by the project. Their views confirm the views expressed above, that the twelve funded months were an insufficient time during which to develop and embed partnerships, change policies and systems *and* effectively reach the target group. However, they projected that this would occur at a later stage:

'I think that it's too early to say [that the young people have been reached]: later, though, we can talk to foster carers and say 'did you use the library? Did you use the activities that were set up?'' [Partner]

'...we're at the early stages. The one problem that there has been with this is the rush, because it's timetabled within a certain period, and trying to kick start everything within that period has made for difficulties.' [Partner]

'They [young people and their carers] need to find out a lot more: we need to find a forum for explaining what's available [from the library service]. The authority has made the leaflet⁴, and that's a good start.' [Partner]

Promotional events organized during the funded period of Caring with Books were also regarded by both librarians and project partners as an effective means of evaluating the impact of the project as a whole. As one librarian suggested:

'I think there will need to be some up-front events, so that we can see who's coming.' [Library staff]

A second librarian also thought that it would be feasible to monitor the impact via the events themselves,

'...by asking those who attended where they were from...I don't think that this would be a problem.' [Library staff]

However, a more cautious recommendation was provided by a third librarian, who suggested that the Social Services department could be requested to keep

the library authority informed regarding, for example, the number of young people they thought would be attending an event. Perhaps Social Services would themselves be able to accompany the young people to the events, thereby removing the difficulty of monitoring?

Despite the obvious concern that it would be difficult to calculate the number of young people effectively reached by the Caring with Books project, certain participants also felt that results obtained regarding the quality of the experience were perhaps more valuable than any statistical data:

'If we manage to reach one or two children in a qualitative way, we've done something. There are no quick wins...' [Library staff]

4.1 Perceptions of the public library service

At an early stage of the initiative, in November 2001, the Project Coordinator met a group of young people in public care in order to ask for their views not of the project but of the public library service in general. Were there any negative issues that they wanted to raise? Did they have any suggestions for a better service? Examples of their responses are given below:

Negative issues raised:

- Worry concerning previous unpaid fines
- An uninteresting, too-quiet environment
- Library staff generally much older than them
- Inappropriate opening hours, difficulty of access
- Foster carers and link workers fail to promote libraries.

⁴ Foster carers' leaflet - see Appendix G

Suggestions for an improved service:

- To distribute more information via schools, youth clubs, care homes
- To open libraries on Sundays
- To offer an 'amnesty period' for those young people with overdue books
- To provide 'drop-off' points for book returns in e.g. supermarkets, video shops, McDonald's, schools
- To offer mobile library stopping points at e.g. youth clubs, care homes
- To create a young people's library newsletter
- To provide an area in the library that encourages visits by young people 'for other reasons'
- To improve customer care - 'some library staff often seem unfriendly'
- To involve young people on planning groups, e.g. for library activities.

5. The public library service

5.1 Library policy or systems changes

A more tangible outcome of the Caring with Books in the West Midlands initiative is where library policy or systems changes have occurred as a direct result of the project. This section notes changes that took place during the funded period, but also planned changes that the project began to set in motion.

When interviewed in December 2001, four project participants expressed an interest in developing or enhancing library services to children in public care as a means of sustaining the work of the Caring with Books project. Two people hoped to reach the young people via revised library membership policy or procedures:

'Any new procedures for membership introduced for this project to be continued so that this type of artificial barrier to library use for [children in public care] is permanently removed.' [Library staff]

'I hope that we can encourage library membership: if, at the end of the project we still have barriers, we will have failed.' [Project manager]

Following a meeting with all its staff participating in the project, a second library authority reported that it regarded certain elements of the project as sustainable, namely:

- *'deposit collections at homes*
- *book sharing as [an] accepted part of carers' training*
- *change in procedures to aid social inclusion.'*

A representative from this authority planned to bring these issues to regional meetings for further discussion.

One member of the project management group felt that it would be beneficial if all library authorities involved young people in public care and their foster families or residential carers in family reading initiatives:

'It would be good to see libraries focusing on family learning as part of that activity. This would make [library] staff aware how difficult things are for these children.' [Project manager]

Eight months later, had these projected changes taken place? Library staff were asked to state whether there had been any changes in library policy systems (or whether any such changes were planned) as a direct or indirect result of the Caring with Books initiative, for example in terms of joining policies, borrowing rights, stock acquisition or library services.

Encouragingly, many changes had already taken place, as the following examples illustrate:

5.1.1 Joining policies

'As a result of this project we are now more aware, we have now decided that when a looked-after child joins the library and his/her details are put on the PC, they are entered in a different way, and the [library membership] letter that goes out is different.' [Library staff]

'We have changed our joining policy; [we now have] special tickets for foster families and residential units.' [Library staff]

'The joining procedure and concessions have changed.' [Library staff]

'We have put together a foster carer's ticket.' [Library staff]

'We made a policy statement about foster carers [no fines for or defaulting to foster carers], to encourage them to act as guarantors for children in foster care.' [Library staff]

An extract from this policy statement⁵ reads as follows:

⁵ The full version of this policy statement is included as Appendix H

'The proposal is that we make a policy decision that in these circumstances, foster carers will not be eligible for fines or replacement costs of books borrowed by a child they have been fostering, where it is neither appropriate nor possible to retrieve the books. Obviously this also applies to the child...so that they are not defaulted, but can continue to use their ticket if they move on to another foster carer in Solihull, or indeed back to their family. We are asking that staff use their discretion, but always with the aim of encouraging and facilitating future use of the library.'

Another local authority had targeted all foster carers within the region with a leaflet⁶ containing the following text:

'If you are a foster carer registered with [name] County Council you can have a Special Library Ticket which may be used at any [authority] library...Just bring along some official identification. You can borrow up to 25 books (and up to 6 story cassettes) for twelve weeks at a time. The ticket is to enable you to introduce the children you look after to the library, and to borrow books for them to enjoy in your home.'

5.1.2 Borrowing rights

'The barriers are coming down: you can now return items to any library in the authority.' [Library staff]

'Our overdue charges have been waived.' [Library staff]

'We took a decision at Library Management Group that foster carers wouldn't be charged fines or defaulted if a child went off with their library books.' [Library staff]

'Now, young people in care, their carers and foster parents will not be charged for damage or fines, they will not have follow-up letters.' [Library staff]

⁶ Foster Carers' Leaflet included as Appendix G

5.1.3 Stock acquisition

'We've brought stock with the Caring with Books money for use by the two local authority care homes...others will be used by the fostering social workers to take out to families...we've also bought some curriculum-based books which the integration support teachers, who are members of the looked-after children team in the Education Department will be using with looked-after children to support their schoolwork...and I think when it comes to looking at general library stock, I'm more aware when I look at a title now, 'oh, that might be useful for a looked-after child', it's just an awareness thing, isn't it?' [Library staff]

5.1.4 Library services

'I think things are changing slowly. Opening hours are improving here because of the Standards [Library Standards], so we were closed on Saturday afternoon, which was a big problem for young people in the area.' [Library staff]

'We have a family centre which is for children at risk...we already gave them a service but we're extending that service to give them some more books...we've also set up a little library area for them as well.' [Library staff]

A representative of one library service reported that changes had been made in all of the above areas, and that such changes were all directly attributable to the Caring with Books initiative:

'The project has affected all those things: they [young people joining the library] now don't have to have a parental signature, there are no fines, there is no charge for missing or damaged books.' [Library staff]

She believed that the model developed during the year of the project was transferable to other priority areas of the library service:

'This [change] will move to other socially excluded groups, so it's going to grow.' [Library staff]

The Caring with Books in the West Midlands project was funded for twelve months only, and in many cases the majority of this period was required to develop and embed partnerships before concentrating on reaching the target group. The evaluation therefore also included an investigation of projected changes, developments that library staff hoped would occur in the near future. One librarian referred to future promotional plans:

'Because of the numbers [of young people] coming in [to the libraries] we haven't really started on that [making changes]. We will have leaflets to send to particular families - we're trying to develop them - to encourage them to come in and read for pleasure. This is part of the plan, and we will also have summer reading activities and author activities.' [Library staff]

A second planned to remove charges for overdue items over the next year, thereby hoping to encourage more children in public care and their carers to use the library service:

'We are thinking for next year about trying to scrap fines for children, but of course that will affect all children, not just children in foster care.' [Library staff]

A third, who had previously mentioned that library users could now return borrowed items to any library within the authority, commented on projected changes to borrowing rights for young people and their carers, whereby this system would be introduced at a regional rather than local level. This would potentially remove the current difficulty faced by many young people in public care who are frequently required to move from one residential or foster home to another, which could feasibly be in another local authority:

'We would like to do reciprocal work with neighbouring authorities: when items are returned to a neighbouring authority...we hope that when a child moves on, they can take their books with them, and the books can be returned to another library at another date.' [Library staff]

This issue of having a cross-regional approach was raised by two other library representatives. One suggested that there should be a 'blanket' strategy that all library authorities could then adapt, in order that each local authority has the same membership and acquisitions policies, and offers the same services to its users. As she explained:

'It's about the whole of libraries: we are going to raise awareness. The issues around joining, fining, providing a guarantor affect every library service.' [Library staff]

She felt that this approach was particularly suited to the current political environment, and the recent Government influence on library policy and practice:

'Social inclusion is a very important part of the Government agenda, so shouldn't there be a blanket rule? Surely having something across the country should be possible...especially with Library Standards, Best Value, etc...?' [Library staff]

However, when this proposal was put to a second librarian, the reaction was that this was not necessarily a good idea, and moreover that it was extremely unlikely that such a significant change would occur in the near future:

'I don't know, that takes a lot of goodwill. My initial reaction would be 'we're not uniform, we don't do anything in the same way as each other, so why would I think that it would be possible to serve this particular group in a uniform way?' I think that it would be extremely difficult, and that's not saying that everybody isn't doing something, and that there isn't a fair measure of goodwill, but it isn't the pattern, is it? No, not in the near future I wouldn't think.' [Library staff]

5.2 Suggested changes to the current public library service

This section will provide an overview of participants' comments concerning the library service in general - not only within their own local authority, but in all public libraries: what, if any, changes could be made to the public library

service to effectively meet the needs of children in public care and their carers?

Many of the issues raised by interviewees had already been covered in the previous section, but a number of suggestions were also made that moved beyond policies and systems, to the wider considerations of service provision. For ease of reference, these considerations can be divided into the following areas:

- Reaching the target audience
- Outreach work
- Attitudinal change: library staff
- Team working
- General service provision.

5.2.1 Reaching the target audience

Many interviewees felt that working on the Caring with Books initiative had demonstrated the difficulty of reaching the target group.

For some, the difficulty was that young people in public care are often difficult to locate. One stated, for example, that even when foster carers and residential homes had been contacted, there remained a large number of young people beyond the immediate reach of the Social Services departments:

'I think that now we are aware that there are children in care who are hidden in terms of being in private care homes about which we knew nothing before the project started. I was not aware that there were all these children being bussed around the country to private care homes in quite large quantities who were actually nothing to do with the Social Services department.' [Library staff]

In order to reach these young people, she felt that the public library service should make a concerted effort:

'...to at least mail out to those private care homes and say 'look, we're here, if you want to bring the children to us or you want some input from us', because I don't think those private care homes have ever used us.' [Library staff]

A second librarian also felt that the existing library service was not effectively reaching young people in public care:

'Existing practices can deter young people and are not generally socially inclusive.' [Library staff]

A Social Services representative reported that she and her colleagues had accompanied young people to local libraries and bookshops in order to encourage them to develop a reading habit:

'The main hurdle is to get them into the library! We are taking groups into the library and showing them bookshops and libraries: it's a question of familiarisation. It's a rural county, so this is always very difficult.' [Partner]

This need for familiarisation was repeated by a member of the project management group:

'[Library staff should] think 'What is it that will bring readers to interesting books?' I think the capacity to listen and learn before diving in, it's about finding out their needs...' [Project manager]

Other interviewees, however, felt that the issue of reaching the target group should be approached with caution, that all young people should expect to receive the same level of service. Interestingly, in all but one case, these views were expressed by Social Services or Education department representatives rather than library staff:

'I think that all children have an entitlement to the same kind of services as their peers...we have to make sure that they are accessible to all children...I think that we may have to make more of an effort to

reach out to foster carers...but I don't think that there is anything particular: you have to be very careful, because they are ordinary children whose family circumstances happen to be perhaps more complicated for a particular time.' [Library staff]

'I don't think it's just about how the librarians work with the children, as I don't think they should be treated any differently. I don't think it should make any difference to the service you receive, whether you're in care or not.' [Partner]

'We have to be very careful with this one: the children in public care undoubtedly have additional needs but there is a very fine line to tread: we must treat them as young people first, then with their additional needs later. I think we should have the 'don't fix it if it's not broken' approach: just because they're looked after, they don't necessarily have to be treated any differently, that only leads to resentment.' [Partner]

5.2.2 Outreach work

Conversely, a second librarian felt that this specific targeting of particular user (or non-user) groups would be helpful, that posts should be created in order to reach out to areas of the community to develop for these people new areas of service provision:

'Outreach work, not just for this target group, but we would benefit from having posts specifically targeted to certain target groups, so that we're free to work outside the library buildings. It is so difficult for us to leave the building without having specific outreach posts; we need community-based, specific posts.' [Library staff]

5.2.3 Attitudinal change: library staff

One librarian felt that public library services could be limited by an excess of bureaucratic restraints, but that the situation was often exacerbated by members of staff who were reluctant to change, to adapt elements of the service to the needs of a particular target group:

'Librarians have got too much red tape, there are rules. Staff in our authority seem reluctant to bend the rules...With all the identification that you have to produce to join the library, I hope to change it, but it's policy and there are people [library staff] who think you can't have one rule for one group, and one for others.' [Library staff]

A member of the project management group also underlined a need to address library staff attitudes and levels of understanding:

'...there is a good hard core of staff who won't necessarily understand the issues, whose attitude leaves a lot to be desired. Authorities need to address this. Librarians need to think about customer care, to remember how to help the staff understand the needs of the children. Some staff have even been antagonistic, so this is not an easy one to crack.' [Project manager]

Overall, however, Social Services and Education partners were extremely positive about the attitude of the participating library staff:

'The way it [the project] was done was super...The librarians have been very cooperative, and willing to help.'

'They're very caring people, they're doing their best.'

'[Name of library contact] is extremely good, she's very enthusiastic, very keen.'

A Social Services employee suggested that where the level of service provided by library staff to young people in public care was inadequate, it was because of a lack of knowledge on their part:

'It's about obtaining information: they [the librarians] have a lack of confidence that's due to their ignorance, to not knowing people's needs.' [Partner]

A second suggested that the service provided by public libraries to young people in care would be enhanced if library staff were involved in more

training programmes in order to ensure that the above-mentioned attitudinal changes took place:

'I think they [library staff] need a lot more training...you can't segregate who's coming through the door, and how do you decide who is a child in foster care and who isn't? So really I think the library staff need training in being child-friendly.' [Partner]

The interviewer then asked this person if she felt that this was a new territory for public library staff:

'Definitely! What you've got is a little core of people who are very enthusiastic, but you've also got a lot of library staff who are very wary of children in care, and children altogether! An awful lot of training has to happen in breaking the myths around children in care, and making the library a very positive place, a haven almost...so I think it's about looking at being people-friendly, and the worry for me is segregating children who are looked after, they're just children like everybody else, but I think it's about being very open to them.' [Partner]

The interviewee felt that this subject of changing library staff attitudes towards children in public care extended to dealing with situations that may otherwise have been dealt with by security staff:

'I also think that libraries should have a strategy in place, so that if there are kids that are a problem, it's not about getting a security guard to get them out of the building, I think there have got to be strategies, to say 'well have you come in for something?'...if you antagonise the situation, they'll just come back for more...but if you're nipping it in the bud it's better.' [Partner]

5.2.4 Team working

One library representative suggested that it would be helpful to create a 'regional group', a group of representatives from all sectors supporting young people in public care, in order to maintain the momentum:

'It would help if we had a local group, with an advisory teacher, a foster carer and a librarian, to keep the ball rolling, to keep the changes going.' [Library staff]

Similarly, a Social Services employee felt that it was vital that all library service staff worked as a team to provide a high quality service to young people in public care:

'...the next thing is to make sure that all the library staff in [authority] realise that this is how it works for this particular group of children: as long as the communication's there, this will be a great bonus, it will take away another barrier.' [Partner]

5.2.5 General service provision

For one librarian, it would be impossible to resolve the difficulties of providing an effective service to young people in public care without first addressing the overall problems facing the public library service:

'...I think that all the things that are problems in libraries are problems for all children, not just children in foster care, and I think all libraries have problems looking up to date, modern...a lot of our buildings aren't very flexible as to where you put things...and then there's the cost of furniture...the problem with all libraries is resourcing the basic infrastructure, and I don't think that's just for cared for children, I think it's a general problem.' [Library staff]

6. Reader development

As cited in its original application to the DCMS Reader Development Programme, the Caring with Books in the West Midlands initiative aimed 'to encourage and promote the pleasure of reading with children in public care and their foster families and public carers⁷', and at the time of submitting the application the applicants hoped that reader development methods would be an appropriate means of doing so.

6.1 Reader development and the target group

Before describing their use of reader development methods during the Caring with Books project, interviewees were therefore asked to give their views of the appropriateness of such methods to encourage young people in public care to enjoy reading.

Respondents generally felt that reader development would be - and was - an extremely effective way of encouraging the enjoyment of reading.

Two gave a cautious response:

'It's one of the ways. I think you have to use a combination [of methods], they're just people like the rest of us, so you need a combination to hit the right notes for some of them.'

'I think it could be...yes, I think it's decidedly possible!'

Three were convinced that it was an essential tool for all library staff working with young people:

⁷ West Midlands Arts (2001) Caring with Books in the West Midlands: funding application to DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund, p.1.

'Yes, it's totally crucial! It's a non-threatening way of expanding reading horizons, it's a way in, it's enjoyable, it starts with the child and their interests.'

'Definitely: it is no use depositing collections of books [in residential homes] without backing this up with reader development.'

'The promotion of reading for pleasure is part of every library service. The difficulty is that we haven't got the staff with the time to do it.'

Library staff in a fourth local authority believed that reader development could be used with ICT to promote reading for pleasure:

'Yes, definitely. We're investigating online reading groups for teenagers. We are doing a lot of IT promotion and tend to think of it in terms of Education, but it can be used for pleasure too.'

ICT would seem to be an effective means of reaching this target group, firstly because many young people enjoy using computers and the Internet, and secondly because young people in public care are often required to move home, and the Internet is an effective, low-cost means of keeping in touch with friends and family.

6.2 Reader development as a focus of the initiative

As part of the interviews conducted in July 2002, library staff were asked to what extent reader development had been a part of their work on the Caring with Books project. Interestingly, just four of the ten interviewees felt that this element of the initiative had been developed during the funded period.

One noted the transferability of lessons learned during the work on Caring with Books to future work in other areas, and equally that previous reader development work conducted within the authority had supported the delivery of Caring with Books:

'I think it has underpinned the whole thing, really...lessons learned in Caring with Books will come in handy for reader development work in other areas, and equally work we've done in reader development beforehand has been useful for Caring with Books. It has just made us more aware of how to use books for more than one purpose, and think a bit more laterally about how we use the materials at our disposal.'
[Library staff]

In two authorities, reader development work had been conducted by library staff working directly with young people in public care to extend their reading choices, and with their foster carers to help them to do the same:

'In the children's homes, staff have worked with the children, have been discussing what books they want to read. It's quite a difficult situation, with the usual mayhem, but we are doing workshops with foster carers...[with] books that can help carers and children.' [Library staff]

'Through the work...at the [residential] home, we have had a very positive response. They've got books now, they're talking about books. We have bought books for the project and will buy more. Books are being posted out with tapes to approximately thirty carers. This will hopefully have a very positive effect on our reader development [work].'

In the remaining cases, however, interviewees reported that they had not yet fully implemented reader development methods to their work with the target group, that they had required the funded period to develop and maintain partnerships with Social Services and Education Departments and to begin to reach the young people and their carers:

'[Reader development has been an element of the project] in as much as we've involved some of the young people in choosing books for their unit, but I'm not sure it's been a major factor'

'So far it's been about building relationships, and reader development is just one hook...[in this project] I think there were other things about library services that we felt we wanted to talk about as well as reader development.'

However, it was encouraging that all planned to introduce reader development to their future work with the target group:

'Reader development is in its very early stages, we haven't really done anything specific - yet.'

'Not yet: it will be...in terms of the events we organise. The pack we distribute will be reader development focused, it will be a fun pack with activities, and we can then feed them into the projects we already have.'

'Not a whole lot yet, and that's partly due to constraints of time...it's something that I'm handing over the local children's librarians...I can't do this on my own!'

'It's coming along. I've bought story sacks...once they arrive there will be a bit of reader development around story sacks, we'll do some training with foster carers on that.'

'It will be a feature of the project once it is fully developed.'

7. Partnerships and sustainability

The evaluation of a consortium-based initiative must clearly take into account the effectiveness of partnerships developed as a result of such an initiative. For the purposes of this evaluation, effectiveness was assessed in the following terms:

- The extent and nature of links developed with external agencies as a result of the project
- Perceptions *from both sides* of how these partnerships have worked in practice
- Sustainability - how all partners envisage the future of the partnerships, after the original funded period has ended.

7.1 The nature and effectiveness of the partnerships

It should be noted here that Caring with Books in the West Midlands was a partnership project on a large scale, involving ten individual library services and their work with local Social Services and Education departments. It is perhaps inevitable, therefore, that the overall planning and coordination of such partnerships is a complex exercise. As one project manager stated towards the end of the project:

'...this was a multi-authority project, therefore some of the planning issues were more difficult...~The more partners, the more complex it is....Actively to encourage partnerships is good but it adds to the time needed.'

At an earlier stage of the project, during interviews conducted in November 2001, a degree of concern was expressed by a librarian and a member of the management group that this 'cross-departmental' aspect of the initiative - in other words, its aim to coordinate the work of multiple agencies - was proving to be problematic, perhaps even 'too ambitious'. A second member of the

project management group felt that a difficulty in developing partnerships was that each of the library services involved had 'a low base line' in terms of any partnership work they had previously conducted, and a third suggested that there was no culture within some local authorities to cooperate with other departments:

'Some authorities don't encourage partnerships within the departments, for example libraries may have worked with the Education department before, but not with Social Services.'

Others had more positive views, simply reporting that it was proving difficult to locate the appropriate people within the potential partner organisations:

'My problem so far: locating the appropriate Social Services staff...Once two key players had been identified they proved to be wonderfully helpful, supportive and interested.' [Library staff]

'I would like to improve partnerships on the periphery [i.e. outside the library service], to develop better relations with Social Services and Education. We could be working together more.' [Library staff]

Following the second Caring with Books staff training day in April 2002, participants were asked to list those activities they planned to do as a result of the training they had received. Many responses focused on the development of partnerships, thereby emphasising the importance to them of this element of the project:

- Developing partnerships with local agencies
- Developing or enhancing existing partnerships with youth and social workers
- Involving local schools in such partnerships.

In July 2002, towards the end of the funded period, library staff and representatives from Social Services or Education departments gave detailed

descriptions of the nature of the links that they had developed with each other. Examples of shared activities are listed below:

Library services and Social Services departments

- Distribution of library book stock to the residential and foster homes
- Support for Caring with Books launch events
- Invitations (to library staff) to foster carers' meetings and activities
- Joint meetings of library and Social Services senior management teams to discuss resources
- Contact with Family Placement Officers (adoption and fostering), residential unit staff, corporate parenting officers
- Library familiarisation tours offered as part of three-week social work programme with excluded children:

'...we want to get them involved in using the different places in the community...rather than it [the library] being a lonely place, there will then be identified people that they can ask for.' [Partner]

Library services and Education departments

- Regular meetings with a team of representatives
- Work with the Family Literacy Coordinator - tutors provided for family literacy sessions in the library
- Links with Education Access - joint planning of project launch on World Book Day
- Joint organisation of book selection
- Awareness-raising exercises, for example:

'Education...brought a video 'How to listen'...very powerful...and brought two girls with them who had been in care, adding their insight. This was very good for opening our eyes and seeing the other perspective. Awareness raising is very important.' [Library staff]

Library services, Social Services and Education departments

➤ Shared expertise:

'[the librarian] is really well informed about library mechanisms and books, whereas I'm perhaps better informed about the actual process of learning to read, and between the two of us we've dovetailed very well.' [Partner]

➤ Shared training programmes with the library services

➤ Shared promotion of events or services in departmental newsletters

➤ General awareness-raising:

'I think it's more that we now know what they're doing, and they know what we're doing...' [Library staff]

'We weren't aware of all the library service before...the library is very important to the carers, libraries go hand in hand with the work we do, because of the Education link.' [Partner]

'I think it's about exchanging information, they're giving us a list of activities in the library, we give them a list of things that are happening in general, so it's about networking, so that we are giving and exchanging information.' [Partner]

7.2 Sustainability: the future of the partnerships

An interesting aspect of the evaluation of the Caring with Books initiative has been the investigation of the impact of the project over time: as the evaluation began as the project began, it was possible to compare sets of data collected at different stages. One area in which this has been particularly effective is in the investigation of the potential of the partnerships to be sustained.

7.2.1 Views of the library staff

For example, interviews conducted in November 2001 with library staff and members of the project management group asked participants to comment on this, to state if they felt that partnerships would be sustained after the funded

period. At this stage the project management group had a far clearer view than the library staff of how they saw the project progressing in this area. Library staff tended to comment on planned changes to library services rather than more specifically on partnerships.

With the benefit of hindsight and further data it is reasonable to suggest that this occurred because after only four months of the project, partnerships were still at a developmental stage, and library staff were understandably unable to think in detail about their future. The project management group, however, were in a position to take a step back and make projections.

When the library staff were asked the same question in July 2002, the focus of their responses was very different, and each was able to clearly assess the likelihood of the continuation of his or her authority's links with Social Services or Education departments. A particularly detailed response is given below:

'We're planning to do something in March next year with a charity, and we have a book festival at the same time, so we're going to be doing something with the children [in public care], giving away books, and having an author. We'll be working on the Storysacks project, and we're also doing a project on Books for Special Situations. So there are several projects that will be continuing on after September, because they're only just coming together now. There's also the computer literacy project that we're doing, and the Technical college will be training some of my staff who will then become Internet Champions and will be doing one-to-ones with families.'

Encouragingly, all library staff reported that at least one aspect of the partnerships they had developed would continue. One library service had recognised the potential value of developing work with the Education department:

'I've made links with Education, to be able to organise various courses of variable length and difficulty...the will is there to do them, and Social Services is making money available for that...so after this project ends, if we want to go into the educational angle a bit more, we can do.'

Sadly, however, a second librarian said that her team had assessed the situation and decided that budgetary constraints may act as a barrier to future partnership work:

'The link with Education will not necessarily continue, based on the success of this project, so we will still have to look for external funding.'

When asked if she felt that this funding would be available, she said:

'I am hopeful, but I think it shouldn't be like this. How do you make projects part of the core service when the budget is not grown and the demand is increasing?'

It is interesting that whereas some library staff commented on the need for project work to become part of the core service provision, involving as many members of staff as possible, others expressed a wish to develop a library post whereby one person could relieve others of work and focus specifically on projects such as Caring with Books:

'I don't want to drop the relationships we've developed, we will continue doing what we can, but we have a lot of projects and we could do with somebody working with special projects. People now have more to do...'

Other ways in which library staff suggested that partnerships would continue were, for example, 'through reader development programmes', via shared newsletters, 'to promote our activities', and even by sharing meeting spaces:

'there are two groups from foster services that meet in the library: they've been doing it for a while, but now I pop my head round the door!'

7.2.2 Views of the project partners

Evidently, in order for partnerships to be sustained, all parties must be equally committed and convinced of their value to their organisation: did the project partners share the views of the library staff?

The theme of awareness-raising through the sharing of information was repeated as a key concern of Social Services and Education representatives:

'From the links we've made, we've advertised in the libraries, with displays of what we do. We weren't aware of all the library services before. We have to continue that relationship: the library is very important to the carers, libraries go hand in glove with the work we do, because of the educational link.'

'I would think so [that the partnerships are sustainable], because the pipelines are open now, and I think we've both found out more about each other and how we work, and also about Social Services, because we can all work in our own little bubble if we're not careful, can't we? There are lots of very different pockets of expertise.'

As was the case for library staff, project partners also projected that partnerships would continue through future shared training and promotional activities:

'One of the ways is that there will be more [library staff] input to foster care meetings, secondly there is going to be National Inclusion Week, and [authority] is going to take the whole month of November, so we're going to get the libraries involved in that, by putting on an activity that will involve foster carers.'

'As a team we're looking at supporting carers, at promoting an ethos with regards to education, so we offer training to all residential staff in the area. We also have ongoing training: [name of librarian] has set up an event for September/October, to ensure that foster carers, Social workers, Education and libraries will be engaged.'

A fifth interviewee underlined the view repeated elsewhere in this report that the funded period of the project had the potential to be just the first stage of a much longer initiative:

'It's definitely ongoing - but it's in the early days of development. I don't see it as at all time-limited. With projects like these, you can develop systems, then it becomes entrenched in practice.'

7.2.3 Views of the project management group

Also interviewed in July 2002, the project management group were very positive that partnerships would be sustained, but felt that it was imperative that all parties were equally committed to their continuation:

'It's a management issue [i.e. the continuation of partnerships], but also it's a personal thing, because often even the busiest person, if they want to do something they will. And I think the majority will...but it's down to personal commitment, I think.'

A second pointed to the danger of partnership continuation relying on the goodwill of individuals, rather than an entire organisation:

'The will is there to sustain them; if the contacts stay in place they will [be sustained]. In some places there are more structural changes occurring for example with newsletters being developed, which are good because they are not so dependent on the same individuals.'

Personal relations are very important because they drive it [the partnership] forward, but in this way they are so difficult to sustain. We need structural changes.'

A third felt that often a lack of funding was merely an excuse for not continuing project work, that in fact participants should be able to find ways of redirecting funds and should by the end of the funded period have reached a point where the momentum could be maintained:

'It's imperative that they are [sustained]: we should be pushing towards what could be funded after the baseline funding has dried up...we can't expect the same injection of funding, but we should be interested in redirecting budgets. Once the momentum is going, I would imagine that it would be less likely to be dropped: people have invested time and learned more. But where will be the spurt to continue pushing on? Who's the catalyst? Otherwise, it could just slow up.'

8. The project structure

8.1 Timescale of the project

The issue most frequently cited by all parties was that of the project timescale, both in terms of the length and structure of the funded period.

'I would have liked more time...we are achieving things but not to the extent that I would like to achieve things.' [Library staff]

'It has been very difficult: the money was suddenly there, and there was very little lead-in, by the time you're making in-roads it's nearly over. You're looking for a longer period: what takes the time is setting up the networks, making contacts. Time is running out!' [Library staff]

'The timescale, that puts such a pressure on them [the library staff]. I think there's a quality issue when you put a hard timescale on like that, the timescale actually becomes the driving force rather than the project itself, and that's a big mistake, I think.' [Partner]

The word 'pressure' was frequently cited in participants' feedback. Some participants, particularly library staff, were concerned that they had perhaps not been able to give as much as they would have liked to the project because of conflicting demands in other areas of their workload, pressures that could be any or all of the following:

- other DCMS Wolfson reader development projects
- New Opportunities Fund (NOF) ICT training (for the European Computer Driving Licence)
- Best Value inspection preparation
- structural reorganization.

'...there's been a huge pressure to keep it going...it's just one of a number of other things going on locally...it hasn't sat easily with local projects really...and it has added pressure, sometimes I just felt that it was too much to juggle with everything else.' [Library staff]

'we've had a lot of other pressures locally.' [Library staff]

'...there is a limit to what we can do...' [Library staff]

'One of the issues that Wolfson has to bear in mind is that there are too many other pressures on time.' [Project manager]

Although the original project outline included a three-month research and preparation period, both library staff and partners felt that this phase was too brief, particularly as this was for most library staff a new area of service provision. Over two-thirds of interviewees stated that it would have been more helpful to have had more time to prepare for the initiative, to establish initial links with potential partner organizations and to develop a working group to deliver the project. Many provided detailed, two-tiered plans, for example:

'I think that the project could work better if it had been in two phases:

Phase 1 would be establishing the interest, doing the research, developing partnerships. Because we're so pushed to spend the money with the time, it's been difficult, but [this way] we would be able to spend time doing research and consultation.

Phase Two would be creating a business plan with a budget...creating a product to encourage young people to read, and deciding what our activities are. Then we could create the product.' [Library staff]

'In an ideal world, I'd like to say 'ok, this is an agreed project, this is how I'd like it to run', and then there'd be a period, maybe three months would be the ideal time, when you could actually get all the interested parties together, and plan it before you start it, as opposed to having to plan it once you've started it! So it's a two-phase project.' [Library staff]

'[I would have liked] to have a period before, to do some ground work...three to four months before the project started. Three to four months into the project was not long enough...people were not quite knowing how the project could go forward...situation analysis needed to be done, but it's a yearly funded project, and suddenly time's ticking away and people get panicky, and think that they should be doing things....' [Project manager]

'The librarian should have had a phase of awareness raising before beginning the project work.' [Partner]

The anticipated results of this revised structure would be that participants would feel a greater sense of ownership of the project, would feel more confident when working with young people in public care, would build up trust with potential partners and would therefore achieve greater results:

'The two-phase plan...might seem a bit slow, but we'd then be more grounded, would have more ownership.' [Library staff]

'...a two-phase project...would help to clarify some of the issues before you started, and also would mean that once you got started you got further down the line faster, because for most of us I think the first three months was purely a case of hard slog of getting on the phone and making contact, all of which could have been done beforehand. Therefore once you've got started, you end up at the stage where you're meeting the carers and the families more regularly by the end of it, which is something that isn't quite happening yet.' [Library staff]

'Like everything, like an awful lot of what the Government's doing, the first idea is fine, but thinking through the implications is not easy. You need to have more information, to be working on a more informed basis.' [Partner]

'When you're dealing with Social Services and they're dealing with individual clients, there are certain barriers to be broken down. There's client confidentiality issues for Social Services, and trust needs to be built up along those lines...all this has to be gone through before you make much headway, and that's time consuming.' [Partner]

One library representative suggested that a further advantage of having an early planning stage was to maintain the momentum, to keep the project foremost in people's minds:

'...if that initial planning period...takes a little bit of time, you're in danger of losing some of the impetus. If everybody's met everybody else before you start, and you've got a clear idea of what you want to do as of a particular date, I think it's much easier to move forward...'

Although many participants felt that a longer timescale would have been beneficial, it is interesting that some felt that a strict timescale could be helpful:

'...you do need timescales to avoid the project drifting.' [Library staff]

'It has kick-started us into an activity that in a way we should have been doing anyway....' [Library staff]

8.2 Project funding

Although all parties were clearly delighted that the funding had been made available to support their work with young people in public care, they nonetheless felt that it might have been more beneficial if certain changes had been made to the way in which funds were distributed.

For example, some library staff commented on the difficulty of producing a project budget before beginning to work on the project. One person, whose two-phase plan (mentioned in 8.1) referred to the creation of a business plan and budget, said that towards the end of the funded period she was now ready to spend the money, but that it was more than she had originally anticipated:

'I'm sure that I'm going to need more money to do what we've planned to do: we've decided to produce a very costly scheme, giving a book pack to all children.'

A second library representative, also speaking in July 2002, was similarly concerned:

'I'm having to spend the money really quickly now, and I could have done with it next year...everything's a bit rushed now, as it took a long time to get it off the ground.'

Others felt that the allocation of funding streams within the budget could have been more effective:

'The current budget is very clearly split between resources and training: in a way, it's pushing us in a direction we don't want to go.' [Library staff]

'I would be interested in taking the funding that could have been used for the staff, perhaps it would have been wiser to clump this together and have one specific person working uniquely on the project, leading the project.' [Library staff]

'It takes longer to embed the principles...perhaps we could have rolled the project over two years - with the same money, even.' [Project manager]

'I would make it a two-year project.' [Library staff]

8.3 Project management

8.3.1 Project Coordinator and project management group

The management of the Caring with Books initiative was such that a Project Coordinator was employed at an early stage of the funded period. This person was required to work on behalf of the project management group to coordinate the work of the ten participating local authorities, and to offer support and assistance in developing partnerships and providing training, where it was felt to be appropriate.

Although the library staff were generally satisfied with the overall management of the project, many had found it difficult to respond to all communications involved in coordinating a large partnership project:

'There have been so many meetings and emails! I don't think they [the project management team] understand the pressures we're working under.'

'Overall, sometimes I did feel as if we were bulldozed into things...although people [the project management team] were saying to us 'we're listening and we are supporting you', we had a few negative days, there were a few things that made us feel that we were not supported.'

'There was a lot of over communication, and I just felt swamped, and I know other people felt the same: bring the wheelbarrow, I'm going to fetch my emails!...getting something by fax and by email and having a phone call did seem a bit like overkill occasionally.'

'...it has felt like an over-managed project: too much structure for what is in effect a reasonably small project which I think should build locally more naturally, more organically...'

Although library staff recognised the benefits of working with other local authorities (see 8.3.3), they also felt that this meant that they had less 'individual' support:

'...it would have been good to have had sole access to Chris [the project coordinator], so many people working on the project has been another pressure.'

'...it was both very supportive being part of a small group and really great having all ten authorities working on it, but it means that there's ten people with ten demands, doesn't it, as well?'

8.3.2 Steering group

A second key element of the management of the Caring with Books initiative was the steering group. This was a team comprising the project management group and representatives from participating library services. Each of the ten local authorities was represented in the first instance, and then in early 2002, as the project developed, it was felt to be only necessary to include one representative from each of the three cluster groups.

This effectively removed the problem brought to light during interviews conducted in November 2001, that in a number of cases the member of library staff who represented his or her authority on the project management group was responsible for managing reader development work conducted within the authority, whereas the member of staff leading the project 'on the ground' was a children's librarian.

As one project manager observed, the management group existed before the project, originating from reader development work previously conducted by the participating authorities, and the potential difficulty was therefore that steering group members may not necessarily have been the most appropriate representatives for this project.

The same interviewee had expressed concern that the initial point of contact for the project had originally tended to be at senior management level, whereas evidently staff at all levels of the organizational structure would need to be involved in order for it to succeed:

'The project should go to as many people as it can: there's no reason to keep to the hierarchy.'

Although at this time another member of this group suggested that 'we might have to revisit the membership of the steering group', it was also acknowledged that it would only be appropriate for library staff to make those changes:

'I am hoping that it will gather organically, that each cluster group will send the right person to the steering group. The difficulty is we can't dictate what will happen in the local authority.'

An issue raised by more than one person was that the work of the steering group was not always relevant to work conducted at a regional level:

'It's important to look at the make-up of the steering group, it's been difficult to relate its work to the clusters. I don't feel that the steering group has given the regional dimension, the project overview.' [Project manager]

However, this project manager felt that these difficulties had been removed by the training days delivered as part of the Caring with Books initiative (see 8.4).

8.3.3 Cluster groups

As described in section 1, the third element of the management of the Caring with Books initiative was the development of three cluster groups, into which the ten library services were divided. Over the course of the evaluation of the project it has become apparent that the cluster group meetings were generally perceived as an effective way of working at a more local level, while at the same time receiving the support of neighbouring local authorities:

'I think that the cluster groups are...the core of this project...Trying to do the whole thing regionally would have been too difficult.' [Project manager]

'There is...a group ethos - they are inspiring each other, and are spurred on, each to try to learn from each other...The cluster group is a good model, it works well.' [Project manager]

'I think that the cluster groups were a good idea, so that individuals are not left by themselves.' [Partner]

Where criticisms were made of the cluster group model, it was only in terms of overall worries concerning the size of workloads:

'It's also been difficult working in the cluster groups, with all the meetings, and the steering group meetings, and regional training days.' [Library staff]

8.4 Project training

A core component of the delivery of the Caring with Books initiative was the five staff training days, offered to both library and Social Services representatives on a range of themes, including:

- Developing confidence and skills when working with teenagers
- Working creatively with young people to encourage an interest in reading
- The art of facilitation
- Marketing communications
- Successful project management
- Working in partnership
- Project sustainability
- Project evaluation.

The response of participants to these days was generally very positive, and many people claimed in their post-event evaluation forms to have developed a number of ideas for future work with the target group:

- *'A well focused day, packed with lots of things to be put into future use' [Library staff]*
- *'The day helped us to firm-up ideas' [Library staff]*
- *'Provided focus for our work with libraries through this project' [Partner]*
- *'The day made me start to think of ways that I could encourage looked after children to read and open their eyes to the many possibilities facing their lives' [Library staff]*

However, interviews conducted towards the end of the project with all parties suggested that further training was still required:

'I think they [library staff] need a lot more training...in being child-friendly, but I also think that library staff could be more involved in foster care meetings and training.' [Partner]

One library representative even suggested that the training provided did not meet the demands of the participants:

'The training has not been very helpful: I think there was a lack of understanding of the skills and knowledge that we already had. Some of us could have helped to create more effective training days!'

A second felt that there had been too much training in too short a timescale:

'Everything's a bit rushed....we've had an awful lot of training crammed into one year...' [Library staff]

In addition to training provided centrally, it must also be recognized that many authorities benefited from cross-sectoral training within their own local regions:

'Because of the project we've also been invited to get involved in cross-agency training within the authority about children in public care, and I think that some of that's been more useful than some of the project training.' [Library staff]

9. Conclusions

Although it would not be appropriate to make generalisations about the value to and impact on public library staff working with young people in public care based on the data presented in this report, it is nonetheless possible to extrapolate, in other words to make 'modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions.' (Patton, 1987:168). The data could therefore be viewed as an indicator that a project with a similar methodology, conducted under similar conditions, would be equally effective.

In conclusion, therefore, it is clear that the Caring with Books in the West Midlands initiative has made considerable progress in many areas, for example:

- **developing sustainable partnerships** between the public library, Social Services and Education sectors:

'...the pipelines are open now, and I think we've both found out more about each other and how we work, and also about Social Services, because we can all work in our own little bubble if we're not careful, can't we?' [Library staff]⁸

- **breaking down previous barriers** that existed between these sectors:

'It's about breaking down the negative image, making a difference' [Partner]

- **training staff** in all sectors to work more effectively and confidently with the target group:

'Provided focus for our work with libraries through this project' [Partner]⁹

- **beginning to reach foster carers and young people** in public care:

⁸ A further element of project dissemination will be the conference on November 13th. This has been planned in response to numerous requests for information concerning developing partnerships with the looked-after sector.

'...later, though, we can talk to foster carers and say 'did you use the library? Did you use the activities that were set up?''
[Partner]

- making **changes in library policy and systems** of services to young people in public care:

'Now, young people in care, their carers and foster parents will not be charged for damage or fines, they will not have follow-up letters.' *[Library staff]*

- beginning to use **reader development** methods to encourage young people and their carers to enjoy reading:

'...lessons learned in Caring with Books will come in handy for reader development work in other areas, and equally work we've done in reader development beforehand has been useful for Caring with Books.' *[Library staff]*

All of these are significant achievements, although it must be recognised that the work initiated by this project must be continued in order for sustainable change to occur.

It should also be noted that although the evaluation was able to monitor a considerable impact on the participating library staff, and to observe the development of effective cross-sectoral partnerships, it was unable to provide a large amount of data as to the impact on the target group itself, the young people in public care. A project manager suggested that the reason for this was a lack of clear targets from the outset:

'It seems to me that in retrospect it was a huge mistake not to have set a numeric benchmark [i.e. in the original project application] for contact with young people, their foster carers and public care home managers.'

⁹ A key part of the dissemination conference (see above) will be the launch of the Good Practice Guide for developing sustainable partnerships with the looked-after sector.

Members of the project management group and library staff were unanimous in their view that the socially inclusive aspect of the Caring with Books initiative must be a key part of its continuation:

'More work like this would pick up lots of different target groups, i.e. not just children in care, but all young people. And children in care would be acknowledged as a group we need to think of when planning any aspect of service provision. Until now this has been an invisible group.' [Project manager]

'...here's a section of the reading community that shouldn't be excluded. It puts rhetoric on the social inclusion argument.' [Project manager]

'Realistically, there are many minority groups worthy of special attention and insufficient funds to target all of them. However, [children in public care] are a public responsibility, deserving of public money to sustain some level of special attention.' [Library staff]

Despite this 'special attention', the project evaluation has also revealed a widespread concern that care should be taken when developing 'special' services for the target group:

'...you've got to be careful, because by doing something good, you're actually segregating them...yes, some of their needs are specialised...but it's the whole point of making it accessible to all people.' [Partner]

A considerable amount of work remains to be done before provision to young people in foster and public care is as we would all like it to be - and is consistent throughout the country. However, the Caring with Books in the West Midlands initiative has undoubtedly begun to tackle this important element of the social inclusion agenda:

'This project has brought the client group to the fore. The benefit is sharing good practice.' [Project manager]

'Success breeds success, so we should have a greater capacity to do something that hadn't been done before, to bring to light a community group that can hopefully be served more effectively.' [Project manager]

'I hope that our involvement with residential units and foster carers means that the intrinsic value of story and reading is now recognised, and that we can all encourage and support the young people in their care in the use of libraries for story, information and multi-media.'
[Library staff]

10. Recommendations

Throughout the evaluation of the project, participants raised a number of issues of particular concern to them. These issues have been presented in previous chapters of this report, but are listed here in order to illustrate the lessons learned during the delivery of the Caring with Books in the West Midlands initiative, and to point to transferable methods of future work with young people in public care.

The following recommendations are therefore made:

Project structure

- That future funded projects should be structured in two phases - a preliminary research and partnership development phase, with situation analysis; and a second phase to develop the 'product'.
- That partners should be allowed to develop a project budget after initial situation analysis, in order to avoid significant under/overspend.
- That a project steering group should include members of staff working in the same field as those staff charged to 'deliver' the project (e.g. library staff, social services staff, and representatives from the education and charitable sectors).
- That the details of a project should be cascaded to staff at all levels of the organisational structure in order to encourage 'ownership'.

Library staff

- That all front-line staff should be aware of large-scale projects taking place within their organisation, in order to provide a well-informed service.
- That senior managers should make every effort possible to ensure that training programmes are available to all staff.

- That policy or systems changes developed for young people in public care should be duplicated in neighbouring local authorities, to remove existing geographical boundaries.
- That library services should investigate the feasibility of developing a 'blanket strategy', to offer the same services to young people in care throughout the country.
- That policy or systems changes developed for young people in public care should be transferred to other priority areas of the library service, e.g. socially excluded groups.

Partnerships

- That a team of representatives from all partner sectors should be created in order to maintain the momentum of project work and to introduce it as part of core service provision.
- That cross-sectoral training should take place in order to share knowledge and to raise awareness of partners' working practices.
- That for partnerships to continue, staff at all levels should commit their time and resources not only to the funded period of the project, but to the period beyond.
- That partnering agencies should regularly exchange information concerning services, and should promote each other's events or services in departmental bulletins.
- That shared activities could develop without external funding if existing funds and resources are redirected.

Reaching the target group

- That public libraries should conduct proactive outreach work to promote their services to young people and their carers, e.g. by directly contacting all residential and private care homes, and foster homes in the area.
- That staff resources should be set aside to conduct such outreach work.
- That library familiarisation exercises should be offered to all young people and their carers.
- That library services could identify groups of young people in care to act as consultants, to support the development of services to them.
- That young people could be involved in stock selection exercises for residential and foster care homes.
- That the target group cannot be effectively reached until working partnerships have been developed between library services and Social Services, and new library policies and systems have been implemented.
- That library services could involve young people in public care and their foster families or residential carers in family reading initiatives.

Reader development

- That reader development should be recognised as an appropriate means of encouraging young people and their carers to enjoy reading and to extend their reading choices.
- That reader development could be used in partnership with ICT to effectively encourage young people to use the library.
- That reader development should be used as a means to continue partnerships between libraries and Social Services/Education departments.

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