Wellbeing and Scottish Libraries

Social Cultural Economic Health

Wellbeing and Scottish Public Libraries: making a difference every day

Scottish libraries are social spaces, physical and virtual, where people learn, share, participate and create; where everyone is equal and everyone is welcome; and where improving our shared wellbeing is at the heart of the service.

1. What is wellbeing?

We can understand wellbeing as how well we are doing as individuals, communities and as a nation. There are different types of wellbeing; the main ones are:
- social
- economic
- cultural
- health

Wellbeing is increasingly important in policy planning, evaluation, and understanding the impact of public services on people's lives. Local and national governments, third sector organisations and other bodies such as the Office for National Statistics all include wellbeing in their work.

Public libraries contribute to all aspects of wellbeing as part of their daily activities and services.

2. Scope of document

This summary document supports the wellbeing infographics developed by APLS (Association of Public Libraries in Scotland) in association with SLIC (Scottish Library and Information Council). It provides a little more detail behind the facts and figures of the infographics.

This document celebrates the impact libraries have on people's wellbeing. It outlines the many ways libraries contribute to social, cultural, economic and health wellbeing.

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It provides an invaluable - and possibly unquantifiable - community service.

She was first in the queue with her new iPad. We helped her to reinstall the eBook app and she was off. She was dancing with excitement at being able to access her audio books again, saying we do not know the difference this makes to her life.

2,074

All the physical books borrowed from Scottish public libraries in one year, laid down end to end, would go up Ben Nevis 2074 times

6.3 times more visits to public libraries than attendance at the men's Scottish Premiership matches

| Social Wellbeing | Cultural Wellbeing | Economic Wellbeing | Health Wellbeing |

3. The power of Scottish public libraries: size matters

One of the strengths of the Scottish public library service is the network of physical access points, mobile and outreach visits, and digital spaces provided across Scotland by all 32 local authorities, either directly or by Trusts.

The reach of this **nationwide network** means that:

- There are **1.9 times more public library visits than there are to the top 10 free visitor attractions** in Scotland each year
- Annually are **6.3 times more visits to public libraries than to the men's Scottish Premiership games**
- The **number of people** who have been to the library at least once in the last 12 months could **fill Murrayfield 22 times**.

- If all the **physical books borrowed from Scottish public libraries in one year** were laid down end to end, they would **go up and down Ben Nevis 2,074 times**.

Scottish public libraries reach children, young people, adults, families, older people, New Scots, the digitally excluded, rural communities, city dwellers, in person and online. They provide services and activities during all life stages, and often work in partnership with other organisations and charities to reach even more people.

4. Social wellbeing: people, place, & participation

For many people, interacting with staff, taking part in activities, and feeling part of a community in a welcoming and non-judgemental space, are all key social wellbeing benefits of public libraries.

Social Wellbeing: People, places & participation

Reading Together

Reading groups are supported by all **32** public library services

"[Group bibliotherapy] is about gaining confidence even though it's not what you think you're there to do, but that's what's happening."

"Your value to me as a place to just hang out is priceless. When you are lonely and broke the library is there for you."

Over **23m** visits in one year to nearly **550** library service points and mobile libraries

23 million visits

Free and Welcoming Space

Knowledgable and Friendly Staff

"Friendly, helpful staff. The library has a lovely atmosphere and I could sit in there for hours."

Taking Part

Activities and adventures whatever your age: clubs, crafts and chat

"The Bookbug sessions are brilliant and make a real difference to my daughter and I, both socially and for her reading, singing and numbers."

Bookbug aims to inspire a love of stories, songs and rhymes from birth.

27,000 sessions

Bookbug Sessions

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The **knowledgeable and friendly staff** are highly valued by customers. Whether it's helping someone get online for the first time, tracking down an elusive book, or running a club or activity, they make people feel welcome and involved.

Although reading is often a solitary activity, all 32 public library services offer **reading groups** where people get together to read, talk about the books and the bigger themes.

Reading together for health is also increasingly important, and **bibliotherapy groups** can be beneficial for people with mild to moderate mental health issues.

> *"[Group creative bibliotherapy] does lead to curiosity about other books, it does broaden the mind, it does challenge your perceptions...it's gone a long way to conquering social anxiety...it's made me feel as if I've got a voice, that I do have an opinion to give." (Midlothian Council Library Service, 2018)*

The **Bookbug** sessions for babies and toddlers aim to inspire a love of stories, songs and rhymes from birth.

> *"The brain develops faster than any other time between the ages of zero and three. Because of this, it's important to foster literacy during the early stages of life." (Scottish Book Trust, 2021)*

Libraries are **inclusive, free and welcoming spaces:** all ages are welcome, with more library staff becoming Dementia Friends, and autism-friendly library spaces also being developed.

Within the physical and virtual library spaces, people can take part in a wide range of **activities**. These not only create opportunities to improve or learn new skills, but are social occasions which have been proven to improve people's confidence, their sense of community and reduce feelings of loneliness.

> *"[The events] are keeping me sharp and are staving off my depression. I thoroughly enjoy the social camaraderie. Long may they continue!"*

> *"I really do appreciate all the library does for both me and the young people/groups I support - you are LEGENDS!"*

5. Cultural wellbeing: communities and creativity

Libraries are cultural centres which create a sense of place, a sense of community and bring the world to the library user.

Cultural Wellbeing: Communities and creativity

64%

Reading for Pleasure

64% said that the library had helped them develop an interest or hobby during lockdown
(Carnegie UK Trust, 2020)

" Reading makes me happy, reading makes me sleep well but I can't buy a book every week as I read over 50 books a year. "

" Since I started reading all the local history books I feel more at home here, even though this is where I was born. "

A Sense of Place

Languages, communities and histories

" It's a place where I feel connected with other people in the community, with a shared interest and enthusiasm about books and stories - it's my place in the community. "

" Makes me think more creatively. "
9-year-old reader

Be inspired by words, music, art, tech and the space to play and create

Creativity for All

14 million books

14+ million print books borrowed and **4 million** electronic downloads from Scottish public libraries

Print and Electronic

" Wonderful couple of hours. Made friends and Christmas gifts. Best time I've had in years. Thanks so much. "

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Research has shown that **reading for pleasure** can have a big impact on how people feel, and can create a sense of community, connecting people locally and globally.

People who read for just 30 minutes a week are 18% more likely to report relatively high self-esteem and greater life satisfaction, and non-readers being 28% more likely to report feelings of depression. (Billington, 2015)

With access to books, magazines, newspapers and more in **physical and digital formats**, library users have the world at their fingertips.

51% of boys said that listening to audiobooks has increased their interest in reading (National Literacy Trust, 2020)

"Reading can transport us to places and ideas that we wouldn't dream of ourselves."

"It's amazing to have access to so much pleasure and knowledge, absolutely free."

Libraries create a **sense of place**, where discovering languages and histories brings an understanding of local communities. **Creative opportunities** inspire people, be it words, music, art, crafts or technology.

"Soon after I moved here I came to a local poetry night and was totally enchanted to hear the
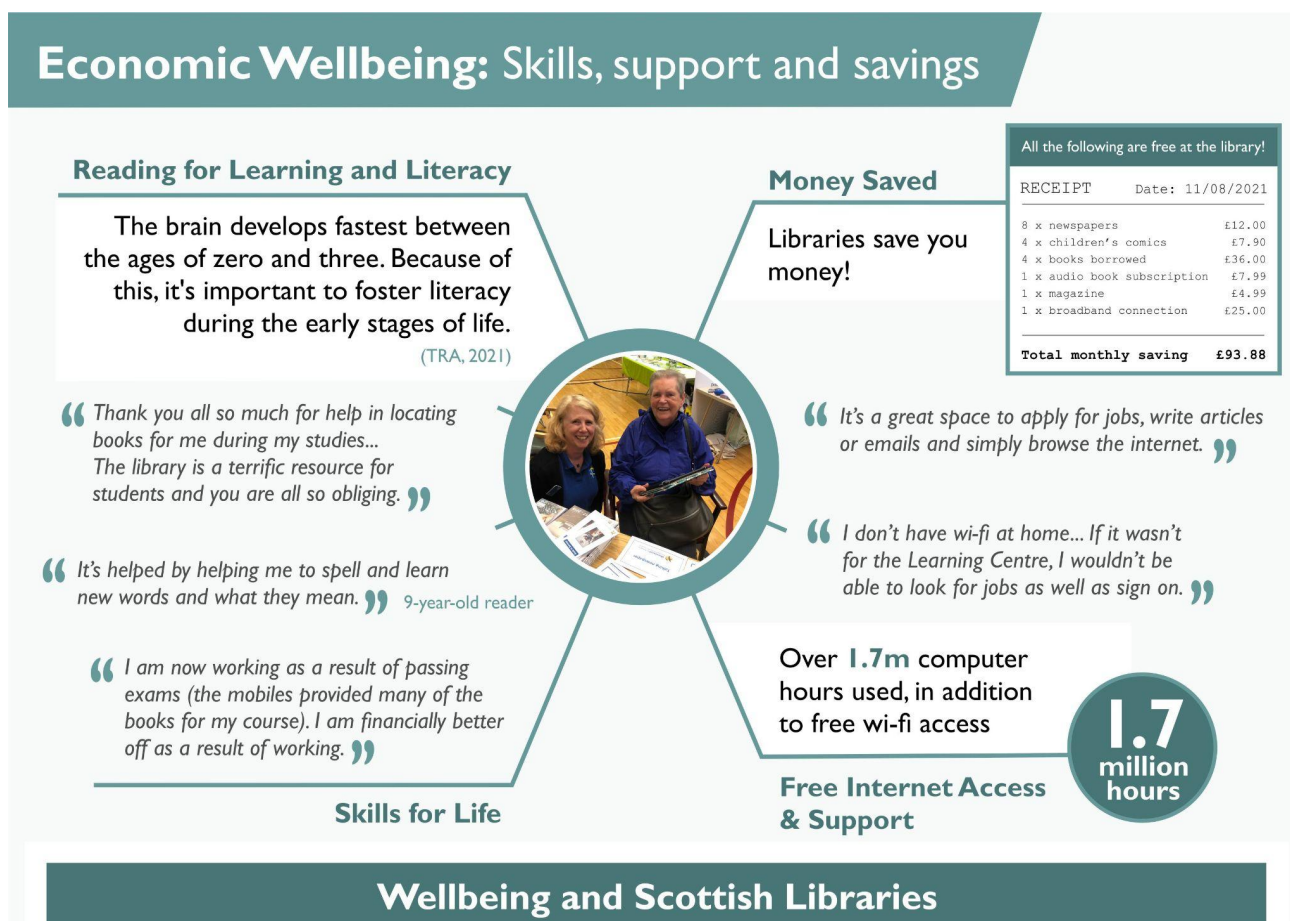
richness of the local dialect."

"It is our wee community's link to the world of literature, culture and craft."

Meeting spaces in libraries, either formal and informal, are used by local groups and foster a **sense of connection** with other people and develop **communities of shared interest**.

"Books open up worlds of possibilities."

6. Economic wellbeing: skills, support and savings

The economic value and impact of libraries may be hard to quantify, but every day thousands of people benefit from their free internet access and opportunities to learn, read and develop new skills. All of these create better life opportunities for individuals and improve local communities.

Economic Wellbeing: Skills, support and savings

Reading for Learning and Literacy

The brain develops fastest between the ages of zero and three. Because of this, it's important to foster literacy during the early stages of life.
(TRA, 2021)

"Thank you all so much for help in locating books for me during my studies... The library is a terrific resource for students and you are all so obliging."

"It's helped by helping me to spell and learn new words and what they mean." 9-year-old reader

"I am now working as a result of passing exams (the mobiles provided many of the books for my course). I am financially better off as a result of working."

Skills for Life

Money Saved

All the following are free at the library!

RECEIPT	Date: 11/08/2021
8 x newspapers	£12.00
4 x children's comics	£7.90
4 x books borrowed	£36.00
1 x audio book subscription	£7.99
1 x magazine	£4.99
1 x broadband connection	£25.00
Total monthly saving	**£93.88**

Libraries save you money!

"It's a great space to apply for jobs, write articles or emails and simply browse the internet."

"I don't have wi-fi at home... If it wasn't for the Learning Centre, I wouldn't be able to look for jobs as well as sign on."

Over **1.7m** computer hours used, in addition to free wi-fi access

1.7 million hours

Free Internet Access & Support

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Using libraries also **saves people money**.

"You save me and my family an awful lot of money, but you also give us things money can't really

buy."

Reading is essential. It is a skill that unfortunately many struggle with, and research shows that people have poorer life chances if they have lower literacy skills. Libraries help with **reading for improving literacy** (children and adults), as well as **reading to help with learning, education and pleasure.**

> *"…reading for pleasure was found to be more important for children's cognitive development between ages 10 and 16 than their parents' level of education. The combined effect on children's progress of reading books often, going to the library regularly and reading newspapers at 16 was four times greater than the advantage children gained from having a parent with a degree." (Centre for Longitudinal Studies, 2013)*

The internet has been referred to as an essential 'utility service'. Digital exclusion exists across Scotland and can include not having broadband at home, not having the necessary equipment, and not having digital skills to use the internet.

Currently in Scotland:

- *11% of the Scottish population are non-users of the Internet (ONS, 2019)*
- *15% are estimated to face digital inequality in Scotland (Inspiring Scotland, 2020)*
- ***It is thought that 19% (c.1 million) of Scottish people do not know how to use digital technology*** *(Inspiring Scotland, 2020)*
- *Over a third of Scottish households in lower income brackets do not have any internet access at all. (Inspiring Scotland, 2020)*

Libraries contribute to **digital inclusion** - essential when access to education, public services and welfare support is increasingly online.

> *"I don't have broadband partly because I can't afford it but partly because I always get stuck trying to do things online. I am getting better but having your helpful staff on hand is so reassuring."*

Libraries are essential for many who use them for **free internet access and support**. This was particularly highlighted during coronavirus pandemic lockdown periods when physical library spaces were closed.

> *"Staff helped me get that [job] application in just in time. I was nearly crying because I couldn't get logged in, what a relief!"*

As well as learning digital skills, library users can take advantage of organised and informal courses, classes and clubs in order to improve a wide range of **skills for life**. Attending a CV clinic, Job Club or simply printing their CV can be the difference between someone getting a job or not.

> *"Finding jobs, obtaining benefits and government services are users' most frequently desired outcomes from library PC use. CVs are the most commonly printed items." (Lorensberg, 2021)*

7. Health wellbeing: self management and signposting

Using a library can be an incredibly powerful activity, particularly in the area of health and wellbeing.

Library usage is associated with higher life satisfaction, higher happiness and a higher sense of purpose in life. (Arts Council England, 2015)

Research also shows that **reading**, whether for pleasure or to learn, has a significant impact on wellbeing.

With rising mental health issues particularly since the pandemic, reading could be promoted as a simple, low-cost yet effective way to change people's lives by **improving their mental health**.

"Children and young people who are the most engaged with literacy are three times more likely to have higher levels of mental wellbeing than children who are the least engaged" (National Literacy Trust, 2018)

"I have been able to borrow books on mental health when I have needed them and healthy eating recipe books."

Reading alone or together, in reading clubs or formal bibliotherapy groups, brings a wide range of benefits. Yet all it requires is access to a library.

"After reading this book I felt a new sense of well-being." (SLIC, 2020)

"Bibliotherapy is a great project because it benefits my happiness, improves my mood, it's what I look forward to through the week, and it improves my employability...it's right there in the middle benefitting me in all sorts of directions." (Midlothian Council Library Service, 2018)

Libraries also help people improve their health through **provision of trusted, quality health information, signposting** people to appropriate resources and organisations, and with **health events** often in partnership with other groups.

"*Reading extensively maintains my health and well-being and learning. I have been able to borrow books on mental health when I have needed them and healthy eating recipe books."*

"[I] use library cookery books for inspiration for healthy eating."

The *Health on the Shelf* report estimated that **public library usage saves NHS Scotland £3.2million every year** as a result of people using public libraries.

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The more people who use libraries, the more money saved and the greater the wellbeing of the Scottish population.

#LibrariesAreEssential

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8. Find out more

SLIC: Scottish Library and Information Council scottishlibraries.org

Forward: Scotland's Public Library Strategy 2021-2025 (Published August/Sept 2021)

APLS: Association of Public Libraries in Scotland

CILIP Scotland www.cilips.org.uk

9. Sources of information

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