

HEALTH ON THE SHELF

Health and Wellbeing in Public Libraries in Scotland



SLiC
Scottish Library &
Information Council

**“A LIBRARY IS
A HOSPITAL
FOR THE MIND.”**

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Public libraries provide a population-scale platform for population-scale public health issues. With 50% of people in Scotland using public libraries, they provide substantial reach through their core services, such as books and computers, as well as through tailored health and wellbeing services. Their impact on people's wellbeing, mental health, social isolation or feelings of loneliness means they play an important part in contributing towards improving the health and wellbeing of the Scottish population.

This research report investigates the health and wellbeing offer from public libraries in Scotland and uncovers the large scale of services and activities that are available. Many schemes have been developed in partnership between libraries and health services, although there is scope to create stronger links particularly in some regions. Availability of specific initiatives varies locally but a common definition of the health and wellbeing offer from public libraries encapsulates the broad approach:

Libraries and library staff contribute towards improving people's health and wellbeing through provision of health-related information in a range of formats; signposting people to other relevant information and organisations; providing health-related activities, services and groups based at the library; and by helping people with their (digital) health information literacy skills so that they have the confidence to find appropriate information for themselves, all within a trusted and welcoming community space with friendly knowledgeable staff.

The health and wellbeing offer from public libraries complements medical provision and is part of the whole system approach to health and wellbeing, having a particular beneficial impact on people's feelings of

wellbeing, confidence and ability to self-manage. Published literature and research undertaken as part of this study highlights:

- the incredible range of the library health and wellbeing offer;
- the contribution such services make towards mental health, loneliness, social isolation, cancer and dementia in particular;
- the personal wellbeing benefits for participants, which are often immeasurable;
- the contribution towards improved health literacy, particularly digital skills;
- the importance of the library space and social interactions with staff and others in the library; and
- the financial savings for NHS Scotland as a result of people using libraries and having better health outcomes.

People's health and wellbeing is affected by a range of factors, and improvements may result from a number of different interventions and actions. Libraries contribute to this multiple-system environment and "[a] considerable – and growing – body of rich and compelling evidence already exists, in the UK and internationally"¹ which shows the impact

¹ Arts Council Wales (2018) Arts and Health in Wales: A mapping study of current activity: Volume 1: Analysis, findings and proposals. Available [online](#).

the arts (including literature and libraries) have on health and wellbeing, particularly in terms of prevention, recovery, and self-management of long-term conditions.

The contribution libraries make is noted in current Scottish policy documents such as Making it Easier and A Connected Scotland. New strategic partnerships are also being established which will strengthen the work in this area, such as the collaborative strategic action plan, A Collective Force for Health & Wellbeing, launched in autumn 2019.² Although capacity is an issue for library and health services, joint working can bring greater impact and effectiveness, particularly if additional resources are made available. The research found that 47% of people surveyed would be interested in health and wellbeing services from public libraries – let's capitalise on that.

This report outlines a number of recommendations for appropriate stakeholders which could help bring greater benefits to the people of Scotland. These include improved promotion of the health and wellbeing offer from public libraries, a stronger evidence base particularly around evaluation and impact, and improved collaboration built upon stronger local, regional and national connections and partnerships. It is hoped this report will also contribute towards greater awareness of the value and diversity of the health and wellbeing offer from libraries and will be relevant to a wide range of people, including health care professionals, policy holders and library staff.

2 SLIC, The ALLIANCE and NHS Scotland (2019) A collective force for health and wellbeing. Available [online](#).

2. INTRODUCTION



This report was commissioned by the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) in 2019 at a time when health and wellbeing have become more prominent in local and national policy making in Scotland. There is growing awareness of the contribution of public libraries to aspects of health and wellbeing such as self-management, health literacy and social isolation, reflected in new partnerships and in policy documents from the Scottish Government, e.g. *Making it Easier* and *A Connected Scotland*. Published statistics on the health of the Scottish population highlight why health and wellbeing is an important priority for the Scottish Government and reaffirm the relevance of health and wellbeing as one of the strategic aims of *Ambition and Opportunity: A Strategy for Public Libraries in Scotland 2015-2020*.

Outwith Scotland, health and wellbeing has become more important for governments. The Welsh Government passed the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, with a statutory duty on public sector bodies to produce wellbeing plans. More recently, its new digital inclusion programme for 2019-21 has a specific focus on health and wellbeing.³ With an overlap between people who are digitally excluded and people with higher health inequalities, this is an important agenda which has particular relevance to public libraries given their contribution towards both digital inclusion and health and wellbeing. Across the UK, wellbeing questions devised by the ONS have been asked within annual surveys since 2011-12 and various recent policy publications have focussed on wellbeing and public services.⁴ Further afield, New Zealand passed a 'wellbeing budget' in 2019, and Scotland is working with Finland,

New Zealand and others on Wellbeing Economic Governments.

There is a growing body of evidence which shows the impact of creative activity on individual wellbeing⁵, and within library literature, numerous reports and articles have been published on libraries' contribution towards health and wellbeing, often focussing on one specific health condition or service, e.g. dementia or bibliotherapy. There are fewer items which show the diversity and immense scale of libraries' contribution to improving people's health and wellbeing, although it was the theme of CILIP's Libraries Week campaign in 2018.

Those working with and within libraries will be aware of some or much of the activity but there is scope for a review of what a health and wellbeing offer from public libraries looks like, the benefits it brings to people, what models of delivery work best, and the

3 Welsh Government, NHS Wales and Wales Cooperative Centre (2019) Digital Inclusion Guide for Health and Care in Wales. Available [online](#).

4 Carnegie UK Trust (2019) Wellbeing and Devolution. Available [online](#); Chief Culture and Leisure Officers Association (2014) The role of culture and leisure in improving health and wellbeing. Available [online](#); All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing (2017) Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing. Available [online](#).

5 Arts Council Wales (2018) Arts and Health in Wales: A Mapping study of current activity: Volume 1: Analysis, findings and proposals. Available [online](#).

contribution such library activity makes towards achieving personal, local and national goals. This research attempts to address these issues within a Scottish context.

The aims for the research, as set out by SLIC, were:

- to conduct a literature review of health offers delivered through public libraries;
- to scope out the health offer which is delivered through public libraries in Scotland, including range and frequency of activity;
- to investigate and present the broad range of health and wellbeing services that are delivered by public libraries in Scotland;
- to compare different models of service design and collaborative delivery;
- to investigate the importance of the library as that trusted, safe space in the community which provides unbiased information;
- to demonstrate the impact the public library health offer has on people and communities including, but not restricted to: mental health and wellbeing, loneliness, social isolation, long term conditions; and
- to provide suggestions of best practice and potential scaling up of initiatives.

The report addresses these aspects first through a discussion of the current Scottish policy context for both health care and libraries and a detailed look at the health and wellbeing offer from public libraries in terms of current provision of activities in Scotland. It moves on to review where the public go for health information and what they think about the health and wellbeing offer from libraries, along with how easy it is to find out about what is available locally. The evidence of the health and wellbeing benefits of using public libraries is explored in general terms and in relation to mental health, loneliness and social isolation, older people and ageing, and cancer. This discussion also highlights the value of libraries as trusted and inclusive community spaces, and the contribution of libraries towards improved health literacy. The financial savings for health services that result from people using libraries are also investigated. Current models of service design and delivery are considered, including co-production, along with the opportunities for scaling up and sharing best practice. This leads into a discussion around the desirability and value of creating an 'all Scotland' health and wellbeing offer from libraries. Recommendations are made throughout the report and are brought together in a final section.

2.1 RESEARCH APPROACH AND PARAMETERS

A range of quantitative and qualitative data gathering measures was undertaken in order to meet the requirements of the research. Work included: desk research and literature review; review of 32 Scottish public library websites; online survey of the 32 public library service managers; follow-up in-depth telephone and face-to-face interviews with a selection of library services; and in-depth telephone and face-to-face interviews with relevant organisations including health charities and other stakeholders.

What do we mean when we talk about wellbeing? Dictionary definitions tend to focus around concepts of being healthy, happy, satisfied and content. Governmental and policy approaches tend to be broader: the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework is referred to as Scotland's wellbeing framework⁶ and it encompasses economic, social and personal aspects under 11 broad categories. The Carnegie UK Trust's work on wellbeing talks about societal wellbeing which encompasses environmental, economic and

6 Scottish Government (2019) Scotland's Wellbeing Report. Available [online](#).

social elements. Their Speaking Volumes publication which outlined the impact of public libraries on wellbeing, focussed on social, economic, cultural and educational wellbeing.⁷ And the ONS has a 10-point definition which includes personal wellbeing, relationships, health, what we do, where we live, personal finance, economy, education and skills, governance, and environment. Its four main wellbeing questions which can be used in local or national surveys are on life satisfaction, happiness, anxiety, and feeling worthwhile⁸.

For this research wellbeing is used within a health context, i.e. feeling well in terms of one's personal health, feeling happy or content, able to cope, life satisfaction and doing things that make you feel good. This report uses wellbeing without a hyphen as this is the more common approach in Scotland. The hyphen is retained where it is used by other reports or organisations in a reference or title.

2.1.1 Scope of the research

Reading has a beneficial impact on health and wellbeing⁹ and so potentially almost all library services and activities could be included in the review. This could dilute the health and wellbeing focus, therefore only specific health and wellbeing initiatives have been included. Services like Bookbug, storytime, general reading groups, mobile libraries and services for visually impaired people have been excluded as a result, apart from a summary in section 4.3.

7 Carnegie UK Trust (n.d.) Speaking volumes: the impact of public libraries on wellbeing. Available [online](#).

8 Office for National Statistics (2018) Surveys using our four personal wellbeing questions. Available [online](#). ONS (2019) Measures of National Well-being Dashboard. Available [online](#).

9 Demos (2018) A society of readers. Available [online](#).

3. SCOTTISH CONTEXT



Scotland's current health challenges include substantial health inequalities, an ageing population, deprivation and poverty, changing patterns of disease, and increasing pressures on health and social care services. Furthermore, although average life expectancy in Scotland has improved it is still significantly lower than in other countries of the UK and the rest of Western Europe.¹⁰ The Public Health Priorities for Scotland publication states that deprivation can lead to life expectancy varying by 28 years for men and 25 for women within Scotland and that "wellbeing cannot be created and sustained by the NHS alone."¹¹ A range of public services, including libraries, can contribute towards improving the health and wellbeing of the Scottish population, particularly with Scotland's approach on self-management, prevention and being person-centric. The creation of the new body Public Health Scotland is an opportunity for new partnerships including libraries.

3.1 SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES

A number of policies and documents published recently by the Scottish Government are important to the discussion of libraries and health and wellbeing. These include not only health-specific strategies but also what is referred to as the Scottish Approach¹² to public services, the response to the Christie Commission of 2011 (prevention, participation, partnership and improved performance), and LOIPs (Local Outcome Improvement Plans). The following list and brief description includes the most relevant strategies for libraries and health and wellbeing.

- Making it Easy (2014) and Making it Easier: A health literacy action plan for Scotland 2017-2025 – This sets out why health literacy is important. The key actions include reference to libraries

(public and health libraries). Outputs include the [Health Literacy Place](#) website which has a range of tools, techniques and resources etc, including a 15-minute video explaining health literacy.

- Realising Realistic Medicine (Chief Medical Officer's Report). Health literacy is at the heart of the person-centred approach in Realistic Medicine and Realising Realistic Medicine.
- A Connected Scotland: Our strategy for tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections (2018). Reducing social isolation and loneliness will contribute to improved health, wellbeing and quality of life for the people of Scotland; public services to work together creatively in conjunction with communities and the third sector; libraries are important community spaces that foster connections.

10 Scottish Government & COSLA (2019) Public Health Reform – The Reform Programme. Available [online](#).

11 COSLA & Scottish Government (2018) Public Health Priorities for Scotland. Available [online](#).

12 What Works Scotland (2017) Outcomes Based Approaches in Public Service Reform. Available [online](#).

- COSLA & Scottish Government (2018) Public Health Priorities for Scotland. This outlines the six public health priorities for Scotland. Although the report does not specifically mention public libraries, the six areas could be a basis for developing a local health and wellbeing offer as many libraries already focus on them, e.g. mental health, physical activity, and early years.
- Scotland's Digital Health and Care Strategy (2018). This emphasises that a digital approach will underpin how services are delivered and how people access health information and health services. Although the document does not make specific reference to libraries, the contribution of libraries is relevant in relation to improving people's digital participation and digital skills.

3.2 THE ALLIANCE AND PARTNERSHIPS

There are a number of stakeholders and third sector organisations in Scotland who work with libraries on health literacy and health and wellbeing, including Scottish and UK charities. The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) is perhaps the most significant organisation given its reach, policies, projects, funding and work with the public.

The findings from the evaluation of SLIC's health-related Public Library Improvement Fund (PLIF) projects found that "the role of public libraries in the health field would be strengthened by the development of a cross-sectoral strategic action plan to align and integrate the public library contribution to health and care policy priorities."¹³ It is therefore very pleasing to see the new collaborative strategic action plan between the ALLIANCE, SLIC and NHS Scotland, which was launched in October 2019: A Collective Force for Health & Wellbeing: libraries, health and social care and The ALLIANCE – Celebrating the power of knowledge.¹⁴

As well as this new strategic partnership, the ALLIANCE is also working on a joint SLIC-funded project with three local library services, NHS Scotland and the Scottish Government's Health & Care Directorate. The project has a specific focus on co-production, mental health, social inclusion and young people, and supporting self-management.

Co-production project

'Building the librarian role into the multi-professional healthcare team: a citizen-led collaborative service model to support self-management and health literacy' (2018-20)

The ALLIANCE, NHS Scotland, and the Scottish Government are working with North Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire and Midlothian library services on a two-year SLIC-funded project with collaboration and co-production at its centre. The project is being led by two part-time project officers. The focus is on young people (aged between 10-25) and mental health, looking at early intervention, prevention and self-management. The co-production element ensures that young people are involved in the design of the programme locally. It is being piloted in three different library services who have flexibility over the local design and can implement it as appropriate to their areas. The project will document the learning to see if it can be scaled up elsewhere.

The ALLIANCE has also worked with public libraries on health literacy training for library staff to enable them to be more confident in guiding the public to appropriate sources of

¹³ Scottish Library and Information Council (2017) Public Library Improvement Fund: Evaluation of health-related projects. Available [online](#).

¹⁴ SLIC, The ALLIANCE and NHS Scotland (2019) A collective force for health and wellbeing. Available [online](#).

information about health and care and to help support self-management, health literacy and shared decision making. Training was delivered by the ALLIANCE from a SLIC-funded grant in 2017 and reached over 100 staff from around 75% of public library services. The training is supported by a toolkit (Going in the Right Direction) and the resources are available on the ALLIANCE website and on the Health Literacy Place website. It is important for library staff to feel comfortable signposting someone to the most appropriate information and other sources of help, and not to feel that they are being asked to make a medical diagnosis.

The ALLIANCE also leads on the [ALISS directory](#) which is a searchable online directory designed to help people find groups and activities close to them on a variety of topics. Libraries can add relevant activities to the directory and can also signpost people to it. It complements Scotland's Service Directory (SSD), delivered by [NHS Inform](#) which features statutory health and wellbeing services. There are on-going discussions around merging the two directories so that a member of the public would search in one place to return all types of results.

Recommendation 1: *Library services to include links to ALISS and NHS Inform/Scotland's Service Directory on their websites and to include their relevant health events in the ALISS directory.*

3.3 SCOTTISH LIBRARY STRATEGIES

The first Scottish public library strategy (Ambition and Opportunity: a strategy for public libraries in Scotland 2015-2020) includes wellbeing within Strategic Aim 4: Libraries Promoting Social Wellbeing. The recommended actions under this aim relate to community and social wellbeing, effective public services and community planning and partnerships, as well as emphasising the importance of the library space.¹⁵ The published refresh¹⁶ of the strategy four years later notes that the strategy has been updated to reflect current service demands and delivery and changing priorities in society. Two of the six strategic aims were re-worded including Aim 4 which is now Health & Social Wellbeing. The associated aim and recommendations have also been adapted to include more references to health issues. The revised aim is that:

"Public libraries in Scotland contribute to social wellbeing, tackling social isolation, inequality, disadvantage, fractured communities and ill health."

In addition, the document notes that "accessing libraries for support for health and wellbeing has experienced huge growth over the course of the strategy" and that this is reflected in the revised recommended actions which now include more direct references to health and wellbeing issues:

- Create strong national, regional and local partnerships with integrated joint boards, strategic organisations and community planning partners to ensure public libraries contribute to healthy lifestyles and improved health outcomes
- Contribute to tackling social isolation and loneliness through programming of events, groups and providing supporting materials

¹⁵ Scottish Library and Information Council (2015) Ambition and Opportunity: a strategy for public libraries in Scotland 2015-2020. Available [online](#).

¹⁶ Scottish Library and Information Council (2019) Ambition and Opportunity Refresh. Available [online](#).

- Work with partners and develop the role of library staff to support programmes for people living with long-term conditions and those looking to access self-management and health literacy material.

These recent changes reflect a shift in emphasis in public policy at a national level (particularly self-management and the impact of health inequalities) and recognition of the extent to which libraries contribute towards improving people's health and wellbeing through many of their established services and activities.

3.3.1 How Good is Our Public Library: a Public Library Improvement Model for Scotland

The performance evaluation and improvement framework for public libraries in Scotland, How Good is Our Public Library Service: a Public Library Improvement Model for Scotland (HGIOPLS), includes consideration of health issues within Quality Indicator 4: Individual and Community Engagement. Indicator 4.2 relates to enhancing individual and community wellbeing. Given the recent increased emphasis on health, wellbeing and self-management at a national public policy level, if the framework is refreshed it may be appropriate to expand this section on health to capture and reflect the extensive health and wellbeing offer delivered by many public library services in Scotland.

Recommendation2: *If the HGIOPLS framework is reviewed in the future, consideration could be given to expanding the indicator relating to health and wellbeing.*

4. HEALTH AND WELLBEING SERVICES IN LIBRARIES



We know that health and wellbeing is important, and that libraries can play a role in supporting people with this, but what does this look like in practice in a library context?

Reading has been shown to have a beneficial impact on someone's health and wellbeing in a variety of ways including through a better ability to understand health information (health literacy) leading to better health outcomes; through learning and empowerment with self-help books; and through affecting the brain including keeping it active and alleviating some symptoms of dementia.¹⁷ One UK-wide survey found that 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.¹⁸ Other research has found that reading for just six minutes a day can reduce stress levels by 68%.¹⁹ Book borrowing is still the prime use of a library, so it is possible to argue that the core of library services, and almost everything they do, has a beneficial impact on health and wellbeing, and that the 'health and wellbeing offer' is the entire library service. However, such broad statements tend not to have as much impact or meaning for members of the public, funders or partners because they lack detail and are not targeted at any group or particular purpose.

It's possible to identify specific library health and wellbeing services, although much of the published literature does not define overall the health and wellbeing offer. One exception is research from 2010 which surveyed over 100 public libraries in England and their health and wellbeing activities.²⁰ The report identified over 1,000 relevant activities taking place, and the recommendations in the report led to the creation of the health and wellbeing offer from the former Society of Chief Librarians in England and The Reading Agency.

In Wales, a scoping review was produced in 2012 by the Society of Chief Librarians Wales which outlined the range of health and wellbeing activities taking place in public libraries.²¹ Public libraries subsequently worked with Public Health Wales to produce the First Incomplete Fieldguide to Wellbeing in Libraries in 2013. The document shows how libraries contribute to the public health agenda through tackling health inequalities, supporting health literacy, improving mental health and helping with the prevention and early diagnosis of illness.²² The report focuses on some of the main activities such as Book Prescription Wales, storytime, Macmillan Cancer Information and Support,

17 Demos (2018) A society of readers. Available [online](#).

18 Billington, J. (2015) Reading between the Lines: the benefits of reading for pleasure. University of Liverpool. Available [online](#).

19 The Telegraph (2009) Reading can help to reduce stress. Available [online](#).

20 MLA & Reading Agency & LISU (2010) Public library activity in the areas of health and well-being. Available [online](#).

21 SCL Wales (2012) Public libraries in Wales: health, wellbeing and social benefits. Available [online](#).

22 Public Health Wales (2013) First incomplete field guide to wellbeing in libraries. Available [online](#).

reading groups, digital access, reminiscence activities, and community space, with examples from each of the 22 public library services.

A key part of the Scottish research for this report was to scope the range of health and wellbeing services which are delivered by public libraries in Scotland, including the range and frequency of activity. A dual approach was taken, namely reviewing all 32 public library service websites for details of what they offer in terms of health and wellbeing, and an online survey sent to all library service managers.²³ From this, a possible definition for the health and wellbeing offer from Scottish public libraries has been drawn up:

Libraries and library staff contribute towards improving people's health and wellbeing through provision of health-related information in a range of formats; signposting people to other relevant information and organisations; providing health-related activities, services and groups based at the library; and by helping people with their (digital) health information literacy skills so that they have the confidence to find appropriate information for themselves, all within a trusted and welcoming community space with friendly knowledgeable staff.

In more detail this encompasses:

- Collections/stock and other information: in hardcopy and electronic format. Health and wellbeing collections may be separately branded, e.g. as recommended healthy reading lists, bibliotherapy, or books on prescription schemes, may be in a separate area of shelving, or items may be part of the main stock available on the shelves or via requests. Health information may also be provided through provision of leaflets and other materials, generally from external organisations. Information can also be provided in the form of recommended websites or directories, and signposting to relevant organisations.
- Activities and groups: health and wellbeing activities may take place in the library on a regular basis such as weekly/fortnightly dementia reminiscence groups, or more occasionally such as blood pressure checks with an external partner, or less frequently for annual health tie-ins such as mental health day. Some activities may take place outside the library, e.g. in the grounds or surrounding area such as the WalkON groups in Fife who walk in the locality then share a drink and a book chat back at the library.
- Health literacy skills: these are often closely related to digital literacy skills as many people search for information online. Library staff help people informally and formally with search strategies, evaluating different sources of information, and improving their confidence and skills to find and use appropriate information.
- Friendly and welcoming staff in a trusted, inclusive and non-clinical space in local communities: social interactions with library staff can be invaluable and the library space and the staff may also be designated as '...friendly' for particular groups, primarily dementia and autism.

²³ The survey was conducted over the summer of 2019. There were 30 responses to the survey, with a total of 22 named completed responses (completion rate of 70%).



4.1 A TO Z OF HEALTH AND WELLBEING SERVICES IN LIBRARIES

What does this broad definition look like in public libraries? Evidence gathered from a survey of Scotland's public library service managers and their websites indicates that the health and wellbeing offer from public libraries is incredibly extensive: it is a cornucopia of activities, resources and groups, as can be seen in the A-Z list below. Some of these may be universal, others may only be available in one or two branches. Many are small-scale and low intensity-interventions.

A

AUTISM friendly
– spaces, staff,
activities

B

BIBLIOTHERAPY
(therapeutic
reading)

BOARDGAME
sessions/groups (for
socialising and brain
training)

BOOKS on
prescription
(formal or informal
recommended
healthy reading lists)

C

CARERS' collection
/ carer's support
group

CHATTY CAFES or
similar, e.g. 'Blether
bench', 'Book
blether' group

COLOURING
groups (for
mindfulness)

D

DEMENTIA
friendly – spaces,
staff, activities and
resources

E

E-BOOKS on health
and wellbeing
topics

F

FERRULES for
walking sticks

FESTIVAL – week or
longer on health
and wellbeing

FILM CLUBS for
dementia, autism,
or families

FOOD and nutrition
information

G

GUIDES and leaflets
on health topics

H

HEALTH
literacy skills

HEARING aid
batteries and repairs

I

INFORMATION on
healthy behaviours
(exercise, diet,
smoking, drinking
etc.)

J

JIGSAW clubs (for
social inclusion and
brain training)

JOINT working

K

KNIT & natter
groups

L

LITERACY skills
(digital, health,
reading)

M

MACMILLAN
Cancer Information
and Support
services

MAKE Every
Opportunity Count
conversations

MEMORY bags/
boxes

MENOPAUSE

groups

MENTAL health activities and groups

MINDFULNESS activities

MUSIC for dementia (Playlist for Life)

N

NEW things to try

NHS Scotland links and partnerships

O

OLDER people groups

P

PERIOD products (free)

PROMOTIONS based around health awareness days/weeks, e.g. Stress Awareness Week

PUBLIC health promotion activities, e.g. blood pressure tests, health checks

Q

QUIET place to relax or study

R

READING groups with health or social focus

REMINISCENCE groups, activities and resources

S

SIGNPOSTING

SING-ALONG sessions (children and older adult

groups, often with refreshments)

SMOKING

cessation groups

SPACE for hire by local health groups/organisations/charities

SPECIALIST

software, e.g. Boardmaker

T

TAI CHI

TEEN café

THERAPETS

TRAINING, e.g. digital skills

U

UNIVERSAL

– open to all

V

VOLUNTEER

opportunities

W

WALKING groups (including walk & talk book groups)

WELLBEING

collections

WOMEN'S

health group

X

EXERCISE

and fitness classes/activities

Y

YOGA, including chair and baby yoga

Z

ZONES for health and wellbeing

Most of these activities and groups are delivered by library staff within their normal day jobs. As health and wellbeing moves up the agenda in Scotland it was interesting to see that a couple of library services noted that current or future restructures will give them the opportunity to create dedicated health and wellbeing posts in their staffing complement. Many services commented that capacity is an issue and that they would love to do more if they had more time and resources, so these new dedicated posts may create that time in these library services.

NB Activities where social interaction is a key part have been included in the list, e.g. knit and natter groups, but not some other skill-based activities, e.g. digital drop-ins, where engaging with others is not central to the activity. People often feel supported in 'activity plus socialising' groups and more comfortable discussing difficult or personal topics when they are occupied doing something else.

4.2 THE LOCAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING OFFER

As noted above, the range of health and wellbeing services offered across Scotland is extensive. Across Scotland, library services offer between 1 and 26 different elements, with many services offering around 17 different things. The average is 12 activities/schemes. The most commonly offered are listed below and are available in half or more library services in Scotland (most common listed first):

- Signposting to health and wellbeing services and organisations
- Reminiscence resources, e.g. dementia collections and memory boxes
- Designated health and wellbeing collections
- Health activities in the library or organised by the library, e.g. yoga, walking group, themed group cafes
- 'Mood boosting' fiction collection
- Reminiscence groups
- Self-help non-fiction informal list of books
- Bibliotherapy / books on prescription / Reading Well / recommended reading list schemes for adults
- Tie-ins with (national) 'awareness' days/campaigns, e.g. Stress Awareness Week
- Macmillan Cancer Information and Support services

Signposting to other sources of information and to other relevant organisations is the only service that was offered by all survey respondents. The health literacy training by the ALLIANCE and supporting documents and toolkit for library staff is therefore a valuable resource to help staff feel confident in signposting people to appropriate health information and organisations.

The survey of library service managers asked questions about the activities on offer such as if it had been evaluated, if there was any evidence of impact gathered, if it was delivered solely by the library or in partnership, funding issues, marketing, and extent of provision across the library service. Some common themes emerged from the responses. These were:

- Most health and wellbeing activities and services rely on external funding, especially to get started and SLIC's grant funding has been invaluable. Project funding is precarious however, and can make long-term planning difficult and some services lack the capacity to make funding applications.
- Most of the activities and services are delivered in partnership with others, and the list of partners is extensive. They are a mix of local and national partners with the NHS prominent, particularly the Health and Social Care Partnerships. The main national

partners mentioned were Alzheimer's Society and Macmillan Cancer, with local partners frequently being carers groups, 'active' organisations (sports/leisure), art/cultural organisations, local community groups, and more specialist groups and charities.

- Many activities and services had not been evaluated. Although some do not lend themselves easily to evaluation because the impact on someone may occur much later after the interaction, e.g. with signposting or public health tie-in events such as blood pressure checks, it's a missed opportunity with many of the activities which could provide useful impact evidence. This could support library services to attract additional funding or resources to continue to provide these services. This situation is not unique to Scotland. Other library and health reports noted that it is difficult to obtain impact and evidence data, and that there is an ongoing need for more and better evaluation.²⁴
- Most of the activities are delivered in-house without the use of volunteers (Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Service being the main exception).
- Many of the activities and services have been offered for more than two years.
- Generally, the activities are available in some community libraries rather than across the whole library service. This is particularly the case when it is something which takes up space, but also reflects local community differences and what might appeal or be relevant to people in the local area.

Usage of the activities and resources varies, with some services reporting very high usage, e.g. attendees at events. However, there appears to be a general small decline in use of recommended reading lists or formal books on prescription schemes whereby loans decline over time, and the scheme requires a refresh in terms of the list, promotion and connections with relevant stakeholders. This experience is not unique to Scotland.

Examples of reach:

19,343 packs of hearing aid batteries issued in 2018-19 (Midlothian)

513 attendances during 2018-19 at the Chest Heart and Stroke support group in one library (North Ayrshire)

125 sessions, with 1,194 participants attending, from six groups for WalkON Fife in 2018-19

Partnerships feature strongly in the health and wellbeing offer from libraries, and the huge range of organisations involved reflects the variety of health initiatives undertaken by library services. The in-depth interviews drew out the importance of local connections and networks and that often these are reliant on a few key individuals and take a long time to establish. Links with the local NHS and other health care professionals vary across Scotland and some library services noted that establishing connections took years. It is possible that if more strategic connections were forged between libraries and health stakeholders, the links on the ground might be made more easily.

This research has begun the work of gathering baseline information about the extensive health and wellbeing offer in public libraries. If this is felt to be an important area for future work, consideration could be given to a simple dataset which could be collected on an annual basis. A detailed grid of the current provision from all 32 public library services is available on request from SLIC.

Recommendation 3: SLIC and APLS could discuss the value of collecting a standardised dataset of some health and wellbeing information and evidence.

²⁴ Carnegie UK Trust (2019) Engaging Libraries: Learning from Phase 1. Available [online](#).

4.3 CONTRIBUTION OF CORE LIBRARY ACTIVITIES AND OTHER TYPES OF LIBRARIES

This section acknowledges the contribution reading and other core library service activities have on people's health and wellbeing, such as Bookbug song & rhyme time and mobile libraries. To keep both this research and the health and wellbeing offer of libraries focussed, these activities were not included in the review or survey of library managers as their prime purpose is not health and wellbeing. However, there is considerable evidence of their contribution which deserves reference here.

4.3.1 Impact of reading on health and wellbeing

The Demos report, *A Society of Readers*, notes that "...reading is more than just a national pastime, and that there is untapped latent potential in unleashing its transformative power to tackle some of our most pressing social challenges", including loneliness, mental health issues and social mobility.²⁵ The report found that 95% of people who are blind or partially sighted read at least once a week to alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation. Other research based on an online poll of over 4,000 people from across the UK found that people who regularly read for pleasure reported fewer feelings of stress and depression than non-readers, and stronger feelings of relaxation from reading than from watching television or engaging with technology intensive activities.²⁶

A large-scale literature review commissioned by The Reading Agency to look at the impact of reading on children and adults found that: "Overall there is a relatively strong and growing range of research findings which show how and why reading for pleasure can bring a range of benefits to individuals and society."²⁷ The review led to an outcomes map for personal, social and external levels. Some of the outcomes include: enjoyment, escapism, creativity, self-identity, self-expression, self-esteem, reduced depressive symptoms, relaxation, emotional intelligence, communication skills, delayed/reduced dementia symptoms, attainment, positive parenting, empathy and knowledge of other cultures.

The review also noted that there is:

"[a] diverse range of studies [which] provide strong evidence about how reading for pleasure can promote mental and physical well-being. The literature suggests reading for pleasure is effective in both tackling common mental issues such as anxiety and stress, and in raising awareness about health issues and habits."

4.3.2 Bookbug and story, song and rhyme time

All public library services in Scotland offer Bookbug, which is a well-established free scheme delivered by the Scottish Book Trust, funded by the Scottish Government and Creative Scotland. The universal scheme provides every child in Scotland with four free bags of books when they are babies, toddlers, and at three and five years old. The bags contain age

25 Demos (2018). *A Society of Readers*. Available [online](#).

26 Billington, J. (2015) *Reading between the Lines: the benefits of reading for pleasure*. University of Liverpool. Available [online](#).

27 The Reading Agency (2015) *Literature Review: The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment*. Available [online](#).

appropriate books and other resources for sharing songs and rhymes. Gaelic Bookbug bags are also available, as are bags for children with additional support needs.

The Bookbug scheme also trains library staff to deliver story, song and rhyme time sessions in libraries. Almost every community library in Scotland offers these free events for children aged 0-5. The scheme aims to create a reading and library habit for new families, encourage reading for pleasure from a young age, and bonding time with babies and toddlers. It is beneficial not only for literacy levels but also for the health and wellbeing of the parents who attend. Research in England found substantial benefits to the mums attending, particularly in terms of their mental health, social inclusion and overall wellbeing.²⁸

Over 24,584 free Bookbug sessions took place in libraries and other community venues across every local authority in Scotland in 2017/18, with 666,938 parent and child attendances.²⁹

Whilst Bookbug is a regular occurrence in libraries, other one-off projects which may not have health and wellbeing at their core, have contributed to improving people's health and wellbeing. Often this occurs as a result of the social interaction whilst taking part in the activity, feeling part of a supported group, and sharing personal stories. One recent example is the Scottish Book Trust's digital storytellers project (see box).

4.3.3 Mobile libraries

Research in Scotland found that using mobile libraries had significant benefits on people's health and wellbeing, particularly feelings of loneliness, social isolation and mental health issues.³⁰ The quotes are all from mobile library users in Scotland.

"Living alone I don't actually speak to many people so the mobile library is a friendly regular contact which brings me a feast of reading as well as some human contact."

"It helps me manage my mental health problem."

"It has become a social occasion, I get to talk to people I normally only see waving through a passing windscreen."

"Registered disabled and unable to get to a library independently. Being an avid reader I find it improves the quality of my life immeasurably."

"Friendliness of staff and bumping into neighbours makes me feel less lonely."

Mobile libraries are generally used most by young families and older retired people, and several users commented how it brought communities and families together, which is also important for community wellbeing.

28 Arts Council England (2018) Library rhyme times and maternal mental health: results of an action research project. Available [online](#).

29 Scottish Book Trust (2018) Annual Review 2017-18. Available [online](#).

30 Scottish Library and Information Council (2019) Libraries on the Move: the impact of mobile library services in Scotland. Available [online](#).

"It makes me feel empowered and something I and everyone in my household look forward to using. It supports my children's language development and gives us opportunities for discussions as a family and brings us closer together."

"Enhances my sense of community."

As with many aspects of health and wellbeing, it is difficult to calculate the benefit using the mobile library has, or the value of it. What is the price of a 'lifeline'?

"The staff are so friendly & great when advising about books for myself & children - I always come off the van with a smile on my face."

"An uplifting experience."

"The library visit is a lifeline to the outside world."

4.3.4 Academic libraries

This report focuses on public libraries but other libraries also offer services and activities which contribute to the health and wellbeing of their users. For example, school, college and university libraries increasingly provide books and other resources to help their students manage with exam or studying stress, personal and social issues, and frequently mental health issues. This is recognised by the new ALLIANCE, NHS Scotland and Scottish Government collaborative project which is focussing specifically on young people, their mental health and social isolation. Several other SLIC-funded projects for schools have also had a health and wellbeing focus with beneficial impacts.

The importance of the school library for wellbeing was noted in research from the National Literacy Trust which found that children and young people who use the school library have, on average, higher mental wellbeing scores.³¹ Other research published by the National Literacy Trust also found that 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.³² If children and young people can be encouraged to enjoy reading early on in life and to maintain their love of reading it has an impact not only on their literacy and life chances but also on their long-term health and wellbeing. The National Literacy Trust also found that children who don't have a book of their own at home are twice as likely to have low mental wellbeing than they are to have high mental wellbeing.³³

4.3.5 Health libraries

Health libraries themselves, such as the NHS libraries, contribute towards the health and wellbeing of the health professionals they serve. They can provide information and activities on a range of health and wellbeing topics for staff, such as having a wellness section or books

31 National Literacy Trust (2018) School libraries: Why children and young people use them or not, their literacy engagement and mental wellbeing. Available [online](#).

32 National Literacy Trust (2018) Mental wellbeing, reading and writing: How children and young people's mental wellbeing is related to their reading and writing experiences. Available [online](#).

33 National Literacy Trust (2018) Book ownership, literacy engagement and mental wellbeing. Findings from our annual literacy survey 2017/18. Available [online](#).

on stress. For example, NHS Ayrshire and Arran has a mental health and wellbeing book collection for staff under the 'Work on Wellness' campaign in Woodland View Library, which contains popular and self-help books. At NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde the library service ran a reading challenge for staff to encourage them to read more, with bronze, silver, gold or platinum awards; offered journaling taster sessions for staff; and the libraries also provide a range of self-help literature. Similarly, NHS Fife has a 'Well@Work' scheme which includes a collection of books on various health topics such as sleeping, healthy eating and depression.

NHS libraries can also promote the services of the local public library to their health care staff. This has the advantage of being somewhere health professionals can go for their own wellbeing as well as learning about what's available in public libraries in order to recommend these services for patients. The research for this report found that connections between the public library service and NHS libraries vary locally and there is scope in many for closer working between the two.

Digital Storytellers in Residence project

The Scottish Book Trust, with funding from the Scottish Government, established two pilot digital storytellers in residence in North Ayrshire and Fife. Following positive responses, they extended this in 2018-19 to five more library services (East Ayrshire, Dundee, Falkirk, Inverclyde and Orkney). A digital storyteller was engaged in each area to work with groups to digitally create and record their personal stories and then to share them with the group and publicly (if they wished). The project provided all the necessary IT equipment and training for library staff as well as for the participants and was designed to work with target groups of disadvantaged people to improve their digital skills through introducing digital skills in a relaxed and supported environment and discussing things of interest to themselves.

Although the project was about improving digital skills and confidence with digital devices there were significant health and wellbeing outcomes for the participants. The independent evaluation found that:

*"There are striking findings related to health and wellbeing outcomes, especially in terms of reducing social isolation, for example participants have made new friends, and socialised for the first time in many months as a direct result of being involved."*³⁴

Other benefits for participants included feeling valued, feeling part of the local community, meeting people, increased feelings of self-worth, confidence and self-esteem. These types of emotions can improve someone's wellbeing. Quotes from participants also emphasise the wellbeing benefits of the activity:

"I got my life back."

"Mixing with other people instead of sitting in the house has been the main benefit. It's been good."

"Dan made me feel really included.... Meeting new people, whilst good, was difficult for me - I have anxiety and depression. ... I just didn't think I was good enough...it was only when we'd finished that I decided to record my voice."

"I felt like it was a healing process. Telling my story....it was therapeutic."

"I have more confidence now in speaking in front of people and felt it might be easier to do it in the future."

Stories and videos of celebration events can be found on the project page (<http://digital-stories.scot>).

34 Scottish Book Trust (2019) What's the story? An independent evaluation of the Digital Storytelling Residences. Available [online](#).

5. VIEWS OF THE PUBLIC AND MARKETING OF SERVICES



As part of the review, a Scottish population survey was commissioned to look at health and wellbeing information from the public's viewpoint.³⁵ One question asked respondents what people or places they used in order to find health and wellbeing information.

If you need to know something for a health or wellbeing matter, which of the following would you use to find information? Tick all that apply.

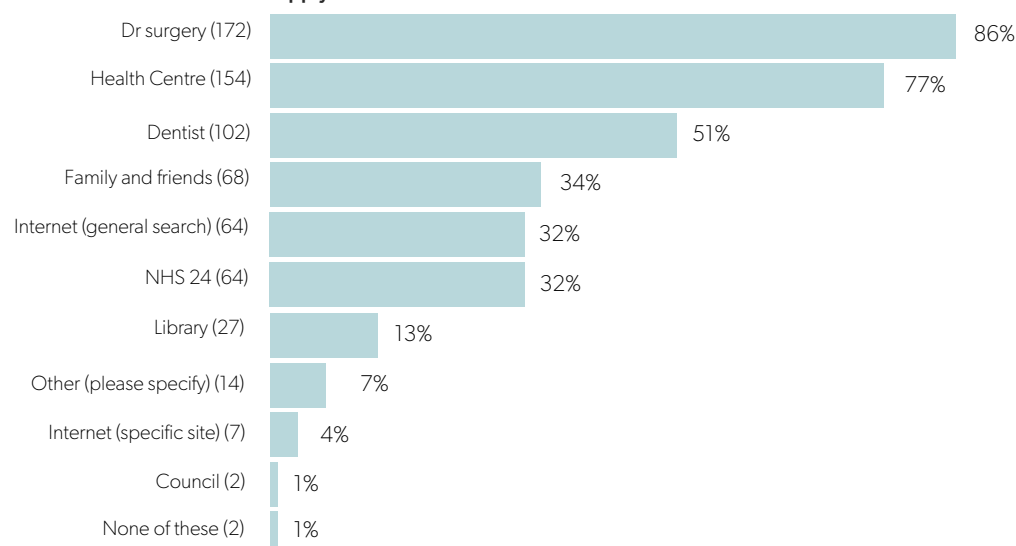


Chart 1: Source of health information (Base: 201 respondents)

The library was outside the top five sources, mentioned by 13% of respondents. This may sound disappointing, however with a population of 5.4 million this equates to almost 707,000 people in Scotland, which is a substantial reach. Interestingly, it was mainly women who said they would use the library, which has implications for events or services where men in particular may be the target audience. Around one third of respondents said they would do a general search on the internet for health

information: this has ramifications for the quality of information found and used depending on their digital literacy skills. It is also an opportunity for libraries to promote the free online Access to Research resource (available on-site in public libraries) which provides access to over 15 million published academic articles. This is free for libraries to offer to their users, although only 23 library services in Scotland currently do so. The recent renewal of the agreement

³⁵ A population survey was commissioned for 200 face-to-face interviews in eight locations across Scotland during the last two weeks of August 2019, with a sample of adults aged 16+. In total 201 interviews took place and the results are accurate for the overall population of Scotland within +/- 6.9% at the 95% confidence level on a survey result of 50% and within +/- 4.2% on a response of 10% or 90%.

with publishers highlighted that medical searchers were amongst the most popular searchers.³⁶ A quick win for the public would be for the remaining public library services in Scotland to sign up to Access to Research.

Recommendation 4: The public library services which currently do not offer the free Access to Research service to be encouraged to sign up and list it on their website to improve access for the public to quality health research.

The population survey commissioned for this health research found that 45% of respondents had used a public library in the last three years, close to other recent published research which found that 50% of the Scottish population use public libraries.³⁷ Within the survey for this health and wellbeing research, the 45% of respondents who had used a library recently were asked a follow-up question, namely if they had used a public library for any health and wellbeing reason in the last three years, of which 20% said yes. This equates to just under half a million people in Scotland (489,429), which is significant reach.

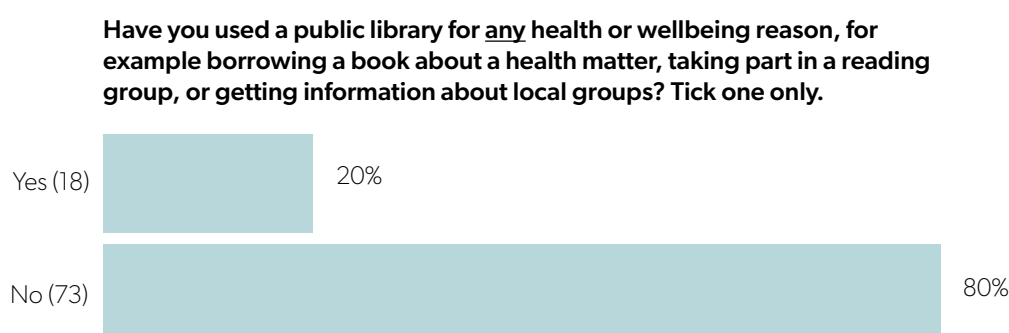


Chart 2: Use of public library for any health and wellbeing reason. (Base: 91 respondents – those who said they had used a public library in the last three years)

Of those who had used it for health and wellbeing purposes, 94% had found this very helpful or somewhat helpful.

How helpful was this for you? Tick one only.

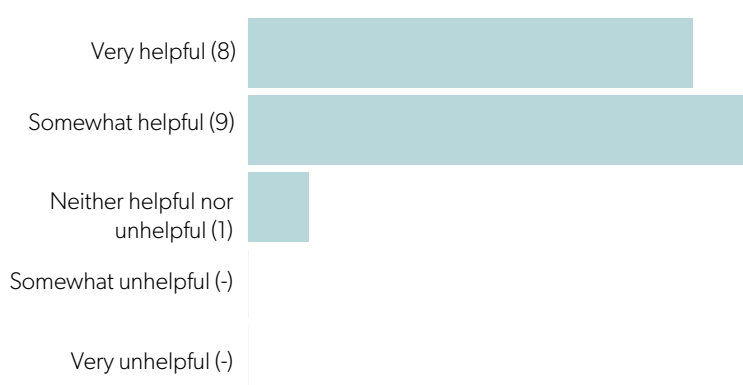


Chart 3: How helpful was the health and wellbeing service from the library. Base 18 respondents.

³⁶ Publishers' Licensing Services (2019) Free 'Access to Research' online search service in public libraries is re-launched. Available [online](#).

³⁷ Carnegie UK Trust (2017) Shining a light: The future of public libraries across the UK and Ireland. Available [online](#).

Whilst around half a million people have used a public library for health and wellbeing purposes, there are many others who might be encouraged to use it in the future. The survey asked all respondents what health and wellbeing activities might interest them at the library. A slight majority said they would not be interested, and it was mainly men (70%) who gave this response. Combined with the library usage results this confirms that engaging with men for health activities or groups may be challenging for library services. This is not unique to library services as men generally are less likely to look into health matters compared with women.

Despite the slight majority saying they would not be interested, there are potentially over 2.5 million people in Scotland who would be interested in things like health events, recommended reading lists and group activities from the local library service.

Which of the following health and wellbeing things would you be interested in accessing at a library? Tick all that apply.

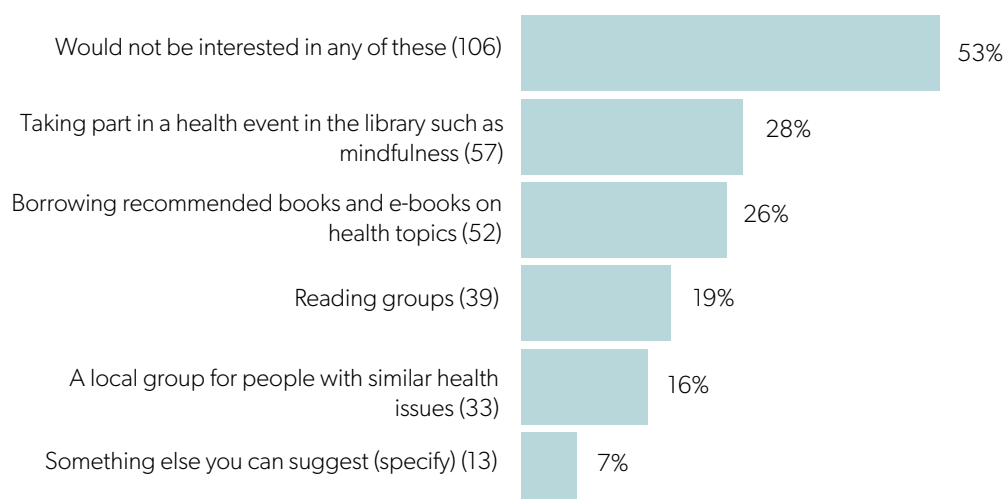


Chart 4: Interest in health and wellbeing activities. Base 201 respondents.

Suggestions from the public of what would interest them included more activities for parents and children together, talks from local community groups, and groups for people with different health problems. Most library services do offer these types of activities so marketing and targeting events is something for library services to consider in order to reach more people who would be interested in attending.

5.1 FINDING OUT ABOUT WHAT'S AVAILABLE

Most library services use a range of marketing techniques to promote their health and wellbeing services and activities. This includes traditional marketing methods of posters, leaflets, newsletters, radio and newspapers, along with newer channels such as social media, plasma screens and 'lamppost wraps'. In the in-depth interviews with library managers, some services mentioned the good links they have with local media who will promote events. Often face-to-face promotion of specific events was felt to be most beneficial as library staff could target specific people who might be suitable for a particular event or group. However, relying too much on in-library promotion may limit the potential for attracting new non-library members to activities and groups. One service noted that: "...traditional channels such as print media seem to be more effective with current library customers. It is word of mouth and social media which are attracting new audiences."

One service also noted that they choose the marketing channels to suit the activity or group being promoted, taking into account, for example, that elderly people are less likely to use social media than younger age groups. Where events or groups are run in partnership with other organisations, library services noted that the cross-service promotion was very helpful as it enabled them to reach new people. Very few respondents specifically mentioned using their website for marketing or promoting the health and wellbeing services and activities.

A research study of health and wellbeing services offered by English public library services found that libraries do not articulate their health and wellbeing contribution particularly well, to partners or the public.³⁸ The Reading Well 2018 evaluation also found that very few users of the scheme joined the library in order to borrow the book, indicating that they were already library members. This is perhaps a reflection on the marketing as the research found that leaflets about the Reading Well scheme were mainly available in the libraries stocking the books, with far fewer libraries distributing to a variety of external places such as GP surgeries or specialist health clinics.³⁹

Online information about the health and wellbeing services from Scottish public libraries is patchy. On some library web pages the health and wellbeing services are easy to find being on the main page, e.g. Aberdeen City, Dundee, Glasgow, Midlothian, Perth and Kinross, South Ayrshire, and the Western Isles. In other cases the information is deeper within the website and takes numerous clicks down perhaps unlikely navigation trails. The review of all 32 library websites found that in most cases, many of the health and wellbeing activities and services offered are not mentioned on the websites at all. This potentially limits the audience and does not make the most of the extensive services available and the contribution to the health and wellbeing agenda that libraries make. If the public only used library web pages as their source of information they would not know that many services are dementia friendly as this is rarely mentioned, for example.

Of course it's not possible to include every single service or activity online, however there is potential for most library services to include more information about the range of what they offer, the groups who meet there, and the resources available. It's acknowledged that some library services, particularly in local authorities, do not have much influence over what they can include on their web pages, so they may be restricted in what they can feature. To overcome this several library services use social media to reach new audiences, sharing videos and other content, e.g. Aberdeen City's YouTube channel. East Dunbartonshire also has a video about their pop-up health library and their other health and wellbeing resources: this is a good example of providing the information in a different format. Several library services are also using a front-facing element of the library management system as the library web pages as they can update this more easily and have more flexibility over content and structure.

It's important to keep online content up to date, and this is easier with social media. Several of the library websites contained out of date information about past events, including year-old event programmes. This does the library a dis-service in terms of reputation and attendance.

It was disappointing to see at the time of the review that only one library service (Dundee) had a link to the ALISS directory, although four others did link to NHS Inform. If the digital library experience is to be similar to a physical visit, particularly for people who can't get to a library so easily, having recommended sources of information is important. Signposting to quality information and other resources is a core part of library work and a relatively quick win could be achieved by including appropriate links on library web pages.

38 MLA & Reading Agency & LISU (2010) Public library activity in the areas of health and well-being. Available [online](#).

39 The Reading Agency & Libraries Connected (2018) Reading Well Evaluation of Year 5 (2017/18). Available [online](#).

Increasing the information about health and wellbeing services delivered by the library would raise the profile of these activities and increase the numbers benefitting from them. This would have a positive impact on people's health as many of the activities contribute towards self-management. As well as libraries providing more information about what they offer, it would be beneficial for signposting to come from health providers to direct people to the library. This requires the libraries to actively promote their services to health providers, which could be done at a local or national level.

Recommendation 5: Library events and other information online should be up to date. Where possible, most library websites could include more information about the health and wellbeing services available.

Recommendation 6: Commissioned research found that most people use doctor, dentist and community health clinics to find health and wellbeing information. There could be potential for a national 'advert' for TV screens in health clinic reception areas about health and wellbeing services from libraries, or local versions which could be more specific. Locally, library services could provide posters and leaflets about relevant health and wellbeing activities that are available in the library.

Recommendation 7: Connections could be strengthened to improve the awareness of people working in health and social care of the range of health and wellbeing services available in the public libraries. For example, social prescribing link professionals could signpost people to a number of the activities in the local library if they knew what was available.

6. EVIDENCE OF IMPACT



Traditionally academia and scientific research was believed to only be valid if it was objective, measurable and replicable. Feelings of wellbeing are subjective and difficult to measure, and it's very difficult to attribute a health gain to something that might have happened months or even years earlier, e.g. attending a health event in a library or reading a book about a health condition. However, the person-centred approach of Realistic Medicine means taking the subjective views and responses from people as valid evidence.

In 2010, a research report on health services and libraries found that there was a lack of impact evidence being gathered by library services, and what was collected was mainly usage data and anecdotes. The report noted that there was no standardised evaluation methodology for library services to use, and that evidence of impact must show "...how libraries can deliver the cost saving benefits of early intervention and of preventative services with clear health and well-being patient outcomes."⁴⁰

Since then there has been an increase in the published research outlining the impact libraries have on people's health and wellbeing. Some of the research relates to reading in general, e.g. *Reading Between the Lines: the Benefits of Reading for Pleasure* (2015) by the University of Liverpool or for specific groups of people, e.g. children (*Reading for Pleasure: Reviewing the Evidence* by Coventry University). Other research is focussed on specific health conditions or library projects, e.g. books on prescription. In fact, much of the literature is around bibliotherapy in its various forms and it would be easy to get distracted by this or see this as the only health activity that libraries offer.

The recent report *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing* by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Arts, Health and Wellbeing Inquiry presents comprehensive evidence and numerous examples which demonstrate the beneficial impact of the arts on people's health and wellbeing. The term 'arts' includes literature and libraries, which were mentioned in particular in relation to social prescribing and attending events. The report found that the arts can:

- help keep us well, aid our recovery and support longer lives, better lived
- help meet major challenges facing health and social care particularly ageing, long-term conditions, loneliness and mental health
- help save money in the health service and social care.⁴¹

The APPG's detailed review is recommended reading for those who wish to see more evidence of impact. An accompanying briefing states that:

40 MLA & Reading Agency & LISU (2010) Public library activity in the areas of health and well-being. Available [online](#).

41 All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing (2017) *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing*. Available [online](#).

"As well as being repositories of knowledge and literature, libraries are accessible safe spaces that are essential to people's wellbeing and can play a central part in the happy, healthy lives of people of all ages. The library network encourages reading among children and adults, promotes health and wellbeing and offers creative sanctuary to community members and refugees."⁴²

In Scotland, the 2017 evaluation of health-related PLIF grants from SLIC found that a number of key impacts were articulated across the projects. These included:

- having an impact on people's sense of wellbeing
- addressing social isolation
- improved self-confidence and self-esteem
- benefitting young people at risk of exclusion from school
- improved fitness levels
- increased community awareness
- increased understanding of dementia.⁴³

The Scottish population survey commissioned for this research asked respondents who had used a library for health and wellbeing purposes if they could give an example of how it had helped them. Some of the responses are provided below. Because they don't provide a quantifiable direct health benefit the impact can be overlooked and undervalued. But for these people, these relatively simple interactions and engagements show the contribution libraries make on a daily basis, which cannot be easily measured but which may be invaluable for each person.

"Books I took helped me understand how certain illness can affect person and those around. Books are better than the internet and could go back to areas I needed more detail on."

"I was able to get help looking on the computer and they printed out information and found me a helpline phone number that helped families of those with particular issues."

"Got toddlers to mix and got me to meet other mums. I made friends at the library."

"Did a baby massage class run at library and it taught me how to relax my baby."

"Was asking for a friend about benefits that could be claimed when you have cancer. Was one of the cancer charities in the library."

42 NCVO & APPG (2017) The Role of Arts and Cultural Organisations in Health and Wellbeing Policy Briefing – September 2017. Available [online](#).

43 Scottish Library and Information Council (2017) Public Library Improvement Fund: Evaluation of health-related projects. Available [online](#).

The following sections focus on the main areas of impact namely mental health (through bibliotherapy and other ways), loneliness and social isolation, and long-term conditions of cancer and dementia.

6.1 BIBLIOTHERAPY, BOOKS ON PRESCRIPTION AND RECOMMENDED READING LISTS

Bibliotherapy is the guided use of reading, with an intended therapeutic outcome, with or without interaction from a health professional or therapist. Various definitions of bibliotherapy exist with three broad categories of types of approaches:

- creative bibliotherapy: generally uses fiction, poetry, song lyrics etc to read and discuss within a group setting with a trained therapist/facilitator to guide the discussion;
- books on prescription: a 'prescription' for non-fiction books for specific conditions, usually based around cognitive behavioural therapy, from a list of recommended titles chosen by health professionals, with a partnership between local health care professionals and libraries;
- self-help: use of non-fiction cognitive behavioural therapy books and other resources to help someone understand more about their condition, and help change behaviour, with the person selecting their own books and resources from the general book stock or from a specific health and wellbeing collection.⁴⁴

Books on prescription and recommended reading lists

Reading for improving one's health has been used therapeutically, particularly within hospital settings, for over 100 years.⁴⁵ The first formal scheme with public libraries is generally credited to Professor Frude in Cardiff in 2003, and its success led to the Welsh Government implementing it across Wales in 2005. The scheme focussed on adults suffering mild to moderate mental health issues and was a partnership between health professionals, health services and public library services. Professor Frude's research states that bibliotherapy was as effective as face-to-face therapy and more cost-effective.⁴⁶ It is also now recommended by NICE.

The first book prescription scheme in Scotland also started in 2005 in East Renfrewshire and currently 22 library services offer either a book prescription scheme or recommended reading list schemes (often called 'Healthy Reading', Shelf Help, or similar) for adults. Most of the schemes have developed organically and responded to local need, and often do not use the 'prescription' element to make it more accessible and effective. This approach is therefore a blend between two types of bibliotherapy and has a greater emphasis on self-management and personal choice.

Outwith Scotland, in 2013 the Wales scheme was adopted and adapted in England to form Reading Well, led by the Reading Agency. Initially focussing on adult mental health, the Reading Well book prescription scheme now features separate lists for dementia, long-term conditions and children & young people. Although the prescription element still exists it is less prominent than in the original Welsh scheme. The Welsh Government has recently

44 University of Westminster (2017) Evaluation of the Reading Well for young people Scheme. Available [online](#).

45 Brewster, L., Sen, B., & Cox, A. (2013) Mind the gap: Do librarians understand service user perspectives on bibliotherapy? *Library Trends*, 61(3), 569-586. Online doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/lib.2013.0001>

46 Frude, N. (2018). Libraries and bibliotherapy for mental health. Slides for EAHIL Conference 2018. Available [online](#).

updated its schemes and now offers Reading Well Wales for dementia and a refreshed scheme for mental health, along with a Better with Books scheme for children and young people.

The latest evaluation of Reading Well found that “the programme has proven value in delivering better health outcomes, supporting health practitioners and helping people to help themselves.”⁴⁷ The report assessed all four schemes in England and found:

- total loans exceeded 2 million between 2013 and 2018
- high levels of satisfaction: 88% of survey respondents (across all years of evaluation) reported that they found the book helpful or very helpful
- most users had accessed the books through self-referral rather than a formal prescription
- the scheme was used by health practitioners as part of a supported treatment programme for patients, diversified the resources they could offer and enabled them to support patients outside of formal consultation time
- almost 90% of health practitioners agreed or strongly agreed that the schemes had helped people understand more about their condition, as well as feel more confident about self-managing their symptoms (80%).

The Reading Well evaluation found that the scheme improved health practitioners’ awareness about the services available in libraries although library staff found there were challenges, including raising awareness of the schemes with health professionals and other organisations, and varying degrees of connection between local library services and relevant health partners. The same comments were made by some Scottish library services. There is potential in Scotland to work with the social prescribing community link teams to raise awareness of local recommended reading lists and signposting people to the local library.

One potential challenge for recommended healthy reading or books on prescription schemes is that most of the selected titles assume a certain level of literacy and knowledge. A review of a book prescription scheme in New Zealand found that prescribers and users indicated a desire for shorter and less-complex texts, on a broader range of health topics.⁴⁸ Newer lists tend to be more aware of this and do try to accommodate different literacy levels and formats, e.g. more audio book versions, and the ‘Mood Boosting’ lists by the Reading Agency address mental health using fiction titles recommended by other readers. However, there is scope to consider this if lists are being updated and if authors, publishers and other stakeholders can produce a range of accessible titles. The published literature on these schemes also notes that the approach may not be appropriate for someone in the midst of a severe mental health crisis or deep depression as they are unlikely to feel up to reading a book, for a variety of reasons.

Whilst the literature review found that bibliotherapy and other recommended reading schemes tended to dominate the published literature on health and wellbeing in libraries, it was also noted that there tends to be a lack of rigorous evaluation of such schemes and also a lack of user feedback or input.⁴⁹ Although there are high satisfaction rates from users, and people have found the books helpful, this does not always equate with learning or behaviour change, or improvements in health. The evaluation noted that more work and research was required on capturing the impact of such schemes.

47 The Reading Agency / Libraries Connected (2018) Reading Well Evaluation of Year 5 2017/18. Available [online](#).

48 Carty, S. et al (2016) Books on Prescription - community-based health initiative to increase access to mental health treatment: an evaluation. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health 40:3, pages 276-278. Online doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.12507>

49 Brewster, L., Sen, B., & Cox, A. (2013) Mind the gap: Do librarians understand service user perspectives on bibliotherapy? Library Trends, 61(3), 569-586. Online doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/lib.2013.0001>

Dr You – Western Isles Library Service

The Dr You healthy reading scheme was launched in 2015 and is a partnership between the public library service, NHS Western Isles and a number of local healthcare practitioners and voluntary organisations. There were good connections between relevant organisations and a common desire to implement such a scheme. A group decided a locally-devised scheme would be the most appropriate so that it could be tailored to meet local needs and conditions, and a list of books was drawn up, along with marketing materials including permanent displays in libraries, posters, booklets and business-card sized items. A positive start to the scheme led to a children's and young people's version being adopted as well - a 'family collection'. The scheme was branded as Dr You, which subtly promotes the concept of self-management. The Dr You brand is a strength of the scheme as it provides scope for marketing without using library or medical jargon; it also enabled local buy-in and ownership from key stakeholders rather than using pre-made generic materials.

Capacity issues within both the library and health services have limited the ability to maintain the momentum of the first couple of years of Dr You. Many staff have workload issues, some key personnel have left, and strategic planning time has necessarily been directed towards service-wide reviews. As is common with local and national versions of similar schemes, the list often requires an update along with a renewed marketing campaign after a few years. Opportunities to engage particularly with non-library users are being explored through new community spaces and making connections to help pre-empt more serious conditions developing.

Further information:

<https://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/leisure-sport-and-culture/libraries-and-archives/leabharlannan-nan-eilean-siar/dr-you/>

Book prescription and healthy reading schemes for children and young people

The Reading Agency launched a bibliotherapy scheme for children and young people in 2016 in England as part of the Reading Well programme but branded as Shelf Help. Several Scottish public library services offer this scheme. The list contains a mixture of non-fiction, fiction and poetry titles, with most focussing on the experience of mental health conditions from the perspective of young people, on topics including anxiety, depression, stress, OCD, self-harm, bullying and eating disorders, as well as general topics relevant for adolescents aged c.13-18 years old.

An evaluation of the Shelf Help scheme found positive impacts for young people who had used it. These included:

- improved awareness, knowledge and understanding of mental health conditions
- improved emotional and mental wellbeing, specifically relating to confidence, self-esteem, hope, isolation and emotional intelligence
- changes in behaviour and improved relationships, and
- normalising and de-stigmatising mental health discussion.⁵⁰

The evaluation provides quotes from young people who had used the scheme and which demonstrate the changes the books have had on their health and wellbeing:

"What surprised me was ... how much you learnt from just reading one book and so if you were to read the next you would get more information and be more the wiser of it. ... And how much I think if I knew I wouldn't of been that

50 University of Westminster (2017) Evaluation of the Reading Well for young people Scheme. Available [online](#).

isolated in the past and now I know for a fact I won't be in the future"

"I was going to say that you don't feel alone and ..., because you know that you're not the only one that suffers from anxiety ... and it's helpful to have that because you know that other people have it too and they could have it worse. So it's not the end of the world and there are ways to try and get rid of it for the time being."

"It helps because when you're having a panic attack or you feel anxious you use that so you think in different ways so you kind of realise that you don't need to be panicking and just try to calm down."

"I think it made me a bit more confident to talk to someone.... I just got more confident with that from reading the book and from being able to understand like how to speak about it and how to deal with it."

(All quotes are by participants in the evaluation of the Shelf Help Reading Well scheme⁵¹)

One participant talked about how their sibling suffered from anxiety and anger issues and after they had read the book *I Had A Black Dog* they encouraged their sibling to read it. The participant spoke of how it helped them understand their sibling, and also the family understood more, and went on to buy the book themselves. This shows the longer term and wider impact of such a scheme.

The evaluation found that in the two study sites it researched, most borrowers were girls. This reinforces findings from the Scottish population survey which found most library users of health and wellbeing services were women. There may be ongoing challenges around engaging boys and men that could be looked at by libraries, health care providers and others.

The evaluation also made recommendations for the scheme in future, including a wider range of books including comic book and audio format, better use of leaflets with advice line numbers and websites.

Recommendation 8: Where local book prescription or recommended healthy reading schemes exist, a presentation and leaflets could be given to the local social prescribing link team. At a strategic level there could be general communication about the schemes and their benefits, in regional areas where such schemes exist.

Recommendation 9: Strategic partners such as Scottish Book Trust, Creative Scotland, Publishing Scotland, NHS Scotland and SLIC could consider the potential for developing a 'Quick Reads' style set of health books which would be more appropriate for people with lower literacy levels, along with digital and audio versions of these books.

Creative Bibliotherapy

Creative bibliotherapy uses words to improve wellbeing but does so through a facilitated discussion, and focuses much more on fiction, poetry and other creative forms of expression. The material is used to stimulate discussion and sharing of personal experiences and feelings in a supportive environment. It is a more therapeutic and healing approach than self-directed

51 University of Westminster (2017) Evaluation of the Reading Well for young people Scheme. Available [online](#).

reading of a non-fiction self-help book and may be more appropriate for some people than recommended reading lists of non-fiction books. However, there may be opportunities for cross-promotion of both schemes where they both exist in the same area.

Bibliotherapy reading groups differ from traditional book clubs as the latter tend to discuss only one pre-chosen book at a time, and tend to be more of a literary critique of the book. Bibliotherapy group participants do not read anything in advance; instead individuals meet and share their thoughts, ideas and emotions, inspired by the stories and poems chosen by the facilitator for that week.

Across the UK the Shared Reading scheme developed by The Reader Organisation is a key example of creative bibliotherapy, and at least four Scottish public library services offer these specific groups (Aberdeen City, Edinburgh, Orkney and Stirling). A few library services offer their own scheme with Braw Blether in Midlothian being the principal example (see case study). An evaluation of the Shared Reading scheme found that it had a range of wellbeing outcomes including emotional, cognitive and interpersonal elements, for example:

- enhanced relaxation
- calmness
- concentration
- improved quality of life
- increased confidence and self-esteem
- feelings of shared community and common purpose
- the opportunity for structure in life
- a safe, social space in which to reflect on personal experiences evoked by the text.⁵²

Other organisations also offer creative words for wellbeing schemes, with Lapidus Scotland being the prime example for Glasgow and the central belt region. The toolkit on their website provides a useful set of resources for people who wish to explore this topic further (<https://www.lapidusscotland.co.uk/facilitators/tools>). In addition, the Scottish Poetry Library, with funding from a SLIC grant, is currently working with Lapidus Scotland on a mapping exercise for the Creative Words for Wellbeing research project. This is expected to be completed in 2020.

52 Longden, E., Davis P., Billington, J., et al. (2016) Shared Reading: assessing the intrinsic value of a literature-based health intervention. *Medical Humanities*, 41, pp.113–120.
Online doi: [doi:10.1136/medhum-2015-010704](https://doi.org/10.1136/medhum-2015-010704)

Midlothian Braw Blether Creative Bibliotherapy Groups

Braw Blether is a bibliotherapy initiative using creative words for wellbeing within a group format. The target audience is adults with mental health issues and/or loneliness and social isolation. It began with a PLIF grant from SLIC in 2014 and subsequently has received funding from the local Integrated Care Fund. This provides for a part-time bibliotherapist. Funding is in place until March 2020 and there are currently three groups meeting in libraries along with outreach groups outwith libraries.

"It's soothing, it's stimulating, it's enjoyable, it's a braw blether, it's culturally enriched, it will make you feel glad to be part of your community, it will encourage you to look up other things... it will be a feature of the week you can look forward to enjoying, it'll let you meet some nice people whose conversation you will enjoy." (These quotes are from participants, published in Braw Blether 2018 evaluation report⁵³)

The literary materials used each week include short stories and poems – the brevity makes them accessible to people who may have depression and lack concentration, as one participant commented:

"A book group would be absolutely daunting to me, I would never have the mental stamina to get through a whole book, it would become a real chore for me...bibliotherapy provides that interface, and it's a social environment to do it...you're sharing the experience with people."

People are encouraged to read aloud in the group and discussion of themes indicated by the materials is facilitated.

The Braw Blether evaluation in 2018 found considerable benefits for those who participated including:

- *reduced feelings of isolation*
- *confidence to meet other people and to speak about their feelings*
- *feeling part of the local community*
- *motivation to read more and pick up former interests*
- *feeling valued and listened to*

"Meeting others. At my lowest point they were often the only people I spoke to during the week other than my partner."

"Gives me confidence to speak in a group, which had been destroyed due to my mental health."

The Braw Blether evaluation used a 10-point 'outcome star' to measure the impact on ten areas of life such as positive thinking, self-esteem, confidence and motivation with a rating of 1 to 4 (high). All ten statements were rated above average or higher, with socialising, motivation and stimulation, and enrich your life, rated as the most effective.

"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."

The role of the facilitator is crucial to the success of the group and the sense of inclusion, welcome and support that participants feel. The Braw Blether facilitator is supported by a supervisor and a steering group with members from a range of backgrounds, including health and social care professionals. The facilitator also maintains extensive networks to promote the service, to encourage referrals and keep abreast of health matters including other services which group participants could benefit from.

Success factors for creative therapeutic bibliotherapy schemes include:

- *a facilitator who can draw people out and facilitates group discussions effectively*
- *clear information for potential participants about the different nature of a bibliotherapy group compared with a traditional book club*
- *the welcome, safe, non-clinical library space for the group to meet*
- *library staff understanding the nature of the group and referring suitable new participants*
- *appropriate mental health and facilitation training and skills*
- *a steering group with range of people including health professionals*
- *involvement of different services, particularly health and social care.*

"It has made a huge difference to me... I genuinely believe it can really help people."

"It 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."

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

The 2018 evaluation report is available online and current information about the Braw Blether groups is available on Midspace. This includes contact details for the current bibliotherapist who is very happy to discuss the scheme and how others can begin to implement similar groups.

53 Midlothian Council Library Service (2018) External Evaluation of Midlothian Libraries Bibliotherapy Service: An Assessment of Service Users' Experiences of Participating in Bibliotherapy. Available [online](#).

Recommendation 10: SLIC and other partners to consider project funding to create a toolkit/resource/champions network for library services to support the introduction of creative bibliotherapy schemes in libraries as there are currently very few in operation.

6.2 MENTAL HEALTH

Library services contribute towards better mental health in a number of ways, including through the bibliotherapy schemes detailed above, as well as with specific mental health activities, mindfulness sessions, and other initiatives.

The books on prescription schemes in public libraries began with a focus on mild to moderate mental health issues, and the Reading Well scheme in England was a finalist for the 2017 Public Mental Health and Wellbeing Award from the Royal Society for Public Health. Currently most of the Scottish recommended reading schemes have a strong focus on mental health issues. Library users of one book prescription scheme in Scotland said:

"It helped me get back things I'd lost ... during the worst kind of depression."
(Midlothian⁵⁴)

"It allows me to tune into books, not always possible when anxiety and depression hits." (Midlothian⁵⁵)

Other users have said similar things:

"After reading this book I felt a new sense of well-being."

"This book was invaluable in my recovery."

"This book has really helped me to learn how to change those thoughts and become a more positive person."

"After working through the exercises in this book I feel more in control of my moods, and I can cope better when I am feeling strong emotions."⁵⁶

People using the Macmillan Cancer Information and Support services inevitably face considerable mental health issues in coming to terms with a diagnosis, and the impact on family and friends. Users of the service in libraries note that it has had a beneficial impact not just on coping with the cancer and being provided with a range of support, but it can have a significant benefit on their mental wellbeing. For example:

"Without speaking to the volunteers today my head would still be spinning. I have been so scared but the volunteers have helped me so much I feel I can breathe again."

54 Harris, S. & Bailey, F. (n.d.) Bibliotherapy - empowering and enabling people through the power of written and spoken words in Midlothian. Available [online](#).

55 Midlothian Council Library Service (2018) External Evaluation of Midlothian Libraries Bibliotherapy Service: An Assessment of Service Users' Experiences of Participating in Bibliotherapy. Available [online](#).

56 Frude, N. (2011). Book Prescription Wales 2011 – A Strategy for Enhancing Treatment Choice for Mental Health. Available [online](#).

"If I hadn't accessed this service I would still feel anxious and alone. Having the service in the library helped me relax and talk more freely in my comfort zone." (Both Macmillan @West Dunbartonshire Libraries service users, published in 2018 Annual Report⁵⁷)

This secondary benefit is also found in the rhyme time sessions for parents and young children. Although it's beneficial for stimulating the toddler's learning and literacy, it has a beneficial impact on the mothers who attend. Research in England into rhyme time and maternal mental health found that:

"... attendance at the ... rhyme times had a positive effect on the mood and mental well-being of mothers both immediately and over a longer period of weeks and months. Mothers told us this was due to being in a group, the warm welcome, singing and reading, and seeing their child interact and develop. For many, simply getting to the rhyme time brought structure to the day, sense of achievement, and half an hour of respite."⁵⁸

Furthermore:

"Aggregated results from 207 rhyme times shows that 95% of mothers felt 'happy' or 'very happy' upon leaving a session compared to 77% when they arrived. Longer-term benefits were also reported including increased personal confidence to join in activities, sense of routine, and new friendships."

57 Macmillan @ West Dunbartonshire Team (2019) Our Journey So Far: January-December 2018. Available [online](#).

58 Arts Council England (2018) Library rhyme times and maternal mental health: results of an action research project. Available [online](#).

Midlothian Healthy Reading Evaluation

An independent evaluation⁵⁹ of one of the early bibliotherapy schemes in Scotland focuses on the Healthy Reading scheme in Midlothian which was launched in 2009. The scheme was based on the original concept as devised by Professor Neil Frude in Wales, and a list of appropriate resources specifically for Midlothian was produced with input from health care professionals and mental health service users. Most of the resources were based on cognitive behaviour therapy models and included books, audio CDs and DVDs, at various levels of complexity to suit most abilities.

The Healthy Reading collection was made available in all 12 public libraries and on the mobile library and in one health centre. The scheme followed the Wales model with a prescription approach, although the review found that very few prescriptions were presented at libraries as people could self-refer and many came across it themselves in the library.

The evaluation included the views of GPs, librarians and users of the scheme. In terms of impact 59% of the users agreed that “using the resource helped me to feel a bit better.” They found it easy to use and considered the resources to be helpful. The review found that:

“Service users improved their awareness and understanding of mental health problems, ... The information prompted self-reflection and provided comfort and hope for people who had previously felt alone. Consequently, service users gained a greater understanding of themselves and their own feelings and behaviours, which in turn allowed them to make positive changes to improve their wellbeing. As the changes were motivated by personal choice, they tended to be sustainable and led to improved mood and some reported reduced reliance on other sources of medical care.”

This confirms that self-management is one of the benefits of schemes like this, and this was recognised by the health professionals:

“The GPs felt that the self-help aspect of Healthy Reading Midlothian was the main benefit of the scheme as it is empowering for the patients, and allows them to make long-lasting positive change.”

Some 10 years later the Healthy Reading scheme is still available in Midlothian. More information: <https://libraries.midlothian.gov.uk/web/arena/health-wellbeing>

6.3 LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

The Scottish Government recently published A Connected Scotland: Our strategy for tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections. Reducing social isolation and loneliness will contribute to improving the health, wellbeing and quality of life for the people of Scotland as both factors have an impact on mental and physical health. The strategy has four priority areas and notes the importance of culture for social cohesion and integration, with specific reference to libraries under priority 4 (support and infrastructure that fosters connections).

There is a significant body of literature which links reading with lower rates of self-reported loneliness.⁶⁰ It's thought this is because not only is it an absorbing pastime, but also because it helps readers connect with the world, manage their emotions, and is a window into other people's lives enabling them to realise that others are in similar positions. Within the library context the benefits arise not only from the reading but from engaging with library staff and from taking part in activities and groups in the library. This is important particularly for social

59 Scottish Development Centre for Mental Health (2010) Evaluation of Healthy Reading Midlothian. Available [online](#).

60 Demos (2018) A Society of Readers. Available [online](#).

isolation (which relates to objective measure of social contact) and as was noted earlier, mobile libraries have a significant impact on people's feelings of loneliness and their social isolation:

"Friendliness of staff and bumping into neighbours makes me feel less lonely."

"It provides a meeting place to connect with neighbours and helps me sleep well each night by providing a book to read that helps me to relax and unwind."

"Having the library visit has lessened feelings of isolation and brings the wider world to my door. The internet is no substitute for the warmth, and interest of someone really interested in my requirements. Keeps my brain alive." (Quotes from mobile library users⁶¹)

Many of the health and wellbeing activities in libraries contribute towards reduced feelings of loneliness and social isolation through the friendly staff, supportive groups and welcoming space. The quotes below show how one group⁶² benefitted people in different ways:

"Encouraged me to socialise more as the group was very open."

"Reduces isolation."

"Feeling part of the community."

In health and wellbeing groups and events, chatting to others is often a key part of the activity, e.g. knit & natter groups or sociable board game groups. Although the activity (craft, games) is important, the social element is equally important. Quotes from users from You Time events in the Highlands provide examples of this:

"Absolutely brilliant class and thoroughly enjoyable and really enjoyed the company with everyone involved."

"Wonderful couple of hours. Made friends and Christmas gifts. Best time I've had in years. Thanks so much." (Source: quotes from feedback forms, provided through personal communication with librarian)

Reading Friends

Reading as an intervention can be used to address loneliness and social isolation, and this approach is the basis of the UK Reading Friends programme with older people and libraries. It is a three-year scheme funded by the Big Lottery from 2017-20 and delivered by the Reading Agency along with the Scottish Book Trust and Literature Wales. It seeks to engage with older and isolated people through reading and conversations, and uses libraries as the space for the groups and volunteers to help deliver the reading groups. Stirling libraries were the pilot service in year one, with Edinburgh joining in year two. A review of the pilot year found that:

61 Scottish Library and Information Council (2019) Libraries on the Move: the impact of mobile library services in Scotland. Available [online](#).

62 Midlothian Council Library Service (2018) External Evaluation of Midlothian Libraries Bibliotherapy Service: An Assessment of Service Users' Experiences of Participating in Bibliotherapy. Available [online](#).

- 88% said the programme increased their opportunities for social contact
- 94% of the participants rated their experience as good or excellent, with important social and personal outcomes such as confidence, feeling included, opportunities for social contact and meeting new people.
- 88% of Reading Friends participants appreciated the increased social contact
- 88% of participants felt it added purpose to their week⁶³

6.4 OLDER PEOPLE AND AGEING

A recent report by Arts Council England found there are numerous ways that libraries contribute towards the wellbeing of older people including:

- helping them stay in their own homes through 'at home' delivery services and digital training
- socialising activities in libraries (to help with isolation and loneliness) as well as library outreach activities and services in care homes
- support for carers through carers' collections
- dementia services and activities, e.g. reminiscence boxes using local history collections and specialist book stock designed for people with memory loss.⁶⁴

The report is recommended reading for anyone interested in library services for older people as it contains detailed case studies and examples of different projects. It states that:

*"One of the most important things these case studies show is that public libraries, which exist in every community in every part of the country, are a **population-scale platform** for meeting the **population-scale challenges** of ageing. There are very few other public services which achieve regular personal contact with over one-third of the 75+ population."(emphasis in original)*

Ayrshire libraries in partnership working

Older people can become lonely or isolated over time, and things like losing their hearing can make someone less confident about going out and taking part in events or speaking to people. Several libraries offer services around hearing aids, including replacement batteries and repair services.

Action on Hearing Loss use a number of Ayrshire libraries to provide the Hear to Help drop-in service to support people to make the most of their hearing aids and manage their hearing loss effectively by providing basic maintenance, information and advice.

The service is delivered by Community Hearing Support Service volunteers through external funding from the local Health and Social Care Partnerships. An evaluation of the service was carried out in autumn 2018 with the following headline results:

- 69% of respondents said that the support provided had made a 'big improvement' to their daily life

63 The Reading Agency (n.d.) The Reading Friends programme test year at a glance (infographic). Available [online](#).

64 Arts Council of England (2017) Stand by me: The contribution of public libraries to the well-being of older people. Available [online](#).

- 78% of participants said they felt happier because they could manage their hearing loss better
- 76% of respondents said socialising with family and friends was easier
- 74% of respondents said that they felt more independent because they could hear better
- 89% of respondents rated the friendliness of staff and volunteers as 'excellent'
- 83% of respondents rated the service overall as 'excellent' (with 17% rating it as 'good').

The main reasons for these outstanding outcomes are:

- people found it easier to get to the drop-ins in the library than to go to the Audiology Department.
- not having to make an appointment
- staff and volunteers have time to spend with participants.

Participants said:

"The service provided in the library is excellent. The staff are friendly and efficient and the overall feeling is one of care."

"This is a great service and local. ... Thank you." (Source: North Ayrshire libraries service, online survey response)

Many library services in Scotland are developing their services for older people through targeting dementia with schemes such as memory boxes/bags, other reminiscence resource packs, dementia cafes, as well as staff Dementia Friendly training and making the space dementia-friendly (see section 7.1). Several services have begun to offer Playlist for Life in their libraries which enables someone to create a playlist of their favourite music to help stimulate memories and reminiscence. The level of involvement for libraries can be through leaflet provision, volunteers and/or library staff trained to give advice on the service, and offering a help point about the free service. Playlist for Life has been training library staff across Scotland and it's currently available in around 40 community libraries from Aberdeenshire to the Borders. Libraries are seen as an ideal venue for introducing the service as they have computers and tablets which can be used to demonstrate how to set up a playlist, and a few library services also have free streaming/download music services (either Freegal or Naxos, see Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Edinburgh and Glasgow).

Recommendation 11: Library services which have reminiscence boxes/memory bags could include the Playlist for Life music leaflets, particularly if music is featured during the reminiscence sessions, to introduce people to the idea of creating their own personal playlist. If the library also has a free digital music service it could offer sessions on creating a playlist using its free subscription.

Moments in Time – Fife library service (ONFife)

The prevalence of dementia varies across Scotland, reflecting the age demographic, and Fife library service noted that their area had a high level of those living with dementia. They started the Moments in Time project with a local contact from Alzheimer Scotland and people with dementia in order to draw up activities that would be beneficial and be based in the library.

The programme features free themed reminiscence sessions, e.g. on holidays, the 1950s etc., and uses stories, poems, objects, music etc on the theme to generate conversations

over a cup of tea and biscuits. The service held 50 Moments in Time events in 2017, and 370 in 2018 and has continued to offer the programme in 2019.

In addition, a variety of special events have been held, thanks to external funding, including:

- Movie Moments (dementia-friendly films): These offer those living with dementia a chance to see films in a relaxed and friendly environment where the lights are turned up and the sound is turned down. Over 300 people attended the three film showings (Calamity Jane, Seven Brides for Seven Brothers, and Grease) and this enables those living with dementia to continue to participate in entertainment.

- Groove ON (dementia-friendly disco): This attracted people of varying ages and physical abilities and provided a shared experience as well as a less-obvious form of physical exercise.

Tovertafel (Magic Table): This special equipment provides interactive light games, played on a regular table using a mounted projector on the ceiling. The projector and other equipment in the box project lights and sounds to create games on the table below. It helps people living with dementia to engage with others and have fun, and the games are designed to provide physical, mental, and social stimulation for people with dementia.

Formal impact evidence can be difficult to gather from people with dementia but anecdotal evidence from carers confirms the health and wellbeing changes and benefits experienced during and after one of the dementia friendly events.

6.5 CANCER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

One health and wellbeing scheme which is unlike most of the other provision in libraries in Scotland is the Information and Support service from Macmillan Cancer, with the difference being that it is delivered in the same way in all participating library services, rather than being a locally-devised scheme. It is currently available in 14 library services across Scotland, having started in Glasgow in 2009. The Easterhouse project was the first time the Macmillan cancer information service had been provided outside of a clinical setting. The non-clinical space of the local library is key to its success.

"It was also local which made a difference because I was sometimes feeling too tired and weak to go far. If it was anywhere else I couldn't have got to it."

"Hospitals and health centres are too busy and too clinical. Library is more relaxed and informal. Most areas have a local library so it is easy to access compared to hospitals."

(Quotes from service users, in Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries 2018 Annual Report⁶⁵)

People with cancer often have mental health issues to deal with, may feel unable to talk to close friends and family, and may not be aware of additional services they can access including financial benefits. The Macmillan Cancer Information and Support service provides a friendly, welcoming space and the time needed for these sorts of conversations. The benefits can be invaluable for participants:

65 Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries (2018) Annual report 2017. Available [online](#).

"This place is a lifeline for me."

"I find coming here useful, it helps me cope."

"I feel a lot better now than when I came in."

"Thank you, I didn't know who to talk to. I feel much better." (Quotes from Saltcoats Library, North Ayrshire, via personal communication with the library service.

The recent external review of West Dunbartonshire's Macmillan Cancer Information and Support service found that some clinical staff were uncertain of the value of the service in libraries with the consequence that referrals were perhaps lower than expected. The report recommends working with clinical staff to emphasise the non-clinical nature of the support, and that it is over and above what someone may be receiving medically, rather than competing with the medical service. Key points for emphasis were:

- about half of service users are the friends, families and carers of people with cancer
- over half of service users spend more than 30 minutes at the service per visit
- the vast majority are looking for someone to talk to, a listening ear or a shoulder to cry on, rather than medical information
- there are a large number of onward referrals made to a wide range of services that users say they would not have accessed otherwise.⁶⁶

The report suggests that there may be benefit in identifying a champion with a clinical background to promote the library service to other clinical staff.

Library provision of the Macmillan Cancer Information and Support service is a tiered model ranging from an information point managed by library staff, to drop-in spaces in the library or a full purpose-built hub space. Funding is available for three years from Macmillan Cancer, after which the library service has to embed it within its own budget or seek alternative arrangements such as being fully run by volunteers. Some library managers felt the issue of sustainability and on going costs were challenging at a time of reduced budgets and capacity, especially if the service had taken a year or more to get established.

A report by Rocket Science in 2018 provides detail on the implementation of community-based cancer information and support services in Scotland, including libraries.⁶⁷ It outlines the provision in several geographic areas, as well as the factors which need to be in place for these support services to flourish, such as early buy-in and support from host services and relevant stakeholders. The report noted that:

"[Cancer information support] services tend to struggle to gain buy-in from healthcare services when their management structure is not embedded within the local Health and Social Care Partnership, and it can be harder to understand who the appropriate points of contact for specific information are."

The survey of library managers and in-depth interviews confirms this finding, and it also applies to other health and wellbeing services in libraries as well. Connections between health partners and library services naturally vary locally and some element of closer working could be valuable, perhaps with strategic agreements at regional or national levels. The

66 Rocket Science (2018) Final Evaluation Report of Macmillan @ West Dunbartonshire Libraries. Available [online](#).

67 Rocket Science (2018) Report on Community Based Cancer Information and Support Services in Scotland. Available [online](#).

evaluation of the cancer information support services also indicated that promotion and capacity are critical success factors for the services.

The Macmillan Cancer scheme in libraries is also different from many other health and wellbeing services in libraries in that it is delivered primarily by volunteers. They receive specialist and accredited training, and several case studies in the annual reports published by Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries⁶⁸ indicate that a significant proportion of the volunteers have been former users of the scheme and are keen to help others in similar situations. One former user-turned-volunteer said:

“Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries is giving people back some power after a cancer diagnosis by offering information and support that may not be available to them otherwise. ... I cannot thank this innovative, supportive and empathic service enough.” (Quote from volunteer Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries)

Volunteers not only spend time with those who come to drop-in sessions but also refer them to other services and organisations such as complementary therapy to help with sleep as well as benefit advice. What may appear to be a basic chat about various things can have a profound, and unquantifiable impact on someone:

“What I really needed was just some time to sit and talk about how I was feeling. The volunteer gave me that time. Asked me how I was feeling, and if there was anything she could do to help. I felt like such a weight had been lifted after that.” (Quote from service user, in Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries)

“I felt like I was drowning and didn’t know where to turn... the ladies in the library were lovely.” (Quote from service user, in Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries)

An independent evaluation report of the West Dunbartonshire Macmillan Cancer Information and Support service identified that “more needs to be done to encourage people to see libraries as hubs for health and wellbeing” along with more referrals from relevant health services and centres, more promotion and greater support from the national Macmillan centre.⁶⁹ Implementing these findings where such schemes exist locally/regionally would be beneficial for those affected by cancer.

68 Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries (2019) Our Story 2018 (Annual Report). Available [online](#).

69 Rocket Science (2018) Final Evaluation Report of Macmillan @ West Dunbartonshire Libraries. Available [online](#).

Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries

The Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Services scheme in Glasgow Libraries currently consists of 33 library-based Cancer Information and Support Service points across the city (14 volunteer-led drop-in services and 19 information points), meaning that individuals in Glasgow are at very most one mile away from their local Cancer Information and Support Service. The service also operates a range of outreach sessions in other community venues, such as hospitals, health centres, community centres and a number of religious settings. There are just under 100 volunteers delivering the service.

The service in Glasgow has been embedded into the core library offer, with the operational volunteer management delivered by Library Supervisors. The current funding cycle from Macmillan Cancer will see Glasgow Life develop a centralised programme of Macmillan volunteering opportunities, the first of its kind in the UK.⁷⁰ This is a reflection of the work they do with volunteers: they were awarded the Macmillan Excellence Award for Service Integration in the UK Macmillan Excellence Awards in 2017, and their volunteers have been shortlisted and winners in a number of similar awards in Scotland.

In 2018:

- 46% of people who drop-in do so for someone to talk to
- 27% want information on what other services are available
- 2 in 3 service users are female
- Over 2,500 attendances at services in libraries and outreach sessions in 2018
- 59% of users live within the most deprived areas in Scotland (compared with Glasgow rate of 48%)⁷¹

Since the launch in 2012 there have been over 18,000 attendances and over 48,000 hours of time from volunteers. Almost half of those who attend are family members, friends and carers which is evidence of the wider impact of cancer and the need for additional non-clinical support.

"The libraries are in great locations and are much less formal than a health care setting with a better atmosphere. They are really easy for me to get to ... The best elements of the service include the volunteers, the non-intimidating environment and knowing that people are there to help. ... If you are living with cancer I say go and speak to them. You won't regret it. You'll get nothing but help. You won't find a better place to go to than the library." (Rob's story, taken from 2017 Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries annual report⁷²)

In addition to the volunteer support, Glasgow Libraries has developed its own one day training course on volunteer management, along with an e-training module on the Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries service so that all library staff have a baseline knowledge of the service and can refer people to it if appropriate.

6.6 IMPACT IF LIBRARY SERVICES WERE NOT DELIVERING HEALTH AND WELLBEING SERVICES

If it is hard to gather evidence of the impact of health and wellbeing library activities, it is even harder to find any evidence of the potential impact of if these services were not available. For geographic areas where there are not many library health and wellbeing

70 Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries (2019) Our Story 2018 (Annual Report). Available [online](#).

71 Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries (2019) Our Story 2018 (Annual Report). Available [online](#).

72 Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries (2018) Annual report 2017. Available [online](#).

activities or services, the impact of not offering them could be regarded as the status quo, e.g. health inequalities and people accessing 'crisis point' services having missed prevention and intervention activities.

The evidence from library users presented here indicates that many people find the library services invaluable for their mental health, reducing anxiety, reducing feelings of loneliness, and provision of self-management information and support. Without such interventions some of these people may well have reached a crisis point and appear somewhere in the emergency or welfare system; many GP visits are connected to stress and loneliness. Through taking part in health and wellbeing activities in libraries, it has provided them with the tools, information and support to manage their health. As other studies have found, it would be beneficial for libraries to gather more high-quality evidence of impact of their health and wellbeing services. This will help raise the profile of the services as well as their value, and will help health care professionals feel confident in referring people to the library service.

Recommendation 12: SLIC and other partners to consider how the varied health and wellbeing activities could be evaluated and if there is scope to create a standardised set of evaluation guidelines for library staff.

Walk ON – Fife Library Service

Walking, talking and reading groups started in Fife in 2015 with a PLIF grant for a project which would combine physical and mental health and wellbeing, including social interaction. The groups started in two locations and currently they are now in 11 locations with 12 groups. Almost all the groups meet fortnightly, although one meets monthly.

Each walk takes 30-40 minutes at the pace of slowest walker and is themed around the local area. Talking during the walk is encouraged, and participants return to the library for a cup of tea and book chat lasting another 30-40 minutes. The staff read aloud from the chosen books and then encourage discussion. The library service has over 100 themed sessions planned so staff can pick them and use them straight away. The library service has offered to share these resources with other services. Library staff have received walk leader training and some can train additional staff, which is important for sustainability of the programme. Over 50 staff have now been trained as walk leaders, and some are trained Dementia Friendly walk leaders as well.

The groups meet and go out in all weathers (unless it's very icy) as it's felt important to build up the walking habit. The groups are free and operate on a drop-in basis, but some are so popular they have a waiting list as there is a limit of 20 people per walk, with two walk leaders.

Anecdotal benefits noted include improved fitness of participants, increased social engagement, and the staff have reported greater feelings of wellbeing and feeling uplifted.

The library service has also been successful in obtaining funding from a national organisation, Paths for All, under their Smarter Places grant which promotes walking and more active travel. See: <https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/>

More information: <https://onfife.com/libraries-archives/walk>

7. LIBRARIES AS TRUSTED COMMUNITY SPACES



One of the key areas where libraries have a significant strength is their value as safe, trusted and welcoming community spaces. This is frequently mentioned by the public when they are asked what they like about the library as well as in the published literature.⁷³ Within the health and wellbeing context it can be especially important as people may feel more comfortable in a non-clinical setting and feel that it's less obvious that they are there for a health issue. This was evidenced by many of the Macmillan Cancer Information and Support service reports.

"Nobody wants to go to hospital. Libraries have a nice relaxed atmosphere".

"The library is a great setting, very local and friendly. I would prefer this to a clinical setting as it is less scary." (Both quotes from services users of Macmillan @ West Dunbartonshire Libraries⁷⁴)

Libraries are also regarded as a trusted space where it's safe to discuss taboo subjects, such as death. The review of the first cohort of the Engaging Libraries initiative led by the Carnegie UK Trust and the Wellcome Trust found that "[as] safe, trusted spaces public libraries were the ideal venue for engaging people on tricky or touchy subjects." In addition, the report notes that:

"Libraries' USP as a safe, trusted space was key to many projects' successes. Members of the public have a high level of trust in the library sector and library staff are recognised as a reliable source of information and advice."⁷⁵

Interviews undertaken during this Scottish research with a variety of third sector organisations and external partners confirmed the value of the trusted library space. Participants commented that libraries:

- are 'a great fit' for their third-sector/charity work
- are valuable because they are free, open to all and have a range of users
- provide an extensive network across Scotland ensuring relative equity of access and reach
- are located in local communities
- have a range of facilities, including meeting rooms and computers
- have trained staff on hand to help, with local knowledge
- may be open outside of traditional opening hours of clinical establishments
- are often willing partners for projects
- are often more relaxed and welcoming than clinical settings.

73 Civica (2018) Changing Landscape Report - The intrinsic value of libraries as public spaces. Available [online](#).

74 Rocket Science (2018) Final Evaluation Report of Macmillan @ West Dunbartonshire Libraries. Available [online](#).

75 Carnegie UK Trust (2019) Engaging Libraries: Learning from Phase 1. Available [online](#).

In addition, some libraries are moving outside the formal walls of the library to utilise outdoor space for health and wellbeing activities. This includes a project in North Ayrshire (GrowNA) which is working with local groups and young people to establish gardens where there is suitable ground at libraries, and another service (High Life Highland) where the library service is working with leisure colleagues to offer an outdoor gym rehabilitation programme. Some of these programmes might appeal to men and could be a potential way to engage with this audience in terms of their health and wellbeing.

Whilst the physical library offers the public a valuable space, it's important to consider the digital space occupied by library services. As using public services digitally becomes more important, particularly for people who can't access other public spaces, including libraries, so easily, does the online library space provide an equally trusted, welcoming space for health and wellbeing? A review of the 32 public library websites in Scotland found that there is considerable scope to improve the digital health and wellbeing 'offer', including providing more information about the range of current activities and services available locally, along with more links to trusted quality health information. One element of the health and wellbeing offer which may be much harder to offer digitally is the interaction and social engagement with library staff and other members of the public within a trusted and safe space, which is an important part of the health and wellbeing offer. One recent report on the value of the public library space found that people would like more two-way engagement online.⁷⁶ Whilst digital services do not have to replicate physical services, there is perhaps scope to review the demand for different online health and wellbeing services. Given that many public library services are stretched in terms of capacity, this may be difficult to achieve, but is an area for future consideration.

Recommendation 13: Improve the online library health offer locally with more information about available activities and services, links to trusted health information, and investigate if there is a demand for some degree of social interaction online combining libraries and health and wellbeing services.

Conversations and signposting in the library - Aberdeen City library service

Make Every Opportunity Count (MEOC) is a scheme which is being applied across Aberdeen City healthcare partners, including libraries, developed and led by NHS Grampian. It encourages staff to have conversations with people when they come in to the library. The staff member can then signpost them to relevant services if appropriate and highlight their own resources. The focus is on making the most of normal conversations, within the usual day-to-day chat and is linked to the self-management agenda in helping people understand and manage their health and wellbeing.

The scheme in libraries has begun with pilots in particular geographic areas, e.g. with diabetes where that has higher prevalence locally. The concept has been extended to home service customers around fall prevention, isolation etc. Library staff use the toolkit provided by the ALLIANCE health literacy training to help with sources of trusted health information. Staff also use the ALISS directory and NHS Inform Scotland Service Directory for local referrals.

76 Civica (2018) Changing Landscape Report - The intrinsic value of libraries as public spaces. Available [online](#).

7.1 INCLUSIVE LIBRARY SPACES

In the last five years there has been a rise in public (and commercial) spaces becoming more suitable for specific groups of people whose interactions with space can be complicated. This is especially so in relation to autism and dementia where places such as hairdressers, supermarkets and cafes may make the whole space 'xxx-friendly', or may have specific times where things like lighting and sounds are adjusted to suit the needs of those attending.

Many public library services in Scotland are adapting their physical space to make them autism or dementia friendly, including adopting official or accredited staff training schemes where these exist, and certification status for individual libraries or the service as a whole. In Scotland, many public library services either have Dementia Friendly staff, or have Dementia Friendly status for some of their libraries. A smaller number are designated as Autism Friendly, with more due to implement this later in 2019-20. Three services noted that they have Safe Space accreditation.

Some of the space changes are relatively easy to accomplish, even on a low budget, whereas others may require more funding or larger changes to the space. In most cases, the adaptations for dementia and autism are similar, but there are a few aspects where the requirements are quite different, e.g. lighting. This is the challenge of being universal and not excluding people but at same time appealing to specific groups. Libraries can overcome any differences to some extent by publishing information about different requirements by some users so that library users can be more understanding, e.g. displaying a poster which explains that autistic people need a calm and quiet environment, but may make noise themselves.

Renfrewshire libraries deserves particular mention. It has a detailed leaflet available online (as a PDF) for every branch, which provides information and pictures about all aspects of the library service, from the front door to issue counters, toilets etc. This meets best practice for autistic users who like to know in advance exactly what to expect. It is possibly the only library service in Scotland which currently does this.

In addition to the space, many services also provide dementia-friendly events, and some provide autism-friendly events. Naturally the dementia events are orientated towards older people, and generally the autism events tend to be geared towards children, which may leave autistic adults without many opportunities.

Recommendation 14: Where capacity exists, library services could create autism-friendly guides for each branch and make them available online, using the Renfrewshire documents as best practice.

7.1.1 Breastfeeding-friendly spaces

Several library services mentioned that they are a breastfeeding-friendly place. This is important as all library services provide activities and services for babies and children. In Scotland, breastfeeding in public is protected by the Breastfeeding etc. (Scotland) Act 2005, under which it is an offence to stop someone in a public place from feeding their child, if under two. Because of this legislation the survey of library managers did not ask about breastfeeding as it is a legal requirement to allow it. However, there can be varying degrees of being a welcoming environment for someone who wishes to breastfeed in public, and many libraries do create suitable spaces for this.

8. HEALTH (INFORMATION) LITERACY



Health literacy is often regarded as the ability to understand instructions provided by health professionals, such as how to take medicine or specific details about the treatment. The broader term of health information literacy encompasses people having enough knowledge, understanding and skills to find and use health information appropriately. Both are increasingly recognised as a significant public health concern, particularly in relation to health inequality, and the impact this has on health outcomes and on people's health.⁷⁷ Poor health literacy can affect how people interact with the healthcare system, their ability to fill out forms, ability to locate service providers, ability to self-manage their condition, and ability to seek and understand health information.

Health information literacy has partly become more of a pressing issue with the rise of the internet in the last twenty-five years and the overwhelming amount of, and easy access to, health information, not all of which is to be trusted. The shift towards self-management and shared decision-making with patients has also led to more people looking for health information. Provision of quality health information is a form of health intervention and with appropriate support can reduce anxiety and stress around the health issue, which leads to greater patient engagement and better shared decision making and self-management. In turn this leads to an improved patient experience and outcomes.⁷⁸

Health literacy and health information literacy are both important for health care, health promotion and ill health prevention. For health literacy programmes to be successful the approach has to be system-

wide and involve individuals, professionals, organisations and policy-makers, and should address the issues that underpin health inequalities, such as deprivation.⁷⁹

8.1 SCOTTISH APPROACH TO HEALTH LITERACY

A freely available international handbook on health literacy was published in 2019 and includes a chapter on the work taking place in Scotland, and which is regarded as a leading country in terms of health literacy policy development.⁸⁰

77 Barr-Walker, J. (2016). Health literacy and libraries: a literature review. *Reference Services Review*, 44(2).pp. 1-30. And: Okan, O. et al (Eds) (2019) *International handbook of health literacy: research, practice and policy across the lifespan*. Policy Press: London. Available free [online](#).

78 Patient Information Forum (2013) *Making the Case for Information*. Available [online](#).

79 Okan, O. et al (Eds) (2019) *International handbook of health literacy: research, practice and policy across the lifespan*. Policy Press: London. Available free [online](#).

80 Okan, O. et al (Eds) (2019) *International handbook of health literacy: research, practice and policy across the lifespan*. Policy Press: London. Available free [online](#).

“The Scottish national action plans have given encouragement and inspiration to many health literacy champions who are making a real difference and working hard to help achieve the ambition in Scotland. Internationally they have contributed to the case for action on health literacy and helped other countries to follow suit.”

The recent annual reports from the Chief Medical Officer for Scotland (Realistic Medicine and Realising Realistic Medicine) highlighted improving health literacy as a vital area of progress within health and care in Scotland. The Scottish approach to health literacy is broader than functional literacy and finding and understanding information as it encompasses people being more confident in relation to accessing and using health information and being a more active partner in their care, including shared decision-making and self-management.

“Health literacy is about people having enough knowledge, understanding, skills and confidence to use health information, to be active partners in their care, and to navigate health and social care systems.”⁸¹

Making it Easy: A health literacy action plan for Scotland was published in 2014 and was followed by *Making it Easier 2017-2025*. The key focus of the health literacy plan is putting people at the heart of services to help them help themselves. This is to be achieved through redesigning services, removing barriers, making health information more responsive to people’s needs and focussing on shared decision making and self-management. The approach also looks at a person’s social and economic context as these are important factors in determining health literacy.⁸² Research from Wales states that “having a sense of personal control is key to well-being as it enables people to make choices that empower them and give meaning to their lives.”⁸³

8.2 LIBRARY CONTRIBUTION TO HEALTH LITERACY

Health literacy, as an example of information literacy, is part of the core library service. Library staff can advise about quality sources in a range of formats, and help someone use those resources effectively. They can help someone gain skills and confidence in searching for information and being able to evaluate what they find.

As many people use the internet to find health information, health literacy is closely tied to digital literacy which is another area of expertise provided by library staff. If someone is helped with their digital literacy skills they will feel more confident in using Google *effectively* to look for information, as well as learning how to evaluate whether a website is trustworthy and up to date, and also how to find relevant local or national groups or organisations who can provide further help with the health condition, or trusted sources of information like NHS Inform.

Digital skills are becoming essential skills, as evidenced by the Scottish Government’s Digital Health and Care Strategy (2018), and are especially important with the increased emphasis

81 Scottish Government (2014) *Making it Easy: A health literacy action plan for Scotland*. Available [online](#).

82 Kramer et al (2019) *Developing health literacy policy in Scotland: A case study*. pp. 419-433. In Okan, O. et al (Eds) (2019) *International handbook of health literacy: research, practice and policy across the lifespan*. Policy Press: London. Available free [online](#).

83 Arts Council Wales (2018) *Arts and Health in Wales: A mapping study of current activity: Volume 1: Analysis, findings and proposals*. Available [online](#).

on self-management and health inequalities. Making it Easier recognises public libraries' role in helping people improve their digital skills and it is hoped that both these strategies will provide opportunities for libraries to be involved with digital health information literacy skills training for the public.

Future opportunities for public libraries include engaging with Health Information Week in July and Health Literacy Month in October. Although both are currently more prominent within health libraries in England, they are open to all library sectors across the UK, with the month being an international campaign.⁸⁴

Recommendation 15: Public (and academic) libraries could partner with health libraries in Scotland to support Health Literacy Week 2020 (in July) and Health Literacy Month 2020 (October).

8.2.1 Libraries as sources of trusted information

Libraries are not only trusted spaces, but are also trusted sources of information, which enhances their role in information literacy. The population survey commissioned for this Scottish research asked people the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement that libraries are source of trusted information.

How much do you agree or disagree that libraries are a good place for trusted information?

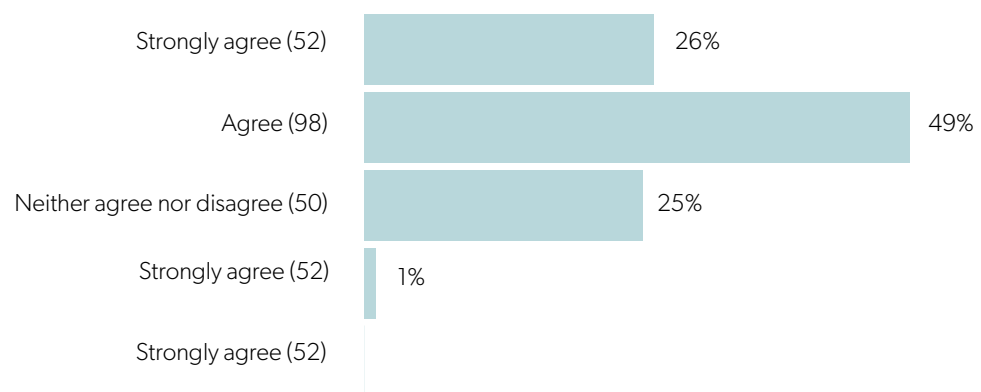


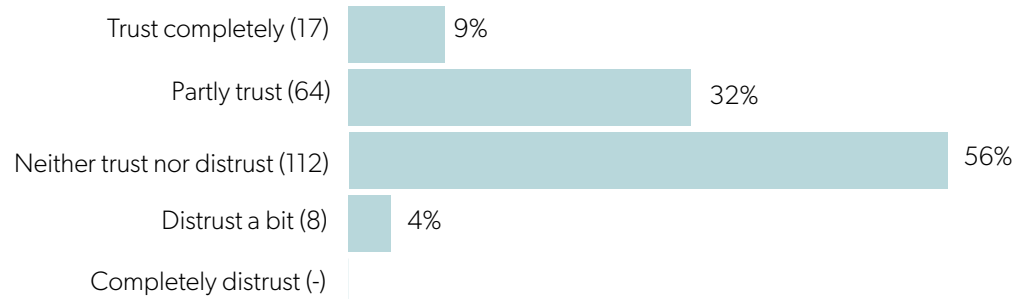
Chart 5: Source of trusted information (Base: 201 respondents)

A total of 75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that libraries were a source of trusted information which places libraries in a strong position. However, some caution should be applied to this high figure, as inherent question bias may predispose people to respond positively. To overcome this, the question of trusted sources of information was also asked in relation to different sources. The charts below show that 41% of participants trusted information from the library, compared with 23% for a general search of the internet and 99% who trusted information from a doctor's surgery.

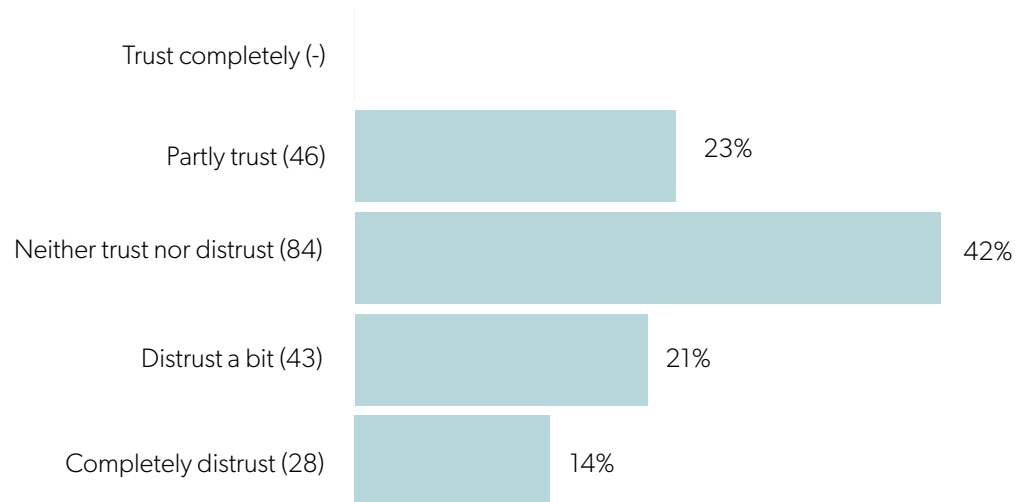
84 See [Health Information Week](#) and [Health Literacy Month](#)

Question: How much do you trust each of the following sources for information about health and wellbeing?

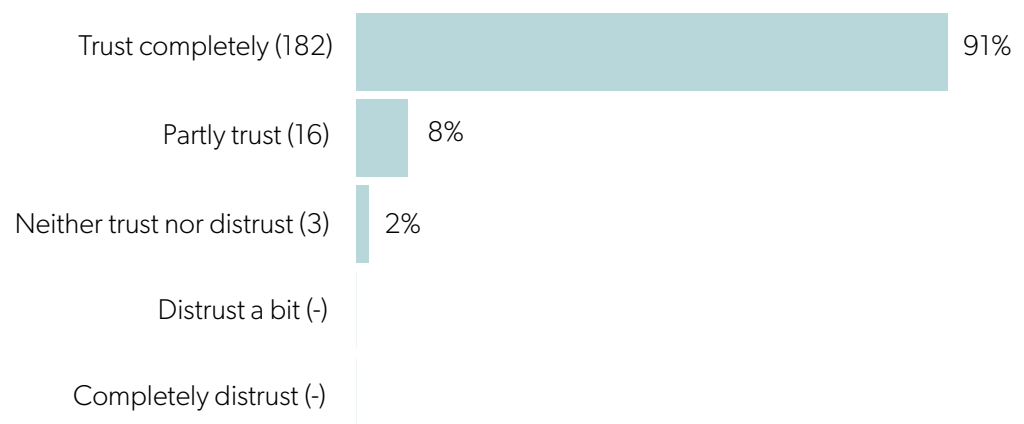
The library



The internet (general search)



Doctor's surgery



Charts 6-8 Level of trust in different sources of health information (Base: 201 respondents)

Therefore, between 41% and 75% of people trust libraries as sources of health and wellbeing information, which means they are important partners in the provision of health information.

8.2.2 Health literacy skills training for the public

Health literacy skills support can be provided informally at the point of request, but also through specially designed sessions and training programmes for the public. It's important to tailor health literacy programmes to specific communities taking into account levels of literacy, cultures, computer skills, ages etc, and ideally, the target audience should be involved in the design of the programme in order to ensure it is the most helpful to them.

⁸⁵ Co-design can be a complex and resource-intensive approach and partnerships between library services, health care professionals and member organisations could help share the work effectively. As health literacy levels vary geographically, this may be more relevant for some library services than others. English public libraries can use an online dataset to see the estimated health literacy level at local authority level.⁸⁶ The interactive Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation provides a useful guide although does not explicitly relate to literacy levels.

Recommendation 16: Investigate the potential for partnership working between relevant organisations and community groups to identify people with poor health literacy and co-design a health literacy skills training programme with them and for them based in public libraries. A linked national project could look at the potential for a national searchable database which shows local/regional levels of health literacy.

Videos for health information literacy - Aberdeen City library service

In 2015/16 Aberdeen City library service reviewed their provision for supporting health and wellbeing to align with the Scottish strategy for public libraries, Ambition & Opportunity. They perceived a gap in terms of digital health literacy and developed a series of short videos for the public with tips on how to search for and evaluate health information online. The videos are available on the library's YouTube channel. The videos are useful resources for the public, and library staff can signpost people to them, for example if someone comes in with a cutting from a newspaper about a health story, the videos explain about how to find trusted health information and to check the facts behind the headlines.⁸⁷

On one occasion a local person who ran a Facebook support page for a particular group of people wanted to make sure that they were sharing trustworthy information. After a health information literacy training session with a member of library staff and watching the video she felt more confident about how to evaluate information, and could share the video with others in the group to aid their learning and improve their self-management in the future.

See: YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbkvfkYhz7hrwraMi6hYkqQ>

85 Baur, C., Martinez, L. M., Tchangalova, N. & Rubin, D. (2017). A review and report of community-based health literacy interventions. Presentation and paper at Roundtable on Health Literacy, The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, Washington, D.C. Online [doi](#).

86 University of Southampton (n.d.) Estimated prevalence of low health literacy. Available [online](#).

87 Gould R. (2018) Animated videos; supporting the "Dr Google" generation at Aberdeen City libraries. ALISS Quarterly, 13(2), 18. Available [online](#).

9. FINANCIAL BENEFITS FROM LIBRARY USE



Research has shown that use of public libraries appears to be associated with higher personal wellbeing ratings as well as financial savings through fewer GP visits.⁸⁸ The research investigated the value of health and wellbeing benefits which resulted from library engagement, as measured through primary (personal) and secondary (wider economic) benefits. The research used the value to someone through improved wellbeing (measured by contingent valuation, i.e. willingness to pay), and the economic value to society through health savings from library use. The results showed that library users have a higher willingness to pay rate than non-library users, and that people who use the library for health services, events or socialising have a higher willingness to pay rate than other library users. This suggests that the benefits from health-related activities are particularly important to library users. The research also found that library usage is associated with higher life satisfaction, higher happiness and a higher sense of purpose in life (although usage was also associated with higher levels of anxiety).

The other significant finding was that library engagement has a positive association with general health, i.e. library users are more likely to report good health. After controlling for other factors, being a regular library user is associated with a 1.4% increase in the likelihood of reporting good general health. Using additional data and applying further calculations, the researchers calculated good health and fewer GP visits leads to medical cost savings associated with library engagement of £1.32 per person per year. The research was conducted in England and cost savings were aggregated across the library-using population in England to estimate an average cost saving to the NHS of £27.5 million per year.

Library users in England are similar to those in Scotland.⁸⁹ On the basis of 857,675 active borrowers (CIPFA figures for 2018-19, defined as someone who has borrowed something in the previous 12 months) and £1.32 per person, this would be an

estimated cost saving of £1.13m every year to NHS Scotland. If 'library users' is used as the basis for calculation (as per the England research) this figure would be £3.2m every year as 45% of the Scottish population say they have used a library in the last 1-3 years (source: population survey commissioned for this report). The England report notes there may be additional secondary economic benefits due to the improved health of library users, such as reduced demand on social care and other health services.

Estimated cost saving to NHS Scotland as a result of people using public libraries =
£3.2m every year

As well as national-level financial savings, there are also personal savings from using libraries. For example, although a cancer

88 Arts Council England (2015) The health and wellbeing benefits of public libraries. Available [online](#).

89 Carnegie UK Trust (2017) Shining a light: The future of public libraries across the UK and Ireland. Available [online](#).

information drop-in point may not be the obvious place for financial help, they can advise on a range of financial matters, particularly around benefits and grants:

"I particularly found them useful as a signpost service. They were able to put me in touch with their benefits team. With all the appointments, missing work, extra heating costs etc. it makes quite a dent in your finances. ... Believe me I could not have done [the complicated form filling] without their expertise."

(Quote from service user in Macmillan @West Dunbartonshire Libraries annual report⁹⁰)

90 Macmillan @ West Dunbartonshire Team (2019) Our Journey So Far: January-December 2018. Available [online](#).

10. SERVICE DESIGN AND DELIVERY



The survey with library managers in Scotland and follow-up in-depth interviews confirmed findings from the literature review which indicate that many health and wellbeing activities in public libraries have started locally, often with one or two enthusiastic staff members, and have either been created on a shoestring budget or utilised grant funding. There are various different design and delivery models in existence, which fall into several broad categories:

- designed and offered by a library – internal/in-house creation, done on their own
- created and implemented with partners
- grant funding to deliver a project – with or without partners
- implement a ‘pre-made’ scheme, e.g. Reading Well from the Reading Agency.

Each approach has strengths and weaknesses and may be more appropriate in different circumstances. What is common, however, is that many library services are currently stretched for capacity and offering new projects without additional funding and staffing is difficult. Even applying for grant funding can be a challenge for some services. The PLIF grants from SLIC have been invaluable for many services to enable them to start projects which they have subsequently continued with library funding.

Whilst project funding enables ideas to be tested, and responds to local need, it can also lead to patchy provision not only across Scotland but also across a library service area. It can also lead to each library service inventing their own wheel, one example of which is the various recommended healthy reading list schemes which have been developed locally. Whilst this does enable services to focus on health issues which are more relevant to their area,

one extensive core list could be created and adapted locally to suit local demand and could reduce the workload on health care professionals and library staff. As recommend reading list schemes need regular reviewing and refreshing, e.g. to ensure the books are all still in print or to check for other new titles, it might be worth considering moving towards a Scottish book (and other resource) list, from which libraries could select which titles to use. Marketing materials could also be designed centrally but with enough space and flexibility for local partner logos to be inserted.

Many local health and wellbeing schemes in libraries are designed with local partners such as the council or local trust, local charities, Health and Social Care Partnerships, and third sector organisations. This is invaluable in order to meet local needs and also builds on existing connections that library staff may have. However, there may be scope for some strategic level Scotland-wide conversations to establish formal links which local libraries and delivery partners could then tap into. This would help overcome variations in the strength of connections between library services and health services locally.

An independent evaluation of some of the health and wellbeing PLIF grants⁹¹ found that some of the common success factors for the

91 Scottish Library and Information Council (2017) Public Library Improvement Fund: Evaluation of health-related projects. Available [online](#).

projects were supportive managers and effective partnership working. Challenges included staff churn within the NHS leading to difficulty establishing connections, procurement of temporary staff, attracting volunteers, capacity, and a lack of evaluation. The report also found that some of the projects were more transferable than others, and there were variable levels of potential future sustainability. Some of these findings are similar to the review of the Engaging Libraries health and wellbeing project from the Carnegie UK Trust which found that some of the challenges were logistics, reaching intended audiences, conveying a clear understanding of their project to others, and more skills support for libraries to undertake evaluation, data capture and impact assessment.⁹²

Some critical success factors for the Engaging Libraries projects included libraries' USP as safe and trusted spaces which connect people to ideas as well as to one another; embracing new opportunities; strong buy-in from senior managers; and effective marketing and promotion to attract participants. A review of health services in libraries in England found that success factors included: small scale, tightly focussed pilots; clearly defined outcomes; good communication and shared planning at all levels of service delivery; partnerships and steering groups which support relationship building and broker introductions; effective champions supported by robust evidence of impact; and funding opportunities.⁹³

In Scotland there is value in starting with local initiatives and responding to the needs of the communities served locally, but there is also potential to capitalise on best practice and to strengthen communication and partnership working at a regional or national level.

You Time – working across services (High Life Highland)

You Time in the Highlands is an example of a library service working with colleagues within the culture and leisure trust to create a programme of events around personal health and wellbeing, learning and leisure. It began c.2012/13 from a desire by the local council to promote the prevention agenda and to target the over-65 age group in terms of loneliness, dementia and sedentary lives. The programme is geared towards physical activity combined with social interaction.

Activities are currently offered in 16 locations across the Highland region, and each location has a lead person who organises the activities. Events may be delivered by a member of staff or external practitioners. There is You Time generic branding and the events are promoted to the trust's members as well as the general public. Unlike most library events, there is a small charge for the events unless the person is a member of High Life Highland, and so libraries tend to concentrate on providing things that are over and above the usual library range of events. The type of events available include walks, talks, chair yoga, family history activities, outdoor activities, craft sessions, and alternative therapies. Organisers have occasionally worked with third sector organisations to help transport people to the events, improving accessibility of the events.

Participant feedback praises the people delivering the events and the social interactions:

"The leaders were fabulous and very encouraging and the topics every week were always varied and kept you sharp." (From Up-cycling sessions)

"Thank you for the Creative Writing sessions with Clio and Jane. I have been enjoying them immensely.

They are keeping me sharp and are staving off my depression. I thoroughly enjoy the social camaraderie. Long may they continue!" (From Creative Writing sessions)

92 Carnegie UK Trust (2019) Engaging Libraries: Learning from Phase 1. Available [online](#).

93 MLA & Reading Agency & LISU (2010) Public library activity in the areas of health and well-being. Available [online](#).

'You Time' Computer Buddies

Anon participant:

- *likes to come because she learns something new every time*
- *social side is one of the main reasons she comes*
- *reason to get up out of bed and on the move on Tuesdays.*

Further info <https://www.higlifhighland.org/>

10.1 CO-PRODUCTION

Co-production has become a key component of service design in Scotland, and is part of the current ALLIANCE/NHS Scotland and Scottish Government two-year SLIC-funded project with young people. As a term it was originally coined in America in the 1970s and was seen as a way to rebuild the 'core economy' of people and community relationships. In the UK, one of the key early co-production reports noted that:

*"This is not about consultation or participation – except in the broadest sense. The point is not to consult more, or involve people more in decisions; it is to encourage them to use the human skills and experience they have to help deliver public or voluntary services."*⁹⁴

This can give someone a sense of worth, when they perhaps feel unable to contribute to society. It is also quite a different angle from the approach which is generally now taken which is more about involving the public in the design of a service, but not necessarily in the delivery of it. Co-production and co-delivery avoids people being defined by their needs (and thus what they lack) and instead looks at the skills or assets that they can offer.⁹⁵ This helps re-build social networks to prevent problems developing, and supports people locally and creates personal and social resilience.

If new health and wellbeing services are being developed there is scope to consider how these co-production principles can be adopted to ensure that libraries are working with people in active two-way participation, rather than passive provision, in order to maximise beneficial outcomes.

Recommendation 17: Training and knowledge-sharing about co-production and how to implement it may be useful for library staff.

94 nef (2008) Co-production: A manifesto for growing the core economy. Available [online](#).

95 nef (2008) Co-production: A manifesto for growing the core economy. Available [online](#).

11. UNIVERSAL HEALTH OFFERS IN LIBRARIES



As was seen in section 4, the local health and wellbeing offer from public libraries is considerable. Every service offers something, often for different target user groups and audiences. Many of the initiatives have developed locally and organically, which helps ensure they are relevant for the local communities. However, it also means that library services may be missing out on capitalising on economies of scale or perhaps strategic working at regional or national level.

The idea of a standardised offer in public libraries so that all branches provide the same resource/activity has precedence, for example, the implementation of the People's Network computers in 2001 in the United Kingdom, and the universal availability across Scotland for Bookbug story times for children. Within the area of health and wellbeing, the Book Prescription Wales scheme, which began as a pilot in Cardiff became an all-Wales scheme available in all public libraries in 2005, funded by the Welsh Government. And in 2013 the Society of Chief Librarians (now Libraries Connected) launched their Universal Offers which were to be delivered in public libraries in England and Wales, one of which was health.

The benefits of a country-wide offer include a recognised level of service for all users wherever they are, economies of scale when producing marketing or other materials, national marketing and awareness campaigns, and greater leverage with partners. The public library network in Scotland consists of nearly 500 community libraries locations, along with nearly 50 mobile libraries, enabling services to reach a diverse range of people and places. For partners, this substantial and inclusive network is a very attractive service to work with.

11.1 EXAMPLES OF UNIVERSAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING OFFERS FROM AROUND THE UK AND THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Different approaches to the health and wellbeing offer from libraries have evolved across the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. A summary of the approaches is outlined below, followed by a discussion on the potential for an all-Scotland health and wellbeing offer in public libraries. The literature review and desk research included looking for examples of universal country-level health and wellbeing offers from around the world and although there was evidence of health issues being included in national strategies, the nine countries that were looked at (including most of the Nordic countries) did not appear to have centrally-organised health and wellbeing offers or policies.

11.1.1 England

The universal health offer for public libraries in England was launched in 2013 by Libraries Connected (previously Society of Chief Librarians) in partnership with The Reading Agency. The original six elements when

launched in 2013 included some specific health and wellbeing elements such as Books on Prescription (bibliotherapy) and public health promotion activity but also referred to community outreach support, community space, assisted digital access, and expert library staff with local knowledge for signposting.

An independent review of the English universal offers scheme was published in 2019 and found that although the six universal offers were considered valuable and served strategic and practical purposes, there was scope to streamline the offer so that it was more focussed. It was also felt that there needed to be more clarity to overcome the lack of consistency between the universal offers and the English library strategy.⁹⁶ The report recommended keeping health and wellbeing as one of four universal offers. Libraries Connected has recently published a revised suite of universal offers for English public libraries which has four areas of focus, including health and wellbeing.⁹⁷

11.1.2 Ireland



The Government's Healthy Ireland initiative is a national strategy to improve health and wellbeing, placing a focus on prevention, individual awareness and keeping people healthy for longer.⁹⁸ The strategy for Irish libraries, (Our Public Libraries 2018-22), includes a section on health and wellbeing, with two main goals under the banner of Healthy Ireland at Your Library: information provision and information literacy skills, and events and programmes to support individuals in healthy living. Government funding has

supported the Healthy Ireland at Your Library programme which comprises the following resources and services in all 300 branches across Ireland:

- a core collection of health and wellbeing bookstock (over 100 titles)
- health and wellbeing online resources
- health information services
- branding and promotion - national and local campaigns
- health and wellbeing programmes and events
- staff training.

Details of the book collection can be found online, along with a short video about the scheme and a branded leaflet outlining the programme.⁹⁹

11.1.3 Northern Ireland

LibrariesNI, which delivers the public library service in Northern Ireland, includes health and wellbeing within its 2019-20 Business Plan. Under the priority area 'Contribute to social and community wellbeing' there are two targets which are: "all libraries will deliver Health and Wellbeing activities and provide health information" and to "deliver a health focussed cross

96 Libraries Connected (2019) Strategic Review of the Universal Offers. Available [online](#).

97 Libraries Connected (n.d.) Universal Libraries Offer. Available [online](#).

98 Government of Ireland (2018) Our Public Library 2022: Inspiring, Connecting And Empowering Communities. Available [online](#).

99 Libraries Ireland (2019) Healthy Ireland at Your Library. Available [online](#).

cutting initiative 'New Year, New You' by March 2020."¹⁰⁰

The health offer, promoted on the LibrariesNI website,¹⁰¹ comprises various elements including:

- access to health information (books, leaflets etc in different formats) and signposting to other services/organisations
- health literacy skills
- bibliotherapy scheme for adults (Read Yourself Well) and Reading Well Shelf Help scheme for children
- health related activities
- social space for group activities, e.g. reading group, mindful colouring, tea & newspapers, knit & natter
- a library-specific version of 'Take Five Steps to Wellbeing' which are: connect, keep learning, be active, take notice, and give (help others).

All branch libraries deliver health and wellbeing activities, the level varying with the size of the library. The Annual Report notes that for 2017-18, there were 13,163 health and wellbeing events and 96,634 instances of participation, and Macmillan Cancer Information and Support is available in all libraries.¹⁰²

The Five Steps approach is based on the Five Ways to Wellbeing concept which was created by the New Economics Foundation in 2008 as a wellbeing equivalent of the 'five portions of fruit and vegetables a day'.¹⁰³ ONFife have also used the Five Ways to Wellbeing as a basis for the development of their health and wellbeing offer and this could be an area of consideration nationally in Scotland.

11.1.4 Wales

In 2018 the Welsh Government funded the implementation of the Reading Agency's book prescription programme in Wales, as a refresh of the original scheme, starting with Reading Well Dementia, which is now available in all public libraries. This was followed in summer 2019 with the launch of the adult mental health scheme. Both schemes are available in English and Welsh, which applies to the marketing materials and the book list. The books are gradually being translated on a rolling basis through a partnership with the Welsh Books Council.¹⁰⁴

The benefits of joining the Reading Well scheme include economies of scales, shared marketing and access to branding, agreed data collection processes, inclusion in the annual evaluations, and established links with strategic partners.

In addition to the all-Wales Reading Well scheme, two indicators in the Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-20 focus on health and wellbeing.¹⁰⁵ One indicator is an impact measure obtained through a user survey (once during the three year framework) to find out "the percentage of adults who have found helpful information for health and well-being at the

100 LibrariesNI (2019) Annual Business Plan 2019/20. Available [online](#).

101 LibrariesNI (n.d.) Promoting Positive Health. Available [online](#).

102 LibrariesNI (2018) Annual Report And Accounts 2017. Available [online](#).

103 Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project (2008). Final Project report. The Government Office for Science, London. Available [online](#).

104 The Reading Agency (2019) Wales. Available [online](#).

105 Welsh Government (2017) Connected and Ambitious: The sixth quality framework of Welsh public library standards. Available [online](#).

library". The other indicator lists five health and wellbeing services, activities or resources which should be provided in library branches open over 10 hours a week:

- Book Prescription Wales scheme (now Reading Well)
- Better with Books scheme (for children)
- designated health and wellbeing collection
- information about healthier lifestyles and healthy behaviours
- signposting to health and wellbeing services.

Library services also report on the availability of five additional health and wellbeing services/activities which may be provided.

According to the most recently available published assessment reports, there were three library services (out of 22) which provided all 10 health and wellbeing services in 2017-18. These were Blaenau Gwent, Cardiff, and Merthyr Tydfil.¹⁰⁶



In summer 2019 a new health campaign led by public libraries was launched called 'Living Well in Wales'. The campaign is a partnership between public libraries and several health charities and is based around four health weeks in the year:

Dementia Action Week in May with the Alzheimer's Society, Know Your Numbers week in September with Blood Pressure UK, National Dyslexia Week in October with the British Dyslexia Association and Blue Monday in January with Mind, Time to Change Wales and The Samaritans. The campaign emphasises the information and resources available as well as the local, trusted, community space and the knowledgeable staff and promotes the health and wellbeing events and activities held in libraries each year.¹⁰⁷

11.2 IS THERE POTENTIAL FOR A SCOTTISH OFFER?

The varied approaches by different countries in the UK and Republic of Ireland to national health and wellbeing library offers gives Scotland different options to review and to learn from what has, or has not worked. The concept raises many questions, ranging from the practical to the ideological:

- Would it be for children, adults or both?
- What would its purpose be?
- How would it be funded?
- How and when would it be evaluated?
- Which key organisations would be involved?
- Are the offers targeted at the public, or library services and other stakeholders?
- Would it be prescriptive, based around practical and specific services (e.g. Wales), like a charter?

¹⁰⁶ Welsh Government (2018) Public library service annual reports 2017 to 2018. Available [online](#).

¹⁰⁷ Business News Wales (2019) Welsh Libraries at the Beating Heart of their Communities. Available [online](#).

- Would it be a strategic framework with local flexibility on how the outcomes could be met and delivered?
- What would the balance be between consistency for all verses local flexibility?
- What would the balance be between being achievable and realistic verses being aspirational and challenging?

Evidence from the survey of library managers in Scotland and follow-up conversations suggests that there is general overall interest and support in some degree of an all-Scotland offer, but, that retaining local flexibility and local focus is crucial. This would allow services to create and target resources and activities effectively to meet local needs. A small selection of quotes shows the range of views:

“Meeting local needs has to be at the heart of any health and wellbeing offer.”

“The potential for an all-Scotland health and wellbeing offer for libraries would be extremely beneficial, however substantial funding and support would be required to enable this to be delivered.”

“...disagree that a national offer is the preferred route as this does not take into account the local priorities and the flexibility required for coproduction to identify local needs. One size does not fit all. Shared practice and shared resources are the most effective way to support the national agenda in delivering localised health improvements. Flexibility in funding for localised project development is essential.”

“This would be good in terms of publicity, and advocacy for local authorities to highlight the work libraries are doing. BUT, capacity is an on-going issue.”

“A national approach can help give guidance and direction to authorities, but the actual output will still rely heavily on individual factors affecting local government - chiefly budget and capacity. One positive outcome may be the national reporting made possible on a small number of key health & wellbeing outcomes for Scotland as a whole.”

11.2.1 What might an all-Scotland offer look like?

There are several different approaches which could be taken for a Scottish libraries health and wellbeing offer, and five have been identified here. A combination of the options may be possible, and there may be other possibilities.

1. Branded concept

A branded concept with marketing materials could be developed which promotes the fact that all libraries offer some degree of health and wellbeing services and activities. It would provide graphics and other materials for use on websites and social media, and relevant groups, events and services that take place could be branded and marketed as part of the offer.

- Like Bookbug – branding, national identity, but adapted locally
- Could help bring partners on-board with additional funding

No specific details of the events/activities would need to be set nationally to enable local flexibility of implementation.

2. National guidelines on what a library service can offer to contribute towards specific health issues

This could consist of a strategic framework based around key health priorities for Scotland, with suggestions and recommendations of what libraries can do to contribute towards each one. It could be based around the Five Ways of Wellbeing, or on key health priorities for Scotland. It could be supported by a toolkit of resources, e.g. 'how to set up a....', with case studies of best practice from across Scotland to facilitate sharing of knowledge.

Generic marketing materials could be developed for us with different stakeholders, i.e. different sets for the public, health care professionals, policy makers etc.

3. Target the offers to key points in people's lives

A coordinated campaign framework could be established which targeted specific health offers to key points in people's lives. This is currently what happens at a local level by default, but could be branded and presented as a specific health and wellbeing offer from all libraries. It would give local flexibility as to how it was delivered.

Targeted stages could include:

- early years activities (storytime, events and groups for parents/guardians)
- teen years (focus on topics such as mental health, bullying etc)
- older people (dementia programmes, socialising events, keeping physically active)

This may subconsciously appeal to the public because when asked if they currently use public libraries or have in the past, it often elicits responses along the lines of 'I used it when I had kids' or 'I use it again now I'm older'.

4. A defined offer with specific services, activities and resources

This could promote the three main areas where libraries contribute towards health and wellbeing, which are:

- Collections and information, in various formats
- Signposting and referral by expert library staff
- Events and activities /and use of the space, including with partners

This could be quite a prescriptive approach (see Wales), or more flexible in that services could decide for themselves what health books to stock and what health activities to hold. Having a specific offer may be easier to market and promote to the public with generic statements and branded materials, e.g. 'All public libraries in Scotland offer X', and could facilitate consistent evaluation. However, it is much harder to achieve on the ground, and does not provide as much flexibility for local services and may be difficult to manage due to capacity issues. A defined offer to be implemented locally may also not take into account what services and activities other local organisations already offer, and so there could be duplication if a library began to deliver something similar. In addition, considerable funding may be needed to enable some library services to establish some of the elements, e.g. a recommended healthy reading booklist scheme.

5. An offer based on outcomes and benefits for the public

With a strong focus on outcomes, co-production and being person-centric, it may be more appropriate for a Scottish initiative to be locally designed around a national framework of outcomes. Outcomes start with the end in mind and can be at different levels: programme/strategy, population, and personal ('what matters to me'). Some possible personal health outcomes and benefits for libraries to use could be around improving an individual's health literacy skills, improving their confidence and self-management of their illness, and contributing towards improvements in actual health and wellbeing. For example:

- I feel better able to find reliable and trustworthy health information
- I understand my condition better and know where to go for help and support
- Using the library service has helped reduce my feelings of isolation and/or loneliness

However, the outcomes have to be what people want and involving the public in designing the outcomes framework would be important. Scenario-building or creating profiles of typical target audiences could help as a starting point before working with the public. Whilst an outcomes approach is harder to evaluate than a more prescriptive model of provision of specific services, it has a stronger resonance with current policies in Scotland, particularly co-production, self-management and placing the citizen at the heart of services.

Recommendation 18: SLIC, APLS, COSLA, the ALLIANCE, NHS Scotland and the Scottish Government to consider options for a Scottish health and wellbeing offer from public libraries.

12. BEST PRACTICE AND SCALING UP



With so many different health and wellbeing services provided across Scotland, there are many examples of particular schemes which could be scaled up across Scotland. However, often they have developed out of existing local connections and from local demand, and may not transplant well elsewhere. It also takes time to build up local partnerships and they cannot always be implemented top-down.

At a strategic level, and with reference to the idea of a national Scottish offer, some health and wellbeing services are currently available in over half the public library services. Some of these could be relative 'quick wins' if all-Scotland coverage is a goal. However, this could take considerable discussion of logistics and investment, e.g. if it was a recommended health reading scheme. Tying in with national 'health awareness' days or weeks such as stress awareness week is another possible activity that could be scaled up, perhaps looking at the scheme in Wales where libraries are working with four charities on four different health issues during the calendar year.

Where activities or services are delivered in partnership with national organisations, strategic level conversations could explore the opportunities for delivering across more library services and the whole of Scotland. For example Fife libraries have been successful with Paths for All grant funding for the walking book groups and if other library services were interested in delivering these as well, a coordinated national conversation may be beneficial to everyone.

Scaling up may be more appropriate regionally, and there could be opportunities for neighbouring library services and health care partners to work together to mutually offer a scheme across borders. This happens in some areas already, e.g. with the three Ayrshire library services, and is often a result of historical partnerships based on different boundaries.

One possible approach to rolling out more health and wellbeing activities would be to adapt the LibrariesNI model whereby each community library is asked to deliver one specific event, perhaps from a choice of different options, and to gather impact data using standardised guidelines. One more event per library in one year in Scotland would lead to almost 500 more health events.

Where activities are suitable for scaling up, useful toolkits could be developed by those with the background and experience with information on how to get started, key partners, top tips for success etc. This was suggested by several library managers in the in-depth interviews. Champions for a few key activities could be identified to help with this work, and possibly a network of local implementers who could learn from the champions.

Recommendation 19: SLIC and APLS to consider if there are some key activities which might either lend themselves to being scaled up across Scotland or would be useful for each service to offer, and a toolkit developed with key steps for implementation, and possibly champions identified for each activity.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS



The recommendations below are a mixture of short, medium and longer term options, including some practical actions for library services as well as strategic discussion areas for relevant stakeholders. Capacity issues in library and health services may limit what can be achieved from this list of suggestions and it may be necessary to prioritise what could be taken forward or to rule out suggestions that are not felt to be the best use of resources. The new partnership behind A Collective Force may be an appropriate place for initial discussions.

Recommendation 1: Library services to include links to ALISS and NHS Inform/ Scotland's Service Directory on their websites and to include their relevant health events in the ALISS directory.

Recommendation 2: If the HGIOPL framework is reviewed in the future, consideration could be given to expanding the indicator relating to health and wellbeing.

Recommendation 3: SLIC and APLS could discuss the value of collecting a standardised dataset of some health and wellbeing information and evidence.

Recommendation 4: The public library services which currently do not offer the free Access to Research service to be encouraged to sign up and list it on their website to improve access for the public to quality health research.

Recommendation 5: Library events and other information online should be up-to-date. Where possible, most library websites could include more information about the health and wellbeing services available.

Recommendation 6: Commissioned research found that most people use doctor, dentist and community health clinics to find health and wellbeing information. There could be potential for a national 'advert' for TV screens in health clinic reception areas about health and wellbeing services from libraries, or local versions which could be

more specific. Locally, library services could provide posters and leaflets about relevant health and wellbeing activities that are available in the library.

Recommendation 7: Connections could be strengthened to improve the awareness of people working in health and social care of the range of health and wellbeing services available in the public libraries. For example, social prescribing link professionals could signpost people to a number of the activities in the local library if they knew what was available.

Recommendation 8: Where local book prescription or recommended healthy reading schemes exist, a presentation and leaflets could be given to the local social prescribing link team. At a strategic level there could be general communication about the schemes and their benefits, in regional areas where such schemes exists.

Recommendation 9: Strategic partners such as Scottish Book Trust, Creative Scotland, Publishing Scotland, NHS Scotland and SLIC could consider the potential for developing a 'Quick Reads' style set of health books which would be more appropriate for people with lower literacy levels, along with digital and audio versions of these books.

Recommendation 10: SLIC and other partners to consider project funding to create a toolkit/resource/champions network for library services to support the

introduction of creative bibliotherapy schemes in libraries as there are currently very few in operation.

Recommendation 11: Library services which have reminiscence boxes/memory bags could include the Playlist for Life music leaflets, particularly if music is featured during the reminiscence sessions, to introduce people to the idea of creating their own personal playlist. If the library also has a free digital music service it could offer sessions on creating a playlist using its free subscription.

Recommendation 12: SLIC and other partners to consider how the varied health and wellbeing activities could be evaluated and if there is scope to create a standardised set of evaluation guidelines for library staff.

Recommendation 13: Improve the online library health offer locally with more information about available activities and services, links to trusted health information, and investigate if there is a demand for some degree of social interaction online combining libraries and health and wellbeing services.

Recommendation 14: Where capacity exists, library services could create autism-friendly guides for each branch and make them available online, using the Renfrewshire documents as best practice.

Recommendation 15: Public (and academic) libraries could partner with health libraries in Scotland to support Health Literacy Week 2020 (in July) and Health Literacy Month 2020 (October).

Recommendation 16: Investigate the potential for partnership working between relevant organisations and community groups to identify people with poor health literacy and co-design a health literacy skills training programme with them and for them based in public libraries. A linked national project could look at the potential for a national searchable database which shows local/regional levels of health literacy.

Recommendation 17: Training and knowledge-sharing about co-production and how to implement it may be useful for library staff.

Recommendation 18: SLIC, APLS, COSLA, the ALLIANCE, NHS Scotland and the Scottish Government to consider options for a Scottish health and wellbeing offer from public libraries.

Recommendation 19: SLIC and APLS to consider if there are some key activities which might either lend themselves to being scaled up across Scotland or would be useful for each service to offer, and a toolkit developed with key steps for implementation, and possibly champions identified for each activity.

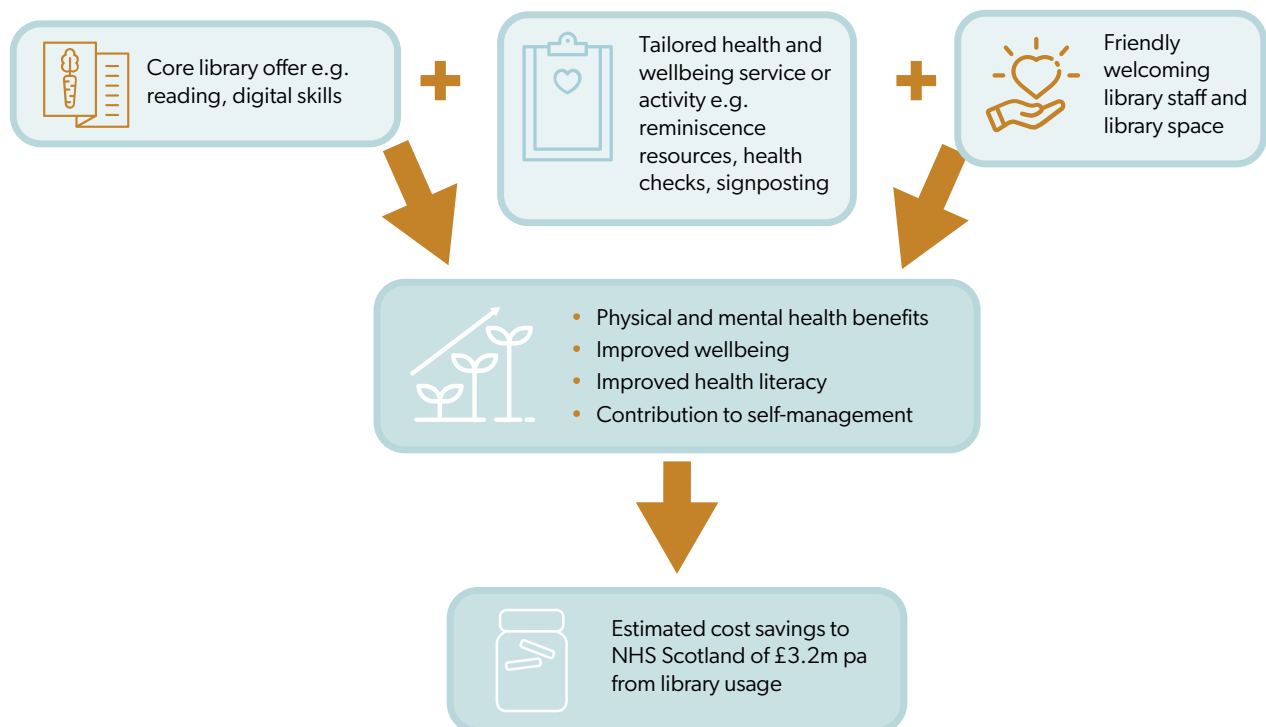
14. CONCLUSION



This research has found that the health and wellbeing offer in public libraries in Scotland is extensive and varied, and beneficial to those who engage with the activities. The wellbeing benefits brought about through reading and participating in health events in the library help contribute towards people feeling more confident about their health, and needing health services less, leading to savings for the health service. Many of the low-cost low-intensity activities delivered by libraries help people avoid reaching crisis point. Recognition of this contribution is growing and new strategic partnerships will hopefully strengthen this.

The key features of public library health and wellbeing services are:

- simple interventions which bring significant benefits
- beneficial impacts to people's mental and physical wellbeing
- social engagement and interaction with others
- friendly, welcoming, inclusive, non-clinical local spaces
- friendly and supportive knowledgeable staff.



Another feature of the health and wellbeing offer in libraries is that it is relatively unknown. Both the public and health care professionals are often unaware of what's available in local libraries. Indeed, one stakeholder said that libraries contribute towards health and wellbeing 'by stealth'. This is an acknowledgement not only of the core services which have an impact (such as reading), but also that simple conversations with a caring member of the library staff may have significant impact on someone's wellbeing in a way that is rarely captured, measured or recognised. It also recognises that it is difficult for libraries to promote this contribution.

There is scope for library services to increase awareness of all that they do in this area so that more people can benefit, and so that health professionals are aware of what is available locally. There is also potential for library services to work with researchers and health professionals to gather appropriate evidence of the beneficial impacts of the library services on people's health and wellbeing. These developments, along with new strategic partnerships such as *A collective force for health and wellbeing*, will strengthen the role public libraries play in improving the wellbeing of people and communities in Scotland.

15. APPENDICES



Appendix 1: Survey of library service managers

An online survey was distributed by SLIC on behalf of the researcher during summer 2019 to the 32 public library managers in Scotland.

1. Please indicate which, if any, of the following services and activities, your library service currently offers [see below for list and sub questions]
2. Are there any other health and wellbeing services or activities offered not included above? Please provide a brief description
3. Do any community libraries or the service as a whole have designated 'friendly' status, e.g. Dementia Friendly service status / Autism Friendly Award status? Please list any and if is service-wide or a few community libraries.
4. What promotion and marketing techniques are used for the health and wellbeing services and events offered, and what is most effective?
5. Do you have any costs (per annum or otherwise) for all of the health and wellbeing services and activities in total, or for some specific projects? Please list any specific figures you have.
6. Please list all the partners the library service works with on health and wellbeing projects.
7. Does your parent body (local authority or trust) have health and wellbeing as a current priority/outcome/policy/strategy indicator? If so, does the library service report on its contribution towards this goal, and what is included?
8. All public library services across the UK and the Republic of Ireland deliver some health and wellbeing services/activities to varying degrees. Outwith Scotland, the four jurisdictions have different approaches to their universal health and wellbeing offer, although they can be grouped around bibliotherapy stock, information provision & signposting, and activities. A brief summary highlights the four different approaches – see .pdf at <https://tinyurl.com/wellbeing-libraries>. What do you think about these four different approaches and offers?
9. What are your views on the potential for an all-Scotland health and wellbeing offer for libraries, and if one was developed, what would it look like?
10. And finally, in order to gather evidence of impact of library-based health and wellbeing activities, I am looking to access some ready-made groups of users who currently use such services, and who could complete a short survey or perhaps take part in a face-to-face session with myself. If this might be possible in your service, please note the group/s and your email address (or name and email of another appropriate person) and I will select some services to work with to achieve this. (Due to timings this will mostly likely take place from July to very early September.)
11. Which library service do you represent?

Q1a Services [each one can be skipped if not delivered]

- Bibliotherapy / Books on Prescription / Reading Well for adults (formal scheme with list of titles, non-fiction, with health partner)
- Bibliotherapy / Books on Prescription / Reading Well for children (formal scheme with list of non-fiction titles, with health partner)
- Informal list of non-fiction self-help books (list created in house)
- Fiction 'mood boosting' collection (formal and informal schemes)
- Designated health and wellbeing collection
- Designated health hub/zone in the library
- Carers' collection
- Information about health and wellbeing matters, e.g. healthy behaviours
- Signposting to health and wellbeing services/organisations
- Reminiscence resources
- Playlist for Life
- Macmillan cancer information and support
- Boardmaker – Autism/special needs communication software
- Health orientated items, e.g. hearing aid batteries, walking stick ferrules

Sub questions if tick yes to any of the above [mostly tick-box choices]

- How long has it been offered?
- Is it evaluated?
- Has any evidence of impact been gathered?
- Are usage figures available? e.g. book issues (please specify if monthly, a year etc)
- Is it delivered on your own or with partners?
- What do the partners provide?
- How is it funded?
- Do volunteers help provide the service?
- It is available in all branches?

Q1b Activities/events [each one can be skipped if not delivered]

- Health information literacy and digital health literacy training for users
- Shared Reading groups (reading aloud together)
- Book/reading clubs with specific health or target group focus
- Reminiscence groups and activities
- Mental health awareness activities
- Public health promotion activities, e.g. holding hearing test sessions, blood pressure checking

- Health activities in the library or organised by the library, e.g. yoga, walking group, themed group cafes
- Tie in with (national) 'awareness' days/campaigns, e.g. stress awareness week

Sub questions if tick yes to any of the above [mostly tick-box choices]

- How often does it take place?
- How long has it been offered?
- Are usage figures available? e.g. number of participants (please specify if monthly, a year etc)
- Is it evaluated?
- Has any evidence of impact been gathered?
- Is it delivered on your own or with partners?
- What do the partners provide?
- How is it funded?
- Do volunteers help provide the activity?
- It is available in all community libraries?

The list of services/activities to include for question 1 was based on initial desk research and literature reading.

Appendix 2: Interviews with stakeholder Organisations and a sample of library services

The researcher is grateful to all participants who took the time to discuss health and wellbeing in libraries in more detail, either in person or over the phone.

- Aberdeen City Libraries
- Carnegie UK Trust
- CLIP Scotland
- Glasgow Life (Macmillan Cancer and Information Support)
- High Life Highland
- Libraries Connected
- Libraries NI
- Midlothian Libraries
- North Ayrshire Libraries
- ON Fife Libraries
- Playlist for Life
- Scottish Book Trust
- Scottish Government (Healthcare Quality and Improvement; Digital Health and Care Division)
- The ALLIANCE (Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland)
- The Reading Agency
- Western Isles Libraries

Appendix 3: Population Survey

CJM Research (cjmresearch.co.uk) were contracted to deliver face-to-face interviews with a sample of the Scottish population. This was conducted during the last two weeks of August in eight locations with 201 adults aged 16+. The locations were: Aberdeen, Banff, Edinburgh (and surroundings), Glasgow (and surroundings), Inverness, Oban, Perth, and Stirling. The results are accurate for the overall population of Scotland within +/- 6.9% at the 95% confidence level on a survey result of 50%, and within +/- 4.2% on a response of 10% or 90%.

The survey questions were:

1. If you need to know something for a health or wellbeing matter, which of the following would you use to find information? (Tick from a list of suggestions)
2. Which one do you use most often or would you be most likely to use? (Tick one only)
3. How much do you or would you trust each of the following sources for information about health and wellbeing? (Tick one on each row)
4. When you hear the word "libraries" what springs to mind?
5. Have you used any public library in the last 3 years?
6. Have you used a public library for a health or wellbeing reason, for example borrowing a book about a health matter, taking part in a reading group, or getting information about local groups?
7. How helpful was this for you?
8. Can you give an example of how libraries have helped you with your general health and wellbeing? What is the example?
9. Which of the following health and wellbeing things would you be interested in accessing at a library?
10. What else would encourage you to access a library for health and wellbeing things?
11. In general how much do you agree or disagree that libraries are a good place for trusted information?
12. Are there any other comments?
13. Age & gender question

Contact SLIC for a full copy of the survey.

Thank you to all library services for taking the time to complete the survey and to all the organisations who I spoke to or who provided information.
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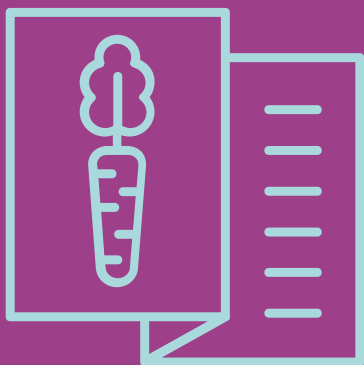
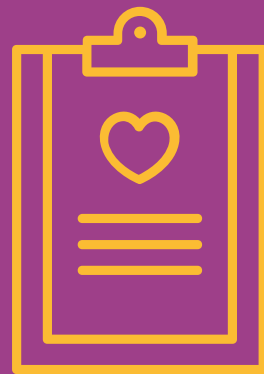
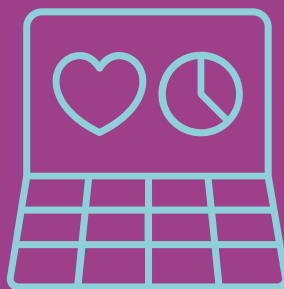
Baseline picture of health and wellbeing services in public libraries in Scotland - as of Summer/Autumn 2019

	Service/activity	Aberdeen City	Aberdeenshire	Angus	Argyll & Bute	Clackmannanshire	Dumfries & Galloway	Dundee City
Services and resources	Formal 'Books on Prescription' or recommended healthy reading scheme (Adult)	●				●		●
	Formal 'Books on Prescription' or recommended healthy reading list (Children)	●						
	Self Help Non Fiction informal list	●				●		●
	Mood Boosting fiction	●	●					●
	Health and wellbeing collection	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Health and wellbeing Zone	●						●
	Carers' collection	●						
	Healthy behaviours information	●				●		●
	Signposting	●				●	●	●
	Reminiscence resources	●	●				●	●
	Playlist for Life							
	Boardmaker software	●						
	Macmillan Cancer Information and Support service			●	●			●
	Health items available eg walking stick ferrules					●		●
Activities	Health literacy training for users	●						●
	Shared Reading	●						
	Health-focussed book club							
	Reminiscence groups	●	●	●			●	
	Mental Health activities	●						●
	Public Health promotional activities	●					●	●
	Healthy activities in library & outside	●	●	●	●		●	●
	Awareness days	●		●		●	●	●
Additional things mentioned in surveys or found on websites	Hearing aid repairs and/or batteries			●		●		●
	Librarian on prescription							●
	Computer based CBT programme			●				
	Therapets	●						●
	Free period products			●				●
	Adult colouring-in group/session			●				●
	Children colouring-in group						●	
	Festival of Health and Wellbeing	●						
	Other cancer support (not Macmillan)		●	●				
	Boardgame groups			●				●
	ASN space/room							●
	ALISS and/or SSD or NHS inform link on website							●
	Pop up health library							

Source: Responses to the survey of library service managers, website review, and follow-up email

● Indicates is offered by the service

[illegible]



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