

The Librarians by Pestiferous



Photo: Transported

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Transported is a strategic, community-focused programme which aims to get more people in Boston Borough and South Holland enjoying and participating in arts activities. It is funded by the Creative People and Places fund from Arts Council England.

As part of the second phase of the project, we have eleven different strands of arts activity, one of which is working with the Lincolnshire County Council Library Service; entitled Open Book. Transported commissioned Pestiferous to create a site specific piece of theatre that would tour the eight Lincolnshire County Council run libraries in Boston Borough and South Holland as part of Health and Wellbeing week 2013.

Objectives

- Engaging library service users in the arts.
- Bringing new audiences into libraries through the arts.
- Introducing the libraries as an arts venue and community hubs
- Empower the staff at the libraries to want to carry on bringing more arts experiences into the libraries.
- Empower the library users to want to carry on bringing more arts experiences into the libraries.



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Target audience

- Library service users in Boston Borough and South Holland
- General public in Boston Borough and South Holland
- Library staff

Process

- Transported starting introducing some arts to the libraries during the Consultation Phase of the programme.
- Transported commissioned Pestiferous to create a brand new piece of site specific theatre for the libraries of Boston Borough and South Holland following on from the success of their first piece, The Nerdy Birdies, as part of the Transported Consultation Phase.
- Transported implemented a commissioner viewing to oversee the work during creation. This was to ensure the piece would be relevant and accessible.
- Transported programmed the piece to be performed in all eight Lincolnshire County Council run library during Health and Wellbeing week in accordance with the libraries opening times and feedback from the library staff as to when footfall was highest at each venue.
- Transported's Community Researchers collected data, vox pops and documented photographs and film of each performance.
- The media was edited together into a short promotional video for Transported to use to exemplify some of the work from the Open Book programme so far.

Outcomes

The piece was highly successful in engaging the service users and drawing in new audiences into the libraries: 315 people saw the performance. It was un-intrusive to service users in the library who happened to stumble upon it and it allowed them to become accustomed to the piece in their own environment; making them more comfortable and willing to get involved.

The piece empowered and excited the staff at the libraries. They still ask for the piece to return to the libraries and talk about its positive impact. The piece was a high quality piece of theatre and Transported have exemplified how such work can benefit the libraries. It also began building a relationship between Transported and the library staff. Since, we have starting taking different examples of arts experiences into the libraries. Transported have been consulting with staff and public about what they would like to see in their library, offering taster workshops and using the space, in kind, to host events that show the library as more than just a building from which to rent books.

The piece has since toured to the libraries in Kent.

Key points for effective practice

- The key to making this collaboration as big a success as possible was to use and maximise on the relevant knowledge and expertise of each party involved; overseen by Transported to ensure the piece met with the CPP aims and objectives. Maximising the knowledge of the library staff regarding busy times, marketing etc and thus making them feel involved with and therefore empowered by the project. Working with a performance company that truly understand the pre-existing barriers as to why this area has significantly low arts engagement. Their understanding of CPP and embodiment of Transported's approach is integral to their work being a success in the area.
- A commissioner viewing during the rehearsal period. If possible, also taking a figurehead from the libraries along. Feedback thoughts and opinions.
- Total cost of the project £6,272.41

Conclusions and recommendations

The project was effective because it brokered the relationship between Transported and the local libraries in a respectful and exciting manner. At the time, there was a lot of controversy around library closures and loss of jobs. Many of the LCC libraries were destined to be taken over by community groups or face closure entirely. In return for the librarians time and advice, we would bring an innovative piece of theatre to them that would bring people through the doors and showcase the venue as more than just a place to rent books; as a community space that is worth looking after. We have since carried on infusing the libraries with arts activity. With the help of the LCC staff, we have begun to broker relationships with the community groups soon to be running some of the libraries and carry on bringing people through the doors.

We also built into the contract a % fee of any further performances as a way of bringing in additional income.

The next phase of the Open Book programme will be to guide and support the people running the libraries in Boston Borough and South Holland to implement their own arts experiences in their venue.