



explore
York Libraries
and Archives

**Annual
Review**

2020-21



Our Libraries, Archive and Reading Cafés



From the Chair

Libraries aren't just places to read stories, they are places to make stories.

Whatever life throws at us, Explore libraries will continue to be places for children, young people, young adults, workers, the carers and the cared for, mums, dads, grandparents and older people generally. They are safe and welcoming places at the heart of the communities we serve: places for readers, writers, poets, storytellers, makers, creators, dancers, artists,

musicians and singers. They are social spaces, community spaces, family spaces, creative and cultural spaces, and learning spaces.

The board is incredibly proud of all that has been achieved during this challenging year. Explore's mission is 'to inspire everyone to challenge their imagination, explore their potential and connect with each other, supporting and enriching our communities.'

We will continue to provide support, direction and



encouragement and, most importantly, Explore colleagues will continue to listen, to learn and to look at how we can further develop these special places to better meet everyone's needs.

Chris Edwards,
Chair of Explore

From the Chief Executive

In March 2020 our Explore Labs project won a prestigious Edge Award. But just two weeks later it broke my heart to have to tell Explore staff we must close all of our libraries and the archive. We thought it would all be over by summer, but as time went by it became clear that covid would change the way we all live our lives forever.

The key change was the move to life online and Explore was at the forefront of making that happen. Our staff were involved in national work to create a toolkit for libraries during the pandemic, to lobby Government, and to set up a series of web links to support people at home. Meetings and events moved online. Staff were able to take advantage of a wealth of training available through webinars, and they used these new skills to provide online events such as poetry evenings, story times and archive stories, with many events made on our YouTube channel.

We lobbied the Government with the result that they announced ahead of the second lockdown that libraries were essential services and their staff were key workers. This meant we could open our three largest Explore Centres to provide access to computers and the internet, so that online services that many take for granted were accessible for all. At a time when being online was so important, Explore also led on creating a city wide 100% Digital York Partnership to give everyone the opportunity to be online.

In 2020 we were here for everyone in York. Most importantly, we provided up to date, accurate information about the pandemic, Government rules, health and wellbeing. Libraries were a one-stop place for people to keep up to date with what was happening. We introduced PressReader giving free access to thousands of newspapers and magazines from around



the world in many different languages.

Throughout the last year our staff rose to meet every challenge. They learned new skills and piloted new services to provide the people of York with the best possible library and archive service. I'm very proud of them, and as we look to the future I am confident that Explore will be able to meet any challenge that comes our way so we can continue to grow and thrive, wherever the road takes us.

Fiona Williams,
Chief Executive of Explore

Here for you

In the year the world turned upside down, Explore was here for you.

Our libraries and archives strengthen the community by creating an inclusive sense of place. But what happens when place is no longer possible? For our staff the answer was simple: innovate, adapt and overcome. As soon as we made the difficult decision to close our doors, we immediately pivoted to new ways of offering services and supporting those in need.

Through virtual events and activities, new e-books, e-magazines and e-newspapers, digital collections, Click and Collect, Lucky Dips, Click and Deliver, and the Home Library Service we were here for the people of York.

“One thing that stands out is the ability of Explore staff to innovate and change. Discovering this about our organisation will inform everything we do in the future.”

**JULIE-ANN,
ARCHIVIST**





Here for you – virtually

We quickly transferred our entire library offer online. We provided everything digitally, from reading and information to supporting individual wellbeing through creative events and activities for all ages, connecting people and communities, and offering ways to engage with one another and with us digitally.

Here for you – Community Hubs

Explore was central to the swift set up and operation of the Council’s community hubs for people who were shielding. These ensured access to food, medicines, and anything else they needed. Clifton and Acomb Explore Centres were used as hubs, Explore staff managed the hubs, and willing Explore volunteers were drafted in to help out. By the end of the lockdown the 8 hubs in the city had provided over 23,000 hours of support.

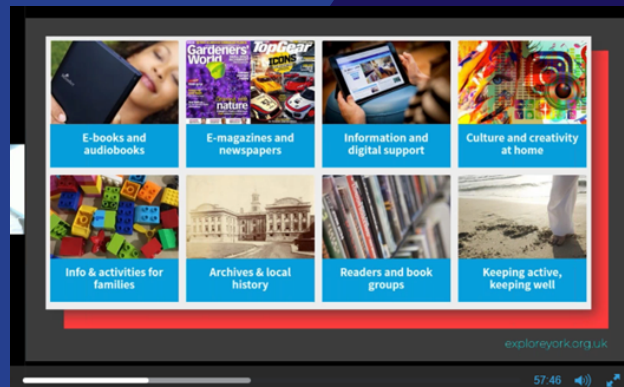
“I volunteered to support the hubs as I wanted to be able to help our community as much as possible during the pandemic. A lot of the people we came into contact with were shielding so were unable to leave their homes. They really appreciated the regular chat with another person. It made them feel less isolated knowing that there was someone who was only a phone call away if they needed any help.”

KAREN, YORK EXPLORE

Here for you – trusted information

Libraries at Home web pages provided links to accurate information about the pandemic, health information, support for home schooling, and a huge variety of content for people to explore and be entertained or learn something new.

So people could easily find what they needed, we refreshed the Explore website using a tile design to highlight and link to specific content. This was used as an example of good practice at a marketing seminar facilitated by The British Library, and was praised for its simple layout and ease of access.



Here for you – safe welcoming spaces

In July ahead of re-opening all libraries we created a video to reassure people that our libraries, cafes and archive were covid-secure environments. Written feedback and informal conversations showed that staff and customers felt safe and welcomed the chance to return to libraries. And the Click and Deliver model now forms part of our strategy should we ever go into lockdown again.

Here for you – an overview of Explore’s services in 2020-21

JULY AND AUGUST 2020

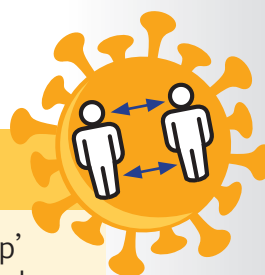
Click and Collect offer: Reserved books or ‘Lucky Dip’ selections and computer access, all by appointment only at Acomb, Clifton, Tang Hall and the Mobile library

Home Library Service: Delivered City wide from Tang Hall

Archives enquiries service by email: Online

Library at Home offer: Online

Reading Cafes open for food service only at Rowntree Park and Hungate



NOVEMBER

Click and Collect offer: reserved books or ‘Lucky Dip’ selections and computer access, all by appointment only at Acomb, Tang Hall, York

Home Library Service: Delivered city wide from Tang Hall

Library at Home: Online

Archives enquiries service by email: Online

Takeaway at Rowntree Park and Hungate Reading Cafes



DECEMBER 2020

All libraries open for browsing and computer access (no computers at New Earswick and Dunnington due to social distancing)

Home Library Service: All libraries (books delivered by volunteers)

Archives access by appointment only at York Explore

Library at Home: Online

All Reading Cafes open for food and browsing and borrowing



2020

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEPT

OCT

NOV

DEC

2021

JAN

FEB

MAR

APRIL TO JUNE 2020

Home Library Service: Delivered city wide from Acomb and Clifton hubs

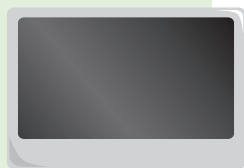
Library at Home offer: Online



SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER 2020

All libraries open for browsing and computer access

(no computers at New Earswick and Dunnington due to social distancing)



Home Library Service: All libraries (books delivered by volunteers)

Archives access: by appointment only at York Explore

Library at Home offer: Online

All Reading Cafes open for food and browsing and borrowing



JANUARY - MARCH 2021

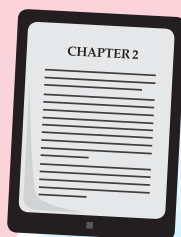
Click and Collect offer: Reserved books or 'Lucky Dip' selections and computer access, all by appointment only from Acomb, Tang Hall, and York

Home Library Service: Delivered city wide from Tang Hall

Archives enquiries service by email: Online

Library at Home: Online

Takeaway at Rowntree Park and Hungate Reading Cafes



Safety visors for frontline health workers

Early in the first lockdown Explore supported a project mobilising makers in the fight against covid to make free safety visors for health workers. The project was the idea of a couple of Explore Labs digital makers, and we donated our 3D printers to support them. Within a week they had more than 50 printers and the network grew fast. They supplied 9,000 3D printed safety visors.



Looking forward – 100% Digital York

Lockdown highlighted the disadvantages for people who are not online. Recognising this gap, Explore took the lead by organising a Digital Inclusion webinar in July 2020. 84 organisations came together to consider how this gap might be closed, and the 100% Digital York partnership was born. Its key priorities are to make sure people can embrace digital if they wish and to provide help when needed. The partnership continues to develop during 2021 and aims to establish a network of digital champions across the city.

Sharing the joy

Sharing the joy of reading in difficult times.

During the first lockdown customers praised Explore's speedy pivot to provide an online Library from Home. Swift and clear communications by email and through council and community newsletters were valued.

Customers were glad we could keep some libraries open during the November lockdown and valued the service they received. Some customers enjoyed phone contact and the chance to chat about books as a welcome respite from a lonely day.

Customers commented on friendly efficient customer service which was especially valued during the challenges of the third lockdown.

New ways of borrowing books during the pandemic such as Click and Collect and the Lucky Dip book selections were highly valued by customers. The element of fun and personal interaction in the Lucky Dips seems to have contributed to wellbeing too.

"I don't like watching TV so this is my entertainment, I would be lost without the books!"

"Thank you from the bottom of my heart ... literally saved my sanity over the last year. Wonderful customer service."

"I am usually hard to please, but was happily astonished - every single encounter is outstanding."

"Massive shout out to York Explore for their 'lucky dip' service. My mum filled out a form about what she wants and got a bag of fifteen books to read. Great idea."

"I looked forward to the contact, and to doing something as a group at a time when we were prevented from meeting in person."

"We had free flow gentle conversations prompted by the book and by current events. Sharing everyday experiences was invaluable, such as vaccines and vaccination experiences."

Sharing the joy - reading together

We ran online reading groups, in partnership with Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust and Ways to Wellbeing, to combat social isolation and improve health and wellbeing. The groups read aloud together, then talked. No preparation was needed, so people who did not necessarily have confidence with literature and did not often access cultural services felt comfortable attending. The sessions were promoted specifically to people who were socially isolated and vulnerable during the pandemic lockdowns.

Sharing the joy - online

Use of e-books more than doubled during lockdown, valued both by adult readers and by families with children. Generous donations from publishers, and cash grants from City of York Council and central Government meant Explore kept up with the increased demand for e-books.

PressReader giving free access to a wide range of newspapers and magazines online – including some we could never have offered in hard copy – delighted many customers. Explore is grateful to City of York Council for providing emergency funding to buy the subscription in April 2020. PressReader’s ongoing popularity means Explore will continue to fund it in 2021-22.

“Books have always been a lifeline, and to have them available digitally, all the more so at the moment”.

“I only discovered the e-library in November... its fab!!! And I link my tablet to the Google hub so the boys can listen to audiobooks in bed. Fantastic!”

Sharing the joy - with children, families and schools

The Summer Reading Challenge 2020 was digital only. To support the challenge we provided additional online craft activities and videos. But we knew that many children would not be able to participate online, so we are grateful for the City of York Council Ward Funding for providing 840 Summer Reading Challenge bags of books and craft activities as an alternative to the digital challenge.

Explore created two videos on YouTube to support schools. One focused on Time To Read the book gifting scheme for every reception class child. The second video was a virtual library visit aimed at older children. Online activities for families included Hoglets storytelling for younger children, and John Kirk’s stories for older children.



University
 Spring term and learning
 Canteen 'fish and chips Friday'
 Warm hugs and handshakes
 No news.
 Lectures via zoom,
 In PJs with pots of tea
 Webcam etiquette.
 Strange Indeed.
 The World Turned
 Upside Down



Challenging Imaginations

Creating opportunities for exploration is at the heart of what we do.

Our aim is to create a dynamic environment for collaboration and transformative experiences, challenging imaginations and igniting dreams.

Thanks to Arts Council England's emergency covid funding we were able to develop a digital cultural offer supporting creativity, health and well-being through collaboration with artists, creatives and communities.

"York should be the city that reinvents libraries as the heart of local communities, where creativity can be developed and new cultural connections can be forged"
YORK'S CREATIVE FUTURE: YORK CULTURE STRATEGY 2020 - 2025

Darren Henley, Chief Executive of Arts Council England was a keynote speaker at Challenge Our Imagination! an event hosted by Explore in July 2020 inviting creative practitioners and organisations to come together and develop a localised, creative arts ecology in York.

In 2021 we will submit another funding bid to Arts Council England to continue to explore creativity with Explore Labs 3.

Embracing and investing in new technologies for cultural and creative expression

- ZOOM:** Live streaming, workshops, training, sector support webinars, collaboration
- YOU TUBE:** Live streaming, premiere events, online exhibitions, storytelling, films
- FACEBOOK LIVE:** Live streaming
- BUZZSPROUT:** Nuisance Inspector audio drama podcast
- VIRTUAL TOUR SOFTWARE:** Nuisance Inspector interactive map

ACCESSIBILITY TOOLS: Otter.ai, BSL and STTR interpreter services, closed captioning, audio to text descriptions

Art forms

Poetry | Visual arts | Storytelling | Interactive media | Audio drama | Digital making | Music technology | Textiles | Origami | Author talks

Challenging Imaginations – The World Turned Upside Down

When local community artist Stephen Lee Hodgkins came across a chapbook in the Archive at York Explore, and Wendy Kent from Explore heard about poet Liv Torc's haiflu poems in response to covid, the idea to create a hand-printed chapbook to make sense of 2020 was born. Taking inspiration from a chapbook printed in the 1800s by York printer James Kendrew, *The World Turned Upside Down Haiflu Edition 2020* beautifully expresses thoughts and feelings about the pandemic year through a combination of art and poetry.

**"Bravo on World
Turned Upside Down!
I am a fully fledged library
enthusiast and have seen
some fabulous creative
community engagement
round poetry in libraries this
month, but York Explore
takes the biscuit..."**

**FORWARD ARTS
FOUNDATION**

Challenging Imaginations – Astronomermaid Panto

"Some kids hadn't heard of physics before – now I have eight-year-olds unfazed by A-level topics'. Former Bollywood actor Lara Stafford now runs daily free science lessons on Facebook (all saved on YouTube afterwards), aimed at everyone from five to 14 year olds. The likes and follows have notched up (she has 25K Facebook followers and more than six thousand people tuned in to her panto *The Little Astronomermaid*." Daily Telegraph, March 2020

**"Great to have such
online events during the
pandemic; please keep doing
even when life returns to
normal; very important to have
online events for people with
health risks who are unable or
very reluctant to venture out
and for whom, without events
online, life would be very
dull and quiet
and lonely."**



Challenging Imaginations – The Nuisance Inspector podcast

In November we used a podcast for the first time to bring the Nuisance Inspector to a wider audience as part of Explore Your Archives week. Based on the story of the Hungate clearances and inspired by letters, maps, books and photographs from the internationally significant Past Caring archives, The Nuisance Inspector used drama, comedy and live music to transport audiences into a powerful and poignant past. Learning how to create a podcast meant we grew in knowledge and experience which will help us bring in new audiences.



Connecting People

Our libraries and archives strengthen the community by creating an inclusive sense of place.

During a year where positive impact was needed the most, we recognised the importance of supporting people to connect with us and with each other.

Connecting People – the power of storytelling

During lockdown a local grandad regularly borrowed a selection of children’s books using our Click and Collect service so that he could read to his little granddaughter every evening on Zoom. The wonder of storytelling made their time together very special, and his granddaughter kept up her reading skills by reading a story to him too. We are proud to have played our small part in that vital family connection.

Connecting People – Archives Accreditation

In July 2020 we received full Archive Service Accreditation.



“A quick chat and someone checking in clearly meant a lot to elderly members of the community who were isolating and making weekly calls was definitely a highlight. I think that was where the hubs were important.”

**RACHEL - TANG HALL
EXPLORE**



Looking forward: Working with Bright White - a leader in the field of heritage interpretation, innovation and experience design - and with funding from The National Archives we developed a prototype archives storytelling tool which we’ll be testing during 2021.



Connecting People – We're back

We asked people to tell us what they missed most about Explore whilst we were closed. Over 1,000 people got in touch to tell us.

“Just had to tell you how many people I meet who are getting more and more down. They all say that what they miss most is the library and talking and laughing with you.”

Connecting People – Missing York images campaign

A picture speaks a thousand words, bringing people together to share stories. This was certainly true of our Missing York campaign. Using Flickr we asked people to help us identify 900 images of historic York with support from York Past and Present. The images were viewed 90,739 times and all images were identified with lots of people sharing their memories on social media.



Your Future Libraries

Explore has an exciting future ahead. Over the next few years, we will work with our customers, local residents, partners, and communities to transform the library service from the one you see today.

Our successful, new co-located libraries in Tang Hall and in New Earswick will be the pattern for renewing our libraries in communities across the city. We will build on our successes in those libraries to develop our other libraries, consulting and engaging people in every community in York so they can have a library shaped by their individual needs.

York Stadium Library

Our newest library in York Stadium opened early in 2021. It has books with a focus on healthy eating and healthy living, sports and exercise, plus lots of stories and information for all ages. Visitors can also delve into York's sporting heritage through a touchscreen display funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with York City Football Club Foundation and York Knights Foundation.



Hungate Reading Café

Hungate was just getting ready to open when the lockdown happened. We finally opened our stylish urban café in August 2020 and it is fast becoming a popular venue for visitors, locals and families with a growing range of events and activities.



Supporting Wellbeing

Resilience and wellbeing were put to the test during this challenging year.

We strengthened and supported individuals and communities in York and beyond through our on-line programmes and the services we provided.

Supporting wellbeing – Events programme

Our online events included poetry and doodle art workshops, stories for adults, reading together at home sessions, monthly poetry evenings, creative writing for calm and relaxation, and make-along sessions with an artist. Attendees reported 94% satisfaction, and said that the events were both enjoyable and had a profoundly beneficial effect on their wellbeing, providing a sense of community and shared purpose.

Supporting well-being – Reading Cafés

Throughout the pandemic our Reading Cafés offered whatever service they could following Government guidelines. Customers old and new appreciated the service, and also said how much they had missed being able to meet up with friends to enjoy a coffee and cake.

“Missed the cafe and meeting up with friends.”

Supporting wellbeing – Volunteers

Explore had over 550 active volunteers in 2020. When restrictions eased they were eager to support Explore in re-opening libraries.

“I looked forward to the contact, and to doing something as a group at a time when we were prevented from meeting in person.”

“Volunteering supported my mental health and wellbeing as I got back to meeting, working, and interacting with other people.”

“e-library issues more than doubled, and it meant a lot to people – our e-audiobooks soothed some people through some very tough times.”

HELEN,
E-LIBRARIAN

“I’ve downloaded the PressReader app and it looks awesome. Will give me something lighthearted and diversionary to read on a break at work!”

NHS FRONTLINE
WORKER

94%
of Explore Libraries and Archives staff surveyed in 2020 agreed that the job they do is worthwhile, and is beneficial to society in general.

Libraries and archives aren't just places to read stories, they are places to make stories and this was especially true in the year the world turned upside down. It would be impossible to create such a rich story without you our customers, staff, volunteers and partners. We want to say a heartfelt thank you for your support and for sharing with us the many ways Explore was here for you.

We applied for and received financial support from various Government grant schemes during 2020 and these helped Explore remain strong and resilient. Special thanks goes to City of York Council and Arts Council England for funding for the e-library and a programme of online events which kept our communities connected. Thanks also to our many partners and supporters who helped us during this challenging year.

Will you help us write the next chapter in our story?

You can help us make a difference by giving your time as a volunteer or Friend at your local library or by making a donation to support our programmes.

To find out more about the many ways you can get involved go to:
www.exploreyork.org.uk/support-us/

Please follow us on:



Explore inspires everyone to challenge their imagination, explore their potential and connect with each other, supporting and enriching our communities.

Supporting wellbeing – e-Library

During lockdown more e-books for all ages and the addition of the PressReader app was made possible with grant funding from central government and the Council. We received many comments from people expressing appreciation for the e-library.

Supporting wellbeing – Study space

University students struggled to find quiet space to study due to pandemic restrictions. When Government rules allowed we offered them study desks at York Explore, providing a calm environment where they could maintain focus on their work.





explore

Knowledge and Ideas for Everyone

www.exploreYork.org.uk