

Libraries

Libraries provide a safe, welcoming environment for the local community. This has been demonstrated in library user surveys, with 99% of adults surveyed in 2009 saying that the library was a safe place to visit and 99% of children saying the same in 2010. They are a neutral space, where everyone can access information, books, use the Internet and join in activities and events. They are often seen as a visible expression of the identity of a local area and help to create a sense of “place”.

Libraries have a vast range of resources reflecting their local communities including books and newspapers in community languages. This tailoring of resources to the needs of local communities helps to promote cohesion with everyone able to access the service together.

Dudley Libraries have a pattern of extensive opening hours across the Borough, including evening opening and Sunday opening in Dudley, Brierley Hill, Stourbridge, Halesowen and Sedgley Libraries. Open facilities increase activity in communities and promote a sense of safety.

The events and activities that take place in libraries engage the whole community. These include for example: Rattle and Rhyme sessions for parents and babies; Reading Groups for Adults; Teenagers; Children; People with Learning Disabilities and Families; Local History talks and groups and author events. Events are also organised in libraries to reflect local and national initiatives such as Road Safety Week.

The Summer Reading Challenge takes place each year, encouraging children to read a range of books and take part in related activities throughout the summer holidays. Research has shown its impact in maintaining the reading skills of children, ready for their return to school in September.

Communities who are informed are more able to participate locally and become involved in the life of the local community. Libraries are a gateway to information, with resources and expertise available in every library as well as access to virtual resources and a 24/7 enquiry service on the Internet at www.dudley.gov.uk/libraries. Dudley Libraries manage and maintain a community information service, with information on local events and groups, benefits and rights available through the Internet at www.dudleyci.co.uk and in leaflet form. There is also quiet study space as well as targeted support sessions such as Homework Help for young people.

Whether accessing information about health, benefits, local history, parenting, work or hobby, knowing that it is freely available and in a setting where informed staff will help you find what you need to know, can be an empowering experience.

The library also acts as a host organisation for other partners who deliver surgery type advice sessions (the Police or local MPs and councillors) or deliver their services locally from within libraries (e.g. Housing, the CAB).

Adult and Community Learning

There is a long standing awareness of the negative socio-economic impact of living in the poorer neighbourhoods where families and individuals are more likely to have few or no formal qualifications.

Adult and community learning is contributing to increase people's economic and social well being and enhances people's life chances. The Adult and Community Learning Team contribute to the reduction of crime and disorder through community engagement, learning opportunities which support people into learning and jobs.

Lifelong learning strengthens local communities by increasing the ability of individuals and groups to influence local decision making processes through participation. Learning outcomes focus on improving confidence and self esteem, healthier lifestyles with adults and an engagement target for older people. Joint working with the Primary Care Trust in 2007/08 has strengthened referrals to health and fitness programmes and recording of fitness starting points.

Learning contributes to strengthening social capital by improving the knowledge, skills, confidence and motivation that communities have across Dudley in their natural networks and associations and supports active citizenship. In some instances, community based provision provides a route to qualifications which leads to voluntary or paid employment as people develop the generic skills required by local employers.

In Dudley, learning focuses on the issues relevant to people lives such as better health, education, greener neighbourhoods, less crime and local employment. Some people have restricted opportunities and influences and are supported to participate in learning as an inclusion strategy. This work has long term impact to reduce social exclusion and close the inequalities gap within the framework of the Community Plan.

2010/11 Key Performance Indicators for Adult and Community Learning in Directorate, Division, Council, Recession, Community Plans		
	Target 10/11	Achieved 10/11
Total number of SFA funded Individual adults participating in learning	6000	6644
Number of individual adults participating in informal learning	2700	2899
Number of individual adults participating in Family Learning	1217	1422
Number of individual adult learners on Skills for Life courses	450	614
Number of individual adults aged 60+ participating in learning	1300	1443
Number of adults participating English for Speakers of Other Languages courses (Pre Entry & Entry)	100	231
Number of employers supported	125	126
Number of individual adults gaining employment	100	138
Number of individual adults supported with discreet Information Advice and Guidance interviews to progress	250	668

Kate Millin, Black Country Library Services Project Manager
 Telephone: 01384 814745
 Email: kate.millin@dudley.gov.uk