

Annex A

Report of ethnographic research



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



LIBRARIES, A NATIONAL HOPE SERVICE

ANALOGUE STRATEGIES

Research with job seeking library customers into the value they get from libraries

WHAT WE'RE GOING TO COVER

i) A brief intro to the research

1) Jobseekers are looking for a fresh start, but it can be hard to find one

2) Libraries help them feel more confident about themselves and their future

3) This ability comes from a unique mix of people, resources and space

i) A BRIEF INTRO TO THE RESEARCH



THIS REPORT COVERS HIGHLIGHTS FROM ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH INTO JOBSEEKERS AND THEIR LIBRARY USAGE

- We conducted site visits to libraries in Westminster, Norwich, Eastbourne and Mansfield
- There were 17 interviews in total. Predominantly with job seeking library users, but also staff and volunteers
- Participants have been anonymised and consent was obtained for any photos used
- Ethnographic interviewing is unstructured and person-centric, allowing informants to reveal their lived experience of the topic being explored. This reduces the impact of outsider assumptions about what does and doesn't matter, and leads to a more authentic and nuanced understanding
- It's important to remember that the data in this study is still based on memories and claims and comes from a specific group of people, rather than a nationally representative sample
- Nevertheless, current and former job seeking library users had a very consistent set of experiences and beliefs about the library



1. JOBSEEKERS ARE LOOKING FOR
A FRESH START,
BUT IT CAN BE HARD TO FIND ONE

THE
TRAIN
ROBBERS
PIERS PAUL READ
AUTHOR OF ALICE



“I decided to come off job seekers, because they were giving me so much pressure and the way they were doing it was more about figures, than trying to get you the right job; I was looking for a complete change of career.”

Library user and staff member

JOB SEEKING IS HARD WORK!

- Across the interviews, we heard accounts of respondents feeling anxious, stressed, under pressure and disconnected from society
- Despite this, we also heard about personal experiences that demonstrated huge stores of determination

For whatever reason, if you're a certain age, they're not interested

It's ramping up the pressure on you, and you're under enough pressure that you're applying yourself

Every time I had to go and see her [Work Coach at Job Centre] I started to dread it. I dreaded it. Because I can't go in and say "Oh hello, do you know, I've got a job!" It's not going to be good news

SERVICES AND SPACES THAT ARE SUPPOSED TO HELP OFTEN MAKE THINGS WORSE

- A consistent pattern emerged in discussions, as people compared the experience of using the library with their experiences with other services, usually colleges or Job Centres
- While usually sympathetic to the challenges and constraints Job Centre workers and college tutors face, accounts of experiences outside the library were largely negative
- NB there are probably lots of happy users of Job Centres and colleges who may have not ended up in our sample because they found an alternative form of support

Job Centres

- Service users felt depersonalised
- Pressure to take up similar jobs to those they had left
- Limited computer access and only for application to a limited and undesirable selection of jobs
- Interactions with staff framed around unemployment, rather than development
- Environment felt to be intimidating, stressful, unsupportive

Colleges

- Large class sizes can feel impersonal and intimidating
- Rigid course lengths and syllabi mean learning moves at the wrong speed
- Course schedules can be hard to manage alongside demands from work, caring or other complex responsibilities
- Some people feel too old to be there

When I got the call saying reading and writing had stopped, I thought "what am I going to do ?!"

That would be the nightmare scenario for me; if all the libraries closed.

Last year, when they closed it 'cause of COVID, I just found myself lost, because I'd been doing this course and it just shut down.

AND LOCKDOWN ONLY MADE THINGS WORSE

- Losing their library access during the lockdown caused people real distress:
 - Loss of hope that they would reach their goals
 - Loss of emotional support and valued relationships with library staff and volunteers
 - If enrolled in a learning programme, feelings of stagnating or falling backwards
 - Fear of having to return to services they had found unhelpful in the past

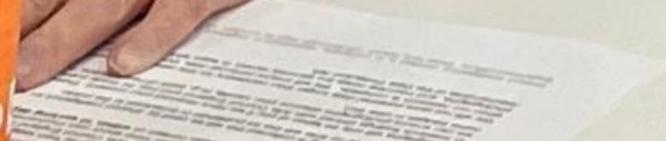
The image shows the entrance of a library. A white table is positioned in the foreground, holding a hand sanitizer bottle, a QR code sign, and a 'Test and Trace' sign. The glass doors are covered with various notices, including 'No smoking', 'Keep clear', and 'Automatic door'. Inside the library, bookshelves and a 'Self-Service' sign are visible.

“People arrive at the library sometimes and they’re completely defeated”

Library user and staff member

paper 2
Start: 12:05
Finish: 12:30

2. LIBRARIES HELP THEM FEEL
MORE CONFIDENT ABOUT
THEMSELVES AND THEIR FUTURE



“And then I came to
the library...”

Library User

**Welcome to
Pimlico Library**

LIBRARIES INCLUDE PEOPLE IN COMMUNITY...

- Job seeking can be an isolating experience
- Libraries provide a variety of levels of social interaction, from the chance to make new friends, to just being around other people who live in your community
- Because of the lack of entrance fee and the range of things that can be done there, libraries are naturally diverse and inclusive spaces, so everyone feels they belong

I lost my husband 8 years ago, and I was in the world on my own. I couldn't talk to people like I talk to them now. And it's different, you meet people, you make friends. Things that I never had. It's made me feel on top of the world.

It gets me out meeting new people. You can be sat at a computer and somebody else can come and sit at one and you end up talking to them. You can make a new friend just by popping to the library.

You meet people. Different people every day. Different cultures as well.

It took me a long time to get to where I am now. I've made quite a few friends coming to these courses. I didn't think I would come out of my shell as much as I have.

That confidence I had when I was younger, when I was working. My confidence came back [and I'm] calmer, a lot calmer, a lot more focus.

If I hadn't had that help through the library, there's absolutely no way I'd ever have had the confidence to actually apply for a job.

LIBRARIES REBUILD PEOPLE'S CONFIDENCE...

- Libraries are the only places where our jobseekers feel that their confidence is being increased by their experiences there
- Partly this comes from feeling respected:
 - Seen and heard by staff who give up their time to help, or who 'bend' rules when they need it
 - Seen and heard by job-seeking peers who they can help and be helped by
- Partly it comes from feeling empowered:
 - Self-directed learning, job-searching and applications
 - No pressure to commit to things they are unsure about
 - When they are involved in learning, feeling like an equal partner, able to take part in decisions about content and timings

AND LIBRARIES INVITE PEOPLE TO PROGRESS

- The library feels like the only place where wanting to move forward is respected and supported
- Our jobseekers felt like they had the agency to make decisions about their future
- They also feel presented with opportunities for making progress towards that future

It's just one step closer to what *I* want to in life.

Bringing people together to do what they need to do. I think it can introduce people to new things, and I think that's kind of important.

It's enabled me to actually continue the journey I'm on. I've got a sense of satisfaction from doing it. For once you can actually look at your life and go "yeah I did that" and that's given me more freedom to progress.

WELCOME TO YOUR COURSE

Inspire Learning aims to provide you with an outstanding learning experience that will help you to make positive changes to your life.

You can expect:

- Clear information about your course
- High quality teaching
- A safe, friendly place to learn
- Help with English and maths
- To be treated fairly and with respect
- To be given the opportunity to tell us what you think about your course
- Information about other opportunities you may wish to progress on to

We need you to:

- Attend regularly and arrive on time
- Let your tutor know if you are going to miss a lesson
- If you have a learning difficulty or health problem, so we can provide support for you
- If there are any changes to the information you provide on your enrolment form
- If you are pregnant or have a medical condition
- Help keep the classroom safe for you and fellow learners
- Treat other learners and your tutor fairly and with respect
- Enjoy making the most of your learning



inspireculture.org.uk/learning | 01623 476 830 | InspireLearningSkills | @Learn_Inspire | Ofsted Good rating

Inspire Nottinghamshire County Council Education & Skills Funding Agency

“A library is a transformative space”
Library User



3. THIS ABILITY COMES FROM
A UNIQUE MIX OF PEOPLE,
RESOURCES AND SPACE

“It’s a community hub, it’s not just a library.”

I didn’t see that so much before, but I see it now. It empowers people. It kind of is unique”

Library User



Today at The Central...
Tuesday 12th October 2021

The Green 10.00	Inspire Learning – Maths Functional Skills 9.30 – 12.30
The Box	After Living Foundation – Cycles of Support 16.00 – 17.00
Studio Floor	Inspire Learning – Reiki 1 10.00 – 12.00
Auditorium	
The Meeting Place	Inspire Learning – GCSE Maths 13.00 – 15.30



THERE'S NOTHING LIKE THIS

- No-one we spoke to could think of an alternative space offering this blend of benefits and emotional outcomes
- In fact many became upset contemplating a scenario when the library wasn't available to them

PEOPLE	RESOURCES	ENVIRONMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none">— Supportive staff and volunteers— Fellow jobseekers to help and be helped by— Connection to community— Chance encounters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">— Computers, printers, scanners, photocopiers— Tuition and courses of different content, formats and lengths— Books and information— Leisure and enjoyment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">— Quiet space to focus— Outside the home— Child-safe— Airy, open and light

BUT FIVE FEATURES CAME UP MOST IN RELATION TO JOB SEEKING

- Easy access to computers, printers and the internet
- A work-friendly and inspiring space
- Supportive staff and volunteers
- Flexible learning
- Volunteering opportunities



EASY ACCESS TO COMPUTERS, PRINTERS AND THE INTERNET

- Libraries provide digitally excluded jobseekers with all the IT equipment they need to find and apply for jobs
- Sessions are a more appropriate duration for the complex, stressful work of job hunting
- Some also reported feeling safer printing and copying personal data in the library than in an internet cafe or Job Centre
- Some jobseekers (and other library users) find desktop PCs intimidating, but are comfortable using touchscreens. Where other kinds of device are available, job seeking is made easier

I came to the library to use the computers that are in the library, because I didn't have broadband at home, and I didn't have a computer.

My circumstances changed and I needed to have Universal Credit. But I didn't have a phone, I didn't have a laptop, I didn't have anything. And I came into the library.

I still come in because, am I going to go and get a printer as well? Probably not. Even if I typed all my letters up and put them on a memory stick I'm probably still going to come to the library. I did try going to a printing shop but there was some problem with my memory stick, it wasn't compatible and they weren't able to print. But I don't have that problem here [in the library]"

It's kind of like a peaceful home from home.

In the library there's a lot of peace and quiet to think about things and concentrate.

I use their Wi-Fi even though I've got Wi-Fi at home now. It's a better environment. You come here, you actually focus on what you're doing. There's quite a lot space, there's a lot of sitting areas next to windows. It's a nice environment to do things.

A WORK-FRIENDLY AND INSPIRING SPACE

- Quiet, airy and well lit spaces are conducive to work
- A place to escape from the distractions of home
- Mutual encouragement from other library customers
- There's also an interesting tension between wanting quieter, more private spaces for important tasks, but also valuing the diverse social contact afforded by the library - a need to be alone, without feeling lonely

SUPPORTIVE STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

- Welcoming staff make customers feel confident to ask for help
 - This is enhanced when staff take additional time to orient new users towards the different job seeking resources available
- This creates a more equal power balance
- Customers feel a strong tie to staff and volunteers
- Exceptions made and rules bent make them feel seen and understood

They made me feel special. They made me feel comfortable. They've made me feel like "you can do this. You've got this" And I'm looking forward to doing my level two. I'm looking forward to it. Honestly it's been really, really, really, great.

The smiling faces. I just walked in here and the gentleman just smiled and said "can I help you?" A welcoming smile and asking just one question; I feel like if I need help with anything I can go and ask someone, because they're here to help. I know I can ask someone.

I just found it nice because if you were running out of time and you go over to the help desk and say "is anybody else using the computer? Could you give me extra time?" I used to get about an hour and a half. They've been very accommodating. When you've got a limited amount of time, you rush and you make mistakes.

I feel better with the library doing it one-on-one because I'm getting used to the reading. The woman I'm with is really nice. She don't rush you. We done about 8 pages this morning and she said "do you want to do any more? You've done 8 pages and for the first day back I think you've done enough."

I find a classroom situation better than a computer screen. I find I learn better interacting with other people.

The teachers, the tutors, whatever you want to call them, they're brilliant. They help you, they'd have time for you, where if you go to college they haven't got time for you.

FLEXIBLE LEARNING

- Being able to learn in an environment which suits them, at a pace that works for them, increases confidence in the outcome and makes the experience less stressful
- Some jobseekers prefer classrooms, valuing peer interaction and mutual support
- Others are shy and prefer one-on-one learning

VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

- For some jobseekers volunteering is sometimes the only way to get the work experience potential employers want
- Volunteering is also instrumental in rebuilding confidence, as it provides very low risk, self-directed working opportunities
- Staff who implement the volunteering programmes are equally instrumental; ensuring the volunteer is pushed out of their comfort zone to the right degree, at the right pace

It made me more confident. Encouraged by people... Firm but fair. Sometimes I'll say to her, I'm not comfortable doing something and she'll say "fine, we'll do something else" She won't push you to the limit where you can get stressed out.

Basically Emma's got a record of things she has done, because the first thing they ask when you go for a job is "what have you done?" And now we can say. And I don't know what else there would have been that would have done something like that.

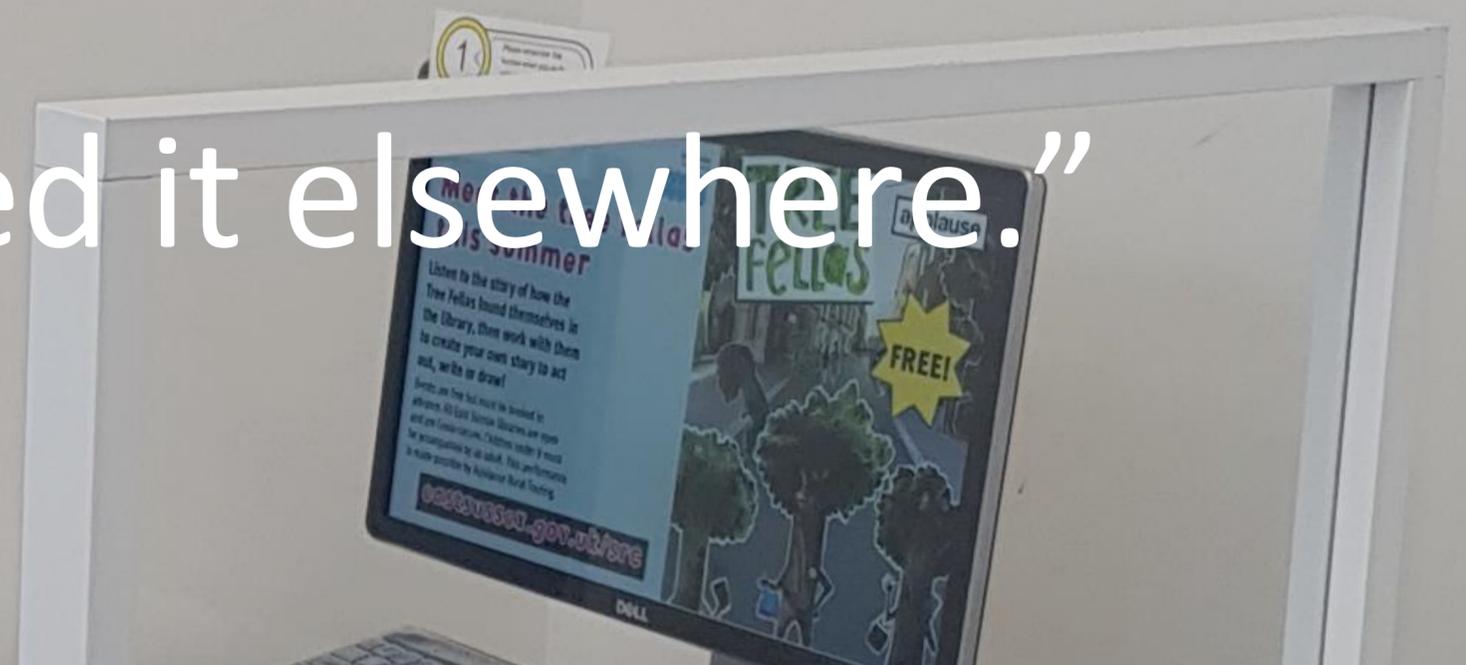
When I left, I bounced down the road. Confidence, do you know what I mean?

Opening doors
to new opportunities

“They’re like, ‘we are holding your hand and you’re going to reach the end of the tunnel with us.’ And you actually feel that. It’s like ‘what is important is for you to reach that goal that you want to achieve, and we can be walking with you.’ That’s what it feels like.

I’ve never experienced it elsewhere.”

Library User



THANKS FOR READING