

Love Libraries Competition: Top Ten New Librarians 2007

ENTRY FORM

Name: Emma Sherriff

Age: 23

Length of service (must be three years minimum): 14 months

Library service: Plymouth Library Services

- **Why have you chosen to make a career in public libraries?**

I applied for the position of Outreach Support Officer for Plymouth Library Services (PLS) because I was excited about the opportunity to engage with children and young people through library outreach work. Growing up I regularly used my local library and later, during exam revision stole time to read novels rather than revise! I had always assumed that I would need a library degree to work in libraries and had not considered the career opportunities that might exist. I graduated from the University of Bath with a 2.2 BSc (Hons) Sociology Degree in July last year. I have been in post for over a year now and I love it. I feel continually enthused by new opportunities to remove barriers to use of libraries. I am committed to bringing new, creative ideas to library events and programmes of literacy for children and young people, and also having a lot of fun whilst doing it!

- **What is it about library work that you enjoy?**

I enjoy surprising young people with innovative activities that they do not expect of Libraries. Also, I am not the stereotypical librarian that they might expect. At 23 I am closer to their age and I have a young appearance too (I still get ID checked buying a soft drink in a pub). I particularly enjoy shocking them with Karaoke as an activity; Karaoke has been particularly successful for groups of young people that I work with who have a low reading ability. The nature of Karaoke helps to demonstrate to them that you are a fun person and that you do not have such a big ego, that you do not want to show yourself up, especially with my poor vocal ability! I have also run the following newly developed workshops: Anime drawing, Drama from *Poetry with attitude*, Comic Fairy Tales with *Shrek*, Movie reviewing and Movie making.

- **Why do you think libraries are important?**

I think libraries are crucially important in society because children and young people of low income families are not able to buy the latest fiction, CDs or DVDs can use them for free, or at a fraction of the cost. Libraries also provide a quiet place for young people to read, work on the people's network or meet other young people. Most of all, libraries offer a different kind of education away from school: research skills, reading something entertaining rather than the set GCSE text and a team of staff on hand to give guidance and advice where required. Libraries are most definitely the unsung heroes of informal education and supporting communities in need.

- **What has been your biggest achievement in the role?**

In my work with young people who are at risk or have offended, in partnership with the Plymouth Youth Offending Team, I have engaged a number of socially excluded young people with the library service. These young people have a range of problems: behavioural, school attendance levels; some had been recently banned from their local library due to their behaviour. I have joined approximately 40 of these young people in the school year 06/07. A third of those are returning to libraries to borrow fiction, CDs and DVDs - I can tell because I receive their overdue notices! I think, though, this is a small price to pay for their acknowledgement that the service is offering something they will use with the right guidance and support. Their borrowing may not be resulting in reading a dense hardback, more likely a graphic novel or girly fiction, but this means they are positively associating libraries with an item they wanted to take home. This is an exciting development as a user group who previously would not have crossed the threshold of their local library is doing so.

- **How have you helped to improve your service?**

I have increased use of the service by children and young people by developing innovative programmes of library and literacy related activities - *literacy with a twist* to bring a new user group of young people to Plymouth libraries.

In addition, I have developed, organised and hosted library events for children and young people. An example is the *Girls Night In* event I designed. I persuaded local hairdressers, a hair braider and a beautician to come along to the library and promote their services by doing demonstrations for girls 11-18 years. The event was highly successful as we used the opportunity to join the girls and promote teen stock. I also, inflicted some Karaoke on them and had my hair curled – all in a day's work!

A children's event I hosted was *Pants!* Based on the book by Giles Andrae, I read aloud the book and the Queens knickers. Each child brought their own pair of pants to decorate. I have developed working partnerships with other agencies that are highly beneficial to the service, including the local Museum and Archives. The Museum was invited to bring a few items of Victorian underwear as an interactive activity whilst the pants designs took place.

I have visited schools and youth centres in a deprived area of Plymouth to petition young people for their own young adult library, as part of the national Book Bar pilot initiative. Recently, rechristened *HeadSpace* in a young person's national survey, the Efford *HeadSpace* will be one of the first 20 young adult libraries. I am working with the group to select stock and furniture for its launch in early December 2007.

I have provided training on delivering a good service to young people. I have used my experience of training and conferences, as well as my own work to inform the content. I included content from *HeadSpace* training, a bookseller seminar *What Teens Want* and the YLG training *The Teen Factor – Have you got it?* I use group exercises and presentations to convey the information.

I am committed to providing a high level of service to our young adult users. I am a welcoming and encouraging hostess, always providing the support and guidance required during activities in the library or externally.

- **Why do you deserve to be recognised as a Top Ten New Librarian?**

I am passionate about the difference that libraries can make when their potential is unlocked by Outreach work. The future of libraries can only be maintained by engaging with children and young people to extend the legacy of libraries to the next generation.

I make a contribution to PLS which enables the service to become accessible and inviting to children and young people who are most in need, for example: low income backgrounds, behavioural problems and acute mental health needs. I take the service to them, engage them and inject some fun and creativity into their literacy curriculum each week.

I train other librarians in working with young people, breaking down the barriers raised by their fear and concerns, generated by the hype of our media.

I promote the service to children and young people through events involving other agencies, including: Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, South West Devon Archives, Performers (Musicians, Magicians), Hairdressers, beauticians and Storytellers.

I have provided two *Lost and Found* Super Story times at the local branch of Waterstones. I also recently hosted *Movie Favourites* – a Movie Reviewing workshop as part of the BBC Blast tour to Plymouth. Young people who participated filmed their own guide to reviewing movies which will be posted online on the BBC Blast website.

In short, the past ten months working with children and young people in libraries have been my Top 10, I hope I make yours!