

Love Libraries Competition: Top Ten New Librarians 2007

ENTRY FORM

Name: Josie Crimp

Age: 25

Length of service (three years maximum): 2 years

Library service: Croydon Libraries

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

I did a course on library services for children and young people whilst doing my MA at UCL, and knew that I really wanted to specialise in this, within either a public library or a school library. I started working as a Children's Librarian for Croydon Libraries in August 2005, and I feel really committed to this sector. Two key reasons I want make my career in public libraries are that I enjoy my work, and I genuinely feel each day that I'm doing a good thing. There aren't many (paid!) careers where you can say both of those things. I also like the fact that I have many skills I still feel the need to develop, because this will help maintain my interest in the profession in the long term.

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

Firstly, the fact that I can go home every day knowing absolutely that that day I have made at least one person's life better. I also have a fundamental, powerful belief in the importance of reading (and in particular reading for pleasure), and I love the fact that I have the opportunity to reach out to so many children and introduce them to books.

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

Libraries, in particular public libraries, are important because they can do so much good in so many ways. People use them for so many different reasons; for pleasure, education, business, or as a social support network, and in many, many more subtle ways they help individuals with varying needs to integrate with society. There are many people today who will happily say that they don't use their library, and obviously this is something that we need to work on, but in truth we are very relevant to a large sector of society. We also manage, with a very limited budget, to reach out to many vulnerable groups; housebound individuals; people with special needs; young people; families on a low income; people living alone who may not have a conversation with anyone else that day. We don't save lives, but we provide a quality of life – which in many ways is a far more difficult task.

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

My biggest achievement so far is setting up TSR (Teen Summer Reads) – a reading initiative that was run in Croydon Libraries for the first time this summer. It's aimed at 11-16 year olds, with the aim of catching young people who think they've grown out of our annual summer Book Trail. When we were discussing the Book Trail at a Children's Services Meeting in December 06, I voiced the

idea of doing a different scheme for teenagers. I semi-led the small committee that was put together to plan the scheme, and finalised the details. I'm very proud of the fact that TSR has quite a holistic approach – as well as promoting reading we're using it as a tool to move young people into using the adult library. They are encouraged to try authors in the YA+ section, and their cards are stamped at the enquiry desk in the adult library, rather than in the children's library. In addition, as Croydon Libraries launched a new Teen Library Card a couple of months ago (for 12-15 year olds), and whenever a young person comes to sign up for TSR, if they're of the right age we make sure they get their new library card. I spoke at assemblies at the two secondary schools near to Croydon Central Library to promote both the Teen Library card and TSR, and several individuals from the two schools have since come up to me in the library to say hello! We are in the middle of running the scheme now and will be analysing our statistics and feedback in September to find out how successful we were. Obviously there are things we'll need to change and improve on for next year, but the feedback I've heard from young people so far has been really positive, and I'm pretty confident that there will be a next year!

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

I've helped to improve the service in both the big ways and the little ways. For example, I always do my best to provide a good customer service, and in the Central Library where I work now I am trying to significantly weed the non-fiction, to make the library more attractive. These are little things, they're not revolutionary, but I believe that in the long run it's things like this that will get customers to either make repeat visits, or stop using the library.

However, I've also helped organise bigger things that improve the library service. In September at Croydon Central Library we're going to start doing a Storytime on a Saturday morning once a month as well as the weekly ones on a Thursday. This enables families with young children where both parents work during the week to come to a library session together. It has involved a bit of work with organising staffing, but we're confident that the sessions will be a success.

Another example of a bigger project I was involved with was whilst I was working as a Children's Librarian at Norbury Library. This branch shut for redecoration from February-May 2007. We wanted to do our best to offer some service to families with young children during this time, so I managed to find a church hall nearby which would let us hire a room one morning a week, for £10 a session. Croydon Libraries paid for this, and one morning a week whilst Norbury Library was closed I would travel out there and do 2 music sessions for babies and toddlers. We also had boxes of withdrawn books so that parents/carers could share books with their toddlers/babies before/after the sessions. We had an average of 34 attending each morning, and many parents said how much they appreciated the extra effort that Croydon Libraries had gone to with this. As I stayed in touch with the parents/carers, it also meant that as soon as Norbury Library reopened we were immediately went back to having big, successful Rhymetimes there, rather than having to build a group up again gradually.

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

The fact that the competition is for a "New Librarian" means by definition that it's not going to the people who are best at their job, or have the most expertise. I think it's about finding individuals with drive, vision, enthusiasm, and the potential to become inspirational leaders in the future. It's telling the winners "yes, what you're doing now is good, but what we're *really* interested in is what you'll be doing in 10 years time". I think I am this sort of individual and I think you will be interested in what I'm doing in 10 years time. I'm committed to working in public libraries in the long term, and want to develop myself to become a leader in the field. I have a passion for libraries, and I genuinely believe

in them as a power for good; for education, for independence, for social cohesion, and for happiness. If someone has lost that belief, it doesn't matter what expertise they have. We all need to be driven by that belief above anything else, if we want to change public libraries for the better.