

Equality and Diversity Case Studies
Directorate: Regeneration and Culture
Service: Libraries

Title: Polish Librarian Exchange

Introduction:

For a few years Chester Library has had some informal ties with libraries in Wroclaw, due to visits made by a Polish teacher to Chester, with a group of students. We also have quite a large Polish community. We decided to arrange an exchange visit between a library in Wroclaw and Chester Library.

Chester Library provides English conversation groups to develop English language skills. The visit to Wroclaw was designed to enable the librarian to develop skills which will enable them to initiate outreach work with the Polish and other East European communities in Chester, in addition to the possibility of employment in Poland.

Wroclaw Municipal Library services have areas of good practice which contributed to the librarian's professional development: library design, partnership with other cultural services, work with young adults, technical and ICT education for disadvantaged groups, promotion and marketing. There is an international community in Wroclaw whose common language is English. Families of multinational employees are a target group for the library service, and the Chester librarian was expected to develop outreach work skills to engage this community. The British International School in Wroclaw helped by giving access to the children of many nationalities who attend their school, and their mothers.

Bright Books is a small company which loans collections of foreign language books to many English library services. They are supplied with books in Polish by Tradebooks, based in Wroclaw. Both Tradebooks and Bright Books supported this project. It offered them an opportunity to improve the responsiveness of their service. It was intended that an

English librarian working in Poland should gain expertise in selecting Polish literature, an understanding of current literary and recreational reading trends and a grasp of popular culture which can be applied in improving services to Polish service users in Chester. During the visit the librarian undertook training in the use of Wroclaw's library system (ALEPH), induction to the service and other ICT-based training

Challenges:

For the visit to Poland we had to find someone who was willing to spend 4 weeks away from home, and also cover their work whilst they were away. We also had difficulties finding an appropriate Polish language course to give the librarian a basic knowledge of the language.

To follow up the visit to Poland we wanted to organise an event that would encourage Polish families to visit Chester library, and also encourage them to come back.

The main challenge was the language barrier, but fortunately there is a Polish language speaking library assistant in Great Boughton Library, so she was able to help with some Polish tuition and translating posters, and contacting the Polish community in Chester.

For the return visit here we had to arrange accommodation and plan out a programme that would show them how our libraries work, and also keep them entertained.

How the challenges were overcome:

We set up a small working group to arrange the Polish family event, which consisted of 3 librarians from Chester Library, Magda Cumberland, the Polish speaking library assistant from Great Boughton Library, and Sheila Houldin, the Cheshire Libraries member of staff who had been to Wroclaw as our part of the exchange. Through Sheila's experience in Poland we decided that a puppet show would be good, so we contacted a local company to come in and put on a show. We also held a Polish storytime and provided a selection of Polish food, along with a traditional English Cream tea.

The reciprocal visit comprised of 2 librarians from Wroclaw visiting us in October 2010. We were able to find accommodation in a house not too far from Chester Library. We arranged a 4 week programme, which included them spending some time in the main Chester Library and visits to the smaller branches to see how they were different. They also visited the Education Library Service, the Cheshire Record Office, our Central Book



Store and Bibliographical Services, to see the different departments within our library service. We also visited external organisations, such as, Chester Cathedral Library and Halton Lea Library.

To celebrate the visit we organised a special event that the 2 Polish librarians could take part in. We decided to hold a Polish themed Reading Group, which would discuss *Death in Breslau* by Marek Krajewski – Breslau was renamed Wroclaw, and the author is a local writer, known to the Polish librarians. We purchased a number of copies of the book, so that people could borrow it and read it before the event. We advertised the event with English and Polish posters, offering a discussion of the book and Polish refreshments.

Outcomes:

Polish Family Event held Saturday 17 April 2010, with 35 Polish parents and children attending, from which the library gained 6 new members.

Reading Group evening Wednesday 27th October 2010, 7-9pm.
Unfortunately only 12 people attended, with only one Polish person.

What we could have done better:

Better advertising to Polish community. After our successful family event we should also have followed it up with more events for the Polish community, for example, a regular Polish storytime

Further information:

N/a

