

**Case Study**  
**London Borough of**  
**Redbridge**  
**September 2012**



## **Working with Young Volunteers**

### **Redbridge Libraries Summer Reading Challenge: Support from Young Volunteers**

#### **Abstract**

The increasing demands of delivering the Summer Reading Challenge led to the creation of a specific volunteer role to support it. Young people were perceived as a readily available group with ideal skills. Success in the SRC improved and there were positive outcomes for both young people and the Library Service.

#### **Background to the project**

The Summer Reading Challenge is a demanding project and Redbridge Libraries are committed to growing our success each year. The increasing number of children participating has placed a strain on delivering the scheme against a background of reduced staffing levels. In order to increase our capacity to deliver we looked to recruiting volunteer help with the clear understanding that the recruitment was not intended to take the place of paid staff.



#### **Partnerships and funding**

Key partners in the wider project were Team London who provided funding to initiate the volunteering programme and Volunteer Centre Redbridge which is hosted by Redbridge CVS. Their support enabled us to provide training to selected library staff to become Champions in all libraries throughout the borough.

Reading Agency training on recruiting young people for volunteer roles was also valuable.

#### **What we did**

- Volunteer Policy and Procedures were established with guidance from Volunteer Centre Redbridge. We identified a variety of roles to be advertised for volunteers including Summer Reading Challenge Assistant.
- Champions were trained in the recruitment, selection, induction and support of volunteers.
- The volunteering opportunity was advertised in libraries, on the Redbridge website and publicised at work fairs and Youth Centres. It was promoted to local secondary schools and through contact with Redbridge Youth Council.

## Objectives

- To provide exciting opportunities for volunteers to gain people skills, communication skills and increasing self confidence in a working environment whilst adding value to their CV.
- To involve local people especially young volunteers in contributing to the delivery of the library service.
- To increase our capacity to meet the demands of delivering SRC.
- To add a new dimension to the experience of children taking part in the Summer Reading Challenge by giving them a chance to chat with young people about books, reading and the Summer Reading Challenge website.
- To increase the number of children completing the Challenge.
- To increase young people's knowledge of what the library service has to offer them.
- To develop partnerships with secondary schools and local youth organisations.

## Data

	2011	2012
Number of volunteers age 13-24	27	80
Number of hours contributed	351	2570
Number of children completing the SRC	1910	1976

## Evidence

Feedback from the young volunteers about their experiences was overwhelmingly positive. The recruitment gained momentum throughout the summer as young people were seen enjoying the role and introduced other friends.

Staff in many of the libraries felt supported by the backup the young volunteers provided. In some cases staff commented that they could not have run the scheme without the additional help.

## Comments from the young volunteers included

- *Volunteering at the library gave me a new outlook on the world of work and gave me the opportunity to interact with children outside of my age group. I thoroughly enjoyed it and it gave me something to do over the summer holidays.*
- *I think that volunteering at the library has really helped me develop new skills which I will definitely come to use in the future.*
- *It was a really great experience. I was able to meet new people as well as contribute to my community while gaining new skills.*
- *I really enjoyed the experience of working in a public library. I learnt new skills and was able to feel that I really was helping the community. The library was one of the few places to allow volunteers my age the opportunity to work in general and I appreciated that I was trusted by the library staff to do something that involved working with the public....I am very grateful for the experience and I am sure it will assist me in many ways in the future.*
- *The Challenge was a great experience and will provide me with skills that I can use for life. Staff were friendly and extremely helpful. Other volunteers were great to work alongside. I would recommend to anyone looking to get experience with working with the general public.*
- *I enjoyed working with the children and listening to and asking them questions about the books they read. I was able to meet lots of new local people and also worked well with other volunteers.*
- *I enjoyed working at the library and feel that the skills I have gained are transferable such as communicating with children.*
- *I have very much enjoyed working in the library as I have met new people, learnt valuable skills and had the experience of working in this unique environment.*

## Impact

- The number of children completing the SRC by reading at least 6 library books increased again this year and extra support made this manageable. Volunteers improved our ability to deliver the SRC and continue to give children one to one attention when sharing their reading experiences.

- Feedback from SRC indicated that children enjoyed chatting to young volunteers. Parents' comments also confirmed that in many cases children grew in confidence chatting about their reading choices to someone outside of school and the family.
- Comments from the young volunteers suggested many had enjoyed the role socially and as a helpful learning experience.
- Some volunteers referred to their increased awareness of what else the library has to offer them in terms of stock, study support and pc's.
- Several expressed an interest in continuing to volunteer if suitable roles were available.
- The willingness of these volunteers to contribute to the community suggests that they would be a good source for consultation in the future about shaping library services.
- The scheme has given young people a more positive image.
- Some of the participants benefitted from the scheme by adding to their hours of accreditation for the Duke of Edinburgh scheme.
- Some young volunteers will assist at the SRC celebration event where their contribution will be acknowledged and applauded.

## Key learning points

- Young people appreciate the opportunity to get involved in their local community.
- The library is an ideal venue for volunteers to gain skills in working with the public.
- Effective partnership working enabled Vision Redbridge Library Service to prepare Volunteer Champions to manage the programme. The ongoing support of Volunteer Centre Redbridge will allow the programme to flourish.
- Response to the advertised opportunities was greater than expected placing a heavy workload on the Champions. Recruiting for the SRC is an annual task and should be carried out to a set timetable starting earlier in the year (from January)
- Recruiting young people under 16 avoided the need for CRB checks but seeking references also takes time and school references should be sought before the summer holiday.
- Volunteers were able to choose times to suit themselves. Staff need to organise a working pattern for them based on that offer in order to make best use of their time in relation to busy periods in the library.
- Libraries need to identify a range of tasks that volunteers can help with when the SRC has quieter periods.

## Future plans

Interest in volunteering continues to grow and young people will be involved in delivering the Summer Reading Challenge next year. The SRC Assistant volunteer role could be developed further to allow young people to get involved in the planning and creative development of the scheme.

Similarly, volunteers could be used at other times to assist with activities such as children's reading groups, events for children and adults, supporting computer skills, establishing teen events of their choice in library space. Further training is also proposed in partnership with Volunteer Centre Redbridge to enable Volunteer Champions to support and develop volunteers.

Volunteers were presented with certificates and a celebration event will be planned to recognise their contribution.

## Further information

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