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Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

Evaluation of the Libraries: Opportunities for Everyone innovation fund

Final report

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Contents

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Libraries: Opportunities for Everyone (LOFE) innovation fund was launched in December 2016 as part of and alongside the Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-21 strategy document, which set out plans to reinvigorate public library services in England.

Its primary aim was to enable local authority library services to trial innovative projects that would benefit disadvantaged people and places in England.

Specifically, the LOFE fund aimed to support projects that would:

- provide library users and communities with opportunities to remove or reduce disadvantage.
- enable library services to develop innovative practice that meets the needs of people and places experiencing disadvantage.

The fund was also delivered within the framework of the Society of Chief Librarians' (now called Libraries Connected) then 5 Universal Offers, and the Libraries Deliver: Ambition's 7 strategic outcomes.

Figure 1 Libraries Deliver: Ambition's 7 strategic outcomes

Outcome 1	Outcome 2	Outcome 3	Outcome 4	Outcome 5	Outcome 6	Outcome 7
Cultural and creative enrichment	Increased reading and literacy	Improved digital access and literacy	Helping everyone achieve their potential	Healthier and happier lives	Greater prosperity	Stronger more resilient communities

Funded projects

Managed by the Arts Council, the £3.9 million fund awarded grants of between £50,000 and £250,000 to 30 projects across 46 library services in March 2017. These were grouped into one of 5 thematic 'clusters' within the evaluation, bringing together projects focused on Libraries Deliver: Ambition outcome areas, aims or activities.

Arts and culture: arts-based activities that aimed to improve young people's confidence and skillsets, as well as their relationship with art, culture, literature and their local library.

Digital: digital activities that aimed to improve people's digital literacy and reduce social exclusion, embedding this within library services through staff training.

Families and wellbeing: a wide range of activities to increase families' engagement, and to improve access to information and physical, emotional and mental wellbeing.

Literature and creative expression: creative activities that aimed to address low levels of participation and bring literature to life for vulnerable and marginalised groups.

Makerspaces: physical hubs that aimed to address local deprivation through digital taster sessions, activities and courses, including creative activities such as 3D printing, animation, robotics and coding.

Evaluation of the LOFE fund

Traverse was selected DCMS to undertake an independent evaluation of the LOFE fund in November 2017. The evaluation aimed to investigate what activities were undertaken by projects and whether these made a difference to participants, libraries and local communities. It also sought to generate learning from both the approaches taken by projects and the support that was provided by DCMS, the Arts Council and Traverse.

The evaluation applied a mixed method approach that incorporated elements of supported self-evaluation. This focused on helping projects to collect and collate their own quantitative data (how many, how much and how often) and qualitative data (what happened, what effects were felt and why).

In doing so, this report presents preliminary evidence on the extent to which expected outcomes occurred, and also provides qualitative insights into approaches to project design and delivery, as well as how to improve upon them. However, it should be noted that the variable quality of project-level evaluations limits the extent to which this evaluation can comment on impact and attribution across the whole programme.

As such, this report provides an initial evidence base that indicates both promise and potential in terms of the differences that libraries can make to the lives of service users, their staff and local communities. There is also an opportunity for this to be used by libraries to inform the conduct of more targeted, project-level evaluations in the future.

Meeting the aims of the programme

The evaluation drew together a wide body of evidence to assess the extent to which aims of the LOFE fund were met, which are summarised below.

Table 1: Summary of impacts

Fund objectives	Achievement of objectives
Library users and communities have opportunities to remove or reduce their experience of disadvantage	The available evidence suggests that the LOFE fund engaged regular, irregular and non-users of library services with opportunities to reduce their experience of disadvantage. This included: • Engaging individuals in **co-design and co-production activities**, which provided individuals with a sense of ownership and helped involve other people from hard-to-reach groups. • Building individuals' **awareness of the opportunities** that engaging with library services, digital tools and reading or arts-based activities could provide. Participation in activities then enabled library users to **develop skills** that could not only help them to address aspects of disadvantage but also **develop the confidence** to apply these skills in their

	everyday lives.
	Anecdotal evidence of **early improvements in mental and general wellbeing,** such as reduced social isolation, improved relationships and improved access to employment opportunities.
Library services will have developed innovative practice that meets the needs of people and places experiencing disadvantage	The available evidence suggests that library services have used their funding to develop new tools and approaches to support people and places experiencing disadvantage. This included: **Developed spaces** which provided access to a range of technological resources and workshops that had a marked impact on digitally deprived communities. **Improved digital confidence and skills** among library staff, which bolstered libraries' offers and improved their position as a service provider. **Improved understanding** among library staff of how best to support people with special educational needs and learning disability, often through working with partners. This led to improved practices and the creation of more inclusive spaces. **Transformed service offers** where LOFE-funded activities were felt to have helped libraries take a significant step forward in terms of embedding digital or inclusive practices as part of their core offer.

Other impacts on libraries

Many projects commented on how coming together around a clear purpose and delivering LOFE-funded activities had a transformative effect on their services. This included improvements in staff morale where staff had accessed training or taken ownership of delivering innovative activities, and extending their service reach into disadvantaged communities. It also included the transformation of library environments where new spaces had been built or innovative services embedded.

The available evidence suggests these developments also challenged and improved people's perceptions of what their local library could offer and achieve. This was felt to have contributed to greater understanding and improved working relationships with local organisations and other council teams such as IT, public health, social services and policy departments, as well as increased service use.

Enablers

Where projects had worked well, project leads highlighted a number of common factors that were felt to underpin the development of innovative library service activities for disadvantaged people and places in England. These are summarised on the next page.

Table 2: Summary of enablers

Theme	Description
Staff	Many projects emphasised that securing the support of management, frontline and volunteer staff had been instrumental to the success of their project, especially as project teams often relied on in-kind resources to help them design and deliver activities. Several projects benefitted from electing to recruit project coordinators, reducing their reliance on overstretched library staff and enabling them to push forward with project delivery at 'crunch moments'.
Partnerships	Working through local community organisations enabled some projects to engage and work with vulnerable and marginalised groups which had historically limited engagement with library services. Some libraries also felt that working alongside these groups helped raise the profile and change perceptions of libraries in these communities.
Engaging participants	Engaging target groups in consultation or co-production activities, often with the support of local organisations, helped projects to better understand the needs of and challenges faced by their target groups. When working with vulnerable and marginalised groups, projects also emphasised the importance of tailored approaches to engagement and project activities.
Programme management	Robust programme management approaches such as working with a multi-disciplinary steering group and undertaking monitoring and evaluation from the start of projects were felt to have helped shape effective project design.

Some libraries also reported that their LOFE grant had enabled them to attract and secure additional funding from local authorities and new partners over and above the 10% match funding required within applications. This additional funding tended to be directed towards the renovation of rooms to house LOFE-funded spaces, or towards the addition of further features within existing spaces, rather than towards increasing the scale of activities.

Challenges

Funded projects identified a wide range of challenges that they had faced in developing activities for disadvantaged people and places in England. Suggested solutions to these challenges can be found in Chapter 4.

Table 3: Summary of challenges

Theme	Description
Staffing	Many projects struggled to engage overstretched staff. Where projects were perceived as additional work this sometimes resulted in a reluctance to engage while, even among enthusiastic staff, limited capacity sometimes made it difficult to attend training or commit sufficient time to projects.

	Projects often worked alongside volunteers to help address this demand, though recruitment processes often took longer than expected due to high demand for them among services and volunteers were occasionally unreliable in their commitment.
Engaging and working with participants	Some projects found it challenging to both engage and work alongside vulnerable and marginalised groups – including managing behaviours that may challenge, and unreliable attendance. Other projects also struggled to communicate new types of activities to their target groups.
Working with partners	Some projects developed new partnerships with organisations that later turned out to be unreliable, while, despite good will, other partners' contributions were also limited by competing demands. Several projects that engaged organisations from different sectors also reported a clash of working styles.
Project delivery	Projects also faced a wide range of delivery challenges, including procurement delays when purchasing IT equipment, health and safety obstacles when building spaces and internal issues with IT infrastructure.

Lessons learned

Projects reflected on their participation in the grant programme and identified a number of learning points:

- **Small grants can make a big difference to services:** the open brief behind the LOFE funding enabled projects to deliver innovative activities without fear of failure. Across all projects, funding was felt to have made the most difference through providing projects with the opportunity to invest in high-value equipment and resources, support their staff with training, and market their full-service provision to local communities.

- **Funders should provide clear communication and flexible support:** clear grant aims and criteria supported applicants during a compressed grant application window. The Arts Council's flexible approach to project plan adjustments was also felt to have enabled projects to better respond to emerging needs and challenges.

- **Grant recipients value opportunities to share ideas, challenges and lessons learned:** 'learn and share' events provided project staff with opportunities to network, share transferable learning and seek reassurance from others – outcomes that can also be supported via online forums.

- **Embed evaluation activities in grant awards:** Undertaking programme-wide evaluation activities at the start of the grant programme would have better supported project development processes, enabled projects to ensure that adequate resource was allocated to evaluation activities, and reduced the risk of duplicating local evaluations.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have emerged from the delivery and evaluation of the Libraries: Opportunities for Everyone innovation fund (LOFE).

- Awarding funding in a way that **focuses library activities on specific audiences and outcomes** helps to galvanise staff and partners to keep momentum on projects, even as circumstances change.

- Through the LOFE fund, libraries channelled their energy into addressing particular areas of need and engaging specific groups in ways that time and resources may not usually allow. Project leads developed new and innovative ways to reach some of those target audiences, often supported by expert advice and local stakeholder groups. These approaches will enable libraries to continue to build those audiences and strengthen their impact and social value into the future.

- This focus on outcomes links to the value of **building in evaluation from the start of a project**. This not only improves data collection and evidence but helps libraries to strengthen and reflect on their aims (e.g. through the theory of change process) before plotting a particular course.

- Some projects in the LOFE fund reported that creating a theory of change, with support, at the beginning of their project lifespan would have led them to approach some activities differently. It would also have focused their efforts in different ways to reach their intended outcomes.

- However, funders do not need to be prescriptive in how those outcomes are achieved. The LOFE fund demonstrated the **value of giving libraries flexibility around the use of funding**. In some cases, staff have already have the ideas, the confidence, the skills and the networks to deliver something fantastic, and a (potentially modest) amount of funding is all they need to make it happen.

- For services which used the funding to invest in new equipment or entirely new spaces, this is changing what those libraries are and how they engage audiences into the future.

- In other cases, a more important investment will be in library staff (and potentially volunteers) where they need support to develop the skills and confidence to work with a new product or project and bring it to life. Without this, the best projects might never gain traction. It is important for funders and project leads to understand that context and invest resources where they are needed, such as including staff training in grant criteria and funding bids.

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- Where funders **encourage (or require) libraries to reach out to local partners in order to deliver a programme** it can help those services forge strong, long-term bonds with organisations in their community.

- These partnerships can enable libraries to raise their game in terms of accessibility and engagement of diverse audiences, raise their profile with other services and community groups, and improve their reputation with more innovative, dynamic partners who may not have looked to libraries as potential partners in the past.

- At its most positive, this can result in the renewal of libraries as a partner and a focal point in a local 'system' and a local community.

- There are clear opportunities for **using programmes like this as a vehicle for building networks and learning across the sector**. Funders who are visible, active and engaged by hosting regional and thematic workshop events can also maximise their impact through the production of thoughtful agendas, activities and resources to underpin learning.

1. Introduction

> **This chapter introduces the *Libraries: Opportunities for Everyone innovation fund* and the evaluation. It explains the purpose of this report and describes the aims, principles and methods of the evaluation.**

1.1. *The LOFE fund*

The Libraries: Opportunities for Everyone innovation fund (LOFE) was launched in December 2016 as part of and alongside the Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-21 strategy document, which set out plans to reinvigorate public library services in England.

The fund was established by DCMS to enable local authority library services[1] to trial innovative projects that would benefit disadvantaged people and places in England[2]. Specifically, the aims of the fund were to:

- Provide library users and communities with opportunities to remove or reduce their experience of disadvantage.
- Enable library services to develop innovative practice that meets the needs of people and places experiencing disadvantage.

Managed by the Arts Council, the £3.9 million fund awarded grants to 30 projects across 46 library services in March 2017. Lead applicants were required to be local authority library services or to have been commissioned to deliver the whole library service on behalf of local authorities.

Each of these projects also delivered within the Society of Chief Librarians' (now called Libraries Connected) then 5 Universal Offers and the Libraries Deliver: Ambition's 7 strategic outcomes. The latter are shown below and referenced as icons throughout the report where project impacts were considered to have contributed towards them.

Figure 2: Libraries Deliver: Ambition's 7 strategic outcomes

Successful applicants were awarded grants of a value between £50,000 and £250,000 for the period April 2017 – March 2018, which was added to a required minimum of 10% match funding in either cash and/or in-kind support. Some projects also supplemented their award with funds from wider local authority resources.

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[1] Lead applicants were required to be local authority library services or have been commissioned to deliver the whole library service on behalf of local authorities.
[2] Applicants were invited to describe (with evidence) why the audience for their proposed activity is disadvantaged within the geographical and demographic context of where the applicants deliver their services.

A list of projects and their grant awards can be found in **Appendix A** of this report.

1.2. *Evaluation of the LOFE fund*

Methodology

Traverse, formerly known as OPM Group, was selected by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to undertake an independent evaluation of the LOFE fund in November 2017.

The aims of the evaluation were to:

- Provide an overview of **activities** undertaken by individual projects, highlighting major themes.

- Provide an understanding of **the difference** that these activities made to participants, libraries and local communities (project impacts).

- Draw out the main learning from the approaches taken by projects, including which activities were felt to be successful and why, as well as what challenges were encountered and how these were overcome.

The evaluation of the LOFE fund applied a mixed method approach that incorporated elements of supported self-evaluation (Figure 3).

This focused on helping projects to collect and collate their own quantitative data (how many, how much and how often) and qualitative data (what happened, what effects were felt and why).

Figure 3: The evaluation methodology
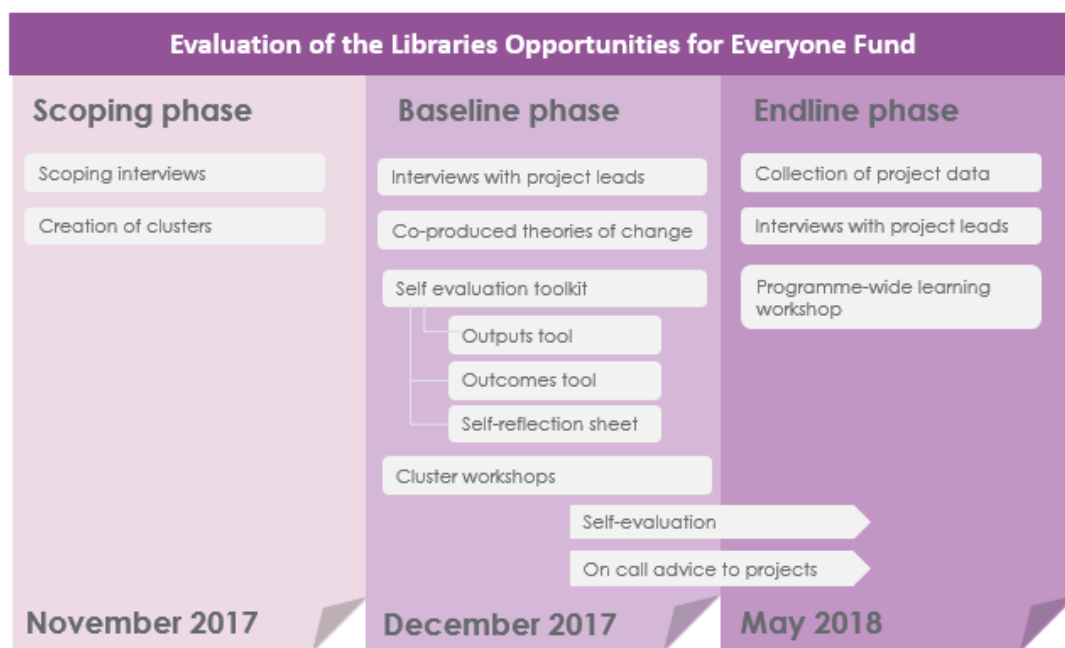
The main evaluation activities included:

- The development of 5 thematic 'clusters' and accompanying theories of change, which grouped projects by common aims and activities.

- The provision of a mixed method self-evaluation toolkit, which included tools to help projects capture their outputs (what they produced), outcomes (what changed as a result) and lessons learned during delivery.

- The provision of evaluation support to projects to help projects plan or refine their data collection activities.

- Peer learning opportunities that enabled projects to share progress, challenges and potential solutions.

- Baseline and endline interviews with library authority staff to explore their expectations, perceptions of which project elements were successful, challenges encountered and how these were overcome, and lessons learned for the future.

A detailed explanation of the methodology is presented in **Appendix B** of this report.

Caveats to the findings

Overall, the level of engagement from project leads was high across all evaluation activities, including the return of the self-evaluation toolkit components.

However, the quality of data within these returns varied significantly between projects. While some projects commissioned external evaluations (and then went to great lengths to transport this data into the Traverse tools), others undertook their own monitoring and evaluation activities, with data gathered in different ways. For some of these projects, the Traverse evaluation was also commissioned at too late a stage to inform their data collection processes.

When considering the findings presented in this report, it is also important to note the following:

- The impacts of the grants have been self-reported by project leads and cannot be verified by Traverse.

- Some projects were still in the middle of their delivery timeline at the point of publication, so the impact of their initiatives has not been fully captured.

1.3. *Structure of this report*

This report presents impacts and learning from across projects in the following sections:

- **Chapter 2:** Findings from funded projects
- **Chapter 3:** Enablers
- **Chapter 4:** Challenges and solutions
- **Chapter 5:** Recommended project delivery approaches
- **Chapter 6:** Lessons learned for grant programme delivery
- **Chapter 7:** Conclusions

The report has 3 primary audiences:

- central government
- local government
- people working in libraries

It includes transferable learning on what works well (chapter 3) and potential challenges that should be mitigated when undertaking new activities in library services (chapter 4), as well as recommended approaches towards working towards specific outcomes that feed into Libraries Deliver's strategic outcomes (chapter 6).

This report is supplemented by a separate **Projects Information** booklet, which provides further information about the aims, activities and impacts of each funded project, as well as contact details.

2. Findings from funded projects

This chapter provides an overview of projects' target audiences, activities, emerging impacts, and perceived sustainability.

2.1. *Overview of clusters*

Funded projects were grouped into one of 5 thematic 'clusters' within the evaluation, which brought together projects focused on Libraries Deliver: Ambition outcome areas, aims or activities.[3]

Table 4: Overview of programme clusters

	Clusters	Libraries
	Cluster 1: Arts and culture	Merton Middlesbrough Lewisham
	Arts-based activities that aimed to improve young people's confidence and skillsets, as well as their relationship with art, culture, literature and their local library.	
	Cluster 2: Digital	Barnsley Hampshire Lincolnshire Manchester Nottingham Sandwell Telford & Wrekin West Sussex
	Digital activities that aimed to improve people's digital literacy and reduce social exclusion, embedding this within library services through staff training.	
	Cluster 3: Families and wellbeing	Essex East Sussex Luton Sefton Staffordshire Tameside
	A wide range of activities to increase families' engagement, and improve access to information and physical, emotional and mental wellbeing.	
	Cluster 4: Literature and creative expression	Bournemouth Borough Council (SW Region of Readers) Bradford Libraries Cultural Community Solutions Ltd – Harrow Greenwich Leisure Norfolk County Council Plymouth City Council
	Creative activities that aimed to address low levels of participation and bring literature to life for vulnerable and marginalised groups.	
	Cluster 5: Makerspaces	Hull Kent Libraries Unlimited – Devon Liverpool Stockton Vision Redbridge Warwickshire
	Physical hubs that aimed to address local deprivation through digital taster sessions, activities and courses, including creative activities such as 3D printing, animation, robotics and coding.	

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[3] Project aims and activities often overlapped with those within other categories. This was acknowledged from the start of the evaluation and, in defining and measuring their outcomes, projects were encouraged to draw on other clusters where appropriate.

Funded projects responded to a wide range of local needs and priorities within different parts of England, delivering tailored activities to their identified target groups. For this reason, this chapter first explores the following at a cluster level:

- **Local needs** - What projects set out to address.

- **Target groups** - Who funded projects engaged and how.

- **Activities** - What innovative activities were undertaken by funded projects.

- **Impacts on individuals** - What changes were measured or observed in participants.

It then explores the following at a programme-wide level, which were more common across the 5 clusters:

- **Impacts on libraries and local communities** - What changes were measured or observed within library services and local communities.

- **Legacy impacts and sustainability** - Which impacts were anticipated to last beyond the LOFE funding period, and how funded projects planned to support them.

Insights have been brought together from a range of sources, including:

- self-evaluation monitoring data and self-reflection questionnaires submitted by project

- baseline and endline telephone interviews with project leads

- programme-wide evaluation workshops

These have then been structured in line with the 5 co-produced theories of change.

This chapter looks at the emerging outcomes of funded projects on individuals, library services, and their communities as a whole.

Measuring these impacts within a 6-month timeframe is challenging, made even more difficult in the case of projects where anticipated outcomes are expected to emerge over far longer periods of time.

Projects were therefore encouraged and supported to monitor and evaluate their activities against the short-to-medium term outcomes within the 5 developed theories of change, which could then demonstrate attribution towards longer-term impacts. Methods of data collection commonly returned by projects included: registration and booking forms; post-event feedback forms; surveys with project participants, staff and partners; and observation.

Some projects also commissioned external evaluations to assess the difference that they had made to participants and communities. Where available, these findings have also been incorporated within this chapter.

2.2. Impacts on individuals

Cluster 1: Arts and culture

3 LOFE-funded projects focused on activities relating to arts and culture (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Overview of projects grouped within the arts and culture cluster[4]
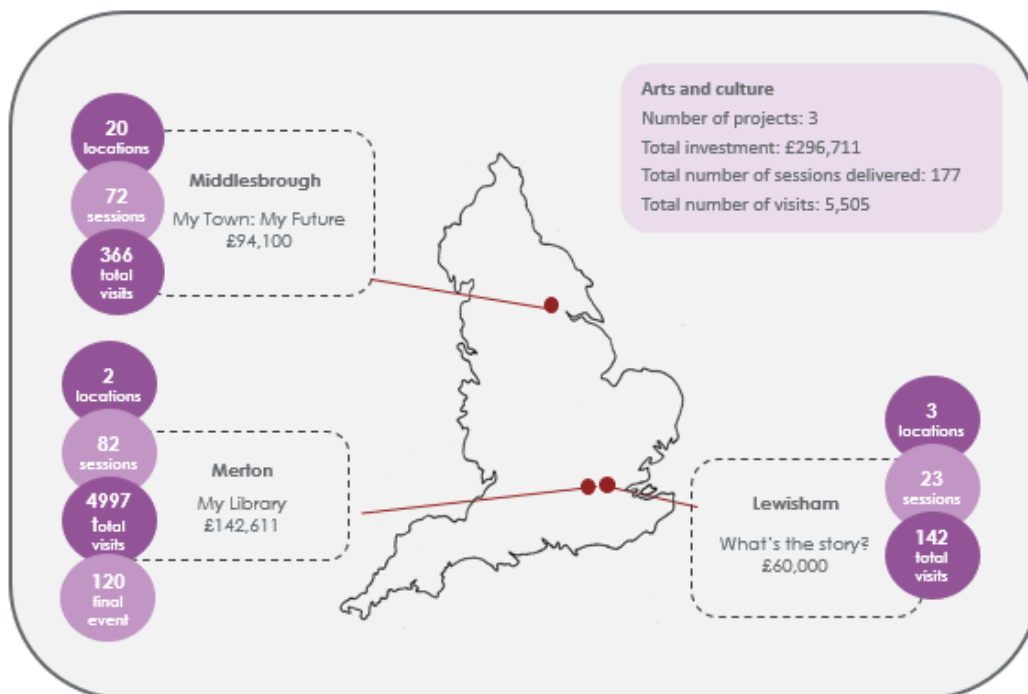
Projects within this cluster:

- Mostly aimed to improve the confidence and skills of young people with lower life chances, as well as improve their relationship with literature, arts and culture and their local libraries.

- Were all targeted at specific audiences where library membership and regular library usage tended to be low. This included individuals who displayed behaviours that may challenge or those with learning difficulties.

- 2 of 3 were aimed to improve civic engagement through the creative exploration of local history. It was also hoped that participants' work would create a lasting resource that will enhance local knowledge and provide a sense of pride in local communities.

- Generally included exhibitions or performances that showcased participant work, which in some instances meant developing an exhibition space.

The table overleaf provides an overview of the projects' local priorities, target groups and approaches to engagement, and a brief overview of the activities undertaken. Where projects are hyperlinked (underlined), this links to posts written by projects that have been published on the Taskforce blog.

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[4] The following terminology applies for all overview diagrams within this report:
Total visits: includes all library/home visits due to funded activities, including repeat visitors.
Recurring visits: where the same participants attended a library multiple times.
Final event: number of attendees at culmination events.

Table 5 – arts and culture	What local issues did funded projects address?	Who were the target groups and how were they engaged?	What were the main activities?
Lewisham	• Goldsmiths has 10 full fee-waived places a year for undergraduates from underprivileged local areas, but currently struggle to fill these. • Lewisham is in the 8 poorest London boroughs across all measures of poverty (London poverty profile, 2015). 1 in 4 of Lewisham residents are aged under 19, where disadvantage is highest. • Lewisham is among the 4 lowest-ranked boroughs for numbers of people on out-of-work benefits, for GCSE attainment and for 19-year olds lacking Level 3 qualifications (2 or more A-levels).	• Recruited young people through the council website and other community links. • Held 3 information sessions in various venues. • Worked closely with Goldsmiths University. • Engaged a member of the Lewisham Young Citizens' Panel (a body of civically engaged local 11-18-year olds) as part of the steering groups. • Used connections with local secondary schools. • Shared project information through a local job fair, social media sites including Twitter as well as distributing leaflets in Lewisham Library.	• Supported young people aged 16 to 21 to take part in a multi-media journalism project which would enhance skills, prospects and provide an introduction to further education. • Sourcing, interpreting and editing stories about their local community. • Learning how to use a video camera, interview techniques, field work, and how to edit a Wikipedia page. • The course used the Battle of Lewisham as a central focus to develop a deeper relationship with and understanding of the local area.
Merton	• Decline in library usage in the borough from primary school to secondary school. • 45% of Merton school pupils are living in an area of deprivation (IDACI). These pupils are half as likely to achieve 5 good GCSE results compared to their peers (White Paper, The importance of teaching, 2010). • Aimed to increase young people's engagement with reading, libraries and the art in localities with reduced life chances.	• Outreach and consultation with young people. • Engagement with potential participants through cultural partners. • Developed and shared the 'art space' brand through a website and on social media. • Engagement with secondary school teachers.	• Hired a youth engagement manager. Delivered a series of workshops that met young people's interests, including art, drama and poetry. • Culminated in an exhibition and performances designed by participants with professional support. • Created a high school reading scheme to encourage library sign ups. • Created dedicated arts spaces within Mitcham and Wimbledon libraries including an exhibition space for the 'My library' art competition.
Middlesbrough	• Focused on wards in the top 20% most deprived in the country, with many featuring in the top 5%. • Aims to highlight past and present contributions made by marginalised groups to the local area. • Only targeted wards in the top 20% most deprived in the country for deprivation (Index of Multiple Deprivation 2015).	• Libraries have restructured to form community hubs. The project has focused on areas where there are community hubs with libraries. They have delivered activities in at least 5 different hubs. • Worked with some schools to recruit participants. • Promotion via council website and Ageing Better Middlesbrough. • Word-of-mouth by participants.	• Digitization of centrally-held resources (such as photos) by the library service using new scanners. • Creating new photographs of landmarks in the area in contrast to the old archive images. • Creative writing workshops and creation of a digital platform for hosting their outputs. • Displaying images on a digital platform as well as in a touring exhibition.

Some projects within other clusters also had elements which related to the arts and culture theme. Where relevant, these projects are included in the commentary below:

Table 6: Other projects of relevance to the arts and culture cluster

Project name	Main cluster	Arts and culture crossover
Vision Redbridge	Makerspaces	• Aimed to give young people in more deprived areas access to technology. • Produced a public art commission, which relied on working with secondary schools producing digital art through workshops and gallery visits.
Devon	Makerspaces	• Aimed to promote literacy, digital literacy, as well as health, wellbeing and employment prospects amongst targeted communities. • Delivered a variety of activities and workshops to encourage creativity, literacy and engagement with the library, including over 40 outreach events.

Impacts on individuals

Projects within the arts and culture cluster varied greatly, but all have reported a wide range of outcomes from LOFE-funded activities for project participants. These are outlined below.

Enhanced skills and prospects for individuals

Across all arts and culture projects, sessions focused on enhancing participant skills.

Improved digital and creative skills: In Lewisham and Middlesbrough, activities were partly focused on enhancing participants' digital skills, and ensuring that these skills can be meaningfully applied to creative and professional endeavours. This involved giving participants from less advantaged backgrounds access to digital tools that they otherwise would not get to use.

There is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that participants will go on to apply these newly acquired skills in the future. For example, in Lewisham, 1 of the 12 course participants continued to use software for a personal project inspired by the course.

In Middlesbrough, 33% of course participants felt that they were more digitally confident following the course, although 83% neither agreed nor disagreed that they would use skills learned in other aspects of their life. This may be because the photography and digital scanning software was very specific and perhaps less easily applied to alternative contexts.

Improved access to jobs and further education: In Lewisham, many participants were not in education at the time the course started and had no experience of a university setting. The workshops took place at Goldsmiths University and gave participants a taste of what studying journalism in a formal environment might be like. Participants were able to complete the course with a tangible piece of work showcasing their newly acquired journalism skills, including sourcing, shooting and editing content. Following the course, one participant applied to a formal journalism course.

In Middlesbrough, 50% of participants reported that they felt they had gained valuable skills from the workshops that would help them gain employment. Having said this, the impacts of the digitisation part of the project were more limited, as most volunteers who took part were already retired and therefore did not plan to use newly acquired skills for future employment.

In Merton, 67% of participants reported that they had increased skills as a result of taking part in the project, while project leads at Vision Redbridge felt that engagement with the project has raised the aspirations of the young participants.

Increased engagement with arts and culture

For most of the projects, participants said that taking part in project activities had led them to join or consider joining more arts or library-based activities. In Middlesbrough 85% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of the project, they had engaged more with public libraries and 67% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed they had engaged more with creative arts.

This was reflected in Merton where 80% of facilitators surveyed felt that the workshops had improved young people's engagement with arts and libraries.

"*Having a theatrical performance in the library is so fab. It gives children a chance to experience a live theatrical performance.*"

Project participant, Devon

"Some of the marginalised groups that we have worked with before… had never worked in arts before. It gave them a whole strand of ideas of activities that they can be involved in with this group." - Project Lead

Improved wellbeing

All of the projects within this cluster reported perceived improvements in participants' wellbeing, mostly through the development and showcasing of new or enhanced skills.

Showcasing skills: In Redbridge, Middlesbrough, Lewisham and Merton, activities included a showcase of participants' skills, where workshops culminated in an exhibition or performance. In Redbridge, for example, this gave participants the opportunity to have their work seen by over 14,000 people. In Merton, the 'art spaces' were created with exhibiting in mind. In Lewisham, the course was designed to help participants create a portfolio for job and university interviews.

Increased confidence: Participants across all of the projects in this cluster self-reported perceived increases in their confidence levels, including day-to-day confidence and their confidence to join other arts and culture activities.

Figure 5: Increased confidence in Merton and Middlesbrough

In Merton, 50% of participants reported increased confidence to participate in arts and cultural activities in libraries

In Middlesbrough, 83% of participants felt that they had more confidence after taking part in the project.

50%

83%
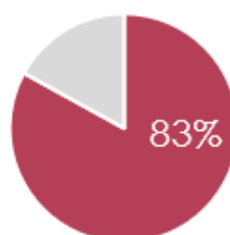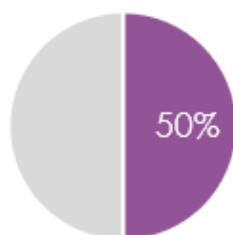
Reduced social isolation: the development of confidence and skills has, in some cases, potentially had an impact on participants' social interactions. In Lewisham, project leads reported that the project helped participants meet like-minded people and build connections through working together. In Merton, the project lead reported that engaging in creative activities has made the participants – often young people who had reported feeling ostracised – feel part of a community.

Cluster 2: Digital

A total of 8 LOFE-funded projects focused on reducing digital exclusion through introducing and training participants in how to use digital tools (Figure 6). Projects in the 'Makerspaces' cluster developed similar activities, but are reported separately.

Figure 6: Overview of projects grouped within the digital cluster
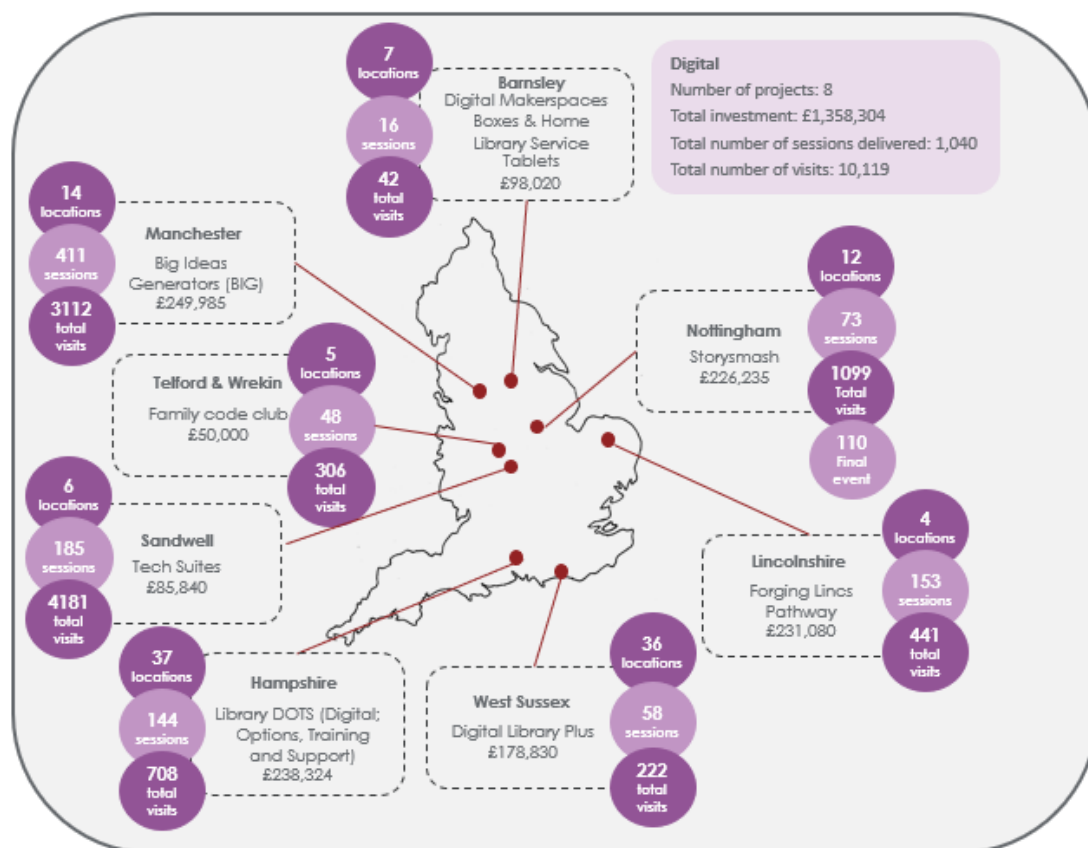
Projects within this cluster:

- Aimed to improve digital literacy and reduce social exclusion through the use of digital tools.

- Worked across a wide range of target groups, from children and young people to families, older people, jobseekers and isolated ethnic groups.

- Ran a wide range of activities, from iPad lending schemes to creative workshops on photography. Staff training was an important activity, with a view to making digital assistance normalised within library services.

The table overleaf provides an overview of the projects' local priorities, target groups and approaches to engagement, and a brief overview of the activities undertaken. Where projects are hyperlinked (underlined), this links to posts written by projects that have been published on the Taskforce blog.

Table 7 – digital	What local issues did funded projects address?	Who were the target groups and how were they engaged?	What were the main activities?
Barnsley	• Widespread social isolation and digital exclusion. • Opportunity to act on corporate outcomes.	• Focus on particularly hard-to-reach-groups such as the elderly and the housebound. • Digitally excluded community groups who cannot afford digital equipment or do not have the knowledge to use it.	• Developed digital kits involving camcorders, tablets, laptops, Raspberry Pi sets and micro:bits. • One-to-one sessions with target groups without a pre-set list of activities, using the digital kits. • Ran or facilitated group sessions with community groups and other local partners.
East Sussex	• High unemployment and poverty. • Low levels of digital literacy.	• The project had 6 different strands targeted towards people with specific needs, 2 of which involved digital activities with jobseekers and children aged 8 to 12-years old.	• Code clubs with 40 children aged 8-12, run by 12 volunteers. • IT for you - sessions with jobseekers.
Hampshire	• Reducing digital exclusion and social isolation.	• Targeted various groups to capture a wide audience (lone parents, Nepalese community, people with low literacy across the region).	• Initial 3-hour training session (crash course). • iPad lending schemes over a 4-week period. • Contact with tutor and coordinator over the course of 4 weeks (pointing people to look at e-books, e-magazines, health and wellbeing, money management).
Lincolnshire	• Coastal deprivation, predominantly rural areas leading to social isolation and digital deprivation. • High unemployment rates.	• 16 to 25-year olds • Opened up target group over the course of the project to anyone who was interested.	• Created Tech Labs in 4 libraries and mobile IT kits to serve 9 other libraries. • 153 workshops and tutored courses in a range of digital and creative suites (e.g. graphic design, music production, photography, coding, computer game writing).
Greater Manchester[5]	• Need for new businesses to extend reach across Greater Manchester. • Help with innovation and entrepreneurship. • Ensure that libraries contribute to meeting business information needs.	• A broad range of participants interested in developing a new skill or business idea. • Worked with partners to reach out to desired target groups.	• Over 400 group workshops on 3D printing, cloud computing, business idea guidance, online tools, social media. • One-to-one sessions at the Business and Intellectual Property Centre. • Smart TV and stand purchased for workshop presentations and streaming events.

[5] Please note that while Manchester is referred to as the project lead, activities also took place across 10 Greater Manchester library authorities.

Nottingham	• Low library engagement with young people above the age of 11. • Tackling area's literary deficit. • Focusing on 5 geographical areas that are hard to reach.	• The target group were young people aged 11 to 25. • Recruited through academies, intense promotional activity and outreach.	• Created gaming hubs in 5 libraries, teaching people to create games using specific software (Twine). • Photography, music editing, coding, creative writing courses. • Author-led writing workshops • Developed youth council for library service to develop the direction of the project.
Sandwell	• An inner-city area to the west of Birmingham with low income, high levels of deprivation and low ownership of many technologies. • Council is delivering more services online as part of a channel shift agenda.	2 focused target groups with specific activities for each: • Children and families • Older people: iPads for beginners	• Virtual reality sets and robotics (for children and families). • Tablet loan (iPads) and classes. • Classes on using council web portal. • Staff training
Telford and Wrekin	• Tackling unemployment and skill shortages. • 4 libraries that serve the most deprived areas of Telford.	• Initial focus on parents and young children, but later broadened to those outside target group who were interested in joining the sessions. • Reached out via social media, by using existing connections and partners (e.g. Town and Parish councils). • Audience development sessions.	• Family code clubs aimed at getting parents to learn coding skills to help them have a better chance of getting jobs. • Sessions using a 3D printer. • Staff training
West Sussex	• A large, predominantly rural county with just under half the population living in rural areas, and a fifth of those living in the smallest, most remote communities. • Individuals experience increased hardship through rural isolation.	• 3 digitally excluded target groups: isolated older people (who find it hard to get digital assistance); job seekers with low digital skills; and people with learning difficulties. • Engaged through signposting new services to existing customers; referrals from partners working with target groups; job fairs; and proactive relationship development with relevant organisations (e.g. hospitals).	• Delivered across whole county via 36 libraries, including sessions in homes, children's centres and job centres. • Home library sessions – providing assistance to older people to use technology if they have it or encourage to borrow iPads. Coaching visits and referral routes in place. • Bespoke workshops with jobseekers on CV building and job search, online software, as well as free one-to-one tuition on public network computers. • Storytime sessions using Matrix Maker software (speech therapy devices).

Impacts on individuals

Projects within the digital cluster reported a wide range of outcomes from LOFE-funded activities at individual, library and community levels.

Increased digital literacy

One of the main driving forces behind the projects within the digital cluster has been the desire to increase digital literacy among selected target groups. Libraries attempted to capture this change through a variety of methods, from conducting pre- and post-activity surveys, to collecting participant stories and developing case studies based on participant or staff feedback. Impacts related to increased digital literacy have emerged in the following ways:

**Increased awareness of and access to digital tools and information:**

Taking participants on a journey of digital awareness was often reported as one of the biggest successes by project leads. The technology that was made available to service users through the LOFE fund was often new to them, as shown in a selection of survey results below:

Figure 7: increased knowledge about digital tools in Manchester, Barnsley and Sandwell
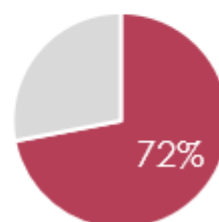

In Manchester libraries, 96% of participants increased their knowledge about digital tools
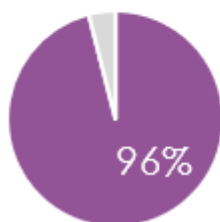
In Barnsley libraries, 98% of participants felt their knowledge had improved
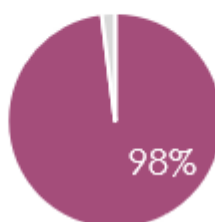
In Sandwell libraries, 72% said this was the first time they had used VR/ robotics/ 3D printers

In some instances, access to new digital tools had the potential to have an immediate impact on participants' quality of life. West Sussex libraries worked with participants with learning disabilities, for instance, for whom free-to-access technology such as Matrix Maker opened up new possibilities:

Case study: increased access to digital tools

Michael has a degenerative condition. To help him communicate, he had a laminated book with sheets that his parents had created for him. His carer was keen to help Michael communicate more and told his mother about the wide range of digital technology that could assist him. However, his mother was not convinced whether it would work and was not sure if she should spend money on it. West Sussex libraries lent Michael an iPad pre-loaded with the Matrix Maker app, containing hundreds of pictures and templates that can be used to create pictures and communication tools.

"This helps customers see what works for them and it has a real impact on the quality of their lives." – West Sussex Project Lead

Improved digital and creative skills

As result of actively engaging in the sessions, participants have not just gained awareness of what opportunities digital technologies can bring to their lives but have also picked up skills in how to use them, whether for socialising, job-seeking or other purposes.

**Figure 8: increased skills in Manchester, Hampshire and Barnsley**

In Manchester, 84% of participants felt that their skills had increased
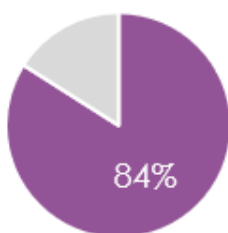
In Hampshire libraries,100% of attendees stated that they maintained or improved their skills and confidence
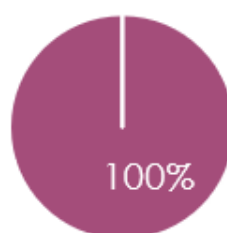
In Barnsley libraries, 71% of participants reported feeling very confident in using a tablet device after taking part in the course

84%

100%

71%
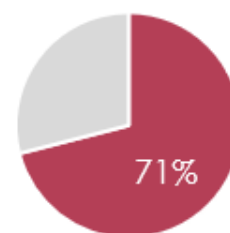
Other libraries did not administer self-assessment questionnaires, but reported similar impacts through tutor observations during sessions.

"Their knowledge is the biggest impact. A lot of them came to us with no knowledge at all in the thing that they wanted to study. They had an interest in the subject but no formal training in those areas. Definitely that was the biggest draw – that they could learn for free and take that knowledge away and use that to help them find a job." - Project Lead

In some cases, by engaging with certain types of digital technology participants were required to draw on other skills, too. For example, in order to create more advanced Twine games, the young people who took part in Nottingham's Storysmash utilised and developed supporting skills in art, design, photography and music, as well as coding. Project leads reported that some of those young people started to become self-sufficient in teaching themselves certain subjects in order to develop their own games. Participants attending events in Hampshire and Lincolnshire libraries also took courses in a range of creative skills such as graphic design, product design and photography.

Increased confidence in the digital world

Evidence suggests that the projects may have had an impact on participants' confidence in using digital technology, particularly among some older participants who felt daunted at the thought of using digital technology.

Libraries adapted their approach to activities in order to address prevalent feelings of fear and uncertainty around what digital technology is and what it enables. This often required a one-to-one approach, which limited the number of people that libraries were able to approach during the funding period. However, project leads often felt that the personalised route led to more tangible impacts on individuals' lives.

"One of the biggest impacts has been the ability to improve their digital confidence. We are just embarking on this so there is not a huge number of people, but we left all of them in much better place in terms of confidence and ability. It's small scale improvement, but what we try to do is listen to the person and figure out what they are interested in and how they need help." - Project Lead

More frequent use of digital tools

Whether as a result of being more aware of digital technology or confident using it, participants across projects reported an increased frequency of using a variety of digital tools.

Project leads in Hampshire reported early evidence and stories from participants who had started using NHS weblinks to book and attend appointments as well as find local dental provision. In East Sussex, customers were also reported to use their newly-acquired digital skills to seek employment and manage aspects of their lives online. In Barnsley's libraries, a final survey of home library service customers has shown that several more people are now interested in having access to digital devices, setting a good foundation for future growth.

Increased employability

Some projects such as East Sussex, Manchester, Telford & Wrekin and Lincolnshire targeted jobseekers. While evidence of people getting jobs at this stage is very limited, libraries attempted to capture outcomes within this space by asking participants to report on the perceived impact on their skills and prospects.

In Manchester, for instance, several participants reported a desire to pursue their own business ideas. In Lincolnshire libraries, over the course of the project the number of participants who thought that improving their employment possibilities was an important reason for taking part in the project increased from 30% to 50%.

Lincolnshire Libraries provided a couple of anecdotal examples of early impact. Project leads reported anecdotal evidence of one participant finding a work experience placement with one of the library tutors and another participant finding work as a result of the portfolio that she built during the project.

"Even if we don't manage to get the unemployed parents into work, I hope that the cycle can be broken because the young people now have the knowledge." - Project Lead

Reduced social isolation and exclusion

Reducing social isolation and (digital) exclusion was an important thread throughout the objectives of projects within the digital cluster. Several sources of evidence across all projects indicate that this was achieved, including both participant testimonies and library staff observations. Many libraries took a proactive approach in reaching those who were isolated, taking digital tools to them and showing them how this can impact on their lives. This is very well-evidenced in the case study presented on the next page. It refers to participants from West Sussex library, but

many similar examples were also reported elsewhere.

Case study: reducing social isolation

Shelley is an 82-year-old Home Library Direct customer. She owned an iPad but had very little idea how to use it. During the first visit, it quickly became apparent how isolated Shelley was. After losing her husband and her mobility, she had become largely housebound. Her only regular visitors were the library volunteer who delivered her books and her friend who helped her with her garden.

The first thing that Shelley was keen to learn was email, so that she could keep in touch with friends from London and also register for other online services. Thanks to her working life as a PA her keyboard skills were very good, and she picked it up quickly. She was also interested in BBC iPlayer and once she registered, she couldn't believe that she was suddenly able to use her iPad to watch Blue Planet.

On her second visit, Shelley reported using her iPad every day. She said that the iPlayer had helped her insomnia and that she had even watched a film in bed. During the visit, she learned how to use other digital apps and resources. Shelley spoke of the importance of those extra activities to fill her day because she was quite lonely and isolated.

It was evident to the Home Library Direct volunteers how much the iPad could improve her quality of life and how much the entire experience of the visit built her confidence. Her subsequent feedback form and emails support this:

"I am using my iPad every day now (I'm beginning to show off...) - it's not shut in a drawer any more. It's magic!"

> "*I'd have to say that Storysmash helped me find my love for coding again and it's definitely helped me be more social, even if it was daunting at first. Having a group project has been really fun and inspiring!*"
>
> Participant from Storysmash.

Even for participants who were not necessarily isolated or excluded, participation in these projects was perceived to have increased their levels of social contact. In Hampshire, 75% of participants said that the project had enabled them to improve contact with friends and family and 17% said that activities had helped them connect with new people.

In Nottingham, several young people created a youth council to develop a more advanced game and planned to enter it into a competition. Project leads reported witnessing a great deal of enthusiasm to create something together, and feedback from participants supports that view.

Improved health and wellbeing

Many project leads documented or observed perceived increases in participants' wellbeing, often linking this to perceived increases in social contact, confidence and employability, as well as access to new opportunities via digital tools. Examples across projects range from non-native participants making friends and overcoming depression, to those experiencing physical or learning disabilities or mobility issues getting out and about more, or feeling more useful to friends and family.

In Sandwell, 95% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that the project had increased their wellbeing. In Barnsley, 71% of participants felt that having access to this technology had been beneficial to their wellbeing, with over half finding they used it more than they thought they would.

Cluster 3: Families and wellbeing

A total of 6 LOFE-funded projects had a significant focus on activities aimed at increasing wellbeing among individuals and families (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Overview of projects grouped within the families and wellbeing theme
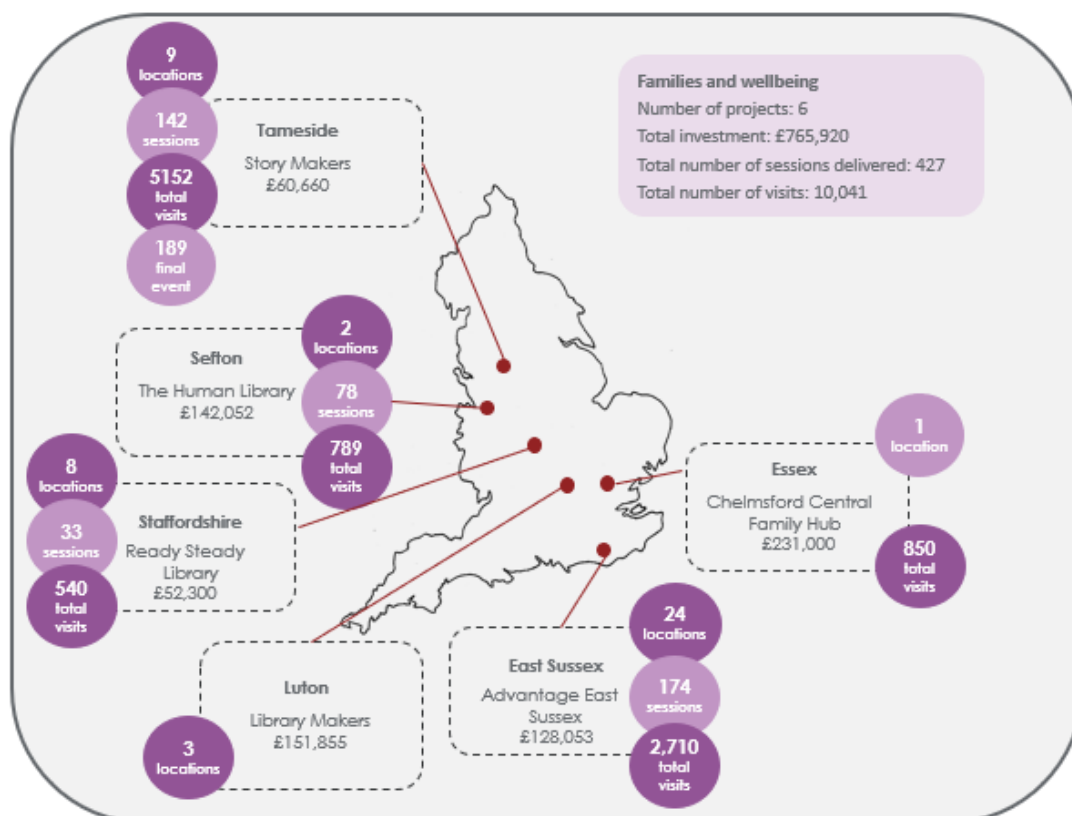
Projects within this cluster:

- Aimed to address a lack of community engagement with libraries and prevalent issues within their local areas. These ranged from low levels of literacy and digital literacy, to low levels of parenting support and attainment in children, and rising number of mental health challenges.

- Ran a wide range of activities that were designed to increase engagement with libraries, improve participants' access to information and levels of confidence in engaging with libraries (specifically through co-production), as well as improve their physical, emotional and mental wellbeing.

While the outcomes of some of these activities overlap with those of other clusters (e.g. increased literacy, increased confidence in engagement with literature, arts and culture), the focus of these projects has been on using these activities as tools to engage families and ultimately improve participants' wellbeing.

The table overleaf provides an overview of the projects' local priorities, target groups and approaches to engagement, and a brief overview of the activities undertaken. Where projects are hyperlinked (underlined), this links to posts written by projects that have been published on the Taskforce blog.

Table 8 – families and wellbeing	What local issues did funded projects address?	Who were the target groups and how were they engaged?	What were the main activities?

East Sussex	• Aimed to support various groups of people in vulnerable situations (affected by unemployment, poverty, mild mental health problems).
	• Focused on communities (both of people and place) in areas of high deprivation.
	• Intended to trial new approaches to inform their new strategy.
		• 4 different strands targeted towards groups:
		  - Adults and families with children and teenagers who wanted to improve their mental wellbeing, engaged through partners and promotional events.
		  - A well-established community of refugees and migrants in the Hastings area with limited English skills, engaged through a local drop-in centre.
		  - People with visual impairments, engaged through work with local blind societies and word-of-mouth.
		  - Young people in secondary schools and Hastings, engaged directly or through community groups.
		2 additional strands addressed digital literacy and are included within this report under the digital cluster.
			• Developed wellbeing boxes that, though originally intended for adults, were expanded to families and children and teenagers. This included stress balls, wellbeing journals, colouring books; information signposting to other services; and launch events.
			• Dual language rhyme time and story times with refugees and migrants.
			• Bought hardware and software and held sessions to support visually-impaired people to read and be more independent; recruited visually-impaired volunteers to train others on equipment.
			• Creative writing workshops held by writer-in-residence.

Essex	• Many areas experiencing high unemployment, contributing to low levels of parental support and child attainment, and high referral rates for speech and language delay. • Aimed to develop a space for a range of services and integrate the service offers of Chelmsford library and the local Children's Centre.	• The space has been created for parents, carers, children and young people (pre-birth to 19) with the help of 2 contracted partners: Barnardo's and Virgin Care Limited. • Participants were not specifically recruited to take part in any activities.	• Redesigned an inspirational, innovative space to provide a range of services that support learning, digital literacy, health, wellbeing and cultural enrichment. • Delivery of other activities had not commenced at the time of the evaluation.
Luton	• Low levels of community engagement among a wide range of vulnerable people.	• The project aimed to create a 'cradle-to-grave' pipeline of engagement in the community, targeting a wide range of irregular and non-users of library services.	• Refurbished 3 spaces through co-production with service users and/ or partners. • Co-production involved focus groups and consultations with service users and partners.

	• Low levels of community engagement among a wide range of vulnerable people.	• Recruited volunteers and engaged with partner organisations and artists to co-produce 3 spaces for teens, children, and an area dedicated to health and wellbeing. Also engaged a range of partners to use the health and wellbeing space for their own activities.	• Used social media to engage volunteers through a system of 'challenges' (useful activities that would be taken on by skilled volunteers to help existing staff).
Sefton	• Create a 'human library' of volunteers and partnerships to build community engagement. • Address issues related to poor mental health and social isolation in one of the borough's most deprived areas. • High number of older people, disabled people and young people experiencing disadvantage.	• Adults who are at greater risk of social isolation and poor mental health issues (with an emphasis on unemployed adults, carers, new and lone parents). • Target group was expanded to include older people who identified themselves as lonely and isolated, as well as children. • Participants were recruited through local paper advertisements, community groups, existing or new partners, as well as promoting activities to existing library users.	• A series of creative, artist-led programmes aimed at uncovering local talents, who became volunteers and led various sessions with participants. • The sessions included story-time tea toast (as snacks were observed to improve engagement), cooking in the library, podcasting, glazing ceramics, flower arrangement workshops and yoga, among others.
Staffordshire	• Low percentage of children who have access to universal education provision; low levels of school-readiness. • Working to reduce the number of children entering the local authority system.	• Parents or carers of babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers, identified with the help of the County Council's Early Years Commissioning Lead, early years providers, Family Support Workers and other local partners who work with young parents.	• Co-produced 7 activity boxes with parents through a series of focus groups and workshops. These included resources and suggested activities for target groups, as well as information that signposted to other services. • Other activities, such as stories and song, accompanied the wellbeing boxes and promoted group cohesion.
Tameside Libraries	• Low levels of literacy among adults in 4 of Tameside's most deprived neighbourhoods. • Aimed to improve early years' school readiness. • Low engagement with libraries and with cultural activities.	• Families with pre-school children or carers of pre-school children from more deprived areas, engaged thorough partners such as early years providers and voluntary and council bodies (children centres, networks for children looked after), as well as health and arts organisations. • The recruitment involved intense outreach activities, as well as marketing and advertising. Project leads report that word-of-mouth from early participants was also an important enabler.	• Held interactive storytelling sessions, ran by a team of actor/musicians. • Recruited a writer and illustrator to to-create a series of 4 pictures books with children and their families; these were printed and published professionally. • Partnered with the Lowry Theatre and the Halle Orchestra from Manchester to hold special performances and workshops for the regular attendees.

2 other projects also had elements which related to the families and wellbeing theme:

Table 9: Other projects of relevance to the families and wellbeing cluster

Project name	Main cluster	Families and wellbeing crossover
Plymouth	Literature and creative expression	• Aimed to combat holiday hunger among children experiencing disadvantage and increase family engagement with the library. • Targeted children and families at 6 schools in Plymouth. • Lunch at the Library and pop-up library sessions, which offered healthy free lunches and included family crafts and coding activities.
Stockton	Makerspaces	• Aimed to address health issues identified in various communities (e.g. dementia, visual difficulties, autism). • Targeted people with specific needs, experiencing a range of health-related conditions, engaged through partners such as Dementia Hub. • Built a sensory room ('Imagination Station'), with projection facilities along 3 panels of the wall, where people can experience a range of activities, from interactive storytelling to videos and aromas.

Impacts on individuals / service users

Increased knowledge among people experiencing disadvantage of how to support their own and their families' wellbeing

All the spaces and activities created by projects within this cluster were aimed at supporting this outcome. Available data suggests that this has either been achieved or is on track to being achieved once the changes (redesigned spaces or new activities) have been bedded in.

Libraries have attempted to capture their impact in various ways. For example, all the wellbeing boxes created at East Sussex Libraries contained feedback forms, which participants were asked to complete. The questions ranged from asking about any positive outcomes that participants and their families experienced after borrowing the boxes, to asking about overall impressions about their contents and suggestions for improvement.

AS shown on the next page, the co-production process involved in creating the wellbeing boxes in East Sussex and Staffordshire Libraries was also an important part of increasing participants' knowledge:

"The wellbeing box is an excellent idea. I found it particularly good for getting you to think about different aspects of your 'wellbeing'. It offers way more than I expected."

Project participant, East Sussex

93%

Of self-reflection sheets collected in **Staffordshire** Libraries show that the co-production sessions improved participants' knowledge on how to support child development.

"I'm more mindful to [take] a few minutes of quiet to listen to my child playing; allowing her to just make [things], even if it's not what I thought or wanted. I don't need to control the situation, just enjoy the process with her."

"I learned that it's playing with my kids that is important – not what you play (with)… [and] not to keep stressing about how he's doing, just enjoy him growing and learning."

Both East Sussex and Staffordshire Libraries reported that throughout their projects, demand for the wellbeing boxes increased, with various partners asking for the resources to use with their own customers. This demand, as well as the number of loans on the boxes, suggest a raised level of awareness and knowledge about wellbeing among the beneficiaries.

In Luton Libraries, the Well & Wise space (a dedicated space co-created with health providers and other health organisations) was opened in February 2018. It offers partners the possibility to hold 17 sessions with customers per week. At the time of the evaluation there was insufficient data to make a meaningful analysis of trends and impacts on participants' knowledge, but feedback from health providers shows that they are finding the use of the space invaluable in engaging with customers:

"An unstructured session as we establish our presence at the library with good interest shown in our service" - Red Cross Connecting Communities

Improved confidence and mental wellbeing

Most projects provided anecdotal evidence of increases in the levels of confidence and mental wellbeing among participants. For instance, the writer in residence employed by East Sussex libraries reported perceived increases in the confidence of participants, as shown in the case study below.

Case study: increased confidence

Maria attended 3 creative writing workshops with her mother. During the workshops, the writer in residence engaged participants in conversations about their feelings and their use of libraries. At first, Maria was not confident and would not speak aloud in the sessions, letting her mother speak for her. By the end of the 3rd workshop, she approached the facilitator to thank him for everything she had learned.

This example illustrates a common outcome reported by many other libraries. The project leads at East Sussex also reported seeing a great impact on the quality of life of visually impaired people, although no primary data exists to support this.

Furthermore, several project leads reported noticing an effect on participants' general levels of wellbeing and happiness. While project leads reported collected some feedback locally (or in their own evaluation), there was limited primary data for this evaluation. Anecdotal feedback (on the next page) from one project lead at Stockton Libraries suggests that the immersive Imagination Station is helping to ease the difficulties of people living with anxiety of dementia:

"[There is] a gentleman who uses our dementia café at Thornaby every month… he lives with dementia and often experiences anxiety and aggression, but finds the Imagination Station the perfect solution. He made a point of telling our Health Librarian that nothing has helped him deal with the challenges he faces more than sitting in the room experiencing the images, sounds, videos and aromas that we programme in. We were very keen to see what kind of impact this facility would have on mental health and here was a direct example" – Project Lead

Feedback forms from one strand of Tameside's project suggest that the sessions contributed to boosting the confidence and self-esteem of adults and children (based on the evaluation undertaken by the University of Salford). Project leads from Sefton Libraries have also provided anecdotal reports that all participants (who self-identified as suffering from depression or anxiety, or simply leading stressful lives) noted a positive change in their wellbeing and happiness levels.

Reduced social isolation

Sefton Libraries and East Sussex Libraries focused particularly on reducing social isolation among certain target groups. While this outcome is particularly difficult to measure, reported accounts from participants and direct feedback from project leads who were interviewed suggest that the activities have had the desired effect.

Sefton project leads reported several participant stories about how taking part in the Human Library enabled them to meet new people from their neighbourhood, improved their sense of belonging and reduced their isolation. There are similar accounts from East Sussex:

"We worked with 3 or 4 people where the improvement to their quality of life was immediate. Some of the visually impaired people we worked with had lost their sight early, and felt marginalised and excluded. They are getting a lot out of working with the equipment and volunteers; they are building friendships and a support network. We also did work with home educational groups… children built links they didn't have due to being home-schooled." – Project Lead

Increased engagement with creative and cultural activities

To build an inspirational space for children and young people, the team at Essex libraries ensured that people from these target groups were engaged in the design of the space. Project leads reported that all attendees were overwhelmingly positive about the opportunity to take part and influence the look and feel of the new space.

In Luton Libraries, a group of year 8 students co-produced the new adolescent space and created visual artwork that related to them and their peers. Working with an artist encouraged their interaction with books, social media and augmented reality, which helped create a new and vibrant environment. Project leads reported that all of the students involved in this project felt their contribution made a positive impact and the majority of students stated that taking part in this project encouraged them to visit the library more. It is believed that the co-production process helped to create a new audience for that space by involving local young people in the project and developing their knowledge of library literature and facilities, and that the project will form a legacy of ongoing engagement with them.

Furthermore, the Library Makers website and challenge structure aimed to stimulate creative outputs by volunteers, in order to co-produce resources such as items for children's trails, design colouring pictures or artwork.

These outcomes are not unique to Luton, with project leads from Staffordshire also reporting that through its nature, co-production had helped improve the engagement of those involved:

Figure 10: co-production in Staffordshire

87% of observation forms show that the co-production activity sessions engaged participants effectively

83% of participants in co-production sessions and focus groups were resident in postcode areas which experience high socio-economic deprivation
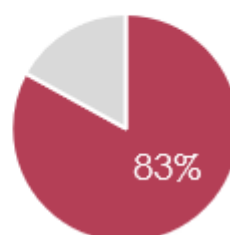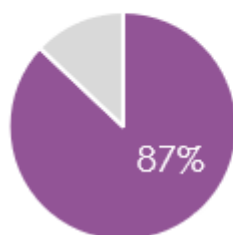
Project leads from Tameside also reported that their storytelling activities, theatre trips and Halle orchestra workshops had created high levels of engagement among participants, with 30% of people engaging with such activities for the first time.

Increased confidence in engaging with literature and creative expression

Both projects in Tameside and East Sussex worked with writers with a view to improving literacy and engagement with literature among target groups. As shown on the next page, participant feedback forms from Tameside indicated that:

Figure 11: increased confidence in engaging with literature in Tameside

54% of parents agreed that attending Story Makers sessions helped their child learn new words

39% started taking more library books out to read at home as a result of taking part in the activities

72% of participants reported reading books at home
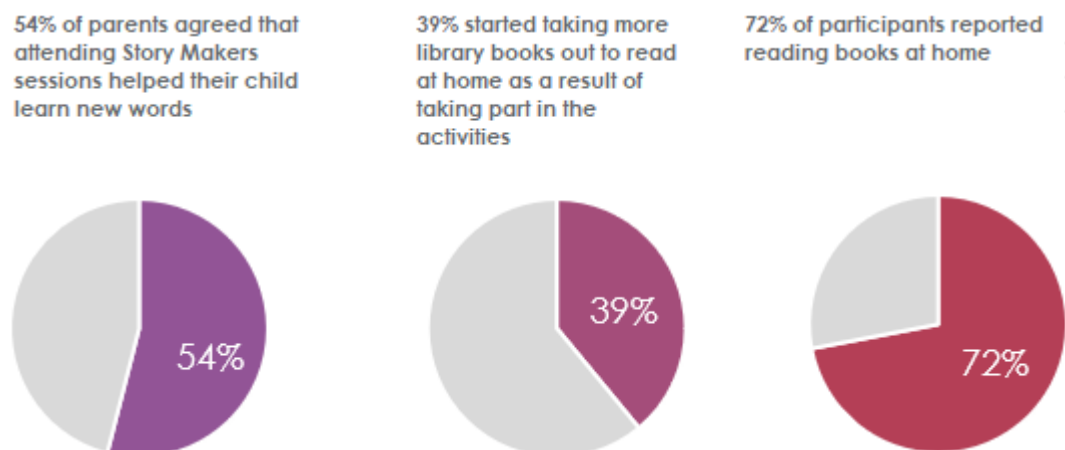
The Writer in Residence employed by East Sussex libraries also provided examples of participants who were worried about not being able to write, who had sub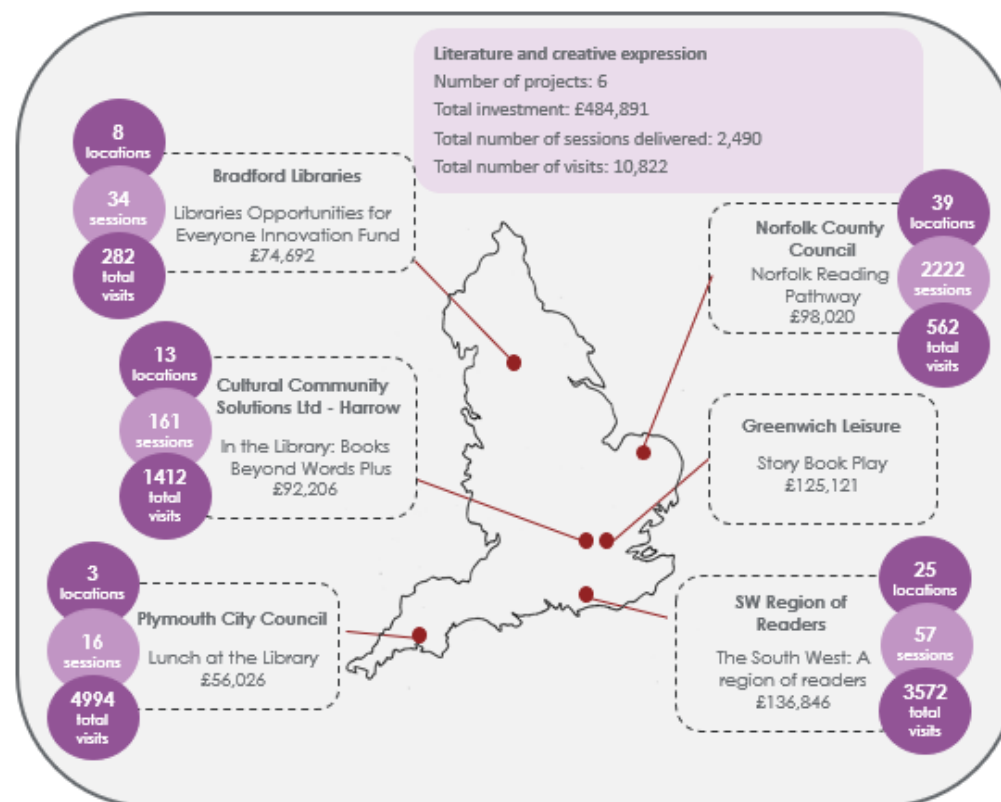sequently turned in pages of writing after taking part in the workshops. Observations from staff at East Sussex libraries also suggested that children and mothers from refugee communities had improved their English language skills.

Cluster 4: Literature and creative expression

A total of 6 LOFE-funded projects focused on engaging vulnerable and marginalised groups in their communities and bringing literature to life through storytelling activities and opportunities for creative expression (Figure 12).[6]

Figure 12: Overview of projects grouped within the literature and creative expression cluster

Literature and creative expression
Number of projects: 6
Total investment: £484,891
Total number of sessions delivered: 2,490
Total number of visits: 10,822

8 locations
34 sessions
282 total visits
Bradford Libraries
Libraries Opportunities for Everyone Innovation Fund
£74,692

39 locations
2222 sessions
562 total visits
Norfolk County Council
Norfolk Reading Pathway
£98,020

13 locations
161 sessions
1412 total visits
Cultural Community Solutions Ltd - Harrow
In the Library: Books Beyond Words Plus
£92,206

Greenwich Leisure
Story Book Play
£125,121

3 locations
16 sessions
4994 total visits
Plymouth City Council
Lunch at the Library
£56,026

25 locations
57 sessions
3572 total visits
SW Region of Readers
The South West: A region of readers
£136,846

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[6] Quantitative data was not available for Greenwich Leisure at the time of publication, who had only recently launched their indoor literary play space – the focus of their grant. Evidence is therefore drawn from baseline and endline interviews, and a self-reflection questionnaire.

Projects within this cluster typically:

- Aimed to address low levels of participation in library services in areas that experienced multiple disadvantages, including high levels of deprivation. These areas, it was often felt, lacked adequate service provision for vulnerable and marginalised groups.

- Worked across a wide range of target groups, but with a specific focus on vulnerable and marginalised groups that were either irregular users or non-users of library services, or could access only limited services. This typically included children and adults with special educational needs and families from lower income backgrounds.

- Ran a wide range of creative activities that were designed to bring literature to life through interactive exercises and environments.

The table overleaf provides an overview of the projects' local priorities, target groups and approaches to engagement, and a brief overview of the activities undertaken. Where projects are hyperlinked (underlined), this links to posts written by projects that have been published on the Taskforce blog.

Table 10 – literature	What local issues did funded projects address?	Who were the target groups and how were they engaged?	What were the main activities?
Bournemouth / Poole, Wiltshire, Dorset, South Gloucestershire, Bristol **(SW Region of Readers)**	• Targeted communities experiencing disadvantage in Bournemouth, Bristol, Dorset, Poole, South Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. • All target communities experience poor health outcomes. • Most communities displayed high levels of deprivation for older people; low levels of educational achievement, skills and employment amongst the working age population; as well as social isolation and loneliness.	• Targeted adults, families, digitally disadvantaged adults and irregular library users. • Network of 9 partners across library and literature development sectors. • Outreach activities by local library staff and community volunteers to engage people face-to-face. • Direct marketing via social media.	• A network of shared reading groups where participants relax, share stories, read aloud or just listen. • Cultural events organised by library services, such as creative writing sessions and digital workshops. • Co-creation of a digital app, online web resources and community activities, inspiring and engaging local creativity.
Bradford Libraries	• Aims to improve access to libraries for people of all ages with special educational needs and disability. • Local area has high levels of disability amongst children and complex health needs compared to the national average. • A service provision review highlighted a lack of targeted, accessible library services for people with special educational needs and disabilities. • Research has shown that literature and storytelling is the most under-represented area of creative expression amongst people with special educational needs and disability nationally.[7]	• Targeted young adults with special educational needs and disabilities; children and adults with complex health needs; library staff and volunteers. • Reached out to disability groups and local strategic disability partnership. Snowballed to other charities and social care providers. • Expanded target audience to include a broader range of disabilities based on demand. Included visual impairment, Down's Syndrome and cerebral palsy.	• Scoping visits to identified groups ahead of delivery. • Immersive story sacks, where books are accompanied by supporting sensory materials. • Staff training in disability awareness, including understanding everyday challenges and looking at how language is used when working with people with disabilities. • Free book provided to attendees
Cultural Community Solutions - Harrow, Croydon, Ealing and Hounslow	• Aimed to offer people with learning disabilities a designated space and necessary support to better express themselves. • Low levels of participation among people with learning disabilities in the creative and cultural life of their communities, due to a lack of accessible, supportive activities and spaces. • National research showed that people with learning disabilities are disproportionately affected by factors that negatively impact quality of life. • Low levels of literacy and educational attainment among	• Targeted people with a learning disability. Carers also attended the group. • Built on existing partnerships with local agencies, including MENCAP and the Autism Society, bringing something new to their service users.	• Impact Theatre Arts Class designed the dedicated BBW library section • Books Beyond Words Reading Groups, where a group of individuals work together to narrate or act out special picture books. • Each session also finished with colouring, craft, or music or drama activity

	people with learning disabilities.		
Greenwich Leisure	• Aim to provide an affordable literary play space to capture children's interest and encourage families to read together. • Local area has higher levels of unemployment and rented accommodation than the national average, as well as high levels of childhood obesity. • Most soft play sites in the local area charge fees that prove challenging for lower income families.	• Targeted children aged 0-8 and families. • Direct marketing via social media, web advertising, local newspapers and magazines and library literature. • Partnership with local arts organisations.	• Consultation with primary school children, teachers and the public. • Public performances, some of which were book-based and/or sensory. • An indoor, literary play space built around the theme of children's literature.
Norfolk County Council	• Aimed at helping non or poor readers to read in 6 months or less. • Project delivered in local libraries within a rural area with poorer access to services. • Approximately 13% of Norfolk's working age population (66,000) have no qualifications, compared to 11.3% nationally. • Lack of qualifications is linked to poor literacy skills, which are linked to poor economic, social and health outcomes.	• Targeted adults and children in over 30 schools • Marketing strategy was supported by library communications department. • Advertised the project in a local magazine with a 'call to action' for volunteers. • Marketing through partner organisations including children's centre, district council and the Department for Work and Pensions. • Working with referrals from the local Job Centre, the library and public health team	• Helped develop reading skills through coaching support and one-to-one phonics-based teaching delivered by volunteers. • Hired 2 volunteer coordinators and a volunteer coach, and worked with 170 volunteer reading coaches using a phonics-based reading tool.
Plymouth	• Aimed to combat holiday hunger among children experiencing disadvantage and increase engagement with the library. • National statistics show that Plymouth has a higher level of child poverty than the regional and national average. 18.3% of primary school children are eligible for benefits-based free school meals – one of the highest in the south west.[8] • 'Holiday hunger' rates amongst lower income families who typically benefit from term time support, and associated negative health impacts.	• Targeted children and families at 6 schools and irregular or non-users of library services. • Trained staff to undertake engagement of non-users of library services. • Targeted Facebook ads for individuals not following on social media. • Promotion in school assemblies in line with Summer Reading Challenge recruitment.	• Lunch at the Library and pop-up library sessions, which offered healthy free lunches and included the Summer Reading Challenge, crafts and coding activities. • First 100 children at each venue were given a free book to further encourage reading.

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[7] Lemos and Crane. 2015. Re-imagine: improving access to the arts, galleries and museums for people with learning disabilities. The City Bridge Trust.
[8] Department for Education. 2016. Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2016. Office for National Statistics.

Impacts on individuals

Projects within the literature and creative expression cluster reported a wide range of outcomes from LOFE-funded activities at individual, library and community levels.

Improved wellbeing

All of the projects within this cluster reported that their LOFE-funded activities had contributed to improved wellbeing among participants. This included:

Increased social contact: SW Region of Readers and Plymouth targeted families experiencing disadvantage. They provided qualitative evidence that suggested participants experienced improved motivation to engage in group activities and meet others. In addition, feedback from Lunch at the Library events in Plymouth suggested that these daytime activities provided parents with a space to meet and spend time with others over the school holidays.

Increased social confidence and inclusion: Bradford Libraries, SW Region of Readers, Cultural Community Solutions and Norfolk reported that participation had increased participants' social confidence and social inclusion. Projects provided quantitative and qualitative evidence which indicated that participation in activities had helped increase people's confidence in meeting new people, and also helped them meet new people and make new friends.
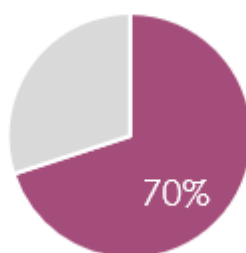
In Norfolk, 70% of participants said that prior to the project their everyday confidence had been affected by their reading ability. At the midpoint of the project:

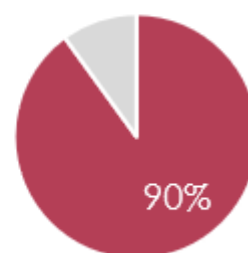**Figure 13: Norfolk Reading Pathway outcomes**

70% reported that their reading had improved significantly
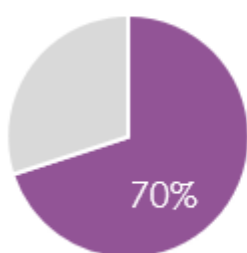
70% reported that they enjoyed reading

90% were already reading more, or intended to read more in the future

> "I have a reason to leave the house."
>
> "It has been the best thing I have done for my mental health and confidence"
>
> Project participants SW Region of Readers

Furthermore, these benefits were not restricted to participants. SW Region of Readers also trained and worked alongside volunteers to lead the delivery of their Shared Reading Groups, returning evidence that showed that 14 of 18 individuals felt that volunteering in this capacity had increased their confidence.

Improved nutrition: Plymouth Libraries worked alongside local partners to distribute 3000 free lunches to children at 3 libraries located in areas of high deprivation: Devonport library, St Budeaux library and Whitleigh pop-up library. Qualitative feedback collected by staff and partners evidenced that, for parents who accessed Free School Meal provision during term-time, these events enabled them to continue to provide their children with healthy food over the school holidays.

> "The lunch at the library means I can feed my children a decent meal at least once a week. It also means we have a free day out so breaks up the summer holiday as the kids get bored."
>
> Project participant, Plymouth

Improved family lives: In Norfolk, developing literacy skills was reported to have had a major impact on the personal lives of participants. Some reported being able to read to their children or grandchildren for the first time, for instance. The project lead commented that the project outcomes were 'about participants being independent rather than being dependent' and that this must have 'a benefit for health, wellbeing and whether [participants] feel isolated or not.'

> **Increased confidence in engaging with literature and creative expression activities**

Project leads for SW Region of Readers, Bradford Libraries, Cultural Community Solutions and Norfolk reported that participants showed increased confidence in engaging with literature and creative expression activities. Depending on the project individuals were involved in, this was observed across reading, drawing and drama activities.

For example, nearly 100% of Cultural Community Solutions participants with special educational needs or learning disabilities fed back that they had enjoyed looking at and reading the books as part of the Books Beyond Words reading groups. Pre-test questionnaires showed that many of these participants had never imagined that they would read or understand a book. As demonstrated in the case study below, facilitators and the project lead fed back that participation had generated enthusiasm and fresh confidence among the groups. By the last group session, several higher-level learners were also able to select books for themselves.

> **Case Study: Improved confidence in engaging with literature and creative expression**
>
> Improvements in social confidence were often most pronounced among individuals with special educational needs and disability.
>
> The project lead at Cultural Community Solutions reported that the structure of the reading groups, the opportunity to hold a book and express their reactions to the pictures, and the process of sharing this reading experience with others had a transformational effect on participants. This was shown in staff's description of one participant's journey:
>
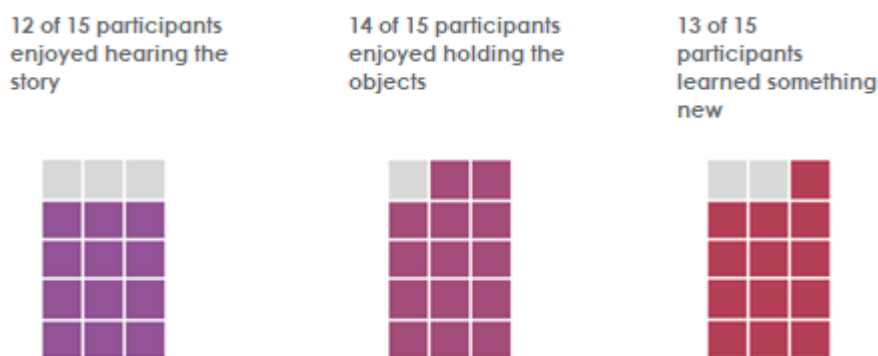> **First session:** Chloe did not participate in the first session.
>
> **Second session:** Chloe took the book and told the story herself.
>
> **Third session:** She was very happy, and her carer said that there had been a big difference in her - much more confident and expressive.
>
> **Fourth session:** Chloe helped give out books and felt tip pens, gathered up drawings at the end of the session and helped another participant with describing pictures.

Similar outcomes were reported in Bradford, where participants with learning disabilities used sensory stacks to either connect with or re-enact stories. As shown on the next page, project feedback forms showed that for one group:

Figure 14: participant feedback in Bradford

12 of 15 participants enjoyed hearing the story

14 of 15 participants enjoyed holding the objects

13 of 15 participants learned something new

Once again, these impacts were not limited to participants for SW Region of Readers. 95% of volunteers that received training as part of SW Region of Readers felt inspired and excited as a result of participating in the Shared reading workshop, and 100% of volunteers felt more confident reading aloud.

Increased confidence to pursue further activities outside of groups

Several projects reported that taking part in project activities had increased participants' confidence and abilities to undertake other activities outside of the library. For both Cultural Community Solutions and Norfolk, participants were either considering joining or had already joined local Reading Ahead programmes, which also support young people and adults to come together and share reading activities.

Evidence suggested that increased confidence also had wider benefits on participants' lives. 63% of participants in Norfolk said that they had already joined a formal course or intended to do so in the near future and for many of these this included a 'functional skills course.' In addition, some participants who had learnt to read for the first time felt the project had given them the skills and confidence to apply for jobs for which they otherwise would not have been able to apply.

"It's helping with my job searching which pleases the Jobcentre. Although I can't read job adverts properly I am now able to spot the word 'cleaner' (type of job he is looking for) and if there is a phone number I can call them to ask about the job. I couldn't have done this on my own before."
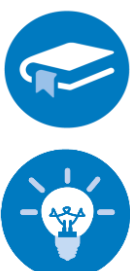
Project participant, Norfolk

"It has enhanced people's confidence in what they can achieve and be involved in." - Project Lead

For SW Region of Readers, which targeted irregular library users, 63% of participants in one group also reported that their confidence had increased since joining the group and several participants commented that the group had either inspired them to read more or to start reading again.

Increased access to literature

Bradford Libraries and Plymouth Libraries provided some participants with free books as part of their events. For example, Plymouth provided the first 100 children at each event with a free book as a gift from the library. Project leads reported that for many children this was likely to be the first time they had a book of their own to access at home. This is significant within the context of national research, which suggests that

there is a connection between book ownership and reading outcomes.[9]

Cultural Community Solutions also made 134 Books Beyond Words sets available to members of the public at 4 libraries in Croydon, Ealing, Harrow and Hounslow, and shared this availability with the Books Beyond Words Reading Groups in each area. Participants' carers were reported to be pleased that many of these books focused on more serious topics such as healthcare, going to court and bereavement, which they could use on a one-to-one basis when needed with their clients.

> **"I have started to read again"**
>
> **"I enjoy sharing views with other people…. it encourages me to widen my scope of reading."**
>
> Project participants, Bournemouth

"One young man from the college now takes that book into college every day. I was also stopped when I went to the Strategic Disability Partnership by a young woman who was attending with her group, and she thanked me for the book, because her mother was reading it to her." - Project Lead

Cluster 5: Makerspaces
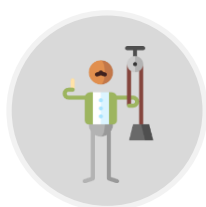
A total of 7 LOFE-funded projects proposed building a makerspace and delivering a suite of accompanying activities as either the core part of their project, or as a component (Figure 15).

Makerspaces are 'physical locations where people gather to co-create, share resources and knowledge, work on projects, network, and build'.[10]

Figure 15: Overview of projects grouped within the makerspaces cluster

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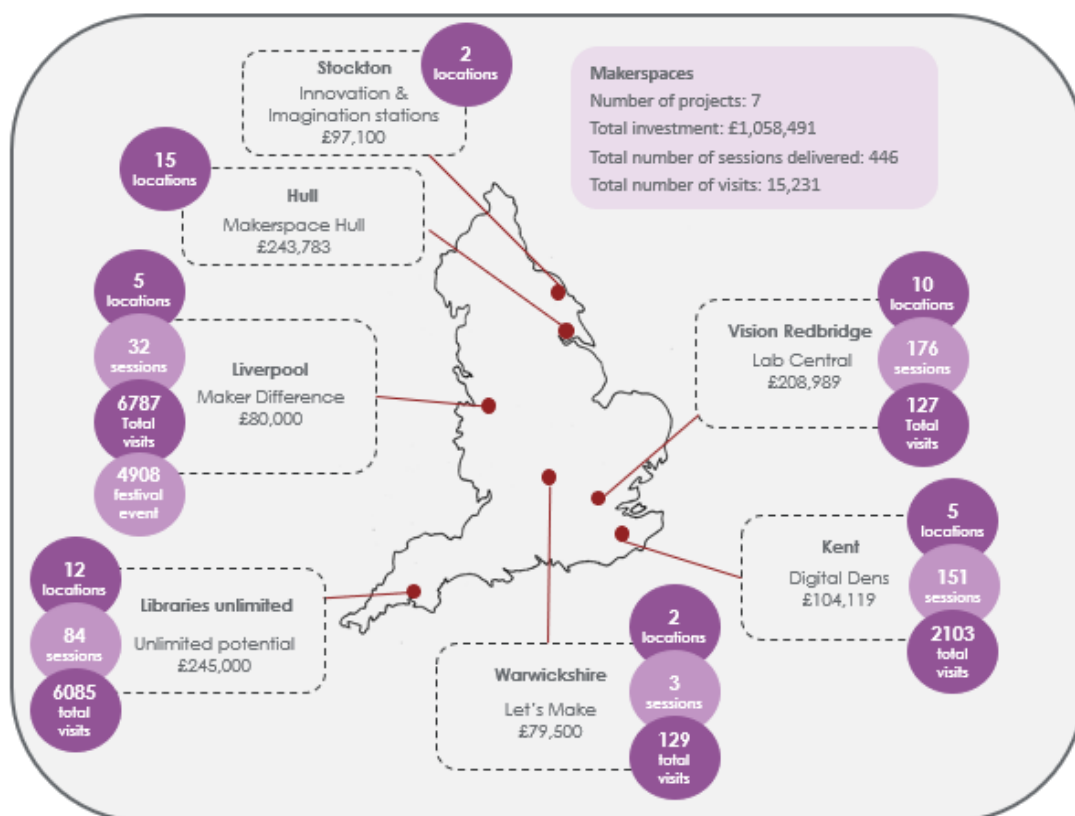
[9] Clark, C. and Teravainen, A. 2017. Book ownership and reading outcomes. London: National Literacy Trust.
[10] Libraries Taskforce. 2016. *Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021.*

Projects within this cluster:

- Aimed to address deprivation within their local areas, often linking their activities to the history of the region, traditional industries, and other characteristics of the local communities that can be celebrated and revived.

- Assessed the needs of the community and interrogated what the gaps were in their engagement with library users. They targeted specific customer segments informed by market research, customer intelligence, by working in partnership with local organisations or by undertaking a range of outreach activities.

- Trained library staff and volunteers in the technical aspects of the equipment and safeguarding. Activities varied from taster sessions aimed at soft-testing the spaces, equipment and connectivity, to full sessions that lasted for a few hours or were part of a longer course held over several days or weeks. Examples of activities included: 3D printing and modelling for different age groups; coding; animation; robotics and micro:bits; and e-textiles and t-shirt design.

However, it should be noted that most makerspaces projects faced challenges in terms of coordinating sizeable construction work. Subsequent project delivery delays have meant that most makerspaces were only completed towards the end of the funding timeline and, as such, had not yet rolled out their activities programmes at the time of evaluation.

The table overleaf provides an overview of the projects' local priorities, target groups and approaches to engagement, and a brief overview of the activities undertaken. Where projects are hyperlinked (underlined), this links to posts written by projects that have been published on the Taskforce blog.

What are makerspaces?

A relatively new introduction to the UK, makerspaces are "physical locations where people gather to co-create, share resources and knowledge, work on projects, network, and build" (Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021).

While the term tends to be used broadly, reflecting a range of local contexts and needs, makerspaces are particularly aimed at engaging with young people, as a means of building their enthusiasm and skills in STE(A)M subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics).

They also tend to include a strong digital component and are often linked with other digital activities delivered in libraries, such as code clubs. Recognising their relevance to local businesses and existing or aspiring entrepreneurs, some libraries have also linked their makerspaces to the local Business and Intellectual Property (IP) Centres.

Table 11 - makerspaces	What local issues did funded projects address?	Who were the target groups and how were they engaged?	What were the main activities?
Devon (Libraries Unlimited)	• Aimed to promote literacy, digital literacy, as well as health, wellbeing and employment prospects amongst targeted communities. • Focused on North Devon, an area with historically low investment in arts and culture and a high proportion of wards experiencing deprivation. • Employment and earnings potential have declined, leading to socio-economic challenges.	• Targeted children and families, teenagers and young people, older users, businesses; and members of the public. • Worked in partnership with those already working with those groups. • Delivering an outreach programme which will focus on community locations, such as GPs and youth centres.	• Developing a digital fabrication lab (FabLab) and new Business and Intellectual Property (IP) Centre at Barnstaple Library. • Reimagining the provision of services to current and potential customers in Northern Devon to support literacy, health, wellbeing, employment prospects and overall life chances.
Hull	• One of the most deprived local authority areas in England, with low access to technology, business advice and other resources. • Opportunity to capitalise on enthusiasm generated by Hull UK City of Culture 2017 and growth in local renewable and digital industries.	• Targeted anyone who wished to explore their creativity in the arts, science, technology and engineering. • Used social media channels and also reached people through word-of-mouth.	• Refurbishing a complete floor in the Central Library to create a Makerspace. • Staff training in how to run taster sessions, workshops and work sessions. • Open or member sessions where people can work on their own projects. • Series of pop-up Makerspaces in other locations across Hull.
Kent	• Aimed to address the disadvantage of young children in the 5 most deprived districts of Kent. • Shortage of technological and digital resources in the communities that its 99 libraries support.	• Targeted children between the ages of 8 and 18 from less advantaged backgrounds. • Relied on customer service development librarians to promote the project in schools. • Social media campaign targeting parents including paid-for posts.	• Each space has been structured as half MakerCart (a portable trolley with technology) and half code club. • Each club delivered weekly, volunteer-led coding and digital exploration sessions, as well as drop-in sessions and seasonal events.
Liverpool	• Activities and makerspaces were strategically located in areas of deprivation, affected by poverty, high levels of unemployment and crime, and higher reported anti-social behaviour. • The project also aimed to address a lack of artistic and cultural facilities in the targeted areas.	• Children and young people aged 8-18 in 4 disadvantaged communities. • Partnered with a community co-working makerspace as well as local schools, organisations and local 'makers' to deliver workshops and help attract participants. • Festival to promote the new makerspace	• 'Maker clubs' containing maker cart, vinyl cutter, circuit boards, 3D printer • Workshops on the use of acquired technology, delivered by partners • Digital creative 'maker' in residence • 2 festivals before and after the project

Vision Redbridge	• 11 neighbourhoods in Redbridge are among the top 20% of deprived wards in England, including target areas of Loxford and Clementswood that surround Redbridge library. • Aimed to position Redbridge Central Library as the technology hub in Ilford Town Centre. • Aimed to give young people in more deprived areas access to technology.	• Aimed at children and young people. • Partnered with organisations in more deprived locations. • Sent a council guide to every family in the borough which includes library updates. • Social media channels. • Young people's board.	• Developed a makerspace on the ground floor of Redbridge Central Library. • Piloted a technology lending service and engagement programme. • Hosted a Tech Festival, an education programme and an arts commission which enabled young people to work with professional artists and have their work exhibited.
Stockton	• Aimed to address the decline in innovation and provide opportunities for local people to learn new skills and use specialist equipment not publicly available elsewhere in Stockton-on-Tees. • Spaces also intend to contribute to the improvement of health and wellbeing among residents in need.	• Targeting young adults from more deprived backgrounds. • Using contacts at the council and engagement team. • Engaging with Clinical Commissioning Groups and health professionals. • Sending out promotional materials through adult learning providers.	• Developed 2 fully equipped rooms within the borough's largest libraries. This includes an 'Innovation Station' – a makerspace with 3D printers and scanners, digital cutters and laptops, where people can create, and an 'Imagination Station', a sensory space where participants can immerse themselves in various interactive projections (videos, storytelling, reminiscence sessions). • Ran coding clubs, robotics sessions and 3D printing workshops in the Innovation Station and used the Imagination Station to develop relaxation and sensory presentations.
Warwickshire	• Aimed to promote educational attainment, economic growth and wellbeing of disadvantaged communities in northern Warwickshire. • North of the county experiences relatively high levels of unemployment.	• Targeted at people of all ages and backgrounds from disadvantaged communities.	• Set-up 2 library-based makerspaces that focused on digital skills and preparing participants for the digital job market. • Makerspaces contain a variety of equipment, such as robotics, virtual reality, 3D printers, iPads, and animation and film software. • Taster sessions for children, young people, families and adults with learning disabilities.

Impacts on individuals

Project leads of the 7 LOFE-funded makerspaces provided data that suggests a range of benefits have been and will continue to be delivered for project participants and library service users.

However, it should be noted that the majority of these spaces were completed towards the end of the funding timeline, and some libraries had not yet rolled out their activities programmes at the time of evaluation. As such, this data indicates what has been accomplished in a limited amount of time, and do not reflect any further activities delivered since fieldwork ended.

Increased access to and awareness of:
- Specialist technology and resources, particularly amongst people in areas of higher social deprivation and children and young people
- Business support

By providing a physical space that is freely available to library users (or people in contact with a mobile version of the makerspace), these projects are widening people's access to a range of technological resources – from 3D printers to kilns and robotics – as well as accompanying workshops and guiding activities. The sheer number of people coming into libraries and attending the makerspace-related events is indicative of this impact.

- Staff at **Vision Redbridge** analysed the total number of attendees to their events over 12 months. Out of 1,789 attendees, 1,106 were children and young people (61% of users), which exceeded their original target.

- Staff at **Kent Libraries** wanted to know how many of the children participating in their workshops were new to the technology and the activities they provided. An overview of their survey results is presented below:

Post-activity, when asked whether they had ever done anything like that before…
- 87% of children who responded said they had never used a 3D printer
- 70% had never seen one before
- 90% had never done anything with robotics
- 60% had never done anything like these activities before
- 90% of children said they did not have access to any of this equipment at home
- 77% said they did not have access to any of this equipment at school

Library membership and user engagement data across all libraries also suggests that the introduction of makerspaces has raised service users' interest in making full use of other library resources, from borrowing books to participating in other types of activities. Some libraries such as the ones in Devon and Stockton have also referred or signposted entrepreneurs or aspiring entrepreneurs to the local Business and Intellectual Property Centre, which provide services and resources to help budding entrepreneurs and innovators launch and grow their businesses.

Increased Interest and engagement in STE(A)M subjects and digital and creative opportunities

Most libraries reported on whether participants enjoyed sessions, with figures ranging from 50% to 90%. These results are supported by qualitative feedback, with participants frequently using words like 'pleasurable', interesting', and 'great'.

"I want to become a computer expert"

"I want to tell people about coding and how fun it is"

"I want to be a developer/do something with technology"

Participants in Kent's Digital Dens

Vision Redbridge, Kent Libraries and Liverpool Libraries were particularly interested in capturing attitudes of children and young people towards STE(A)M disciplines.[11] Feedback forms collected by Kent Library indicate that the majority of children showed a desire to take part again, join another code club, or take part in another library-based digital activity. As described below, at least some of those who attended a Digital Den were inspired to pursue STE(A)M-related activities in future – both in the short and longer term. Participants at Vision Redbridge were also surveyed and indicated similar levels of interest.

"Immediately after participating, just over 50% of the students who responded to this question indicated that their attitude towards tech as a career had changed and the qualitative feedback clearly identified the blend of design, making, crafting and tech as being one of the aspects they most enjoyed."

Project Lead

Participants from Liverpool's Maker Club commented that activities had whet their appetite to learn more about technology and coding. Testimonials from participating children and project leads were also recorded in a [video](#).

Improved technical, digital and business literacy/skills among all age groups and those with entrepreneurial ideas

As a core objective for the makerspaces cluster, changes in participants' levels of digital and technical literacy were measured across most libraries through quantifiable surveys or discussions with staff and volunteers at the start and end of the training sessions. For example:

Figure 16: improved digital skills in Warwickshire, Kent and Redbridge

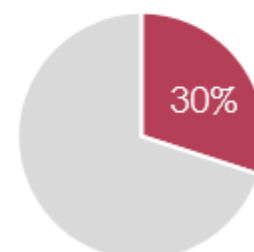In Warwickshire Libraries, 88% of respondents reported improved digital skills
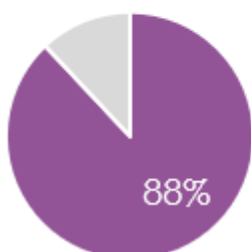
In Kent Libraries, 90% of children who responded said the club had helped them use computers
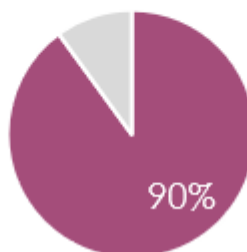
In Redbridge, 30% reported that activities allowed them to gain skills which will enable them to improve their education or employment prospects

[11] Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics education that also integrates the arts.

Devon and Hull were also committed to supporting entrepreneurial people by offering advice, support and referring them through the Business and Intellectual Property Centre. In Devon, 23 individuals were introduced to the centre and starting a business.

2.3.   *Impacts on libraries*

Project leads also reported perceived impacts of LOFE funding on libraries.

Increased skills and confidence among staff and volunteers

Across all clusters, project leads felt that the delivery of training and subsequent wider cultural shifts in how staff approached their work, had led to:

Improved support of vulnerable, marginalised and disadvantaged groups. Project leads for Bradford, Merton, Sandwell, and others reported:

- improved awareness among staff of the challenges faced by service users with additional needs

- improved understanding of support and behaviour management techniques

- increased confidence to work alongside them

Staff had needed to proactively approach people from disadvantaged groups, have more meaningful conversations with them and respond to their needs better.

In some cases, projects worked with partner organisations to receive specific training on the needs of target groups. For example, one coordinator from Sandwell Libraries received tailored training from a Men's Shed group to improve their work with older men experiencing loneliness.

At the end of the project in Bradford Libraries…
- 73% of staff and volunteers strongly felt confident working with disabled people (up from 66% before the project)
- 66% of staff and volunteers felt confident working with people with complex health needs (up from 33% before the project)
- 80% of staff and volunteers felt confident in creating a sensory story (up from 27% before the project)

At the end of the project in Merton…
- 100% of staff delivering project activities felt that they had more confidence working with young people.

Improved digital and creative skills. Project leads in the digital and makerspaces clusters reported increased confidence among library staff in using different types of technology. Across libraries, many staff members had never heard of some of the technologies before the start of their projects and were either resistant to change or lacked self-assurance. One measure of success was when the same staff later showed increased levels of awareness and enthusiasm to carry on using technology, which helped improve the libraries' competitive position as a service provider. Feedback from library staff and volunteers are summarised on the next page:

Figure 17: improved staff confidence in Warwickshire, Kent and Redbridge

In Warwickshire Libraries, 96% of staff reported an increase in their confidence in promoting the 'Let's Make' spaces, activities and resources after completing the staff familiarisation session
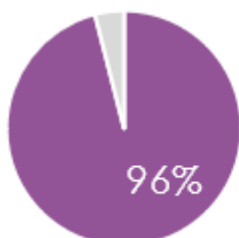
At Kent Libraries, 100% of staff and volunteers reported an increase in their confidence in using technology
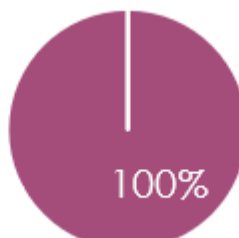
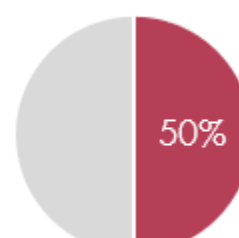At Vision Redbridge, 50% of staff report greater confidence in developing and delivering ideas to engage with library users in other areas, as well as digital media and technology

Many project leads also commented how the LOFE-funding had a positive impact on staff morale at a time when library services were still facing significant service pressures and cuts.

"Thanks for giving us the opportunity to develop something new and exciting that has helped capture the imaginations of our staff and residents." – Project Lead

Improved perceptions of libraries

"I never expected this to be in a library!"

Project participant at Fablab, North Devon

Across all clusters, project leads felt their LOFE-funded activities had improved perceptions of library services among target groups, many of whom were vulnerable, marginalised or from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Many libraries designed spaces and ran activities with their LOFE funding, which had made irregular or non-users of library services feel more comfortable in libraries. For example, the introduction of accessible activities for people with learning disabilities and/or special educational needs at Cultural Community Solutions and in Bradford was felt to have helped these participants overcome the perception that they would not be welcome in libraries. For those individuals who had been to a library before, participating in activities gave them the confidence to go on and explore more of the library, speak with library staff, and engage with different areas of service provision such as book borrowing.

As shown on the next page, these spaces and activities not only challenged participants' expectations of what a library can offer and achieve, but also provided staff with an invaluable opportunity to improve awareness of the libraries' wider service provision.
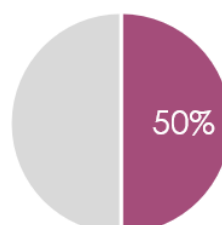
Figure 18: improved perceptions of libraries in Lewisham, Redbridge and Plymouth

In Lewisham (arts and culture), 80% of participants said they were more likely to attend arts and cultural activities in libraries
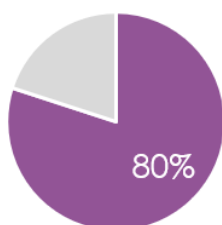
At Vision Redbridge (makerspaces), an average of 50% of participants reported they had an attitudinal change towards libraries and perceived use

In Plymouth (literature and creative expression), 61% of respondents said the 'Lunch at the Library' events had made them more aware of the range of library services
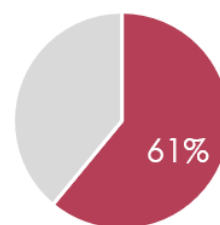
In some cases, project leads reported that activities had improved the perceptions, built greater understanding and improved working relationships with local organisations and other council teams such as IT, public health, social services and policy departments.

Increased service use

Across most clusters, libraries reported that service use had increased among their main target groups, especially among people with special educational needs and learning disabilities and people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

As shown below, libraries' membership data, survey data and anecdotal reports showed both increased membership numbers and an increased frequency of visits.

⇧**692%**

198 children and adults with special educational needs and disability came into libraries in **Bradford** (literature and creative expression) between October 2017 and March 2018. Of these 54 came on at least 4 occasions. This represents an increase of 692% compared to the same time period the previous year (25 individuals).

In **Manchester** libraries (digital), 32% of participants use library services more than they did prior to their course.

In **Norfolk,** 18% of participants who were non-users at the start of the project had joined or were intending to join the library.

⇧**3,927** secondary school students became library members following the start of the project in Merton (arts and culture), which focused on increasing membership among this group. 49.7% of these new members came from deprived wards.

Several libraries also saw an increase in loans of books, digital resources or technology kits (iPads, e-books, e-magazines, micro:bits). In Plymouth (literature and creative expression), book issues increased by 24% at the 3 participating libraries, while within the digital cluster:

- In **East Sussex**, micro:bits became one of the most popular loan items, with stock reaching areas of deprivation across the county.

- In **Barnsley**, customers involved in the project downloaded 101 digital items. Overall there was also an increase in access to online resources also correlated with staff receiving training in using these resources:

In Plymouth (literature and creative expression), evidence suggested that the increased availability of reading activities and awareness of them among targets groups had a knock-on effect on participation levels in other library-based activities. Participation increased by 50% at Devonport Library and 20% at St Budeaux Library compared to the previous year, which was well above the 9% increase across all Plymouth libraries.

Project leads from Essex (families and wellbeing cluster) also reported high levels of engagement on the social media pages of their libraries and partners, with a reach of over 10,000 posts relating to the newly designed space. This is believed to have directly led to a tangible increase in engagement, attendance and participation from families and young people.

Transformed library service offers

Project leads felt proud of what they achieved through the LOFE fund, while many commented on the transformative power of coming together for a clear purpose.

Within the digital cluster, the grant was also felt to have triggered meaningful conversations about what the roles of the modern library and the librarian are in a constantly changing environment. The perceived success of LOFE-funded activities in the digital cluster was also felt to represent an important step forward in terms of embedding digital services as part of libraries' core offer.

Many project leads commented that their project had 'forced' them and their teams to think about their strategy, particularly in the context of sustainability. Similarly, project leads from Middlesbrough and Lewisham (arts and culture) reflected that the introduction of activities involving new, digital equipment had changed the service offer at their libraries.

At the time of endline interviews, libraries across these clusters had already built some of the digital activities into their new strategies or were planning on doing so. However, other project leads felt the challenges they had encountered during the delivery of digital projects revealed that more work was required to transform library service offers and bring about a true cultural shift in terms of embedding digital services and activities.

Several libraries have now embedded co-production and other approaches for engaging target groups into the library's future strategy. Projects such as those led by Luton, Tameside and Staffordshire libraries challenged traditional ways of working.

2.4. *Impacts on local communities*

The LOFE fund has supported libraries to explore, articulate and promote their value in contributing to wider strategic goals in their communities, including economic development and social regeneration. While their long-term impact on local communities will not be evident for some years, libraries reported several emerging, anecdotal impacts.

> **Strengthened partnerships and increased collaboration between libraries and local organisations**

Across the 5 clusters, participation in the LOFE fund enabled libraries to approach partners, councillors and the public with more credibility than before. This was felt to have helped develop new partnerships between library services and a range of local organisations.

Types of partners varied between projects, but included other departments within councils, charities focused on the same target groups, education partners, specialist organisations and local practitioners and artists. Developing these relationships has taken time and not always borne fruit as intended. Nevertheless, by the end of their projects all libraries felt the dynamic had started to change, with libraries reporting the following impacts:

- **Improved project delivery:** Where funded projects had worked alongside other organisations to deliver activities, project leads felt these relationships had added value in terms of expertise and in-kind support. Partners brought first-hand experience of working with local communities and vulnerable and marginalised groups, as well as experience of the tools that some projects opted to use. This helped shape projects' approaches to their activities and how best to work alongside target groups.

- **Increased integration between services:** where projects had worked with partners to engage target groups and co-deliver activities, there is some suggestion both parties benefitted. For example, libraries in the digital cluster reported feeling like they were now "on the digital map", embedded in digital communities, and that partners had access to resources not available to them before. Barnsley Libraries worked with 4 community groups that had used the portable digital kits and, following the end of LOFE funding, had plans to use them over the summer months.

- **Increased opportunities for partnership:** project leads felt that improved perceptions of libraries had led to more opportunities for partnership with organisations in the area. For example, several projects in the literature and creative expression cluster reported how their activities prompted conversations with policy teams and social services. In Redbridge (makerspaces), the library's transformation means it's now viewed in a new light, becoming a central focus of the regeneration of Ilford town centre following its first prize in the Physical Category at the Edge Conference 2018.

Other community impacts

Where community-level impacts were specific to projects or clusters, these included:

Table 12: Other community impacts

Emerging impact	Description
Increased appreciation for the local community *Cluster(s): arts and culture*	In both Lewisham and Middlesbrough, where projects focussed on local history and civic engagement, project leads reported high levels of appreciation from participants for their local community. In Middlesbrough, 67% of participants reported feeling a stronger connection with their local community than before taking part in the project and in Lewisham, participants reported a greater appreciation for their local area.
Decreased antisocial behaviour *Cluster(s): arts and culture*	In Merton, one of the project's aims was to change the public perception of younger people among staff and other library users and to make them feel welcome in the library environment. As a result of this project, there is anecdotal evidence that when young people have been engaged in activities within the library, there has been less antisocial behaviour in the area.
Increased social cohesion *Cluster(s): digital*	By bringing together diverse groups that would not normally come into contact with each other, some libraries felt they contributed to achieving social cohesion. The project leads at Nottingham felt particularly proud of the engagement between various groups of young people from different areas of the city which would have otherwise been unlikely. In Lincolnshire's libraries, a multi-cultural group of women was established as well as a group of home-schooled children who were looking to set up a network to meet once a week.
Social return on investment *Cluster(s): digital*	As part of the independent evaluation commissioned by Greater Manchester Libraries, the project's impact on the economy was also calculated. The Social Return on Investment and Gross Value-Added social impact analyses suggest that for every pound spent through the BIG Project there is a £4.99 Social return on investment. Therefore, it is estimated that the BIG project had a positive impact on the Greater Manchester economy of £1,248,691 as a social return.

2.5. *Legacy impacts and sustainability*

It is clear that the funding provided library authorities with an opportunity to test new approaches and engage new participants with their work.

Across all clusters, project leads reflected on the value of this opportunity and its potential to influence their future work. Most felt that the main legacies of their funded activity would be:

- increased awareness of libraries and the services that they offer
- the continued involvement of new service users
- the continued use of the spaces that had been constructed

The table below summarises the main outcomes identified by projects that would support these legacies, as well as common approaches to building and embedding sustainability within their work.

Table 13: Legacy impacts and actions to promote sustainability

Legacy impacts	Promoting sustainability
Increased digital literacy and reduced social exclusion. *Cluster(s): digital*	• Continue using and promoting digital tools and services to maximise investment made (by library and partners). • Engage staff to deliver or continue delivering activities beyond the project end, or use volunteers to do so. • Link existing services within the library that serve priority target groups.
Improved digital skills and confidence among staff and volunteers. *Cluster(s): makerspaces*	• Make a case for an additional funding to increase outreach, promotion and deliver future activities. • Secure long-term training if possible, and appoint a digital champion.
Improved knowledge and skills of staff and volunteers in how to engage and support hard to reach service users. *Cluster(s): arts and culture; literature and creative expression*	• Embed a staff-wide culture of how best to work with people with special educational needs and learning disability, young people and those with more limited life chances, through supporting good practice among colleagues.
Purchased or developed materials, which can continue to be used by services and their users. For example, digital equipment, sensory story sacks, wellbeing boxes (equipment), websites and apps (tools).	• Establish loan or hire systems for equipment to other libraries or audiences, so users have continued access to materials that facilitate their involvement. This includes sensory material sacks, Books Beyond Words sets and digital equipment.

Cluster(s): arts and culture; families and wellbeing; literature and creative expression; makerspaces	
Developed physical spaces which can continue to be used by services and their users. *Cluster(s): arts and culture; families and wellbeing; literature and creative expression; makerspaces*	• Embed activities that make use of developed spaces in the core offer of the library and working together with volunteers and paid staff to continue delivering them in their day-to-day roles. This may be reflected in the library's business plan.
Cultural shift in how libraries are perceived by local communities *Cluster(s): digital*	• Embed digital activities into strategy plans and appraisal processes. • Continued training and input from different stakeholders (management, staff supporting each other, wider council, Libraries Connected) to continue to encourage trying new things around digital integration in libraries.
Springboard for future projects *Cluster(s): all*	• For some library authorities, the LOFE-funded projects have provided a body of evidence on which to build; expanding project reach, spreading to more libraries, or using evaluation outputs to form a basis for further funding.
Established or more productive partnership with local organisations and care groups, which helped access and support vulnerable and marginalised individuals *Cluster(s): all*	• Maintaining partnership agreements for ongoing cooperation. • Sharing contacts with colleagues such as Library Development Officers to mitigate the risks of staff turnover.
Improved networks between libraries, businesses, educational organisations and local communities *Cluster(s): all*	• Securing support and funding for a permanent project coordinator role to develop networks and coordinate activities between partners.

3. Enablers

This chapter provides an overview of what has worked well in the design and delivery of LOFE-funded activities.

Where projects had worked well, project leads highlighted a number of common enablers they felt underpinned the development of innovative library service activities for disadvantaged people and places in England. These have been grouped into 4 themes: staff; partnerships; engaging participants; and programme management.

3.1. *Staff*

Many projects emphasised how instrumental their project team had been to the successful design and delivery of project activities. Enablers included:

Table 14: Enablers - staff

✅ Enablers	Description
Securing staff buy-in	Many projects emphasised the vital importance of securing the support of management, frontline and volunteer staff. Taking the time to explain the need for a project, as well as its purpose, activities and anticipated benefits for those involved, was reported to have enthused staff and encouraged them to take ownership of its delivery. Staff at all levels were then more inclined to act as ambassadors for the project, from frontline staff engaging members of the public, to managerial staff ensuring that library staff had time to work on the project.
Having the right people on the team	Several projects credited their success to specific individuals in their team. Examples included project sponsors and staff who had approached delivery with a 'can-do' attitude and drove projects along when required, as well as passionate group leaders, tutors and volunteers. In some cases, projects had revealed hidden skills and interests in staff which they had never applied to their work before.
In-kind contributions	Most projects relied on in-kind contributions across all levels of staffing to design and deliver their activities. This included: • senior managers contributing to project planning and championing the library • library managers marshalling their staff • frontline and non-frontline staff delivering activities or covering others • volunteers who also led or helped to deliver

	activities.
Bringing additional capacity to the team	Several projects reported that recruiting project coordinators or project-specific workers had reduced their reliance on overstretched library staff and enabled them to push forward with project delivery at 'crunch moments'. These roles were also useful for coordinating activities that were set up and delivered across multiple locations. Notably, one project that worked over a large geographic area reflected that they should have allotted more time for running a project of its size.
Clearly defined volunteer roles	Where projects relied on volunteers they found that it was beneficial to have a clearly defined project with a specific aim, so volunteers knew their role and what was expected of them.

3.2. Partnerships

Many projects felt that partnerships with other organisations were fundamental to successful, timely project delivery. Working with partners was felt to bring the following benefits:

Table 15: Enablers - partnerships

✓ Enablers	Description
Drawing on partner expertise to inform design and delivery	Many projects reported that working with partners had been fundamental to the design and delivery of their activities, enabling them to navigate unfamiliar, complex topics. Partnerships with a wide range of organisations brought expertise in IT and technology, marketing and social media, specialist interior design, and training around approaches to working with vulnerable and marginalised groups.
	Several projects felt this had helped them get their projects right from the start, including improving understanding of how best to work with groups, designing new spaces that were fit-for-purpose and procuring the right digital equipment from a wide range of options. Some projects also reported that their staff had undertaken training with partner organisations.
Working through partners to engage hard-to-reach groups	Working through local community organisations provided some projects with direct access to vulnerable and marginalised groups who historically had limited engagement with library services, such as disadvantaged families and people with special educational needs and disability. Partner organisations were also able to publicise library services' activities to their service users. Some projects felt these enablers to participation had also raised the profile

	and changed perceptions of libraries in these communities.
Working with partners to identify practitioners	Some projects reported that partners had been instrumental in helping them identify practitioners to deliver activity sessions. This often led to the development of new relationships with organisations in the local area. This was particularly beneficial in topics that library staff were unfamiliar with, such as creative and arts-based activities.

3.3. *Engaging participants*

Some projects also felt the following factors had helped them successfully engage their target groups:

Table 16: Enablers – engaging participants

✅ Enablers	Description
Involving target groups in project design	Some projects incorporated elements of consultation or co-production to help inform their design of project activities. Engaging members of identified target groups through project partners helped projects gain a better understanding of local needs and design activities that future service users would find interesting and beneficial. Co-production with partners was also felt to have created spaces that were interesting, practical and user-friendly, such as Luton's work alongside local health providers in the creation of their Well & Wise space.
Adopting a tailored approach to working with groups	Some projects emphasised the significance of a tailored approach to supporting the participation of vulnerable and marginalised groups. Examples included engaging young people through social media and face-to-face marketing as opposed to leaflets, and delivering activities in the same format, space and with the same staff for people with special educational needs and disability.

3.4. *Programme management*

Several projects also highlighted the difference that robust programme management processes had made to their work. These included:

Table 17: Enablers – programme management

✅ Enablers	Description
Working with a multi-disciplinary steering group	Projects reported that their steering groups had provided them with invaluable guidance and support, from helping project leads reflect on progress and lessons learned, to actively promoting projects in their own professional circles. For these reasons it was felt to be particularly beneficial if

	groups were composed of members with different knowledge, skills and professional backgrounds, as well as from different locations where projects operated across a wide region. For example, the programme board in Merton included representatives from police, youth organisations and other local services for a rounded approach.
Building evaluation into project design from the start	Projects that commissioned external evaluations, or implemented their own performance monitoring from the start, felt this had been invaluable in tracking their progress and shaping project delivery. It was also felt that the information collected across the project is not only useful for demonstrating impact, but will feed into future publicity, engagement, partnerships and fundraising bids.

In addition, some libraries reported that their LOFE grant had enabled them to secure additional funding from local authorities or partners over and above the 10% match funding required within applications. For example, Essex received an additional £171,000 grant through Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding and £24,000 through Essex County Council. Notably, additional funding tended to be directed towards renovating rooms ready for LOFE-funded spaces to be created within - or adding further features to - spaces, as opposed to increasing the scale of activities.

In other examples, receipt of the funding was felt to have helped attract partners who had not previously worked with the library. Cultural Community Solutions also used the delivery of their project as a business case to secure funding for a permanent post that now promotes library services for adults and coordinates the Books Beyond Words groups established by LOFE-funding.

4. Challenges and solutions

This chapter provides an overview of the challenges that projects faced in the design and delivery of their activities, as well as suggestions from projects on how to overcome them.

Funded projects identified a wide range of challenges they faced in developing innovative library service activities for disadvantaged people and places in England. These have been grouped into 4 themes: staffing; engaging and working with participants; working with partners; and project delivery.

4.1. Staffing

Most projects encountered challenges in staffing their projects.

Table 18: Challenges and solutions - staffing

Challenges	Recommended solutions
Staff capacity was reported to be overstretched in many library services. Lack of time and/or resistance among overwhelmed staff had made it difficult for some projects to engage staff, especially when staff perceived that it would involve extra work. Limited capacity also made it difficult for enthusiastic staff to attend training sessions or run activities. Where staff were recruited to projects, some found the rapidity of the project timelines challenging when new in post.	• Secure staff buy-in by running briefing sessions that explain the purpose of the project, the opportunities it presents the library, and a clear resourcing plan. • Involve non-frontline staff to cover frontline staff during training sessions or other activities • Recruit volunteers or employ casual staff to cover activity sessions. • Consider budgeting for a dedicated Project Officer.
Some projects reported that **recruiting volunteers** had taken longer than expected due to high demand for them among other services and an initial lack of understanding about the projects proposed.	• Dedicate early activity towards recruiting volunteers. • Review proposed volunteer roles to check they are essential. • Work through local organisations such as colleges, as opposed to only advertising roles.
Several projects reported that they had struggled with the **reliability of volunteers**, including inconsistent attendance at events and high turnover.	• Review volunteers and their roles to reorganise if necessary to get the best from them. • Review whether recruitment processes are attracting suitable volunteers.

4.2.   Engaging and working with participants

Projects that placed a specific focus on engaging and working with vulnerable and marginalised groups encountered several challenges.

Table 19: Challenges and solutions – engaging and working with participants

Challenges	Learning and solutions
Some projects reported that they had found it hard to engage **vulnerable and marginalised groups**, including ethnic minorities, people with special educational needs and disability, those experiencing disadvantage, socially isolated individuals, and individuals experiencing digital disadvantage.	• Start with a wider demographic to increase local awareness, then target hard-to-reach groups through local groups and contacts. • Work with target groups to co-produce materials that will inspire their peers. • Work with local partners such as housing associations to engage hard-to-reach individuals.
Several projects **struggled to communicate their activities** to target groups who lacked awareness of what the activity involved, or what the benefits of participation would be. This included where projects had adopted unfamiliar activities such as Shared Reading exercises, as well as where digital projects had targeted areas of high digital deprivation. It was also exacerbated in contexts where local communities lacked awareness of libraries' general service provision.	• Run initial taster events at the library or at local meetings to increase understanding. • Reimagine activities in line with target groups interests, such as stop gap animation involving familiar items such as Lego. • Build partnerships with local community organisations to improve awareness and perception of library services.
Several projects faced behaviour that may challenge from **individuals from vulnerable and marginalised groups,** as well as poor attendance across some sessions.	• Close working with youth services and other agencies on how to support service users. • Identify a tutor with specific skills required to run sessions or draw on partners for support. • Be clearer with the participants what is expected from their participation.

4.3. *Working with partners*

Although working with partners was clearly beneficial, developing and maintaining these relationships also presented a range of challenges:

Table 20: Challenges and solutions – working with partners

⚠ Challenges	💡 Learning and solutions
Many projects worked alongside partners that later turned out to be **unreliable.** This included partners not turning up to deliver timetabled activities and underdelivering against targets.	• Establish partnerships before the start of the project. • Set-up clear roles and responsibilities and agree channels of communication. • Regular meetings where attendees talk honestly and with respect for the other's point of view. • Ask providers to submit regular monitoring forms, enabling you to track identified outputs for each provider. • Don't be afraid to cut your losses and focus energy on more fruitful working relationships. • Identify potential back-up partners in the local community to ensure consistent provision.
Some projects reported that, though enthusiastic, their partners were also overstretched, had **limited capacity** and competing priorities. This made it difficult to maintain regular communication and integrate partners within the delivery of activities. This situation was also exacerbated when partners underwent restructures.	• Use different communication methods and flexible meeting times. • Leave meetings with an agreed set of actions for both organisations.
Several projects reported **a clash of working practices (procedures) and styles (culture)** between themselves and partners, especially those that engaged creative, arts-based organisations. One project also reported a clash of styles between different creative partners.	• Use project board meetings to facilitate discussion around overcoming issues related to working practices (such as invoicing requirements).
Some projects found it hard to work effectively alongside **steering groups.** Groups were often reliant on the commitment of members, meetings were hard to convene due to the seniority of members and competing priorities, and decisions could be delayed when consensus was split.	• Appoint a Steering Group Head who has the authority to make final decisions.

4.4. *Project delivery*

Projects encountered delivery challenges when attempting to locate, build or develop suitable spaces for activities and integrate new technology into library services.

Table 21: Challenges and solutions – project delivery

⚠ Challenges	💡 Learning and solutions
Projects in the digital and makerspaces clusters that were part of the public library network or part of the statutory library service encountered significant delays when **procuring digital equipment**. Projects found that it took time to sort through the range of suppliers, equipment and materials and frequently encountered difficulties in engaging with their corporate IT teams. This included limited knowledge, risk concerns and mandatory procedures that delayed delivery (such as internal quotes on the purchase of equipment).	• Anticipate procurement delays and avoid front ending project activities. • Involve corporate IT teams from the start and analyse potential risks and pitfalls. • Draw up a memorandum of understanding or risk log with IT teams. • Use existing contracts and frameworks where possible.
Projects in the arts and Culture, literature and creative expression and Makerspaces clusters encountered challenges in **building, locating or modifying adequate spaces** for their activities. For makerspaces, this included securing planning permission, undertaking background work such as health and safety and procurement of suppliers. For other projects, this involved finding appropriate spaces for activities within libraries, which often required a license to develop.	• Consult library supervisors about transformation processes and seek their input. • Ensure the project brief clearly articulates the needs for the space, so property management companies reach decisions quicker. • Innovate existing space, such as using moving walls to create spaces.
Projects in all clusters encountered a range of **IT issues** when installing and running new hardware and software. This included limited internet connection in rural regions, library service firewalls blocking new technology, and an example where a wifi network had to be reconfigured to accommodate new IT devices.	• Source alternate locations in the local community for delivering project activities. • Purchase extended warranties and support packages if equipment has to be sourced externally.

5. Recommended project delivery approaches

This chapter draws together learning from the evaluation of the LOFE fund and presents a series of recommended delivery approaches for funders towards specific aims, which can be used as guidance when assessing applications.

The recommended approaches in this chapter draw together learning from across the report. Aims been selected for their prominence within individual clusters or across all LOFE-funded projects.

At the service level, selected aims include:

Improve the confidence of library staff in working with service users whose behaviours may challenge

Develop new ways of engaging vulnerable and marginalised groups who do not traditionally engage with library services

Engage staff and service users in activities that are new to them

At the level of specific target groups, selected aims include:

Improve confidence and skills among service users

Improve confidence and engagement with literature among people with special educational needs and learning disability

Improve digital literacy among people experiencing deprivation or digital isolation

Each recommended approach outlines the main considerations in terms of:

- how to engage participants
- the design and delivery of activities
- potential challenges and mitigation strategies
- the potential for sustainability, replicability and scalability

Funder aim: Improve the confidence of library staff in working with service users whose behaviours may challenge

Leads to: improved perceptions of libraries; transformed library services; increased service use

Target group: library staff

How should services engage target groups?	• Brief staff on the rationale behind the project and the benefits it will have for them, the library and service users. Where no extra work is involved for staff, make this clear. • Foster staff ownership over new activities or spaces, such as naming new spaces.
What should the activity plan cover?	• List of potential partners who can provide specialist training; plan to use partnership agreements. • Staff training scheduled ahead of activities with target groups. • Baseline and endline questionnaires to identify areas where further training might be required or improve future training.
What challenges might exist and how can they be mitigated?	• Limited staff capacity – plan to cover sessions through casual staff or volunteers, or work with partners during busier periods such as the summer holidays.
What is the potential for sustainability?	• Trained staff can embed new approaches around working with service users whose behaviours may challenge. Supporting colleagues, they can contribute to a wider culture change in libraries and the way they are experienced by those service users. • Increased cooperation between libraries and local groups, based on a greater awareness of accessible library activities and improved relations with local organisations.

Funder aim: Develop new ways of engaging vulnerable and marginalised groups who do not traditionally engage with library services

Leads to: improved perceptions of libraries; transformed library services; increased service use

Target group: hard-to-reach groups that are irregular users or non-users of library services

How should services engage target groups?	• Develop partnerships and approach target groups through community advocates or trusted community organisations which are based locally and/or or specialise in supporting individuals. • Tailor marketing approaches to target groups, such as social media marketing or face-to-face conversations

	within local communities.
	• Advertise activities that address a primary need among target groups – such as holiday hunger.
What should the activity plan cover?	• Risk assessment and mitigation outlining how to address preconceptions of library services. • Co-production and co-design with an initial cohort of engaged hard-to-reach groups. • Short, 'no obligation' taster sessions which can be used to gauge the appetite of target groups towards specific activities.
What challenges might exist and how can they be mitigated?	• Clash of working cultures with partner organisations from different sectors – staff need to be open to new ways of working and willing to find work-arounds.
What is the potential for sustainability?	• Successful activities can be incorporated into new engagement strategies. • However, it can often take time to successfully engage hard-to-reach groups and so many of these approaches are dependent on continued resource to support staff time and/or volunteers to foster those relationships.
What is the potential for scaling-up or replicating activities in other contexts?	• It may be more difficult to identify some community organisations in rural locations.

Fund aim: Engage staff and service users in innovative activities that are new to them

Leads to: improved perceptions of libraries; increased service use; increased digital, creative and literacy skills

Target group: staff; regular users, irregular users or non-users of libraries

How should services engage target groups?	• Brief staff on the rationale behind the project and the benefits it will have for them, the library and service users. Where no extra work is involved for staff, make this clear from the start. • Work with existing partner organisations to identify potential service users who want to get involved with co-design and co-production activities, which are likely to make new activities more appealing. • Develop activities that address the primary needs of individuals (e.g. holiday hunger) and then build other

	innovative activities in and around this service offer.
	• Advertise across various channels and then test what is working best by asking new service users how they heard about the project.
What should the activity plan cover?	• Consult or co-produce with target groups to ensure the activities or spaces are fit for purpose and address the needs of service users, and foster a sense of ownership.
	• Create eye-catching permanent or temporary spaces in the library to capture the imagination of service users, for example a makerspace, an arts space, or a dedicated area for showcasing skills.
	• When activities involve new technologies, plan informal 'hands-on' familiarisation sessions with staff to let them experiment, see the benefits first-hand and cast-off concerns and fears.
	• Short 'no obligation' activity taster sessions which can be used to gauge the appetite of target groups.
	• Endline questionnaires or feedback sessions to identify what worked well and less well about activities.
What challenges might exist and how can they be mitigated?	• Limited staff capacity – plan to cover sessions through casual staff or volunteers, or work with partners.
	• Resistance to change – project briefing and/or familiarisation sessions.
	• Low literacy levels or skillsets - ensure the content is appropriate to the target group and can be made flexible according to needs.
	• Poor attendance rates – contact customers in advance of sessions to remind them or suggest alternative dates when they are unable to attend.
What is the potential for sustainability?	• Trained staff to embed new approaches around working with service users whose behaviours may challenge or working with new technologies, part of a wider cultural change in libraries.
	• Redesigned spaces can continue to be used by service users and/or hired to local organisations.
	• Embed co-designed and co-produced activities into the way libraries plan and deliver their work.
What is the potential for scaling-up or replicating activities in other contexts?	• Creation of a new area requires some spare floor space, but innovative approaches can transform small spaces.
	• Co-production approaches can be easily replicated.

Funder aim: Improve confidence and skills among service users

Leads to: participation in other more challenging activities; elevated aspirations; improved work and educational opportunities

Target group: young people with lower life chances; job seekers

How should services engage target groups?	• Engage with local youth groups to understand what activities are most relevant and what types of engagement would be most effective. • Ensure that activities are affordable for attendees, including the cost of transport to/from venues. • Offer activities during holidays or weekends where children are available. • Tailor marketing activities, including online and social media campaigns for young people, and leaflets and/or posters in locations that parents visit.
What should the activity plan cover?	• Needs assessment of target groups prior to starting activities, and adequate training provision to ensure that frontline staff can meet those needs. • Co-production of activities through a youth advisory group. • Plan to develop partnerships with higher education institutions and educational organisations, including having members of academy staff on the project board or steering group. • Activities should include access to and training using tools and equipment to which participants would otherwise not have access. • Activities that tie in with the school curriculum or build a work-related portfolio. • Creative activities should culminate in a celebration event, such as a public showcase of work. • Programme activities should be pitched to the right level for participants, and should be flexible to match their interests.
What challenges might exist and how can they be mitigated?	• Behaviours that may challenge – train staff and volunteers in behaviour management. • Low literacy levels – shorter activities, verbal instructions and visual support aids. • Personal commitments – provision of creche facilities to help parents and carers engage in co-design and co-production. • Digital equipment procurement – plan to involve council IT teams as early as possible.
What is the potential for sustainability?	• iPads, cameras and other digital resources can continue to be used by groups and other users or loaned to other libraries and/or local organisations.

	• Trained staff can continue to deliver activities. • Youth advisory groups can be embedded within library authority management structures.
What is the potential for scaling-up or replicating activities in other contexts?	• May be more difficult to identify youth groups in sparsely-populated rural locations.

Funder aim: Improve confidence and engagement with literature among people with special educational needs and learning disability

Leads to: improved perception of libraries; Increased service use; improved wellbeing

Target group: people with special educational needs and learning disability

How should services engage target groups?	• Work alongside trusted local disability organisations.
What should the activity plan cover?	• Staff or community-led shared (visual) reading groups in an accessible venue. • Frontline staff should be trained in disability awareness, or training should be planned. • Frontline staff should have sufficient time allocated to develop relationships with local groups, as well as set-up and run initial groups or sessions. • Programme delivery should plan to use the same or similar session formats, located in the same space, with the same staff members. • Accessible project resources such as visual literacy books or sensory materials
What challenges might exist and how can they be mitigated?	• Limited staff capacity – plan to employ to cover sessions, potentially through casual staff. • Limited space – plan to identify space where participants feel comfortable, potentially through involving service users.
What is the potential for sustainability?	• Trained staff can continue to promote a culture of disability awareness. • Sensory books and other resources can continue to be of benefit to groups. • However, staff-led activities may be reliant on further funding and retention of specific staff.
What is the potential for scaling-up or replicating activities	• It may be more difficult in rural locations as it requires close involvement of organisations that work alongside people with special educational needs and disability. • Projects can be easily scaled-up to create a network of

in other contexts?	reading groups, but will likely incur additional management costs to coordinate delivery and partnership-working.

Fund aim: Improve digital literacy among people experiencing deprivation or isolation

Leads to: improved wellbeing; improved life chances; reduced social isolation; Increased service use

Target group: jobseekers; older people who feel lonely and isolated

How should services engage target groups?	- Outreach is crucial for reaching and engaging those who can most benefit. This can be done by assigning 'champions/ ambassadors' who can proactively identify and engage with people (e.g. in their homes; at job fairs; through community venues and groups). - Working closely with local community groups and other partners to refer service users. - Considering whether a one-to-one approach is more beneficial/ impactful than a group approach when it comes to delivering sessions/ activities.
What should the activity plan cover?	- Frontline staff or volunteers should be trained in using a variety of digital tools. - Accessible tools and resources such as computers, tablets, digital kits or virtual reality sets should be made available for loan to service users. - Plan to support learners through a series of sessions rather than one-offs, and offer support via tutors/ coordinators. However, consider whether drop-in sessions are more suitable for target groups than fixed-term courses.
What challenges might exist and how can they be mitigated?	- Limited staff/volunteer capacity and skills – ensure training is in place, and secure training resources for longer periods of time if possible, to help mitigate turnover. A digital champion can help drive the digital upskilling of staff as a priority. - Technical difficulties regarding the infrastructure – connecting new devices to the internet, ensuring participant data is wiped out before resources are re-loaned. 'Digital apathy' can be difficult to overcome, with people reluctant to embark on a new learning process later in life or unconvinced they will benefit from being digitally active.
What is the potential for	Digital tools and resources can be re-used, and only need

sustainability?	to be maintained periodically.
	• Trained staff can continue to deliver sessions with service users or promote digital solutions, as long as capacity exists, and this is a priority area for the library.
	• Evidence of impact can help embed activities into wider strategy and decision-making.
What is the potential for scaling-up or replicating activities in other contexts?	• These approaches are harder to scale because they require higher time commitment from staff, but are thought to offer greater impact. Higher numbers of digital resources will also incur additional costs.
	• Projects can be easily replicated in other settings.

6. Lessons learned for grant programme delivery

This chapter provides an overview of the main lessons learned through the administration of the LOFE fund, focusing on funding, programme support and evaluation support.

As part of the endline interviews, project leads were encouraged to reflect on the effectiveness of the funding and support provided by the Arts Council, DCMS and Traverse. Project leads also made a range of suggestions as to how DCMS and other organisations could support future projects. These are summarised below.

Lesson 1: Small grants can make a big difference to services

Project leads expressed that the LOFE fund had provided them with a rare opportunity to deliver new activities (often at scale) without fear of failure. This was felt to be particularly significant within the context of cuts to library services, which had severely restricted libraries' ability to leverage core funding towards testing out new activities. As such, an influx of funding focused on new services and activities were often seen to have a positive impact on staff morale.

Across all projects, the most common areas where funding was felt to have made the most difference included:

Investment in equipment and resources: many libraries invested in equipment and resources that they would otherwise have been unable to afford and for which funding was unavailable elsewhere. This was felt to have had a particular impact in areas experiencing deprivation, where libraries were reported to be reliant on limited collections of books and outdated technology. These purchases were also viewed as an investment that would benefit library users and community groups for years to come, while some libraries have started to explore the creation of monetised loan schemes to help fund future library activities.

"The tablets that are still there allowed us to continue the project and one of the things we looked at post-funding was how we maintain our service – looking at different charging models and operating models. Without the tablets we wouldn't be able to do that." **-** Project lead

Marketing activities: several libraries commented that the funding had enabled them to market their full range of service provision to local communities and build partnerships with organisations with which they had not previously worked. The innovative nature (and sometimes scale) of the projects attracted attention from local media and communities, while local libraries were also lent extra credibility through the DCMS and Arts Council brands. Across all clusters, this was perceived to have helped changed communities' perceptions of their local library, which some projects hoped would lead to more work together in the future.

"That funding meant we could do proper staff training, which we hadn't done for years. We could offer the staff quality, fun training. It really helped a lot of the staff, especially as morale wasn't great at the time." **-** Project lead

Supporting staff: some libraries used the funding to support staff through training in new types of activities or use of equipment, particularly in locations where libraries had been unable to afford training or teambuilding activities in previous years. This resulted in improved confidence, knowledge and skills among many staff. For other libraries, the funding represented a rare opportunity to support staff in their work through engaging external professionals, such as designers, illustrators and an evaluator.

Lesson 2: Provide clear communication and flexible support

Most project leads felt the aims and objectives of the programme were clear, and they also valued the communication and support they received from Arts Council England. In particular, project leads praised the guidance provided during the grant application workshop, as well as Arts Council representatives for their understanding and flexibility when it came to them adjusting project plans in light of emerging needs and challenges.

"Working with the Arts Council relationship manager was very beneficial, and I greatly valued their support and advice." – Project lead

This support was particularly important within the context of challenging grant application and project delivery timescales. Where projects recommended improvements, most only commented on lengthening the grant application, project delivery and reporting timelines.

Lesson 3: Grant recipients value opportunities to share ideas, challenges and lessons learned

Most projects valued the cluster and programme-wide learn and share workshops run as part of the evaluation, in addition to regional Arts Council meetings. These provided opportunities to connect with other practitioners, share ideas and also solutions to common challenges – which were particularly beneficial for projects undertaking activities of this scale or innovative nature for the first time. Where projects were struggling, project leads also found it reassuring:

"I found the evaluation workshop really useful as it meant I could speak to others delivering projects similar to mine and finding that others had experienced similar problems, so I felt better after that." **-** Project lead

Some projects also made use of the Library Innovators Network to share learning with other projects. However, several leads felt they would have benefitted from additional support tools which could have helped them work more closely with other projects. For example, an online forum that was specific to the grant programme, or a space where resources could be easily shared with others, such as session plans.

Lesson 4: Embed coordinated evaluation in grant awards

While many projects found the Traverse evaluation workshops and self-evaluation data collection tools useful, the introduction of an external evaluator halfway through the grant programme was felt to be burdensome. Many projects struggled to resource the staff time necessary to complete the tools, particularly alongside a separate reporting process to Arts Council England. Projects also commented that the tools would have been far more beneficial if they had received them at the start of the grant programme, especially those who had in the meantime commissioned their own external evaluations.

"I wish the [Traverse] element had been introduced earlier but I am very glad to have had an opportunity to contribute to this process. We have learned an immense amount through completing this report [to Traverse]." – Project Lead

7. Conclusions

This chapter draws together learning from across the report to assess the extent to which the LOFE fund met its aims.

7.1. *Meeting the aims of the programme*

The LOFE fund provided grants that would enable library services to trial innovative projects of benefit to disadvantaged people and places in England. The programme aimed to deliver 2 core outcomes:

- Library users and communities have opportunities to remove or reduce their experience of disadvantage
- Library services will have developed innovative practice that meets the needs of people and places experiencing disadvantage

The extent to which each of these has been achieved is examined below.

Library users and communities have opportunities to remove or reduce their experience of disadvantage

The available evidence suggests that the LOFE fund provided people from a wide range of backgrounds with opportunities to reduce their experience of socio-economic disadvantage through:

Co-design and co-production: There were many examples of where library staff, users and local communities were closely involved in the design and delivery of refurbished spaces and activities. This both facilitated the involvement of hard-to-reach groups and provided individuals with a sense of ownership over the newly built spaces and/or library activities.

Building awareness, skillsets and self-confidence: The available evidence suggests that projects helped increase participants' awareness of the benefits that engaging with library services, digital tools and reading or arts-based activities could bring to their lives. Participation in activities then enabled library users to not only develop skills that could help them address aspects of disadvantage but also develop the confidence to apply these skills in their everyday lives.

Wider benefits: While it is too early to observe or measure wider changes in library users' lives or communities, anecdotal evidence suggests that some participants started to experience early improvements in mental and general wellbeing. These included reduced social isolation, improved relationships and improved access to employment opportunities.

Library services will have developed innovative practice that meets the needs of people and places experiencing disadvantage

The available evidence also suggests that library services developed innovative practices through the fund, creating new tools and approaches to support people and places experiencing disadvantage.

Developed spaces: Access to a range of technological resources, workshops and guiding activities were perceived to have a significant impact on digitally deprived communities, while the creation of immersive literary environments brought literature

to life for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and people with special educational needs and learning disability.

Improved digital skills: Across libraries engaged in digital activities, many staff members had never heard of some of the technologies before the start of their projects and were either resistant to change or lacked self-confidence in using them. It is a measure of project success that the same staff later showed not just increased levels of awareness but also enthusiasm to continue using these technologies. This helped improve the libraries' position as a service provider and bolstered their libraries' offer.

Inclusive practices: Understanding of how best to support people with special educational needs and learning disability improved across libraries that engaged these target groups. Access to training through partners was perceived to have improved staff awareness and confidence. Project leads also felt that this had contributed to the creation of more inclusive spaces within the libraries, elements of co-production within activities, and the use of visual and other innovative reading techniques to better respond to their needs. For some service users, this provided them with the opportunity to 'read' a book for the first time or to feel more welcome within their local library.

Transformed service offers: The success of LOFE-funded activities was also felt to represent an important step forward for many libraries in terms of embedding digital or inclusive practices as part of their core offers. From cutting-edge makerspaces to temporary inclusive spaces within libraries, the development of innovative, engaging spaces also catalysed conversations about the service offer and strategic aims of libraries.

7.2. *Impacts on libraries*

Almost all libraries were proud of what they have achieved through the LOFE fund. Many also commented on how coming together around a clear purpose had a transformative effect on their services. In meeting the stated aims of the fund, libraries also observed additional impacts on their services.

Staff morale: While some frontline library staff had initial concerns about additional workload or the introduction of new technology, project leads were grateful for the funding and the opportunities it presented against a wider backdrop of cuts. The influx of funding enabled staff to access training, extend their service offer to disadvantaged communities, and both engage in and take ownership of imaginative activities, which was felt to have increased morale.

Library spaces transformed: Where libraries have developed new spaces for staff and service users to engage in new and creative activities, these will continue to have ongoing impacts on how these libraries are perceived and used. They will provide a focus for trialling new, innovative services and activities, and embedding these as part of the library's core offer. This potentially even recast the role and function of that library amongst certain audiences or within that community.

Improved perceptions of libraries: Working in partnership with community organisations and delivering LOFE-funded activities challenged communities' perceptions of what their local library could offer and achieve. In some cases, project leads also reported that activities had improved the perceptions of decision-makers within the council, external partners and other organisations such as the NHS and social services.

Increased service use: Libraries reported increased visitor numbers, membership registrations and borrowing rates among target groups. In one location, evidence suggested that the increased availability of reading activities and awareness of them among targets groups had a knock-on effect on participation levels in other library-based activities such as the Summer Reading Challenge.

Strengthened partnerships: Participation in the LOFE fund enabled libraries to approach partners, councillors and the public with renewed confidence and credibility. This facilitated the development of new partnerships between library services and a broad range of local organisations. Developing these relationships took time and they were not always successful but, at the point of evaluation, some projects had clearly improved opportunities for effective partnerships to develop. Other services and local partners viewed libraries in a more positive light through the impact of LOFE-funded activities.

7.3.   *Contribution of the LOFE Fund*

While the timescales of the grant application and funding windows presented challenges for funders, funded projects and evaluators alike, most aspects of the LOFE fund were widely appreciated.

Project leads felt that the fund's open brief had provided them with a rare opportunity to deliver new activities without fear of failure. This was felt to be particularly significant within the context of cuts to library services, which had increasingly limited libraries' abilities to engage in innovative activities.

The cluster workshops, programme-wide workshops and regional Arts Council meetings also enabled projects to connect with like-minded professionals and projects. They could share resources for others to use, discuss common challenges and provide reassurance to practitioners with less experience.

Project leads also reported that the theory of change exercises had helped them to think more strategically about their work, though this had a limited impact on their project design due to the stage at which the evaluation was commissioned. However, several reported that they would use this approach to inform their project design processes in the future.

7.4.   *The future of funded projects*

Most projects felt the main legacies of their funded activity would be increased awareness among local organisations and communities of libraries and the services that they offer, as well as the continued involvement of new service users and the continued use of the spaces that had been constructed.

Approaches to ensuring these impacts were sustained varied between projects, but it is clear that those libraries which had invested in constructing spaces and purchasing book stock, digital tools or subscriptions have provided themselves with a strong foundation for further activities. This included establishing loan schemes as a recurrent source of funding, for instance. The same can be said for projects that have improved perceptions of their services among vulnerable and marginalised groups through working alongside community partners and improving their working practices. Though these projects may be more vulnerable to external factors such as funding, staff turnover and limited capacity.

Appendices

Appendix A: List of funded projects

Table 22: list of funded projects

Applicant name	Award	Cultural and creative enrichment	Increased reading and literacy	Improved digital access and literacy	Helping everyone achieve their potential	Healthier and happier lives	Greater prosperity	Stronger more resilient communities
North								
Barnsley	£52,910			✓			✓	
Bradford	£74,692		✓					
Hull	£243,783			✓				
Liverpool City	£75,500			✓	✓			
Manchester City	£249,985						✓	
Middlesbrough	£91,410			✓				✓
Sefton	£99,000							✓
Stockton	£97,100			✓				
Tameside	£60,660	✓	✓					
London								
Cultural Community Solutions Ltd	£92,206	✓	✓					
Greenwich	£125,121		✓					
Lewisham	£60,000	✓	✓	✓				✓
Merton	£142,611	✓	✓					
Redbridge	£208,989			✓				
Midlands								
Lincolnshire	£231,080			✓				
Nottingham City	£226,235			✓	✓			
Sandwell	£85,840			✓				
Staffordshire	£52,300					✓		
Telford and Wrekin	£50,000		✓		✓			
Warwickshire	£79,500			✓				
South East								
East Sussex	£128,053					✓		
Essex	£145,586					✓		
Kent	£104,119			✓				
Luton	£151,855							✓
Norfolk	£98,020		✓					
West Sussex	£178,830			✓				
South West								
Bournemouth / Poole, Wiltshire, Dorset, South Gloucestershire, Bristol	£136,846	✓	✓	✓				
Devon	£245,330			✓				
Hampshire	£238,324			✓				
Plymouth	£56,026		✓			✓		

Appendix B: Methodology

This section contains a detailed methodological description of each evaluation activity, as well as brief reflections on the methodology.

Baseline interviews

Traverse conducted baseline interviews with project leads in each of the 30 projects, using a semi-structured topic guide to ensure that priority questions were consistently covered. The focus of these interviews was to:

- Build relationships and buy-in to the evaluation
- Further our understanding of each project, their aims, target audiences and operating context
- Ascertain existing monitoring, evaluation, and economic data that is being collected by each project (and identify any areas where Traverse could help them develop their evaluation skills).
- Explore emerging learning they have gained from project delivery to date, including both successes and challenges
- Inform the development of draft theories of change and our data collection and self-evaluation recommendations

Production of 5 'starter' theories of change and data collection tools

Following the review of project data and the interviews with project leads, Traverse produced:

- A suite of 'starter' theories of change (1 per cluster), which outlined indicative inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes, and the underpinning assumptions and change mechanisms associated with the projects.
- A self-evaluation toolkit, which included a draft monitoring template composed of a series of worksheets, which allowed projects to enter outputs and outcomes data drawn from the theories of change on a rolling basis. The spreadsheet contains a 'dashboard' frontpage, which draws on the metrics data and summarises progress through a series of charts and tables. The toolkit also included a self-reflection questionnaire, which allowed project teams to reflect and review progress, recording views on a user friendly proforma.

These were distributed to projects at the cluster workshops and then returned between March – July 2018. The table below summarises the number of projects that returned each evaluation tool:

Table 23: Response rate for self-evaluation toolkit elements

Self-evaluation tool	Number of projects that returned tool
Outputs return	29 of 30
Outcomes return	28 of 30
Self-reflection questionnaire	29 of 30

Cluster workshops

These workshops provided space for project leads to build relationships and share experiences and learning to date. The workshops:

- Followed on from initial phone calls, and restated the purpose and value of the evaluation and how it can help them both now and for future funding opportunities;

- Relationship-building between project representatives;

- Introduced the draft theories of change, as well as tested and developed them further with project leads;

- Advised project leads how to tailor the theories of change to their specific projects;

- Introduced the draft data monitoring template and self-evaluation tools;

- Next steps and how Traverse wanted to work with projects until the end of the evaluation;

Evaluation support

Each project was offered telephone evaluation support to either discuss and help them improve their approach to data collection, or to advice or troubleshoot use of the self-evaluation data collection tools.

Project end interviews

A second wave of qualitative telephone interviews was undertaken with projects at the end of the funding period. Before each interview, Traverse reviewed submitted data, so it could be explored in greater depth during the call.

As with the first wave of interviews, a semi-structured topic guide was used to ensure that priority questions were consistently covered. The interviews focused on the team's perception of progress, including successes and challenges, how different elements of the project contributed to the overall aims (based on the agreed theories of change), hearing about particular user journeys which help to bring the project to life, and the findings and experience of undertaking self-evaluation activities. They also included questions on added value and replicability in different contexts, as well as reflections on the sustainability of the projects.

Shared learning workshop

After the end-stage interviews were completed and before analysis and reporting began, Traverse facilitated a shared learning workshop across all clusters. The aim of this workshop was to bring projects together to celebrate their successes, reflect on their journey, share their challenges and continue to develop their learning about monitoring and evaluation. This event sought to draw out learning from both within and across themes too, placing a focus on what challenges had been encountered and how they were overcome.