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National Assembly for Wales

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into: Public Libraries

Response from: Charmaine Rolland

As a student health visitor, parent and library user I wish to provide you with my opinions on the community services offered by my local libraries, and those used by the families that I work with.

The Welsh Government document “Libraries Inspire – The Strategic Development Framework for Welsh Libraries” highlights the important role that libraries hold within their communities, and states that library use in Wales has increased. Whilst the current economic climate means that cuts are inevitable, it is vital to ensure that our community libraries are still able to offer their services. I work with vulnerable families who may not have the resources themselves to buy many books for their children, and for whom ‘rhymetime’ sessions within their local library provide a vital opportunity for socialisation. As the parent of two young children I really appreciate these sessions and see a lot of families enjoying them immensely.

During research for a recent assignment as part of my Health Visiting qualification, I was able to see the huge difference that schemes supported by both health authorities and libraries such as Bookstart have made to young children’s language and literacy development. In fact, there is research which demonstrates that there is even a link between reading to toddlers and improved science and mathematics skills, as well as in English. Libraries must continue to offer services available to all, and work closely with Bookstart through the ‘Bookcrawl’ scheme and rhymetimes in order to facilitate shared reading and singing between parents and children.

Taking my closest library, Sketty, as an example, there is much to do to enable it to meet the standards set out by the “Libraries Inspire” framework. There are no toilet facilities, which as the mother of 2 able bodied children can be challenging enough, I cannot begin to imagine the difficulties that a parent of a child with additional health needs would manage to visit the library for any length of time. In contrast, Swansea Central was relocated to County Hall five years ago where it now boasts wonderful facilities and offers marvellous activities for children. Cardiff Library has also received huge investment in recent years, and it is my belief that it is now time for our smaller libraries to receive some investment, as not everyone is able to travel into our city centres.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to give my views as part of this consultation.