



## Evaluation for Investing in Children membership

### Benwell Library

Over recent years Benwell Library has developed itself as a valuable resource which is based at the heart of the Benwell community. When you walk into the library you get an instant understanding of how diverse the community is. The library provides the opportunity for children, young people and the wider community to mix together who would otherwise not have the opportunity to do so.

**Evidence of dialogue and change** within Benwell Library is provided by the children and young people I met with on different occasions during an arts and crafts and drop in sessions. For the purpose of this evaluation I had the pleasure of meeting with Sam, Tasha, Tracey, Kamara, Tammy, Donya, Danielle, Sasha, Jenna, Courtney, Drew, McCaurly, Saskia, Bianca Toni, Michael, Keith, Billie – Jo, Chloe and Ellie.

There are a number of groups that run from the Library. These sessions are the result of a group of children and young people coming together to discuss with the staff what they want from the Library.

The group asked local children and young people to give them some ideas. The groups worked with staff to put these ideas into a funding bid. They were successful in the application and the library now runs a number of activities throughout the week.

This includes evening activities, Saturday Breakfast Club (with a mixture a newspapers and magazines) and also a Playstation 2 with six games.

Children and young people work together with the staff to plan a range of arts and crafts sessions which take place every Thursday between 3.30 until 4.30. Some of the recent activities include; Nail art, animal making (puppets) and music sessions. **“The decks are the best”** and I am sure the noisiest.

In order for the Breakfast Club to run on a Saturday morning Christine had to undertake a foundation certificate in food hygiene. The Breakfast Club provides members of the community with cereal, toast and orange juice and, after requests, crumpets and fruit. As a result of dialogue between children, young people and staff the breakfast club now runs once a week rather than once a fortnight. The Breakfast Club is a huge success with all members of the community and Drews tummy **“I like to go to the breakfast club; it fills up my tummy all day”**.

Michael and Keith were fixed to the Playstation 2 and enlightened me that they worked with the staff to make it fair for everyone to get a go of the Playstation. **“Everyone has 30minutes and can go on as many times as we like, we just put our names on the sheets, and borrow games or bring our own.”**

The children and young people who I spoke to were involved in changing the internet policies for the whole of Newcastle City Library Service. **“I was not happy when we could not use MSN in the Library; I really enjoy using it with my friends. I asked if we could use it and she asked her boss and now we can”.**

This is a fantastic achievement for the young people and staff of Benwell Library, to have made such an exciting change not just within their library but the whole of the service. This was all down to children and young people feeling comfortable to ask their staff questions. **“I am not scared to ask, they always help me”.**

Billie – Jo, Ellie and Chloe gave me a guided tour of the children’s section. With lots of pride they pointed out books that they had helped to choose and the games and teddies they enjoyed. However the only complaint was **“I am getting too big for the baby chairs there should be another section for older kids from 6 years old to 10 years old”.**

The library has set up an external link with the local primary schools to introduce children and young people to the service. Sasha informed me how she had come to the library for the first time with her teacher. **“We all came along on the bus and spent all afternoon in the library, I come now with my friends and use the computers. My favorite thing is coloring in.”**: Library staff also visit the schools to read to children and give assemblies. The staff can also be found wandering around nearby streets to get their face noticed within the community and encourage people to feel comfortable with the service.

Benwell Library has a very busy future. They are currently awaiting news of developments for their new building, which everyone will be involved in the planning.

All the children and young people who I spoke to were happy with the service the library provides however they would like to work on a few changes which they recommend they work on with Christine, Margaret and Graham.

**“It would be great to have ‘Just for Kidz’ meetings with the staff”** the children and young people suggested that these meetings should be split depending upon age groups 5 – 10 years old and 11 – 16.

They also agreed that these groups should look at the following issues:

**“It would be great to have more sessions like the breakfast club after school; I get hungry before my mam is in from work”**

**“Try and get the library to open on a Wednesday and a Sunday, I bet if we all worked and asked for more staff we could do it”**

**“More playstation 2 games - we could apply to the Keyfund for them and give out questionnaires to all the people that use the library. We could get different age range games up to 15 and the staff could work out your age by your details on the computer.”**

**“Different seating areas for different age groups; Babies – 5 years old, 6 years old until 10 years old and then for 11 years old to teenagers.”**

**“Some new colouring pencils or felt tips rather than crayons, they snap”.**

Benwell Library provides a safe environment for children and young people from a wide range of backgrounds to come together in a friendly relaxed atmosphere. It is clear that they have ownership over the library and are keen to be part of the decision making process. Benwell Library has come along way in recent years and has established itself as a crucial part of the community. I look forward to hearing of the move into the new building and I am sure that the library staff will work alongside the children and young people on the above recommendations for the future.

Benwell Library has excellent dialogue with the children and young people that use their service. The children and young people involved in this report have agreed the content and recommendations. It is with great pleasure that I on behalf of the children and young people recommend Benwell Library for Investing in Children Membership

Well done and keep up the hard work!

**Kim Kyle**  
**Project Worker**  
**Investing in Children**  
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