

Harrow Green Community Library (HGCL) 2016 Report

HGCL is now in its fourth year



HIGHLIGHTS OF 2016

HGCL helps to launch a new national project

In April we were invited to the UK HQ of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) in Maidenhead to give a presentation to staff there about our participation in a pilot project that led to the national launch of the Living Memory Project.

This new initiative aims to connect people with their local war graves. HGCL was invited to be one of about 30 pilot projects in Oct-Nov 2015. Members of the Creative Writing Group were asked to visit local war graves and respond to these experiences in poetry. We were chosen as one of six case studies included in the formal evaluation of the pilots which then contributed to the decision to launch nationally. Two members of the Creative Writing Group attended the official launch in April in the Houses of Parliament. The Project this year focussed on the centenary of the 141 days of the Somme. Information about our work in the pilot project was on the CWGC website throughout this year's project.

Summer Reading Challenge brings more children to HGCL

With the backing of Waltham Forest's Cultural Programme and support from one of the Programme's Officers, Maddy Fogelman, we participated in the Reading Agency's Summer Reading Challenge which this year was themed as the Big Friendly Read and focussed on the centenary of Roald Dahl's birth. We organised an additional opening (2-3 hours) on Tuesday evenings from late July to early September, staffed by dedicated volunteers, and specifically to coincide with a group for local young people run by one of Peabody's Youth Workers. Other children and their parents also made use of this additional opening. The Challenge requires children to read six books (of their choice), with rewards along the way and a medal and certificate on completion. This demands careful organisation and record-keeping.

Nine children completed the challenge, one enthusiastic child completing it twice; two partially completed; six registered and borrowed the first two books but did not follow-up in the required time.

The loan of books to both adults and children trebled during this period.

Participation also motivated us to better organise our stock of children's fiction to help children select books at the right level for them and enable volunteers to become more familiar with HGCL's collection.

Making HGCL book stock more accessible and more visible

One of our volunteers who started with us this year, is leading us in a project to fully computerise our catalogue, membership and circulation using software developed for smaller organisations. Every book has been described and subject categorised and we hope then to make this available as an online catalogue next year. The strength of the Library lies in its fiction collections so work is also being done to further categorise our fiction and make these sub-categories more visible to members visiting the Library. Some of the categories chosen have been influenced by the particular interests of members who visit and borrow books regularly.

HGCL is a case study for a Masters dissertation

A librarianship student undertaking a distance learning course at Aberystwyth University approached us last year as part of her research for a dissertation focussing on the sustainability of community libraries. She has since moved to London to take up a librarianship post here so was able to visit us in early

November and collect more information and statistics. It was helpful to hear some of her general comments and thoughts based on her experience of contacting and visiting a range of community libraries. She certainly feels that it is time for the professional body for librarians, CILIP, to take a stronger role in providing guidance and standard setting for community libraries. We look forward to hearing more once her dissertation has passed through the University system.

LIBRARY DEVELOPMENTS

Membership and stock

HGCL membership has reached 400. The Library now holds just over 4,100 books most of which have been donated by individuals. Sadly, due to lack of space we had to withdraw some of our non-fiction collection in order to provide better and more accessible space for children's fiction.

We have remained consistent in our three day opening times on Monday, Thursday and Saturday and throughout the year have circulated a professionally produced double-sided leaflet which on one side has details of the Library and its activities and on the other, details of HGCL volunteering opportunities.

Volunteers

We have had some interesting and very helpful volunteers join us for different lengths of time, including an experienced librarian. But as ever the situation is fragile and the total number of volunteers is small, probably partly due to improved employment opportunities and, recently, the withdrawal of Voluntary Action WF's volunteering recruitment service. We were lucky that at a low point three volunteers came along who have committed considerable time as well as offering valuable skills. One of these has provided continuity across the three opening times which has highlighted how useful this can be for support both to Library members and volunteers. A priority is also to attract more longer-term members to our overseeing planning group.

It was encouraging for us to be approached for a visit by the IPAT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) team from South Forest Centre. Apparently some of their patients have volunteered for us and reported back on the positive effects this has had on their recovery. All of us as volunteers need some support and the aim is to provide an environment which can help restore confidence and develop skills. For example a volunteer worked with us for a short time as part of rehabilitation following a brain injury.

Partnership with CBHA/Peabody

We continue to work in partnership with CBHA, the local Housing Association that is part of the Peabody Group. We are very grateful to them for paying the monthly rent for the room housing the Library within the Epicentre Community Centre. HGCL volunteers can register as Peabody volunteers and access useful training opportunities.

We look forward to closer working where feasible on Peabody's increasing community development work; and seeing whether we can benefit from Peabody's strong volunteering structure to attract volunteers to HGCL.

Local Funding and Support

References have been made throughout to the support from Waltham Forest Cultural Programme. Jo Regis, Cultural Programme Officer was instrumental in facilitating our participation in the London Citiread and the Summer Reading Challenge, and has ensured publication of our activities in the seasonal 'What's on' booklets. With her advice we applied for and obtained an LBWF arts development grant of £2,370 in June 2015 towards continuation of Saturday Storytime .

This year HGCL applied to Cathall Ward Forum and was awarded £1000. We are very grateful for the grants we have received from both Cann Hall and Cathall Ward Forums over the past three years.

We appreciate our local councillors calling in to see the Library on a regular basis, and their encouragement and support.

LIBRARY ACTIVITIES

All four activities which HGCL commenced with the help of a Lottery Grant in 2015 have continued successfully and for free. Three of these activities are held in the Library.

Saturday Storytime

This is now held monthly on the first Saturday and includes some regular attendees though we would love to attract a bigger audience. This activity is the key one requiring funding as we pay for a room, for professional storytellers whose diverse talents and engagement with children and parents is much appreciated, and for administrative help in arranging and hosting the event.

English Conversation Group

This is very much a drop-in session, run weekly, to cater for varying needs and availability of attendees from different nations, including on one occasion a French couple on holiday here! Other nations represented include Argentina, Bulgaria, Turkey and Pakistan. Sessions are often based around a theme. We are grateful to the facilitator, a former teacher, who freely gives of her time to lead these sessions. One of our regular volunteers who attends helps with administration and publicity. Activities have included cultural visits such as to the British Library and the William Morris Gallery.

Creative Writing Groups

Currently there are 23 people on the email circulation list for this group and a further three who do not have email. A solid membership of over 15 regularly attend the day and/or the evening sessions with others attending when they are able to. Members also visit and work with two housebound people in local sheltered accommodation. Members range in writing experience but all regular attendees have moved on in their skills and in their confidence in sharing their work and receiving and offering advice. We now have plentiful content for a sequel to our successful Buzzwords compilation published to mark the end of the Lottery project in 2015. We hope to publish Buzzwords 2 to celebrate HGCL's fourth birthday in Spring 2017.

Reading Club

This has remained a small but cohesive group meeting on the last Monday morning of each month. Our initial plan to base meetings on themes, interests and types of writing rather than always necessitating the reading of a particular title has worked well in encouraging a fantastic range of contributions which in turn has introduced all of us to works or authors that we haven't read before.

With the help of Waltham Forest Cultural Programme team we took part in the 2016 London Citiread in which reading clubs throughout London all read the same book at the same time with opportunities to attend related events. The book this year was newly published 'Ten Days' by Gillian Slovo, and members of our club attended events led by the author and hosted by Wanstead Library and the Vestry House Museum.

HGCL Planning Group and Volunteers - November 2016

The Library is at The Epicentre, West Street, Leytonstone E11 4LJ

Open: Mon 11am-4pm; Thurs 3-5.30; Sat 11am-2pm.

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