



**Haringey** Council

## **HARINGEY LIBRARY SERVICES FOR OLDER PEOPLE**

Most Library users in Haringey are young; nonetheless some areas in the Borough have significant numbers of older people, and we aim to provide a range of services to meet the needs of our older customers. It is important to understand that 'older customers' are individuals; each one may have very different interests and very different abilities. Someone aged fifty may regard themselves as 'old', while a seventy year old still feels – and describes themselves – as young.

In order to provide appropriate services and facilities for older people, we focus on a number of issues:

### **Facilities**

We aim to ensure that libraries are comfortable for older people to use. Although we provide mobile library services and deliver books to the homes of housebound customers, it is more pleasant for the customer and better value for money for the Service if older people can make use of our library buildings.

In order to ensure that older users can access our facilities in comfort, we review our facilities to ensure that they are appropriate to the needs of the older person. Accessibility is particularly important. Four of our nine libraries are fully accessible and have accessible toilet facilities. Where there are still access issues, we are addressing these with new development or major refurbishments.

The furniture used in libraries is also important. We try to ensure that books and other library materials are easy to reach, neither too high, nor too low. In Wood Green Library, for instance, we consulted the views of the public in a survey entitled, "Are you sitting comfortably?". As a result of our findings, we installed higher seats with arms, which our older customers found easier to use and also purchased a number of small trolleys to be used when a customer collects items to borrow.

### **Stock**

Older people may experience difficulties with vision and hearing. We therefore provide large print materials, and books on cassette or CD. These items are not used exclusively by older people but they often prove helpful in ensuring that older people can enjoy the pleasure of reading for longer.

Material may also be selected with the tastes of older people in mind. This selection process cannot be regarded too simplistically however, as the definition of the older person may stretch from 50 upwards - and many of all ages read very widely.

### **ICT**

Older people may not be as familiar with ICT as younger generations. We provide People's Network facilities for all ages, offering free access to the Internet and also providing office software and printing facilities.

In order to ensure that older people can receive training in the use of these facilities, we provide Silver Surfer Training sessions in all libraries. These sessions give an opportunity for people to meet and get to know each other – and often become more like a club. Individual coaching is also available if required. These services are all free of charge.

Some users require adapted hardware to enable them to use technology more effectively. Aids range from keyboards with larger keys to specific software for use by individuals with some level of visual impairment. We also provide desks which can accommodate wheelchairs and which are easily adjustable.

## **Services**

Although users enjoy visiting the library, some have mobility problems which means that a housebound service is the only way they can continue to access library facilities.

We provide both mobile and housebound services, lending not only books and audio-visual material, but also the equipment required to play talking books on cassette and CD. We also provide deposit collections for old people's homes across the Borough. In addition, we work with other organisations such as the Asian Centre and the Afro-Caribbean Centre which provide facilities for older people within these communities.

Within Haringey we have a specialist Reminiscence Librarian who works with older people, talking about objects and books which act as a focus for memory. Some of the members of the reminiscence groups have recorded their memories; others have written them - and here there is often a link with the Silver Surfer programmes. Indeed a number of the recollections of older people in Haringey have been posted on the BBC Web site. We have an annual exhibition of reminiscence work.

## **Information and Learning**

Libraries provide a range of information services and a number of these are targeted towards older people.

We focus on health for the older person. We have Happy Heart days, focussing on keeping fit and healthy for as long as possible. A health specialist is located in a library for the day to give advice and support. Another area for health awareness is mobility and, again, we hold "Keep moving on" sessions where specialists work with older people to encourage them. We have regular clinics run by partner organisations, such as Age Concern and the Pensions Service.

We hold learning activities, too, including the Older and Bolder programme which provides a range of courses and activities for the older person.

### **Just meeting other people...**

In a number of our libraries we offer coffee mornings or drop-in sessions specifically for older people. These together with Silver Surfer sessions, the information and learning programmes and, indeed the housebound and mobile library services enable older people to meet with others. We organise outings, activities and parties - and all seem to enjoy the varied programme.

### **Staffing**

A number of staff within the Libraries, Archives and Museum service are specifically concerned with older people. These have been brought together within an Action on Ageing Team whose aim is to improve and enhance our services for older people.

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