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Launch of West Midlands public library health, well-being and social care offer

Public Libraries in the West Midlands launched a pioneering health, well-being and social care offer at NHS West Midlands' Patient Information Forum Partnership Event in Birmingham at the end of January.

The offer positions public libraries as key partners for the health and social care sector, advocating the important contribution local services are making to improving the health and well being of the communities they serve. The shift of responsibility for public health from the health service to local authorities makes this a timely rallying call for the positive health benefits libraries can deliver.

“The Public Library Health and Social Care Offer has been developed by West Midlands Society of Chief Librarians (SCL), in partnership with The Reading Agency, as part of a regional advocacy campaign promoting the impact of public libraries on the health and well being of local people. It has been designed for that five minutes in a lift moment, outlining at a glance why libraries should be partners of choice for the health and social sector.” Kate Millin, assistant director, Libraries, Archives and Adult Learning, Dudley.

The offer advocates the value of public library assets including accessible and non-medicalised community space, the ability to reach out and work with local communities, provision of on-line services and expert staff. It also promotes the health and well-being benefits of a modern reading service providing targeted health and social care information and learning resources as well as events and activities including social reading activity such as reading groups.

The West Midlands Public Library Health and Social Care Offer is the centrepiece of an online partnership toolkit developed by The Reading Agency, the independent charity working to inspire more people to read more. The toolkit brings together examples of good local practice by libraries with the wider evidence base for the role of public libraries and reading in delivering health and social care outcomes for partners and local people.

“Recent research shows public libraries make an important contribution to the early intervention and prevention health, well-being and social care agenda. This contribution is not always obvious to health and social care partners. The West Midlands approach is a pioneering development in that it makes clear how libraries can support the health and social care agenda and the work of local, regional and national health partners in supporting healthier and happier communities.” Debbie Hicks, director of research, The Reading Agency.

“The West Midlands Public Library Health and Social Care Offer is a significant step in bringing the work of public libraries onto the health and social care radar in the region. The developing partnership with libraries has also been formalised by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between SCL and NHS West Midlands.” Sarah Greening, NHS West Midlands.

- To receive a copy of the West Midlands Public Library Health and Social Care offer, please contact Kate Millin on 01384 814745 or Kate.Millin@dudley.gov.uk

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Notes to editors

- The Reading Agency is an independent charity working to inspire more people to read more. It is funded by the Arts Council and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council www.readingagency.org.uk
- The Society of Chief Librarians leads the debate on the future of public libraries and advocates for continuous improvement of the public library service on behalf of local people. For more information about the work of the Society of Chief Librarians, please visit www.goscl.com
- As part of their funding for The Reading Agency, The Museums Libraries and Archives Council have supported the development of the West Midlands Health and Well Being Partnership Toolkit in line with the recommendations of a recent research project mapping public library activity in the areas of health and well being (see below). The research recommended the need for a core library health and well-being offer to articulate the health benefits libraries can deliver to partners and the public www.mla.gov.uk
- Public Library Activity in the Areas of Health and Well Being, Hicks, D., Creaser, C., Greenwood, H., Spezi, V., White, S., and Frude, N. at www.mla.gov.uk/news_and-views/press/releases/2010/libraries_health
- The public library health and well being developed in the West Midlands provides an important model for positioning libraries as partners in delivering local authorities’ new responsibilities for public health.