

the reading agency

HeadSpace – the first 3 years

“This project has changed young people’s views of what the library is about. When you tell friends about it and show them what we’re doing here, what they can do here, they think it’s cool” Shehryar, 15, High Wycombe

HeadSpace is a national project run by The Reading Agency, working with 20 community libraries across 4 regions.

HeadSpace provides a model for delivering the national Library Youth Offer and is meeting the urgent need for free, local, safe spaces where young people can take part in positive activities. It gives a clear message that young people are welcomed in libraries and their participation is valued. HeadSpace was originally supported by an award of £575,000 from the Big Lottery Young People's Fund and significant matched funding from the participating library services, making the total budget for the project in excess of £1 million. In November 2009, the first self-funded Participate HeadSpace opened in Chelmsley Wood Library in Solihull, closely followed by Bournemouth and Croydon which both opened in September 2010. This marks the extension of HeadSpace to 23 sites, extending to 6 English regions.

HeadSpace aims to:

- Support library staff to develop skills in working with young people
- Establish HeadSpace sites, to meet the needs of socially excluded young people
- Develop active partnerships between young people, libraries and youth sector
- Engage young people, especially socially excluded young people, to take part

Who uses HeadSpace?

5623 young people have already taken part in the HeadSpace project.

40% of young people involved are young people at risk of exclusion. More than **50%** of young people taking part were not previously library users.

The project aims to engage young people who for geographic, social or economic reasons find library services hard to reach. These include:



- Young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs)
- Teenage parents
- Young people living in areas of high social deprivation
- Young people excluded from school or school refuses
- Young offenders
- Looked after young people
- Young people from black or minority ethnic backgrounds
- Young people who are homeless or vulnerably housed
- Young people with disabilities

Empowerment:

HeadSpace enables young people to lead and participate in shaping the spaces and services they want to use, from being involved in models of budget devolution to volunteer delivery of services.

2415 young people have taken up leadership and decision making roles within the project. These roles empower young people to participate in creating HeadSpace sites and shaping of the services that they want to use. Activities include recruiting and training staff, selecting and purchasing stock, auditing services, running creative groups and events, designing the look and use of space and advocating to policy makers.

“One thing that really builds confidence is the feeling that you are being listened to. At HeadSpace we have that and more confidence means that we want to do more things, if you don’t feel confident, there’s fear and you won’t feel motivated. I’ve applied to do voluntary work at the library because I’ve found that I like working with younger children and doing youth work” Khalid, 18, Haslingden

Over **309** young people have found longer term community volunteering roles, giving on average 2 hours of their time on a regular basis to developing the project. This puts them in a better position to go on to accreditation, further education or employment and promotes citizenship skills and community engagement. 36 young people have undertaken long-term work placements as a result of their involvement in HeadSpace, and around half of these have gone on to find employment in libraries and youth services.

Volunteer roles have been developed in partnership with young people and all roles include aspects of team working and empathy skills as well as technical skills development. Young people can also choose to be accredited for volunteering from a range of nationally recognized awards including Duke of Edinburgh and Youth Achievement Awards. **308** young people nationally have already received an award. A further **111** young people are also working towards accreditation.

"I've been to all the HeadSpace meetings from the start I've been involved for about a year and I'm definitely going to stay involved, it's a really friendly place and I'm volunteering, which goes towards my Duke of Edinburgh award. I think HeadSpace will make a big difference in Padstow. There's nothing to do in Padstow in the evenings, it's really bad. We wanted to show people that Padstow is worth something, that it's not a just a rubbish place". Samantha, 15, Padstow

Access:

The HeadSpace name and brand was developed by young people working with The Reading Agency. It represents free, safe and welcoming places where young people can go to meet friends, discover something new or join a group. HeadSpace sites extend the range of out of hours facilities for young people and provision of positive activities and learning support. HeadSpace also has a virtual presence at www.grouphing.org/headspace.

"You can go down in the evenings – it's free and you can get support doing homework –they've got internet access and the staff or volunteers will help you – you can go on the internet and do a bit of homework and then you can have fun". Molly, 14, Efford

Quality:

Nationally HeadSpace project is supported by a range of strategic partners including members of the National Youth Libraries Board. Locally the 23 participating library services also benefit from a strong network of partners, including Regional Youth Work Units, Connexions, Looked After Children's services, Youth Offending Teams and Youth Services ensuring that HeadSpace actively involves the most socially excluded young people.

"HeadSpace provides great opportunities for the youths in Haslingden, which is a racially mixed community with limited activities for young people and an area which has in the past suffered racial tension amongst its young people." Inspector Dave Hodson, Lancashire Constabulary

Reader development

HeadSpace provides an informal and exciting way to introduce books and reading to young people who might not normally use libraries. By choosing their own stock and helping to plan their own reader development events, young people are exposed to new materials and authors.

Publishers and authors enjoy the innovative approach and venue provided by HeadSpace and being part of a national network of HeadSpace sites, has enabled libraries to take advantage of unique author offers.

"I think the event went beyond what we expected – the teens from Crawley were outstanding and the numbers of attendees was brilliant." Lauren Bennett, Random House

All of this has an impact on young people's long-term relationship with reading.

"The majority of the young people involved still attend HeadSpace sessions and in most cases their interest in reading and perception of reading as a worthwhile activity has increased (those who were less keen previously will now borrow books and engage in casual discussion of reading)". Lucy Gill, Project Manager, HeadSpace Crawley

For the vast majority of libraries, the introduction of HeadSpace has also led to a significant increase in usage and loans amongst the target age range.

"The number of active borrowers aged 11-17 has increased by 73% and more branches are now running activities & events aimed at young people." Kimberley Rolfe, Bristol Libraries

Outcomes for young people

Data from the initial period of Lottery funding shows:

- **2080 young people show improved knowledge, understanding and skills.**
- **55 young people felt that they had improved self confidence and confidence in working with others as a result of their involvement with the HeadSpace project.**
- **48 young people felt that the project had helped them to progress and find further opportunities to be involved in positive activities.**
- **114 young people felt that the project had introduced them to new creative activities that they found enjoyable and inspiring.**
- **986 young people feel that they have improved awareness of their own feelings and values and those of others**
- **1031 young people have experienced personal development and social progress**
- **2145 young people have discovered opportunities for enjoyment, inspiration and creativity**

Outcomes for the Library Service

"In Plymouth, HeadSpace Efford has been the catalyst to begin revolutionising our services for young people for the better. Our partners at the youth service, youth offending service and schools have been amazed by the change in the service we offer at Efford Library. As a result of this success Plymouth will be launching two new sites by 2012." Emma Sheriff, HeadSpace Efford

All of the library services involved in HeadSpace feel that the project has been a resounding success for their authority. Some are seeking to open new HeadSpaces in other libraries and all are cascading their learning across the authority. For many, HeadSpace has opened doors to new partnerships, funding streams and recognition within their local area.

“Another main achievement is that, following on from the HeadSpace project and using the knowledge and skills developed as part of this project, we have now rolled out a Young Volunteer offer across Bolton Libraries and over 80 young people have found volunteering opportunities with Bolton Libraries since this was launched.” Emma Ali, HeadSpace Bolton

“HeadSpace is helping us to deliver the Library Offer to young people. It has provided a welcoming space that the young people have been able to take ownership of.” Emma Ali, Bolton Libraries

“With more and more financial pressures on the service it is important that libraries are seen to be contributing to the Local Area Agreement and Headspace helps us to do this.” Merryn Kent, Cornwall Libraries

“(HeadSpace) has raised the profile of the library service with internal and external partners. As the HeadSpace Area is in a high profile new Central library it has been a very visible project with visits from other library authorities as part of a general visit. Two official openings of the Central library have showcased the work to many visitors including the MLA and HRH Princess Royal. Has enabled me as Head of Service to use it as an example of the excellent work my teams do in reaching hard to reach groups and also give it as an example of how we deliver against the Council’s objectives in other areas”. Allyson Jordan (Head of library Service, Swindon.

“HeadSpace has definitely helped to deliver and develop the library offer for young people in Central library. The usage of the library by young people has certainly increased – it is an attractive, vibrant area offering an excellent service and a wide range of events and activities, and perhaps mostly importantly, gives young people their own space and has changed many perceptions of the public library.”

Mark Jones (Strategic Manager-Information Services, Central Library, Swindon.

“HeadSpace is the model that all our library services for young people is based upon.” Emma Sheriff, Plymouth Libraries

Expanding HeadSpace

To develop HeadSpace in other areas, The Reading Agency has launched Participate, a new modular programme for public libraries work with young people. For further information on our work with young people contact, Sue Jones, Senior Project Manager, Sue.Jones@readingagency.org.uk

