

**Libraries
for
living,
and
for
living
better**





Libraries for living, and for living better



The value and impact of public libraries
in the East of England

Report for Libraries Connected East
June 2023

University of East Anglia
CreativeUEA and
Health Economics Consulting

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We estimate a national value

of library services of £3.4bn.

£3.4

4bn



**Libraries are places
of living literacy,
raising children's
literacy levels and with
potential to return a
value of up to £60,000
throughout each
child's lifetime.**



FOREWORD

Libraries Connected Eastern Region commissioned the production of a research report and development of an evaluation tool that would help measure, manage, and evidence the impact of social connections in libraries in May 2022. It has been a sector-led approach in partnership with CreativeUEA and UEA Health Economics Consulting, supported by Arts Council England and national Libraries Connected.

Libraries Connected East comprises Bedford Borough, Cambridgeshire, Central Bedfordshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Luton, Norfolk, Peterborough, Southend, Suffolk, and Thurrock Library Services. The region includes a range of library governance models, including local authorities – both county and unitary – and various charitable independent models. Working collaboratively, we contributed to the development and funding of the project, for the benefit of the whole sector.

The ambition was to reach a credible, recommended methodology, a replicable framework for wider application and use, and articulate a return on investment, providing a financial value of social engagement. The result has been to deliver an academic research report that has also delivered extra monetary evaluation and provided an independent reflection on the provision of support for communities through the public library network.

The report acknowledges the complexity of valuing a holistic service and the many variables that apply; caution has been applied to ‘downstream’ assumptions, and the observation that many ‘intangible’ elements mean that the value of libraries may never be described definitively clarifies the role of public libraries. The report identifies how libraries provide safe and comfortable spaces where people can develop their literacy skills, and offer important support when individuals experience crisis moments of digital exclusion. Libraries are places of living literacy, raising children’s literacy levels and with potential to return a value of up to £60,000 throughout each child’s lifetime. This is one value calculation that can be adapted and used locally by professionals working with libraries in other areas of the nation.

The authors of the report estimate that library services in England can generate social benefits to their communities to a value of at least £3.4bn per year in relation to the three value dimensions investigated. Their modelling also suggests that **libraries’ return on investment is at least six times the known annual cost of running libraries nationally**. With a branch library typically providing a gross value of £1M (ranging between £600,000 and £1.5M depending on the volume, activities and before costs), this report opens the conversation for library services to develop recognition of the holistic impact they make on areas of society.

The publication of this report does not conclude the work; it intends to make recommendations and encourage continual reflection and cross-sectoral conversations. It enables the use of the evaluation tool (EVOLS) as an interactive model, which can be adapted for a wide range of social connections and interventions that are a regular feature of statutory library services now and for the future.



Libraries are important places. They are institutions and mean so much to so many people.

Library user in the Libraries Connected Eastern region

INTRODUCTION

Libraries Connected East asked us to create a credible, replicable and recognisable methodology for articulating the impact of social engagement with public libraries. They also asked us to look at the value and impacts of public libraries around three themes: digital inclusion, health and wellbeing, and children's literacy.

We found that the three themes are inextricably linked in the work of the libraries we visited and studied, though we present the themes separately for clarity. We found many instances of activity ostensibly based on one of these themes having a major impact on the other themes. We provide examples throughout the body of this report.

The report presents a valuation tool which we created to estimate the monetary value of library service impacts, for example, in terms of benefit for taxpayers or at the level of families using a particular service at a branch library. We also present ten case study examples of stakeholder engagement with public libraries in the Eastern region.

We have grouped the ten case studies according to the three themes:

Theme 1 Digital inclusion	Theme 2 Health, wellbeing and independent living	Theme 3 Children’s literacy and associated outcomes
<p>Here we report impacts of free access to digital skills and devices for adults and families.</p>	<p>Here we report impacts of activities and events provided for adults.</p>	<p>Here we report impacts of targeted library programmes for children, young people and their families, also considering how programmes contribute to literacy recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic.</p>

For each case study, we present illustrations of monetary value and benefits using the valuation tool. We also present discussion of other aspects of value represented by each case study. We use the term ‘extra-monetary value’ to describe these aspects.

Our report offers stakeholders a picture of the value of library services from a variety of perspectives. We hope that the valuation tool presented here will be a useful resource for professionals working with libraries. It allows them to make meaningful estimates of the benefits of library services and programmes, identifying their value in monetary terms.

Though the valuation tool has been developed through research in the region represented by Libraries Connected East, we expect the tool to be useful for library professionals working in other areas of England and potentially across the UK.

We found that attempts to describe the value of libraries usually understate their reach and impact. Our research led us to reflect with care on what ‘value’ means when we describe the value of library services. Even when we measure only the monetary value of a service, we must decide how to assess elements of that service. What units of value, cost and benefit do we consider to arrive at an overall valuation of a service or programme? We discuss these decisions when we present the methodology adopted in the design of the valuation tool.

When we look beyond assessment of monetary value, value can mean many things. Stakeholders attribute value to activities according to different needs, purposes and beliefs. Some of the impacts we might value are relatively immediate, such as finding information to resolve a practical issue in a book or online. Other impacts may be less obvious or extend over time, for example, the outcomes of joining a ‘reading and

walking' group. Participating in a group of this type may shape our habits so that we spend time walking with others far into our future lives. Some of the impacts we have looked at begin outside the physical spaces of libraries, starting when library users engage with digital services online or when they use a mobile library service.

Our experiences of conducting research for this evaluation confirmed a picture that we also found in the research literature about libraries: the value of library services has many dimensions, and as a result it can be difficult to describe. Some of this may be because the availability of libraries is taken for granted, because libraries fulfil many functions, or because people are not entirely aware of what libraries offer (Moore, 2004). Sometimes not knowing what libraries offer today is linked to how rapidly libraries have changed in response to the growing availability of online information sources over the last two decades. If stakeholders have not visited libraries regularly in that period, their sense of what libraries offer may be out of date.

Recent research about public libraries suggests that these changes are part of a cultural shift where the functions of libraries are transforming concurrently with changes in public culture and civic engagement (Wyatt, Mcquire and Butt, 2018). International perspectives recognise that these are changes accelerated by advances in digital technology and education, but also by the global Covid-19 pandemic and the economic instability that we have experienced since (Connaway et al, 2021). The changes also bear directly upon the three themes we are investigating: new literacies are required for leisure and work, we may be included in or excluded from the public sphere in new ways, and the effects of those changing aspects of life and others shape our health and wellbeing anew. In this changing context, people may look to libraries for new reasons and value them for different qualities. Policy makers and other institutions may require or favour different functions and outcomes from library services at different times, so that the terms by which their value is judged also change. The value of libraries may never be comprehensively quantified.

Some factors influencing the value we attribute to library services are beyond the scope of this report. Previous studies examining the attractiveness of libraries to users have identified influencing factors that are external to library services, like their proximity to other public amenities and accessibility by public transport (Delrieu and Gibson, 2017). Our study does not explore these 'pull factors', rather it examines a selection of library services available in branches and online and what stakeholders value about them.

The libraries we visited, covering various locations of different population sizes, demographics and prosperity, had user populations that are reasonably representative of their local area. and we saw nothing to suggest differences in patterns of library use according to ethnicity. Our case studies describe activities in libraries in each of the regions represented by Libraries Connected East, and include examples from urban, rural and coastal branches. In this respect, we believe that when the ten case studies we present are considered as a group, they provide meaningful insights about what stakeholders value in library provision for literacy, health and digital inclusion. In the context of the other studies we have cited, it may also be reasonable to view our case

studies as a good indication of what library stakeholders value in libraries regardless of their socio-economic context.

The terms of reference for our study required us to articulate the value of services and activities provided by libraries. We recognise that libraries themselves are cultural assets with strong ties to their communities, and often to the heritage of their communities (Loach, Rowley and Griffiths, 2017). We believe our approach to making a valuation of library services articulates both the monetary value and the cultural value of services. It captures aspects of extra-monetary value at a generalised level but also at a micro level. We ask readers to consider the link between these levels as they read this report.

Our report shows that how library branches understand and respond to what their local communities value is itself a high-value feature of library services in general. Across our report, we seek to balance attention to the value of generalisable features of library services with consideration of value determined by context, and by the needs of library visitors and users in a given community and location. spaces of libraries, starting when library users engage with digital services online or when they use a mobile library service.

THE INTRINSIC VALUE OF LIBRARY SERVICES

Linked services support users' wellbeing across the life course

Non-judgemental & inclusive spaces

Frontline mediators for many public services & charities

Alleviate social isolation & loneliness

Strong links across the themes of Digital inclusion, Health, wellbeing and independent living, and Children's literacy

Responsiveness of library professionals

Services & resources for living, and for living better

Creative in providing diverse activities within tight financial constraints

THE VALUE OF LIBRARIES FOR DIGITAL INCLUSION

**Support when
people experience
crisis moments**

*Provide training for
digital technology*

**Free access to many
digital resources**

**Link equipment,
skills and
connectivity**

Provide IT services
for all

THE VALUE OF LIBRARIES FOR HEALTH

**Support
independent
living**

Improve wellbeing
across the life course

**Offer
information
on health and
wellbeing**

*Signpost people to
health and social
care services*

Provide other
opportunities
for learning
new skills

**Partnerships to improve health
and wellbeing for adults**

Support community service

Support GPs
and other
organisations
for social
prescribing

**Long-term
intergenerational
benefits**

THE VALUE OF LIBRARIES FOR CHILDREN'S LITERACY

Support 'living literacy' for families and children

Access to books for all children

Link literacy with many aspects of peoples' lives

Complement school libraries

THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN THE EAST OF ENGLAND: THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF LIBRAIRES

A branch library
typically provides £1m
worth of value

Library services
can generate social
benefits to a value
of at least £3.4bn
per year

Libraries' return on
investment may be at
least six times their
annual running cost

Library services in England can generate social benefits to their communities to a value of at least £3.4bn per year in relation to the three value dimensions we investigated. This is based on a conservative estimate of 50% of libraries offering services in the way that aligns with the methodology we have used.

The return on investment calculated from our benefit modelling suggests a conservative figure of at least six times the known annual cost of running libraries nationally. value due to high participation.

- ✿ A branch library typically provides £1m worth of value (range of £600,000 to £1.5m depending on volumes and activities undertaken. These figures are gross, before operating costs, and include only the domains identified by this report).
- ✿ For digital inclusion – benefit value of £379 per participant, assuming that participants continue to secure employment within two years of using these services.
- ✿ For health – benefit value between £244 and £60,000, depending on the intervention.
- ✿ For literacy programmes – a value of £279 per participant in any programme
- ✿ For mobile library services – a value of £49.70 per participant, and high total value due to high participation.

ABOUT THIS REPORT AND THE EVALUATION TOOL WE DEVELOPED

We take a holistic approach to gauging the value of library services. We describe many types of value, including extra-monetary value and monetary value. Please consider these forms of value together.

We link value at different levels, across authorities, in library branches and programmes, and for people. Please consider these links which contribute to value, and value for money.

There is no single method to evaluate and measure the value of all outputs of libraries.

EVOLS EVALUATION TOOL FOR LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS

Use the interactive tool to gauge the monetary value of services and their benefits

Spreadsheet-based with pre-populated case study examples

Use or adapt the case studies or create your own

Easy to update

Interactive menu of value domains relevant to libraries, with associated monetary values.

Customise value data for your services (for scale, participants, events...)

Run evaluation at the push of a button and save different calculations

The value of libraries may never be comprehensively quantified or definitively described.

Any valuation of libraries must combine qualitative and quantitative measures.

Some library users are unsure what services are available, or how to access them.

THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN THE EAST OF ENGLAND: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE VALUE OF LIBRARIES CONSIDERED BY THEME

We evaluated provision in library services across the Libraries Connected East region, conducting three case studies for each of three themes, and another on mobile library services. We collected information about outcomes of the activities described in each theme to inform a robust economic evaluation of the impact and value of the library services to strengthen future business cases.

THEME 1 - DIGITAL INCLUSION

- a) Libraries offer individuals and communities many forms of help and support for communication (e.g. email, social media), printing (e.g. CVs, returns labels, tickets) and engaging with government services (e.g. bus passes, blue badges, passports, housing, schools). For many people, the help available through digital services and resources also addresses wider health issues they may experience, particularly isolation, and enables them to participate in society.
- b) The main factors inhibiting better digital inclusion are poor user interfaces and lack of accessibility, task complexity and process design of digital-only processes and keeping pace with rapidly changing technology. The net effect is that people who are older, disabled or with literacy needs may be excluded from many digital services, including statutory government services which are digital-only, which risks being discriminatory.
- c) Library facilities and support are critical and often effective in reducing the impact of these factors. However, the support offered varies because of perceived privacy or data protection concerns, staff skills and availability. Improvements in process and systems design could address these barriers.

THEME 2 – HEALTH, WELLBEING AND INDEPENDENT LIVING: THE IMPACT OF PROVIDING ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS FOR ADULTS IN LIBRARIES, INCLUDING THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR SOCIAL PRESCRIBING MODELS

- a) Throughout the Eastern region, many partnerships and initiatives seek to improve health and wellbeing for adults and maintain independent living. These cover diverse activities, though some library professionals reported that most are attended by older people. Library services offer activities that impact directly on the wellbeing of adults, such as physical activities and mental health initiatives. They also offer activities which impact indirectly on them and their social networks, through adult education, convening groups to support parents, carers and families, people with long-term health conditions and their carers, and intergenerational group activities.
- b) Libraries offer information on health and wellbeing and signpost people to other services. This support has the potential to help people to live independently, to reduce the risk of falls, and to reduce NHS and social care costs. Overall, library services provide social care that is central to existing social prescribing and its development. Library services often initiate activities to address wider population ambitions such as to level up society or improve the health and wellbeing of less affluent communities. One example is the mobile library service that provides contact for many people in rural communities.
- c) Tangible outcomes for participants joining these activities include physical activity, socialisation and finding employment, which can improve their wellbeing and reduce mental health issues. Many less tangible impacts include the effects of trust, volunteering, experience of leading groups, learning new skills, community service and long-term intergenerational benefits. Library services provide opportunities for people to improve their employment, health and to socialise. These are three key indicators for wellbeing outlined by the Office of National Statistics, which also link the three themes investigated for this report (health, children’s literacy, and digital inclusion).
- d) Library professionals are creative in providing a range of activities within tight financial constraints. Circumstances vary between localities. In some, limited staffing and current challenges to volunteer recruitment and staff training may limit what could be achieved.

THEME 3 - CHILDREN'S LITERACY AND ASSOCIATED OUTCOMES: THE IMPACT OF TARGETED LIBRARY PROGRAMMES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE THAT SUPPORTS LITERACY RECOVERY FOLLOWING COVID

- a)** Library programmes have value and impact on post-Covid literacy recovery by providing rich experiences and stimulating environments for speaking, listening, reading and writing. Literacy activities are interactive and face to face, with impacts on children's socialisation and confidence.
- b)** Library programmes for children are creative, fun and motivating. They build from basics, introducing children to libraries and helping them become confident and familiar with them. Children learn to find their way around libraries, make return visits, and begin to use libraries habitually. By introducing children and their families to libraries and collections, library services encourage autonomous and motivated information literacy through life.
- c)** By addressing the whole family unit, libraries provide services and advice which help families to support their children's literacy at home and beyond their direct involvement in specific library programmes. For many children and their families, library programmes provide free access to a wealth of books and resources that they would not otherwise encounter. This is shown by new or increased borrowing of library books by children participating in programmes, by children's use of 'creator spaces' for art and digital making, and in the involvement of parents, carers and grandparents who are sometimes surprised that libraries today can be very different from what they knew as children.
- d)** Library programmes have important impacts on children's literacy that complement but differ from the impacts of literacy learning in schools. Library programmes develop 'living literacy', for example, by linking literacy with day-to-day experiences like making a meal at home, or by providing the kit for children to try out science experiments with household objects. The programmes link literacy with family relationships, and help develop science and health literacies. Importantly, the model of literacy in the evaluated programmes is non-judgemental.
- e)** Some programmes are modelling collaborations with two or more organisations (council services, charities). They improve programmes by linking the expertise of different organisations for making grant applications that secure funding for literacy provision through sponsored programmes.

We estimate a national value of library services of £3.4bn

A typical library might be expected to produce around a £1m worth of value per year

THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF LIBRARIES

We have attempted to value the outputs of libraries and their associated activities in monetary terms. There is no single method to evaluate and measure the value of every output of libraries in how they respond to community needs. There are several ways to ascertain value. The most useful of them for this evaluation is assessment of ‘value in use’, resulting from the flow of services, including the knowledge of library professionals and people who use library services. ‘Value in exchange’ can also be used as a measure where we can use actual market prices to inform our valuation, but usually this gives the minimum value. We adopted a pragmatic approach to finding the best economic data we could, but where data were unavailable, we had to assume that ‘value’ was equal to the cost of the delivery of a particular service (e.g. the cost of a library professional’s time or for using space in a building). Although this approach is standard practice, we sought to go beyond this wherever possible.

Without running a full evaluation of each service, we made assumptions based on the best evidence available. We adapted available published results about library services to this study, and where necessary updated them to current prices. This helped us to infer what the total value of a service and value per participant might be. We have aimed at conservative estimates when assessing downstream benefits, as direct links with library usage can sometimes be tenuous and subject to other confounding factors. The case of health benefits is such an instance. Any valuation suggesting a link between improved health knowledge and a change in behaviour and outcomes would need to consider many stages which can affect savings on the health system. The same care would be needed in estimating the extent of the influence of computer access and use through library services on children’s literacy.

The areas of value ('domains') we identified for our valuation are:

- 🌿 Book and other media borrowing
- 🌿 Browsing and information
- 🌿 Digital services
- 🌿 In-library events
- 🌿 Community hubs
- 🌿 Health benefits (physical and mental health)
- 🌿 Loneliness
- 🌿 Computing and digital literacy
- 🌿 Community support and enablement
- 🌿 Sanctuary and shelter
- 🌿 Specialised assistance and advice

We valued each of the outputs of library services in the domains shown above and applied these values to the known volume of activities in this study. Each of these assumptions is shown in the Appendix, in the Economics Methods paper, where they are fully explained.

Using these assumptions, we built a model to estimate the monetary benefits for the ten case studies described in this report, as well as a general library model with multiple activities. At its crudest estimate, prior to detailed costings and working on broad assumptions, this whole library model was estimated to generate around £1m of social benefit per year for a typical urban-centred library. However, because of the uncertainties and assumptions in the modelling, we designed our valuation tool with varying circumstances in mind. This modelling can be adapted by a user as required. The Economic Valuation of Library Services (EVOLS) tool we have created can use a variety of estimates for future assessment of other services and libraries, where users can enter their own estimates both of utilisation and cost.

The overall value of domains

We found that there is high overall value in domains associated with a traditional view of library services i.e. 'General browsing' and 'Books, borrowing and reading'. This factor remains important as it can drive many of the other services offered by libraries.

The domain of 'Computing and digital education' had high overall value. This seems high by unit value rather than volume. We found these values in previous work by economists looking at digital inclusion. This value suggests that digital literacy is very important in many areas of life, including work productivity, time saving, government efficiency, access to health services, etc.

The domain 'Media download/accessed' had relatively high overall value. This is driven mostly by high volumes of downloads and the cost of electronic media. It is more expensive than physical books and print media, mainly because of initial expense, a shorter life before becoming obsolete, and the need for investment in certain technologies.

The related domains of 'Health', 'Sanctuary and shelter', 'Community support and enablement' and 'Community hubs' are broadly equal in values. Taken individually, each of these domains has less value than 'Events', but together their value is greater. These smaller sums usually reflect the numbers of sessions and possibly the working value we adopted. We found that valuing sessions was challenging, given how different they can be in terms of what can take place and who they are for. Their benefits are often intangible and harder to monetise as libraries offer a range of non-linear directly attributable services. We used the cost of their provision as their marginal value, not the cost of access or willingness to pay.

The value of domains by unit

We have used a set of values per unit, which we feel can be justified (see above). For example, 'Computing and digital literacy' has the greatest value per unit (£400), with the second greatest value of £60 per unit applying to domains of 'Events', 'Community hubs', 'Community support and enablement', 'Sanctuary and shelter' and 'Health'. The domains of 'General browsing', 'Books, borrowing and reading' and 'Media download/access' have unit values under £9. These estimates are based on a number of approaches we found in the research literature, and they often varied because of volume. There may be other bases on which to calculate these values, but after some consideration we based them on recommended methods.

Conclusion

Library services in England can generate social benefits to their communities to a value of at least £3.4bn per year in relation to the three value dimensions we investigated. This is based on a conservative estimate of 50% of libraries offering the services in the way that aligns with the methodology we have used. The return on investment calculated from the benefit modelling suggests a conservative figure of at least six times the known annual cost of running libraries nationally.

A typical library might be expected to produce around £1m worth of value per year but this may vary, depending on volumes and activities undertaken, from £600,000 to £1.5m. These figures are gross, before operating costs, and include only the domains identified by this report.

VALUING PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND THEIR IMPACT: A NEW EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

OVERVIEW

This section presents a brief outline of the evaluation methodology we developed for this project. We intend our methodology to be replicable, and that the methods can be adopted by library professionals to gauge the value of their services. Colleagues adopting these methods in further projects should follow the sequence of steps we used. If the recommended steps are not followed, valuation may lack validity and is unlikely to present a holistic account of the value of a library or service.

The steps we took were:

STEP ONE: INITIAL HORIZON SCAN OF LIBRARY SERVICES IN THE EAST, INCLUDING COLLECTING DATA ON STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT WITH SERVICES AND PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICES

Based on the data offered by key stakeholders, we conducted a series of face-to-face and online workshops with library users, library professionals and other library stakeholders and partners. We sought a comprehensive picture of services, including individual experiences, to inform the next evaluation activities. Library professionals may mirror this step by conducting at least one workshop or focus groups or a targeted survey, for example, for a specific category of library users.

STEP TWO: EXPLORING LIBRARY SERVICES 'ON THE GROUND': COLLECTING CASE STUDY DATA

Based on the data and materials collected in Step One, including comments provided during the workshops, we identified examples of library services provision for our closer attention. For the themes of Health, wellbeing and independent living,

and Children's literacy, our case studies looked at specific programmes currently offered in different libraries, considering value in terms of cost and benefit as well as extra-monetary value according to thematic interests. Through visits to the libraries and in-depth interviews with users and librarians, we learned about programmes and their value. We also looked at available documentation such as budget sheets, policy documents and available programme-level evaluation. For the theme of Digital inclusion, we adopted a slightly different approach because digital inclusion tends to be supported through a variety of inter-related services and resources rather than through specific programmes or events. As with the other two themes, we conducted interviews with the same range of stakeholders but also used observational methods to learn how library users engaged with digital services and for what purposes. For each theme, our approach was informed by findings from the workshops in Step One.

Library professionals may replicate this approach by investigating one or more programmes through a case study approach, drawing on multiple sources of data, and/or by introducing observational data to their study. They may choose other themes. It is important that data relating to the cost of services is obtained, and participant data, in order to complete Step Three.

STEP THREE: DESIGNING AND USING A TOOL CALLED EVOLS TO GAUGE THE MONETARY VALUE AND BENEFITS OF LIBRARY SERVICES

We used data from Steps One and Two to design the EVOLS valuation tool. Workshop and thematic findings influenced the value domains we incorporated to the tool, building on and adapting domains already described in the research literature for this field. We also applied the tool to the examples of library services investigated in Step Two, so that we can comment on both the monetary value and extra-monetary value of library services according to the three themes for our evaluation.

Later sections of this report present each thematic case study and monetary valuations for each, estimated using the EVOLS tool. Library professionals will be able to apply the tool to their services without further design work. We recommend using the EVOLS tool together with case study evaluation, as in Step Two, so that both monetary and extra-monetary value can be gauged. This method makes it possible to understand the value library users attribute to services as well as monetary value and benefit.

We have outlined our methodology in this way, identifying these steps, because it tells the story of our work. In this section of our report, we use the same sequence to share more detail about each method. We follow the same sequence to describe the findings of our workshops and thematic case studies.

STEP ONE: HORIZON SCAN METHODOLOGY – WORKSHOPS

UEA researchers and Libraries Connected East colleagues held four workshops in the Eastern region to involve stakeholders in the evaluation of library services. Two online workshops and two in-person workshops supported maximum engagement with stakeholders. All workshops were conducted with procedures approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of East Anglia¹.

We took various measures to recruit participants. We invited members of governing bodies, interest groups and associations to attend. Additionally, we used local advertisements to raise awareness of the workshops among library users. We placed posters throughout communities involved in the study, in public areas such as GP offices, gyms, libraries, and food banks. Leaflets were distributed to nearby residents, and community social media pages were used to advertise the events. These measures allowed for convenience sampling of respondents local to the libraries.

One workshop was held specifically for senior library managers and another for an expert group of councillors, technologists, clinicians and educators associated with the wider field of each theme for our evaluation (Digital inclusion; Health, wellbeing and independent living; Children's literacy). The two library user groups included people from different racial and ethnic minority groups, older adults, and people living in localities experiencing poverty. All participants gave informed written consent prior to joining the workshops.

On the consent form, we asked participants to agree to or reject the recording of their statements (audio and video), and whether they would like to review transcripts of their contributions made by our researcher team. We gave each lay group participant a £25 voucher in thanks for their participation in the workshops.

RECRUITMENT METHOD

- 🌿 Distribution of flyers
- 🌿 Invitation of governing bodies, interest groups and associations
- 🌿 Social media advertisements

SETTING

- 🌿 Two workshops held online
- 🌿 Two workshops held in person

ANALYSIS

- 🌿 Thematic analysis of workshop transcripts

¹Digital inclusion – ETH2223-0137; Health, wellbeing, and independent living, and Children's literacy – ETH2223-0162

Workshop aims

We designed workshops to gather information about the activities provided by library services, their potential impact on service users, and what improvements could be made. Specifically, we aimed to investigate the following:

- 🌿 What are the local needs of communities?
- 🌿 Who uses the libraries and for what purposes?
- 🌿 How could non-users be encouraged to access the libraries?
- 🌿 How do users of libraries relate to other public services and to online information services?
- 🌿 What can libraries do to make communities healthier, and how can they deliver this to the public?

Workshops in libraries: library users, stakeholders, partners and professionals

We informed participants joining the in-person workshops in libraries about the evaluation project and the workshop agenda. Participants were invited to comment on different topics and to ask questions related to each of the themes (Digital inclusion, Health and well-being, and Children's literacy) by responding to inclusive resources and activities placed at different tables/stations in the library venue. Participants provided feedback verbally, in conversation and/or through contributing to word clouds, sharing comments using Post-it notes and using pictures or emojis. We also used scenario methods to collect information, for example, we asked participants how they would use the library to learn about health, eating well, or joining a gym. Each workshop lasted between 90 and 120 minutes and included a discussion of proposed action points at the end.

Workshops online: library service stakeholders

The platform we used for online workshops was Microsoft Teams. We structured online workshops in the following way: when participants joined, they were welcomed and informed about the project; different 'rooms' were available to discuss the topics/questions for each theme of our evaluation. Online sessions were recorded (audio and video) and transcribed. We conducted thematic analysis of the contributions and made notes which informed emphases in Step Two, our case study activities.

STEP TWO: CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

Case study methods can provide a rich picture of an activity, programme or service using different kinds of data collection. They often entail consulting different groups or individuals to gain information about their subjective experiences and perceptions of the focus of the case study. Their responses can give insights to what they value, how their own values influence their perspective, and how their comments relate to their context. Researchers often speak of case study methods as a way to generate 'rich data', as they offer in-depth insights to participants' lived experiences according to their circumstances.

We believe this approach suits this evaluation if we want to understand what library users value about their local services. It is also useful if we want to understand the value and benefit of library services in relation to health, wellbeing, education and digital inclusion. In these fields, the rationale, design and efficacy of programmes and interventions may be determined by different frameworks. Often, programme provision may be shaped by a combination of assumptions and conscious choices about what constitutes effective or ‘good’ provision, in fields where the criteria for judging quality and value are contested in the research literature.

The use of multiple perspectives and different kinds of data collection is characteristic of high-quality case study and lends weight to the validity of the findings. The use of two or more forms of data collection and/or the use of two or more perspectives is known as ‘triangulation’. Through triangulating data and/or perspectives, it is possible to gain a fuller and more robust picture of the case.

We decided to address the three themes for evaluation through case studies representing library services in the localities represented by Libraries Connected East. We looked at services in these areas:

-  Cambridgeshire
-  Essex
-  Hertfordshire
-  Luton
-  Norfolk
-  Suffolk

Our team used a common case study template across themes to record information for each specific evaluation. The templates documented facts about the provision examined in each case, recording factual information (e.g. location, time, participation, etc.), programme aims, details about their links with other themes, and notes about their value for the evaluation. The rationale for our selection of cases within themes varied a little depending on the theme. We explain the rationale for each approach in Section 4, where we present our case studies.

STEP THREE: ECONOMIC VALUATION METHODOLOGY

From the start of our evaluation activity, we recognised that there is no single method to evaluate and measure the value of all outputs of libraries. In economics there are several ways to ascertain value. We believed that the most useful method for considering library services was ‘value in use’, resulting from the flow of services and including knowledge and information arising from their use or expected ‘utility’ as far as it can be known. We also used ‘value in exchange’ when actual market prices could be implied. In this study we adopted a pragmatic approach to ascribe value. In some cases, where data was unavailable, we had to assume that any ‘value’ that arises might be equal to the cost of the delivery of that particular service (e.g. for time spent with a librarian, or for use of building space). This assumes that a service would only

be provided if costs were less than any assumed benefits. This was not always our preferred method, so we sought other empirical evidence of more comprehensive value estimates wherever possible.

This approach depended on well-conducted assessments or statistical studies of specific services, which were not possible in this study due to constraints of time and data availability. We adapted these figures for our study as well as to current prices and have tried to infer from them the cost and value of services per participant where feasible. Finally, we have been strictly conservative in our estimates when assessing downstream benefits since any direct link with library usage may be tenuous and subject to other confounding factors. The case of health benefits is such an instance, where caution must be adopted in making the link between knowledge and a change in behaviour, but it also applies to other areas like computer literacy.

The areas of value ('domains') we identified for our economic valuation are:

- 🌿 Book and other media borrowing
- 🌿 Browsing and information
- 🌿 Digital services
- 🌿 In-library events
- 🌿 Community hubs
- 🌿 Health benefits (physical and mental health)
- 🌿 Loneliness
- 🌿 Computing and digital literacy
- 🌿 Community support and enablement
- 🌿 Sanctuary and shelter
- 🌿 Specialised assistance and advice

We could not estimate the extent of the synergy between benefits such as childhood literacy, digital inclusion and health although it is obvious there will be some. We have used the best estimates from the literature for the case studies.

A tool for the Evaluation of Library Services: EVOLS

Because of these uncertainties and assumptions, and because the model has many applications, we designed a valuation tool to be used interactively. The Evaluation of Library Services tool (EVOLS) is capable of using a variety of estimates for future assessment of other services and libraries, where users can enter their own estimates both of utilisation and cost. The unit cost values used in EVOLS can also be changed to keep abreast of future prices or variations e.g. according to geographical variation. EVOLS can also be used to gauge value at scale should this need arise.

The EVOLS model is spreadsheet-based and already contains ten pre-populated case studies. These can be adapted, or they can be used as they are. However, users of EVOLS may want to create their own scenarios or cases for future evaluation. To facilitate this, we have designed it interactively so a user can select from a 'menu' of

relevant value domains (see above) as appropriate, along with their associated monetary values, already populated in the EVOLS interface. EVOLS users can customise these values simply by changing the appropriate value cells. Used in this way, the model also depends on user estimates of the scale of use for a particular service, in terms of number of participants, events, visits made, etc. Once all relevant inputs are made, the model can be run by the push of a button. Results will be automatically generated. Users of EVOLS should note that the calculations include a probability function, so that these results account for any likely variance in each input parameter. This means that the results, for example, in terms of total benefit or return on investment, will vary slightly every time the model is run. A save function is included so that when different versions of the model are run, or versions are run on different dates with different figures, they can be saved. The model also has an embedded user guide for easy reference and use. No prior knowledge is assumed. Libraries Connected will act as a gatekeeper for access to this model so that a body of evidence can be built over time.

Demonstrating economic valuation in the themed case studies

The following sections of this report include analysis of each theme through case study examples. Each case study provides descriptions of library provision and programmes. These qualitative accounts of their extra-monetary value link findings to available research literature about the relevant theme. We also present data and comment about the monetary value of these examples. These data are generated using the EVOLS valuation tool described in section 2.4. We present the case studies alongside valuation data to demonstrate how the EVOLS tool can be applied to different library services. This also ensures that discussion of the value of library services balances attention to monetary and extra-monetary forms of value. The forms of data available for using with the tool sometimes varied between cases, so the examples illustrate the flexibility of the tool around whatever information is available for the library professionals who use it in practice.

LIMITATIONS OF OUR LIBRARY EVALUATION

We used several methods (flyers, posters, social media, invitations) to recruit participants for the workshops. Overall, the response was good, but participants were generally female, older adults, and few were from ethnic minorities. Each of these could introduce some bias into the findings.

Case studies were chosen for reasons decided by the researchers of each theme. Digital inclusion researchers wished to cover specific locations. Children's literacy case studies were selected to showcase the thematic literacy and reading programmes across childhood (0-18 years). Likewise, health, wellbeing, and independent case studies were chosen to highlight the activities provided by the library service and how these benefit people. Selection processes mean that many other activities and libraries are not included, thus determining the coverage of the evaluation and its limits.

The economic evaluation of libraries was based on many assumptions, mostly due to the lack of available data and resources to conduct a comprehensive costing of activities and benefits.

CONTEXT: EAST OF ENGLAND

Regional overview

The East of England is one of the nine official regions of England. It includes the counties of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, and Suffolk, and the unitary authorities of Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire, Luton, Peterborough, Southend and Thurrock. According to the 2021 Census (Office for National Statistics, ONS, 2022), the East of England was the region with highest population growth over the past decade, an increase of 8.7%, with the highest growth recorded in Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire. The region's current population of around 6.3 million means that it is the fourth most populous region in the UK. Bedford, Luton, Basildon, Peterborough, Southend-on-Sea, Norwich, Ipswich, Colchester, Chelmsford, and Cambridge are the region's most populous settlements (Brinkhoff, 2021). Overall, the East of England is a diverse and dynamic region with a varied economy and a rich cultural heritage.

Geography

The East of England is region of variety. Many of its areas are predominantly rural, characterised by expanses of countryside, low-lying hills and forests. Much of its farmland supports intensive farming. There are many small market towns, villages and hamlets. Other areas have seen some of the UK's most extensive housing development since 2011, particularly around Cambridge and Peterborough. The region is home to tech innovation, for example, in the Silicon Fen area near Cambridge, and the cluster of telecommunications companies at Adastral Park near Ipswich. The East of England also has several cities, including Cambridge, Peterborough, Norwich, Chelmsford and Southend, known for their architecture, retail, entertainment and rich cultural heritage. They attract visitors and students from all over the world, due in part to their large and well-regarded universities. The East of England coastline comprises seaside towns, harbours, ports, nature reserves and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Popular coastal destinations include Clacton-on-Sea, Great Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Southend-On-Sea and Southwold. Variety in the region's landscape is paralleled by variety in its demographics. It includes some of the most deprived areas in England, and several areas receiving government funding for 'levelling up' (e.g. Clacton, Colchester, Great Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Luton, King's Lynn, Peterborough and Southend), though as a whole the region ranks third in the UK for gross disposable household income (GDHI) per capita (2018 data, ONS).

Age

In the East of England, 19.6% of the population are aged 65 and over, compared to the national average of 18.4%. The region has a higher proportion of people aged 85 and over compared to other regions in the UK. The region has a low proportion of young people aged 16-24 (ONS, 2022). The East of England has a median age of 41.7 years, which is slightly higher than the national median of 40.3 years (2019 data, ONS).

North Norfolk is the local authority with the highest median age of any in England and Wales at 54 years (ONS, 2022). Among adults, public libraries in England are most frequently used by people aged 25 to 44 (36.7%) and 65 to 74 years (35.7%). From 2011 to 2019, the proportion of individuals aged between 16 and 24 years who reported visiting a public library in England decreased from 34.5% to 20.8% (Statistica, 2023). Among children, 64% of those aged 5 to 10 and 58% of those aged 11 to 15 visited libraries in the year 2019-2020.

Ethnicity

The East of England has a predominantly White British population, accounting for just over 85% of the region's total population (ONS, 2022). The next largest ethnic group is Asian/Asian British (6.4 %), followed by Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (2.2 %) and Mixed/multiple ethnic groups (2.1%). The region has a sizeable Eastern European population, particularly in Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire. The Government review of the use of libraries in the UK by ethnicity (8,161 total respondents – Gov.UK, 2019) found that Asian people (42.5 %) and Black/African/Caribbean/Black British people (33.8 %) were more likely to have used a library than White people (31.8 %).

Religion

In the East of England, 46.6% of the population identify as Christian, 3.7% as Muslim, 1.4% as Hindu, and 0.7% as Jewish (Norfolk Insight, 2023).

Economy, education and employment

The East of England has a diverse economy, with strengths in agriculture, manufacturing, technology, and a growing cultural and creative sector. The region is home to major companies, including AstraZeneca, Lotus and JCB. Green energy, in particular wind power, is expanding. The region has a highly educated population, with a high proportion holding degrees or equivalent qualifications. It also has several well-regarded universities, including the University of Cambridge, the University of East Anglia, the University of Essex, the University of Hertfordshire and the University of Suffolk. The average salary in the East of England is £38.3K (Plumpot, 2023). The unemployment rate is 3.3%, compared to the UK rate of 3.8% (2022 data). Across the UK, adults who were not working had higher rates of library attendance than those who were working (33% compared to 30%) (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport - DCMS, 2020).

Libraries

Latest datasets indicate that there are 2,581 public libraries in England (Arts Council England, 2023). Across the East of England there are 11 library services, with around 330 library branches (Libraries Connected data, 2023). Across 2019/20 there were 7.6 million active borrowers in the UK and 34% of all UK-based adults had used a library within 12 months (DCMS, 2020).












VALUING PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN THE EAST OF ENGLAND: OUR EVALUATION

STEP ONE: HORIZON SCANNING WORKSHOPS

A total of 54 participants joined the four workshops we held. These comprised 26 library members, 10 public members and 18 partner stakeholders. Of the total 54 participants, there were 34 women and 20 men including four ethnic minority participants. At the workshops, we invited discussion about library services addressing health and wellbeing, digital inclusion, and children's literacy. The figure *Library benefits by theme* outlines the main benefits of services relating to each of the themes as reported by the participating stakeholders. *Figure: Library benefits by theme*

Theme 1 Digital inclusion

-  The Good Things Foundation
-  Access to the National Data Bank
-  Learn My Way
-  Support from library staff on open access equipment
-  Coding classes for children
-  CV printing
-  Scanning, copying, and printing documents
-  Access to email
-  Engagement with businesses during the pandemic in distributing donated laptops refreshed with software to vulnerable households

Theme 2 – Health, wellbeing and independent living

- 🌿 Replacement of hearing aid batteries
- 🌿 Free DBS checks for those hosting Ukrainian refugees
- 🌿 Drop-in sessions for Ukrainian refugees
- 🌿 Safe places for at-risk groups including refugees and asylum seekers, carers, and people with physical or learning disabilities
- 🌿 Various interest groups e.g. knitting, walking, memory
- 🌿 Phone calls to people at risk of social isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic
- 🌿 Replacement of ferrules on walking sticks
- 🌿 Provision of batteries to those with hearing aids
- 🌿 Slipper Swap programme
- 🌿 Chronic health condition support
- 🌿 Digital health hubs
- 🌿 Read My Mind
- 🌿 Home library service during Covid-19 pandemic
- 🌿 Free weekly Pilates and yoga sessions refreshed with software to vulnerable households

Theme 3 – Children’s literacy

- 🌿 Early reading services
- 🌿 Foster communication
- 🌿 Sphere of Reading: a Covid-19 Recovery Project
- 🌿 Dedicated study and tutoring space outside of schools
- 🌿 Book clubs
- 🌿 Adult Community Learning – English classes for non-native speakers
- 🌿 Infant programmes – sensory play, bounce and rhyme sessions
- 🌿 Holiday Activity Fund
- 🌿 Delivery of library cards through schools
- 🌿 Holiday reading challenges for school children
- 🌿 Child socialisation and communication through reading, crafts, and Lego groups
- 🌿 Support for parents through community groups

The libraries were regarded by the participants as holding a unique role in the community because of their holistic approach to wellbeing. The stakeholders acknowledged that librarians are not meant to give expert health advice, but they recognised that the staff provide much-needed guidance by signposting individuals towards relevant resources. Libraries also co-ordinate with health experts and community organisations in supporting initiatives geared towards prevention and early-stage intervention.

Participants of the workshop agreed on the importance of supporting the libraries as a safe, warm space for all people to gather. This applies not only to those seeking adult social care, but also for families with children. Participants described libraries as welcoming spaces offering support free from judgement.

Stakeholders identified three main areas in which libraries promote digital inclusion: digital skills, connectivity and devices. Initiatives maintained and supported by library services promote the teaching of basic digital skills, signpost individuals towards additional support and provide free mobile data and devices to those who could not otherwise access these resources.

On the theme of digital inclusion, participants identified and discussed the important point that people may not realise they are digitally excluded until they reach a crisis point. The ability to access digital support through library services can be critical in these situations. Supporting libraries is therefore crucial for helping those who cannot otherwise access support. Libraries are a vital resource in empowering individuals to use digital resources on their own.

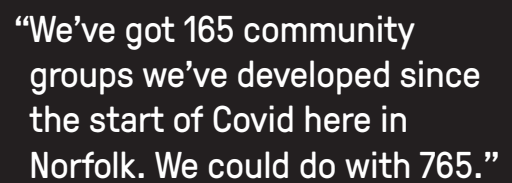
Libraries are highly regarded for their support of reading programmes, including children's literacy. One library professional at the Cambridgeshire meeting shared her experience of providing reading services for younger children. She emphasised the importance of maintaining services which promote early reading and help build communication skills. Libraries are not only beneficial for children's communication, but also for offering support to parents. Regarding community groups for young parents, a librarian in Norfolk reported: 'We've got 165 we've developed since the start of Covid here in Norfolk. We could do with 765.'

Libraries are working within the community to address learning gaps resulting from the 2020 pandemic. Sphere of Reading, a £1,000,000 Covid recovery project, is an example of how libraries have worked in co-ordination with public organisations to support childhood education. This programme is funded by Essex County Council and run by the Essex Education Task Force, a literacy educator from the library, and an educational psychologist. Together they lead initiatives to foster early reading.

The intrinsic value of the libraries was reported across the health and wellbeing, digital inclusion, and children's literacy themes. Libraries have evolved to meet the needs of their communities and must continue to assess rising challenges and areas for improvement. The needs of each community differ based on factors such as demographics, geographic location and available resources. This affects which services are needed most by a region and therefore impacts the benefit that certain initiatives will yield. Additionally, overlapping trends can produce greater benefits in the community overall. An improvement in reading skills, for example, can help a person in their ability to find online resources and obtain health information.

The findings of our horizon scanning workshops highlight the value that speaking directly with the public has for understanding the needs of individual communities. This research is not without limitations: library and expert stakeholders represented most of the workshop participants and only four participants overall represented ethnic minorities. Future research should continue to engage with local communities

while aiming to include a greater number of public stakeholders and a more diverse participant group in age, race and gender. Still, the workshops provided informed insight on how libraries are perceived regionally and how users feel services could be improved. Libraries should continue to maintain open communication with lay and expert stakeholders to gauge the areas in which services are most needed.



“We’ve got 165 community groups we’ve developed since the start of Covid here in Norfolk. We could do with 765.”

STEP TWO: THEMATIC CASE STUDY - DIGITAL INCLUSION

DIGITAL INCLUSION COMPOSITE CASE STUDIES – METHODOLOGY

Ethnographic methods have had a part in computing research, focusing on understanding systems design, for several decades (Dourish and Button 1998; Garfinkel 2002). More recently the use of ethnographic studies has been broadened to cover the context and use of digital systems and devices. Our approach is similar to O'Hara's (2021) study of Detroit libraries.

The main element of our research summarised here is observation. We visited libraries² to observe activity and interactions, and to interview staff about their work. We selected locations for library observations to reflect the general composition of eastern England: small cities, market towns, rural settlements, and commuter towns linked to London. Good geographical spread, and differing levels of prosperity, were also considered when making the selection. We made observations of library users' activity and behaviour during daytime visits of 60-90 minutes' duration to a sample of libraries in the region. These were chosen to provide coverage of the range of locations across the region.

We conducted interviews with library professionals. Our interviews were open-ended, designed to allow staff to describe what they saw as important. Prompts were minimised, and the researchers' questions were focused on clarifying and understanding the points made. This ensured that the different staff views of what was important to them were minimally directed or channelled by the interviewers, to allow differences of emphases and approach in different places and authorities to be seen.

Case studies were developed based on findings from the observations conducted in the libraries, and the interviews with library staff and volunteers. These case studies on digital inclusion are composites or archetypes, illustrating the main features of the libraries in the region. The locations of the case studies are fictional, but each element of the case studies is based on the observations and interviews we carried out. All quotations included in the case studies came directly from library professionals working in the branches we visited. The results from this work are described in the thematic discussion below, used in the digital inclusion elements of the model, and synthesised in the three case studies.

² Colchester, Great Yarmouth, Hatfield, Letchworth, Luton Leagrave, North Walsham, Norwich Mile Cross, Norwich Millennium, St Ives, Stevenage, Wisbech.

DIGITAL INCLUSION – MAIN FINDINGS

The libraries we saw all have user populations that are reasonably representative of their local area (given the overall demographic profile of daytime library users); we saw nothing to suggest that visible ethnic minorities are less likely to be library users, which is consistent with a recent Government Review (Gov.UK, 2019). This does not detract from the typical unbalanced demographic profile of library users: the lack of teens and younger working age adults using libraries was observed, and frequently mentioned by respondents. There are exceptions to this, for example, libraries near to colleges or universities, where students make use of the study spaces from late morning onwards.

Responsiveness

The facilities and services offered by each branch library can be characterised as a variable but often substantial local adaptation of an authority-wide core provision. Consequently, libraries with similar catchment areas have very different services as they are responsive to other local provision. This responsiveness is a significant strength in delivering efficient and effective services. The following examples illustrate these characteristics:

- ✿ Great Yarmouth and Wisbech libraries both have substantial areas of deprivation in their catchment areas. Much library work in Great Yarmouth is driven by the need to help library users find, use and engage with information and digital services. It also offers substantial direct provision to alleviate need (e.g. Grab and Go bags containing toiletries, sanitary products, warm clothing, food).
- ✿ Wisbech Library does not seek to replicate activities to address deprivation provided by the well-established Rosmini Centre, the local community centre which provides employment support, digital support, translation services, health advice and access to sport. In library provision, there is a strong focus on digital inclusion with ‘digital buddy’ sessions, ‘Tea and Tablets’, a laptop borrowing service, help with wi-fi access and printing, and well-used facilities for people working from home (who may not have access to good quality wi-fi or printing facilities).
- ✿ North Walsham has a high proportion of home-schooled children, so the library runs a weekly Lego Club in school hours (in addition to the weekend Lego Club) to bring these children together; it also runs groups for cared-for children and a monthly autism café.

Co-ordination with other services

The increasing emphasis on libraries as community hubs makes their role as bases for a range of other activities and services more important. Examples of this include library space being used for:

- 🌿 Adult education (particularly ESOL)
- 🌿 Access to Work
- 🌿 Registry Office services
- 🌿 Citizens Advice
- 🌿 Probation services
- 🌿 Banking consultations
- 🌿 Post Offices

In several cases, we saw or were told of scope for further co-ordination between libraries and other services (e.g. Adult Education), including co-location. A member of library staff noted that their library has the space and equipment for more co-ordination, though it is not used in this way, expressed in comments such as “we’ve got the space but no service.”

Isolation

Public library services have several important strands of work that reduce social isolation and loneliness and it is an important part of the work of every library we visited.

- 🌿 From our work, we estimate that across all libraries, an average of two people per hour visit any single library branch to alleviate social isolation and loneliness.
- 🌿 Many of the group activities offered by libraries (such as Knit and Natter, Tea and Tablets, Baby Rhymetime) are designed to reduce isolation, and the volunteer-led digital services which we looked at had an equally important role in reducing isolation.
- 🌿 Outreach services to housebound people and for care homes have a clear role in reducing isolation

From our observations, coupled with information from staff interviews, we were able to identify individual behaviour patterns indicating that the library user was primarily or largely visiting to alleviate isolation. These patterns included lengthy visits browsing the book stacks but not borrowing or reading, long periods reading a newspaper with little page turning or similar activity, short visits to ask a question and leaving without acting on the answer, and purely social visits – only engaging with staff on matters unrelated to library resources. Fully quantifying the impact of this element of library work is outside the scope of this study, but social isolation is known to have an adverse effect on a wide range of health conditions (e.g. Chowdhury, 2018).

“People are being thrown off the back of digital.”

Digital-only services

The increasing number of digital-only services, particularly for e-government, excludes people who cannot access them as a result of disability or health issues, access to digital infrastructure, low literacy, or unfamiliarity with online systems. There is also a range of systems-related issues, the most important of which are:

- 👤 Task complexity and process design of digital-only processes.
- 👤 Poor user interfaces and lack of accessibility.
- 👤 Rapidly changing technology.

Libraries offer a wide range of help and support for printing (e.g. CVs, returns labels, tickets), communication (e.g. email, social media) and official services (e.g. bus passes, blue badges, passports, housing, schools). For many people, the help offered also addresses wider health issues (particularly isolation) and enables them to participate more fully in society.

The types of issue encountered can be shown through the examples of free bus passes and online banking, though there are other significant issues too.

Bus passes

- 👤 The service is online-only. It requires a National Insurance (NI) number, which is problematic for refugees.
- 👤 The process is difficult to complete by people assessed as medically unfit to drive.
- 👤 The concept and process of renewal can be confusing, particularly for people with cognitive or psychological frailty/

Online banking

- 👤 Some people don't trust it as they worry about viruses, scams and phishing – these fears may often be reinforced by cybersecurity awareness training which is not sensitive to the background and mental models which people hold (particularly older people).
- 👤 Multifactor authentication is a major problem for many people, particularly those who only use a phone.

Other problems with online-only services include

- 🌿 Repeat prescription requests
- 🌿 Viewing GP letters (links sent to featurephone users)
- 🌿 Blue badge applications (as the application process is lengthy and confusing)
- 🌿 Council housing applications or swaps
- 🌿 School choice and enrolment

These examples show that libraries are acting as ‘frontline mediators’ (O’Hara, 2021) for many services and for many others that have non-digital channels that users find too difficult, expensive or time-consuming.

The net effect is that many older, disadvantaged and disabled people are excluded from many digital services, which is potentially discriminatory. Library facilities and support are critical in alleviating the impact of these problems, but the support offered varies widely because of perceived privacy and data protection concerns, staff skills and availability. Some libraries will not help with any problem that may involve finance, health or any other data that may be thought of as personal, although most take a pragmatic or risk-balancing approach.

Inclusivity and non-judgemental approaches

The frontline staff we spoke to on all our visits emphasised a non-judgemental approach and inclusiveness as key principles for their work. These emphases were evident in the interactions we observed, the choice and presentation of materials in the library and, in many cases, the organisation of space (e.g. setting up the reception desk to allow collaborative work on a screen to help users find resources).

An illustration of this is with adult literacy, where most or all the Adult Education provision is progress-based, which can be a deterrent for many more vulnerable and disadvantaged library users. In contrast, the help offered by libraries does not emphasise progression, allowing people to use the service in ways which work for them (and addressing their needs beyond the presenting issue).

Library professionals

We found that not all frontline library staff are comfortable with digital technologies. Some younger staff are alarmed at the complexity of Facebook, and dislike the assumptions of some visitors and colleagues that because they are young they will be good at looking after the library’s social media presence. For staff of all ages, familiarity with phone interaction modalities does not prepare people for PC use.

Summary

A review of recent research in libraries, with a focus on digital inclusion, finds common issues and trends across library services in Europe and North America. The methodologies used in recent research are based on observations of interactions within library settings, large scale surveys, and interviews with librarians.

There has been a shift in focus from the provision of physical books towards digital resources and services, with a consequent change in the competencies needed to support users of these services. Libraries now have a key role in facilitating access for disadvantaged people to essential digital services, particularly e-government services. The provision of free access to equipment and wi-fi is consistently reported as an important benefit of public libraries. There is a large cultural shift from libraries as book repositories to becoming information-focused community hubs providing necessary social interaction, particularly for vulnerable or disadvantaged groups. Critical elements of this are libraries' status as trustworthy institutions, in keeping with findings from the Ipsos Veracity Index (Ipsos, 2021) showing that librarians are considered the second most trustworthy profession, and the inclusive and non-judgemental staff ethos. The main barriers are a lack of resources or funding to address the needs of library users adequately, along with an increased need for staff training.

DIGITAL INCLUSION COMPOSITE CASE STUDY 1: DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES 'DEANGATE LIBRARY, WESTWICH'

Background

Most of the local area is in the bottom quintile for deprivation measures, and many households do not have broadband access. The library is a two-storey purpose-built building, opened in 1972. It is situated at the edge of the town centre and, although it is signposted, it is not on a major pedestrian route. The staff believe this affects footfall.

The public facilities are mostly on the ground floor, with the local history section, two hireable rooms and staff facilities on the first floor. The ground floor has book stacks, some casual seating, book borrowing/return stations, a PC and printing area with eight workstations, study desks and two informal meeting areas. The rooms are used extensively for ESOL and return to work classes, as the area has a high proportion of non-native English speakers and, most recently, Ukrainian refugees. The front desk is at the entrance to the library, with an open layout so that library users and staff can share a screen.

The library plays an important role in the local community, as there are now few other community resources in the area. Before the pandemic, a local charity was offering regular lunch clubs and drop-in sessions, but they ceased when the lease on their building was due for renewal. A combination of local needs and responses to budget cuts has led the library service to adopt a devolved management structure, with a common core offering and services adapted to best meet local needs. Staffing has been reduced due to budget constraints³ and there has been some reduction in staffed opening hours.

³ They also considered alternative strategies focusing on reduced opening hours or increasing the charges made for all non-statutory services.

The library offering

The book stock for adults has been reduced, with a compensating investment in online subscriptions. This trend towards digital resources was greatly accelerated by the pandemic, when hard-copy magazine and newspaper subscriptions were cancelled. There is a good collection of audiobooks, large print, and digital media. The digital resources are well publicised in the library, but the staff feel that few people are aware how much is on offer and commented, “we’d like to advertise this on the side of a bus.” They use Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to publicise library activities and events.

The library is a ‘warm hub’, offering free tea and coffee, and has ‘Grab and Go’ with warm clothing, food, toiletries and sanitary products for anybody who wants them. No questions are asked, and the staff say the toiletries and sanitary products are very well appreciated.

The staff see the library and its functions changing rapidly – it’s like a community hub”; “... not a library anymore, it’s an information service” – but they are committed to helping people and are proud of their universal, non-judgemental approach. They spend an increasing amount of time helping with digital issues, mentioning printing (CVs, return labels, tickets, boarding passes etc. mostly from phones) and help with official services, particularly those which are online only (including Universal Credit, blue badges, bus passes, appointments, and a wide range of official services). Many people are competent smartphone users but struggle with PCs and tablets. Staff mention poor accessibility, poor user interfaces and online-only services as having the biggest adverse impacts on people.

The children’s area has a good book collection and open space for Rhymetime for pre-school children, Lego Club, Homework Club and a jigsaw exchange. Staff noted that, apart from the primary activity, these groups play an important role in reducing isolation and encouraging social interaction.

A large proportion of the daytime visitors are older people who visit regularly and for whom the library is one of their main forms of social interaction. Apart from the informal interactions, there is a regular Tea and Chat group. Volunteers run regular services for care home residents and housebound people, borrowing and returning books. There is some outreach work from the library to care homes. *Key services at Deangate library (main areas of impact only).*

Literacy	Health	Digital
ESOL CV building Return to Work Homework Club Foreign language publications	Rhymetime Lego Club Grab and Go bags Warm space Tea and chat	CV printing Bus pass application Blue badges Universal Credit Passport/visa renewal Travel documents Free access (wi-fi, PC)

DIGITAL INCLUSION COMPOSITE CASE STUDY 2: MARKET TOWNS 'DUNTON LIBRARY'

Background

The town is a centre for the local rural area, with good local amenities and a weekly market on Thursdays. The population is economically mixed, and the area has a high proportion of older residents.

The library is a single-storey 1970s building situated next to the town's bus interchange. It is a single space, with a large children's area with tables for study and club activities, soft seating for pre-school children, and book borrowing/return stations. There is a PC area with four workstations and a printer. The front desk is screened, but staff can move to a more open position to communicate with people who have impaired hearing. To cope with budget reductions, the library opening hours have been reduced, so there are fewer staff employed and many have had their hours reduced, or they are working over several libraries.

The library offering

There is a good selection of books including an extensive collection of large print and audiobooks. There is a strong focus on wellbeing and mental health, with a well-stocked section for adults and a display of resources designed for older children and young adults. They publicise their activities through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok, although some younger staff dislike the assumption that they should be responsible for these because they're 'digital natives'.

Since the pandemic, there has been a notable reduction in visitors, particularly on market days. Staff attribute this to old routines being broken, increased borrowing limits, and a big increase in the use of online library resources. The library still has a small selection of print newspapers, but all the magazines are online.

The printing facility is extensively used by local people working from home, including County Council employees, who all have free access by using their badge, as well as the normal range of return labels, car insurance, prescriptions and other tasks. It is clearly an important local resource, as there is not a copy shop in the town.

Staff are spending increasing amounts of time helping people (particularly older library users) with digital issues, although they also say that, for many more isolated people, 'problem solving' is a gateway for social interaction. There is a laptop loan service, but staff report widespread confusion among a wide range of users over different input modalities (touchscreen, keyboard, mouse, trackpad) due to misconceived mental models about the available technology (confusing the phone and laptop; models of internet connectivity). There is a volunteer 'digital buddy' who offers 1:1 sessions for a few hours each week. He notes that he has at least as much impact on isolation as on digital literacy.

The library has well-established activities for pre-school children on most days. They used to offer a baby weighing service but stopped as they could not pay for the routine calibration of the scales. There is a primary age homework club, run by

a recently retired teacher, as well as a range of clubs and activities (such as Lego, Reading Challenge, Chess), and schools outreach. A six-month trial of a weekly Autism Café is due to start soon but staff also recognise value in extending the current provision – “We need to run more things for kids.”

Services for older people are extensive, including books and other items for local care homes, reminiscence boxes, a Library at Home (RVS) service for housebound people, and ‘Tea and Tablets’. Many of the regular users are elderly people who visit for the interaction with staff, even if they’re not borrowing or returning books.

Key services at Dunton Library (main areas of impact only)

Literacy	Health	Digital
Homework Club	Rhymetime Lego Club Grab and Go bags Warm space Tea and chat	Bus pass application Blue badges Travel documents Return labels Email

**DIGITAL INCLUSION COMPOSITE CASE STUDY 3: COMMUTER BELT
‘LINTON ABBOTS LIBRARY’**

Background

The library is a purpose-built 1930s building, retaining many of its original decorative features. It is isolated from the main pedestrian routes by a busy road, although there is an adjacent pelican crossing.

The public space is all on the ground floor, with the children’s area in one corner, linked spaces for reference books, a PC area and a hireable space that previously had PCs. The IT area has six PCs (two with visual impairment keyboards) and five chairs; the PC printing facility has not worked since the pandemic. This space is used for financial advice and banking sessions, following the closure of bank branches in the town. The enquiries desk is fully screened, which makes some interactions with older and disabled users more difficult.

Charging for services and space hire has been the library’s most direct response to recent budget reductions.

The library offering

The library has a good book collection with many recent acquisitions, including some foreign language books (Tamil and Polish); there is also a wide selection of hard copy magazines and four daily newspapers. Since the pandemic, there has been an increase in the remote use of digital services and borrowers are taking out more books for longer periods.

The staff see a clear distinction between ‘library work’ and ‘digital work’ and are uncomfortable with the speed at which their work is changing. They see themselves as pioneers or leaders in digital. They regret the loss of interaction around digital training, which is now mostly online, and see themselves as having a much greater social- and community-oriented role than previously.

The library offers hour-long 1:1 digital skills taster sessions led by a volunteer, mostly employment-focused, and charged for. The biggest digital activity for staff is helping library users print from their phones, using the library app. They have a strict code about not helping with any activity which may involve users’ personal or financial information (e.g. booking tickets), and people are advised to bring somebody with them; staff mentioned visually impaired users as the largest group facing these difficulties.

The library has a range of groups for children and older people, many of which are charged for; this depends on the event and the demographics – staff see a value in charging as “if it’s free, people won’t bother to attend.” Events are publicised online via the library’s Facebook page, where staff estimate there are typically 30 views per post.

The staff are committed to outreach activity and are aware that their non-judgemental approach sets them apart from other public services. Outreach activities include a dementia group based in one of the local churches, work with the YMCA to help homeless people, local SEN schools for ‘Time to Read’, and the district council. The library is part of a local initiative to give free lunch vouchers to disadvantaged people (on request, no questions asked).

A recent development is the creation of a ‘maker space’ with facilities for 3D printing, virtual reality (VR), digital embroidery, digital cutter and business development. This is mostly used by students from the local college and people working from home, who need quiet space. The more advanced technologies are underused, as the support and informal ecosystem around the hub are insufficient to achieve the mass critical for self-sustaining success.

Key services at Linton Abbots library (main areas of impact only)

Literacy	Health	Digital
Time to Read in SEN schools Saturday stories Weekly ESOL group	Dementia group Work with homeless (YMCA)	Bus pass application Blue badges Returns labels Police-led sessions on cybersecurity awareness






STEP TWO: THEMATIC CASE STUDY - HEALTH, WELLBEING AND INDEPENDENT LIVING

HEALTH, WELLBEING, AND INDEPENDENT LIVING CASE STUDY – METHODOLOGY




Case studies for the health, wellbeing, and independent living theme of this evaluation were selected by UEA researchers to highlight the benefits of library initiatives in the Eastern region. We selected one case study for health and one for wellbeing, though divided independent living in two to provide better coverage of the value libraries bring to people.

Overall, these case studies demonstrate a qualitative approach via stakeholder conversations, observations, and the initial overview workshops to understand the value of the services provided by the libraries in the Eastern region. Using qualitative case studies provides real life examples, supported by sound research, to build the quantitative economic evaluation.


RECRUITMENT METHOD

-  Desk based research
-  Workshops
-  Two site visits
-  Chats with library staff (face to face and online)
-  Chats with service users (face to face)

CONTRIBUTORS

-  Fifteen library staff
-  Eight service users
-  Fifty-four workshop attendees

ANALYSIS

-  Thematic analysis of chats

These case studies offer examples chosen from the wide range of programmes run by libraries in the Eastern region. Thetford (Norfolk) was selected for the case study on health because the town experiences a high incidence of unhealthy behaviours (diet, smoking, alcohol consumption, low physical activity), which consequently result in more episodes of avoidable chronic health conditions, such as coronary heart disease, and some cancers. Health data are presented for the east and west of Thetford which show the effect of deprivation on health.

Clacton, Essex, was chosen for the wellbeing case study because of the high incidence of mental health problems, which may be due to deprivation in the seaside town. The other two case studies relate to independent living, representing schemes devised at county level for countywide access. They describe the Slipper Swap initiative, and mobile library services. Hertfordshire developed a Slipper Swap scheme to reduce the risk of falls in older and vulnerable people, while the mobile library services in Cambridgeshire support people living alone and living in rural communities. The mobile service is a miniaturised version of a static library and therefore overlaps with the other three case studies in this theme, and with the Children's literacy theme.

MAIN FINDINGS – HEALTH, WELLBEING AND INDEPENDENT LIVING

The library service provides numerous activities to help improve health, wellbeing and independent living for adults living in the Eastern region of the UK. The case studies focus on activities that attract older adults, however, there may be potential for greater diversity. Many of the activities provided by the library service could be included for social prescribing to improve health, wellbeing and independent living. The three themes addressed in this evaluation – Digital inclusion; Health, wellbeing and independent living; Children's literacy – are interconnected, as they all contribute to the wellbeing of service users across the life course.

Much of the value of the library service is intangible and hard to put a monetary value on. The economic valuation based on the Knit and Natter case study shown below may look modest because it focuses on provision at a single branch library, but if costed at county level the sums would be considerable. In addition, there are challenges to the service, such as constraints of time and funds; much more could be done with additional resources. Each case study offers insight into future directions for the library service, however, collectively, there should be exploration of engaging with minority groups, men, young adults, and others who do not use the service. Development of best practice guidelines to engage these communities, to promote and welcome cultural exchanges, could be one point for action.

Thetford Library, Norfolk: Books and Boots activity

Thetford is a rural market town with around 26,000 inhabitants. It is considered one of the most deprived areas in Norfolk (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019). Unhealthy lifestyle choices (diet, smoking, alcohol consumption, low physical activity) contribute to major health conditions, preventable cancers, musculoskeletal conditions, and mental health that are above the national average (Norfolk County Council, 2020). This reflects the links between deprivation and poor health identified in recent research, as described by Michael Marmot (Marmot et al, 2020).

At Thetford library, people can join a monthly Books and Boots group. Books and Boots was established as part of the wider Healthy Libraries programme, in partnership with Public Health Norfolk, with the aim of promoting healthier living in the county. It links walking outdoors with reading.

The programme sought to overcome challenges experienced by the local community, such as the cost of purchasing books. When the group began six years ago, it had 12 members, and the library manager led the walk, pointing out wildlife and historical points of interest, which members enjoyed. Participation numbers have halved since the Covid-19 pandemic, but those attending liked the informal nature of the group and were keen for it to continue and grow. Members liked being introduced to books that were ‘out of their comfort zone’, and they enjoyed walking about two miles along the river in a beautiful rural area adjacent to the library. One of the group’s members remarked, “[I] don’t know what we’d do without libraries.”

Books and Boots groups impact health in multiple ways. There are the health benefits of walking that reduce the risk of many chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancers and obesity (NHS, 2019). In addition, walking impacts mental health both directly (Kelly et al, 2018) and indirectly through socialisation (Hanson and Jones, 2015). Furthermore, walking in green spaces is also known to have a positive benefit on health (Barton, Hine and Pretty, 2009). Sedentary behaviour results in excess healthcare costs: cardiovascular disease (£424m), type 2 diabetes (£281m), colon cancer (£30m), lung cancer (£19m) and endometrial cancer (£7m) (Heron et al, 2019). Conversely, interventions to increase physical activity in adults are cost effective (Munro, 1997). For example, twice-weekly exercise classes for 10,000 participants would prevent 230 patient events with an attached annual healthcare cost of £601,000 (1997 prices) (Munro, 1997). Research in Norfolk shows that physical activity is associated with lower hospital admissions and the less time spent in hospital (Luben, 2020).

“I don’t know what we’d do without libraries.”

“I feel that they [libraries] are a community hub, if we’re trying to move towards prevention – early intervention – supporting our communities at an early stage.”

The value of libraries for health

Members of the Thetford Books and Boots group take the walk independently of the library manager. The library continues to support the group by welcoming group members to the library, choosing books for the group, and by ensuring refreshments are available after the walk.

Walking is an activity that most people can do at very little cost. Norfolk has 12 walking events each year and other counties, such as Hertfordshire, have over 20 events (Storywalk), attended by more than 190 people. In addition to walking, there are many other physical activity events held in libraries across the Eastern region. For example, there are running groups in Norwich held in partnership with MIND, a mental health charity. Norfolk also offers yoga with instruction in English and Polish, while other counties provide free seated and outreach yoga and Pilates. Such activities have potential value to reduce the burden on the National Health Service. Libraries also function as safe non-medical places for people to seek holistic health information and are ideal for signposting to other services as required, as described by a healthcare worker: “I feel that they [libraries] are a community hub, if we’re trying to move towards prevention – early intervention – supporting our communities at an early stage.”

Libraries offer health-related support through books, digital access to health information, and signposting. Thetford library also has strong links with other organisations, including Norfolk Public Health and the Charles Burrell Centre, which support people in surviving the economic crisis and in improving their health. These facilities can empower people to improve their health literacy, change their behaviours, and effectively manage long-term health conditions.

Future directions

In partnership with Active Norfolk, Norfolk Ramblers, and other groups, libraries could increase Books and Boots groups in Norfolk and the Eastern region to offer opportunities for more people to stay active. The toolkits already used by library services could be further developed into best practice guides to steer the setting up of such groups and to help library professionals. There is potential for increasing access for young adults, families, and people with disabilities with suitable walking routes and support. Books and Boots, as well as similar activities in the Eastern region, could be used by General Practitioners and social prescribers for improving the health and wellbeing of those seeking treatment.

HEALTH, WELLBEING AND INDEPENDENT LIVING CASE STUDY 2: WELLBEING

Clacton Library, Essex: Knit and Natter activity

Clacton-on-Sea is a coastal town with a population over 53,000 (Census, 2021). This seaside town is one of the most deprived in the UK. It has many older people, children with low education attainment and high unemployment (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021). Despite wellbeing and mental health benefits of living by the sea, the impacts of deprivation reveal a different picture. Clacton has more incidences of preventable diseases than the rest of Essex and the second highest score for poor mental health in England, often leading to self-harm and suicide (Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government, 2019). Employment, health, and connection are key drivers of wellbeing, and improvements made in these areas can produce greater benefits (Office of National Statistics, 2023). Social isolation and loneliness negatively impact wellbeing across the life course, and these needs should be addressed across communities and society (Mental Health Foundation, 2022). Providing places and spaces for people to interact is important – libraries are key to this by offering many free group activities.

Knit and Natter is one such activity group, held weekly in Clacton library, that can help overcome social isolation and loneliness and improve wellbeing. Around five participants meet at the library weekly, following the closure of the previous venue. The ladies are of older age and most travel to the library by public transport or mobility scooter. The volunteer for the Warm Welcome Campaign, a community initiative that was set up in response to the cost of living crisis, helps the group and makes refreshments. People attending the Knit and Natter groups welcome the opportunities for socialisation and getting to know people. One member of the group said, “I look forward to it. Gets me out of the house.”

The room is free for the group to enjoy conversation while knitting, crocheting, or sewing and sharing knowledge about projects. People can take refreshments provided by the library and set up their own social media groups; however, group members said they were not particularly confident with computers and preferred in-person activities. Creative activities and group sessions can improve wellbeing and mental health across the life course (Fancourt and Finn, 2019); additionally, providing social activities can reduce loneliness and be effective for people with mental health issues (Brooks et al, 2022).

The value of the libraries for wellbeing

Clacton library provides free space for the Knit and Natter group, which otherwise may have folded due to closure of other facilities. Libraries are ideally placed to fill gaps left by closure of other facilities, such as day centres. Knit and Natter sessions are commonly available in libraries across the Eastern region. For example, in Essex there are 27 weekly Knit and Natter events attended by around 180 people. In Hertfordshire there are more than 230 Knit and Natter events, which are attended by over 1,600 people. Knit and Natter members in Norfolk also participated in charity projects such

as making clothes for premature babies, and the shoe box scheme for refugees, which adds further value for wellbeing.

Knit and Natter sessions may be most popular with older people, but there are different activities to support the mental health and wellbeing of other age and demographic groups. In libraries across the Eastern region, art and creativity sessions are available which are directly aimed at improving wellbeing. Many libraries offer support groups for people with long-term health conditions and their carers. Such activities may improve wellbeing by providing a safe space for shared experience and support, leading to a sense of camaraderie and community. As part of the Home Service, volunteers visit people in their own homes and bring books, thus connecting with people unable to travel to libraries. Home services have the potential to combat feelings of isolation amongst people living in rural/coastal areas who face difficulties in reaching library services and maintaining social connection.

The library service contributes to wellbeing indirectly by supporting people to navigate systems and gain access to other services e.g. signposting through pamphlets and online resources. Many libraries offer literacy and digital technology classes and help people gain additional skills through adult education and training opportunities. For instance, a library in Essex has a café where people can learn to become baristas. The library also hosts children's activities, literacy sessions, and intergenerational programmes that positively impact wellbeing.

Overall, libraries address wellbeing in many ways that help to reduce the use of NHS and social care services. As a Council member of staff at a stakeholder workshop noted: "We're using libraries as community hubs because we're commissioning our services to sit in those libraries to support older people specifically. But in terms of adult social care, they really are kind of one of our front doors to a safe space that people don't feel scared to go in, where open conversations happen quite naturally."

Future directions

There is potential for partnerships with organisations such as Age UK to create further opportunities for overcoming social isolation and to challenge normative expectations of activities according to gender, as found for knitting. 'Read my Mind' was developed in Norfolk to support mental health for men, in partnership with Public Health. The initiative already has over 70 participants and could be extended across the Eastern region. This could be further developed to provide non-clinical support for people with mental health issues while waiting on community therapy team lists. These wellbeing activities could be added to social prescribing lists⁴ to offer people alternative ways to gain help.

⁴Non-clinical support for patients waiting for mental health treatment | NHS Confederation

HEALTH, WELLBEING AND INDEPENDENT LIVING CASE STUDY 3: INDEPENDENT LIVING

Hertfordshire libraries: Slipper Swap scheme

Around 30% of people aged 65 and over suffer a fall at least once a year. The proportion rises to around 50% of people aged 80 and over. Having a fall causes pain and psychological distress, and around 5% of falls result in a fracture and hospitalisation (Public Health England, 2022). The cost to the NHS is over £ .3bn per annum. More than 25,000 emergency admissions due to falls in people aged 65 and over were recorded in the East of England region during 2020/21 (Office for Health, Improvement, and Disparities, 2023). Falls prevention includes behavioural aspects, such as staying active, eating well, and drinking enough, as well as practical solutions, such as looking after eyesight, hearing, choosing the right footwear (Menant et al, 2008), and having non-slip walking aids (Age UK, 2020). Physical activity can reduce the risk of falls by 34% (Sherrington et al, 2019) and the relative risk reduction of falling when hearing loss is corrected with suitable hearing aids is 13% (Mahmoudi et al, 2019).

To reduce the risk of falls, Hertfordshire Libraries, in partnership with Adult Social Care, developed the Slipper Swap initiative. Between October and December 2022, eight Slipper Swaps were held and gave out 395 pairs of slippers to people in Hertfordshire communities. Slipper Swap events were made into social events for people to engage with other people and organisations, such as Citizens Advice Bureau (with information on keeping warm and the cost of living crisis), social prescribers, Macmillan Cancer, Age UK, Herts Healthy Hubs, Fire Safety Officers, Carers in Herts, Herts Healthy Walks, local police, and local Lions Clubs.

The local police became involved after making a house call to an elderly housebound resident who had been targeted by vandals. The police officer noticed the poor condition of the resident's slippers and made a return visit with some literature on falls prevention and a pair of robust slippers. The Slipper Swap is aimed at older and vulnerable people and everyone, including the service users, were pleased with the initiative:

“On one occasion I was descending carpeted stairs in my home, as usual, and slipped halfway downstairs to the bottom. I could very well have broken a limb. These slippers I have received will make a difference and it's therefore a preventative measure.”

The value of libraries for independent living

Hertfordshire library service has added value due to the potential reduction in the risk of falls in older and vulnerable people. The Slipper Swap adds to social activities already on offer to provide stimulation and interaction that will also impact on wellbeing and health. Maintaining good health and wellbeing is essential for people to live independently, and the libraries offer information and support for this.

Across the rest of the Eastern region, initiatives such as replacement of ferrules (non-slip walking aid tips) and hearing aid batteries reduce the risk of falls and the attached need for emergency health and social care. Other information helps people stay safe within their homes and communities.

Outreach services, such as the Library Home service, continue the work by visiting people at home and in local communities. During the Covid-19 pandemic, some libraries telephoned service users to find out how they were. The service users valued this as they had little or no contact with other people.

Libraries work with other organisations, such as Adult Social Care, to share information about falls prevention and to signpost service users to other places if they need help with other issues. These are great opportunities for professionals, like occupational therapists, to work in the community and help older people. The work of libraries was seen as invaluable to staff in county councils: “We know that falls are very costly in terms of health interventions, but also leading to adult social care interventions. These [issues] can all be supported within libraries. So, for example, Cambridgeshire libraries offer walking stick trade-ins for people needing hearing aids. All of those are bits of equipment that they can support people with, that can lead to a de-escalation of need, which is what we want to do really in terms of adult social care and health.”

Future directions

Libraries should continue to develop partnerships with organisations to promote and support independent living. Strategies such as the Slipper Swap can help to reduce falls and promote independent living; however, other library services are not aware of all the activities. These strategies and activities could be articulated in best practice guidelines, where library professionals present details of new initiatives, to include the partners involved, and how they are disseminated for sharing across the region.

HEALTH, WELLBEING AND INDEPENDENT LIVING CASE STUDY 4: INDEPENDENT LIVING

Cambridgeshire: Mobile library service

Cambridgeshire has three mobile library vans that call at 388 locations in 98 villages and communities once a month.

The library vans have a broad range of books, and people using the service can order books and CDs as well as swap magazines and jigsaws. In addition, the vans carry a range of services including the sale of stamps and reading glasses, and free walking stick ferrules and NHS hearing aid batteries.

The vans visit care homes, primary schools, playgroups, day centres, housing shelters, and other places where people are socially isolated (Shared Intelligence, 2017). The breadth of stops also includes campuses, science parks and retail parks. All vehicles have lifts for easy access. Each van supports between 20 and 60 people per day of all ages and provides an opportunity for them to meet others in the community. The staff provide non-judgemental interactions that build trust with services users. This trust allowed a young person to tell a staff member about potential safeguarding issues. Another service user came to the library van to tell the staff that her healthcare tests had come back negative. She was overjoyed but had no one else to tell.

Social isolation and loneliness are associated with the risk of falls (Petersen, König and Hajek, 2020). Falls cost the NHS over £2.3bn per annum, but this figure almost doubles (£4.4bn) with social costs and productivity costs (Care Industry News, 2017). Furthermore, loneliness can affect anyone across the life course. The annual economic costs of mild, mild to moderate, and severe loneliness in the UK are estimated as £6,429, £8,157 to £9,537, and £9,976 respectively. Loneliness also places an individual at greater risk for conditions such as depression, heart disease, stroke, and dementia (Peytrignet, Garforth-Bles and Keohane, 2020), with associated healthcare costs. Research is limited on what works well to reduce social isolation and loneliness, but commissioners are urged find ways to reduce these and the subsequent use of health and social care services (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2018).

The value of libraries for independent living

Mobile library services are essential for people unable to access static library services, however, some mobile library services in the Eastern region are under threat due to financial cuts in the public sector, while others have already been cancelled. Mobile libraries provide a lifeline to rural communities and can reduce the social isolation of living alone in rural areas. Norfolk Mobile Library Service has hundreds of stops within local communities, which include playgroups, schools, care homes and village halls. A recent stakeholder consultation in Norfolk showed that mobile library services are key to local communities to reduce loneliness, social isolation, and to improve literacy (Norfolk County Council, 2023:564).

Mobile libraries offer an environmentally friendly service. In the context of the cost of living crisis, they also provide access to the library service for those who cannot afford

to travel to central libraries. In addition to the loan of books, library staff can share information, monitor the health and wellbeing of service users, and signpost participants and carers to other services or even alert social services if they see a problem. These are hidden values for which it is hard to evaluate the full economic benefit.

Mobile libraries have added value by selling or replacing items that can reduce the risk of falls and additional costs for health and social care. Additionally, public awareness of the wider library service is promoted by the mobile vans going to events around the county. Mobile libraries use social media to alert service users to their stops. This strategy has increased use of services, especially by families with young children and people who would normally have been at their workplace at the time of a mobile library visit.

Cambridgeshire libraries also work in partnership with Cambridgeshire Deaf Association to provide hearing aid batteries and support for people with hearing problems. A member of the public from a stakeholder workshop said: “Libraries are important places. They are institutions and mean so much to so many people.”

Likewise, library staff appreciate the need for the library services that travel around the community and the volunteers who visit service users in their own homes: “The home library service has a huge value to those who can’t leave their homes for whatever reason.”

Future directions

Library services could use local consultations, such as the consultation conducted in Norfolk, to understand local needs and redesign mobile services to meet these needs in line with The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 and relative to economic constraints. For example, the Slipper Swap scheme successfully pioneered in some localities could be added to mobile libraries to provide further value to the library service, support people living alone and in isolated rural areas, and help to reduce the risk of falls. More research is needed to understand the hidden value of mobile library services in the Eastern region.

STEP TWO: THEMATIC CASE STUDY - CHILDREN'S LITERACY

CHILDREN'S LITERACY CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

In combination, the case studies we present in this section allow us to consider library service provision for children's literacy from birth to adulthood, across the birth to 18 age range. The cases allow us to make focused investigations of the relationships between library service literacy provision and school provision for three different age groups, also taking account of the changing roles of families, parents and carers for children across that stage in the life course.

Our selections also allow us to make links with the other two themes of investigation in this evaluation (Health, wellbeing and independent living; Digital inclusion), to recognise the multiple and overlapping functions and impacts of library programmes. We complement each area-based case study with desk research considering programmes and provision in other areas which have similar functions and aims. Finally, our case studies afford qualitative exploration of the value of services through stakeholder testimony, observation and fine-grained attention to programme design and operation. This qualitative case study approach is aligned with our quantitative approach to examine the monetary value of library services, providing illustrative examples of 'value' as it is experienced by users of library services.

Our selection of cases is based on the general requirements of the LCE commission and on the requirements of evaluation specific to the theme of children's literacy. We were asked to examine the impacts of library provision on the positive contribution that engaging with public libraries can have on a child's school readiness and levels of literacy. We explore how public libraries support families and children with their literacy needs post-Covid recovery, for impacts on the development of literacy skills through the life course, including on self-esteem, accessing information, employment prospects, and health and wellbeing. Libraries provide safe and comfortable spaces where people can develop their literacy skills, complementing the support that parents/carers and schools provide for young people. We will also address the benefits of free access to books, IT, events, and activities that engage young people with reading and information as well as to enjoy reading for pleasure.

We have selected three examples of library literacy and reading programmes for children and young people to investigate, to understand their operation, format and the involvement of stakeholders.

Selection of case studies according to topic, age range and location

The selected programmes reflect different age groups between birth and 18, and engage parents/carers and families in different ways. They also represent the range of relationships between library services and schools, other services, charities and voluntary organisations.

The first case study is an instance of the core library provision of pre-school parent-and-toddler ‘Storytime’ sessions, a form of early literacy and oracy support catering for the birth to five age range, directly relevant to school readiness and giving insight to how libraries respond to parental and family literacy needs. The innovative element of this provision is in the co-development of the activity in partnership with the family and community centres to engage difficult-to-reach communities. Crucial parts of the programme, such as the selection of participants as well as part of the delivery of the programme itself, have been planned in collaborations between the library and the community centre and all its activities have been delivered by members of both organisations.

The second case study looks at provision for the 5-11 age group (corresponding with primary school provision), with a focus on the intersection of literacy with health and wellbeing, for instance around healthy eating and active lifestyles. We examined a ‘Fit, Fed and Read’ scheme, a form of provision which we have found across different authorities and which represents an overlap with the social and health-oriented contributions of library services, especially in a period of crisis in the cost of living. The third case study explores provision for the 14-18 age group, corresponding with the upper secondary age range when young people are engaged in study for GCSEs, A-levels and other qualifications. In this age group, young people may use libraries to support their study, for example, to inform school homework tasks (a link with home and family life), but also resulting from other motivations such as reading for pleasure. We have selected a programme which aims to encourage reading for pleasure relative to STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), also engaging young participants in voluntary civic contributions to their communities and developing skills likely to help them in continuing education and/or employment. The programme, called ‘Reading Sparks’, also represents a collaboration between library services and a charity, The Reading Agency, as well as connections with the secondary phase school curriculum.

The programmes we have identified represent three areas of the LCE region (Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire), selected in the context of the wider evaluation which engages in activity and consultation across all areas of the LCE region. These selections also afford opportunity to explore provision in communities that vary according to socio-economic and demographic profiles.

CHILDREN'S LITERACY CASE STUDY 1: EARLY READING 0-5 YEARS

Wisbech, Cambridgeshire: Storytime for pre-school children and families

This case study describes a co-developed Storytime model designed and delivered by Wisbech Library in partnership with the Wisbech Children and Family Centres in Cambridgeshire. The study suggests the effectiveness of promoting tangible actions that link staff members from different services with an innovative and transferable model for libraries everywhere, to use for the promotion of reading.

Wisbech Library is one of the ten BookTrust Storytime libraries in England, each invited to pilot activities intended to incentivise 'difficult-to-reach' families with pre-school children to use their local library. The pilot took place between September 2021 and February 2022. Wisbech Library partnered with the Wisbech Children and Family Centres to select and involve families who would not otherwise have considered using their local library. The service developed an eight-week programme delivered and scaled up for the general community. The programme is described in a video created by the partnership, available via YouTube.

Materials collected for this case included:

- 🌿 Interviews with Wisbech library staff, the Development Officer, library users
- 🌿 Flyers, and photos gathered during a visit to the library
- 🌿 Details on the structure and content of the sessions
- 🌿 The Book Trust correspondence and materials
- 🌿 Statistics for attendance at the library
- 🌿 Cambridgeshire Libraries Service Review

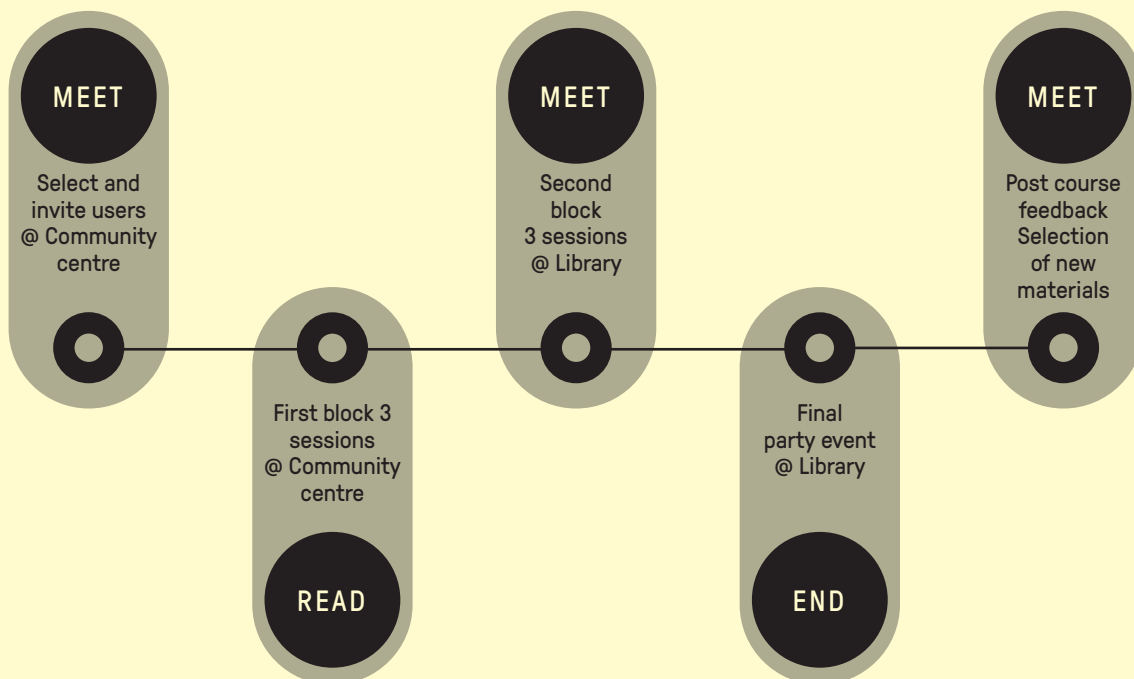
This case study describes a programme model based on the observation that low-income families do not visit libraries but are involved in weekly sessions at their local Family and Community Centres. The programme built on the idea of developing a set of Storytime sessions first delivered in the local Family and Community Centre, then moved into the library space (see design activity timeline below). Wisbech Library decided to contact the Wisbech Children and Family Centres and set up a Voting Group to select participants in low-income families who would have never considered using their library. Criteria for participation included low income, a socio-economic profile represented in the experience of parents and carers already active in the Wisbech Children and Family Centres.

The Storytime activity co-developed by Wisbech Library and Wisbech Children and Family Centres consisted of an eight-week programme devised around the Book Trust's annual Storytime Book Prize. The co-production model proposed by Wisbech Library was based on the idea that families need to be familiar with the place where the activity is based, as it would be easier to build up a sense of belonging around the activity. Each weekly session would include one resource from Wisbech Library and one from the Wisbech Children and Family Centres. The programme was delivered with a first block

of three sessions in the Wisbech Children and Family Centres (an environment familiar to the families), with a transition to the library space for the remaining five sessions after the first block. The programme concluded with a party for participants.

BookTrust invited the families joining the pilot to help select the next Storytime Prize shortlist. The parents and library staff read the longlisted books and took part in an online discussion to nominate the books for the shortlist.

Design activity timeline



Based on the piloted activity, Wisbech Library and Wisbech Children and Family Centres now have a well-attended weekly Story/Craft session catering for children under five years old. This second offer was requested by the parents and supported as part of the First Steps Library Club project commissioned by Cambridgeshire Early Years Service. It uses funding from the Department for Education, East Fenland, and East Cambridgeshire Opportunity Area.

The Year 2 BookTrust Storytime pilot, targeting difficult-to-reach and lower income families, started in January 2023, with resources selected by parents to address better the needs and interests of that age group.

Remarking on some of the benefits of the piloted activities, the Community Library Assistant responsible for delivering the project said: "I was just there and they got to know me, so when they came to the library the idea of it wasn't quite so scary. They had a familiar face to come into the building to. They got really comfortable, and I think they realised that you can make noise, you can have fun, you know, and all the staff interacted with the children as well."

The programme has been covered in the media, with a report available online.

CHILDREN'S LITERACY CASE STUDY 2: YOUNG READERS, 7-12 YEARS OLD

Hertfordshire Library Services: Literacy and health – 'Fit, Fed and Read'

During school holidays, Hertfordshire libraries provide programmes for children eligible for free school meals. They collaborate with Hertfordshire Sports Partnership and Hertfordshire Catering Ltd to challenge the educational inequalities that can arise from hunger and isolation. National surveys assert that 16 year olds who are eligible for free school meals are less likely to earn good GCSEs than their peers, by a margin of around 27%.

Hertfordshire's Fit, Fed and Read scheme is an adaptation of the Fit and Fed scheme established by the charity StreetGames. Hertfordshire's innovation, launched in 2018, recognised an opportunity to support children's literacy as well as their nutrition and health. Fit, Fed and Read is available to children aged between 7 and 12 in ten neighbourhoods. In a typical day of the programme, it offers participating children a free nutritious meal, physical or sport activities, and creative literacy sessions which develop children's skills and confidence for the whole school curriculum. Library professionals working in the libraries of each neighbourhood design and develop the literacy sessions, whenever possible organising them in the libraries but also using other community spaces such as schools, sports centres and fire stations. First offered in the Easter and summer holidays, the successful scheme was expanded in 2022 to run in half-term holidays as well.

The value of Fit, Fed and Read for developing children's literacy has several dimensions. First, it offers fun and accessible activities for its communities, engaging families and children who may not access public libraries otherwise. Library service evaluations of the scheme have shown that some of its participants and their parents take up library membership, make return visits to libraries, and begin new habits of borrowing and enjoying books. During the scheme's book-based sessions, children join themed activities and games that develop their reading, writing, speaking and listening. Through varied themes like codebreaking, superheroes, food, and robots, children learn new vocabulary, read different genres, write for different purposes, and speak for different audiences. They enjoy listening to stories and poetry read aloud for them and with them by the Fit, Fed and Read team. They spend time with adults of different backgrounds who are role models for enjoying reading.

For the community and its families, Fit, Fed and Read has value in raising their awareness of what their local library can offer. They become more confident in visiting libraries, and in understanding how to use them. Participating families see how library resources and spaces support their children's completion of school homework. Some evaluations suggest that the scheme helps children who have been reluctant to attend school towards return. It also seems to offer a space where children and their families feel comfortable to discuss barriers to their own literacy, acting as a gateway to help from other services. Fit, Fed and Read also influences the aspirations of its participants, partnering with the University of Hertfordshire for an end-of-programme celebration day. For many families, this is their first link with a higher education institution, and

first opportunity to meet a well-known author in person. Children also receive a free book, though the wider benefit of Fit, Fed and Read extends to parents and carers who already buy books but realise that borrowing and engagement in its activities can save them money. For some themed activities around food, families received the ingredients for making a nutritious meal at home.

For the library professionals involved in Fit, Fed and Read, the scheme affords valuable links with colleagues in other local authority services and organisations. Library professionals and Sports Partnership colleagues often plan and co-teach programme activities together. They learn informally from one another as well as through reciprocal training. These teams also worked together to provide a camp for Afghan refugee children housed in Hertfordshire, with library professionals overseeing craft-based literacy activities for participants. Through collaboration, representatives of these services offer their communities experiences that respond to community needs, and which set literacy development in the context of their everyday experiences, environments and priorities.

CHILDREN'S LITERACY CASE STUDY 3: TEEN READERS, 14-18 YEARS OLD

Gainsborough Library, Ipswich, Suffolk: Reading for civic action – 'Reading Sparks'
Library and Information services provide spaces, resources and expertise to develop community and family literacies. They extend and complement models of literacy addressed by schools, and have potential lifelong impacts on science literacy and health literacy.

At Gainsborough Library in suburban Ipswich, young adults aged 14-18 share their understanding of science with children and families in their community. The library facilitates the events and communications led by the young adults through the Reading Sparks4 scheme, with materials provided by The Reading Agency.

The value of library services in relation to this scheme is substantial, in areas directly related to the literacy development aims of the Reading Sparks scheme and in other areas brought to our attention by activities linked to the scheme's provision. The availability of the scheme for this community, at this library, derives from the knowledge and skills of library professionals. It is the outcome of a competitive application process. The application, devised by library professionals, was informed by their understanding of the needs of the community served by the library, and their appreciation of the contributions that other local organisations could make to offering the scheme.

Library professionals interpret and mediate the materials of Reading Sparks to realise literacy outcomes and community impacts that would not arise from the well-designed materials alone. Library professionals select and organise book stock drawn from the scheme's reading lists, presenting these attractive books 'front facing' in carefully chosen spaces of the library to encourage visitors' engagement with them. They help library users to make links between Reading Sparks-recommended books and other library stock.

Library professionals also identify and facilitate the interactions that make Reading Sparks books and activities meaningful for library users. They help to translate experiences of the scheme from the library to home and leisure settings. They afford agency for the young adults participating in the scheme (Martin and Ito, 2013), for informal and peer-to-peer learning, as they organise events where people of all generations in their community can meet. They share their new knowledge of science (Archer et al, 2015) in themed activities they have designed themselves, making civic contributions and taking responsibility as volunteers and leaders. They also participate in and contribute to connected learning (United Nations, 2020), teaching each other the digital media skills needed to share podcasts, videos and animations on the Reading Sparks webpages for national and international audiences. Post-pandemic, the library provides physical, virtual and social spaces for young adults to meet and collaborate for the benefit of their community.

Library services contextualise and catalyse literacy learning for Reading Sparks participants and for the community. The services offer, support and conceptualise literacy development in ways which differ from formal education and school curricula. In this case study, 'reading for pleasure' includes reading non-fiction, and reading about science in diverse genres, in narratives and in poetry. It encompasses digital literacies, and acknowledges reading and making texts for real purposes, around materials and science kit provided for conducting experiments at home (Heck, 2017). Literacy develops in family and peer interactions, where speech, writing and images combine. In the process, these library service users become more confident in reading and understanding science writing in different genres, with potential benefits through life for leisure, employment, health literacy and wellbeing.



STEP THREE: ECONOMIC VALUATION OF LIBRARY SERVICES BY THEME

VALUATION OF DIGITAL AND COMPUTING PROVISION USING THE EVOLS TOOL

This section presents an economic valuation of library services related to digital inclusion, demonstrating application of the EVOLS tool to data about a service we considered during our case study activities. We have chosen to provide an estimate of the value of services which support library users in preparing CVs.

The value we present is based on an assumption that there are two people using this service in a branch library in any hour (i.e. two participants for this provision per hour, as observed during library visits). If we estimate the total use of this service annually, we arrive at a total of roughly 4,000 participants per year. This figure was estimated through our field research observations, though in practice it may fluctuate according to participants' needs and market conditions.

The EVOLS tool presents these estimates in a Microsoft Excel interface which looks like this:

Computer/digital literacy (CS10)	
Participants per year	4000
Value per Participant	£379.20
Inflated Value	£379.20
Total Value	£1,516,800.00

The tool also provides this contextualising information:

ASSUMPTION

Based on the assumption of two participants per hour for 250 days (library opening hours).

SOURCE

Good Things Foundation, 2022. *The economic impact of digital inclusion in the UK*. (Taking the average cost of all digital learners today as £176.21).

COMMENTS

In terms of libraries' activities, we assume a cost of £40 per participant, multiplied by a CBR of 9.48 we calculate the value per participant).

This provides a benefit of around £379 per participant.

We estimate that the total value of this provision is £1,516,800.

VALUATION OF HEALTH, WELLBEING AND INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAMMES USING THE EVOLS TOOL

The screenshots below show valuations for four services relevant to our case studies for this theme. We have presented four services to illustrate the variation in participant numbers and value for services relevant to this theme, as the forms of provision differ greatly depending on the aspect of health, wellbeing or independent living they address. The screenshots are drawn directly from the EVOLS tool which can be used on any device capable of running Microsoft Excel. We entered data about each service to the tool, generating the valuations shown below.

The data show that services related to this theme have values per participant which vary between £244 (from low intensity, less impactful services) and £60,000 (from higher intensity and more impactful interventions).

In addition, we present illustrations of other information available to users of the EVOLS tool in its interface. The figures below show details that are typically displayed in the tool, which can include information on literature, research or assumptions which inform the modelling and resulting estimates of value. Often they are accompanied by brief explanatory comments. The information provided for each service can vary according to availability, so the forms of information used in each valuation may also vary.

SERVICE A

Falls Prevention Case Study (CS4)	
Participants per year	10
Value per Participant	£739.00
Inflated Value	£831.45
Total Value	£8,314.47

SOURCE

PHE, 2018. A Return on Investment Tool for the Assessment of Falls Prevention Programmes for Older People Living in the Community. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/679856/

[A_return_on_investment_tool_for_falls_prevention_programmes.pdf](#)

SERVICE B

CBT Mental Health Case Study (CS5)	
Participants per year	80
Value per Participant	£244.00
Inflated Value	£251.11
Total Value	£20,089.12

ASSUMPTION

Two sessions per week for 40 weeks as per observations of the research team.

SOURCE

Knapp, M, Wong, G, 2020. Economics and mental health: the current scenario. World Psychiatry 19, 3–14. doi:10.1002/wps.20692.

COMMENTS

We have adopted an RoI 2.3:1 based on Knapp 2020. The cost per session is £106 in 2021 values (PSSRU 2021).

SERVICE C

Read My Mind Case Study (CS6)	
Participants per year	1
Value per Participant	£60,000
Inflated Value	£71,643.14
Total Value	£71,643.14

ASSUMPTION

Conservative assumption of delaying completed suicide for one participant.

SOURCE

McDaid, D, Park, A, Zervedas, P, 2017. Commissioning Cost-Effective Services for Promotion of Mental Health and Wellbeing and Prevention of Mental Ill-Health. LSE Personal Social Services Research Unit.

COMMENTS

According to the PHE report, there are economic benefits from delaying completed suicide as the number of lost years of productive activity will be reduced; overall it is estimated that, on average, costs averted of around £60,000 per year per person of working age can be realised where suicide is delayed.

SERVICE D

Loneliness - Knit and Natter (CS9)	
Participants per year	5
Value per Participant	£5,692.00
Inflated Value	£6,038.64
Total Value	£30,193.21

Following the same sequence, data for mobile library services modelled in the EVOLS tool estimates a value of the service of £49.70 per participant. The screenshot from EVOLS shows the bases of this evaluation:

Mobile Libraries (CS11)	
Participants per year	6437
Value per Participant	£49.70
Inflated Value	£49.67
Total Value	£319,725.79

The additional data for this valuation is as follows:

ASSUMPTION

Participants based on case studies' average yearly visits in mobile libraries.

SOURCES

Verbooy K, Hoefman R, Jobvan E & J, Brouwer W, Time Is Money: Investigating the Value of Leisure Time and Unpaid Work Value in Health 21 (2018) 1428-1436;

Amazon statistics (value per book), Arts Council of England report (2014).

The total value of each of these services depends on the number of participants using each service. Of all of the services represented here, the mobile library provision involved the largest number of participants (n=6,347) and a total value just under £320,000.

Falls Prevention Case Study (CS4)	
Participants per year	10
Value per Participant	£739.00
Inflated Value	£831.45
Total Value	£8,314.47
Comments	Assumption based on typical Tai Chi cohort as describe by Public Health England (PHE)
Source	PHE, 2018. A Return on Investment Tool for the Assessment of Falls Prevention Programmes for Older People Living in the Community. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/679856/
Comment	Tai Chi has a Social Return on Investment (SRDI) of £1.97 per £1.00 invested. The cost per participant is £374.99 in 2018 values (£422.05 inflated to 2022 using a 3% interest rate). So we estimate a Social value of £831.45 per participant.
Source	A Return on Investment Tool Assessment of Falls Prevention Programmes for Older People Living in the Community.
Reference	PHE, 2018. A Return on Investment Tool for the Assessment of Falls Prevention Programmes for Older People Living in the Community. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/679856/
GO TO CALCULATIONS	

CBT Mental Health Case Study (CS5)

Participants per year	80
Value per Participant	£244.00
Inflated Value	£251.11
Total Value	£20,089.12

Comments Assumption: 2 Sessions per week for 40 weeks

Source Assumption of the research team

Comment We have adopted an RoI 2.3:1 based on Knapp 2020. The cost per session is £106 in 2021 values (PSSRU 2021). The value was inflated to 2022 using 3% interest rate

Source Economics and mental health: the current scenario

Reference Knapp, M., Wong, G., 2020. Economics and mental health: the current scenario. World Psychiatry 19, 3-14. doi:10.1002/wps.20692

GO TO CALCULATIONS

READ MY MIND CASE STUDY (CS6)

Participants per year	1
Value per Participant	£60,000.00
Inflated Value	£71,643.14
Total Value	£71,643.14

Comments Conservative assumption of delaying completed suicide for 1 participant

Source Assumption of the research team

Comment According to PHE report there are economic benefits from delaying completed suicide as the number of lost years of productive activity will be reduced; overall it is estimated that on average costs averted of around £60,00 per year per person of working age can be realised where suicide is delayed

Source Commissioning Cost-Effective Services for Promotion of Mental Health and Wellbeing and Prevention of Mental Ill-Health. LSE Personal Social Services Research Unit

Reference McDaid, D., Park, A., ... Zerveddas, P., 2017. Commissioning Cost-Effective Services for Promotion of Mental Health and Wellbeing and Prevention of Mental Ill-Health. LSE Personal Social Services Research Unit

GO TO CALCULATIONS

LONELINESS - KNIT AND NATTER (CS9)

Participants per year	5
Value per Participant	£5,692.00
Inflated Value	£6,038.64
Total Value	£30,193.21

Comments Based on case studies and libraries field research

Source Libraries field research

Comment Estimates based on Loneliness monetisation report (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2020). The report shows the median total cost of the loneliness per year per individual is around £6,429-£9,538 depending on the degree of loneliness.

Source Loneliness Monetisation Report

Reference Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2020. Loneliness Monetisation Report

GO TO CALCULATIONS

MOBILE LIBRARIES (CS11)

Participants per year	6437
Value per Participant	£49.70
Inflated Value	£49.67
Total Value	£319,725.79

Comments: Based on the average yearly visits in mobile libraries

Source: Case Study

Comment: Average of the value of borrowed book (Amazon statistics) and the leisure time of browsing and wellbeing WTP

Source: Various

Reference: Verbooy K, Hoefman R, Jobvan E & J, Brouwer W. Time Is Money: Investigating the Value of Leisure Time and Unpaid Work Value in Health 21 (2018) 1428-1436; Amazon statistics (value per book), Arts Council of England

GO TO CALCULATIONS

VALUATION OF CHILDREN'S LITERACY PROGRAMMES USING THE EVOLS TOOL

The screenshots below show EVOLS valuations for each programme described in our case studies for this theme. Earlier sections of this report present EVOLS valuations for other themes and explain how the EVOLS tool functions to provide valuations in these formats.

Each literacy programme shows a value per participant of £279. Though the programmes differ in aims, their design and delivery principles have some commonality, which may account for the parity of value per participant. However, programmes involve or engage different numbers of participants. The Reading Sparks programme, for example, involves volunteer participants in similar numbers to the other programmes described here, but also engages many other participants in the community through events organised by library professionals and the volunteers. In the valuation data presented, this results in a higher total value than the other programmes described. The valuation using EVOLS is limited to monetary valuation and does not address the other forms of value offered by these programmes and which we described in our case studies.

Book Trust Storytime Price (CS3)	
Participants per year	30
Value per Participant	£279.00
Inflated Value	£474.98
Total Value	£14,249.36

Fit and Fed Case Study (CS2)	
Participants per year	30
Value per Participant	£279.00
Inflated Value	£474.98
Total Value	£14,249.36

Reading Sparks Case Study (CS1)	
Participants per year	650
Value per Participant	£279.00
Inflated Value	£474.98
Total Value	£308,736.24

As readers of this report are now familiar with the forms of information provided by EVOLS, described in relation to the other two themes, here we present screenshots of the full EVOLS displays for each literacy programme we considered. These include details of sources and explanatory comment.

Reading Sparks Case Study (CS1)	
Participants per year	650
Value per Participant	£279.00
Inflated Value	£474.98
Total Value	£308,736.24
Comments	165 Families (250 adults & 650 children)
Source	The Reading Agency - Reading Sparks Final Reporting Template, November 2022
Comment	As a proxy we used the value of the Sure Start Programmes in UK. Spreading this benefit across all eligible children (as was done with costs) produces an average lifetime economic benefit to society of between £279 and £557 per eligible child. Two-thirds of the economic benefit is received by taxpayers and one-third goes to families. The lower bound value used to inflated to 2022 values using a 3% interest rate.
Source	Research Report DFE-RR073 - National evaluation of Sure Start local programmes: An economic perspective
Reference	2004. The National Evaluation of Sure Start Local Programmes in England. Child and Adolescent Mental Health 9, 2-8. doi:10.1046/j.1475-357x.2003.00069.x
GO TO CALCULATIONS	

Fit and Fed Case Study (CS2)

Participants per year	30
Value per Participant	£279.00
Inflated Value	£474.98
Total Value	£14,249.36

Comments Staff from 10 Libraries deliver to up to 30 children in each location (school) a one-hour session 1x a week. This programme lasts 1 year

Source Case Study

Comment As a proxy we used the value of the Sure Start Programmes in UK. Spreading this benefit across all eligible children (as was done with costs) produces an average lifetime economic benefit to society of between £279 and £557 per eligible child. Two-thirds of the economic benefit is received by taxpayers and one-third goes to families. The lower bound value used to inflated to 2022 values using a 3% interest rate.

Source Research Report DFE-RR073 - National evaluation of Sure Start local programmes: An economic perspective

Reference 2004. The National Evaluation of Sure Start Local Programmes in England. Child and Adolescent Mental Health 9, 2-8. doi:10.1046/j.1475-357x.2003.00069.x

GO TO CALCULATIONS

Book Trust Storytime Price (CS3)

Participants per year	30
Value per Participant	£279.00
Inflated Value	£474.98
Total Value	£14,249.36

Comments **5 families attended each week (5 Adults / 6 Children) for 8 weeks**

Source **Case Study**

Comment **As a proxy we used the value of the Sure Start Programmes in UK. Spreading this benefit across all eligible children (as was done with costs) produces an average lifetime economic benefit to society of between £279 and £557 per eligible child. Two-thirds of the economic benefit is received by taxpayers and one-third goes to families. The lower bound value used to inflated to 2022 values using a 3% interest rate.**

Source **Research Report DFE-RR073 - National evaluation of Sure Start local programmes: An economic perspective**

Reference **2004. The National Evaluation of Sure Start Local Programmes in England. Child and Adolescent Mental Health 9, 2-8. doi:10.1046/j.1475-357x.2003.00069.x**

GO TO CALCULATIONS

THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN THE EAST OF ENGLAND: FINDINGS

When we synthesise the findings of our linked approaches to gauging value, we identify the value of library services in these terms:

The intrinsic value of libraries

Participants in our research for evaluation commented on the intrinsic value of libraries in workshops and in activities reported in our thematic case studies. Often this value was associated with free and holistic provision, and connected with the three themes we investigated (Health, wellbeing and independent living, Digital inclusion, and Children's literacy) and other areas. Participants felt and recognised that library services evolve to meet the needs of their communities. They articulated many qualities for which they valued library services, including:

- 🌿 their flexibility and responsiveness to local needs and circumstances
- 🌿 the variety of services on offer, presented in different modes and formats
- 🌿 their contributions to partnerships with other services, organisations and community groups, including leadership and innovation
- 🌿 their provision of space and material resources for voluntary and community-led activities which may not otherwise be resourced
- 🌿 their contribution to learning and building skills, for leisure, education and employment
- 🌿 their outreach activities to engage difficult-to-reach groups in public life and social connection

In many ways, and for many people, libraries provide services and resources for living and for living better.



In many ways,
& for many people,
libraries provide
services & resources
for living and
for living better.



The value of libraries – the expertise of library professionals

Participants in our research often remarked on what they valued about their interactions with library professionals. Library professionals were widely perceived as trustworthy, non-judgemental and helpful. They were reported to be enthusiastic about working in partnership with other services, organisations and community groups. In our case study work, we learned that library professionals are highly knowledgeable about the communities they serve. They often demonstrate skill in catalysing, organising and leading activities and innovations, or in mediating and adapting other services and provision to add value in monetary and extra-monetary terms. For example, they play an important role in ensuring schemes and resources provided by other organisations such as charities meet the needs of their communities.

The value of library spaces

We found library branches, mobile services and online provision to be welcoming spaces offering support of many kinds, free from judgement. Library buildings are seen as safe, warm places in which people of many ages and backgrounds may gather. Libraries have a role in adult social care, but also for families with children. As freely accessible indoor spaces providing resources around which people interact, libraries promote social connection and contribute to reducing isolation.

Theme 1 – The value of libraries for digital inclusion

Libraries offer many cost-free or low-cost activities that engage participants in physical activities. They support mental wellbeing by offering opportunities for social connection. Libraries help to maintain independent living and contribute to risk reduction. They increase health literacy through the provision of health information literature and signposting to other services and specialist expertise. Importantly, libraries in the Eastern region provide direct and indirect value to the wellbeing of people across the lifespan.

Theme 2 – The value of libraries for health, wellbeing and independent living

Library services support digital skills development and connectivity, providing free mobile data and access to devices. Digital services signpost individuals towards additional support from many other services. Libraries also offer important support when individuals experience crisis moments of digital exclusion. Digital library services are critical in mediating and obviating access issues associated with potentially discriminatory digital resources.

Theme 3 – The value of libraries for children's literacy

The programmes and activities we reviewed promote early reading and help build communication skills, offering support and literacy education to parents as well. Libraries offer diverse programmes to cater for users' different interests and purposes for seeking information. These programmes also promote a form of 'living literacy' which connects different spheres of life – the home, the workplace, formal education and leisure.

The economic value of libraries

We found that return-on-investments for library services were higher where beneficiaries of health-related interventions by library services were in work, or where they had the potential to resume paid work and improve their longer-term productivity and wage capacity.

Interventions that make an impact on the life course of individuals generally show potentially much higher returns on investment. Examples include programmes like Reading Sparks and pre-school projects such as Lego Club and Storytime.

The area of digital inclusion through libraries makes a substantive return-on-investment based on the case study example. This too is based on the future productive capacity of participants in the workplace, and on the future potential impact on their lifetime earnings. This estimate also includes some health benefits that offset NHS costs.

For some library programmes, the subsequent health benefits are quite modest, though in a few cases annually the interventions they provide help to prevent or avoid catastrophic events such as falls and suicide attempts, and in a few cases can even save lives.

The scale of library service events and the extent of participation in them are important to the overall size of benefits. Schemes with low benefit value per person but high participant numbers may in fact have large monetary impacts. Putting on or running more events like these, and doing so more often, could realise much bigger benefits.



ADDING TO THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES: RECOMMENDATIONS

Review marketing, signage and online access for library services

As indicated in the foreword to this report, the functions of libraries and the needs they address have been in transition for some time. In that context, members of the public can have misconceptions about the services currently offered by libraries. We encountered this during our research. Although libraries have evolved from their traditionally perceived image as a 'quiet space', communities often continue to view them in this way. This may result in people not feeling welcomed, especially those who are new to the library or who have young children. Libraries should work to promote awareness of the services they offer and of their function as an inclusive space. A digital inclusion officer reported a "massive drop" in volunteers after the pandemic and a hesitancy throughout the community to be in public spaces due to health concerns. Stakeholders supported the development of a national bank of volunteers for online support to address this change.

Throughout the report, we have reported on the holistic value of library services and the ways in which different types of service overlap with one another. We believe this virtue and source of value also presents a challenge: it can be difficult to communicate the 'offer' of libraries simply and clearly. At the same time, it can sometimes be hard for library users to identify exactly what services are available, and how, where and when to access them. In our research, working across different library services, we found that the presentation of online information about services varied. It was not always easy for us to locate information. A review could consider how improved access supports inclusion of different types, and how to help all members of the public find and reach the services they need. Consideration of a wider range of communication methods, such as audio tools or pictures, is needed to inform the public of library services. Participants suggested creating video clips that could be presented in libraries and promoted through platforms such as WhatsApp and Nextdoor, as well as the continued use of social media.

Develop liaison and sharing best practice between library services and other partners

We found many instances of very effective and often innovative collaboration, at different levels. At the same time, members of different groups, including library professionals, indicated to us that there was sometimes scope for better liaison and communication between partners to realise the full value (monetary and extra-monetary) of some activities. Sometimes they felt that this could be achieved with extra investment.

Improving digital provision

Some specific steps could enhance digital provision. These include adopting a legislative provision similar to Section 6 of the Care Act 2014 to improve collaboration and co-ordination with other services. Developing a campaign to increase awareness of the range of library services among the wider (non-library using) public could be useful. In particular, this could promote awareness of digital and non-book provision. We recommend that any revisions to library apps and websites are focused on improving their core usability, accessibility and navigation over visual design, and that such improvements are driven by user needs and appropriate metrics.

Understanding the impacts of library services on health, wellbeing and independent living

Service providers could explore the impact of schemes on falls prevention, to estimate how many falls may be prevented by interventions. Development of evaluations on specific activities could lead to impacts on health, wellbeing, and independent living across the life span. In terms of the emphasis of this report on the value of services, it would also be possible to estimate how library service initiatives create savings for other public services. Social prescribing is one area where this relationship could be examined: it is a key component of the national strategy of the NHS for promoting personalised care. Social prescribing connects people to activities and services within the community to meet practical, social and emotional needs that impact personal health and wellbeing.

Extending the reach of services supporting children's literacy

Library services could consider how to develop the offer of programmes for teens and older teens to match the success and variety of programmes available for younger children. They could embed approaches we saw in the programmes we considered, where reading and literacy were supported through connections with other interests and through purposeful, practical activities. It may also be useful to consider which locations and what type of spaces support the engagement of more teens with reading and literacy programmes. Schemes which afford older teens agency and responsibility appeared to be very successful, especially when they worked alongside young adults as role models. Libraries could seek to identify more effective ways of communicating their offer to this age group.

Further evaluation of services

We suggest that library services consider developing a sampling and data collection strategy, to provide appropriate quantitative data for evaluating the impact and effectiveness of public library services in key areas. In addition, services could initiate an evaluation of the wellbeing and mental health outcomes of different library activities. An evaluation of the environmental impact of using mobile library vans may also be worthwhile.

Areas for Improvement Identified by Workshop Stakeholders

- 🌿 Engage more with those who do not currently use library services in learning how to encourage library use
- 🌿 Link with the external partners to address community gaps in resources and services
- 🌿 Standardise services where possible
- 🌿 Increase outreach for those who are homeless by providing meal vouchers
- 🌿 Automatic enrolment, especially for areas of deprivation
- 🌿 Collaborate more with primary schools
- 🌿 Work with local General Practitioners to obtain suitable health information to pass on to library service users
- 🌿 Use of appropriate tools to advertise library activities
- 🌿 Co-locating services and cross-promotion of services with local organisations
- 🌿 Lifelong learning consultations with marginalised people who feel they have not been served by schools or libraries in their lives
- 🌿 Remove time limits on computers and allow use until the next booking
- 🌿 Expansion of programmes for maternity services – support groups for pregnant and new mums and increase health literacy among this group

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APPENDIX

THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF LIBRARY SERVICES (EVOLS): METHODS AND ASSUMPTIONS

This paper provides an overview of the underlying principles and techniques employed to assess the economic value of library services. More specifically, it:

- 🌿 Groups and explains the ‘value domains’ that have been identified based on the field research conducted and the feedback received from various stakeholders during face-to-face events.
- 🌿 Explains the rationale for the value domain we have identified.
- 🌿 Describes the method/s that have been selected for measuring these values and the rationale for the selection, including the economic approach and where appropriate, the data sources used.
- 🌿 Guides the reader to relevant economic and related literature that supports the content discussed in the paper.
- 🌿 Explains the data requirements for the modelling that was undertaken.

AIM OF EVOLS

The project aims to estimate the monetary value of services provided by libraries in the Eastern region, demonstrating relevance on both a local and national level. Fundamentally we found that libraries, big or small, rural or urban, are responding to their communities’ needs, in specific and nuanced ways. Libraries are highly heterogeneous in the services they offer and vary by the populations they serve, their size, location, available resources, and local council priorities. For these reasons, we have modelled different case studies from the field work undertaken using a common framework and set of options in our main model. The model is available online via Libraries Connected and UEA Publishing Project.

METHODS

In economic theory, there are numerous approaches to assess value. Among them, the most suitable for libraries are the "value in use," which considers the practical benefits derived from library services, and the concept of "value in exchange"; which is relevant when certain services or goods, such as book purchases, are already exchanged in a market setting. Value in use describes the likely or expected 'utility' that is derived, while the value in exchange is more about willingness to pay for a product that has a 'shadow' market price that can be implied. We could not find a single method to evaluate and measure the value of the output of libraries, so we adopted a pragmatic approach for each strand of value that was identified. In some cases where we had nothing more, we assumed that the value of provision was equal to the cost of the particular service i.e., when considering services such as time spent with a librarian or the utilization of building space, we assumed that these services would only be provided if the cost incurred was not greater than the presumed benefit gained. This is standard economic theory. However, this was not our preferred method and we sought empirical evidence of more comprehensive value when we could find such relevant sources.

We have tried to identify the most common sources of values of library services based on extensive relevant research into libraries.

We also appreciate that the role and definition of a library has changed and is continuing to change in step with social and cultural change. Libraries have had to address these trends when faced with issues such as digitisation, competition in the book reading space from alternative sources, new media, and a decline in reading generally. Literacy and reading habits have also become more challenging in some populations and the Covid-19 pandemic, financial cuts, and a lack of LA funds for investment have also played a part in diminishing conventional library access and in particular, traditional footfall.

COST OF RUNNING LIBRARIES

From the costs associated with library services, we can infer certain aspects of their value. The usual costs associated with running libraries consist of fixed costs (i.e. overheads) and variable costs (i.e. mostly staff and consumable). Knowing these costs is an effective means of expressing value of human input and expertise and the physical resources required to run a library service. We recognise that such value attribution is only a minimal value and in many more cases, there may be much more value potentially to be realised.

Consider a scenario where a class is held in a room within a library. While the value of this class can be assessed based on the resources invested, such as staff and space, its true worth is more likely to be reflected in the broader outcomes it generates for society. The impact of the class on the participants' health, knowledge, skills, and overall societal benefit is often far greater than the mere inputs utilized to facilitate it. We have pursued such benefits wherever possible and used such estimates where the evidence is reliable. Some services in libraries have been evaluated in this way in

academic literature and various reports but others have not. Where possible, we used these, provided there was a direct analogue with the services we knew had been carried out in the specific library case studies being investigated. Otherwise, we have fallen back on the input's method. We should also add that none of the case studies that have been reported in the main report have been formally evaluated, so that the evidence we have used in the economic modelling if it exists at all, is imputed from other studies not directly from the scope of this report.

We sought figures for the running of libraries from respondents and specialists in library services who have collaborated with us in this study. We asked them for estimates of the cost of running:

1. Buildings, rent or borrowings, maintenance, power and heating etc. and related services.
2. Staffing, including local and (% of) centralized services, contractors, etc.
3. Other capital equipment, including computers, etc. and transport e.g. vehicles such as vans, mobile libraries, etc.
4. Consumable (e.g., marketing, postage, advertising, outreach etc.)

Observation from the fieldwork in the project led us to derive some clear activity functions performed by all libraries to some degree. From these activities it was clear that different types of outputs emanated from them and that these could be grouped into several domains, namely:

BOOKS BORROWING, IN-HOUSE READING, AND DIGITAL MATERIALS

Book borrowing

A mainstay of the value of libraries is book borrowing and in-library usage, whether in physical or digital format, and this value may be defined in different ways. Book borrowing may be evaluated as a conventional rental (albeit usually a free one, although sometimes potential fines are attached to overuse). The value of accessing and borrowing books, often found using the shadow value of leisure time, may also be considered. Users are not restricted by a need to physically visit the library since materials are available through online library portals. These qualities add to the 'human capital' value of libraries through their role as education and literacy enablers. Their additional value in serving the wider society and the economy can also be considered.

In summary books etc. can be valued by their:

- 🌿 Rental value, or shadow-price
- 🌿 Time value (of staff or users, or both)
- 🌿 Educational/literacy value ('human capital')
- 🌿 Societal value

We have chosen to develop a proxy rental value for our valuation purposes. However, we acknowledge that every book that is read could have a human capital development facet. For example, a book may improve a person's literacy or knowledge or increase human economic productivity to society. Some of these values have been measured in other library activities we have encountered in the case studies which go beyond simply borrowing books. For the purposes of this model, we assume a base rental value as a minimum value which works to account for stock management and maintenance including the costs of buying and replacing stock, turnover and replacement costs and depreciation.

For borrowed books, we have used the 'shadow price' of purchasing the book as the working life of a book and have discounted it (at 3.5% pa) using a standard method to obtain the Present Value (PV) of an average physical book in today's terms

The average book price we used in the model was **£13/book or per item**. This is based on information gleaned from the Amazon statistics.

Browsing time

Much harder to value is in-library reading time. Users visit libraries in person and on-line, engaging in both short and sometimes lengthier reads. The value to them is harder to measure directly without further study. However, we have ascertained the average time spent in the libraries by a user, the value of leisure time, and the product of both these factors.

We have therefore assumed that users mostly use their leisure time in libraries. In our model we can assume whatever duration is chosen, however half-an-hour of time per visit is seemed reasonable. The value of leisure time which has been estimated to be £14/hr (Verbooy, Hoefman & Brouwer, 2018).

We have inflated this to the most current value last year (2022 prices) to **£16/hour**.

ACCESSING DIGITAL MATERIALS

For accessing and downloading digital materials (e.g.books) for consumption over a given period, we suggest substituting the wholesale price of the book as per the method above with its 'Kindle' equivalent' price.

The average Kindle bookstore price is **£8.83** (converted from US\$ equivalent at current rates).

EVENTS

Libraries often organise events for their communities either as 'one-offs', or as ongoing programmes such as reading groups, health and well-being, arts, and crafts groups etc. that occur regularly over a period of time. The costs we consider include the cost of the staff involved in setting up and running an event. Staff costs might also include time spent in preparation, delivery and follow-up of the events, and administrative tasks such as report writing. Additionally, a proportion of overheads may be applicable.

STAFF COSTS

We have used the cost per hour of the appropriate grade of librarian or assistant undertaking an activity. Additionally, our model uses the number of events laid on per annum. Average salary levels have been used. Volunteers' time was included as appropriate and valued in terms of was valued at their value of leisure time (see above).

2023-24 estimates with on-costs:

£14.51	Library and Information Assistant
£17.88	Library Coordinator (e.g. for Volunteers, Children, Refugee or Digital activities)
£21.45	Community Librarian or Library Manager Level 2
£29.39	Locality Manager or service leadership

We have also used Norfolk venue hire rates for the space in lieu of space costs which can vary considerably.

Venue Hire rates per hour (vary at different sites):

£7.50	Standard
£15.00	Commercial

Except for Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library:

£15.00	Standard
£30.00	Commercial

OTHER WAYS TO MEASURE VALUE

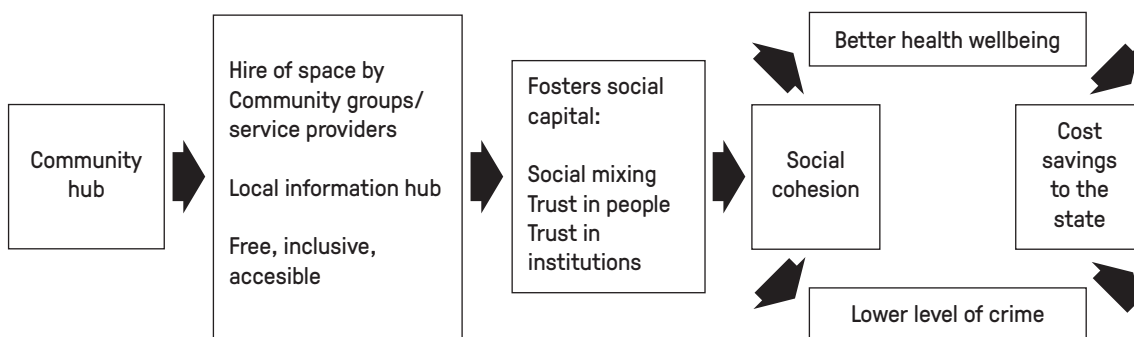
Benefit imputation

During our fieldwork, we encountered various types of events or programs organized by libraries that were suitable for evaluating outcomes. To assess these programs, we utilized a combination of our own case studies and published evaluations. One such case study was the 'Reading Sparks' initiative which not only contributes to the development of social and long-term life skills but also introduces young adults to volunteering opportunities and serves as a platform for informal mentoring and support. Where we could identify existing benefit estimates using similar programmes with sufficient robust evidence, we have used the reported return-on-investment (RoI) estimate instead of the above methods (space and staff cost). In this case, we took the costs and actual programme in question and multiplied it by that RoI to get the benefits estimate. Obviously, this method is only a 'best guess' and should be treated cautiously. We have used a method known as 'probabilistic sensitivity analysis' (PSA) to account for possible variation in the estimates we derived.

COMMUNITY 'HUBS' (E.G. FOR SOCIALISATION, INCLUSION AND OVERCOMING ISOLATION ETC.)

1) Well-being

A recent Arts Council of England report (2014) undertaken by economic consultants SIMETRICA sets out a logic model.



The above is wide and comprehensive and includes the benefits of social cohesion such as health and well-being gains and reduced crime, resulting in cost savings to the state. Using willingness-to-pay methods in a survey of 2,000 adult library visitors, the well-being gains were estimated to be worth £26.44 and £29.08 per visitor from elicitation of willingness-to-pay from library users (they were free in practice, so this makes it difficult to be exact, but the figures are modest and suggest some realism).

General well-being gains are of between **£26.44** and **£29.08** are used in our model

2) Health benefits

Using the WTP method (all at 2015 prices), the health benefits in this study were estimated at £39.03. However, using statistical analysis of the British Household Survey and 'Taking Part' survey, the authors also found the value of using health services through libraries to be only £1.32 per person/year. WTP estimates are accepted often as providing over-estimates.

Since, the personal value of using a health session at a library is difficult to estimate and could be somewhere between **£2** and a possible maximum of **£49 per user/ year** (at current prices), we suggest a figure of **£23.50 per user/ year** (based around the second inter-quartile range). We use this figure for organised programmes in our model.

However, a more general health savings on the NHS etc, were found to be £109 per year (**£136.25** in 2022 prices).

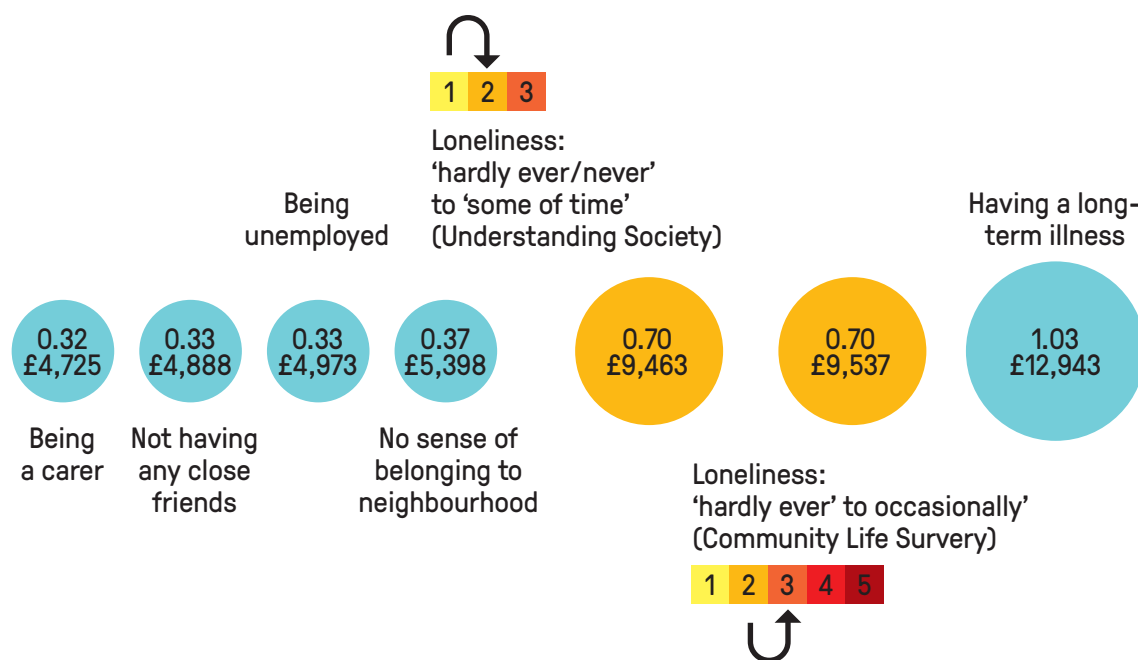
In terms of the health and well-being benefits offered by libraries in a broader sense, the range can vary significantly. Based on two pertinent studies, the estimated benefits range from £23.50 to £136.25 per year per user. Therefore, to determine a representative value, we have opted to use the median figure of **£79.88/year**. This provides a central estimate for the health and well-being benefits derived from engaging with library services.

Therefore, we suggest using a figure of **£23.50, £79.88 or £109.00** based on their relevance and appropriateness for the library services being modelled.

For children attending a one-hour session per week, the Fit and Fed programme was estimated to yield benefits of £279 (**£474.98 inflated in 2022 values**) per child in lifetime economic benefits using evidence from an evaluation of the Sure Start programme (The NESS Research Team, 2004). This figure could also be used for similar programmes.

3) Loneliness

Libraries in the UK support programmes and offer services which seek to combat loneliness and provide social support, particularly for those at risk of isolation. Estimates based on the Loneliness monetisation report (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2020) undertaken by consultants, Symmetrical assessed the number of days off work caused by loneliness (and the proportion of days of work lost due to depression, heart disease and stroke) attributable to severe loneliness. This method obviously misses out many other costs both to wage and non-wage earners alike. When considering the impacts of severe loneliness, they took into account that not all people with severe loneliness are in work (therefore unlikely to suffer from productivity impacts) or are over aged 65+.



The report shows the median total cost of loneliness per year per individual is around **£6,429-£9,537** depending on the degree of loneliness (see below).

Table 4: The health, productivity and wellbeing impacts of loneliness

Impacts	Lack of, to mild loneliness	Mild to moderate loneliness	Moderate to severe loneliness
Health	Evidence NA	Evidence NA	£109
Productivity	Evidence NA	Evidence NA	£330
Wellbeing	£6,429	£8,157 to £9,537	(at least) £9,537
Total	£6,429¹¹	£8,157 to £9,537¹²	(at least) £9,976

The impact that libraries made was based on the degree of severity of loneliness suffered. From this report, we have estimated that the productivity gain of a single visit to a library to overcome loneliness might be in the order of **£21 per person/single visit** in increased productivity.

The extent to which loneliness can be alleviated by libraries is obviously debatable. A hypothetical case study of a befriending scheme for 1,000 lonely individuals showed a total savings of £5,692 (discounted) per year, or **£5.69 per person**. This figure may be indicative of similar schemes organised through libraries and is highly conservative.

We have used a figure between £5.69 and £21/per visit with a median of **£13.35 per visit** (14.16 inflated in 2022) for general loneliness programmes run by libraries. We have used figures for visits for loneliness from the fieldwork to estimate the total visits for total savings.

Where schemes are targeted at unemployed or economically inactive groups, then **£5.69** may be a more appropriate.

Computing and digital education

Digital exclusion is about the lack of access, skills, motivation or confidence to use the internet and benefit from the opportunities that it provides (Good Things Foundation, 2021).

In a paper commissioned by the Good Things Foundation and undertaken by Capita Economic consultants in July 2022 at the Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR), an economic case was made for investing in interventions to help the UK's 10.6m digitally excluded population.

The result of this analysis was a cost-benefit ratio of £9.48:1, indicating that for every £1 invested in digital skills training, £9.48 is gained throughout the economy. This is based on using a learning hub in the community (but not specifically a library). The following table from this report provides more detail in terms of non-disabled and disabled clients.

	Disabled		Non-disabled	
	Operating cost per learner	Capital cost per learner	Operating cost per learner	Capital cost per learner
17-24	£176.15	£5.79	£47.04	£1.55
25-34	£212.46	£6.99	£56.73	£1.87
25-44	£219.41	£7.22	£58.59	£1.93
45-54	£279.26	£9.18	£74.57	£2.45
55-64	£299.78	£9.86	£80.05	£2.63
65-74	£339.33	£11.16	£90.61	£2.98
75+	£420.66	£13.83	£112.33	£3.69
Average	£278.15	£9.15	£74.27	£2.44

Source: Lloyds Banking Group/Ipsos MORI, ONS, Cebr analysis

The benefits of digital inclusion are various as shown in next table. The report estimates several of the main benefits, shown below:

	NHS	GOV Efficiency	Time Savings	Transactions	Corporate	Employment	Earnings	Gov Tax Revenue	Environment	Total Benefits	Costs
2023	20	30	84	77	4624	4	13	11	2	287	182
2024	39	58	162	150	101	7	25	20	3	566	173
2025	56	85	237	217	156	11	37	30	5	832	164
2026	72	109	307	280	208	14	47	38	6	1,082	155
2027	87	132	374	338	258	27	57	47	7	1,316	147
2028	101	152	437	391	305	20	66	54	9	1,536	139
2029	114	172	496	441	250	23	74	61	10	1,741	131
2030	126	190	552	487	392	25	82	68	11	1,933	124
2031	101	206	604	530	432	28	89	74	12	1,112	117
2032	114	221	653	569	470	30	96	80	13	2,279	111
2030	889	1,355	3,906	3,480	2,719	179	586	483	76	13,683	1,443

The table above shows the results of our analysis when a discount factor of 3.5% is applied to net present value calculations, as per HM Treasury 2022 guidelines.

The total benefits estimated currently appear to be £287m compared to an outlay of £182m, or 57% return-on-investment (RoI). However, this RoI looks to increase year-on-year in these projections, as benefits increase sharply as costs fall. This occurs as more people are digitally included in the next 10 years. By taking the average cost of all digital learners today (£176.21) from the likely total benefits in five years' time (2027), of approximately £1,536 per person, we obtained an added value of **£1359.79** (undiscounted) per digital learner.

The benefit figure of **£1,359.79 per participant** is used in our model as a reliable estimate.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND ENABLEMENT

In a modern library, the role of signposting and helping users find information is extremely important. Visitors find this useful in order to undertake various tasks and find out more information.

A study of the role of signposting and social prescribing in improving health and wellbeing in Scotland (2016), suggested that a 'culture of signposting 'should be regarded as a component of a long-term, whole system approach rather than a one-off project'. It suggested that such initiatives can only be sustained if co-produced with other local people and groups and integrated with hubs such as local public services, general practices, libraries, voluntary and third sector groups.

We have been advised by members of our steering group that the effectiveness of role of signposting in libraries lies with the professionalism and training of individual librarians. A librarian must be able to interpret a question, define a need, offer insights, and direct the user to the next stage or level of information. Generally, it is not the task of a librarian to substitute for other professionals. However, referring or directing people to more specialised individuals or organisations is considered a key-role. This being a multifaceted role, it is not as straightforward to establish a monetary value for such services.

The approach we prefer to take is the basic value of the service rendered by a librarian in terms of the time spent with such clients.

We have used the cost per hour of a basic grade of librarian's salary cost of £14.51/hour. However, we appreciate that every contact will be different, and some enablement will have much bigger financial impacts. The model can be changed by the user if they have better evidence.

SANCTUARY AND SHELTER

This covers the role of libraries as a safe and warm space in the community for shelter, private study, and reflection etc. The domain requires less staffing and may even be accessible outside out of hours, occasionally without the presence of library staff.

The key value component is space and warmth. We believe that the overhead costs of running such space could form the basis of the benefit estimation. In a sense this represents the opportunity cost of providing those services elsewhere, perhaps at higher, more commercial rates.

We have used **the standard cost of £7.50 per hour** venue rate to be on the conservative side. More commercial rates of **£15/hour could be used**, where appropriate.

SPECIALISED ASSISTANCE AND ADVICE

In some cases, librarians provide more specialist assistance than only general signposting. This is where a librarian can actively help with a specific problem or represent users, for example where the user has literacy challenges, disabled or otherwise disadvantaged. Other examples, include things like DBS checks, HMRC enquiries and submissions, Blue Badge and other official applications etc.

Again, the approach we prefer to take is the value of the service rendered by a librarian in terms of time spent with such clients. The cost per hour of an appropriate grade of librarian can be used for this domain.

We have used the more senior librarian cost of **£21.45** (Library Manager Level 2).

OTHER WAYS TO MEASURE VALUE OF LIBRARY ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES

Benefit imputation

We have used published results from other studies or similar services to impute the wider social value that libraries create. These studies had to be robust and easily transferable to library services. We used the results of these studies (savings, costs, return on investment etc.) to impute hard monetary value. We acknowledge that this direct imputation method has weakness and may not be context specific. Nor are monetary values always inclusive of all intangible benefits.

We looked at these studies carefully, decided to use UK evidence only, and consulted with library experts. We adopted the results with caution, modifying them where we thought it was appropriate. These estimates are deliberately conservative.

In our fieldwork we came across many different types of ‘events’ or programmes provided by libraries, that could be suitable for outcomes valuation. We used the case studies that were collected by other members of the team and combined them with published evaluations. Some of these are actual but several were a composite that we found and were combined to be more typical.

One such example is the Reading Sparks initiative. This programme helps develop social as well as longer-term life-skills. It also introduces young adults to volunteering as well as acting as informal mentors etc. We identified existing benefit estimates using similar programmes with sufficient robust evidence and using their reported return-on-investment we took the costs the actual programme in question and multiplied it by the imputed RoI to derive the benefit magnitude. As a proxy value we used the value of the Sure Start Programmes in UK. Spreading this benefit across all eligible children (as was done with costs) produces an average lifetime economic benefit to society of between £279 and £557 per eligible child. We have used the low range figure to be on the conservative side. Two-thirds of the economic benefit is received by taxpayers and one-third goes to families. The lower bound value was used and inflated to 2022 values using a 3% interest rate.

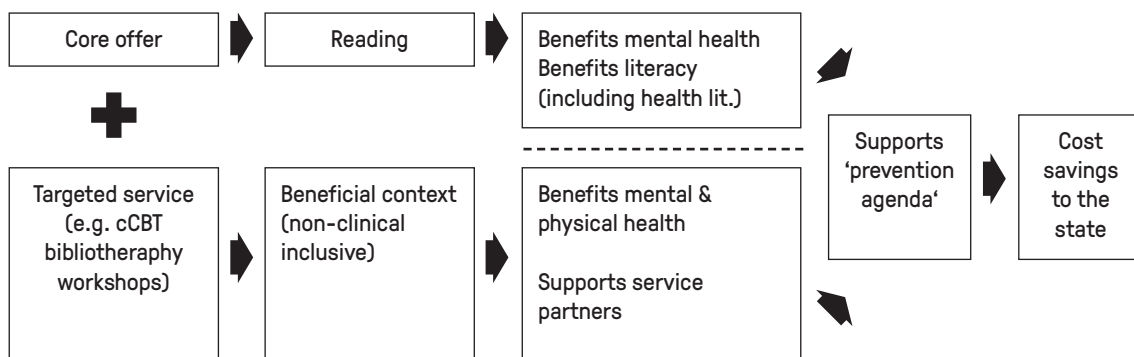
We also used a method known as ‘probabilistic sensitivity analysis’ (PSA) to account of possible variation in the estimates based on known variance. All costs and monetised benefits were discounted or inflated to a base year (2022) for correct valuation.

HEALTH BENEFITS

Libraries contribute to the delivery of health benefits through a range of activities. These include providing individuals with accurate information on health and wellbeing, offering courses that address specific health concerns, guiding individuals to relevant organizations that provides direct personal assistance. Examples of such assistance include distributing hearing-aid batteries, offering walking stick ferrules, providing new anti-slip slippers, and facilitating access to socially prescribed books for reading, as recommended by healthcare professionals such as GPs. As you might expect, the attribution of these health benefits to these kinds of activities is complex. Any posited impacts on final health outcomes must be treated with caution due to multifactorial issues.

In a systematic review of improving health literacy, Eichler et al, (2009), concluded that “little evidence is available if interventions that aim to improve health literacy in citizens/patients will reduce service costs or are cost-effective on a societal perspective.” Although confirming a direct impact of libraries can be challenging, we maintain that it becomes more apparent when considering a broader perspective. Specifically, when expanded to encompass knowledge of where to seek help and the availability of reliable information about specific conditions or treatments, the potential for a direct impact of libraries becomes evident. In the majority of examples, it is perhaps better to measure the benefits of health literacy from the value derived from good signposting and supportive care from librarians than any downstream health benefits. In this regard, health signposting can be measured similarly to general signposting value of libraries (see domain 6).

However, the direct health benefits of libraries may also be in prevention. Particularly, in addition to physical health, libraries offer support for mental health by playing a significant role in reducing isolation, facilitating socialization, providing a sense of safety, serving as a sanctuary, and offering various forms of support. Such a logic model is shown from the Arts Council England report (2014):



This may prevent/reduce the development of higher dependency on services such as community health, social care, crisis care, A&E and hospital care etc. It may also improve the ability to live independently despite mental health problems. Poor mental health is estimated to cost the UK £118 billion per year or 5% of UK GDP (2019), but much can be prevented according to a report by the LSE's Care Policy Evaluation Centre (Public Health England, 2017).

Libraries have the potential to have a substantial impact on mental health, especially among specific groups such as the long-term unemployed, economically inactive individuals (such as retirees and disabled groups), and young people, including school-age children. However, the direct impacts on MH improvement of libraries are still difficult to measure.

One UK study found that MH interventions among school children saved £1.58 per £1 of expenditure, with more general MH interventions having a RoI of between £1.26 and £39.11 (PSSRU, 2017). Assuming a mid-lower quartile in this range, a return for every hour of leisure time spent by those with moderate MH issues in libraries gave a return of £10.1.

Therefore, using this robust study we assumed **a RoI from direct library service inputs into mental health of approximately £10 per £1 spent.**

However, when it comes to specific programmes such as suicide prevention, the figure per life saved from the 'Read my Mind' programme ran in some library settings, was estimated to be £60,000 per individual (£71,643.14) just in averted lost productivity. The attribution of successful suicide prevention to this programme in libraries was one case per year per participating library.

With regard to physical health, every scheme is different depending on its target group and the intensity and duration of the programme. For example, we have evaluated the impact of falls prevention from the various services that libraries often provide (walking sticks, anti-slip shoes, hearing aids etc). In this case, we based the estimate of benefit on the most effective falls prevention evidence for a community setting (PHE,2018). Taking into account a potential exercise program like Tai Chi, which incurred a cost of £422.05 per participant, the **RoI was estimated to be £1.97 per £1 spent.**

DATA REQUIREMENTS FOR EVOLS MODELLING

To populate our model for any given library service requires several data points as highlighted in the third column of the table below. We are happy to advise on the format of the data and periods over which it is to be collected.

VOLUME DATA

Volume data refers to the quantification of library users or visitors, commonly referred to as "footfall". Wherever possible it should be taken from first-hand reported data or observed in a study. Where this has not been possible, we used typical numbers or potential estimates, based on the literature or data we have been able to assemble.

Value domain name	Type of activity	Data measure sought in annual period
'General services'	Building, equipment, staff etc	Rent, annual running cost & payroll information
'Books, borrowing and reading'	'Books, borrowing and reading'	Average price books/media; the average number of times the books/media is borrowed; the 'working life' of the book; and the normal circulation period
'Browsing'	Footfall	The number of visitors; the average time spent in the library by users (or proxy).
'In-library events'	Sessions by topic	The cost per hour of an appropriate grade of librarian or assistant. Volunteers time input (as required).
'Accessing digital materials'	Digital products	Number of downloads etc
'Computing and digital education'	Sessions by topic	Number of clients assisted
'Community support and enablement'	Services rendered by a librarian in terms of the time spent with clients	The cost per hour of an appropriate grade of librarian/assistant/volunteer
'Sanctuary and shelter'	Space and time available	Total overhead cost of space per sq. metre. The cost per hour of any librarian staff/assistant/volunteer
'Specialised assistance and advice'	Services rendered by a librarian in terms of the time spent with clients	The cost per hour of an appropriate grade of librarian/assistant/volunteer

'Health Benefits'		
Physical health signposting and all extant referral pathways	See: Community support and enablement (above)	The cost per hour of an appropriate grade of librarian/assistant/volunteer
Mental health	'Books, borrowing and MH and well-being activities sponsored by libraries	Number of clients/users taking part

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All contributors were involved in the design of the project. They all took an active role in devising the research methods and activities, and all contributed to the writing and reviewing of the final report. All contributors also took on specialist roles within the project as detailed below.

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Libraries for living, and for living better



The value and impact of public libraries
in the East of England

Report for Libraries Connected East
June 2023

University of East Anglia
CreativeUEA and
Health Economics Consulting

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