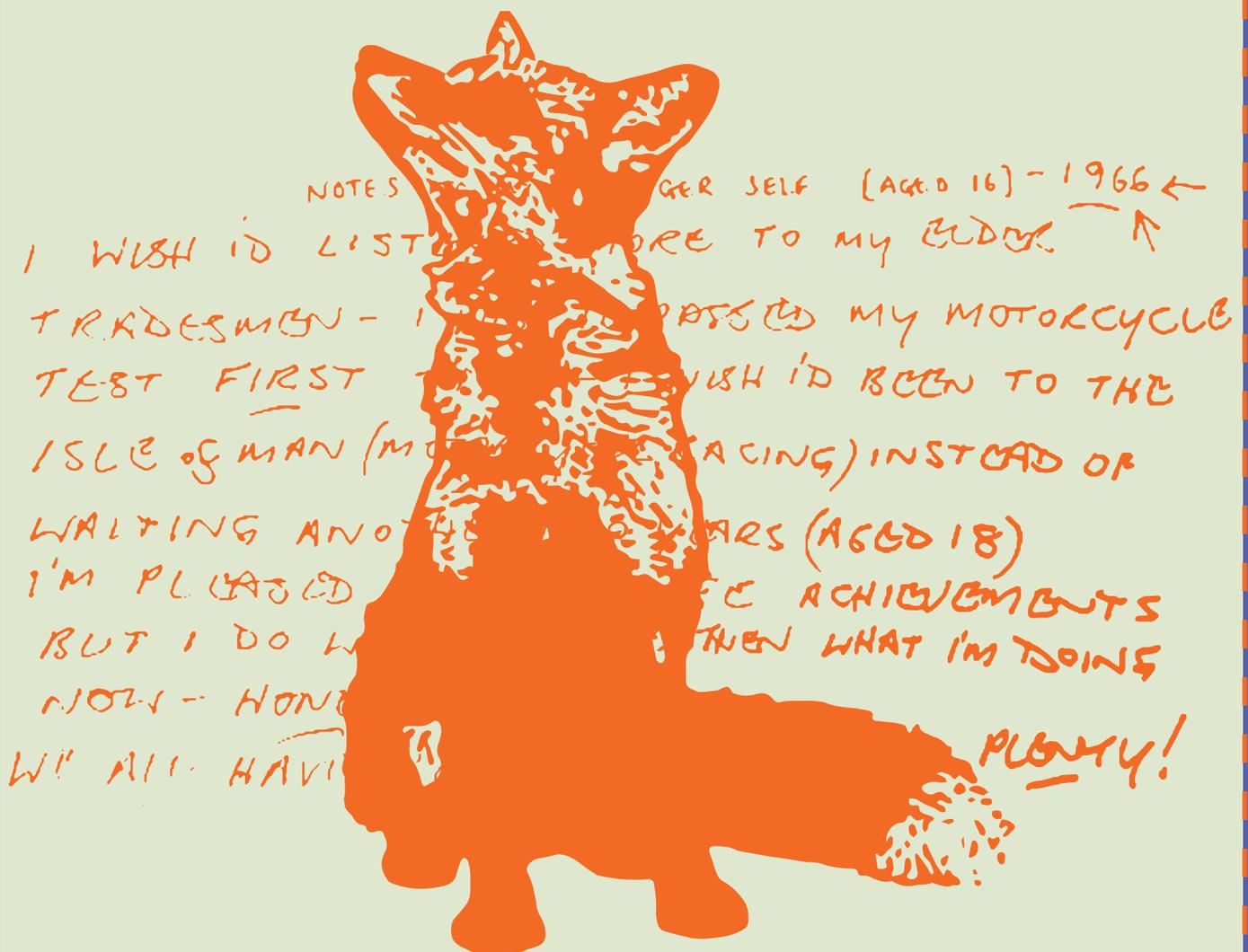


Midlothian Council Library Service

External Evaluation of Midlothian Libraries Bibliotherapy Service: An Assessment of Service Users' Experiences of Participating in Bibliotherapy



Author and Researcher

Rachel King, Clinical Psychologist

Co-author

Fiona Bailey, Healthy Reading Bibliotherapist

Contributors

Alyssa Lee, Healthy Reading Bibliotherapist; Jane Milne, Customer Service Manager; Stephen Harris, Library Development Officer; Penny Balfour, Clinical Associate in Applied Psychology; Martin Bird, Mental Health Planning Officer; Karen Forrester, Clinical Associate in Applied Psychology

Acknowledgements

The Midlothian Libraries Bibliotherapy Service would like to thank the contributors who form the Bibliotherapy Steering Group; the participants of the Braw Blether group for sharing insight and experience; and Alyssa Lee, Healthy Reading Bibliotherapist at the time of the evaluation.

Back cover poem by Mose of Penicuik Braw Blether.

Design and layout by Anna Holt | onlyeightfingers@yahoo.co.uk

Midlothian Council Health and Social Care
Fairfield House
8 Lothian Road
Dalkeith
Midlothian EH22 3AA

© January 2018

Introduction

The Bibliotherapy service, one of the first of its kind in Scotland, was introduced in Midlothian libraries in 2014, with grant funding from the Public Library Improvement Fund, and in partnership with The Scottish Library and Information Council, NHS Lothian, CAHMS and Choose Life. The service has become a key mechanism in libraries making a difference to the mental health and wellbeing of individuals in our communities. Initially perceived as a 'next step' beyond the Books on Prescription scheme, it has since grown to become an important facet of the public library offer in Midlothian, complementing other locally available services in promoting social inclusiveness, social interaction and increased confidence.

The library setting, and the relationship between library staff and customers proves to be crucial for engagement when supporting issues associated with stigma. Library spaces are an obvious 'fit' for a service that emphasises the benefits of reading; participants describe it as a safe, neutral, and non-clinical space. Library staff are well placed to identify individuals who would most benefit from bibliotherapy work, and are pivotal in the promotion and ongoing success of the long-term groups.

The skill of the bibliotherapist is also key in the long-term success of the service, and in enabling expression through discussion and the written word. Well facilitated groups create a shared-experience for individuals, by linking thoughts and feelings to creative literature (rather than self-help), enabling a greater capacity for mutual support between participants and a growing sense of community.

Alongside the success of the core bibliotherapy groups, the service has been able to offer bibliotherapy strands, and packages, tailored to specific client groups. Outreach includes short-term work in high schools, and a recovery café; most recently the service has begun work with an organisation supporting young people excluded from mainstream education, secured through a grant from Creative Scotland. The potential for further collaboration and consultancy from the bibliotherapy service is huge and will be increasingly explored as Midlothian libraries expand the potential of this innovative and life changing service.

1 . Midlothian Bibliotherapy Service

The Midlothian Libraries Bibliotherapy service began in 2014. A steering group of professionals and service users of similar projects have informed the development. The service aims to improve the health and wellbeing of people with mental health difficulties in Midlothian; it is delivered by a part-time Healthy Reading Bibliotherapist.

Initial funding was provided by the Scottish Libraries and Information Council Public Libraries Improvement Fund (PLiF). The main service cost was the employment of a part-time Bibliotherapist for eighteen hours a week. Funding for year two and three (2015-17) came from the Integrated Care Fund (ICF), a local fund using Health and Social Care integration money from the Scottish Government.

Midlothian Libraries use a creative bibliotherapy model, in a group setting. Bibliotherapy is a broad term encompassing different forms of therapeutic practice, using print and non-print materials. The creative approach focuses on 'Imaginative Literature'; poems, stories, nonfiction, news articles, song lyrics, quotes and pictures, as prompts for discussion, to aid linkage of texts and emotions. Wellbeing is encouraged through reading, writing, and storytelling, as a means to improve and support positive outcomes for people. Group participation builds confidence through speaking in front of others.

The service uses a social model. Group sessions are delivered in non-medical, community settings; with a mix of core library-based groups branded Braw Blether, and outreach sessions. Groups aim to promote social interaction, inclusion, and a shared experience. The Healthy Reading Bibliotherapist supports individuals to engage in group participation, whilst offering signposting for any specific needs.

Braw Blether is advertised widely, though promotional material targets individuals with poor mental health and wellbeing. This offers people the chance to self-refer, and the choice to openly identify with a mental health difficulty, or not.

1.1 Current Core Service Provision in Midlothian

There are currently three regular library-based groups, each running ninety-minute sessions.

- Penicuik Braw Blether, set up in November 2014, met weekly on Tuesday afternoons at Penicuik Library (range* = 3-8)
- Dalkeith Braw Blether, set up in October 2014, meet weekly on Monday afternoons at Dalkeith Library (range* 5-8)
- Braw Blether for Carers group meet monthly at Dalkeith Library following the success of a six-week pilot (average n = 5)

** average number of attendees in the past 12 weeks*

1.2 Purpose of Evaluation

This assessment aims to provide an external evaluation of Midlothian Libraries' Bibliotherapy Service, focussing on the impact of Bibliotherapy on attendees' lives. Subsequent findings and recommendations intend to complement the service's ongoing, internal monitoring and evaluation.

2 . Method

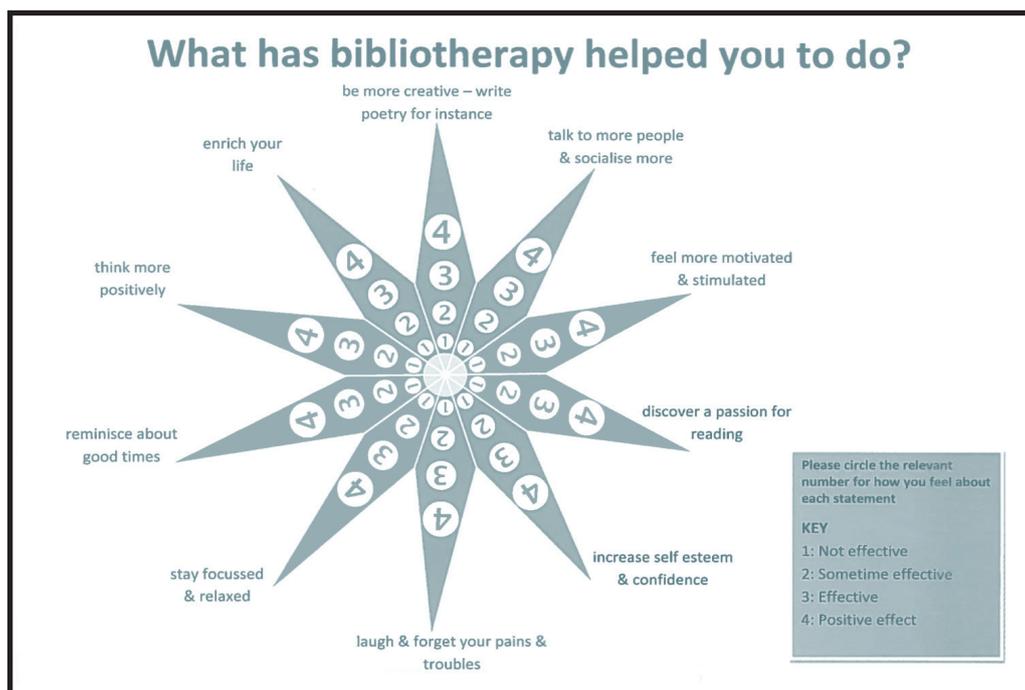
2 . 1 Participants

Thirty-five bibliotherapy service users were invited to participate; this included 23 current members from all three core library groups, and 12 former members of the weekly Braw Blether groups, who had remained contactable by post.

Participants received an evaluation pack, containing; an information sheet, an invitation to attend an interview, a short questionnaire, an 'outcomes star' evaluation, and a consent form. The carers' group did not receive questionnaires as certain aspects, i.e. recruitment, were not relevant.

2 . 2 Outcomes, Star Evaluations and Questionnaires

The Outcomes Star evaluation tool “What has Bibliotherapy helped you do?” (**Fig. 1**) was selected to focus on participants' individual experience of attending bibliotherapy sessions. Participants were asked to rate each benefit on the ten-point star from 0-4 in efficacy.



The Outcome Star is based on the tool used by Kirklees Council; and Camden, Westminster and Derbyshire Local Authorities.

A brief questionnaire was devised to record; location, frequency and duration of attendance, reasons for choosing not to attend, and individual comments on the perceived personal benefits of bibliotherapy to form points for discussion with the Focus Group.

2 . 3 Focus Group

All seven members of Braw Blether for Carers' were invited to attend a Focus Group, at Dalkeith Library. The all-female group shared long-term friendships, and had previously attended other facilitated support groups in Midlothian. Findings from the Focus Group formed follow-up questions for the semi-structured interviews.

2 . 4 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews provided a method to gain an in-depth analysis of individual experiences of Bibliotherapy. Interviewees were selected randomly with an online number generator, and stratified by; age, gender, and location of group. Ideally the selection hoped to include at least one attendee who had disclosed mental health difficulties, and an individual who had only chosen to attend the group once.

7 weekly, Braw Blether attendees volunteered for interview, including one attendee who had chosen not to return. Open-ended interviews were conducted with 5 attendees; 4 from Penicuik, 1 from Dalkeith. One volunteer chose an interview by telephone, and the remaining interviews took place at Penicuik Library. The length of each interview varied, ranging from 23 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes, with a mean duration of 45 minutes.

All interviews were conducted by the researcher to reduce the risk of subjectivity in responses, from participants who may have developed a rapport with the Healthy Reading Bibliotherapist. Interviews were transcribed and analysed for key themes.

3 . Findings

3 . 1 Participants

From the 27 Penicuik and Dalkeith attendees who received evaluation packs, 5 (18.5%) people completed the questionnaire 9 (36%) completed both the questionnaire and the star evaluation and 8 (29.6%) chose to participate in an interview. 6 (85.71%) people from the carers group completed star evaluations and 5 out of 7 (71.42%) current attendees took part in the focus group.

3 . 2 Outcomes Star Evaluations

Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents from each group. Further findings from Penicuik and Dalkeith are reported together, as only three evaluations from each group were fully completed, with a further three from Penicuik partially completed.

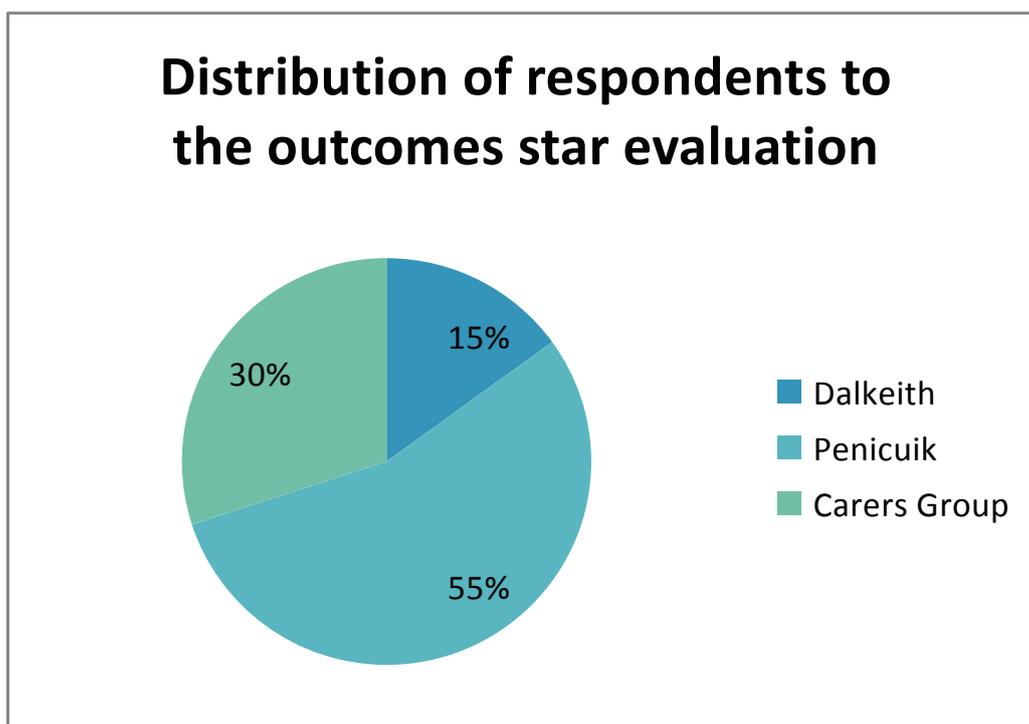


Figure 3 shows the average ratings for each statement on the star evaluation. All ten statements were rated above average or higher; with socialising, motivation and stimulation, and enrich your life; rated as the most effective.

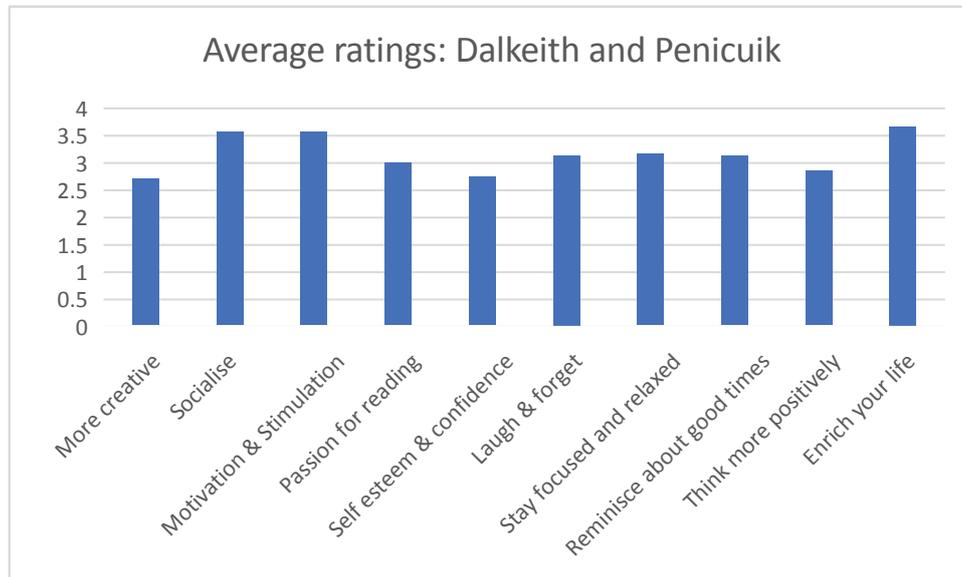
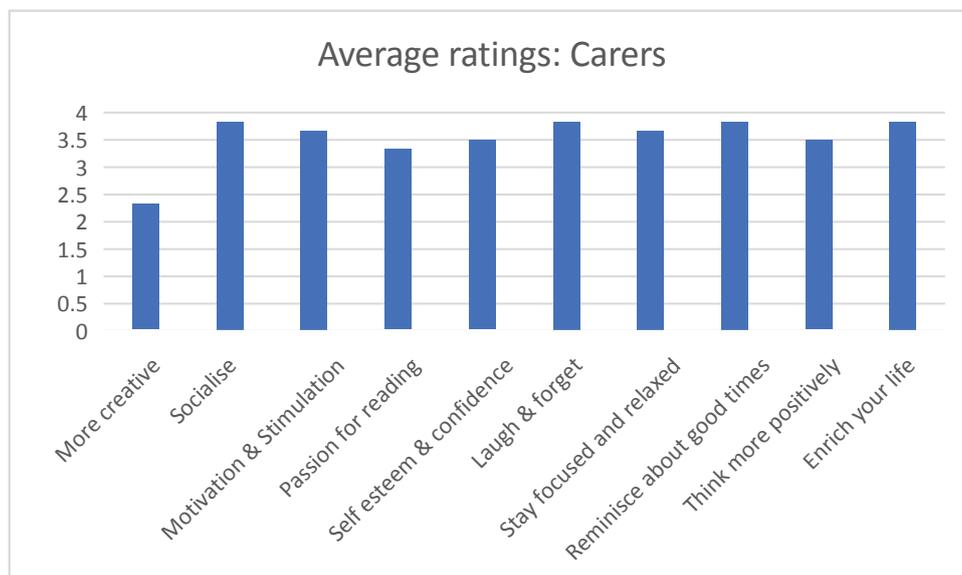


Figure 4 shows the average ratings for each statement from the carers' group. Once again all statements were rated above average, with the exception of be more creative. Two of the four highest rated statements socialising and enrich your life were common to Penicuik and Dalkeith, and the other two were laugh and forget troubles and reminisce about good times.



3 . 3 Questionnaires

Figure 5 List of questions used to form the questionnaire.

You have previously expressed an interest in the Braw Blether service in Midlothian Please take the time to answer the following questions with as much detail as possible, or as much detail as you wish to give. If you need more space please continue on the reverse side of the page.

- 1 . How did you find out about Braw Blether?
- 2 . Did someone recommend Braw Blether to you? If yes, who?
- 3 . Did you attend Braw Blether?
- 4 . If you didn't attend, or only attended once or twice, what stopped you from coming along?
- 5 . If you did attend, how many sessions did you go to?
If you can remember, please write the number in the first box. If you are unsure, please tick one of the other boxes.
Exactly At least 1 Around 2-4 5+
- 6 . If yes, where did you attend?
- 7 . What do you feel you have gained from coming to Braw Blether?

Figure 6 is a summary of responses to questions 1- 7 from both weekly Braw Blether groups.

	Dalkeith	Penicuik
How people found out about Braw Blether	Recommendation from relative (n=1), after speaking to the bibliotherapist in the library (n=1), through the Orchard centre in Bonnyrigg (n=1)	Notice board in library (n=1), email from Midlothian libraries (n=1), told about it by the librarian (n=4), advertised in the Midlothian advertiser (n=1), from a current attendee (n=2), Want to Work group (n=1)
Number of sessions attended	2-4 times (n=2), 5+ sessions (n=1)	1 session (2), 2-4 times (n=3), 5+ (n=6)
Reasons people stopped attending	Session times didn't suit Work commitments	Session times didn't suit Health issues Busy schedule Not for them - would prefer a book club set up

The responses to question 7 informed the focus group's discussion. Both groups reported a wide range of benefits from attending bibliotherapy sessions, which can be seen on page 28.

3 . 4 Focus Group

Five out of seven carers took part in the focus group, which lasted 45 minutes. Most people had not been sure what to expect beforehand, but had enjoyed it when they came along.

It was clear the group really looked forward to the sessions. The general feedback was very positive and there was only one change the group would make, if they could, which would be to meet more often.

“ It surprised me and I love it,
absolutely love it ”

“ The carers have to be able
to escape to get here ”
“ Yeah, you’ve got to know
the person you’re caring
for is fine ”

The women were asked about potential barriers in attending the group, and identified the responsibilities involved in the caring role. All agreed, a crisis may occur that has to be dealt with immediately, which might result in a missed session.

The shared experience of being a carer was seen as one of the group’s main benefits, and this lessened any impact of changing circumstances on attendance. The mutual understanding about the unpredictable and challenging role of being a carer alleviated potential feelings of guilt.

“ We all understand. We’ve all been through it ”

Another positive aspect of bibliotherapy, particularly for those who are more isolated, was the social aspect and this was something everyone felt that they had benefited from; both from the group itself as a social event, and from extending their social circle from meeting others and then going other places together. Though most of the women knew one another beforehand, all felt the sessions had allowed them to get to know one another better.

One important factor identified in the group's success was the facilitator, the relationship that develops, and the knowledge and skill that the facilitator possesses. Throughout the focus group, the bibliotherapist received very positive comments, and the group acknowledged her efforts both during the group, and in arranging other events for them to attend.

“ ”

Everything's been well researched

“ ”
She's so enthusiastic which is brilliant and she really stimulates you

“ ”

This is perfect, it's an escape, as reading is

I feel I'm battling most of the time, I've had to, and you don't have to do battle here. You can sit and have a laugh and you just enjoy what you're discussing, and it's such a refreshing change, it really is.

I do manage to switch off here

”

People also enjoyed learning in a stimulating way, and found the most enjoyable part was listening to what everyone had to say about each piece of reading. Everyone found this very engaging:

“ ”

I think you're learning all the time, never too old to learn.

And it's opening your mind to different people, different things...

And there's no right or wrong

”

The group are keen readers, but because of the demands of the caring role, many had struggled to find the time to read. But through the sessions, they had rediscovered their enjoyment of reading, reclaiming a bit more time for themselves.

“

”

...reading's one of the first things in my case that went because I had so many other priorities.... and since coming here I think oh no, I'm gonna go to the library, I'm gonna get the book out and I'm going to read it.

The findings from the focus group helped to inform interview questions for the rest of the evaluation, and provides examples of the positive impact that bibliotherapy has. For example, the carers mentioned that people who do not read regularly may not enjoy the group, and this was explored in the interviews after attendees had identified any barriers they could think people would face in coming along to groups.



4 . Interviews

There were 5 interviewees in total; 3 males, 2 females. One interviewee was in employment and two were retired. The remaining two interviewees were unemployed; one of which was actively seeking work. The two longest interviews were chosen as case studies, using pseudonyms. Both individuals shared an experience of mental health difficulties, which they felt the bibliotherapy group had helped them with.

4 . 1 Case Study One: 'Sophie' from Dalkeith Braw Blether

Sophie came along to the group hoping that it would be a place to discuss books, and find out more about other people. She started attending while the group was still forming, which relieved some anxieties. Sophie stated that due to mental health issues, it may have been more difficult to come along to a pre-existing group.

“ I think I probably would have found it hard if I joined in later on, just because of the kind of depression and anxiety issues I have. ”

Sophie felt that when other people joined the group later, the bibliotherapist had handled this very well and had eased people in.

“ I've certainly not felt it's been awkward when other new people have come and I didn't get the feeling that they felt that way, but it is because [the bibliotherapist] is prepared for it I think. ”

While Sophie found the bibliotherapist and the group very welcoming, she noted potential doubts around not knowing what was going to happen in the group, or how big the group was. Sophie suggested that providing some information about how the group runs, either when advertising the group, or before joining, could help with this.

Perhaps some kind of context as to what you're going into and that there is a recognition that you're joining something that is already established, and as far as they can guarantee that you'd be made to feel welcome and brought into the group.

When asked about changes or improvements that could be made to the group, Sophie felt that there is a lot of pressure on the bibliotherapist to come up with ideas, and that although the bibliotherapist does ensure that the group is participative, there should be more of a focus on the group to do this:

I think maybe there ought to be more emphasis on us, y'know, the group is for us, why isn't there more onus on us to bring stuff along and to have ideas about what to do, and I think people would do and they would get used to doing that.

Sophie proposed that to prevent individuals feeling pressure when doing this, people could pair up, or have a theme to work towards. Another suggestion was using different forms of books, perhaps art books. Sophie mentioned one session where the group had picked cookbooks from the library and used these.

...types of art as well, and linking them to different moods...I think it make people more comfortable, the idea that it's not just about the literary stuff.

Other suggestions included; more activities involving the Scots language, focusing on events happening in the local community, and outings such as to the Book Festival. Sophie was aware plans had been made to go to the book festival, but was unsure whether these went ahead or not.

Sophie could not think of anything that she did not like about the group.

You don't really know what's going to happen any time, so I've certainly never been bored in it and I've always been engaged...it always turned out to be really quite interesting.

When asked about what she had gained personally from coming along to the group, Sophie felt that it was important in that it got her out of the house during a difficult period in her life.

“ ”

It was really was one of the lowest points that I had and it really was for a while the only time that I went and did anything other than go to see my GP... literally this is where I would come to see other people.

Another advantage of the group for Sophie was the creation of a small community of people, which she hadn't expected, since sometimes groups do not come together in her experience. She found the group to be a lot of fun, with lovely people, led by a skilled facilitator. Sophie also valued the participatory aspect, and support with underlying skills such as confidence building.

“ ”

I've brought in things to read to the group, and it did let me feel-and I'm sorry because I hate words like this-but it did make me feel like I had a bit more ownership and was taking a bit more responsibility...bringing in something that meant something to me and talking about that, particularly at a time when it wasn't that easy for me to do things like that. I did find that really really valuable.

Sophie also stressed the importance of people not feeling forced to participate, and that people are eased into participating in a non-intimidating way.

“ ”

It is about gaining confidence even though it's not what you think you're there to do, but that's what's happening.

Sophie was asked if the group provided the escapism for her, as the carers described. Sophie felt that this applied to her, although not consistently. The group would help her feel more positive, at least temporarily.

“ You did have that hour and a half where that's all you were thinking about, not anything else, just engaging in this and kinda chatting to people, and it was good to have that, it helped me a lot. ”

In terms of benefits that bibliotherapy brought to Sophie's everyday life, she felt that it had reminded her about enjoyment, at a time when she did not feel motivated to do much.

“ I think it helped me just get back some of the things I kinda lost track of when I was really at the worst kind of depression and when I felt that I didn't really want to talk to people, or go out of the house or do anything, this reminded me that there are things out there, that there are things that are pleasures to do. ”

There was also a sense of bibliotherapy opening up other reading options, allowing Sophie to get back to reading which had always been a huge interest of hers.

“ I was interested in the stuff that they would bring because it wasn't stuff that I would have looked at. And [the bibliotherapist] was very broad about what she brought along...she managed to find something in it that was more interesting than I would have ever supposed so it did open up some doors for me... ”

Sophie found that mental health difficulties reduced her concentration levels, making it more difficult to read - something that she had previously spent a lot of her spare time doing. Bibliotherapy helped Sophie to get back into reading and to find different ways of doing this.

“ Exposing me to different things that I wouldn't necessarily thought of reading... pointed me towards some things that made it easier to get back into reading... I can concentrate again...”

Sophie didn't feel that it was a barrier to coming along if someone did not read much. On the contrary, she felt that it could help someone to see that there are different forms of reading, not just reading long books, and it could encourage people to read more.

“ ...[bibliotherapy] showed me there were different ways into it.”

When asked about any specific sessions, Sophie spoke about an exercise where the group each had a pile of words and collaborated to make lines of a poem. Sophie had expected the exercise to 'excruciating', but found it to be very enjoyable, particularly as there was no pressure to make a rhyming poem or even one that made sense.

“ It was actually really, really good and [the bibliotherapist] did a really good job of getting us to work together to make that, it wasn't her doing it or one person. It was a really good exercise for the group, but also individually.”

Sophie also stated that something which made sessions enjoyable was that the bibliotherapist was able to encourage people to tell their own stories; why people chose a particular story or poem to read, why they reacted to something in a particular way and things they had experienced which were relevant to the material covered.

“ People tell you stuff about their lives that probably wouldn't come up if you just met them under ordinary circumstances, which is interesting. [The bibliotherapist] was very creative in the ways that she encouraged people to share things, but only as much as they wanted to and only to the level of detail that they wanted to.”

This enjoyable aspect of the group was due to the bibliotherapist's skill in drawing people's stories from them, but not pressuring people to do so. When asked about what she felt the most important aspect of bibliotherapy was, Sophie felt that the skill of the bibliotherapist was a crucial factor in creating the right atmosphere in which people felt comfortable enough to participate and share their personal stories, as well as in facilitating and managing the group.

“

”

...creating an atmosphere in which people felt okay to speak and to show that you were able to move from talking about a book to talking about something that is more personal, and that shift might not have happened...if you had a different facilitator who isn't as skilled as [the bibliotherapist].

Sophie was asked how she would describe or 'sell' the group to others who may be thinking of coming along.

“

”

I think I would probably sell it just on the idea that it's fun, and there's no obligation to it, you go along and contribute stuff if you want to or listen to people if you just want to, have your cup of tea and enjoy it. Find out about things that you probably wouldn't necessarily have come across yourself.

Sophie felt that there was a lot of interest in bibliotherapy, although people may not know what to call it or realise what it is specifically. As part of a blog, Sophie writes about bibliotherapy and receives very positive responses and a lot of interest from people in the UK and worldwide. This in turn has led Sophie to feel fortunate that bibliotherapy was available near her.

“

”

I felt really glad that it was there and lucky that I found out about it and took the chance on doing it without really knowing exactly what I was getting myself into, because it has made a huge difference to me... I genuinely believe it can really help people.

4 . 2 Case Study Two: 'Jack' from Penicuik Braw Blether

Jack had 'very favourable' impressions of the group to begin with, as he was told about it by an existing group member. He felt that the group had a good atmosphere, and there was no pressure to prepare anything like there would be for a book group. Jack felt it had also helped that the bibliotherapist got in touch before he came along.

“

”

[The bibliotherapist] had actually got in touch with me when she heard that I was going to come along, so that sort of introduction broke the ice...made me feel a lot more relaxed about coming because when you've got a mental health problem like myself, going into anywhere that's unfamiliar is quite daunting.

Jack described the group as stimulating, and as having an atmosphere which relieved tension, allowing him to speak within a group - something which he had had a negative experience with.

“

”

That situation [bibliotherapy] was quite a good sort of comforting arena to begin to express myself...it's just your opinion that is asked for, there's no right or wrong answers, and you feel secure. you kinda feel as if, as a group, you're exploring things, exploring literature together.

Jack saw the group as something to look forward to and acknowledged the bibliotherapist's role in linking texts to experiences and allowing people to build up confidence.

“

”

[The bibliotherapist] was able to come up with material that was relevant to experiences individual group members had...[bibliotherapy] was definitely something that encouraged me to speak of more and more and contribute, and it certainly seemed to work that way for other group members.

Jack directly linked the experience of coming along to the group as helping with his mental health difficulties, in part due to the stimulating group interaction.

“

”

When you're feeling bad about yourself, you've got mental health problems you tend to find everything's a bit stilted, and having that flow of conversation, that interaction that's so relaxed, with everybody bringing along stuff... you can share observations on things.

One theme that Jack touched on was the idea of exploring different cultures as a group through reading books that you may not pick up normally, as well as sharing and comparing perspectives with others.

“

”

It opens up the world...you get to feel as though you're a world citizen again.

“

”

It kinda reflects society in a way, and it builds understanding between different age groups. Gives you a better perspective...

When asked if anything about the group could be improved or changed, Jack thought that the group worked very well as it is. In contrast with Sophie, Jack liked the mystery of not knowing what would be presented each week, including looking at materials he would not normally be exposed to, such as children's books. Jack thought the format was good enough to be exported to many other health and social groups.

When asked about potential barriers to attending, Jack felt that the bibliotherapist dealt with any anxieties, and that the main barriers may be set times and encouraging people to come along initially, particularly people with mental health difficulties.

Jack also mentioned how bibliotherapy helped overcome some of the difficulties mental health problems can create, in trying to read.

“ With the depression and anxiety, I find it hard to read a whole book or something long...your concentration can be appalling, but the bibliotherapy group provides a focus. It's good, manageable sizes of things to read... so it's absolutely perfect for people that are suffering mental ill health, as well as people who are not great readers, it builds familiarity and attachment to literature that you'd maybe feel excluded from otherwise.

Like Sophie, Jack did not feel that a huge interest in reading was necessary to come along. Jack thought advertising should be clear that bibliotherapy was different from a book group.

“ A book group would be absolutely daunting to me, I would never have the mental stamina to get through a whole book, it would become a real chore for me... bibliotherapy provides that interface, and it's a social environment to do it...you're sharing the experience with people.

Some of the main benefits were that Jack felt bibliotherapy gave him were exposure to different materials and ideas, and help with social anxiety.

“ It does lead to curiosity about other books, it does broaden the mind, it does challenge your perceptions...it's gone a long way to conquering social anxiety...it's made me feel as if I've got a voice, that I do have an opinion to give.

Jack described most things in life as fitting into one of three categories; health, wealth and happiness. Bibliotherapy, Jack argued, fits into all three of these categories for him.

“ Bibliotherapy is a great project because it benefits my happiness, improves my mood, it's what I look forward to through the week, and it improves my employability...it's right there in the middle benefitting me in all sorts of directions. ”

Jack had started using other libraries within Midlothian as a result of the bibliotherapy group, generally looking at employability and self-help books. This had led to him being more aware of what happens in the community, and had also encouraged him to use the gym located next to the Penicuik Library. Jack also felt that it was beneficial for the groups to be held in libraries.

“ Libraries are quite a welcoming place, they're neutral territory...it doesn't feel like it's the school's, the school kids' or anybody else's. ”

When asked about specific highlights or moments, Jack felt that it was enjoyable to see how different things affected different group members, and particularly enjoyed occasions where members had shared material that they had written themselves.

“ [Another group member] has read two or three poems that are incredibly well written and they just went down so well, the experience was quite emotional because he was going over his past, things that mattered to him. ”

Jack also identified the skill of the bibliotherapist, as an important aspect of the group.

“ It's a very professionally run project... the ability to choose material...that stimulates quite a diverse group of people...is a high level ability...it's well worth it, it does benefit people, it does benefit society...it requires a real professional who can look into the hearts of the people in the group. ”

When asked how he would describe Braw Blether to a friend, Jack said:

“It’s soothing, it’s stimulating, it’s enjoyable, it’s a braw blether, it’s culturally enriched, it will make you feel glad to be part of your community, it will encourage you to look up other things... it will be a feature of the week you can look forward to enjoying, it’ll let you meet some nice people whose conversation you will enjoy.”

In common with Sophie, Jack felt grateful to have had the opportunity to come along, and was proud of the fact that Midlothian is a place which offered bibliotherapy groups. Jack also identified the cohesion of the group that has built over time. As with Sophie, Jack felt that demand for the group would be high in other places as it seemed to be helpful for many other people in different situations to him. Jack also identified one of the most important benefits of bibliotherapy to him was that it had increased his confidence and self-esteem.

“I’ve been given time to speak in these things, my opinion’s been revisited if it’s relevant to something somebody else has said, it all gives a sense of worth to the individuals and that helps low self esteem in a way that you feel you’re part of a group. What you say matters to the individuals there.”



5 . Recommendations

- 1 . The location of the three library-based groups proved particularly significant. Described as 'neutral territory', during one case study – indicating that libraries are ideal venues for work improving mental health and wellbeing in a non-clinical setting.

The interviewee who had attended the group once and decided not to return, had found the group enjoyable, and felt the group would be a useful to structure their week and provide a way to meet new people. However, the set time did not fit their current schedule, suggesting more varied session opportunities might be valuable.

- 2 . Many star outcomes charts were not completed, or partially completed, which may be a reflection of the wording used to rate each statement. For example, if an individual believed bibliotherapy had not helped them to discover a passion for reading, they may not have wanted to rate this as 'ineffective' and decided to leave this outcome blank instead. It's also possible that participants may have missed the star chart altogether, as it was the last page in the evaluation pack. Future evaluation exercises should rectify this potential for confusion and offer a different layout and structure.

- 3 . More information about the way the groups work would be useful. Feedback suggested that promotional material could include more context to help set expectations. Many interviewees felt literacy issues were not a barrier to attending bibliotherapy sessions. This may be an important point to make in promotional material, to encourage participation and ensure a wide appeal. It's important to make a distinction from a traditional book group, to help meet expectations but also to encourage attendance - differentiating Braw Blether from a book group at the promotional stage would help with context. There is possibly potential for a comparative study of the different effects and impacts of a bibliotherapy group vis a vis a book group.

Braw Blether attendees do not need to prepare for sessions, this helps set it apart from a traditional book group, and was seen a positive aspect by some. Balancing the level of participation between individuals is another requirement of facilitation skills. Others, like Sophie, felt there should be more of an emphasis on the group to contribute materially. This creative aspect is something that could be explored more fully, perhaps in separate groups with more of a focus on such work. The therapeutic effects of such groups may be significant and would require further assessment and evaluation.

4 . Commonality can be powerful, but having a mental health association can create a stigma for the group. Sophie mentioned a group outing that was planned but didn't seem to have taken place. It's possible, based on some of the feedback, that people may have felt uncomfortable about being visible. It is an area that perhaps needs further exploration, both in terms of impact and measures to mitigate.

5 . During the evaluation, library staff were identified as a source of referrals to Braw Blether, indicating one of the aims of the bibliotherapy service - to increase mental health awareness among staff – is being met. Library staff often know their local communities well and are able to promote the groups and suggest attendance to those whose circumstances are known to them, and who they think will benefit. Since library staff have often had a long acquaintance with their regular customers, their suggestions are often taken seriously and trusted by those guided towards the service. Maintaining and expanding this aspect of the service would be a worthwhile undertaking.

6 . It was clear from participant feedback that facilitation skills are key to running a successful service, and maintaining a healthy group dynamic. It could be worthwhile exploring requirements for facilitating bibliotherapy groups, and setting standards for ongoing professional development. Midlothian Libraries Bibliotherapist receives monthly clinical supervision, which is an important contributory part of the service and aids service delivery.

7 . From the current findings there appears to be significant potential for growth of the service; in terms of increasing the number of group sessions, the library locations where the service is offered, and in outreach capacity. The Carers' group were enthusiastic about being able to meet more regularly, and weekly groups commented on the potential use for bibliotherapy in other libraries/locations.

Recent pilot work undertaken at Beeslack High School and the Horizons Recovery Café has focused on specific groups, and shown the potential utility of the service in other locations. Future service development could continue to focus on targeting specific groups in Midlothian. The existing skills and resources within the service can go on to form a toolkit for sharing practice.



Full responses to Q.7

Meeting others.

Getting out of the house

Meeting new people who have had similar experiences to me in terms of mental health

At my lowest point they were often the only people I spoke to during the week other than my partner.

Good company

Friendship

It has been very interesting having poems or short pieces of prose as stimuli for discussion and hearing others points of view.

I felt a positive vibe, which made me feel good about my literacy as a place to go and pool resources and media

Exercised my brain

Feel more motivated and interested generally

Nice to meet new people

Encouraged me to socialise more as the group was very open

Enjoyed discussing ideas and views about pieces of literatures

Feeling part of the community

Appreciated being allowed to express myself freely & have enjoyed the discussions

Opened my eyes to poetry

Renewed my interest in reading

Gave me a chance to express myself

Given an insight into other cultures and books out with my normal association

Reduces isolation

Enjoying something different

A way of airing my own collection of books as well as a springboard to other library use

Engaging in discussion with others

Encourages me to extend my range of reading and explore genres I don't usually seek out

It allows me to tune into books, not always possible when anxiety and depression hits

Having fun!

Gives me a forum for cross generational discussion and sharing of experience outside of familiar circles and I've built friendships

Broadened my interest in terms of what I read

Hearing others points of view

Very interesting talks, chats and topics

A possible new interest which was studying/hearing about a play or a book in a relaxing, welcoming atmosphere.

Gives me confidence to speak in a group, which had been destroyed due to my mental health

Enjoyed discussing books and different views on them

Braw Blether

Reading Between The Lines



YESTERDAY - TODAY AND THE MORN
THIS IS THE PLACE WHERE I WAS BORN
& THE FOUNDRY AND THE PAPER MILLS
THE SIGHT OF THE BRAW MOUNTAIN HILLS
IS A PACT AND ITS NO FLURRY
MY HOME TOWN IS PENICUIK
THAT, I'M PROUD TO SAY AWFAR PENICUIK

Midlothian

