

CILIPS Autumn Gathering 2017

Having never attended the CILIPS Autumn Gathering before, I couldn't pass up the chance to attend when I heard it would be held in Glasgow this year. I applied to the CILIPS Professional Development Fund – which I had heard about previously at a Chartership workshop – and was delighted when I was told that my application was successful. I looked forward to attending all of the sessions – particularly one on the recently published *How Good Is Our School Library* document. I was also keen to discuss the new School Library Improvement Fund with fellow school librarians.

The conference began with a keynote speech from Douglas White (Head of Advocacy, Carnegie UK Trust) and Duncan Wright (CILIPS Trustee, school librarian and organiser of the Save Scotland's School Libraries Group). Douglas and Duncan spoke about the importance of advocating for libraries. Being a school librarian, I was familiar with the Save Our School Libraries campaign - but it was great to hear Duncan talk about his experience in person. Both speakers stressed that we must campaign with a goal in mind for what we want to achieve – a solution to the problem - and not simply build a campaign that “complains” about the things that we don't like. There was a clear message that sharing the stories and experiences of our service users can be a powerful tool when used as evidence of the value of our libraries.

I then attended a School librarian discussion workshop presented by the School Libraries Group (Scotland). This session saw SLG members provide each group with a set of questions to discuss and answer together. I found this to be a great opportunity to discuss issues directly relating to school libraries. The topics discussed were different at each table and all answers will be collated and made available online. I took part in discussions about dealing with overdue books, using social media, lunch time activities and keeping up with the changing library profession. I certainly took away several ideas from this after hearing what has worked well in other schools.

Following this, I heard Shelagh Toonen (Elgin Academy) and Susan Morton (Inverclyde Academy) share their experience of working in school libraries. Hearing about the activities that take place in other schools to encourage pupils to use the library is always inspiring. Shelagh's described the success of her recent project dealing with teens and mental health which was of particular interest to me as it is an issue of concern to school library staff in my own local authority at the moment. I will be sure to pass on details of Shelagh's talk when I next meet with colleagues. From Susan's talk, I took away a feeling of pride that as school librarians we are involved in so many activities designed to engage our young people with books, reading and writing.

The session on *How Good Is Our School Library* again saw group discussions taking place. I felt daunted when I overheard: “It says How Good is Our *School Library* but it's really asking How Good are *You*”. However, through our discussion we realised that as dedicated school librarians; we are already doing the things outlined in the document. Each group discussed the ways in which we self-evaluate to evidence the work we are doing, the impact we have and our contribution to the curriculum. We were encouraged to use the model for triangulation of evidence and think about how we would collect quantitative data, people's views and use direct observation.

My final breakout session was a presentation by Joy Court on reading for pleasure. Joy talked about ways to engage young people and show them how to be readers. It is important that they are given time to read and the freedom to choose what they read. There is no such thing as a reluctant reader – it's just that they haven't found the right book yet. Again, I took away many ideas that I can use in my school library.

The day was drawn to a close with a final keynote speech from James Clay on the Intelligent Library. James talked about how using technology to gather data about library users can provide opportunities for improving user experience. It was very interesting to hear about developments that once would have sounded futuristic but that are now very real possibilities - for example, having the ability to “nudge” users when they are at a certain location via a message to their smartphone encouraging them to visit the library or to observe their surroundings.

In summary, I got so much more than expected from attending the 2017 Autumn Gathering. Whilst I planned to use the conference as an opportunity to network with fellow school librarians, I found that there were great things happening in other sectors too. Through taking the opportunity to network during refreshment breaks, I was able to share ideas with professionals working in other areas. I came away with so many ideas that I can adapt for use back in school. I would recommend that anyone who hasn't attended an event like this before or who feels that conferences “aren't for them” should give it a go. I will certainly be looking to attend next year.