CILIP Scotland Conference Reflective Report 2019
Courage, laughter, and Innovation: A resilient profession

I was successful in securing the CILIP Scotland personal development fund to attend the CILIP Scotland conference this year. I felt attending both days provided me with a rounded immersive experience of the event. The conference focused on the innovative means by which the library profession is able to withstand challenges in the current climate. Here are my reflections on four of the sessions that made the most impact on my professional development.

Innovation, it's a State of Mind

The speaker whom truly inspired me was Jane Cowell, CEO for Yarra Plenty Regional Library in Australia. Everything in her presentation held meaning to me, as she seemed to pitch her talk so that it resonated with delegates from all library sectors. Her talk was based on looking for solutions and outcomes in making the impossible possible; providing meaningful experiences to communities by personalising services; and encouraging a culture where staff are not afraid to speak out with their ideas and learn from their mistakes. Her example of libraries adapting to the emergence of the Internet and all the digital technologies that arose from this, made me reflect on how libraries have had to harness technology and collaborate with it rather than compete against it. I can see this being evident across library sectors: public libraries offering computer classes, as well as school and higher education libraries offering digital literacy classes.

I was interested to hear from Jane that innovation focuses on key meaningful experiences that create a sense of belonging, and this can prove challenging with social media and smart phones making people less likely to physically connect and reach out. Jane purported that libraries have evolved to include other spaces and activities than purely the library collection – Wi-Fi, cafés, and programmes of events – resulting in tailoring the business model to the customer. Thinking back to my own workplace, having a variety of inviting study spaces by experimenting with a range of attractive 'maker space' movable soft furnishings would definitely encourage more students to use the space to study more effectively and connect with each other. The digital collections we offer in my workplace are a good example of providing convenience, making it easier to access collections remotely. Jane believes that libraries have to have convenient services and resources when they are competing with paid services that utilise personalisation such as Netflix or Amazon. This made me think of the new reading list software my library will be using soon, which incorporates many of the features of these paid services.

I also agreed with her line of thinking that innovation needs a culture that allows staff to have time to learn new skills in daily work practices. I feel fortunate that I am able to reap the benefits of this culture as my workplace has staff training and development sessions three times a year, visiting other libraries and learning about other services within the University. I think the example Jane gave of providing other ways to learn and contribute to

the wider library community; through her staff being trained to add a citation to Wikipedia – #1Lib1Ref – could be incorporated into my workplace as another means to aid learning. Jane argued a culture where staff are able to question every library norm and feel confident to come up with their own ideas is also important. This makes sense; with lots of ideas raised by staff in an open culture, there will always be one worth building on. I think being innovative in this way will enable libraries to continue to be a place that people want to visit which is especially important when there is competition for funding.

School libraries and mental health and well-being

I enjoyed listening to how School Librarians have been harnessing innovative practices to remain relevant to their school community. To me this is even more inspiring because they are doing this despite the budget cuts and pressures that have resulted in many of them having to split their working week between schools and for some, a reduction in hours. I attended two separate presentations delivered by two school librarians over the two days, one from St Ninian's Secondary school in Kirkintilloch and the other from Elgin Academy. Both of these presentations discussed how their libraries have become involved in mental health and well-being programmes, which was of particular interest to me as my MSc dissertation was on self-help bibliotherapy.

I really liked the idea of St Ninian's 'Shelf-help' project, an idea that originated from all eight East Dunbartonshire secondary schools highlighting that more could be done to support their pupil's mental health and well-being. As a consortium they successfully applied to the Scottish Libraries Information Council for Scottish Libraries Improvement Fund (SLIF) funding to undertake this project. I especially liked the branded 'shelf-help' online reading lists, which constituted staff and student fiction and non-fiction book recommendations for mental well-being. I feel having a reading list like this in the library at university level and branding it in such a way that the students will use it would promote a safe library space and create dialogue about mental health issues. It was interesting to hear how the School Librarian, Pamela McLean, attended a school libraries conference where she heard a talk by a youth mental health expert and was so impressed that she managed to organise the same expert to pitch mental health talks to the students as part of the shelf-help programme. This has inspired me to review all the sessions I have attended at conferences and determine whether I would be able to raise any topics for future staff development.

Elgin Academy ran a similar mental health project. Each school within the local authority designated certain pupils as mental health 'champions' with their role being to raise awareness of mental health issues and act as peer mentors, enabling other pupils to seek support from the library. I really enjoyed hearing from Shelagh Toonan, Elgin Academy's School Librarian, who provided some context for the underlying need for school libraries to offer mental health and well-being support and resources. I learnt that today's generation of young people, born between 1995 – 2012, are known as 'i-gens', those who have never known life without the Internet and are known for their continual use of smartphones. I was not surprised to hear that this generation experience poorer emotional mental health resulting from too much screen time and less social interaction. I agree with Shelagh that

this has a knock-on effect on young people's transition to higher education with a lack of preparation for adult-hood. Therefore, it was reassuring to hear from both schools that their role as School Librarians is to teach information literacy to all pupils, as well as introduce older pupils to the university library through regular visits. I feel having a networking event between those working in school and academic libraries would help bridge this gap further. Both presentations gave me an insight into the role of School Librarians. I learnt how School Librarians follow the strategic themes from the 'Vibrant Libraries, Thriving Schools. The National Strategy for School Libraries in Scotland 2018 – 2023' in their daily work practices.

Public Libraries and the importance of reading

I chose the sessions on public libraries and the impact they are having with reader engagement and development as I recognised through my PKSB that this was something I wished to gain knowledge on. Rather than hear purely about the Scottish Reading Strategy itself, it was insightful to hear from a Researcher from Birmingham City University on her findings from analysing the strategy. I was heartened to hear that her findings showed that public libraries enrich individuals and communities through reading. With the prevalence of funding issues, the findings also found that the strategy seems to serve as an advocacy tool used by ground level staff in public libraries. It enables them to make their case to management in running events or obtaining resources. I think this is advantageous as I feel that it is the staff working directly with customers in the public libraries, who have more of an understanding on what events or activities would work well to engage their local community. Judy Dobbie, head of Library and Information Services at Leisure and Culture Dundee, reiterated the usefulness of the strategy as an advocacy tool in highlighting the importance of reading and the ability to share good practice amongst libraries.

I learnt how the Scottish Reading Strategy is utilised by all public libraries by splitting their target audiences up – early years, children and young people, and adult groups – and focusing on key implementations for each one. The essential theme that came across from this presentation is that public libraries need to communicate with each other (an online communication resource called 'base camp' seems to be working well for this purpose), and to maintain support from governing bodies to promote reading as much as they can.

Having heard about the strategy, I thought it worked well that the next presentation, by representatives from The Reading Agency, focused on one of the key audiences; looking at the level of impact that the summer reading challenge has on the reading attainment of children over the summer holidays. It was interesting to hear that the summer reading challenge relies on funding and sponsorship to provide the resources for the challenge. I was not aware that this was the case, with the recent Tesco Bank withdrawal affecting participation levels of the challenge, presumably due to fewer resources – stickers, gift bags, badges – on offer to potential participants. I also gained insight into how funding is needed to properly evaluate the summer reading challenge in order to show the anticipated benefits of children's reading levels and make the case for investment of the challenge. I really hope that a future evaluation does take place, as I feel the challenge is a brilliant way

to encourage children to read as well as utilise their local library, paving the way for educational benefits and an enjoyment of reading for the rest of their lives.

Overall Impressions

Attending the conference has provided me with an appreciation of the roles of information professionals in other library sectors as well as an understanding of the issues that they face. It has made me think about the importance of utilising customer stories – what customers get out of using their library – in demonstrating to funding providers the impact library services have on their communities. I am grateful to CILIPS for awarding me the funding to attend this conference and engage with many like-minded professionals.