

Courage, Laughter and Innovation – CILIPS Conference 2019

I was lucky enough to receive the Professional Development Funding to attend the annual CILIPS Conference 2019. The variety of talks on offer gave the attendees the chance to learn about other sectors, but also find a way to adapt ideas and use them going forward.

Day 1

Our first Keynote Speaker was Sue John with 'Women on the shelf: Bravery and the making of a Women's Library'. The venture of the Glasgow Women's Library (GWL) has grown vastly since its birth and clearly won't be slowing down anytime soon. As with any talk, the room hears the same information, however they will never take away the same lessons. The two lessons I took from the room were

1. The angle of a question. Sue explained an incident where a man was staring at the Women's Library, and was asked if he needed help. He asked, 'Why do we need a women's library?'. This question would no doubt invite debate to most, but the meaning behind the question may have been born from wonder, rather than assuming it was born from ignorance. As all good librarians do, they invited the man in, to not only answer his question, but for him to learn.
2. Breaking the fourth wall. I believe the reason this library is continuing to expand is not merely their subject matter, but their engagement with their audience. They do not rely on word of mouth, or walk ins; they are seen and heard! They have created walking tours, collaborated with Royal Conservatoire of Scotland for the *March of Women*, created merchandise (see image below), and backed campaigns, such as Repeal the 8th, attended the Edinburgh Book Festival and more.



Example of merchandise sold by GWL. All of the mugs shown are sold out.

Being able to applaud the women who are achieving this is important. It's great to remember what women of the past have done for us to create modern society, but it is lost if we do not acknowledge the women of modern society who are creating the future. It's even better that they do it with such enthusiasm and humour.

Day 2

During lunch on the second day, I was happily at a table with the Mitchell Library staff who were giving a talk that afternoon; Libraries Change Lives - The Mitchell Library and Citizen Advice Bureau working together. As public libraries take on more responsibilities and partnerships, it was fascinating to learn of the Mitchell and CAB collaboration. Public libraries are used by many people who need help but don't know how to help themselves, but this partnership ensures that the users can get the support and advice they need, and so far, it has had an astounding impact on many lives. Much like the GWL, they were not just waiting for people to turn up and ask for help, staff engagement, and in-reach working helped to reach people who were not questioning their rights. Their simple way of talking to people, gaining their trust and guiding them in their rights has helped people across Glasgow, and they have fully deserved their CILIPS Libraries Change Lives award. Much like the GWL, they work with humour, and were able to laugh about the struggles they faced when putting this plan into action. It was also interesting to hear from the CAB staff, as they work within a library, understand and appreciate libraries, but are not library workers. They could give their perspective on the collaboration as well as hearing from Mitchell Library staff. It's a project that I hope rolls out into other libraries in the future.

All of the talks over the two days were really interesting. I have focused on two here as these two made the biggest impact on me and how I would like libraries to move toward in the future.