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Libraries and community health: new research project launches

Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) has commissioned The Reading Agency and LISU (Loughborough University) to conduct a major new project looking at the contribution public libraries are making to the health and wellbeing of the communities they serve. Professor Neil Frude, who launched the original Cardiff Books on Prescription Scheme is providing expert support to the project.

The team will examine the current landscape of health-related library work, focusing in particular on partnerships with health service providers such as the NHS and on a wide range of models including the highly successful Books on Prescription scheme, creative bibliotherapy, health information and public health activity. It will also look at the future potential for this work.

Sue Wilkinson from the MLA says: "We are excited about the potential for this work to make an impact, both in terms of the development of a public library health offer and a sound evidence base to inform future health outcomes research".

The first stage of the research will take place in January. It will include interviews with library staff, patients and patient advocates, health and social care representatives and local authority representatives. These will gain their views on issues such as:

- libraries' potential to take on a greater role in contributing to the community health and wellbeing
- current partnerships between NHS/social care and libraries and how well these have worked
- where barriers to partnership working might exist, and be overcome
- the keys to success for establishing future partnerships.

There will also be a national survey of English library authorities to discover the extent of their current contribution to the health and wellbeing of local communities and case study work undertaken, to highlight examples of good practice. Findings will be reported in May 2010.

"This is an exciting piece of work that plays an important role in building the case for the health and well being impact of libraries. It also links closely with The Reading Agency's developing strategy for work in this area, following on from the national reading and health think tank we held recently, and will help underpin our regional training programme," says Debbie Hicks, director of research with The Reading Agency, who will be leading this project.

For more media information please contact:

**The Reading Agency: Debbie Hyde, Oasis Media
debbie.hyde@oasismedia.co.uk or 07956 320 486**

**Museums, Libraries and Archives Council: Sunita Sharma
Media Relations Adviser at MLA 020 7273 8299 or
sunita.sharma@mla.gov.uk**

Notes to editors:

- The Reading Agency is an independent charity working to inspire more people to read more. It is funded by the Arts Council and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. (www.readingagency.org.uk)
- Leading strategically, the MLA promotes best practice in museums, libraries and archives to inspire innovative, integrated and sustainable services for all. (www.mla.gov.uk)
- LISU is an internationally renowned research and information centre for library and information services, based in the Department of Information Science at Loughborough University. LISU collects, analyses, interprets, and publishes statistical information for and about the library domain in the UK, and undertakes research and consultancy projects for a wide range of organisations (www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/dils/lisu/).