

## Libraries

# The Opportunities Project

## Dundee City Council

### Contact for Enquiries

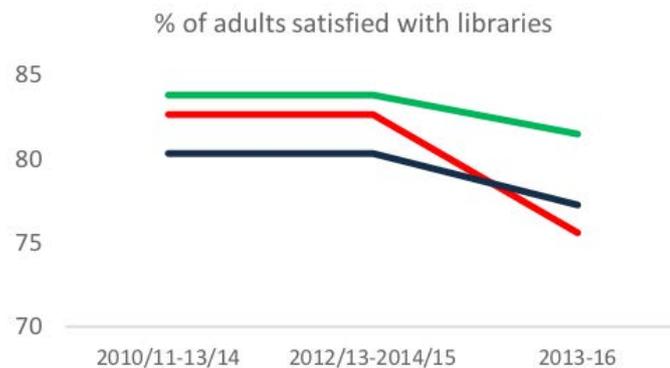
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As a response to anticipated demands on library services to support communities through welfare reform changes, Dundee library introduced a new space in the central library called the Opportunities room. The Opportunities room is run by volunteers who offer customers a range of support including development of IT skills for online job-searching and welfare rights systems, access to computers and recently support with Universal Credit. The space is further used by a range of external agencies including the Job Centre and Welfare Rights. The Opportunities room have been a success in integrating different agencies and services as well as attracting new customers to the library, particularly digitally excluded citizens of Dundee.

### Summary & Background

Satisfaction rates for libraries in Dundee has decreased at a faster rate compared to the Scotland and family group average. With increasing budget cuts for library services, there is a need for libraries to develop their offer and join up with other agencies to increase community participation and satisfaction with local libraries.



The opportunities room launched in October 2013 following an application to the public libraries improvement fund. The aim was to respond to anticipated demands on the library service to support communities through welfare reform changes.

### Key Activities

Key changes to the traditional service include:

#### Refocus and rebrand of existing reference library

- Dundee created a dedicated space in central library to deliver the project
- The Opportunities room offer a drop-in service Monday to Friday, 10am-12pm & 2-4pm.

- Volunteers and library staff offer a range of support that was not traditionally associated with the library including support to apply for Universal Credit and develop digital skills
- Job Centre coaches use the space for interviews
- Welfare Rights use the space once a week
- The Opportunities Room is also used by Code clubbing, Amina & Dundee college

Dundee library services wanted to engage with the community and increase the participation of volunteers within library services in Dundee. Volunteers had traditionally been recruited on an ad-hoc basis and were placed in individual community libraries without a structured plan. The introduction of the Opportunities room enabled the library to involve volunteers, and the community, on a more meaningful basis.

### **Appointment of Volunteer Coordinator**

- Dundee appointed a volunteer coordinator.
- The volunteer coordinator has been funded through different organisations over time, but is now permanently funded by Leisure and Culture Dundee.

### **Use of Volunteers**

- Recruited volunteers through posters in the library
- Started with 6 volunteers that were trained up using online courses
- Currently 28 volunteers and 2 volunteers at any one time
- Volunteers are from different backgrounds including students, retired and unemployed.

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## Benefits and Impact

The opportunities room is now, 2017, embedded in the core service. The opportunities room has also received recognition by clients and awards. Statistics include:

- 28 volunteers
- 4,059 volunteer hours
- 10,531 digital assistance sessions

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## Learning

- Sustainability has been the main challenge with the funding for the volunteer coordinator being secured on a yearly basis.
- Pilots with drop-in sessions in community libraries have been in low demand. Volunteers and customers prefer to visit the central library rather than work in individual community libraries.
- The central library is located in a shopping centre where shops

are closing down. The passing trade has therefore dropped and closing of big retailers have significantly affected footfall to the library.

- A recent challenge with the roll out of universal credit on the 8th of November 2017 is that volunteers require additional training and access to the latest technology since the forms need to be filled out online.