

Love Libraries Competition: Top Ten New Librarians 2007

ENTRY FORM

Name: Bernadette Brewster

Age: 55

Length of service (three years maximum): 20 months (12 months as Casual Library Counter Assistant, 8 months as Youth Librarian)

Library service: London Borough of Haringey, Culture, Libraries and Learning

- **Why have you chosen to make a career in public libraries?**

My career to date has been wonderfully eclectic with a natural progressive link from one industry to another. That link has brought me to the library service, and allows me to combine many of the skills I have gained and to work in an environment that I love. I love books, I love working with young people, and I love technology, it is exciting to see the developments that are taking place in this industry and I want to continue to be a part of this. I also want to be able to raise the awareness of the need for Teen libraries, in providing a good space and a valuable resource for young people.

- **What is it about library work that you enjoy?**

When applying to work for the libraries, back in May 2006, it was with the intention to “slow down” in my career. How wrong was I? My feet haven’t touched the ground since. I started off working as a relief counter hand. This meant that I got to work in all of the Haringey libraries. Which was great fun, never boring. The opportunity then arose to apply for the position of youth librarian. Now as permanent youth librarian I am having a total ball. This was a new post and therefore has been a continual exploration to create a place for the young people to come and enjoy and benefit from. I love the everyday and long term challenges I am faced with. Working with teenagers is, great fun, and rewarding.

- **Why do you think libraries are important?**

Libraries, particularly in London reflect the diversity and character, and the needs and expectations of our community. I think that the service that the library provides to this diverse community is invaluable. Their needs and expectations are often extensive, and therefore reflect how important the library is to them.

Many would argue that the digital age will replace our libraries, however, the web is among the resources for finding information, but it’s not a replacement. As youth librarian I am very aware that we need to adapt our perception of libraries so that we do not alienate our young people and create a place that they enjoy and benefit from.

- **What has been your biggest achievement in the role?**

The summer program of workshops and the final presentation day.

Over the summer I have organised and put on a series of digital and science workshops. They were well attended with over fifty young people attending the various events. We then had a presentation day, the Mayor of Haringey came to present certificates to the young people having attended and completed workshops.

- **How have you helped to improve your service?**

Before starting in this position there was no teen library at Wood Green Central Library. The Young Adult books were shelved in the children's section. Since joining I have set up a separate space now known as the 1319 Teen Library.

In the spring I put in and won a bid, to the IOP (Institute of Physicists). With the money I was able to put on a number of events. The highlight of these events was the visit of the Science Museum outreach group. This was well attended with over 30 children enjoying the "Get a Grip" session.

As part of the Summer Science program I arranged a creative writing event that combined our Physics theme of Forces together with creative writing. For this at the beginning of the summer we had a local author Cheryl Moskavitz who ran the first session, producing some excellent work. To finish off the summer we had Subdhassi who is a "Renga" (Japanese poetry) writer. This produced brilliant work and was a good fun session. It was also delightful to hear the author (Subdhassi) saying "without doubt this is by far the best teenage library he has been to, in London".

Early in the year I took part in the Young Cultural Creators project and worked in collaboration with Bruce Castle Museum and St Thomas Moore School.

One of my first projects as youth librarian was working with KIS training (Keep It Simple), who are a DTI approved enterprise agency. They have courses running, for teenagers that have failed secondary education in one form or another, Part of their course was a four week module "Introducing Libraries". I developed and delivered a program to reintroduce these young people to what public libraries have to offer, and to boost their confidence in engaging in reading once again. The feedback from the students was extremely positive.

I am actively involved in the Reading Agency developments and have attended seminars with the view of bringing new and creative ideas to the library service. As a direct result of "The Reading Revolution" Seminar I am in the early stages of organising Manga workshops using Manga Studio software to create Manga art. Also working with our reading group to introduce "reading group blogs" on our 1319 web site (1319.org.uk).

I have worked with a colleague who is responsible for reader development in putting forward a bid for a "Polish Day" we want to attract the new Europeans to the library. Together we have managed to source a Polish author who has agreed to support the event with a personalised performance.

We have many activities now running in the evenings and weekends. Book clubs, design workshops, competition workshops. Due to the large influx of Eastern European migrants into the area, I have set up a Euro reading group for 11 – 16years olds.

In the summer we had numerous digital workshops running as well as creative writing and art workshop, this was all part of the "Haringey Summer Uni" program. In the digital workshops we worked with the young people to enhance their IT skills and they now have a live web site 1319.org.uk where their work is displayed.

Finally, I bring to the library my flexibility. Although I am the Youth Librarian, I am happy to help in all areas, I have been called upon to help with the Book & Toy Bus, I have taken the 1st Byte sessions in the branch libraries, represented the library with a stall at a local "Polish Fair", and local community fairs, held throughout the summer.

- **Why do you deserve to be recognised as a Top Ten New Librarian?**

I have brought enthusiasm, innovation and hard work to the library.

Due to my previous jobs the library benefits and is enhanced from my experience and skills.

The digital workshops have been great fun and thoroughly enjoyed by the teens throughout the summer. The youths continue to come back in the evening after school to use the youth library resources.

I have lots of new ideas and plans for future events in our teen library. I am always looking for new opportunities that will benefit the teen library and library as a whole.

I am good with teenagers, understanding their needs and not being a fuddy "shush" librarian. I am always accessible to them, and will help in anyway I can. I enjoy the satisfaction of being valuable and serving a purpose.

It would be terrific to be recognised for the work that I have done to date, but more so to emphasize the fantastic facility we have at Wood Green Central Library, so that greater numbers of teens can take advantage of the teen library and the on going events and workshops.

Having two staff working with me, I think it is so important to keep a positive spin, and always have a sense of fun, so that we look forward to coming to work each day, and have a smile on our face going home at the end of the day.