

# The Park Bench

## Annual Report 2007



Registered Charity No. 1111578

Web Site [www.theparkbench.org.uk](http://www.theparkbench.org.uk)

Trustees Steve Witt (Chair), Heather Lister (Secretary), Stella Wintle,  
Richard Drake (Treasurer), Linda Ewles

The Park Bench is a voluntary charitable organisation which aims to provide access to a lending library service for people in Bristol who find it difficult to register with the Public Library.



# Thank you!

**For donations, encouragement and support, thanks go to the following –**

Quaker Homeless Action for start-up funding, and in particular Gill Lowther of the London Mobile Library for homeless people, for continuing encouragement and supplies of books.

Bristol Libraries, for much help, donations and loans of books, and access to large print books and “Quick Reads.”

Woz, and the staff and clients at New Street Day Centre, for their hospitality and help.

Anita and others at Logos house for their hospitality and encouragement.

Books for Amnesty Bookshop, Gloucester Road.

The Big Issue, for encouragement and storage space.

Everyone who has donated books – staff, borrowers and others who have heard of us!

To all our borrowers, whose enthusiasm has kept us going.

To St. Nick’s for the parking space

Caring at Christmas for the space to hold our AGM

To all our volunteers who have run library sessions, come to meetings and sorted books

– a big thank you!



## Chair's report

In September 2007 The Park Bench Library celebrated its second anniversary at New Street drop-in centre. Our excellent team of volunteers has made sure we have continued to offer a library session every week of the year at New Street, with just one week's break in the Christmas period when other activities drew guests and volunteers away.

Staff shortages and the continuing disruption of building work in the area has made this a difficult year generally for the New Street drop-in, and on several occasions a reduced number of guests have been allowed in (although one or two changed their books through the kitchen window) Inevitably this has affected the number of borrowers and books borrowed, but we are continually assured by workers that we are welcome at the drop-in, and by guests that they appreciate the service. New drop-in staff have arrived, and refurbishment going on at the moment suggests there will soon be a new lease of life for this venue.

Our latest success story is the library session we run on Thursday evenings (6 – 7pm) at the Salvation Army hostel. At the start of the year we began with a fortnightly service in the dining room, where few residents discovered us unless workers were kind enough to drum up custom. Even so there was a lot of interest (a “book at bedtime” being very popular in a residential setting) so from September we tried things differently. We offered a weekly session at a “twilight” hour, so that volunteers who were working could participate. We bought another book trolley and set up the library in the entrance lobby, where everyone encounters us. Coffee, tea and snacks are provided by staff. We've had a series of busy and enjoyable sessions. Many residents not only borrow books, but sit and discuss them, and some donate their own books.

We continue to replenish bookcases in other locations, including One25 (women's drop-in), Townsend House (women's hostel), and the Well (shared house) Stella and Heather visited the Big Issue offices intending to relieve them of the books they had been storing for us, and found that the books were furnishing a new reading room, so now we make sure they get fresh stock now and then. We are watching developments at Jamaica Street, which is increasing its outreach.

We continue to have good links with Bristol Libraries, particularly Central Library and our local, Trinity Road, branch. At least one young man that we know of is now going regularly to the public library after encountering Quick Reads on our shelves and discovering the joy of reading.

We have attracted some interest from the wider world this year. Nicola, a librarian and research student at the University of Wales, is writing a thesis about the problems homeless people face when trying to access public library services, and what those services can learn from “library-style” projects like ours. Nicola has already attended a meeting and a library session. Charlie Russell, a BBC film-maker, is planning a documentary about the London Mobile Library service, in which we may get a mention.

Nevertheless our aims remain modest, and we persevere in avoiding setting grandiose targets, big spending, or piling stress on anyone involved. Our main hope is that we will continue to be valued where we are, and become more widely known as an organisation that brings books to people whose conditions of life are improved by having something to read.

Finally, having now fully relocated to Gloucestershire, and no longer working in Bristol, I feel that its time to resign as Chair of the Park Bench. However, I'm keen to stay involved as a trustee and wish to continue to support the project in any way I can.

Steve Witt

### **Treasurer's Report**

We received a grant of £1500 from Quaker Homeless Action to start up the library and ended up 2006 with £458.94 in the bank having spent about £1,000 on initial materials. The largest single expense was about £500 on a sturdy wheeled display unit. In 2007 we have only spent £42.35 on library sundries and expenses and we have received £17.86 interest income. This leaves us with £434.45 in the bank at 31 December 2007.

These figures don't include any donations in kind, which, aside from the regular donations of books also include books purchased by volunteers to meet specific requests and an additional book trolley for use at Logos house.

Richard Drake

### **Other Facts and Figures**

We do not judge the success of Park Bench solely by counting numbers of books and borrowers: even if only a few people have their lives enriched by The Park Bench it would be worthwhile. But we think it is useful to monitor the service, so that we have some helpful statistics for users, members, volunteers, trustees, people who have funded us and anyone who may be thinking of setting up a similar service elsewhere. So here are some facts and figures about the service at New Street centre and the Salvation Army hostel in 2007.

## New Street Centre

This is the second year for which we have kept a computerised record for the weekly Friday morning library service at New Street centre for homeless people.

The following table summarises facts and figures for the 12 months January - December 2007. We have included the annual figures for 2006 for comparison.

Date	Books returned	Books taken out	New clients	Returning clients	Total visits	% books returned over quarter	Average no of books taken out per week	Average no of new clients per week	Average no of visits from borrowers per week
Q1 Jan-March 2007	29	97	33	49	82	30%	7	3	6
Q2 Apr-June 2007	26	91	19	42	61	29%	7	1	5
Q3 July-Sept 2007	29	78	17	46	63	37%	6	1	5
Q4 Oct-Dec 2007	18	53	14	24	38	34%	4	1	3
<b>Annual 2007</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Annual 2006</i>	<i>244</i>	<i>548</i>	<i>139</i>	<i>258</i>	<i>397</i>	<i>44%</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>8</i>

### How many people used the library in 2007?

Eighty three individuals used the library for the first time during the year. Some may have borrowed books only once; others several times and some became 'regulars'. The total number of visits from new and established borrowers in the year was 244.

The average number of borrowers each week was five, but this ranged from the quietest week with none to the busiest with ten. As well as 'old' clients, on average there were two new clients each week, but there were as many as five in a busy session.

We also have contact with people who do not borrow books: they may visit the library to renew books, talk about reading or simply have a chat. This, too, is part of our service and this year we have monitored the number of 'non-borrowing' people we met. On average, there were two a week, ranging from none to ten.

### How many books were borrowed?

There were 319 book loans in the year, with an average of six books borrowed each week. Again there was a wide range in the number of books borrowed each week, with 15 books borrowed in the busiest session of the year. About a third (32%) of all books loaned were returned. This is acceptable as it is often difficult for borrowers to return books and our book stock is easily replenished.

### Could we spot any trends in usage over the year?

The most striking feature is that use of the library declined throughout the year, both in terms of the numbers of borrowers and the numbers of books borrowed. Numbers for the

last quarter compared with the first quarter had reduced by about half. Compared with the previous year, the numbers of visits and books borrowed in 2007 were about 60% of those for 2006.

Why? As we noted last year, our numbers generally reflect how busy the Centre is as a whole. The more people there are in the Centre, the more our library is used, and it was evident in 2007 that the Centre was not as busy as it used to be. We cannot be certain why this was. Is there a good reason - that the number of homeless people in Bristol has reduced?

There are a number of other possible reasons. They include the vast redevelopment of the nearby Broadmead area which may deter people from making their way to the Centre, and a ban on street drinking in the vicinity. Also, shortage of staff meant that on several occasions from July onwards the centre was wholly or partially closed, although we still ran sessions. In December the Centre was being refurbished so that there were limited facilities which perhaps deterred clients from coming along. We did not run a session on 28 December.

Detailed statistics can be seen on our website:

<http://www.randh.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/TheParkBench/TheParkBench.html> and follow the link to 'documents' and 'monitoring report'.

### **Salvation Army hostel**

We started keeping records of the library service at the Salvation Army hostel in October 2007, when it had become established. The system for monitoring book loans is simpler than at New Street: at each session, we note the title and author of each book loaned and who borrowed it. For each loan, there is also a column in which to write the date of the book's return.

This means that we can monitor how many books are loaned and how many borrowers we have at each session. We can also see the proportion of books returned.

<b>Month in 2007</b>	<b>Number of books loaned</b>	<b>Average number of books loaned per session</b>	<b>Number of borrowers</b>	<b>Average number of borrowers per session</b>
Oct - 3 sessions	30	10	23	8
Nov - 5 sessions	66	13	35	7
Dec - 4 sessions	17	4	14	4

Of the 66 books loaned in November, 29 (44%) had been returned by the first week in January. This is a higher return rate than we have at New Street, perhaps to be expected because the books probably remain on the premises while they are being read.

Although it is too soon to think about trends and patterns of usage, the number of borrowers is encouraging.

*Linda Ewles*

*January 2008*

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