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Chan, L. et al 2002. *Budapest Open Access Initiative*. New York: Open Society Institute. Available at: <http://www.soros.org/openaccess/read.shtml> [Retrieved 22 January 2007].

Welsh Information Literacy Project: closing conference

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1. Introduction

The Welsh Information Literacy Project (WILP) has featured regularly in the Journal of Information Literacy during its five-year existence. The project formally closed with a conference centred on case studies from Phase 5 of the project, which focused on community engagement and employability.

I was invited to the conference to give a presentation on a community engagement project I had organised at Abergele Library, which is part of Conwy Library Service. I have been involved with WILP since 2012 as a member of the steering group and have enjoyed meeting and working with a wide cross section of libraries throughout Wales. The project has enabled me to develop and support information literacy (IL) at my base library, working in partnership with a number of stakeholders, in particular the local town council and schools.

I saw this day as an opportunity to meet fellow peers with an interest in IL and to discover how IL support is offered outside public libraries. I was also aware that the conference would mark the end of my current working partnership with members of the steering group due to the closure of the project.

2. Presentations

The day was launched with a keynote from Nancy Graham, the outgoing chair of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) Information Literacy Group (ILG). Her key message emphasised the important role all information staff, working in different sectors, have in providing IL support to their users, and recognising how we can change people's lives. It was good to hear her praising the success of the project and reminding us that it was a grass roots movement driven by strong-willed individuals.

We were reminded of the achievement of the project in obtaining government support and recognition, highlighted by the prominence of IL in the latest edition of the Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS). Nancy also highlighted the role of CILIP in bringing people together to share ideas to support IL, and emphasised the role of IL in supporting digital inclusion.

Anne Lewis from Agored Cymru spoke next. Anne had worked closely with the project as it developed the IL units within the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW). Anne gave us the figures for the number of individuals throughout Wales who have completed these units and she mentioned the impact on the lives of those who have participated, including those who had followed the units but did not undertake formal assessment. Again, information literacy was closely linked with digital literacy, as IL skills are essential to find, manage and edit digital information.

Most of the remainder of the day was spent hearing an inspiring series of case studies supported by the project. First up was Natasha Harron-Edwards from Monmouthshire Public Libraries. She has been working with a group of jobseekers supporting the government employability agenda, using the Agored Cymru Information Literacy unit in her library. The entire group passed the units but their attendance was not regular. This meant she had to be flexible to fit in with their lifestyle. She also observed that the two-hour sessions she had arranged were too long as the participants struggled to focus. The benefits were visible as they had improved in confidence and gained a new, transferable skill and also an award to put on their CVs.

Next, Sarah Deeley, a librarian at Cymmer Community Library, Neath Port Talbot, explained that the library was run by volunteers and that she was employed by the community group. She had used the Agored Cymru Information Literacy units to upskill new volunteers in their role as information providers at the library. Following a formal accredited unit had also significantly improved their confidence when dealing with information enquiries.

Wendy Jefferson, a youth worker for Denbighshire County Council, followed. She had taken young people out of school and into the local public library to complete the Agored Cymru Information Literacy unit. Each individual chose a subject to research and concluded by producing a short film to showcase their results. Wendy's whole presentation was vibrant; the young people involved in the project were present at the session and actively took part in the questions and answers at the end.



Wendy Jefferson with some of the young people who had successfully completed the Agored Cymru Information Literacy unit

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The main barrier facing this group was their initial refusal to look beyond the internet for any information: “their thumbs are willing, but not their bodies” was a memorable quote. It was also interesting to note that young people find it intimidating to ask for help from library staff.

Gina Maddison from Grŵp Llandrillo Menai had been involved in an IL project working with Essential Skills Wales. Gina had been working with adult learners based at a local community college venue. None of the group had any formal qualifications. Ethics played a large part in this project as the participants did not trust information in general due to their life experiences. They were taught how to find information (such as the next recycling day for

their street) and they were asked to use the internet, telephone the council and obtain information from the library. The group was also encouraged to look for information on careers and jobs. In contrast with the youth groups, adult learners preferred to speak to people to find information rather than search for it online – despite the trust issues highlighted above.

Aled Rees from Grŵp Llandrillo Menai undertook an employability project with Gwynedd County Council staff. The Council ran two staff training workshops with frontline staff. The workshop was themed around Google and participants were taught searching techniques and how to evaluate the information. Council staff who had recently completed Essential Skills Wales qualifications were targeted. It is hoped this pilot will be extended to council staff who regularly use information searching as part of their job roles.

Sharon Lyn Jones from Grŵp Llandrillo Menai spoke next. She has been working with three specific groups in the community. Working with youth services she has been offering IL sessions as part of the Duke of Edinburgh awards. The other two projects were working with a Women's Aid refuge and a 'Get Started' programme for homeless young people. Gaining the entry level 1 award has provided these individuals with something positive to focus on while also developing a useful life skill. All of these initiatives highlighted that information literacy is an essential skill, of value to non-traditional library users in a very non-academic environment – helping with confidence and employability skills.

As the final case study of the day, I had the opportunity to outline the family history sessions which I had organised with a tutor in Conwy Library Service. These sessions, aimed at the elderly, have an information focus and are based on the Agored Cymru units. This group was not interested in accredited learning, but they all appreciated the opportunity to formally acquire information searching skills. I was able to share some of the stories of how these sessions have had an impact on the participants.

3. Conclusion

Although funding for WILP has ended there will be a forum (consisting primarily of members of the project steering group) which will monitor information literacy developments across Wales. There is an intention to continue to hold an annual cross-sector good practice event. In addition, specific sectors have taken on responsibility for continuing the virtual communities of practice for schools and public libraries.