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Conference Corner

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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> [Accessed: 18 November 2015].

CILIP Conference 2016: We're all in this together

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A powerful reminder that we do the same job and face similar issues regardless of sector or specialism was delivered at CILIP Conference 2016 in Brighton (July 12-13). This was offered upfront in a hard-hitting keynote from Scott Bonner, public library director in Ferguson, Missouri – a town that saw extended protests and civil disorder after Michael Brown, a young African-American man, was summarily shot dead by a police officer in August 2014. Scott, new in post and with enviable managerial autonomy from a UK perspective, was faced with the task of working out how his library could best serve this fractured community in the midst of street protests and violent unrest. Initiatives followed to educate young people turned away from shuttered schools, and to support struggling businesses.

Scott's message was very simple and incredibly powerful – that he was no-one special, he just did what librarians do, and on occasions he did it badly. He reminded us that, if we put the user at the centre of our practice, and build services that respond to their needs, we can achieve great things. It may be that not many of us will face such a tense and dramatic situation in the course of our careers. But we have all seen smaller-scale problems and emergencies in our communities or institutions, and Scott reminded us that we often play a crucial role in supporting people through them. He also pointed out the fundamental fact that, in order to achieve anything, one must accept mistakes, imperfect decisions and the tendency of life to frustrate the best-laid plans. After his keynote, Scott went on to host a well-attended fringe session to give conference-goers a chance to talk to him in greater depth.



Scott Bonner: a modest superhero. Image: Lisa Hutchins

The conference offered separate strands on information management (IM), innovation, technology and career development as well as an exhibition and fringe area. This led to inevitable compromises for any delegate without a Harry Potter-style time turner allowing them to be in three places at once. The IM strand presented a new offer from CILIP to information and knowledge managers, promoting a forthcoming special interest group to reflect their concerns and make professional membership more valuable to them. There was much here to interest the information literacy (IL) practitioner, including a discussion by Stephen Phillips, executive director at Morgan Stanley, on how to value knowledge management (KM) within an organisation. He proposed concentrating on the highest-value, highest-impact work and on advocacy among influencers and decision-makers. Stephane Goldstein, Information Literacy Group (ILG) advocacy and outreach officer, presented his research on determining how IL adds value in the workplace, particularly welcome as this is an area that has not received much academic attention. Rebecca Dorsett, an information and knowledge manager with the Ministry of Defence, and Michelle Morton, image manager with the Royal Shakespeare Company, shared their experiences of implementing different aspects of knowledge and information

management in the workplace, and discussed the outcomes for their organisations. CILIP Trustee Naomi Korn, and Elizabeth Lomas, senior lecturer in information governance at University College London, rounded off day one with fascinating presentations on copyright and information governance. Both proposed a risk management model, bringing the benefits of more control and better understanding for the practitioner, and both stressed the importance of an enabling approach which meets business objectives.

A significant contributor to the day, whose lunchtime presentation chimed particularly well with Scott Bonner's keynote, was poet and educator Becci Louise. She proposed that librarians are uniquely placed to help break down stigmas around mental ill-health and end the silence that too often surrounds it. She pointed out that experiences of mental ill-health are discussed with unusual freedom in literature and that language, one of humanity's most powerful and unique tools, is curated by libraries. She sees libraries as a key tool in building resilience through the connections they can build among real and fictional sufferers. She closed by stressing the incredibly powerful combination of knowledge, creativity, education and connection-building that libraries can bring to this issue.



Time to talk: Becci Louise asked how we can help break down barriers around mental health. Image: Lisa Hutchins

Day two was launched by Sir Nigel Shadbolt, Professor of Computer Science at Oxford University, giving an insight into the world of Big Data. He told us the world changes when what is previously scarce becomes abundant, citing the industrial revolution and the invention of printing. However, in the past abundant things were consumed - if one person used them, another could not; a statement that is not true for knowledge and information. Add to this the exponential growth and availability of computer power and you have a force to change the world. He spoke about the Open Data Institute's work in moving towards common standards and a common language, and highlighted achievements powered by open data in health, transport, culture and the environment. He ended by explaining the concept of linked data, reminding us that the value of data often increases when it meets other data. He looks towards a future when a national data infrastructure allows for innovations that further the public good and increase the accountability of politicians.

The day two IM strand included a session from Paul Corney on the future of KM and a useful examination by local government officer Andy Bent on how a public sector partnership in the field of social care has made it easier to share knowledge and improve performance. Postgraduate researcher Steve Skeldon asked whether the extension of the Archive Accreditation Scheme or museum accreditation arrangements to libraries could provide tangible benefits in terms of advocacy, performance management and a much-needed bulwark against cuts. Finally, consultants Philippa Fogarty and Richard Turton presented a case study in data stewardship, before delegates gathered in the main hall to hear Lauren Smith, research associate at the University of Strathclyde, on why knowledge matters, discussing how shared professional values and ethics are fundamental to our jobs.

Social events at the conference were on a fairground theme, including fish, chips and a funfair on the pier – an evening only somewhat dampened by poor weather. Delegates were also offered a useful opportunity to tour Brighton’s flagship Jubilee public library, nearly adjacent to the conference venue (or to take a quiet solo walk round if there was no space on the organised tour). The conference was ultimately very successful in doing what such events should do – providing a professional shot in the arm and a timely reminder of why it is we do this.



Brighton rocks: Fish and chips, candyfloss, popcorn and fairground rides on the pier. Image: Lisa Hutchins

Acknowledgements

I remain very grateful to the ILG for the opportunity to attend.

Resources

Speaker presentations are available on the CILIP Conference website:
<http://cilipconference.org.uk/past-events/cilip-conference-2016/>