



Stories from the Web traveller project in Hertfordshire

A year after taking part in the pilot for a unique literacy, storytelling and ICT project using the online reader development resource *Stories from the Web*, a small group of Traveller children in Hertfordshire are enjoying an enhanced sense of creativity and self-esteem and have started to form a connection with their library service. Parents and carers have also benefited from adult education services. Another six primary schools with Traveller pupils have joined the scheme since the pilot.

*“The children have gained an enormous sense of self-worth from the fact that the project has been something special created just for them. They are still writing material for *Stories on the Web* and other children want to join in. It’s something they are seen by the other children to be leading on.”*

Headteacher, Essendon primary school

“So even I can join?”

Traveller child on first visit to library

The effects

The **Travelling Stories pilot scheme**, made possible by a Study Support Out of School Hours Learning grant from the Standards Fund, introduced six primary school children from a Traveller community in Hertfordshire to a wider world of learning and to the services available at their local library. Children took part in six after-school sessions which explored ICT, literacy and storytelling. A year later, they continue to use *Stories from the Web*, an online reader development tool which promotes books, authors, poets, reading and creative writing to young people.

The experience

Julie Jones, Young People’s Services Librarian, Hertfordshire (now Bookstart Development Officer)

Travelling Stories was a six-week after-school literacy and ICT project held at Welwyn Garden City Library, for three boys and three girls aged between seven and nine who were living in a Traveller community site and attending Essendon Primary School. The school had identified them as underachieving in key stage 2 literacy. We wanted to engage them in writing and storytelling by using new media through *Stories from the Web* alongside traditional storytelling. *Stories from the Web* has created a Traveller Space with the intention that it will always be a virtual home for their writing if their families move on. Sessions incorporated work on *Stories from the Web*, an online reader development tool which promotes books, authors, poets, reading and creative writing to young people. Some of the children’s literacy was too poor to access *Stories from the Web* so we devised other

activities. There were specific learning outcomes for each hour-long session, which were led by the Young People's Services Librarian plus another adult from HALFS or the Traveller Education Service. Each week built on the previous week's programme and the children were set pieces of writing to finish at school. We incorporated online sources, books, games and discussion. It was the first time the children had participated in an out-of-school activity or visited a public library. They had to learn to feel comfortable with new adults outside their culture, although it helped that the participation manager of HALFS had visited their site and some of them knew her. They responded well to this, set their own ground rules for the club and helped each other during sessions.

Outcomes

Sessions were always very lively: the young people were responsive to ideas and were, in the most part, eager to prove their understanding. The library's closed-access computer suite in the Learning Zone was a discreet and non-threatening environment.

The participants had work published on the SfW website including some they produced in their own time, such as poems and book reviews. They assembled portfolios of their work and received a certificate of achievement at the end of the project. They continue to make contributions to SfW. Their headteacher says that they have benefited from having a project specially created for them and that other children show interest in their work on SfW and want to join in, so they are given an opportunity to introduce their friends.

The project contributed to several Every Child Matters outcomes: Be Safe (it has raised awareness of Traveller culture in a safe environment); Enjoy and Achieve and Make a Positive Contribution. The pilot has now been extended for work with six more schools.

The wider project includes work with Traveller families to introduce adults to further education opportunities. Traveller Space was created on Stories from the Web: a first. Access to the website has continued outside the project. Travelling Stories enhanced working partnerships between Hertfordshire libraries, the Adult and Family Learning Service and the Travellers Education Service and built on the library's experience of SfW. It engaged with a hard-to-reach group.

It raised awareness of the services provided by the libraries in the Traveller Community. The second phase of the work, which took place in schools rather than the library, replicated and improved the experience of the pilot.

Resources and staffing

The total cost for the pilot and the second phase of the project, involving a total of 36 children, was £7854, paid for by Study Support Out of School Hours Learning (SSOSHL). This included:

- Transport by taxi from the children's rural site to the library
- Software
- Subscription to Stories from the Web
- Memory keys for children to complete their work at school

Challenges/Lessons learned

There was limited time for preparation in the run-up to the pilot project. The pilot itself was too short: 10 to 12 weeks would have been ideal. Staff needed more training and fuller briefings on the young people, especially regarding advance information on literacy and IT levels. It would have been useful for staff taking part in the pilot to agree a common approach to managing the young people; their expectations and discipline, in particular. Transport difficulties have meant that the young people from the pilot school have not been able to continue to access the library service (they can only reach the nearest mobile library stop via a busy main road).

Partners

- Hertfordshire Libraries
- Hertfordshire Adult and Family Learning Service
- Travellers Education Service
- Essendon C of E Primary School

The future

Using Stories from the Web with Refugee young people in Hertfordshire.

To work with the parents of the Traveller children to introduce them to Library services, with a possibility of involving them in short courses.