

**The impact of Sheffield public  
library closures on young  
children.**

**by**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The nation-wide outbreak of closures and reductions in the opening hours of public library services, due to central and local government budget cuts, has hit the city of Sheffield particularly hard. In 1995, six of Sheffield's local branch libraries were closed.

A consideration of the users and potential users most disenfranchised by library closures concluded that young children, who are particularly dependent on their parents in terms of mobility and the encouragement of reading, are extremely vulnerable. The study, therefore, aimed to investigate the impact of public library closures on young children in three communities in South Sheffield - Hackenthorpe, Handsworth, and Hemsworth.

It was established that the public library service as a whole invests a great deal of commitment to children's services and openly promotes their role in supporting the literacy development, education, enjoyment of reading, and personal empowerment of children. Mutually beneficial relationships with schools can strengthen this role.

Access to children's services is theoretically equal, but there are many barriers which prevent children from using the library. In the case of the Sheffield closures, barriers to access expressed by the study's participants mainly concerned the inconvenience of using alternative services because of the time, distance, or expense involved.

Consequently, there is a significant number of children in these three areas who have either stopped using a library altogether since the closures, or now use it far less than they used to. Some parents and carers also feel that their children are reading less, on average, since the closures. Furthermore, many schools and individual families feel that they have not been able to compensate for the loss of their local libraries.

Overall, those parents and carers, librarians and teachers who participated in the study felt that a local library is of great value to children's lives in a multitude of ways, and that children have, therefore, been severely disadvantaged by the closures.

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Background**

Financial constraints in the public library service cannot be far from the minds of anyone who is currently working within the field. Although many innovative and admirable attempts are being made to seek alternative sources of funding in order to maintain a thriving and popular library service, for some libraries it is too late. There are many authorities in the UK which have suffered more than most. In many cases, attempts to reduce local budgets have resulted in decisions to severely reduce opening hours or implement library closures. Sheffield has been particularly hard hit by such cutbacks and its local libraries have found themselves on the receiving end of both these kinds of money-saving measures.

Library professionals may be familiar with the pressures and the kind of impact that these reductions and closures have placed on themselves and their staff, but as yet there is very little published research which indicates the short and long-term effects of these measures on library users and the public in general.

Furthermore, there is not only a need to focus more closely on the communities as a whole which have been affected by the closures, but to investigate in particular the impact on the most vulnerable groups within those communities. Young children are still very much dependent on their parents, carers or teachers to educate and introduce them to what the library is offering them. What the library *is* offering them, of course, is a prioritised service very much dedicated to serving their needs and supporting them on the path to lifelong learning. For the purposes of this study, the term ‘young children’ will refer to these kind of dependants rather than to children within any specific age limits. However, implicit in these delineations is the likelihood that children from

0-9 are particularly isolated in terms of dependence, and that the under fives are the most vulnerable of all.

With this in mind, it can be argued that there is a real need to investigate, as the title suggests, the impact of library closures on children within the communities affected.

### **1.1 Library Closures**

In December 1995, the local branch library services at Concord, Lane Top, Grenoside, Handsworth, Hackenthorpe and Hemsworth in Sheffield were closed. These measures are symptomatic of the gradual deterioration of the public library service on a nation-wide scale and is of great concern to library professionals. Geoffrey Hare (1996) proposes that it is “*Because of the substantial loss of revenue and capital resources to support the service in recent years*” that, in general, there has been a decline in the “*provision of service*” (p152). Reductions in library opening hours and service closures have been the ultimate result of this crisis and lack of support. L.I.S.U. statistics for 1994 show that between 1988-1994 public library service points in the UK fell by 183 (3.6%) as well as a 17% reduction in opening hours over 45 hours per week (Loughborough University 1994).

The closure of six of Sheffield’s libraries illustrates the severity of central and local government’s economy drive which has been reflected in the cutbacks and reductions in local budgets. The whole issue presents a national crisis for public libraries and their actual and potential users, and yet research into the short and long-term effects of closures and reductions in services is relatively limited at present, or is in its early and incomplete stages.

An attempt to fill this gap in public library research has been made by the University of Sheffield’s Department of Information Studies. The eight-

week Sheffield libraries strike of 1995 provided an opportunity to investigate the opinions and behaviour of users when they are deprived of their service. Proctor et al (1996) conclude that,

*“The research revealed that for the vast majority of library users the public library is a service of inestimable value, enhancing quality of life, and, for many people, fulfilling an essential need that no other pursuit or activity satisfies”* (p40).

Following on from this pioneering work, researchers in the same department are currently undertaking two largely qualitative studies which are concerned with the value and impact of the public library service within communities, and are being funded by the British Library’s Research and Innovation Centre (BLRIC). A social audit is being carried out in one project, and in the other, which is related to the study in hand, the extent of public library closures and reduced opening hours, and their impact on library users is being investigated. In the latter study, early unpublished findings have shown that 59 out of the 123 UK authorities who responded had closed libraries, and that 91 of these had reduced opening hours since 1986.<sup>1</sup> This is ground-breaking research which extends the findings of the *ASLIB Public Library Review* of 1995 for the DNH. It is unique in the sense that it involves making contact with library users and finding out how they feel about their library service and the reduction and withdrawal of those services.

For the purposes of this study, the unfortunate situation of the simultaneous closures in Sheffield provided a unique opportunity to focus on the impact of closures on the communities affected within one library authority. More importantly, it was an opportunity to examine and assess the effects on young children within these communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Figures obtained from unpublished BLRIC research due for completion November 1997

## **1.2 The value of libraries to children**

In recent decades, public libraries have shown a commitment to children's services which has escalated and developed in scope. In the early 1970s, Janet Hill's *Children are People* drew attention to the role of the children's librarian as community worker, which corresponds with the burgeoning 'outreach' trends of the time. The book was important not only because it gave value to children as library users, but it encouraged children's librarians to develop their role in and outside of the library boundaries and to publicise that role as well as the value of books and reading. The premise of the book, as the title obviously suggests, is that "*Children are people*" who are able to think and communicate and read for themselves, and that "*Their infinite variety is something for which to be thankful*" (Hill 1973: 130). One of the aims of providing books and information materials for children is to make them independent readers and learners, and yet, as will be shown in due course, in the early years the child is solely dependent on others and the environments that they are introduced to by others.

In more recent times there has been great attention paid to the primary importance of library services to children, from many areas within the field. There is now a considerable body of reports and recommendations, both internal and external, which have set standards and made proposals for improvements in children's services. One result of these developments is that public libraries usually prioritise children's services in times of financial hardship. When Sheffield's adult book fund was cut to zero this financial year, the children's budget remained protected. This is because the central importance of children's services in creating the reading adult is widely recognised.

The Library Association has produced guidelines in their commitment to providing the fullest service within public library means for children of all ages. The recently updated edition of *Children and Young People: Library Association Guidelines for Public Library Services* (1997) recognises that library

services play a central supportive role in child development throughout the most formative years. The guidelines stress that libraries and their resources and activities can contribute to a child's intellectual, emotional, linguistic, social, educational, and motor skills development, and to their overall well-being (p13).

The ASLIB Public Library Review (1995) reinforces this by recommending that libraries need to make “*Improvements to services for children*” and to “*improve their response to the expectations and demands of young people who use public library services or might do so in future*” (p15-16). It is important to remember that children of today are the adult users of the future, and that it is necessary to enhance children's services in order to encourage them to make use of the library from an early age. The social auditing approach to researching and assessing children's services should help in moving towards these goals.

The Department of National Heritage's Reading the Future: Public Libraries Review (1997), produced by the last government, also recognises the role of the public library in young people's lives. It states that libraries provide an opportunity “*for young children to develop reading and a love of books, the first rung on the ladder to literacy and learning throughout life*”. The review also asserts that, “*The reading habit can best be inculcated from an early age. Young children's experience of books and stories is known to have a considerable impact on their future educational attainment*” (p20).

Finally, it also suggests that libraries will have a “*key role*” in the National Reading Initiative, in which children have a central part to play.

Perhaps the most influential and supportive report and set of recommendations for children's library services is the DNH's Investing in Children (1995). Among its key conclusions and 21 recommendations are

suggestions that there should be strategies, objectives and charters secured for children's services, and that "*clear priorities should be established for children's needs across ages and stages of development*" (pvi). Other specifications suggest that the government needs to be expertly advised on children's needs in this area and should lend its support to "*libraries and information services and literacy programmes for children*" (pvi).

More pertinent to the proposed study are the recommendations that "*Every library authority should have a strategy to ensure and promote equal access to its resources for children and young people*" and that "*Priority should be given to research which explores the benefits, impacts and effectiveness of library provision for children and young people*" (pviii).

Since this report was produced, research has accumulated in relation to children's services. An investigation of the impact on and use of public library services by children is being made by 3 British Universities. A collaborative study, once again British Library funded, has been established at the Universities of Central England, Loughborough, and Aberystwyth. The study addresses three "*core questions*":

- How do public libraries benefit children?
- What makes an effective service?
- How do public libraries define and assess success?

(Reproduced from an article entitled 'In children's interest' in *LA Record*, March 1997, 99(3), 122).

Furthermore, a CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting) working party, funded by the BLRIC has been set up as a result of the *Investing in Children* recommendations. This party is developing the survey methodology which will measure the effectiveness of children's library services. This involves taking a child-centred approach in surveying the needs of children and young

people which involves consulting the children themselves where ethically possible (Gordon & Griffiths 1997: 372-374).

Current developments are also hinging on the state of literacy projects which have arisen recently (see Chapter Three). Middleton (1997) reports that library partnerships are both inevitable and necessary in regard to these educational and governmental developments (p409). It seems that whilst library buildings and opening hours are diminishing, the role for the library and its special focus on children, is expanding.

The efficiency of these developments, of course, depends on how accessible libraries are to children in the first place. While, as Elkin and Lonsdale (1996) confirm, "*Libraries need to look at how they can improve access to information for children, carers and others and improve the quality of information*" (p50), the library closures bring the issue of equal access and accessibility to library resources for children into question.

With all these issues and problems in mind, the general consensus among those most dedicated to children's services seems to be that the library's role is crucial to child development. As Elkin and Lonsdale (1996) affirm, "*Children are complex individuals growing up in a rapidly changing world. If books and literacy are so important for early development and life long learning even in today's technological age, then access to stories and books is an essential part of the child's pre-reading experience and needs reinforcing as they become sophisticated readers, learners and thinkers. The role of libraries is paramount in supporting the child's reading and access to information and ensuring equitable access to all, regardless of age, gender, race, wealth, physical or intellectual ability or geographical location and in promoting reading and connecting the right book with the right child*" (p16).

### 1.3 Aims and objectives

Given that, as Elkin and Lonsdale (1996) propose, “*contemporary children’s librarianship suggests that children are deemed to be an ‘investment’ and ‘at the heart of the core services’*” (p66), this study recognises that there remains a need to find out how this vulnerable group of users, many of whom are already disadvantaged in many ways, have been affected by the closure of their local libraries.

The study, therefore, set out to raise and attempt to address some of the following questions in order to assess the impact of library closures on young children:

- **In what ways do members of the community feel that their children have been affected?**
- **Do they feel that their children have been disadvantaged since the closure? If so, in what ways?**
- **Do they miss their library? In what ways?**
- **Have they ceased using a children’s library altogether?**
- **How easy has it been for them to use an alternative service?**
- **What are their new patterns of library use?**
- **Are the children getting the same service from these alternatives?**
- **Are they satisfied with their new services?**
- **Do the children have access to other resources for books and other library-related materials?**
- **Do the children use a library more, less or the same since the closure?**
- **On average, are the children reading more, less or the same since the closure?**

- **What are people's general thoughts and feelings concerning the library closures in relation to the overall well-being of the children in the communities affected?**

The central aim of the study, therefore, was to investigate the impact of the closures on young children by distinguishing what they had gained from and miss most about the former services, and whether they have found compensation for the loss in any way. The study also aimed to discover the perceptions of parents and teachers who may also have been directly or indirectly affected. Although the project aimed to investigate the *behaviour* of the individuals affected by the library closures, more importantly, it sought to establish the *reactions, opinions* and *feelings* of the families, teachers and librarians within the communities in Sheffield where library closures took place.

## CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

### 2.0 Research methods

The decision to use largely qualitative research methods was based on careful consideration of the nature and the aims of the study. In order to attempt to gauge the impact of library closures on young children it was deemed necessary to discover the perceptions and knowledge of those individuals directly affected, and the viewpoints of other professionals involved with the former libraries. It was felt that the accumulation and analysis of statistics, typified in quantitative research methods, would not in any real sense reveal the subjects' reactions to and experience of the closures.

Qualitative research was judged to be more valuable and appropriate for the study because more attention can be paid to "*areas dedicated to human service*" (Mellon 1990:1), and this is relevant to the social discipline of librarianship in more ways than one. After all, as Mellon (1990) later observes, "*In this age of automation, it is necessary for librarians to keep reminding themselves that theirs is a profession aimed at bringing information to **people***" and exists to "*satisfy the needs of people*" (p3).

Determining the publics' personal viewpoints, and therefore their needs, is part of this process, and has become a way of making improvements in services.

Qualitative research has gained more popularity in recent times, and the importance and validity of non-scientific data has finally been recognised. Ely (1991) stresses this value and validity when she writes that "*there is a need to make more public the interplay between the emotional and the intellectual in ethnographic research, since this interplay is an essential ingredient*" (p1).

The process of the study involved the non-manipulative and objective collection of data through the eyes and mouths of those most directly concerned

with and affected by the closures, in order to seek their perspectives on the impact of those closures on children. It was as much concerned with individual feelings as with the gathering of figures and collective correlations from a representative population. It is for this reason that all opinions expressed in the data were judged as valid, whether they were statistically representative or not. Once this data was collected, it was then that its analysis was “*guided not by hypothesis but by questions, issues, and a search for patterns*” (Patton 1987:15). It was also important that the study evolved in its own direction, without the bias of pre-conceived perspectives. The people-centred approach of qualitative research helped to ensure this process.

The data, for the large part, was gathered from questionnaires and interviews, and was supported with contextual information from written sources. Patton (1987) describes how the raw data collected in this qualitative manner results in a body of “*direct quotations*” which “*reveal the respondents’ levels of emotion, the way in which they have organized the world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions*”. Furthermore, “*The task for the qualitative evaluator is to provide a framework within which people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their point of view about the program*” (p11). The process of fulfilling these methodological objectives was done in the following ways.

## **2.1 Literature search**

The original intention of the study was to investigate the impact of library closures on the under fives, who are generally perceived to be an extremely vulnerable and dependent group of library users. Therefore, the initial search for material involved the area of access to and use of libraries by the under fives, as well as general information about library closures. This, it has to be said, was not entirely fruitful as there is a wealth of literature concerning children’s services as a whole, but not a great deal that specialises on the under fives. This strengthened the assumption that the study itself would be filling a

gap in current research, and the lack of material available on library closures in general reinforced the need for the study.

The search was then extended, and it developed into three main areas. The first regarded the deterioration of public library services, the second concerned child development and the role of libraries in supporting literacy, and the third covered children's services in general.

It is worth pointing out that this was a preliminary measure which did not intend to provide a prescriptive framework for the study, but to provide information on the context and general background of the area of research. It was also taken for granted that the search for relevant literature was a continuous and evolutionary process which would develop accordingly as the data was being accumulated, and as issues and patterns emerged.

As the study developed, other sources which proved useful included internal documents produced by the library and education departments, local studies information and census material, and documents from an external educational perspective. The original specifications were extended as the study evolved and so, therefore, was the scope of relevant literature. However, it soon became clear that to concentrate on the under fives would not only involve a more difficult methodological process, but that it limited the richness and the extent of feedback from respondents. It was therefore decided that the study would still be able to focus on the under fives by using the more generic term "young children", but that this would also include children between the ages of 5-9, who are still very much dependent on their parents/carers and teachers in terms of library use.

## **2.2 Preliminary interviews, visits, and research**

Andrew Milroy, Group Manager at Sheffield's Learning and Young People's Unit, was the first point of contact. An informal face-to-face interview took place in order to seek Mr Milroy's advice and professional knowledge of children's services in Sheffield. Significant names and contacts, addresses and phone numbers of libraries and schools were obtained at the interview as well as background information on the six libraries that had closed, and the alternative libraries that people might be using. Finally, arrangements were made to conduct a more formal, semi-structured interview at a later date.

Andrew Milroy had suggested contacting Isabelle Stonecliffe, former Community Librarian at Handsworth, who is now based at Woodhouse library. During an introductory face-to-face interview with Mrs Stonecliffe, a profile was built up of 3 of the affected communities in Sheffield Libraries and Information Services' South group.

On the basis of the information obtained at this interview, as well as some preliminary research based on census material and local studies information at Sheffield's Central Library, the decision was made to concentrate the study on the South Group libraries that had been closed - Hackenthorpe, Handsworth, and Hemsworth. These three libraries were based in very different, self-contained communities, and so it was felt that they would provide a rich and varied cross-section of the areas in Sheffield affected by the closures. There was also an element of geographical convenience in the choice given the limited time-span during which the study was to be completed. It also proved advantageous to work with a network of contacts who were familiar with South Group and its libraries and staff. However, if time had allowed, an investigation of the impact on *all* the areas of Sheffield which have lost their libraries would have been undertaken. (See Appendix 1, p104 for a full map of Sheffield libraries).

During the preliminary interview with Isabelle Stonecliffe, further contacts were obtained and arrangements were made to visit the 3 communities and the nearest accessible libraries in those areas. During these visits to Hemsworth and Newfield Green, Handsworth and Woodhouse, and Hackenthorpe and Waterthorpe, there was an opportunity to talk to library staff in South group and obtain further contacts and names of nurseries and schools. Dorothy Morritt, former Children's Librarian at Hackenthorpe, now at Waterthorpe, who ran a very successful under fives group at the former library, was one such member of staff.

The next step was to build up a fuller profile of Sheffield Libraries and Information Services and of the areas of Hackenthorpe, Handsworth, and Hemsworth and their former libraries. This was done, once again, by talking to staff at South group, consulting internal library documents, and searching for archive material at the Central Library's Local Studies Unit.

### **2.3 Contacting schools and library staff**

It was decided that the ideal point of contact in order to reach those children and their families affected by the closures was through the schools within the catchment area of the former libraries. Sheffield Education Service's publication, *A Guide for Parents 1997-8* provided valuable contact information about the schools in the 3 areas, as well as a map of schools in the South of Sheffield.

The intention was to distribute questionnaires throughout these schools, which would be sent home to parents/carers with the children. The questionnaires, it was hoped, would lead to more in-depth interviews with parents and children. Ten schools were contacted initially, but due to various reasons during negotiations, it was only possible to distribute questionnaires in 7 of them. These are listed overleaf.

### Hackenthorpe

- Birley Spa Primary School
- St John Fisher RC Primary School

### Handsworth

- Athelstan Primary School
- Ballifield Primary School
- St Joseph's RC Primary School

### Hemsworth

- Hemsworth Primary School
- Herdings Primary School

Opportunities to interview teachers at one school from each area arose, including a representative from a school in Hackenthorpe in which questionnaires had not been distributed. This was Rainbow Forge Nursery, Infant and Junior School. These interviews revealed the need to find out more about the schools' relationships with the former libraries, and so a question sheet was generated (see Appendix 2, p105) and was sent to the 8 schools which had co-operated with the study. Six of these were returned.

It was also necessary to contact library staff who had been involved with the former libraries or the nearest alternative services, and other related professionals. Arrangements were made to interview representatives from each area, the Group Manager for Children's Services, and the Group Manager for Mobile and Special Services.

## 2.4 Questionnaires

As already mentioned, the questionnaires designed to be distributed to parents/carers through the schools, were initially meant to provide a point of contact through which more in-depth interviews could be arranged. In anticipation of poor response rate, efforts were made to catch the parents and children's attention and encourage returns by printing the 3-page questionnaire on brightly coloured paper, using simple computer graphics, and giving every respondent the opportunity to enter their children for a prize draw.<sup>2</sup> The books and other gifts for the draw were obtained by writing to six well-known children's publishers. Three of these responded, and enough gifts were obtained to offer prizes to every school in which the questionnaires were distributed.

The questionnaire itself was comprised of an explanatory note to parents or carers, followed by 11 questions which were either open or closed in nature in varying degrees. This was followed by a final sheet where parents had the option of leaving their details so that they could be interviewed at a later date, as well as the opportunity to enter their child for the prize draw (see Appendix 3, p107).

The questionnaire was designed with the study's qualitative objectives in mind, but it was also necessary to obtain a number of factual and more quantitative details. As Patton (1987) suggests,

*“It is important to keep in mind that the purposes and functions of qualitative and quantitative data on questionnaires are different, yet complementary. The statistics from standardized items make summaries, comparisons, and generalizations quite easy and precise. The narrative comments from open-ended questions are typically meant to provide a forum for elaborations, explanations, meanings, and new ideas”* (p11).

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<sup>2</sup> Notably, more questionnaires on coloured paper were returned in proportion to those printed on white paper

For instance, it was necessary to have an idea of the children's ages, whether they had used the former library, whether they had used an alternative since its closure, what they had used the library for and how regularly, where else they obtained books from, and whether they were reading and using the library less since the closures. The information gained from these closed questions was intended to provide background details about the users and their patterns of use before and after the closures so that their behaviour could be compared.

The respondents had an opportunity to elaborate on this information or add their own comments in the open ended questions. These included asking for their reasons for not transferring library membership if they had not used a library since the closures, why they had used the library less since the closures, and then giving them an opportunity to make their own general comments concerning their feelings on the withdrawal of the service, and how they felt that their children had been affected.

The reason for obtaining the more factual information was not entirely to show, for instance, the numbers of children no longer using the library, so much as to assess individual behaviour in relation to the closures. However, quantifying the answers to the closed questions enabled the identification of themes and patterns of use and behaviour. It also helped to confirm whether or not the closure of a local library acts as a deterrent to library use. As it was not possible to gauge how representative the sample of returns were, it was not so much the exact percentages that were sought after, as much as an indication of just how much a deterrent closures can prove to be. Details of the quantitative results from the returned questionnaires can be found in the tables in Chapter Five and Appendix 4, p111.

Although the questionnaire was initially introduced as a means of contacting parents and children for fuller interviews, the nature of the responses to the open-ended questions provided far more data than anticipated. Parents and carers, on the whole, contributed a wealth of information in their comments and it was felt that further interviews would only prove repetitive. Additionally, as time was limited, this made more sense, and the 23 parents willing to be interviewed out of the 124 respondents were not contacted as originally hoped.

The method of distribution varied according to each school. During negotiations with Head Teachers, class numbers were determined, and the number of questionnaires required were estimated accordingly. As the study was aimed at younger children, it was decided that in order to limit the numbers of questionnaires, enough would be generated for the reception classes and years 1-4, and occasionally year 5, which would reach children up to the age of 9. However, it was possible to extend these limits in the case of the smaller schools where class numbers were less.

It was originally hoped that there might be some arrangement whereby the *local* children, who were more likely to have used the former library, might be identified in order to avoid wastage. However, this was only possible in three of the schools. St Joseph's school is small enough for the local children to be identified, and the Head Teacher suggested 20 relevant families in Handsworth. The substantial class numbers at Athelstan School posed a problem which was remedied by consulting the school register in order to identify local Handsworth families, and 167 were distributed. In the same way, 60 were distributed to St John Fisher School in Hackenthorpe. However, for three of the schools, questionnaires were distributed according to full class numbers, and so Hemsworth school received 130, Herdings 250, and Birley Spa 240. Ballifield School agreed to take a sample of 100, to be distributed with the teachers' judgement and knowledge of local children.

The overall 13% response rate which resulted from this distribution was not entirely statistically successful, but was irrelevant to the qualitative nature of the study. What it has to say about the numbers of parents and children actually *using* the public library is another matter. It was assumed that of the questionnaires that actually reached home or back to school, it is likely that only the families who were regular library users would have made an effort to return them.

## **2.5 Interviews**

Patton (1987) advocates that, “*the major way in which the qualitative evaluator seeks to understand the perceptions, feelings, and knowledge of people in programs is through in-depth, intensive interviewing*” (p11). In terms of the study’s qualitative objectives, interviewing parents, children, and the relevant professionals from library services and schools was judged to be the best option.

It was decided that semi-structured interviews would be the most productive in this case. The information which was sought was both of a factual and a qualitative nature, and so once preliminary details were collected through closed questions, the more open-ended questions aimed to investigate individual and collective perceptions. Although questions were prepared beforehand, they were mainly guidelines and points of reference, and the interviews became more spontaneous as themes arose in the conversation which might not have been anticipated. In this way, extra questions were added and the interviews moved in their own direction but were guided back to the main topics by the pre-prepared questions. All interviews were recorded and transcribed so that it was possible to concentrate on what the interviewee was saying without both parties becoming distracted by note-taking.

As already mentioned in the previous section, hopes of interviewing parents and children did not materialise, and so the interviews focused on three professional areas. These were,

- Heads of Services for children's work
- Library staff involved with the former libraries and with their new alternatives, including mobile services
- Teachers from the schools who had made use of the former libraries

### **Library staff interviews**

The library staff involved with the former libraries who were interviewed, were chosen partly because their new positions were held at libraries which are the nearest services to the ones which had closed, and which were publicised to users as the most geographically convenient alternatives. As there were no statistical figures available to gauge how many families with young children had transferred membership, it was hoped that these members of staff, who were familiar with the local faces in the 3 communities, would be able to estimate how many people were now using the alternatives. This, therefore, was one of the pre-conceived questions for library staff. The other questions focused on how people with children felt at the time, how many library users they felt had been lost, details of children's facilities and how popular the under fives and other activities were, whether there were any nursery or school visits, and their perceptions of the overall impact of the closures on families and young children.

### **Handsworth**

Isabelle Stonecliffe - Former Community Librarian at Handsworth and Woodhouse. Now based at Woodhouse.

Nigel Hann - Former Children's Library Assistant at Handsworth and Woodhouse. Now holds the same position at the Central Children's Library.

## **Hemsworth**

Andrea Tranter - Former Library Assistant at Hemsworth. Now circulates between Newfield Green, Manor, Jordanthorpe, and Woodseats.

## **Hackenthorpe**

Dorothy Morrill - Formerly Children's Librarian at Hackenthorpe, now at Waterthorpe.

Andrew Milroy, Group Manager for the Learning and Young People's Unit of Sheffield's Libraries and Information Services, was interviewed in order to draw upon his professional experience of children's services and his links with both school and public libraries in Sheffield. The themes of the questions revolved around possible alternatives when local libraries close down, whether the Schools Library Service or individual schools themselves can compensate, the value of the static library, reverberations of closures on the Schools Library Service, and perceptions of impact of the closures on young children.

Rosemary Telfer, Group Manager for Mobile and Special Library Services, was interviewed with the intention, primarily, of establishing more details about the extra mobile services which had been running in the 3 areas since the closures. Further questions were based on how the mobile services were geared to and used by children, if registrations by children had increased since the closures, the differences between static and mobile services, whether the mobile services had picked up on the reactions and comments made by the communities, and evaluative questions concerning the impact on children.

## **Interviews with teachers**

The last group of interviews were sought from representatives from the schools in the 3 areas which had used the former libraries on a regular basis. Questions requiring factual information on their use of the library opened the

interview, and then it moved on to questions about whether the school had wished to or been able to transfer their arrangements, if and why they valued their use of the public library, what the ideal relationship with the public library would be, how great a loss the closure was to their school, whether and how they can compensate for that loss, what they believed the children gained from the visits, and finally, their impression of the impact of the cessation of those visits.

### **Handsworth**

Bernadette Pathe (Year 5) and Janette Sheehan (Reception) - St Joseph's RC Primary School

### **Hemsworth**

Janice Evans and Alison Marshall - Hemsworth Primary School

### **Hackenthorpe**

Judith Butler (nursery) - Rainbow Forge Primary School

## **2.6 Methodological problems and limitations**

### Time limits

The restricted time span in which to collect data set certain limitations on the study. These included:

1. Only three communities could be studied.
2. All the data from schools had to be collected before the school holidays began.
3. Schools were very busy with end of year activities, and in one case an Ofsted inspection.
4. In-depth interviews with parents children did not take place.

In spite of being the focal point of the study, the children themselves were not interviewed.

### Problems with schools

1. It was not possible to make uniform arrangements with schools and so their participation varied.
2. Sheer numbers in school classes and the identification of former library users proved a problem, and a great number of questionnaires were probably wasted.
3. Overall returns from Hackenthorpe were very low and this may have been boosted if negotiations with Rainbow Forge School had been possible earlier. Evidence from Dorothy Morritt suggested that the children's library at Hackenthorpe had been thriving, and yet the questionnaire might not have reached those who were most involved with the library in the community.

### Miscellaneous

1. Nurseries and playgroups were neglected due to the extent of involvement with the schools. For this reason, fewer families with pre-school age children were able to express their views.
2. The figures which were obtained from census data may be out-of-date as they reflect the 1991 survey.
3. It would have been useful to have more accurate figures concerning registrations after the time of the closures.

**CHAPTER THREE: LIBRARIES, LITERACY AND CHILD  
DEVELOPMENT - A FURTHER REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

**3.0 Child development and literacy**

*Investing in Children* (1995) cites figures from surveys by the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit which claim that,

- “- *one-third of 14-year-olds have a reading age of 11 or less;*
- *6.5 million, or one in eight of over 16s, have serious difficulties in reading, writing, understanding or speaking English;*
- *40% of 16 to 19-year-olds in further education lack basic literacy and numeracy skills.”* (p13)

The inconsistency of literacy levels among children and adults is a common and repeatedly publicised problem in society at large. Barton (1994) draws attention to the general feeling in schools, communities, and the world of politics that,

*“More than one hundred years after the introduction of compulsory schooling we do not have an educational system which turns out happy, well-educated people”* (p1).

Barton is highlighting the ever-topical literacy debate which often lays the blame at the door of formal education.

Developmental research, however, often takes the onus away from education and widens the definition of literacy and its skills so that it is understood to originate in a pre-school context. Elkin and Lonsdale (1996) survey some of the different perspectives of literacy from the traditional view of attaining basic reading, writing and oral skills, to the more survivalist role of functional literacy. This, they describe, has its limitations in that it may only *“suffice to make individuals functional members of a modern state”* but *“by emphasizing instrumental skills, individuals may be deprived of the opportunity*

*of critical and creative thought and chance of betterment”* (p8). The wider, more personal and formative value of literacy, which will be looked at in more detail in due course, is often overlooked.

The advancement of literacy, according to developmental theories, begins long before children embark on their schooling years. As Tucker (1981) suggest,

*“It is now, in fact, a commonplace in developmental psychology that even small babies can soon be actively occupied in learning about their environment by a continuous process of assimilating and adjusting to new experience, so that their first reactions eventually become organised into ever-more coherent patterns of thought and behaviour”* (p23).

Tucker recognises that part of this process can include the introduction of picture books to children at this early stage, but that even before they are likely to respond to books and stories, they are more likely to *“react to the sound and rhythm of language itself”* (p29). Nursery rhymes, songs, and simple poems are often the child’s first experience of language construction and its patterns.

Barton (1994) describes the act of reading to children as a *“literacy event”* (p141) which *“provides a great opportunity for children to learn about language”*, its rhythms, structure and discourse, and it also introduces them to talking *about* language itself (p145). When the child is old enough to participate in the story-time, during interaction with the storyteller, the story and its pictures can be discussed, and the child can consolidate his or her view of the world and its objects. Children can *“learn many things about life, about adults, about the family, about knowledge and how to acquire it, about human interaction, about social practices”* (Barton 1994: 145).

Barton (1994) and Weinberger (1996) both describe this process of early development as the 'emergent literacy perspective'. This is linked to Vygotsky's proximal development theory which claims that children develop as a result of social interaction which helps them to "*participate in activities that are beyond their capabilities when working independently*" (Rogoff 1989:67). This highlights how much the development of children hinges on the adults around them, and how vulnerable a position they are in during the pre-school years.

The formative role of parents, teachers, and librarians should not be underestimated. Weinberger (1996) describes how "*It is very important for children to have an experienced reader to guide and help them in their reading. They need experienced readers to explain their misconceptions and teach them, at appropriate times, about aspects of literacy they have not yet fully understood*" (p6). Much of the research on literacy highlights studies concerning children who are read to and have access to books from an early age, and the findings suggest that they become more interested and skilled in reading in later childhood and into adulthood. This new awareness of parental and educational influence on literacy has fuelled interest from many professional and personal angles.

In recent years the government has shown its concern in various ways. The Tory's National Reading Initiative has no doubt laid the groundwork for Labour's Literacy Task Force, and the next academic year will be the National Year of Reading, for which plans are being made at present. The *LA Record* recently reported on the partnerships for libraries which will emerge from these new opportunities, and drew attention to two influential publications from July 1997. The first is David Blunkett's white paper entitled *Excellence in Schools* which expresses concerns for literacy at primary levels, and the second is the National Literacy Trust's *Building a Literate Nation*, "*which it hopes will feed into the government's agenda on literacy*" (Middleton 1997:409).

More recently reported government developments include recommendations of standards which propose an informal contract with parents to read with their children for 20 minutes daily. Sheffield's contribution to the national upsurge of literacy schemes includes their 'Reading Recovery Programme' which is working with parents, schools, and libraries in some of the most deprived areas of the city to improve literacy levels. In light of this, the role for schools and libraries is ever-important and instrumental.

### **3.1 The 'reading journey': Establishing the reading habit**

Alec Williams, Head of Children's Services at Leeds Library and Information Services, in a recent presentation concerning children's public library services, described a more complex aspect of literacy than the one-dimensional, functional process of simply learning to read. He called it the 'reading journey' and continued the discussion by describing the role of the public library in supporting and fuelling this lifelong process which should, ideally, begin in the earliest years.

A similar idea and a useful parallel was expressed in a recent conversation with Trevor Dickinson, former HMI and boundless enthusiast for children's literacy and education. He described how it is not enough just to teach children to read, but that one of the greatest gifts you can give them is *readership*, which is to give them a love of books and language which will fuel the reading habit for a lifetime. He used the parallel of learning to play the piano or a foreign language at school, but then discontinuing the lessons and practice. How many of us could pick up from where we left off from all those years ago? In the same way, a reading habit which is lost when the schooling years are over, may unfortunately be lost for a lifetime, especially if it is associated with the enforced reluctant reading of syllabus texts. This is why it is important for teachers to remember the personal and idiosyncratic enjoyment factor in reading literature.

Dickinson (1990) advocates that because “*Our children and the adults they become need to be able constantly to ask the right questions about life and its living*”, they will need “*the best language in which to understand the answers*”. Furthermore, Dickinson suggests that because children need to be surrounded by “*rich print worlds*”, this “*places special obligations, of course, upon school and public libraries. They share a particular responsibility to demonstrate, through their book provision, that the adult world deeply cherishes its children. That essential demonstration pays dividends.....in helping the growing of children into adults who, touched from their earliest years by the sad and joyful magic of books, have been given the chance to be creative, imaginative beings, more fully conscious of, and more sensitive to, the needs of the many living worlds about them*” (p4).

Brice (1990a) distinguishes between “*functional reading*” and the more personally valuable “*formative reading*” which will have a far deeper influence on changing the life of the reader for the better, and, hopefully, for a lifetime (p6). In her examination of formative reading she outlines the parents’, teachers’, and librarians’ roles in guiding, supporting and identifying the kind of quality materials which will have these life-changing effects. Librarians’ skills in this area are particularly experienced and therefore extremely valuable.

### **3.2 The role and value of the public library**

So far, this chapter has concentrated on the value of reading, but this is only half the picture. The role of libraries extends far beyond the provision of a wide range of quality fiction for children. First of all, this overshadows the value of non-fiction which, according to Carter and Abrahamson (1991), is equally as important to child development. They write, “*traditionally educators have pressed fiction upon readers in a sincere effort to encourage their reading development. Such single-mindedness not only ignores those youngsters who clearly preferred non-fiction (many of whom chose not to read at all when forced into a reading environment made up exclusively of fiction), but it also*

*overlooked the diverse habits of both novice and mature readers whose tastes switch back and forth between fiction and non-fiction, prose and poetry, genres and formats” (p364).* They also chart the importance of non-fiction to emergent literacy. Children can benefit from early counting and alphabet books, and in the later years can gain enjoyment from seeking out factual information for themselves.

Children’s library services have played a less passive role which has developed in scope in recent years. They have become more involved with schools, nurseries, and playgroups as well as providing storytimes, under fives groups and general activities for children. This burgeoning aspect of children’s services has become vital to provision all over the UK.

Having already examined the developmental benefits of reading aloud to children, it is clear that the role of storytelling should not be underestimated. Mortimer (1981) claims that,

*“Reading aloud is a valuable form of preparation for children’s own later reading. It can be an important source for children of a variety of language structures and forms - poetry, nursery rhymes, folk tales, fairy stories, all with differing cadences, rhymes and rhythms. It can strengthen the child’s capacity to assimilate complex speech patterns, and help him to experience colours and movement of words” (p69).*

She also writes that the public library setting is ideal for providing this help with literacy development, especially if the children do not hear stories at home or at school. Furthermore, the library is *“one of the very few institutions whose function it is to serve all the children in any given community, no matter to which family, school or socio-economic grouping they belong” (p70).*

It is for this reason that it is important for librarians to develop the right skills for reading aloud in order to catch the children’s interest and instil in them

a love of reading and language which may last a lifetime. Additionally, the fact that these activities take place outside the home or school may be significant to a child's socialisation and integration into its community and wider environments. This reinforces Vygotsky's theory of interactive and proximal learning.

In examining literacy, it is all too easy to concentrate on the influence of books and overlook the other mediums which are now developing at an escalating rate. It is necessary for libraries to move with the times and make use of the technology so prevalent in most organisations within our society. Younger generations are now more proficient in terms of information technology because of its widespread introduction into homes and schools. These IT skills will be both commonplace and indispensable to them in the future and so, where funding has allowed, libraries have promoted this need for computer literacy by providing CD-ROM facilities for children with on-site usage. This role for the library is set to expand in the future if they can maintain financial support and security.

In conjunction with all these issues, the public library also has a symbolic presence for supporting literacy because of its ethos of free and non-discriminating access to all members of the community, and because of all the efforts it has made in recent years to improve services to children. Elkin and Lonsdale (1996) describe how they are concerned with "*reading and literacy in relation to the individual child's development, as a stimulus to helping that child reach its full potential and discover a road to learning for life*", and that "*it is only through wide access to books and other learning materials that every child is empowered to achieve its potential, and the library is the most significant point of access*" (p4). It has been suggested that public libraries, at their best, can be a developmental gateway to numerous benefits and life skills, but this process of empowerment needs to be examined in terms of equality of access and accessibility. A child will be deprived of these benefits if their library is not accessible to them, and this issue is examined in full in Chapter Five.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: LIBRARY PROFILES AND THE COMMUNITIES OF HACKENTHORPE, HANDSWORTH AND HEMSWORTH**

### **4.0 Sheffield Libraries and Information Services**

Areas and communities which make up the city of Sheffield, with its population of 531, 000 (Proctor et al 1995: 5), are more often than not described as ‘villages’. When the present day library system came into being, it was decided that services would be provided on a more local basis, as opposed to a smaller network of larger libraries serving wider catchment areas. The libraries are divided into North, South, East, and Central groups, and as district, town, inner city or local within those geographical divisions. A tiering system is now in operation and district libraries are prioritised in financial terms, traditionally providing a wider range of materials.

Reinforcing recommendation 8 in the *Investing in Children* (1995) report, Sheffield, like many other authorities in the UK, prioritise their provision for children and divide their total materials budget to correspond with “*the percentage of children and young people in the population served*” (pvii). Therefore, approximately 19% of the budget is reserved for children’s stock. This financial year, for instance, although the adult book fund has been cut to zero, the children’s budget has been protected.

Sheffield also has a Schools Library Service, which is based at the Learning and Young People’s Unit. This provides project loans, block loans, and teacher’s reference materials for all LEA schools and any grant-maintained schools who wish to buy their service. This service has also suffered from budget cuts in recent years. Additionally, many schools in Sheffield make use of their public libraries for class visits and induction sessions, depending on how local they are. These relationships will be discussed in full in Chapter Six.

In 1974 there were 38 branch libraries in Sheffield, but by the end of 1995, only 33 remained. The Council's financial crisis that year resulted in the closure of 6 libraries which were classed as 'local' - Concord, Grenoside, Hackenthorpe, Handsworth, Hemsworth, and Lane Top. These were small libraries with comparatively low issue figures, but there was a great depth of feeling among people in their communities on the lead up to the closures. Public reactions included meetings, petitions, and even a 22-day sit-in at Hemsworth Library by its residents.

However, the closures went ahead and these difficult decisions were made according to the geographical proximity and ease with which the users could reach an alternative service. On the lead up to the closures, these alternative branch and mobile services were publicised within the former libraries in the form of posters and leaflets.

Sheffield also has a Mobile and Special Library service which is aimed at the elderly, disabled, and under fives population. The mobiles make a considerable number of stops in various rural, inner city, and suburban areas as well as at sheltered housing and special needs centres all over Sheffield.

At the time of the closures, arrangements were made to create extra mobile provision in the areas which had lost their libraries. Three full days were set aside for these services so that a full morning or afternoon could be spent at 2 or 3 stops in each area. The needs, opinions, and requests of the residents in each area were taken into account when the services were being planned. Rosemary Telfer, Group Manager for Mobile and Special Services, stresses that these services were by no means intended to replace or compensate for the loss of the static community libraries, and it was for this reason that the mobiles do not stop outside the closed libraries. This was felt to be insensitive and inappropriate. The mobiles provide a very different kind of service to static

libraries and are still aimed at specific members of the community who are less 'mobile' themselves. However, the fact that these communities had lost their libraries urged them to publicise their services more after the closures, through community groups, schools, and door-to-door leaflet distribution.

#### **4.1 Hackenthorpe**

The district of Hackenthorpe, to the lower south-east of the city, was developed in the early 1950s when a large corporation housing estate was built. It was later in this decade that the group of shops adjacent to the library were built. A range of shops still occupies these buildings and provides a focal point for the community, which was reinforced in October 1972, when the library was built. The library, therefore, was situated centrally and conveniently within the community. The building has, since then, has been taken over by the Residents' Association's Management Committee which runs a small community centre called 'Central Point'. Activities such as mother and toddler groups, keep fit classes and pensioners' coffee mornings are now run at the centre.

Although Hackenthorpe itself is a self-contained community with all its own shops and healthcare facilities, neighbouring areas have been subject to extensive developments which include the widespread construction of new private housing, and the nearby Crystal Peaks shopping complex. The area has, therefore, expanded a great deal since the 1950s.

Statistics from Sheffield's Libraries and Information Services' assimilation of the 1991 census figures, using the SASPAC software, relating to Hackenthorpe are presented in Table 4.1, overleaf. The figures show that a substantial percentage of the population in this catchment area is under nine. The unemployment rate is fairly substantial, as are the percentages of households with dependent children and lone parent households without a car.

<b>TOTAL POPULATION</b>	<b>11, 947</b>
<b>% POPULATION AGED 0-9</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>% UNEMPLOYMENT RATE</b>	<b>19.5%</b>
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS</b>	<b>4, 947</b>
<b>% HOUSEHOLDS WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>% HOUSEHOLDS WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN AND NO CAR</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>% LONE PARENT HOUSEHOLDS</b>	<b>3.4%</b>
<b>% LONE PARENTS WITH NO CAR</b>	<b>69%</b>

**Table 4.1 Characteristics of Hackenthorpe Library’s catchment population**

Hackenthorpe Library, pictured below, was small and open-plan. Staff relate how there was a strong sense of community among its users, particularly in relation to children’s services. Dorothy Morrith ran a thriving under fives group as well as story-times and other activity sessions. Local schools also made use of their facilities. These activities were well-attended and members of the community often helped and joined in. Class visits were particularly regular at Hackenthorpe for individual borrowing, induction sessions, and story-telling.

The nearest libraries to Hackenthorpe are Waterthorpe and Frecheville. However, as Waterthorpe library is a large district library situated in the Crystal Peaks Shopping Centre next to the Council Offices for Rent Payment, Housing, and Family and Community Services, the people of Hackenthorpe may have more reason to go there. Since its opening, this library has always been in competition with Hackenthorpe, and when the former library’s hours were severely reduced, issues had suffered further. Dorothy Morrith now works at Waterthorpe and has recognised a number of Hackenthorpe users, but found it difficult to estimate the precise number of younger users who have transferred. She can confirm, however, that none of the children in Hackenthorpe’s under

fives group were able to transfer to the group at Waterthorpe, because of a two-year waiting list.

Transport by bus from Hackenthorpe to Crystal Peaks and Frecheville is very regular. The 41 Mainline bus service, which stops at both places and to the town centre, runs every 5-10 minutes either way. Waterthorpe Library is a 15-20 minute walk from the lower end of Hackenthorpe, and the distance from Hackenthorpe to Crystal Peaks is approximately 1.5 miles.

#### **4.2 Handsworth**

Handsworth is situated to the south-east of the city centre and has a rich agricultural and mining history and more of a 'village feel' to its make-up than the other two communities. Along its main road is a considerable number of shops and facilities which include a chemist, a number of newsagents, and dental and doctor's surgeries. The former library, although it was not situated on the main Handsworth Road, was within short walking distance from one of its side streets. At face-value, Handsworth appears to be a prospering and friendly community.

Figures manipulated by the SASPAC software for Sheffield's Libraries and Information Services, according to the library catchment areas indicate the following characteristics of Handsworth's population. It is a smaller community with a lower percentage of unemployed and higher number of car owners than Hackenthorpe and Hemsworth.

<b>TOTAL POPULATION</b>	<b>8, 958</b>
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<b>% POPULATION AGED 0-9</b>	<b>9%</b>
<b>% UNEMPLOYMENT RATE</b>	<b>15.2%</b>
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS</b>	<b>3, 724</b>
<b>% HOUSEHOLDS WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN</b>	<b>24%</b>
<b>% HOUSEHOLDS WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN AND NO CAR</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>% LONE PARENT HOUSEHOLDS</b>	<b>1.5%</b>
<b>% LONE PARENTS WITH NO CAR</b>	<b>66%</b>

**Table 4.2 Characteristics of Handsworth Library’s catchment population**

Handsworth Library, formerly housed within the building pictured overleaf, has had a history of disappointments. The purpose-built library was demolished in 1980 when asbestos was found in the building. They were re-housed in a nearby school and managed to maintain the premises when the school closed in 1994 and Catering for Sheffield took over the rest of the building. The children’s library was fairly well-used, even though when staff were more numerous it was inconveniently situated on the upper floor of the building. The children’s assistant was not replaced when she left in 1992, but the service nonetheless managed to maintain an under fives group with 10-14 members, and to deal with school visits for individual borrowing, induction sessions, and occasional activities. However, in the years prior to the closure, the staffing problem deteriorated and it became difficult to maintain as full a service as had been possible in the past.

Aside from the new mobile services, when Handsworth Library closed, the alternative branch libraries that were publicised to its borrowers were Woodhouse (circa. 1.5 miles) and Darnall (circa. 1.5 miles), and even Waterthorpe (circa. 3 miles) as it is on a direct bus route from Handsworth. These three libraries serve very different populations. Darnall serves a multi-cultural area and its stock reflects this, but the advantage is that it is situated amidst a larger shopping area where Handsworth residents might be likely to

visit. Waterthorpe Library also has this advantage. Woodhouse Library serves its own small and self-contained ‘village’ community. Library staff surmised that Handsworth residents would have to make a special trip unless they worked at Woodhouse or had another specific reason to go there.

The 52 Mainline bus service is extremely regular and goes to Darnall and Woodhouse, but there is no bus service from Handsworth to Woodhouse which stops *near* the library, and there is a hill which would have to be tackled to get there. Staff at Darnall confirmed that many users transferred their membership at first, but it was impossible to say how many children this included. Isabelle Stonecliffe estimated that as little as 10% might have transferred membership to Woodhouse Library.

#### **4.3 Hemsworth**

Hemsworth is situated to the south-west of the city and it’s housing is part of the Gleadless Valley estate built in the mid-1950s. This residential area was among the Council’s purpose-built housing estates which were highly commended for their design at the time. To the North is Newfield Green, and the opposite direction runs into the Norton area. The estate is built on the side of a hill and the valley region in between Hemsworth and Newfield Green makes the journey by foot arduous in both directions.

Figures illustrated in Table 4.3, from the same census information referred to in 4.1 and 4.2, recount the characteristics of Hemsworth Library’s catchment population. The figures show that there is a much greater unemployment rate within this very small community, with higher percentages of lone parent households and lower percentages of car owners.

<b>TOTAL POPULATION</b>	<b>5, 585</b>
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<b>% POPULATION AGED 0-9</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>% UNEMPLOYMENT RATE</b>	<b>31.8%</b>
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS</b>	<b>2, 500</b>
<b>% HOUSEHOLDS WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>% HOUSEHOLDS WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN AND NO CAR</b>	<b>46%</b>
<b>% LONE PARENT HOUSEHOLDS</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>% LONE PARENTS WITH NO CAR</b>	<b>83%</b>

**Table 4.3 Characteristics of Hemsworth Library’s catchment population**

Hemsworth Library, pictured below, was opened simultaneously with Greenhill Library in February 1963. It was purposely built within a pedestrian precinct adjacent to the bus terminus. Many of the shops have closed down and although it is still a focal point in the community, the facilities in this precinct are extremely depleted. The open-plan library now stands empty with its shelving and issue desk still in view.

Although there was much resistance in all of the communities which lost their libraries, Hemsworth put up the greatest fight when members of the Residents’ Association, library staff and other locals occupied the library for over three weeks before they were eventually evicted. Although the library was small, it was relatively well-used as it was in such a central and convenient position within the community. There was no under fives group, as attendance when attempts were made had been very poor, but other children’s activities were successful. Two playgroups had an arrangement to borrow books and Hemsworth School made class visits regularly for inductions, individual borrowing, and to take part in children’s activities. There was no specific children’s assistant at Hemsworth, but staff shared the responsibilities for children’s services.

The nearest library to Hemsworth is Newfield Green, which is a downward route followed by an upward ascent of about one mile. The 47 and

48 Mainline bus services run to Newfield Green from the Herdings and Hemsworth regions, and the 33 and 34 run in the other direction. The 48 and 47 are more regular, and so Newfield Green is probably quicker and easier to get to by bus. There is an hourly service which runs to Jordanthorpe, or it is possible to get to Woodseats on the 33 bus, but this would probably entail a special trip if Hemsworth residents had no other reason to go there.

Staff at Newfield Green estimate that perhaps 10% of Hemsworth users have transferred overall, but once again find it difficult to estimate the exact numbers of children. Andrea Tranter, who would have been familiar with the local faces at Hemsworth, found it difficult to think of any specific families who were now using Newfield Green, Jordanthorpe, or Woodseats regularly as an alternative. She suspected that the number of transferrals were very few.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: ACCESS AND ACCESSIBILITY**

### **5.0 Access and equality in children's services**

While it is true that public libraries are dedicated to providing a prioritised, high quality, and non-discriminating service to children, whether or not this service can or will be effectively far-reaching enough is a more complex matter. More importantly, the commitment itself does not guarantee that these services will reach the most needy or socially deprived, or the children with the poorest literacy skills. As Dickinson (1992) surmises, many studies have confirmed that,

*“Whatever the reality of the noisy but doubtful debate on present reading standards, the one known and universally accepted truth is that (with obvious, remarkable exceptions) the poor and bookless read less well than the rich and book-surrounded”* (p2).

The Library Association's service philosophy for children, relating to access and equality claims that,

*“The library's responsibility is to the whole, not just its current users. Every child is a potential user, and all children should be reached in some way. This will involve working directly with children, and also through a variety of agencies working with children.....Children from all backgrounds and cultures have an equal right of access to library services”* (p14).

However, maintaining this philosophy of equal access is more difficult in practice when there are so many barriers which prevent the library from reaching every potential child user.

#### **Geographical barriers**

The *Investing in Children* report (1995) discusses aspects of unequal access which are a threat to children's services. It recognises that access can never be geographically equal but that *“it is obvious that inequality has been exacerbated by cuts in budgets leading to children (and their parents and carers) being denied access through reduced opening hours and in some areas*

*closures of service points*” (p22). It also makes reference to the problem of reaching children in rural areas, and the shortcomings of the national inter-lending situation in relation to children’s materials. It concludes that,

*“Total equality of access is unrealistic throughout all parts of the country, but a minimum level of access is essential for children in particular, who are liable to disadvantage through physical, social and legal factors such as distance, opening hours, dependence on carers, and absence of supervision”* (p22).

All of these issues arose in the findings of the study, as will be shown in due course. When a library closes, these are the kind of barriers which prevent children from gaining access to alternative resources. Geographical barriers often have the most damaging effects on children in less affluent areas, and it could be argued that they are doubly disenfranchised by the closures for this reason. The *local* nature of the public library can make all the difference in relation to frequency of use, both for economic reasons, and in terms of convenience. This is something which emerged in the findings of the study (see 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3).

### Physical barriers

The reduction of opening hours, which can very often have the same effects as full closures, is only one facet of the physical barriers which users with busy lives have to face. Lewins and Renwick (1989) made a study of barriers to access for pre-school children in libraries and drew attention to the lack of facilities for children and their carers which act as a deterrent to use. As well as pinpointing the tangible barriers to prams and pushchairs and other lack of baby-care facilities, they also found that *“there were wide variations in service provision between individual libraries, particularly in the areas of storytimes and outreach work with pre-school organisations. It was felt that this may be a result of a lack of clearly defined policies and objectives for library services to the under fives”* (p85).

Up-hill walking distances and bus journeys can also be a physical barrier for parents and carers with prams and push-chairs. Although there is a short distance between Hemsworth and Newfield Green Library, for those on foot, or with prams and push-chairs, the journey up-hill might be a struggle, especially in adverse weather conditions. Theoretical statements of equality are often marred by practical barriers, but there are also mental barriers to access to deal with.

### Mental barriers

The effects of parental non-use of the public library is examined in greater detail in Chapter Six, but it is likely that if parents are daunted by what they feel the library represents and what and who it exists for, they might be less inclined to encourage their children to use it. In spite of its original intention to bring education and alternative recreational activities to those in society most deprived, as well as its present-day egalitarian ethos, the public library is still very much viewed as a middle-class institution. People also might feel that it has little to offer them because they have their own technological sources of information and entertainment, in the form of videos, computer games and so on. The large percentage of people who did not respond to the study's questionnaire may be in this category.

As Marriott (1991) affirms, *“accessibility means more than just providing time, vital though that is. Adults who use libraries and are familiar with them are often not at all conscious of what forbidding places they can be to the uninitiated. Introducing children to the way in which the library works is thus important in order to demystify the place and the experience, and also because at first sight young children are likely to find library systems totally*

*bewildering*” (p38). Strong relationships with local schools and regular class visits, as illustrated in Chapter Six, can break down these kind of barriers.

There are other kinds of ‘outreach’ work which are important. Projects such as ‘Bookstart’ are a step in the right direction. The schemes provide ‘starter packs’ for parents and new babies with the co-operation of health clinics and have been successfully operated in areas such as Birmingham, Sunderland, West Sussex, Hertfordshire (Scott et al 1995: 149-152) and in Newport (*LA Record*, February 1997: 62). These literacy projects aim to introduce parents and young babies to books and reading, and bring them into contact with the public library service from an early age. As well as publicising the role and facilities of the public library, these kind of schemes may reach families who may not make contact with the library of their own accord.

The problems of barriers to access in all of these areas are intensified by library closures, and the findings of the study highlighted 4 main inter-related areas which are associated with the question of accessibility - convenience, transport, locality, and economic factors. What follows is an examination of the factors relating to access which, according to the parents/carers and librarians affected by and involved with the closures, impede the use of alternative services by children.

## **5.1 Convenience and transport**

There were two queries in the parents/carers questionnaire which aimed to find out if users had replaced their service, and what new patterns of use were taking place (see Appendix 3, p107). Question 5 provided an opportunity for respondents to either state the alternative service they were using or, if they had not transferred their membership, to explain why. Question 8 aimed to establish their new patterns of use, and the reasons they might or might not be using the library less in general.

Inconvenience was a constantly recurring theme in the parents' feedback. Many of the respondents who stated that they had not transferred their membership since the closure revealed that it was due to the inconvenience of using another service. Four Handsworth users and five Hemsworth users who had *not* transferred membership at all made this response. When asked why they might be using the library less, once again, this notion was referred to. Many parents/carers described how visits to the library conveniently tied in with other activities like shopping or collecting the children from school. Therefore, the time factor is an important element of library use given that opening hours need to fit in with families' busy schedules.

### **Comments:**

#### **Hackenthorpe respondents**

- "Previously library was 2 minutes walk away. Now need to drive and visit library when shopping - not always a suitable time for children as they are at school, therefore a 'special trip' is sometimes made"
- "Our trip to the library usually combined with food shop, which the children hate"

#### **Handsworth respondents**

- "Not as convenient. Takes more travelling time"
- "Before the closure of Handsworth library we used to go on foot regularly after school but we now have to catch the bus or go by car to Woodhouse library which takes up a lot more time"
- "We feel that it is awful that Handsworth library had to close down because it was handy from school"
- "My children are taken to a library further away but it's hassle so they go less often. Some of my friends and relatives children miss out because their mothers don't drive. Local library is a big loss"

- "I feel a child should have a local library that is convenient to visit as and when wanted and needed"
- "Without a local library, an outing to another area makes it a chore having to go by car or bus"
- "Would have to make a special trip whereas used to pass Handsworth Library regularly"
- "...it is an effort to go to Darnall and would be much more inconvenient as Handsworth was in walking distance and we would probably go once a week instead of every three weeks"
- "It is not always convenient to go to Central Library and we therefore find we are buying more books"

#### **Hemsworth respondents**

- "I cannot travel too far because of work, money, and it is just not as easy as you think, with taking a small child with you"
- "Woodseats is less convenient to get to. I haven't found the time"
- "...it is still inconvenient and expensive to visit Newfield Green Library and would be much better having a library closer to home"
- "I miss the handiness of Hemsworth library"
- "As I am a working mother I am unable to take my children to a library. The nearest one is a bus journey away but they are too young to make this journey alone whereas before they could go to the library after school as it was just around the corner (literally) from our house"

The librarians involved with the former libraries echoed these concerns, based on their experience of users comments before and since the closures:

- "Some families just love books and so they come here instead but others just weren't bothered because it's no longer convenient, so we seem to have lost them"

- “Families used to call in on their way home from school, so they didn’t have to make a special trip”

- “The users are not likely to register anywhere else because it’s just too inconvenient.....and very often, the times of the mobile don’t coincide with their own routines - work or shopping”

- “....people seem to come to the library with their kids if it fits in with their daily routines....Women working full-time or part-time with young children are trying to juggle everything they’ve got to do in the day. Whereas before, a visit to the library might take half an hour, to go on a special journey to somewhere else might take an hour and a half at least. That’s a big commitment for busy people in terms of time. If it doesn’t fit in with people’s lifestyles, they’re not going to want to know.”

- “You have to remember also, that library hours have already been reduced, so in visiting the alternative library people have to make a lot more effort or they simply cannot get to a library because of their schedule”

Transport, which is very much linked to the idea of convenience in terms of the study, was another major factor for the cessation of or infrequent use of the library. Many people explicitly stated that they did not own or have use of a car, and in hindsight, this might have been a useful question on the questionnaire. Many respondents also stated that they found bus journeys inconvenient due to the expense or the awkwardness of taking small children and push-chairs with them.

### **Comments:**

#### **Hackenthorpe respondents**

- “In a sense it’s alright for us - we have a car and make the extra effort to go to a library further away. However, I am sure there are others who have been deterred and no longer visit a library, or simply do not have access to a car”

### **Handsworth respondents**

- “I do not have use of the car very often”
- “I can’t drive. Before, we could walk to Handsworth library. It’s a bit of a hassle in the rain, getting pram etc. on bus to Woodhouse”
- “It takes up so much more travelling time. Transport is not always readily available”
- “Poor parking facilities at Darnall. This means library visit is now a special trip rather than a weekly occurrence”
- “It’s a lot further to travel and we need to go by car or bus”

### **Hemsworth respondents**

- “I find it hard on the bus with my children”

## **5.2 The ‘local’ library: a question of proximity**

Linked with the idea of the inconvenience of special bus or car journeys is the issue that the value of a local library is that it is accessible by foot and can be visited when performing other daily activities like shopping or collecting children from school. Alternatively, if a library is near enough, then it will not seem like such an effort or a ‘special trip’ to visit it whether there are other daily chores to perform or not. The other advantage of a local library is that children may be able to visit by themselves if they are old enough and the library is near enough. Some of the parents thought that this was beneficial to children in terms of gaining independence.

There was a huge response from people who mentioned the convenience of having a library within ‘walking distance’. Eleven Handsworth users specifically mentioned that they now do not use an alternative library service at all because it was too far away or too far to walk, as did one former Hackenthorpe user and twenty-one former Hemsworth users.

## **Comments:**

### **Hackenthorpe respondents**

- “Previously library was 2 minutes away. Now need to drive and visit library when shopping.”
- “The children could previously go to the library on their own - now they can’t. Using car is bad for children’s independence, health and environment and teaches them that cars are good, walking is bad! Using car does not help to teach children road safety...”
- “Local libraries are better near homes, where children may walk to them on their own sometimes, to choose a book”

### **Handsworth respondents**

- “Darnall library is not within walking distance when carrying two bags of books”
- “Our library was Handsworth which was just 2 minutes away. We use it less now because it involves a car journey”
- “We use the library less now because it’s not as convenient to get to them. Takes up so much more travelling time. Transport is not always readily available. Too far for children to go alone”
- “We miss our library very much as it was just across the road, 2 minutes away. We called in there every day after school and on Saturday mornings”
- “I am not always able to take the children with me to choose books due to the distance and the time factor therefore I feel they are missing an important part of growing up, making their own choices on books which suit them. They were able to go alone before”
- “I think it would have been nice to have a local library, especially as the children get older, they could have visited on their own”
- “I feel very sad my children will not be able to go to the local library when they get older. I always enjoyed my visits alone to my library as a teenager and it

angers me that my children will not have that opportunity. They should not have to go on a bus ride to the library”

- “Part of the pleasure in Summer was a stroll to the library and choosing books. When you lose your local library you lose that part of it”

### **Hemsworth respondents**

- “As I am a working mother I am unable to take my children to a library. The nearest one is a bus journey away but they are too young to make this journey alone whereas before they could go to the library after school as it was just around the corner (literally) from our house”

- “...there should be a local library available to the children in this area”

- “The children liked to go down by themselves and choose their own books. Now they can’t.”

- “My sons love reading but when the library closed my sons have to go a long way to get a new book to read.....it was the worst thing that happened to Hemsworth”

### **5.3 Economic factors**

A number of parents and carers were concerned about the extra expense involved in visiting an alternative library. Unemployed or single parents are often disadvantaged in this sense, whereas those ‘special trips’ might be financially easier for working parents.

### **Comments:**

#### **Handsworth respondents**

- “An alternative trip is not as convenient. Have to use public transport, therefore costs more”

- “It’s further to travel to visit another library and more expensive - bus fares/petrol”

- “We don’t use another library because of the distance, plus the added cost in bus fares”
- “.....all children and adults should have easy affordable access to them [libraries] for the benefit of all”
- “The library provided books which people would not normally be able to purchase, it is missed by most people, but it was most important for children and the elderly to whom the library was essential”

### **Hemsworth respondents**

- “I cannot find the time and sometimes the money to travel on the bus (I have to get back for school) and it’s too far to walk to Newfield Green”
- “It’s too far to walk in bad weather and it costs £2.10 return on the bus”
- “Because of Hemsworth’s closure, Newfield Green is now our nearest library, but to take my children, it now costs me £1.40 in bus fares, which being on income support I could do without. But as a parent I still feel my children’s education as well as enjoyment is well worth the extra expense. However, it is still inconvenient and expensive.....”
- “[The library] provides good story books for people who can’t afford to buy them. Closing libraries is not the way forward for future generations”
- “.....soon there will be nothing left for us to do that doesn’t cost money and there’s nowhere for my children to go anymore”

### **5.4 Use of alternative library services**

Patterns of library use since the closures were extremely varied according to each area, as Table 5.1 below illustrates. Hackenthorpe has the highest percentage of respondents who have continued using a library service since the closure (86%), whilst Hemsworth has the lowest (32.5%). This indicates a large number of former Hemsworth users and their children who responded to the questionnaire have discontinued library use (67.5%). A significant number of former Handsworth users and their children are also not

gaining access to an alternative library service (39%). Overall, therefore, 56% of the respondents in the three areas *have* used an alternative library since the closures, and 44% have not. It is difficult to estimate how far these figures relate to convenience of access to alternative libraries, but it may be likely that Hackenthorpe users are now using Waterthorpe because they are more likely to visit Crystal Peaks shopping centre, whereas Hemsworth users, where the percentage of car owners is low (see Table 4.3, Chapter Four), might be deterred by the return ascent from Newfield Green Library.

	<b>% of respondents who have used an alternative library since the closures</b>	<b>% of respondents who have not used an alternative library since the closures</b>
<b>HACKENTHORPE</b>	86%	14%
<b>HANDSWORTH</b>	61%	39%
<b>HEMSWORTH</b>	32.5%	67.5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	56%	44%

**Table 5.1 Percentage figures of use and non-use by respondents since the closures**

While it was not possible to obtain exact overall figures from library records of the numbers of families who transferred membership to alternative libraries, of those who returned the questionnaires, the details of alternative use were as follows:-

### **Hackenthorpe**

Twenty-three questionnaires were returned from the Hackenthorpe parents and carers, and the following services in Table 5.2 are the alternative libraries that were cited by respondents. Some respondents had used more than one library and so the numbers using alternative services were in Table 5.2, overleaf.

<b>Alternative library</b>	<b>Nos. of transfers</b>
Waterthorpe	17
Frecheville	3
Gleadless	1
Manor	2
Broomhill	1

**Table 5.2 Alternative library services used by Hackenthorpe respondents and the numbers transferred**

### **Handsworth**

Fifty-one respondents out of the sixty-one returned stated that they had used another library since the closure, while the remainder admitted they had not. The following table shows the number of people who stated that they had transferred use to one or more alternative services.

<b>Alternative library</b>	<b>Nos. of transfers</b>
Darnall	20
Woodhouse	7
Central	7
Manor	1
Waterthorpe	6
Aston	1
Mobile service	1

**Table 5.3 Alternative library services used by Handsworth respondents and the numbers transferred**

### **Hemsworth**

Thirteen of the forty respondents had transferred library use, while twenty-seven of them had not. Once again, some of the respondents were now using more than one library whether frequently, or not, and the transferral patterns were as follows:

<b>Alternative library</b>	<b>Nos. of transfers</b>
Newfield Green	6
Gleadless	3
Central	3
Woodseats	1
Mobile	1

**Table 5.4 Alternative library services used by Handsworth respondents and the numbers transferred**

Overall, transferrals tended to take place in greater numbers at the nearest library to the former one (Newfield Green, Waterthorpe), or the library near to where there are more shopping facilities (Darnall, Waterthorpe) so that users would not have to make a ‘special visit’. Former Hackenthorpe users had the highest numbers of transferrals in relation to their response rate, while there was the lowest number of transferrals at Hemsworth. This suggests that many of Hemsworth’s former child users are now not gaining access to a library at all.

When asked what other sources their children obtained books from (see question 9, Appendix 3), respondents generally stated school, private purchases, book clubs, school book fairs, or gifts from friends and relatives. One Handsworth user mentioned a mother and toddler group, and a Hackenthorpe user mentioned that they obtained books from their crèche. The figures were as follows, in Table 5.5, overleaf. The majority of respondents in each area stated that the main source from which to obtain books since the library closures was from school.

Area	Alternative source	Nos. of respondents
Hackenthorpe	School	4
	Private purchase	1
	Crèche	1
Handsworth	School	22
	Private purchase	14
	Book clubs	3
	School book fairs	2
	Gifts	2
	Mother & Toddler group	1
Hemsworth	School	16
	Private purchase	13
	Book clubs	3

**Table 5.5 Alternative sources mentioned by respondents from which their children obtain books**

### **Mobiles**

The interview with Rosemary Telfer from Sheffield’s Mobile and Special Library Services, indicated that the new mobile services were not wholly popular with families with young children in the 3 areas. As Mrs Telfer confirmed,

- “Sadly, the best used children’s services on the mobile I would say are in the predominantly white, middle-class areas of Sheffield like Ecclesall or where the children are encouraged to read more by the parents....”

- “In Hemsworth, most of the parents pass the mobile as they collect their children from school but they don’t tend to call on it.....The answer is to get the children using the mobile library with the parents and they won’t do it. The initiative’s not there. People will not be tied down to a day and a time. We’re there for a whole afternoon in Hemsworth but parents don’t seem to bring the children on.....The trouble is, they’ve lost their pattern of use. Trying to re-establish that pattern during one hour at one stop is very difficult....We even stop near the schools in Hackenthorpe to try to attract parents as they collect the

children but it doesn't seem to do any good. I suspect we've lost hundreds and hundreds of readers. What would be ideal, of course, would be to set up a mobile especially for children which would visit playgroups and schools and do storytimes. That would be ideal.”

These are some of the difficulties the new mobile services have had in attracting new users in the affected communities. While they have made great efforts to publicise the new services through public meetings and local organisations, and through door-to-door leaflet distribution, they realise that more publicity is needed but that at the end of the day, whether or not this will have positive effects is out of their control.

The number of respondents who seemed to be aware of the mobile services were indeed, very few. One Handsworth user and one Hemsworth user cited the mobile as their alternative source for children's materials, but one of them actually worked for the mobile library service and so explained how family borrowing was more convenient for them in this sense. A few respondents made the following comments on mobile services but overall, awareness seemed to be misinformed or non-existent.

**Comments:**

**Handsworth**

- “We now have a mobile library which stops at Handsworth Top, but we don't use it”

**Hemsworth**

- “The mobile library visits once a week, but it has moved on by the time Hemsworth School ends” - “Although there is a mobile library, this has usually left before my child has returned from school and there should be a local library available for the children round this area”

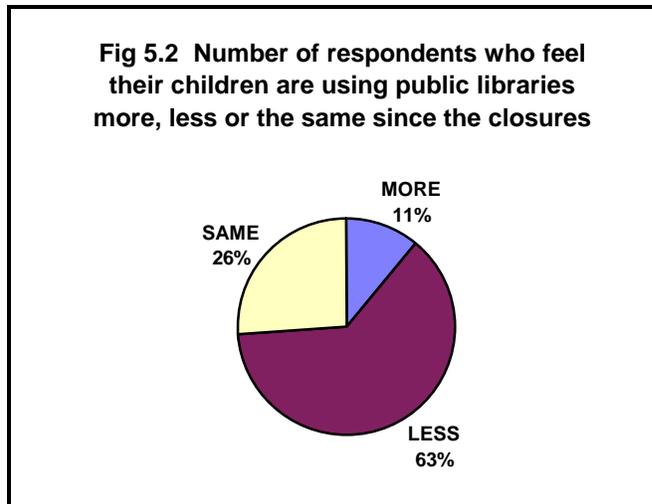
The study has not revealed a great deal about the reasons why people seem reluctant to use the mobile library service, and this is something which might warrant further investigation.

### **5.5 Patterns of reading and library use**

In relation to the respondents' judgements of their reading and library use since the closures, once again, the results varied according to each area. As Table 5.6 illustrates, Hackenthorpe respondents were relatively evenly divided on the issue of whether their children were using a library less or the same on average since the closure. 19% of them felt that they were using a library more. There was a significant number of Handsworth users (65%) who felt that their children were using the public library less on average, and this was the same for a higher percentage of Hemsworth users (83%). Overall, the total percentage of respondents who felt that their children were using the library less on average was 63%, while 26% felt that there was no change in their use and 11% felt that their children had increased library use since the closures (see *fig. 5.1*). Many respondents, however, who stated that their children's library use had increased since the closures, qualified this with a remark that this was only because their children's ages had increased and their reading abilities had improved.

	<b>% HACK. USERS</b>	<b>% HANDS. USERS</b>	<b>% HEMS. USERS</b>	<b>% TOTAL NOS. OF USERS</b>
<b>MORE</b>	19%	13%	0%	11%
<b>LESS</b>	38%	65%	83%	63%
<b>SAME</b>	43%	22%	17%	26%

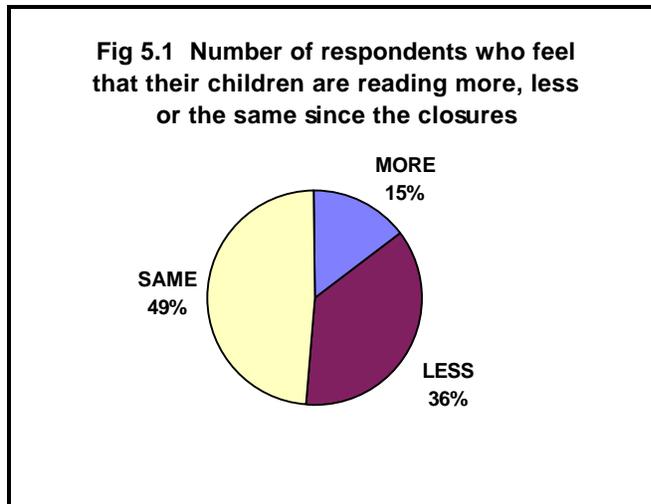
**Table 5.6 Percentage numbers of respondents whose children are using the public library more, less or the same since the closures**



In terms of patterns of reading since the closure, a different set of results emerged, whereby greater numbers of respondents felt that their children were still reading the same amount of books in all of the areas. This was reflected most strongly in Hackenthorpe, where 64% of respondents were of this persuasion and even numbers felt that they were reading less or the same (18%). The figures from Handsworth and Hemsworth respondents were very similar, where relatively even numbers of parents felt that their children were reading less or the same (see Table 5.7 below for full set of figures). Overall, nearly half of the respondents felt that their children’s reading patterns were the same, while 36% felt that they were reading less. Once again, of the 15% who stated that their children were reading more, it was often specified that this was because of the children’s age or improved ability.

	<b>% HACK. USERS</b>	<b>% HANDS. USERS</b>	<b>% HEMS. USERS</b>	<b>% TOTAL NOS. OF USERS</b>
<b>MORE</b>	18%	14%	15%	15%
<b>LESS</b>	18%	40%	40%	36%
<b>SAME</b>	64%	46%	45%	49%

**Table 5.7 Percentage numbers of respondents whose children are reading more, less or the same since the closures**



## **5.6 Summary and conclusions**

- **Users of children’s services consider convenience of access in terms of fitting in with their daily schedules and routines, and not demanding too much of their time or money**
- **Distance is a deterrent to library use in many cases, and car or bus journeys are deemed to be an inconvenience. Having a *local* library within walking distance is preferable**
- **Cost of travel expenses is a deterrent in some cases**
- **Parents feel that it is their right to have easy access to a *local* service**
- **Parents feel that they can let their children go to the library unaccompanied if it is local enough. Some feel that this is a valuable exercise for their independence and self-confidence**
- **Parents are not relying on the new mobile services so much as on nearby libraries, school books, or private purchases**
- **Some parents and children are using the library less for some or all of these reasons**
- **Some parents and children have stopped using a library altogether for some or all of these reasons**

- **Far fewer of the respondents from Hemsworth and Handsworth have renewed their former patterns of library use for their children since the closures. In relation to the other two communities, more of the respondents from Hackenthorpe feel that their children are still using the library with the same regularity.**
- **Overall, 56% of respondents and their children are continuing to use libraries while 44% no longer use a library at all**
- **Overall, the majority of respondents feel that their children are using the library less since the closures (63%), but a nearly half of the total respondents felt that their children were reading the same amount (49%)**

**CHAPTER SIX: SCHOOLS AND THE PUBLIC LIBRARY - AN  
EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE IMPACT OF LIBRARY  
CLOSURES**

**6.0 The relationship of schools with the public library service**

*Investing in Children* (1995) highlights the disparities in funding and, therefore, in library provision within schools in the UK (p29). It concludes that “*Schools must take the responsibility for providing adequate libraries: their failure to do so can have a harmful and unjustifiable impact on the public library service, to say nothing of the pupils*” (p34). This draws attention to the problems which have developed from local management of schools (LMS) and the increase of grant-maintained schools. The impact on public libraries in relation to this is perhaps the one highlighted by Elkin and Lonsdale (1996) when they discuss the public library’s unofficial role “*as a support for the inadequacies of school library services*” and the “*increase in attempts by schools and teachers to use the public library to support the curriculum*” (p203). Elkin and Lonsdale also describe how the whole issue has led to measures ensuring that “*all services above and beyond the standard personal loan and access to books and information....have now to be paid for by schools*” (p204).

Sheffield Libraries and Information Services, with regard to these issues, has produced a set of guidelines and recommendations<sup>3</sup> entitled ‘Library Strategy: Library Services to Education and the National Curriculum’ which include:

- The primary role of the public library service’s interaction with schools should include class visits, library induction sessions and promotion of the Public Library Service within schools. Any additional services provided, such as regular and specific input to library and information skills programmes, book weeks etc. should be considered on a charged for basis.

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<sup>3</sup> Extracts reproduced from internal document produced by Andrew Milroy, April 1997

- There should be no loan of public library stock to schools other than what is normally available on an adult ticket. Dynix should be alerted to the need to ‘police’ this when accession number prefixes change next year. Libraries should be particularly aware of this in relation to private schools and GMS schools who do not choose to ‘buy back’ into the LEA funded Schools Library Service.
- Public libraries will need to reflect the ongoing need for study support materials; however, this should be seen in relation to ever declining budgets and the need to ensure that resources are not drained from the important areas of children’s stock. Materials should continue to be bought for curriculum topics but not in quantities that are out of proportion to the other stock, or which see the public library service resourcing under-funding in the Schools Library Service or individual schools.

The latest edition of the Library Association’s *Guidelines for Services to Children and Young People* (1997) has a good deal to say about relationships between service providers, and is very much aware of the pressures that public libraries are placed under. It suggests that “*Good communication between schools library service staff and public library staff is essential to enable maximum benefit from such contacts*” and advocates wide areas of provision to support “*children, parents, carers and teachers*” (p31). Some of the roles for provision in the relationship between schools and libraries that it then continues to define are as follows:

- Books and other materials for individual use
- Individual library membership
- Class visits to the library to help children develop the habit of reading and library use, and an opportunity for them to learn how to use library resources
- Visits by authors, illustrators and storytellers to public libraries to foster children’s enjoyment of reading and books
- Visits to schools to promote public library use

- Encouragement and support for reading for pleasure

It will be shown in due course that a selection of the schools in Hackenthorpe, Handsworth, and Hemsworth had monopolised on this philosophy and built up important relationships with their local libraries.

It is important, therefore, to understand that schools' use of the public library service can be something quite different from what they get from the Schools Library Service in terms of borrowing materials to support the curriculum. Even though the relationships of schools with public libraries are varied, it is clear that some schools are not only giving their pupils an opportunity to obtain general library and information skills, but that they are encouraging them to use the library for enjoyment and leisure purposes while simultaneously supporting their curricular needs.

This is the kind of mutually supportive relationship of many of the schools and libraries investigated in this study. In libraries such as Hackenthorpe, where issues were low since the reduction of opening hours and the opening of Waterthorpe library, school visits were depended on for borrowing and attending activities.

Additionally, as the data will suggest, arrangements for individual borrowing for leisure purposes by school classes is a way of ensuring that each child has contact with the library whether their parents encourage them to do so or not. In this sense, schools can help to reach those vulnerable children who are isolated and disadvantaged by parents who are not committed to bringing their children into contact with the library or nurturing the reading habit from an early age, often because they cannot find a convenient time to do so.

The literature concerning the relationship of schools and the public library is not altogether prolific, and it tends to be limited in the sense that there is much concentration on the development and support of school libraries and schools library services, but there is not a great deal which focuses on the importance of local school and public library alliances. This may be because they are, after all, discouraged from supporting curricular activity in too great a way. As one Head of Services for Sheffield Libraries and Information Services stressed,

- "It is not the schools' role to use public libraries for school purposes. They ought to be using the Schools Library Service for project materials. Individual borrowing is a different matter. The problem is that the parameters of what the public library can offer education are not always clear cut".

As Heeks (1996) suggests,

*"While public libraries have seen some connection between their work and education from the outset, this has demonstrated itself largely in a number of add-on activities, and has not been integrated into a philosophy of purpose"* (p125).

Heeks later points out that,

*"The concept of education being the primary purpose of the public library probably commands less support than it did in 1850. Now it may conflict with the affiliation of libraries with leisure and recreational facilities and, in any case, must compete with business information services, arts activities and a community development commitment"* (p141).

This is indeed the case, and the fact that many library services in the UK have been transferred from the education department to leisure and cultural services within local authorities illustrates this.

However, all the teachers interviewed for this study recognised that the recreational activity involved in class visits and individual borrowing was

indirectly supporting educational development and the National Curriculum. There is also an issue here concerning the definition of education. The ‘education’ that a child gains from books and other materials accessed through the public library does not necessarily have to be a formal one. As Chapter Three suggests, the attainment of ‘literacy’ means more than being able to read. It involves a process of obtaining a wide range of life skills, including enjoyment of reading and self-improvement.

This aspect of literacy, it could be argued, can only enhance formal education and the various dimensions of the National Curriculum, indirectly or not. As Dickinson (1992) proposes,

*“The National Curriculum was prompted in part by a concern to raise educational standards, to see children as skilled, informed and educated, better able to make sense of themselves and the world around them. It is not insignificant that references to wider reading, to reading for enjoyment, to reading for information, to the need to develop children’s capacities to locate, interpret, digest, compare, contrast and synthesise information, abound in the Pelions of National Curriculum documentation. The language of libraries and reference to library use, both direct and implicit, are to be found in all National Curriculum subject areas”* (p5).

Marriott (1995), in his examination of fiction in primary education, reinforces this idea of learning valuable skills through reading fictional stories. He concludes that reading fiction can have personal, social, intellectual and curricular benefits for children (p23). He describes the *“crucial relevance of stories to the curriculum and especially to the development of literacy, to children’s abilities to read, to write, to talk and to listen”* (p19) and also stresses how the latest version of the National Curriculum specifies that *“Pupils should be taught to use library classification systems, catalogues and indexes”* (p38, Marriott quotes from *Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority English in the National Curriculum: Draft Proposals* London, SCAA, 1994, p13).

Some of the schools in this study seemed to take advantage of their local public library to support these recreational and curricular requirements, while others did not. This often depended on their proximity to the library in question. Rainbow Forge, Hemsworth, and St Joseph's schools all seemed to rely on their local libraries more heavily than the other schools in these three areas, but then they are or were also situated within a very reasonable walking distance of the former libraries. This suggests that there may be a problem in the unevenness of support from public libraries. A recent survey by Sheffield Libraries and Information Services entitled 'Community/Central Library Links with Sheffield Schools' found that only 32% of the schools that responded to the study had made alliances with their local library to borrow materials regularly.<sup>4</sup> However, it is often the case that the schools try and compensate for this internally by building up their own libraries and by teaching library skills in class, which is what St Joseph's School has done since the closure of Handsworth Library.

### **6.1 The relationship of local schools with the public library services at Hackenthorpe, Handsworth and Hemsworth**

When the early research for this study began, it was not envisaged that findings relating to the relationships of schools with their local libraries would be so vital. Interviews with teachers from schools in the 3 affected areas, however, revealed the importance of the kind of mutual support which can be built up between primary schools and public libraries. These relationships usually consisted of regular class visits for individual borrowing purposes, induction talks, and children's storytelling and other activities. Depth of use varied according to each school's policy or the teachers' commitment.

To obtain a clearer picture of the ways in which the local schools made use of their public libraries, a question sheet was distributed to 8 of the schools

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<sup>4</sup> Figure taken from internal document produced by Andrew Milroy, March 1997

(see Appendix 2, p105). Six of these were returned. This was mainly to glean more factual information about library use by the schools where it had not been possible to interview a member of staff. It was possible, however, to interview representatives from one school in each area, and this helped to build up a more detailed profile of public library use by schools in general.

### **Hackenthorpe**

Hackenthorpe library seems to have built up the strongest relationships with its local schools. It was found that all three schools which co-operated with the study had used the library at some point, but at varying levels. The classes at St John Fisher RC School had visited the library before it became part-time, but the arrangement was discontinued long before the library was closed. It now relies on its own school library.

Birley Spa, however, made class visits to the library for their years 1-5. These occurred monthly, but the arrangement was mainly to introduce the children to the library and to library skills and to have induction talks. The children were allowed to borrow if they had their own tickets from home. The information on the returned question sheet indicated that the school has not transferred this arrangement with another library, and that it has its own school library as well as making use of the Schools Library Service, the Central Library occasionally, and classroom loans and book sales. Their reason for not visiting an alternative library was that it was too far away. School visits, as the study confirmed, tended to take place on a more regular basis the nearer the library was situated to the school. The teachers took into consideration whether or not it was a safe and reasonable walking distance for the children to travel. The information on the question sheet indicated that Birley Spa considered library visits to be valuable because they;

- “Introduced children to the library”

- “Gave them the confidence to use it again out of school”, and,

- “Made them aware of the activities at the library”

It was Rainbow Forge, however, which had built up the strongest and most mutually beneficial relationship with Hackenthorpe library. The interviews with Dorothy Morritt and Judith Butler confirmed this. The nursery classes, reception class and years 1, 2 and 4 visited the library fortnightly. Hackenthorpe Library was a 10 minute walk from their old site and each class would spend about an hour there. The younger classes went to the library for storytelling activities and for borrowing books, whilst the older children just borrowed books individually. This meant that every child in those classes was borrowing a book fortnightly whether they used the public library out of school hours or not.

It was not possible to make the same arrangement with Waterthorpe, even though the school had been assured of a renewal of their former relationship from the Council. This was because Waterthorpe is an extremely busy district library covering a wide catchment area, and it therefore already has its own schools to deal with and cannot cope with the kind of regular arrangement that had been possible at Hackenthorpe. Intermittent school visits for library induction talks were, however, possible.

The returned question sheet from Rainbow Forge indicated that the reasons for not transferring the arrangement were due to travel problems and the fact that the same facilities as before were not available. The comments concerning the value of public libraries to schools were as follows:

- “Encouraging reading as leisure”
- “Responsibility for books borrowed - social skills”
- “Links with community”, and,
- “The library enhanced the provision both within and outside of the curriculum”.

### **Handsworth**

Four schools in the Handsworth area used the library to varying levels. The privately run Handsworth Christian School visited the library on a regular basis and the children had a borrowing arrangement. The returned question sheet from Athelstan School suggested that all year-groups used to visit Handsworth Library weekly but they have not transferred this arrangement because it is “too far to travel” to the alternative libraries. They now rely on their own fairly substantial school library, but affirm that in visiting the local library it was “a chance to view a wider selection of titles”.

Ballifield School had a less regular arrangement which involved “familiarisation” visits once per term for all junior children. They do not visit a library now because of the distance, and suggest that the library was valuable for “introducing children to the library and encouraging its use”. They also miss how the librarian used to visit the school to help with specific projects.

St Joseph’s School seemed to have the most committed relationship with Handsworth Library, but it is also the nearest school to the former library building, and visits were therefore more convenient. All classes visited every 2 or 3 weeks and each child would borrow a book until the next time. They suggest that it is too far to visit the nearest alternative library and, in the comment sheet, the school states that,

- “The range of books was better than at school. It taught the children library habits which many then used outside of school. It provided an additional source for supporting school-based work”.

The school now relies upon its own libraries - separate infant and junior facilities - which they have gradually built up since the closure. However, they stress that they were in the process of creating these libraries before the closure, and they were not established as a direct result of it. They have managed to build the library through fund-raising events and they now teach library skills to the children within their own context. The children are allowed to take the

books home, but the teachers still felt that visiting the public library was more than just about borrowing books.

### **Hemsworth**

It was not possible to find out more about the relationship of Herdings School with the library at Hemsworth, but former staff confirm that they did not visit regularly to borrow books. The library did, however, have an arrangement with a nearby playgroup to borrow a set number of books for the under fives over a two-month period. Staff at nearby alternative library services have established that this playgroup has not transferred this arrangement since the closure.

Hemsworth School, however, as it is situated within a reasonable walking distance of the former library, relied on it a great deal. During an interview with two of Hemsworth's teachers, it was confirmed that at least 3 of the infant classes visited the library to borrow books, every two or three weeks. Every child was allowed to borrow a book on their own ticket if they had returned the previous one. They have not transferred this arrangement with another library because of the distance, but were keen to arrange for the mobile library to stop in their school yard. This was not possible because, as Rosemary Telfer explained, the van was too wide to fit through the school gates and there were parking limitations directly outside the school.

The school, who were actively involved with protests about the closure, set up their own library to compensate for the children's lack of access to story-books, but as their funds are limited, they cannot supply the breadth of materials, and children are only allowed to read the books within the school premises.

The teachers stress that this was a difficult decision to make, but they were concerned that as they had invested so much money in the school library, they wanted to keep the books in good condition and make sure that they did not go

astray. They do, however, still miss the kind of arrangement they had with Hemsworth Library, and fuller details of their comments can be found in the following section along with the remarks of teachers from two schools in Hackenthorpe and Handsworth.

## **6.2 The value of school links with the public library**

It has been established that at least one school in each area had built up a very strong relationship with the local library, and that all other schools in the communities had relied upon their local services at some point, even if it was not on a regular basis. Furthermore, it has not been fully possible for these schools to make the same arrangements or re-build relationships elsewhere. With this in mind, what follows is an examination of teachers' and parents' concerns about the loss of their local library facilities in relation to education and school use.

### **Teachers concerns**

- **Parental responsibility**

All the teachers interviewed were concerned that class visits were the only point of contact that some of the children had with the public library. They felt that the individual borrowing arrangement was particularly beneficial to the children who were not encouraged to use the library by their parents or carers. It was also felt that by bringing these books home, the parents might be motivated to use the library with their children.

### **Comments:**

#### **Rainbow Forge**

- "We attached a great deal of importance to the visits because we felt that for children in this area it was very important what we were offering them by extending their learning. Particularly because perhaps they weren't necessarily getting it at home, and because it was introduced so young at school we felt that perhaps we were extending it into the homes as well. A lot of the time parents would say - 'we've taken back the book she borrowed. She's got another one

now and so she can bring it back when she goes with the school'. And so it encouraged family use of the library as well"

- "I think it's a very small percentage of our children who actually go to the library now. Parents don't or can't always take them if they're working or for other reasons. Sometimes they don't use the library themselves and if that parental support isn't there, the children are severely disadvantaged"

### **St Joseph's**

- "I don't think many of the children would actually go to a library if we didn't take them. You know, it just depends whether their parents use it or not. It's a shame in that respect. They just won't experience going to a library at all."

### **Hemsworth**

- "That visit was all that a lot of those children knew about the existence of libraries, and that you can borrow books there, and there's so much choice, and you can read them or have them read to you. A lot of these children don't realise that. Either parents choose not to or just can't afford to buy books for home"

- **Breadth of reading materials**

The teachers drew attention to the fact that their own libraries often lacked the funding to compensate for the breadth of stock that had been available in the former libraries. Some of them believed that this was detrimental to their pupil's development of independent reading skills given that the element of choice is an important aspect of the reading experience.

**Comments:**

**Rainbow Forge**

- “What was important was the breadth and variety of reading materials on offer to them. They’ve lost that choice and breadth. We have very little money to spend on books as a school. We use the Schools Library Service of course, but that’s for the teachers. I think there’s something special about the child choosing his or her own book, and I think that’s lost now. The children lose that independence. They lose that experience of - ‘I will choose a book for myself from this vast choice’. They could decide on whatever they liked, and that was important”

**St Joseph’s**

- “We haven’t got the same breadth of choice for the children. Not yet anyway. But we are getting there. We get a lot of help from outside - parents do a lot of fund-raising for us. We don’t do too badly”

**Hemsworth**

- “Our library cannot offer a huge amount of choice. That span of books was important. Obviously, we offer a much more limited choice for them. The children used to be goggled-eyed at all the books in the library”

• **Support for the National Curriculum**

One teacher in particular drew attention to the fact that the school had regarded their visits to the library as a curricular activity in the sense that the reading habit was being instilled in the children through their enjoyment of books, and through the teaching of library and information skills. Other teachers referred to this indirectly when they discussed these skills.

**Comment:**

**Rainbow Forge**

- “The alternative library we could use has offered us sessions on library skills but this does not encourage regular use of the library because children are reliant

on parents to take them. Whereas with our previous arrangement, *every* child borrowed books and learned how to use the library for themselves. We felt that was the most important thing and is part of the English curriculum because it enables them to have a wider scope for their reading”

- **Library and information skills**

Another aspect of the National Curriculum concerns the teaching of library and information skills to children. Although it is convenient for some of the schools to travel to an alternative library, such as Waterthorpe for Rainbow Forge, for others, the distance is too much of a deterrent. It is for this reason that the schools now incorporate this aspect of the curriculum into their school lessons. Overall, however, teachers felt that the librarian’s expertise within the external environment of a public library was of more value to the children than what could be taught in the classroom.

**Comments:**

**Rainbow Forge**

- “The actual regular thing of remembering that ‘this is the book I borrowed. I must take care of this book, it belongs to the library and here’s the date on the label for when to take it back’ - these were the kind of skills we were trying to build in, as well as knowledge of classification systems. The librarians can still offer us a more general introduction to these skills, but it’s through individual library use that children really learn about how a library works and how to use it. We cannot address this problem ourselves”

**St Joseph’s**

- “There’s the whole skill of looking for a book, finding the one they want, learning how the system works in a public library. They’ll lose that. We can only teach them library skills in the context of school, not in a real library. These skills will be important to them as adults really”

## **Hemsworth**

- “Although we have our own library now, I think it would have been important to visit occasionally, purely because it was a ‘real’ library, in order to gain awareness and skills....The children also learn how to behave in a library and things like that. It’s not the same in a school library because it’s part of a class activity”

- **A ‘social event’**

As well as the development and enhancement of social skills and social interaction, the teachers felt that the visits were of value because it was a novelty for the children to leave the school premises and learn in a new environment. Alternatively, choosing books and learning library skills in the classroom will inevitably lose that novelty factor, and blend into the day’s lessons.

### **Comments:**

#### **St Joseph’s**

- “For the smaller ones it was more of a social event really. It was exciting for them to get out of school.....We miss the experience of literally going to the library - the out-of-school activity. It’s just not the same in a school library because it’s part of a class. It’s not as ‘action-packed’ for them”

## **Hemsworth**

- “[Our own library] works, but it doesn’t work as well because it’s still part of school and the children needed to be aware that there were other places to go for information, and that it’s not just a ‘school thing’”

- **Community relationships**

There were a number of comments relating to the close relationships which had been built up with the library staff at the former service points, and how the experience of visiting the library brought the children into contact with the community as a whole. It was considered important for the local children to

build up that sense of familiarity with the library and its staff so that they would be more likely to return to the library in later years. The idea that children should learn to regard the library as a community centre and focal point also arose a number of times.

### **Comments:**

#### **Rainbow Forge**

(Teacher)

- "In the nursery, we felt that the relationship we'd built up with Dot Morrith at Hackenthorpe library had been so good. Dot built up a relationship with the children and they really looked forward to having stories, which Dot used to choose especially for them. This was so important and we wanted to transfer this kind of arrangement when the library closed"

(Former Hackenthorpe Librarian)

- "I really enjoyed having the classes because they all knew me, and I knew them all by name. We watched them grow up really. And the older users loved to watch the little ones coming in"

#### **Hemsworth**

- "I think as children grow up the library becomes the focal point in the community doesn't it. The children could have developed this awareness of the library as a focal point on a more long-term basis"

- "And there were other, sort of peripheral things that we miss also. We used to go down at Christmas and they'd put on mince pies and crisps for the children and wine and cheese for the elderly and the children used to sing carols to them. They loved that. So the library was used as a community centre and focal point. I think this made children more aware of other people in the community and perhaps would give them more respect for the elderly. So that knock-on effect is gone. It's not just the books."

- "The librarian would talk to them, read to them, show them new books and that sort of thing. We built up relationships with staff there"

- **General impact**

Other considerations expressed by the teachers during interviews included concerns about the long-term impact on the children due to disadvantaged access to libraries in the early school years and beyond:

**Rainbow Forge**

- “Children in the nursery now aren’t used to going so maybe they don’t know what they’re missing, but at first it was mentioned by the children a lot. They actually asked me, ‘Why aren’t we going to the library anymore?’. The parents were also very concerned and wondered why the children weren’t bringing library books home anymore.....As far as the school was concerned, and particularly the nursery, it was a tremendous loss”

- “I think it’s a very small percentage of our children now who actually go to the library.....When I eventually arranged a visit to the new library, there were only 2 or 3 out of each session who said, ‘I come here’ or ‘I’ve seen this book’. You know, they didn’t respond to show that they were familiar with the library. That was a real shame. I could really see that difference it has made not having access to Hackenthorpe’s facilities”

- “We can do our best to compensate for the loss of access to books by using the Schools Library Service, or extending the amount of money from our budget which is spent on books and so on, but that’s just half the story. I think the other side of it, which is the *use* of the library itself, is a different aspect which we can’t actually address.....We will make an effort to visit a library from time to time, but it won’t be the same in any way. We miss it *very very* much at this school. It was a great shame”

**St Joseph’s**

- “Children just won’t get used to using a library and all the skills that go with it. As I say, I do think that a lot of them wouldn’t go unless they went with the school, so it’s a great shame in that respect”

### **Hemsworth**

- "I think our visits were vital and now it's harder for books and the whole library experience to reach every child. I suspect that there's just a great number of children now who aren't using the library at all"

- **Parents' concerns**

Many parents were concerned about the effects of the loss of their local libraries on their children's educational well-being.

### **Comments:**

#### **Hackenthorpe respondent**

- "Although my children have not used the local library, I do feel that the education of children who are not able to obtain books by borrowing will suffer"

#### **Handsworth respondents**

- "Using a library is a very educational activity and I feel angry that it has been taken away from my child just at a vital age for him"

- "I feel that the closure of local libraries is a very short-sighted act by the council and will add to future literacy problems in this city"

- "I think the closure of local libraries will affect her [my daughter] later in her school career as she will have to travel further to obtain the materials she needs"

#### **Hemsworth respondents**

- "Since the cut-back of teachers there isn't much time to spend with each child and help them on a one to one basis and I would just love to take them to the library out of the way of each other to spend precious time reading with them"

- "Tony Blair's main concern is education, or so he would have us believe, but yet the libraries are still closed. The main source of a young child's education comes from books, so I say to Tony Blair, we need more libraries, not less"

- "It is obvious that the government is not thinking of the future needs for children. Education cuts lead to unemployment and therefore crime is committed"

### **6.3 Summary and conclusions**

On the basis of the comments made by teachers and parents, what follows is a summary of the main areas of concern expressed. From an educational perspective, this is how those affected by and involved with the former libraries perceive the impact of their closures on young children.

- **If parents/carers do not encourage public library use, then a great number of children, who were formerly visiting the library as a school activity, will no longer have access to a library throughout their dependent childhood.**
- **Younger generations might not be aware that the public library exists**
- **Many children now only have access to a limited variety of books from their school libraries and what they may or may not have at home**
- **Many children will no longer have the experience of choosing a book for themselves in a public library, and this was important because it encouraged independent and confident reading skills**
- **Schools have lost an important facet of support for the National Curriculum in terms of the teaching and learning of library and information skills and instilling enjoyment of the reading habit in children**
- **Many children are now deprived of the value and novelty of this out-of-school activity and the social skills and interaction it enhances**
- **Many children will no have contact with a central focal point in their local communities, and will not be able to build relationships with staff there which might prove useful to them for the future**

- **The development of this familiarity can make the child’s experience of the library more enjoyable and less daunting. In this sense, they are more likely to return to the library in their later life**
- **Teachers believe that children are already showing signs of non-use and are not familiar with the purpose of libraries**
- **Schools can only compensate for the loss of public libraries in a very limited way.**
- **Teachers expressed the opinion that, overall, the library visits were ‘not just about books’ and that the children have now lost the opportunity to gain a wider range of skills and experiences that the school cannot offer of its own accord**
- **Public libraries provide materials for children to read outside of school hours which not only support their educational development but make up for the lack of time that teachers have for reading with the children individually**
- **There are concerns among parents for the literacy and education levels of future generations and for the problems that will arise in society as a result of this**

**CHAPTER SEVEN: THE VALUE OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY**  
**EXPERIENCE TO YOUNG CHILDREN**

**7.0 The advantages of the static library**

In examining the benefits of children's library services, it has already been suggested that the children in the communities where closures have taken place are being disadvantaged in terms of support for literacy and education, lifelong learning, and the encouragement and enjoyment of the reading habit. It has also been established that partnerships with schools are mutually beneficial and encourage library use to wider numbers of children within a community. However, there remains many additional general concerns expressed by parents/carers and librarians, and overall, perceptions of the impact of the closures were numerous and wide-ranging. People felt strongly about the value of the static library within a given community, which can be individually stamped with that community's identity.

One Head of Services described the advantages of a static library in more detail:

- "Well I think a static library has so much more to offer. A static library is a focal point, it's always there, it has regular and pronounced opening hours. You've got the social mixing and social facilities there. You've got reference stock, you can carry more stock, you've got space for homework and study in some cases, capacity to put machines, CD-ROMs, computers and so on. You can grow an affinity with and to your area from one service point. They don't always tend to be that more expensive to run than mobiles. The capacity to teach library and information skills is better because they have more stock and space. Overall, what you're trying to do is engender that knowledge of coming to a library and using books etc. That's why I think static libraries are better for children to learn the library habit and what a library can offer them".

The new Library Association guidelines for services to *Children and Young People* (1997) outline clear perspectives on how public libraries can

benefit children. The guidelines estimate the ideal value of libraries and library materials to children's lives to include:

- *enjoyment* of the story experience, of language and of associated art
- *knowledge* of the wider world through both fiction and non-fiction
- *understanding* of other people, their behaviour, cultures, situations
- *self-knowledge*, identity (both individual and cultural) and security
- *information*, through both problem-solving and unguided discovery
- *confidence* in the acquisition of vocabulary, speech and language skills
- *shared experiences* between adult and child
- *support* for both formal and informal education
- *assistance*, guidance, interpretation, enthusiasm and encouragement from trained staff
- *a wider range* of materials than home or school can generally provide
- *resources* for every child, regardless of background or culture
- *access* to locally based services at a choice of times and places
- *free loan* and use of the majority of materials
- *a gateway* to the greater library network
- *neutral ground* between home and school for independent and unhindered discovery
- *skills development* in information handling
- *experience* of the library as an inviting and social place, with activities and events
- *community facilities* that have potential lifelong relevance
- *objective* information

- *literacy* support

(Reproduced in full from *Children and Young People: Library Association Guidelines for Public Library Services*, 1997, p14)

These have been fully reproduced from the guidelines just to highlight how interesting it is that many of the issues which have emerged so far in the study from parents/carers and teachers are reflected in these objectives. This suggests that members of the public who use libraries seem to appreciate and understand the service's aims and what it has to offer their children throughout their lives. The following sections will further demonstrate how parents/carers, teachers and librarians are aware of the practical benefits outlined so far, and why, therefore, they are concerned about the loss of their local libraries for these reasons.

### **7.1 The variety of materials**

Teachers' concerns about the loss of access to a 'wider range' of materials have already been highlighted in Chapter Six. Comments from parents echoed these anxieties, and it was recognised that the public library is a specialised source which is essential for children who have limited access to a wide range of books at school or at home, often because of financial limitations.

#### **Comments:**

##### **Handsworth respondents**

- "My older daughter has her school books to read, but the younger one now has less variety and overall, they both read less since the library closed"

- "My younger child loves to read and therefore still does a lot of reading. She receives books as presents and gets some from the school library. However, my older child now reads less as he prefers to read fact-based books and not fiction. These were a lot easier to obtain from the library and are more expensive to buy"

- "I am not always able to take the children with me to choose books due to the distance and the time factor therefore I feel they are missing out on an important part of growing up, making their own choices on books which suit them.....They are also not seeing the vast variety of options available to them and not being taught how to find answers to questions by using the non-fiction section"

#### **Hemsworth respondents**

- "I really enjoyed taking my children to the library, I would prefer my children to have more books and a wider range, to help them learn to read"

- "I have a large selection of books from my childhood, thus I read a lot of those to them. However, borrowing books from libraries widens their scope....."

- "Daniel does not get as much variety of books since the library closed. I do try to buy as many as I can"

## **7.2 Social interaction and community life**

Reinforcing the teachers' comments in Chapter Six, many respondents and interviewees felt that the local library is a community focal point where children can learn important social skills and build relationships with the library staff and their community as a whole. Familiar relationships with library staff was considered to be important in making the library more amenable and less daunting. Additionally, children may gain more confidence in information-seeking skills if they feel able to approach the staff for guidance. In this way, independent lifelong learning may be engendered and encouraged.

#### **Teacher's comment:**

- "We had such a good relationship with *our* local community library. It was important because it gave our visits such a personal touch, to the extent that the staff knew all the names of the children and vice versa"

### **Librarians' comments:**

- "We often had the older members of the community coming with the little ones. Grandmas came with the under fives sometimes. There was a really nice community feel to the library....Everyone got on"

- "Some people were in tears when it closed, especially the older ones. They liked to come in and chat and they loved seeing the kids. Thursday mornings when we had the under fives in, they used to come in, have a coffee and they loved to see the children.....It felt a bit like a big family really, even though that sounds corny. We got to know families and all the children and watched them growing up, and they got to know us too"

- "When a child came to Hackenthorpe library, they knew who I was - Mrs Morrill, children's librarian. The contact level at Waterthorpe is very different. It's not possible to maintain that level.....Children weren't scared to come and ask you. Here in Waterthorpe I think children don't like bothering you because it's too busy. It was because Hackenthorpe was a small community library that they could approach you and ask for help, and because we knew them too. You can't get to know them in the same way here. It's just a different kind of library that's all, but the advantage here is that the provision is far greater. It's lovely for them to have more choice"

- "It was a community focal point. An important community resource that they've lost. The books can be got from somewhere else, but it's the physical place for children to play and learn and be a part of the community that's lost. A place they could call their own and have their own space"

- "The few people who have transferred say to me, 'we still miss it, it's not the same coming here'. It's because they're out of their own area and they don't meet people that they know. They can't say I'll meet you in the library at 10.30. People actually used to meet. It was a meeting place as good as any. Yes, for the elderly mainly, but also for the mothers and young children. It was probably the only place in Handsworth where you could meet and sit down"

### **Parents' comments:**

#### **Handsworth respondents**

- "I feel that a village library within walking distance is important to the local community in order to maintain 'village life' and 'community spirit'"
- "Handsworth library was a part of the community, friendly staff, a place to find out about local amenities - it is sadly missed"
- "We used to go to Handsworth as a family outing and to meet other parents and children but it is not a social event now. We still do not feel at home in our new library as it does not serve the community we live in. Also, local events are not advertised and we have not got to know the librarians as we did at Handsworth. They did a lot of community work and extra activities to encourage children to come to the library. Also, we could ask them for information and they would do their best to help us"
- "It [the library] also brings people together, which can mean a trip to the library is even more enjoyable to someone who would normally not see people on a regular daily basis"

#### **Hemsworth respondents**

- "I was really upset when I heard the library was closing because there was always a nice reception off the librarians and my daughter used to enjoy reading the books"

### **7.3 Local amenities**

Linked to this value that is placed on the library as community focal point for all, there seemed to be strong feelings concerning the withdrawal of a *local* facility, and how children would be disadvantaged by this. Many comments showed anger against the local council, as one librarian predicted:

- "The whole issue is very emotive. Closing the library is more than just closing a library. The council are withdrawing the facility from the area and for the residents, that makes a point. It's a symbol that the council are running the area

down. In a lot of communities the library may be the only council building left apart from the area housing offices”.

Another member of staff commented,

- “If you take away schools, libraries, local amenities, you’re taking away what a community is. Libraries are places for everyone to get together - young and old”.

Parents’ concerns reflected this, but also showed that there was some anxiety about the long-term effects of closures on their children in these respects, and about what they were being deprived of. A recurrent concern was that there are very few local amenities for children in general, and so the closure of libraries exacerbates this problem.

### **Comments:**

#### **Handsworth respondents**

- “The children need facilities for books and social activities”
- “These local amenities make your own area more pleasant and rewarding to live in”
- “There’s not a lot of facilities for children anymore”

#### **Hemsworth respondents**

- “.....borrowing books from libraries widens their scope, enables children to be involved in local amenities”
- “I think it is unfair that children should be deprived of library facilities due to cash shortages”
- “It’s very sad that people feel they should close our shops, schools, libraries etc. It makes things more difficult for us and soon there will be nothing left for us to do that doesn’t cost money and there’s nowhere for children to go anymore”

#### **7.4 'Children need libraries'**

The opinions of teachers on this matter have already been examined in Chapter Six, but many parents/carers and librarians had additional strong views on how children would suffer in the short and long-term because of library closures. The general consensus from respondents and interviewees seems to be that children need libraries to enhance their quality of life from an early age and that barriers to their access can have detrimental effects. Here is a final selection of some general comments from librarians and parents/carers which confirm this affirmation.

##### **Library staff comments:**

- "The impact of closures is that children will simply not get used to using a local library and get introduced to reading and information skills. They will get access to this when they go to secondary school but the early years can be crucial because they lay the foundations for these skills. They won't get into the reading habit, which may affect their performance levels at school. They won't be able to use it for recreation of leisure purposes. They won't get into the habit of just making use of what the library's got to offer and this comes at a time when the library's got to compete with other sources of competition - the video, the shopping mall, home computers, and access to other leisure facilities in Sheffield. It's a great loss at a difficult time for libraries"

- "I've seen research that claims that if children don't use the library from a young age, then they tend not to use it as adults, so I would argue that the effects will be long-term. With this new generation, there'll be a huge gap in library use. You'll have a semi-illiterate generation. To alleviate this you need a centre in a *local* area for a community to have its own resources"

- "I'm a great believer in pre-school education. I think that children who go to nursery schools or use the library from an early age are steps ahead of the others in terms of literacy, but also on a social skills level and in terms of educational advancement. Libraries don't get enough credit for that really.....If children don't use the library from an early age, they'll grow into adults never having

used the library, and they're not likely to come back. How can you quantify that loss?"

- "It's such an important process - that transgression - helping children become reading adults. Building up relationships with regulars helps that transgression.....In comparison with the alternatives, their old relationships with their local libraries are irretrievable. Basically, they're being denied access. In a sense, people could argue that it's discrimination against a vital section of the community - that's what children are. The problem is that children themselves have no voice, no vote. They have no choice"

### **Parents/carers comments:**

#### **Handsworth respondents**

- "I feel they are missing an important part of growing up"

- "I think children miss out a great deal by not having a local library. Thankfully, my children have a great selection of books at home, but not all children are that fortunate. A great many things can be learnt from books. They can get a lot of fun from books, it gives them access to all kinds of information. They can bring the outside world into their own front room"

- "Mark was rather young when we had the old library, which is why we didn't visit very often. But I wanted him to get use to it (show him what a library is, what you do there etc.). As children, my sister and I visited Handsworth library every week or two weeks - we were in the 'bookworm' club! I wanted my children to be able to do the same. But they can't.....Now mine is at school, he won't have a local library for school work"

#### **Hemsworth respondents**

- "The government is not thinking of the future needs for children. Education cuts lead to unemployment and therefore crime is committed"

- "Libraries are a valuable place for children to gain information. It also provides good storybooks for people who can't afford to buy them. Closing libraries is not the way forward to provide for future generations"

## **7.5 Summary and conclusions**

- **Static libraries can provide a vital focal point for children in the community as well as important amenities for them which may already be insufficient within an area**
- **Static libraries can provide a wider variety of materials which might not be available at school or in the home because of economic restrictions**
- **The public library is considered to be a place of social interaction and provides a friendly and familiar environment in which children can learn important social skills. It can also encourage lifelong learning because of this conducive atmosphere**
- **Familiarity with the library and its staff encourages independent learning and self-confidence in children which supports their educational abilities**
- **Many parents/carers, teachers and library staff are concerned for the future of children who have lost their libraries. It is felt that the closures will have long-term effects on future generations and library use in general**
- **Many parents/carers feel that children are missing out on the range of benefits to be gained from library use, and are therefore being severely disadvantaged by the closures<sup>5</sup>**

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<sup>5</sup> For a full list of parents/carers' comments see Appendix 5, p112

## CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

### 8.0 Reflections on the impact of library closures on young children

*“Daddy”, she said, “do you think you could buy me a book?”*

*“A book?”, he said. “What do you want a flaming book for?”*

*“To read, Daddy”.*

*“What’s wrong with the telly, for heaven’s sake? We’ve got a lovely telly with a twelve-inch screen and now you come asking for a book! You’re getting spoiled, my girl!” (p12)*

*“Did you know”, Mrs Phelps said, “that public libraries like this allow you to borrow books and take them home?”*

*“I didn’t know that”, Matilda said. “Could I do it?” (p19)*

*The books transported her into new worlds and introduced her to amazing people who lived exciting lives. She went on olden-day sailing ships with Joseph Conrad. She went to Africa with Ernest Hemingway and to India with Rudyard Kipling. She travelled all over the world while sitting in her little room in an English village. (p21)*

(All extracts from Roald Dahl’s *Matilda*)

Matilda is “*four years and three months*” (p15). Matilda’s parents do not know or approve of her visits to the library and yet at this tender age not only has she made her way to the library unaccompanied, but over a six-month period has tackled authors such as Dickens, Austen, Hardy, Kipling, Hemingway, Steinbeck, and Orwell (p18). Matilda, of course, delightful though she is, is just a figment of Roald Dahl’s imagination, from which, no doubt, many children have embarked on splendid adventures while sitting in their ‘little rooms’.

In reality, without parental encouragement or the opportunity for class visits from schools and nurseries, it is unlikely that children will even know that the public library exists, let alone find their way to it of their own accord and with no supervision. Yet in areas where local libraries have closed in the UK, there is a new generation of children who are growing up without these choices or opportunities. In Hackenthorpe, Handsworth, and Hemsworth there are no Matildas, just very real children whose needs are not being met by a local library service.

Judith Krug from the American Library Association has written that, *“The wonderful thing about libraries and bookstores - even the television or the radio - is that no one is forcing you to read anything, or to go to any particular movie, or to watch something on television or listen to something on the radio. You have free choice”*

(As quoted in Exley 1991:15).

Children, however, do not always have that free choice. They are often completely reliant on the adults in their lives. They need these adults, just like Dahl’s Mrs Phelps or Miss Honey, to influence them and encourage them to develop a lifelong reading habit which will enrich their lives. This element of choice is ultimately restricted when libraries are closed.

Although this study has produced evidence which suggests that there are many parents/carers, teachers and librarians who care a great deal about bringing children into contact with the wide variety of materials available in libraries, it has also shown that many children are reading and visiting the library less or not getting access to a library at all since the closures. In this sense, the impact of the closures has serious implications in terms of unequal and uneven access to the benefits for children which can be gained from library use. These benefits, which were outlined so thoroughly in *Children and Young People: Library Association Guidelines for Public Library Services* (1997) reproduced in the previous chapter (see p83), include support for education and literacy,

enjoyment of reading and personal enrichment, and the development of social skills and independent information-seeking skills.

Returning to Trevor Dickinson's (1990) belief in teachers and librarians as agents and enablers (p5), it would not be untrue to say, based on the positive commendations from parents/carers and all other interviewees who were involved in the study, that the former libraries had made good progress in working towards these ends for all the children in the three communities examined in this research. By exposing what it is that children can gain from their local library service, this study has sought to reveal what they are now being deprived of due to the closures. As Dickinson (1990) concludes, "*Without libraries, who will guide children on their 'reading journey', urging them to become independent readers but more importantly, independent individuals?*" (p5).

### **8.1 Summary of main conclusions**

With all these issues in mind, what follows is a consideration of the study's most prominent conclusions. These conclusions are based on the concerns expressed by the parents and carers, teachers, and library staff who have direct experience and knowledge of the closures. Inherent in the appraisal of the value of public library use to children, is the presumption that many children in the affected areas are missing out on these benefits. It is in this way that the real impact of the library closures in Sheffield on young children can be revealed and evaluated.

- **Public libraries are dedicated to providing a high quality service for children which aims to enrich and empower their social, educational, intellectual and emotional lives**
- **Public libraries are dedicated to supporting the development of the wide range of literacy skills which help children grow and survive in their everyday lives from infancy to adulthood. They are open to**

*“integrated strategies”* and partnerships which will strengthen this role  
(Children and Young People: Library Association Guidelines for Public  
Library Services 1997: 31)

- **Public libraries promote equal access to library facilities “*regardless of age, gender, race, wealth, physical or intellectual ability or geographical location*” (Elkin and Lonsdale 1996: 16)**
- **Varying standards of services to children and uneven geographical distribution of libraries makes this commitment and its egalitarian approach difficult to maintain. The closure of service points has exacerbated this problem**
- **The libraries at Hackenthorpe, Handsworth, and Hemsworth were popular and well-used by children in varying degrees. Efforts had been made to maintain prioritised services for children which included under fives groups, other children’s activities, and strong relationships with local schools**
- **The majority of parents, teachers, and library staff involved in the study considered the closures to be a great loss to children in the communities affected**
- **In many cases, individual families and schools have not been able to maintain the same involvement and relationships with alternative library services**
- **Barriers to access to alternative services were mainly concerned with the inconvenience of finding the time, money or transport to the nearest libraries. Overall, distance was a major deterrent to renewed library use since the closures**
- **Other barriers to access were often linked to ideas of what is ‘local’ and within walking distance, and to opinions on community ownership**
- **Parents were not relying on the new mobile services so much as on nearby libraries, schools, or personal purchases**

- **Of the parents who responded to the questionnaire in the three communities, 56% have used a library service for or with their children since the closures, while 44% no longer use a library service**
- **Overall, the majority of these respondents feel that they are now using the library service less, but estimate that their children are reading the same nonetheless**
- **Teachers believe that part of the value of individual borrowing during class visits was to bring books into the homes of children whose parents do not encourage or have the time for library use. They feel that many children are now isolated from library use for this reason, and that younger generations might not even be aware that the public library exists**
- **Schools believe they have lost an important basis of support for the National Curriculum as well as a means of engendering enjoyment of the reading habit in children**
- **Schools can only compensate for the loss of their local libraries in a very restricted way, and only in terms of limited resources rather than the out-of-school ‘library experience’**
- **Many teachers, parents/carers, and library staff believe that the library experience was ‘not just about books’, but that it enriched children’s social and educational skills, and life experience on many other levels**
- **Many teachers, parents/carers, and library staff agree that it is important for children to build familiar relationships with their *local* library and its staff in a way that enhances community involvement and builds their confidence for information-seeking skills and lifelong learning**
- **The main areas of concern about the impact of library closures expressed by teachers, parents/carers, and library staff were as follows:**
  - **lack of educational support**
  - **lack of support for literacy**

- **impeded access to a wider variety of materials**
  - **loss of the opportunity to gain independence and self-confidence in choosing own books**
  - **loss of the opportunity to improve social skills**
  - **lack of local amenities for children**
  - **loss of community focal point and the integration of children and adults**
  - **loss of pre-school support**
  - **concern for future generations of adult non-users**
- **Many teachers, parents/carers, and library staff agree that children in the areas which have lost their libraries have been severely disadvantaged and are concerned about the future well-being of these children and the long-term effects of this deprivation**

### **8.3 'Afterword'**

Many recurrent themes which emerged during the study were either not entirely relevant to the subject, or merited a brief reference rather than any in-depth analysis. Although these themes have either not been mentioned at all, or have only been referred to in passing, some of them are significant issues that might need to be addressed by library organisations or by research in the field of librarianship. These issues are as follows:

- Varying levels of relationships and uneven distribution of effective 'integrated strategies' with and between schools and public libraries
- The value of library services to the elderly, and the impact of closures on this high percentage user population
- The effect of closures on more rural communities (e.g. Grenoside)
- The effect of closures on dual-use libraries (e.g. Concord)

- The effectiveness and ethics of dual-use libraries
- Non-use of mobile library services
- Problems of encouraging pre-school library use

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## APPENDIX 2: SCHOOLS' QUESTION SHEET

### Schools' Question Sheet: The impact of Sheffield public library closures on young children

1. Did you use \_\_\_\_\_ library for class visits?

YES  NO

(If you answered NO please go to question 2, if you answered YES turn to question 3)

2. Please explain briefly which other sources your school uses to give the children access to books (e.g. other library, own library, schools service etc.)

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3. a) Which classes visited the library? \_\_\_\_\_

b) How often? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Since \_\_\_\_\_ library closed, have your classes visited another library?

YES  NO

(If you answered NO please go to question 5, if you answered YES turn to question 6)

5. If you have not transferred class visits to another library, please explain why:

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**6.a) Please state which library your classes now visit\_\_\_\_\_**

**b) Do you visit this library as regularly as before?\_\_\_\_\_**

**c) If not, why?\_\_\_\_\_**

**7. In what way(s) do you think that library visits are valuable to the children?**

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**8. Additional comments:**

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## APPENDIX 3: PARENTS/CARERS QUESTIONNAIRE

### QUESTIONNAIRE: The impact of Sheffield public library closures on young children

Rachel Reilly

Dear parent/carer,

11/6/97

I am undertaking some research for the Department of Information Studies at the University of Sheffield and I am investigating how public library closures in Sheffield in 1995 may have affected your child's access to books and libraries. I am interested in library use by children from 0-9, but the early years in particular. If you and your children used the libraries at Hemsworth, Hackenthorpe, or Handsworth, please could I ask for 5-10 minutes of your time to fill in my questionnaire. Every returned questionnaire will be entered for a prize draw of books and other goodies donated by children's publishers.

1. How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_ 2. How old are they? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Did your child/children use any of these libraries? (Please tick as applicable)

Hemsworth	<input type="checkbox"/>	Handsworth	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hackenthorpe	<input type="checkbox"/>
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4. Have they used another library since your local library closed? (Please tick as applicable)

YES  NO

5. a) If you answered YES to question 4, which library/libraries are you now using for children's materials since the closure of your local library? (Please give the name of the library/libraries in the space provided)

b) If you answered NO to question 4, please state reason(s) for not transferring library membership to an alternative library .

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6. Please tick your reason(s) for using the library (tick more than one if appropriate).

Borrowing children's fictional story-books	
Borrowing children's non-fiction or educational books	
Storytelling and other children's activities	
Children's videos	
Children's books on cassette	
Family outing	
Meeting other parents/carers	

If you and your children used the library for another reason, please state what it is:

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7. If you used to use one of the libraries at Hemsworth, Hackenthorpe or Handsworth, how often did you visit on average? (Please tick as appropriate)

More than once a week	
Once a week	
Once fortnightly	
Once every 3 weeks	
Once monthly	
Every few months	

8. If you are now using an alternative library service do you visit the library more or less than you used to? (Please tick as appropriate)

More		Less		The same	
------	--	------	--	----------	--

If you use the library less, please state why in the space provided:

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9. If your children do not have access to a library service, do they obtain books from elsewhere? If so, where?

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10. On the whole, do you think your children are reading more or less since your local library closed? (Please tick as appropriate)

More	<input type="checkbox"/>	Less	<input type="checkbox"/>	The same	<input type="checkbox"/>
------	--------------------------	------	--------------------------	----------	--------------------------

11. If you wish to add any details concerning your feelings on the withdrawal of your local library service and how that closure relates to your children, please make your own comment:

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\_\_\_\_\_ (please continue on the back of this page if the space provided is insufficient)

**MANY THANKS FOR TAKING THE TIME TO FILL IN MY QUESTIONNAIRE**

**DON'T FORGET TO FILL IN YOUR DETAILS FOR THE PRIZE DRAW OVERLEAF**

I am very interested in finding out more about your opinions. Would you and your children be willing to talk to me about how you feel about the library closure? If so, please leave your name and telephone number or address and let me know an appropriate time to ring you:

NAME ..... TEL. NO. ....  
-----  
ADDRESS .....  
-----  
BEST TIME TO RING .....  
-----

## PRIZE DRAW



The prize consists of books and other goodies donated by children's publishers.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO ENTER YOUR CHILD/CHILDREN'S NAME(S) FOR THE PRIZE DRAW PLEASE FILL IN THE DETAILS BELOW:-

NAME OF SCHOOL:-

NAME OF TEACHER:-

NAME OF CHILD/CHILDREN:-

**Please return the full questionnaire and prize draw entry to your school as soon as possible, but before 10th July 1997 at the latest**

#### **APPENDIX 4: ADDITIONAL RESULT TABLES FROM PARENTS/CARERS QUESTIONNAIRE**

*Table 1: Percentage numbers of respondents who specified one or more reasons for using the former library's children's services.*

<b>REASON FOR USING LIBRARY</b>	<b>% OF RESPONDENTS</b>
<b>Borrowing children's fictional story-books</b>	<b>83%</b>
<b>Borrowing children's non-fiction or educational books</b>	<b>68.5%</b>
<b>Storytelling and other children's activities</b>	<b>35%</b>
<b>Children's videos</b>	<b>51%</b>
<b>Children's books on cassette</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>Family outing</b>	<b>14.5%</b>
<b>Meeting other parents/carers</b>	<b>9%</b>

*Table 2: Total number of respondents' frequency of library use before the closures.*

<b>FREQUENCY OF USE</b>	<b>% OF RESPONDENTS</b>
<b>More than once a week</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Once a week</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>Once fortnightly</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>Once every 3 weeks</b>	<b>19%</b>
<b>Once monthly</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>Every few months</b>	<b>10%</b>

## **APPENDIX 5: COMMENTS FROM PARENTS/CARERS QUESTIONNAIRE**

*The following comments from parents and carers are reproduced in their full and original form from the replies to question 11. of the questionnaire (see Appendix 3). The ages of the respondents' children, unless omitted by the parents, are specified in the brackets which precede the quotations.*

### **HACKENTHORPE RESPONDENTS**

**(7 & 9)**

**Our trip to the library usually combined with food shop, which the children hate. The children could previously go to library on their own - now they can't. Using car is bad for children's independence, health, and environment and teaches them that cars are good, walking is bad! Using car does not help to teach children road safety. In a sense it's alright for us - we have a car and make the extra effort to go to a library further away. However, I am sure there are others who have been deterred and no longer visit a library, or simply do not have access to a car.**

**(5, 14 & 25)**

**We were very upset that it closed.**

**(2, 11 & 12)**

**Local libraries are better near homes, where children may walk to them on their own sometimes, to choose a book.**

**(5 & 8)**

**We now use Waterthorpe but we used to use Frecheville. The children can read for themselves now and want to read and visit the library more, especially for homework.**

**(5, 10 & 11)**

**Although my children have not used the local library, I do feel that the education of children who are not able to obtain books by borrowing will suffer.**

(5 & 7)

My children started borrowing books after those libraries closed, so they've always gone to Crystal Peaks.

#### **HANDSWORTH RESPONDENTS**

(7 & 11)

I grew up without a library within walking distance and so I was pleased we had Handsworth Library locally for my children. The closure of local libraries seems like a step backwards for society.

(5)

Using a library is a very educational activity and I feel angry that it has been taken away from my child just at a vital age for him.

(1, 3, 6, & 7)

The children need facilities for books and social activities. They need to learn about different subjects which the library can provide with their equipment.

(20 months, 5, 13 & 17)

These local amenities make your own area more pleasant and rewarding to live in.

(3 & 5)

We are lucky enough to have our own transport but as both of us work, outings to the library are only at weekends. Previously our nanny could take the children up to the library as soon as all the books had been read and they had a greater change of 'reading diet' then. My older daughter has her school books to read, but the younger one now has less variety and overall, they both read less since the library closed.

(8 months, 5 & 7)

I feel that a village library within walking distance is important to the local community in order to maintain 'village life' and 'community spirit'. I was very disheartened by its closure considering it had a lot of local support.

(7 & 10)

I think it is really sad that all the libraries are closing and that them what are open, the conditions of books and other things are very poor!

(5 & 16)

The closure of the library doesn't really effect us as our older child doesn't read books and our younger child is provided with books from school which are of a good standard and are a great help with her learning process.

(5 & 9)

My children use the library less times a week but read the same amount as they have more books from the library borrowed and bought. But we miss our library very much as it was across the road, 2 minutes away. We called in there every day from school and on Saturday mornings.

(5)

My child has used the Woodhouse library more, simply because it is more convenient because I tend to shop more in Woodhouse village.

(8 & 10)

I think a local library is important to my children. My younger child loves to read and therefore still does a lot of reading - she receives books as presents and gets some from the school library. However, my older child now reads less as he prefers to read fact based books and not fiction. These were more easier to obtain from the library and are more expensive to buy.

We feel it is awful Handsworth Library had to close down because it was handy from school.

(5 & 11)

I feel strongly about the closure of Handsworth as my children visited the library every other day, encouraging them to take an interest in books and to value books. We also attended story-times and other activities. Handsworth Library was a part of the community, friendly staff, a place to find out about local activities - it is sadly missed.

**(6, 8 & 9)**

**The children enjoyed the opportunity to read a vast variety of books and to include mother and father in aiding their selection. As a parent I was pleased to be able to make sure that their selection was suitable for their age level. As access to 'unsuitable' material is so easy i.e. newsagents, videos and T.V., we felt more in control of deciding the children's reading material. Children should not have 'unsuitable' material made easily accessible.**

**(8 & 11)**

**I am not always able to take the children with me to choose books due to the distance and the time factor therefore I feel they are missing an important part of growing up, making their own choices on books which suit them. They are also not seeing the vast variety of options available to them and not being taught how to find answers to questions by using the non-fiction section. It is too far for them to travel alone therefore if reference books were needed it would be up to us to take them to the library when required, once again taking their independence and self-confidence away.**

**(9)**

**I feel the closure of local libraries is a very short-sighted act by the council which will add to future literacy problems in this city.**

**(8)**

**I feel my daughter obtains enough reading material from school and from her cousins but I think the closure of local libraries will affect her later in her school career as she will have to travel further to obtain the materials she needs.**

**(Twins aged 5)**

**My children are taken to a library further away but it's hassle so they go less often. Some of my friends and relatives' children miss out because their mothers don't drive. Local library is a big loss.**

**(8)**

**Apart from the cost of bus fares the closure of Handsworth Library has not affected us.**

**(7 & 10)**

**I feel a child should have a local library that is convenient to visit as and when wanted and needed.**

(2, 6 & 12)

I was most annoyed that Handsworth library had to close, it was small and friendly and had a comfortable atmosphere to choose books and videos for all the family.

(7 & 10)

I think it would have been nice to have a local library, especially as the children get older, they could have visited it on their own.

(6 & 9)

We enjoyed our little trips to Handsworth Library and although there was a lot of support for not closing it, they did. After attending the meetings it was obvious that money was more important than the benefits to children and other members of the community. I feel very sad my children will not be able to go to the local library when they get older. I always enjoyed my visits alone to my library as a teenager and it angers me that my children will not have that opportunity. They *should not* have to go on a bus ride to the library.

(3 & 6)

We now have a mobile library which stops at Handsworth Top, but we don't use it. All the family used Handsworth library as it was within a few minutes walk, the older people miss it too. There's not a lot of facilities for children anymore.

(8 & 10)

The children enjoyed being able to browse and choose for themselves. Without a local library an outing to another area makes it a chore having to go by car or bus.

(6)

We have always used the Central Library because there is a greater choice of books, videos and story tapes.

(3, 4 & 8)

My children are more likely to visit a library more often if it wasn't so far to travel.

**(7 & 9)**

**I think children miss out on a great deal by not having a local library. Thankfully my children have a great selection of books at home, but not all children are that fortunate. A great many things can be learnt from books. They can get a lot of fun from books, it gives them access to all kinds of information. They can bring the outside world into their own front room.**

**(3 & 6)**

**Local libraries offer a very important service to the community, for old and young alike. When a local library closes many people are not able to travel to another and this is a great pity (I have a car). I am sure many people lose out under the circumstances - local libraries should not be the victims of cut-backs.**

**(5 & 7)**

**My children read more books because they fetch them home from school, also I buy them and they have books given them. If the library was open, I would take my children on a regular basis, as they are now more interested and capable.**

**(9)**

**We used to go to Handsworth as a family outing/meet other parents but it is not a social event now. We still do not feel at home in our new library as it does not serve the community we live in. Also local events are not advertised and we have not got to know the librarians as we did at Handsworth. They did a lot of community work and extra activities to encourage children to come to the library. Also we could ask them for any information and they would do their best to help us.**

**(7)**

**Handsworth library was nearer for my daughter and me to visit, also some books she may have needed to read for school, she could obtain from the library.**

**(6 & 9)**

**It is yet one more facility our children are deprived of.**

(2, 5 & 9)

A library is a vital part of any civilised community. We should have one in every area and all children and adults should have easy affordable access to them for the benefit of all.

(5)

She is only reading more since the library closed because she is older. However, it is an effort to go to Darnall and would be much more convenient as Handsworth was in walking distance and we would probably go once a week instead of every three weeks.

(1 & 4)

I, my family and friends were deeply upset at the closure of Handsworth library. My Grandfather (who is nearly 90) no longer visits a library. My father visited every 2 weeks. He now goes to Woodhouse. He loves books and reads about 2 a week. Part of the pleasure in Summer was a stroll to the library and choosing books. When you lose your local library you lose that part of it. To go from the library we had, to a temporary library in the old school, to nothing. Mark was rather young when we had the old library which is why we didn't visit often. But I wanted him to get used to it (show him what a library is, what you do there etc). As children, my sister and I visited Handsworth Library every week or two weeks. We were in the 'bookworm' club! I wanted my children to be able to do the same. But they can't. Then, friends I knew with school age children were very upset at the closure (books for reference for school work etc). Now mine is at school, he won't have a local library for school work.

(6 & 8)

I keep meaning to try another library because my children enjoy reading books. We also used to hire videos which they enjoyed and both say they miss going. It is a shame Handsworth had to close.

(9)

The library provided books which people would not normally be able to purchase, it is missed by most people, but it was most important for children and the elderly to whom the library was essential. Children need to have access to reference books, which quite a number of parents cannot afford, due to the cost. To a lot of elderly people books are a way of using their time usefully and enjoyably, again the expense of books does not always allow them to enjoy books to the full. It also brings together people, which can mean a trip to the library is even more enjoyable to someone who would normally not see people on a regular daily basis.

(4 & 7)

It was a shame because now I don't take them. It would also teach them they had to be quiet/respect others, they would see their friends and also the school lost out as they don't visit a library now.

(7 & 9)

The children read more now, but only because their reading has improved, so the library would have been more useful now. The children used to visit with school once a fortnight (as well as the occasions when I took them). There is not a library close enough for the school to do this now.

(9)

Having the facility of a good library near to home is important especially for growing children. Rebecca has always enjoyed reading and it is a shame that we now don't have a good library nearby. It is not always convenient to go to Central Library and we therefore find we are buying more books.

#### HEMSWORTH RESPONDENTS

(2, 8, 11 & 13)

My feelings on the closure of our library are that my children do not have the advantage to read the books they want to and reading seems to me to be important especially to my children who have trouble reading.

(2 & 6)

Because of Hemsworth's closure, Newfield Green is now our closest library, but to take my children, it now costs me £1.40 in bus fares, which being on income support I could do without. But as a parent I still feel my children's education as well as enjoyment is well worth the extra expense. However, it is still inconvenient and expensive to visit Newfield Green Library and would be much better having a library closer to home.

(2 & 4)

I really enjoyed taking my children to the library, I would prefer my children to have more books and a wider range, to help them learn to read. Since the cut-back of teachers there isn't as much time to spend with each child, to help them on a one to one basis and I would just love to take them to the library out of the way of each other to spend precious time reading with them.

**(5 months & 5)**

**I was really upset when I heard the library was closing because there was always a nice reception off the librarians and my daughter used to enjoy reading the books.**

**(5, 8, 11 & 14)**

**We was a bit disappointed when the library closed. We enjoyed going to choose books we wanted to read. The children liked to go down by themselves and choose their own books. Now they cannot.**

**(7)**

**There should be one closer.**

**(6, 10 & 13)**

**My sons love reading but when the library closed my sons have to go a long way to get a new book to read and when the library closed it was the worst thing that happened to Hemsworth.**

**(1, 3 & 6)**

**I have a large selection of books from my childhood, thus I read a lot of those to them. However, borrowing books from libraries widens their scope, enables children to be involved in local amenities. I miss the handiness of Hemsworth Library.**

**(7 & 9)**

**As I am a working mother I am unable to take my children to a library. The nearest one is a bus journey away but they are too young to make this journey alone whereas before they could go to the library after school as it was just around the corner (literally) from our home. I was appalled at the decision to close Hemsworth library, but not entirely surprised. When things go wrong local authorities hit out at the most vulnerable people of our society without stopping to think of the consequences. In my opinion the 'fat cats' just get fatter from their so-called money-saving ideas and innocent people like children and the elderly suffer more. This country is a mess and it is about time some changes were brought about.**

**(8)**

**I think it is unfair that our children should be deprived of library facilities due to cash shortages.**

**(3, 5 & 7)**

**Libraries are a valuable place for children to gain information. It also provides good story books for people who can't afford to buy them. Closing libraries is not the way forward to provide for future generations.**

**(4, 6 & 8)**

**Hemsworth library was closed due to cutbacks, yet the library is still standing empty. the mobile library visits once a week, but it has moved on by the time Hemsworth School ends. Many parents are wondering why it was that there was no money to keep it open or was that just an excuse for something else. Money was soon found for each mobile library of which there 2 staff on each. Tony Blair's main concern is education, or so he would have us believe, but yet the libraries are still closed. The main source of a young child's education comes from books, so I say to Tony Blair, we need more libraries, not less. I bet there's a good library near his home, his children won't have to miss out on good books and many other services our library provided.**

**(7 months, 7 & 8)**

**My children do not get as much variety of books since the library closed. I do try to buy as many as I can.**

**(3 & 6)**

**The children used to visit the library once a week with the school and get a library book. Now they can't.**

**(4 & 6)**

**Although there is a mobile library, this has usually left before my child has returned from school, and there should be a local library available for the children round this area.**

**(3 & 7)**

**It is obvious that the Government is not thinking of the future needs for children. Education cuts lead to unemployment and therefore crime is committed.**

**(5 & 8)**

**Why?!!! It's our children's education.**

**(8)**

**He misses library visits and choosing his own books. I have to choose books when I manage to get to the town centre.**

**(9, 15, 16 & 21)**

**It is very sad that people feel they should close our shops, schools, libraries etc. It makes things more difficult for us and soon there will be nothing left for us to do that doesn't cost money and there's nowhere for children to go anymore.**