DO PUBLIC LIBRARIES NEED ‘FRIENDS’?

An evaluation of the importance and influence of Friends of Library Groups in Sheffield and Rotherham

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# CONTENTS

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**  

**CONTENTS**  

**ABSTRACT**  

**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**  

1.1 What is a Friends of the Library (FOL) Group?  

1.2 Background  

1.3 Aims and Objectives of the Research  

1.4 Motivation for this Research  

**CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**  

2.1 Why Have a Friends of the Library Group?  

2.2 Fundraising  

2.3 Problems with Friends of the Library Groups  

2.4 Summary  

**CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**  

3.1 Research Methods  

3.2 Preliminary Literature Search  

3.3 Preliminary Contact  

3.4 Data Collection Methods  

3.4.1 In-Depth Interviews  

3.4.2 Interview Schedule  

3.5 Samples
3.5.1 In-Depth Interviews 24
3.5.2 Interview Schedule 25
3.6 Limitations of the Methodology 26

CHAPTER 4: PROFILES 28

4.1 Sheffield 28
   4.1.1 Sheffield Central Lending Library 28
   4.1.2 Central Services User Group 28

4.2 Rotherham 30
   4.2.1 Rotherham Central Library 30
   4.2.2 Friends of Rotherham Central Library (FRCL) 30

4.3 Walkley 31
   4.3.1 Walkley Library, Sheffield 31
   4.3.2 Walkley Library Action Group (WLAG) 32

4.4 Herringthorpe 34
   4.4.1 Herringthorpe Library, Rotherham 34
   4.4.2 Friends of Herringthorpe Library 34

CHAPTER 5: INTERVIEW ANALYSIS 35

5.1 What is a Friends of the Library Group? 37
   5.1.1 Definition 37
   5.1.2 Should a FOL group be representative of the library community? 38
   5.1.3 Critical Friends? 40
   5.1.4 Summary 41

5.2 Why Do People Join/Form FOL Groups? 42
5.2.1 The significance of a crisis or threat 42

5.2.2 Can a FOL group influence library authority policy decisions? 46

5.2.3 The social aspect of a FOL group 48

5.2.4 Under what circumstances would the group fold? 49

5.2.5 Summary 50

5.3 How a FOL Group Forms 51

5.3.1 Is the group self-governing? 51

5.3.2 Would FOL groups benefit from an umbrella organisation? 53

5.3.3 Summary 55

5.4 The Role of the Group 56

5.4.1 Advocates, fundraisers, volunteers or a quiet support group? 56

5.4.2 Are FOL groups in this country a potential pool of volunteers? 57

5.4.3 Summary 59

5.5 Relationships 59

5.5.1 Best of Friends? 59

5.5.2 Enemies into Friends? 60

5.5.3 Mixed Loyalties? 62

5.5.4 Summary 65

5.6 Fundraising Issues 65

5.6.1 Should FOL groups raise money in the UK? 65
5.6.2 *Is donating money to libraries in the UK ‘paying twice’?*

5.6.3 *Will the budget be cut?*

5.6.4 *Books versus equipment*

5.6.5 *Summary*

5.7 *Advantages and Disadvantages of FOL Groups*

5.7.1 *Advantages*

5.7.2 *Disadvantages*

5.7.3 *Are FOL groups a ‘good thing’?*

5.7.4 *Should public libraries in the UK cultivate FOL groups?*

5.7.5 *Summary*

CHAPTER 6: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

6.1 Sheffield Central Lending Library

6.2 Rotherham Central Library

6.3 Herringthorpe Library

6.4 Walkley Library

6.5 Summary of Results

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Reflections on Friends of the Library Groups in the UK

7.2 Summary of Main Conclusions

7.3 Criteria For Success

7.4 Recommendations for Further Research
Private support is increasingly taking on an influential role in the provision of the public library service, as public funding for libraries is increasingly put under pressure. Due to the success of Friends of the Library (FOL) groups in the United States, it has become necessary for library professionals in this country to consider the addition of FOL groups to the UK library environment. This study, therefore, aimed to increase the knowledge of library professionals about the importance and influence of FOL groups, in the library authorities of Sheffield and Rotherham.

The opinions and experiences were sought of FOL group members, library staff, librarians, heads of libraries and elected members. These opinions were examined through face-to-face standardised open-ended interviews and considered against the backdrop of the situation in the US. A structured interview schedule was used to survey library users in order to establish the influence of the group in the library community, and the demographic make-up of the people not involved with the FOL group.

Issues discussed in depth were: what is a FOL group; why do people join/form FOL groups; how a FOL group runs; the role of the group; fundraising issues; and the advantages and disadvantages of a FOL group.

It was established that in Sheffield and Rotherham the primary catalyst for the formation of FOL groups, was a crisis or threat to the library. Groups were also formed by the library service for the purpose of user consultation, although reservations were expressed about the fact that...
a FOL group is self-selecting and therefore does not represent the library community.

Overall, everyone included in this study felt that FOL groups were a ‘good thing’ and not more trouble than they were worth. However, the overwhelming opinion was that they were not something to be entered into lightly. To this end, ‘Criteria For Success’ are suggested for the consideration of library professionals across the UK.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

‘Friends of Library organisations operating in the United States have impressed me not only by their fundraising achievements but also by the fact that they appear to engender a community spirit using the library as the focal point for that community’. (Baker, 1994 p.379)

‘Friends of the Library groups, like so many other “cultural” imports such as fast food and presidential election campaigns, originated in the USA. I would suggest that they are more trouble than they are worth and that they skew service provision to suit the needs of a few busybodies who have the time to get involved’. (The Commoner, 1992 p.784)

The above quotations illustrate the sharply contrasting views of Friends of the Library (FOL) groups in the UK. On the one hand, the groups are viewed with respect and admiration for their achievements in library communities in the USA. On the other hand, they are viewed with suspicion because of the effects that have on public library services. This dissertation sets out to establish which view is most appropriate to the actual situation in this country today.

1.1 What is a Friends of the Library (FOL) Group?

One of the problems associated with research into this topic, is the number of different names given to what this dissertation is terming a Friends of the Library group - ‘action group’, ‘user group’, ‘user council’, ‘user forum’ to name but a few. “Friends” will be used as an umbrella term because it illustrates most successfully the philosophy behind such a group; the relationship between the library and their FOL group
should be characterised by friendship. An action group or user group does not by its name alone, suggest a partnership or friendly relationship.

Many of the authors on this topic propose their own definitions and I find that an amalgamation best serves the needs of this dissertation. Mathews (1980 p.42) suggests that:

“Friends of the library” are those people who believe that any community is a better place in which to live if it has a first-rate library. They have a common concern for their library’s active expansion and participation in community life, and they are convinced that good library service is important to everyone’.

This establishes the philosophical background behind Friends of the Library. The important thing to highlight, is that members of a FOL group think that their community is a better place with a public library in it. This belief underpins whatever action they may undertake on behalf of the library.

Ferguson (1997 p.48) is more specific in his definition, about the roles that a FOL group may play. He defines a FOL group as a group of people who voluntarily associate themselves with the library to assist them by:

1. ‘encouraging communication between the community and the library;

2. promoting use of the library by all groups in the community;

3. enhancing the social, cultural, and educational role of the library to users and funders of the library;

4. protecting and encouraging sources of funding;

5. assisting with developing and maintaining library services for the benefit of all’.
These categories cover, in a broad sense, any act that a FOL group might perform. They illustrate the importance of the library to the community, and the way the FOL group must come from that community. They also cover the possibility that members of the group might have to defend the existence of the library. This dissertation will test whether these definitions are appropriate for FOL groups in the UK.

1.2 Background

It is worth mentioning briefly the background to FOL groups, as this may have some bearing on the issue today. Bennett (1980) in his essay on the theoretical history of Friends groups, points out that libraries up to about 130 years ago were either profit making enterprises, an offshoot of bookselling, or co-operative ventures dependent on private support. The public library as supported by taxes did not exist, and libraries were established primarily to support academic institutions or house private collections. Most libraries combined the two. Private support was very much at the forefront of libraries across the Western world.

This situation changed dramatically when public, tax-supported libraries began to develop in the United States, and an Act of Parliament allowed English towns to create public libraries. This caused a dramatic shift in the role of the benefactor, as Bennett (1980 p.24) explains:

‘Where before the benefactor, be it a single person or a corporate group, brought the library into existence and guided its development, now the benefactor had only a complimentary role to play. Now libraries were created as a matter of public
deliberation (often after a vote of taxpayers), and library operations were a matter of public policy, controlled by officers answerable to the public'.

This is not to say that benefactors no longer had an important role, rather that it was now a supporting role rather than a primary one. However, it would not be true to say that benefactors had no major part to play in the setting up of public libraries across the world. Andrew Carnegie’s donation of library buildings to the value of $56 million soon negates that argument. The point is that even if, as with Carnegie, private initiative led the way, it did so only with regard to public policy. Carnegie only donated money for a library building if the library authority could match it with public money for the contents of the library; their roles were therefore defined by a form of partnership. Parallels can be drawn between the historical role of the benefactor and the more recent supplementary role of a FOL group. A FOL group has little impact on the provision of the core service, that is the books and contents of the library, but through partnership they can enhance the library in other significant ways. For example, they can play a part in improving the building, or raising the profile of the library in the community.

FOL groups are a form of private support. As public funding is put under more pressure, private support is increasingly taking on a more important role. As a result FOL groups are common, especially in the United States. Several American authors (Bennett, (1980) and Ferguson (1991)) draw parallels between library funding now, and the situation in the United States during the Depression. Then, as now, libraries had to call upon private support to make up the shortfall in public funding, and FOL groups flourished in this environment. In Britain, people come forward to defend their library when it is threatened by economic hard times, but it can not be said that FOL groups flourish here.
There are two main ways in which FOL groups develop. Both ways are usually as a response to the common problem of funding being restricted. A group can form as the result of a threat or crisis, usually caused by problems associated with lack of funding. This can take the form of the cutting back of opening hours or the closing of a library all together. In this case the formation of a Friends group is, as Murison (1979 p.39) expresses, ‘the natural, spontaneous banding together of similarly minded people in order to achieve the wish of the community’. In some situations, a group formed out of crisis can transform into a group that works in partnership with the library staff.

The other common way that a group may form, is as the result of a library authority cultivating a relationship with members of their library community, and suggesting that they form a FOL group. This group will therefore already be in place should the existence of the library be threatened in any way. The main problem with the formation of this kind of group, is that when the initiative has come from the library staff, the users and members of the resultant group, may feel that they have been manipulated to suit the library’s needs. External organisations may also perceive that the library has formed the group for their own reasons, and the political power of the group may be diminished.

1.3 Aims and Objectives of the Research

The main aim of this research was to increase the knowledge of library managers and professionals about the importance and influence of Friends of the Library (FOL) groups, in two public library authorities in the United Kingdom. This would help the profession to consider the value and viability of FOL groups within their own authorities.
The objectives of this dissertation were:

- To evaluate the importance of FOL groups in Sheffield and Rotherham.
- To assess the influence of FOL groups in Sheffield and Rotherham.
- To draw conclusions, translating the findings of the research into ‘criteria for success’, that can be applied to any library authority in the UK.

1.4 Motivation for this Research

As stated in the previous section, private support is taking on an influential role, as public funding for libraries is increasingly put under pressure. According to recent research (Proctor et al., 1998), between the years of 1986-1996, 112 out of 126 (88.9%) library authorities reported either closing libraries or reducing opening hours. Further, it was found that over two-thirds of libraries were closed for financial reasons. This depressing picture goes some way to explaining why the attention of library professionals was drawn to the USA, where FOL groups were successfully raising the profile of their libraries, and in most cases raising funds on behalf of the library.

The other significant reason why library professionals had to start considering FOL groups a viable addition to the library environment, was that a UK equivalent (often called ‘Action Group’) was springing up spontaneously to defend library services that were being threatened or cut back. It was becoming necessary to work with these groups, as their objective of saving the library was an honourable one that could not be ignored.
This dissertation came about as the result of conversations with librarians working for Sheffield Libraries and Information. This particular library authority has experienced serious financial restrictions in recent years, with several budgets not allowing for the purchase of adult stock. In addition 6 libraries were closed in 1995. As a library authority they have experienced both successful FOL groups, and groups that have fallen by the wayside. The success of one particular group made it the perfect example of a group that formed spontaneously out of crisis, but which has developed into a permanent part of the library community. Was there anything to be learned from this group and their ongoing relationship with Sheffield City Council, the library authority, and the staff and users of the library? It was hoped that this research would be able to either recommend that other public libraries in the UK should cultivate FOL groups, or to conclude that they were indeed, more trouble than they were worth.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A search of the literature surrounding the issues of FOL groups, highlights how little research there has been into the topic in the United Kingdom. FOL groups are primarily a phenomenon of the United States, although there are articles indicating their existence in South Africa, Australia, Canada and Scandinavia. Since FOL groups are common in the USA, it is no surprise that the literature from there mostly concentrates on “how-to” set up and run a FOL group successfully. Whilst this issue is appropriate in a country where there are many FOL groups, this dissertation is more concerned with general issues associated with FOL groups. This chapter will look at how desirable, feasible and viable FOL groups are to the public library scene in the UK. It will discuss why libraries have FOL groups, issues that surround FOL group raising funds for the library, and general problems with FOL groups.

2.1 Why Have A Friends Of the Library Group?

Dowlin and Shapiro (1996 p.174) suggest that ‘community support is the key to making the public library the most significant public institution of the future’. This means that if support for the library can be established in the community now, then should its existence ever be threatened in the future, that support can be mobilised in defence of the library. FOL groups are therefore a way of involving the community with their library. Baker (1994 p.379) sees FOL groups as a ‘valuable supplement to core provision’ in a way that improves the library service as a whole. He also related the point made by an American user of his library that ‘no authority should be expected to, or even could, solely provide the type of library I want for me and my community’. Involving users through a FOL group, is a valuable way, although not the only
way, of keeping in touch with the users of the library and their needs. This can only be effective however, if the group is representative of the community, which is not an aim stated in the literature of a FOL group. If anything, FOL groups provide a useful starting point for user consultation. To use them as anything more would be unwise.


- Money
- Services
- Public Relations
- Advocacy
- Community Involvement

FOL groups in the US raise money for projects outside the direct remit of the library budget. They provide volunteers to help in areas where specialised staff and their skills are not needed. Each member of the FOL group is a walking advertisement for the library and this improves both relations with the public and the profile of the library. Members of the FOL group can lobby on behalf of the library when facing a threat or crisis, and an organised and visible FOL group is proof of the library’s value to its community.

Other advantages that Murison (1979) adds, are that FOL groups allow for the education of users in matters of library operations, fostering a relationship based on understanding; they improve relationships between staff and users; and they encourage the ventilation of areas of discontent before they escalate into full blown disputes. It is not really common for members of a FOL group to act as library volunteers in the UK, as unions usually prevent this. One of the things this
dissertation hopes to establish is whether the prominence of volunteers in the FOL environment in the USA, has resulted in librarians in the UK being fearful of FOL groups. Do they feel that if they have a FOL group, they will in turn have volunteers, which will threaten their jobs and professional status, or is it the case that they are they wary of FOL groups for other reasons?

For FOL groups to have maximum effect, a number of authors have indicated the advantages involved in the setting up of a national network of FOL groups. Murison (1979 p.46) quotes one librarian who wrote to him on the topic of FOL groups: ‘To be effective user councils would need to be a part of a national network so that they could provide a sorely needed pressure group on behalf of better public library services’. (The term FOL groups can be substituted for ‘user councils’, without affected the meaning of the statement). Whilst there is no arguing with this statement as it stands, to infer that FOL groups are not worth bothering with unless they have a national network for support is unhelpful. FOL groups primarily serve their library. If they can do this successfully then they are doing their job efficiently and effectively; with or without a national network. However, as Murison (1979 p.43-4) himself points out:

‘Consideration should be given to forming a network of user councils, regionally and nationally, if for no other reason than to encourage the individual members of the users councils that similar work is progressing and to exchange ideas on how best to carry out various projects where conditions are comparable’.

The situation in the Unites States highlights how beneficial an umbrella organisation can be to the formation of FOL groups across a country. The United States does have a national network (FOLUSA) which aims to ‘provide programs and publications to 2,800 member groups reaching hundreds and thousands of Americans, teaching citizens
nationwide how to develop local library Friends to raise funds, be advocates and promote libraries’ (WWW1, 1998). The thing worth remembering about FOLUSA is that it was formed after many libraries across the United States had already successfully established their own FOL groups. It is debatable whether the UK would, as yet, benefit from the existence of a national network. One question that this dissertation hopes to answer is whether an umbrella organisation would encourage the formation of more FOL groups, or whether it would find itself redundant as there are not enough firmly established groups to warrant its existence?

2.2 Fundraising

It has been determined from this review of the literature pertaining to FOL groups across the world, that the most common reason for the setting up of a FOL group, is to raise additional funds for the library. In an interview with William R. Gordon, Director of Prince George’s County Memorial Library System, Washington D.C., Harrison (1997 p.7) quotes Mr. Gordon as saying:

‘No matter how stable one’s public funding may seem today, it is inevitable that most of us will find ourselves in a position where raising money from the private sector will become essential… I can only say that the best weapon against disaster is to have a plan and be prepared. Being prepared implies building coalitions within the community, including businesses, friends groups, and other agencies’. Obviously, this illustrates the situation in the United States, but parallels can be drawn. A FOL group is a way of providing funding as a supplement to normal government funding, and it is also a way of assuring that the library gets it’s required funding through lobbying and advocacy. Countries such as the UK and Australia have historically
placed less emphasis on supplementary funding as the government has met the library’s needs (Bennett, 1980). This could explain why FOL groups in the UK, are years behind the highly organised FOL group environment of the USA.

The advantage of having a FOL group that is involved in fund-raising for the library is that, as Scott (1988 p.139) states, ‘library personnel are not seen to be about the business of procuring funds and little conflict with tax dollars is perceived by officials’. This advantage also points to one of the main perceived disadvantages of engaging a FOL group in fund-raising. This disadvantage is two-pronged: first there is the disadvantage stated by Murison (1979 p.45) that, ‘to launch large schemes to raise funds, especially in times of economic stress, would bring library service into the same plight as many pre-war hospitals - essential services dependent on the whim of public charity’. This could have the added disadvantage of establishing the public library as what Azar-Luxton (1993 p.14) terms ‘the deserving but, community “poor relation”’. The second part of the fund-raising disadvantage is that there are very real fears, expressed by Skory (1989 p.320), ‘that budgets will be further cut if Friends groups are depended on to raise money’.

This in particular, was one reason that Bennett (1980 p.28) put forward for the lack of documentary evidence to establish a comprehensive history of FOL groups. He suggested that ‘care was taken not to publish the value of friends support lest legislators [felt] that those gifts were an adequate substitute for public appropriations’. Whether this fear is real or imagined, the reality exists where libraries can actively discourage FOL groups from fund-raising in case their statutory funding is cut. Dolnick (1987 p.139) does her best to allay this fear by stating categorically that ‘Friends raise money to enhance existing library programmes, not replace budget items,’ but as her perspective
is an American one, it is obvious that she does not speak from the point of view of those who hold the library purse strings in a more paternalistic society such as the UK. The fears therefore continue that a FOL group can be detrimental to library funding.

The situation in the United States is such that the fear of funding being cut as a result of fundraising by FOL groups, are virtually non-existent; experience has not found this to be the case. As a result, fund-raising in the USA is more organised and aggressive. A lot of the literature that was initially reviewed dealt with ideas on “how-to” raise funds for libraries, from book sales to chocolate covered strawberries renamed “liberries” (Brownlee and Ney, 1988). Wilkinson (1993 p.11) in her study visit to examine FOL groups in the USA noted that ‘individuals appear to have a pronounced sense of “civic good” with regard to their public libraries’. Can it therefore be said that in the UK because libraries are financed through taxes, British people simply expect the public library to always be there, and do they not realise its value in the same way as they do in the USA?

It is more likely that fundraising for libraries is affected by a nationwide attitude, highlighted by Potts and Roper (1995 p.21) who state that ‘British people expect their taxes to be sufficient to pay for all services’. Giving money towards libraries is therefore seen as paying for the service twice. However, this view is coming under fire as it is apparent that traditional funds are no longer enough. Potts and Roper (1995 p.21) go on to say: ‘British libraries are being pressured into raising funds through financial necessity but as yet they are failing to respond in an organized way’. In Britain, fundraising is more haphazard with each fundraising idea being approached individually, and with no real opportunity to learn from the experience of others. This problem brings us back to the idea of a national network dealt with earlier in this
chapter. A national network like FOLUSA, would provide advice on “how-to” raise funds whilst not affecting statutory funding.

2.3 Problems With Friends Of the Library Groups

Whilst many FOL groups operate successfully within their chosen sphere, the literature is full of cautionary tales where FOL groups have been unsuccessful or detrimental to the library. The most vocal of these was a scathing attack from The Commoner (1992 p.784) in the Library Association Record:

‘Friends of the Library groups, like so many other “cultural” imports such as fast-food and presidential election campaigns, originated in the USA. I would suggest that they are more trouble than they are worth and that they skew service provision to suit the needs of the few busybodies who have the time to get involved’.

This idea of the FOL group as ‘busybodies,’ trying to create the kind of library they would like to see is not a new one, and is associated with the idea that members of the group can develop what Seaton (1980) terms the “in-group” syndrome. As Azar-Luxton (1993 p.14) explains: ‘There is a danger that such a group can deteriorate into a self-perpetuating ‘in’ group who view themselves as the community conscience in matters concerning the library’. Whilst being representative of the library community is not a traditional aim of a FOL group, the library needs to be careful that the group does not become a clique. The presence of such a clique could discourage other people from using the library.

Murison (1979 p.47) recalls one librarian writing to him to make the point that:
‘The library is as democratic a body as you could imagine. They [FOL group members] might be trouble-stirring groups of articulate people who are getting the best bargains from the library while others less articulate don’t protest because, for one thing, they do not expect so much from the library, being unaware of just how much it could do for them’.

The emphasis must therefore be placed on the librarian, who can in some ways act as a concerned outsider, to ensure that the FOL group remains as democratic as the library with which it is associated. Without a diverse membership, the FOL group cannot claim to represent a diverse community and as a result its power as a community advocate must be diminished.

Murison (1979 p.49) recalls the difficulties that FOL groups cause for the staff who have day-to-day contact with the group: ‘They may be torn between pressures from user council members, pressures which may be quite welcome for the sake of the local service, and the pressure of other communities which the chief librarian has decided are of higher priority and which, no doubt, have been explained to all staff’. If the FOL group is focused only on the library that it represents, it can find itself in conflict with the goals of the library service as a whole. This is especially common where the existence of an individual library is threatened. The staff can find their allegiances seriously tested, often resulting in the relationship between the library and their FOL group becoming less than friendly.

Another problem associated with FOL groups is where a library fails to have a say over what their FOL group is doing. In this case, its public relations image can be in serious danger. This is primarily because to an outsider, the FOL group is perceived as the library (Seaton, 1980). Anything that the group does, reflects back on the library, and where this does not occur in partnership the effects can be damaging.
The main way to avoid the many problems associated with FOL groups is to make sure that from early on in the life of the FOL group, its aims and objectives are clearly established. In this way there is no room for disagreement between the members of the group, library staff and the librarian about what exactly their role is.

2.4 Summary

This dissertation will try to discover, through the experience of those involved with FOL groups, whether fears associated with FOL groups are real or imagined: does fundraising undermine statutory funding; do FOL groups result in volunteers being brought into the library; and do staff find themselves in positions where their loyalties are mixed? The overriding opinion from the literature seems to be that if everything is made clear from the beginning of the relationship, then as Dolnick (1987a p.139) points out: “Friends of the Library” groups are what the librarian chooses to make them: advocates, fund-raisers, volunteers or a quiet support group’. This dissertation aims to establish whether the literature bears any relation to what is actually happening with FOL groups in Sheffield and Rotherham. One thing that is patently clear from the literature is that a FOL group is only truly successful when a library and their FOL group work in partnership. Whether this is the case in public libraries in the UK, remains to be established.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Methods

In order to evaluate the importance and influence of FOL groups in Sheffield and Rotherham, a method of research was required that involved talking to, and understanding the perspectives of, the people directly involved with the groups. For this reason, qualitative research was deemed most appropriate since as Veal (1992 p.93) states, ‘it is based on the belief that the people personally involved in a particular...situation are best placed to analyse and describe it in their own words’. This belief underpins all research considerations in this dissertation.

In line with the objectives of qualitative research, this study is primarily concerned with the individual feelings and emotions of the people involved in FOL groups, rather than the gathering of facts and figures from a statistical sample of the library population. A quantitative approach would not have been productive since, as Stone (1984 p.6) explains, ‘quantitative research seeks objective explanation by statistical description and manipulation, [whereas] qualitative research seeks understanding of an event or behaviour from the ‘actor’s’ perspective’. In order to understand things from the actor’s perspective, it was decided to use the qualitative data collection method of the in-depth interview.

Bell (1987 p.4) states that, ‘the great strength of the case-study method is that it allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific instance or situation and to identify, the various interactive processes at work’. A case-study approach was chosen for this dissertation to allow for the presentation of results within narrative, which is the basis of qualitative research. This approach also allows for a specific event
or situation to be examined in detail. Case-studies are often seen by some as non-scientific because of a lack of statistical validity and reliability. This is primarily because qualitative research places emphasis on words and actions rather than numbers. The most important thing in this approach is not statistically how often an event occurs, but rather how that event is explained in words by the subject, and how the researcher interprets that explanation. As Maykut (1994 p.18) explains, ‘from the qualitative perspective, to present [a] situation mathematically by using statistics would be to strip the experience of its meaning, that is, the meaning as the participants experienced it’. All opinions expressed in this study are therefore viewed as valid.

It is often argued that a case-study approach is too specific for generalisations to be made from the findings. To combat this, it was decided to take a multi-site case-study approach. This allows, as Patton (1987 p.168) states, ‘modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions’. These modest speculations should allow the reader to view the whole picture as Maykut (1994 p.47) reiterates, ‘a qualitative research report characterised by rich description should provide the reader with enough information to determine whether the findings of the study possibly apply to other people or settings’. Whilst focusing on Sheffield and Rotherham, this multi-site case-study approach should allow for the transference of findings to other situations.
3.2 Preliminary Literature Search

A preliminary search of the literature established that very little research has taken place on the existence and impact of FOL groups in the UK. It was during the initial literature search that it became apparent that one of the major problems that this study was to face, was the issue of the range of different names used to refer to FOL groups. Search terms were therefore expanded to include ‘user group’, ‘user forum’, ‘user council’ and ‘action group’.

From this expanded search it was established that there are FOL groups active in public libraries around the world, especially in the United States. It was found however, that the literature originating in the US was of a broad practitioner focus, rather than a research focus. It was established that an in-depth research study of FOL groups was needed, and would hopefully be useful to public libraries in the UK.

3.3 Preliminary Contact

This dissertation came about as the result of a conversation with a librarian working for Sheffield Libraries and Information, who is closely involved with Walkley Library Action Group. He became one of the key informants for this study, providing introductions to other appropriate parties. This was totally in keeping with Mellon’s (1990 p.49) assertion that:

‘Key informants provide direct assistance to the researcher in establishing and maintaining the research relationship with the organisation or situation being studied. They provide initial information about the study site and the administrative hierarchy controlling it, they help to identify possible respondents, and they provide information and assurance during the course of the study’.
My dissertation supervisor and the head of libraries in Rotherham also took on this role.

In Sheffield it was relatively easy to make contacts and attend a couple of FOL group meetings. In this way, the co-operation of certain key people was assured relatively early on in the academic year. Establishing contact in Rotherham was more difficult, as it was not possible to meet anyone involved with FOL groups until the study was already under way. This was mainly due to geographical inconvenience.

On the basis of ongoing conversations with the key informants, four FOL groups were chosen for inclusion in the study. Walkley Library Action Group (WLAG) was chosen first as this is the most well known and long established group in Sheffield. It has a rich history of both conflict and co-operation with the library authority and is often used as an example to other libraries contemplating the cultivation of a FOL group. It was hoped that a lot could be learned from their experience. The group based at the Central Lending Library in Sheffield was also suggested to provide a contrast to WLAG. Central Services User Group (CSUG) is also well established, and whilst it was formed as a user group, some of its members have undertaken activities that place it in the category of a FOL group. Following an initial meeting with librarians in Rotherham, two parallel groups were volunteered for participation in the study: Friends of Herringthorpe Library (FHL) was included because, like Walkley it is based in a small branch library, and Friends of Rotherham Central Library (FRCL) was included because it is based in a central library. It was therefore hoped that comparisons could be drawn. Two library authorities were chosen in order to get different policy perspectives.
3.4 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

3.4.1 In-Depth Interviews

The standardised open-ended interview approach was adopted to ensure that the same ground was covered with each respondent. As Patton (1987 p.113) states, ‘the basic purpose of the standardised open-ended interview is to minimise interviewer effects by asking the same questions of each respondent’. It was necessary to ensure that within each subset (i.e. librarians or library staff) each respondent was asked the same question, but it was also desirable to be able to slightly re-word questions according to whom they were being asked. For example, to a librarian it might be asked “how would you describe the library’s relationship with the group?” The same question would then be asked to a member of the FOL group, rephrasing it to read “how would you describe the group’s relationship with the library?” It was therefore possible to compare responses to essentially the same question, allowing for the different perspectives of each individual respondent.

It is sometimes suggested that this interview approach is weak because ‘it restricts the pursuit of topics or issues that were not anticipated when the interview was written’ (Patton, 1987 p.114). However, because the interviews were only being carried out by one person, it was possible to probe and add subjects as appropriate, and as the interviews progressed.

The problem with in-depth interviews is that while insight is being gained into a person’s attitudes and motivations, the conversation is, as Taylor (1984 p.81) explains, ‘subject to the same fabrications, deceptions, exaggerations and distortions that characterise talk between persons’. People have different perceptions about events, and to counter any exaggerations or fabrications it became important to gain a wide range of views surrounding FOL groups. For example, if
the librarian felt the relationship with the group was bad, whilst a member of the library staff felt it was good, what did this reveal? When analysing the in-depth interviews it therefore becomes not a question of who is telling the truth, or indeed what the truth is, but rather why do they perceive a situation in that particular way? It is up to the interviewer to find the answer to this question, through probing and the asking of additional questions.

Taylor (1984 p.84) also highlights another important consideration when conducting interviews, that is, ‘people simply do not have equal ability to provide detailed accounts of what they have been through and what they feel about it’. The onus therefore lies with the interviewer to adapt to each interview, in order to get the best and most appropriate responses from each interviewee.

Questions were asked in subject clusters centred on issues of how a group forms, the role of the group, fundraising, relationships between the group and the library, policy towards the groups, and any problems that had been encountered. This helped the evaluation process to focus on a thematic approach. Analysis was therefore, as Patton (1987 p.15) states, ‘guided not by hypothesis but by questions, issues, and a search for patterns’.

The questions were developed as a result of the literature review and preliminary conversations with key informants. Full copies of the interview questions asked can be found in Appendix A. Some questions were added as the interviews progressed and the study evolved. This illustrates again the flexibility inherent in qualitative research.
3.4.2 *Interview Schedule*

An interview schedule was carried out at the four libraries in this study. Through this it was hoped to establish, whether there were any significant patterns in the demographic make-up of the people *not* involved with the FOL groups. It was also hoped to determine whether there were any significant reasons for their non-participation. It was decided to focus only on these questions, keeping the interview schedule simple and short in order to ensure a response from the people questioned. A copy of the interview schedule can be found in Appendix B.

People were engaged in the interview schedule as they entered each library in two separate occasions: Saturday mornings and one day during the week. Different types of library users were therefore approached in order to get as broad a range of respondents as possible. In order to convince the respondents that the research was genuine I introduced myself as a student from Sheffield University. In most cases this caught their attention enough to make them pause and answer the questions. It was found that without exception, everyone questioned at the branch libraries answered the questions, while people using the Central libraries were generally in more of a hurry. It is estimated the 80 per cent of people approached at the Central Library answered the questions.

People were given a choice of responses to the question “why are you not a member of the group?” and the study could therefore be accused of leading the respondents. However, many people did use the “other” option when they felt the responses offered were either inappropriate or too simplistic.
3.5 SAMPLES

3.5.1 In-Depth Interviews

In order for the different perspectives of the various people involved to be evaluated it was decided to interview: members of the FOL groups; library staff who deal with the groups on a regular basis; and professional librarians who enact policy towards the groups. One other librarian was included who was considering forming a FOL group at his library.

Initially it was hoped that a uniformity could be established in the interviewing process by talking to 2 librarians, 2 library staff and 2 members of the FOL groups, in order to allow for a richness of views and opinions. However this rigidity soon proved impractical, as not all groups had that many people either involved, or willing and able to talk at length about their experiences. What soon became apparent, was that I needed to talk to people who were information-rich sources about FOL groups. As Patton (1987 p.51) states, ‘the power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the evaluation’. Whether I talked to 3 or 6 people therefore became irrelevant, it was the detail that each interview added to the study that was most important.

As the interviews progressed it became apparent that the study was missing the opinions of those who devised overall policy towards the groups and it was decided to add to the study, elected members with direct responsibility for libraries, and the heads of the library authorities in this study. It was only possible to interview the elected members over the telephone due to time pressures on both parties. This
illustrates the advantage of the qualitative approach, in that it allows for flexibility and adaptation once the study has begun.

3.5.2 Interview Schedule

Whilst interview schedules are primarily used in quantitative research where samples are strictly valid and statistically reliable, a qualitative approach can be taken providing the methodology is justified. It was decided to adopt Taylor’s (1984 p.83) strategy of theoretical sampling where ‘what is important is the potential of each “case” to aid the researcher in developing theoretical insights into the area of social life being studied’. This strategy was also adopted with the in-depth interview sample.

Initially, it was planned that two per cent of registered users would be questioned, but this proved impractical because of the large difference between the number of registered users at a branch library and a busy central library. For example, whilst Herringthorpe Library has 1129 registered users, which means that a two per cent sample should lead to 23 people being included in the study, Sheffield Central Lending Library has 34,356 registered users, which would mean that 687 people should be included in the study to maintain uniformity and statistical validity. In the time scale of this dissertation, this approach was therefore deemed inappropriate.

Instead it was decided to talk to 25 users at Herringthorpe, 50 users at Walkley and 150 users at the central libraries in Sheffield and Rotherham. In this way, the proportions of registered users at the libraries are acknowledged within the time constraints of this study. This is also in line with Stone’s (1984 p.14) assertion that ‘the larger the population, the smaller the proportion which can be used’.
3.6 Limitations of the Methodology

Time limits

- It was not possible to talk to more library users via the interview schedule.
- It was only possible to focus on four libraries.
- It was only possible to interview elected members over the telephone, which resulted in a less in-depth examination of their views and opinions.

Problems with the Libraries

- At one library there was a lack of appropriate space to carry out the interviews.
- At one library I was used as an advertisement for the FOL group and expected to hand out membership forms. This may have damaged my impartiality.
- At Rotherham, interviews were arranged by key informants who set up group interviews. I therefore had to conduct interviews with several people at one time, rather than the more productive method of individual interviews.
- At one library, a library staff member was present while the interview schedule was undertaken, and on occasion users were prompted to answer the questions in a certain way.
- It was difficult to talk to the library staff outside their working environment, and their answers during the in-depth interview might be biased accordingly.
- Some interviewees were intimidated by the tape recorder and only revealed key details once the recorder had been switched off.

Miscellaneous
• The census material is out-of-date.

• The majority of people interviewed are involved with successful FOL groups. It would have been helpful to include a study of a group that did not sustain its existence. This was not undertaken because of the difficulty of pulling together all the people involved, in order to get a broad overview of the reasons for the failure of the group.

• The interview schedule should have been completed first, so that specific questions that arose during analysis of the results could have been put to the interviewees. For example, I might have asked why only one-fifth of people questioned knew of the existence of their group. Were they doing enough to attract new members, or had the group become a self-selecting clique?
CHAPTER 4. PROFILES

This multi-site case-study approach involved looking closely at four libraries and their FOL groups, in order to get a range of opinions and situations associated with FOL groups. Accordingly, this chapter briefly profiles the library and the group, in order that practitioners can draw their own parallels between the libraries under consideration here, and their own libraries.

4.1 SHEFFIELD

4.1.1 Sheffield Central Lending Library

Sheffield has an estimated population of 501,202 with a gender distribution of 48 per cent male, 52 per cent female. One-fifth of the population is of pensionable age and it has a registered unemployment rate of six per cent. Sheffield Central Lending Library has a registered user population of 36,000 which represents just seven per cent of the population of Sheffield. However, because it is the central library, many of its users will be registered with their branch library, but will use the central library when it is more convenient.

4.1.2 Central Services User Group (CSUG)

This group was formed four years ago when a librarian working at the central library became concerned that the service they were providing could not be taken for granted, just because it was situated in the central library. CSUG was formed as an attempt to both consult the users, and to keep them informed about the service. All libraries in Sheffield were under some sort of threat, whether it was complete closure, or cutbacks in spending and opening hours. Sheffield
Libraries and Information are still in serious financial crisis and as a result last year, did not purchase any books for adult stock, apart from large print and ethnic books.

The group meets once every three months and is organised and run by the librarian who founded the group. She sends letters out to inform the members that a meeting will be taking place, and asks them if they have anything they would like to discuss at the meeting. There are 30 registered members although only six to eight people on average turn up for meetings. The meetings are held at different times on two different days to try to accommodate for the different life styles of the members. New members are recruited by invitation only, although initially the group was advertised within the library and any users were encouraged to join. If a user makes a complaint to the library, they are often invited to join the user group, on the grounds that if they have been motivated enough to make a complaint in the first place, they will be motivated enough to contribute to the discussion of the group.

The thing that places this group into the category of “Friends Group” is the fact that some members of the group raised money for the library. This activity did not include all the members and there is no obligation on the members to become involved in fundraising activities. A small number of the group raised £400 towards the purchase of two benches that can be found in the entrance lobby of the library. Their target was £3000 but they did not have to continue fundraising, as they were awarded an external grant from the Arts Council of £2600. They have not raised any more money since then.

People interviewed for this study include the librarian who formed the group, a library staff member who is keen to recruit interested members of the public, and two members of the group who have been
involved from the start. 150 library users were spoken to as part of the interview schedule.

4.2 ROTHERHAM

4.2.1 Rotherham Central Library

Rotherham has an estimated population of 251,637 with a gender distribution of 49 per cent male and 51 per cent female. 17 per cent of the population are of pensionable age and 12 per cent are registered unemployed. Rotherham Central Library has a registered active user population of 34,000 which equals 14 per cent of the population of Rotherham. While again it is important to remember that most users will register with their branch library, it is interesting to compare this figure with the Sheffield registered user figure of six per cent for a population that is essentially 100 per cent larger than Rotherham’s. The reason for this disparity is that Sheffield Libraries and Information have just completed a borrower record purge, removing those users they term inactive. This means that the Sheffield figure is perhaps truer than the Rotherham figure, which could include people who are registered to use the library, even though they have not borrowed anything for over five years.

4.2.2 Friends of Rotherham Central Library (FRCL)

This group formed just one year ago for a combination of reasons. The primary reason was that users were incensed that the library had implemented Saturday afternoon closure, without them being able to do anything about it. This came at a time when library staff were encouraging the formation of FOL groups. The group was therefore
instigated by staff members who compiled a list of interested people and organised the initial meeting.

The group is now self governing although two library staff do sit on the committee. Their stated aims are:

1. To promote the Central Library.
2. To act as a forum for debate.
3. To pass ideas on to the librarians.
4. To maintain and improve standards.

They produce a newsletter every three months and attract new members through leaflets on the issue desk. They organise various social events for members, such as a tour behind the scenes of the library. They have not yet raised any money although discussions are continuing as to how they would do this, and on what the money would be spent.

People interviewed for this study include the librarian with responsibility for the group, a library staff member who sits on the committee of the group, and a member of the group who has been involved from the start. 150 library users were spoken to as part of the interview schedule.

4.3 WALKLEY

4.3.1 Walkley Library, Sheffield

Walkley has a population of 13,983 with a gender distribution of 49 per cent male and 51 per cent female. This represents three per cent of the total population of Sheffield. 17 per cent of Walkley’s population
are of pensionable age while five per cent are registered unemployed. Walkley Library has a registered user population of 1113 which means that it is serving just eight per cent of the population. This figure is again the result of the borrower purge, and the registered user figure previously represented approximately 14 per cent of the population

4.3.2 Walkley Library Action Group (WLAG)

This group was formed in 1992 as the result of a perceived threat that Sheffield City Council was going to close the library. This did not happen, although six libraries in Sheffield did eventually close in 1995. The group has 184 registered members although only six to eight people attend the committee meetings that occur every six weeks. Approximately 10-15 people regularly attend the group’s coffee morning which is held in the library. The group formed as the result of library staff being told by their unions to encourage the formation of a group at the library, thereby illustrating support for the library in an attempt to forestall closure. The group consists mainly of pensioners.
The aims of the group are:

1. To help maintain a library service in Walkley which meets the needs of the local community.

2. To support improvements to the library service and building to ensure that the facilities available make it usable by the broadest range of users.

3. To encourage and support the provision of a wide range of activities which will extend the use and popularity of the library service and building.

4. To help maintain and improve the unique Walkley Library building for the continuing benefit of the people of Walkley.

The group gained English Heritage listed status for the library building because they felt that if the building fell into further disrepair, the library authority would be able to close it, on the grounds that they could not afford to repair the building. By gaining listed status they can apply for external grants to help maintain the exterior of the building.

The group is publicised within the library through membership forms on the issue desk, and notice boards both outside the library and in the entrance lobby. The group is well known throughout Sheffield as it has received publicity in the Sheffield newspaper ‘The Star’, and on Radio Sheffield.

WLAG have raised approximately £10,500 since the group began, of which so far, £2478.62 has been spent on equipment and £4461.32 has been spent on books. Money is raised through donations, sales, fairs, raffles, coffee mornings and the purchase of two lottery tickets.
People interviewed for this study include the librarian at Walkley who deals with the group regularly, a librarian who has been involved with the group for four years, a library staff member who has dealt with the group since it began, and two founding members of the group. 50 library users were spoken to as part of the interview schedule.

4.4 HERRINGTONHORPE

4.4.1 Herringthorpe Library, Rotherham

Herringthorpe has a total population of 10,291 with a gender distribution of 47 per cent males and 53 per cent females. This represents 4 per cent of the total population of Rotherham. Approximately 19 per cent of the Herringthorpe population is of pensionable age. It has the highest registered unemployment rate in Rotherham with one in four people being without work. Herringthorpe Library has 1129 registered users which represents 11 per cent of the population. It is estimated by library staff that this is made up of 60 per cent old aged pensioners. This is primarily because of the location of the library, which is surrounded by four sheltered housing complexes for the elderly.

4.4.2 Friends of Herringthorpe Library (FHL)

This group formed approximately two years ago. It came into being because the librarian at the time was keen to form FOL Groups, and also because there was a need to discuss the possibility that Herringthorpe Library would be closed. The group is self governing following the initial meeting that was organised by library staff. It is run through committee. One library staff member sits in on the committee meetings, although she does not have an official role to play other than
one of liaison. In the formative stages, the committee contacted WLAG for advice.

The groups stated aims are:

1. To preserve and increase facilities at the library.
2. To encourage greater use of the library.
3. To raise funds to improve facilities.
4. If necessary, to resist and closures or reduction in opening hours.

The group meets once a month if they have anything to discuss. They attract new members through leaflets on the library issue desk and through activities that take place in the library. They raise money for short term projects through donations and a couple of fundraising events a year. They have been actively discouraged from raising money for books by the library authority.

People interviewed for this study include the librarian with responsibility for the group, a library staff member who sits in on committee meetings, and a founding member of the group. 25 library users were spoken to as part of the interview schedule.
CHAPTER 5. INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

In line with the qualitative objective of understanding the issue of FOL groups from the ‘actor’s’ point of view, it was decided to conduct a series of in-depth interviews with members of the groups, librarians and library staff involved with the groups, heads of libraries for their overall views of policy towards the groups, and elected members with direct responsibility for libraries. In all, 17 people were interviewed in depth, 2 elected members were interviewed over the telephone, and one group interview with six people was conducted. Mellon (1990) emphasises the importance of confidentiality and anonymity when carrying out research, and accordingly no quotations are attributed to a named person. The analysis of the interviews is divided into six sections covering the following themes:

- What is a FOL Group?
- Why do People Join/Form FOL Groups?
- How a FOL Group Runs
- The Role of the Group
- Fundraising Issues
- The Advantages and Disadvantages of a FOL Group

Details of the questions asked during the interviews can be found in Appendix A.
5.1 WHAT IS A FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY GROUP?

5.1.1 Definition

One of the first problems that research into this area uncovered was the confusion surrounding the difference between a FOL group and a user group. The literature review found that FOL groups were also called ‘action groups’, ‘user groups’, or ‘user councils’, despite the fact that user groups are not, by definition, Friends groups. User groups are a forum where both sides, the library and the user, can get together to talk about what is happening to the library now, and what will happen to the library in the future. FOL groups have no provision for this role within the definitions found in the literature, and yet the term user group kept cropping up during the interviews. The literature defined a FOL group as ‘those people who believe that any community is a better place to live if it has a first-rate library. They have a common concern for their library’s active expansion and participation in community life, and they are convinced that good library service is important to everybody’ (Mathews, 1980 p.42). To see if this definition corresponded with experience in Sheffield and Rotherham, and also because the people interviewed were using the terms ‘user group’ and ‘friends group’ as interchangeable, it was decided to ask respondents how they defined a FOL group:

“Friends groups are where a group of people are concerned about their library, are prepared to put effort in and are willing to help support the service” [Head of Libraries]
“I would say that its a group of local people who want to see the facility retained for the community, and are prepared to fight for it and lobby the council... They perhaps become fundraisers... Committed people that want to work for the good of the community in retaining the library service”.

[Librarian]

“Its a very helpful group. Very keen, they don’t want to lose the library so [they] alert people to the idea that there is a library here and if we don’t use it, we lose it. They are very enthusiastic over whatever they do to try and help us out”. [Library Staff]

“Its a group of people who are active users and who believe that the library service is a good worthwhile service, and who are prepared to put their time and energies into supporting it in various ways”. [Group Member]

5.1.2  Should a FOL group be representative of the library community?

In line with the definitions found in the literature, none of the definitions suggested by respondents mention user consultation as playing a part in FOL groups. Despite this, Rotherham Libraries and Information Service is deliberately setting up what they are terming ‘FOL groups’, primarily to perform the function of user consultation. It should be mentioned that in the literature, Ferguson (1997 p.48) does suggest that one function of a FOL group is to ‘encourage communication between the community and the library’. User consultation could be viewed as a form of communication between the community and the library, and could therefore be incorporated into the possible roles of a FOL group. If is to be the case that FOL groups are used for user consultation, then the implication is that a FOL group must be representative for it to be able to perform the function of user consultation effectively. As one library staff member explained: “We
do try and get a cross section. The first meeting we had was attended mostly by old people so we tried harder to interest other sections of the community. The ideal is to get a cross section of your users so that you can get different views represented”.

This view was challenged by one librarian who felt that: “I don’t think its absolutely necessary for [a FOL group] to be representative as we wouldn’t just hear what [they] had to say. If we were doing a consultation I would listen to what they had to say, but then I would talk to the schools and the education establishments, and I’d have a handout to give to other users that had nothing to do with the group”.

One head of libraries was firmly against using FOL groups for user consultations: “If a user group is trying to get a group that is broadly representative of people who use the service, then Friends groups are a very poor foundation on which to do that... They are self selective and they will always be like-minded people”.

Using a FOL group for user consultation can only be successful if the group is representative of the library community. Opinions expressed here have so far suggested that if the FOL group is not being used for user consultation, then it is not necessary for the make-up of the group to reflect the make-up of the library population. However, one library staff member disputed this, suggesting that a FOL group should be representative, especially if the group is a visible presence in the library. It was suggested that a lack of diversity can lead to an appearance of exclusivity. Another staff member claimed that if the group is not representative then they could discourage other people from using the library, as it appears that the library is run by, and for, one sector of society: “If they’re not representative then they are only representing their own interests. Therefore, would they discourage
other people from using the library because they would see it as basically being run by a self-interested group?"

The groups included in this study are not representative of their library communities. CSUG is too small, and FRCL, WLAG and FHL are made up of mostly older people. However, this point was made by one group member when asked whether their group was representative of the library community: “By the numbers that come, not very. But on the other hand, by what we’ve raised through people coming into the library, buying stuff when we’re selling, leaving donations, donating books, it is very representative”. Whilst the group may not specifically represent the library community, at one particular library they have its representative support. This was backed up by the findings of the interview schedule at that library. Being truly representative of the library community is not always necessary, as long as they are welcoming to all new members and do not develop into a clique. It should primarily be the responsibility of the librarian and library staff to ensure that this does not happen.

Most of the people questioned were aware that their groups did not represent the library community as a whole, and respondents from Rotherham claimed only to use the FOL groups as a ‘starting point’ for user consultation. They recognised that they would have to make positive moves towards making the groups more representative in order to do this effectively.

5.1.3 Critical Friends?

One elected member suggested during a user group meeting, that what the library service needed were “critical friends”, which again links the idea of a FOL group with user consultation. The councillor was
asked to elaborate on what he meant by the phrase, “critical friends”: “Critical friend, constructive criticism. In a way it's the same thing. It's a way of the user saying, why are you doing this, I don't agree with it. There will be times when we disagree and that's what being a critical friend is all about”. The term “critical friends” is therefore just another way of expressing the function of a user group, not a FOL group. However, if the group is to be used as a form of user consultation, then it is only to be expected that criticism is a part of it. The term “critical friends” could be appropriately used where a FOL groups is used for user consultation. Whether criticism can be a permanent part of a “Friends” group is still open to question.

Other people who attended the same meeting were invited to comment on this idea during their interviews. Their responses were as follows:

“As long as the criticism is constructive and you don’t just get people banging the same old drums all the time. We do get criticism but we do also get a lot of positive feedback and a lot of understanding at our problems”. [Librarian]

“I was really a bit alarmed when the councillor began to talk about renaming the group as a critics group. That to me is inviting criticism and it is a negative”. [Group Member]

5.1.4 Summary

- A FOL group is not by definition a user group.
- Since a FOL group is self-selecting, it should only be used as a ‘starting point’ for user consultation.
A FOL group can enjoy representative support from its community, without being representative itself.

If the group is highly visible within the library, it should aim to be representative in order to not appear exclusive to other library users.

“Critical Friends” is another title for the function of user consultation.

5.2 WHY DO PEOPLE JOIN/FORM FOL GROUPS?

5.2.1 The significance of a crisis or threat

The threat of closure or a cutting back of the service provided, has played some part in the formation of all four of the groups studied here. WLAG formed solely because there was a perceived threat of closure; FHL formed partly because there was a possibility of closure; FRCL formed partly as a response to the library implementing Saturday afternoon closure; and CSUG formed because a librarian there was hearing worrying things about how essential it was to have a central library. As a result, when questioned about why people joined, or played a part in forming the groups, saving the service was the predominant answer:

“Fear of closure. They are frightened of losing their books. We are in the middle of an old aged pensioners complex and they can’t get in to the town. They are so frightened of losing what little they’ve got.” [Library Staff]

“I think its because they’re concerned about the library service. People are frightened of losing the library”. [Library Staff]
In the beginning they were up in arms about losing their library…” [Librarian]

“Because they have a real affection for the library, they use it regularly and they want to help”. [Group Member]

“In most cases they’ve got fears about the future of the library service. Not necessarily about the library closing but from curtailed hours, that sort of thing”. [Librarian]

“Because they were threatening to close the library and we just couldn’t have that. So we had to form a group to fight it”. [Group Member]

The literature states that, ‘when there is no longer a major issue to challenge the drive and energy of friends, resolute efforts are required to maintain vitality and interest on the part of the friends’ (Seaton, 1980 p.57). The evidence of the in-depth interviews suggests that all the groups involved in this study have found it this to be the case. Most respondents expressed how difficult it was to both maintain membership and attract new members once the threat or crisis was no longer there. This problem links with the issue facing libraries wishing to cultivate FOL groups at their libraries. How do you attract new members when there is no threat to the service? How do you keep your present members when the threat is not there to maintain the cohesion of the group? No one questioned for this study had any answers to these questions.

“People turn up when its threatened but if things are ticking along smoothly then I don't think they do. Its general nature isn't it?” [Library Staff]

“The people who are going to join, have joined, and the ones who aren’t joining, aren't bothered”. [Librarian]
“We found that even at [this library] that after the immediate threat of closure was taken away, it was a bit more difficult to maintain the enthusiasm”.
[Librarian]

These comments suggest that the main thing that keeps a group going, or contribute to its formation, is a threat or crisis. So why do some groups carry on when that threat has gone away? Most people spoken to felt that whilst the initial threat had gone away, the possibility of a new crisis was always just around the corner. The group’s continued existence ensures that the library has ‘ready made’ support to illustrate that their library is important to the community. They can mobilise this support should the situation call for it. This idea of being prepared for a crisis is one important reason which makes the cultivation of a FOL group attractive:

“Fairly early in the [group’s] existence we decided we were prepared to keep the group in being because we are always aware that although the threat has gone away for the moment, its liable to raise its head again every year”.
[Group Member]

“It’s a terrible thing in some ways. The group here, you almost think that, if when we start getting budget information next year, that there is a renewed threat to this library [the group] could come back into its own. It could reactivate a lot of the members and then they could start saying look at all we’ve done since we’ve been around, look at how good [this] library is at serving the community. That could have an effect on whether the axe actually falls… I think the most useful thing about it being in existence at the moment is the fact that it does already exist. If the threat returns, they will be able to do something good”. [Librarian]
“It was down to the main ones… because we all realised that it's going to be a crisis every budget time and though we're safe for one year, when the budget comes again… we don't know where we stand. We could have to fight again”. [Group Member]

“I know that if I have to close [that library] at some time, it's going to be a damn sight ‘louder’ to close it than [a different library]”. [Head of Libraries]

The above comments especially ring true in communities where the groups have maintained a high profile and can call on the support of the rest of the community. The responses on the interview schedule of people in Walkley, illustrate that they would have the support of their community to call upon, as awareness of the group’s existence is still high.

However, one library in this study found that, despite maintaining a group so that they were prepared for action should the library become threatened in any way, their group did not respond with any support when opening hours at the library were cut. The library found that they had done so much explaining about the difficult financial position that they were in, there was no reaction from the group. As the librarian involved with the group explained: “[It’s] resignation in a way. They know the difficult position the council is in”. It should therefore be remembered that having a group in existence does not automatically ensure that you have a loud response from your users, if a threat or crisis arises.
5.2.2 Can a FOL group influence library authority policy decisions?

One problem that several respondents identified with groups that form as the result of a threat or crisis, is that they are very single minded in the pursuit of their goals. The threat or the crisis is what defines them. This can lead them into direct opposition with the objectives of the library service as a whole:

“Whilst we are sympathetic with what happens in other areas of the authority, we are very branch oriented”. [Group Member]

“They are very up-front and say that they are only concerned about [this library] and that’s fine because that’s what they are there for… They’re not bothered about what everybody else does.”. [Librarian]

“At one time it used to say [on the notice board] ‘Join the Library and Fight the Council’ and I objected because that’s a bit steep isn’t it? I felt it was quite hard wording to actually be displayed in a council building that the council is paying for”. [Librarian]

This separation between the group, the library, and the library authority can lead to further problems, as the evidence suggests that a FOL group can be quite powerful when it comes to influencing the policy of the library service. The librarians questioned for this study, felt that the groups definitely wielded significant political power:

“There is definitely a role in changing decisions that have already been made because I know of examples where because of campaigning by groups, decisions have been reversed and libraries have remained open”. [Librarian]
“I think they might feel they can [influence policy]. They certainly try and put their views forward and if they feel strongly about something I would encourage them to do that”. [Librarian]

“We live in the real world and we live in a political world and the users of the library, representatives of the library, have a voice. That voice has political power to it. That’s inevitable, it’s a fact of life. It’s just something we need to take on board and recognise”. [Head of Libraries]

“Groups wishes cut across the general policy that you have. What we might want to do regarding libraries - it could actually be changed by a very strong pressure group at one library”. [Librarian]

This final point of view illustrates the very real fears that professional staff feel about the amount of power that a FOL group might have, and how they use that power. The irony is that this contrasts with the views from group members, who overwhelmingly felt that they could not influence library policy:

“I don’t think we can really. The things that tend to crop up are very small things and often tend to be whinges”. [Group Member]

“I don’t think I would try really”. [Group Member]

“I don’t think we can”. [Group Member]

All parties involved with FOL groups obviously have very different views about the amount of power that the FOL group members hold.
5.2.3 The social aspect of a FOL group

The other common reason given by group members as to why they joined a FOL group, was that the group played a big part in their social life:

“We learn things from here. Its our social life”. [Group Member]

“Its been a great part of my life… I really look forward to coming into the library. Everybody knows me and its been wonderful. Its really my social life as well as everything else”. [Group Member]

“I went initially, it was a period of time when I had a lot of free time and I was interested to join the group… mainly to find out what it was about but also because I had free time”. [Group Member]

“Some people join because its something to do. The majority join because libraries are very important to them”. [Group Member]

“An old man came in the other day and said how nice it was to see people sitting there talking together, and hopefully he may join”. [Group Member]

Association with the library is a non-threatening social activity. As one librarian pointed out: “FOL groups are a comfortable thing to be involved with”. Being involved with the library means being involved with the community. If they have to fight for the library, then they are fighting for something “respectable”. They are not going up against society by wanting to keep a library open.
5.2.4 Under what circumstances would the group fold?

The evidence suggests that for two of the groups studied, the only thing keeping the group in existence is one person who holds everything together. People were asked whether the group would fold should that one person leave the group. Their answers were a resounding “yes”:

“Probably if she left and I was still here, I’d make an effort. I’ve just sat back and let her get on with it and she has got a lot further than I would have done”. [Group Member]

“If [she] pulled out I think they’d be in trouble. I think there’s a bit of magic in it, I really do”. [Senior Librarian]

“If she left… it would carry on for a while but I think it would peter out. I don’t think anyone else in the group could be so single minded”. [Librarian]

“[The group would fold if] I failed to keep it going. If I decided not to have any more meetings”. [Librarian]

The question of how to cultivate that one dynamic person is unanswerable. As one respondent stated, “there’s a bit of magic in it”.

Other reasons given for the possible demise of the groups in the future were also suggested. These comments illustrate the vulnerability of FOL groups:
“Lack of membership”. [Group Member]

“If it never had another meeting it would fold instantly”. [Group Member]

“We’re only a small group of people who are willing to do things and if you begin to impose heavily then even the most enthusiastic lose their enthusiasm”. [Group Member]

“Apathy. When we started there was a closure threat and we got a tremendous amount of interest… Since the threat seems to have gone away [we’ve had less people interested]”. [Group Member]

5.2.5 Summary

- A crisis to the service, or the threat of closure, plays a large part in the formation of a FOL group.
- People join primarily to save the service.
- It is beneficial to have a FOL group already in place, in case of a threat or crisis.
- With no threat or crisis, it is difficult to set up a FOL group, or maintain the membership of an established group.
- Sometimes the success, or continued existence of a group, is down to one committed person.
- FOL groups are primarily only concerned about their library, sometimes to the detriment of the overall plans of the library service.
- Professional staff feel FOL groups have political power, whilst group members do not feel that they have any power.
5.3 HOW A FOL GROUP RUNS

5.3.1 Is the group self-governing?

The way that a group runs, that is, how much of a role the library takes in the running of the group, can have an important part to play in the group’s effectiveness. If the library is heavily involved in the running and the activities of the group, then the group can be seen as a puppet of the library service and it therefore loses its political clout. If the group runs with little contact with the library, then it can not truly be termed a “Friend” of the library. Evidence gathered here suggests that opinion and practice is split. On the one hand, some groups have library staff involved with the committees of the groups:

“[The group] runs independently but we have staff, two members of staff at the moment, who are on the committee”. [Library Staff]

“I see my role on the committee as a person who liaises really, between [the library] and the group”. [Library Staff]

“She sits in on our committee meetings and quite frankly she could be a member of the group. There’s no barrier there at all”. [Group Member]

On the other hand, staff are actively discouraged from taking any sort of role in the running of the groups:

“I do think it is a bad idea for library staff to actually have jobs on the committee”. [Librarian]

“I do think a Friends group needs to be independent. I would discourage staff from taking any official permanent role within it… If library staff are there [the group members] tend to defer to them”. [Head of Libraries]
“I think I would have been reprimanded very severely if I had attended any meetings”. [Library Staff]

Several librarians who were interviewed, commented in more depth on the damaging effect of library staff playing an active role in the running of the group. They felt that the group’s power with external organisations would be diminished if library staff were perceived to be influencing the group. The difficult positions that staff involved with FOL groups could find themselves in, were also acknowledged:

“In terms of staff influencing the service we have our own procedures. Also, staff are employed by the local authority, they are paid to do a job. A Friends group, working effectively, represents a particular type of interest, with a particular agenda… If library staff try to play on both sides, they end up doing neither side any real benefit”. [Head of Libraries]

“[The group] has an independent voice. They don’t agree with everything that we say. They can go along to a council meeting and say that they are there as [the group]. I can go along to a council committee and say I think we should have more emphasis on these services and the councillors will say, yes, well you would say that because you are a librarian who is bound to say that. Whereas if you’ve got some voters coming along and saying these things, or people who’s only axe to grind is that they want the service to be improved… If we can actually get the people who use the service to say we need more funding because we want these functions, then its a much stronger voice”. [Librarian]
5.3.2 Would FOL groups benefit from an umbrella organisation?

The situation in the United States highlights how beneficial an umbrella organisation can be. Friends of Libraries USA (FOLUSA) aim to ‘provide programs and publications to 2,800 member groups reaching hundreds and thousands of Americans, teaching citizens nationwide how to develop local library Friends to raise funds, be advocates and promote libraries’ (WWW1, 1998). Interviewees were asked whether the UK would benefit from such an organisation. The majority of responses were in favour because as one library staff member pointed out: “I think they work very much on their own. I don’t think they’ve got any guidelines. It’s very much a… hit and miss affair. They really don’t know where they stand… The goal posts are always moving and I think if there was an umbrella group they’d have more clout”. This comment refers to having more clout within the relationship between the library and the group. Other responses reached further:

“Councillors would give more weight to a group which liases with FOL groups overall, than one that liases totally with libraries and information services for their support”. [Librarian]

“I think it would be easier for groups to form and remain formed if there were an organisation you could work with”. [Librarian]

“It would be easier for me to find out what everybody else was doing if there was an umbrella group”. [Librarian]

“When we have anything to say we are a voice in the wilderness… and if all libraries had a group and we got together… as one voice, its got to have more standing than just one library”. [Group Member]
There were a few dissenting voices which link to the idea that FOL groups are essentially a selfish entity, concerned only for the well being of their own library. These comments should also be viewed in the context of the vulnerable nature a FOL group. There is a definite feeling of competition between the groups, which does not help the fragile nature of the existence of a group:

“Certainly yes, go to meetings and discuss things but I think each “Friends of” are wanting for their own… I can’t see that it would work”. [Library Staff]

“While some [groups] would welcome a consistency of advice, others are very localised and don’t want anything to do with anybody else. They don’t want to share their ideas, particularly for fundraising, just in case they are competing for external funding from the same body”. [Librarian]

“The problem is, how do you organise it? Bearing in mind that we’re all volunteers, we’re all giving up some of our time, and we’re all focused on our particular branch”. [Group Member]

Some group members have already made moves to at least making contacts with other groups, both locally and around the rest of the country:

“All I’ve said to other people in my position in other groups, is let’s at least exchange telephone numbers so that if one of us hits trouble, then we can call on the others”. [Group Member]

“We are trying to get everybody to agree to circulate a database of information, identifying who the different groups are, and what the contacts names and addresses are”. [Head of Libraries]
“What I have started doing now is writing an open letter to all the libraries stating… that we would be better as one voice”. [Group Member]

The possibility of an umbrella group, as the links become stronger between groups, is therefore a very real option.

5.3.3 Summary

- Library staff do sometimes take official positions on the committees of FOL groups.
- This was not recommended by all respondents. Staff can be placed in difficult positions and the independence of the group can be affected when dealing with external organisations.
- The majority of respondents would welcome the formation of an umbrella organisation for FOL groups.
- Some respondents felt that FOL groups were too focused on their own branch to benefit from an umbrella organisation.
5.4 THE ROLE OF THE GROUP

5.4.1 Advocates, fundraisers, volunteers or a quiet support group?

Dolnick (1987a p.139) writing of the situation in the United States, summarises what she sees as the role of a FOL group: ‘Friends of the Library groups are what the librarian chooses to make them: advocates, fund-raisers, volunteers or a quiet support group’. Whilst one librarian spoken to in the course of this study suggested that “the role is defined by the issue of the time”, the overwhelming evidence from the data collected in the interviews, is that FOL groups in this country perform three of the above four roles:

“It can fundraise… If the place is going to close, it can make issues. It can highlight, it can write to councillors, write to MPs. It can do the sort of political stuff which council employees can’t do”. [Librarian]

“Making sure the library stays open and providing books wherever we can, when we have the money and generally making it a pleasant library for people to want to come”. [Group Member]

“Sometimes it tends to be a ‘whinger’ group rather than a support group and I know the people who come along who are whinging have come across problems, but if all of them were pushed to the line that would say, ‘Yes, the librarians do a damn good job’”. [Group Member]

When asked what they saw as the role of a FOL group one library staff member said: “I think they’d be able to give us their opinions as to how the service is run and the quality of the service. We’re looking at the library service from the inside so its nice to get a viewpoint from the outside”. This role of user consultation is particular to the situation in the UK, and could be added to Dolnick’s American list, despite all the
previously discussed reservations about basing user consultation on a self-selecting FOL group.

5.4.2 Are FOL groups in this country a potential pool of volunteers?

Librarians and library staff in this country were overwhelmingly against a FOL groups in this country having a role as volunteers working in the library. The main reason given for this was that the unions in this country would not allow it:

“I don’t think we should have volunteer programmes. If there is work to be done we should be paying people to do it. If you have volunteer programmes you can start saying, well why are we paying people anyway?” [Librarian]

“I personally don’t think that’s the professional way forward… I would not want to encourage that”. [Librarian]

“It would threaten our jobs - that would be the main thing”. [Library Staff]

“Its not going to happen that they are even behind the counter because trade unions won’t listen to that, they won’t allow it”. [Librarian]

Group members were more enthusiastic about being used as volunteers, but again, they were well aware of the union issue:

“Unions are very particular about how involved you actually get. I personally would become a lot more involved and give a lot more time if there were opportunities. But I know that its difficult because of the job situation… unions perceive it as a threat”. [Group Member]
“It hasn’t been allowed up to now… We offered to do whatever we could to help but then the unions came up… We have done as much as we’ve been allowed to do. For instance when books come in we have been allowed to put the writing in them… put labels on them…” [Group Member]

The interesting thing about this issue is that both the heads of libraries questioned, were more keen on the use of volunteers than their staff:

“The Borough Council as a whole is just formulating a policy on volunteers and volunteering. Something will be put into the annual library plan… At this stage we anticipate extending the use of volunteers”. [Head of Libraries]

“The questions of volunteers is that the union’s position is ‘over dead bodies’ time, managerially I am increasingly interested in the concept of whether I can get local people in some way involved”. [Head of Libraries]

The link was not made by the heads of libraries to incorporating volunteering into a role of the FOL groups: “I don’t think Friends automatically become a pool of volunteers, although it may be for some. Any volunteers will tend to be people who are interested in working in libraries anyway”.

It is apparent that while the jury is out on the issue of volunteers in libraries, they are not associated with FOL groups in this country. It was proposed in the literature review that perhaps librarians in this country were cautious of FOL groups, because of their role as volunteers in the US. The evidence has shown that this is not the case.
5.4.3 **Summary**

- The roles of a FOL group in this country are: advocates, fundraisers, quiet support group, and user consultation.
- FOL groups in this country are not viewed as a pool of volunteers for the library.
- Volunteers are not commonly used in this country as unions do not allow them to take the place of paid staff.
- Professional and non-professional staff are very much against the use of volunteers in the public library service.
- Heads of libraries are interested in incorporating volunteers into public libraries in Sheffield and Rotherham.

5.5 **RELATIONSHIPS**

5.5.1 *Best of Friends?*

The relationship between the FOL group and the library is a vital one. The maintenance of a “friendly” relationship is important to the existence and success of the group. A friendly relationship means that the group and the library work in partnership with the library having a say over what the group does. This is essential because, as the literature review established, if the library fails to have a say over what their FOL group does, then its public relations image is in serious danger. This is because to an outsider, the FOL group is perceived as the library (Seaton, 1980). Anything that it does, reflects back on the library, and where this does not occur in partnership the effects can be damaging.
Evidence from the interviews suggests that there is a difference in relationships between the libraries and the groups that formed out of crisis with no input from the staff, and groups that formed with input from staff (although crisis still played a part in the formation). If staff were involved in the formative stages then it seems that there were fewer problems in the relationship between the group and the library. As the group members explain:

“I think we were quite tactful in the early days by getting together with [the senior librarian] to assure him that while we were a sort of watch dog group, we were totally supportive. We’re both working for the same end which is the best possible service for the people in the area. We have a very happy working relationship”. [Group Member]

“At the very early stages, I said that if we were going to liaise with the library management, what had to be remembered was that we were a voluntary group, we were Friends. We were not here to run the library and we were not here to make decisions as to how the library should be run”. [Group Member]

“I think they see that we are sincere in what we are doing. We are not trying to cause trouble, we are trying to help”. [Group Member]

5.5.2 Enemies into Friends?

The oldest group in this study was established before there was a move towards setting up FOL groups with input from management. As a result, when the group first came into being their relationship with the library was very difficult:
“Management didn’t like [the group] at all. Life was quite difficult. If anyone ever found out that we’d told them anything then we were hauled over the coals and it was made quite clear to us that we were not to co-operate. So it was very cloak and dagger at first”. [Library Staff]

“I think they could have resented us. We were perhaps getting too much into the system… Possibly at first they could have been a bit scared that they were letting us do things that we shouldn't do”. [Group Member]

“You get somebody who wants to do something for the library. They’ll work hard and raise a lot of money. It might not be in the interests of the library and the library may not want it at all. They might feel forced into accepting it”. [Librarian]

There then came a shift in opinion towards the desirability of FOL groups, as more libraries were threatened and FOL groups were seen as a way to offset the threats. It therefore became important for the group and the library to establish a more positive relationship and work together. The librarians and group members involved describe how they did this:

“We did talk to them and start to do things alongside them, or, if you want to put it another way, they started to do things alongside us…Because we spent more time explaining to them why we do what we do, like the pressures that we are under, like the fact the we don’t have a bottomless pit of funds, and we don’t chose to close a library… then they have started to develop more understanding”. [Librarian]

“We’ve now actually got the same goals… Our relationship has become more complementary as opposed to us being at loggerheads all the time. I think that’s really just by saying we are going to do something and doing it, rather than making a lot of promises”. [Librarian]
“I don’t come down particularly on any side. I’m looking for a way forward that’s agreeable to both of us. I do that through open management so the group really know what the situation is with the building, what the situation is with the book fund, what the situation is with the staffing. Its totally open management”. [Librarian]

“I think the library environment has been much better since we made some clear guidelines as to what I want”. [Librarian]

“I think the key is to be honest… If there are differences you need to get those differences out. The worst thing to do would be to have a group of people committed to the service and wanting to do something, and just kind of stringing them along whilst doing something else. Its much better to have a frank exchange of views and the try to work out what the solution is to everyone”. [Head of Libraries]

“We don’t always agree and we voice our opinions on things and they will discuss with us. They’ll argue the same as we will argue, but that’s how things get done”. [Group Member]

“The old saying that if you can’t beat them, join them, is very much in keeping. Its no good fighting them all the time, you have to work with them”. [Group Member]

5.5.3 Mixed loyalties?

All the groups involved in this study have positive relationships with their libraries now. The people who seem to be in the most difficult position in this relationship are the library staff who in effect stand between the professional staff and the group. The literature revealed that ‘they may be torn between pressures from [group] members, pressures which may be quite welcome for the sake of the local
service, and the pressure of other communities which the chief librarian has decided are of higher priority and which, no doubt, have been explained to all staff (Murison, 1979 p.49). One of the librarians interviewed, backed up this point of view: “The staff were in a bit of a difficult position because they felt torn between the group and wanting to support the group and wanting to keep the library open, which we all do, and possibly not being able to defend what they saw as policies that they were asked to implement by management. Knowing that they couldn’t do what they wanted to do all the time because we do have rules, that you can think what you like but when you are actually working for us you have to do and say certain things in line with our policies”.

The library staff in this study were asked if they ever experienced mixed loyalties when dealing with the FOL groups. Their answers were a resounding “yes”. Careful consideration therefore needs to be taken by library management towards the sometimes difficult position of their library staff. Being completely honest with the FOL group makes the lives the library staff easier. Library management should also be aware that as their library staff are the public face of the library, the FOL group will often go to them first with any queries or grievances:

“I did get into some trouble at some point because of something I’d said to them. I got hauled over the coals and [the group] did send letters in my defence”. [Library Staff]

“I do have to bite my tongue sometimes but I am for the library so I am for the public. In one way I’m against management”. [Library Staff]

“I very much want to help them but I think that I am constrained in what I can actually do because I’m in the middle. I’ve got management on one side and
group on the other and I don’t hold any authority. I’m treading on egg shells a lot of the time”. [Library Staff]

“I’ve experienced a lot of aggravation from both sides I have to say. I’m always a little bit scared that what I might say might get misinterpreted or that I might be misquoted. Now that we’ve got the management to take part in it as well, then I find that if they don’t agree with management then they come back to me and its an even more difficult position. Its a very strange position to be in when you don’t hold any authority and you hold very strong views”. [Library Staff]

“Its better now but there are still odd occasions when I have mixed loyalties and I do think that sometimes because [the group] don’t have a lot of clout, management can sometimes pull the wool over their eyes with certain things. I think that they are scared to react in the way they would have done five years ago because they don’t want to go back to the situation that they were in before”. [Library Staff]

The other slightly worrying thing for library management is that all the library staff spoken to in this study felt that if the chips were down and the library was threatened with closure, they would fight with the FOL group against the closure. Keeping a library open for the public was the most important thing for them:

“I do have to bite my tongue sometimes but I am for the library so I am for the public. In one way I’m against management”. [Library Staff]

“I think I’d fight with the user group and fight to keep the library open”. [Library Staff]
5.5.4 Summary

- Groups formed with input from the library have a good relationship with the library.
- A good relationship is characterised by good communication, honesty, clear and mutually agreed goals, and understanding.
- Library staff involved with the groups do experience mixed loyalties.
- Library staff expressed stronger allegiances to the group and the library, than to the objectives of senior management.

5.6 FUNDRAISING ISSUES

5.6.1 Should FOL groups raise money in the UK?

It is implied from a review of the literature pertaining to FOL groups across the world, that the most common reason for the setting up of a FOL group, is to raise additional funds for the library. However, countries such as the UK and Australia have historically placed less emphasis on supplementary funding as the government has met the library’s needs (Bennett, 1980). Three of the four groups studied here, have raised money for their libraries, with the fourth group currently considering how they will go about fundraising. Two of the groups raise money regularly. All interviewees were asked how they felt about raising money for the public library service and the overwhelming feeling was that while it was not ideal, it was appropriate to the world in which we are living:
“Well I think it's a sorry state when we have to. Certain things should be provided like books but in this economic climate you have to fight for what you can get. If you have to ask for money that’s it isn't it?” [Library Staff]

“The council should be providing the money for the books but what can you do?” [Library Staff]

“I don't mind them raising money for specific issues. I don't think they should be raising money for the sake of raising money”. [Librarian]

“I think the way of the world these days, unless sponsorship comes into libraries, fundraising is going to become a more and more important part. Hopefully, we’ll never have to raise money for books and things that should be there as a fundamental right but there are lots of other things that the library needs and if we can't have sponsorship in libraries then fundraising is going to have to be something of the future. I think the FOL groups are going to have to be there to back that up”. [Group Member]

One librarian felt that there was a difference between them raising money because they wanted to, and actually asking the group to raise money, or indeed, forming a group specifically to raise money: “If we are asking them to raise money then there is something woefully wrong with society”. [Librarian]

Library staff in particular felt that raising money showed the council what they should be doing, and that it made the libraries and their FOL groups more powerful in the long run:
“[Fundraising] shows the council that [the public] are not going to sit back and watch the service go downhill”. [Library Staff]

“In some ways its shamed the council. We’ve advertised and put that people have donated books, people have raised money for books”. [Library Staff]

“In a way it could also be seen as putting you in a more powerful position as well because, if you are saying to elected members “Look we have done this, we are willing to be positive and we have raised money, come on lets see you doing some of the same. We value the service, show us that you do”. So it could be, in a sense, a bargaining tool”. [Library Staff]

“We’re not too keen on the fundraising now as regards getting money… We do not feel that we should keep putting money into the library because we feel the local government should do that…” [Library Staff]

The elected members were therefore asked whether they had any problems with members of the public raising money for what is essentially a statutory service that they should be funding more adequately: “It is a statutory service but the problem with trying to define that, is although its statutory and we have to do it, the legislation doesn’t say at what sort of level… In the last 20 years, we have took cut after cut as a city council. Libraries, some years have been protected and others they haven’t… Personally I now think that we are at a stage with libraries that we can’t take any more cuts. We are falling below what I would call the minimum level in statutory terms… Its not as if its just a straight begging bowl. That’s not what its about. The people who are in these groups get a lot of enjoyment out of being in the library, meeting people that they perhaps wouldn’t meet otherwise. Getting out of the house particularly if they’re elderly and its a bit of fun for them raising money. If they don’t mind doing it and they can see the benefits, because it does go directly into the library that
they’re associated with, it doesn’t disappear into a council black hole, then yes, I’ve no problems with it at all”.

It does not appear that the council is particularly ‘shamed’ by the groups raising money. If anything, they are all for it and want to encourage other groups to raise money. Is this therefore going to be the way forward for libraries, that if they are in dire need of supplementary funding, one way to gain access to it is to form a FOL group? Is a situation going to develop in this country where FOL group are formed specifically to raise money? After all, one of the advantages of having a FOL group is that it opens up the door to external funding. CSUG received a grant from the Arts Council of £2,600 for which the library on its own would not have been eligible. WLAG gained English Heritage listed status for Walkley Library building which means that it is sometimes eligible for external grants. Public libraries can not ignore the fact that FOL groups open up this avenue, and that it can produce an extra cash boost for the libraries.

5.6.2 Is donating money to libraries in the UK ‘paying twice’?

It seems that the main difference between libraries here, and libraries in the US, is that it is easier to raise money for libraries in the US because people there give more readily to libraries. Wilkinson (1993 p.11) identified various motivations for people giving money to libraries in the US:

- Belief in the cause, i.e. that libraries are a ‘good thing’.
- Loyalty to the library.
- Desire to be associated with the library.
- Desire for immortality and personal recognition.
- Tax incentives.
- ‘Feel good’ factor.
People give to success.

Potts and Roper (1995 p.21) highlight the fact that ‘British people expect their taxes to be sufficient to pay for all services’. They often perceive that donating money to libraries is ‘paying twice’ for the service. What is interesting is that it was the fundraising experiences of group members at the central libraries that found this to be the case:

“Quite a few gave quite gladly but it’s not an easy thing to fundraise within the library because of the thing that’s grown up over the years that [libraries] are there for the community and they should be free and we shouldn’t have to pay for things that should be given as a right”. [Group Member]

“The fundraising we were doing was extremely slow. People who use the library tend to have this opinion that its council run, the council ought to be paying for it, why should we put anymore money into it - this sort of attitude - we came across this a lot”. [Group Member]

No one in the FOL groups at the branch libraries expressed this problem, but this could be because the group was specifically associated with saving the service. People may give more readily when they know that their library is, or has been under threat, than if a group was set up specifically to fundraise. It can also be suggested that people give more readily to their branch libraries because it is situated in their community, where they are more likely to experience the benefits themselves. There is less of a sense of community at a central library:
“Our [group] is quite small compared to some of the branch libraries. We get a different type of borrower here… People are in a hurry, they’re on their lunch hour…” [Library Staff]

“Its quite hard in a central library to get a strong group. There are just too many users”. [Head of Libraries]

5.6.3 Will the budget be cut?

Another problem with FOL groups raising funds for libraries is that there are very real fears, expressed by Skory (1989 p.320), ‘that budgets will be further cut if Friends groups are depended on to raise money’. Dolnick (1987a p.139) tried to reassure by stating that, ‘Friends raise money to enhance existing library programmes, not replace budget items’. However, opinion was split in the comments collected here. Some felt that the above fears were justified:

“There was a feeling that whatever we saved them in that budget, we wouldn’t get the equivalent back. This happened with the children’s furniture so the group said ‘no more furniture’”. [Library Staff]

“I think if I was a councillor I would be very aware of libraries in the area, which were raising money towards the bookfund because I might say in that case we can divert money”. [Librarian]

“If you raise too much money, then the council see that as a way of not paying the department what it should pay and that is why they will only target things like extra chairs, little things. They don’t see that as affecting the core service”. [Group Member]
Others had assurances from senior management that their budget would not be cut, whatever the amount of money raised by the group:

“I’m all for the groups raising money. The only constraints I think I’d put on are constraints on us. We shouldn’t reduce the spending we make on the library… On the whole I think that’s an important principle”. [Head of Libraries]

“It would always have to be a supplementary thing and not an expected part of funding”. [Library Staff]

“We had promises that that wouldn’t happen. We would still get our share of the library budget”. [Group Member]

5.6.4 Books versus equipment

For all the groups being studied here, the impetus to raise funds for the library came from the groups. This being the case, difficulties were often experienced when it came to deciding what to spend the money. After all, the groups had raised the money so why couldn’t they spend it on what they wanted? However, the libraries obviously want some say about what the money raised in their name is spent on. The main difficulty surrounds the question of whether FOL groups should raise money to buy books for the library. Three of the four groups in this study do not raise money for books, preferring instead to buy equipment:
"I think we’d want to buy actual designated items and flag them up as having been bought by the group. I don’t really like the idea of the group just buying books that become anonymous". [Librarian]

“You’d like to think that however bad it gets, books are the thing that we ought to be able to continue to buy. I find it more useful in other ways because the things that I’m most looking to supplement are equipment budgets which are tiny”. [Librarian]

“It might be quite significant to the groups in terms of the group themselves its a tangible, visible indication that they are there and that they’ve been active”. [Head of Libraries]

“We decided that we wouldn’t [buy books]. In the early stages we were quite willing to, but then we talked to library management about this and they pointed out that the books in the library service are not particular to one branch… Most people seemed to say that they wouldn’t want to subscribe to books that would finish up [elsewhere]”. [Group Member]

This final comment refers to a problem that was encountered by the FOL group that do buy books for their library. From the very beginning the group was quite insistent that they would raise money for books, but this caused problems as they wanted the books that they purchased to remain in the library. Sheffield Libraries and Information use a computerised issue system that does not allow books to remain in just one library. Books can be requested by users at different locations within the system:
“We had terrific arguments about it. We were told that the books would stay 
at Walkley and we took it to mean that they would be there right from the very 
beginning. All [management] meant was that they would come back to 
Walkley when they had been borrowed”. [Group Member]

“That upset quite a few people because [it was] decided they would have to 
go to all the Sheffield area - not just [our] library. That upset a lot of people 
and we lost quite a few of our volunteers”. [Group Member]

The group still buys books for the library although they were 
discouraged from doing so last year, when no books were bought for 
the whole of Sheffield Libraries and Information. Once again the 
library staff sided with the group against management:

“I think it’s sad that they are restricted in what they can spend [their money] 
on. They would very much like to spend more money on books and they’ve 
been told not to. Our management tend to suggest what they should spend 
their money on and I’m not altogether happy with that… I think that things 
management suggest they spend the money on are not totally relevant to 
what we need. We’re in contact with the public who come in, we know what 
the public want. They don’t particularly want computers and web sites. They 
don’t want a fax machine which is what we’ve got. A photocopier they would 
have liked. We’re more in tune with the public while management are more 
in tune with their own desires and aspirations ”. [Library Staff]

“Because of our not having stock that people want to read, our readership 
falls, it’s a downward spiral. So if they put more books in we’d get more 
people in, wouldn’t we? Then if they wanted to put us under threat again, 
more people would fight it. I think that a [FOL] group should be putting things 
into the library that encourage people to use the library, and I feel that this 
basically is books”. [Library Staff]
However, library management has to see the wider picture whilst still encouraging the group in its association with the library. As one Head of Libraries pointed out, “As long as its spent within our stock policy and those policies which affect particular service points, then fine”. Sheffield Libraries and Information operate a tiering policy, which means that different service points across Sheffield offer different levels of service. By buying books for “their” library, the FOL group is in danger of undermining that policy. As one librarian pointed out: “We wouldn’t want [this library] to be a mini-Central Library’.

One point of view that was expressed by several people was that why couldn’t the other libraries raise money to buy books for their own library? According to them, other libraries have as much ability to form their own groups and reap the benefits:

“I don’t see why the money [raised] can’t be fed back into the book fund for [the library]. It would perhaps encourage other libraries to set up their own Friends to raise money”. [Group Member]

“The people of [this community] had actually put the money there for this particular community, not for other communities. I think that every other community has the same opportunity and why should they benefit from the money that people have given [here]?” [Group Member]

“We were very very angry… because as we said, all the other libraries could form groups like ours and they could all be providing books without having to depend on us”. [Group Member]

What this point of view fails to acknowledge is that not every library community has the same ability to form FOL groups, or to raise money.
If the library authority agreed with these opinions then they would be creating a library system of “haves” and “have-nots”. It is therefore up to the library management to ensure that this does not happen:

“Its a statutory service and everything should be provided from the money raised through taxes. I want equality of service across the [system]. I feel everything should be provided, decent tables and a good book supply. Having said that, we haven’t been having a good book supply… and so therefore I can only think that its got to be a good thing if they’re raising money. What worries me is if the library next door isn’t having money raised for it”. [Librarian]

“From a management point of view, I wouldn’t want to think that [this] library has it all and another library doesn’t. We’re in a society where we’re wanting to give equal opportunities to everybody”. [Librarian]

“We’re one service and any fund-raising which is done in any part of a library ought to be for the whole library service. There are a few libraries where the communities do have disposable income where they can give [money] to buy books. You can go to another part of the city where people have no disposable income but they might bring second hand books which fall below our standards… and in their eyes they are helping. So I don’t think you should always focus on money”. [Librarian]

“It depends on the community that you’re in. If you’re in an area where people have got disposable time because they are financially comfortable… then they are more likely to help with good causes. If you’re in an area where people have got disposable time because they’re unemployed… then the library becomes a secondary thing because basically their day to day existence is more important”. [Librarian]
It therefore appears that the groups have to make a choice. They can
raise money just for their branch, and spend that money on equipment
specific to that branch, or they can raise money to spend on books that
benefit the library service as a whole. Or they can not raise money at
all. There is no room in this country, for libraries within the same
service to have better services and facilities than others, just because
they have a FOL group.

5.6.5 Summary

- All respondents felt that raising money for libraries is not ideal,
  but it is appropriate to the world in which we live.
- Elected members are not ‘shamed’ by groups raising money -
  they are all for it.
- FOL groups gain access to external funding that the library, as
  a statutory service, does not.
- People in this country who give money to libraries, can feel that
  they are paying for the service twice.
- There are real fears that the library's budget will be cut if money
  is raised for the library. Some groups have official assurances
  that this will not happen.
- If the group wants the money raised to specifically benefit their
  library, they must buy furniture and equipment.
- If group wants to buy books, they must be aware that the books
  will be available to the whole of the library service.
- It is not appropriate for one library to have more than another
  library, just because they have a FOL group.
5.7 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF FOL GROUPS

5.7.1 Advantages

As a way of summarising the issues covered during the interviews, people were asked what they saw as the main advantages to the library of having a FOL group. Some comments covered the issues already discussed:

“They are there to fight should any threat occur and they are there to put some funding in. They do give a higher profile to the library than you might otherwise have had because they go around talking about what they’re doing”. [Library Staff]

“There’s the possibility of external funding… There’s the advocacy role that they have, which is, as I see it, the most important part. They are a practical demonstration of what we say to councillors: the people care about the service, because they are stood there saying they care about the service. They are an advert to other people in the area, to say have you considered using the library”. [Librarian]

“Libraries are part of the community and if you can get as many people involved in your FOL group, it makes the library more integral to the community”. [Librarian]

“Libraries are one of the most important buildings in the community… They are a wonderful institution and I think that the Friends of the Library group can only do good to promote what is very important. They can be there to voice any objection to anything that would cut down the service that we’ve got, any nearer to the bone than it already is”. [Group Member]
Other responses were more specific, with several people listing user consultation as the main advantage to the library of having a FOL group:

”[They help] us to provide a fuller service because of the links we form. It gives a broader understanding of what people want, what their needs are, what their expectations are. The financial aspect is, I think, secondary”.  
[Library Staff]

“They give us their opinions and we try to improve the quality of the service. They actually see things that we don’t”.  [Library Staff]

“While ever we’re there, although we’re only very small, they have got people who’s opinions they can ask”.  [Group Member]

“The ability to use them as a consultation”.  [Head of Libraries]

“I see them being useful for a number of things. Predominantly because as a council we’re providing services. Before we provide those services we need to know what services people want… Its a consultation exercise”.  [Elected Member]

The other main advantage that was focused on, was the role of the group to make sure that the library remained open, offering a specific level of service. Should the library be threatened in the future, the group would already be in existence:
“Its to make sure the library remains in existence and to be alert to any reduction in its facilities. Either in the number of books coming in or the number of hours that the library is open”. [Group Member]

“The fundraising is secondary. The thing that we feel that we need to be here for is in case there is a closure threat”. [Group Member]

“I think in the context of this library its a potential pressure group if the threat renews itself. I think that is its biggest asset that I see”. [Librarian]

“To me it would be a group that you could go to when there are perhaps problems with the service… for them to motivate some action”. [Library Staff]

Only three respondents cited fundraising as the main advantage of having a FOL group at a library:

“I think that's the money”. [Head of Libraries]

“As a voluntary group they have access to external funds that a statutory service doesn't. Any fundraising they do is helpful”. [Elected Member]

“Its useful where they do actually raise money to spend within the library. So it creates a partnership as well”. [Elected Member]

Others mentioned fundraising as a useful spin-off to having a FOL group. It is worth noting that the people citing fundraising as a primary advantage were a head of libraries and both elected members spoken to for this study. Its a little bit worrying that those people who control the finances of the libraries, are focusing so heavily on the fundraising aspect of FOL groups. Funding to libraries is obviously not going to
improve if they see fundraising as the primary advantage of a FOL group.

5.7.2 Disadvantages

Interviewees were then asked whether there were any disadvantages to the library of having a FOL group. Responses focused on different issues. The first was the disadvantage of using a FOL group for user consultation:

“I do think we could actually get to the point where we’re backing away from our responsibility to make decisions and make choices and use our own judgement. It’s a fine line”. [Librarian]

“They can put forward an opinion that isn’t representative of the users though it looks as though it is”. [Librarian]

“It creates more work in a sense, its very necessary work but it creates more work because if we’re going to have this two-way process, if we’re going to listen, if it’s not just going to be done on the surface. If we’re going to listen then of course, as a staff we have to then get together and say, well you know, what about this, is this realistic? We have to start talking back and maybe making changes. So that involves work obviously, and time because it puts more pressure on us as a staff. If could be seen as a disadvantage but it has a positive effect”. [Library Staff]

Another worrying disadvantage, referred to the issue of ownership of the library. It was felt that perhaps sometimes the group “forgot” just who ran the library, and that it is there for all the community:
“I felt that the library was being taken over by fundraising, rather than keeping it to specific times of the year. I specifically requested that they would raise money on events but not be raising it all year round. I felt there would be more impact if they raised it over two days than always asking people to give money. So we had a “discussion” about that and the library was tidied up”. [Librarian]

“One of the other issues, of which there is a tension there, as yet unresolved, is that there are occasional times when [the group] appears to take over the library. But it’s not quite reached that stage yet where we have to really do something about it”. [Head of Libraries]

“We tend to wonder sometimes who runs the library. We’ve all had occasions where we’ve been told [by the group] that we’re not doing the right thing. If you’re sitting having a coffee break then they’re quite likely to just burst in. You don’t feel like the library is yours”. [Library Staff]

“I think there might be people out in the community that find using the library more difficult when they are actually having a function. I think some people don’t want to see the library used as a point where you sell things all the time”. [Librarian]

The irony is that one elected member felt that groups who engaged in fundraising had “more of a feeling… of owning the library”. The evidence from the librarians is that they do not really want to promote this feeling too much because the library belongs to everybody, not just the members of the FOL group.

One librarian felt that the main disadvantage of having a FOL group was that: “They can spread misinformation. They are a group of people who talk and gossip. People outside the group may think that they are privy to some knowledge that others aren’t and therefore if
they say something it must be right’. This also links to the issue of ownership of the library because if they did not act as if they owned the library, then perhaps they would not be perceived by other users to have a direct line to senior management. Unfortunately it is human nature to gossip and this disadvantage is not particular to FOL groups.

Several respondents expressed a very real worry that by encouraging FOL groups they were raising user’s expectations of a level of service that they could not deliver. This opinion was particular to the library authority that was cultivating groups for the purpose of user consultation. Is it fair to have FOL groups that ask the users for their opinions on the service, when nothing can be done about the service because of financial restrictions:

“They all generally have a shopping list of services that they would like to see in their library, that we can’t meet. We can raise expectations too much”. [Librarian]

“But there’s a danger, particularly in these times that if you ask users what they want from the library service, that you could be setting up expectations that you can’t fulfil”. [Head of Libraries]

“You’ve got to have a good service to offer. If you can’t offer them help [as a volunteer] because of political reasons and the union. If you can’t offer them money because they see it as a substitute for what they ought to be getting anyway - what are you doing to do?” [Group Member]

“I think maybe some staff are a little bit cynical. They think we are offering some sort of expectation that we can’t really support”. [Librarian]
5.7.3 Are FOL groups a ‘good thing’?

Finally, people were asked whether they though FOL groups were a ‘good thing’ or were they, as suggested in the literature, ‘more trouble than they were worth?’ (The Commoner, 1992 p.784). Not one person interviewed felt that they were more trouble than they were worth. Even those who were more negative during their interviews than others, still felt that FOL groups were a ‘good thing’. However, in expressing that they were a ‘good thing’, they also expressed a framework of requirements that need to be in place before benefits can be experienced:

“I think they’re a good thing but I do think if you’re having something like this, rather than it just be set up and meander along for a long time with no rules, no regulations, no guidance, it can get out of hand. If you’re going to have something like this you do need very clear guidelines”. [Library Staff]

“I think they are a ‘good thing’… they only become more trouble than they are worth when nobody quite knows what the rules are. Because at the end of the day, those people care enough to come and do something. I think that we must never forget that people who come in and aren’t members of those groups, have as much say”. [Librarian]

The evidence of those involved with FOL groups suggests that there must be rules about the role of the group and where it fits into the overall strategy of the library authority, before any real benefits can be experienced.
5.7.4 *Should public libraries in the UK cultivate FOL groups?*

The most common reason for the formation of a FOL group is as the result of a threat or crisis to the service. It therefore follows that one of the reasons a library might like to cultivate a group, is to have that group already in existence in case of a future threat or crisis. The difficulty lies in cultivating a group when there is no threat or crisis to focus on:

”I’ve put it in my service plan that we’re going to put another two in my libraries, this financial year… But there’s no threat of closure so you wonder what you’re going to hang it on”. [Librarian]

”I haven’t worked out how to cultivate them. All the group managers have been given a broad commitment to go and find some Friends groups. But what’s the trigger? I need a champion in each library. Someone who’s prepared…” [Head of Libraries]

Not one person interviewed came out completely in favour of FOL groups. Whilst they are overwhelmingly viewed as a ‘good thing’, most people still had reservations. As one head of libraries explained:

“We’ve gone for them primarily because they began to exist and if people are that interested why should we discourage them? We just have to find a way to live with them, and them with us”.

Several people commented that the cultivation of groups could only be successful if rules and boundaries were set up so that all the parties involved, knew exactly where they stood. This would have to be done alongside an awareness that too many rules and regulations might discourage people from taking on the responsibility of running the group:
“If we had an example of a group that was working well then promote that. But not just for the sake of them. You have to be very clear about what they’re doing and how they fit in”. [Head of Libraries]

“There has to be a strategy. You’ve got to say what ‘Friends’ is about”. [Group Member]

“If we’re going to encourage Friends of Libraries then I think management ought to say we want FOL groups and we want aims and objectives and what is, and what isn’t permissible. We’ve gone along this road for some time and its quite difficult dealing with things that occur when you don’t actually know what the main line is”. [Library Staff]

The most interesting problem raised by just one librarian, was that in cultivating groups, it could be seen by outside observers that the group was being manipulated by the library: “It loses its authority when talking to elected members and senior management because we are seen to be in bed with them, if you like - too close”. [Librarian]

It is apparent that allowing the group to have its own voice, within a strict set of guides and boundaries, is the way forward. Unfortunately, it also seems that the threat or crisis has a large role to play in the success of a group in this country. Without that “trigger”, the experiences of people interviewed for this study, were that it was very difficult to motivate people to become involved with a FOL group.
5.7.5 **Summary**

- Advantages were listed as: the groups are already in existence should a threat occur; they raise the profile of the library; they are a means of user consultation; they raise funds; and they lobby councillors.

- Disadvantages were listed as: the groups can put forward opinions that are not representative of the library community; they can appear to take over the library; they can associate the library too strongly with fundraising; they can spread misinformation; and the existence of a group can raise users expectations.

- FOL groups were overwhelmingly viewed as a ‘good thing’.

- Without a threat or crisis, it is incredibly difficult to cultivate a FOL group.

- Rules and guidelines at the beginning make life easier in the long run.

- If cultivation by the library is too obvious, the group loses its political autonomy.
CHAPTER 6. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE RESULTS

Whilst it was most important to talk to the people directly involved with FOL groups, it was also seen as important to talk to library users, to get an idea of the influence of FOL groups on the library community. Were the users aware that the groups existed? Were there any revealing reasons for their non-participation in the groups? In order to answer these questions it was decided to carry out a short interview schedule, on two different days (including a Saturday morning) at each library in the study. A copy of the interview schedule can be found in Appendix B. A summary of the people spoken to is as follows:

Total Distribution of Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>No. of People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td></td>
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No. of People
In all the interview schedules, more females were encountered than males. This suggests that there are more active female library users at the libraries in this study, than active male library users. This was especially found to be the case in Herringthorpe where the library is surrounded by sheltered housing for the elderly, and the majority of respondents were female from the 65+ age range.

No one from the 14-25 age range entered Herringthorpe library whilst the interview schedule was being conducted, and one-third of those not aware of the existence of WLAG, were from the 14-25 age range. It can therefore be suggested from this information, that people in this age range are less frequent library users at the libraries in this study.

### 6.1 Sheffield Central Lending Library

This interview schedule was carried out on a Tuesday and Saturday morning. 150 people were spoken to in total, of which 68 were male and 86 female. Only 10 people were spoken to from the 14-25 age range.
range, while other respondents were distributed equally between the remaining age ranges. The results are as follows:

Are you aware that there is a FOL Group called Central Services User Group at Sheffield Central Lending Library?

As the chart clearly shows, the majority of people questioned were not aware of the existence of CSUG. This opinion spanned both male and female respondents from all age ranges. It can therefore be assumed that the majority of library users of Sheffield Central Library are unaware of the existence of the group. This lack of public awareness relates to the fact that the group is primarily a user group, which is not concerned with the high profile of either the group or the library. However, if the group do make some move towards becoming specifically a FOL group, or if a separate group forms, they will have to pay careful attention to publicity. This links in with the idea put forward during the in-depth interviews, that it is harder to maintain a FOL group in a central library, compared to a branch library with a geographically defined community.
6.2 Rotherham Central Library

This interview schedule was carried out on a Thursday and a Saturday morning. 150 people were spoken to, of which 74 were male and 76 female. Only eight people were spoken to from the 14-25 age range. The rest were distributed between the age ranges of 26-45 (27%), 46-65 (39%) and 65+ (29%). The results are as follows:

![Bar chart showing awareness of FOL Group at Rotherham Central Library]

Approximately one-fifth of the people questioned were aware of the existence of the Friends of Rotherham Library. This is slightly more than Sheffield Central Library, and is probably due to the fact that the group was specifically formed and publicised as a FOL group. Half of the people who knew that there was a group at the library were from the 65+ age range. Of those who were unaware that the group existed, two-thirds were male, primarily from the 26-65 age range. None of the people who were aware of the existence of the group were members themselves.
The main reasons that respondents gave for their non-participation in FRCL were that they were too busy, they were not interested, or that they just had not thought about joining. It could therefore be concluded that by publicising the group a little more, FRCL might attract new members and therefore ensure a broader base of support for the library. Either way, should Rotherham encounter a threat to their service, FRCL would have support and awareness from within the community to call upon.

### 6.3 Herringthorpe Library

This interview schedule was carried out on a Tuesday afternoon and a Saturday morning. 25 people were spoken to, of which 4 were male and 21 female. Over half of these were from the 65+ age range. This reflects the population of the surrounding area. The results are as follows:
Two-thirds of people spoken to at Herringthorpe Library knew of the existence of the Friends Group. These respondents were primarily female from the 65+ age range. Of those remaining respondents who were unaware of the existence of the group, these were again primarily female, but from all age ranges, except the 14-25 age range. No one entered the library from this age range whilst the interview schedule was being performed.
“Other” reasons and comments given by respondents: “I don’t like it where there is a gang of women gossiping”.

Of the people who were aware of the existence of FHL, one-third were members of the group. Those who were not members gave a variety of reasons why this was the case, the most common being that they were too busy. The user who did not like it when there is a gang of women gossiping, highlights the issue that a FOL group can sometimes be seen as a clique that takes over the library. This issue was also mentioned in the in-depth interviews. In Herringthorpe, the group is made up mainly of pensioners so they could be seen as exclusive to those not from that social grouping.

6.4 Walkley Library

This interview schedule was carried out on a Friday afternoon and Saturday morning. 50 people were spoken to, of which 15 were male and 35 female. This does not reflect the gender distribution of the area. The people spoken to were distributed evenly between the age ranges with the highest proportion of respondents from the 26-45 age range. The results are as follows:

Are you aware that there is a FOL Group at this Library called Walkley Library Action Group?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. of People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>15</td>
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</table>
Approximately two-third of respondents were aware of the existence of WLAG. Of these, over two-thirds were female from all age ranges. Just 10 men were aware of the existence of the group. One-third of those people who were not aware that the group existed, were from the 14-25 age range.

![Bar Chart: Reasons for Non-Participation in Walkley Library Action Group]

“Other” reasons and comments given by respondents:

“I’m too busy but I really support it in principle”.

“I’m sorry that I am too busy to be a member. Without WLAG this library would have closed and I think that they are a wonderful thing. Public libraries should definitely cultivate FOL Groups”.

“I don’t know enough about it - when they meet for example. I do think libraries should become more like community centres though”.
Many of the people who were not members of the group for different reasons, expressed their support for the group. This implies that if the library encounters a threat to its service in the future, the core members of the group will have a broad base of support to call upon from within the community. This confirms the idea that just because you are not a member of the group, does not mean that you are not a “Friend of the Library”. People support the library by using it, and in Walkley they also support their FOL group by doing things like purchasing raffle tickets or attending the Christmas Fair.

The respondent who thought that the group was just for “old ‘uns” illustrates again the problem of a group appearing to be a clique. This problem seems particular to the groups at the branch libraries, where the groups have a higher profile through coffee mornings and fundraising events. If the groups seriously want to improve the variety of their membership, then they must think carefully about how they present themselves to other library users in the library environment.

Reasons given for non-participation in the group were primarily that the respondents were too busy. Three-quarters of these were female, from the 26-45 age range.

One person was encountered who had withdrawn from the group. She explained that this was because she “didn’t like them sending books to other libraries that we had bought”. This confirms the assertion from the group that they lost money and donations when books bought by

“I don’t really know how the group operates. I thought it was just old ‘uns drinking coffee”.

“I’ve got other things to do but I do think they are a good thing”.

95
WLAG were placed on the library system, making them available to users across Sheffield, not just in Walkley where the group wanted them to remain.

6.5 Summary of Results

People at the central libraries in Rotherham and Sheffield are less likely to be aware that there are FOL groups operating at their libraries. More people at Rotherham, were aware that there was a FOL group, compared with Sheffield where the group is not advertised or publicised as a FOL group.

This compares with the groups at the branch libraries where two-thirds of respondents knew there was a group at their library. This suggests that approximately two-thirds of all library users in Herringthorpe and Walkley know that there is a FOL group at their library. This evidence links with the idea that it is easier to maintain a group at a branch library that has a geographically defined community, than at a central library where the range of users is more diverse. It is also interesting to note that these two libraries raise funds for their libraries regularly. People are more likely to remember the existence of the group is they have donated money to it.

Most of the people questioned who were aware of the groups, were too busy to become involved with the FOL group at their library. Walkley library users exhibited the most verbal support for the group through the additional comments that they made during the interview schedule. This heightened awareness probably has something to do with the large notice board in the entrance lobby that reminds people of the existence of the group, and also because of the vigorous campaign
that accompanied the launch of the group, and its continued high profile in the surrounding area.
CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Reflections on Friends of the Library Groups in the UK

This dissertation set out to establish the importance and influence of FOL groups in Sheffield and Rotherham. It found that whilst everyone involved in the study felt that FOL groups were a ‘good thing’, they were not something to be entered into without careful consideration.

FOL groups flourish in the environment of the USA where funding for libraries is different to the situation here in the UK. It would take a change in the way that libraries are funded to allow the groups to flourish here. The evidence suggests that the prime catalyst for the formation of a group in this country is a crisis or threat to the library. Without that threat or crisis it is difficult to cultivate a FOL group. If the library is secure and well funded then it does not need the support mechanism of a FOL group.

In Rotherham, FOL groups are being formed in order to consult the users of the library. If a group is to be cultivated for this reason, then that group needs to represent the library community. Whilst a truly representative group is not realistic, a FOL group should at least aim to reflect the library community. In this way, the library can use the group as a ‘starting point’ for user consultation. It was also suggested during the course of this dissertation that a FOL should be representative even when it is not being used for user consultation, so that it does not appear exclusive to other users of the library.

The experience of the people involved with FOL groups in Sheffield and Rotherham, established that it is easier to raise money at a branch
library when the service has at some point been threatened. Those trying to raise funds at the central library encountered users who felt that they had already given money to the library service through their taxes. Considering the problems encountered at one library, it is advisable not to buy books for the library. This is enforced by the fact that the other groups in this study do not buy books for their libraries, preferring instead to purchase furniture or equipment, or hold off from raising funds at all. Professional staff spoken to for this dissertation, overwhelmingly felt that it was inappropriate for one library to have more books or better services, simply because they had a FOL group at that library.

In all, FOL groups are a 'good thing' worth considering in this world of library cutbacks and closures. However, without a threat or crisis, it remains to be established how a group can be successfully cultivated and maintained.

7.2 Summary of Main Conclusions

- It is easier to maintain a FOL group at a branch library than a central library.

- People give money more readily to a FOL group at a branch library where there is less a feeling of paying for the service twice.

- The groups with the highest profiles had the support of their communities, even though the make-up of the group did not represent that community.
• FOL groups at the central libraries had relatively low profiles within the library community.

• A FOL group should aim to represent its community for two reasons: firstly, it may be used for official or unofficial user consultation; and secondly, it may appear exclusive to potential members and other users of the library, if it is made up of one particular social grouping.

• A FOL group in the UK is likely to be used for some form of user consultation.

• A FOL group in the UK is not seen as a potential pool of volunteers.

• People join FOL groups primarily to save the service, although it does have the potential to become a significant part of their social lives.

• It is difficult to cultivate or maintain a FOL group in this country without a threat or crisis to motivate people.

• The existence of a FOL group is fragile. The group is likely to fold if the committed core members leave, if the threat or crisis goes away, if people move away, if people become bored, if people are apathetic, if the relationship with the library is difficult, and if the group has nothing specific to do.

• Professional staff are wary about the political influence of a FOL group as their demands can upset the balance of the library service as a whole.
The groups feel that they have no significant political power.

Library staff experience mixed loyalties, but their allegiances are to the group and the continued existence of the library, rather than to the library management.

The formation of an umbrella organisation would be welcomed by most, whilst some people felt that FOL groups were too selfish to share ideas and experiences.

Fundraising was seen as a secondary role of a FOL group by all respondents, except both elected members and a head of libraries who saw it as the most important role.

Professional staff were wary of one library having a better service or facilities, just because they had a FOL group.

Ownership of the library is an issue that needs to be clarified. The library belongs to the whole community and the FOL group should not be allowed to act as if it owns the library.

Some felt that where FOL groups are being used for user consultation, the expectations of those users could be raised by the presence of a FOL group. The professional staff were worried that they were not going to be able to meet satisfy those expectations.
FOL groups were perceived as a ‘good thing’ providing certain ‘criteria for success’ were adhered to. They are not more trouble than they are worth.

7.3 Criteria For Success

Dolnick (1996 p.29) published ‘Ten Commandments’ for FOL groups and their libraries in the USA. Those commandments have been adapted here, to reflect the situation in the UK, and the findings of this dissertation:

1. All levels of library staff must wholeheartedly co-operate with a FOL group.

2. All parties involved must recognise the time commitment necessary to both form and maintain the group.

3. When the group is formed, rules and guidelines must be established and mutually agreed upon by all parties.

4. The group committee must be enthusiastic and dedicated to their role, as defined by mutual consent.

5. The group must be aware of the position of their library within the library service as a whole.

6. Communication between all parties must be open and honest.
7. The group must be aware that the library is for everyone in the community, and where possible should aim to reflect that community.

8. A FOL group should only be a ‘starting point’ for user consultation.

9. Library staff should not be placed in difficult positions, by either the library management or the FOL group.

10. Groups do not have to raise money. Where groups do raise money, it is advisable not to spend that money on books.

Further consideration should be given to:

- the formation of an umbrella group.
- the profile of the group within the community.
- the difficulty of cultivating or maintaining a group without a threat or crisis to motivate people.
- the fact that groups are primarily concerned with their own library.
- the political influence of the group.
- the wisdom of having library staff on the committee of the FOL group.
- what the money raised by groups will be spent on.
- what external funds the groups are eligible for.
- whether raising money will result in the library budget being cut.
- the degree to which the group reflects the library community.
the extent to which library influence on the group is perceived by external organisations.

7.4 Recommendations for Further Research

- It would be useful to conduct a survey of public library authorities across the country, to establish the current state of play with FOL groups in the UK.

- All the FOL groups in this dissertation have been established for at least one year. More insight might be gained through the interviewing of people in the throes of setting up a FOL group as a response to a threat or crisis. Something could perhaps be learned from the immediate difficulties experienced in that situation.

- It would be useful to include in a study of this type, experiences from a group that did not sustain its existence.

- It would be interesting to consider the feasibility and viability of the setting up of an umbrella organisation for FOL groups in the UK.


APPENDIX A. IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

SECTION 1. QUESTIONS FOR LIBRARIANS

- 1a. How long have you been involved with the group?

How a group forms

- 2a. How did this group form?
- 3a. How does the way the group formed affect the way that it operates? i.e. independent or influenced by library staff?
- 4a. Is the group self-governing?
- 5a. How representative is the group of the library community?
- 6a. Is it necessary for a FOL group to be representative of the community?
- 7a. What role does the library play in publicising the group?
- 8a. What part does the library play in attracting new members?
- 9a. Would FOL groups benefit from an umbrella organisation like FOLUSA?
- 10a. Why do you think people join the group?

Role of group

- 11a. Does the group have aims and objectives?
- 12a. If YES, what part did the library play in deciding what these should be?
- 13a. How were they decided upon?
- 14a. When were they decided upon?
• 15a. Is the group working towards anything specific at the moment?

• 16a. To what extent do they ask for your help?

• 17a. Are you able to help them?

• 18a. Do you want to help them?

• 19a. What do you see as the role of the group? (Explore whether they are advocates, volunteers, fund-raisers, quiet support)

• 20a. Do you suggest things for them to do? If so, what?

• 21a. What would you like them to do that they are not already doing?

• 22a. How much staff time does the group take up?

• 23a. In the USA, FOL groups operate an extensive volunteer programme. Do you see this as appropriate to the situation in this country?

• 24a. Should a FOL group be viewed as a user group?

• 25a. If NO, how should the group be utilised by the library?

Fundraising

• 26a. Does the group raise money for the library?

• 27a. If YES, how much?

• 28a. Where does the initiative come from?

• 29a. How do you feel about them raising money?

• 30a. Are you constrained as to what you spend the money on? (Please expand)

• 31a. If NO, would you like them to raise money?

Relationships
32a. How would you describe the library’s relationship with the FOL group?
33a. Has it always been like this?
34a. How do you feel about their association with the library?
35a. Do you act upon things that the group suggests?
36a. Who holds the power in the relationship?
37a. What are the feelings of your library staff towards the needs of the group?

Policy
38a. What is the general library policy towards FOL groups?
39a. Has anything happened historically to influence this?
40a. To what extent does the FOL group feel that they can influence general library policy?

Problems
41a. What do you see as the main advantages of having a FOL group?
42a. And the disadvantages?
43a. Under what circumstances do you think the group would fold?
44a. Have you experienced any specific problems with the group?
45a. Do you feel that the group members expect preferential treatment?
46a. Do you think FOL groups are a ‘good’ thing or are they more trouble than they are worth?

SECTION 2. QUESTIONS FOR LIBRARY STAFF
1b. How long have you been involved with the group?
How a group forms

- 2b. How does the way that the group formed affect the way that it operates?
- 3b. How representative is the group of the library community?
- 4b. Do you think it is necessary for the group to be representative of the community?
- 5b. What role does the library play in publicising the group?
- 6b. What part does the library play in attracting new members?
- 7b. Why do you think people join the group?
- 8b. Would FOL groups benefit from an umbrella organisation like FOLUSA?

Role of group

- 9b. Is the group working towards anything specific at the moment?
- 10b. To what extent do they ask for your help?
- 11b. Are you able to help them?
- 12b. Do you want to help them?
- 13b. What do you see as the role of the group? (For example, advocates, fund-raisers, volunteers, quiet support group)
- 14b. Do you suggest things for them to do? If so, what?
- 15b. What would you like them to do that they are not already doing?
- 16b. How much staff time does the group take up?
- 17b. In the USA, FOL groups operate an extensive volunteer programme. Do you see this as appropriate to the situation in this country?
• 18b. Does the group take up a lot of your time?
• 19b. Should a FOL group be viewed as a user group?
• 20b. If NO, how should the group be utilised by the library?

**Fundraising**

• 21b. Does the group raise money for the library?
• 22b. If YES, how much?
• 23b. Where did the initiative come from?
• 24b. How do you feel about them raising money?
• 25b. If NO, would you like them to raise money?

**Relationships**

• 26b. How would you describe the library’s relationship with the FOL group?
• 27b. Has it always been like this?
• 28b. Do you feel the library values the group?
• 29b. How do you negotiate the relationship between the library and the group?
• 30b. To what extent do you experience mixed loyalties?
• 31b. Who holds the power in the relationship?

**Policy**

• 32b. To what extent does the FOL group feel that they can influence general library policy?
Problems

- 33b. What do you see as the main advantages of having a FOL group?
- 34b. And the disadvantages?
- 35b. Under what circumstances do you think the group would fold?
- 36b. Have you experienced any specific problems with the group?
- 37b. Do you feel that the group members expect preferential treatment?
- 38b. Do you think FOL groups are a ‘good’ thing, or are they more trouble than they are worth?

SECTION 3. QUESTIONS FOR GROUP MEMBERS

- 1c. How long have you been a member of this group?
- 2c. Why are you a member of this group?
- 3c. Under what circumstances would you leave the group?
- 4c. How is the group run?

How a group forms

- 5c. How did this group form?
- 6c. How does the way that the group formed affect the way that it operates?
- 7c. How representative is the group of the community of the library?
- 8c. Do you think it is necessary for the group to be representative of the community?
• 9c. How is the group publicised?
• 10c. How do you attract new members?
• 11c. Why do you think people join the group?
• 12c. Would FOL groups benefit from an umbrella organisation like FOLUSA?

Role of group

• 13c. Does the group have any specific aims and objectives?
• 14c. If YES, how were these decided upon?
• 15c. When were they decided upon?
• 16c. Is there anything that you are specifically working towards at the moment?
• 17c. How much involvement do you expect from library staff?
• 18c. What do you see as the role of the group? (For example, advocates, fund-raisers, volunteers, quiet support group)
• 19c. Are you able to perform this role to your satisfaction?
• 20c. Are there things you would like to do for the library but cannot?
• 21c. In the USA, FOL groups operate an extensive volunteer programme. Do you see this as appropriate to the situation in this country?
• 22c. Have you ever offered your services as a volunteer? If so, what was the reaction of the library?

Fundraising

• 23c. Do you raise money for the library?
• 24c. If YES, how much have you raised?
• 25c. Where does the impetus for fund raising come from?
26c. What do you want the money to be spent on?
27c. How do you feel about raising money for the library?
28c. To what extent do you worry that if you raise funds for the library, their budget will be cut?
29c. Are there constraints concerning what the library can spend your money on? If so, how do you feel about these?
30c. If NO, would you like to raise money for the library?

Relationships
31c. How would you describe the group’s relationship with the library?
32c. Has it always been like this?
33c. What is the staff attitude towards you?
34c. Has the relationship ever been negative?
35c. Do you feel the library listens to you?
36c. Who holds the power in the relationship?

Policy
37c. To what extent do you feel you can influence library policy?
38c. Do you feel that the library has an appropriate policy towards you as a group? (Please expand.)

Problems
39c. What do you see as the main advantages of having a FOL group?
40c. And the disadvantages?
41c. Under what circumstances do you think the group would fold?
• 42c. Have you experienced any specific problems during your involvement with the group?

• 43c. What do you expect from the library as a FOL group member?

• 44c. Do you think FOL groups are a ‘good’ thing?
APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Are you aware that there is a Friends of Libraries group at this library?  Yes  No

2. If YES, are you a member of the group?  Yes  No

3. If you are not a member of the group, why is this?
   Not interested
   Too busy
   Not made to feel welcome
   Don’t agree with Friends of Library groups

Other/Comments........................................................................................................
..............................................................................................................................
..............................................................................................................................
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Male  Female

Age Range:  14-25  26-45  46-65  65+