

**SPREADING THE WORD: IS ENOUGH BEING DONE TO PROMOTE
POETRY TO TEENAGERS IN SHEFFIELD'S PUBLIC LIBRARY
SERVICE?**

A Study submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Librarianship

at

THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

by

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September 2006

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the staff from Sheffield libraries who kindly participated in this research – in particular Claire South (from the Schools library service in Bannerdale) who was a great help in providing me with a list of initial contacts. Thanks too to all the young people who participated.

Whilst this project has been a hugely stimulating and enjoyable learning experience, I feel extremely fortunate to have had such a great supervisor – Kendra Albright – who was always available to offer suggestions and guidance. Thank you Kendra.

ABSTRACT

This research investigating whether enough is being done to promote poetry to teenagers in Sheffield's public libraries stems from the researcher's own interest in poetry and a recent article in the academic press highlighting the promotion of poetry as a pleasurable activity to primary age children. It was felt that there was a sufficient gap in the literature to merit research involving an older user group.

Besides finding out whether enough is being done to promote poetry to teenagers, other aims included identifying barriers to promotion, finding out activities that could be implemented and the resources required to promote poetry as an accessible form of literature. Underpinning the main aims were the following objectives: to determine if interest in poetry is declining because promotion is waning; to investigate the perception of librarians and teenagers to poetry in libraries; to find out whether poetry has a role in public libraries' reader development work with teenagers; to see how libraries can use information and communication technology to generate an enthusiasm for poetry and whether poetry can promote the public library service. As the research was largely inductive, a qualitative approach was adopted. This approach – which includes the interview and questionnaire as data collection techniques – allows trends to be identified from relatively little data. Furthermore, the qualitative approach enables the subjects of the research to express their opinions on the topics under investigation. The research was conducted in four libraries around Sheffield with a range of library staff, who worked with young people. They participated in interviews and questionnaires were given to teenagers who used the library.

The results indicated that not nearly enough is being done to promote poetry to teenagers in Sheffield's public libraries. Psychological barriers including confidence of

staff and rational barriers included funding/resources were identified as obstacles to promotion. Of considerable significance was that the results gleaned from the questionnaires correlated with interviewees' opinions that more should be done to promote poetry, suggesting that there is a healthy appetite for poetry amongst young people. Overall, it was found that poetry has great potential to be a vital ingredient in libraries' reader development agenda. It could also contribute towards literature promotion as a whole and include such aspects as: poetry events tailored for young people, poetry displays, role models/poetry champions, workshops for library staff, better signage of poetry in the library, making use of ICT as a promotional tool, liaising with external organisations and organising sustained initiatives such as turning National Poetry Day into National Poetry Month.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Aims of this research

The principal aim of this project is to ascertain whether enough is being done to promote poetry to teenagers in Sheffield's public libraries. If not, what kind of activities could be implemented and what resources are required to help promote poetry as an accessible form of literature for young people? Key to this will be soliciting the views of young people librarians and teenagers, finding out their perceptions about poetry and what they feel needs to be done. The objectives highlight the aims in more explicit detail.

1.2. Objectives for this research

The five objectives listed underneath underpin the main aims of this investigation, illustrating what will be explored. The results explained in chapter 4 will correlate with the objectives described here.

1.3. Investigating whether interest in poetry is declining because promotion is waning

Poetry has often been portrayed as the poor brother of fiction, not only in terms of sales¹ but also the exposure that is devoted to the genre in the main media. Whereas there are numerous fiction awards, with the most notable in the UK being the Man Booker prize, poetry's equivalent – the T.S. Eliot prize – gets relatively minimal

¹ Smith, D. (2006). "Poetry? It'll soon be about as popular as Morris dancing." The author quotes figures that highlights sales of poetry books diminishing in 2005 to 890,220 while fiction sales soared to 45,772,541

limelight by comparison. However, the poetry society is seeking to mitigate this with its mission to promote the wide-ranging benefits of poetry and the annual Poetry Day extravaganza, held in early October, which is gaining in popularity and prestige. Initiatives like *Poems on the Underground*² help to convey the message that poetry has relevance in modern life. More recently, *The Poetry Archive*³ was created in order to facilitate access to a range of poets performing their own poetry, thus providing a platform from which to show the range of wonders that poetry can yield.

Whilst recognizing that poetry will always have a certain niche appeal, there is a great potential for public libraries to promote this genre – particularly to young people – as it is an accessible and pleasurable form of writing. Through promotion, public libraries can raise the profile of poetry and as it lends itself readily to participation through performance, it can be a great way to develop young people’s confidence and improve those whose reading skills are relatively poor. This is due, in part, to its succinctness when compared with a novel, for example. This study will investigate whether the libraries have organized any poetry-related activities recently (i.e., in the last twelve months). If so, what were the main aims, the target group that was involved, and whether enough was being done to promote poetry? It is assumed that interest in poetry would increase if promotion was more pervasive, dependent on the enthusiasm and confidence of library staff.

² Transport for London (2006) “Poems on the Underground was launched in 1986. The programme was the brainchild of American writer Judith Chernaik, whose aim was to bring poetry to the wide ranging audience of passengers on the Underground...Readers who sample the poems on their way to work often want to read more” <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tube/arts/poems/> (accessed 30.08.2006).

³ The Poetry Archive came into existence November, 2005 and was a project conceived by Andrew Motion (UK Poet Laureate) and Richard Carrington (recording producer) in order to “make poetry accessible, relevant and enjoyable to a wide audience.” It aims to emphasise poetry as an oral art form as well as a written one. <http://www.poetryarchive.org>

1.4. The perceptions of librarians and teenagers to poetry in libraries

Ascertaining the views of library staff and young people themselves is a critical part of this project. As the library staff are interviewed, their attitudes will reveal if they think poetry has a place in the public library and how they think teenagers respond to poetry promotion. The teenagers, who will be provided with a questionnaire, will have the chance to comment on their personal feelings about poetry, what kind of activities they would like to see their library organize (if any), awareness of poetry in their library, whether they think there are enough poetry books in the library and whether more could be done to promote poetry.

The views of the library staff will be compared with those of the teenagers, particularly as qualitative research is essentially an interpretive process whereby the results will inductively identify trends (see Chapter 3). The interview questions and questionnaire have been designed to include open and closed questions. Closed questions help to facilitate data analysis but the open questions provide a chance for the respondents to express their views and feelings about poetry. Although the interview is designed to yield diverse opinions on a range of areas under investigation, a final question was included that would allow interviewees to express anything that they felt hadn't been covered previously. It was important, too, to make sure that none of the questions had a "leading" tone to them, which would introduce elements of bias and devalue the perceptions which this investigation is seeking to unearth.

1.5. Find out whether poetry has a role in public libraries' reader

development work with young people

Reader development is a topical issue in the sphere of public libraries.

Therefore, it will be interesting to investigate the ways in which poetry could feature in libraries' reader development work with teenagers. If reader development is concerned not only with emphasising the pleasurable aspect of the reading experience but extending the reader's horizons, then surely poetry has a significant role to play? It is often stated that poetry is a great way of introducing younger children to new patterns of language with the emphasis on rhyme and rhythm (Maynard et al, 2005; Johnstone, 2005; Sedgwick, 1997). There is an opportunity with older children, i.e., teenagers, to promote the notion of poetry as performance art (as well as being a private art), combining it with music to produce rap poetry, for example.

Within this reader development context, the question will be asked whether poetry can be a means of getting non-readers interested in reading. Poetry's brevity lends itself readily to be used with readers who have literacy problems. Furthermore, it can help develop oral and listening skills. As poetry is performed, this can play a role in reader development work. Teenagers are commonly exploring a lot of emotions in their teenage years; poetry can provide them with an avenue through which they can explore their emotions and understand the world (Maynard, 2005 and Hall, 1989) It is often suggested that teenagers' interest in reading declines as they get older (Define, 2006). It will be of particular interest to find out whether library staff think poetry can help stymie this apathy.

1.6. How libraries can use information and communication technology

to generate an enthusiasm for poetry

Evidently, much has been written about the potential of ICT in public libraries in recent years, not only as a promotional tool but also as a reader development tool (Denham, 2003 and 2000). It is clear, too, that ICT is popular with a teenage audience so amalgamating reader development with ICT has the potential to lead to fruitful results. A crucial aspect to consider will be whether libraries are using ICT in reader development activities with teenagers? ICT not only fosters collaboration/interactivity but can help empower and instil a sense of pride in the young person – for example if they have posted a review on a website or submitted a poem/story and seen that it has been published online. However, this raises ethical/privacy issues as people under eighteen would need parental consent to do this. Given that young people are interested in ICT, it will be interesting to discover whether library staff think their libraries could utilize ICT in order to promote an enthusiasm for poetry amongst teenagers.

Making use of ICT to promote an enthusiasm for poetry is also dependent on the skills and confidence of the library staff due to the perception that ICT is too difficult. However, this negative fear could be turned into a positive force if managed correctly and awareness of ICT's potential is heightened. Finding out what poetry-based websites are widely known will give a good indication of awareness of web-based resources. Related to the notion of ICT being a hook to catch young people's imaginations, it will be further illuminating to ascertain if using ICT to promote poetry can foster a wider interest in reading; i.e., to see if there is a correlation between ICT, poetry promotion and reader development.

1.7. Whether poetry can promote the public library service and if so, how?

Poetry is an excellent promotional tool for the library. The fact that it can be displayed easily, anywhere around the library means that it is very accessible and can help raise the profile of the service. There is a potential for themed promotions as well as promotional events related to special occasions. As *Poems on the Underground* has helped to raise the profile of the London Underground as well as showcasing poetry's inherent ability to stimulate the mind and elevate one's imagination, there is no reason why poetry couldn't have a similar effect in public libraries.

It will be of particular interest to find out how library staff believe poetry could promote the public library service. Furthermore, it will be illuminating to discover how this could be achieved. If libraries are about celebrating the vitality and breadth of literature and language (amongst other things), then surely poetry has a powerful role to play. Imaginative poetry displays can help promote local competitions, forthcoming events and raise the profile of the public library itself. There are possible constraints to contend with, relating to financial resources and staff enthusiasm, but it would be to turn a deaf ear to poetry's potential as a life enhancing force if public libraries didn't use it to shout about themselves (as will be further illuminated in Chapter 2).

1.8. Background

Essentially, the chief focus of this project lies in exploring poetry's position within the public library service and whether enough is being done to promote it and make it accessible to teenagers. This interest has arisen out of a personal interest in the value of poetry and a belief that it has become a neglected resource in the public library service

provision. As will be suggested, in the review of key literature (see [Chapter 2](#)), poetry has an incalculable benefit for young people's language, emotional, personal and imaginative development. However, whilst a recent article in the press highlights the empathetic dimension of poetry and how it can enlarge our understanding of ourselves and the world around us, "poetry can enrich our understanding of life like no other medium" (Goodwin, 2005) there is also concern that poetry is losing its appeal as a result of declining book sales (Smith, 2006), "it will be like Morris dancing: really interesting to people who do it, and incomprehensible and slightly annoying to people who don't" (quoting Goodwin). A main reason for the decline in poetry book sales is its relative cost when compared with other books. Many view poetry books from commercial outlets as being poor value for money. As library books are free, libraries are in a prime position to increase the value of poetry through effective promotion.

Set against this background, public libraries have an opportunity to promote and foster an interest in poetry – creating a new generation of poetry lovers – particularly in relation to teenagers, where it is the researcher's belief that there is a sufficient gap in the literature to merit this investigation (see following chapter). If libraries have a significant role in exposing young people to a wide range of literature, then surely the promotion of poetry is equally as important as the promotion of regular fiction and non-fiction? Libraries cannot simply be viewed as information centres but rather need to be considered as imagination centres, which nourish the soul and broaden the reading horizons of its users, particularly young people who are the life-blood of public libraries' existence in the future.

In order to satisfy the aims of the investigation, the research was conducted in four public libraries in Sheffield. As these libraries were located in different areas of the city, a good spread of data was obtained. The data collection methods used included: the Interview (see Appendix 1) and the Questionnaire (Appendix 2). These methods will be elaborated on in greater detail in Chapter 3. Suffice to say that these methods, as Powell and Connaway (2004:261) assert, “are frequently used for obtaining information about a person’s perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes”, which are inextricably linked with qualitative-based research.

In order for the data-gathering and analysis to be manageable in the time allowed (the bulk of this research was carried out in June and July so that it could be written up by 1st September 2006), 8 people were interviewed in total – two staff from each library - who were engaged in work with young people and occupied a variety of job titles: Children’s champion, Reading group co-coordinator, Writing group co-coordinator and Library assistant. 65 questionnaires were handed out in total (20 in the Central Library and 15 at three branch libraries). 15 questionnaires were returned. It is important to realise that with qualitative research (as opposed to quantitative-based) relatively little data can yield rich results, “qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed data about a much smaller number of people and cases” (Patton, 2004:227). This approach will be elucidated in greater detail during Chapter 3 that focuses specifically on the methodological framework for this research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

“However dark the environment is, poetry
is a continual possibility of light” (Sedgwick, 1997:2)

As indicated in the previous chapter, this project has primarily arisen out of the researcher’s deep-seated interest in poetry, its imaginative dimension that it occupies in the world of literature and whether libraries have neglected it as a vital resource in their service provision for young people. When conducting a literature search for this topic, it was clear that there was a definite gap in the literature on “Poetry Promotion to Young People”, which is hardly surprising when one considers that poetry tends to occupy a “niche” position – not just within libraries but also amongst people’s perceptions of books/literature in general. Whilst a wealth of literature on literature promotion was uncovered, there was hardly any that pertained specifically to poetry and its promotion in public libraries. Therefore, such a gap in the literature validates research investigating whether enough is being done to promote poetry to teenagers in Sheffield’s public libraries. Upon reviewing the literature, it was possible to extract particular themes pertinent to this investigation, such as: Why poetry is important? ; Poetry within the context of reader development; Reading promotion and Young People are the future. These themes have been separated by the headings below. What became apparent was that far from occupying a niche position, poetry has great potential to become a central part of libraries’ reading development work with young people.

2.1 Why Poetry is Important?

Various commentators have highlighted the life-enhancing aspect of poetry, suggesting that it has a transformative quality. Brown⁴ (1996) advocates “poetry can enhance understanding; it can affect the spiritual quality of life.” Wright and Asser (1995:132) suggest “poetry works not at an explicitly political level but in the inner life of the spirit. It is...the ultimate agent of change.” Its restorative qualities are celebrated by Johnstone (2005) who is a firm believer that it should be introduced to young people as early as possible:

“Poetry pleases, inspires and consoles us like no other literary form; it is vital to establish an early love for it – life is much the poorer without it.”

Furthermore, in an age of increasing technological advancement, uncertainty and rapid change, poetry can touch on something that is more profound, humane and eternal, as Tunnicliffe makes clear, “in an age of consumer goods and ‘value for money’, poetry is a refreshing reminder of the existence of different, more truly human values” (1984:5). Poetry is not merely a means through which to express oneself but an avenue through which people can explore their feelings and, moreover, understand feelings of others around them – whether they be from their own culture or overseas. This sense of exploration is alluded to by a number of writers. For teenagers, this emphasis on poetry as exploration has significant implications as the adolescent years usually involve a process of discovery, as one begins to fully understand oneself in relation to the world and make sense of one’s place in this world. As Johnstone (2005) further elucidates:

“reading poetry is a unique means of enabling a child to look

⁴ This project was in part inspired by research carried out by Brown (1996) *Is There a Place for Poetry in the Public Library*. University of Sheffield: MA in Librarianship. Brown concludes that poetry has a role, dependent on the enthusiasm and promotional skills of library staff. This project seeks to answer what kind of promotional events libraries can organise in order to engage teenagers with poetry and how to overcome negative stereotypes that young people might have of poetry and libraries respectively.

at and interpret the world around them, to understand themselves
- and their place in that world – in a fresh and creative way.”

Through poetry, young people not only explore aspects of life in fresh and innovative ways “poetry is a way of finding out, of exploring and learning; it provides a constant possibility of ‘Eureka’ throughout our lives” (Sedgwick, 1997:4) but find that language can be used in a different way to what they are used to. As Maynard et al (2005) assert, “[poetry] introduces them to unfamiliar language, repetition, rhyming words, language, patterns and words from oral tradition.” Introducing children to the pleasures of poetry not only develops their emotional and personal development but also enhances their language development as they see how poetry can use words in a playful and imaginative fashion. Moreover, just as books can help young people understand the world around them, poetry can enlarge their knowledge – in a different way, principally because as Hall (1989:12) affirms, “...it is language at its most concentrated and memorable.” Poetry can also encourage young people to write, “reading poetry is one of the best and most engaging ways for children to learn about language and start writing themselves” (Children’s Poetry Bookshelf).

Aside from poetry’s role in extending young people’s emotional, language and cultural development, it also has a pivotal part in promoting a sense of pleasure, “poetry motivates reading by generating delight and even rapture” (Hall, 1989:6). This is even more pronounced given the current culture of “test and targets” that young people live under – one that places great emphasis on mechanistic thinking or as Sedgwick (1997:5) avers “[is] concerned with the external, the observable, the measurable, the skills.” Whilst not disputing that skills are essential for life, poetry can help unfetter the imaginative spirit that has been browbeaten by an educational environment that puts great emphasis on assessment and targets. Furthermore, because poetry lends itself

readily for performance, it is uniquely placed to promote pleasure and participation. For teenagers this is crucial, for if they can see that something is pleasurable as well as fostering a sense of participation/ownership i.e. such as Poetry Slams⁵ then they are more likely to get involved – seeing poetry as relevant to their lives. Reading, writing and performing poetry is a great way for young people to develop/explore their creativity, encourage collaboration with others and foster their communication skills.

Ultimately, poetry allows people to explore their emotions and feelings, whilst simultaneously allowing them to enlarge their empathy of the world and people around them, “to understand that there are different perspectives on the world from the one we hold ourselves” (Maynard et al, 2005: 37). Similarly, Sedgwick (1997:17) accentuates this exploratory aspect, “poetry provides a way for us to research the differences and similarities between ourselves and the rest of the world.” For teenagers, this aspect is immeasurable particularly as the teenage years are often a period whereby young people are continually re-aligning their feelings and viewpoints vis-à-vis the world encapsulating them. Having highlighted poetry’s multi-faceted appeal, it is important not to forget that one of its prime assets is its accessibility. For example, the relative succinctness and brevity of poetry when compared with conventional fiction means that it can be an excellent means in which to introduce non-readers/lapsed readers to the pleasures of reading. With regard to encouraging boys to read this is particularly important, as recent research by Maynard et al (2005) indicates. Accessibility is further underscored by the fact that poetry is adaptable in a number of ways, as Meade (2000) attests, “poems are concise – they can easily be made accessible through posters,

⁵ Poetry Slams originated in Chicago, America in the early eighties. As defined on the website <http://www.poetryslam.com> (accessed 04.08.2006) “poetry slam is the competitive art of performance poetry. It puts a dual emphasis on writing and performance, encouraging poets to focus on what they're saying and how they're saying it.”

bookmarks and projects like the hugely successful Poems on the Underground.”

However, perhaps poetry’s accessibility is best represented by the fact that there is so much of it, that far from occupying a niche market, there is the potential to offer something for everyone. As Hall (1989:18) elucidates, “English poetry is too rich and too varied to be limited to a few scholars. There is something in English poetry for everyone because there is so much of it.” This has implications for libraries’ reader development work with young people.

2.2 Poetry in the context of Reader development

“Books inspire their imagination, help them grow emotionally and develop their understanding of the world and their place in local and global communities, past and present.” (CILIP: 2002)

This assertion from *Start with the Child* highlights the importance of reading and the role it can play in children’s lives today. Many articles have been written which have strengthened the case for reading and celebrated the inherent vitality of books. Elkin (2003:11) proposes that “through books, readers can be transported into another time, another place...into situations vastly different from their own.” Byatt similarly emphasises the imaginative aspect of reading and how it can enlarge the reader’s empathy and awareness of the world surrounding them, “reading is a means of encountering the world outside in a safe way in the world-in-the head, which can give both experience and understanding” (1992:15). More recent research has re-affirmed the significance of reading in relation to children’s social and emotional development. *Fulfilling their Potential* (2004) alludes to this, “it helps young people see that their experiences are not unique, and it builds their emotional literacy, helping them work through issues.” Similarly, Holden (2004) asserts, “[reading] helps young people to explore the world and enriches them educationally and emotionally.” This sense of

development is reinforced in Bachelor's (1999) research, "reading...can help them in their quest to come to terms with the world they live in."

It is evident that reading, knowledge, empathy, imagination and self development are inextricably linked. For those who don't read the consequences are far-reaching, as Leesing (1998:49) argues, "[a] hinterland of knowledge, information, reference is lacking in people who do not read." *Framework for the future* paints the scenario even more vividly, "people cannot be active or informed citizens unless they can read. Reading is a prerequisite for almost all social and cultural activities" (DCMS: 2003). Therefore, it is never too early to start promoting the pleasure of reading with young people.

Reader development is at the heart of what public libraries should be doing with young people. What exactly do we mean by reader development? Train (2003: 34) summarises what reader development signifies by contrasting it with the specific acquisition of reading skills, "whereas reading development focuses on...reading skills, reader development focuses on the reading experience itself." This correlates with the notion of libraries providing an environment in which reading is seen to be a pleasurable experience, where reading horizons can be broadened and imaginations stretched. For young people, instilling a sense that reading is a pleasurable activity, an activity that can be communal as well as solitary is crucial, as Denham (2003:64) asserts, "[reading] is about choice and sharing which are fundamental to the concept of reading development."

Reader development is about opening up books and freeing imaginations, allowing people to perceive that it can be liberating to talk about books and exchange ideas, where preconceptions may be reinforced or challenged. For young people (particularly teenagers) this helps to remove negative stereotypes which they may possess of reading as something that is “old hat” and “boring”.

Where does poetry fit into this context of reader development? As has been suggested, libraries can open up new horizons for young readers, “libraries, in particular children’s libraries, have a role to play in ensuring cultural diversity in reading” (Elkin, 2003:136). Entwined with this notion of choice in children’s reading habits is the idea of pleasure, which as Leesing argues, is what libraries should be engendering via the collections they provide for children:

“it is a wide range of experience that children need and this means that books, literature, libraries, should be seen as treasure-houses of opportunity and pleasure, full of surprises and paths leading to whole worlds of delight.” (1998:49)

Poetry is a rich and vibrant art-form that introduces young children and teenagers to fresh and invigorating perspectives, extending their awareness of the world around them, equipping them with the means to understand and explore their emotions. Johnstone (2005) argues that a well-stocked library is fundamental to ensuring this development, “it is a local or school library with a well-maintained and wide-ranging children’s poetry section which will provide a child with the much needed means for extensive exploration and discovery.” Not only does poetry open up new worlds, but it can also be an excellent way through which to attract young people to the joys of reading, as Hall (1989:3) affirms, “it is a very convincing way of catching our pupils’ interest in reading as a pleasurable activity. Above all, it fosters a desire to read more.”

Because of its succinctness and use of language in concentrated form, poetry can work well, particularly with boys as Maynard et al (2005:40) conclude in their study, “poetry collections are read in much the same way as a magazine or reference book – selectively and piecemeal, not from beginning to end.” Poetry can be dipped into, depending on one’s mood; for teenagers who have competing demands, this could be a powerful attraction. The dual aspect of poetry shouldn’t be forgotten, which is why it has such great potential as a reader development tool, “the study of poetry requires a level of attention to detail...yet it can also be dynamic” (Maynard et al, 2005). Poetry can lend itself naturally to interactivity, as Wright and Asser (1995) suggest, “the act of listening to poetry is a participatory activity.” It might be argued that writing and performing poetry are also acts of participation that not only develop young people’s all-round skills but also promote the concept that poetry is a fun and meaningful pursuit. Poetry’s eternal qualities are rhythm and language which have been highlighted by Sedgwick (1997:10), “poetry strengthens our sense of rhythm” and Hall (1989:9) respectively, “cliché is often dead language that is often resurrected, whereas the language of poetry is alive.”

This sense of aliveness is crucial in order to wed young people to the idea that poetry can be vital and empowering in equal measure. Maynard et al (1995) stress this emphasis on self-development, “poetry is important to children as a preparation for meeting the outside world, the pressures of reality and the demands of other people.” Although the literature suggests that poetry clearly has a role to play in libraries’ reader development work with young people, the question that needs to be asked is: how can poetry be presented to a teenage audience so that they don’t get turned off? The answer would seem to lie in effective promotion which, as will be revealed underneath, is the

bedrock upon which any successful library service resides. This emphasis on promotion is even more pertinent for a teenage audience, as recent research undertaken by DCMS and MLA (in conjunction with the Laser Foundation) conveys, “marketing is required to communicate and demonstrate to potential users that libraries have something to offer them” (Define, 2006). Intrinsic to this is dismantling barriers, projecting an image of libraries as being exciting and dynamic places to be, that offer an array of riches waiting to be explored – one of which could be poetry. However, due consideration needs to be given to the way in which poetry is presented, “poetry can be popular when it is presented in the right way” (Meade, 2000). For poetry to have popular appeal - particularly for a teenage audience – the underlying importance of promotion cannot be underestimated.

2.3. Reading Promotion

“if libraries do empower...and it is agreed that every child has the right of access to that empowerment regardless of background or origin, then promotion becomes perhaps the most important aspect of service”
(Eyre, 1996:178)

Eyre identifies promotion as being an intrinsic element of the public library service. Promotion is not simply telling users what you have available in your library but engaging them through a variety of media – displays, leaflets, postcards, online advertisements etc – to access and utilise the range of services that their library provides. In the case of reading and books, successful promotion allows users to see that their library holds a variety of stock that they might otherwise have not encountered. Bachelor (1999) defines reading promotion as, “telling people what stock you have in the library, and using a variety of methods and techniques to focus the users’ attention on certain items or collections.” Stock management and promotional activities go hand

in hand, so an ideal public library service is one where all stock – fiction and non-fiction – is promoted. Reading promotion is not only about broadening people’s reading habits but breaking down preconceptions as Van Riel and Fowler (1996) illustrate, “the purpose of promotion is to address psychological barriers and open up areas which people regard as closed to them.” This is unquestionably relevant in the case of poetry which has suffered from negative connotations as something that is too difficult or outré.

Davidson (1997) alludes to this negative publicity, “modern poetry is still often regarded as incomprehensible with many would-be readers reluctant to take to poetry for fear of simply not understanding the poems.” This is despite the presence of contemporary/performance poets who have helped made poetry more accessibly in recent years. Davidson (1997) goes on to argue that creative promotion can be successful, emphasising a scheme that Birmingham libraries ran, in conjunction with the Poetry Society, in establishing public libraries as “Poetry Places”. The success of the scheme was dependent on two factors – “a core stock of contemporary poetry and an enthusiasm to promote this stock [was] a requirement”. Meade (1997) laments the fact that there is no national policy for poetry promotion in public libraries⁶, especially as “every library contains surprises and delights – literary gems and creative connections you just can’t find anywhere else.” A key ingredient in enabling these surprises and delights to be savoured is the enthusiasm and vitality that staff inject into promotional work, “enthusiasm should be vital and from the heart” (Wright & Asser, 1995). Vis-à-vis poetry, this is critically important.

⁶ The Reading Agency published two toolkits (downloadable from <http://www.readingagency.org.uk>) to coincide with the launch of the Poetry Archive in November 2005, suggesting how libraries could use this resource and offering many useful tips on how to promote poetry.

Bricetti (1996) advocates the importance of the librarian's role when discussing how poetry can be promoted, "librarians fill a critical role in making the genre more accessible." Wright & Asser (1995) emphasise the librarian's role by articulating that librarians can adopt an enterprising approach, "as professional mediators concerned with the promotion of imaginative writing, we librarians should take an entrepreneurial approach in making this happen." Successful promotion works by bringing the stock to life, making users aware of what is available, "without lively promotion the newly-circulated stock will lie dead on the shelves, waiting for someone to discover it" (Van Riel & Fowler, 1996). In relation to poetry, having attractive displays helps to capture the imagination, as Bricetti (1996) affirms, "include poetry in topical displays, both for adults and young adults. This reinforces the idea that poets respond to anything and everything in the world." For young people especially, this helps to remove the perception that poetry is arcane or elitist. Bricetti highlights that in America there is a designated poetry month in which libraries organise a lot of promotional activities around poetry. Within the UK, the celebration of poetry is aided by an annual National Poetry Day (this year it is the 5th of October, with the theme being "Identity") organised by The Poetry Society. Events like these help to accentuate the notion that poetry is a participative and dynamic art-form.

ICT is a significant way in which poetry can be made accessible and promoted successfully. As Denham (2003:173) suggests "the internet has proved to be a powerful promotional tool in the book world." The use of new technologies can help to promote interactivity and collaboration, "one of the main advantages that new media have over traditional-based materials is their ability to allow increased interactivity" (Denham, 2003:178). ICT can open up new worlds not only in terms of promoting reading and

promoting the library service, but by breaking down traditional notions as Maynard et al (2005) explicate, “the image of the solitary reader or writer, closeted away from the rest of society...must be shattered here.” The potential for collaborations and sharing of ideas is limitless; for a youthful audience such as a teenage user group, the excitement emanates from the way in which the web can allow them to explore the web pages of their favourite author/poet and interact directly. Dymoke (2003:130) states, “by using ICT in its various forms, the relationship between the reading and writing of poetry is brought ever closer.” However, whilst ICT has great potential there is a need to be cautious of the skills required in order to fully realise its many benefits, as Denham (2000:94) highlights, “there is a need for librarians to develop new skills in the area of promotion.” Having the skills to utilise ICT as a reader development as well as a promotional tool is equally important for the librarian in the twenty-first century.

Undoubtedly, reading promotion is one of the core aims for any successful library service, but there is a necessity to view it in a holistic context – particularly as fashion changes, “reading promotion methods need to be constantly under review, so libraries can ensure techniques are revised before they go stale and lose their impact” (Bachelor, 1999). This is particularly the case for services for teenagers – where they need to have relevance and engage interest if they are to make an impact on this user group. Above all, generating excitement and stimulating interest need to be underlying concepts in the field of literature promotion. It is evident that poetry does have a role in libraries’ reader development and promotional work if one takes into consideration that one of the main aims of the public library is to broaden the reading imagination of its users, “[the library] is about empowering people to make choices and take risks across the full range of material” (Van Riel & Fowler, 1996).

Meade (2000) suggests that poetry is ideally placed to be promoted in libraries as it can easily be performed, can be displayed anywhere (and unlike a book, a whole of a poem can be displayed), is conducive to borrowing due to its size and fosters people to participate – whether this be in reading or writing groups. Poetry not only introduces teenagers to new perspectives, different styles of writing – enlarging their reading compass in the process – but it can also be a vibrant way in which the public library promotes itself. Much has been written in the recent press about the threat facing public libraries but poetry could be a way of counteracting this, as Meade (1997) suggests, “use the power of poetry to shout about libraries, to help the public and politicians see them afresh, to fight off the gloom and keep the breathing room breathing.” Libraries have a cultural, emotional and developmental role in the lives of everyone, particularly young people. Libraries are natural places for promotion, but if they are to thrive and remain relevant then young people need to have a say on what kind of services should be provided.

2.4. Young People are the Future

“children want to be listened to. Librarians need to make that little bit extra to listen and to offer opportunities to involve them. The outcomes will be above and beyond expectations.” (Blanshard, 1998:55)

Involving young people in the planning of services, giving them a voice through which they are able to articulate their desires for what they want their libraries to embody, not only gives them a sense of identification with their library but also a sense of ownership. *Fulfilling Their Potential* (2004) highlights how libraries can deliver on the government’s agenda in improving areas of young people’s lives outlined in *Every*

*Child Matters*⁷. As *Framework for the Future* emphasises, public libraries are vital cornerstones of our communities, helping to foster a sense of citizenship and solidarity amongst their users, “libraries have a vital role as anchor institutions in our communities. They are among the most basic membership institutions in civil society” (DCMS, 2003). For young people, libraries offer a space in which they can develop educationally, emotionally and culturally, “[representing] a non-judgemental place for children to feel safe and empowered to make their own choices” (*Start with the Child*, 2002). There is a sense too that libraries allow young children to recognise their place in an increasingly complex and globalised world, for as Elkin & Lonsdale (1996:3) stipulate, “young people need to be prepared for a world where many of the barriers between cultures and between nations have been broken down.” Arguably, diversity in reading choices – in which poetry has a prominent role to play – is what libraries can offer young people, “one of the unique aspects of library use is the freedom of choice it offers children and young people” (*Start with the Child*, 2002). There is also diversity, in the areas of development that libraries can help nurture, in relation to young people: intellectual and emotional development, language development, social development and education development (Blanshard, 1996).

Libraries can make a positive impact on young people’s lives, giving them the means to develop themselves and explore the world around them whilst at the same time developing a life-long love of reading. As Elkin (1996:66) asserts, “[they] can create the habitual adult reader and user of the library, instilling a positive view of libraries throughout childhood.” However, with a teenage audience in mind, it is not enough to say that libraries can make a positive impact; consideration needs to be

⁷ An influential government report written in 2003 highlighting the areas in which services for young people can tap into their lives, with the emphasis on: Being Healthy, Staying Safe, Enjoying & Achieving, Making a Positive Contribution and Economic Well-Being.

afforded to how? This is what recent research commissioned by the DCMS and MLA (Define, 2006) emphasises – libraries need to consider developing their services and modernising their image if they are to remain relevant in young people’s lives today. Indeed, the problems of poor promotion and signage were areas alluded to by the subjects of the research, “lack of display and supporting information on books (versus bookshops) makes it difficult to seek ideas or be inspired” (Define, 2006). Unless, young people can connect with the environment then it is unlikely that they will make use of it, which is why it is essential that libraries consult with young people on matters relating to stock and library design. Denham (2000: 42) makes this clear:

“it is very important that children feel valued and they won’t if you give them old bookstock...a branch library refurbished with input from children really helps them to see that the library is their library.”

In developing services for young people, their needs must be given paramount importance, as *Start with the Child* (2002) highlights, “any consideration of how services might change or develop in the future must be the result of a focus on the individual child.” Within this context of delivering services to young people that are meaningful and relevant to their lives, the role of the children’s librarian becomes hugely important – in terms of promoting the library and promoting reading as a pleasurable and life-enhancing activity.

Heeks (2000) argues that in order for the public library to have a significant role in shaping a young person’s development as a reader, then the librarian acting as intermediary and guide on the side is crucial. From a range of case studies looking at the context for children’s services it was found that, “staff attitudes and a bedrock of book knowledge were [considered] as major elements in successful service” (2000:16). Clearly the two go hand in hand in any area of librarianship, but particularly in

children's services where enthusiasm can help catch the fire of young people's imaginations. Hill (1973) champions the role of the children's/young people's librarians as being instrumental in young people's development as readers and wider development as citizens of the community, highlighting the importance of out-reach activities, the promotion of services and benefits that the library can offer. However, in her key text, she strikes a note of caution – highlighting that librarians need to be realistic as to what can be achieved, “an effective librarian needs to be both realistic and idealistic about what it is possible to achieve within the context of contemporary society” (1973:11). Evidently, idealism shouldn't be thwarted but service provision needs to be considered within a realistic framework – such as availability of resources and budget constraints. It is notable though that Hill is vociferous in the belief that librarians' role as reading sages and advisors shouldn't be undervalued, “ discrimination and taste need to be developed, and sensitive guidance can be valuable” (Hill:119). In a world in which the number of books being published for young children is increasing each year, such guidance is necessary and can also be helpful in expanding the reading horizons of young readers.

The literature review suggests that libraries need to adapt and modernise, in their provision of services to young people – especially teenagers – if they are to remain relevant as key players in their lives today. Undoubtedly, libraries have much to offer young people not only because they provide a neutral space, as *Start with the Child* clearly indicates, distinct from a school or formal learning environment, but due to the access they furnish:

“it is only through wide access to books and other learning materials that every child is empowered to achieve its potential and the library is the most significant point of access” (Elkin & Lonsdale, 1996:4)

Accessibility can be enhanced through promotional work and active librarianship that considers the needs of its users; for libraries to appeal to young people, negative stereotypes need to be subverted and services modernised and made relevant. Define (2006) highlights this, “[libraries] need to tap more strongly into the way in which these activities are part of this age group’s lives.”

Undoubtedly, libraries in the twenty-first century not only have the potential to be information services but imagination services too (Meade, 2000) – with the emphasis on promoting books/reading in all their depth and variety. In this milieu, libraries’ work with young people is vital as *Fulfilling Their Potential* (2004) makes clear, “libraries’ work with young readers can help build a society of involved citizens; it connects them to each other and helps them understand themselves and others.” Reading is the glue that binds us to this world of knowledge, enlightening the imagination and enriching the soul, “to begin to understand we must read” (Hill, 1973:135). For young people, reading opens up new worlds, breaks down barriers and aids in the quest for enlightenment. Whilst libraries need to consider the needs of their teenage audience and seek to shed any negative images that young people may harbour, it shouldn’t be forgotten that books are the means through which they can claim meaning over their existences. Championing reading for pleasure and putting the “P” back into Poetry (emphasising pleasure, participation and performance) can help achieve this. It is left to Maynard et al (2005) to celebrate the vital importance that poetry can play in young people’s lives today:

“Poetry can be the means of empowering children as they seek to make choices, articulate their thoughts and ideas and claim ‘ownership’ over both their reading and their lives.”

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach

“qualitative research is a process of enquiry that draws data from the context in which events occur, in an attempt to describe these occurrences, as a means of determining the process in which events are embedded and the perspectives of those participating in the events, using induction to derive possible explanations based on observed phenomena” (Gorman & Clayton, 2005:3).

As the main aim of this investigation is to ascertain young people’s and librarians’ attitudes and perceptions about poetry in Sheffield public libraries – in relation to the objectives listed in chapter 1 – these research results will inductively identify trends from the data gathered. This will involve adopting a qualitative approach, which Gorman & Clayton (2005:10) define as, “...likely to be interpretive, tending to begin with evidence and then build theory.” Patton (2002:11) reinforces this by suggesting that the theory “emerges from the researcher’s observations and interviews out in the real world rather than in the laboratory or the academy.” A major advantage of the qualitative approach is that it allows for in-depth exploration of the issue at hand. As Mellon (1990:18) observes, “the method of naturalistic inquiry should be selected where in-depth understanding of human actions is the primary focus.”

This notion that qualitative methods allow for a more detailed and richer understanding of the issue(s) under investigation is affirmed by Silverman (2003:8) who suggests, “[qualitative research] provides a deeper understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative data.” Indeed, it is possible to argue that the qualitative approach helps to explore issues in greater detail and explain the life stories behind the numbers (Patton, 2002). Essentially, the aim of qualitative research is

to understand those being studied from their own viewpoint (Gorman & Clayton, 2005) and to discover, “how and why they have come to this particular perspective” (King, 2004:11). Qualitative research is not so much concerned with numbers as it is with exploring people’s perceptions, beliefs and attitudes in detail. As Patton (2002:14) highlights, “qualitative methods facilitate study of issues in depth and detail.”

Furthermore, as qualitative-based research is largely centred on depth as opposed to breadth, then generalisability is something that cannot be considered. Although significantly richer data from a smaller sample size is often yielded – resulting in a more in-depth understanding – generalisability is unviable (Patton, 2002). Silverman (2002:36) conveys this point in stark terms, “it always helps to make limited claims about your own research. Grandiose claims about originality, scope or applicability to social patterns are all hostages to fortune.” Allied to this is a need to be aware that rigour should be upheld when conducting qualitative research. However, if the nature of qualitative research is one that “includes a cyclical process of data collection and reflection” (Gorman & Clayton, 2005:188), then having a flexible and adaptable approach becomes a crucial facet of the qualitative researcher’s armoury.

3.2. Methods of Research

A mixed-method qualitative approach will be used in this study, due to the fact that this is one of the most effective ways to address weaknesses that may result by using only one research method (Gorman & Clayton, 2005:126). The methods used will include: the questionnaire and the interview. Using a combined approach will allow for greater exploration of the issues under investigation and assist in providing richer data, as Powell & Connaway (2004: 162) attest, “data collection techniques may be

combined in order to provide richer data.” Moreover, triangulating the data collection methods helps to give the research a greater sense of validity; “consistent findings among the different data collection techniques would suggest that the findings are reasonably valid” (Powell & Connaway, 2004: 124). Patton (2002:248) qualifies this by suggesting that “...the point is really to test for such consistency.” It is important to consider the relative strengths and weaknesses of each of the data-collection techniques.

3.2.1. Questionnaires

A major strength of the questionnaire is that it is a powerful tool for collecting large amounts of data in a relatively short space of time. This is affirmed by Powell & Connaway (2004: 125) who suggest that, “questionnaires can facilitate the collection of large amounts of data in a relatively short period of time.” Furthermore, because questionnaires can be disseminated anonymously then there is a likely chance that the answers will be of a frank and honest nature. This is not to say that elements surrounding misinterpretation/bias are non-existent. The potential for bias is largely due to the manner in which the questionnaire is constructed and the kind of questions formulated. Poorly phrased questions might confuse the participants or generate misleading/biased answers which could skew the research. Oppenheim (1992:112) warns against the dangers of putting words into respondents’ minds i.e., to “...avoid putting ideas into the respondents’ minds or to suggest that they should have attitudes, when they have none.”

Therefore, careful construction of the questionnaire is required if ambiguity and imperfections are to be ironed out. This is particularly important when targeting a teenage audience. Whilst aiming for simplicity and to help facilitate comparison

between data, open questions should be included in the questionnaire so that insight into the issues under investigation can be obtained. As Oppenheim (1992:112) asserts, “the chief advantage of the open question is the freedom it gives to the respondent.” However, it is important to recognize that most questionnaires incorporate a mixture of open and closed questions (Oppenheim). Due to the fact that the user group for the questionnaire was young people, it was necessary to tailor the questions for the target audience. As Powell and Connaway (2004:141) emphasise, “in order to facilitate accurate, easy response, the researcher should strive for simplicity in word use and careful construction.” Piloting the questionnaire also helped identify weaknesses in the design.

3.2.2. Interviews

The interview is an excellent way in which to explore issues in greater detail, not only allowing the researcher “to enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 2002:341) but also being able to “follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings, which the questionnaire can never do” (Bell, 1998:91). Patton (2002:4) attests, “interviews yield direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge.” This, however, is dependent on the skills of the researcher in being able to establish a rapport with the interviewee, “in conducting an interview, the interviewer should attempt to create a friendly, non-threatening atmosphere” (Powell & Connaway, 2004:117).

Furthermore, adaptability is a major advantage of the interviewing approach (Bell, Powell & Connaway). This is equally applicable for the researcher as King (2004:17) attests, “flexibility is the single most important factor in successful qualitative

interviewing.” The researcher needs to be conscious of elements of bias creeping in; “it is a highly subjective technique and therefore there is always the danger of bias” (Bell, 1998:91). Similarly, King (2004:13) suggests, “[there is a need] for the researcher to consciously set aside his or her presuppositions about the phenomenon under investigation.” Additionally, whether to take a structured or standardized open-ended approach needs to be considered. Patton (2002:347) advocates a combined approach, “a common combination strategy involves using a standardized interview format in the early part of an interview and then leaving the interviewer free to pursue any subjects of interest during the latter part of the interview.”

Adopting this approach for my interviews allowed not only a level of consistency to be achieved, but also a better comparison of data was attained, thus facilitating data analysis. In addition, a state of personableness can be attained by asking more specific/probing questions. Conscious of the need to create an atmosphere of trust and relaxation, interviews were structured to last for 20-25 min.

3.3. Ethical Issues

King (2004:17) highlights the importance of addressing ethical issues, when conducting qualitative research; “potential participants must be assured of confidentiality, and should be told clearly who the research is being carried out for, and what it hopes to achieve.” Appendix 3 shows the participant information sheet that was given to each participant in the research. As this project involves young people under the age of eighteen, then parental/adult consent was required in order for the young person to participate. The participant consent form (Appendix 4) was adapted to meet this requirement. Further information tailored for the parents was prepared in a parental

information sheet (Appendix 5), which further clarified the nature of the research – what their son/daughter was being asked to do, in order to help satisfy the aims of the research project.

In order to ensure confidentiality of data, anonymisation was used during data analysis. This was indicated on the participants’/parents’ information sheets and participants’ consent forms. As Powell and Connaway (2004: 187) assert, “by using pseudonyms, removing identifying details and employing careful record keeping, the researcher does everything possible to ensure that the subjects will never be identified to anyone outside of the study team.” Once the dissertation has been submitted all the data, including audiotapes and returned questionnaires, will be destroyed.

3.4. Analysis of Data

Silverman (2003:187) emphasises the importance of data analysis and clearly this is pertinent to transcribing interviews, “that the reliability of the interpretation of transcripts may be greatly weakened by a failure to transcribe apparently trivial, but often crucial, pauses and overlaps.” A rigorous and professional approach is useful to ensure that the quality of study can be enhanced during the dissertation process. As this research is qualitatively-based and the sample size is relatively small, it is important to avoid making generalisations. It is hoped that credibility will be achieved and as Patton (2002: 245) stipulates, “the validity, meaningfulness and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size.” The essential significance of data analysis is further underscored by Silverman (2003:51), “ultimately everything will depend on the quality of your data analysis rather than the quality of your data.” In this project, data analysis focused on exploring the

aims and objectives highlighted in chapter 1 and seeing what trends could be identified. Furthermore, it involved comparing attitudes to the range of issues under investigation, deducing important clues in the data and observing if there was any correlation between the views expressed by the young people's librarians with those of the teenagers.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

As indicated in the introduction, there are five objectives that are being explored in this project. For the purpose of clarity, the findings relating to the objectives are listed under separate headings below. This chapter seeks to illustrate the findings for this piece of research in a way that is easy to decipher. Please see Appendix 1 in order to see an explanation of the codes used in this chapter and to which libraries they refer. The questionnaire distributed to the young people can be referred to in Appendix 2.

4.1 Objective 1: Is interest in poetry declining because promotion is waning?

It was apparent that all the interviewees felt that more could be done to promote poetry in the library in order to increase interest. This was felt to be dependent on a number of factors, namely, how it was targeted, what activities were used to promote it and breaking down perceptions of poetry as boring or not being particularly relevant. As

A1 comments:

“No much more could be done. If it was done properly and in a way that got children excited, then I think it would be very popular.”

Two interviewees suggested how it was presented to be particularly crucial with one emphasising the different kinds of poetry that can be pushed and the other suggesting the practical aspect of how poetry is presented on the page to be of vital importance. B1 asserted:

“I am a big fan of someone like Milligan...people like Spike Milligan have always appealed. If you can get people to read some lighter stuff to start with without hitting them with Milton’s Paradise lost, ease them in gently and then try and provide them with something else.”

On the subject of presentation, B2 felt that the way poetry was laid out on the page influenced people's perception of it; this is particularly so with young people, when one considers that there are other competing interests vying for their attention:

"If you look at poetry on a page...it doesn't look very inspiring...for the rap project we designed a poetry book which was great as it incorporated design as well as writing...the designer laid the poetry out in such a way that made it seem funky...I enjoy writing myself...poetry on a blank page doesn't really inspire....I think that you have to look carefully at how it can be promoted particularly as it does suffer from an image problem"

This negative perception of poetry is covered in more detail underneath the next objective below. Suffice to say, that perception is closely entwined with how something is promoted which suggests that if poetry was promoted/introduced in an innovative way to teenagers – that encouraged participation – then these negatives views could be dispelled.

Whilst acknowledging that not enough was being done to promote poetry, a couple of the young people's librarians highlighted that there was gap in the kind of poetry books that would be suitable for a teenage audience:

"I haven't heard of any poets for the teenage section because we don't have any poets there. I don't really know any poets who write for teenagers. If you get somebody like Chris White then I think it would work. Teenagers are getting interested in that sort of thing aren't they but there is a gap." (C2)

"I don't know if you've looked at our teenage section. There's nothing out there on poetry. It doesn't seem that people are writing poetry for teenagers. If people aren't publishing poetry that teenagers would like to read, then we can't actually buy them so they're not actually sitting out there on the shelves" (A2)

It was felt that whilst plenty of poetry books were published specifically aimed at primary-age children and there was much poetry written for an adult audience, the market for teenagers was sufficiently lacking. However, the clearest indication of why poetry could be promoted more is indicated by A2:

"I mean it's a brilliant way of expressing yourself, your thoughts and feelings down on paper"

4.2 Objective 2: The perception of librarians and teenagers to poetry in libraries

It became clear from talking with the librarians that poetry has great potential in the work that libraries do with young people but a clear theme emerged relating to the idea that how it is presented is closely allied to how poetry is perceived. As indicated in the literature review (Chapter 2) poetry suffers from an image problem, which in turns places it in grave danger of becoming marginalised in the world of imaginative literature. Sedgwick (1997:12) makes this clear, “*in our society, it is seen by most people (to judge from the sale of books) as something irretrievably minor.*” In order to remove this stigma, libraries can play a significant role in demystifying such negative perceptions. However, targeted activities are crucial to realising this:

“I think it depends how it’s aimed...how its’ tackled because if it’s just like...dry then it wont work. I think you need to do something with a bit of a quirk...like Benjamin Zephaniah...something that’s a bit different, that’s going to entertain them...that’s going to get poetry across as well as getting them to listen to the poetry.” (A1)

Poetry per se won’t necessarily work. It can be made accessible, dynamic and fun in a variety of ways. Whether this is through interactive poetry events, poetry posters, themed poetry displays or poetry performances is dependent upon the library. Two of the librarians interviewed suggested that music could play a pivotal role in shaping young people’s perception of poetry (a recent report looking at the provision of services to young people highlights the importance of music⁸), which could help generate a buzz around poetry:

“If you think of something like rap music, it’s poetry isn’t it...that’s what I feel...if they can see that, then it lowers the bar as it were from that intellectual loftiness people view it ...generally speaking...down to a more street level as it were.” (B1)

“I suppose rap would work....something that is topical, that is now would work...think of something like the world cup..if it was too general I don’t think it would work.” (D2)

⁸ Define (2006) “building services around music would allow for the promotion of informal learning but also provide a means to build community identity and develop citizenship amongst young people”

Clearly, topicality is a crucial issue but this is something that can be said to be true of any promotional work one is doing with literature. However, in seeking to captivate a teenage audience, this sentiment of relevance is even more pronounced. Evidently, poetry promotion doesn't work in isolation. This is a fear alluded to by one of the children's champions who stated in response to the question, "*How do you think teenagers respond to poetry promotion?*" asserted, "*I don't think that it would be very well attended. I'm not quite sure what poets they study today. I don't know many teenagers who come in here and read poetry. We get girls reading poetry but not boys*" (A2).

Captivating the audience was perceived to be crucial in relation to lighting up young people's imaginations:

"I think that it would be difficult to get them in the first place. If you had a captive audience and somebody like Chris White who was aimed at teenagers then I would think it would go down well" (C2)

Interestingly, one interviewee asserted that from personal experience she felt poetry was a great success with socially excluded young people, highlighting that young people much prefer writing poetry than reading it:

"I have done lots of work with socially excluded people and people with literacy problems and I would say that poetry has done better than other forms of literature with those groups..." (B2)

Whilst recognising the therapeutic value of poetry, she went on to emphasise that poetry must be presented in a way that is meaningful and relevant to young people growing up in Britain today. As intimated previously, poetry must be presented in a way that is accessible and induces pleasure; this will help counteract the perception that poetry is less popular than Morris dancing. As one interviewee emphasised:

"If you make it fun and bring it down from its lofty heights, then there's great potential...if you make any education fun as though it's not working ...

that's what I'm trying to do. Getting teenagers interested and excited is crucial. Poetry certainly has great potential if you can make it fun." (B1)

Poetry can have immeasurable benefits for those people who struggle with reading, perceiving it to be a difficult chore, as one of the children's librarians suggests:

"For the person who doesn't have the confidence in reading it may be a way to give you a little bit of confidence to go on to other books..." (D1)

However, image and presentation are crucial factors in how successful poetry promotion can be, particularly when it comes to attracting boys. "*Ideally, you want something that looks like a graphic novel but is poetry which would be a brilliant way of attracting boys*" (D2). There were concerns about whether or not people had enough confidence to promote poetry:

"I think poetry can be a difficult thing because you think, "Oh I don't know anything about it". It's quite specialised which might make you stay away from it." (C2)

"With poetry, it's more you're worried about that you're doing it wrong... that you might not be technically right." (C1)

Both the above interviewees elaborated by saying that as they felt poetry had great potential, then a poetry-based workshop would be a great means of instilling confidence in those people who work with young people, who would like to promote poetry but don't have the confidence. On the subject of poetry's potential in Sheffield public libraries one interviewee was critical of the current situation:

"I would like to say that Sheffield libraries could and should do a lot more for young people because frankly they're not very good. Poetry could be one of those things and I don't know where poetry is in here... that is often the case...more could be done" (B2)

Clearly, if the signage is bad then promotion is an even more pressing issue (particularly if young people are unsure if there is a poetry section in their library). There is evidence to suggest that young people feel more could be done to promote poetry in their library. As to why poetry can have a significant role in young people's emotional development and why more could be done to push it, one interviewee elucidated the empathetic dimension of poetry that teenagers can relate to:

“It’s a shame because it doesn’t get read and I think that you can get a lot of insight into how people think. For example the War poets. You really get to see in descriptive language not like in newspaper bulletins or the tabloids what people are feeling. For teenagers that’s great” (A1)

4.2.1. Young People’s Perceptions of Poetry

The charts on p.45 summarise the results gleaned from the questionnaires.

Overall, there was a very positive response about poetry and what particular aspects young people liked. The rhythmical structure of poetry was praised by one respondent, “the rhythm and floating motion of the words used” (Female, 17) as was poetry’s capacity for therapeutic effects, “I like how it flows and it helps to calm me” (Male, 13). The emotional and expressive aspects of poetry were alluded to by two further respondents, “the way it’s expressive and is mysterious because its words have to be unravelled before they are understood” (Female, 17) and “a good way to express your feelings” (Female, 14). These thoughts suggest a good awareness of poetry’s capacity to offer solace, its inherent rhythmical qualities – that gives people a vehicle with which to explore their emotions. Furthermore, poetry’s capacity to make an impact through concentrated language was cited as a positive effect, “I like the phrasing of words, that through a few well chosen words, an image, sound or feeling is delicately portrayed” (Female, 15) and “the imagery and mood that is created by just a few words” (Female,17). The notion that poetry can encourage further reading due to its accessibility was highlighted as a positive factor, “because it’s easy to read and makes you want to read more and more” (Female,17). One respondent gave a detailed explanation of what she liked about poetry:

“it follows a pattern, rules; it has order, rhythm. Yet additionally, poetry can make up its own rules: it can be nonsense and still contain meaning/hidden semantics. Poetry, good poetry, should sound good when it is read aloud. It is like music, but better, because it does not require the accompanying musical background.” (Female, 17)

Although these thoughts reveal a subtle appreciation of poetry's multi-layered capacity to appeal, it is interesting that the oral and musical aspects of poetry should be highlighted. Poetry can mean many things to different people, but the above comments reveal a sensitive awareness of the elements of poetry that can enchant and surprise in equal measure; its creative use of language, the sense of rhythm, its ability to reveal the truth in mysterious ways and the way it allows feelings to be explored. Having said that, there were some negative comments which took into account poetry's ability to be complex, irrelevant and lacking in narrative:

“it is sometimes quite hard to understand” (Male, 14)

“it's boring, doesn't make sense. It confuses me, uses long boring words and is about things like Lakes!” (Female, 14)

“I don't enjoy reading poetry as many poems have no Story to them and therefore are hard to understand and get into at once” (Female, 15)

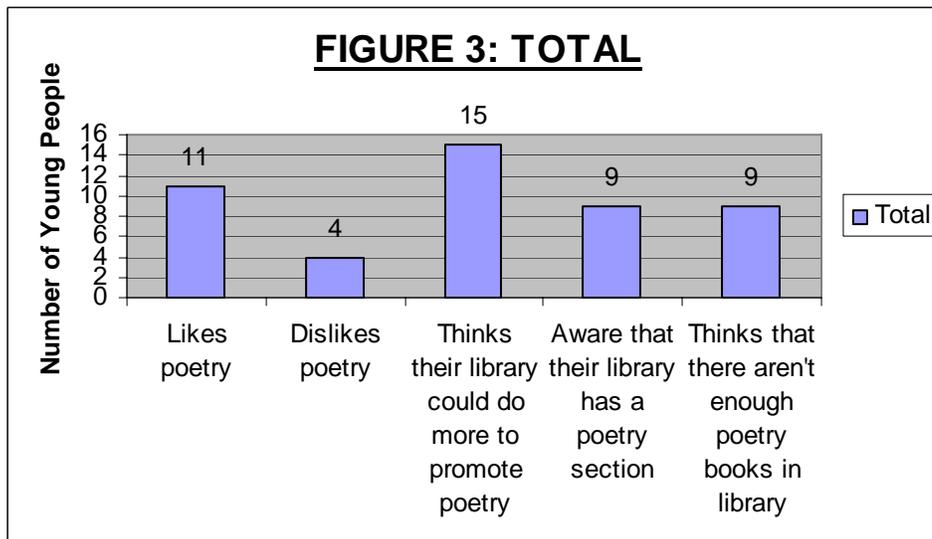
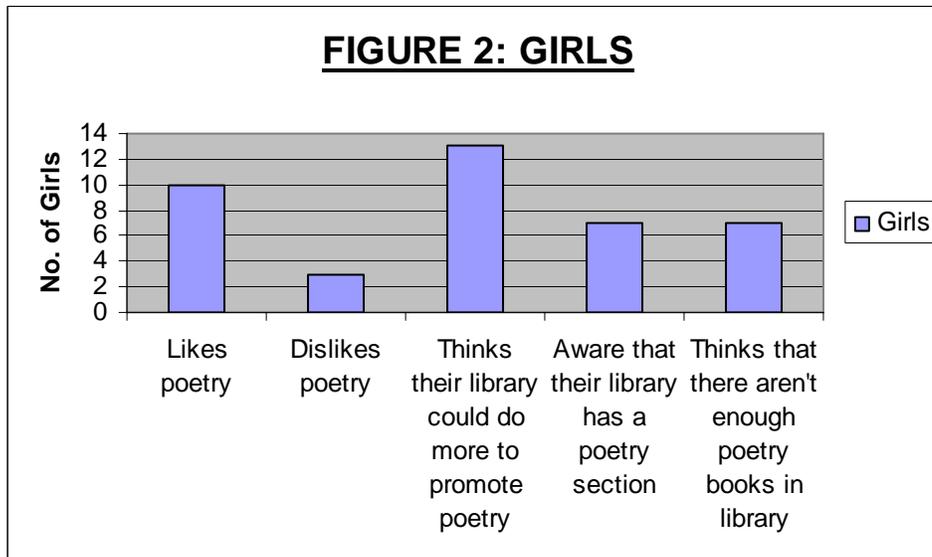
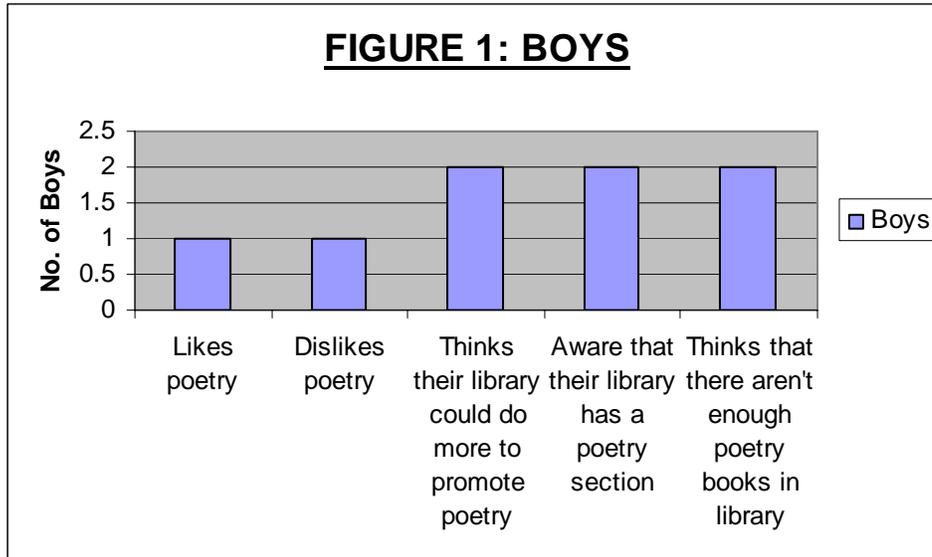
Amongst those respondents who stated they liked poetry, poetry readings by poets in the library, poetry competitions and the opportunity to write and perform your own poetry were all cited as ways in which to encourage an interest in poetry with those who had an aversion to it. One respondent even suggested that if young people read more poetry in school, then it might have a bearing in terms of deciding upon a future career, “I think maybe reading some in school may interest some younger children and make them think of it as a career choice” (Male, 13). Another respondent proposed that sessions studying poetry would be a good idea as they would help to understand meanings and demystify the notion that poetry is too abstruse.

Noticeably, one respondent was critical about each of the options and was fairly explicit why. With regard to *poetry reading by a poet in your library*, she states “this is advertising poetry as something they already do not like” (Female, 17). For *Poetry*

Competitions, “only people interested in poetry go for these.” The suggestion that *Poetry Posters* would be a good way to attract non-users of poetry is questioned, “these would be mocked/ignored.” Finally, the option of *writing and performing your own poetry* is challenged on suitability grounds, “people who do not like poetry do not enjoy being forced to engage in activities they despise.” These comments, evidently passionate and from the heart, indicate that poetry-related activities need to be presented in a fun, accessible and targeted manner if poetry is to appeal to those young people who suffer from poetryphobia.

Although, the suggestions of displaying “poetry posters” was dismissed it is interesting to note that two of the respondents who claimed not to like poetry said that *Poetry Posters* would get them interested in poetry. Other suggestions that were labelled positive include: “Poetry reading by a poet in the library” and “poetry with accompanying illustrations.” This latter comment hints at poetry’s potential to mingle with other arts, in this case – drawing/painting – and could be a good way in which to encourage teenagers to see poetry as a vibrant activity. The fact that all of the options were circled at least once and other suggestions were provided suggests that poetry has the potential to appeal, providing that it is presented in a range of different methods, thus increasing the chances of getting more young people hooked onto poetry.

4.2.2. Summary of Bar Charts



The bar charts break down the salient points that the questionnaire was seeking to ascertain, revealing the results by gender before giving an overall picture. Evidently, it is fatuous to speak of percentages as the response rate was relatively low (15 out of 65 questions were returned). As has been mentioned on the chapter on methodology, making generalisations from such a small sample is unfeasible and impractical. However, even in a small non-random sample such as this, it is possible to discern notable trends which correlate with the views expressed by the library staff working with young people.

Evidently, the most glaring result is that all the respondents felt that more could be done to promote poetry in their library. This is interesting as the majority of the library staff interviewed conveyed the same sentiment. Furthermore, this sentiment was unaffected by those who had stated they didn't like poetry which suggests that there is a great potential for poetry to be promoted effectively to teenagers in Sheffield libraries, much more than is being presently done. It suggests too that young people perceive the value of promotion as a vital aspect of service which libraries should embrace wholeheartedly.

As has already been discussed, there was a positive response to poetry's appeal – as the comments previously explained, reveal. It would have been interesting if more questionnaires completed by boys had been returned, for as the results stand, it is clear to see that there is a greater appreciation of poetry amongst girls than amongst boys. If more questionnaires had been returned by boys, then this statement could be challenged. Additionally, the greater appeal that poetry has for girls reflects the wider comment often stated that reading is more popular with girls than with boys in their teenage years.

Some of the librarians' comments touched on whether poetry would receive a good reception with boys, principally because of the image problem and the overarching sentiment that a lot of boys consider reading as not being for them.

All of the libraries under investigation in this project had a poetry section so the results make for interesting reading in the fact that just over half of the respondents were aware that their library possessed a poetry section. Two of the female respondents were unsure if this was the case (these answers were classified as negative). Therefore, when combined with the 100% positive response to the question of more being done to promote poetry, it is manifest that libraries not only need to address promotional issues but issues relating to signage. If poetry featured in more prominent positions within the library, then this could help to create a healthy appetite for it amongst young people.

This notion of a healthy appetite for poetry is reflected by the fact that over half of the respondents felt that there weren't enough poetry books in their library. This sentiment was not restrained to those who exclusively liked poetry either or girls as both male respondents indicate that there should be more poetry books. It is evident then that in this small sample, there is a zest for poetry, which libraries could do more to tap into. Indeed, this enthusiasm is reflected in the answers provided in the bonus section of the questionnaires, relating to favourite poet and favourite poem. As there was no obligation (stated on form) to fill in any answers to these questions, the fact that ten respondents answered was very significant. The answers revealed a range of poetic styles – from the humorous to the serious to the topical to the classical – as poets included John Cooper-Clarke, Walt Whitman, Siegfried Sassoon, T.S. Eliot, Spike Milligan, Rudyard Kipling, Carol Ann Duffy, Robert Frost, Benjamin Zephaniah and

John Donne. Out of the ten who mentioned their favourite poet, eight could relate the title of their favourite poem which was more than the researcher had anticipated.

Results indicate that there is a greater awareness of poetry amongst this user group than previously anticipated and that libraries could be doing significantly more to promote it.

4.3. Objective 3: Find out whether poetry has a role in public libraries' reader development work with young people

In response to the question, “Can poetry be a means of getting non-readers interested in reading?” the interviewees were unanimous in their affirmation. However, this was dependent on the kind of poetry that was used and, as mentioned previously, the confidence of the person who was introducing the poetry in order for enthusiasm to rub off onto non-readers. Advantages attributed to poetry were its brevity, humour and accessibility as the following assertions illustrate:

“Well, I think if you look at it from the viewpoint that poetry can be short, sharp and snappy and if you are a non-reader you're not going to pick up a big novel to start with are you...you obviously need another way...” (B1)

“...like Roald Dahl. Kids love it, because it's funny. Even though it's poetry, kids won't register” (A1)

“The project I ran called Youthbox which was about getting socially excluded young people involved in reading...I mostly used non-fiction and poetry...poetry was really accessible compared to say using fiction, for example, as books can be too long” (B2)

This notion of accessibility was alluded to by one of the children's champions in Broomhill, who highlighted that poetry can work really well with children who have special needs, “*We do have some SEN children and they do relate very well to poetry. It's the rhythm that can really capture their imaginations*” (A2). This relates to the idea of poetry being a form of therapy. Although the interviewee here was talking about younger children as opposed to teenagers she did recognise that poetry and music combined could have a big impact on a teenage audience.

Dissenting opinions highlighted potential obstacles, namely: confidence in promoting it, poetry's poor image and whether there was enough time in which to savour the joys that poetry can yield. One interviewee candidly acknowledged that a lack of confidence would hinder introducing poetry to a teenage audience:

“Going back to the primary level, I've often read poetry to them. It's different, instead of having a picture book...I've never tried it with teenagers...I must admit I've never had the confidence” (D1)

Her colleague was equally honest in assessing the value that poetry would have in young people's lives, unless it was relevant and possessed a certain “Wow” factor. Interestingly, she asserted that if poetry was labelled under another name, then it would be more popular with a teenage audience:

“How it's presented is crucial. Would you call it poetry? Maybe a *something else* session. I don't know the answer!” (D2)

When one considers the great success of Poetry Slam events and the great numbers of people who are encouraged to participate, then this could be a potential answer. Making poetry fun, accessible and relevant to young people's lives were common sentiments shared by these interviewees.

On the subject of confidence, one interviewee highlighted how this could only come about from having a good knowledge of the poetry scene in Britain today and poetry in general – that confidence and knowledge were inextricably linked: “ You would have to know what you were doing...you would have to have a good knowledge of the poetry out there” (B1).

Although poetry's brevity was highlighted as one of its virtues, one of the children's champions questioned whether the fact that its compactness precluded sustained interest in the genre:

“With fiction you can lose yourself in it straightaway whereas with poetry I do think you need time to sit and read it and re-read it and digest it to get the full meaning out of it. You know the lives we lead nowadays there’s not that time to sit and reflect...especially with children and computer games and things like that, it’s very difficult” (A2)

In the context of libraries’ reader development work with young people, this is an interesting statement. Surely libraries should be championing all forms of reading? Whilst recognising that poetry is a markedly different genre of writing from fiction, doesn’t its succinctness lend itself very well to be read in all kinds of places? As one commentator has expressed, “*poetry can do anything that fiction can do, only poetry does it much better because it does it in a smaller compass and shorter space of time*” (Hall, 1989:17). Notwithstanding this, the final part of the interviewee’s comment (indented above) sheds light on what young people are interested in today. There are discernible ways in which the use of ICT could promote an enthusiasm for poetry; this is covered in the next objective below (see page 53).

There was an overwhelming “Yes” in response to the question, “*Do you think poetry has a role to play in public libraries’ reader development agenda?*” In a few cases it was noted that poetry was more pronounced with younger children – with activities such as storytelling and picture books quite common. How to keep older children – i.e. teenagers - engaged with reading, interested in poetry and enthused with their library remained a thorny issue:

“ I think poetry isn’t used enough with everybody from teenagers to adults. With reader development you would have to be very careful I think. if it was too funny and off the wall I think that it could put you right off actually, poetry could be really attractive, especially for those who don’t necessarily want to read a big book”. (C2)

As to whether poetry could help alleviate children’s interest in reading declining in their teenage years there was a generally upbeat response. The main issues concerned

how the poetry would be presented and in what ways it would be targeted. One interviewee conveyed this in stark terms:

“With kids, it is very much how we are getting it across and making it interesting. I think if you just put them in a poetry section, I don’t know how well it would go down.” (A1)

There was a great emphasis on targeted promotional work, which would help capture young people’s imagination. A few of the interviewees highlighted the image problem, particularly with boys where reading isn’t seen as “*the cool thing to do*”. Having male poets visiting the library who were popular and contemporary would be a great means of conveying the sense that poetry can be relevant, hip and meaningful for young people:

“It’s finding the route really, finding something that would interest them to make them think ‘*wow this is great, this is cool!*’ Poetry isn’t always seen as cool in the teenage years, reading isn’t seen as cool in the teenage years especially with boys” (A2)

“Somebody like Zephaniah would be very good because he is very cool and he would talk about issues. It wouldn’t be too childish and the young people wouldn’t feel patronised. Somebody like him would work really well. That would be great.” (C2)

A majority of the interviewees re-affirmed the view that getting someone who was well known to visit the library – who would treat the teenagers fairly – would be a great way to arouse interest. One interviewee suggested that capturing the interest of boys and other non-readers was perfectly feasible, as long as you had the right person, “*you need someone to animate the poetry to make it interesting*” (B2). This sentiment was shared by the reading group coordinator:

“Poetry linked to music could really help. If it’s done in the right way and had some famous people who came along to explain...I think someone like Zephaniah or Linton Kwesi Johnson...You would need someone pretty big to do that.” (B1)

The image factor surrounding poetry was considered to be a major obstacle so in order to counteract this, presentation was emphasised as a crucial factor by a couple of

the interviewees. This is enhanced when one considers that poetry occupies a niche place in the grand world of literature:

“I think that poetry will always be a niche thing really as not everyone is going to be interested...it’s about presentation...I don’t see young people are going to pick up poetry books but if you had poetry on the wall, poetry in magazines or poetry on postcards then certainly young people will read more.” (B2)

In relation to the physical aspect, the actual design of the book was considered to be of significant importance, *“if it’s a cream book with not a lot of content then it’s not going to be riveting is it? However, if the book is bright, captures your attention then you’re more likely to pick it up aren’t you?”* (D2). Vis-à-vis this aspect of grabbing the attention of the users, one interview highlighted that promotion had to be actively “pushed”, which in turn would be an excellent way of advertising stock that has hardly been touched:

“It’s getting the kids’ imagination, you’ve got to bring it to them to get them to take it out. If you do a display on poetry you’d probably get them taking books out. It’s a case of bringing it to their attention.” (A2)

As well as bringing poetry to young people’s attention, it was felt that having a role model that they could look up to and events that encouraged participation would be good baits – especially for teenage boys – as one interviewee neatly summed up, *“You want more visible people that boys look up to ...it needs them to be seen to be reading poetry as well. I mean it would be nice to get a poetry book put together of their favourite poems.”* These aspects of writing and participation are alluded to in the next section that follows.

4.4. Objective 4: How libraries can use ICT to generate an enthusiasm for poetry

A majority of the interviewees felt that using ICT had great potential in promoting an enthusiasm for poetry, particularly as it is an interactive medium and something which teenagers today are engaged with, “...*Because at the moment all kids are interested in computers. If they can use the sites, like Benjamin Zephaniah and Jacqueline Wilson and all the links with poets/poet laureates then that will encourage them to explore and discover ...*” (A1). The interviewee then went on to assert that using ICT creatively could even bring the person to look at the books in the library if they see that they are available. This raises interesting questions about the harmony between books and ICT – in relation to poetry; young people could use the Internet to find out more information about poets/writers they might be interested in and then see if their library stocks the particular book.

Naturally, fostering a sense of collaboration and instilling a feeling of ownership were cited as key benefits of ICT. Not only would it engender exploration but allow young people to develop their writing skills:

“You could conceivably have a go at writing poetry, getting them to write their own poetry...writing poetry and then reading it to other people... put it on the web can't you...you can put your poetry on the website as well as looking at other teenagers' writing” (C1)

The web induces the possibility of connectivity, “*if you could connect with other book groups or poetry books then that might be encouraging*” (C2). Such is the potential of ICT that one interviewee got slightly carried away in describing the activities that she could do using the Internet, “*We could do a bit of research with the websites...try to make a display around websites for them to look up... do a competition even...One could have poems that are projected, maybe going on to ceilings and onto*

roofs...maybe I'm getting carried away here!" (D1). However, this merely illustrates that there is an opportunity in which ICT could raise the profile of poetry in the library.

A couple of interviewees commented on a successful project that was run a couple of years ago, which involved using ICT to create a series of short stories. These stories were collaboratively written by young people (with the librarians on hand to guide and support) at various libraries around Sheffield – with the uncompleted stories being forwarded on via email to other branches – and finished in a day. Whilst acknowledging that it was hard work, it was recognised that something similar could be done with poetry, *"We could do something similar with poetry...it's really dependent however on cash and having enough computers."* (B1)

As well as the financial constraints, another concern raised in relation to using ICT was the confidence factor, *"Do you want to have somebody who is more in tune...maybe having something akin to a workshop over a period of weeks, someone who could show the potential of ICT with poetry. This would whet the enthusiasm"* (D1). Unquestionably, if libraries were going to promote poetry through ICT then library staff would need to feel suitably skilled and confident to do this.

Additionally, there was a belief that there was scope to develop a wider interest in reading amongst teenagers when using ICT to promote poetry:

"If you used it to find poetry or to find poets then it may lead on to finding other books...if they read the poetry and like it then they might find other books the poet has written or books in a different area...so they are not necessarily reading fiction" (C1)

One children's champion felt that ICT could be a perfect springboard as the enthusiasm for computers is inbuilt with this user group: *"you'll find some kids who*

want to use the Internet all the time...it's the first thing they'll go for...then they'll go back to the book ... You could have a site that says, "For more of this author, why don't you read such and such a book?" As previously hinted, this could encourage young people to go to the shelves in the library and read around the subject. Her colleague felt that on a more fundamental level, revamping the council's page on the web could be an excellent way of capturing young people's attention, promoting poetry and the wider joys of reading:

"Looking at when we switch the computers on the people's network, there is scope to have a page with poetry links instead of the council one...if it was eye-catching it would work particularly as young people go straight to the computers." (D1)

4.5. Objective 5: Whether poetry can promote the public library service and if so, how?

Overall, there was a general consensus that poetry could promote the library service. One of its big selling points was considered to be the fact that poetry can convey a message using relatively few words and is readily adaptable:

"Yes. I think it could. There are lots of things you could do with poetry. You know, things like performance poetry. You could read your poetry anywhere can't you! It's very accessible isn't it. Off the Shelf⁹ used poetry on big billboards" (C1)

One interviewee suggested that involving local poets could act as a promotional tool. Highlighting that during the *Off the Shelf* festival that takes place in Sheffield every October, poets and writing groups go round the pubs giving poetry readings, why couldn't something similar be done in libraries? As she suggests, it would help promote a different image of the library, away from its stereotypical norm, "*That's getting away from the usual idea that libraries are quiet. It would be nice to have. Maybe it's worth*

⁹ "Now in its 15th year, Off the Shelf is well established as one of the major cultural events in the region's calendar and one of the largest and most exciting Festivals in the North of England"
<http://www.offtheshelf.org.uk> (accessed 15.07.2006)

having a poetry competition with the library as a theme.” (A2). Other activities suggested using resources that libraries might have at their disposal, “I think if you used postcards...poems on the back of opening times that would be nice...if you had poetry on a moving screen that would be good like at train stations...magnetic poetry would be nice too”. (B2).

Having a catalyst via the media was felt to be critical if poetry was going to act as a promotional tool, *“If you had something like the Richard and Judy Book Club that was just poetry based then yes it would probably promote the library service.” (A1)* Maybe there is a potential for public libraries in Sheffield to work with other organisations, as they do during *Off the Shelf* festival, such as the local radio network to advertise, for example, poetry competitions libraries might be running for young people. Clearly, creating a Richard and Judy effect or something akin to the success of Oprah’s book group in America would be beyond Sheffield libraries’ remit but creating a buzz about poetry, especially with teenagers through activities like rap/performance poetry that encouraged participation, would act as a great promotional tool for the library service.

However, one interviewee felt that the overriding image problem facing public libraries, especially pervading the user group under focus in this project was a major problem:

“I think libraries have an image problem and I’m not sure that the best way to improve the image is poetry...IT and music seems to be the way... this is where the work with young people is going...can we make libraries relevant?...you can promote libraries with poetry as a way of getting young people interested.” (B2)

As has previously been mentioned, recent research carried out by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2006) ratifies this. On the question of

pushing poetry, another interviewee suggested that there should be a rethink as to where it was positioned in the library – that instead of allowing poetry books to be shoved to the side and gathering dust on the shelves, they should be integrated with regular fiction. *“One of the things we could do is to promote poetry with the fiction...otherwise people aren’t going to go and look at it. Perhaps one of the things we should do is mix poetry with the fiction. It tends to get a bit sidelined due to the fact where we put them.”*

(B1)

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

5.1. Objective 1

“[poetry promotion] is something we have never done but I would be really interested in finding out what we could be doing, what resources there are and who is available to promote poems and I think it could be good.” (C2)

Overall, there was a largely upbeat tone expressed by the young people’s librarians in relation to poetry promotion to teenagers. Whilst recognising that not enough is being done to promote poetry presently, there was an underlying awareness that interest in poetry would increase considerably, providing that poetry promotion was effective and engaging in equal measure. This emphasis on *engagement* is highlighted, when one considers the common sentiment that young people – in particular teenagers – might have negative perceptions about poetry. Therefore, key to fostering this connection with poetry amongst a teenage audience was realising the importance of presentation, incorporating a range of activities and encouraging a sense of participation. As one comment reinforces:

“people would rather participate than listen...this would apply especially with poetry events...for example with Off the Shelf, writing workshops are more popular than reading with young people...things like poetry slams have been really successful.”(B2)

If young people could see poetry as a dynamic and exciting activity – and if it is promoted in a relevant manner – then the general feeling seemed to be that interest in the genre would increase. However, barriers to promotion were highlighted. These included: lack of confidence amongst library staff, poor awareness of ICT resources (i.e. poetry-based websites), a gap in the publishing market for poetry books aimed at teenagers, poor image of poetry amongst teenagers, poetry as a niche genre with limited appeal and the fact that poetry is competing with other interests that have more appeal to teenagers, such as music and ICT. As will be suggested in the practical

recommendations on p66, there are various ways in which these barriers can be broken down.

As to why poetry should be promoted more, it was apparent that there was a unanimous belief that poetry is a brilliant way of expressing yourself. This expressive element was highlighted in the literature review, “why poetry is important?” The interviewees felt that poetry can enable teenagers to explore their feelings and understand the world around them, allowing them to empathise with a range of emotions and perspectives. These facets of poetry are clearly alluded to by Hall (1989:7), “poetry can play an important part in developing the imagination, in nourishing the emotional life of our pupils and in extending their experience and insight.” Whilst the results clearly indicate poetry’s educative potential, there was a common perception that it needs to be made fun. This can be said to be true of any literature promotion but particularly poetry promotion where it is often regarded as occupying a niche position and perceived as being too highbrow. Humour and emphasising the performance element were cited as two ways in which poetry as a pleasurable activity could be promoted.

5.2. Objective 2

Although the overwhelming perception of poetry was largely positive, the interviewees accentuated that its poor image amongst teenagers was something that needs to be addressed, as this comments suggests, “as something in which you can dip in and out of, poetry is very amenable...then again young people might not think that it’s cool unless you brand it under something else” (D1). Poetry’s accessibility was highlighted as a positive virtue but the general feeling was that a poor image of poetry

as being irrelevant or boring precludes sustained interest in the genre, amongst a teenage user group.

Targeted activities were mentioned by the interviewees as being an excellent way in pushing the appeal of poetry and generating a buzz around it. Furthermore, twinning poetry with music could help reduce negative reactions to poetry. Examples include highlighting poetry's close association with rap music and organising poetry events with a musical theme. Combining poetry with other arts could help engender interest and foster participation. It was noticeable that the librarians felt unreservedly that if young people could see poetry taken out of a stereotypical classroom context and saw it being promoted in innovative ways, then they would respond with eagerness and enthusiasm. However, confidence was mentioned as a disabling factor amongst some of the librarians interviewed – particularly if they had no prior experience of poetry promotion and were concerned how teenagers would react to promotional activities, involving poetry. Despite this, as previously intimated, the results indicate that poetry is invaluable as it offers different perspectives on the world around us, similar to regular fiction/non-fiction.

Perhaps the most illuminating aspect of the results yielded from the data is how the teenagers' comments on the questionnaires correlated with those of the young people's librarians and further elucidate the points already highlighted. The sentiments expressed on the returned questionnaires suggest that the young people respond to poetry in a largely positive manner, appreciating poetry's mystical and life-enhancing qualities. Although the librarians' comments intimated that poetry is not especially popular with a teenage user group, the results would suggest otherwise. Of course, a

word of caution has to be adopted here due to the small sample size but there can be no discounting of the largely positive affirmation of poetry. It would appear that for poetry-related activities to be successful, then they need to be promoted and presented in a fun, accessible and targeted manner – particularly if it is to appeal to those who don't like it. Furthermore, the results suggest that in order to achieve this, a range of activities could be actively promoted by the library: poetry competitions, poetry readings by popular poets who can engage a teenage audience, poems posters displayed around the library, poetry performance events and combining poetry with other art-forms, whether it be music or art.

Asked whether, “would you say that enough is being done to promote poetry in your library?” all of the young people's librarians said that much more should be done. The young people endorsed this sentiment, which would seem to indicate that young people perceive promotion to be a vital aspect of library service provision and that there is an appetite for poetry, which libraries could tap into. Instead of relegating poetry to the dark corners of the library bringing it to young people's attention is vital, not only to ensure the survival of poetry but also to encourage young people's all-round development as readers.

5.3. Objective 3

Evidently, poetry has a vital role to play in public libraries' reader development agenda. Poetry's accessibility, humour and relative brevity (when compared with long novels for example) were cited as key strengths. Moreover, poetry introduces young people to a concentrated form of writing and contributes to language and emotional development, “poetry has a part to play in reader development as it uses unusual words

and explores emotions” (A1). Intrinsic to reader development is encouraging those with poor literacy skills or from a socially excluded background to read; it would seem that poetry, when presented in an innovative fashion, can help promote this reading development. However, library staff highlighted how they needed to feel confident before they could use poetry with a teenage group not solely due to the perception that poetry is difficult but also that a teenage audience can be hard to engage with and enthuse.

Therefore, for poetry to have a meaningful part to play in libraries’ reader development work with young people, it was apparent that a number of the young people’s librarians felt that “role models” would be an excellent way of capturing a teenage audience. For example, if well known faces who were either poets or enthusiastic about poetry visited the library and could relate with young people on a down to earth level, it was suggested that enthusiasm would rub off. However, such an event would need to contain specific activities in order to give it structure and captivate young people’s imaginations.

If poetry is to have a successful role in a reader development context, then presentation becomes of paramount importance. As one interviewee emphasised, “it depends on how it is actually marketed, with who and whether you did it working with schools” (D2). This last point is interesting as liaising with schools to see what poetry is currently being taught on the curriculum would have an impact on the poetry that could be promoted in the library. Unquestionably, in order to obviate a generally poor image problem that poetry suffers from amongst a teenage audience, then how it is presented is a matter of huge significance, “if it is scattered around in interesting ways...such as

text messages then I think people would be interested...presenting it in a more accessible way would make it more likely to get read” (B2).

5.4. Objective 4

There was an overriding awareness that ICT could be used to generate enthusiasm for poetry given that a sizeable majority of young people have a keen interest in new technologies. However, constraints were highlighted by a number of interviewees relating to budget resources and staff confidence. The potential of ICT – that encourages exploration, discovering of new information, learning of new skills and independence of spirit – was cited as an essential ingredient that libraries could exploit. For example, internet based resources relating to poetry would allow young people to explore a range of poets/poetic styles and discover new/old poems by a poet/writer who interests them. Additionally, ICT can help foster collaboration and interactivity through the exchanging and penning of ideas respectively. If Sheffield libraries embraced the potential of ICT as a promotional tool, then not only could poetry be promoted effectively, but young people could explore a whole new world of poetry at their fingertips, honing their writing skills and widening their reading development in the process.

Undoubtedly, ICT and the Web throws open new portals – in terms of discovering new books/ new styles of writing and empowering the individual. As was alluded to in Chapter 4 the thrill for a teenager if they could see that a poem they had written was being hosted online, available for all to see, would have a big impact. Naturally, there are a number of poetry competitions which could create the same effect, but if Sheffield Libraries – as was suggested in the previous chapter – included a

section on their web pages for teenagers providing links to popular poets, competitions and poetry tips, then interest in poetry would grow. Indeed if young people were themselves involved and consulted on the design of the web pages, then these links could be made relevant and the profile of poetry considerably enhanced.

Whilst recognising that there was a great potential for libraries to embrace ICT as a tool with which to captivate young people's interest, the results suggest that awareness of poetry-based websites was relatively low amongst the interviewees. If this awareness was increased, then not only would the dynamic potential of ICT be more easily exploited but the confidence of library staff working with young people would grow too (see Practical Recommendations on p.66). Financial constraints were cited as a mitigating factor in realising the potential of ICT, but considering the success and fun that a previous project yielded – using networked computers in a number of Sheffield libraries to create and design a booklet of stories involving young people – there is no reason why something similar couldn't be done with poetry. It would certainly help to project an image of poetry as something that can be dynamic, participatory and interactive.

5.5. Objective 5

On the subject of whether poetry could promote the public library service in Sheffield, there was a unanimous agreement that this could occur. This is reinforced by the perception that poetry lends itself readily for promotion as it is accessible, relatively short and can be displayed anywhere. Therefore, libraries could not only do more to promote poetry to teenagers but do more to promote themselves through poetry. For example, poetry celebrating the library could be championed through a range of

methods – such as competitions, postcards, themed displays, bookmarks (with opening times on the front/poems on the back) – which could be affiliated with local events such as Off the Shelf festival or National events like National Poetry Day. Promoting poetry via these means would help engender the notion that it can be fun, topical and a powerful form of literature.

Furthermore, if libraries liaised with other organisations such as the radio/local media, then this could help raise the profile of poetry as well as the libraries, especially if a competition was advertised and prize money was on offer. Of course, this is dependent on resource allocations and funding, but there is evidently great potential for libraries in Sheffield to project themselves as thriving centres for poetry and other forms of writing. As has already been mentioned, using poetry to shout about public libraries could help dispel negative perceptions about the genre – further promoting public libraries as dynamic centres of the imagination where all genres of literature are championed and celebrated.

5.6. Recommendations

The Recommendations listed below, underneath the next heading, will highlight the measures that could be adopted by Sheffield libraries in order to overcome the barriers to promotion that have previously been mentioned in this research. Due consideration will then be given to the limitations of this research before areas for possible future research are propounded. The chapter concludes with an appraisal of the fulfilment of the aims highlighted in Chapter 1.

5.6.1 Practical Recommendations

- Poetry Events tailored for Young People

In order to promote the notion that poetry is a pleasurable activity then libraries should organise events that encourage participation and interactivity – involving young people as active participants. These events could take a range of forms such as Poetry Slams, poetry competitions, interactive workshops conducted by local/famous poets and poetry readings.

- Poetry Displays

Displaying poetry around the library is an excellent promotional tool, particularly if they are imaginatively displayed with pieces of art for example. These displays could be themed – i.e. related to topical circumstances, tied in with events highlighted above or act as a promotional tool for the library itself. Involving young people in the selection and organisation of poetry displays would give them a sense of ownership.

- Role Models/Poetry Champions

Enthusiastic promotion that is successful and effective originates from enthusiastic individuals. Establishing designated poetry champions from library staff working with young people would help give poetry a more prominent position within service provision. Furthermore, “poetry champions” could help accentuate poetry’s role in libraries’ reader development work with young people.

- Workshops for library staff

Confidence was mentioned as a barrier to poetry promotion to teenagers. Suitably tailored workshops that focused on the value of poetry, involving teenagers in promotional work and suggested activities could help remove

anxiety about promoting poetry. Obviously, as with the range of events highlighted in the first recommendation above, this would be dependent on financial resources. However, workshops would not only help to instil confidence but could be a source of knowledge, as new knowledge is shared by participants. As one interviewee said quite emphatically in relation to service provision to young people, Sheffield libraries has the potential to do a lot more. It would appear that workshops could help facilitate effective promotion and best practice.

- Better Signage

Poetry suffers somewhat as it is often relegated to the darkest corners of the library. Bringing it out into the light can further reinforce the impression that it has value and meaning in the library of the twenty-first library. This can be achieved by creating designated poetry sections that young people can relate to, putting bookmarks into heavily borrowed books advertising the poetry section and maybe leaving poem cards near the front desk or amongst the teenage section which young people can take at their leisure.

- Making use of ICT

As there is an appetite for ICT amongst young people, then it is apparent that libraries could build on this enthusiasm by using it more effectively as a promotional tool. In relation to poetry, popular poetry/poets' websites could be foregrounded and websites that encourage writing could be championed. This is dependent too on the relative skills of the library staff – if confidence is an issue, then tailored workshops as previously mentioned can help counteract this.

- Liaising with other organisation

Poetry promotions to teenagers could be made more effective if partnerships were established between libraries and other organisations, demystifying the notion that poetry is only for a particular group of people. As Poetry is an oral art as much as written one, then liaising with outside partners such as Off the Shelf and Sheffield FM could showcase poetry's potential as a vibrant activity. This is dependent on budget resources but would help give added significance to poetry-based events organised by the library and moreover promote the library.

- Turn National Poetry Day into National Poetry Month

National Poetry Day promoted by the Poetry Society is held annually in early October. This could become an excellent promotional tool for poetry, if libraries built on the hype generated by NPD¹⁰, sustaining interest in the genre by making October "Poetry Month". This would increase the chances of poetry promotion having more of an impact on young people if initiatives could be sustained. It goes without saying that this recommendation incorporates elements of suggestions previously put forward – dependent on staff resources and funding – but would play a prominent role in projecting poetry as a lively and animated form of literature.

5.6.2. Limitations of Research

Although qualitative research, as suggested in chapter 3, can inductively identify trends from a relatively small sample it would have helped to increase the validity of this research if the sample size had been larger. However, due to the time constraints in which the research was conducted, it was important that data collection was kept manageable so that there was ample time for data analysis. As the questionnaire

¹⁰ National Poetry Day

response was relatively low – albeit the results yielded noteworthy trends – interviewing a few of the young people would have allowed issues to be explored in greater detail, thus enhancing the exploratory nature of qualitative research. Furthermore, although the questionnaire contained open-ended questions the interview would have provided a platform from which the teenagers would have been able to express their opinions on the topics under investigation.

5.6.3. Suggestions for further research

- Poetry promotion in school libraries

It would be interesting to investigate how well poetry is promoted in a school library context in comparison with a public one and ascertain what kind of liaison there is, if any, on what kind of poetry books should be promoted to young people. This stems from the notion that public libraries have a role to support and enlarge the learning that is undertaken in a school environment. If poetry resources are meagre in a school library then this may explain why public libraries do relatively little to promote poetry to teenagers.

- Analysing libraries' policies on stock promotion, particularly in relation to poetry

Further research investigating libraries' policies on stock promotion and where poetry fits into service provision would shed light not only on the nature of the policies and how well they are being implemented on the ground floor, but also whether the needs of the users are being met. Clearly, if there is an appetite for poetry amongst users then this should be incorporated in libraries' promotional strategies.

- Comparing literature promotion to primary-age children to secondary-age children

As this research suggest that more could be done in relation to promoting poetry to teenagers, it would be useful to discover what kind of promotional activities libraries are doing to encourage primary age children to read and explore a wide variety of books. Could any of the promotional; activities identified be adapted and utilised with an older user group like teenagers?

- Exploring the effectiveness of ICT as a reader development tool

Evidently, the potential of ICT within libraries' reader development agenda is massive. It would be interesting to investigate whether libraries could promote this potential in a more explicit manner, as a way with which to capture young people's attentions. How well prepared are libraries in relation to incorporating the benefits into reader development initiatives? Is there enough groundswell of opinion – amongst users – in support of ICT to encourage libraries to put more resources into this area?

- Effectiveness of poetry-based initiatives

If libraries include poetry events – such as National Poetry Day – in their service to the public, it would be useful to observe how popular they are, the reasons for organising them and whether these meet the expectations of the users.

Furthermore, if these events were considered successful, it would be useful to address the issue of sustainability and what measures libraries could adopt to ensure that the halo generated by such initiatives doesn't rub off too soon.

5.7. Fulfilment of Aims

It is evident that much more could be done than at present to promote poetry to teenagers in Sheffield's public libraries. This research has suggested a range of recommendations by which this could be achieved. It was apparent that successful promotion was dependent on the enthusiasm, skills and confidence of the library staff. As the results convey, clearly there is an appetite for poetry which libraries, as centres of literature promotion, are ideally placed to tap into. Furthermore, by promoting poetry to young people, public libraries could help ensure poetry's long term health as a vital genre of literature, by creating a nation of life-long poetry lovers.

This research also confirmed the notion that as poetry is an accessible art, then not only does it lend itself readily to be promoted to young people but it can also act as a dynamic promotional tool for the public library service. On the question of ICT, there is evidence to suggest that ICT-related activities can help promote an enthusiasm for poetry, particularly as IT is an important element in young people's lives today. ICT can enable young people to take control of their lives and explore the world around them; poetry can emulate this, aiding us in our quest for enlightenment, as Sedgwick (1997:3) asserts, "the educational power of poetry, like that of all purposeful individual writing stems from the fact that it is a process of discovery, not a record of it." Promoting poetry to teenagers in libraries on a more prominent level will not only raise the profile of poetry but more importantly develop a life-long love of reading poetry for pleasure.

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7.1. APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Codes used in Chapters 4 and 5

A1= Broomhill
A2= Broomhill
B1= Central Library
B2= Central Library
C1= Ecclesall
C2= Ecclesall
D1= Firth Park
D2= Firth Park

Poetry in the library

- 1) Have there been any poetry-related activities in your library recently?
- 2) If so, what were the main aims?
- 3) What was the target age group for each activity?
- 4) How do you think teenagers respond to poetry promotion?
- 5) Would you say that enough is being done to promote poetry in your library?

Poetry/Reader development

- 6) Can poetry be a means of getting non-readers interested in reading?
- 7) Do you think poetry has a role to play in public libraries' reader development agenda?
- 8) How would you describe the relationship between reading and poetry?
- 9) It is often stated that children's interest in reading declines as they get older, particularly in their teenage years. Do you think poetry can combat this?

Poetry/ICT

- 10) Have you used ICT in reader development work with young people?
- 11) Are you using ICT activities to promote poetry?
- 12) How do you think your library could use ICT to promote an enthusiasm for poetry amongst teenagers?

- 13) Would you say those activities are effective in generating an enthusiasm for poetry?
- 14) Do you believe that the use of ICT to promote poetry can develop a wider interest in reading?
- 15) What poetry-based websites are you aware of?

Final Questions

- 16) Do you think poetry can promote the public library service, and if so how?
- 17) Is there anything else you would like to say about poetry promotion to teenagers in Sheffield public library service?

Poetry in Your library

6) Do you think your library could do more to promote poetry?(Please circle)

Yes No

7) Does your library have a poetry section? (Please circle)

Yes No

8) Do you think there are enough poetry books in your library?(Please circle)

Yes No

Personal Data

To help me sort out your answers, would you mind answering these questions?

9) Are you? Male Female

10) How old are you?

Bonus Questions

(You don't have to answer these, but I'd love to know!)

11) Who is your favourite poet?

12) Do you know the title of your favourite poem?

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire. Your help is greatly appreciated!

7.3. APPENDIX 3

Participant Information Sheet

1. **Research Project Title:**

Spreading the Word. Is enough being done to promote poetry to teenagers in Sheffield's public libraries?

2. **Invitation paragraph:**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If you are under the age of 18 you and your parent will need to sign the consent form. Please contact me (**see no. 13 below**) if there is anything that isn't clear or you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

3. **What is the project's purpose?**

I am interested in exploring poetry's position within the public library service and whether enough is being done to promote it and make it accessible to teenagers. The main objectives I hope to cover include:

- Investigating whether interest in poetry is declining because promotion is waning
- The attitudes of librarians and teenagers to poetry's position in public libraries
- Find out whether poetry has a role in public libraries' reader development agenda
- How libraries can use ICT to generate an enthusiasm for poetry
- Whether poetry can promote the public library service and if so, how?

4. **Why have I been chosen?**

You were chosen in order to help me satisfy the main aims of my project. The sample size is large enough for my results to be meaningful.

5. **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form if you are under the age of 18. This signed consent form along with the signed parental consent form that your parent should sign should be returned with the completed questionnaire in the **stamped addressed envelope** attached with this sheet. You can still withdraw at any time and you do not have to give a reason.

6. **What will happen to me if I take part?**

You will be involved in the research for as short amount a time as possible.

- **Young People:** the questionnaire will take between 5-10 min.
- **Library staff:** the interview will take no longer than 30min.

The questionnaire will be simple and easy to follow. The Interview is designed to allow for exploratory discussion in a friendly atmosphere.

This isn't a test for you! Your participation will be extremely valuable, in the sense that I am finding out useful and interesting information that will help me in my project.

7. **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

If you are asked to be interviewed you will notice that I will have a recording device to record the interview. This will enable me to listen to and write up the interview in my own time. No one else will have access to the interview. You will be reminded before the interview, if you are comfortable with this.

8. **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Although there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will bring to light some recommendations about how poetry can be promoted effectively to teenagers. Therefore, your contribution is greatly appreciated.

9. **What if something goes wrong?**

In the unlikely event that something goes wrong please don't hesitate to contact me or my supervisor. Details are provided below (no.13).

10. **Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All the information that I will collect during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications.

11. **What will happen to the results of the research project?**

The results of my research project will be written up by the end of August this year. My final project will be made available in the university library. If you would like to see the final project please don't hesitate to contact me as I will be able to provide a summary of the results. I would like to make clear that *all* results will be made anonymous.

12. **Who has ethically reviewed the project?**

This project has been ethically approved via 'The Information Studies' department's ethics review procedure. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

13. **Contacts for further information:**

Researcher's Name: Alexis Dimyan
Address: 54 Spooner Road, Broomhill, Sheffield, S10 5BN
Tel no: 07837905328
Email: alexisdimyan@hotmail.com

Supervisor's Name: Kendra Albright
Address: Department of Information studies, Regents Court, Portobello Street, Sheffield
Tel no: 0114 2222649
Email: k.albright@sheffield.ac.uk

14. **Finally:**

Thank you for taking part in this project!

7.4. APPENDIX 4

Participant Consent Form

Title of Project: *Spreading the Word. Is enough being done to promote poetry to teenagers in Sheffield's public libraries?*

Name of Researcher: Alexis Dimyan

Participant Identification Number for this project:

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated: 25/04/2006 for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.

4. I agree to take part in the above project.

_____	_____	
_____	_____	
Name of Participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	
_____	_____	
Name of Parent	Date	Signature
_____	_____	
_____	_____	
Name of Person taking consent (if different from researcher)	Date	Signature
_____	_____	
_____	_____	
Researcher	Date	Signature

Copies:

7.5. APPENDIX 5

Parents' Information Sheet

1. **Research Project Title:**

Spreading the Word. Is enough being done to promote poetry to teenagers in Sheffield's public libraries?

2. **Invitation paragraph:**

Your son/daughter is being invited to take part in a research project. Before you give parental consent it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please contact me (**see no. 12 below**) if there is anything that isn't clear or you would like more information. Thank you for reading this.

3. **What is the project's purpose?**

I am interested in exploring poetry's position within the public library service and whether enough is being done to promote it and make it accessible to teenagers. The main objectives I hope to cover include:

- Investigating whether interest in poetry is declining because promotion is waning
- The attitudes of librarians and teenagers to poetry's position in public libraries
- Find out whether poetry has a role in public libraries' reader development agenda
- How libraries can use ICT to generate an enthusiasm for poetry
- Whether poetry can promote the public library service and if so, how?

4. **Why has my son/daughter been chosen?**

Your son/daughter was chosen in order to help me satisfy the main aims of my project. The sample size is large enough for my results to be meaningful.

5. **Does my son/daughter have to take part?**

Your son/daughter's decision to participate is entirely voluntary and is dependent upon your consent. If you decide that your son/daughter's participation is alright you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. This signed consent form along with the signed participant consent form should be returned with the completed questionnaire in the **stamped addressed envelope** attached with this sheet. Your son/daughter can withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

6. **What will happen to my son/daughter if he/she takes part?**

Your son/daughter will be involved in the research for as short amount a time as possible.

He/she will be asked to complete a questionnaire that is designed to be clear and easy to follow. It shouldn't take any longer than 5-10mins.

This isn't a test for your child! Their participation will be extremely valuable, in the sense that I am finding out useful and interesting information that will help me in my project.

7. **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Although there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will bring to light some recommendations about how poetry can be promoted effectively to teenagers. Therefore, your son/daughter's contribution is greatly appreciated.

8. **What if something goes wrong?**

In the unlikely event that something goes wrong please don't hesitate to contact me or my supervisor. Details are provided below (no.13).

9. **Will my son/daughter's participation in this project be kept confidential?**

All the information that I will collect during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Your son/daughter will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications.

10. **What will happen to the results of the research project?**

The results of my research project will be written up by the end of August this year. My final project will be made available in the university library. If you would like to see a summary of the final project please don't hesitate to contact me. I would like to make clear that *all* results will be made anonymous.

11. **Who has ethically reviewed the project?**

This project has been ethically approved via 'The Information Studies' department's ethics review procedure at the University of Sheffield. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

12. **Contacts for further information:**

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13. **Finally**

Thank you for your cooperation with this project!