HOW CAN PUBLIC LIBRARIANS ENGAGE WITH HOMELESS PEOPLE THROUGH OUTREACH ACTIVITY?

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by

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Abstract

Background.
The literature reveals that homeless people are a socially disadvantaged group and that being homeless has multiple causes and effects, such as illiteracy, substance abuse and unemployment, which public libraries can help with. However even though public libraries can help the literature suggests that the homeless may feel uncomfortable using libraries, that libraries do not fully meet their needs and that some public library staff hold negative, prejudice opinions about them.

Aims.
The overall aim of this research was to explore how public librarians can, and do, engage with homeless communities to provide benefit and support. To achieve this the research had three objectives, to investigate the scope of existing public library activity with homeless people, to explore the collaborative relationships that exists between public libraries and homeless charities and to establish a relationship with a section of the homeless community to explore their relationship with reading and public libraries.

Methods.
The methodology followed by this research was an interpretative ethnographic approach. The researcher set up a reading project at a homeless centre in Sheffield called Cathedral Archer Project and then reflected upon this experience. The other data collection technique used was questionnaires, with them being completed by the staff and clients at the Cathedral Archer Project, the members of an electronic public library mailing list and a member of staff from the Quaker Mobile Library. The results were thematically analysed and a rich picture was created.

Results.
The different strands of research revealed some key themes related to public libraries engaging with the homeless through outreach activity. These included the need for training and the benefits of partnership working.

Conclusions.
It was concluded that each of the research objectives were at least partially met. The general findings of the research were summarised and three recommendations for best practice and six for future research were made.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Definition of Homelessness

There are many definitions of homelessness and so it is important to establish which one this piece of research will follow. The researcher decided to follow a broad definition of homelessness and so includes people who are living on the street, in temporary accommodation such as a homeless shelter or a ‘bed and breakfast’, people who squat somewhere or those whose housing situation is insecure (Outside Story, 2010; Warnes et al, 2003; Crisis, No Dateb).

The research also looks at homelessness in terms of people without a ‘home’ rather than simply a ‘house’ and so considers the fact people may be isolated from social networks due to their housing situation (Beresford et al, 1999; Stone, 1997; Daly, 1996).

1.2 Background and Context

1.2.1 Homelessness

The extent to which homelessness exists in the United Kingdom is difficult to estimate. There is a lot of disagreement amongst researchers about the exact definition of homelessness with many people viewing those forced to live on the street as being the most obvious definition (Shelter, 2009; Stone, 1997; Daly, 1996; Crisis, No Datea). Homelessness is more than just those who live on the street though, it also includes those who are vulnerably housed or living in temporary accommodation such as a ‘bed and breakfast’ and it is estimated there were 48,010 households of this kind in December 2010 (Communities and Local Government, 2011; Shelter, 2009; Stone, 1997; Daly, 1996; Crisis, No Datea). Official statistics are difficult to establish though as there are ‘hidden’ homeless, which is when people have nowhere to live but do not meet the criteria for help from local authorities, and those who sleep on the street often hide for safety (Howard et al, 2001; Daly, 1996; Crisis, No Datea; Crisis, No Dateb). However it is clear from the statistics that the homeless form a substantial section of society meaning public libraries should be considering how best to provide a service for them (Communities and Local Government, 2011).

The causes of homelessness are varied and many, with each homeless person’s situation being unique (Outside Story, 2010; Shelter, 2009; Warnes et al,
However, there are a number of common causes including, but not exclusive to, unemployment, domestic violence, substance abuse and ill health (Warnes et al, 2003: 45; Fitzpatrick et al, 2000; Stone, 1997: 1).

Many homeless people are functionally illiterate, meaning they are not able to read or write at the level necessary for a person to successfully cope with life and work (Jama and Dugdale, 2010; Gorman, 2003; Daly, 1996). Furthermore, the experience of being homeless has a very disruptive impact on a child’s education; for example, they have no space to complete their homework in (Crosson Tower, 1992: 56; Korinek et al, 1992; Howard et al, 2001). The ability to read is important for educational development and finding employment, with people with low literacy levels being less likely to be in full-time employment when they are thirty (Jama and Dugdale, 2010: 5; Jiao and Onwuegbuzie, 2003; Beresford, 1999). As unemployment is thought to be one of the contributing factors to homelessness this can lead people to become trapped in a ‘no home and no job’ cycle (Fitzpatrick et al, 2000: 33; Greve, 1991). The importance of reading in maintaining and improving mental agility should also not be underestimated (Oltermann, 2007; Kinnell and Shepherd, 1998).

There are also high levels of mental health problems amongst the homeless (Warnes et al, 2003; Howard et al, 2001; Fitzpatrick et al, 2000; Beresford et al, 1999; Craig, 1998; Daly, 1996; Salter and Salter, 1996; Stronge, 1992; Crisis, No Datea). Mental health problems can be a cause of homelessness but equally they can be caused, and exacerbated, by being homeless (Fitzpatrick et al, 2000: 31; Craig, 1998; Daly, 1996).

The homeless also have other daily concerns such as staying warm and dry (Warnes et al, 2003; Daly, 1996). There are also issues related to personal safety, as the homeless are susceptible to violence particularly those who sleep on the streets, and how to look after their personal belongings as they have no where to leave them (Warnes et al, 2003; Daly, 1996; Crisis, No Datea).

1.2.2 Public Libraries and the Homeless

One of the key roles public libraries can play in supporting homeless people is that of providing free access to information. This can include things on, amongst other things, housing, jobs, education, health and child care (Barbieux, 2010; Homeless UK, 2010; Hersberger, 2005; Gale, 1998).
Public libraries can also allow homeless people access to computers and the Internet. The Internet can be used for educational purposes, to find information and is becoming increasingly important in regards to finding employment and people without access to it are becoming more and more disadvantaged to their peers (Gorman, 2003; Muddiman, 2003; Cullen, 2001).

Public libraries can also help ease the symptoms of people suffering from mental health problems (Brewster, 2008; Davis et al, 2008; Brewster, 2007; Howard et al, 2001; Daly, 1996; Salter and Salter, 1996; Crisis, No Datea). Bibliotherapy has been found to help reduce the stigma surrounding, and the effects of, mental illness and can be provided in a variety of ways including reading groups (Brewster, 2008; Davis et al, 2008; Brewster, 2007).

Also public libraries have a natural role to play in improving literacy levels with Johnson (2010 : 8) saying “librarians’ values….include universal literacy”. Improving literacy could help people improve their chances of educational attainment and finding employment, which could help people escape the cycle of homelessness (Jiao and Onwuegbuzie, 2003; Fitzpatrick et al, 2000 : 33; Beresford, 1999; Greve, 1991).

There has also been cases of public libraries providing different services and holding events aimed at breaking down barriers between the homeless and the rest of society. San Francisco Main Library has hired a psychiatric social worker who, although there for any library patron, is predominantly there to help the increasingly high numbers of homeless people who frequent the library (Knight, 2010; Roach, 2010). Birmingham Central Library held a ‘human book’ (where people borrow a person who then tells them about their life story) event in collaboration with the homeless charity Crisis with the theme being homelessness (Crisis, 2011). This type of event could help remove prejudice against the homeless and also help them to create social networks (Beresford et al, 1999; Greve, 1991).

However in spite of all the positive affects public libraries can have on the lives of the homeless there are many barriers to them accessing services. There is a phenomenon known as ‘library anxiety’ which leads people to feel emotionally distressed when considering using a library (Onwuegbuzie et al, 2004; Jiao and Onwuegbuzie, 2003; Jiao and Onwuegbuzie, 1999). It is believed that low literacy levels exacerbate library anxiety and that barriers involving staff, such as them appearing unfriendly and superior, is an important factor (Onwuegbuzie et al, 2004; Jiao and Onwuegbuzie, 2003; Jiao and Onwuegbuzie, 1999).
The idea that library staff can be a barrier to library usage by the homeless is supported by authors such as Holt and Holt (2010) who discuss the fact they are sometimes viewed as being ‘problem’ patrons or not ‘proper’ library users (Vincent, 2005; Murphy, 1999; McNeil and Johnson, 1996; Shuman, 1996). All of this combined can lead to public libraries being viewed as solely middle class environments (Molyneux, 2004; Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2000).

The many ways public libraries can help the homeless make this researcher feel the subject of public libraries and the homeless is extremely worthwhile. As there are barriers to the homeless accessing services some public library authorities have attempted outreach work which is why the subject of librarians engaging with homeless people through outreach activity will be explored (Harris and Simon, 2009; Homeless Link, 2009; Molyneux, 2004).

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

1.3.1 Aim:
To explore how public librarians can, and do, engage with homeless communities to provide benefit and support.

1.3.2 Objectives:

- Investigate the scope of existing public library activity with homeless people.
- To explore the collaborative relationships that exist between public libraries and homeless charities.
- Establish a relationship with a section of the homeless community to explore their relationship with reading and public libraries.

1.4 Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation will be structured as follows; the next chapter will be a review of the literature to ensure that the research is built upon a solid understanding of the issues involved. Then the methodology will be described, including the approach, data collection methods and analysis, and the practicalities and ethical considerations. The following chapter will be the results and discussion, there will be separate discussions of each of the research strands including the reflections of the researcher; then there will be an overall analysis to bring all the different elements of the research together and this will include a rich picture. Finally
there will be a conclusion with a summary of the dissertation and recommendations for best practice and future research.
2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This review will look at literature related to four different themes; staff perceptions of the homeless, homeless people using the library, homeless outreach work and bibliotherapy. These four themes relate to the objectives of this research as looking at staff perceptions of the homeless population and the ways the homeless are, and could, be using libraries will help to establish a basic understanding of the scope of existing public library activity with homeless people. Bibliotherapy also connects to this as it is something which libraries can deliver which has been found to be of benefit to homeless people who suffer from mental health problems (Brewster, 2008; Davis et al, 2008; Brewster, 2007; Howard et al, 2001; Daly, 1996; Salter and Salter, 1996; Crisis, No Datea). Reviewing the literature related to existing homeless outreach work will also help to establish the scope of existing public library activity but also to form an understanding of the collaborative relationships that exists between public libraries and homeless charities (Machi and McEvoy, 2009; Eve, 2008; Hart, 1998).

2.2 Staff Perceptions of the Homeless Population

Whilst the literature reveals a variety of opinions and attitudes towards the homeless population, staff perceptions of homeless people tend to be portrayed as quite negative; there are articles which are positive about the role of libraries in combating social exclusion but these often comment on the barrier that is negative staff attitudes (Samek, 2007; Jackson, 2006; Berman, 2005; Hersberger, 1999).

A famous case in America that involved a homeless person behaving inappropriately in a public library, and which led to a number of articles being written debating whether or not staff are prejudice against the homeless and so do not tolerate behaviour from them that they would from other patrons, is Kreimer v. Bureau of Police, Morristown from 1990 (Jackson, 2006; Grace, 2000; Jones, 1999; Murphy, 1999; Comstock-Gay, 1995; American Libraries, 1991). Kreimer, a homeless person, frequently visited the public library is Morristown, New Jersey and was said to enjoy spending time there reading and quietly contemplating (Grace, 2000 ; 54; Jones, 1999 : 7). Although the library did not have a written policy relating to behaviour, in 1987 the director began to record problem behaviour with there being entries relating to Kreimer staring at the library staff and court records showed that the fact he often came to the library unwashed was an issue (Jones, 1999 : 7).
Then in 1989 a written policy regarding appropriate behaviour in the library was created and it was used to expel Kreimer on more than one occasion (Jones, 1999 : 7-8). It was argued in court that the terms used in the policy were too vague but the opposition stated that the stress it caused library staff to deal with difficult patrons was not appreciated (Jones, 1999 : 8-10; American Libraries, 1991 : 610).

Articles by Grace (2000), Jones (1999), Comstock-Gay (1995 : 35) and American Libraries (1991) all discuss the case but there seems to be much debate and conflicting arguments about the behaviour of Kreimer. Jones (1999) manages to discuss the issues in an impartial way and covers the original case and all the subsequent appeals in comprehensive detail. Conversely Grace (2000 : 54) and Comstock-Gay (1995 : 35) only cover the most basic facts relating to the case and so the depth and conflicting arguments that arose are not made clear.

Samek (2007) and Berman (2005 : 5) examine library behaviour policies and argue that they essentially criminalize poor and homeless patrons. They argue, as does Hersberger (1999 : 9), that behaviour policies unfairly discriminate against homeless users and say, for example, body odour policies are not likely to be enforced equally on a middle class patron wearing too much perfume and on a homeless patron who does not have access to shower facilities (Samek, 2007 : 5; Berman, 2005 : 52). The American Library Association’s Hunger, Homelessness and Poverty Task Force (2005) support the idea that poor personal hygiene should not be viewed as ‘problem' behaviour.

Both these pieces of literature are well written and try to offer solutions to some of the dilemmas raised, such as libraries providing shower facilities to help eliminate problems related to body odour; however they do not engage with the issue of staff attitudes effectively nor do they consider, or offer solutions for, the fact that some staff may struggle to deal with problems if there is not effective training or support available (Samek, 2007; Berman, 2005; Vincent, 2005).

Jackson (2006) discusses similar issues to those Samek (2007) and Berman (2005) do. However Jackson’s (2006) findings are from a literature review which does not include a great deal of literature, a fact which undermines their validity.

Chadbourne (1990) discusses the issues public library staff face when dealing with ‘problem’ patrons; the homeless are included in this category. However it is not discussed why the homeless as a general population are considered to be difficult library patrons. This suggests they may be biased against homeless library
users as a whole. The idea that you can categorise the entire homeless population as ‘problem’ patrons is contradicted by Hersberger (2005), Shuman (1996) and Hersberger (1999) who highlight, using legal definitions, that the homeless are not a homogenous group. This would suggest that the article by Chadbourne (1991) is not very balanced.

Hersberger (1999) writes a balanced article which highlights the fact that a person can not be identified as homeless from the way they look. This is an article which tries to look at all aspects of homeless people using the public library, and discusses how staff should not look at the homeless as a homogenous group (Hersberger, 1999). The fact the homeless are a heterogeneous group with a variety of needs is supported by research into homelessness such as that by Daly (1992: 20) which adds to the validity of Hersberger’s (1999) work.

Vocino (1976) presents the viewpoint that it is irresponsible for public library staff to deal with patrons who exhibit extreme behaviour. This article is about patrons suffering from mental health problems rather than the homeless specifically but, as it has been previously discussed, the homeless do suffer disproportionally from mental health issues (Howard et al, 2001; Daly, 1996; Salter and Salter, 1996; Murphy, 1999; Crisis, No Datea). This article is interesting as it argues there are certain issues which public library staff are not qualified to handle and that to try and do so would potentially lead to harm for both staff and patrons, and Venturella (1998: 33) also discusses that the library profession disagrees on how involved staff should be with social exclusion; however it is overly negative in tone and is not as balanced as it could be (Vocino, 1976: 373).

Landgray (1991) examines the fact that homeless people are sometimes unable to become members of the public library as they have no fixed address. This idea is built upon by Harris and Simon (2009: 26) who found that seventy seven percent of library staff surveyed did not think people should be able to register with the library without an address. The reason given for this is the possibility of financial loss for the library arising due to unreturned items (Harris and Simon, 2009: 26). However, whilst Harris and Simon (2009) discuss their methodology and findings competently, there is no evidence to support or dismiss the idea of homeless library patrons being unreliable borrowers so it is hard to establish whether the staff are voicing a realistic concern or being prejudice.

Holt and Holt (2010: 13) present an argument regarding the homeless which states that libraries have homeless patrons who are local and that they consider to
be their ‘own’ and homeless patrons who are new to the area who are very different. The book seems to be attempting to make a serious argument but the idea that homeless people new to an area will automatically be ‘problem’ patrons is a stereotypical generalisation (Holt and Holt, 2010 : 113). This would seem to strengthen the argument, supported by Vincent (2005), that some library staff automatically judge users based on appearance and this makes them biased against some homeless patrons who conform to the traditional perception.

2.3 Homeless People Using the Library

As mentioned previously Landgray (1991) discusses how some homeless people are unable to join the library as they have no fixed address. This is a well balanced article which manages to consider both the benefits to the homeless population and the practical issues for the library. The article does not consider differences which may arise between different types of homeless library users such as homeless families and homeless veterans but this may be due to the fact it looks at a specific case study in San Francisco (Landgray, 1999).

Shuman (1996 : 11) attempts to present a balanced argument regarding the reasons for and against having barriers to the homeless using public libraries. However this presents the homeless as a homogenous entity which contradicts Shuman’s (1996 : 11) earlier statement that the homeless cannot be categorised in this way. Murphy (1999) presents the issues in a more balanced way, discussing legal precedents and showing how the problems with homeless patrons are often the same as with any patron.

Chadbourne (1990 : 60) includes a case study of Haverhill library in Massachusetts which created a separate room for homeless patrons. Staff discuss whether or not this serves to segregate homeless patrons but the patrons themselves are not consulted, this not only leads to an issue about segregation but also as Castle and Clyde (2002 : 132) argue it is important to make “sure you are meeting an actual need, not just doing something for the sake of doing something” (Chadbourne, 1990 : 60).

Collins et al (2009 : 109) write about the experience San Jose Library had of addressing the needs of the homeless population. Whilst this is a case study which means its findings can not necessarily be implemented by other library services it does present some interesting observations and the library decided on the best way to provide a service to homeless patrons by combining findings related to
programme attendance, observations and anecdotal evidence which increases the study's validity as it was not just library staff assuming what users’ wanted (Collins et al, 2009 : 112; Eve, 2008 : 25; Brewer, 2007 : 38; Castle and Clyde, 2002 : 132). Some of the things suggested libraries can provide for the homeless is access to health and employment information, literacy classes and information technology (Collins et al, 2009 : 112). These would seem to be legitimate suggestions as the literature has found that a leading cause of homelessness is unemployment and that the homeless can often struggle with literacy, which can affect likelihood of employment, and from ill health (Jama and Dugdale, 2010; Gorman, 2003; Warnes et al, 2003; Howard et al, 2001; Fitzpatrick et al, 2000; Daly, 1996; Greve, 1991).

Another way the homeless could use public libraries is to attend bibliotherapy sessions.

2.3.1 Bibliotherapy

Get into Reading is one of the most famous and successful bibliotherapy schemes, with it being found to help encourage people who felt uncomfortable visiting and using libraries to do so, but Brewster (2007) found many library services also informally deliver sessions (Davis et al, 2008).

The work by Davis et al (2008) and Brewster (2007, 2008) highlight the benefits of bibliotherapy and also mention how it could be of particular benefit to homeless communities. Bibliotherapy can take a variety of forms including reading groups which use fiction to encourage a love of literature (Brewster, 2008; Davis et al, 2008; Brewster, 2007). This is supported by Scothern (2000) who found that joining a reading group could be of benefit to an individual and Usherwood and Toyne (2002 : 35) whose research highlighted the fact people find reading fiction provides a distraction from any negativity they may have in their lives.

There are some issues with the literature related to bibliotherapy, mainly that it is fairly limited; there is not a lot of research available and it was difficult to find any which spoke of how bibliotherapy could be of benefit to the homeless. This could be due to the fact that, as Brewster (2007 : 3) found, bibliotherapy does not have a clear and concise definition and that it is a relatively new concept. Another limitation of the usefulness of the research is that the supporting evidence regarding the benefits of bibliotherapy, such as that presented by Davis et al (2008), is often anecdotal but that is likely to be because it is not something that is easily quantifiable.
2.4 Homeless Outreach Work

Harris and Simon (2009) discuss and highlight outreach schemes aimed at the homeless such as ‘Park Bench’ but do not establish what exactly these schemes are or who runs them. This serves to undermine the validity and usefulness of the article.

Much more informative is the work by Heffernan (2009) and Molyneux (2004) which clearly discusses their respective attempts at homeless outreach work. Heffernan (2009 : 6) discusses the homeless outreach project, ‘Outside Story’, the aim of which was to encourage the homeless to use public libraries by showing them what libraries could currently offer them and also by asking them what services they felt they needed (Homeless Link, 2009; Outside Story, 2008a; Outside Story, 2008b; London Libraries Development Agency, 2007). Molyneux (2004 : 15) writes about the project ‘Your Choice Books’ which had a similar aim to that of ‘Outside Story’ as it wanted to change the perception homeless people had of libraries and encourage them to use them more.

What is particularly useful with these articles is that they surveyed more than just public library staff (Heffernan, 2009; Molyneux, 2004). Molyneux (2004 : 16) surveyed staff members at the YMCA and Heffernan (2009 : 6) included both staff who worked with the homeless and the homeless themselves. By doing this issues which may prevent the homeless from using libraries or being responsive to outreach programmes were identified, this is important information for people wanting to work with the homeless (Heffernan, 2009 : 6; Molyneux, 2004 : 21).

However the articles are both limited as they each only concern a single case study and case studies are often too specific which means general findings do not emerge (Heffernan, 2009; Eve, 2008 : 25; Brewer, 2007 :38; Molyneux, 2004).

Middleton (2003 : 6) writes about an outreach project conducted by Gloucestershire County Libraries and Information Service which involved providing access to information technology for users of a homeless shelter. This article is well written and is interesting as it relates to providing access to technology whereas the majority of the other research is concerned with ensuring access to the physical library and books. However, like Heffernan (2009) and Molyneux (2004), this article relates only to a single case study and even though it is quite recent, advances in information technology over the past eight years means it may lack relevancy now (Eve, 2008 : 25; Middleton, 2003).
The evaluation report by Train (2001) on the outreach project conducted by Shropshire Library Service is very useful even though, as with the majority of the literature on homeless outreach work, it is based upon a single case study (Eve, 2008 : 35; Brewer, 2007 : 38). It includes a lot of useful discussion about the management and delivery of the service, such as the fact that the reader development worker on the project felt “that it was only when the trust [between themselves and the homeless] had been established that it was possible to encourage and support their reading habits” (Train, 2001 : 26). It also features an appendix which explains the methods used to conduct the research which is helpful for people who would like conduct similar studies as research which includes the homeless can be more complicated due to the fact they are a vulnerable, transient group (Train, 2001).

Wilson (2007) and Lomas (2003) both provided interesting case studies about outreach work they have personally been involved with. These articles are both informative, the article by Lomas (2003) is particularly interesting as it relates to an outreach project aimed at a specific group of homeless people, families, rather than targeting the homeless as a homogenous group. However there could be some potential for bias as the projects were funded by Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA) and the case studies are presented on the MLA website (Wilson, 2007; Lomas, 2003).

Cheunwattana (2003) and Cheunwattana and Meksawat (2002) write about a project in Thailand where an old train carriage was turned into a library for homeless children to use. As the articles are written about a project from Thailand the findings do not easily relate to research being conducted in England but most of the issues facing homeless children are similar in both countries, such as them having very few safe places to spend time in (Cheunwattana, 2003; Cheunwattana and Meksawat, 2002; Crosson Tower, 1992).

2.5 Conclusion

The literature reveals that there are a number of issues related to the homeless using public libraries and outreach work being delivered which are the same both in the United Kingdom and the United States, with there even being similarities in places such as Thailand. The American literature tends to reveal a more negative attitude towards the homeless than that of the United Kingdom but generally most of the literature is either an opinion piece or based around a case study which can undermine their usefulness.
3. Methodology

3.1 Approach

The research is inductive, instead of testing a theory conclusions were formed after a literature review and research were conducted (Brewer, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Patten, 2007; Gorman and Clayton, 1997).

It was decided that qualitative research methods would provide the most appropriate type of data for this research. Using qualitative methods allowed the researcher to understand people’s behaviour and actions as they not only describe but also help to explain situations (Creswell, 2007; Punch, 2005; Gorman and Clayton, 1997; Holloway, 1997). Smith and Ravenhill (No Date) also suggest qualitative methods are the most appropriate kinds to use when a marginalized population, such as the homeless, are involved with the research.

The approach that the research followed was interpretive (Andrade, 2009; Creswell, 2007; Holloway, 1997). This is because part of the research involved the researcher reflecting on their experiences of organising and leading a reading group in a homeless shelter. Due to this the research data collected was not free from the personal values of the researcher. The research was designed as a result of the researcher’s experiences with the reading group and the data collection methods adapted accordingly.

The research specifically follows the ethnographic strand of the interpretive research approach (Fulcher and Scott, 2003; Bilton et al, 2002; Hannabuss, 2000; Harvey and Myers, 1995). Ethnographic research “is a form of research in which the researcher actually participates in some way in the situation being studied”, as the researcher did by establishing the reading project (Fulcher and Scott, 2003 : 3). This research approach allows for real world issues to be explored so that recommendations for best practice can be developed (Harvey and Myers, 1995 : 22).

3.2 Data Collection

The main qualitative method that was employed for this research was questionnaires. Questionnaires are traditionally viewed as a quantitative method but the ones used for this research contained open-ended questions which produced qualitative data although some descriptive statistics did emerge (Eve, 2008).
The sample population included the homeless, people who work with the homeless, public library staff and organisations involved with homeless outreach work. Due to time constraints convenient sampling was used and whilst this does raise the potential issue of bias it is hoped that as data triangulation was employed the research will be reliable (Creswell, 2007; Patten, 2007: 157).

The reading group conducted and reflected upon by the researcher was based at Sheffield Cathedral Archer Project (Archer Project); this was chosen due to the Cathedral’s existing connection with the University of Sheffield’s iSchool. All staff members at the Archer Project were invited to complete an online questionnaire and all clients were given the opportunity to complete a paper survey.

Due to the difficulties the researcher encountered whilst conducting the reading group it was felt important to contact other organisations who carry out homeless outreach work. Three organisations, Get into Reading, Manchester Public Libraries and Quaker Homeless Action, were identified through the literature and agreed to participate; however not all of them responded when the open-ended online questionnaires, specific to the organisations, were distributed via email (Manchester LitList, 2009; Davis et al., 2008; Quaker Homeless Action, No Date).

An online questionnaire was also distributed across an online British public library electronic mailing list and all members of public library staff were encouraged to respond. It was decided that public library staff should be surveyed as it would give an understanding of how public library staff feel about homeless people using the library, whether outreach work is conducted or not, and other issues related to public libraries engaging with the homeless through outreach work.

3.3 Pilot

A basic pilot was conducted with five colleagues on the librarianship course testing the questionnaires targeted at the Archer Project staff, the clients at the Archer Project and the public library electronic mailing list. This proved to be useful with the questionnaires being made more user-friendly. The questionnaires aimed at the Quaker Mobile Library (QML), Get into Reading and Manchester Public Libraries were not piloted as it was felt these were too specific to the organisations in questionnaire, especially as there had been some confusion when piloting the questionnaire for the clients at the Archer Project as it had been deliberately simplified to avoid literacy issues but those piloting found it difficult to put
themselves in that mindset. However, the results of the initial pilot were used to improve the organisation specific questionnaires.

3.4 Analysis

The analysis of the data followed Grounded Theory techniques, with thematic analysis being the primary analysis method (Patten, 2007; Punch, 2005). The data was coded thematically to try to discover similarities, differences and patterns between all the different research strands (Patten, 2007: 159, Punch, 2005: 204). The themes emerged from the data itself, rather than being pre-defined by the researcher, this was to avoid the analysis being biased although the researcher’s reflections on the reading project were included (Patten, 2007; Punch, 2005).

In addition to this a rich picture diagram was also created to concisely draw all the research strands together (Sutrisna and Barrett, 2007; Monk and Howard, 1998). These are traditionally used as part of the soft system methodology but as this research has a number of different elements it was thought a rich picture would “[capture]..the richness of information….” that emerged (Sutrisna and Barrett, 2007: 164; Monk and Howard, 1998). The rich picture is used to show barriers, relationships and positive elements to public libraries engaging with the homeless through outreach work.

3.5 Practicalities

3.5.1 Timing and Scheduling

As the homeless are a vulnerable group it was important the researcher took the time to build relationships with the sample population before the research began. Heffernan (2009) and Train (2001) have found this to be true and have highlighted the need to build up trust, so the researcher began the weekly reading group in January 2011 in the hope that by the time the questionnaires would be distributed there would be clients at the Archer Project willing to complete them. Also the researcher would not have been able to gain such an in-depth understanding of the issues surrounding homeless outreach work if they had not worked at the Archer Project for a significant amount of time.

The questionnaires were completed and piloted in May before being distributed at the end of that month. Results were analysed between the end of June and mid-July with the literature review being ongoing throughout the year.
3.5.2 Access

The University of Sheffield’s iSchool had an existing relationship with Sheffield Cathedral and so, via this, the researcher was able to make contact with the Archer Project. The researcher was required to complete a Criminal Records Bureau check before the reading group sessions could begin.

3.5.3 Resource Requirement

As part of the reading group at the Archer Project a small library was set up within the premises and so books were required. These were acquired through donations and so it was not possible to have a stringent collection policy, although some books were rejected due to poor condition, but Dixon (1986) discusses how all genres have distinct and varied appeal (Spiller, 1991).

3.6 Ethics

This research was categorised as high risk as it involved interaction with a vulnerable group and the researcher working away from the university campus.

3.6.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent is an important ethical issue and special consideration needed to be made as the research involved vulnerable people who may have literacy issues (Patten, 2007). Information sheets were provided for staff at the Archer Project and copies were available for clients. Two copies of the information sheet were created for the clients, an in-depth one and one with only the essential information written in an easy-to-read way for people who struggle with literacy. The researcher also spent an additional hour at the Archer Project for two months so clients could ask questions.

Each reading group began with the researcher verbally explaining the research project and getting the participants to sign a consent register (see appendix 1). The two leaders of the Archer Project decided a register was the best way to get written consent and also signed overall consent forms on behalf of the clients.

Clients who completed the questionnaire were required to sign a consent form. For all other participants consent will be assumed by the completion of the questionnaire.
All data was anonymous, stored on a password protected computer and then destroyed once the research was completed.

3.6.2 Personal Safety

The Archer Project has health and safety guidelines and conducts risk assessments. Lone worker policies are in place so the researcher had to complete a ‘lone worker’ movement sheet (see appendix 2). There were always other members of staff present at the Archer Project.

3.6.3 The Reading Group

After discussion with one of the leaders of the Archer Project it was discovered that projects are frequently of a short time span at the Archer Project and so they were not concerned about distress arising if the reading group should end. However the reading group will be offered as a voluntary project to the 2011-2012 M.A. Librarianship students.
4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

Initially the research was going to consist of only the researcher’s reflections on the reading project they conducted at the Archer Project. However after being fully immersed into the everyday life of homeless people and those who work with them it was realised the issue of homeless outreach work is more complex than originally thought. The researcher was able to observe firsthand some of the challenges, barriers to and reasons for public libraries engaging with the homeless through outreach activity but was not able to see this from the public librarians’ perspective nor fully appreciate the personal viewpoints of the homeless and those who work with them. It was decided to gain a better insight surveys would be sent to an electronic public library mailing list and the staff and clients at the Archer Project. It was also felt it would be useful to contact people who currently engage in homeless outreach work and so three organisations were contacted but only the QML responded. By fully immersing themselves in the research it was possible for the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the issues and so the questions asked on each of the surveys were informed by the researcher’s personal experiences whilst working on the reading project.

Individually the data results are limited but when combined they paint a rich picture of the issues surrounding public library engagement with the homeless through outreach activity. This is why it was decided to include a rich picture at the end of this chapter as, even though it is part of the Soft Systems Methodology, it meant all aspects of the research findings could be easily combined to give a simple overview of what is a complex set of results (Sutrisna and Barrett, 2007; Monk and Howard, 1998).
4.2 The Reading Project

In order to gain a better understanding of homeless outreach work I set up a small library and led a weekly reading group between January and May 2011 at a Sheffield based homeless centre, the Archer Project. This experience informed the rest of the research process as many issues and questions arose.

4.2.1 Timing

The homeless population are a vulnerable group and so the timing of the reading project had to be carefully considered (Train, 2001). I felt it was important that the reading project be started earlier than dissertations normally are so I could build a relationship with the clients at the Archer Project, I also did not feel it would be possible to find out anything meaningful if my dissertation began at the normal time (Train, 2001). This meant ethical approval needed to be received by the beginning of January 2011, before the research methods module which explained the process begun. It would not have been feasible to conduct this research project in the traditional time scale and I feel that the procedure to obtain ethical approval may mean people are less likely to attempt research projects of this style. It was quite complicated to complete the forms and, although I appreciate the safety of myself and the participants needed to consider, I felt that the people who worked at the Archer Project and who know the clients there best would be the ones to look to for advice on how necessary ethical approval was and they did not feel it was essential that such stringent rules be in place.

However whilst it was possible to undertake this project in the time scale I feel that it would be better suited as PhD project. I would have been able to build much stronger relationships with both the Archer Project staff and clients, and that would have meant I would have been able to unveil more significant findings.

4.2.2 Book Selection

Funding was an issue with regards to stock selection and so I had to rely upon donations. This meant that a collection policy was not created although damaged books were not included. I did feel it was ideal that a wide range of stock be included as this would attract as many readers as possible as Spiller (1991) and Dixon (1986) both discuss how all genres of fiction have a diverse reading base. However I would have liked to have more control over stock selection as I would have been able to ask clients what type of books they prefer to read and so have a
number of books which I knew had a guaranteed audience. Also in one reading group session myself and the client discussed political autobiographies and the client expressed an interest in reading more, it would have been great if I could have bought some and then based a reading group session around them.

Two main issues arose with the stock; how to issue it and how to deal with donations.

4.2.2.1 Issuing Stock

I decided that, due to the volume of stock involved and the time constraints on the reading project, it was not feasible to complete a full stock check and so a definitive list of the stock was not made. The books were dropped off at the Archer Project a month before the project began and left in a basement which was across the road from the main building, there was no way to even make informed decisions about what stock was brought up to the library, I was reliant on busy people to help me carry the stocks and it would not have been possible to spend a significant amount of time working in the basement going through the books.

I also decided that, since borrowing books from the Archer Project was a new venture (previously the small amounts of stock available were not allowed to be taken off the premises) it may have been off putting if clients had to sign the books out.

These decisions combined meant I was not able to keep track of the stock and how much of it was being borrowed and returned. I was not too concerned by this as there was a large quantity of stock available (a lot remained in the basement) and all involved knew the library and reading group was a trial process. However it means that I have no statistics available on how many books were borrowed by clients; also if a public library were to conduct a similar project stock selection and management would be of much greater concern.

4.2.2.2 Donations

Mid-way through the reading project a large donations of books appeared, these were not in great condition and were distracting slightly from the rest of the stock. However as I was the only person involved with the reading group and I was not connected to a wider organisation I did not know how to broach the issue. The donations were given with the best of intentions and it was not known whether they were donated by a staff member or a client. I thought that if it was a staff member it
would be easier to suggest the books be removed but I was still concerned the person may be offended and that the fragile links I was starting to build with the staff would be broken. A bigger worry was that if a client had donated them and saw the books removed they would no longer feel inclined to borrow stock and may have felt the library and reading group were somehow 'exclusive'.

I think this issue would have been easier to resolve if I had been working with another person on the reading group. I would have been able to discuss ideas and potential solutions and feel supported in any decision made. Also if it was a public library delivering this service they may have been able to refer to an official collection policy.

4.2.3 Partnership Working

One of the reasons I decided to work with the Archer Project was practical, as previously mention the University of Sheffield’s iSchool had an existing connection with Sheffield Cathedral. However I also felt it was important to work with people who understand the needs and complexities of the homeless population and Goulding (2006 : 238) has argued that partnership working is important and "often the key to public library work on social inclusion....". This is supported by Berman (2005 : 54) who, when discussing how libraries can combat social exclusion, argues collaboration with community organisations is the way forward and Vincent (2005 : 10) who says partnership working is important as people working in other areas have the skills needed to work with specific groups, such as the homeless, that library staff do not.

The idea of a physical library as being seen as intimidating and authoritative was also considered (Onwuegbuzie et al, 2004; Jiao and Onwuegbuzie, 2003; Jiao and Onwuegbuzie, 1999). I wanted to see if bringing the library and reading community to the homeless community would mean issues relating to library anxiety could be explored. I also wanted to see if public librarians need to go out to the homeless community rather than expect them to come to the library (Onwuegbuzie et al, 2004; Jiao and Onwuegbuzie, 2003; Jiao and Onwuegbuzie, 1999).

4.2.3.1 Difficulties

The Archer Project deals with the important practical issues the homeless community have to deal with on a day-to-day basis such as hygiene and having enough to eat (Cathedral Archer Project, 2011a). They also have to try combat
serious problems such as substance abuse, all of this costs a lot of money and so setting up a library and reading group would not be practical or feasible for them (Cathedral Archer Project, 2011a; Cathedral Archer Project. 2011b). This also meant that it was not especially easy to convey the reasoning behind the reading project to staff, especially given that staff are very busy. Furthermore the fact that staff deal with very serious issues on a daily basis meant the idea of a reading group may have seemed like a frivolous endeavour.

Once the purpose of the reading project had been established staff were supportive but there were still issues to contend with. Space was problematic; the books for the library had to be placed on a windowsill and were kept in a locked room. This placed restrictions on borrowing and also meant that when I went in for the additional promotional hour in the first two months of the reading project I was not able to be sat near the books. There was not a clear sign to advertise why I was there and I was not able to help with stock selection as I had hoped.

There were also issues with basic things such as entering buildings. To start the reading group sessions I needed to get through a secure door, sign in at reception, enter through another secure door, then enter the locked office where staff were based and then get the key for the room where the reading group was held. Whilst staff were willing and happy to help they were also busy so I often felt awkward and, in a way, like I was bothering the staff who obviously had important jobs to do. Again I felt that having an additional person working on the reading project would have helped to ease some of this worry and stress.

As I’ve mentioned the staff had other priorities, I was aware of this when I started but being aware and seeing the reality are quite different. I think public librarians need to appreciate that even if those working with the homeless would like to work in partnership with them they do not have the time to approach them. The staff had day-to-day roles that needed to be completed but then also had to deal with many other things on a daily basis such as breaking up fights, dealing with clients who felt they were being unfairly treated and ensuring nobody under the influence entered the building. I found it difficult when faced with all this to ask questions of the staff and seek their help, they were already so busy and I was aware that I had already created extra work just by starting the reading project.
4.2.4 Issues with the running of the library and reading group

4.2.4.1 Promotional Hour

The first promotional hour was at 8:30am but I soon realised that this was not appropriate. The Archer Project opens at 8:30am, this meant I was there when the clients biggest concerns were getting breakfast, showering and arranging appointments, no one paid attention to the fact someone new was in the room. The time was changed to 9:00am and, although the Archer Project is always hectic, this was more successful with people occasionally talking to me. It was difficult to decide how to approach the promotional hour, the best way to promote would have been to engage with clients and talk to them but I was worried that this may be intrusive and so I decided to wait for clients to acknowledge me. Whilst some people did talk to me and I had some positive moments such as helping someone set up an e-mail account and playing games of chequers with clients the decision to not be proactive probably negatively affected the amount of people who attended the reading group. I think lack of confidence also played a part in the decision to wait for clients to come to me, I felt quite unsure of myself and I did not know how best to work; if I had had someone else working with me I think I would have felt a little more self-assured. It was also difficult to build up a relationship with the clients as the homeless are a transient group and so new faces were always appearing at the promotional hour.

4.2.4.2 Promotional Material

The library and reading group were also promoted with posters, leaflets and flyers. These were placed around the Archer Project and also handed out by staff. I found it difficult to design the poster and leaflets as I am not the most artistic of people and I also did not know what would attract clients. The poster design was very simple and was made using only clipart from Microsoft Publisher 2007; I think if I was artistic then the poster could have been more eye-catching and would have drawn a greater amount of interest about the reading group (see appendix 3). At first I wrote ‘share a love of reading’ on them but I decided this would be off putting as the reading group was meant to be for anyone, including those who did not feel reading was for them; this also accounts for why I refer to the group as a book club on the poster, I did not want people to think there was a huge emphasis on being able to read at an advanced level. There were also issues when designing the leaflets, leaflets traditionally have more information in them than I felt appropriate and so the leaflet ended up having a very similar front and back. Staff at the Archer Project decided that having flyers would be more appropriate than leaflets and so I
designed these using the poster as the guide. I feel this shows the importance of working with people who work with the homeless as they understood the best methods of promotion.

4.2.4.3 Reading Group

Similar to the issue with the timing of the promotional hour I soon realised that 2pm on a Friday was not the best time to hold the reading group. The Archer Project closed at 1pm meaning clients would have to specifically come back just for the reading group. Furthermore the reception was closed which placed an obstacle on clients entering the building. It was suggested clients may come to the reading group so they could come out from the cold but the sessions held on Fridays were very unsuccessful. The reading group was then moved to 9am on a Tuesday morning, this was slightly more successful but overall the reading group only attracted five individuals with only two of them returning. Most sessions had either one or no people attending.

One reason for the lack of attendees could be my inexperience with both leading reading groups and working with the homeless. I initially did not want to be seen as an authoritative figure and so decided the reading group should be democratic with everyone having an equal say in how the group was run and what the sessions included. However I soon realised that the groups needed someone to lead and that without that it came across as unorganised and probably contributed to the fact that three attendees never returned, this is supported by research findings from Scothern (2000 : 78) which found “the leader’s role...a key contributor to a [reading] group’s success”. I referred to advice by East Midlands Public Libraries (2008a) and designed ideas for sessions. A session was run using one of East Midlands Public Libraries (2008b) suggestions and this was one of the more successful ones. However having good ideas for sessions after clients had already attended sessions and been disappointed was too late.

Similar to the fact that the staff at the Archer Project were busy it also needs to be remembered that the clients themselves had many more pressing concerns, such as finding food and shelter, than attending a reading group. In one reading group session the clients discussed how they previously had had to search for food in restaurant bins and how all encompassing an alcohol addiction can be; this is supported by Fitzpatrick et al (2000 : 33) who say “satisfying basic survival needs generally precludes [other concerns]...”. Then there were also the things I witnessed when I was at the Archer Project, clients were more concerned with ensuring they
got breakfast or in the queue to see the dentist than with the person sat advertising a reading group, and they can hardly be faulted for that. Connected to this is the fact that I was the only person running the reading group and this meant in cases of sickness the reading group did not go ahead. I was in the process of building a rapport with a client who attended three sessions but after I was ill and had to cancel a session they never returned, in fact no one attended a session after the illness incident. Furthermore when people have important things to do, they like to know when they are sacrificing an hour of their time that it is going to be time well spent, if they turned up for reading group and it was cancelled why would they risk their time being wasted again?

4.2.5 Overall Conclusions

There was a lot learned from the reading project. The books in the library appeared to be well used but as previously mentioned there are no statistics regarding how many books were borrowed and returned. I learned things which were not specific to conducting outreach projects but which were more general, such as how you truly cannot tell if a person is homeless just by looking at them (Hersberger, 1999). This is something that I always knew on some level but I came to realise when working at the Archer Project that there were many people who you may pass on the street that you would never assume had nowhere else to go, it made me see how extensive the issue of homelessness is and how it goes so much further than the more visible element such as beggars.

It is difficult to measure the success of this reading project. In terms of numbers of clients attending reading group sessions it was very unsuccessful but the homeless are a transient group who often have serious issues to contend such as lack of food, finding somewhere to live and substance abuse and so, with the reading project only being run over a short space of time, it was not expected that a high number of clients would attend. Personally I did feel that at least three of the sessions were successful and impacted positively on both myself and the client, however it is difficult for me to judge how successful the reading group was in terms of benefits to those who attended as I am obviously prejudiced in its favour and have a vested interest in the reading project being seen as a success. This is why I decided to survey the Archer Project staff and clients to gauge their opinions and feelings.
The experience of the reading group informed the questions asked of the public library staff and the other outreach schemes. For example my personal feeling that more than one person is needed for outreach work to be successful led to a question being asked about number of staff involved with outreach work.
4.3 Archer Project Staff

There were two respondents out of twelve staff to this survey and they were mostly in agreement with their answers.

It was agreed that homeless people could benefit from reading and that there could be positive outcomes from having books available and holding the reading group at the Archer Project. It was stated by both respondents that reading could “help with education” with one also saying it “is an activity to keep people busy”. One respondent also said “reading can help with a person’s mental health and provide comfort and interest to a person’s life” (it has been found that mental health problems affect homeless people on average more than the rest of the population) but also made the point that reading can be beneficial to any member of society and so there is no reason why it would not be of benefit to homeless people (Howard et al, 2001; Daly, 1996; Salter and Salter, 1996).

One respondent said having the books in the Archer Project was a positive thing as it meant clients could read what they wanted, when they wanted. The other respondent commented that “the way in which books were lent out was very positive; putting across the message that they were being trusted is a really good thing”. It was stated the reading group was a positive thing as it complimented the library and allowed relationships to be built through engagement with clients. It was also felt that the reading group could help encourage clients to read a broader range of books.

Both respondents stated there were no negative issues regarding the reading group taking place and one respondent said no and the other unsure to the question regarding whether or not there were drawbacks to having books available in the Archer Project. The respondent who was unsure about the books voiced concern that they may go missing. One respondent also commented further on the potential issues with the reading group saying clients may not attend regularly but that this should not be seen as a negative just an inevitability.

Both respondents stated they would like the reading project to continue in the future, with one saying the variety of books available could be increased. However one respondent felt the reading project could be improved (the other was unsure) stating it could be advertised more effectively.

Neither respondent was aware of links to a public library.
4.3.1 Limitations

There were only two respondents to the survey meaning the findings cannot be taken as representative of the staff at the Archer Project as whole, for example the low response rate means it is possible there are links to a public library service and that it is just the two members of staff who completed the survey that are unaware.

There are a number of possible reasons for the low response rate; the staff at the Archer Project are very busy so it is may be that they did not have time to complete the survey, the researcher has already discussed how relationships were not built between themselves and staff and so this may have contributed or it is possible some staff were unaware of the reading project, a comment in the survey was that it could have been advertised better.

Another issue could be that only the two members of staff who felt the reading project was worthwhile completed the survey. The results are very positive in favour of the reading project and it could be that other staff did not feel this way and so did not want to contribute to the research.

4.3.2 Summary

The feedback from the two members of staff was very positive. They both agreed that reading, and the reading project, could be of benefit to homeless people. The fact that the continuation of the reading project would be a positive thing was also agreed upon. It was also stated that the reading project could have been better advertised and that it may be difficult to have a consistent number of attendees.
4.4 Clients at the Archer Project

Nine clients at the Archer Project completed a paper survey about their views on the reading project.

Out of those who responded to the survey, five did not know books could be borrowed from the Archer Project and four did not know the reading group existed. It is interesting that two of the clients who knew the reading group existed did not know books could be borrowed. The books had a greater, permanent visible presence within the Archer Project and all the material advertising the reading group did at least mention books were available to borrow.

None of the clients who completed the survey borrowed books or attended the reading group. Eight commented further on the reading group and their reasons for not attending were varied; three did not know it existed, two were not at the Archer Project between January and May 2011 when the reading group took place, two commented that they were too busy dealing with other things to attend and one said they did not have the confidence.

Four respondents were members of public libraries and one did not comment. Two clients, who were members of public libraries, said they thought the reading project was a positive thing and another client commented that they wished they had known about it.

The only comment about public libraries in general came from a non-member who said that they are a good thing and that information should be free.

4.4.1 Limitations

Due to time constraints it was not possible to conduct interviews with the clients; this meant interesting comments could not be followed up on such as trying to find out why the respondent who liked libraries was not a member of one. Also it meant the questions were solely dictated by the researcher.

The fact it was a paper survey also meant that any literacy issues clients faced were not overcome, particularly as the researcher was not able to go to the Archer Project to offer help with understanding the questions. Literacy issues could have contributed to the fact that there were only nine respondents which is not a very representative number. However it was felt positive that any clients responded
to the survey given the difficulties the researcher faced in trying to build relationships.

There was no response from clients who either borrowed books or attended the reading group but as the homeless are a transient group it is possible they no longer attend the Archer Project.

No data was requested regarding gender, ethnicity or age so no patterns in terms of the different needs of different homeless groups could be established. This was a deliberate decision as it was felt it may be off-putting to clients to give any personal data.

4.4.2 Summary

There was not a lot of awareness from the respondents about either aspect of the reading project which suggests it could have been better advertised. Two respondents stated they were aware of the reading group but were too busy to attend. There was also two additional comments which stated the reading project was a positive thing.
4.5 Public Libraries

A survey was sent to a public library electronic mailing list to try gain an understanding about the amount of existing outreach work already being conducted, any difficulties public libraries face, such as staffing levels, when trying to deliver services and staff perceptions of homeless communities.

Forty-nine people responded to the questionnaire, with the majority, sixty-nine percent, working in a public library which did not run outreach work aimed at the homeless. This is nearly the same amount which said people needed identification or a home address to join the public library they worked in. It could be argued that the harder it is for homeless people to join a library the more important it is that outreach work takes place. While the majority of respondents said they accept temporary addresses such as that of a homeless shelter this does not allow the street homeless to join and furthermore the fact people have to identify themselves as homeless could mean they are intimidated to join (Fitzpatrick et al, 2000; Crisis, No Datea).

The reason people may be reluctant to identify themselves as homeless is that negative stereotypes exist about them and some feel very judged by people (Beresford et al, 1999; Greve, 1991). The literature review already revealed that some library staff are prejudice against the homeless and that library anxiety can be caused by staff appearing to be intimidating (Vincent, 2005; Jiao and Onwuegbuzie, 1999 : 279; Berman, 1998). One of the questions asked in the survey was ‘what, if any, are the challenges you face when working with the homeless’. It was hoped this question would reveal practical issues that need to be considered, such as financial, but that it would also unveil any prejudices library staff may have against the homeless. Nineteen people responded to the question and on the whole the responses were related to practical issues, such as one comment regarding the difficulties involved with running outreach and training staff with the financial cutbacks, but there were five worrying comments. Two of these comments related to the hygiene and trustworthiness of the homeless whilst another revealed the respondents serious issues with the homeless community as a whole:

“…Also in my personal experience you have to be careful how much kindness to show as sometimes homeless people become overly attached to you and misunderstand. I also once started chatting to a homeless man about the weather and it turned into a rant (on his part) about black jazz musicians and freemasons in league.”
The things this respondent discussed are not true of all homeless people nor are they behaviours exclusive to that group in society. There is potential for any library user to become overly attached or to begin a passionate speech that the member of library staff feels uncomfortable with. It is possible that the respondent had only had negative experiences with library users who identified themselves as homeless (although it is only assumption the users discussed actually identified themselves as homeless), there is a mention of excrement being smeared on the wall once; however it is important that it is remembered that the homeless are not a homogenous group and that how one homeless person behaves is not representative of all others (Shelter, 2009; Vincent, 2005; Daly, 1996). The comments which suggested negative attitudes to homeless users are connected to two respondents who voiced concerns about the challenge of overcoming the issue of staff who have prejudiced opinions.

One solution to this, as one respondent suggested, could be improved staff training. Only twenty-two people responded to the question regarding training for people working with the homeless but of that number only two said it was available. There were some additional comments that said training would be welcomed. As there was only one comment to the question about the challenges which arise from working with the homeless which stated they treated all customers equally it may be important that training is available to all staff members. It would seem important that training be offered regardless of whether a person is seen as likely to come into contact with people who identify themselves as homeless or if the library they work in conducts outreach work for homeless communities. It does seem clear that there are some issues involving prejudice that need to be overcome.

A reoccurring practical challenge respondents raised was the difficulty in actually identifying homeless communities and building lasting relationships with them. However a number of those respondents who are aware of outreach work in their library stated there were working in partnership with homeless charities or organisations, such as shelters. Working in partnership could help those libraries which struggle to identify homeless populations and it could also help with training issues as the staff at a homeless shelter would understand the type of training and knowledge library staff will need when working with the homeless. However one respondent said they were rarely approached by homeless charities as they perhaps do not see libraries as natural partners. This would suggest libraries need to take the initiative and be the ones to make first contact and that libraries also need to better promote the ways in which they can be of benefit to homeless people.
Furthermore partnership working does not solve the problem of how libraries can build lasting relationships with a transient population who are often allowed to stay in the shelters for a short time period only.

Another issue that emerged from the survey was that of Internet access. Some respondents discussed how they are legally obliged to see some form of identification if library users wish to use the Internet, even for guest log-ins. The Internet can be used for educational purposes, to find information related to, amongst other things, health, housing and jobs, and people without access to it are becoming increasingly disadvantaged to their peers (Gorman, 2003; Cullen, 2001). The issue of Internet access for the homeless is an important one, which needs to be considered further; Jackson (2006) and Rogers et al (1994) found access can be of particular benefit to this section of society and the homeless outreach project Middleton (2003) discusses was related to a library authority providing access to information technology for users of a homeless shelter.

Of those respondents who said the library they work in conducts outreach work with the homeless, sixty-eight point eight percent said they do not target specific groups such as homeless families or lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) homeless. The homeless are not a homogenous group and the needs of different groups are likely to vary so it could be beneficial to target specific groups as the project Lomas (2003) discusses does (Shelter, 2009; Warnes et al, 2003; Daly, 1996; Greve, 1991). This could be particularly important in relation to reaching homeless women, the majority of respondents who discussed the nature of the outreach work they conduct said they worked with homeless shelters. Greve (1991) discusses how women can find these places daunting, Norris and Kennington (1992) agree and say women may feel intimidated by their male counterparts and be less likely to take part in activities which they dominate.

There could also be a worry that, by going to the shelters and having, as three respondents discussed, books there for users, a divide between homeless and other library users will be created and the idea homeless people do not belong in the library will be reinforced. Molyneux (2004) and Chadbourne (1990) have previously discussed this issue; Molyneux (2004 : 15) stated that while part of the ‘Your Choice Books’ project included a library being set up in a homeless shelter the aim was not to create a separate space but to show the users there what the library could offer and Chadbourne (1990 : 60) writes about a case study involving Haverhill library in Massachusetts where a separate room at the library was created for the homeless
which some staff felt was like segregation. However one of the respondents did say that that patrons of the homeless shelter they keep books in are users of the library too, and that they prefer to use it as reference only as they themselves worry about keeping the books safe and so appreciate having stock available at the shelter. This highlights an important issue in relation to outreach work, finding out the users needs. Only two respondents discussed creating a dialogue with homeless communities to find out what they wanted from the library and it is important libraries find out what users want instead of merely assuming it.

It was also interesting to note that for some library authorities there were more than one respondent. On the whole the responses were the same but there were some slight discrepancies which show that maybe library staff are not all equally informed about policies and procedures.

4.5.1 Limitations

None of the questions were mandatory which means that they did not all get an equal response rate. For example sixteen respondents said the library they work in conducts homeless outreach work but only thirteen answered the question related to how many members of staff are involved with the work. The decision to not make the questions compulsory was taken as it was felt people may have been more reluctant to contribute anything to the survey if they felt forced to answer questions they did not want to.

Some respondents raised issues with some of the questions wording. Someone felt 'what, if any, are the challenges you face when working with the homeless' was not clear and wondered whether the question was related to the homeless using libraries in general or just in terms of outreach work. The question was related to any aspects of working with the homeless but this could have been clearer and the fact it was not may have been the reason why only nineteen people responded to it. Some also felt the words ‘in your local authority’ should have been added to the question ‘is there any training available for people working with the homeless’ as while there may not be training offered at the specific library a person works in it may be available somewhere in the wider authority.

Another limitation is that the survey did not ask for the respondent’s job title. This could have helped to reveal any patterns relating to gaps in knowledge about policy and procedure, for example maybe it is only counter staff that are unaware of what specific training is available.
Also the survey did not define what the term ‘homeless’ should be taken to mean and the literature shows that there are many varying definitions meaning respondents may have all taken it to mean different things (Budnick, 2006; Fitzpatrick et al, 2000; Stone, 1997; Crisis, No Dateb).

4.5.2 Summary

The majority of respondents stated that the public library they worked for required identification or a home address to join but that they also accept a temporary address such as that of a homeless shelter.

Most of the respondents did not work at a public library which ran outreach work aimed at the homeless. Out of those who did only a small minority targeted specific groups of homeless people such as women.

There were some comments which revealed prejudice attitudes against the homeless and there were also respondents who worried that staff who hold negative opinions about homeless users were a barrier to providing an effective service for them. Something which would help combat this, and which some respondents indicated they would like, is training for staff working with the homeless; however only two respondents said this type of training was available.
4.6 Quaker Mobile Library

The QML provides a mobile book service to the homeless population of London who may not be able to join public libraries as they are of no fixed abode, a representative completed an online survey about the work they do (Nayler, 2007; Oltermann, 2007; Quaker Homeless Action, No Date).

It was revealed that this service is provided by one van and thirty people, the project is funded by Quaker Homeless Action but a person does not have to be a Quaker to volunteer. The van issues, on average, fifteen thousand books a year with users being allowed to borrow two books at a time which they can keep for two weeks. There is a comprehensive training programme for volunteers which consists of three observation days, participation shifts, verbal induction, a guidance pack and a training day.

The QML work in collaboration with other homeless charities, for example they take the van to homeless centres, and with public libraries. The project receives old stock from libraries and they publicise libraries and the events they hold.

There were some difficulties with running the project that were highlighted. Homeless centres are open during the week and so this would be the best time for the van to be running but it is also the time when the least volunteers are available. It was also said that it has been hard to show and demonstrate the needs of the homeless to public libraries and that what the project wants is for “it to be far more widely known firstly that street homeless without permanent addresses need books and that it is fairly cost effective to provide”.

4.6.1 Limitations

Due to time constraints this was conducted as an online questionnaire instead of an interview. This meant follow-up questions could not be asked regarding interesting things that emerged that the researcher had not previously been aware of, such as what would happen if the funding for the project was to reduce or be stopped completely or to find out more information about things such as participation shifts.
4.6.2 Summary

The QML is a successful reading project aimed at the homeless. They work in partnership with other homeless charities and with public libraries (whose work they publicise). A comprehensive training programme is available for their volunteers and the main difficulty they face is demonstrating the needs of the homeless to both public libraries and the general population.
4.7 Get into Reading and Manchester Public Libraries

It was hoped that a representative from both Get into Reading and Manchester Public Libraries would complete an online survey regarding their work with homeless communities but this did not occur. It had been hoped that using more than one case study would ensure the research was reliable as it is sometimes argued case studies are too specific meaning general findings do not emerge (Eve, 2008: 25; Brewer, 2007: 38).

It is possible the fact that this was going to take the form of an online survey instead of an interview meant it was less likely a response would be possible as people set aside specific time for an interview and also get to contribute to the questions asked.
4.8 Discussion

There were a number of common themes to emerge from the different strands of research including the need for training and the difficulties involved with publicising, and the perceived importance of outreach work.

4.8.1 Priorities of the homeless and those who work with them

Whilst working on the reading project the researcher became acutely aware of the many daily challenges the homeless and those who work with them face. The homeless face a variety of problems that need to be solved and which are of immediate concern, these include substance abuse, finding somewhere to live, finding enough food to eat and dealing with medical conditions (London Libraries Development Agency, 2007; Warnes et al, 2003; Fitzpatrick et al, 2000; Beresford et al, 1999; Stone, 1997; Dalt, 1996; Johnson, 1992; Norris and Kennington, 1992; Stronge, 1992; Greve, 1991; Crisis, No Datea). These types of things are pressing concerns that can affect how important a priority libraries and reading are to the homeless; a discussion in reading group revealed that a barrier to getting people to attend it would be substance abuse and they also talked about having to forage for food in waste bins. This conversation made the researcher realise that convincing people to attend a reading group when they did not know where their next meal was coming from would be very difficult. Two respondents of the questionnaire aimed at the clients of the Archer Project support this viewpoint saying “I have] other commitments to attend” and “I have a lot to do when I leave this place” in answer to the question ‘why did you not attend reading group?’

These issues the homeless face also affect how important the people working with them view libraries to be. A respondent of the public library questionnaire said “we’re rarely approached by those working with the homeless – maybe they don’t think of libraries as a partner…” The researcher saw first-hand the challenges the staff at the Archer Project dealt with on a daily basis. The Archer Project receives approximately fifty clients a day and provides food, access to hygiene facilities and medical provision, and helps with substance abuse problems (Cathedral Archer Project, 2011a; Cathedral Archer Project, 2011b). The staff had to deal with the everyday running of the organisations but also be prepared to deal with issues relating to things such as fights, clients wanting to use the telephone after the designated time and people who required medical assistance but did not want to go to the NHS Walk-In Clinic; all of these additional occurrences require a lot of staff time and attention. On top of this the Archer Project needs to raise money to ensure
they are able to continue providing the services mentioned previously, the staff do not have the time or provisions to consider things like library outreach work which, when compared to ensuring people are fed and teaching HIV prevention, can seem almost frivolous.

It is important public libraries are aware of these challenges so they understand that homeless charities may not even think to approach them and so libraries must make the first step. They also need to accept that outreach work may be slow to build up and that, as mentioned by a respondent who worked at the Archer Project, getting people to attend regularly may be difficult. Train (2001) discussed how it can take time to develop a relationship with homeless people; this means outreach work needs to be consistent. This is something the researcher also found, a client attended three reading group sessions but then a session was cancelled due to illness and they did not return. This could be because the relationship was fragile but also due to the fact the client was sacrificing valuable time to attend reading group and so would not want to risk this time being wasted. It is difficult to give advance warning of the fact a session will be cancelled, putting it online would not be very practical for homeless users and so word of mouth would have to be relied upon which may not be effective. This is why the researcher thinks it is important more than one person be involved with outreach work so that if one is absent another familiar face is able to take over. Two of the respondents to the public library questionnaire stated ‘one’ in response to the question about how many members of staff were involved with their homeless outreach work. They did say they had “..support from a good team” and “...appropriate assistance from others…” but it is not known exactly how extensive this support is and it could be very important; there are thirty people involved with the QML which is a very high number in comparison.

4.8.2 Barriers to the Homeless Using the Public Library

It is not just the homeless and those who work with them that may not see the importance of homeless outreach work, those working in and using public libraries may not either. The representative from the QML said a challenge they face when working with the homeless was “demonstrating their needs to public libraries and the public” and only sixteen out of forty-eight respondents to the public library questionnaire said they run outreach work involving the homeless. This may be because it is felt that by allowing the homeless to register either without identification or by using a temporary address such as a homeless shelter, as thirty-nine
respondents to the public library questionnaire stated their library did, all barriers to the homeless using libraries are removed. However if a user has to give a temporary address to register with the library they would have to identify themselves as homeless and not all people will feel comfortable doing this. This is because the term homeless can be viewed negatively and so people may not want to tell others they are homeless as they worry the perceptions of them will change (Lynch, 2009; Jackson, 2006; Beresford et al, 1999; Daly, 1996; Greve, 1991).

This problem is likely to be exacerbated by the fact that, as a lot of the literature reveals, public library staff can hold negative opinions of homeless people and this will affect how important they see homeless outreach work to be; if they do not think the homeless belong in libraries why would they want to encourage them to use the service? (Holt and Holt, 2010; Harris and Simon, 2009; Samek, 2007; Jackson, 2006; Berman, 2005; Hersberger, 2005; Vincent, 2005; Castle and Clyde, 2002; Grace, 2000; Jones, 1999; Murphy, 1999; Venturella, 1998; McNeil and Johnson, 1996; Shuman, 1996; Chadbourne, 1990). There were five comments on the public library questionnaire which either revealed a prejudice attitude towards the homeless or worries that negative staff attitudes were a challenge when working with the homeless.

Libraries can be seen as middle class institutions and library anxiety, which may already affect those homeless people who struggle with literacy, can be increased by negative or imposing staff attitudes; a lack of empathy and understanding of social inclusion issues from staff could lead to homeless people avoiding the library (Wilson, 2007; Molyneux, 2004; Onwuegbuzie et al, 2004; Jiao and Onwuegbuzie, 2003; Castle and Clyde, 2002; Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2000; Muddiman et al, 2000; Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 1999; Jiao and Onwuegbuzie, 1999; Daly, 1996).

The other library users can also react negatively to homeless people being in the library and balancing the needs and demands of the two groups is a difficult responsibility of the library. Jamieson (2004) states he does not think public libraries should be used as an alternative to homeless shelters and Schneider (2010) highlights the fact patrons at Seattle Central Library have expressed unhappiness about the way the homeless use libraries.

With Wilson (2007) saying a challenge faced when conducting homeless outreach work was getting them into the physical building, with one user physically shaking before entering, and one of the clients at the Archer Project saying they “did
not have the confidence to go [to the reading group]” it seems clear public libraries can not just expect the homeless to come to them, outreach work is important. This is even more pressing as libraries can be of great benefit to homeless people (Barbieux, 2010; Broadley, 2010; Homeless UK, 2010; Collins et al, 2009; Flagg, 2000; Cohen, 1998; Gale, 1998).

Homeless people often struggle with literacy, which affects their ability to get a job and means they get trapped in a cycle of despondency; libraries have a natural role to play in combating this (Jama and Dugdale, 2010; Daly, 1996). Furthermore a disproportionate amount of homeless people suffer from mental health problems and bibliotherapy can help ease the symptoms, this could be an especially important role for public libraries as the fact “reading can help a person’s mental health…” was raised by one of the respondents who works at the Archer Project (Brewster, 2008; Davis et al, 2008; Brewster, 2007; Usherwood and Toyne, 2002; Howard et al, 2001; Craig, 1998; Stronge, 1992).

4.8.3 Training

Something which could help overcome the issue of negative staff attitudes is effective training. The researcher’s personal opinion is that training is incredibly important for outreach work with the homeless, their personal experience was that without it one would struggle a great deal and Heffernan (2009 : 7) stresses the importance of training saying “visiting hostels can be daunting for library staff. They are chaotic places…”, which is similar to the researcher’s experience. Broadley (2011) came to similar conclusions in their research and recommended staff be trained to work with the homeless and an aim of Wilson’s (2007) outreach programme was to ensure staff were trained effectively to work with vulnerable groups. Only two respondents to the public library questionnaire said training was available for those who worked with the homeless and there were comments that training would be welcome. As mentioned previously there were comments which suggested a prejudiced attitude against homeless users, it is possible these people have only ever had negative experiences with those users who identified themselves as homeless and it would be difficult to move past this if there was not effective training or support available (Vincent, 2005).

The QML offers a comprehensive training programme which includes observation days, a guidance pack and a training day. It may be wise for public libraries to look to homeless charities for advice and guidance on how to put
together a training programme and what the most important things staff need to be taught are (Vincent, 2005).

4.8.4 Advertisement

One of the staff from the Archer Project stated the reading project could be advertised better and six out of the nine clients who completed the survey were unaware of the reading group, the fact books could be borrowed or both. This supports the researcher’s own feelings that the reading project was not promoted very well and that this may have contributed to the low attendance level at the reading group. It is difficult to know how best to promote services to homeless people as they are unlikely to have regular access to the Internet and may also struggle with literacy making leaflets difficult to comprehend (Middleton, 2003; Norris and Kennington, 1992). Word of mouth is probably the most effective way to advertise but as the researcher found, and responses to the public library questionnaire show, it can be difficult to build trust and relationships with the homeless as they are a vulnerable, transient group (Train, 2001). The response from the QML may offer a solution as they say they stock leaflets from local libraries and promote their events so maybe increased partnership working would lead to increased usage of the library.

4.8.5 Targeted Outreach Work

The homeless are not a homogenous group, they are made up of wide variety of groups from society such as veterans, LGBT, families and young people; it is not realistic to think they all the need the same thing from the library (Broadley, 2010; Hersberger, 2005; Flagg, 2000; Daly, 1996; Greve, 1991). However sixty-eight point eight percent of those respondents who said they run outreach work involving the homeless did not target specific groups. Aside from not considering the individual needs of the homeless this may also lead to some not feeling confident enough to go, one client from the Archer Project stated confidence as an issue but did not state the specific reason why and Norris and Kennington (1992) and Greve (1991) have discussed how women may find shelters and groups run in them intimidating. An issue with delivering separate outreach work is that it would lead to even more problems related to advertising.
4.8.6 Conclusion

The research suggests that training is an important issue for public library staff, there are some issues related to empathy and the understanding of social inclusion which need to be overcome and training would help. Training would also help staff to feel more confident in delivering outreach work and ensure they provided the most effective schemes.

Partnership working is also important as it means public libraries can identify homeless people and gain the benefit of the experience staff who have worked with the homeless have (Goulding, 2006; Berman, 2005; Vincent, 2005). However it needs to be remembered that organisations working with the homeless have serious practical concerns and funding issues which mean they are less likely to contact public libraries, public libraries need to contact them first.

People involved with outreach work need to be patient, advertising to the homeless is difficult and word of mouth is one of the more effective means to promote services. However it can take time to build relationships with the homeless as they, like those who work with them, have serious practical problems to contend with and so may take a while to warm to the idea of attending, for example, a reading group.
4.9 Rich Picture
5. Conclusions

5.1 The Aims and Objectives

This section of the conclusions will discuss how far the aims and objectives stated at the beginning of this dissertation were met.

Objective one was to “investigate the scope of existing public library activity with homeless people”; to some extent this was met. The public library questionnaire revealed, to a degree, the amount of public library activity with homeless people. It helped to reveal how much outreach work is undertaken and what form this activity takes; it also showed some barriers to homeless people using library services such as needing identification or proof of address to join and negative staff attitudes. The literature review also uncovered some other library outreach projects aimed at the homeless, such as ‘Your Choice Books’ and ‘Outside Story’ (Heffernan, 2009; Molyneux, 2004). However the full extent of public library activity was not ascertained as the public library questionnaire was not answered by a representative amount of library staff.

The second objective was “to explore the collaborative relationships that exist between public libraries and homeless charities”; again this was achieved but not to the degree that had been hoped. The public library questionnaire revealed that a number of respondents who said where they worked ran outreach projects said they did in collaboration with homeless charities; this was also true of the literature review. Furthermore the QML questionnaire showed that they worked with public libraries on occasion but that they found it hard to demonstrate the needs of the homeless to library staff. The researcher’s own reading project at the Archer Project showed that, while homeless charities would probably be receptive to the idea of working with public libraries, these organisations have to deal with very urgent and important daily issues and so may not have the time to, or even consider, making first contact. This objective could have been achieved further if Get into Reading and Manchester Public Libraries had responded to their questionnaires and if the researcher had had time to conduct interviews which would have allowed follow-up questions to interesting points raised and allowed a greater understanding of the issues.

The third and finally objective was to “establish a relationship with a section of the homeless community to explore their relationship with reading and public libraries”. Whilst the researcher did attempt to establish a relationship with the
clients at the Archer Project it was not very successful although they did gain an understanding about the daily lives of the homeless. There were nine responses to the questionnaire aimed at the clients at the Archer Project but they were very basic and did not deliver a great deal of insight and the number was not representative of the client population. It would have been better if there had been time to conduct interviews as it is likely more in-depth responses would have been given, it is also likely the researcher would have been able to establish a greater relationship with the homeless if they had been able to spend longer working at the Archer Project. However it is felt it is positive that anyone responded to the questionnaire and the time spent at the Archer Project did mean the researcher could gain some insight into the relationship between reading and public libraries.

The overall aim of the research was “to explore how public librarians can, and do, engage with homeless communities to provide benefit and support”. It is felt that this was achieved and the next section of the conclusions will be recommendations for best practice that public librarians can implement to engage with homeless communities. However there are still issues which need to be explored and that is why there will be a section with recommendations for future research.

5.2 Recommendations for Best Practice

- Training appears to be a key issue; if staff at all levels are not trained to work effectively with the homeless problems may arise. If staff have only had negative experiences with library users who identify themselves as homeless and have no support or training to show them the problems the homeless face or the fact that the homeless are not a homogenous group they may start to treat homeless users negatively. This could undo any good work outreach projects achieve, if the homeless are encouraged to use libraries only to find an unwelcoming attitude they may be unlikely to return. It is also important outreach workers understand the best way to work with homeless people to ensure they do not cause any undue harm and that they also feel confident doing their job.

- Finding partners in the community, such as homeless shelters, to work with is a way for public libraries to identify homeless people. They can also learn a lot from people who work with the homeless on a continuous basis, such as the most important aspects that training sessions need to cover; they may also be able to help libraries tailor outreach work so it meets the needs of the
homeless. Also the homeless are a vulnerable group who may be wary of new people and so, by working with a trusted organisation, who can promote their work, public libraries may be more likely to build up a strong relationship.

- It is thought that more than one person should be involved with outreach work; this means the library staff can support each other and that if one is unable to attend work there is someone else, who is known to the users, who can take over.

- It would also be beneficial for public libraries to speak to homeless people themselves. This would enable them to find out what the homeless would like from a library service, they’re every day needs and problems and any barriers that may stop them from using the library. It is important libraries provide a service that is needed, rather just a service they think is needed.

### 5.3 Recommendations for Future Research

- It would be interesting to discover more about the opinions of homeless people about public libraries and reading. This may be best done as a PhD as that would allow more time for the researcher to build relationships with the homeless. However if this researcher had had slightly more time on this project and if the scope had been narrower focusing solely on the opinions of the homeless it would have been possible to conduct in-depth interviews with the clients at the Archer Project meaning it would be possible for a future researcher to gain insight about the opinions of the homeless whilst doing M.A. research.

- As a finding of this research was that partnership working is an important aspect of providing effective outreach work to homeless populations it would be useful if more research was conducted around the opinions of, and constraints facing, those people who work for homeless charities and organisations.

- It would also be useful to gain a complete understanding of the amount of homeless outreach work being undertaken so research which looked at each Public Library Authority in the country is recommended.

- Some of the respondents to the public library questionnaire discussed how they are legally obliged to see some form of identification before they can allow a library user to access the Internet and so it would be interesting to
look further into the issue of the homeless populations’ ability to get online and how this affects their quality of life.

- Concern has been raised that allowing homeless people to join the library would result in a loss of stock; it would be interesting if there was research into the validity of this assumption.

- It may also be interesting to conduct more specific research into how bibliotherapy can be of benefit to homeless people.

### 5.4 Overall Conclusions

The research revealed a number of key issues including the need for training and the difficulties involved with publicising, and the perceived importance of, outreach work. A lot of these problems could be overcome by partnership working; working with homeless charities could help public libraries to put together effective training programmes and they could also help to publicise the work that libraries do. Also the homeless are a vulnerable group who may not trust people easily and so having an organisation that has an established relationship with them to promote library services would be an advantage. Homeless charities and organisations could also help libraries to put together outreach projects or to decide which of the services they currently offer are best suited to the needs of the homeless.

Training is important for all members of staff, not just those involved with outreach work; if a homeless person was encouraged to use the library only to be confronted by a hostile member of staff they could be unlikely to return.

It would also be useful for public libraries to try establish the opinions of homeless people about library services; this would help libraries to ensure they provide a service which is needed rather than one that they think is needed. It would also help them to remove any barriers to the homeless accessing the library that may not have been considered.
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Appendices

Appendix One

Participant Consent Register

- I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 17th/01/2011 explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences.
- I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.
- I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research.
- I agree to take part in the above research project.

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# Appendix Two

**Lone Worker Movement Sheet**

| Date: | Name | 08:30 | 09:00 | 09:30 | 10:00 | 10:30 | 11:00 | 11:30 | 12:00 | 12:30 | 13:00 | 13:30 | 14:00 | 14:30 | 15:00 | 15:30 | 16:00 | 16:30 | 17:00 | 17:30 | 18:00 |
|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|       |      |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |

**PLEASE RECORD:**

1. Your name.
2. Your position.
3. Your contact number (mobile or car).<br>4. Any additional information.
5. Your initials when the sheet is completed.

**Meeting ends:**

- 04:00
- 03:30
- 03:00
- 02:30
- 02:00
- 01:00
- 12:30
- 12:00
- 11:30
- 11:00
- 10:30
- 10:00
- 09:30
- 09:00
- 08:30
Appendix Three
The Reading Group Promotional Poster

Every Tuesday 9am until 10am
All welcome
If you don’t like books come tell us why!
Refreshments will be available

Books Are Available To Borrow
If you are interested in borrowing a book,
please speak to a member of staff

Images from Microsoft Publisher (2007) Clipart