

Chapter 7

Cross – Generational Learning Case Study: A Working Partnership between Malahide Library and Malahide (Post-Primary) Community School

Susan Lovatt

Fingal County Libraries, Ireland

ABSTRACT

“The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision – making and cultural development of the individual and social groups.” (IFLA/ UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, 1994)

No public library, however large and well funded, can meet all the needs of its customers on its own (2010, IFLA, p. 28). With fewer staff resources, collaborations and partnerships have become even more important in today’s economic environment to help deliver a quality service to library customers. The working partnership established between Malahide Library and the local post-primary school delivers mutual benefits to both. It has enabled the library to meet its customers’ needs through sources of volunteers who assist in the delivery of technology-based classes within the library. The cross-generational approach of the partnership has enabled the students to fulfill their school requirements of engaging in social responsibility and developing life skills. The partnership has assisted in enhancing the role of the library within the community and fostering good relationships with its future customers.

INTRODUCTION

The working partnership between Malahide Library and Community School (MCS) has developed over the last three years, proving beneficial to

the library, the students involved and the wider community. The students participating in the partnership are part of the Transition Year (TY) Programme run in the school.

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Transition year is a one year “stand alone” programme designed by individual schools within the framework of national guidelines. It occurs after the compulsory three year cycle (age 12-15) and Junior Certificate state examination, and before students embark on a Leaving Certificate programme for the final two years of their schooling. Transition year programmes build on the idea that mid-adolescence is very much a time of change and there is a strong focus on facilitating transition from the dependence of childhood towards the relative independence of adulthood (Jeffers, 2004, p. 54).

29,000 students drawn from 550 schools throughout Ireland currently participate in a Transition Year program. The Transition Year program calls for the students involved to participate in social responsibility and self – directed learning and to develop life skills. In this chapter, I will outline the background to the partnership, its delivery, benefits and progression over the last three years. Examples will be given of how it is meeting the individual needs of all participating in the partnership and how, through its cross-generational learning approach, it is contributing to breaking down some of the barriers that exist in our digital society. Cross-generational learning not only supports bridging the digital divide; it also can be seen as bridging the gap between formal and informal education. The partnership with the local school has given the library the opportunity to be seen as an educational partner, highlighting the influence it can have on the students’ lives. This is demonstrated through the school’s openness to move the partnership into different directions. Foremost outlined within the chapter will be how the partnership with MCS supports Malahide Library in delivering an efficient and quality service to meet the various needs of its customers.

BACKGROUND

Malahide Library is part of Fingal County Council which administers the County of Fingal in North County, Dublin. Fingal covers an area of 450km² and is Ireland’s fastest growing county, with a 22% population increase between 2002 and 2006. A network of nine public libraries and a mobile library service are uniquely placed to reach all citizens of the county to deliver a quality service. In addition, a housebound service and an archival and local studies service are available to all residents. Four of the libraries are open fifty-six hours a week; two are open fifty hours, while the remainder are part-time (30 hours per week). At present, there are 140,337 registered users of Fingal Libraries out of a total population of 273,051 (Census 2011).

Malahide Library is located in the coastal village of Malahide; the library is a Carnegie building dating back to 1909. It serves Malahide Village and surrounding area and the adjoining suburbs of Kinsealy and Portmarnock. In 2007 the library reopened after a major refurbishment and expansion. The refurbishment allowed the library to increase the stock and facilitate a larger range of activities and events. The floor space has increased to 1,200 square meters, the opening hours have been extended to 56 hours a week, and the number of public access computers has increased from two to sixteen. The library, in retaining its position as a focal point in the village and surrounding area, strives to meet the needs of all in the community. In ascertaining these needs, Malahide Library continually asks its customers for suggestions on activities and events that they would like facilitated within the library. There are many requests for children’s activities. However, the main request is for computer classes to be organised and run in the library. The main responsibility and focus of librarians in Malahide library is organising activities and events. This focus has led to collaborations and partnerships with the MCS .

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