

Title of paper: The Career Library

Name of speaker etc.: Mikkel Helldén-Hegelund, Norerrebro Bibliotek, Copenhagen Libraries, Copenhagen, Denmark.

Abstract:

The Career Library is an innovative library project, which is part of the outreach programme at Noerrebro Library in Copenhagen, Denmark, targeting young people aged between 14-25 years.

The primary aim of the project is to create and host a human-network available at the library as a new service to youth, seeking information about education, future jobs and Career opportunities.

This paper tells the story of the background for the project, and discusses it's results, problems and reflections involved in the process.

Full text:

The Career Library

Project background

After finishing my education as a librarian in 2005 I started working at the Noerrebro branch at the Copenhagen Libraries.

This library is one of the larger branches in Copenhagen and is situated in the most diverse area of the capital city.

This neighbourhood hosts about 40.000 people from more than 45 nationalities, with inhabitants primarily from the Middle East, and the neighbourhood is the most youth-dense area in Copenhagen.

The area is facing a range of problems mostly social and educational. The statistics tell that 80% of the youth here do not continue their education after finishing primary school and thereby they inherit some the problems that their parents are facing such as unemployment etc.

A project idea takes form

To help the kids and youth in the Noerrebro area my library is engaged in a variety of projects, such as language programmes, learning center and home work studios in collaboration with different organisations.

One of the organisations is a Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) called the Danish Refugee Council and soon after my start at the library I found my self discussing different project ideas with Rie Graesborg - one of their representatives.

As a new librarian I wanted to create a project where the library played a more significant part in helping the youth to learn and take advantage of the

possibilities in the Danish educational system where there is an abundance of possibilities and where you actually get paid to go to school and university.

Rie Graesborgs experience working with the youth with a non-Danish background has given her the conclusion that a key problem for them is that, they don't know any people outside the school and social system, to give them information about different jobs and educations in Denmark.

After discussing this problem and doing some research we came up with the idea of creating a kind of living library, a human network or a Career Library as we named it, as a new service to youth, seeking information about education, future jobs and career opportunities.

At the Career Library we wanted to give the youth of Noerrebro regardless of their background the possibility to meet a person, a doctor, a teacher or a carpenter, to learn about their work and education and life in general.

A living library which would bridge the gap between text and real life and a library which would serve as a cultural meeting point where people who rarely meet, got the chance to talk and know each other.

10 months later, May 3. 2007, Copenhagen Libraries and the Danish Refugee Council opened the Career Library at Noerrebro Library as a joint venture project after having received funding from the Danish Agency for Libraries and Media formerly known as the Danish Library Agency

The project formally ended May 1.2008, but is now implemented as a part of our service. I will now present some results an reflections about the project.

The core idea

After a lot of pre-project work which included interviewing youngsters from the neighbourhood, The Career Library was formed as a project targeting young people between 14-25 years with interest in education.

The core idea was, that the Career Library should create a collection or network of people with different jobs and education available for meetings with young people with an interest in their job and education.

Our goal was to help young people make a choice about their future education on a more informal basis.

Designing the project

The project design included taking some important decisions about the project. Some of them I will briefly discuss here.

Volunteers

First of all we had to decide how to attract the persons or "the living books" in the project which we very early decided should be volunteers.

Working with volunteers in libraries is not very common in Denmark but is developing these years in connection with social work.

We were in doubt whether the project would be able to attract the volunteers needed to present a useful collection of jobs and educations, but the enthusiasm of the people presented to our idea convinced us that this was the right path for the project.

To engage volunteers in talking about themselves, their jobs and education seemed to be a simple, original and relevant idea that many people could relate to.

In the designing of the project, we also made some very simple rules of engagement for the volunteers to make the project attractive to working people who we know have a busy urban life.

This was fx. that a volunteer could only partake in one meeting a month, that communication and setting up the meeting would be taken care of by the library and that the meetings would be max 45 min. in the after-work hours from 15-19.

Finally and maybe most important, we stressed that the volunteers should not have any special knowledge to participate more than to have a job and be open minded and willing to share their experience from work and education.

Another part of our strategy was to appeal to people on a personal level instead of trying to reach them through their work, company or organisation.

With this strategy in hand we worked on getting through to the media and succeeded in getting heavy media attention from both TV and newspapers. Thanks to this and to our strategy we rapidly recruited over 100 volunteers for the project.

Target group

The target-group of the project was primarily youth in Noerrebro with a mixed non-Danish background. This was the group that we first of all wanted to reach, but the project was open to everybody regardless of their background.

The age of the target group was decided to be broad from 14-25 years after discussions with neighbouring schools and their counsellors.

Our strategies to reach the target group was originally primarily to catch them at the library where a relative large part of our neighbourhoods youth visit daily. We also made some informal agreements with the counsellors at the local schools to make them use our project as a supplement to their counselling.

The library as a meeting place

We also had to decide if the meetings should take place at the library or at the volunteers place of work. This would be easier for them and could be beneficial to the loaners in regards to literally see fx. how an architect works.

On the other hand the library has advantages as a meeting point. Its an open space for everybody. The youth, especially the girls, are allowed to go there and in regards to the meetings we found that meeting here in safe surroundings would even out the hierarchy between the parts and have a positive influence on their dialogue since none of them would be on home ground. Finally we wanted to show and promote that the library can function as a intercultural meeting point.

Facts about the Career Library

Project results

After running the project for about a year we summarized the results:

Loaners

- 51 persons young people met with a volunteer in the Career Library during 49 weeks.
- Loaners focused on the same jobs and educations - 3 traditional jobs, doctor, engineer and IT-worker represented 18 loans
- There were a 50% share between boys and girls.
- Loaners from age of 13 to 35 years – the main part from primary school.
- 90% of the loaners had a mixed or non Danish background.
- Very positive evaluations, pointing to the fact that the Career Library gave new and valuable information.

Volunteers

- 150 volunteers representing around 120 different jobs signed up to be a part of the project.
- The main part of the volunteers have academic background
- Growing number of volunteers
- Very positive evaluations of the meetings and the project

Partners

- Positive reactions from different partners such as schools, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, the Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs, the media and the local society among others.

The results

Loans and loaners

Overall we found the project to be successful.

Our idea came through to the target group. The project was used by both genders and the evaluations were very positive.

In regards to the choice of jobs and educations for the meetings, we had hoped to broaden the view of the loaners and make them see other jobs than the very traditional ones that they normally chose.

But looking at a so-called prestige list of the most prestigious jobs rated by the Danes gave us an understanding of their choices since the top list of the Career library was also found at the top of prestige list.

Evaluating the loans also made us aware of that it takes time to integrate a new and innovative service. To reach the target group and make them understand how it works involves hard work, and looking ahead our focus needs to be even more on the users since we now have the volunteers and the basis for the project.

Volunteers and user involvement

The number of volunteers and their reactions and evaluations of the project were very positive. The volunteers believed in the idea and in the library as a reliable host of the project. In these times where focus on user involvement, participation and contribution sometimes seems to be occupied by the web 2.0 trend we were very happy to attract a large number of volunteers in the physical library. Talking to the volunteers furthermore showed us that they were not our typical loaners or bookworms, but citizens who wanted to contribute and make a difference through the project.

To involve users and non-users like this has several benefits.

First of all it allows the library to extend and develop. It furthermore shows that the library can play a positive role in the social work of its local society, depending on the needs there.

It opens up the library to involve users and show them that the library is not only for librarians but for them – that the library is open to everybody.