

The Home Library Service

■ Summary



The Home Library Service volunteers visit people unable to leave home. A team of 75 volunteers currently visit about 175 readers who have age-related mobility and/or visual impairments, and other health problems such as agoraphobia.

Library deliveries are also made to some adult residential homes and sheltered housing complexes. These may consist of a selection of books available for borrowing from shelves in a day room. The volunteers who select and deliver the books also have a 'befriending' role, offering their readers companionship and a contact with the outside world.

■ The problems and how we tackled them

The biggest problem is balancing the recruitment of readers and volunteers - to try to match demand and supply across the authority. We use poster campaigns, leaflet drops and word of mouth in targeted areas.

It is important that the volunteers are kept in touch with the library staff, and with each other, so that they can be used as a route for communicating vital information to their readers. The library service hosts an annual volunteers event which addresses this problem. Speakers are invited to the annual event, including Police, medical experts and Council officers.

■ Next steps

We are currently working with a 'Meals on Wheels' provider to advertise the service in areas where we have enough volunteers to be able to take on more readers. Implementing a partnership arrangement or finding funding to be able to recruit a Volunteer Manager would enable many more volunteering opportunities to be offered across the libraries.

For more information about your local Home Library Service visit www.bathnes.gov.uk/BathNES/leisureandculture/Libraries/mobile

■ Outcomes and impact



The service helps meet the needs of many people who are unable to leave their homes because of ill health, disability or age. Many volunteers have looked after older relatives in the past, and bring a real understanding of the value of the service to the people they visit.

Eileen Colburn and co-volunteer Jean Weare, (pictured) are Bath & North East Somerset's two most senior Home Library Service volunteers. They set aside a day every two or three weeks to deliver library books to people's homes. "Some of the ladies are in their 90's with no relatives nearby and no friends alive. They are very lonely," says Jean. "I often stay for half an hour or so. It feels good to be doing something worthwhile. I love books and can't imagine life without them."

People using the service regard it as a lifeline. Some typical comments;



"It's excellent, it keeps me going, I couldn't manage without it"

"It's a good way of being able to continue reading and a great way to develop strong friendships"

"Best service provided by the Council"; "It's a great life line - I don't get many visitors - it's lovely to see people."