

The US! Project: Moving the Bigger Picture On



Final Report to the
Paul Hamlyn Foundation

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**THE US! PROJECT
FINAL REPORT TO THE PAUL HAMLYN FOUNDATION**

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FINAL REPORT OF THE US! PROJECT

PART 1: CONTEXT

1. 1 Introduction

The 'Utterly Sensational Books and Reading Project for You, Me, Us!' (hereafter referred to as the US! Project) was a project designed and managed by Read On - Write Away! (ROWA!) and took place from September 2001 - August 2004. ROWA! was set up in 1997 as a cradle-to-grave literacy initiative, constituted as an Independent Partnership. ROWA! co-ordinates a large number of literacy projects and initiatives, in partnership with a number of agencies including: Derbyshire Local Education Authority, Derbyshire Social Services, Derbyshire Libraries and Heritage Derby City Council, The Basic Skills Agency, The National Literacy Trust and The Derbyshire Learning and Skills Council. The US! Project was designed in response to national and local concerns about the educational attainment of looked after children.

Department for Education and Skills statistics indicate that at 30th September, 2003, there were 415 looked after children and young people in Derbyshire, 330 of whom were of school age (DfES, 2004). There has been national concern about the educational attainment of looked after children and patterns of underachievement can be seen in the figures for Derbyshire LEA. Focusing on the area of reading and literacy, it is clear that looked after children in Derbyshire do not achieve their potential. At key stage 1, 50% of looked after children achieved the expected level 2 in reading, as compared to a figure of 88% for all children. In the key stage 2 English assessment, 46% of looked after children achieved the expected level 4 in English; the figure for all children was 77%. At key stage 3, the disparity was greater – 22% of looked after children achieved the expected grade in English, as opposed to 68% of all children. No looked after children in Derbyshire achieved 5 GCSEs grades A-C, whereas 53% of children nationally did (DfES, 2004). Research into the educational under-attainment of looked after children nationally has indicated that the key factors contributing to this problem include the following:

- capacity - serious staff shortages in social care, and lack of training on the educational needs of children in care;
- weak management and leadership, with a lack of senior level commitment to improving education for children in care, and a gap between managers and the frontline;
- a shortage of resources and poor planning that can lead to bad resource management;
- systems and structures which interfere with joint working.

(SES, 2003)

A number of initiatives have sought to address some of these issues, with varied success (SES, 2003). In 2000, The Who Cares? Trust worked with the National Literacy Trust on the 'Right to Read' Project, which focused on providing residential centres with books and encouraging looked after children and young people to read. The project was very successful and the libraries had a beneficial effect on the looked after children and young people involved. It was found that critical factors in the success of this project were the commitment of senior management within the local authority and the enthusiasm of the project staff (WCT, 2001).

The US! Project was set up by Read On - Write Away! (ROWA!) in September 2001 in order to build further on this work and develop looked after children and young people's access to books and motivation for reading. The project received funding for the first two years of the project from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF) and was a partnership project between ROWA!, Derbyshire Libraries and Heritage and Derbyshire Social Services.

This Final Report is also an Evaluation Report and was completed by an independent evaluator. It contains a summary of the project organised in response to the questions set out in the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Guidance Notes, which is then followed by a more detailed Evaluation Report.

1.2 Methodology

The evaluation took place from September 2001 until April 2004. A number of approaches were taken to the evaluation:

(a) Documentary analysis

The following documents were analysed and informed this evaluation:

- Project Co-ordinators' reports to the Steering Group.
- Minutes of Steering Group meetings.
- First year report to the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.
- Letters sent to partner organisations (Social Services, Step Up 2000, Libraries and Heritage).
- Letters, leaflets and posters sent to children and young people
- Evaluation forms from training sessions.
- Evaluation form from a residential weekend for looked after children and young people.
- Booklet featuring looked after children's poems.
- Written evaluation notes from a worker at a Family Centre for children with disabilities.

(b) Statistical analysis

Statistics relating to take-up of project initiatives and activities were accessed.

(c) Interview data

Eighteen people were interviewed as part of the evaluation:

- 2 Project Co-ordinators.
- 7 looked after children and young people.
- Senior Manager, Young People and Policy Development, Libraries and Heritage.
- 2 additional representatives from Derbyshire Libraries and Heritage.
- Assistant Head of Services, Children and Families, Social Services.
- Representative from Step Up 2000.
- Corporate Parenting Officer, Social Services and Education.
- 3 Family Centre Managers.

(d) Observational data

Filed notes were constructed from observations undertaken in four family centres.

PART 2: SUMMARY REPORT

2.1 General aims and specific objectives

The aims of the project were:

- To provide a range of approaches to develop the interest and involvement of children and young people in public care in books, reading and literacy.
- To provide a range of approaches designed to make a significant impact on the care culture so that books and reading are at the centre.
- To provide a range of approaches that contribute to helping to break the cycle of disadvantage experienced by young people in public care and those leaving care.
- To provide a range of approaches coherently linked to national initiatives such as Quality Protects, the Education of Children in Public Care and basic skills.
- To work with Derbyshire Social Services and other agencies to ensure continuation, beyond August 2004, of the approaches developed in this project.

The objectives of the project were identified in relation to seven strands, as follows:

Table 1: Objectives of each strand

| STRAND | OBJECTIVES |
|---|---|
| <i>Buddy Book Boxes to Family centres and Children's Centre</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To help young people in residential care to develop their interest in books and reading. • To encourage carers to interest and involve children and young people in residential care in the library. |
| <i>Buddy Book Boxes to Foster Carers.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To help young people in foster care to develop their interest in books and reading. • To encourage carers to interest and involve children and young people in foster care in the library. |
| <i>Buddy Mentors</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To recruit and train a small number of residential and foster carers and young adults who have left care in 'shared reading' techniques. • To support and resource the above in using shared reading techniques with children and young people in public care. |
| <i>A Book of My Own</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To facilitate the provision of books for children and young people in public care for their ownership |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To make progress in developing a similar strand for children and young people in foster care. |
| <i>Specific Focused Provision for 'looked after' children</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To set up activities for children and young people in public care to encourage reading for fun and creative writing. |
| <i>Developing specific provision/ initiatives for young parents in care and young parents who have left care</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To contribute to the social development of parent/child relationships by encouraging reading to/with babies and small children. • To ensure that young parents (looked after or care leavers) receive 'Books for Babies' bags and information about using the library. • To develop a specific book box containing a wide range of factual and fictional books about pregnancy, child birth, parenting and linked options. • To incorporate young parents (looked after or care leavers) in basic and parenting skills residential courses. |
| <i>Training for Residential Workers and Foster Carers</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide input on appropriate existing training courses on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the importance and fun of reading techniques to encourage reading -the role of reading and literacy in contributing to meeting the needs of looked after young people as identified in current national initiatives. • To set up a separate event or course for foster carers and residential workers promoting the above. |

2.2 How it was done and by whom

The Project was managed by a Project Co-ordinator. Terry Smith managed the project from September 2001 – March 2003. Mandy Hatton replaced Terry as the Project Co-ordinator.

The project had a Steering Group which consisted of the following members:

- Fiona Cameron: Senior Manager, Read On - Write Away!
- Annie Everall (Chair): Senior Manager, Young People and Policy Development, Libraries and Heritage
- Steve Lowe: Children's Rights Officer
- Joe McNelis: Operations Manager, Children's Services, Step Up 2000
- Sue Owen: Corporate Parenting Officer, Social Services and Education
- Peter Riddle: Assistant Head of Services, Children and Families, Social Services
- In addition to the Project Co-ordinators: Terry Smith and Mandy Hamilton.

2.3 What problems were encountered in doing it

Section 4.2 in Part 4 of this Report (page 36), details the problems encountered during the project.

2.4 Whom it benefited and how many

The project benefited a large number of looked after children and young people. Unfortunately, because the Project did not collect precise statistics about take-up, it is not possible to provide exact figures here. Figures provided part-way through the project¹ indicated that:

- 41 boxes of books (1250 books in total) were loaned to Family and Children's Centres, Foster Carers, After Care Projects, Family Support Centres, Looked After Children Groups.
- 315 books were distributed to young people in residential care as part of the 'Book of My Own' strand.
- 51 children in foster care were provided with 2 books during the 'Roadshows'.
- 12 books were distributed to 7 birth children of carers during the 'Roadshows'.
- An innovative project providing and using books with disabled children, which included Story Sacks training /development, reached out to approximately 60 disabled children.
- 3 special books events were held which involved 78 looked after children and care leavers, 9 foster carers, 26 carers/social workers/after care workers.
- Starter libraries were set up in all residential family and children's centres which provided an estimated £300 of books of their choice.

¹ These figures were provided by the Project Co-ordinator on 26th March, 2003.

- 2 Facts and Feeling Boxes were established for work with sexually active looked after children and care leavers.

Details about all of these initiatives can be found in Part 3 of this Report.

2.5 How other interested parties will be informed of the outcome

The Final report will be circulated to all Steering Group members.

The Final report will also be placed on ROWA!'s website (<http://www.rowa.org.uk>).

2.6 How we know whether or not it has succeeded

The Project was evaluated by an independent evaluator. The Evaluation Report can be found in Part 3 of this Report (pages 9-40). This evaluation indicates that the project was very successful in a number of areas.

2.6 Which other funders were approached and with what success

Derbyshire Social Services contributed approximately £5000 p.a. to the project after PHF funding finished. The Project Co-ordinator estimated that an additional £2000 - £4000 was contributed by Step Up 2000, the Corporate Parenting Initiative, ACPC and the Library service.

ROWA! core funding contributed 60% of the Project co-ordinator's salary p.a. after PHF funding finished (£14, 911).

2.7 Continued funding

No continued funding is needed as the Project ends in August 2004.

PART 3: EVALUATION REPORT

The project had seven different strands². In the following section, each strand is evaluated in turn.

3.1 Strand 1: Buddy Book Boxes

Table 2: Strand 1

| Strand | Objectives | Description |
|---|--|--|
| <i>Buddy Book Boxes to Family Centres and Children's Centre</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To help young people in residential care to develop their interest in books and reading.• To encourage carers to interest and involve children and young people in residential care in the library. | This strand consisted of a book loan and exchange system involving children and young people and their carers from the 7 Family centres and the 2 units. Children and young people from the Children's Centre were involved in choosing and exchanging a wide selection of books. Books exchanged on a quarterly basis. Associated promotional materials for young people and their carers aimed at interesting and encouraging reading and the use of the library were developed and distributed. |

This strand has been highly successful and has met its aims. In total:

- 41 boxes of books were loaned to Family and Children's Centres, Foster Carers, After Care Projects, Family Support Centres, Looked After Children Groups, as part of the 'Buddy Book Boxes' strand.
- Approximately 1250 books were given to children and young people through this project. Many of these books were rotated quarterly, others occasionally.
- All residential family and children's centres were provided with an estimated £300 worth of books of their choice for central loan.

The evaluation is structured under the following headings: changes in provision; changes in culture; changes in centres' practices; changing reading practices of looked after children and young people; changes in library use.

² At the beginning of the project, there were 8 strands. Strand 7 focused on training for Foster Carers, strand 8 on training for Residential Workers. Because of the similarities in these strands, they were combined into one strand.

Changes in provision

At the beginning of the project, the Project Co-ordinator had found very few of the family centres providing a central role for books. Books were often found hidden away on shelves and the collections contained many out of date books, some in a severe state of disrepair, as this observation of the provision in a centre notes:

I asked to see the centre's collection of books. I was taken to a room in which the books were placed on a high shelf, not in central vision for the children and young people. Looking at the titles, I was shocked to see some from my own childhood, books which were popular over thirty years ago. I asked the worker if the books were used and he stated that the young people preferred to use the computer. In the second centre we visited, there were no books on central display at all.
(Field notes for visit in May 2002)

The US! Project has made a significant impact on this level of resourcing. Due to collaboration with Derbyshire Social Services, each centre or unit now has a designated, accessible space and appropriate book case/ shelf for the books. Each centre was given approximately £300 of books to begin their new libraries, funded jointly by the US! Project and Corporate Parenting Initiative. All of the centres attended sessions in a local book distributor's store in order to choose their selection of books. This selection visit was also attended by library staff, who gave advice on purchases. All centres had been invited to bring along two young people to the event; three young people attended the event.

Changes in culture

This is related closely to provision of resources. At the beginning of the project, although some of the centres did display books, there was little encouragement of their use by staff. At other centres, the books were ignored or marginalised. During one visit, the Project Co-ordinator found that the books donated to a family centre had been locked away in a cupboard for three months. He reported that workers frequently suggested that young people were not interested in reading and had other priorities. The culture of the majority of the centres was most definitely not conducive to promoting reading. The US Project has made an impact on this culture, although the Project Co-ordinator felt that this impact was differentially experienced across centres:

I think centres have moved on a lot but there is a long way to go with most of them. I think in one or two centres there's definitely a books and reading culture, they look forward to you coming, there are books there, the young people have stayed in specially, the staff are talking in one voicein other centres, despite what happens, you will get, "I didn't know you were coming, what is this all about"and it seems like a really hard slog.

There were still for example, centres which did not see reading as important. One centre had attended a session at a book publisher's warehouse in which they had chosen books for their centre. This box of books had been taken in error by another centre, but this had never been followed up by the first centre:

I mentioned the books that they had chosen had gone to another centre and they hadn't really followed it up so I sort of came away feeling quite depressed about that, feeling, you know, maybe the steps that I thought we'd moved forward we hadn't moved quite so clearly, but again, I have had some very good times there as well, so it comes and goes.

However, by the end of the project, the Co-ordinator felt that over half of the family centres had changed their reading cultures:

Well over half and I have been getting there with all of them really. Yes there are aboutwell there are two centres I am thinking of at least who are very enthusiastic and then the rest fall into quite enthusiastic, it depends on what day and which member of staff. But getting there...for example, I'm informed that some young people are now visiting a library from one of the centres. Yes that's right. So that is exciting and also it is exciting that I get to know about that.

The Co-ordinator felt that the children themselves were at times responsible for challenging cultures:

Quite often, incidentally, because young people move around from centre to centre quite often you'll go to one centre and they'll say, "Oh we know about this because the young person has talked about it" or young people will say, "When are you coming again?" and that sort of thing.

Two centres had already developed a reading culture by the start of the US! Project and the Project Co-ordinator felt that, in those cases, the Project had contributed to the support of that culture:

... what we have done is we have taken something that I feel is quite important anyhow and reinforced that and provided resources and contributed to the culture there. Another centre, I think, also had some books and it had a more ordered environment than perhaps some of the centres and I think what we've done is contribute to that and provided books and brought books and reading into that.

These differential responses to the US! Project were also seen in the interviews with two of the centre managers. One of these managers was clear about the changes made to the centre's culture as a result of the US! Project:

A lot of young people responded to it more than others but there were a couple of young people who got really a lot out of it and it did increase their reading. It definitely promoted a book culture in the centre. It wasn't something that we had given an awful lot of thought to, we did have a few books before, but it wasn't something we regularly went out and got and it wasn't something the young people regularly asked for either so we just didn't think about it, but that did give us an awareness about reading and how important it was and it shows that the young people did take up an interest in it.

This manager indicated that she would have liked to have seen more frequent visits made by the US Project. However, the second manager, whilst highlighting the interest the young people had in the book boxes, felt that the visits had been too frequent.

The box of books again, a fantastic idea. When it first started they were really into it, that was when it was a bit of a novelty but second time round, third time round, interest sort of waned over time. At our centre, we have actually got loads of books ourselves, it's not like these are the only books that our kids come across...when the books first come, the kids were interested, the kids were looking at the books all the time but as time went on, the kids were looking at the books that we've got.

It appeared that the interest and commitment of staff in this centre differed from that of the previous centre:

Some members of staff would use the box of books more than others. It was a bit like the kids, really, initially the staff would tend to use them but... it depends what the kids want to read.

Although many centres had changed their resistant culture by the end of the project, there were still centres which marginalised reading as a socio-cultural activity. The Project Co-ordinator felt that this was due to lack of strategic direction from some of the centre managers.

I think each manager of the centre needs to be saying to the staff why books are important and to be fully behind that themselves.

The co-ordinator felt that the family centres should change their cultural resistance to reading for wider reasons than the development of children and young people's reading skills:

I think each manager of the centre needs to be saying to the staff why books are important and to be fully behind that themselves. Its about trying to ensure that the centres are ...there's a certain sense

of normality amongst them, you know, instead of it being a very hectic, frightening place for young people with a huge emphasis on control and containment, if we can move that environment so they're much more developmental, normalising the situation so young people will not only read books at the centre but will go and join the library and take part in community activities and that sort of thing. That will help the young person's own development. I think also individual workers, using their own knowledge of books and reading, their own enthusiasm about books and reading, talking to young people about that, reading to them is vital and, yes, of course there might be child protection concerns in some, but there are ways that you can still read to young people that helps them to develop a reading habit and get excitement and interesting reading.

Overall, it is clear that the Buddy Book Boxes strand did have a positive impact on the culture of family centres, although the extent of this impact differed according to each centre's existing provision and attitudes of centre staff.

Changes in centres' practices

Closely related to the changes in culture, a number of centres also changed their practices with regard to the promotion of reading as a result of involvement in the project. For example, one centre began to take young people on visits to the library, as this centre manager indicates:

When he used to bring the books and leave them, they all started reading and, as a result of that, started going to the library as well. They all use the library now.

In other centres, more workers than previously would talk about books to children and young people. Rather than suggesting that they did not know about the visits, some centres were becoming increasingly well-prepared for visits and had young people who waited with excitement for the Project Co-ordinator's visit. Sometimes, staff made accessibility of the books easier, which appeared to promote reading. In one centre, a young person reported that staff had placed books:

On the landing so that we can actually get them from there so then we don't have to trail all the way downstairs.

In addition, young people were increasingly involved in the selection of books. For example, on one occasion, young people from a centre visited a book distributor's store in order to choose a selection of books for children and young people in care. Each young person was given a book to keep and the group was taken to McDonalds following the selection. This visit was attended by the Children's Librarian from the local library.

Changes in reading practices of looked after children and young people

Of the seven children and young people interviewed, two suggested that they rarely read:

Bob: *We only read...sometimes we only read the passwords, you know, on the PlayStation.*

The Project had appeared to make little impact on their practices. However, for other children, the project had developed their motivation for reading:

Jackie: *And has it made you read more or less, or about the same?*

Bob: *Same, I would say.*

Martin: *I'd say a bit more because I always get a load of books out of the box.*

Jackie: *Has being part of this project changed the way that you feel about reading?*

Paul: *I'm reading more now.*

Jackie: *You are reading more because of the project?*

Paul: *Yes.*

Jackie: *Right, why is that do you think?*

Paul: *Because I like reading.*

Jackie: *But why are you reading more because of the project?*

Paul: *Because you get into books more better.*

This enthusiasm for the Project led to requests for more frequent visits:

Martin: *I'd like it to be explained why you only come out 4 times a year.*

Jackie: *And how often would you like the books?*

Martin: *I think the books should be changed at least once a mont*

In addition, the provision of the books appeared to have contributed to the development of communities of readers:

Jackie: *Do you ever read the same books?*

Scott: *We swap.*

Jackie: *Which ones do you swap?*

Scott: *Anything really ...like poetry ones.*

Jackie: *The ones from the book boxes?*

Scott: *Yes, we just, like, pass them around.*

From the interviews with the children and young people and the centre managers, it was clear that the Buddy Book Boxes strand had contributed to changing attitudes and reading practices of some of the children and young people, although this was not universal.

Changes in library use

It was not possible to determine widespread changes in library use as a result of this strand of the project. One centre had started to visit the library with children and young people on a regular basis, as reported previously. Some of the children interviewed indicated that they visited the library, however, at times this was due to familiarity with libraries because of prior visits when living with birth families. This strand had, however, raised the profile of libraries in each of the centres because a librarian had accompanied the Project Co-ordinator on many of the visits.

Summary of 'Buddy Book Boxes' strand

From the evidence above, it can be seen that this strand was very successful. The strand did achieve the first aim, to help young people in residential care to develop their interest in books and reading. This was not universal, but the majority of children and young people interviewed did indicate that this was the case, and this was also supported by observations from the Project Co-ordinator and centre managers. It was less clear from this data how the strand had met the second aim: to encourage carers to interest and involve children and young people in residential care in the library. One centre had begun to visit the library on a regular basis as a result of involvement in the project. Some of the children and young people interviewed used the library regularly, but in some cases this was linked to prior use when living with birth families.

3.2 Strand 2: Buddy Book Boxes To Foster Carers

Table 3: Strand 2

| Strand | Objectives | Description |
|--|---|---|
| <i>Buddy Book Boxes to Foster Carers</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To help young people in foster care to develop their interest in books and reading. • To encourage carers to interest and involve children and young people in foster care in the library. | <p>This strand intended to provide a book loan and exchange system for children and young people in foster care. It intended to provide support to foster carers in a variety of ways (e.g. promotional materials, contact with carers) in encouraging reading. It also aimed to encourage carers to help children in public care to use the library. However, because of contact problems, the focus of this strand moved away from Buddy Boxes to the development of 'Roadshows', book events which took place at community libraries and to which foster carers and children were invited.</p> |

The implementation of this strand was initially hampered by difficulties in contacting foster carers through Social Services networks. The approach to the strand was, therefore, changed to avoid some of these difficulties. It was decided to extend the 'Book of My Own' initiative to children and young people in foster care. In order to ensure that this did not cause disruption in families with children who were not in care, Step Up 2000 funded the provision of books to the children of carers as well. These books were distributed at 'Roadshows', set up in public libraries in Derbyshire. In addition, 'Book Parties' were held at a number of libraries. The statistics are as follows:

- Roadshows took place in 7 Derbyshire libraries and Book Parties took place in 6 libraries.
- 51 children in foster care were provided with 2 books of their own in the Roadshows.
- 12 books were distributed to 7 to birth children of carers in the Roadshows.
- 4 books were given out to children in foster care in the Book Parties.

From the interview data with the Project Co-ordinator and three members of library services, it was determined that the success of these events had been highly dependent on Family Placement workers' involvement in promoting them. The Book Parties, for example, had been poorly attended, but carers had not received notification, despite the Project Co-ordinators' publicity having been sent to the relevant departments:

After discussion with a foster carer she explained that she had only known about the event through her involvement with Step Up 2000 and had not received a flyer or notification from anywhere else. I had notified management of Social Services and the Family Placement team and had provided flyers.

The Roadshow with the highest attendance had been promoted by an individual worker:

Where we had the most success was Chesterfield and again that was because of the initiative of the workers within the team who went round, contacted young people in care, went into where they were, most were in foster care I think probably but some were perhaps in lodgings or something like that.

The Project Co-ordinator reported that the format of the Roadshows was well-received by participants:

Young people and their carers were offered library tours and some joined or renewed their membership. There were often very constructive discussions with carers and the young people themselves. All children and young people were excited/pleased to receive the books and chose book plates for their books which we had downloaded and printed from the Anne Fine website.

The Roadshows which were highly attended were successful, but a representative from Library Services felt that there needed to be clearer plans for the Library Service about where to take the work next:

... I support doing things for looked after children and I think that the roadshows were good and I think the response was good and I think that is great but I think it is only a starting block and I think in terms of projects like this it needs to be more thought about, where is it going, where is it going next? You know we have got these people here but what is going to be our next contact, what do we want them to go away with more than just a book...the thing that we are always trying to do is any contact that we make with people who are not users of our library, we don't want them to leave and not come back, we are always looking for repeat customers, always looking to draw them back in and what I felt personally was there wasn't enough of that coming across in the Roadshows, there wasn't enough ofwell, what's next, then?

Therefore, although the Roadshows did work successfully in those cases where Family Placement workers had promoted them, there were issues relating to the

planning of these Roadshows which have implications for future work in this area by Derbyshire Social Services and Library Services.

Summary of Buddy Book Boxes to Foster Carers' strand.

Appropriate flexibility was demonstrated by the Project co-ordinator in amending the design of this strand due to communication difficulties with foster carers. The introduction of 'Roadshows' held at local libraries was an imaginative response to this difficulty. The Roadshows were successful in reaching 55 children in foster care. However, it was clear that not all of the Roadshows and Book Parties were well attended and that this was due, in part, to lack of awareness of the initiative by foster carers, which reflected on the communication networks within Social Services. In addition, the Library Service did not feel that they had planned sufficiently well for follow-up from the Roadshows and this needs to be taken into account in future planning.

3.3 Strand 3: Buddy Mentors

Table 4: Strand 3

| Strand | Objectives | Description |
|----------------------|---|---|
| <i>Buddy Mentors</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To recruit and train a small number of residential and foster carers and young adults who have left care in 'shared reading' techniques. • To support and resource the above in using shared reading techniques with children and young people in public care. | <p>It was intended to set up a day's training for a small number of residential workers (4) foster carers (6) and young adults who have left care (4) on techniques of mentoring and shared reading. Working with social services, the intention was to identify appropriate placements for Buddy Mentors to help 'looked after' children with their reading and to encourage and facilitate Buddy Mentors to achieve an OCN – Buddy Reading accreditation.</p> |

The development of this strand was hampered by a number of factors. Due to heightened sensitivities of schools following the murder of two children in Soham in August 2002, it was initially felt that it was not possible for the Buddy Mentors to work in schools until full police checks had been conducted. Once this issue was resolved, the After Care Projects still did not feel that it was appropriate to develop the Buddy Mentoring Projects and gave the following reasons:

- Too busy.
- Additional legal requirements under the Leaving Care Act.
- Young people involved in other initiatives. The drive to get young people into college meant that they were not available during the day.
- Staff changes in the projects.
- Projects stated that the young people were not interested or not suitable for the role.

(Smith, 2003)

This strand, therefore, has not taken place due to factors beyond the direct control of the US! Project.

Summary of 'Buddy Mentors' strand

This strand has not taken place due to security measures within schools and lack of response from the After-Care Projects.

3.4 Strand 4: A Book Of My Own

Table 5: Strand 4

| Strand | Objectives | Description |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| <i>A Book of My Own</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To facilitate the provision of books for children and young people in public care for their ownership • To make progress in developing a similar strand for children and young people in foster care. | Opportunities were provided for each child in residential care to choose one book to own per year. Books were selected by panel, including young people in care and carers |

This strand was successful in providing books to children and young people in care:

- 315 books were provided to young people in residential care.
- In 2002-3, children and young people in residential care received five books each due to increase in funding from Step-Up 2000.

This strand ran alongside the Buddy Book Boxes strand and the synergy between the two different activities appeared to have been important in promoting a reading culture in family centres. Although the Buddy Book Boxes provided a source of

renewable texts, the Book of My Own strand had been important in enabling children and young people to choose books which they could keep permanently. So, for example, Sarah suggested that she liked the 'Book of My Own' project:

Sarah: *Because you can keep it.*
Jackie: *What is so good about keeping it?*
Sarah: *You can read it over and over again.*

One of the centre managers suggested that allowing the children and young people to keep books had promoted their general care of books:

It was nice for them to have a book to keep and they looked after them and treasured them because they were their own.

Book ownership amongst the children and young people in residential care appeared to be low. Most of the children and young people interviewed stated that they owned fewer than 5 books of their own. It was clear that the 'Book of One's Own' had contributed significantly to children's ownership of books.

The Project Co-ordinator felt that this strand could be developed further by enabling young people to go to bookshops and purchase books for themselves:

Well it is a bit of an institutionalised way of getting books, you know if we want to get a book we go to a book shop. I would think that it could be reviewed at some pointI mean we get a very good discount and we get very good books but it is a rather institutionalised way of choosing books, I would much prefer those centres to take young people down to book shops or young people to go to book shops themselves.

This strand was extended to children and young people in foster care through the 'Roadshows'.

Summary of 'A Book of My Own' strand

This strand has been successful in meeting its aims. It has enabled children and young people in care to own books of their own and this has been a very important part of the promotion of a reading culture in family centres and units.

3.5 Strand 5: Specific Focused Provision for Looked After Children

Table 6: Strand 5

| Strand | Objectives | Description |
|---|--|--|
| <i>Specific Focused Provision for Looked After children</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To set up activities for children and young people in public care to encourage reading for fun and creative writing. | A range of activities were organised which aimed to encourage looked after children and young people's reading and creative writing. |

There have been a number of events which have occurred as a part of this Strand's activities:

- Three special books events were held which involved 78 looked after children and care leavers, 9 foster carers and 26 carers/social workers/after care workers.
- The Project Co-ordinator took part in a residential weekend for care leavers in which a CD-Rom was produced.
- A poetry competition was devised which involved children and young people in the creation of poems. These were then published on 4 posters which were distributed to all libraries participating in the Roadshows, each After Care Project and every Family/Children's Centre.
- The project set up and ran the Communicrew Bus Project in which young people at two secure units and two family centres took part in animation workshops using laptops.
- Nick Toczek, a poet, visited two secure units and did some very successful work with the resident young people.
- A selection of magazines, including motorbike magazines, computer magazines, 'Beano', 'Just 17', 'Mizz', 'Smash Hits' and so on, were sent to all of the family centres, along with a review form for the children and young people to complete. Eight responses have been received.
- An innovative project was set up to provide and use books with 60 disabled children in respite care. This included Story Sacks training/development.

All elements of this strand appeared to have been very successful. As was the case with activities in the other strands, a key factor in the success of particular events was the support of centre staff. For example, in the animation workshops, staff interest was noted by the Project Co-ordinator:

Initially the young people didn't want to look at boring computers but eventually they all had a go and again produced some good work. One young man in particular was able to film his own fashion show to

model his new clothes he had purchased that day...The staff were interested in what the young people were doing and participated in the session. It was a positive and welcoming experience.

The lack of interest by staff had a direct effect on the success of this activity in another centre:

At Z Centre, however, the session was much less successful. It was clear that staff were not expecting me although my visit was logged in the diary. Consequently, my work with the young people was interrupted several times over domestic issues. The lack of interest and support from the staff meant that it was difficult to motivate the young people to take an interest in what we were doing.

The use of ICT was also central to another successful project, the creation of a CD Rom at a weekend for 25 looked after young people and care leavers:

...we were asked whether we could contribute to a residential weekend for looked after young people and care leavers, could we provide some resources, well what we did we went along and we organised a plan with the workers and we organised a CD making session and I think that was very successful and it involved lots of different skills and when you think about it you could build in an accreditation around that, there was designing the cover, there was the interviewing, there was writing the music, writing the rap, performing, doing the interview and so on and the CDs were made, commissioned somebody to come in and do all this work with us and every young person and staff for the weekend had one to take away... everybody took part, everybody had some role, some people had more of a turn than others but everybody had something to do with that project.

A Residential Worker who was present at this weekend felt that although a number of the other activities that occurred that weekend were successful:

The music/ sound project was particularly successful as it ran all through the weekend and pulled all the strands of other things together.

One aspect of the US! Project's success was its continual responsiveness to the needs and interests of children and young people. An example of this was the development of a poetry writing competition, as outlined by the Project Co-ordinator:

One of the things that I discovered was that when going round they were really keen about poems, often would bring out poems and show them to you, you know, things that they were slightly embarrassed about, but often it says something about their lives and that sort of thing and what I tried to do was to give them a lot of praise and encouragement for that. Sometimes the posters that the Who Cares Trust or whatever would be on the wall and people would comment on it and you know I told you the story of the young person who removed it from the frame I had and photocopied it because they were really enthusiastic about it and said "Oh it is amazing because other young people were experiencing similar things to me." So we set up a writing competition and the idea was not to make it too competitive but to try and encourage young people in care to write, care leavers as well and we thought it might be a good idea to try and involve carers, because if we thought if carers are involved in writing they might be writing with the young person. We only had one carer who wrote a poem or whatever, most young people wrote poems; about half of them were about the experiences they had had, all the writing was about experiences they had had, about half the poems were about other issues, about Harry Potter, like Muppet my hamster and so on. So we published those on a series of posters that have all gone now actually. The posters have gone out to lots of different places.

Another factor in the success of this particular project was the celebratory launch of the posters:

We did a celebration evening as well for the posters and what we did was we brought young people who had been involved with the Buddy Reading Project, young people who had been involved with the posters and also some young people from the Millennium Volunteers Project, so we brought them together and we made a whole evening of activities and made T-shirts, they did nail painting, there was food, there were lots of activities and workshops and so on and we had a celebration. There were certificates and books and so on so - it was good.

The posters that were produced made a big impact not only on the young people themselves, but also staff attitudes. The Assistant Head of Children's services stated that:

One that made the biggest impact in terms of improving the awareness of the department and our staff was when the poems were published and the Project Manager actually got those printed onto poster style sheets and we have used those in displays...I think that is very positive reinforcement for the young people as well, being able to illustrate to staff what young people could do and that came from the US project initiatives.

Another successful aspect of this strand was the work with a family centre which offered short-term care for disabled children. The Project Co-ordinator reported how:

What we said was that we had a centre in Derbyshire...which is for disabled children who are receiving ...short term care and the idea is that they go and spend a week in there or a day or something and the original idea was so that they could give parents a break but with the coming of the Children's Act, there's much more emphasis on what's important for the young person...I think it has been exciting about the getting the books there and to get a worker involved....particularly one worker that's very enthusiastic and has used the books in lots of innovative type ways, that's been excellent.

Staff at the centre were trained in the use of Story Sacks and made these resources with the support of the US! Project. This family centre was also provided with a Box of Books. One of the workers at this family centre reported that there was lots of interest in the books, particularly those which related to the children's favourite television characters. Children who had autism responded to the books featuring pictures of familiar objects. Staff also used the books to read stories to groups of children. The resources provided by the US! Project made a significant contribution to the reading culture of this centre.

Summary of 'Specific Focused Provision for Looked After Children' strand

This strand has been very successful. It has provided a range of innovative and creative events which have promoted reading and writing. These have raised the profile of the US! Project, as well as enhanced enjoyment of reading and writing for looked after children and young people.

3.6 Strand 6: Developing Specific Provision/ Initiatives for Young Parents in Care and Young Parents Who Have Left Care

Table 7: Strand 6

| Strand | Aims | Description |
|---|--|---|
| <p><i>Developing specific provision/ initiatives for young parents in care and young parents who have left care</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To contribute to the social development of parent/child relationships by encouraging reading to/with babies and small children. • To ensure that young parents (looked after or care leavers) receive 'Books for Babies' bags and information about using the library. • To develop a specific book box containing a wide range of factual and fictional books about pregnancy, child birth, parenting and linked options. • To incorporate young parents (looked after or care leavers) in basic and parenting skills residential courses. | <p>The aim of this strand was to provide each leaving care group/ organisation with examples of 'Books for Babies' bags. These would include clear information of how these can be provided to young adults coming up to leaving care and care leavers who have or are expecting a baby. The bags would also provide information to these young adults about the library and what it can offer babies, young children and young parents.</p> <p>In addition, specific book boxes were developed containing a wide range of factual and fictional books about pregnancy, child birth, parenting and linked options for loan to groups/ organisations and individuals working with this group for loan to these young parents. Finally, it was intended to overcome the isolation and other obstacles so that courses for young parents provided by ROWA! incorporated looked after or care leaver young parents in basic and parenting skills residential courses.</p> |

As part of this strand:

- 2 Facts and Feeling Boxes were established, with some help from Derbyshire Area Corporate Parenting.
- Books for Babies bags were distributed to 7 leaving care organisations.

Although these resources have been developed by the US! Project, the project Co-ordinator felt that there was little evidence that they were being used effectively:

The way we approached it was to make sure that all the After Care Projects who were working with young people from 16, in some cases up to 25, were aware of the bags, had one, could show a young person and could very easily get hold of another one from us and so we would write to all the After Care Projects. When I went round

some time afterwards at least one project had given it away without ordering another one and I had no evidence at all that they are being used and nobody comes back to me and says, "We would like one", which is really strange and worrying really because it seems as though they are being overlooked. Either that or suddenly all the young people are managing to get to clinics and get the 'Books for Babies bags'...so there is no evidence that it worked.

In addition to this, the Project Co-ordinator felt that he played a large role in raising the profile of the needs of care leavers who were parents in the organisation of ROWA! as a whole. For example, he noted that care leavers had not been effectively incorporated into a ROWA! residential weekend for young parents:

It [the US! Project Evaluation plan] says to incorporate young parents, looked after or care leavers in basic and parenting skills residential courses. Now we have run a whole range of those, we just had for example a residential weekend and it was always envisaged that some care leavers would go on...what we probably didn't realise was they hadn't been invited, the way you organise those courses which have been community based at these community groups excluded young people so we have actually contributed to the isolation.

The Project Co-ordinator felt that this issue was now being seriously addressed by ROWA!'s senior management group. However, the overall process of involving young parents in care and young parents who have left care in US! Project initiatives was hampered, the project Co-ordinator felt, by lack of communication:

I think it is a range of things, it is poor communication, it is being overlooked, it is lack of training, it is Projects that are reactive rather than proactive....there is a problem with communication and it is difficult because you don't want to give people too much of a hard time because I know they are under a lot of pressure and they are doing some very good work.

Summary of 'Developing Specific Provision/ Initiatives for Young Parents in care And Young Parents who Have Left Care' strand

This strand had not met its aims because of the difficulties in communicating with After Care Projects.

3.6 Strand 7: Training For Residential Workers And Foster Carers

Table 8: Strand 7

| Strand | Objectives | Description |
|--|---|--|
| <p><i>Training for Residential Workers and Foster Carers</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide input on appropriate existing training courses on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the importance and fun of reading techniques to encourage reading -the role of reading and literacy in contributing to meeting the needs of looked after young people as identified in current national initiatives. • To set up a separate event or course for foster carers and residential workers promoting the above. | <p>The intention was to work with Social Services Staff and Development and Training Section and Mackworth College Derby to provide training input on NVQ – Social Care courses on -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the importance and fun of reading ○ ways and techniques to encourage reading ○ the role of reading and literacy in meeting the developmental needs of young people in public care and ○ how the development of reading and literacy links in with Quality Protects, the Care Leavers Act and the Education of Young People in Public Care. <p>Similar input was planned for Residential Workers’ training.</p> |

The training input developed as part of this strand consisted of the following:

- A brief explanation of ROWA! and its aims.
- A description of the US! Project.
- A consideration of the changes faced in the work with young people in care, based on research.
- Information about recent policy developments.
- Information about the importance of reading/ literacy.
- Consideration of the ‘Right to Read’ Report.
- ‘Breaking Their Fall’ video.
- Information on ways to encourage reading.

Unfortunately, this strand did not achieve its aims because of the lack of clear communication with the organisers of the course for foster carers and residential workers. The Project Co-ordinator explained that despite several attempts to contact the course organisers in order to arrange a training slot about the US!

Project, no provision was made to offer a session. Eventually, the Project Co-ordinator was able to work with another organisation, Step Up 2000, in order to offer a short slot:

I contacted them several times and then eventually they said “Oh well we have sorted it out, but aren’t you part of Step Up 2000 because we have given Step Up 2000 a day and we thought you were part of it, so would you fit in with them?” So I said, “Well, I’m not part of Step Up 2000, but I will contact them”, so I contacted them. Step Up 2000 said, “Well, we’ll give you an hour or 90 minutes or something”. So I worked out a programme and I looked at all the units they were doing and made sure they were referenced to the units and got a video... it was very difficult to fit it into 90 minutes but I did it.

The course was delivered to four groups of foster carers. Evaluation forms were completed by two foster carers. These evaluations were highly positive; both foster carers felt that the session had raised their understanding of the importance of books and reading for looked after children and young people. Comments on the forms included the following:

I have special needs children who I look after and Terry showed me some books that are easy but appealing. Thank you, I found the talk interesting.

I think more workshops would be very helpful.

The Project Co-ordinator reported on the failure to implement training for residential workers:

The difficulties we have encountered include a patchy approach, being invited to some courses but not others, poor attendance, changes in arrangements for training responsibilities and changes in personnel responsible for training.

Summary of ‘Training for Residential Workers and Foster Carers’ strand

This strand did not meet its aim because of the miscommunication with those responsible for organising the training for foster carers and residential workers. The workshops that were delivered for foster carers had been successful and helped to raise awareness of foster carers of relevant issues.

3.8 Overall Impact of US! Project

In evaluating the strands in this way, there is a danger in overlooking the overall impact of the US! Project. There was a cumulative effect discernible from the impact of the work across the strands on the statutory provision for looked after children. The Project helped to raise awareness of the issues for looked after children in relation to Library Services, as the Head of Library Services acknowledged:

The US! Project has moved on the bigger picture in terms of services for looked after children. The US! project has done much to raise awareness of the needs of looked after children in Derbyshire. It has helped to identify a need to build upon the lessons learned and the work done already by focusing specifically on increasing and mainstreaming access to books, resources and reading experiences through library services. It has highlighted the scale of the gap between delivery of mainstream library services and take up by looked after children and their carers...US! Project has actually helped to raise awareness of the need for not just library services, but corporately, for us to focus on this client group. Specifically from the point of view of libraries, it has made us more aware of the particular difficulties for young people in care around access – the fact that they often move many times, so that becomes an issue in terms of their access to books and libraries. It has made us aware of some of the values that those access issues raise, things like joining the library, and retaining membership of the library, and actually holding on to things like library cards.

Another representative from Library and Heritages suggested that in addition to the overall impact on the culture of the service, the awareness of individual librarians had been raised:

I think the biggest feedback was their own awareness being raised, going into family centres and what that actually meant. I mean I am probably the same as lots of people and thought of the family centre and I could see this sort of huge, ancient, Victorian mill almost which is obviously the totally wrong image but I think some of that carried over. I mean part of the training I know that the Project Co-ordinator has done with us in explaining what family centres were ...I think that is what has come across in terms of the visits that the other children's librarians have made that they have sort of experienced something different than they expected.

The US! Project had prompted a process of reflection and forward planning on the part of Library and Heritage; it had pointed to the need for targeted provision for looked after children:

We feel that the US! Project has done a great deal of very positive work but it has been harder and taken longer to change the overall care culture in terms of raising the awareness of foster carers and family centre workers of the need for books and I think there is a feeling that we need to move beyond giving out information about libraries to creating much more active library users, So as a result of the learning from the US! Project, we felt that the next step would be to look at doing some very detailed work in terms of creating much more access to library users and developing local networks...we have already started to work on the development of a specific library strategy for children and young people in care.

Similarly, the US! Project had made a significant impact on Social Services' provision. The Assistant Head of Social Services commented that:

I think it was one of the very initial projects that we embarked on in relation to improving the access of looked after children to books and that sort of material and also to try and involve carers in that process. I think that it alerted us, really, to the fact that we'd got a major shortfall, given what we know about the poor outcomes of looked after children. It also alerted us to the fact that we needed to do so much more about creating positive environments and a culture whereby children are encouraged to read and to learn and to make use of those sorts of materials. I think the fact that the first Project manager had quite difficult responses sometimes from some of the residential homes and some of the staff really helped us to focus on the fact that we needed a lot more input and training so that looked after children could make use of this. I think one of the things that came to light was that quite a few of the carers themselves had not particularly had positive experiences either of education or in terms of being encouraged to read. This alerted us to the fact that we needed to do a lot more work with staff, because you couldn't just provide books and access to books to young people if that wasn't supported in their living environment.

As was the case with Library Services, a number of the initiatives developed by the US! Project had been mainstreamed, partly because of the commitment of that particular Senior Manager:

It was entirely opportunistic because it became clear that just doing that activity in isolation wouldn't have the biggest impact. A much more coherent, wider strategy was required and the US-type development should be part of a wider strategy for improving the access and attainment of looked after children and we have started to develop that now. For example, we have identified a member of staff in each residential unit who is going to have a specific role in relation to access to books, to education materials, to taking a lead on educational issues. We have also started running training courses for

foster carers and residential workers now, at which some of the teachers that we employ run sessions with the carers around the importance of reading and education. These teachers are also quite prepared to go out to foster homes and look at what the child needs, both in terms of IT access, but also reading materials and to provide that. So in terms of the project, although it was a good initiative on its own, if it is going to impact, it needs to be embedded in a much wider learning, reading, positive culture across the whole care system and those are some of the elements that we have started to develop.

Although the mainstreaming of activities is important, the Assistant Head of Social Services felt that the additional funding of projects such as the US! Project was needed in order to develop new ideas and approaches:

It does need additional funding because in the end, statutory authorities do what they have to do and some of the more creative things can come in from the outside and add to that. But I think it is about getting a balance between what is our responsibility as a corporate parent to fund, what would any good parent do, but also, can we make use, as families do, of opportunities to engage in other activities and get access to other resources...The US project has got to the stage now where there are issues about ongoing funding and how it is going to be maintained. I think that what should happen is that things like the US! Project should develop the initiatives, the new experiences, and then we should look at taking that funding over so that they can develop new approaches. It's about mainstreaming things so that it isn't always beholden to a few people seeking out funding and taking opportunities.

The Assistant Head of Children's Services felt that any future work should encourage more direct involvement of looked after children and young people:

If we were starting again, I think we would like to start with getting a group of young people together, to talk to them about it. In a sense... the Project Manager initially went in cold, both in relation to the young people and the staff, because it was a top-down process and I think we are much better now at sitting down with young people on any initiative and asking them for their views. All these initiatives, if they are rooted in involving people, both carers and young people, you identify some of the problems earlier on and you are able to make adjustments and to incorporate those.

From these interviews, it was clear that the US! Project had played a major role in raising the awareness of statutory authorities in relation to the issue of reading and looked after children and young people.

3.9 Multi-disciplinary working

Another very successful element of the US! Project has been the way in which different services have worked together to deliver specific elements of the project. This integration of expertise is necessary because, as the following representative from Library Services commented, the knowledge of key professionals is crucial to success:

I think we are all willing to do that, to go out either to family support centres or to meet parents of children in care. I think what we need is perhaps a bit of help and direction within that from other professionals to make sure that that time is targeted well and that...it is successful and it is positive.

The Head of Library Services felt that the existence of the Steering Group had provided an opportunity to develop effective networks that would continue to have an effective after the project had finished:

I think that the coming together of the steering group helped create a working network that we've been able to build upon and will continue to be able to build upon.

Another library representative suggested that this work demanded an independent Co-ordinator who could weave the various strands together:

...you really need somebody to coordinate who has got an overview of what is happening because you are working with professionals of different fields. It needs somebody to have that overview and to pull all of that together...

This kind of co-ordination could prevent duplication of work across services:

I find a lot of ...you know duplication of work or you start doing something in one area and...6 or 7 months after you are into it somebody turns up and says, "Well why didn't you tell us, we never knew, blah, blah, blah", and this is exactly the sort of thing that we need. We need some way of making clear, succinct lines of communication, network between these different groups.

The Library representative felt that the networking opportunities offered by the US! Project, through structures such as the Steering Group, could provide a more effective means of developing cross-agency work:

...you can't structure a network just by names on a page and say well this person does this and that person does that, you actually have to get all those people together. Because one of the things that I find

with local authorities is that there are very different professional cultures within different areas of a local authority. I mean we all in Derbyshire live under one umbrella and you say, "This is the culture of Derbyshire", but within that there are cultures within that organisation because each of the different areas of the authority.

Although the involvement of a number of different agencies was identified as a strength of the project, it was felt by some members of the Steering Group that there could have been greater involvement of their services from the beginning of the US! Project:

The greater involvement of partners in the delivery of the project in the early stages, I think that would have helped and linked into that, perhaps to have had specific aims and objectives, target outcomes for individual services that were part of the steering group and were perhaps on the periphery in the early stages...and maybe looking at developing local networks between librarians, family centre workers and social workers.

Nevertheless, from the evidence outlined in this section, it was clear that the US! Project had been highly successful in promoting inter-agency work and the formation of the Steering Group in particular had played a large part in creating effective networking opportunities.

PART 4: CONCLUSION

4.1 Review of achievement of aims and objectives

Table 9 presents a summary of how far the aims of the US! Project were achieved:

Table 9: Achievement of aims

| Aim | Review of achievement |
|--|--|
| <i>To provide a range of approaches to develop the interest and involvement of children and young people in public care in books, reading and literacy.</i> | This aim was achieved. A range of innovative and creative approaches were developed to enhance the interest and involvement of children and young people in public care in books, reading and literacy. |
| <i>To provide a range of approaches designed to make a significant impact on the care culture so that books and reading are at the centre.</i> | This aim was achieved to a great extent. A range of approaches were designed which made a significant impact on at least 50% of the family centres. Impact on foster carers' practice was less well established because of communication difficulties. |
| <i>To provide a range of approaches that contribute to helping to break the cycle of disadvantage experienced by young people in public care and those leaving care.</i> | It is not possible to ascertain whether or not this aim was achieved. It is laudable as an aspirational aim, but the evaluation procedures do not enable a judgement to be made about its success or failure. |
| <i>To provide a range of approaches coherently linked to national initiatives such as Quality Protects, the Education of Children in Public Care and basic skills.</i> | This aim was achieved. A range of approaches were developed that were linked to national initiatives such as Quality Protects, the Education of Children in Public Care and basic skills. |
| <i>To work with Derbyshire Social Services and other agencies to ensure continuation, beyond August 2004, of the approaches developed in this project.</i> | This aim was achieved. The US! Project developed highly effective liaison with Derbyshire Social Services and Library and Heritages departments to ensure continuation, beyond August 2004, of some of the approaches developed in this project. |

Table 10 presents a summary of how far the objectives of the US! Project were achieved:

Table 10: Achievement of objectives

| STRAND | OBJECTIVES | REVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENT |
|---|---|---|
| <i>Buddy Book Boxes to Family centres and Children's Centre</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To help young people in residential care to develop their interest in books and reading. • To encourage carers to interest and involve children and young people in residential care in the library. | <p>This objective was achieved.</p> <p>This objective was achieved to a more limited extent; a number of residential workers did not interest and involve children and young people in residential care in the library.</p> |
| <i>Buddy Book Boxes to Foster Carers.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To help young people in foster care to develop their interest in books and reading. • To encourage carers to interest and involve children and young people in foster care in the library. | <p>This objective was achieved to some extent through the Roadshows.</p> <p>This objective was achieved to some extent through the Roadshows.</p> |
| <i>Buddy Mentors</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To recruit and train a small number of residential and foster carers and young adults who have left care in 'shared reading' techniques. • To support and resource the above in using shared reading techniques with children and young people in public care. | <p>This objective was not achieved because of lack of interest from the After Care Projects.</p> <p>This objective was not achieved because of lack of interest from the After Care Projects.</p> |
| <i>A Book of My Own</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To facilitate the provision of books for children and young people in public care for their ownership • To make progress in developing a similar strand for children and young people in foster care. | <p>This objective was achieved.</p> <p>This objective was achieved to some extent through the Roadshows.</p> |
| <i>Specific Focused Provision for 'looked after' children</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To set up activities for children and young people in public care to | <p>This objective was achieved.</p> |

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| | encourage reading for fun and creative writing. | |
| <i>Developing specific provision/ initiatives for young parents in care and young parents who have left care</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To contribute to the social development of parent/child relationships by encouraging reading to/with babies and small children. • To ensure that young parents (looked after or care leavers) receive 'Books for Babies' bags and information about using the library. • To develop a specific book box containing a wide range of factual and fictional books about pregnancy, child birth, parenting and linked options. • To incorporate young parents (looked after or care leavers) in basic and parenting skills residential courses. | <p>This objective was not achieved because of lack of communication with After Care Projects.</p> <p>This objective was not achieved because of lack of communication with After Care Projects.</p> <p>This objective was achieved.</p> <p>This objective was not achieved because of lack of awareness of the issue in ROWA! at the time, but this is now being addressed.</p> |
| <i>Training for Residential Workers and Foster Carers</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide input on appropriate existing training courses on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the importance and fun of reading techniques to encourage reading -the role of reading and literacy in contributing to meeting the needs of looked after young people as identified in current national initiatives. • To set up a separate event or course for foster carers and residential workers promoting the above. | <p>This objective was achieved to a limited extent (i.e. training sessions were provided for 4 groups of foster carers).</p> <p>This objective was not achieved because of lack of communication with training organisers.</p> |

4.2 Challenges faced by the Project

In attempting to achieve the stated aims and objectives, the Project faced a number of challenges. Each of the difficulties is highlighted, along with an indication of the progress made in addressing the difficulties.

(a) Lack of communication between and within agencies.

Because of the number of agencies involved and the complexities of each organisation, communication difficulties were a major problem. Often, information sent out by the Project Co-ordinator did not reach the intended audience. It was particularly difficult to communicate effectively with foster carers because of communication difficulties within Derbyshire Social Services. The Steering Group have now identified a need to collect local information on foster placements.

(b) Resistant cultures within Derbyshire Social Services' provision i.e. family centres, residential units and after care projects.

Despite the serious commitment to the US! Project demonstrated by the Assistant Head of Children's Services, a number of workers within Social Services did not appear to share this commitment. It is recognised that changing the cultures of large institutions such as Social Service departments is not a simple task and it was beyond the scope of the US! Project to effect large-scale changes. However, it did make a significant impact on awareness and has been used by the Assistant Head of Children's Services as a lever for internal change.

(c) Lack of systematic data on Project take-up.

Although some information exists about the numbers of looked after children and young people who have benefited from the Project, this information is not sufficiently well documented. This has been recognised by the current Project Co-ordinator and has informed the design of a newly-funded project which focuses on provision for looked after children and young people in Derby City.

(d) Lack of extensive involvement in the Project design by looked after children and young people.

The direct involvement of children and young people in the Project was limited to the purchase of books for the 'Buddy Book Boxes' and 'Book of my Own' strands. It was recognised by the Project Co-ordinator that any future projects should involve looked after children and young people in more extensive and meaningful ways.

4.3 Key successes of the project

As was seen in Section 4.1, the US! Project achieved many of its aims and objectives. In reviewing this work, it is clear that the US! Project was highly successful in:

(a) Improving reading attitudes and behaviours of looked after children and young people.

There was a change in the reading behaviours and attitudes of a number of looked after children and young people as a result of the Project.

(b) Enhancing the provision for and culture of reading in Derbyshire's family centres and residential units.

The Project had a strong impact on the reading cultures of a number of family centres and residential units. There was an increase in provision of resources for reading in the family centres and residential units.

(c) Raising awareness of the needs of looked after children and young people within statutory authorities in Derbyshire.

The US! Project raised awareness of the needs of looked after children and young people in relation to reading and literacy across a number of services and statutory authorities in Derbyshire. As a result of this awareness-raising, services have identified a number of ways in which they are improving their educational services for looked after children and young people.

(d) Enhancing long-term provision for looked after children and young people in Derbyshire.

A number of the initiatives developed by the US! Project have been mainstreamed by Derbyshire Social Services and Libraries and Heritage.

(e) The development of effective multi-agency networks.

The implementation of a Steering Group was a very effective means of developing multi-agency work which will have long-term impact.

(f) The development of high-quality resources.

The resources produced by the Project Co-ordinators have been of high quality and have contributed to the successful dissemination of information. In addition to

the book boxes and 'Facts and Feelings' resources, handouts and leaflets produced for various audiences have been accessible, well-designed and provided highly appropriate guidance.

4.4 Recommendations

There are a number of recommendations to be made which can inform future projects of this nature:

- (a) Projects such as the US! Project should continue to be funded, but this funding should also include provision for statutory agencies to conduct some elements of the work.*

It is necessary for funding to be awarded to an independent body, such as ROWA!, for the development of specific projects for looked after children and young people. This will enable vital cross-agency work to be undertaken and such a Project can play a key role in initiating innovative and creative activities which integrate the work of various services. However, unless statutory authorities also have additional funding to support such initiatives or related projects, it may be difficult for initiatives and activities to be supported fully and mainstreamed by these authorities.

- (b) In projects which involve multi-agency work, all key partners should be involved in project design from the beginning and each agency should develop individual aims and objective which contribute to the overall aims and objectives.*

The identification of key targets for each organisation involved in a similar project could help to ensure successful implementation of strategies developed.

- (c) In future projects, strategies for improving communication between and within services need to be developed.*

There is obviously further work which needs to be done in relation to large and complex organisations, such as Social Services, in terms of improving communication. However, there are strategies which could be put in place to circumvent, to some extent, the problems faced in this project. For example, senior management roles could be allocated in local authority services to the issue of the education of looked after children and one of the responsibilities of this role would be liaison across agencies. Local area networks could be developed with information about looked after children and young people shared across relevant professional groups.

- (d) *There is an urgent need for training of Residential Workers in family centres and residential units about the literacy needs of looked after children and young people.*

Training materials could be developed at a national level for the purpose of local dissemination and adaptation. The decision of Derbyshire Social Services to allocate a worker at each centre who will be responsible for co-ordinating the educational needs of looked after children and young people should improve the situation within this local authority.

- (e) *Future projects should develop specific strategies for individual family centres and secure units.*

Within the US! Project, it was clear that different family centres and residential units had individual cultures and practices with regard to reading, yet the Project took a generic approach to the work. Future projects should undertake a needs-analysis of individual centres and develop strategies which are designed to meet the individually identified and specific needs. Multi-levelled approaches could then be designed for particularly resistant centres which focused on the provision of bespoke staff training courses and development of resources requested by resident children and young people. In addition, local networks of community librarians, social workers, learning mentors and designated teachers could be developed for each centre, to ensure reinforcement and extension of the Project's work.

- (f) *Future projects should continue to promote one-off events which are designed to promote enthusiasm for reading and literacy.*

The one-off initiatives in the US! Project were very successful and contributed to the overall impact of the Project. It enabled the provision of events and activities that involved cross-agency work. These one-off events could supplement intensive, ongoing work with individual centres and groups of foster carers.

- (g) *Looked after children and young people should be more closely involved in project design and implementation.*

Looked after children and young people could be involved in the initial design of a Project, its implementation and its evaluation.

- (h) *Reading materials used in similar projects need to incorporate young children's popular interests.*

There is research which has indicated the value of using children and young people's popular culture to promote reading and literacy practices (Alvermann et al., 1999). The US! Project focused primarily on the provision of books, although the current Project Co-ordinator did utilise magazines in the 'Big Flick' initiative. Future

projects could include books related to popular film and television interests, magazines, comics and CDROMs in order to enhance motivation for reading.

(i) Future projects could make greater use of new technologies such as the Internet and mobile phones.

New technologies provide a number of potentially motivating opportunities for looked after children and young people to engage in discussions and activities centring on reading and literacy, such as the use of discussion boards, chat rooms and text-messaging.

(j) The use of professional writers and artists could be extended.

The US! Project demonstrated the value of drawing on the skills of professional writers through the use of Nick Toczek. Future projects could develop and extend this by, for example, having 'Writers in residence' for extended periods of time at individual centres.

(k) In order to enhance opportunities for developing contacts with foster carers, local networks could be developed which included family placement workers, social workers, community librarians and teachers responsible for looked after children in schools.

Schools did not feature strongly in the work of the US! Project, yet they could be a potentially useful link to foster carers. Designated teachers in schools could be drawn into future projects more effectively and these contacts could increase the chances of making contact with foster carers.

(l) Future projects could develop strategies to ensure that generic programmes, such as 'Keeping up with the Kids', parenting workshops or family literacy programmes, considered the needs of looked after children and young people.

Projects which focus specifically on looked after children and young people could do much to raise awareness generally and ensure that generic courses consider the needs of looked after young people and care leavers who are parents, as long as such work did not detract from the main aims and objectives of the focused projects themselves.

4.5 Summary

The US! Project has been highly successful and has helped to change the practices of one local authority with regard to reading and looked after children and young people. The US! Project has, as one respondent noted, moved 'the bigger picture on'. Planned future developments within this authority owe much to the success of and strategies promoted by the US! Project.

The major factors in the success of the project were:

- the vision, energy and enthusiasm of the Project Co-ordinators;
- the effective integration of the project into the work of ROWA!;
- the commitment to the project demonstrated by senior managers in the agencies involved e.g. Libraries and Heritage, Social Services (Children and Families), Step Up 2000;
- the development of an effective liaison network through the Steering Group;
- organisation of the project e.g. clear objectives set for each strand, regular Steering Group meetings which were minuted and circulated widely, long-term planning of activities, close monitoring of progress;
- the development of a wide range of activities which complemented each other and ensured a balance between sustained and consistent activities over time and one-off events which stimulated enthusiasm and creativity.

In concluding this Evaluation Report, it is important to note that many of the successes of and challenges faced by this Project have the potential to inform national initiatives. There is still much work to be done to improve the educational attainment of looked after children and young people, but the US! Project has demonstrated how focused strategies to enhance reading and literacy practices can make a significant contribution to changing the culture of local authority services.

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