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THE BOOK BRIGADE



When Gleadless library was threatened with closure, volunteers stepped in. **Phoebe Seymour** finds out how they are safeguarding its future.

When Sheffield's libraries came under threat because of government funding cuts in 2013, it was down to a bunch of committed volunteers to ensure these much-loved local services did not vanish.

We currently have 27 community libraries in Sheffield, 15 of which are run by local volunteers. And though their support and dedication continue, these libraries are still under the threat of closure.

The new Gleadless Library and Community Hub on White Lane has recently celebrated its one year anniversary as a volunteer-run centre.

"Two years ago, I found out that the library was going to close unless some volunteers came forward to run it," says one of Gleadless' founding volunteers Ann Bradbury. "Sheffield City Councillor Karen McGowan started us up and has been very supportive ever since."

And though Sheffield City Council is financially supporting the

library for its first three years, Ann admits the future is looking uncertain.

"They've given us a grant for our first year, based on the former Gleadless Library running costs, but from April 2016, we will not be getting any more money upfront. We will be reimbursed, but we need to find ways to fund ourselves until then."

The library has already introduced some fundraising initiatives including raffle tickets, selling nearly new books and has raised an impressive £155 from the sale of their chocolate-filled knitted chicks for Easter, but with an estimated annual running cost of £16,000, they still have a way to go.

Gleadless Library is therefore welcoming everyone in the area to their Christmas Fayre on Saturday 14 November from 2pm until 4pm. Entry is free and there will be a number of stalls to peruse such as crafts, toys and cakes, as well as nearly new books and clothes. And who knows, Father Christmas may also be making a visit closer to Christmas.



But it's not just money that the library needs. Ultimately, it will be the local visitors and members that will ensure its survival.

Ann's husband and library volunteer Pete Bradbury said: "One of the biggest problems is that people don't know we are here or they presume we are closed and those that do know we are here don't always realise the number of services we provide."

"We changed our name to The New Gleadless Library and Community Hub because we do so much more," adds Ann.

As well as providing a wide selection of books with everything from adult fiction and children's picture books, to standard novels and large print and audio books, the library has a number of PCs (which are always very busy) with access to the internet. There is a wealth of leaflets about services and events taking place in the area, comfy seating areas, coffee and tea facilities and a bright and cheerful seating area, where children can sit and read.

As their new title suggests, the Community Hub is also a great place for a number of groups to meet up. The weekly Russian Speaking Group is fantastic for both native speakers and beginners wanting to learn the language, Monday's Knit and Natter is a chance to do just that, whilst Time To Change, run by volunteer Kate Steel, not only supports local people, but aims to fight the stigma attached to mental health issues.

A charity group working on behalf of a number of organisations meets for coffee mornings on Wednesdays and even Charnock Hall Primary School has worked with the library. Ann is hopeful that Valley Park School will be visiting the library in the new year.

It is also inspiring to hear that, even in a digital age, many children still visit and rely on libraries. The centre recently took part in a Record Breakers Summer Reading Challenge, where children must read six books over the summer holidays. Over 100 local children took part and were awarded with certificates to say they had completed the challenge.

The library is now welcoming the children of Gleadless to enter their latest colouring-in competition. The winner receives four tickets to take the whole family to Disney on Ice: Worlds of Enchantment live at the Sheffield Arena between 18 and 22 November. The competition closes on 31 October, so visit the library and pick up your colouring-in sheet today.

Another thing many people probably don't realise is that this local library is part of the central library in Sheffield city centre. You can therefore use the same card to take out up to 15 books for up to three weeks, any books you can't find at Gleadless can be transferred from the central library and you can reserve and renew your books online at library.sheffield.gov.uk.

The New Gleadless Library & Community Hub is very much a place run by the community for the community and although there are as many as 25 volunteers running it, Pete insists there is a lot of work going on behind the scenes too.

"There are a lot of man hours and we are not all available at the same time. It's not just opening hours we need to cover. Just maintaining the building and enforcing health and safety can take time."

But although it is hard work, it can be very rewarding to see the difference the library is making.

"It's great to see parents and grandparents sitting in the library and reading to children," says Pete. "It's not just about the books; it's about people having somewhere to come. The Wednesday Coffee Morning group have been coming here long before we took over. If we closed, these groups would have no where to go."

There's something for everyone at The New Gleadless Library and Community Hub, so why not pick up a book or join in with a new activity today? Find out more by visiting www.gleadlesslibrary.org or The New Gleadless Library Facebook group.

If you would like to come to the Christmas Fayre on Saturday 14 November or would like to become a volunteer, call Ann Bradbury on 0114 239 4630 or email

gleadless.library@gmail.com to help The New Gleadless Library and Community Hub stay open for years to come.

The New Gleadless Library & Community Hub is located at White Lane, Gleadless, Sheffield, S12 3GH.

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