

## Reflections on CILIP Conference 2018

I have yet to write up my notes from the CILIP Conference but two phrases have been haunting me since my return in early July:

“Reading is a torch in the night.”

And

“Tax is money spent on libraries, because you are a proxy for someone else’s compassion for someone else”.

Both quotes from two very different sessions illustrate the power of libraries and demonstrate what an inspiration conference attendance can be.

This was my first CILIP Conference and I was unsure what to expect. I am a seasoned HLG attendee but felt I would like to try something new and broaden my awareness of the profession so was lucky enough to gain a sponsorship from YOHLNet to attend. Thank you YOHLNet!

The sunshine, seaside and mango ice cream definitely helped, as did the early morning paddle, but the real boost I got from attending the conference was from the sheer variety of speakers. Keynote speakers included the House of Commons Librarian, Orkney Children’s Librarian and journalist Samira Ahmed amongst others. I learnt about sectors I knew very little about and others in which I had worked previously. I took the deliberate decision to **not** attend all of the health library sessions as I saw this as an opportunity to gain a broader insight into the profession and perhaps unsurprisingly learnt that we all face similar issues and difficulties in delivering our services.

I have never wanted to work in a prison library but I have always been curious to know what it is like and I gained a great insight when I attended the *prison libraries change lives* workshop. Four librarians from four different prisons delivered short 10 minute talks on how they have been engaging with prisoners. This ranged from setting up a book club for young offenders, whereby participants had to be selected based on the grounds of who was unlikely to start a fight with whom, to a programme of Cognitive Simulation Therapy for prisoners with dementia. It was during this session that the “reading is a torch in the night” quote was given. One of the prison librarians used her 10 minutes to read short extracts, written by prisoners, on what the prison library means to them. Each extract varied in length, language and complexity but this quote hit home and demonstrated how illuminating having access to books can be (excuse the pun). The librarian reported that this particular prisoner, Peter, has now left the prison and has secured some work with a library.

I have to confess that I had not heard of EveryLibrary prior to attending the CILIP Conference. I now know that EveryLibrary (<http://everylibrary.org/>) is the only national library organisation in the United States dedicated solely to securing the future of library funding at all levels of government. I attended two sessions fronted by a couple of directors from EveryLibrary and this is where the “tax is money spent of libraries, because you are a proxy for someone else’s compassion for someone else” quote comes from. I am used to working in libraries where the emphasis is on getting people to register with the library as that demonstrates the need for the service. EveryLibrary take a slightly different viewpoint and recognises that not everyone will want to join and use the library but

someone may still recognise the value of the library and will consequently pledge support to the library. Essentially, the message was that if you focus your marketing and messaging to convince people to become users, you alienate people who don't want to be users but still value who you are and what you do. This was a welcome change of thinking for me.

A condition of my YOHHLnet bursary was that I had to tweet from the conference. I am not a big social media user and I had not sent a tweet prior to the conference so this part filled me with some dread. I started badly by using the wrong hashtag but once I'd spotted my mistake I was able to join the #CILIPConf18 conversation. I found it very difficult to tweet during sessions and I was left wondering what it must feel as a presenter to see a room full of people on their phones whilst they are presenting. I managed to tweet a bit between sessions and did smile when a few people liked my tweets. However, I fear I am still a Luddite and found it much more useful to talk to other delegates in person about the sessions.

If you get the opportunity to attend the CILIP Conference in 2019 I heartily recommend it although it will be in Manchester so no paddling this time unless you fancy the canal!

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