

Simon Belshaw - Anytime Storytime Project

The project will develop two bespoke story-telling devices to be installed in two libraries. The devices are small and user-friendly, and will play audio recordings of stories, poems, and oral history stories for both adults and children. Stories will be original, developed through workshops to engage with multicultural and under-represented groups within the area (including rural areas), and professional writers. Each workshop will allow the participants to contribute to the design and look of the final device, and the recordings will be voiced either directly by participants in the workshops or voiceover artists. Headphones will give the stories intimacy and immediacy, and a chance for a diverse community to share stories.

The project is to develop two devices that will be installed in two libraries (Exeter Central and St Thomas). Both libraries already hold successful story time sessions where members of staff read picture books to you children. This project builds on that and will allow library users to have story time on demand. There will be a catalogue of stories and poems that will have a synopsis of each one on a postcard. When that card is placed on or near the device an audio recording of the story will play.

To create the stories, poems and riddles that will be available on the devices we will hold several workshops where participants will work with professional writers and library staff. There are a number of families in Exeter for whom English is not their first language and this device will have potential for them too. One of the workshops will be specifically for these families and it is hoped that we will be able to produce bilingual stories too. There will also be an opportunity to help with the design and look of the device; an important element of the project is that the device not only functions well but is also an attractive object in its own right.

We have support from Libraries Unlimited for this project who are offering us the space to hold the workshops as well as providing library staff to assist. They will also provide us with access to the FabLab that will enable us to manufacture the devices.

The stories will be recorded using a professional voiceover artist with the potential for workshop participants to contribute their voices as well. The stories will be enhanced by using sound design to provide a new and exciting way to experience them.

Research has shown that listening to audiobooks has many benefits for children. According to research from the National Literacy Trust 'One benefit of audiobooks is that children have the opportunity to hear speech patterns and rhythms that they might miss in print. They teach them about voice and expression, which can help with their own speaking and articulation.' So, not only will the device be an

incentive for children to come to the library, it will also be of benefit for their development and in particular their reading and listening skills.

The devices will remain in the library for as long as they are required and have the potential to be updated with new stories and to have specific stories for times, seasons or events during the calendar year. Whilst we see this project as complete in itself we believe that this project has enormous potential for expansion and development not only for local libraries but far wider. For example, there are now many libraries that are single staffed or community led that no longer have the capacity to provide a live story time session so devices could be installed into these in the future.

simon@simonbelshaw.co.uk

simonbelshaw.co.uk