

CULTURE BELONGS HERE

Inclusive, community-centred culture across our library network

Buckinghamshire Libraries | Katie de Joux with Zoe Loake

A practical story of access, representation and disability inclusion



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIBRARIES



THE CONTEXT

One county. Many communities. One consistent ambition.

Culture became a strategic priority for the service since 2023.

28 public libraries

+ 2 prison
libraries

- ✓ Rural communities and market towns
- ✓ Areas of deprivation identified through Opportunity Bucks
- ✓ A trusted network close to where people live



OUR APPROACH

Four design choices keep the work community-centred

A repeatable model, not a series of isolated projects.

1

Start local

Listen to the community and use the library's trust.

2

Remove barriers

Keep activity free or affordable, nearby and welcoming.

3

Partner well

Connect culture to health, learning and community priorities.

4

Make it repeatable

Pilot, learn, adapt and share across the network.

The result: culture becomes everyday library practice.

EXPANDING ACCESS

Bring creativity closer to home

Libraries reduce financial, geographic and confidence-based barriers.

Place Local activity across the network

Price Free or affordable cultural experiences

Confidence Familiar, non-traditional cultural settings

Connection Links to Early Years, Public Health and community partners



REPRESENTATION

Make room for voices too often missing

Representation is both what people see and who gets to shape it.

CARERS

Recognition built into the service

- Dedicated library membership category
- Easier access and extended borrowing benefits
- Carers Week activity with local organisations

Young carers co-designed new library card artwork, giving lived experience visible creative ownership.



DISABILITY INCLUSION

Move from access to agency and pride

Disability history and disability-led creativity belong in everyday cultural spaces.



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIBRARIES

THE OTHER LIBRARY

A multisensory, disability-led installation in accessible library spaces

NATIONAL PARALYMPIC HERITAGE TRUST

Buckinghamshire's connection to the birthplace of the Paralympic Movement creates a powerful platform for history, visibility and local pride.

Zoe connects people, services and ideas

Her leadership makes inclusion organisational, not dependent on one project.

1

Convene

Established the Buckinghamshire Steering Group for the National Year of Reading.

2

Align

Connected libraries with Children's Services, Public Health, Early Years, Leisure and Parks.

3

Translate

Turned strategic priorities into practical activity in local libraries.

4

Enable

Built a structure colleagues and partners could adopt, adapt and sustain.

**Whatever you're
into, read into it.**

Discover your local library.

**GO
ALL
IN.**

National
Year of
Reading
2026

Inclusive culture must also be responsible

Environmental choices, fair access and ethical partnerships reinforce each other.

Reuse

World Book Day costume swaps reduce textile waste and support families.

Local

Library delivery reduces the need to travel to traditional cultural venues.

Fair

Free or affordable access, fair commissioning and transparent partnerships.

Creative ambition and social responsibility are not competing goals.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT

Inclusion is not a strand of the programme. It is how the programme is built.

- 1 Start with trust and place.
- 2 Share power through co-design.
- 3 Build inclusion into partnerships and systems.
- 4 Pilot locally, then make learning portable.

Zoe's reflection

What changed for you as a leader, and what would you pass on?

