

Library scheme at Saughton Prison wins Award

A library for prisoners was opened at HMP Saughton, Edinburgh, in November 2008, with the aim of enhancing prisoners' lives, both as prisoners and on release. The results speak for themselves: just 18 months later, it is the only library in Scotland with a waiting list; it welcomed over 12,500 prisoners through the doors in its first year; and damage done to library books has reduced significantly from 80% to zero since the new library opened, demonstrating the new-found value the prisoners have for their library.

Housed in a purpose-built extension the library's purpose is to produce a library that can tackle social inclusion issues amongst the prison population and provide support opportunities for education and employment, thereby improving the transition from prison to outside community life.

With a bright and welcoming design, the library sits in contrast to the rest of the prison environment, and includes designs and fittings that were created and built by prisoners themselves. As well as providing numerous opportunities to improve literacy, the library has study desks and laptops for use in education and to support activities such as creating CVs.

One prisoner commented: "When I first came into jail I found it really hard to read because I wasn't good at concentrating and I would have to read the same paragraph over and over but after persisting with it and practising all the time, I find reading just as easy as breathing. I have to admit that reading is now a hobby for me. I love it and I would be lost without it as it's helped me through my sentence."

Commitment to the project was demonstrated by the decision to staff the library with an experienced and skilled local

authority librarian – Kate King – which means that in addition to regular library services, prisoners can also learn librarian skills. 10 prisoners have already been trained to deliver basic library skills, with one securing a recent interview with Edinburgh City Libraries.

Linda Constable, Senior Manager, Dorset Libraries, and chair of the judging committee, said: “This project demonstrates and evidences ‘changing lives’, and has made a huge impact on all the prisoners and the staff working in the prison. In addition, Kate’s approach, empathy and passion have driven this life-changing work, not only in the prison, but on release by giving prisoners improved life-chances, which in turn have a wider impact on their families, communities and society in general. It is our hope that the partnership work that has taken place at HMP Edinburgh will be an inspiration for similar projects around the country.”

Ian Kirkby, Library Development Officer at Edinburgh City Libraries, said: “Our work and focus is in making the prison library work to reduce re-offending and in supporting healthier local communities. None of us set out to seek awards – however it is delightful and uplifting to be acknowledged by our profession for our work in this project and a reaffirmation of the value of libraries in our communities.”

Councillor Deidre Brock, Convenor of Culture and Leisure for the City of Edinburgh Council, said: “Winning this award is a tremendous honour for our Libraries service. Through their dedication, vision and hard work, they have achieved something quite remarkable at HMP Edinburgh (Saughton), and have unquestionably changed people’s lives. It has been an enormous success in helping prisoners to improve their literacy and employability, reducing their risk of re-offending upon release. My heartfelt congratulations to all our superb staff.”

Now in its 19th year and open to all UK libraries, the Libraries Change Lives Award, highlights and rewards

partnership projects that bring people together, demonstrate innovation and creativity and which ultimately change lives. The winning library service was announced today (6th July) by broadcaster Mark Lawson at the new Libraries Change Lives Conference in London. As well as celebrating the achievement of the winning project, the conference provides an opportunity for the library community to discuss the increasing pressures libraries are facing to deliver social benefits and core lending services during a time of deep spending cuts. The winning library service will receive a trophy and prize money of £5,000, whilst the other two finalists will each receive prize money of £2,000.