

# **Work Developing Bibliotherapy**

## **Christine Cather**

In 2007, I researched the practice of bibliotherapy for a Masters of Information and Library Studies in collaboration with Glasgow Women's Library (GWL). The aim was to provide a basis for a bibliotherapy service for GWL. In particular, I investigated the extension from the self-help or Books on Prescription schemes into imaginative literature or creative bibliotherapy models in the UK.

My results showed that for the use of text for well-being, an element of discussion is essential. Across the UK and worldwide, various models of bibliotherapy showed how the range of texts can be used. It was particularly important to extend the self-help Books on Prescription schemes to include creative works and tailor them for those with literacy and other needs. To improve on self-help services it was also necessary to look at a more joined-up approach with NHS and public libraries. There was a need for public libraries to provide more patient information for customers and to be involved in the provision of information sources for health.

Useful examples for developing further use of creative reading were :Reading And You Scheme (RAYS) in Kirklees and Calderdale district and The Reader Organization's Get Into Reading scheme.

After training with these approaches, and as a writer in a Lapidus group, I have formed my own take on delivering sessions (see two examples below). My aim is to deliver a creative approach linking my love of poetry with shared reading and writing.

In Scotland, there is a growing interest in bibliotherapy and the Scottish Health Information Network (SHINE) presented an event in 2008. Current work by NHS

Education for Scotland Knowledge Services (NES) has developed networking and training events organised in partnership with SHINE and Lapidus Scotland. Funded by NES, this toolkit will build on bringing personal meaning to information and use bibliotherapy activities to increase self-management and to improve person-centred care and well-being.

The breadth of the NES work on models of bibliotherapy has included : the self-help model books on prescription; health literacy; patient information; a range of pilot projects including creative writing and a guided self-help lifeskills course (Living Life to the Full).

## **Using bibliotherapy to promote well-being in groups**

### **Example 1. Easterhouse Women's group**

The group setting was within a project for alcohol recovery that had for many years been meeting for two days a week for lunch, friendship and various activities.

The group was encouraged to listen to and discuss short stories and poems that the facilitator read aloud. The great benefit of reading aloud is that it gives access to those unable to read or write. The aim was to bring in something new for them that could develop conversations and allow for personal reflection. The texts were chosen by the facilitator along with the development worker who asked for themes on inter-generational, family relationships, in particular. The members were asked for their suggestions on what to read - and they asked for some short inspirational sayings, quotes and aphorisms . A focus on women writers and Scottish writers influenced the selection. The members were given copies of the text and were encouraged to read aloud when they wished to throughout the sessions. On only 2 occasions were they very keen to do this, and we heard them several times- the first was on hearing Tom Leonard, in Glasgow dialect, in 'Unrelated Incidents – No. 3', or 'the six o'clock news'. The excitement was tangible, some women wanted to take the poem home to their family. The second

wow poem was 'Still I Rise' by Maya Angelou. The women felt empowered and excited.

Their long friendships were deepened through talking with one another about the stories and poems. In so doing, they also saw new things about each other. They were a very thankful group and we had a really enjoyable time together. Some women said they would now read more. A comment was "When ye read,...it gets ye through the hard times."

## **Example 2. Wellhall Care Home**

At Wellhall Care Home, I read stories, poems and newspapers to a group of residents. I took a range of resources, such as: the local newspaper; a magazine with interesting pictures; old Scots sayings; poems and a story. I started the session with an old Scots song, 'Three Crows sat upon a wa' and often closed with it or another song. The participants could be challenging, with strong opinions about a poem or story. Dementia and forgetfulness was addressed by repeating the song. In addition, I brought a variety of types of resource, all chosen to stimulate conversation. Other projects like Living Voices have worked with dementia sufferers such as in this care home.

For these two example groups, there were problems in reading, due to lack of concentration and dementia.

For others, the lessons I learned from both these examples are:

- ⤴ Prepare by reading your selected texts, thinking of questions, interpretations and possible discussion points. Always go over-prepared with extra stories and poems.
- ⤴ Prepare your attitude and presence. This work is more than delivering a presentation. It demands authentic interaction and one thing that carried

me through any challenges was my passion for the poem, or story and for the people I was with. I wanted them to gain from it, to enjoy it!

- ⤴ Think of how you can respond to someone being upset, crying, angry, or emotional. Develop confidence in what you are doing, as well as patience and kindness.
- ⤴ Always have a co-worker with you e.g. for both above groups we had a worker present. This helped because the staff knew the participants and how to behave with them. They could take them out of the room if that was needed.
- ⤴ Ask participants to suggest material to bring to the group.

## References

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You can contact me at :[christinecather27@gmail.com](mailto:christinecather27@gmail.com)