

The Park Bench

Annual Report 2019



Registered Charity No. 1111578

Web Site www.theparkbench.org.uk

Trustees: Lucy Palmer (Chair), Heather Lister (Secretary), Richard Drake (Treasurer), Stella Wintle, Andy Watson, Jenny Cartwright, Tim Southall, Carrie Spittlehouse, Michelle Douglass, Helen Tierney, Jill Meakin

The Park Bench is a voluntary charitable organisation which aims to provide access to a lending library service for people in Bristol who find it difficult to register with the Public Library.

Thank you!



For donations, encouragement and support, thanks go to the following –

Quaker Homeless Action for start-up funding, and in particular Gillian Lowther of the London Mobile Library for homeless people, for initial inspiration and continuing encouragement.

All at Logos House (the Salvation Army Hostel) for their continued hospitality and encouragement.

All the team at the Wild Goose café, for making us feel appreciated in the Friday morning session until we moved the service in the summer.

All at the Methodist Centre in Lawrence Hill for welcoming our Wednesday morning service during the year.

Everyone who has donated books – staff, borrowers and others who have heard of us!

Our borrowers – whose enthusiasm has kept us going.

Our volunteers who have run library sessions, come to meetings and sorted books.

- A big thank you!

Chair's report

I am delighted to present this report of the year 2019. We have completed 14 full years of operation!

The Park Bench service in 2019

Once again, this year we've continued to provide a unique service: popular books available on free loan with 'no strings attached' (no fines for returning books late or not at all) for people who are homeless or in temporary accommodation. For our book borrowers, joining a public library is rarely a realistic option, and buying books even less so. Providing a 'good read' is one way of making a small difference and enriching someone's life.

Our well-established Thursday evening (6pm-7pm) staffed library service at Logos House, the Salvation Army hostel, continued, but the Wild Goose café planned to close for refurbishment in June and we moved our service to the Methodist Centre in Lawrence Hill (Wednesdays 10.30am-12 noon). At these locations, as well as lending books, we will try to find specific titles or more books by a favourite author on request.

We maintained or helped to maintain shelves of books for loan in other locations:

- * One25 women's drop-in
- * The Julian Trust night shelter for homeless people
- * St Anne's 24-hour shelter (during the winter)

Occasional visits ensured that the book supply was replenished with new titles.

Our grateful thanks go to all individuals and organisations who have donated books over the last year. Without you, we could not have the library! Sometimes new book titles appear on our book trolleys and we have no idea who donated them. Many are received from our own borrowers, keen to share the pleasure of reading. And our volunteers keep an eye open for requested titles in charity shops, etc.

Being a volunteer handing out books is not an impersonal task: volunteers are always willing to chat, and many a conversation about books or other topics has taken place. Personal contact with a friendly volunteer is an important part of the service. Even in those sessions where no books are lent out, we never fail to have interesting and, we hope, encouraging conversations, on everything from Shakespeare to Brexit.

The 'Facts and Figures' section in this Annual Report details the volume of the service at Logos House, the Wild Goose (up to 28 June) and the Methodist Centre (from 10 July), and the current trends in its take-up. Over the year we had a combined total of 93 visits from borrowers and 140 books loaned. In addition, we have many readers at the locations where we keep the bookshelves stocked – so altogether that's a lot of readers and books.

Volunteers

All this does not happen without the work and continued support of volunteers. Heather is our secretary, ensuring that agendas and minutes are sent out. She also does much fetching and

carrying of books and sorts them out, recycling any too dilapidated to use. Heather also manages the volunteers for Logos House, drawing up rotas and providing support when needed. Jenny has been instrumental in setting up the service at the Methodist Centre, and thanks go to her for coordinating the rota.

Thanks also go to Richard, who supports Heather in her tasks, as well as being our Treasurer and minute-taker at our quarterly volunteer meetings.

Crucially, thank you to the reliable and friendly band of volunteers. This year we welcomed two new volunteers, Helen and Jill, who are also both trustees. Andy, Jenny, Helen and Jill are a steady presence at the Methodist Centre. Richard, Heather, Lucy, Tim and Michelle attend sessions at Logos House. Stella has given extra assistance at Logos House whenever needed and Carrie hopes to get back on the rota now she has been able to return to just two jobs.

We have quarterly meetings when necessary to which all trustees, volunteers and other interested individuals are most welcome. Here we share information and discuss progress, problems and plans. We kept in touch between meetings with emails and phone calls.

Looking ahead

What will next year bring? We hope to keep providing the current service of staffed bookshelves at Logos House and the Methodist Centre. We will keep the services under review and monitor their use. We will be alert for opportunities for developments – such as the possibility of offering a staffed lending session or other book-related activities at any new shelters or services. If any Logos House residents express an interest in literacy support, we can refer them to Myra Parsons, who will liaise with EasyRead. We will try to make sure we make good use of our resources, both books and volunteers. We have started to consider looking for source of small amounts of additional funding. Above all, we will aim to provide opportunities for homeless people to enjoy reading, whether by browsing through a good stock of books or seeing friendly people at our weekly locations.

*Lucy Palmer, Chair
The Park Bench
January 2020*

<h3>Treasurer's Report</h3>

Our expenses this year are £60 bank costs and £92.75 related to AGM & administration costs. We received anonymous donations of £160 to fund the general costs and £20 from UWE.

We receive many donations of used books which are not reflected in the accounts and I have included an estimated £25 for donations in kind for books purchased by supporters and not reclaimed.

We end the year with £129.85 in the bank.

Richard Drake, Treasurer

Facts and Figures

We do not judge the success of Park Bench solely by counting numbers of books and borrowers: even if only a few people have their lives enriched by Park Bench it would be worthwhile. But we think it is useful to monitor the service, so that we have some helpful statistics for users, members, volunteers, trustees, people who have funded us and anyone who may be thinking of setting up a similar service elsewhere.

We do not keep statistics about the use of books we provide on shelves and boxes, but we do have some facts and figures about our services by location.

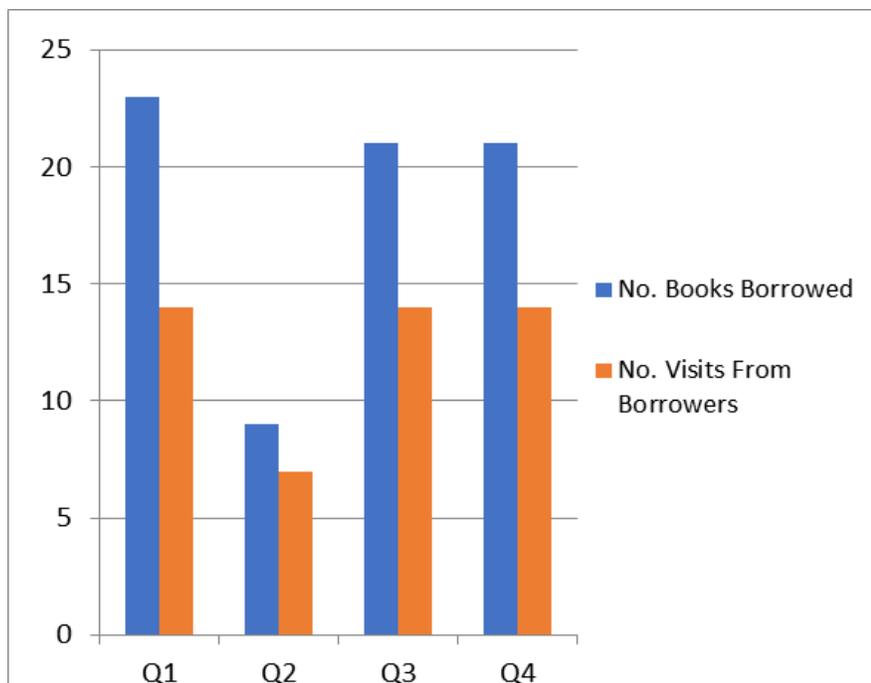
The Wild Goose & Methodist Centre

The service at the Wild Goose Café was set up in November 2010 following the closure of the New Street drop-in centre and in 2019 we moved to the Methodist Centre in the expectation of a temporary closure of The Wild Goose for refurbishment. So 2019 starts with Wild Goose data and ends with Methodist Centre figures, with a noticeable hiatus in Q2 because of the intended move.

Key points are:

- The books loaned at the Methodist Centre seem to be more consistent and a generally higher level than at the Wild Goose.
- Over the whole year we had 49 visits from book borrowers who borrowed a total of 74 books a marked increase from 2018 despite the gap in service
- The take-up of the service seems to be more consistent at the Methodist Centre with fewer weeks where there are no borrowers, though averages are similar.

**Wild Goose/Methodist Centre:
number of visits from borrowers, and number of books borrowed each quarter in 2019**



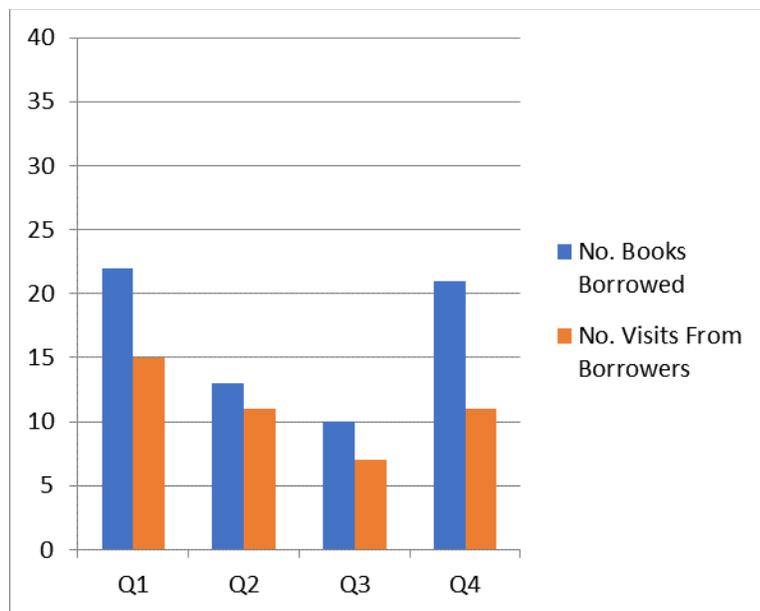
Salvation Army hostel (Logos House)

We started keeping records of the library service at the Salvation Army hostel in mid-October 2007, when it had become established, so 2019 is the 12th full year we monitored.

Key points are:

- The library was available every Thursday evening in 2019 between 6 and 7pm with only one or two exceptions due to volunteer illness.
- We had 44 visits from book borrowers who borrowed a total of 66 books a decrease from 2018 (66 visits and over 100 books).
- Although there are quite a few weeks where no books are borrowed the average is between 1 & 2 books a week. We seem to have had fewer prolific borrowers this year.
- Every week, we also chatted to people who didn't borrow books, about reading and other issues. This is also part of our service.

Salvation Army (Logos House): number of visits from borrowers, and number of books borrowed each quarter in 2019



Richard Drake, January 2020