The KU Big Read

The Humans by Matt Haig

http://kubigread.kingston.ac.uk

‘One life form’s gold is another life form’s tin can’

Haig (2013, p. 272)
‘A paradox. The things you don’t need to live – books, art, cinema, wine – are the things you need to live.’

Haig (2013, p. 273)
Project origins

• Widespread reporting of the **benefits of reading for pleasure**
• A research project looking at **how to improve student transition, engagement and retention**, particularly among vulnerable communities
• Pre-arrival shared reading common in US universities
• Research among first years (2014-15) showed much greater interest in reading for pleasure than anticipated. We went ahead with a customised edition of Nick Hornby’s *About a boy*
Feedback from Year One

- Very strong student engagement – particularly from those living at home
- How best to reach the staff; let them *ask* rather than just *receive*
- How libraries offered a capillary network across the university
- Administrative/professional staff particularly keen
- A water-cooler project. Widely discussed – even by those not taking part!
The wider Kingston context

• Many students commute
• 1:8 homes in Kingston has a KU connection
• Building on our active programme of civic engagement with Kingston Council
• Many administrative staff live locally
• Multiple contact points promote action!
The next year

• Choosing the book, involving the whole institution
• Using an algorithm and then letting humans make the choice
• Rolling out the shortlist across the institution – key library role
• How this developed into other workshops
Partners come on board

- Similar student demograph, different ethnicity
- 35,000 print run for *The Humans*
- Working with LRC staff at Edinburgh Napier
Community involvement

• U3A
• The Joel Project, centre for those experiencing homelessness
• Sale of books to Kingston Council
‘You have really created a buzz. I feel I want to take part.’
Corridor conversation with Senior Lecturer in Pharmacy

• Boost the vision with a simple statement of what you are trying to do
• Use all means of communicating across the organisation
• Ensure transparency of process
• Find project champions
• Leverage involvement by sharing information
• Encourage others to develop the idea
• Share the outcomes
Unexpected Benefits

• Staff response
• Raised institutional profile nationally - articles published by academic and library staff in academic and professional press (3) and conference papers (4)
• Students now with a Publications section on their CV
• Rose Award
KU Library – Why?

- Raising library profile across the institution
- Learning hub of the university and so a central collection point
- Opportunities to network across community through committee structure
- Social media presence gives ideal opportunity to reach out to students
- Encourages user engagement with the LRC
KU Library – How?

- Money to buy books
- LRC Induction sessions – practical examples e.g. referencing
- Reading groups in Welcome Week
- LRC staff training: Annual Summer Refreshers and Night Team
Wider library sharing

- Sofa sessions in the university library cafes
- Public Libraries/KU summit on good practice
Spin-offs involving the LRC

- Hillcroft Women’s College – through a helpdesk library contact
- Youth groups on local Council Estate
- The Big Economics Read – for all new KU economics students!
Further collaboration

• Contribution to Customer Services Excellence Award – Kingston and Napier
• RBK joint seminars: World Book Night and Cityread
• The Kingston Award – a possible model for Council staff development
Edinburgh Napier University
Events
Sharing experiences

‘Thought it was a well-chosen book due to the themes complementing the transition to a new environment very nicely’
Edinburgh Napier University
Digital Outreach

“AT SOME POINT, BAD THINGS ARE GOING TO HAPPEN. HAVE SOMEONE TO HOLD ON TO.”
MATT HAIG, THE HUMANS

Learn more about Relationships at http://libguides.napier.ac.uk/BigRead
Wider library sharing

• Sale of books to Kingston Council
• Rolled out across 7 public libraries in the borough
• Surbiton Library event
• Public Libraries/KU summit on good practice
Community involvement

• All based on promoting **community and inclusiveness**
• Sharing attempts to chart our effectiveness
• Strategy and evaluation development
What was learned in the process?

• Expanding on 2016
• Reaching more people – residents and across the Council
• Involvement in university’s research plans and other cross over