

# Enlighten, Enrich, Engage: Learning, Culture and Community in Public Libraries

Public Libraries Conference 2015  
Garryvoe Hotel, East Cork,  
11-13 November 2015

At the invitation of Cork County Council, the 2015 Annual Conference was held at the Garryvoe Hotel. Over 100 delegates attended and the conference was accredited by the Library Association of Ireland. The conference theme continued the exploration of key areas in **Opportunities for All**.



LAI President Philip Cohen, formally opened the conference, welcomed delegates and spoke on the benefits of becoming an active LAI member and recognising the value of a vigorous library community.

The conference included three panel discussions covering funding, literary awards and My life in Books. In addition there was a keynote speaker, several supplier lightening sessions and a professional lightening session.

The funding panel explored which local, national and European funding avenues are open to public libraries. This session generated many questions from the floor. Anastasia Gasia (The European Library) outlined the work of the library and their Europeana Archive.

The literary awards panel gave information on the selection process and the importance of the awards in today's information society. Awards considered included the Kate Greenway Prize and the Irish Book Awards.

The conference concluded with the firm favourite 'My Life in Books' panel, chaired by Eddie O Sullivan, which included actor and comedienne Tara Flynn, *Irish Independent* Sports writer Vincent Hogan and author Pdraig O Rourke. The panel discussed a wide range of books that impressed them from a young age, through to their teens and into adulthood.

Keynote speaker Richard Bealing, (Head of Library Services, Wigan Libraries), considered ways to promote the work of public library services to reach wider audiences. Wigan produced a generic video promoting the services in a fun, qualitative, way, in contrast to the more quantitative, statistical approach services have used in the past. Other speakers included Fintan Mulligan on the '121 Digital Programme', a one tutor/one learner programme developed with transition year students training the elderly on Internet enabled devices. Ciaran McKinney (Director of Development, **Age and Opportunity**) gave a lively presentation on, and insight into, the organisation's work in engaging the elderly in a wide range of creative activities, from the Bealtaine and Samhain festivals to the Azure Project, helping those with dementia related conditions take part in cultural activities.

During short professional contributions, Offaly Library Service gave an update on their Open Libraries Project and noted that the project is going well with no major problems encountered by staff or users. Marjory Sliney spoke on writing for *An Leabharlann: the Irish Library*.

A conference highlight was the presentations by the LAI Public Libraries Section Project Prize finalists (Carlow, Kilkenny & Wexford). Applications had been invited from all local authorities with the aim of providing an opportunity to develop and implement innovative ideas. The initiative served to stimulate ideas and creativity amongst public library staff and the presentation to conference delegates allowed for potential project emulation in other library services. Carlow's winning project was 'Live from the Library': working with local teenagers on a six-month production of YouTube music videos on issues facing teenagers. Kilkenny colleagues spoke on their 'Aistear in the Library' project, working with junior and senior infants classes to develop play-related activities around libraries. Staff from Wexford presented their 'eSkills for Work and Entrepreneurship' a project focusing on education and employment options for school leavers.

Following a vote from delegates on their favourite shortlisted project, a fund of €1000 was awarded.



Cork County Libraries arranged for delegates to visit the refurbished library in Cobh where County Librarian, Eileen O'Brien, gave a presentation on the County's 'Year of Light' project. Cork's larger scientific enterprises were contacted to fund events throughout the county, promoting their collections linked to the project theme. The delegates also had a tour of the Midleton Distillery and then attended the conference dinner with after dinner speaker Colm O'Gorman.

*Mary Murphy is Chairperson, Public Libraries Section LAI and Executive Librarian, Meath County Council.*