

In Lockdown and Beyond

The UK's National Shelf Service

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At the time of writing this, in fall 2020, England has just entered its second national lockdown of the past eight months. We are librarians with a commitment to working with young people and have been galvanized this year to find new ways of working with children, families, schools, communities, and each other to deliver our services.

On both sides of the Atlantic, rhyme times have gone virtual, click and collect/curb side services prevail, and reading groups meet via Facebook, Teams, Zoom and a host of other cloud platforms. Library workers provide ongoing and increased user support of digital services. Never has our profession been under so much pressure.

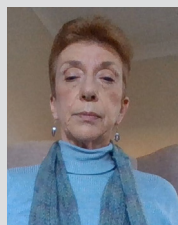
Back in March 2020, when the first lockdown was imposed, lifestyle and body coach Joe Wicks began daily morning workout sessions on YouTube, capturing the imagination of millions of families across the United Kingdom who were forced to home school their children.

A chance comment to CILIP's (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) Chief Executive Nick Poole prompted him to wonder if librarians could offer the equivalent in terms of daily e-book recommendations to children and families who were unable to access physical resources due to school and public library closures. We then created the National Shelf Service, a play on the name of the UK's invaluable National Health Service) and Youth Libraries Group sprang into action.

We reached out to public and school librarians across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, in tandem with our professional body, enlisting the support of colleagues to

recommend their best reads for children and families. Our core mission was six-fold:

- To connect with children, young people, and families and help them find great things to download and read.
- To support the nation's mental health and well-being during a public health crisis through reading.
- To celebrate the ability of librarians to connect readers with books and e-books.
- To promote librarianship during a time when libraries weren't physically open.
- To raise awareness of the e-book services of libraries.
- To encourage more people to read and to discover a wider range of more diverse and inclusive books.



Alison Brumwell is a chartered librarian and freelance reader development consultant based in Leeds, UK. She is past chair of the CILIP Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medals (2019) and currently serves as national Chair of CILIP's Youth Libraries Group (2020–2022). She has also been a volunteer with London-based charity Africa Educational Trust (now part of Street Child) since 2012 and has helped set up more than one hundred primary school libraries in rural Eastern Uganda.

We launched the National Shelf Service initiative in April 2020, the beginning of schools' two-week Easter break. A team of three creative directors, including myself, Jake Hope (Chair of the CILIP Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medals Working Party), and Natalie Jones (CILIP's Campaigns and Awards Manager) worked closely with the creative team at CILIP, who set up a dedicated YouTube channel and ensured that pre-recorded broadcasts were lined up to air every day.

We wanted the National Shelf Service to have a life beyond lockdown and the pandemic, so it was critical for us to engage with external partners, including e-book providers, so parents and caregivers had access to a range of options for borrowing and buying books for their children.

These were already in place in advance of the project's launch and included Nielsen Book and Libraries Connected (a charity that promotes innovation and accessibility throughout the library and information profession and represents all public library services in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland), in addition to the UK's largest e-book providers.

Relationship building in these early stages was crucial to National Shelf Service's successful launch. And what a launch it was! Bobby Seagull, the nation's favorite math teacher and a powerful advocate for literacy and libraries, kicked us off in style with a promo video. This was followed by librarian Angela Foster's recommendation of the CILIP Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medal winning classic *A Monster Calls*. These two videos alone have been viewed more than 3,000 times by audiences from as far afield as the US, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Portugal, Spain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and South Korea.

Maintaining momentum after such a brilliant start was a challenge, especially as an increasing number of colleagues began to face redundancy, working from home and being placed on furlough. We engaged our 1,500 membership base

through a monthly e-newsletter and were able to enlist ongoing support. But it was a lot of work for us as volunteers alongside our substantive roles. Coming up with daily morning broadcasts for fourteen weeks is mind-boggling; we couldn't have achieved this without the contributions of more than seventy librarians from across the UK who wanted to reach out to children and families, despite the massive professional and personal constraints of a national lockdown.

In July, we moved to weekly book recommendations with a Throwback Thursday broadcast which re-visited the very best contributed videos. Throughout this time, we also collaborated closely with the UK book industry and with other national awards and initiatives. These included the BookTrust Storytime Prize, Klaus Flugge Prize for Illustration, Little Rebels Prize, and the CILIP Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medals 2020. National Shelf Service provided an additional forum in which the outstanding achievements of authors and illustrators could be celebrated and shared as widely as possible in the absence of live ceremonies and promotions.

National Shelf Service also invited international contributions and we were delighted to feature some from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the US (Louise Lareau, managing librarian, Children's Center at 42nd Street, The New York Public Library). Lareau brought to life for UK viewers the amazing work of Caldecott and Pura Belpré-winning author and illustrator Yuyi Morales.

When we wrapped up the program in October 2020, we had more than 25,000 YouTube views with 119 episodes broadcast and close to 1,000 subscribers. These broadcasts are now organized into playlists of recommendations for various age groups, so National Shelf Service is a living archive that schools and parents/caregivers can easily access.

National Shelf Service can be accessed on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPUlqIJM0aieXdq-LxKDvWA>. &