

# Porlock Community Library

## Porlock Parish Council: Volunteers run the “shop”



**Interview with:** Kay Wright, volunteer  
**Name of project:** Porlock Community Library

### Who is involved:

Porlock Parish Council, Somerset Libraries Service and the 24 volunteers.

**Aims:** To create a community-led village library offering a hub from which to provide a range of additional activities and events.

### The story:

In 2014 Somerset County Council (SCC) Library Service and Porlock Parish Council worked together to test the concept of creating a community-led library and to see how well various benefits could be delivered as part of the broader SCC Library Service Review Programme. These benefits are:

- Increase in visitor numbers
- Increased volunteer support
- Increase the number of partners sharing the premises with the library
- Libraries run by communities are sustainable



A large pool of local volunteers signed up to help (initially all were screened by the SCC Volunteer Bureau) and underwent a 6 month training period run by the Library Service to pass on the skills needed to enable them to keep the service running.

In June 2014 a collaboration agreement was signed with Porlock Parish Council for a one year pilot, this was extended in 2015. Porlock Library is now run by a team of 24 volunteers. Somerset Libraries Service is part of a wider consortium, LibrariesWest – one of the leading public library consortia in the UK.



### What were the main considerations when the project was set-up:

Somerset Libraries Service wanted the community library to build upon the existing library service model, by providing events and other services, so the library could function as a ‘community hub’. The volunteers have developed this suggestion to provide, for example, regular coffee mornings, poetry readings, IT tuition, book signings and other local initiatives; in addition to the national library events such as the Summer Reading Challenge in the school holidays. These initiatives are well supported by the village.

The performance of Porlock Library is measured, as for other libraries, on a number of factors: numbers of visitors and books borrowed, public network computer usage and enquiries made.

### Partnership work and sources of advice:

There were no community or volunteer-run libraries to lead by example or advise. The library staff of Somerset County Council gave full training and they provide telephone back-up as needed.

### What are the project constraints and limitations:

There is a limit of how much of the librarian’s job the volunteers can do, such as using the computer systems. A member of the Library Service comes in to provide support for the volunteers for 4 hours every week.

## How and why did you get involved in the project:

I believed in it. Also, I am interested in books and literature and I wanted to do something that directly benefitted the village.

## Benefits to you:

- Challenging – satisfaction in understanding it and then seeing it in operation
- Interaction with public and the team is enjoyable
- In a way, I miss working (obviously not all of it) and volunteering enables me to continue doing some of those aspects of my past employment that I enjoyed.

## How much time do you spend on the project?

The library is open 5 mornings per week and 2 afternoons per week. Shifts are 2.5 hours and the volunteers work in pairs.

## Downsides to being involved:

Commitment: you cannot make last-minute or “spur of the moment” plans if you’re on duty; we work in pairs, but obviously you don’t want to let down the other person by not turning up – if you are ill or for whatever reason cannot make it, you need to phone and let them know or try and arrange someone to swap with you.

## Recruiting:

Volunteer positions are not actively advertised, but are always on the lookout and pleased when interest is expressed. New recruits are largely trained by other volunteers with induction given by the Library Service.

## A typical day in action:

- Open library before 10am and set-up
- Deal with any incoming stock
- Greet members of the public and make them feel welcome
- Deal with queries
- Some volunteers provide regular IT tuition sessions
- Organise or change display to keep it looking fresh



## As a volunteer, what are the most important things for organisers to be aware of?

- Volunteers are not employees, it’s very different: employees are selected and trained for their specific role; volunteers have enthusiasm and commitment but a wide variety of skillsets – organisers need to tactfully work with that and adjust the work to suit the volunteers.
- Due to other commitments, volunteers have time restraints and may be absent for long periods. Any rota should take account of this, and some give and take will be needed among the volunteers, as last minute changes will always occur.
- Not as stable and static as working with employees.
- Wonderful team! Committed and lots of effort!

## Any advice to those looking to get involved?

- What you put in is what you get out
- It might be challenging, but.... the more challenging it is, the more worthwhile it is

## Other comments:

It has been a big success! Porlock Community Library has received praise from the Library Service and the village – from all perspectives, it is very successful.

To find out more about it, please visit: [www.porlock.org](http://www.porlock.org)

Facebook: Porlock Community Library