Creating libraries of tomorrow with children and young people today

Strategy 2026-2031

Libraries Rising is the operating name of Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians
Registered charity in England and Wales (1200443).

Chair foreword

Since we became a registered charity in 2022, we have been thinking carefully about what Libraries Rising needs to be for the future: how we better support our members, raise the profile of public libraries for children and young people, and school library services, and platform the voices of children and young people to shape the libraries they need now and in the future. With the support of Arts Council England, we have been able to develop as a charity and look towards what comes next.

We are proud of the journey that brought us here. Since 2023 the charity has focussed on five strategic priorities:

Children and young people feel that **libraries are safe, welcoming places where their voices are heard and valued**, particularly the voices of those who do not currently use libraries, children and young people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

The **offer for children and young people is vibrant, dynamic and joined up** across public and school library services and through the Universal Library Offers.

Staff and volunteers working with children and young people in libraries have access to **talent development and career pathways** and the value of specialist skills in this area is recognised and rewarded by employers.

The role of libraries in providing support and learning opportunities for children and young people is recognised and **libraries are seen as first-call partners.**

The charity is a **diverse, inclusive and effective organisation** that supports libraries to provide an excellent offer for children and young people.

As ASCEL, we built a strong and valued network, bringing people together around a shared belief in the importance of libraries and the difference they can make in the lives of children, young people and families. We are incredibly proud of that legacy, and of the people behind it. Our members' knowledge, passion and commitment continue to be one of our greatest strengths.

In November 2025, we became Libraries Rising. Our new name and identity reflect a charity that is growing and evolving, while staying true to the same core spirit of connection, support and kindness.

We are now looking to the future at a time of significant change. Library services are navigating local government reorganisation and changes to skills and specialist roles, while children, young people and families face challenges around health and wellbeing, technology, climate change and a shifting political landscape. These challenges make our work more important than ever, but they also create opportunities to rethink and strengthen the role libraries can play.

This strategy is a key part of that next step; setting out our ambition to become a stronger and more visible network, to amplify the voices of our members and of children and young people, and to champion the future of libraries for children, young people and families. We are excited about what lies ahead and about the opportunity to create the libraries of tomorrow with children and young people today.

Annabel Gittins
Co-Chair

Lucy Starbuck Braidley
Co-Chair

Chief Executive introduction

Libraries play a crucial role in the lives of children and young people. They can be vibrant spaces that encourage learning and creativity, and they are also places to socialise, feel safe and create a sense of belonging. For some children and young people, a library might be the one place in their community where they feel welcome and able to be themselves.

As the world around children and young people changes, so do the ways they learn, spend their time and create connections with others. New technologies, changing reading habits, climate change and widening inequalities are shaping their lives. Libraries are an important part of the wider ecosystem of support around children and young people. Libraries must continue to respond to these changes, creating spaces and opportunities that help children and young people feel understood, empowered and inspired.

At the same time, library services and the teams who deliver them are navigating significant change, including funding pressures and changes to local authorities and schools. Schools Library Service's offer vital services to schools and there is an opportunity to build on their expertise and strengthen their role for the future. In public libraries, as experienced children's specialists are retiring and roles are changing, it's critical that we continue to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence within the workforce to ensure families continue to access high quality and inclusive libraries.

There is a huge amount of expertise and knowledge across our membership and wider sector. Our members' experiences help us understand where support is needed and where there are opportunities to make a difference. We want to bring people

together, share knowledge, and support our members and their library services to respond to the changes facing libraries and their communities.

Most of all, we want to make sure that children and young people feel welcome in their libraries, see libraries as relevant to their lives, and feel involved in shaping what libraries look like in the future.

This strategy sets out what we want to achieve and will continue to develop. Our members guide what we do, and we will continue to listen to their experiences and respond as the needs of children and young people, our members and the wider sector change.

Our strategy sets out four priorities for how we will do this:

Activate: platforming young voices with libraries locally, regionally and nationally.

Develop: enabling library services with knowledge, skills and inclusive practice.

Energise: connecting our networks to harness opportunities and overcome challenges.

Champion: advocating for high-quality and inclusive children and young people's public libraries and school library services.

To do this we need to build a **thriving charity**. One that is connected to our networks, confident in its expertise and ready to respond to what comes next.

Tabitha Witherick Macaulay

Our network

Libraries Rising is the national network for leaders in children and young people's public library services and schools library services (SLS). We believe that children and young people need safe spaces and real-life connections to support the demands of modern life. Together, we're working with partners and supporters to create libraries for today's world, where children and young people feel understood, empowered and inspired.

Our members are the driving force behind our mission to ensure every child feels at home in their library.

Together, our networks work in partnership to drive collective national impact. We are creating libraries of tomorrow with children and young people today.

We are committed to integrating member insights into our work, ensuring our support remains agile and relevant to the local needs of library teams and the children, young people and families they work with.

Regional Networks

Our regional networks bring together local members to explore place-based opportunities and sharing good practice.

Schools Library Service Network

Our national schools library services network brings together SLS to share good practice, resources and develop opportunities to raise awareness for the vital support and expertise they offer to schools.

National Members Committee

Our national members committee brings together representatives from across our member network. The group acts as a forum for member voice, discussing priorities and emerging opportunities to ensure the charity responds to members' needs and advocates effectively.

Youth Engagement Network

The Youth Engagement Network is a national programme that brings children and young people together with their local library services to share their ideas, influence decisions, and co-create activities, spaces and services that reflect what matter to them.

Our context

Challenges and opportunities for children and young people's library services

- Local government funding and reorganisation, including school funding pressures
- Skills, confidence and succession planning, including a loss of specialist roles and retirement of skilled practitioners

Challenges and opportunities for children, young people and families

- Health and wellbeing, including declining child health, mental health challenges and income divide
- Changing technological environment, impacting on learning, leisure and work, including AI, digital skills, changes in reading habits, social media and mis/disinformation
- The impact of climate change, an issue that matters to many children and young people and one they will inherit
- Young people's belonging, with less than a quarter of children feeling that leaders listen to them[1] , while young people also want more opportunities to shape and lead what happens in their communities[2]. A decline in safe, free places to spend time has also left young people in England feeling less secure, supported and connected than a decade ago[3].
- Societal and political change, polarised perspectives, mean a library's role in providing access to free, accurate information and diverse stories remains critical
- Outdated perceptions and previous negative experiences of libraries can impact on how likely some children, young people and families are to visit

Challenges and opportunities for our charity

- Diversifying our charity's impact and programme delivery when competition for funding remains high
- Ensuring our membership (and support from library leaders) stays engaged, grows and finds value in our offer during a time of change
- Building our profile to develop strategic partnerships that advance our goals and grow our positive impact for members and children.

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[1] Children's Commissioner for England, (2024). *The Big Ambition: Ambitions, Findings and Solutions*. London: Children's Commissioner for England. Available at: Children's Commissioner Website.
[2] Department for Culture, Media and Sport, (2025), Youth Matters: Your National Youth Strategy. Available at: Gov.UK
[3] Morjaria, A. (2026) *"I feel quite unsettled and unsafe": Young people, belonging, and the broken promise of childhood*, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) blog. Available at: IPPR Articles

Our vision

Libraries for today's world where children and young people feel understood, empowered and inspired.

Our mission

In a world where children and young people need real-life connections and safe spaces, our mission is to harness vital support and resources to enable libraries to platform young voices.

We do this by co-creating vibrant, relevant and inclusive services, spaces and programmes that empower and inspire.

We are a values led charity

- We are **progressive**
- We are **kind**
- We are **inclusive**
- We are **aspirational**
- We are **collaborative**

Our strategic priorities



Activate

Platforming young voices with libraries locally, regionally and nationally



Energise

Connecting our networks to harness opportunities and overcome challenges



Develop

Enabling library services with knowledge, skills and inclusive practice



Champion

Advocating for high quality and inclusive children and young people's public libraries and school library services



Thriving charity

Securing a sustainable, dynamic future

Our approach to delivering change

Core strands of our strategy respond to the needs identified by our members:

Activate

There is significant support for a strategic shift toward platforming young voices, to better understand the changing needs of children and young people and shift agency to the next generation of library users.

Energise

Our networks and peer support are regularly sited as a valued benefit of Libraries Rising membership, informing our strategic goal to leverage our networks to maximise impact.

Develop

There is a clear demand for support to ensure specialist knowledge within the library workforce in areas like early years, inclusive practice and engaging young people, to ensure library staff feel equipped with the knowledge, skills and confidence to deliver high quality inclusive library services.

Champion

Our members call for louder advocacy and express a critical need for evidence at a local, regional and national level to demonstrate the value of public libraries for children, young people and families, and school library services.



Activate

Platforming young voices with libraries locally, regionally and nationally

By 2031:

- Every library service in England and Wales engages children, young people and families co-creatively to shape services, spaces and programmes
- Local library leaders and national stakeholders actively seek, hear, and advocate for the voices of children, young people and families to directly inform library policy
- Barriers experienced by children, young people and families are better understood and our programmes and partnership support libraries to respond
- Our charity is celebrated as an inclusion change maker in the sector; partners and library services proactively approach us to collaborate

We will:

- Extend the Youth Engagement Network to 90 local library services and create opportunities for young people to have a say nationally
- Secure funding to deliver programmes to pilot engagement, inclusive practice and tools across age groups and diverse lived experiences
- Develop information streams and research to highlight trends, views and needs of younger generations to the sector
- Co-create programmes that address the barriers children, young people and families experience in accessing the library
- Investigate demand for a training, consultation and strategy development offer for local library services (income generation potential)



Develop

Enabling library services with knowledge, skills and inclusive practice

By 2031:

- Public library services and school library services demonstrate leading practice in inclusive engagement and co-creation with children and young people
- Children and young people library offers in England and Wales are recognised internationally
- Library staff report they have the skills, confidence and knowledge to deliver inclusive engagement and respond to the changing needs of children, young people and families

We will:

- Centre the Children and Young People's Promise as our strategic delivery framework, mapped to a child's development milestones, key transitions, lived experiences and age ranges
- Create our prioritised development, evidence and activity roadmap, to inform bid pipeline and capacity building
- Embed a national training offer, securing funding to develop new resources
- Nurture partnerships to deliver unique high-quality training on needs, lived experiences and trends for library staff
- Co-create tools to support libraries to develop services, spaces and programmes to meet the emerging needs and expectations of children, young people and families



Energise

Connecting our networks to harness opportunities and overcome challenges

By 2031:

- All members are actively engaged – participating in training, networking and sharing issues and ideas to help direct and shape our work
- Our membership includes at least one active member in every public library service and school library service, while reaching the entire library workforce with our specialist services, training, and tools
- Our partnerships, alliances and networks deliver benefit and impact

We will:

- Adapt our membership model to changing local structures and delivery models
- Deliver a responsive membership experience that aligns our work with member needs and offers national professional development opportunities
- Support regional networks and celebrate member library services to extend our reach, activate all members, and strengthen engagement
- Strengthen Children's Promise and Universal Library Offers collaboration
- Connect our regional networks with other professional regional groups
- Maximise the Libraries and Early Years Partnership to increase parental engagement and secure libraries in the early childhood system



Champion

Advocating for high quality and inclusive children and young people's public libraries and school library services

By 2031:

- We are recognised as the national organisation that platforms the voices of children and young people on library issues that matter for them
- We are invited to speak publicly about issues affecting children, young people and families in public libraries, and the benefits of school library services
- Our members report the benefit of our evidence and advocacy

We will:

- Grow our influence, by developing productive connections with government, partners, and children and young people's organisations
- Work with partners to raise the profile of library services across age ranges and lived experiences, showcasing emergent practice and impact through collaborative case studies and strategic partnerships
- Secure funding to commission research, reports and toolkits that evidence the impact of libraries and school library services for babies, children and young people
- Build connections globally, to highlight international practice



Thriving charity

Securing a sustainable, dynamic future

By 2031, our charity is:

- Well-known, influential and respected
- Led by strong, diverse and inclusive governance
- Attracting, developing and retaining diverse talent
- Secure with sustainable income to be well-resourced
- Seen to lead the way with our approach to climate action as we develop our charity to be sustainable for the long term
- Known for shining a light on positive equity and inclusion practice

We will:

- Be flexible, learning from our experiences, and scaling up our work responsibly
- Establish effective systems and efficient ways of working
- Develop our team with expertise to grow and support the sector
- Involve children and young people authentically in our team and governance
- Demonstrate the value of our work to secure funding, ensuring financial stability and a range of income streams
- Make environmental sustainability central to how we operate, ensuring our charity minimises its impact on the planet
- Recognise and address inequality through our equity, diversity and inclusion practice
- Remain high profile to influence decision making at local, regional and national levels

Strategic partnerships

Partnerships remain an essential cornerstone in our ability to influence and deliver.

We will:

- Establish partnerships to progress our strategic goals
- Be deliberate in accepting and declining opportunities to achieve our goals

Our key stakeholders include:

- Member library services
- Children, young people and their families
- Heads of library services
- National sector partners, including Libraries Connected, CILIP, Schools Library Association
- Arts Council England as the development agency for libraries
- Government, including Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Department for Education
- Literacy charities, including BookTrust, The Reading Agency and National Literacy Trust
- Local government, including Local Government Association
- Education sector, including schools, higher education and further education
- Experts and organisations working with children and young people
- Funders and foundations
- Alliances and coalitions, including the Libraries Alliance.