

**SUFFOLK  
LIBRARIES**

# Creating positive wellbeing & making lives better

August 2020

**WHERE I  
BELONG**



## The changing role of library services

### WHERE I BELONG

The role of libraries within our communities has evolved over recent years. This change was even clearer - and the evolution even quicker - during lockdown as we have all adapted to new ways of living and working as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.

For Suffolk Libraries, this has meant changing how we deliver our services, and fresh approaches to connecting with our communities.

### Our Vision

Suffolk Libraries aims to provide safe, fun and inspiring places that:



EXPAND  
KNOWLEDGE



CONNECT  
PEOPLE



STIMULATE  
CREATIVITY



FOSTER A SENSE  
OF COMMUNITY

We believe that delivering this vision has a positive effect on people's wellbeing, helping to make their lives better. This approach has never been more important as we need to meet the challenges presented by a 'new normal' world.

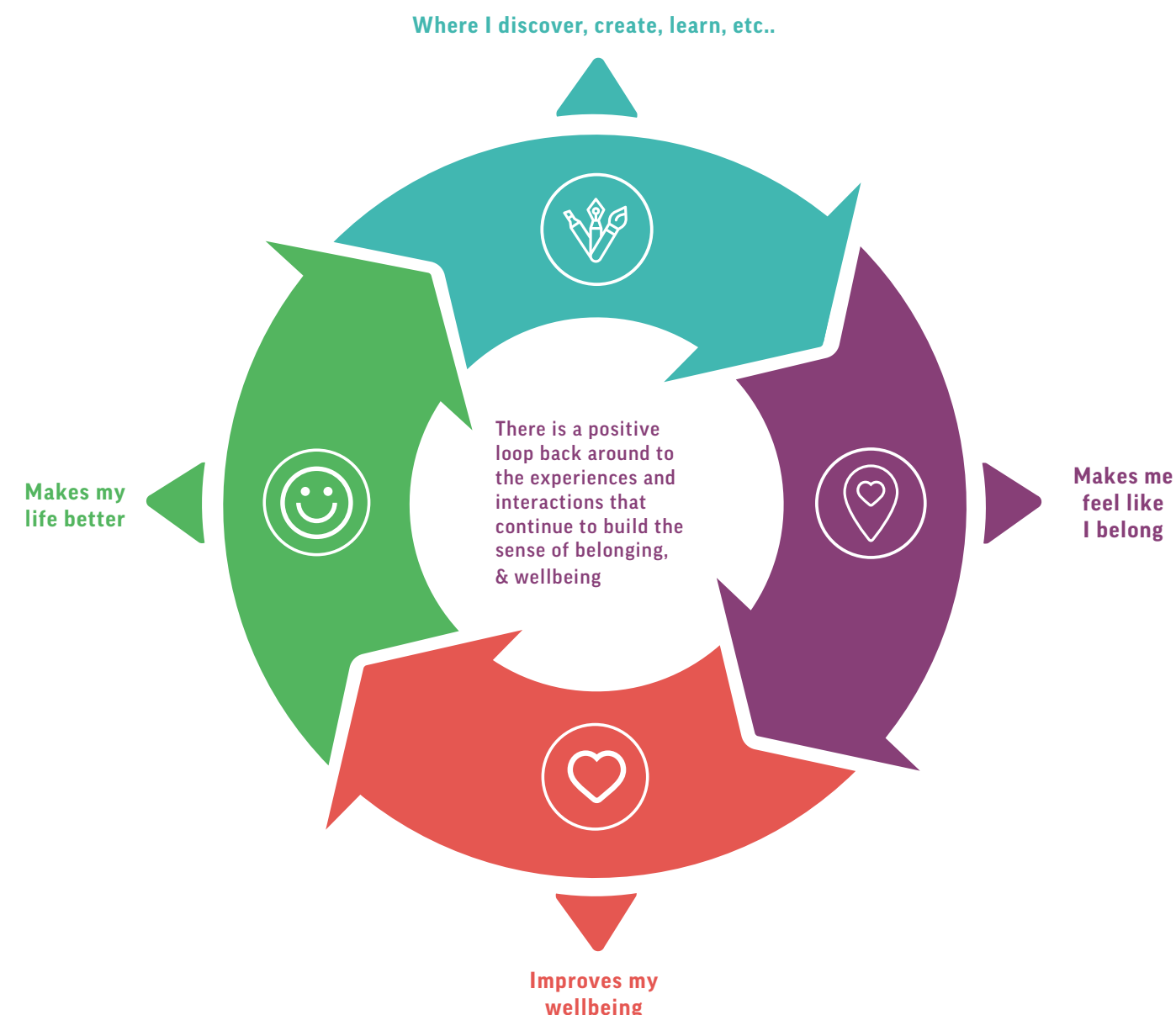
Our collaboration with Suffolk Mind has guided our thinking and approach, and the recent independent research by Moore Kingston Smith\* validates our approach.

This document provides some background to our philosophy, celebrates some great successes from across our network - both before, during, and after 'lockdown' - and paints a picture of how we see our services evolving in the near future.

\*Hereafter referred to as MKS Report



## The link between our services, wellbeing and a better life



As community hubs, libraries provide experiences and interaction - both in the physical place, but also virtually in the digital space - where customers can discover, create, learn, be entertained, connect, feel safe, and so much more.

These experiences and interactions create a sense of belonging and meet many of our basic emotional needs.

Suffolk Mind's model shows that meeting these emotional needs directly improves wellbeing and as a result makes our lives better.



# The social value of our services

## The big picture

WHERE I  
BELONG

“

Two nights ago I read my son a book in bed for the first time without him getting upset. You have helped him reach a very big milestone and I almost cried with happiness that I could read it to him. He was so happy and enjoying it too.

”

Mother, Mr Men Book Buddies Club,  
Lowestoft Library

This feedback is just one example of how we make life better for the people of Suffolk every day.

The MKS Report\* found that every £1 spent on three key Suffolk Libraries services creates £8.04 in ‘social value’ and that these activities alone generate just under £2m of social value every year.

Social value is a way of identifying the value of change that individuals experience – in this case through their engagement with three of Suffolk Libraries’ services. Methods of valuation include how much a service would cost if someone had to pay for it themselves or the money it potentially saves other organisations.

This value has only been attributed to three of our many services and provides telling insight into the power and social impact of libraries.

The study also found that the three activities create **£284,000** worth of social value for the NHS every year.



£1 spent on  
3 of our  
services  
creates



£8.04 in social value:  
equivalent to £2 million per year  
& £284,000 for the NHS



# Celebrating our success 2019/20 in numbers

WHERE I  
BELONG



We are proud to say that the use of our services has increased significantly year on year for the past four years. We've seen huge growth in attendance at our events, activities and experiences as well as the use of our eLibrary services. This positive trajectory far outweighs the national trend of fewer physical books being borrowed.

During the Covid-19 'lockdown' period between March and July, our digital reach and connectivity with the community rose dramatically. The introduction of streamed sessions, befriending calls and podcasts - to name but a few - captured the imagination of the people of Suffolk.



# Supporting the wellbeing of children and families

## WHERE I BELONG

Libraries provide a fun and nurturing environment for young children to explore with colourful books and Wordplay activities which bring families together and start children on their reading journey.

“ I have twins and it can be daunting finding sessions which are suitable for us as I don't have any free hands! It is a really enjoyable and lovely session. The twins now love songs and books and I am convinced it is because of these sessions. It helps us feel part of the community.

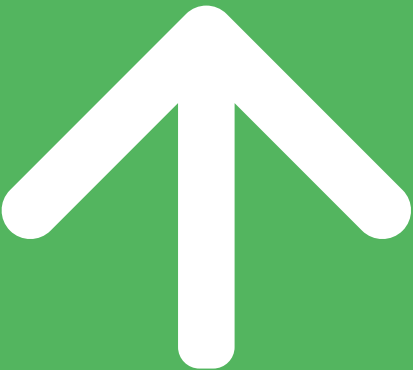
“ My child has grown in confidence interacting with other children during our time in this group. The action songs are developing her coordination and physical skills as well as her language (speech) and counting. It's also encouraging her love of books.

“ We had been locked down as a family with two children under 5. We were regular library users and 'super fans' of Charlotte the librarian at Southwold! Both children attended the tot rock and baby bounce sessions before lockdown and when all normality ceased, I cannot explain how reassuring it was to join in with Charlotte and sing nursery rhymes with my children. The children responded to seeing a familiar facedaily, at a time when their world had shrunk unimaginably. Summed up in a sentence - it's been a lifeline..



Key outcomes from attending Baby Bounce and Tot Rock early years sessions\*

\*MKS report



Improvements in:

- Speech & communication skills
- Literacy and social skills
- Parent – child relationships
- Opportunities for parents to access help and emotional support



## Making life better for young people

### WHERE I BELONG

Suffolk Libraries is a National Portfolio Organisation which means our Arts Council-funded BLOC programme (building libraries on creativity), engaging young people, is of national significance.

The Arts Programme team were also busy during lockdown creating podcasts and online workshops. Suffolk Libraries now hosts a new resource to help people find quality online arts and cultural activities.

Feedback from Abi Hirst, English Teacher at Felixstowe Academy on the BLOC Felixstowe.docx writing project:

“

It has honestly made my year working with you. You had such a positive impact on so many students' lives. Two are going to enter a poetry competition, one is so confident and contributing intelligent ideas in lessons and one is thinking about pursuing creative writing as a career.

“

”

I have really noticed a change in J's motivation and attitude since he has been being supported on a weekly basis. When I first met him, he was not very open to new ideas and he is now saying that he will give things a try. I cannot stress how much of a change this is. Having the Arts Award sessions gave him a sense of purpose and a reason to leave the house.

”

More of our libraries have been running arts activities and there is now a Suffolk Libraries youth council. BLOC has also been involved with a range of regional events including the likes of **Suffolk Pride**, **FILMFEAST** and **First Light Festival**.



### FIRST LIGHT FESTIVAL



Suffolk Libraries is a National Portfolio Organisation which means our **Arts Council-funded BLOC programme**, engaging young people, is of **national significance**.

**Over 1,400** young  
people engaged in  
activities during the  
first year of the project



## Keeping our older residents connected, active and supported

### WHERE I BELONG

Our libraries play a vital role in the lives of many older people in Suffolk. Loneliness and social isolation can be a big issue in a largely rural county with an ageing population, and our range of activities and groups – as well as just being there to listen – make a real difference in their lives.

“

One of our elder residents comes in every day – for her the library is her sanctuary – a place where she feels safe and where she can enjoy some social contact.

”

Library Manager Long Melford

“

We have a customer who requires a lot of emotional support as she is in the early stages of dementia and can become quite distressed. She forgets things, becomes very anxious and has also developed an eating disorder. We have supported her to seek help which she has now done. We have had organisations who can provide help to such people – including Wiltshire Farm Foods who provide meals to people – deliver a Top Time session.

”

From a staff member



The MKS Report\* found that our sessions have the following benefits:

- Combatting social isolation by helping people to make new friends and providing access to better emotional and practical support
- Learning new skills or developing existing skills – keeping the mind active
- Better mental and physical health
- Improving happiness and wellbeing

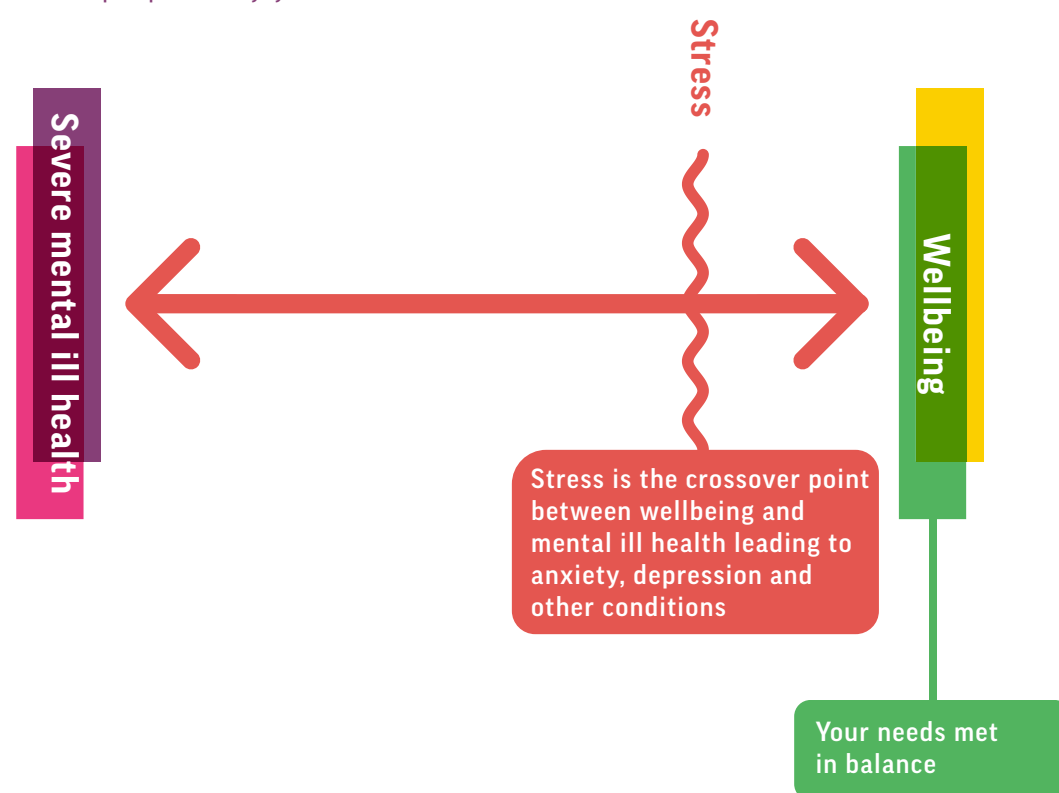
**Top Time is a range of activities including exercise, craft, quizzes and more aimed at the over 55s. In 2019/20 we saw **32,700** attendances at our sessions for older people – connecting nearly **630** people every week.**



## Positive wellbeing at the heart of our vision

### WHERE I BELONG

We have worked closely with Suffolk Mind to explore how – and to what extent – the different services we provide can meet a person's emotional needs. Meeting these basic needs ensures that positive wellbeing is maintained. The connections, networks and services provided by our libraries play a key role in this process for thousands of people every year.



The Suffolk Libraries New Chapters service provides events and information to support mental health and wellbeing.



<sup>^</sup>2019/20 data



Open Space sessions are run in eight libraries and offer a relaxed environment where people can drop in as they see fit. The MKS Report\* found that members of these groups benefited from many positive outcomes:

- Reduced isolation and loneliness
- Reduced feelings of depression and anxiety
- Less chance of relapse in substance abuse and other psychological disorders
- Opportunity to try and learn new things
- Improved social networks and making new friends
- Improved sense of purpose and sense of self-worth.

New Chapters also supports other projects, such as Pride & Periods; providing free sanitary items in libraries, and Move It! which enables customers to loan sports equipment.

“

I've witnessed the impact that it has had for people from all walks of life. I spoke with various people who told me about how Open Space has changed their life.

”

Rachel Temple of mental health research charity McPin Foundation.

“

Open Space allows for people to view themselves in a much more positive way, as a human being, rather than a stigma or incurable disease/illness.

”

An Open Space group member



## Thriving during lockdown evolving our services

### WHERE I BELONG

Like all organisations, we had to learn how to adapt to a 'new world' and find new ways to reach out to our communities to keep them connected and supported. Given our focus on Wellbeing, and our understanding of the issues surrounding social isolation, we recognised that there was an opportunity – and a need – to offer new services and think outside the box. This led to some heroic actions by our staff and volunteers:

Staff at Gainsborough Community Library have worked alongside a local foodbank preparing and delivering food parcels to over **250 families** every week.

Members of our team set up and delivered the Suffolk Lifeline telephone and email support services, making around **8,000 calls** during 'lockdown' and beyond.

Jackie Harman, a volunteer at Capel St Mary library has been a true '**guardian angel**' to elderly residents at Dove Close independent living, working tirelessly to improve the lives of the residents.

“

I was absolutely amazed by the kindness of them

”

This was a comment from 102 year old Doris Bugg after staff at Ipswich County library recorded their own audiobook of a novel from her childhood to help keep her upbeat during lockdown.



Access to our digital content grew dramatically during the lockdown period as the figures below show. We expect this trend to continue into the future, alongside our other new services, which are designed to give customers choice over how they connect with us.

eMagazines &  
eNewspapers

Issues read  
**327,400**

music, film and  
Youtube views

**12,500**

eBooks &  
eAudio issues

**137,800**



## Celebrating our Team

### WHERE I BELONG

At the end of the day, it is our Team that makes us successful. Throughout this document we have highlighted examples of their selfless effort, energy and compassion.

Our culture is defined by our values - the things we believe in and live by. Our values are:

- Welcoming & helpful
- Knowledgeable
- Passionate and dedicated
- Empathetic
- Creative
- Resilient

There's no doubt that these values are more than words on paper, the stories shared here and the many more that exist demonstrate how as a Team we live these values every day.

We couldn't mention our Team without saying a huge thank you to our tireless volunteers and friends who make such a difference to the services we provide - our annual volunteer awards ceremony is a chance for us to celebrate the immense effort and contribution they make.





## The importance of partnerships

### WHERE I BELONG

Suffolk Libraries has partnerships with dozens of organisations across Suffolk and beyond. Being at the heart of the community we offer a natural place to share, collaborate and connect.

The power of these partnerships is clear by their impact on those who benefit from them. Some of our current partners include:

- **Suffolk County Council** who support the delivery of our core offer as well as the **SAGES** (Suffolk, Advice, Guidance & Emotional Support) partnership alongside **Suffolk Family Carers** and **Suffolk Mind**
- **NSFT** who support the delivery of our perinatal programme 'Me, Myself and Baby' as well as weekly wellbeing drop in **Open Space** alongside **Suffolk Mind**, **Julian Support** and the **Richmond Fellowship**
- **East of England Co-op** who support our Lifeline telephone service as well as **Pride and Periods** alongside **Pink Parcel** and **Bloody Good Period**
- **Barclays Bank** who provide in-branch consultations for their customers and who have recently donated screens for our libraries to protect staff
- **East Suffolk Council** and **Babergh and Mid-Suffolk** who both provide information services at a number of our branches
- **Sopra Steria** who support the delivery of UK visas and immigration via Ipswich County Library
- **Coffeelink** who provide fine coffee
- **Home-Start Suffolk** who we work with to provide access to digital devices for families in their homes
- **People Plus** who we work with to run 10 prison libraries across England
- **4YP** who help run youth-focused groups at Gainsborough Library

Our sincere thanks go out to all those who have supported us to make life better for people across Suffolk and beyond.

## Conclusion



We are constantly working to challenge people's perceptions of libraries.

By showing how we make an impact we hope that more people will understand the crucial role our service plays in making lives better.

The more people that engage with us, visit and use our services or want to work with us and support us, the stronger we will be in the future and the more we can contribute to Suffolk life.

For further reading you can access the **Suffolk Libraries Impact Report** by Moore Kingston Smith and the **Suffolk Libraries Strategy summary**. Both documents are available from our website.



## How we make a difference In words

### WHERE I BELONG

“

Setting up a Manga Club with the support of the library and Friends of Thurston Library has increased my confidence immensely and helped me improve my organisational skills. I also get to work with the Thurston community and encourage children and young adults to be more creative and express themselves through art. I think it's a great space to put your ideas into practice.

”

“

A customer asked me about computer courses, so I told her about our drop-in days on Thursdays and Fridays and the Realise Futures Courses. She was tearful and on chatting further she said that she needed IT help as her husband had died recently and he had done all the internet banking etc. She also confessed that after years of being a couple she was finding it hard to do things solo. I gave her details of the courses and discussed the various library groups as a way to get out and meet new people. She contacted me a few days ago to say thank me for helping her. The lady has since become a valued member of a local group and they attended the Tales from Your Table group at the library before lockdown.

”

“

The customer said that the call was a lovely surprise and had made her day! She was chatty and we talked about the support she was getting. She said she was 80% ok, and this was such a wonderful thing that Suffolk Libraries were doing. She wanted another call from us as she does not speak to anyone much.

”

“

Suffolk Libraries run some fantastic initiatives for our communities, some of which we have been pleased to be able to support. This is a brilliant example of an organisation adapting their services to meet the needs of those who are being impacted by the current situation.

”

Niall O'Keeffe, Joint Chief Executive of the East of England Co-op

“

I feel I need to raise your awareness of what an amazing job the staff of Lowestoft library are doing to engage with the community and brighten people's day during what are trying and unsettling times. The hard work and dedication shown by the staff has never ceased to amaze me. Every day during lockdown I log onto social media and am entertained by the staff members.

”

From a letter to Peter Aldous, MP for Lowestoft

“

The Suffolk Lifeline calls have been a pleasure and it's lovely to keep in touch with the customers and feel you have made a difference to them. Some are just pleased that we are thinking of them, some have welcomed the chance to talk to a friendly voice and some have specific concerns and questions we can answer.

”

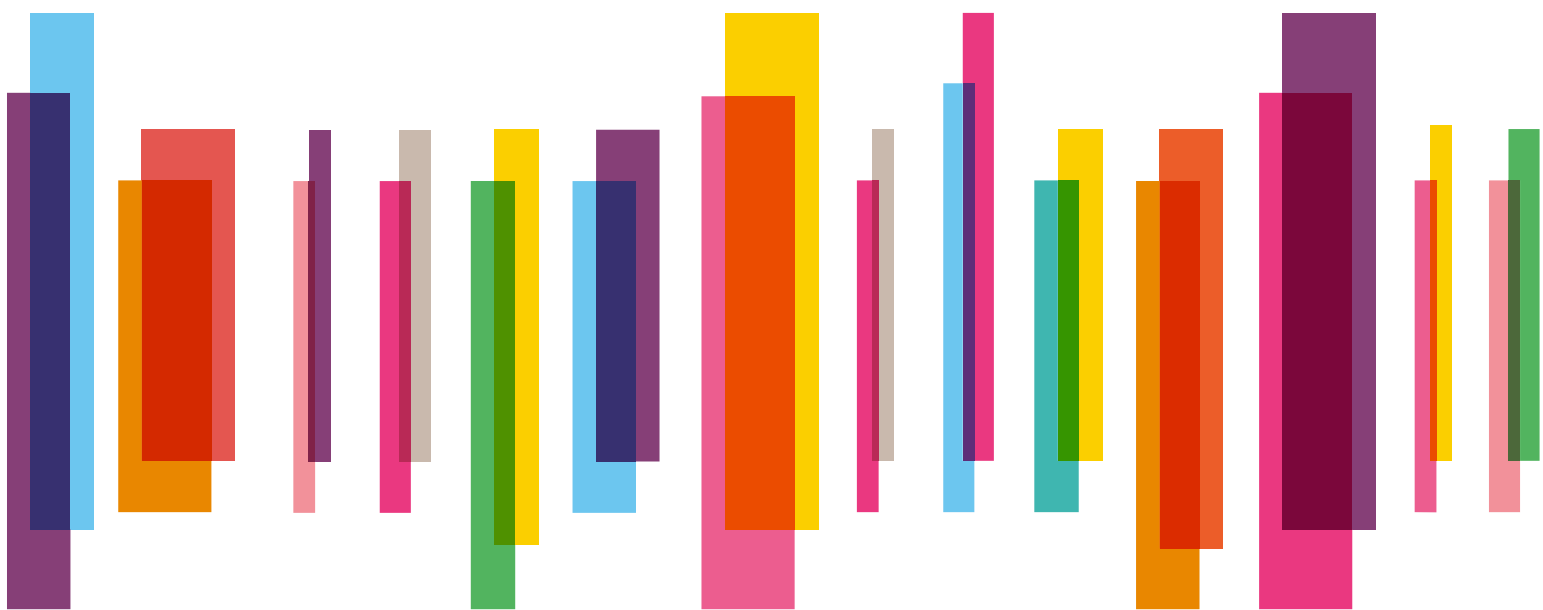
Southwold Library manager Charlotte Clark on making Lifeline calls during lockdown





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# WHERE I BELONG



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