

'The Library is open': creating safe working environments for LGBTQ+ library employees and marketing supportive LGBTQ+ services

Date: 17-18 August 2023

Location: Government of the Netherlands, The Hague, The Netherlands

Let's library – Lund Public Library for all!

Catharina Isberg

Lund Public Library, Lund, Sweden

E-mail address: catharina.isberg@lund.se

Emma Karlsson

Lund Public Library, Lund, Sweden

E-mail address: emma.karlsson@lund.se

Karin Morwing

Lund Public Library, Lund, Sweden

E-mail address: karin.morwing@lund.se

Eleonor Pavlov

Lund Public Library, Lund, Sweden

E-mail address: eleonor.pavlov@lund.se

Queenie Van

Lund Public Library, Lund, Sweden

E-mail address: queenie.van@lund.se

Hanna Zander

Lund Public Library, Lund, Sweden

E-mail address: hanna.zander@lund.se



Copyright © 2023 by Isberg, Karlsson, Morwing, Pavlov, Van and Zander. This work is made available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

Abstract:

Libraries for all start with the staff. Everyone working in the library enables and creates conditions for the library to be welcoming, inclusive and a possibility maker – internally and externally. In Lund public libraries, our focus on LGBTQ+ is part of this work since 2017.

There are three important key points to making this practice work: it is strategic and well structured, includes all staff and has the support of the management.

Keywords: LGBTQ; public libraries; Human resources policies and practices; management; inclusion

LUND PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR ALL!



On a strategic level, the work with LGBTQ+ is indeed intertwined with the purpose of the library as such. We all should work on democracy and human rights as well as accessibility. The LGBTQ+ work is part of, and in line with this. The library also has other prioritized groups, such as national minorities or people with disabilities and sometimes visitors are part of several prioritized groups at once. It is clear for both staff and visitors that the library is focusing on LGBTQ+, and it is included in the business plan, the action plans and part of every project and initiative.

Everyone is working on it! There is a working group that has the strategic view

and reports to one of the members of the library management team, but everyone in the library staff makes the LGBTQ+ work part of their daily work. All staff have been taking courses to increase their knowledge about LGBTQ+ and this is also updated on a yearly basis. When someone new joins the staff, there is a mandatory course followed by a group discussion.

There are also folders and flyers available which are used for both internal and public use, covering how the library works with this.

In 2017 a decision was made on making the library LGBTQI certified by RFSL (The Swedish federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex rights). For the continuous work the management decisions and the management support have been key, in addition the support and work from the staff has been and is of high importance.

The RFSL certification was a starting point for the Lund library work with LGBTQ+. It resulted in developing the library service, the work environment as well as the welcoming and treatment of our library patrons. The work is visible in how we treat our patrons and each other, how we sort our collections, what activities and programs we offer, as well as what we communicate and market – both in our locations and in print and social media.

One example of how we work in practice with LGBTQ+, is that we display LGBTQ+ books visibly in the library space. We are trying to have an up-to-date stock of books, that we present in what we call “rainbow shelves”. In our main library we have two “rainbow shelves”, and the smaller libraries all share a shelf that rotates between them (except for two libraries that wished to have their own, fixed shelves). There is a symbolic value in keeping the shelves visible, but the books available on the “rainbow shelves” can also be found on our “ordinary”



shelves. Moreover, we work with meta data in our library catalog in order to easily find tips of books for visitors, pre-schools and schools.



Rainbow shelves.

Another example of how we prioritize LGBTQ+, is that all libraries have visible rainbow flags that are a permanent part of the furnishing (I.e. we do not pick them down at any time, for example before elections or debates). The staff has been informed about what to answer if visitors question the flags. We also have rainbow stickers on our name tags and some of us also have a rainbow lanyard.



The LGBTQ+ work group can also help to answer or support if there are specific questions or incidents regarding LGBTQ+. As a reminder to our staff, we also keep “notes” on the walls of our mutual staff spaces (staff room, elevators etc.) that we all have been educated to welcome and include *everyone*. This, of course, also applies to the treatment between us, the colleagues.

Among the public programs with LGBTQ+ theme that we have offered our visitors over the last year, we can mention: a book club for adolescents, Drag story hour (drag queens reading fairytales for kids) and a writer who talk about her life as a trans woman. The libraries also try to have their “queer glasses” on when booking and planning programs, so that there is a broad variety of public programs of which at least some amount some has a LGBTQ+ connection.

Our work is connected to others, both within the municipality and with non-profit organizations. We are a part of the Pride celebrations in Lund, as well as visiting the local meeting place for LGBTQ+ teenagers, Q-hänget. On these occasions, we do pop-ups where we provide activities, book tips and information about the library's services.

As well as seeing our work connected to others for our visitors, we also see great value in being connected to other libraries in different networks. We have had several libraries from other parts of Skåne visiting us to talk about the work that we do with LGBTQ+ issues, and we have been able to learn from each other. We see great strength for us in discussing these things with libraires throughout all of Sweden, to be inspired to do the work that is purposeful for our staff as well as our visitors.

One of the more important networks Lund Library are a part of is the Swedish Library Association's network for LGBTQ+. As part of this work, one of our staff was a cowriter of a guide for LGBTQ+ in libraries. Giving and sharing advice, thoughts and experiences, the purpose of the guide was to serve as inspiration for everyone active in the library sector. The guide is important to point out that LGBTQ+ is something we should all work on and can be used at different libraries regardless of how far you have developed this work. <https://www.biblioteksforeningen.se/rapporter/guide-for-working-with-lgbtq-issues-in-the-library/>

What's next? Since the RFSL certification in 2017, a huge amount of work has been going on. The certification was just the starting point for structured and strategic work including all staff and all services. During 2023 we are preparing for our next phase; in 2024 we will begin a new chapter looking into new ways of deepening the work even more. Every part and phase of this work serves its purpose.

Libraries are open to all. The services should reflect the needs of the local community and should become even better at providing an arena for spontaneous and planned meetings between people, between people and technology as well as between people and information and knowledge.

We will continue to do our best to keep Lund Libraries open, inclusive and welcoming for everyone – as well as a safe working space for our colleagues. Throughout this work, the library continues to be a strategically important part of the city's development work and we provide great libraries for today's and tomorrow's residents.

Let's continue to library, Lund Public Library for all!



Reminders in mutual staff spaces about that we have been educated to welcome everyone.

“We have been educated to ensure that all visitors and staff feel welcomed, seen and respected at the library, regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, or any other basis of discrimination. We work long term with our attitudes, reception, and practice to reach our goal as an inclusive environment.”



FURTHER READING:

- Web information, LGBTQ+ work at Lund Public Libraries:
<https://folkbiblioteken.lund.se/hbtq-certifiering>
- Action Plan LGBTQ+ Lund Public Libraries (in swedish: "[Handlingsplan HBTQI Folkbiblioteken i Lund](#)")
- Guidelines, Swedish Library Association:
<https://www.biblioteksforeningen.se/rapporter/guide-for-working-with-lgbtq-issues-in-the-library/>

BIO – PARTICIPANTS AND AUTHORS

Catharina Isberg: As Library Director at Lund Public Libraries, Catharina is actively working on developing the library services to best meet the needs of the community on both local, regional, national and international level. Important in this work is to continuously work on the work environment, staff resilience and creating a diverse and welcoming atmosphere. As former Library Director in Helsingborg City, Catharina has during the last 10 years been involved in different initiatives to develop the library services as well as creating an inclusive, healthy and resilient workplace. Since 2011 Catharina has been active in IFLA in different sections (CPDWL and Management & Marketing). From August 2023 Catharina is a member of the Europe Regional Division. During 2019-2021 Catharina served as Division Chair and on IFLA Governing Board, IFLA Congress Advisory Committee and Professional Committee. Nationally she is a member of the Swedish Library Association Governing Board. Catharina also has a past in both a pharmaceutical industry library and a university library.

Emma Karlsson: Librarian at Lund Public Libraries working with children and the library bus in the digital and mobile department. Since 2020 member of the LBGTQ-working group at Lund Libraries

Karin Morwing: Librarian at Lund Public Libraries working with literature mediation, reading promotion and program activities in the city library. Since 2020 member of the LBGTQ-working group at Lund Libraries

BIO – AUTHORS

Eleonor Pavlov: Librarian at Lund Public Libraries working mainly with purchasing and cataloging children's books. Since 2016 member of the LBGTQ-working group at Lund Libraries. Co-writer of the Swedish Library Association's "A Guide for Working with LBGTQ+ Issues in the Library". Speaker at World Library and Information Congress 2021 on "International Guidelines for LBGTQ+ Library Resources and Services".

Queenie Van: Librarian at Lund Public Libraries working with children ages 0-12 in the department of district libraries. Since 2023 member of the LBGTQ-working group at Lund Libraries.

Hanna Zander: Developer at Lund Public Libraries working with digital inclusion and the library bus in the digital and mobile department. Since 2019 member of the LBGTQ-working group at Lund Libraries.