

Belonging from the beginning

Supporting inclusive early years practice in libraries



Hybrid conference: May 12th 2026

 **BookingsPlus**

 **Peters**

 Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

**Libraries
RISING**

Welcome



Welcome to our Libraries Rising conference: *Belonging from the Beginning: Supporting inclusive early years practice in libraries.*



Tabitha Witherick- Macaulay
Chief Executive

I'm really pleased to welcome you to our Libraries Rising annual conference. Whether you're joining us in person or online, we're excited that, following feedback from our members, this is our first hybrid conference. Opening up our conference in this way means we can include more colleagues from public libraries, Schools Library Services, education and early years settings, and make the day accessible to as many people as possible.



The first five years of a child's life shape so much of what comes next.

It feels especially important, in this National Year of Reading, to take this time to come together, deepen our understanding of how we support every child from the start, and reflect on the lasting impact of our work.

This year's conference focuses on immersive learning, giving you the chance not just to listen but to actively engage with ideas and with each other. You'll explore topics that are not always discussed in early years practice, opening up conversations on inclusive practice, the voice of the baby, mental health and wellbeing, and anti-racism practice.

Today is also an opportunity to look ahead. The discussions you take part in, the ideas you share, and the connections you make all have the power to help shape the future of early years practice in libraries, to ensure every child feels **Belonging from the Beginning.**

Thank you,

Tabitha



About the day



This year's Libraries Rising conference brings together colleagues from across public libraries, Schools Library Services, early years settings and education to explore and strengthen inclusive practice in early years.

The focus of the day is on immersive learning and has been designed to give you the opportunity to share ideas, as well as time and space to reflect, engage, and take away approaches you can use directly in your own service and organisations.

Accessibility and inclusion

We are committed to making our conference inclusive and accessible.

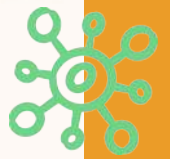
- Hybrid format to support wider access and participation
- Live online participation includes interactive Q&A, discussion space and shared engagement tools
- All sessions have been designed to encourage accessible and inclusive engagement
- If you have any specific access requirements, there is space to detail this when you book your tickets
- A supportive team will be available throughout the day to assist in-person and online delegates



I think it was the best conference I've ever attended. I loved the variety of topics, very interesting and inspiring speakers. Lots of ideas, my head is spinning. Also fantastic time keeping! Well done to everyone involved.

2025 Conference attendee

Our code of conduct



We want everyone to feel welcome, safe, and valued at our conference.

Respect and dignity: We ask that all participants treat each other with kindness and respect, no matter background, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, or ability.

Inclusion: Together, we will create an online environment that is supportive, friendly, and free from harassment, discrimination, hate speech, or bullying. Everyone's voice and contribution are valued.

Professionalism: We encourage everyone to follow event instructions, schedules, and guidelines to help the day run smoothly.

Thank you,

The Libraries Rising team



Conference agenda

9:30 AM-
10:00 AM

Arrival

Tea, coffee and networking
Online attendees: can join early, say hello in the chat, and get comfortable!

10:00 AM-
10:10 AM

Welcome

Tabitha Witherick- Macaulay Chief Executive, Libraries Rising

10:10 AM-
10:15 AM

Introducing BookingsPlus

10:15AM-
11:15 AM

Inclusive practice in early years libraries: Interactive workshop

Alison Heseltine and Louise Campbell White,
Early Years Alliance

11:15 AM-
11:35AM

Break: Cake and conversation

Online attendees can join a shared virtual whiteboard space to network, share ideas and connect with others.

11:35 AM-
1:05 PM

Listening to the voice of the baby: Interactive workshop

Amy Hall-Gibson, Starcatchers

1:05 PM-
1:45 PM

Lunch and meeting exhibitors

1:45 PM-
2:15 PM

Defining mental health and wellbeing in early years

Guest speaker: Dr Alice Haynes, Anna Freud

2:15 PM-
2:55 PM

Anti-racist practice in the early years

Guest speaker: Shaddai Tembo

2:55 PM-
3:10 PM

Break: Cake and conversation

Online attendees can join a shared virtual whiteboard space to network, share ideas and connect with others.

3:10 PM-
3:50 PM

The future of early years: Collaborative workshop

Mark Rooney, Deputy Director, Best Start Family Policy, Department of Education

3:50PM-
4:00 PM

Reflections and close

Tabitha Witherick-Macaulay Chief Executive, Libraries Rising



Plan your day



Joining in person

Arriving and getting started

- Staying the night before? You're very welcome to join the Libraries Rising team for an informal get together at All bar One, New Street Station, Smallbrook Queensway, Birmingham B2 4QE, from 6:00pm
- Arriving by train: The Studio, Birmingham is just a 5-minute walk from Birmingham New Street station
- Arriving by car: The closest car parks are NCP Birmingham High Street, B4 7LN, Birmingham Snow Hill Station Car Park, B3 2BJ
- Please arrive between 9:30–10:00 to sign-in, grab a coffee and ease into the day with our informal welcome activity
- Your tickets will have been sent in advance to your email

Refreshments

- Our coffee and cake breaks are a chance to share ideas and build relationships whilst enjoying a slice of homemade cake
- Enjoy a 2-course buffet lunch, prepared freshly on site, using seasonal veg tables.

Meeting our Exhibitors

- Throughout the day, you'll be able to meet our exhibitors, who will be sharing children's titles, early years resources, library design ideas, and inspiration for more inclusive spaces.



Joining online

Joining and getting started

- Your joining link will be sent to you by email
- Feel free to join from 9:30 and say hello to other attendees

Getting involved

- The day will be streamed via our YouTube channel
- Feel free to use the chat function to join discussions and workshops
- Share your ideas using the interactive whiteboard
- There's no need to be on camera unless you'd like to



Meeting our Exhibitors

- During arrival and lunch a slideshow will be showcasing all our exhibitors, who will be sharing the latest children's titles, early years resources, library design ideas, and inspiration for more inclusive spaces.

Our Speakers



Dr Shaddai Tembo: Bath Spa University
Anti-racist practice in the early years



Dr Alice Haynes: Anna Freud
Early childhood mental health



Amy Hall-Gibson: Starcatchers
Listening to the voice of the baby



Louise Campbell and Alison Heseltine: Early Years Alliance
Inclusive practice in early years libraries



Conference topics



Dr Shaddai Tembo: Bath Spa University

Anti-racist practice in the Early Years: Dr Shaddai Tembo is a Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Studies at Bath Spa University and an independent speaker with Critical Early Years. During his session, he will share insight into anti-racist practice when working with young children, with space for reflection and discussion. Drawing on his work in early childhood studies, he'll explore how anti-racist thinking can shape everyday practice and share practical ideas you can apply in your own library setting.

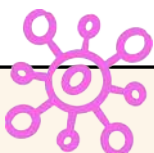


Louise Campbell and Alison Heseltine: Early Years Alliance

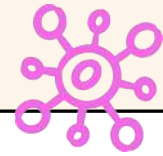
Inclusive practice in Early Years libraries:: How do we ensure our youngest children and their families can feel that a library is a space they truly belong in? This interactive session explores what inclusive practice looks like in early years library provision, with a focus on challenging stereotypes and supporting children and families with diverse needs, identities and experiences.

Together, we'll examine practical, meaningful ways libraries can embed early years inclusion, from creating sensory-friendly environments and supporting children with SEND, to representing diverse cultures, gender identities and family structures in resources and interactions. We'll consider how small changes can have a big impact on children's confidence, comfort and sense of belonging

Led by Alison Heseltine, Early Years Development Manager for the Early Years Alliance and Louise Campbell White, Early Years Development Officer for the Early Years Alliance.



Conference topics



Amy Hall-Gibson: Starcatchers

Listening to the voice of the baby

Starcatchers Amy Hall- Gibson will lead a practical, creative 1.5 hour session exploring Voice of the baby.

This session will be creative and hands-on exploring Starcatchers' Voice of the Baby approach, including engagement signals and schematic play. Discover how creative experiences can help us better understand babies' communication and perspectives.



Dr Alice Haynes: Anna Freud

Early childhood mental health: Dr Alice Haynes is Head of Implementation in Anna Freud's Clinical division. She has over 10 years' experience of working in perinatal and early years research, policy and practice, including roles at the NSPCC and as national development manager for the National Lottery Community Fund's strategic programme, A Better Start. She holds a PhD in social work and psychology.


She will explore what we mean by mental health in the early years, and to outline what 'good' mental health looks like. Highlight positive and negative impacts on early mental health, with data on babies and young children experiencing poor mental health, along with highlighting the types of mental health support and services available to babies and families. She will also explore why library staff are so important in supporting families and children in their early years, with signposting to resources where attendees can learn more.



The future of early years



The final session of the day you'll have the opportunity to be a part of a collaborative conversation about the future of early years, sharing ideas and learning from each other.



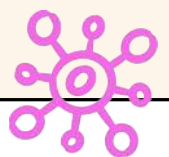
Department for Education

Marc Rooney, Deputy Director,
Best Start Family Policy,
Department for Education,

Marc Rooney, Deputy Director, Best Start Family Policy, Department for Education, will open the conversation by sharing the wider direction of early years support and what it means for libraries and those working with children and families.

‘Giving every child the best start in life’ outlines the government strategy for how the government will improve child development and ensure that all children have the chance to achieve and thrive. With the ambition that 75% of 5 year olds in England have a good level of development by 2028.

Children’s North East will also be featuring as part of our future of early years discussions. They will be encouraging you to consider new perspectives about designing library services with poverty-proofing in mind.



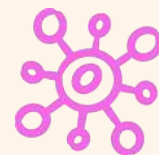
Poverty Proofing Children's North East



Poverty Proofing®

Children North East exists because growing up can be hard. We create life-changing differences for babies, children and young people in their families, schools and communities. Children North East deliver services, support and initiatives that provide a platform for children, young people and families to work through issues, take action and provide them with the tools to reach their full potential. These include therapeutic services, mental health support, youth work, family support, domestic abuse services, community-based support, consultations with young people and Poverty Proofing®.

Introducing BookingsPlus



We're delighted that BookingsPlus are our headline sponsor for this year's conference.

If you've ever tried to explain the value of a library, it becomes clear that it's not always about what's on the shelves. It's about how a space feels, how easy it is to use, and whether people feel confident enough to walk through the door in the first place.

That focus on access and creating a welcoming experience from the very first interaction is one of the reasons we're really pleased to be partnering with BookingsPlus.

BookingsPlus works with library services, local authorities and schools across the UK to make spaces easier to access and use. Their venue hire software allows people to find, book and pay for library spaces online, helping services open up to their communities while also generating income and reducing admin time.



Their virtual tours are a big part of why we're excited about this partnership. These tours allow people to explore a library remotely, understand the layout and find key services in advance. For some users, including those who benefit from knowing what to expect, that sense of familiarity can make all the difference. It can turn a space from something uncertain into something welcoming.



Introducing Peters



Peters are delighted to be sponsoring the Libraries Rising Conference: Belonging from the Beginning on 12 May 2026 as they come to our patch here in Birmingham!

Our librarians work with public libraries, School Library Services, schools and early years settings to promote reading from a very young age and help you get the best books into the hands of children. Our team read and review thousands of newly published children's and teen books every year, so we can support you in selecting the best, high-quality, diverse and inclusive stock for young readers. We also provide a wealth of reader development support, from book lists and recommendations curated by our team to free promotional materials to enhance your book displays.



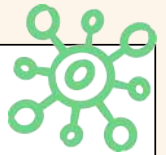
Bespoke design and furniture for libraries

It's not just the books – we also provide high-quality, sustainable furniture for libraries and educational settings, designed to help you create the best book displays for borrowers of all ages. We offer a bespoke free library design service to revamp your library and help you make reading an appealing activity for all, where our designers will visit you on site to discuss your plans for the space, or work from photographs and dimensions to bring your vision to life.



Email library.services@peters.co.uk to find out more and request a visit.

Our exhibitors



[Find out more](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Facebook](#)

Play matters. That's why Boromi - ('borrow-me') - are building a national, non-profit Network of Play. Through their evidence-based and multi-award-winning early years Play Libraries, Boromi are working in partnership with educational and community settings across the UK to empower parents with children from 0-5+ years to nurture early language and development through playing and talking together.



Hachette Schools brings pupils, teachers and librarians closer to brilliant Hachette Children's Group books and authors.

Our extensive list of titles ranges from fantastic non-fiction that supports the curriculum, to well-loved authors including Cressida Cowell, Kes Gray, David Almond, Patrice Lawrence, Dermot O'Leary, Francesca Simon, Matthew Syed. Visit our Catalogues page to find out more.

[Find out more](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Facebook](#)

Here you can discover a wealth of free resources for new and well-loved books, specially written to support the curriculum and encourage discussion in the classroom or library, and hear about all the latest news and competitions.

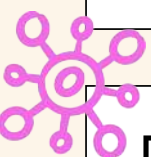


SIMON & SCHUSTER

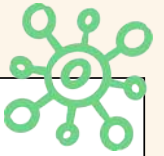
[Find out more](#)

[Instagram](#)

Simon & Schuster Children's Books is home to bestsellers, award-winners and quality commercial picture books, children's fiction and YA. We are committed to publishing the very best books that children and young adults want to read. Our bestselling fiction authors include Ben Miller, A. F. Steadman, Katie & Kevin Tsang and Adam Silvera plus award-winners Benjamin Dean and Danielle Jawando. Stars on the picture book list include the million-copy bestselling authors Sue Hendra and Paul Linnet, award-winning Lu Fraser & Kate Hindley and Smriti Halls & Steve Small.



Our exhibitors



thedesignconcept

thedesignconcept is an award-winning international interior design and furniture specialist, dedicated to shaping the future of library environments. Since 2008, we have built a reputation for creating innovative, people-centred spaces that inspire learning, creativity, and community connection.

[Find out more](#)



[LinkedIn](#)



[Instagram](#)



[Facebook](#)



[Youtube](#)

Working across public, academic and specialist libraries, our team delivers bespoke design solutions that combine striking aesthetics with practical functionality. From concept through to manufacture and installation, we provide a fully integrated service covering interior design, custom furniture and shelving systems.

Our approach is rooted in originality. Every project is tailored to reflect its unique context, culture and users—ensuring no two libraries are ever the same. We are proud to be recognised as leaders in progressive library design, continually pushing boundaries and setting new benchmarks across the sector.

At thedesignconcept we don't just design libraries—we design tomorrow's library, today.



Imaginative resources to inspire young minds

At Cosy we know that teachers want to be a champion of childhood through natural learning. In order to do that, they need exciting early years ideas and affordable resources. The problem is often not knowing what is possible or where to find it.

We believe that learning spaces should delight and inspire children and educators. We understand the challenge of finding inspiring solutions that tick all the boxes which why, as an award-winning company, we have come up with over 30,000 product ideas in our 15 years.

Whether you are looking for room designs for your new or refurbished setting, or looking for that resource that will really make the difference to your children - you'll find what you need at Cosy.

[Find out more](#)



[LinkedIn](#)



[Instagram](#)



[Facebook](#)

Alanna Max

[Find out more](#)



[Instagram](#)



[Facebook](#)

Our exhibitors



The Family Music Hub is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to supporting those who include music in their work with young children (0-5) and their families. We work alongside staff and volunteers to build confidence and strengthen practice through high-quality training, CPD, and practical resources grounded in research and everyday experience. We offer bespoke in-person and online training programmes, as well as short courses. Our low-cost online subscription platform, The Hub, provides accessible training, a rich bank of songs and rhymes, and a supportive community of practice for library staff and volunteers across the UK. Our approach centres on relationships, connection and musical understanding, recognising the important role leaders play in supporting early communication, nurturing parent-child interaction, and bringing people together through shared musical experiences. By investing in those who lead rhyme times, libraries can support consistent, high-quality experiences for families while strengthening their role in early childhood development and community wellbeing.

[Find out more](#)

[Find out more](#)



[LinkedIn](#)



[Instagram](#)



[Facebook](#)



Kindred² is a charitable foundation working in collaboration with partners across the early years sector to improve early education and child development. We aim to increase understanding of the importance of the early years, support evidence-led practice and policy, and help ensure every child has the best possible start in life.

Kindred²

We want organisations to work with us to create and co-own the changes we seek. We believe that together, with a shared vision, the sector (charities, practitioners, private and public sector nursery providers, academics, policymakers) will have a greater impact than any single organisation can achieve alone.

[Find out more](#)



[LinkedIn](#)



[Facebook](#)



[Find out more](#)



[Instagram](#)



[Find out more](#)



[BlueSky](#)



[Instagram](#)



[Youtube](#)

Libraries **RISING**

Creating libraries of tomorrow with
children and young people today



Thank you to our headline sponsor BookingsPlus and
supporting sponsor Peters



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



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**