

Premises

Mirella from the Share Shed in Totnes said it best - the biggest obstacle to starting a library of things is finding a premises. Once you've got the where in place, people and groups take you more seriously, and things start to line up. Here are some of the things we've learnt about finding and setting up a premises.

- **Have a good hard look around your town centre** We noticed that there were two abandoned toilet blocks, and built our first pitch to our Heritage Foundation around setting up in one.



LETCWORTH GARDEN SHED
A LIBRARY OF THINGS

Entirely casual meeting, 22nd of April '22
Jemma McLean and Angela Bell for L.G.S.,
with Alastair Stewart of the Heritage Foundation.

Hi! Coffee?

What we'd like to discuss today is the possibility of starting up in one of the dis-used properties the Foundation administers:

The toilet block behind the town hall.



...the toilet block in the arcade at the end of the Wynd.



the empty units in the Heritage Foundation building, or other

They came back asking if we would consider a retail unit, many of which were also standing empty, and we said two things - *You betcha*, and *If you have a plan for how to fund it*. Which was the start of a very long conversation, ending with us in our gorgeous premises. There are two points here. Firstly, think creatively and look at a range of possible premises - a desk in a like-minded

business, a public library, long-empty retail units (remember that landlords still have to pay rates on these premises, even if unoccupied, which might act as incentive to have you in there, covering at least the rates). Secondly, the value of turning up with a plan, even if it's in the early stages. Looking as if you're putting the work in and came prepared to a funding meeting always puts you on a good footing.

- **Negotiating a lease** Even if you've got a handshake deal with a local business or landlord, it's definitely worth getting something in writing. You may have a solicitor in your team or in your wider circle who's willing to draw up something legally valid that protects your interests, or evaluate terms and conditions of a formal lease. But if not, there's help available at LawWorks (<https://www.lawworks.org.uk/>). We've mentioned elsewhere that the solicitor we were assigned was quick to respond, diligent and meticulous about making sure we understood every aspect of what we were signing up to. Highly recommend.
- **Signage** - Wherever you are, we've found it's important to point people in your direction. Even though we have a large window shopfront, we've had people say they've looked down the street and not seen us - we put aside some funding and got a street sign to go on the pavement. Whatever wall, door or window you've got, print out a poster, get some decals printed up (approach your local printers), or buy some window paints and get your most artistic volunteer to work.
Our experience so far has showed us that your messaging needs to be as clear as possible. We thought that having 'Library of Things' and 'A library, but with things!' on our window would be enough to get across what we're doing. We were wrong. Our volunteers joke about how often people come in, assume we're a charity shop, and try to buy things. We're currently in the process of designing new decals with 'Borrow/ Use/ Return' on them for the front window. The library of things concept is still fairly new, and a

lot of people will be encountering it for the first time. Our advice is, *spell things out as clearly as possible.*

- **Storage** - You're going to need shelving, whether you've got storage in-house or are transporting items from a different location to your shopfront. Sturdy, industrial shelving is best - domestic can be good for display, but often doesn't have suitable weight-bearing capacity. This is a good thing to put the word out about early. It's a volatile time for retail, and with enough notice you might come across a business that is closing down, moving or upgrading their storage. Getting rid of big items like shelving can be tricky, so often people are up for giving it away, as long as you transport it yourself (this is how we ended up with two volunteers carrying shelving units down our high street to the Shed one sunny Saturday). Something we didn't know about in time to take advantage of it is the ScrewFix Foundation (<https://www.screwfix.com/landingpage/screwfix-foundation>). Their funding is really tightly focused on improving/ kitting out the premises of individuals and community groups - they're very clear they don't give donations of stock or grants for anything else. If we were setting up again, we would definitely apply to this foundation to help with any and all renovation costs, including shelving. There is guidance about arranging and tracking your stock items - so important! - in the 'Practicalities: Setting Up' resource.
- **Health and Safety** - this is something we're still working out, given our reluctance to spend hundreds of pounds on an official consultant. We tried approaching other, similar organisations, like charity shops who have a similar shop front/ storage area arrangement, to see if they would share their policies, but disappointingly we had no luck. If anyone's got a model policy that they feel is robust and based on the official sources, we'd love to see it!

Here's what we've learned.

1. It's important that you have a H&S policy and Risk Assessment, and that both these documents are considered 'living' papers.

Including in the title the date they were set up, and the date they'll next be revised, indicates that you're planning to learn from how you operate and to integrate those lessons into your documentation.

2. The policy is a statement of intent, and there are loads of templates available online - we've included one in the 'resources' area of the webpage.
3. Your risk assessment should include any of the following that could be relevant to your premises and how you operate - keep in mind that even cleaning products such as toilet cleaner and so on count as biohazards.

Biohazards

Burns and Scalds

Collision with Moving Object

Collision with Stationary Object

Cuts and Lacerations

Display Screen Equipment (DSE)

Electricity

Environment

Working at Height

Goods In/Out

Hazardous Chemicals

Hit by Flying, Falling Object

Legionella

Manual Handling

Safeguarding

Slips, Trips and Falls

Stress

Violence

Hazard Identification).

4. It's also best practice to keep a dedicated log of H&S incidents. The advice we got from a qualified inspector was that an empty log actually raises suspicions. Note down any near misses or injuries, with the date, the problem identified and the action taken to

mitigate the risk, and if you are inspected at any point, it will provide evidence that you're committed to improving as you go.

5. We've continued to ask advice about H&S, and recently someone mentioned that the IOSH courses aren't prohibitively expensive (less than £150), and designed to be done at your own pace (. We are now seriously considering training up a board member to better critique and refine our H&S policy and risk assessment.