Reading Friends
Reading Befriending to Combat Loneliness and Isolation

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The Power of Reading and Stories

‘After nourishment, shelter and companionship, stories are the things we need most in the world’. Philip Pullman

‘You can live many lives through reading including your own’ A reader
Connecting through Reading

Turn to the person next to you and tell them about something you’ve read that you’ve enjoyed or has been important to you (can be a book, poem, story, article...)
The Reading Agency

Working to inspire, share, celebrate reading
Because everything changes when we read
Reading and Health- Fact not Fiction!

• Evidence base for reading as a self-help, health and well-being tool:
  • readingagency.org.uk/readingwell/evidence base
  • https://readingagency.org.uk/resources/2277/

• Health information and learning
• Mood Boosting fiction and poetry
• Connecting communities and people
• Sharing stories and life issues
• Cognitive and creative stimulation
• Driver for volunteering/social activism
Libraries support health literacy and self-management, provide health related events and activities, stimulate creativity and learning and connect individuals and communities...

WHAT IS IT?
- Expert staff in a non-stigmatised & trusted community space
- Assisted digital access
- Volunteering activities & events

WHY WE NEED THIS OFFER
- 1 in 4 people and their families experience the consequences of poor mental health
- 10% of older people are lonely
- Dementia Cafes & reminiscence groups

Libraries Deliver:
Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021 by the Libraries Taskforce...describes how libraries support a number of outcomes aligned with national and local priorities, including healthier and happier lives for individuals.

Your public library supports the health and wellbeing of communities

Libraries help local communities to be healthy and live well

MOOD BOOSTING BOOKS
- Reading Well Books on Prescription

Libraries for Lifelong Learning

Creative opportunities for individuals and groups
- Health promotion events

Admiral Nurse
As a nurse, sometimes I have the feeling that I haven’t much to offer, except for a shoulder to cry on. Whereas a book to read is something tangible, something else to suggest and offer.

CBT therapist
One of my patients suffers from social anxiety; we are working together using the book that I prescribed to him. He reads one chapter or paragraph every week, and our conversation starts from that. He finds it very useful.

www.reading-well.org.uk
Reading Well Books on Prescription

- Delivered by The Reading Agency and SCL/ASCEL funded by Arts Council and Wellcome Trust
- Endorsed by leading health organisations
- Evidence based reading helping people to understand and manage their health
- Referral and self referral model
- Universal library offer and public health intervention
Targeted Health Conditions

- Adult common mental health conditions list: anxiety, depression, panic and stress and difficult life experiences...
- Dementia list for people with dementia, carers and people with memory problems
- Reading Well Shelf Help for young people, targeting 13-18 year olds
- Long term conditions covering physical and mental aspects of a range of conditions
Reading Well Books on Prescription for dementia

- People with dementia, carers and those worried about their memory
- Information and advice, practical support, personal stories and therapeutic activities including reading
Spotlight on Loneliness in the UK

7 in 10 people know a friend who is lonely.

92% of us find it difficult to tell others they are lonely.

Lonely people are more likely to develop heart disease.

Lonely people are 64% more likely to develop dementia.

2 in 3 people know someone who is lonely.

1 in 4 Brits know a parent who is lonely.

1 million people aged 65+ always or often feel lonely.

Loneliness is a comparable health risk as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

33% of people believe others think there is something wrong with them.

8 in 10 of us feel judged negatively for feeling lonely.

92% of us think people are scared to admit they are lonely.
Risk Factors

- Living alone or in residential care
- Triggers; divorce, retirement, caring, bereavement
- Deprivation, rurality, high crime
- Low economic status, poor health
- Loss of contact with family
What is Reading Friends?

- Four year Big Lottery funded UK programme
- Reading befriending model for vulnerable older people
- Reducing loneliness and isolation
- Delivered through social reading activities
- Driven by social activism and volunteering
Reading Friends’ key principles

- Welcoming
- Fun
- Building relationships
- Empowering
- Breaking down barriers
Reading Friends test sites

Conwy

- Conwy Libraries and Age Connect
- High percentage of Welsh speakers
- Retired Welsh farmers living in remote rural areas

Newcastle

- Age UK Newcastle and Newcastle Libraries
- Group and one-to-one approach
- Focusing on befriending via Age UK and groups via the library

Oldham

- Oldham Libraries, Springboard and Thriving Communities
- Small volunteer-facilitated groups & home visits via home library service
- Potential to expand across Greater Manchester
Reading Friends test sites

Sheffield

• Sheffield Dementia Action Alliance and Sheffield Libraries
• Focusing on six community-run libraries working with volunteers from the local community
• Will work in a number of settings - Pakistani men’s group, antique shop reminiscence

Stirling

• Stirling Libraries, Life Changes Trust and NHS North Valley Trust
• Focus on oral storytelling
• Large percentage of Gaelic speakers

West Sussex

• Dementia Support, The Abbeyfield Society and Age UK Horsham supported by West Sussex Libraries
• Will run across sheltered housing, care homes, community centres and in the home
• Intergenerational strands – school children and university students
The Reading Friends programme test year: at a glance

How many took part?

624 Reading Friends
104 Reading Partners (volunteers)

The biggest motivation for Reading Friends’ participation is ‘to meet new people’

What did they do?

244 hours of contact...
...across 239 activity sessions

What did people think?

90% of Reading Friends participants would recommend the programme to others
90% of Reading Friends participants want to carry on taking part in the programme
94% rated their experience of the programme as ‘good’ or ‘excellent’

100% of Reading Partners would recommend the programme to others
100% of Reading Partners wanted to continue volunteering
The average score Reading Partners gave the experience was 9.3/10

Where were the test sites?

Stirling
Newcastle
Oldham
Sheffield
Conwy
Chichester
Horsham
Abbeyfield
Reading Friends: Next Steps

- Pilot phase - cross generational, prisons, LGBTQ
- Northern Ireland
- Extension work using different models
- Business modelling and commission ready scoping
- Positioning against national strategy
Reading Friends in Wales

Elena Schmitz
Head of Programmes, Literature Wales
LITERATURE WALES

National Company for Literature Development in Wales

Our mission:

WORDS BELONG TO EVERYONE.
LITERATURE WALES INSPIRES YOU TO DISCOVER THEM,
ENJOY THEM AND CREATE WITH THEM.
WITH THEM WE CREATE NEW WORLDS.
Literature Wales manages Reading Friends on behalf of The Reading Agency in Wales.

One site in Wales during test phase (Conwy Library Service); second site to join project for pilot phase in September (Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board, or ABMU Swansea).

Participation key strategic aim of Literature Wales:

IMPROVE OPPORTUNITY IN WALES THROUGH THE POWER OF WORDS AND INCREASE THE ACCESSIBILITY OF LITERATURE

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Reading Friends is a part of a wider Literature Wales focus on literature and wellbeing: projects include literature and health projects in care homes in Gwynedd, Lit Reach and the Literature and Wellbeing Funding Scheme.
Literature in the Community

Through the following activities and initiatives, we aim to improve the opportunities for individuals and communities throughout Wales to participate in literature.

We work directly with partner organisations, Local Authorities, community groups, support services, writers, artists and practitioners to create tailor-made programmes and activities to respond to local needs.

www.literaturewales.org
Reading Friends in Action
Conwy Library Service

Cheryl Hesketh
Any questions?
Discussion

- How can you engage with/support Reading Friends in your area of work?
- What do you see as its strengths/value and challenges?
- What other links/partnerships/opportunities do you suggest we develop?
- What funding/commissioning/business models might be relevant in your area?
- What books would you recommend as conversation starters?
Get in touch

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