

# Reading Friends

## Reading Befriending to Combat Loneliness and Isolation

### EAHIL 2018

Debbie Hicks The Reading Agency

Cheryl Hesketh Conwy Library Service

Elena Schmitz Literature Wales



# 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*

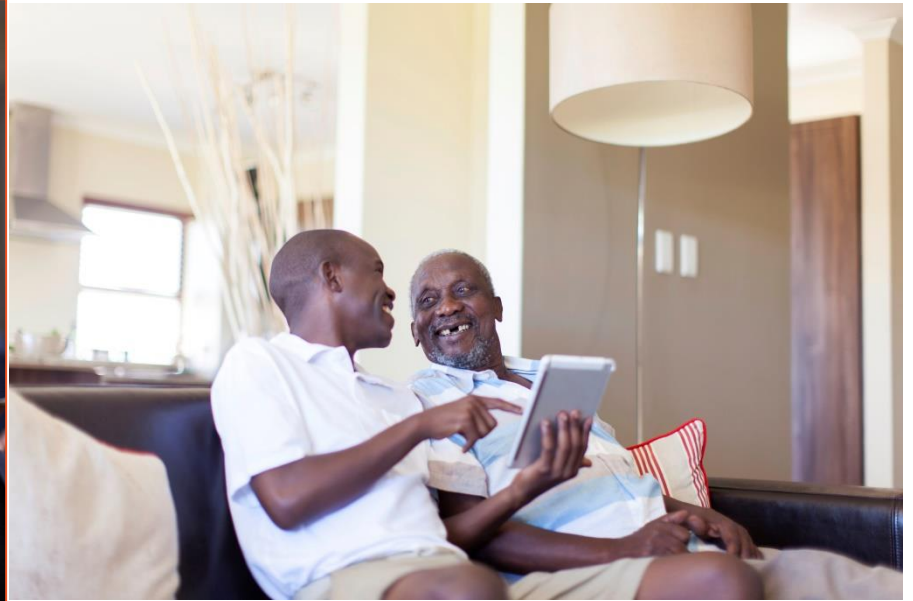


# Connecting through Reading

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*



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# Reading and Health- Fact not Fiction!

- Evidence base for reading as a self-help, health and well-being tool:
  - [readingagency.org.uk/readingwell/evidencebase](https://readingagency.org.uk/readingwell/evidencebase)
  - <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



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# LIBRARIES



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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?**



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.

**WHY WE NEED THIS OFFER**

**1 in 4 people** and their families experience the consequences of poor mental health

**WHY WE NEED THIS OFFER**

**10% of older people** are lonely

Provide health information & support



**WHY WE NEED THIS OFFER**

**15m people** are living with a long term physical condition



**MOOD BOOSTING BOOKS**

Creative opportunities for individuals and groups



**Your public library supports the health and wellbeing of communities**

LIBRARIES HELP LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO BE HEALTHY AND LIVE WELL

Dementia Cafes & reminiscence groups



**WHY WE NEED THIS OFFER**

**One person** develops dementia every 3 minutes



**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.





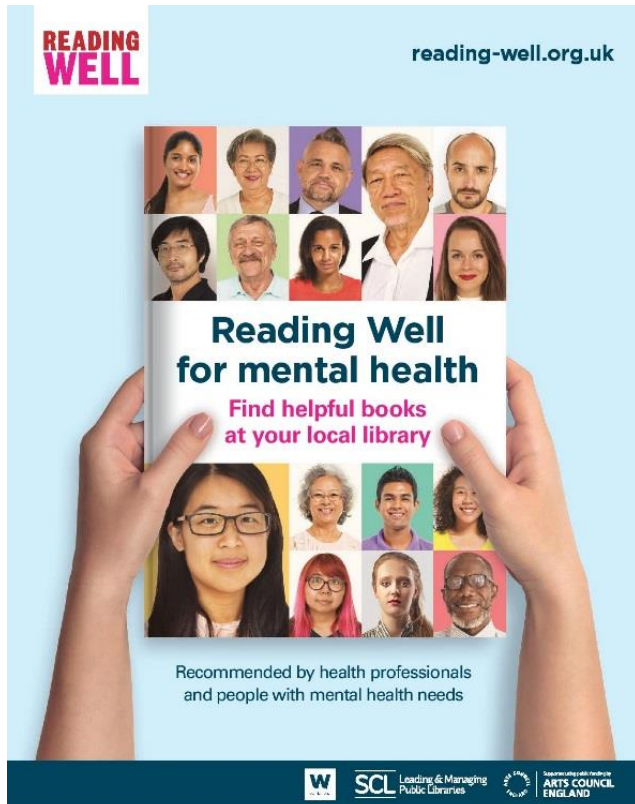
# Reading Well Books on Prescription

- 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



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- 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



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# 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



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**7 in 10**

people know  
a friend who  
is lonely



Loneliness  
is worse for us  
than obesity



**8/10**

of us feel judged negatively  
for feeling lonely



**92%**

of us find it difficult  
to tell others they  
are lonely



Lonely people are  
**64% more likely**  
to develop  
dementia



**2 in 3**

people know  
someone who  
is lonely



# SPOTLIGHT ON LONELINESS IN THE UK

Lonely people  
are more likely  
to develop  
heart disease



**92%**

of us think people  
are scared to admit  
they are lonely



**13%**

of us feel  
lonely all  
the time



**1/4**

Brits know a parent  
who is lonely



**1 million**

people aged 65+  
always or often  
feel lonely

Lonely  
people are  
more likely to  
develop depression



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



of people believe  
others think there  
is something  
wrong with them



# 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?



All chit chat and tall tales welcome

Tewkesbury  
READING FRIENDS

Reading Friends meet regularly to chat and share stories

Call Janice to find out when and where Reading Friends meet in Tewkesbury, 01684 293756. Lorem ipsum dolor sit uida rumquunt ent.

Delivered locally by

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Supporting public funding by  
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

THE READING AGENCY

© The Reading Agency. Registered charity number 1205443 (England & Wales)

- 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



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# Reading Friends Partners



# Reading Friends' key principles

- Welcoming
- Fun
- Building relationships
- Empowering
- Breaking down barriers



# Reading Friends test sites

## Conwy

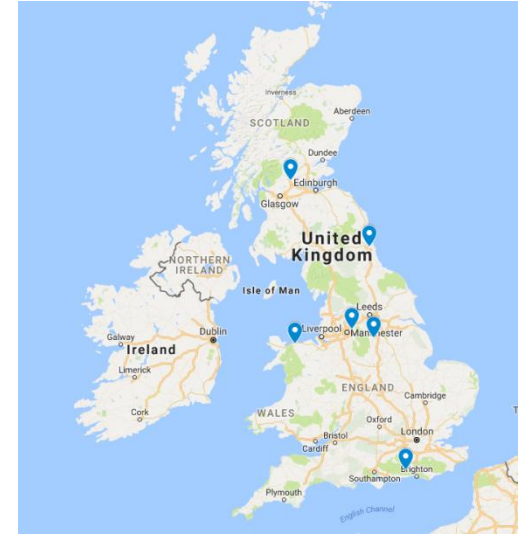
- Conwy Libraries and Age Connect
- High percentage of Welsh speakers
- Retired Welsh farmers living in remote rural areas

## 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



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# The Reading Friends programme test year: at a glance



**Reading Friends aims to:**  
*'empower, engage and connect older people who are vulnerable and isolated, people with dementia and carers by starting conversations through reading.'*

## How many took part?



**624**  
 Reading Friends



**104**  
 Reading Partners  
 (volunteers)



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

## Where were the test sites?



## 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



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# 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

WORDS BELONG TO EVERYONE.

LITERATURE WALES INSPIRES YOU TO DISCOVER THEM, ENJOY THEM AND CREATE WITH THEM.

WITH THEM WE CREATE NEW WORLDS.

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.



Llên Pawb | Lit Reach



Literature for Wellbeing  
Funding Scheme

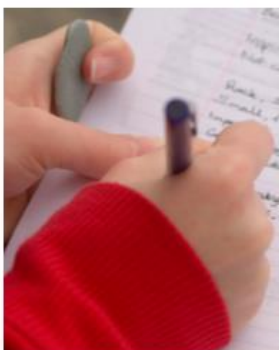


Weird and Wonderful Wales

[www.literaturewales.org](http://www.literaturewales.org)

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Reading Friends



Individual and Tailor Made  
Projects



Literature for Health and  
Wellbeing



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# Reading Friends in Action Conwy Library Service

Cheryl Hesketh













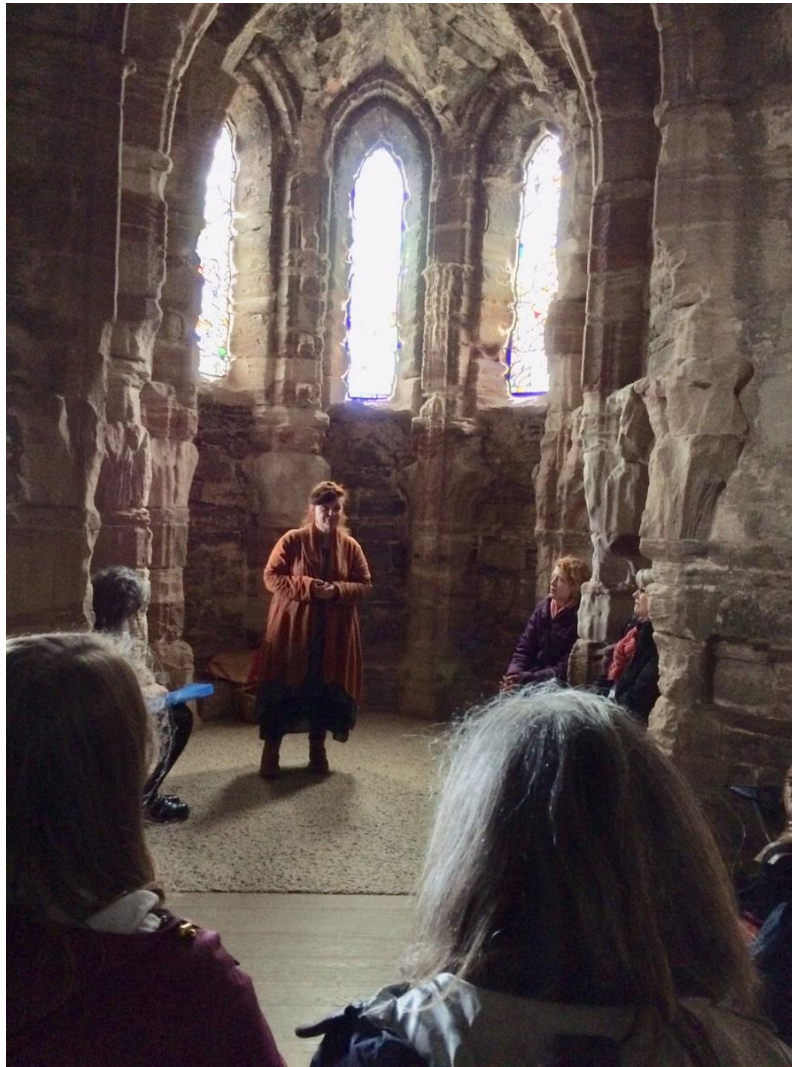












# Any questions?





# 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?



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# Get in touch

[debbie.hicks@readingagency.co.uk](mailto:debbie.hicks@readingagency.co.uk)

[cheryl.hesketh@conwy.gov.uk](mailto:cheryl.hesketh@conwy.gov.uk)

[elena@literaturewales.org](mailto:elena@literaturewales.org)

