



MEDIA RELEASE – WEDNESDAY 26 JULY 2017

## For the community, by the community

### 40+ partners and 800 volunteers to join forces to transform North West health and well-being with innovative *Shared Reading* programme

The Reader, a national charity based in Liverpool's Calderstones Park, has announced a major investment creating a new collaborative community-led strategy for the North West. Over the next two years, the *Shared Reading North West* campaign will create over 200 new *Shared Reading* groups, bringing the health and social benefits of *Shared Reading* to more than 2100 people in communities across the region.

Since 2008, The Reader has pioneered the use of *Shared Reading* to improve well-being, reduce social isolation and build resilience in diverse communities across the UK. This new programme will bring *Shared Reading* to many more people, training and supporting volunteers to run their own groups in their local areas – for the community by the community.

The Reader's founder and director Jane Davis said: "*The Reader was born in the North West and we've worked with communities here for over a decade. It's fantastic to bring those long-term commissioning partners together with brand new partners under the Shared Reading North West banner. With their support, and the people power of our growing family of Reader volunteers, we aim to make Shared Reading available for people in every community across the North West. Huge thanks must also go to Nesta and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport for recognising the potential of Shared Reading through The Second Half Fund; their guidance and support is an incredible resource.*"

Supported by a growing family of commissioning partners including Knowsley CCG, Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust, North West Boroughs Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council and a collaboration between Halton Borough Council, Halton CCG and Well Halton, The Reader will train and support more than new 800 volunteers, with a particular focus on those aged over 50.

Working with commissioning partners, delivery partners and volunteers within their local communities, The Reader will establish hundreds of new *Shared Reading* groups across Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St. Helens, Warrington, Wigan and Wirral in diverse settings such as libraries, community centres, GP practices, health centres, hospitals, care homes and workplaces. The Reader has ambitious plans to grow this innovative approach to health and well-being further across the North West region over the next three years and invites partners to get in contact and get involved.

Crucial support for the project comes from innovation foundation Nesta and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport through The Second Half Fund. The Reader is one of 13 organisations selected to take part in the Second Half Fund, which was created to support the growth of innovations that mobilise the time and talents of people aged 50+ to help others, alongside public services.

Vicki Sellick, Director at Nesta, commented: “We know we have much to gain from the considerable talents of people as they enter the second half of their lives, given freely alongside public services. By supporting these innovative social action projects to grow we know they will transform lives and make a significant impact on some of the biggest social challenges we face.”

Dr David Fearnley, Medical Director at Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust said: “Shared Reading enables participants to feel differently about themselves and others - bringing shifts in perspective which are part of the process of developing mental wellness. Reading and reflecting together in a safe environment loosens default patterns of thinking, being and behaving, making it possible for all kinds of people to believe in their own capacity to be resilient or to change. I’m really proud to be part of this innovative work, which is a great example of the way in which traditional services can be supplemented by interventions that are based in the arts.”

Luciana Berger, Member of Parliament for Liverpool Wavertree and Patron of The Reader said: “I’m delighted to welcome this initiative which will hugely increase the number of Shared Reading groups in the greater Merseyside and wider North West area. The Reader has been delivering these welcoming, easy-access groups across the region for more than ten years. I’ve had the privilege of meeting a number of group members and have heard first hand their remarkable stories about the positive effects of Shared Reading on well-being and mental health. I’m delighted that Nesta are backing The Reader with funding and much deserved support to further test the programme with a view to making the initiative national. This is a wonderful opportunity for Merseyside to pioneer a unique approach to community well-being, model collaborative working on a regional scale and establish itself as a leader of excellent and innovative practice.”

Frank Cottrell Boyce award-winning novelist and screenwriter, and Reader Patron said “Shared Reading groups provide companionship, structure, mental adventure and joy. They offer a way out of isolation, and depression. There should be one on every corner.”

Shared Reading North West is a great opportunity for the people of the North West to come together and build healthier, happier communities. There are a number of ways that individuals, companies and service providers across the North West can get involved. Get in touch and be part of the story:

- Individuals can volunteer their time and skills with our flexible roles – Shared Reading Organiser, Shared Reading Advocate and Reader Leader. Volunteering with The Reader is an exciting and enriching experience that will connect you to a network of like-minded people. For more details visit our website to find your local Shared Reading Information Workshop.
- If you are a business, charity or organisation interested in bringing Shared Reading to your workplace, setting or local community, speak to us about training and engagement opportunities.
- If you are an organisation in the NHS, public sector or third sector and would like to bring Shared Reading to your service users, speak to us about how you can be part of the collaborative project.

For more details email [northwest@thereader.org.uk](mailto:northwest@thereader.org.uk) or call 0151 729 2200.

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NOTES TO EDITOR

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SOCIAL

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About The Reader [www.thereader.org.uk](http://www.thereader.org.uk)

The Reader is an award-winning, charitable social enterprise which brings people together, changes lives and builds communities through sharing great literature. Our unique Shared Reading model brings

small groups together each week to read aloud a story and poem with group discussion led by a trained Reader Leader.

For over a decade The Reader has been working in partnership with CCGs, Public Health Bodies and NHS Trusts across the UK to support thousands of people with a wide range of health and social issues including, mental health conditions, dementia, chronic pain, isolation and recovery from substance misuse.

Whether delivered by volunteers, partner staff or Reader staff, *Shared Reading* offers people a practical way to improve well-being, build confidence and connect with others.

*Shared Reading North West* is a collaborative project between The Reader, commissioning partners Halton Borough Council, Halton CCG, Knowsley CCG, Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust, North West Boroughs Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, Well Halton and Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council and 30+ long-standing and new service delivery partners including library services, voluntary sector organisations, other charities and corporate organisations.

## About The Second Half Fund

At a time when people are living longer and research shows the benefits of volunteering in later life, the Second Half Fund from Nesta and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will help organisations tap into the time and talents of people over the age of 50.

The projects funded will be recruiting volunteers into a wide variety of roles to grow their successful models and support more people across the country; from grandparents who act as a primary daytime carer to an under five year old, to teaching older people how to avoid and manage falls through innovative dance classes.

Learning and insights from the projects will be shared throughout the Fund, with a final report published in early 2019. The organisations taking part in the Second Half Fund are:

- FareShare
- Volunteering Matters
- Aesop Arts and Society
- BuddyHub
- St Joseph's Hospice Hackney
- Eden Project Ltd
- The Reader
- Home Start - Greater Manchester
- Spice Time Credits 50+
- Family Action
- Volunteer It Yourself
- St. John Ambulance
- The Access Project

The Second Half Fund sits alongside a number of funds aiming to mobilise the time and talents of people aged 50+ to meet specific social challenges. These include the Join In Stay In and Get More Give More funds. More details of these and their grantees is available at [www.nesta.org.uk](http://www.nesta.org.uk).

The funds follow on from Nesta and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's [Centre for Social Action Innovation Fund](#) which ran from 2013-16 and mobilised volunteers to work alongside public services. An evaluation of the 52 projects' funded is available on the [Nesta website](#) and showed that it mobilised 70,000 volunteers to support 175,000 people.