

## The Reader

*'Reading is a form of friendship'* – Marcel Proust

### Welcome from Jane Davis, Founder and Director

Hello and welcome to The Reader.

We've put together this pack to provide you with information about our organisation, our mission to change the world through a reading revolution, our values and ambitions, what we offer and what we are looking for from our people.

At The Reader we believe literature is for life and that's why we're working to develop Shared Reading in old people's homes, community centres, hospitals, addiction rehab units, prisons, public libraries, children's services and many other places. We find it easy to imagine a near future where all people – regardless of background, career or personal situation – bring books to life: opening and sharing the centuries of vital information contained within them. Our purpose is to ensure that this amazingly rich content is available for everyone to enjoy. We're creating a reading revolution to make reading part of the fabric of life.

We're an organisation with national (and international) reach, based at Calderstones Mansion, in Calderstones Park, Liverpool. Calderstones, our HQ and organisational home, is about to undergo a £4m refurbishment. We've been based here since 2013 and we're building a community built on Shared Reading, which has created 30 plus jobs, hundreds of volunteering opportunities and thousands of visitor experiences.

I hope this pack provides you with everything you need to know about our vision, ethos and values, what you can expect from working with the Reader and the opportunities we will provide.

I look forward to meeting you.

Jane Davis, MBE, Ashoka Fellow

### About The Reader

The Reader is a dynamic national charity and social enterprise, headquartered in Liverpool. Since 2002, The Reader, has pioneered the use of *Shared Reading* to improve wellbeing, reduce isolation and build community resilience and connectedness across the UK and beyond. We inspire and support people to read great literature, *aloud*, together. It is a deceptively simple, yet powerful model which is highly replicable as it works for people of all ages, backgrounds and life situations.

We are driven by the ambition of making *Shared Reading* part of the fabric of our communities – in every care home; in every library; in every mental health trust and in every community centre –so, like the Scouts and Guides - wherever you find yourself living, there will be a group nearby.

## About Shared Reading

Shared Reading is a simple yet powerful non-medical intervention to improve wellbeing, reduce isolation and build community. Groups take place in many settings in the community and across the region. Group members often describe Shared Reading as helping them to have insight, to recognise themselves, to build confidence, share things they often could not easily say. Shared Reading creates a safe and calm place in which people feel a sense of community and a connection to self and others. A piece of literature is read aloud and the group stop whenever to discuss their responses whenever someone has something to say. There is never any pressure to read or contribute, and participation is always self-directed.

### *Extracts from* **The Reader's Business Plan: 2017 - 2022**

#### **I. Vision, Mission and Ambition**

##### **I.1 Our Vision is:**

A world in which the Shared Reading of great literature means that the complexities of human experience are discussed in reading communities everywhere.

##### **I.2 Our Mission is:**

We will bring about a reading revolution, ensuring that Shared Reading groups are widely available, making great literature accessible to everyone.

##### **I.3 We will do this through:**

The development of national and international networks of Shared Reading practice, and the building of a large-scale, long-term Shared Reading community radiating from our organisational home at Calderstones, the International Centre for Shared Reading, Liverpool.

##### **I.4 Our Ambition:**

Our ambition is to make Shared Reading part of the fabric of life - in every care home, in every library, in every hospital, in every mental health service, in every school and in every community centre – so like the Scouts and Guides - wherever you find yourself living, there will be a group nearby. Like Scouting and Guiding, our scale will be achieved through tens of thousands of passionately committed, week-in, week-out volunteer group leaders.

Within 5 years we would see success in the following terms:

**A successfully launched International Centre at Calderstones** - by 'successfully launched' we mean a lively and well-used centre which is financially self-supporting and providing a Shared Reading hub for Liverpool City Region and the wider North West as well as the rest of the UK and the wider world.

**A support structure in place to inspire and support a growing Shared Reading movement** - by 'support structure' we mean the necessarily infrastructure (e.g. digital,

communications, training and support, Quality control for the Shared Reading movement, and a working financial structure to support its continued growth.

## **1.5 Our history**

This plan posits a new stage in The Reader's development.

**During Phase One, (1997-2008)** The Reader's Founder, Jane Davis, developed the practice and underlying principles of Shared Reading and began experimenting with the taking of great literature out of her University English department. Jane worked with a number of close colleagues and began The Reader with the founding of The Reader magazine in 1997. By 2003 she was employing three colleagues and in 2008, with a turnover of approximately £400,000, span The Reader out of the University.

**During Phase Two (2008-2016)** The Reader grew its staff base and reach, professionalising its delivery structures, creating markets for Shared Reading, building organisational infrastructure and attracting investment. We also successfully bid for Calderstones Mansion and £1.9m heritage lottery grant to refurbish the building, transforming it into The International Centre for Shared Reading. During this period, we developed a number of large-scale projects which involved volunteers. With the loss of a large commission from a public body, we realised we needed a more sustainable delivery model for the reading revolution and began to develop the community-led model.

**Phase Three (2017-2022)** will see the further development of and eventual roll out of this community-led model. Like Guiding and Scouting, The Reader will depend on passionate individuals who are willing to give up their own time to run Shared Reading Groups, week in, week out. The Reader's core staff will exist to ensure (i) Sustainability (ii) Quality of Practice and (iii) Growth. During this phase we will move from being a staff-delivery-based organisation to a teaching-and-support-based organisation.

## **About The International Centre for Shared Reading at Calderstones, Liverpool**

The Reader is at a pivotal moment in its development. With the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, Liverpool City Council, Arts Council England and additional grant funders The Reader will transform Calderstones' grade II listed Mansion House into an international flagship project for shared reading – Our International Centre for Shared Reading.

We are creating a community based on reading that will help people reach their full potential through Shared Reading volunteering, training opportunities and employment. The site will include the conservation and display of The Calder Stones in a new location in the heart of the Mansion House grounds. As part of the vision for the site, post refurbishment, The Reader will be launching a number of new social enterprises and building capacity within the catering business that it already operates.

There will be readers and reading rooms, The Storybarn (our existing interactive storytelling experience for children and families), heritage exhibitions and activities, a shop, café and ice cream parlour, wellbeing activities, cultural events and special occasion spaces, the Secret Garden, the Theatre Room – all within a beautiful public park. Our social businesses will generate income for the

charity, as well as buzz for the site, jobs and additional volunteering opportunities. Above all, Calderstones will be created by our people – thousands of visitors, hundreds of volunteers and staff. We are hugely ambitious for Calderstones, the development of which is a key part of the Reader's strategic plan, and which we believe will influence the national conversation on sustainable community, health and wellbeing and the value of literature.

*Extract from* **The Calderstones International Centre for Shared Reading, Business Plan - A community built on Shared Reading**

With the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), Liverpool City Council (LCC) and grant funders The Reader will transform Calderstones' grade II listed Mansion House into an international flagship project for Shared Reading, a model reading community. We are creating a community based on reading that will help people reach their full potential through employment, volunteering and training opportunities and will include the conservation and display of The Calder Stones in a new location in the heart of the Mansion House grounds. We are hugely ambitious for Calderstones, which we believe will influence the national conversation on sustainable community, health and wellbeing, and we will continue to work to build partnerships to facilitate this. The development of Calderstones is a key part of the Reader's strategic plan.

As part of the vision for the site, post refurbishment The Reader will be launching a number of new social enterprises and building capacity within the catering business that it already operates. These enterprises, alongside our core charitable reading and community activity will generate sustainable income and provide valuable opportunities for people for years to come.

Heritage and social impact are at the heart of this project and have been considered in all elements of the business planning. All proposed enterprises are in line with our strategic aims and have interests of the community at their centre.

Each year we expect Calderstones to: Welcome over 40,000 visitors to site with 30,000 of those visitors experiencing heritage.

- Deliver a targeted strategy across the city to ensure that at least 10% of our visitors (4000) will come from areas of deprivation of which 100 visitors per year who participate in activity will be from our prioritised geographical areas (as outlined in this plan) and 100 visitors from priority target beneficiary groups.
- Operate 30 weekly reading groups and 15 community wellbeing groups providing opportunity for 450 participants to take up community activities such as reading, arts, gardening, yoga, craft, dance or other activities with significant proportions reporting improved wellbeing or reduced social isolation as a result
- Create or sustain 40 jobs, provide 2 apprenticeship opportunities and provide meaningful volunteer opportunities for over 100 volunteers
- Host 100 school groups and provide a broad range of learning opportunities for both Children and adults

## **Our beliefs and values**

Our beliefs and values shape our culture and guide us in our work both internally and externally. These are principles that we hope will help everyone who works for us, everyone who works with us and everyone with whom we read understand who we are, what we stand for and how we do things.

It's really important to us that we recruit people who feel they can work in accordance with these values:

- Great literature is at our heart
- We read to lead
- We are kind but bold
- We respect individuality but work as a team
- We value innovation and find ways to live with change
- We have strong boundaries and are well supported
- We celebrate success but learn from our mistakes
- We work whole-heartedly and value our wellbeing

Please read more about our purpose, beliefs and values on our website, [www.thereader.org.uk](http://www.thereader.org.uk)

## **Why this is a unique opportunity**

You will be coming to work with The Reader at an exciting, pivotal moment of organisational change and development. This is an opportunity for an experienced Digital professional to lead the transformation of our digital infrastructure which is crucial to our transition from a staff-led delivery model of shared reading to a national, community-led sustainable model for growth in which we empower, train and support thousands of volunteers to set up and lead their own reading communities. To do this we want technology to be an embedded thread running through our Shared Reading model, strengthening and expanding its reach and impact to new communities.

We are about to make a developmental leap forward and we need a digital infrastructure to help propel us; you will have a unique opportunity to define, design, build and implement digital products in service of the reading revolution.

## **What our staff say**

*“The Reader is the most demanding place I’ve ever worked, but also the most rewarding, the most fun, and the most flexible”*

“I like that I have a clear route for personal growth, development and progression. My manager works closely with me to identify my skills and passions and we work together to set out a number of strategies to help me reach my goals.”

*“The Reader acknowledges that everybody has different styles of working, and we are encouraged to find what is best for us in order to get our job done to the absolute best of our ability.”*

I’ve never worked in a place that cares so much about the work they do. From finance to project workers we all are working towards a common aim – to build a reading revolution.

### **What our volunteers say**

*I feel very privileged to work with this group. The members are truly inspiring. Some of them say they love the group because it keeps them learning. It keeps me learning too, all the time.*

This isn’t something I would have imagined myself doing, and yet now, it’s become a part of my job that I look forward to and feel incredibly passionate about. I’ve learnt a valuable skill that is bringing huge benefits to people in my community.

*“The whole Read to Lead course was fantastic, the course leaders were brilliant – I’ve never been on the receiving end of such skilfully delivered and amazing training. I came away feeling that I had been given something very special and powerful to take home with me.”*

### **What our group members say**

“This group has become the highlight of my week and I clear my calendar to ensure I can make the sessions”.

*‘Mondays have taken on a completely new aspect. I’ve got something to look forward to now, for the first time in years’.*

“Without the Shared Reading group, I don’t feel that my recovery would have been possible.”