

MEDIA RELEASE – embargoed until Thursday 11 January 2018, 9am

## *Shared Reading* expands nationwide thanks to National Lottery funding

UK charity to help people living with social isolation, mental health issues and dementia through reading groups.

The Reader, a national charity which aims to build stronger, healthier communities through a volunteer-led *Shared Reading* programme, has been awarded £850,000 of National Lottery funding through the Big Lottery Fund.

The Reader brings people together through *Shared Reading* – a simple model which creates a positive impact for those living with social isolation, mental health issues or dementia. Weekly reading groups provide a friendly and welcoming space where stories and poems are read aloud, and thoughts and reflections can be shared. Group members can find personal meaning in the literature, improving their emotional wellbeing, and form social connections with others, creating stronger and more supportive communities.

In a recent survey of Reader volunteers from projects in London, Bristol and across the North West, over 90% reported that their experiences leading *Shared Reading* groups had improved their personal wellbeing, provided a greater sense of achievement and made them feel more connected to other people. Furthermore, 93% of people felt better after attending a *Shared Reading* session and 91% said their confidence and communication skills had improved. One group member said: “*The reading groups are a different kind of medicine and it’s through them that I’ve found a way back to life.*”

The National Lottery grant will run over three years to develop stronger digital platforms, communications channels and resources to help the charity reach more people. This will also enable the large-scale recruitment, training and support of over 700 volunteers, as well as empowering an existing network across various parts of the UK, to create and grow local, supportive communities for people of all ages and backgrounds.

Developing new models of partnership, the project will work with established community organisations, such as The Bromley by Bow Centre, to embed *Shared Reading* in their services. Working closely with local GPs, health, library and community services, The Reader will bring *Shared Reading* to those who will benefit most from the social and emotional support provided by these weekly groups.

Jane Davis, Director of The Reader, said: “We are thrilled to have received this National Lottery funding, which is not just an investment in *Shared Reading* but also in the people who are going to lead this movement. It is people who make this incredible thing happen when we sit down to read together. Years ago, the volunteers we worked with through the Big Lottery funded Merseyside project inspired us to put volunteers in the lead and how fitting now, that this grant will enable us to do that across the UK.”

Joe Ferns, UK Funding Director at the Big Lottery Fund, said: “Research carried out by The Reader shows the difference *Shared Reading* can have for both volunteers and group members, which is why we are proud to be putting National Lottery funding behind the expansion of this project across the UK. It will give people the opportunity to improve their social skills and in time help them to lead happier lives.

“Led by an army of volunteers, this project will make a vital difference to communities, bringing people of all ages and backgrounds together to expand their minds and experience a new adventure through someone else’s eyes.”

In 2011, The Reader embarked on a five-year Big Lottery Funded project which trained over 280 volunteers to bring *Shared Reading* to 2243 older people in care homes and community settings across Merseyside. When the project came to an end, over 80% of volunteers expressed their intention to continue reading with older people in their local communities. This passion and personal commitment these volunteers demonstrated to create positive social impact in their own communities laid the foundations for The Reader’s transition to a volunteer-led model and informed the development of the volunteer support system which will be enhanced by this digital investment and rolled out nationwide.

If you would like further information on *Shared Reading* or how you can volunteer, please visit <https://www.thereader.org.uk/>

**ENDS**

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

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

SOCIAL - [@thereaderorg](https://twitter.com/thereaderorg) #SharedReading For further information, please contact: Emma Walsh, Communications Assistant: [emmawalsh@thereader.org.uk](mailto:emmawalsh@thereader.org.uk) 07565 816 022

About Big Lottery Fund

The Big Lottery Fund uses money raised by National Lottery players to help communities achieve their ambitions. From small, local projects to UK-wide initiatives, its funding brings people together to make a difference to their health, wellbeing and environment. Since June 2004 it has awarded £8.5 billion to projects that improve the lives of millions of people.

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