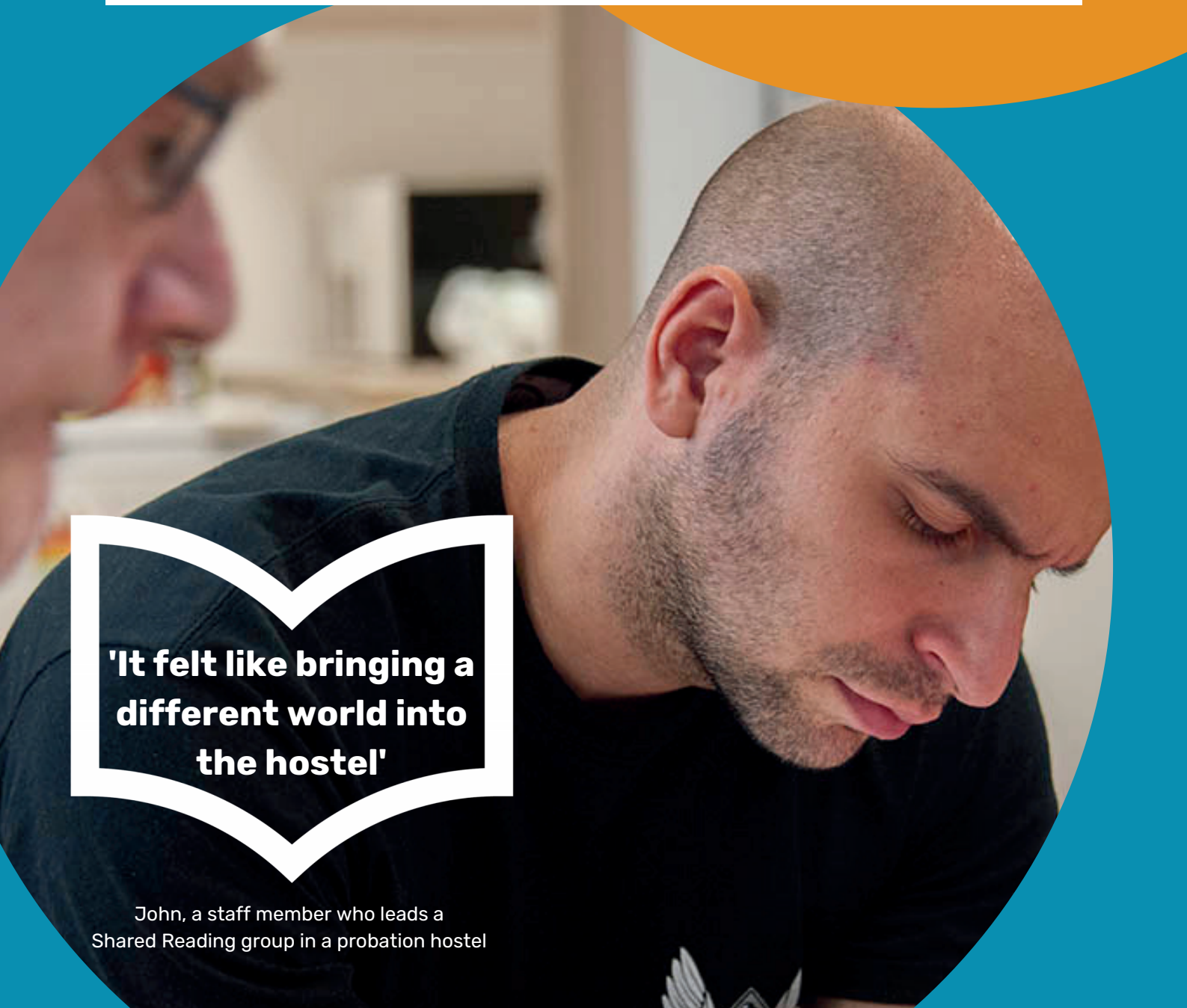


# SHARED READING IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM



**'It felt like bringing a  
different world into  
the hostel'**

John, a staff member who leads a  
Shared Reading group in a probation hostel

# THE READER

**The Reader is a national charity, working to bring the transformative power of great writing to people, whatever their story. We call this Shared Reading. Our work spans all sectors; we deliver in various settings including prison, probation and mental health services, with consistently impressive results.**

Led by a trained facilitator, Shared Reading connects people to the human experience found in the written word, and each other, through inclusive, welcoming groups. Participants control their degree of involvement in a safe, social space where people feel valued and at home. Everything is read aloud, easily navigating differences in literacy and confidence within groups. This work is rooted in two decades of practice, where literature is made available in everyday places for profound personal reflection. To this aim, we currently work with a range of partners, including NHS Trusts and MoJ- funded Psychologically Informed Planned Environments (PIPEs) across the country to deliver Shared Reading groups on inpatient wards, prison-based units and community settings.

**'Out of all the groups we do, this is the one where they feel most together... They can show their vulnerability - I don't think we have that in any other group.'**

HMPSS Officer on Shared Reading

**'I definitely wouldn't have the same relationship with staff without Shared Reading. I feel like we all come and in here and we share our experiences, our thoughts and our stories in an equal way.'**

Group Member, Female Prison

**83%**

I've grown more confident since taking part in this activity

**85%**

This activity helps me feel better

**71%**

What we've read helps me to understand myself better

**88%**

This activity helps me to understand other people better

**89%**

This activity helps me to connect with others in a deeper way

**93%**

Hearing other people's views helps me to think differently about things

*\*Shared Reading Group participants in the Criminal Justice System, Feedback Week Spring 2022 - pop. 76-78*



# "IT ALTERS THE WAY YOU THINK"

**I've been coming to the Reader group for about four months now. I enjoy hearing the story being read, and how people interpret it differently to me. It's like all looking at the same painting and seeing different colours or interpreting it differently, I can then see what they mean; it alters the way you think about it.**

I hadn't come across Shared Reading before, they didn't do it in our jail, now it is one of the groups I make sure I attend. I come because I want to know what the next story is, and to see the people in the group. I enjoy hearing their opinions and that's what keeps me coming back.

We read a story about a lady all dressed up in her finery who was visited by a younger person\* – I really liked that. This story reminded me of the lonely life I lived before I went into prison, that's why it struck a chord with me. Also, I enjoyed 'Tea With The Birds' by Joanne Harris, a story all about birds in cages, there was a woman who had just moved into a new flat. At first she didn't want to know anyone, but meeting the man in the other flat brought her out of herself, so maybe she'd go on to do other things. I'm now out of jail and away from the situation I was in and hoping it's going to get better.

I struggle in social situations and want to retreat all the time, so it helps me to work on that side of my personality. I would say to anyone who hasn't been before, come in, just sit and listen at first, even if you only do ten minutes, or half an hour, just try it.

I'm just very grateful that The Reader comes here every week and does the group with us.

**Shared Reading Group Member  
-Approved Premises**

*It was then I began to understand that everything in the room had stopped, like the watch and the clock, a long time ago....Without this arrest of everything, this standing still of all the pale decayed objects, not even the withered bridal dress on the collapsed form could have looked so like grave-clothes, or the long veil so like a shroud... I knew nothing then, of the discoveries that are occasionally made of bodies buried in ancient times, which fall to powder in the moment of being distinctly seen; but, I have often thought since, that she must have looked as if the admission of the natural light of day would have struck her to dust.*

\*Miss Haversham, Great Expectations  
Chapter Eight, Charles Dickens

**34**

Criminal  
Justice  
Settings

**64**

Weekly  
Groups

# IMPACT

**Shared Reading can contribute to a sector in support of reform, by encouraging and equipping offenders to explore their experiences in a safe and creative way.**

Through Shared Reading, group members get new, creative ways to tell their stories and imagine others. Wider research has shown that Shared Reading can be offered as alternative activity, follow-up or adjunct to Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) for people with mental health issues.

The Reader's informal, weekly Shared Reading groups offer the opportunity for people to listen, empathise and share. In a supportive environment, staff and offenders work together, freed from roles and expectations. Shared Reading can function as part of health improvement, education and behaviour change programmes, as well as being enjoyed as an independent meaning-making activity.

In 2022, the Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service published 'An Evaluation of Shared Reading in PIPEs'. The research, carried out by University of Cambridge, identified the contribution that Shared

Reading makes to the work of Psychologically Informed Planned Environments in prisons and described the 'significant value' of Shared Reading, with participating prison residents reporting 'higher levels of wellbeing, hope, agency and self-efficacy, and interpersonal trust' compared to their peers.

Our work to date has included:

- Category A, B and C, men, women and young people.
- A national contract to work in Psychologically Informed Planned Environments (PIPEs) as part of the Offender Personality Disorder (OPD) Pathway.
- All prisons in Northern Ireland.
- Our first 'Through the Gate' project for people returning to the community, piloted from 2019.

**If you'd like to find out more about embedding Shared Reading into your service, contact one of our friendly team:**

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