



IMPACT REPORT

2023-2024



THE READER IS THE UK'S BIGGEST SHARED READING CHARITY



Our vision is of “A world where everyone can experience the power of literature to help us survive and live well.” This year, it’s been inspiring to see our talented volunteers and staff continue to make this a reality – exploring stories with children and their families at the Storybarn, concluding our heritage project with the installation of a new permanent artwork, expanding our Reading Heroes project for care-experienced children, creating anthologies and podcasts, programming open air theatre, and delivering hundreds of Shared Reading groups across the UK.

In Liverpool, we are building [a community based on Shared Reading](#) at our organisational home in Calderstones Park to demonstrate how a creative model of health improves social connection and wellbeing. A varied programme of community activities is underpinned by a thriving volunteering scheme and growing social enterprise which provide meaningful jobs and unrestricted income to support the Reader.

But there is so much more to do. In Liverpool, [one in every 64 children](#) were living in care last year. [7.1% of people](#) in Great Britain (3.83 million) experience chronic loneliness, meaning they feel lonely ‘often or always’. The waiting list for NHS mental health support is estimated to be [1.2 million](#).

Many people who come to this country seeking refuge don’t find a welcoming place. [1 in 5 children](#) don’t have a book of their own. Many people don’t feel that literature is for them.

When society is faced with such challenges and funding is tight, the pressure grows on charities and cultural organisations to prove their value. For years, The Reader has been quietly pursuing our mission and developing a body of evidence which demonstrates the power of Shared Reading to transform lives.

This report focuses on sharing some of the stories from the last year, and as always we are grateful to all the staff, volunteers and supporters who have made them happen.



Jemma Guerrier
Managing Director



Anita Marsland MBE
Chair of the Board of Trustees

SHARED READING FOR FREE, FOR EVERYONE

For over twenty years, The Reader has been building a community of Shared Reading groups across the UK and around the world. Here, people connect and share experiences using stories and poems. There is no pressure to talk or read aloud.

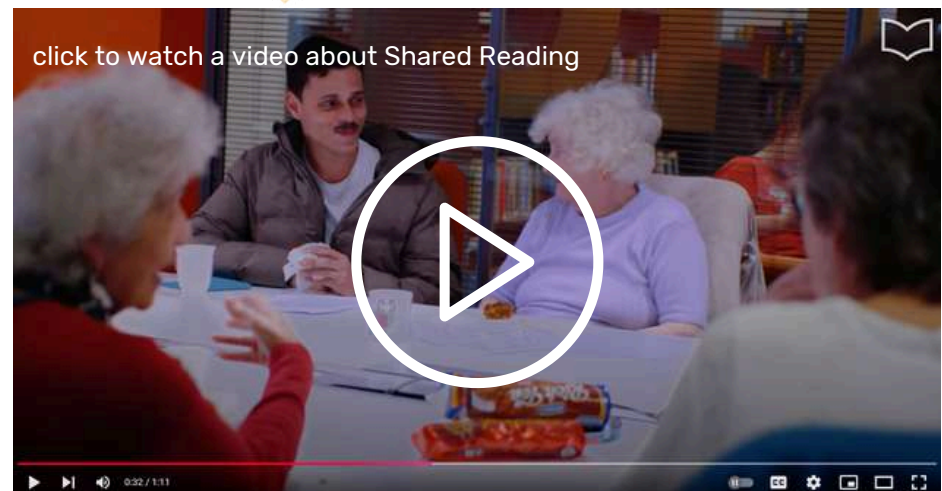
These groups happen in all sorts of places including libraries, care homes, cathedrals, cafes, hospitals, prisons, and our home in Liverpool's Calderstones Park – the International Centre for Shared Reading – and are attended by people from all walks of life.

We believe that literature's unique power has the potential to connect individuals, help us feel better and to rebuild lost social bonds.

We believe that Shared Reading is needed now more than ever.



**"It's like a therapy
for your mind"**
Shared Reading group
member



"I'm back to the old me."

Alison attends a weekly Shared Reading group which began at our home in Calderstones Park 15 years ago. The current youngest member is 23, and the eldest 98.

"I medically retired from work at the council after being diagnosed with Fibromyalgia. I was getting used to having a disability, had lost all confidence and did not want to go out.

I felt I didn't have anything to offer. A friend of mine said they were going to Shared Reading, so I went along too. When I first came to a group I felt dead uncomfortable. I do not read aloud, I like to listen, and I never used to stay for coffee afterwards.

But eventually I started talking to people and realised how interesting they were. They inspired me. They all had interesting lives. Gradually I became more outgoing.

Shared Reading has been a bit of a journey for me. I am back to the old me and feel much more confident."



Liverpool

Alison's Reader Story

OUR YEAR AT A GLANCE

Criminal Justice contract renewed to deliver

Shared Reading in 28 PIPEs
(Psychologically Informed Planned Environments) across the country over the next two years

£120,000 in ticket income

Reading Heroes

expansion outside Liverpool City Region for the first time, for care experienced children aged 2-15

625
UK volunteers

55,000
social media followers

37
new episodes of The Reader podcast

New partnerships with Camden Council, Halton Borough Council and Alder Hey Children's Hospital

62,998
cups of coffee

1320
people attended our Christmas Story Trail

We now recycle more of our waste than goes to landfill

16,850
Storybarn visits

Funding secured for Shared Reading across mental health pathway

33,551
cups of tea

Operated a welcoming public building
364 days a year

496 Shared Reading groups in the UK

1297 children attended heritage school trips

66,942 scoops of ice cream

20,778
UK Shared Reading participants

300+
trained Reader Leaders abroad

18
countries hosting Shared Reading internationally

110
events from weddings to wakes, & christenings to corporate away days

Our first ever Christmas Appeal raised
£8550.56
to give the joy and life-long benefits of reading to vulnerable children through our First Page project

11,500 tickets sold

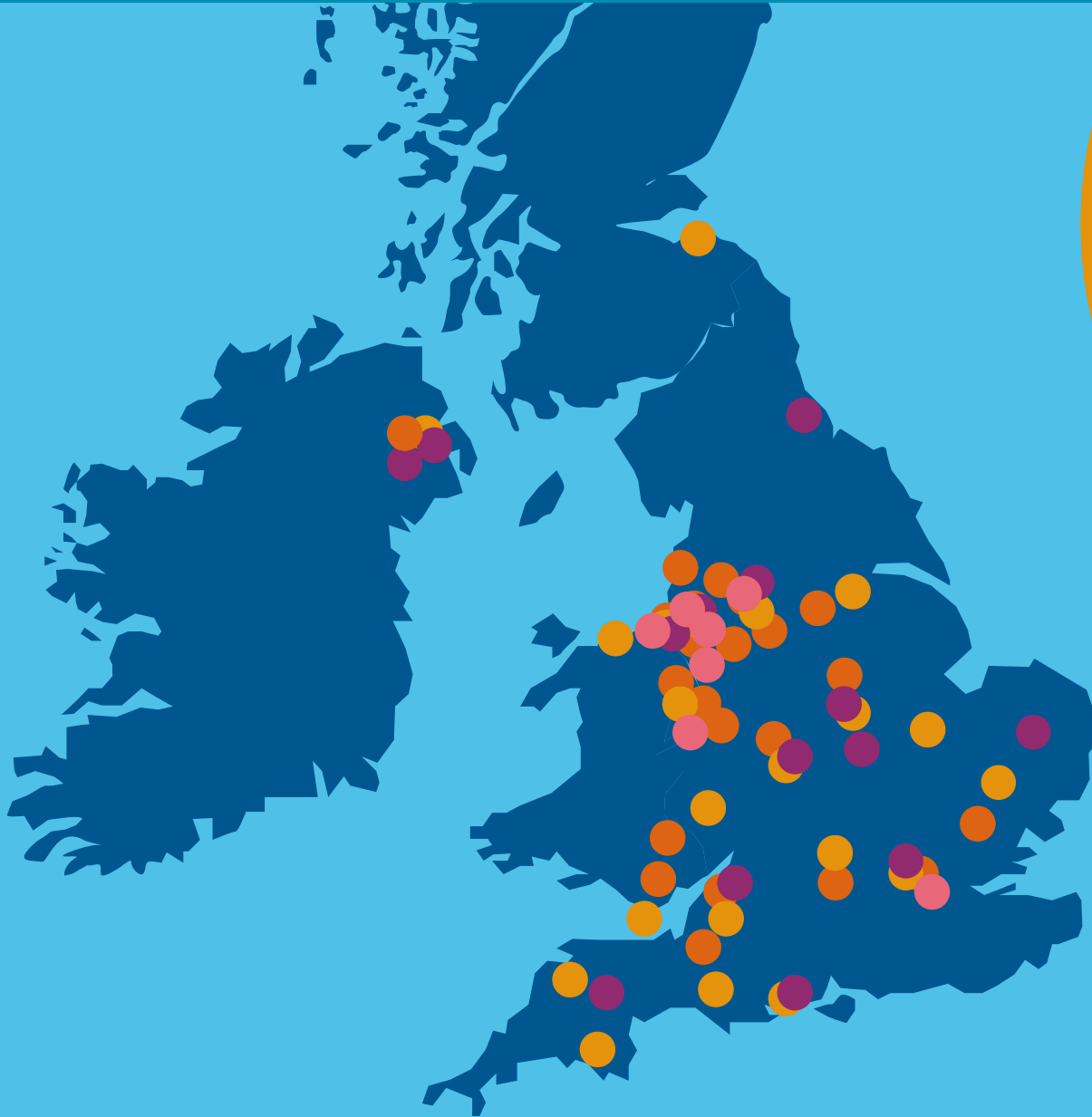
395,000+
visits to Calderstones





Concluded our National Lottery Heritage Fund Heritage project engaging our community through Shared Reading, events, anthologies, podcast, volunteering and the installation of our first permanent artwork, Now We Sit With It.

WHERE WE READ

INTERNATIONAL SHARED READING

Belgium, Denmark, Germany
Ireland, New Zealand, USA
Mexico, Sweden, Norway
Switzerland, Canada, Finland
Brazil, Argentina, China
Australia, Spain, France, Italy




-  **Community Shared Reading groups**
-  **Closed settings**
-  **Children and Young People**
-  **Criminal Justice**

WHO IS LITERATURE FOR?



Literature is for everyone, but perhaps especially, for those who might think it is not for them. The great library at Thebes in Ancient Greece bore the inscription, 'The medicine chest of the soul'. The idea that reading can do us good is not a new thought. Great books are available in all public libraries, but many people – often the most in need – don't realise great books exist for them.

For example, Kim – a young woman in a Shared Reading group in a prison told the group leader she thought poems 'boring and rubbish. Stories and poems make no sense. Pathetic. Crap. Stupid.' Until one week the group read 'Bluebird' by Charles Bukowski.



**There's a bluebird in my heart that
wants to get out
but I'm too tough for him,
I say, stay in there, I'm not going
to let anybody see
you.**

The effect on Kim was immediate. 'It's got my belly churning...I can feel it here. It's the best thing I've read. It's really good. It's like me really... that one... man, it got me!'

Beyond the intrinsic value of books, the act of reading them together as a live activity, rather than in solitary-reader-isolation, can multiply their power and value. Great literature connects us and provides us with a space where the complex, mysterious parts of life can be sought out. The inner stuff is given a form and shape and new language is supplied for thoughts, feelings and struggles.

We are passionate about ensuring Shared Reading is **accessible and available to everyone** because we need more human connection, feeling, thinking and crucially more free and open conversation.

We need to encourage a love of reading in children from an early age because it builds, in the words of our patron and Children's Laureate, Frank Cottrell-Boyce, 'the apparatus of happiness'. We need to keep on reading, together.



Katie Clark
Director of Literature

LITERATURE IS FOR ALL CHILDREN

Since 2016, we've been successfully promoting the benefits of reading for pleasure for care experienced children aged two to 15 years across Liverpool City Region through our Reading Heroes programme. Reading Heroes sparks a love of reading for pleasure by pairing children with a highly trained volunteer to enjoy the magic of reading aloud together.

We were especially delighted this year to create **Tiny Heroes**, a new Shared Reading programme for pre-school children, aged two to four, commissioned by Liverpool's Virtual School. Tiny Heroes focusses on volunteer led home visits, full of the joy of story sharing, singing and nursery rhymes.

click to watch a video about Reading Heroes



Funding from The Rayne Foundation has allowed us the opportunity this year, to take steps towards **growth and expansion**.

We've been working on developing relationships with Virtual Schools throughout **a wider geographic area**, leaving us best placed to expand Reading Heroes into new authorities.



100%
of participants
reported significant
improvements in
wellbeing

**"I don't think she's had
anyone reading aloud to her
in the way that I do it."**

Daniel, a Reading Heroes
volunteer

"Her happiness just beams out of her."

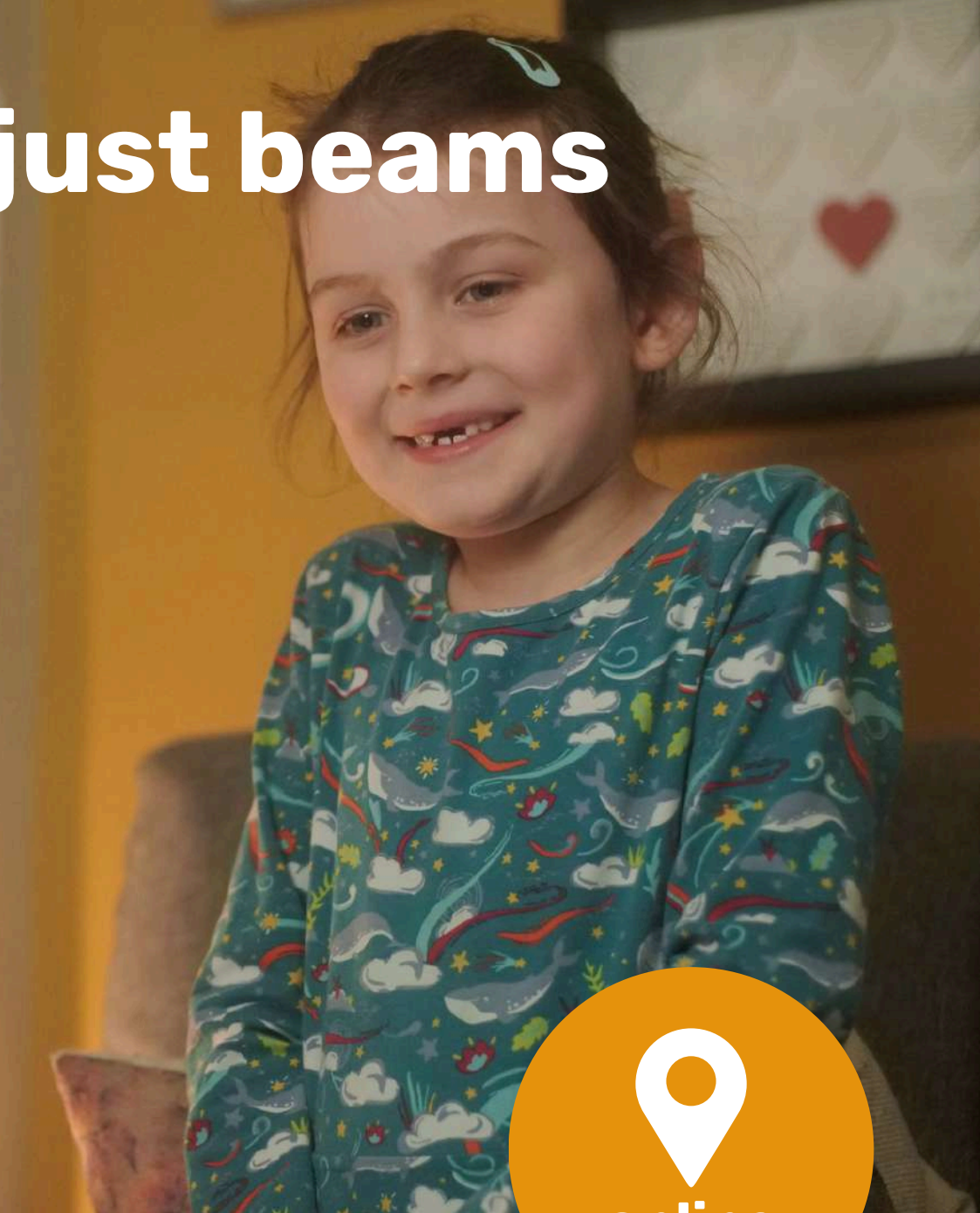
Daniel, a retired teacher, reads over Zoom with two siblings: an eight-year-old girl and a seven-year-old boy.

"Both of them are responding very, very positively to the idea of reading for joy. The girl particularly responds in a remarkably happy way. Her happiness just beams out of her. This is her time to shine, as a reader, and also within the reading relationship that we have.

That's the pleasure of reading a book aloud. But then all that pleasure found within books does lead us on, into a world of relationships, understanding and identification, and engagement in imagery and metaphor and philosophy.

In a child's experience of the adult world, which certainly for many looked after children may be a frightening, bleak and dark one, the relationship with a Reading Heroes volunteer has a beginning, middle and end – a bit like a story. It is an opportunity for a relationship that, beginning to end, is wholly positive and wholly good. They can take that with them, and put it in that secret, special place where they put wholly good things."

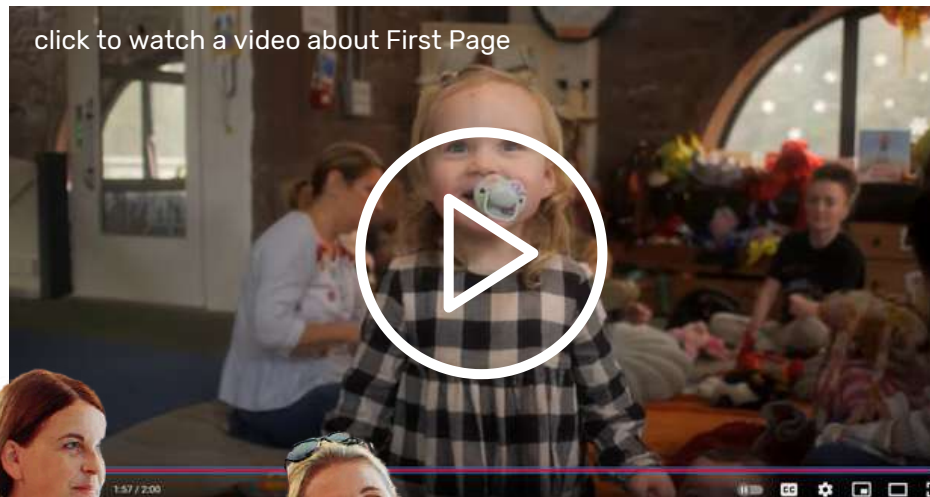
Daniel's Volunteer Story



online

LITERATURE IS FOR ALL FAMILIES

Our First Page Project brings the joy of story sharing and reading for pleasure to families across the North West, through collaboration with a network of trusted partner organisations. Our partners include children's centres, health providers and third sector organisations, such as Homestart, Refugee Women Connect and Kinship Carers, who are trained and supported to embed The Reader's Shared Reading model within their services.



We delivered **16 Family Fun Days**, allowing families to immerse themselves in our magical playspace The Storybarn, unleash their imaginations and explore nature.

Successfully ran **five Sharing Stories in the Early Years training days** for partner staff and volunteers, helping to support them to run a weekly story and rhyme group for under 5s.

Visited **nine community based storytimes** currently delivered by partner staff and volunteers that have been Reader trained.

Delivered **four Stories for You & Yours Workshops** to build the confidence of parents and carers with Shared Reading.

The Reader team went out to five partner organisations to deliver **six week cohorts of our Books & Babies groups**, offering moments of calm and reflection to new parents.



**"Made my imagination
run wild, LOVED IT!"**
Family Fun Day participant

WELCOME TO THE STORYBARN

The Storybarn
welcomed

16,850

people in
2023-2024

The Storybarn is our magical playspace for families. Here you'll find a team of trained Storyhunters, dressing up clothes, bubbles, a craft room and installations to stimulate young imaginations including a 12-foot robot, a hot air balloon, a tree house, a slide and of course, hundreds and hundreds of books.



A YEAR AT THE STORYBARN



We launched our popular new Holiday Clubs, for children aged 5-10, where **196 children** enjoyed our exciting and enriching activities during the school holidays.

Our Storyhunters engaged new communities and delivered Shared Reading sessions with **over 600 people** in one day at popular Halloween event the Spooky Welly Walk.

Children with additional needs are always welcome at the Storybarn and this year, we also held **12 Storybarn Relaxed Sessions** to ensure that children with autism and sensory conditions can enjoy the magic of the space at their own pace. Nine members of the Storybarn team attended **Autism Awareness training** led by Autism Adventures.

This year, we were able to deliver **BSL read along experiences** on request for deaf or hard-of-hearing children where an additional member of our team reads along using sign language to ensure that everyone can experience storytime together.

The Storybarn magic also went out on the road, reaching **1068 children** through workshops focused on reading for pleasure. These featured an exciting mix of interactive reading sessions and games designed to help encourage a love of reading outside of the educational framework.



LITERATURE IS FOR BREAKING BARRIERS

The Reader wants Shared Reading to be available for everyone. We are keen to reach those who do not see themselves as readers, because we know that Shared Reading can have an even greater impact for them.

From our twenty-year history, we know that the power of Shared Reading can help **build connection between people from diverse backgrounds** and grow our ability to think in different ways and better understand different experiences and perspectives. A key part of our model has always been that there is no pressure to read aloud or talk. If you want, you can simply come and listen.

This year's evaluation findings show that respondents who felt negatively about reading before joining their group experience **significantly higher rates** of strong agreement than our community as a whole for certain within-group impacts, including:

74%

the group
lifting their
mood

from
58%

51%

connecting
with others in
a deeper way

from
39%

58%

feeling a
sense of
achievement

from
45%



"If we don't feel like sharing our thoughts or feelings we don't have to, but everyone knows and understands that, so you don't feel excluded, you still feel part of something."

Group Member

"It's been a huge part of my recovery."

Paul moved to Damien John Kelly House - a recovery living centre for men in Liverpool - to support him with his alcohol and drug addiction. He attends a weekly Shared Reading group at Calderstones.

"I thought it'd be 'like pulling teeth' and to be honest, for the first couple of sessions, it was! I was still settling in at that time - coming to terms with leaving behind a life in farming and being brought to Liverpool to live in the house.

Coming to the Shared Reading group every week has grown to mean a lot to me personally. My way of thinking has always been very black and white - it's one way or the other, there's no middle ground. Reading these stories and actually hearing other people's opinions is allowing me to understand there are grey areas and that there are other ways to think.

I feel blessed to be able to come to the group every week. This is the kind of thing I will take forward when I leave the house. I'll hope to keep going to a group because I know it's going to help me be a better dad and a better person to be around."

Paul's Reader Story





LITERATURE IS FOR BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

This year's evaluation showed us that 24% of group members from adult community groups identified as D/deaf, disabled or living with a long-term health condition.

Over a fifth of them told us that before joining their group, 'I used to enjoy reading, but hadn't done it much lately.'

We have been working hard over the last year to build partnerships which help get Shared Reading out to those who need it, and to think about ways we can adapt our resources to ensure that Shared Reading truly is accessible to all.

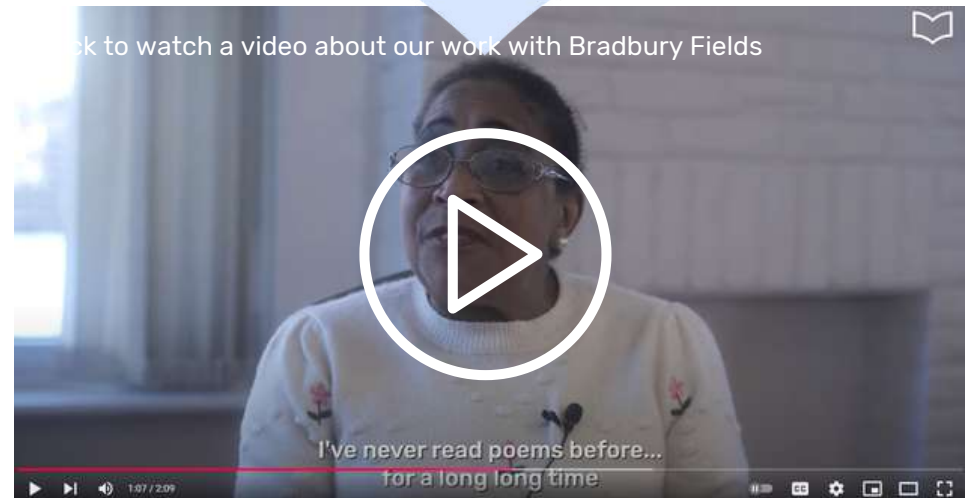
This year, we developed a new partnership with **Bradbury Fields**, a charity in Liverpool which works with blind and partially sighted people.

Together we set up a weekly Shared Reading group at The Bradbury Centre where they are based.

We provide all the literature we read in advance, so that it can be printed in braille and extra large fonts to make sure that it is accessible for everyone.

"It gives you perhaps a deeper insight into feelings. And I think that always helps with your wellbeing."

Shared Reading participant at
Bradbury Fields



LITERATURE IS FOR UNDERSTANDING OUR HERITAGE

The National Lottery Heritage Fund supported our three year 'Making Meaning at Calderstones' project which engaged the community in the history of our home.

Over 5,500 hours were contributed by volunteers to this project, including Volunteer Researchers who were led by a historian to explore the links between The Mansion House and the transatlantic slave trade. This research inspired artist Sumuyya Khader to produce the artwork 'Now We Sit With It' - now permanently on display in our Calderstones home.

Other exciting outcomes included Heritage Open Days, a new trail celebrating the history of the trees in Calderstones Park, episodes on The Reader podcast, new anthologies, 16 people's living memories being recorded as oral histories, a heritage focussed Shared Reading group, and theatre performances.

This project saw an increase in volunteers from global majority backgrounds and living with a disability, as well as engaging 1,297 children and young people in heritage trips which have become a permanent feature of the Storybarn programme.

The impact of this project ripples throughout our space, with our increased understanding being embedded in our programming and public spaces. [Read more here.](#)





LITERATURE IS FOR EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Whilst inclusion is integral to our work, we know that we can do more to make our belief – that Shared Reading is for everyone – a reality. In particular, we want to help ensure that racism is eliminated from the world and feel we have a small but vital part to play in that change.

In particular, over the period of our current three-year business plan, we aim to increase the representation of **global majority communities** in our staff team, volunteers and participants in our work by **50%**.

In this year we made progress by:

- Making our recruitment processes more **inclusive**.
- **Diversifying** our recruitment networks.
- Beginning the development of an internal **EDI training** offer.
- Signing up to the **Care Leaver Covenant**, enabling ways to connect our opportunities with the care leaver community.
- Continuing to focus on diversity in the **literature** we read, using our annual Bookshelf, in-house anthologies and volunteer support sessions to promote use of diverse texts.
- Establishing twelve ESOL Shared Reading Groups for **asylum seekers and refugees** and/or those who have English as an additional language.

- Following on from our 'Just Us' staff project, we have developed principles for Shared Reading in relation to issues around race and racism that can arise in literature. As well as written guidance, we are developing practical support workshops for Reader Leaders and a new 'Just Us' anthology of tried and tested literature for reading in groups.

[Read our full EDI commitment here.](#)



"I wanted to communicate as humans - soul to soul."

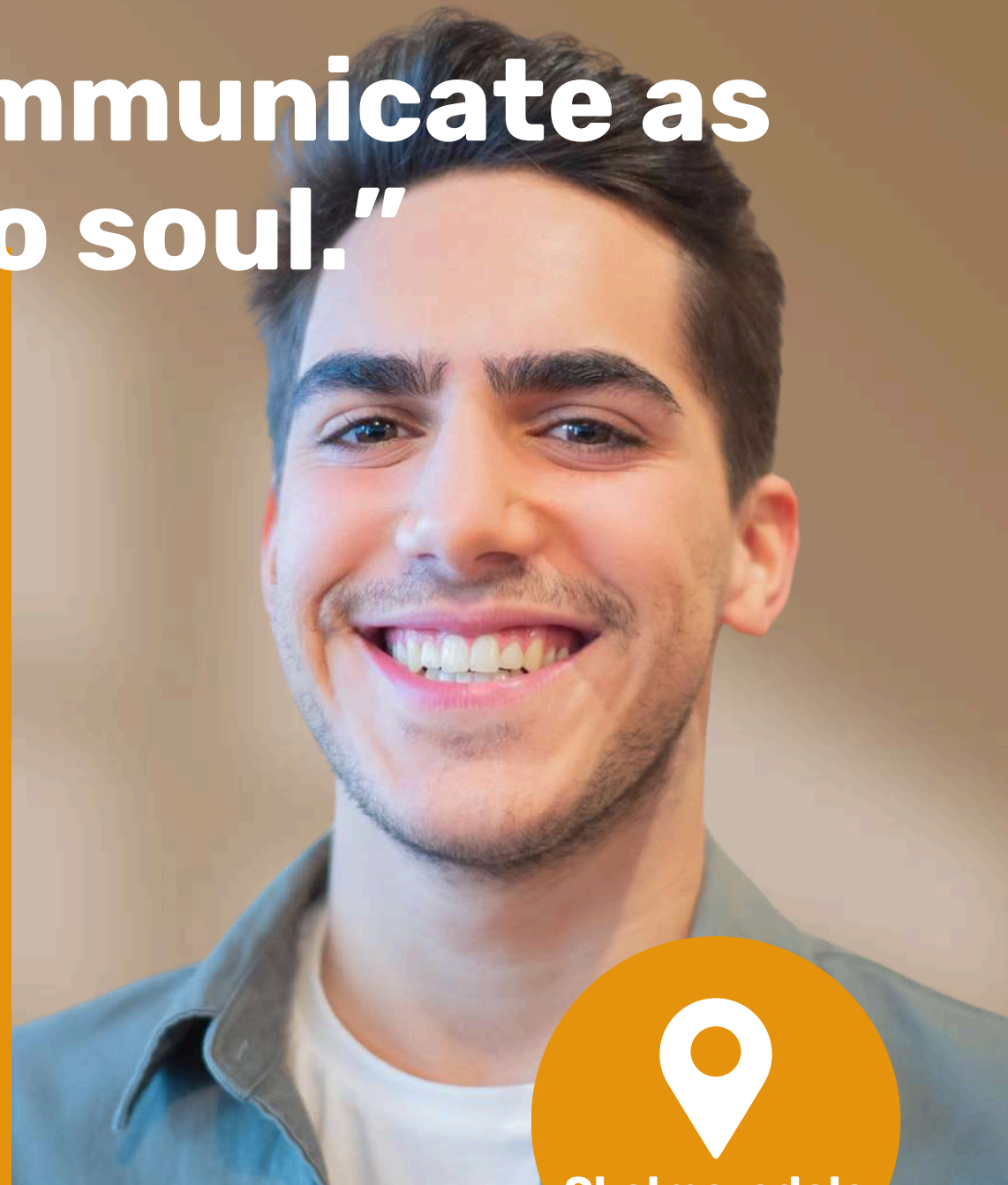
Tariq had been living in Gaza with his family where he was studying law, but was forced to flee with his brother to escape the continued conflict that has become part of everyday life in the region. While Tariq was seeking asylum, he joined one of The Reader's ground-breaking ESOL Shared Reading groups.

"Through the group I've made new friends and my English has improved a lot. I've discovered many new words through poetry and it's helped me to develop my knowledge of everyday English."

Jane, a retired teacher from Lancashire is one of the group's Reader Leaders.

"Over the years we've read with people from Iran, Palestine, Syria, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Recently we've had more people joining from Eastern Europe and Ukraine, sometimes we have mums coming along and bringing their children which is lovely."

For displaced people, much of their interaction with their new country is transactional, filling in forms and so on. I wanted to communicate with them as humans - soul to soul."



Skelmersdale

Tariq & Jane's Reader Stories

OUR VOLUNTEERS, STAFF & PARTICIPANTS*

Regularly monitoring the diversity of our people and participants is a crucial part of our EDI work to help us understand who we are reaching and how that changes over time, ensuring that Shared Reading is in the places where it's most needed.

OUR GROUP MEMBERS

18%
were under 50

36%
were 50-70

47%
were 70+

71%
female

7%
identified as a
sexuality other
than heterosexual
or straight

28%
identified as
D/deaf, disabled
or with a long-
term health
condition

*adult participants

In recent years we've had a particular focus on increasing the racial diversity of our reading community. In Spring 2024, we were 1% below our 10% target and pre-Covid position for group members identifying with a global majority background.

However, data for our newest group members shows that:

17% of those who had been attending for three months or less identified as people of the global majority.

This progress with our newest open community members is something which we hope to see reflected and built upon in next year's data.

OUR VOLUNTEERS

86%
female

10%
global
majority

8%
in 2023

16%
identified as
D/deaf, disabled
or with a long-
term health
condition

3%
identified as a
sexuality other
than heterosexual
or straight

OUR WORKFORCE

17%
identified as
D/deaf, disabled
or with a long-
term health
condition

14%
in 2023

14%
identified as a
sexuality other
than heterosexual
or straight.

12%
in 2023

28%
identified as
neurodivergent

19%
in 2023

8%
global
majority

RECRUITMENT DATA

40%
identified as a
sexuality other
than heterosexual
or straight

31%
in 2023

32%
identified as
neurodivergent

19%
in 2023

LITERATURE IS FOR HEALTH & WELLBEING

Shared Reading has health and wellbeing benefits for people at all stages of their mental health journeys. We were delighted to receive funding this year from Garfield Weston and the National Lottery to build on our existing portfolio of work to break and prevent the UK's cycle of ill mental health, by building and testing local, replicable networks of Shared Reading support.

Across the year we established 50 new groups in communities, including:

- RASA Merseyside, supporting women who have experienced sexual abuse.
- Social Adventures in Salford, a social enterprise supporting mental health and wellbeing.
- Birmingham Hospital Staff wellbeing group.

For 13 years, The Reader has been running **the UK's only clinical Shared Reading group for patients with chronic pain.**

Taking place in Liverpool's Broadgreen Hospital, this group is a pioneering intervention and has proved highly successful as a useful therapy for people with chronic pain, alongside existing NHS therapies.

The group continued this year, alongside an online Shared Reading group for those with chronic pain.

"Shared Reading does not reduce pain, but it gives a huge boost to wellbeing and enjoyment of life. All my patients who attend the group tell me frequently of the difference it makes to their lives. As well as the known benefits of group working, literature itself has an independent effect. Shared Reading changes lives for the better."

Dr Andrew Jones, Broadgreen Hospital

90%

Shared Reading gives me space to put my day-to-day concerns to one side

95%

Shared Reading lifts my mood

97%

look forward to this group as an important part of their week



"I don't think I'd be where I am today if I hadn't come."

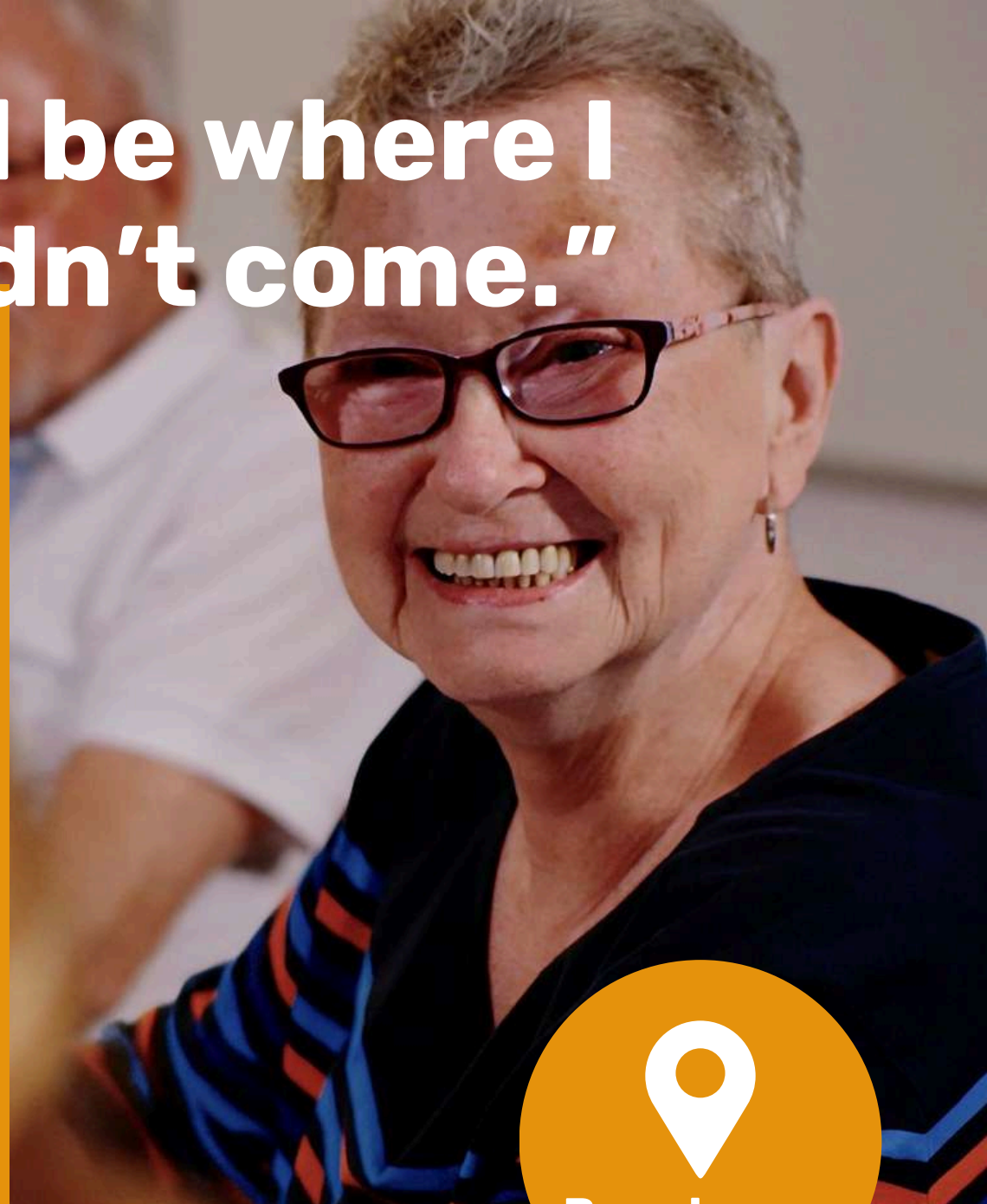
Sammi is a 50-year-old Liverpool mother-of-three and carer. She has been attending a Shared Reading group at Broadgreen Hospital chronic pain clinic for five years.

"I have always struggled with reading. I like books but I've never really read very much on my own as I am dyslexic. Shared Reading has been a good thing for me to get involved in. It's made a big impact on my confidence and understanding of literature.

I find Shared Reading distracts and takes your mind off things. You feel like you're part of a community with like-minded people. We all know how each other feels when it comes to coping with pain.

My head is in a good place now considering the pain I am in. I have gained a lot of positivity and realise I can read a novel with everyone's support. It may seem like a small thing, but it has meant a lot to me.

...I don't think I'd be where I am today if I hadn't come to this Shared Reading group."



**Broadgreen
Hospital**

Sammi's Reader Story

LITERATURE IS FOR THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM



We were delighted to be awarded the contract for the delivery of Shared Reading in PIPEs (Psychologically Informed Planned Environments) for the next two years. PIPEs support the progression of offenders with complex needs and personality related difficulties and our Shared Reading work reaches more than 650 people.

We have been delivering in PIPEs since 2013, and this new contract sees us extend our reach to 28 PIPEs settings, including prisons and Approved Premises. This year we were asked to start the first groups in PIPEs settings that house residents with additional needs.

We also deliver Shared Reading in Criminal Justice settings across Northern Ireland.

We have also been funded by three individual Criminal Justice units, including a maximum security prison, a female prison unit and a Secure Children's Home for residents aged 10 to 17.

We aim to develop links between 'closed' settings The Reader works in (such as prisons), intermediary services (such as probation), and our community-based activity. We would like to include our existing partners in these wraparound plans, forging 'through the gate' pathways in meaningful ways to support people engaged with justice services, either currently or historically.

[Read more about our Criminal Justice work here.](#)

93%

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

34

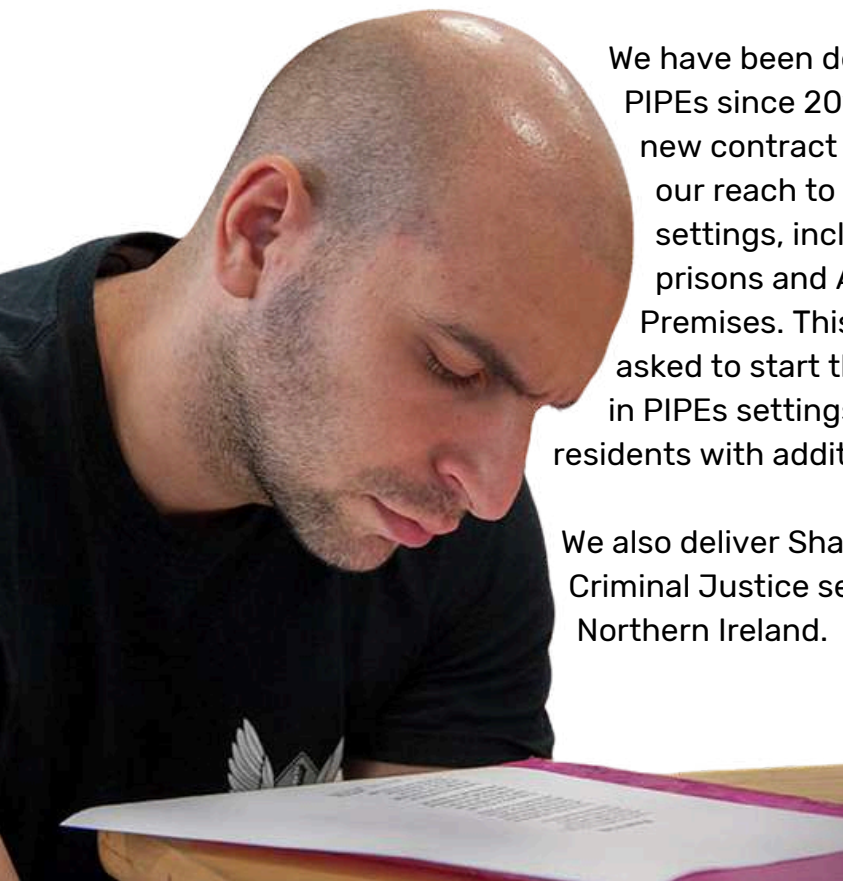
Criminal Justice Settings

64

Weekly Groups

"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."

HMPPS Officer on Shared Reading



"You are relaxed by the end."

"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

"This is like a gentle opening of a door and a person can choose whether they want to go through that door or not... I think that's what makes it quite special for the women here. They've been asked for a lot of information, they're required to give of themselves, but this involves a choice. It just opens this little space where if they want to they can say something about their past."

Clinical Lead, Female Approved Premises

"It is one of the things that I will have learnt in prison that I would like to carry on outside. It is relaxing, if you go to the Reader group when you are feeling a bit tense you are relaxed by the end."

Group Member, Category C Prison

Criminal Justice Reader Stories



**UK-wide
Criminal
Justice
settings**

LITERATURE IS FOR ALL COMMUNITIES

Loneliness is considered by many to be one of the largest Public Health challenges we face. Approximately 7.1% of people in Great Britain (3.83 million people) experience chronic loneliness, meaning they feel lonely 'often or always'. It can affect anyone, from the elderly to new mums, or refugees to the recently bereaved.

Our 2023-2024 evaluation of community group members showed

8%

spent time with someone they didn't live with once or not at all in the previous week

98%

of these looked forward to the group as an important event in their week, with three quarters strongly agreeing

They were also more likely than our community as a whole to strongly agree 'Shared Reading helps me to connect with others in a deeper way'

93%

felt like they belong more to a community as a result of attending

"Shared Reading is the highlight of my week. It has had a very deep inner healing effect in me. It provides mental stimulation, that my day-to-day life lacks. Monday is a good day to look forward to."

Group Member, 2023-2024 evaluation

Shared Reading group members who reported higher levels of loneliness also reported lower life satisfaction and a sense that what they did was worthwhile than we see in national datasets or our Reading Community as a whole

81%

said Shared Reading helped them see things they experience in their own life as things other people go through too

"Time out to relate the experiences of other people in the group to my own life triggered by the stimulus of literature. This leads to increased empathy for others"

Group Participant, 2023-2024 evaluation

96%

felt valued by the group and accepted for who they are

Feedback indicated that Shared Reading is playing an important part in helping them to feel more connected and supported

Those socialising less were considerably more likely to agree that they have become more confident since starting

93%

agreed 'In Shared Reading, we have conversations that matter'

"It's a lifesaver."

A former charity manager, who is housebound and lives alone, Diana has been participating in regular weekly online Shared Reading for the last three years since taking early retirement due to ill-health.

"For me, Shared Reading on Zoom really is a lifesaver – I can be with other people live in real time, reading interesting material and having stimulating discussions. We laugh and cry together. For that hour I feel I have a connection with others and am learning something in an interesting way. It's also an escape from one's own difficulties. You can lose yourself in a story or discussion.

I love the open-mindedness of people from different backgrounds and different ages respecting each other. It makes for interesting discussions, and we share so many ideas. It really makes you think.

It has also led me to becoming a volunteer, I now lead a regular online poetry discussion session for people with visual impairments. I have found Shared Reading to be lifesaving and stimulating. It helps me to cope with my day-to-day difficulties."



online

Diana's Reader Story

LITERATURE IS FOR ALL AGES



With an ageing population, the number of people living with dementia in the UK is increasing. The NHS tells us that over 944,000 people in the UK have dementia – 1 in 11 people over 65. Through 15 years of practice and in-depth studies, we know that Shared Reading significantly improves the quality of life for people living with dementia and their families.

This year, our staff and volunteers, along with trained partner staff, have led 57 groups and one-to-ones for those living with dementia, reading with over 370 people weekly.

In addition, with 76% of our open community members being aged 65 or over, Shared Reading helps all older adults to enjoy their lives and age well.



This year saw The Reader establish successful new Shared Reading groups for those living with dementia in both closed settings, such as Willow House Care Home in Knowsley, and open community settings, such as Liverpool Central Library. Across our 15 groups which began during this financial year we welcomed over 187 new attendees, reading with approximately 79 people every week.

Our survey of Shared Reading group members living with dementia found:

- 93% said that they always enjoy being part of the group
- 99% said that they always feel safe and welcome
- 77% said that they always made new friends

Our survey of staff working in our dementia partner organisations found:

- 100% agreed that the group helped to lift members' moods.
- 100% agreed that members unlocked new memories
- 100% agreed that members seemed to find the group calming

“It makes me feel a bit special. Like I still have my mind and can think about things and have my opinions respected.”

Dementia Shared Reading group member

"The poetry brings life back to life."

Sally, an Occupational Therapy Assistant, tells us how Shared Reading has benefitted patients she works with who are living with dementia.

"Shared Reading is so important for people living with dementia. I've seen patients find another language when expressing their thoughts, feelings and needs, which is frequently prompted by listening to poems.

In addition to this, there's the positive emotional and physical experience of connecting with others within the group setting. It offers individuals a safe space, where they have the time to find themselves again, when they may otherwise feel lost, trapped, and even robbed by their cognitive impairments. It also reduces distress, anxiety, confusion, aggression, and other associated feelings and behaviours for both the individual and the caregiver - it really is powerful stuff!

Shared Reading is not merely a distraction as it gives patients the chance to really feel something; to think, to breathe, to live, and to connect with others....the poetry somehow brings life back to life."



**Specialist
Dementia
Ward**

Sally's Reader Story

LITERATURE IS FOR WEATHERING THE STORM

We know that great literature is key to the quality of impact outlined in this report. The Reader Bookshelf is an annual programme of carefully curated literature to support all of our reading-based work. It's a way of forging connections between our supporters, volunteers, staff and readers using a shared constellation of literature.

This year's theme was [Weathering the Storm](#) and we turned to books, poems and stories which explore how humans endure stormy times. This collection of 24 titles for adults, children and young people offered understanding, refuge and space to think through the changeable weather of our lives

396

Shared
Reading
sessions used
texts from the
Bookshelf



the most popular texts



THE VITAL ROLE OF OUR VOLUNTEERS

It is only through the commitment and dedication of our volunteers that The Reader is able to impact communities in such a rich and meaningful way. We know how important it is to offer ongoing support, development opportunities and connection to our Reader Leaders who work across the UK reading with adults and children weekly in person and online.

At our home in Calderstones Park, our volunteers provide a warm welcome seven days a week. They also deliver weekly Shared Reading groups, upcycle once-loved furniture, lead heritage tours and - from this year - take care of our gardens, propagate plants for additional income and contribute to our environmental goals.

Keen to celebrate and share their successes, in May 2023, we nominated three volunteers for Coronation Champion Awards. We have continued our commitment to the Investing in Volunteers Quality Standard.

In 2023-2024 we supported:

170
new
volunteers

415
Volunteer
Reader Leaders



41
Reading Heroes
Volunteers

240
Volunteers based
at Calderstones



"I couldn't have asked for more!"

Raks is a Volunteer for our Reading Heroes project which pairs care experienced children aged 2-15 with a trained volunteer to read online and in-person.

"I was matched with a teenager, an asylum seeker from Afghanistan, who was settling into a care home and a new life in England. It was a privilege to read with him over nine months, and slowly build a friendly relationship. At our last session, he showed me the pile of books we had read together and said each one was a memory. He would be re-reading them as his English continued to improve. I couldn't have asked for more!

I learnt it was possible to build a strong human connection, even with very different life experiences, cultures, countries, faiths, and languages. I learnt about the power of pictures, humour and stories to break through language barriers and transcend borders."



Streatham

Raks' Volunteer Story

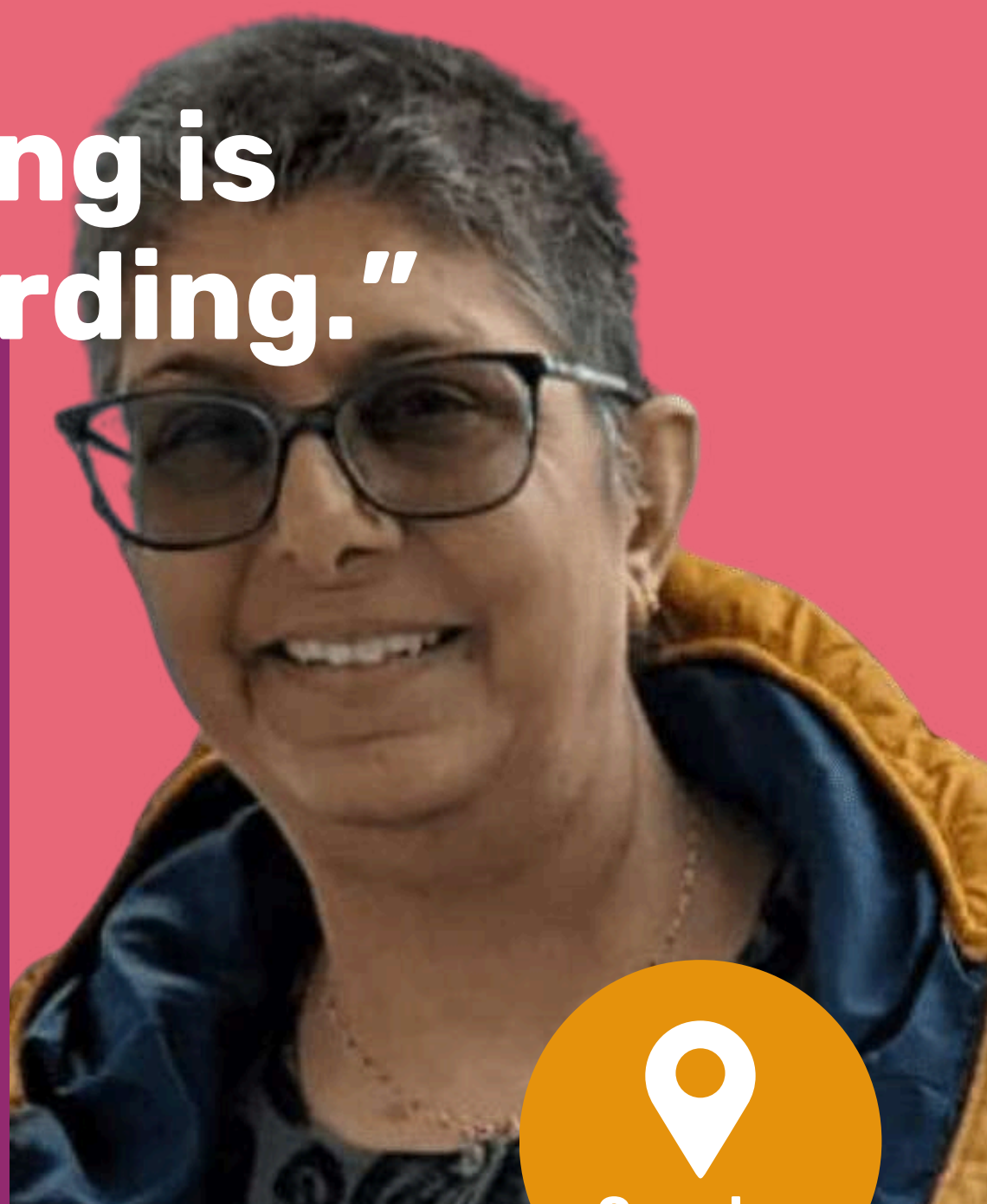
“Shared Reading is mutually rewarding.”

Kirti is a Volunteer Reader Leader running a Shared Reading group.

“With Shared Reading the world is there for you to explore. I think that leading a group on a voluntary basis where you feel like you’re getting something back is very satisfying. I’m helping other people but getting something out of it myself as well. Shared Reading is mutually rewarding.

Shared Reading and leading the group has taught me a few things in the rest of my life. For instance, sometimes you want to win an argument or a debate, but through Shared Reading you wonder if that’s so important. I’ve realised it’s more satisfying to come out of the group where everyone feels enlightened.

The Reader's voluntary structure helps make it work as we become a group of advocates for Shared Reading. I was a manager initiating change in the workplace. I see Shared Reading as a way of making change, leading by example and feeling like I’m part of an organisation. It challenges me.”



Croydon

Kirti's Volunteer Story

GROWING OUR VOLUNTEER GARDENING GROUP

When The Reader's founder Jane Davis MBE retired, she was keen to keep herself connected in a new way to Calderstones. Jane was appointed Volunteer Head Gardener in April 2023 and established our thriving group of volunteer gardeners based in Calderstones Park. This grew from four volunteers to 14 in its first six months and now forms a key part of our wellbeing programme.

With ages ranging from 21 to 88, the volunteers meet two days a week, 44 weeks of the year and maintain and enhance The Reader's gardens within the curtilage of the Mansion House. There is a clear commitment to sustainable, organic principles.

During this year, the group worked to:

- Build three cold compost bays and use our homemade compost and leaf mould mulches to develop soil health and conserve water.
- Restore existing borders and develop new ones.
- Create an Annual Flower Meadow to support pollinators.
- Use no chemicals, herbicides, or plant sprays of any sort since April 2023, including no lawn chemicals.
- Only use pre-used plant pots.
- Propagate a range of plants to be sold to the public in 2024-2025 raising additional unrestricted income for the charity.



"Following a death....this has enabled me to move forwards step by step through my grief. The group has acted as a lifeline for me. No volunteering day is the same and there is always something that needs doing."

Gardening Group Volunteer

ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

The Reader recognises that its activities impact upon the environment through its routine internal operations, its infrastructure development, and through its influence and effects on the wider community. We take seriously our responsibility for, and our commitment to, protection of the environment at all levels.

As we work towards a net-zero strategy, in 2023-2024, some key achievements were:

Changing our Waste Management contract

Enabling us to retrieve Recycling Reports every quarter and better take responsibility for improving contamination levels through data analysis

Undertaking a review of all of our commercial suppliers and changing numerous to reduce food miles for deliveries

Use of the Too Good to Go food waste app avoided:

531kg of CO₂

197 meals saved from landfill

Food caddies in all of our kitchens (staff and commercial) to be disposed of in our onsite hot composting facilities

Attending Sustainability Network meetings to share and build knowledge across a number of departments in the organisation

Continued our popular Upcycling Group which gives new life to furniture headed for landfill

Planted wildflower meadows in the grounds to encourage biodiversity and pollination habitats

Implemented a new recycling system for our offices creating a cultural shift towards recycling at work and reducing contamination levels

Adapting our menus to use local seasonal ingredients to highlight local produce and reduce imported food miles

For the first time in our organisational history, **more waste is recycled than sent to landfill**

Greatly improved our knowledge of a realistic carbon journey through Net-zero Consultancy allowing us to create a set of actions to work towards and highlighting our major carbon contributors

Using fully compostable packaging across all of our in-house products from Cafes and Ice Cream Parlour

Joined a trial of Arts Green Book Toolkit providing access to expert knowledge and working alongside other cultural organisations to reach baseline accreditation

Took part in "No Mow May" across the site

LITERATURE IS FOR THE FUTURE

Our mission remains unchanged and drives our work; to ensure that literature becomes part of the fabric of life, and that Shared Reading groups are widely available, bringing people and books together in welcoming places.

We are so grateful to all our staff and volunteers who strive week in, week out, to spread the joy and power of Shared Reading. Thank you to all our funders and partners who believe in literature's life-changing benefits and to all the readers, young and old, who read with us.

The idea of reading being good for us isn't a new thing, but faced now with a range of 21st century challenges in our society, including an [ageing population](#), [socially disconnected communities](#), [increasing loneliness](#) and [mental health concerns](#) – the time for Shared Reading is now.

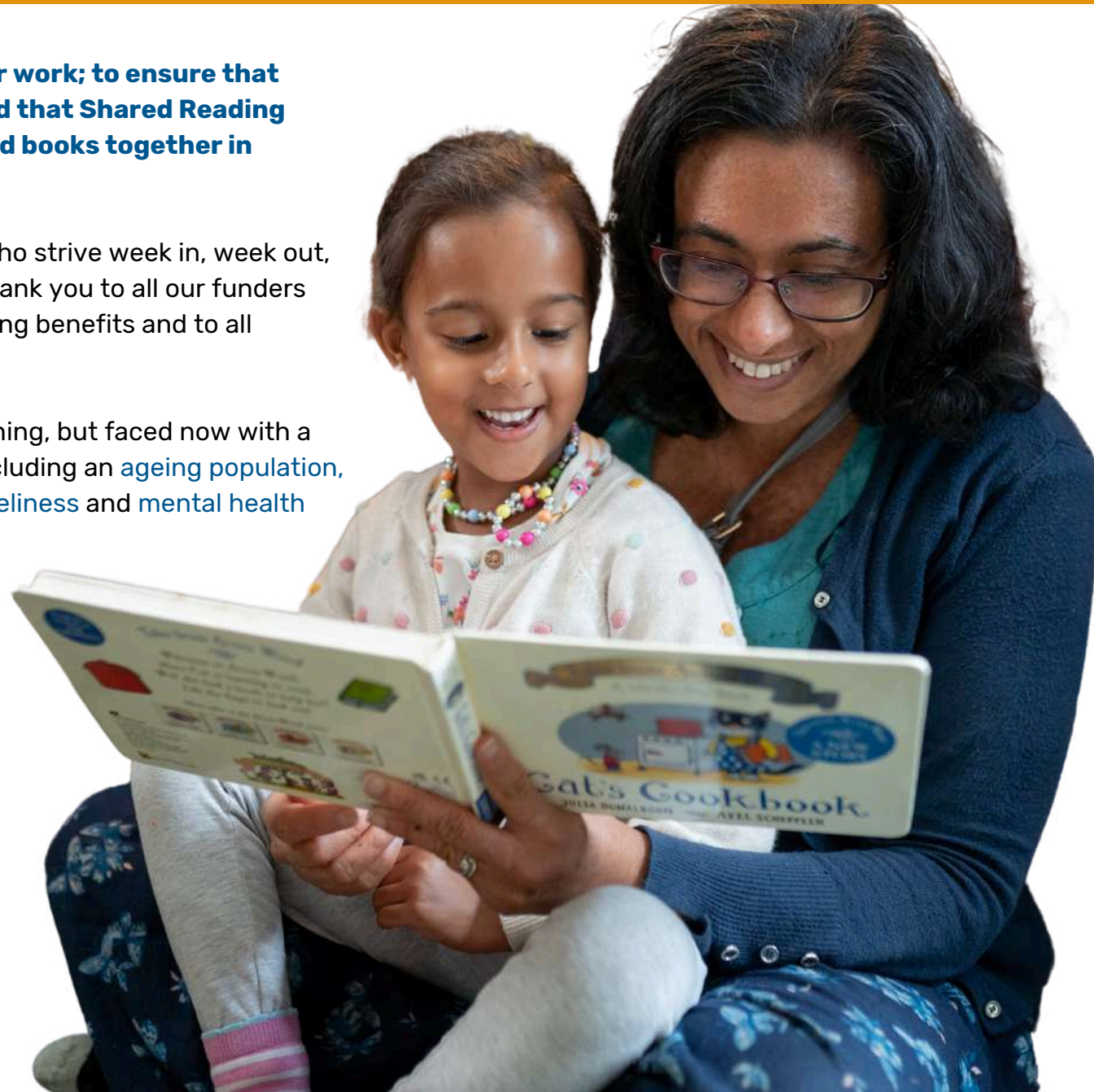
However, many people don't realise great books exist for them. [The Reader](#) wants to reclaim great literature for everyone.



Jemma Guerrier
Managing Director



Katie Clark
Director of Literature



THANK YOU!

The Reader has a collective of supporters, including commissioners, grant funders, corporate partners and individuals.

Funders and Commissioners

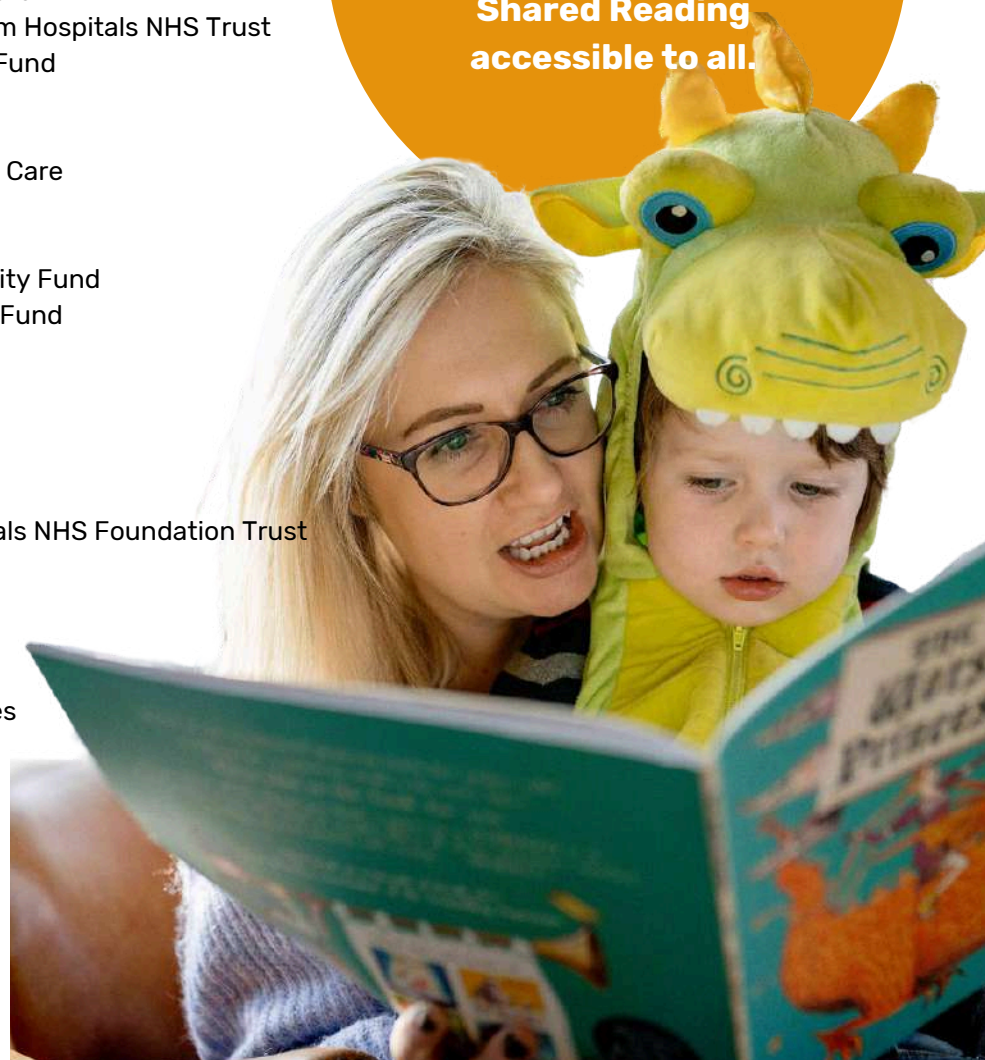
Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust
Arts Council England
Barton Moss Secure Care Centre
Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
BDB Pittmans LLP
Bury Virtual School
NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board
Cheshire West and Chester UK Shared Prosperity Fund (Communities and Place Grant)
City of Doncaster Council Public Health
Conwy Libraries
Dorset Council Libraries
Duchy of Lancaster Benevolent Fund
Elizabeth L Rathbone Charitable Trust
Garfield Weston Foundation
Hammersmith & Fulham Libraries and Archives Service
Haringey Council
Hemby Charitable Trust
Highway One Trust
HMP Kirklevington Grange Prison
Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service
Jewish Care
John Lewis and Partners Liverpool
Livv Housing
Liverpool Virtual School
Masonic Charitable Foundation
West Lancashire Freemasons
Welsh Government National Library of Wales
National Literacy Trust
Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board

Northern Ireland Public Health Agency
Notting Hill Genesis
Players of People's Postcode Lottery
Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospital Trust
Richmond Integrated Care Board
Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust
Sefton Council UK Prosperity Fund
Sefton Virtual School
Segelman Trust
Somerset Council Adult Social Care
Croydon Relief in Need
The Granada Foundation
The National Lottery Community Fund
The National Lottery Heritage Fund
The Rayne Foundation
The Swire Charitable Trust
St Giles Trust
University of Bristol
Unwin Charitable Trust
Warrington and Halton Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Wirral Borough of Culture
Woodchurch High School

Groups:

Knit and Natter at Calderstones
Gardening at Calderstones
Upcycling at Calderstones

Thanks to our community
of individual donors
for their vital support
in helping to make
Shared Reading
accessible to all.



GET INVOLVED



DONATE

Give a one off donation or support Shared Reading with a monthly gift and become a Regular Giver. As little as £3 could provide reading materials, bringing people together and books to life.

[DONATE HERE](#)



PARTNER WITH US

We're keen to grow Shared Reading in a way that is complementary to other services and we want to ensure that we partner with organisations who can help us reach those people who will benefit most.

[READ MORE](#)



VOLUNTEER

Whether you're looking to read with adults or children or even wanting to volunteer at our organisational home in Calderstones Park, we have a variety of volunteering opportunities on offer.

[APPLY HERE](#)



FIND A GROUP

Shared Reading groups happen in all sorts of places all over the UK as well as online. They are free and for everyone and there is no pressure to talk or read aloud.

[FIND A GROUP](#)