

Case Study: Starbucks Readers, Essex Libraries/Braintree Library.

The group is made up of 1 man and 12 women in their late 30s and over 70s and is run flexibly, where members can join or leave at any time. Members come from a broad range of countries eg South Africa, Nigeria, Seychelles Islands, Hong Kong, Turkey, Czech Republic, India, Russia, Spain and the UK. For 9 of the group, English is a second language. Most of the group are employed, for example, as teachers, solicitors, home helps, customer service assistants and some are retired. There is one young parent. They are all fluent readers and some are members of a 'regular' book club. They are all members of Essex Libraries and borrow a range of books at any one time.

The group evolved from a monthly coffee meeting between the group leader and a friend who would go for coffee and bring along a book they had enjoyed reading, to talk about. More friends found out about this and joined in. The group has grown ever since.

How it works

The group is now actively promoted at the local library and in Adult Literacy and ESOL classes. They meet on the first Wednesday of every month (10.30 – 11.30 am) at Starbucks Coffee Shop in Freeport outlet shopping village, Braintree. At Christmas and at the end of the school year they have a social outing – a lunch at a local restaurant. The readers have joined the group for social reasons.

The group reads the designated Quick Reads book – picked either by the leader or recommended by other readers. The book is the focus and discussions follow. The group's varied life experiences come up in the conversation; Quick Reads have proved a perfect vehicle for increasing inter-cultural understanding. At times, information that some may not have is also shared.

Outcomes

One of the members comes from the Czech Republic. On one of her visits home, she talked about this book group to her English tutor. The tutor has now set up a similar group there and gets the books ordered through the British Council office.

By coming to the group 3 members have gained a great deal of confidence in talking in English and improving their job prospects. Two of them have secured jobs in London.

One young mum who did not do any reading has now started listening to the stories and is encouraging her children to read daily.

All the group members feel they have benefitted by growing as a 'family'. They discuss the books but also seek support on other matters. In terms of reading, some are already members of other reading groups and so have successfully made the

transition from much more challenging books to simpler books. There is much camaraderie in the group and they support cultural events at the local library.

One of the members has been encouraged by coming to the group, to write and publish a book.

Evaluation

The group members have joined predominantly for social reasons. The group who are more used to longer reads have found the books beneficial as light reads and have used them to build reading into their spare/leisure time. Some read a book just before going to bed or even listen to the CD version while cooking their evening meal. Their interest in reading has grown over the period.

The books and reading group activities have helped members to develop their own interest in reading, share useful information, find employment, help their children with homework, improve their English language skills, promote the reading group model in their home country, raise awareness about libraries and the events they offer.