

READING FRIENDS

Reading Friends pilot year (September 2018 - August 2019) : at a glance

The Reading Friends programme connects people by starting conversations through reading. It helps those who are vulnerable, isolated and at risk of loneliness, giving them the opportunity to meet others, share their stories, make new friends and have fun.

1518 participants
a retention rate of 65%



In the pilot phase there were 22 projects and, during the course of the year, the programme started testing a library subscription model with 19 library authorities. Reading Friends meet in libraries, cafes, care homes, prisons, hospitals, and many other locations all over the UK:



208 volunteers
a retention rate of 61%

96% of participants and **95%** of one-off participants rated their experience as Good or Excellent

94% of participants and **95%** of one-off participants would recommend Reading Friends to others



97% of volunteers rated their volunteering experience as Good or Excellent

90% of volunteers would like to carry on volunteering with Reading Friends



readingfriends.org.uk
@ReadingFriends_



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ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

THE READING AGENCY

Reading Friends shows how powerful reading and sharing stories can be. Our evaluation findings provide evidence that Reading Friends is making a difference to people's lives, improving their social connections, quality of life and experience of reading. Key findings are:



PERSONAL OUTCOMES

"I am living with dementia. I sometimes read out a poem to the group - one that [the volunteer] knows I will be able to read out. I enjoy the group, and **love taking part when I am able to do so.**"

Participant, Horsham

92% of volunteers agreed being a volunteer had given them a sense of purpose.

63% rose to **78%** - participants agreed they felt confident trying new things.

78% rose to **93%** - volunteers agreed they felt confident trying new things.

76% of participants indicated the programme had added purpose to their week.

"By reading to them in hospital I am actually filling a gap in their lives. Sharing stories and poems with people who have missed out on these in their lives is a truly wonderful thing for me to be able to do."

Volunteer, Edinburgh



SOCIAL OUTCOMES

"I was looking for different things I can do with other people. **I am alone so I wanted to make sure it would be sociable.**"

Volunteer, Sheffield

67% rose to **83%** - participants agreed they 'feel connected to other people'.

77% rose to **95%** - volunteers agreed they 'feel connected to other people'.

"I've got to know people I didn't before - now if I met them out on the street I would chat to them. It's someone to say hello to, and we have something to talk about. **Brings people in the village together.**"

Participant, West Sussex



READING OUTCOMES

"I was a voracious reader...then, I developed schizophrenia and never read again. [I] couldn't hold onto what had come before, in my head. **Being read to is different because I can interact, and there is something to hold onto.**"

Participant, Edinburgh

93% agreed the programme had increased their enjoyment of talking about reading with others.

83% of participants enjoyed talking about what they read with other people.

"To pass the book on and share it with someone else and ask what do they think of it...Yeah that is one of the things that I miss with my wife dying...she was a great reader and we would sit and talk about it. **And now, you've got somewhere to come and...say: 'hey, this is a great read'.**"

Participant, Greater Manchester