

Transcript: Reading Well and Bibliotherapy in Wales Webinar

Debbie Hicks

Bore Da

Hello everyone. My name is Debbie Hicks. I'm Creative Director at The Reading Agency; a national charity working across the UK to use the proven power of reading to tackle life's big challenges

I'd like to start by welcoming you all. Thank you from The Reading Agency and our partners for joining us for this exciting webinar on bibliotherapy; a term which when unpacked means the therapeutic use of books and reading to support mental health and well-being.

We are going to be focusing our bibliotherapy discussion today on Reading Well Books on Prescription; an important reading and health intervention available across Wales delivered by The Reading Agency working in partnership with public libraries, SCL Cymru and Welsh government.

And we have an amazing panel of expert speakers to share their thoughts. We're delighted that Professor Neil Frude, consultant clinical psychologist and Books On Prescription Wales pioneer will be speaking alongside senior librarians, Cheryl Hesketh and Bethan Hughes. We are also going to hear from community navigators Rebecca Szekely, Haf Williams, and Sue Mitchell about how they use Reading Well as part of their social prescribing toolkit.

But lets start with the housekeeping first.

Some of our speakers will be delivering their presentations in Welsh. Simultaneous translation into English is available by clicking on the 'interpretation' button at the bottom of your screen and selecting English. If you want to mute the original language you can do this by pressing the button beneath the language you choose. The main seminar will take place on the Welsh channel, so when you have finished listening to the interpreter, remember to select Welsh again so that you can hear the rest of the speeches. If you have any problems hearing the interpreter, please contact us for a transcription.

Before I hand you over to our experts, I wanted to start with a few observations from The Reading Agency on the Reading Well programme. We are incredibly proud to lead and partner on this work driven by our passionate belief in the proven power of reading to tackle health inequalities and deliver better health outcomes.

Together we have all achieved something amazing; a new public library health service, driven by the power of reading, quality assured by health professionals and experts with lived experience, delivered through a curated list of brilliant books by brilliant authors able to inspire and inform, spark story sharing and start conversations that help us to manage our well-being.

And there can be no doubt the need for such support. These are anxious times with public spaces closed and long-term social distancing in place, the experience of the pandemic has been disruptive and disorientating for all. Not surprisingly, the consequence has been a huge increase in the need for mental health support as prevalence rates climb.

More than a million parents recently surveyed by Barnados said that their child needed psychological help as a result of lock down. And whereas 1 in 8 children had a diagnosable mental health condition prior to Covid 19, Save the Children report that 1 in 4 are now experiencing anxiety with the risk of lasting psychological distress and depression.

Between April and December 2020, mental health counselling sessions delivered to **young people in Wales** have increased by 13% on average. And a recent Mind Cymru survey published in November 2020 showed that of a sample of 13,000 people, half were showing clinically significant distress linked to the pandemic with 20% reporting severe effects. The psychological impact of the past year has clearly been wide ranging but it has also thrown into sharp relief existing health inequalities with younger people, women, those living in poverty and BAME communities disproportionately affected.

We know that library delivered bibliotherapy schemes such as Reading Well delivered aren't the answer to the Covid mental health challenge but we also know they can be part of the solution. Welsh Government have funded Reading Well book collections to help adults, children and families to understand and manage their mental health and well-being as well as to support people living with dementia. These collections available in every library authority in Wales and provide quality assured reading curated and endorsed by health professionals and people with lived experience.

Reading Well delivers the gold standard in bibliotherapy practice. It is evidence based and works within clinical guidelines. It draws on expert advice, consultation, review and best practice. It takes over a year to put together each list with an expert panel who work hard to ensure that each book selected has been rigorously evaluated and is accessible and relevant to need. Each collection provides a wide range of content from book based CBT therapy to fiction and real-life personal stories in a range of different formats including e-books, audio, graphic and picture books and workbooks. We work hard to ensure there is something for everyone including less confident readers

How does the scheme work?

Books can be recommended by appropriate professionals but are also available for anyone to borrow from public libraries in their preferred language. The books are available in both Welsh and English thanks to our brilliant partners Books Council Wales, who have worked tirelessly to ensure the highest quality translation which has included work with mental health professional to develop new Welsh terminology where none previously existed.

Reading Well is a powerful public library reading and health offer that really does work-so far 1.2 million people have borrowed 2.3 million books with 90% of users saying their Reading Well book was helpful. There are also associated benefits to reading with regular readers reporting reduced stress and depression and stronger feelings of relaxation than non-readers. [28](#)

Reading Well works because it delivers the quality assurance of health partner endorsement with the guaranteed authenticity of genuine co-production with experts by experience. And because its driven by real partnership working; with public libraries who deliver Reading Well right into the heart of local communities and with health partners such as the Royal College of GPs, Mind Cymru and local health boards supporting people across the country.

And although library spaces may not be open, libraries are working hard to get books to those that need them most through click and collect and digital lending services alongside local partnerships with school, in the community and with the health sector.

Reading Well sits at the heart of The Reading Agency's mission to tackle big life challenges such as poor mental health through the proven power of reading. Our Reading Well partnership with public libraries drives a public library health bibliotherapy offer that really is delivering better health outcomes for local communities. Reading Well is more than just a book list – it represents the real power of reading and libraries to change lives.

Introduce Neil

And now over to our experts to tell you more. It gives me great pleasure to introduce Professor Neil Frude, Consultant Clinical Psychologist and founder of the original Books on Prescription Wales from which Reading Well has drawn both its inspiration and approach. Without Neil, Reading Well would not have happened and The Reading Agency is incredible grateful to him for his long standing support of our work.

Professor Neil Frude - Bibliotherapy, a psychological perspective

Hello, I'm Neil Frude and I'm a clinical psychologist.

I'm going to start with two quotes:

The first is from the 16th Century: *"Come, take choice of all my library, and so beguile thy sorrow"*

That was written by William Shakespeare and it's from *Titus Andronicus*

And the other quote is very recent. It's from a scientific paper that reports a systematic review of randomised clinical trials – conducted over the past 20 years – of the impact of self-help books on people with clinical depression:

"Bibliotherapy appears to be effective in the reduction of adults' depressive symptoms in the long-term period, providing an affordable prompt treatment that could reduce further medications. The results of the present review suggest that bibliotherapy could play an important role in the treatment of mental health issues"

What these two quotes have in common, of course, is the powerful message that books can have therapeutic power. This is true of many kinds of books – from do-it-yourself cognitive behaviour therapy manuals to novels and poetry.

Appreciating the fact that books can greatly benefit people who are experiencing emotional distress then leads us to think about how we can take full advantage of the potential.

We know that, at any one time, around 1/6 of the adult population across the UK has a clinical psychological problem – and the comparable figure for school-age children is around 1 in 8

And those figures are from early 2020 – before any effects of the pandemic.

So, very MANY people are distressed – and in the majority of cases their suffering could be significantly reduced if they had access to psychological therapy. But, sadly, only a small minority – between 10% and 20% - ever receive such help. There simply aren't the mental health professionals available to provide individual face-to-face treatment.

But there are other ways of providing such support – and one very effective – and highly COST-effective – way of doing this is by means of high quality, carefully selected, books whose authors have set out to provide the necessary support and guidance through their writing.

So although psychological therapy can be HIGHLY EFFECTIVE, the DELIVERY of such therapy has been greatly limited by a logistical issue – limited availability. By analogy, it's as if we had developed a highly effective vaccine but had limited capacity to distribute it.

Thus, the overall IMPACT of psychological therapy has been relatively slight, because there are limits to how many people can be reached by the traditional methods of DELIVERING such treatments.

I have a simple formula – $\text{Impact} = \textit{Effectiveness} \times \textit{Reach}$

So the IMPACT of therapy reflects EFFECTIVENESS – How effective is the therapy?

And it also reflects REACH – How many people can be provided with the therapy?

So, in principle, we could double the impact by doubling the effectiveness – this is impossible because psychological treatment is already over 50% effective – or we can double the REACH – and with affordable and plentiful resources we can easily double or triple the reach – or even multiply it by 100 fold.

Bibliotherapy is certainly highly effective – there's a huge evidence base showing that many people with emotional problems can benefit significantly from this type of psychological help.

And bibliotherapy can have very wide REACH – if we can find ways of getting the most effective books into the hands and homes of a large number of people. So the strategy of Bibliotherapy makes so much sense – in principle. But if it's to make a real IMPACT we need to translate this STRATEGY into a working SCHEME.

And the scheme that was devised to maximise impact was called **“Books on Prescription”**

I think everybody watching will be familiar with the Books on Prescription idea, so I don't need to describe it.

But it IS worth emphasising that – in essence – it’s a public-library-based service that operates as a “joined up system” incorporating elements of the existing infrastructure. It makes use of readily available resources – doctors and other health professionals, public libraries, and books – carefully selected, high quality, truly excellent books.

The approach employs a familiar clinical “device” – the “prescription” – and a GP’s prescription or recommendation for a particular book CAN give added credibility and increase a person’s motivation – but these days the majority of books on the list are not in fact prescribed, but are borrowed by people who have learned about them through the Reading Agency leaflets and websites or have come across them as they browsed library bookshelves. Such a variety access routes is to be welcomed – because every borrowing of one of the books increases the REACH – and therefore the IMPACT – of the scheme.

The first library-based Books on Prescription scheme was launched in Cardiff in 2003 and this was soon followed by the nationwide scheme “Book Prescription Wales” which was fully funded by the Welsh Government.

When this scheme was launched in 2005 it attracted considerable international attention. It received press coverage around the world – and as a consequence was then emulated in a number of countries. A survey in 2011 indicated that there were over 100 Books on Prescription schemes operating in various part of England alone – all with different booklists, operating strategies, etc.

There were clear benefits in having a single integrated national scheme and the Reading Agency took on the task of devising and coordinating such a scheme – and they did so magnificently – resulting in a quantum leap in the quality of all aspects of the operation – including the book selection process, professional and reader involvement, coordination with libraries, promotion, evaluation and the development of related schemes.

I was truly delighted when in 2018 The Welsh Government commissioned the Reading Agency to collaborate on extending the operation into Wales. As part of the major initiative *“Together For Mental Health and Wellbeing in Wales”* Welsh Government funded the rollout of the first Reading Well scheme, including paying for the book collections and the supporting materials.

AND they have also paid for the translation into Welsh of the majority of the books in the three schemes that have now been launched in Wales. This has led to over 60 books on mental health themes – for adults and children – becoming available in Welsh for the first time.

The mammoth translation task – I've been told that it may be the largest translation project ever commissioned by Welsh Government – has been expertly managed by the Books Council of Wales.

Following the initial launch of the dementia scheme in Wales in 2018, the adult mental health scheme followed in July 2019 and the child scheme in 2020. The launch of the child scheme, of course, was online, and while we can celebrate the fact that the launch did take place despite the pandemic, it's also very frustrating that temporary restrictions on library opening times are limiting the accessibility of the books that are needed at this time – now, more than ever.

You'll be aware of the fact that this webinar is occurring during Child Mental Health Week and that children's mental health has been increasingly recognised as a major cause for concern. A highly significant report by the Welsh Assembly in 2018 pointed to the urgent need to address the rising number of children with mild, moderate and severe emotional problems and called for increased resources to be made available. The excellent Reading Well for Children scheme can play a significant part in providing some of the help that is needed – especially in these disrupted and troubled times.

So much care went into the selection of these books – and into the design and production of the supportive materials – not to mention the translation of the books into Welsh – and now the issue is – as always – that of REACH. We need these books to reach the many children who could benefit from them. We have such enthusiastic librarians who champion the scheme – and I am hoping that schools will fully appreciate the value of the scheme and introduce the books into the classroom.

Some experts are now warning of possible severe longer-term adverse mental health consequences of the pandemic for both adults and children. Such widespread distress – if it does occur – will call for every available means to REACH those of us who are experiencing post-pandemic distress. Bibliotherapy can be a powerful resource that can help us – as Shakespeare put it – to *“beguile our sorrow”*

Thank You Diolch yn fawr

Introduce Libraries

And now over to the library perspective on bibliotherapy and its role as a key community asset in the social prescribing toolkit. I would like to introduce two super star librarians; Bethan Hughes, Principal Librarian (Denbighshire Libraries) and Cheryl Hesketh, Library Development Manager: Reading (Conwy Libraries). Bethan is the Society of Chief Librarians Cymru lead for Health and Wellbeing and is active in integrating Reading Well at a strategic and operational level locally and nationally, and in partnerships with Health and the third sector. Cheryl also has a strategic lead to work across sectors locally and nationally building partnerships and raising awareness of the power of reading to support wellbeing including the Reading Well scheme.

Bibliotherapy and social prescribing, a library perspective:

Cheryl Hesketh – speaking in English.

Bethan Hughes – speaking in Welsh.

Cheryl Hesketh

Library Development Manager : Reading, Conwy

Why Libraries ?

Public libraries sit within the heart of their local communities, both physically and figuratively. The value that communities place on public libraries has been seen during this pandemic we now find ourselves living through. Public libraries were one of the first services which were allowed to operate during this crisis largely because it was recognised that books really are a lifeline to so many people particularly during isolating, stressful and anxious times. During normal times, when we can be open, then libraries provide a neutral, non judgemental space just to 'be'. The author Matt Haig said that public libraries are more interested in us as an individual than the size of our bank balance or how much money is in our wallet or purse. There aren't many community spaces which are totally free at the point of access in the way libraries are and which exist for everyone regardless of who they may be. It's a very levelling environment in that sense. In public libraries, everyone receives the same invitation and welcome to use our spaces and our books whether you are newborn or ninety. So they are places of safety, neutrality and reassurance and our partners from other sectors recognise this strength we have within our communities and this is why they want to work with us to deliver their services and engage with their users within our space. We have a trusted record of working closely and effectively with a whole host of partners from social care, health, employment agencies, education, third sector etc

Libraries are non-threatening, and they are impartial. If you walk through the door into a library no-one has any idea what you're going in there for so your privacy is protected and you don't feel you're being judged. Library staff are committed to and eager to help their readers and that help and support is rewarded by the affection that communities demonstrate towards library staff. Library users will share the most personal and poignant stories with the staff and for some people the library may be their only source of human chat on a daily basis and library staff recognise and value the significance of their role in this way and they are respectful and discreet. And it's important to remember as well that we are a fully bilingual service and that these conversations can take place in Welsh and English and that we provide books in both languages to reflect and meet the needs of our communities. It's incredibly important to be able to explore and understand issues surrounding your wellbeing or that of a family member or colleague in your first language which could very likely be Welsh here in North Wales. So I think when you combine all of those factors it really does make sense that libraries are the perfect partner to provide bilingual medically endorsed books and information on such a common yet potentially sensitive subject as our emotional and mental health.

Libraries also provide the flexibility of ensuring we do all we can to reach readers with the books that can support their mental wellbeing even during these challenging times when libraries can't be open as we would normally be. We've expanded our digital offer during the pandemic so that people can download ebooks and audiobooks and we've also established a Call and Collect service so that we can arrange for people to pick up their books at an agreed time from the library. All of this within the safety of approved risk assessments. And we're also enabled to carry on providing our home library service at this time because we know that people especially when they are at their most vulnerable really do rely on getting their books. (quote ?)

Libraries are places of discovery and hope and insight which provide limitless opportunities for expanding and enhancing our lives through this unrestricted access to information and reading. Libraries help us reach our full potential by providing gateways to support and opportunity for everyone which is hugely empowering.

I've worked in public libraries for over 20 years and I'm passionate about the role of reading to support our mental health. I've delivered various bibliotherapeutic projects and I have to say that Reading Well is one of the most powerful projects to support mental health that is freely available to everyone through their public libraries and I believe it really does have the potential to save lives.

Bethan Hughes

Prif Lyfrgellydd, Llyfrgelloedd Sir Ddinbych

Diolch i ti Cheryl.

Ers pan lansiwyd y cynlluniau Darllen yn Well yng Nghymru, roeddwn i'n benderfynol o ddod o hyd i ffyrdd i'w ymsefydlu o fewn ymarfer y sector iechyd a gofal cymdeithasol yn lleol yma yn Sir Ddinbych ac ar draws y gogledd, a'u cymryd nhw 'y tu allan' i'r llyfrgell ac i mewn i ddwylo y pobl fyddai'n elwa ohonynt a'r bobl fyddai'n gallu eu hawgrymu a chymeradwyo.

Roedd strategaeth Law yn Llaw at Iechyd Meddwl Llywodraeth Cymru yn edrych ar ffyrdd newydd o gefnogi iechyd a lles meddyliol. Roedd llyfrgelloedd Conwy eisoes yn cydweithio gyda Grwp Canlyniadau Conwy ar gyfer Iechyd Meddwl a Lles Emosiynol dan gadeiryddiaeth Debbie Doig-Evans i ddod a buddion darllen i'r sector iechyd a gofal cymdeithasol, ac roedden ni yn Sir Ddinbych yn rhan o sawl fforwm aml-asiantaeth lle roedd cyfloedd i hyrwyddo Darllen yn Well.

Daeth yn amlwg fod cyfle da i gyd-weithio ar draw y ddwy sir. Felly, gyda chymorth Siwan Jones o Iechyd Cyhoeddus Cymru i agor drysau i ni o fewn y sector iechyd, a thrwy ein aelodaeth o'r Tîm Gweithredu Lleol ar gyfer Conwy a Sir Ddinbych, cawsom wahoddiad i wneud cais am arian i godi proffil Darllen yn Well a'i effaith posib ymysg ymarferwyr iechyd. Mae unrhyw un sy'n gweithio mewn llyfrgelloedd yn gwybod fod hi wastad yn her i ddod o hyd i'r capasiti i wneud y math yma o waith ymestynol, felly roedden yn sylweddoli fod hwn yn gyfle euraidd i greu y capasiti hwnnw, ond hefyd i gymryd trywydd ychydig yn wahanol ac i weithio o fewn cyd-destun rhagnodi cymdeithasol, maes sy'n ehangu'n gyflym.

Ers sawl blwyddyn mae ein llyfrgelloedd wedi gweithio yn agos gyda'r rhwydwaith o Gyfeirwyr Cymunedol sy'n cynnig gwasanaethau rhagnodi cymdeithasol i'n cymunedau lleol. Rydym yn cynnal Pwyntiau Siarad ac ystod eang o wasanaethau cymorth a chefnogaeth cymunedol, sy'n manteisio ar nodweddion a sefyllfa unigryw llyfrgelloedd fel mae Cheryl wedi amlinellu. Fe wnes i sylweddoli fod sgiliau'r Cyfeirwyr Cymunedol a'u rhwydweithiau eang o gysylltiadau yn ddelfrydol i godi ymwybyddiaeth o Darllen yn Well.

Roedd ein cais am arian yn llwyddiannus yn hwyr yn 2019 ac fe wnaethon ni gychwyn trwy benodi tri Chyfeiriwr Cymunedol i weithio hefo ni yn ychwanegol i'w swyddi arferol, fel bod modd i osod Darllen yn Well i mewn yn eu hymarfer rheolaidd fel man cychwyn. Yn ogystal â hyfforddi staff llyfrgell mewn ymwybyddiaeth o iechyd meddwl a'r ymchwil y tu ôl i ragnodi llyfrau, y bwriad oedd i weithio'n agos gyda meddygfeydd lleol, meddygon teulu a gweithwyr iechyd rhengflaen eraill i sicrhau eu bod i gyd yn ymwybodol o Darllen yn Well a'i botensial. Cychwynodd y Cyfeirwyr ar eu gwaith yn rhoi sgysiau a chyflwyniadau, arddangos y llyfrau a chefnogi pobl i gael mynediad i'w llyfrgell leol i'w benthyg nhw.

Ac wedyn, wrth gwrs, daeth Covid a bu'n rhaid i ni roi'r math yna o weithgaredd o'r neilltu, a gan fod rhaid i lyfrgelloedd gau, nid oeddem yn gallu cynnig mynediad i'r llyfrau chwaith am gyfnod. Fe ddaeth un cyfle unigryw i ymateb i'r pandemig gyda chais i leoli rhai o'r llyfrau

mewn cyfleusterau llesiant staff y Gwasanaeth Iechyd yn y prif ysbytai lleol i gefnogi staff sy'n gweithio dan straen aruthrol. Roeddem yn naturiol yn hapus iawn i wneud hyn.

Yna, yn ystod yr haf, wrth i lyfrgelloedd gael caniatad i gynnig gwasanaethau archebu a chasglu, fe wnaethon ni ailymgynnull fel tîm prosiect ac rydym nawr wedi addasu'r cynllun i weithio'n wahanol – ac i ganolbwyntio fwy ar godi ymwybyddiaeth y cyhoedd yn gyffredinol o Darllen yn Well yn ogystal ag ymarferwyr ym maes iechyd a gofal.

Fel y clywch chi toc, mae'r Cyfeirwyr wedi ymgorffori'r cynllun o fewn eu gwaith gydag unigolion a gyda ymarferwyr eraill, ac mae gennym gynlluniau i wneud rhagor o ddefnydd o'r cyfryngau cymdeithasol a dulliau eraill i ledaenu'r neges. Gyda lansiad Darllen yn Well i Blant yn yr hydref, rydym nawr yn cynllunio i geisio cyrraedd teuluoedd, ysgolion a'r sector gwasanaethau plant.

Cyn cloi hoffwn ddweud fod Darllen yn Well wedi bod yn fodd i ni fel llyfrgellwyr i greu perthnasau gweithio newydd a chyffrous gyda phartneriaid yn y maes iechyd. Mae'n rhywbeth real a hawdd i'w egluro a deall, ac mae'r buddion posib yn glir i bobl. Trwy ddefnyddio Darllen yn Well fel man cychwyn, rydym yn gallu mynd ymlaen i amlinellu cynigion eraill ein llyfrgelloedd a'r buddiannau maent yn cynnig.

Diolch yn fawr i chi am eich gwrandawriad. Mae'n bleser gen i rwan i gyflwyno'r Cyfeirwyr Cymunedol sydd wedi bod yn gwneud y gwaith ar y rheng flaen i ni, sef Rebecca Szekely, Haf Williams a Sue Mitchell, a'r cyntaf i siarad fydd Rebecca sy'n gweithio fel Cyfeiriwr yma yn Sir Ddinbych. Bydd Rebecca yn siarad yn Saesneg. And in English

Principal Librarian, Denbighshire Libraries

From the launch of the Reading Well schemes in Wales I was determined to try to find ways to embed them into practice within the health and social care sector locally in Denbighshire and across the north of Wales, and take them 'out' of the library and into the hands of potential beneficiaries and prescribers.

The Welsh Government's Together for Mental Health strategy was exploring new ways of supporting mental health and wellbeing. Conwy libraries were already collaborating with the Conwy Partnership Group for Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing chaired by Debbie Doig-Evans to bring the benefits of reading to the health and social care sector, and we in Denbighshire were members of several multi-agency forums where Reading Well was being actively promoted.

It became clear that there was a good opportunity to work in partnership across both authorities. Therefore, with the support of Siwan Jones from Public Health Wales as our door-opener into the health sector, and through our membership of the Local Implementation Team for Conwy and Denbighshire, we were invited to submit a bid for funding to raise the profile of Reading Well and its potential impact amongst health practitioners. Anyone who works in libraries knows that capacity for this sort of outreach work is always challenging so we saw this as a golden opportunity to create that capacity,

but also to take a slightly different approach and to work within the growing context of social prescribing.

For many years our libraries have worked closely with the network of Community Navigators who offer social prescribing services to our local communities, hosting Talking Points and a wide range of community advice and support services and making the most of libraries' unique position as Cheryl outlined. I realised that the Community Navigators' skillset and wide network of contacts and connections would be ideal to raise awareness of Reading Well.

The bid was successful in late 2019 and we began by appointing three Community Navigators to work with us in addition to their regular roles, so that Reading Well could become embedded into their practice to start with. As well as training for library staff in mental health awareness and the research behind book prescription, the intention was to work closely with GP practices and other frontline health workers to make sure they were all aware of Reading Well and its potential. The Navigators started their work giving talks and briefings, demonstrating the books and supporting people to access libraries to borrow them.

And then of course Covid struck and we had to suspend all that activity, and as libraries had to close we could not offer access to the books either for a time. We did have one unique opportunity to respond to the pandemic when we had a request to place some of the books in the NHS staff welfare units in our major local hospitals to support staff who have been working under such stressful circumstances. We were of course very happy to be able to do this.

Then during the summer, as libraries started to be allowed to offer order and collect services, we reconvened the project team and we have now adapted the plan to work differently – and to focus more on raising the general public's awareness of Reading Well as well as a wider range of health and wellbeing practitioners. As you will hear in a moment, the Navigators have embedded the scheme into their roles both with individual clients and with other practitioners, and we have plans to make more use of social media and other means of getting the message out there. With the launch of the Children's Reading Well scheme in October we are now also planning to try and reach families and the school and children's services sector.

Before closing, I'd like to say that Reading Well had been a means for us to create new and exciting working partnerships within the health sector. It is a very tangible entity which is easy to explain and understand, and the benefits are clear to people. By using Reading Well as an opener, we have been able to outline other library offers and the benefits they can bring.

Thank you very much for listening. It is now my pleasure to introduce the Community Navigators who have been doing the work for us on the ground, and the first to speak will be Rebecca who is a Community Navigator here in Denbighshire.

Rebecca Szekely

Community Navigator

My name is Rebecca and I am a Community Navigator, I work for Age Connects North Wales Central, but I sit within Denbighshire County Council. Myself along with a team of others, deliver the Social Prescribing Service for the Local Authority.

Social Prescribing can be delivered in a number of ways and even within Age Connects the models of delivery differ, but essentially the outcomes are the same: to promote health and well-being, supporting people remain independent and sign-posting and referring citizens to a variety of organisations. We have been told we are the 'tourist information' of services and a 'mind field' of information.

As a Community Navigator this Reading Well project has fitted into three streams.

Firstly we have used the books to support our citizens, the people who have been referred to us. During Covid our tool kit of resources went from plentiful to virtually nothing. So being able to use reading well when it was needed the most has been extremely valuable.

Secondly, as a Community Navigator I used to spend as much time as possible within the community. I take great pleasure in attending social groups and informing people of my role and how I am able to support. During Covid19 this has changed. However, I was able to use these networks to speak to citizens virtually. I have attended many a meeting to discuss the project and talk about the books. As I have been fortunate to have a set of books at home, I have even read out segments of a particular book which has been extremely powerful. Age Connects North Wales Central have promoted the scheme via their Newsletter to reach people without access to the internet.

Finally, I have used my networks to virtually speak to other professionals about the books, both within the local authority and the third sector. By sharing the scheme, these professionals can use it as part of their tool kit. I would be honest and say that meeting virtually has meant that I have spoken to a wider range of professionals than perhaps if I was attending meetings face to face. Feedback from professionals has been very positive and I think that their willingness for me to be a guest speaker demonstrates not only the need for the scheme but also it's value, especially during these challenging times. .

I will now hand over to Haf who will be speaking in Welsh.

Haf Williams

Cyfeiriwr Cymunedol

Helo, a fel y clywsoch chi gan Rebecca, yn enw i ydi Haf Williams, a dwi'n gweithio fel **Cyfeiriwr Cymunedol**, yn cydweithio gyda Grwp Clwstwr Meddygon teulu Gorllewin Conwy.

Ein prif nod ni fel **Cyfeirwyr cymunedol** ydi ymestyn allan i unigolion i ddelio a materion seico-gymdeithasol. Rydan ni'n delio a materion o ganlyniad i unigedd, arwahanrwydd,

diffyg cymhelliant, hwyliau isel a diffyg hyder. Ein gwaith ni fel cyfeirwyr cymunedol ydi cyfeirio unigolion i'r gwasanaethau cywir, cynnig gwybodaeth a rhoi cyngor a chefnogaeth.

Yn ogystal a materion seico-gymdeithasol, rydan ni hefyd yn dod ar draws materion anhwylder iechyd. Felly, mae'n hanfodol gallu cynnig gwasaneth ag agwedd gyfannol, sydd yn manylu ar beth syn bwysig i'r unigolyn.

Dyma lle mae '**Llyfrau Darllen yn Well**' yn galluogi ni i gynnig rhywbeth ychwanegol, ac ar y run pryd cefnogi i wella iechyd a lles - i fagu hyder, adennill pwrpas, bod yn fwy annibynnol, a hefyd, i annog adsefydlu iechyd.

Hoffwn i rannu un stori hefo chi fel esiamp! o sut mae'r llyfrau wedi helpu un gwr:

Cafodd Mr Smith ei gyfeirio atai oherwydd ei fod yn byw ei hun - roedd on dioddef o iselder ysbryd, ac hefyd yn ei chael yn anodd i ddelio gyda unigrwydd.

Yn ddiweddar mi gafodd Mr Smith broblemau iechyd a newidiodd ei fywyd dros nos. Ac oherwydd, roedd hyn wedi cyfyngu ei symudiad corfforol, ai adael yn hollol ddibynnol ar ei gadair olwyn i symyd o gwmpas. Roedd derbyn ei gyflwr yn annodd iawn iddo.....

Cyn ei broblemau iechyd, roedd on berson bywiog iawn, ac yn mwynhau cymdeithasu. Un oi brif hobiau, oedd pysgota - ond ar ol i'w iechyd dorri lawr, bu raid iddo roi gorau i yrry car - roedd mynd allan or ty yn rwystredig iawn iddo, a bu raid iddo roi gorau i'w bysgota.

Ychwanegodd hyn at ei unigrwydd, yr unig bleser oedd ganddo bellach oedd gwyllo teledu yn ddyddiol. Roedd on gweld y diwrnod yn hir, ac roedd llawer oi deulu'n gweithio yn ystod y dydd - dywedodd yn ddiweddar i fod yn 'colli ei bysgota yn fawr iawn'!!!!

Pan dorrodd COVID-19 allan, cafodd hyn effaith pellach ar iechyd meddwl Mr Smith - cododd ei lefel **gorbryder** oherwydd cyfyngiadau ynysu.

Mi nes i gyflwyno Mr Smith i lyfrau **Darllen yn Well** - ac mewn dim o amser roedd staff y llyfrgell wedi trefnu cerdyn aelodaeth iddo, a hefyd diwrnod cyfleus i'r gofawrwr ddod a llyfrau i'r ty.

Heddiw, mae Mr Smith yn derbyn detholiad o lyfrau - ar Gorbryder, Iselder – ac am Bysgota. Mae'n enghraifft perffaith o sut mae llyfrau **darllen yn well** yn fan cychwyn da ac yn agor drysau a mynediad at ddewis eang o lyfrau llyfrgell ar gyfer diddordebau unigolion.

Fyddai'n dal i gael sgwrs a Mr Smith yn aml, mi ddwedodd yn ddiweddar, ' mae'r llyfrau'n ddiddorol..... dwi'n mwynhau edrych ar y lluniau..... Mae'n gwneud gwahaniaeth rhag gwyllo teledu o hyd... a, dwi wrth fy modd yn derbyn y llyfrau yn gyson'

Fel y gwelwch chi, mae llyfrau **Darllen yn Well** wedi cael effaith bositif ar fywyd Mr Smith – ac ar y run pryd yn rhoi cyfle iddo gael sgwrs ar bob galwad, sydd yn sicr o leihau ei unigrwydd a gwella ei iechyd a lles!!!.

I will now hand you over to Sue Mitchell who is also a Community Navigator and covers the coastal area.

Haf Williams

Community Navigator

Hello, and as you heard from Rebecca, my name is Haf Williams and I work as a Community Navigator, in partnership with West Conwy GP Cluster.

Our main aim as Community Navigators is to reach out to individuals to deal with psycho-social issues. We deal with issues relating to loneliness, isolation, lack of motivation, low spirits and low confidence. Our work as community navigators is to refer individuals to the right services, offering information and giving advice and support.

As well as psycho-social issues, we also come across health problems. So it is essential to offer services in a holistic way, focusing on what is important to the individual.

This is where Reading Well enables us to offering something additional, and at the same time to support health and wellbeing – to boost confidence, regain purpose, to be more independent and also to encourage regaining health.

I'd like to share one story with you as an example of how the books have helped one gentleman:

Mr Smith was referred to me because he was living alone and in low spirits, and he was finding it hard to deal with loneliness.

Recently he'd had health issues which changed his life overnight. Because of this his physical movement was limited and leaving him reliant on a wheelchair to get about. He was finding it hard to accept his condition.

Before his ill-health, he was a lively person and enjoyed socialising. One of his man hobbies was fishing, but after his health deteriorated he had to give up driving. Getting out of the house was very frustrating and he had to give up his fishing.

This add to his loneliness, and the only pleasure left to him now was watching telly all day. He found the days long and many of his family were working during the day. He recently said that he was missing his fishing very much!

When Covid struck, this had a further effect on Mr Smith's mental health and his anxiety levels increased due to having to isolate.

I introduced Mr Smith to the Reading Well books and in no time the library staff had arranged a library membership card for him and a convenient day for the carers to bring the books to the house.

Today Mr Smith receives a regular selection of books – on anxiety and depression – and on fishing. It's a perfect example of how the Reading Well books are a good starting point and open the doors and access to a wide range of library books to suit individuals' interests.

I speak with Mr Smith regularly, and he said recently "the books are interesting...I enjoy looking at the pictures... it makes a change from watching the telly all the time... and I love receiving books regularly".

As you can see the Reading Well books have had a positive effect on Mr Smith's life and at the same time given him something to talk about on each call, which has certainly reduced his loneliness and improved his health and wellbeing.

I will now hand you over to Sue Mitchell who is also a Community Navigator and covers the coastal area.

Sue Mitchell

Community Navigator

Good Morning, My name's Sue Mitchell.

I also work as a Community Navigator for Age Connects working with referrals for patients within the Conwy West G.P. Cluster Network locality.

I have always been passionate about supporting others; and prior to the Navigator role I was a volunteer Counsellor for several years supporting women affected by Domestic Abuse with ADAS (Aberconwy Domestic Abuse Support Service).

Even then the waiting times for access to Counselling & Psychological Therapies were quite lengthy.

In March 2019 Covid 19 brought about increased pressure on already overloaded services as the nation struggled to adapt to lockdown restrictions, people that would normally cope well ,found themselves suffering with anxiety as they struggled to adapt to working from home, being furloughed from work, home schooling, and anxiety re Covid itself.

As a Counsellor and in my role as a Community Navigator, the use of Books On Prescription has proved to be invaluable allowing me to continue to support patients as well as local groups working with Mental Wellbeing issues through The Reading Well Scheme.

As well as working one to one remotely with patients referred to Community Navigator, I have been busy raising awareness locally and linking in with hard to reach groups, such as those supported by Aberconwy Domestic Abuse Service.

Working in this way has allowed a wider reach and has proved very effective in terms of benefit to individuals referred to the service.

Feedback in terms of benefits gained to date has been very positive and individuals supported have quoted the following.

“I have found the use of Books On Prescription has helped me to gain a sense of control back in my life.”

Another said “I now feel as though I am not the only one going through this anymore.”

And another “I feel I now have the tools to manage my anxiety when it arises.”

Personally I feel that using Books On Prescription has fitted seamlessly into the work myself & my colleagues do in our role as Navigators , and in helping support others with their mental well-being.

I am currently having conversations with ADAS to see if BOP can be introduced into the educational programmes they run, such as The Freedom Programme for women, as well as The Star Programme run in schools supporting young people with their mental well-being.

I hope overall we have given you a flavour of the work we have been involved in; and how working in partnership with the libraries and using Books On prescription in our tool kit has been invaluable in supporting others with their mental well-being.

Thank you for listening.