

Summer Reading Challenge Volunteering 2013

Summary

- The Summer Reading Challenge is the UK's biggest children's reading programme, run by the charity The Reading Agency in partnership with public libraries. It inspires children aged 4 to 12 to join their local library and read six books in the summer holidays. This year, 98% of UK library authorities ran the programme, engaging a record 810,089 children, an increase of 9% on last year. By making reading really fun, the Challenge improves children's reading range, motivation and confidence and helps prevent the holiday dip in literacy levels skills.
- An increasing number of *Reading Activists*, young people aged 12-24, are volunteering in their local library to help children do the Challenge. The Reading Agency provides quality frameworks, training and resources to support this growth in volunteering opportunities, with funding from the Cabinet Office's Social Action Fund and the John Laing Charitable Foundation.
- In 2013 The Reading Agency is working with the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians to extend the *Reading Activists* programme and develop year round library volunteering opportunities for young people, with the help of Arts Council funding. Summer Reading Challenge volunteering is also being built into the new Reading Activists Challenge, funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

2013 Headline Figures

- 5,684 young volunteers aged 12-24 years recruited in libraries in the UK
- 30% increase in the number of volunteers recruited compared with 2012
- 96% of volunteers gained new skills and experience through volunteering
- 71% of volunteers said they would like to keep volunteering in a library
- 810,089 children participated in the Summer Reading Challenge
- In 2013, 137 library authorities involved volunteers in 1,454 libraries.
- This represents a growth from 117 library authorities involving volunteers in 1,000 libraries in 2011 and 139 library authorities and 1,271 libraries in 2012.



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What volunteers say

I have volunteered for over two years now in Redbridge Libraries and I have enjoyed all aspects of it. I have learnt valuable skills that have helped me in and outside of school and I feel that it is a good opportunity for young people to give back to the community. Saagar, Redbridge

Volunteering has allowed me to break down walls and experience the real world in an environment that is still safe but gives a far better image of the wider world. It has allowed me to acquire the essential life skills needed in the world of work and to apply the basic skills I already had, such as communication, in a practical way. It has also provided me with the opportunity to become an active citizen within the community. Maneha, Swansea

Volunteering has given me independence in everything I do; I feel a lot more confident speaking to members of the public and also speaking and sharing ideas with children. I used to go to the library about once a week, but now I find myself down there every day; I have realised how much a library can do for you and make you a more responsible happier person. Lydia, Plymouth

1. Development of a three year programme

The Reading Agency has been working with public libraries since 2011 on a three year programme to develop Summer Reading Challenge volunteering. This has been funded by the John Laing Charitable Trust and the Cabinet Office's Social Action Fund.

Overall the programme aims to provide young people with a quality volunteering experience which can improve their confidence and build skills to help them move into paid employment. It also aims to open their eyes to the value of reading and libraries as both a joy and a lifelong resource.

At the same time, the volunteering programme can give children aged 4-12 individual attention from young people acting as role models as they progress through the Challenge. It can also help them to enjoy reading more. Furthermore it provides library staff with support for running the Challenge, and the opportunity to talk to young people and become more aware of their perspective on libraries.

2. The 2013 Programme

Aims

In addition to the overarching aims outlined above, the 2013 volunteering programme aimed to:

- increase numbers of volunteers to 5000
- increase accreditation opportunities for young people
- increase young people's awareness and usage of libraries
- encourage more children and young people to enjoy reading

In the past, UK library authorities were offered the chance to attend training sessions. This year, The Reading Agency made training and resources available to all library services through the Reading Agency website. This allowed libraries to roll out training locally across their authorities. The training provided libraries with advice on establishing a volunteering strategy and working with young people, and included case studies from library services.

The Reading Agency provided libraries with a Volunteering Handbook; Volunteering Templates (e.g. Volunteering Policy Risk Assessment, Identifying Volunteering Roles); Summer Reading Challenge volunteering certificates; and free badges for volunteers.

Volunteers were recruited through the *vinspired* website, advertising in the library, word of mouth and through links with local schools and organisations. Recruitment processes varied, but libraries usually asked potential volunteers to fill out application forms, followed by short informal interviews, before completing CRB forms. Once volunteers had been recruited, libraries were encouraged to support them in the following ways:

- Run **training sessions** before the Challenge started. The sessions outlined the summer ahead and introduced volunteer roles.
- Provide **roles for volunteers** who wanted to develop particular skills.
- Provide **accreditation opportunities** where possible and support links to accreditation schemes such as v50, ASDAN or Duke of Edinburgh.
- Encourage **year-round volunteering**, and offer volunteers opportunities in the library after the Challenge finished.

This year, the Reading Agency also developed the online offer for young people, creating an Ideas Bank where young people could create a profile and share their ideas with each other. The Ideas Bank can be viewed here: <http://ideasbank.readingagency.org.uk/>

3. Results and Evaluation

Being in the library has shown me what volunteer work is actually like. It makes me realise how a library is not just about books and I have been part of lots of different situations in the library. Being a Summer Reading Challenge volunteer has given me something positive to do each week in the summer holidays, and I don't get bored so easily.

Louise, Lancashire

A range of methods was used to evaluate the programme:

- 1,057 young people completed a pre-volunteering survey and registration form
- 671 young people filled in a post-volunteering survey
- 205 library authorities completed the Creepy House Evaluation form

In addition ad-hoc feedback and qualitative evaluation was collected through interviews with volunteers and librarians. Regular contact was maintained with libraries services over the Challenge period and feedback collated from visits, emails and phone conversations.

3.1 Numerical Results

- 5,684 volunteers aged 12-24 years were recruited by library authorities over the summer, an increase of 30% over last year.
- 61% of volunteers recruited (across all ages) had not volunteered in a library before

Key demographics

- 19.4% of volunteers were from Black and Other Minority Ethnic backgrounds.
- 3% of volunteers were not in education, employment or training.
- 3% of volunteers were in care
- 21% were male, 79% were female

Most volunteering took place in England, with 75 volunteers in Scotland and 45 in Wales.

3.2 Impact on skills and confidence

I have learnt new skills and I am now more comfortable and confident with talking to the public. This opportunity has enabled me to become more confident with talking and engaging with people.

Hansinee, Bexley

Volunteers reported gains in skills and confidence. 96% in total said they gained new skills and experience.

Levels of confidence	% of volunteers before volunteering	% of volunteers after having volunteered
Very Confident	40	65
Confident	58	35
Not confident	3	1

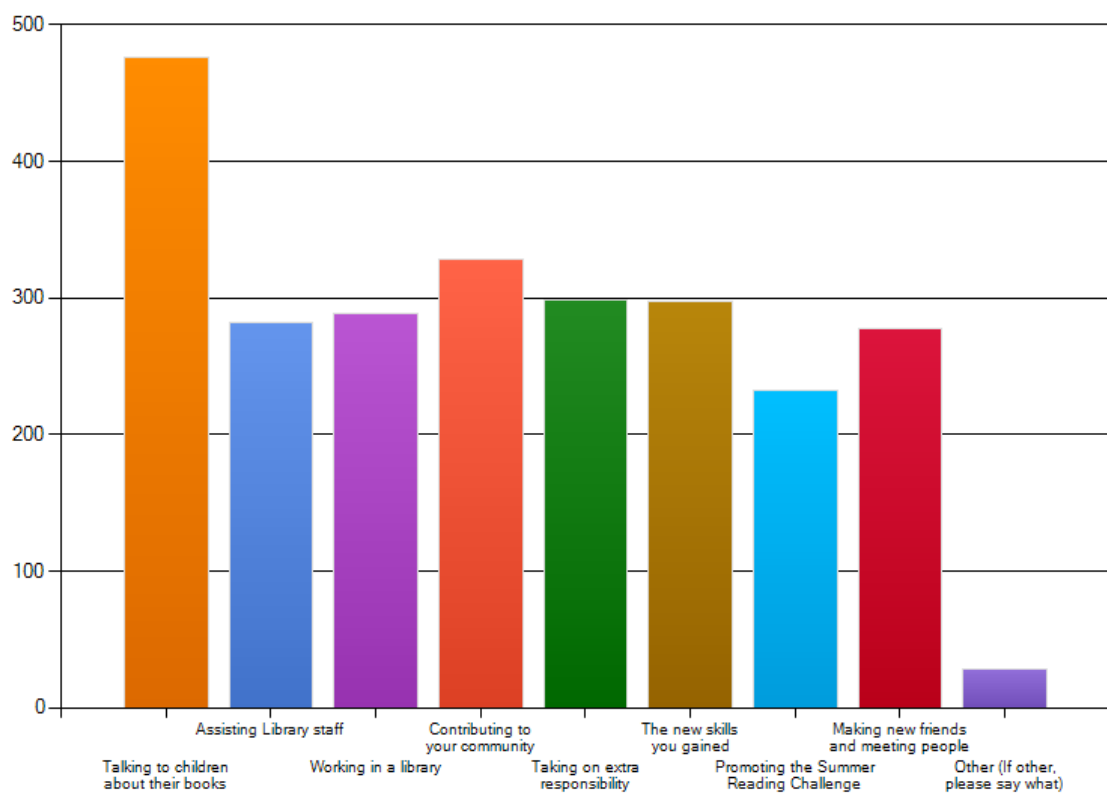
Speaking with members of the public

Levels of confidence	% of volunteers before volunteering	% of volunteers after having volunteered
Very Confident	40	58
Confident	35	41
Not confident	3	1

Main skill breakdown by area

Skill gained	Percentage of volunteers gaining skill
Experience of working with children	91.3%
Communication	88.5%
People skills	78.8%
Organisation	53.2%
Management	19.7%

What did you enjoy most about volunteering with the Summer Reading Challenge?



3.3 Encouraging more children and young people to read more and use their library

I would like to say that volunteering for the summer reading challenge has helped me develop many skills and has greatly boosted my confidence. I hope I can continue to help the community further by volunteering in future library events.

Muhammad, Redbridge

55% of volunteers felt that they were more interested in books and reading as a result of being involved with the Summer Reading Challenge. 63% of volunteers intend to use the library more now, after completing the volunteering

In total, 97% of volunteers felt they helped children with their reading confidence (37% A Lot, 60% A Little).

3.4 Increased accreditation opportunities for young people

The experience was fantastic, with me achieving my first award on vInspired and having some brilliant opportunities. I've been able to write articles, I have the prospects of continuing a reading group at the library and I've helped my writing skills progress - something that means a great deal to me. Jess, Harrogate

The total number of young people whose volunteering was counted towards accreditation schemes was reported as 608. The top three types of accreditation were:

- Duke of Edinburgh award: 397
- Arts Award: 61
- Children's University Award: 52

Other types included the Children's University, ASDAN, Welsh Bacc, Youth Achievement Award, the Dorset Award and the Saltire Award

In addition to accreditation, volunteers' achievements were recognised across the programme through certificates from The Reading Agency, and in some authorities, certificates from the local council.

3.5 Increasing the number of children completing the Challenge

81% of library authorities said the volunteers helped more children to complete the Challenge by reading six books, 24% felt this strongly.

On a scale of 1-5 how much do you think the volunteers helped more children to complete the Challenge?	Percentage of libraries working with volunteers
5 = A lot	24%
4	28%
3	29%
2	12%
1	4%
0 = Not at all	4%

Authorities commented on the support provided by volunteers below:

There was definitely some increase in completion in those libraries that had volunteers
Rachel Levy, Sutton

They are friendly and enthusiastic and many much nearer to the age of those taking part so often find it easy to relate, gain their confidence and interest. They have a good knowledge of

current popular authors and titles often from having read same things themselves not so long ago. At the busiest times our larger libraries have volunteer-manned desks near the entrance to enable them to proactively engage as soon as families walk in. They also have lots of creative ideas for displays and activities and enjoy preparing crafty bits and pieces. Hilary Marshall, Derby City

Their help in registering children to the Challenge was invaluable - really helped to take pressure from library assistants. Their interaction with youngsters especially at events added another dimension to things & again worked really well. We had a celebration event at the end of the summer to celebrate our volunteer work & recognise their achievements. This has helped to raise the profile of the SRC & the use of young volunteers in general. Cheryl Gardner, Leicestershire

Using volunteers meant that children taking part in the Challenge were able to have more individual attention whilst in the library. They were invaluable to the running of the Challenge. Jo Jacobs, Central Bedfordshire

We had many positive comments about volunteers and how essential they are in supporting library staff with the extra work involved. Children, parents and staff commented that talking to the volunteers about their books was one of the most enjoyable aspects of the Challenge for children. Paul Howarth, Suffolk

3.6 Continuation and Employment

I am really enjoying working in the library. It had built up my confidence and skills. I would also be interested in volunteering again next year.

Aiman, Luton

71% of volunteers said they would like to keep volunteering in a library after the Summer Reading Challenge has finished.

53% of library authorities have offered young people opportunities to continue volunteering in the library or the community after the summer, with offers made to at least 2,181 volunteers. These opportunities include:

- Supporting other children's activities including rhyme times, Cradle Clubs, Homework clubs, craft sessions, holiday events; also general library tasks including shelving, holds checking and alerting customers of availability, displays.
- Young Reading Group Leaders and Young Ambassadors as part of Norfolk Library and Information Services volunteer programme
- Helping at homework clubs and with children's activities
- Supporting staff with half-term and weekend events

- Working as crafts volunteers for monthly craft and activity sessions within the library, welcoming borrowers to the library, helping with RFID machines and other general library duties
- Working in focus groups as part of the Grants for the Arts bid to create an older Summer Reading Challenge next year in the Eastern region plus helping at occasional events in the library during the year e.g. Library Invasion Day in November

In addition, 10 library authorities offered a total of 15 job opportunities to volunteers.

4. Lessons learnt

Suggestions from volunteers

Volunteers largely reported very positively on their time volunteering:

It was fun and gave me the chance to step out of my comfort zone and do things I don't usually do-like talking to members of the public that I have never met before.

Meeting new people and having the opportunity to help encourage children to read was very rewarding.

I enjoyed working with the children and their parents and feel it has boosted my confidence about interacting with members of the public.

Their suggestions for improvement included:

- *There should be more than one volunteer working at a library, so as to allow volunteers to meet and share the experience with each other. This would make the experience altogether much more fun.*
- *Perhaps a little more training beforehand so volunteers know how to work the desk and what to do with exceptional cases (such as children with dyslexia) in order to accommodate for their needs.*
- *I think it would be a good idea to get the volunteers more involved in ideas for the Summer Reading Challenge. For example, they could input creative ideas that the library can set on for the children to do. But otherwise, I absolutely loved every moment of it! The library staff were wonderful, friendly and very inviting.*

Learning and recommendations

- It is important that libraries provide a clear structure and communication about when volunteers are needed in libraries and what their roles are
- The incentivising of volunteers needs further developing – e.g. libraries could put volunteers forward for awards
- Planning should include opportunities to keep volunteers engaged through other roles

- Libraries should consider how to involve young people beyond the summer

5. Next steps for The Reading Agency

- Based on the strength of the 2013 programme, The Reading Agency has received follow on funding from the Cabinet Office Social Action Fund to extend the programme to work with 80% of library authorities and 8,000 volunteers in 2014.
- The resources, training and website will be developed earlier in the year, with new recruitment materials and a volunteering pack offered to authorities to maximise planning and recruitment opportunities. Training will continue to be offered to authorities setting up a volunteering programme for the first time. In addition, further training sessions will support libraries in scaling up their existing programme, building in quality experiences and developing a year-round offer. Training will be offered in England, Scotland and Wales.
- Resources will be offered in building in accreditation opportunities, including the Arts Award. Partnerships are being established with accreditation bodies such as Duke of Edinburgh and Guides to increase the number of young people accessing accredited opportunities in libraries.
- Building on the piloting of resources for a school volunteering role in 2013, The Reading Agency will produce materials and advocacy resources to support library authorities working with schools. This is part of the schools engagement plan to increase the number of children undertaking the Summer Reading Challenge, and to give young people who have volunteered before the chance to develop their skills and experience.
- Following the award of a £1 million gift from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, The Reading Agency will integrate Summer Reading Challenge volunteering opportunities into a new Reading Activists Challenge for young people. The learning from the three year Summer Reading Challenge volunteering pilot will inform development of the Challenge, which is currently in the feasibility stage.
- The learning and models will be integrated into the Universal Reading Offer strategy being developed by the Society of Chief Librarians and The Reading Agency.

More information about Reading Activists online can be found on
www.readingagency.org.uk/young-people

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