

Reading Friends Impact 2021

Reading Friends is a social reading and befriending programme, developed by The Reading Agency. Reading Friends brings people together to share stories, meet new friends and have fun. It uses reading material of any kind to start conversations and connect people, building on their interests and hobbies.

69,485
engagements



102 Library
Authorities

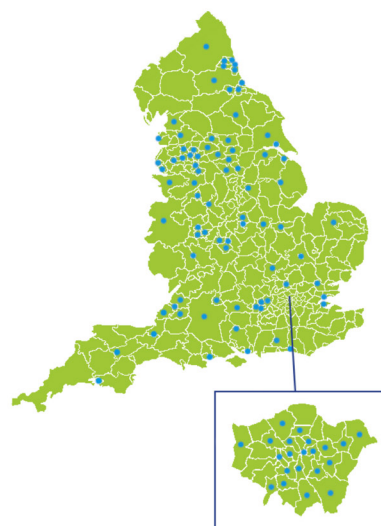
At the end of 2020, The Reading Agency received funding from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to expand Reading Friends activities across England. This investment funded 102 public library authorities to set up Reading Friends groups and one-to-ones to help people connect by phone, online and through social distancing:

Locations and Key Audiences¹

96% of **participants**
rated their
experience of
Reading Friends as
Good or Very Good

**Clinically
vulnerable or
shielding
60%**

**People with
dementia
28%**



**Lived alone
45%**

**People with
disabilities or
support needs
59%**

93% of **befrienders**
rated their
experience of
Reading Friends as
Good or Very Good

Reading Friends is making a real difference to people's lives particularly for those experiencing health inequalities and heightened feelings of loneliness. Our evaluation provides evidence that it is using the proven power of reading to create meaningful social connections, build confidence and improve quality of life.



Personal Outcomes

"It's given me a focus and I've looked forward to those interactions. That's been **my support group** as well and **given me purpose** during this time."
—Befriender

74% of participants and **65%** of befrienders said Reading Friends had 'added purpose to my week'.

55% of participants and **54%** of befrienders agreed Reading Friends had 'increased my confidence to try new things'.

"My mental health was fragile and I was feeling de-skilled. I was also feeling anxious about returning to work. Since getting involved in Reading Friends, **my mental health and self-esteem have improved.**"
—Befriender



Social Outcomes

"The fact that it's free and we can all meet up, engage and share experiences, it's been **an absolute lifeline**. Especially for people who are elderly and isolated, or like myself people who are disabled. We can't get out and meet people easily. It's been amazing."
—Participant

83% of participants and **77%** of befrienders agreed Reading Friends had 'helped me feel more connected to other people'.

72% of participants agreed Reading Friends has 'helped me feel less lonely'.

"I have a chronic illness and therefore do not get the opportunity to leave the house often. This group helps **improve my mood, manage my anxiety and feel connected to others** and I wouldn't be without it."
—Participant



Reading Outcomes

"**My interest in reading keeps me interested in life.** If I didn't have my books, my one thing to think about would be what to do for dinner. It's something to look forward, speaking to [the befriender] and reading books."
—Participant

69% of participants and **77%** of befrienders agreed that taking part in Reading Friends inspired or encouraged them to continue taking part in a Reading Friends project.

"By being part of the Reading Friends group it has not only helped me get my confidence back up, gave me something to look forward to, it has given me **the opportunity to take up reading again** and have some 'me' time. I've also been able to **meet new friends** who have been in a similar situation to myself."
—Participant

Find out more about the difference Reading Friends has made at readingfriends.org.uk/sharing-stories

readingfriends.org.uk

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