

February 2008

The Reading Agency
newsletter

read
the reading agency

The Reading Agency newsletter

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Vision needed for libraries

At The Reading Agency we aim to get more people reading more. We believe that everyone should have equal opportunities to develop their reading. That makes public libraries crucial partners for us.

So, we're always keen to look at the trends when the annual CIPFA library statistics come out in January. Many commentators are missing important trends in their analysis, which tends to be along the lines of "visits are down and people aren't using libraries for books any more."

If you dig deeper into the figures, there's a different, more cheering story to tell about what's happening.

Children's book issues are up for the third year running, only a fraction (4.3 per cent over three years) but still up. This is not by chance – there's been an investment in creating a modernized reading service, a lively,

socially relevant service combining books, IT, social activities and outreach.

Families are being attracted to libraries by activities that help their children become readers for life. And lots of these are happening through a powerful combination of national co-ordination and local delivery. We're proud to lead several national schemes, including the Summer Reading Challenge and Chatterbooks reading groups.

We need a vision and linked strategy

However, libraries need a clearly articulated vision and linked strategy if this emerging modern reading service is to become a reality. Our vision is of libraries helping develop a nation of readers in new ways – becoming THE place where local people go for active reading experiences. Yes, borrowing books but also meeting authors, join-

ing reading groups, blogging with other readers, doing reading challenges, getting expert help with book choices and linking to national conversations about reading through promotions.

In some libraries this is already happening but this great work is patchy and needs fast forwarding. Exciting library offers need to be available everywhere; special help for disenfranchised groups is needed; local people need to be involved with shaping the service and a national online platform is desperately needed.

The National Year of Reading is a huge opportunity to develop and debate all this and we're excited to have a new joint workplan with the Society of Chief Librarians to help make elements of the vision a reality.

Miranda McKearney,
Chief Executive Officer,
The Reading Agency



We are five

The Reading Agency was five in November and we celebrated our birthday at the Royal Festival Hall.

It was great to see so many faces from publishers, libraries, think tanks, government departments and broadcasters helping us to celebrate.

We have grown rapidly and achieved much in five years and are seriously grateful to our partners and funders who have worked with us to bring more reading to more people – we couldn't have done it without you...

In the next five years we'll be concentrating on getting reading support to the people

who need it most, like families with a parent in prison, people with health needs and socially excluded teenagers. We'll be exploiting the creativity of new technology and finding ways to inject more enjoyment into the way that groups like children and adult learners experience reading.

The National Year of Reading 2008



The National Year of Reading is the next big thing in the reading world. And we are delighted to have been appointed, with the National Literacy Trust, to lead a consortium of organisations to run the National Year of Reading 2008.

One of our main roles is to make sure libraries' work features and develops strongly during the Year. We are now working on a joint workplan with the Society of Chief Librarians (SCL) to improve the reading services that libraries provide for children, adult readers and adult learners.

We are delighted that 100 per cent of English libraries have signed up to take part in it. We hope that one of the legacies of the Year will be a greater recognition of the importance of libraries to developing a national culture of reading. We hope that their work will be firmly embedded in national and local government strategies to support reading.

The National Year of Reading was officially launched at Downing Street on 8 January by the Prime Minister. It was great to have the Prime Minister's personal endorsement for the campaign and he's

already said he wants to be involved further.

The opening campaign for the Year is a major push on library membership, running from April onwards.

For updates and to add your events to the calendar, visit the general website for the Year at www.yearofreading.org.uk. This is currently a fairly basic site but by the end of February it should be properly up and running and fully interactive.

If you are working in libraries, you'll want the library specific information and support material from www.readingagency.org.uk

We are delighted that 100 per cent of English libraries have signed up to take part in the National Year of Reading 2008.

The Reading Agency in action

Each edition we will be highlighting a particular area of our work in a special feature. This edition we kick off with a library highlight that brings you up to date with an exciting new Year of Reading initiative that will bring thousands of readers together with authors in every English library authority.

Year of Reading - Reader meets Writer

In line with our vision we are especially heartened by the work with the publishers who have signed up to support our Reading Partners' project. These publishers recognise the exciting potential of libraries' strategic position to join readers up with writers. So they are pledging their big name authors to take part in library events during the National Year of Reading and we will be running a huge Reader Meets Writer programme.

The announcement was made at the Public

Library Authorities' Conference back in October when the nine Reading Partners publishers (some of the biggest in the UK) announced that they were backing the 2008 National Year of Reading with an array of ambitious activities to connect readers to writers in every English library authority. These include:

- Publishers sending big name adult authors on library tours and pairing 149 writers with 149 library authorities, as writers in residence.

- BBC Asian Network to compare three showcase London library events with BME writers and a debate about libraries.

These activities are being planned now and will be run between April and December 2008. You can find updates on these activities, sign up for our Reading Partners' newsletter and find more information about the project at www.readingagency.org.uk/adults/reading-partners

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New brand – new website

As part of our birthday celebrations we re-branded. Our new brand places 'read' and 'reading' at the very centre of our identity and is based on the underlying proposition that the more you read, the bigger you think.

As part of our new branding we launched our new-look website at

www.readingagency.org.uk. However, we are already developing the next stage of the website. We plan to add more features and functionality to the site over the coming

months but we need some help evaluating our current site. If you are interested in giving us some feedback on our current website please see our appeal for website volunteers in the Noticeboard at the back of this newsletter.

Our work with adults

Research we carried out found that adults in Britain read books for 4.6 hours every week – that's 39 minutes a day. But we also know that not all adults find reading easy or enjoy it. We support people, such as librarians and broadcasters, who are encouraging more people to read more through campaigns, events and projects and we support readers who want to get together to read more.

The Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction

Look out for:

Richard & Judy

Best Read of the Year promotions from now until 12 March.

World Book Day promotions 6 March.

Murder Most Famous on BBC2 from 3 to 7 March.

Orange Prize readers' day event, Liverpool, 19 April.

We are once again working with the Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction. We have been co-ordinating the library promotional materials and supporting libraries to run activities around the Orange Prize since 2000.

Now in its thirteenth year, the Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction is the UK's most prestigious annual book award for fiction written by a woman, celebrating excellence, innovation and accessibility and the best of outstanding international fiction in women's writing.

The judges are:

Kirsty Lang (Chair), Journalist and Broadcaster

Lisa Allardice, Editor of Guardian Review

Lily Allen, Musician

Philippa Gregory, Novelist

Bel Mooney, Novelist, Journalist and Children's Author

"I was extremely honoured to be asked to chair this year's Orange Broadband Prize if not a little daunted by the task. However I do have a very strong line-up of judges which should make for some lively debates." said

Kirsty Lang. *"I think that in an increasingly crowded book market, the Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction is more important than ever in getting women writers the exposure they need."*

We will be getting promotional materials into libraries across the UK and working with Liverpool Libraries, The Bluecoat, Time To Read, and The Reader to run an Orange Prize readers' day, presented by Kate Mosse, on Saturday 19 April at The Bluecoat in Liverpool. The winner of the Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction will be announced on 4 June.

BBC RaW

Later in the year RaW will be a broadband website supported by outreach activity. More details to come but we hope that libraries can be fully involved.

Nearly 4000 libraries in the UK are involved with the adventure that is RaW (Read and Write) under the strategic partnership between libraries and BBC Learning. We are responsible for coordinating the libraries' involvement with RaW.

RaW is supporting

World Book Day by promoting Quick Reads with a BBC2 series currently called *Murder Most Famous* on BBC2 from 3 to 7 March. A well-known crime writer sets six celebrities (none of whom have published a work of fiction before) the challenge of writing a

thriller. One celebrity will get to write and publish their first work of fiction as a Quick Read title in 2009.

And following the success of the RaW Family Festivals last autumn, the BBC are running further events in June and July, all of which will involve libraries.

Six Book Challenge™ for adult learners

In September we formed a very exciting partnership with libraries and the Costa Book Awards to run the Six Book Challenge™. This helps adult learners build reading stamina and complete six books – a real challenge for some people. Our challenge is to make sure they get the support they need by running the annual Six Book Challenge between January and May. The Six Book Challenge forms part of our wider adult literacy programme – The Vital Link.

The Six Book Challenge was pioneered in Hull libraries and has since been run across Yorkshire. In Hull, 91 per cent of people who took part said they read more confidently, 96 per cent took part in book discussions

and 100 per cent said that they felt more positive about libraries. And these were people who were not confident about reading and books.

We're delighted to report that 65 per cent of library services across the UK are offering the Challenge in partnership with local learning providers and that over 40 prisons and another 50 learning organisations are taking part. We're happy for people to join in at any time so please see www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk for how to get involved.

Support from the Costa Book Awards provides all Challenge participants with a £2 coffee card, a generous national prize draw open to all those who complete the Chal-

lenge by June (and a separate prize for prisons). We are also running experimental partnerships with Costa stores and libraries in Glasgow, Liverpool and Leeds.

Costa has also worked with us to appoint bestselling novelist Mike Gayle as a patron for the Challenge. Mike is very enthusiastic about the initiative and will be working with us to promote it over the coming months.

We are using the Six Book Challenge to evaluate the learning benefits of reading for pleasure and links with libraries. This qualitative evaluation will focus on libraries running the Challenge in the South East (almost 100 per cent) but all organisations running the Challenge are encouraged to use the same methodology.



Mike Gayle © Writer Pictures

Our challenge is to make sure they get the support they need by running the annual Six Book Challenge between January and May.

The Vital Link

The Vital Link is our national programme which aims to reach out to adult literacy learners and emergent readers. We're doing this by encouraging libraries and adult literacy practitioners to work together to create a brilliant offer to new readers – a welcoming space with friendly

staff, support to learn, the right books and lots of creative ways of promoting them. We know that this can motivate adults to improve their reading so that they can read more – and enjoy it.

We have now embarked on a further phase of The Vital Link's Reading and Libraries Campaign with

support from the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. During this phase we will be doing a range of things including producing a Reading for Pleasure support pack linked to the National Year of Reading and running an audience engagement project in Yorkshire which will bring together libraries and

union learning representatives in workplaces through The Six Book Challenge. The Vital Link will also be producing further resources to support ten new Quick Reads titles due to be published on World Book Day, 6 March. See www.vitallink.org.uk to keep up to date. For details about booking a place at The Vital Link conference, see Noticeboard in this newsletter.

Our work with children

Our work brings us into daily contact with the energy, enthusiasm and impact of libraries' work with children and families while initiatives like the Summer Reading Challenge™ and the Big Book Share provide ideas to support and develop this work. We also have projects that encourage schools and libraries to work together, creating the best possible reading experience for children.

New TRF website

Look out for:

The new **TRF website** – www.theirreadingfutures.org.uk – from mid-February

Partners for Enjoying Reading – government funded push on school/library partnerships. Website and resources available from April

TRF (www.theirreadingfutures.org.uk) is our online resource for all library staff to support their work with and for young readers (including children, young people and families) – and to help build skills in this work.

The TRF site has e-learning packages for new staff, for staff wanting to refresh skills, and for managers. People can use these individually for personal learning – or the packages can form part of a cross-service training programme.

We have recently produced a handbook *TRF: The Training Programme*. This gives managers a model training programme and resources for using TRF in training with large groups of staff.

TRF: The Training Programme was launched at the Public Libraries Authority and Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL) conferences and is available online on the TRF site and in hard-copy. Complimentary copies have been sent to all library chiefs and are also on their way to all ASCEL members.

We are also updating the site and adding lots of new content.

From the middle of February the site will have

- New look and feel
- Easier access to project and activity resources
- A special e-learning centre with all the TRF learning packages and resources
- An improved Coffee Break Discussion area for sharing ideas, queries and best practice

See the results of our hard work shortly at www.theirreadingfutures.org.uk

Schools working with libraries in the Year of Reading

More information and details of the other stakeholders that are collaborating with us can be found at www.readingagency.org.uk/young-people/enjoying-reading

We're delighted that the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) is taking a new look at the importance of libraries and joined up community support for young readers. They are funding Partners for Enjoying Reading, a new project to create resources for schools and libraries to use during the Year of Reading and beyond.

The aim is to build a better co-ordinated way of supporting young readers by joining up the work of schools, school libraries and public libraries.

We are doing this by describing what libraries can offer to schools, promoting the ways that schools and libraries can work together and producing

practical guides and tools. Look out for the website from April.

We are leading the a group of partners delivering this work including the National Literacy Trust, the School Library Association, the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians and the Museums Libraries and Archives Council.

Summer Reading Challenge™

Team Read is the new Summer Reading Challenge™ for 2008 in the National Year of Reading. In a happy coincidence the Summer Reading Challenge celebrates its tenth birthday this year. This massive team read promotion for four to 11 year olds has special website and hologram card for 11 to 13 year olds is the embodiment of the exciting new vision of libraries' modern reading service involving books, IT, activities, meeting writers and

other readers and outreach work.

We expect that this year's Summer Reading Challenge will build on the successes of last year which had a magnificent 650,000 children taking part and 338,000 children read six books or more during the summer holidays.

"It was the first time ever that he'd picked up a book on his own and read it – they tell you it will happen eventually but this was

a real milestone moment for us." Londoner Gill Bowles on son Ralph, aged seven, who did the Summer Reading Challenge for the first time

We are now gearing up to Summer Reading Challenge 2008. If you work in libraries you will be able to register to take part in the Summer Reading Challenge shortly. To keep up to date visit www.readingagency.org.uk/children/summer-reading-challenge

"It was the first time ever that he'd picked up a book on his own and read it." Gill Bowles

Dates for your diary

Events for reading world professionals

15 April, London Book Fair seminars, (connecting readers to writers; and school library partnerships to help children enjoy reading)

13 May, Library lunch and plenary, Bookseller Association conference, by invite only

Events with BBC Asian network

5 March, Gautam Malkani at Hounslow library theatre.

12 March, Moshin Hamid at Tower Hamlets library tbc

19 March, Inviting a library reading group onto the show from Birmingham, World Book Day Spread the Word

26 March, round table event at Swiss Cottage library, Camden.

Chatterbooks groups have been contributing to a special book list being produced by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) by choosing favourite reads that will enthuse boys aged five to 11 and get them reading.

World Book Day

As we head towards World Book Day on the 6 March, a fantastic 95 per cent of libraries have signed-up for one of the World Book Day promotions. Over 2800 libraries will be supporting the children's campaign (www.worldbookday.com) and Quick Reads (www.quickreads.org.uk) and over 2600 are supporting Spread the Word (www.worldbookday.com/spreadtheword) which this year features a vote on Books to Talk About – a natural for libraries.

Our work with young people

Research shows how important it is for young people's life chances that they enjoy and are involved with reading. We know that if you capture a young person's imagination and get him or her involved then they can, and do, get fired up by reading.

Fulfilling their Potential is our big national consultation programme with young people that finds out what they want from their libraries, provides means for them to get involved and gives libraries practical tools to help develop services for teenagers. HeadSpace is our very exciting embodiment of a new vision – young people's vision – for 21 century library services and the young people's website will be our thrilling new resource.

Fulfilling their Potential in Yorkshire and Humberside

Sixty staff attended the training courses we ran with partners from the Yorkshire MLA, the National Youth Agency and Regional Youth Work Unit.

Following hot on the heels of the success of Fulfilling their Potential projects in the north west and south west, our latest FtP project is now well underway in Yorkshire and Humberside. Since the autumn staff from 11 library authorities in the region have been planning their projects, preparing their consultation sessions, working with partners and, above all, engaging with young people. Sixty staff attended the training courses we ran with partners from the Yorkshire MLA, the

National Youth Agency and Regional Youth Work Unit. The authority projects are now ready to go. In fact, some couldn't wait until the New Year and have already started. Each authority will be running a small service development project designed to put their new learning and skills into practice and to encourage young people to see libraries as good places to be. The projects vary tremendously. Young people will be involved in planning one new library and creating a signature look for an-

other; they will be developing materials to use in staff training and selecting stock. They will take part in a large-scale cross-authority arts consultation and a small focus groups. Some teenagers have already been consulted about their reading group and have asked to be "challenged and surprised!"

The challenge is on now for library staff – at all levels – to fulfil their expectations.

More information at www.readingagency.org.uk/young-people/fulfilling-their-potential

HeadSpace

We are rolling out our HeadSpace programme, a visionary new kind of library provision developed with young people. Prototypes were launched in Bolton by Amir Khan and Nick Hornby in Lyme Regis, as well as in Kent and Plymouth. Since

November 2007 we have been launching a new HeadSpace each month in 18 other

locations. See www.readingagency.org.uk/young-people for details.



Young people's website update

During the latter half of 2007 we ran focus groups with young people, consulted library and school professionals, developed the offers to publishers and libraries and brainstormed ideas for the website (fuelled by pastries). In October we sent out an online survey and waited for the results – which poured in! Three hun-

dred and fifty professionals and 250 young people completed the survey. The data confirmed what we suspected – 65 per cent of young people had their own page on a social networking site yet 67 per cent of libraries and schools don't allow social networking sites and 80 per cent don't have a website for young people.

By Christmas we had developed a full website brief which centred around the key ideas of group pages and a section for creative work. The next step in February 2008 will be to refine the brief and start the exciting job of working with the developers, designers and groups of young people to create the website.

Three hundred and fifty professionals and 250 young people completed the survey.

New thinking

We place great value on new thinking - whether it takes the form of research, discussion, events or training and learning. We believe that it is very important to find out about reading, understand readers and appreciate how to serve them better. And we want to share our knowledge and learn from others working in the field so we stage events and conferences. We're also active in public policy and advocacy, working with government departments and think tanks.

Reaching Readers

Last year our Reading Partners initiative that brings libraries and publishers together had a special focus – to understand the reading habits and market gaps for British Black Minority Ethnic readers. Reaching Readers, was a short investigative project that helped publishers and libraries understand how their offers to readers could better

reflect the creativity and reality of the ethnically diverse world around us.

The Reaching Readers publishers and libraries worked together on innovative projects to promote books and the joys of reading to a culturally diverse audience. Activities included work with reading groups, exciting book promotions to

introduce more readers to books by British Black and Asian writers, and engaging author events.

New research linked to this work on promoting BME reading will be published shortly. For information and to sign up to the Reading Partners newsletter visit www.readingagency.org.uk/adults/reading-partners

Youth conferences

Look out for:

Basic skills research survey ready late February

Toolkit of reader/writer models as a platform for action and debate, launched London Book Fair, 14 to 16 April

New research into BME reading audience trends, linked to **Reading Partners**, around March

We have held a couple of exciting conferences looking at how libraries can engage with young people as part of our Fulfilling their Potential work. Aiming High: the library offer to young people in January was a very well timed conference on the eve of the National Year of Reading. It looked at how libraries' work with young people can help the government deliver its ambitious ten-year strategy – Aiming High for Young

People. We had some fabulous examples from our Fulfilling their Potential projects and from HeadSpace which demonstrated how public libraries are a vast national resource offering young people things to do in safe, welcoming and, increasingly, youth-centred places.

This built on the discussions that we had at the Fulfilling their Potential conference in 2007 that looked at the many different

ways that young people could get involved with local library services and why libraries were so important to young people. Drawing on real life examples our speakers spoke passionately about putting young people and libraries together.

Conference speeches and more information are available by visiting www.readingagency.org.uk/new-thinking/conferences

Conference pushes for reading based work to promote community engagement

The conference we held jointly with the Local Government Association in November 2007 reached some powerful conclusions about how libraires' work with readers can be the basis for a big new push on involving local people in shaping their public services.

- Libraries have an important role to play attracting and engaging with local communities

- Libraries need to use the power of their everyday work with readers to reach out and involve local people in shaping decisions about local public services.
- Libraries must convince local and national government that their reading work can contribute to community engagement strategies.

- Libraries can help make sure that a broad range of local voices is heard.

More information and updates can be found at www.readingagency.org.uk/new-thinking. We will be producing a publication soon.

Noticeboard

Website volunteers please

We are looking for volunteers to be part of a panel to test our new website. This will involve following a short questionnaire and should take no more than half an hour. We

expect to run the trial over a couple of weeks in March. We are looking for people from a variety of professions who visit our website such as librarians, publishers, teachers,

adult literacy practitioners, etc. If you can spare us some of your time email natasha.roe@readingagency.org.uk and we will send you details.

Orders for libraries

The following promotional materials are available to order from The Reading Agency. Please visit www.readingagency.org.uk and go to the relevant project page.

Galaxy British Book Awards shortlist and winners posters, stickers and Preview magazine.

Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction 2008 longlist and shortlist posters, stickers and banners.

Spread the Word information sheet available to download, part of World Book Day 2008.

Discover Nature materials, part of the BBC's Breathing Places campaign

New look rolling calendars

The rolling calendar lists publisher offers such as authors available for library events, free posters and books for reading groups, and library offers for publishers such as fes-

tivals or readers' days. To post information about events and offers, go to www.readingagency.org.uk/calendar/ and click on 'submit your event'. Use the new

form and please submit as much information as possible. Once you've submitted the form it will need to be authorised, which may take up to 24 hours.

Reading Groups database for libraries

You can add details of your reading group to our Reading Groups database. Visit www.readingagency.org.uk/adults/reading-groups-database and follow the instructions.

Our shop

Will open at www.readingagency.org.uk in mid-February. You will be able to browse through all our products, order online, check the status of your orders and manage your own account.

Research

Our large-scale research into *Book Sales in Public Libraries* is available to order priced £29.95 by emailing resources@readingagency.org.uk with the number of copies you would like, your delivery address and invoice address.

Registered office c/o CW Fellowes,
Templars House,
Lulworth Close,
Chandlers Ford,

Phone: 020 7278 8922

Email: info@readingagency.org.uk

We believe in those amazing moments that reading can bring us. And that we should all have more of them.

Time to stop reading. Time to get someone else to start.



Amir Khan opening our HeadSpace at Bolton High Street Library (see page 8) © Bolton Council

www.readingagency.org.uk

Book now!

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The Vital Link libraries and adult literacy conference for the National Year of Reading is run in partnership with the National Literacy Trust. **A passion for reading: where does it fit into Skills for Life?** will be held

on Wednesday 12 March 2008 at the Botanical Gardens in Birmingham. Key speakers include Honor Wilson-Fletcher, Project Director for the National Year of Reading, Helen Sunderland, Assistant Director, LLU+,

and Quick Reads author Gilda O'Neill.

See www.vitallink.org.uk for a booking form and early bird prices. Enquiries Ronan Cahill ronan.cahill@literacytrust.org.uk

New Thinking publications for sale

The Reading Agency's *New Thinking* series of publications brings together creatives, strategists and activists who are passionate about reading and libraries' work with readers.

Be part of it:

New Thinking series 1: Community engagement through reading, April, £15 + p&p

New Thinking series 2: Our space: young people reading and libraries, April, £15 + p&p

New Thinking series 3: A passion for reading; where does it fit into Skills for Life? May, £15 + p&p

Order two for £25 + p&p or all three for £40 + p&p [re-sources@readingagency.org.uk](mailto:sources@readingagency.org.uk)