

October 2007

THE READING AGENCY CELEBRATES FIFTH BIRTHDAY BY ANNOUNCING PLANS TO MARK 2008 YEAR OF READING

As the National Year of Reading approaches, The Reading Agency is celebrating five years of inspiring more people to read more. At a special event on 8 November 2007 at the Royal Festival Hall, London, it will announce a future research and events programme, launch new branding and share news of several major initiatives.

In 2008 The Reading Agency will launch a new social networking website to extend teenagers' reading, a major *reader meets writer* events programme, and a Six Book Challenge ™ in association with the Costa Book Awards to inspire adults trying to improve their literacy skills. (Please see „Notes to editors“ for more information.)

The Reading Agency was founded as a charity in 2002 by merging three smaller agencies. It has grown very rapidly and is revenue funded by the Arts Council. Co-founder of the Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction and bestselling novelist Kate Mosse says: ***“The Reading Agency burst onto the scene five years ago and is now a real force for change. I admire particularly the way in which it has succeeded in promoting reading in all parts of the country, by working with the public library network, and leading organisations such as the BBC and Orange, and the prison service.”***

In its first five years The Reading Agency has developed a series of experimental projects into major national reading programmes and partnerships. Just two examples are:

- The Summer Reading Challenge, which now reaches 650,000 children a year, is run throughout the library network and inspires children to read three million books over the summer holidays. Research shows it improves their reading range, confidence and enjoyment.
- The Chatterbooks network of reading groups for four to eleven year olds, which started in three trailblazing library authorities in 2001. It now runs in 160 authorities, and involves 6,000 children.

Other work will be built on and developed in the 2008 National Year of Reading, which The Reading Agency is helping to run with the National Literacy Trust. This includes partnerships with publishers, the Richard & Judy Book Club, Orange, BBC Learning and BBC Radio. Plus family reading programmes in prisons, work to stimulate the formation of new reading groups and to transform the reading experience teenagers get in libraries.

For more details of existing projects, and innovative new work by The Reading Agency over the coming months, see Appendix A to this press release.

Miranda McKearney, director of The Reading Agency says: ***“Finding and encouraging new readers is at the heart of what The Reading Agency does. We believe that the more you read, the bigger you think. The more you read, the more you know. The more you read, the more you imagine.”***

“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 groups like children and adult learners experience reading."

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APPENDIX : THE READING AGENCY KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE WORK

The Reading Agency – getting more reading to more people

Achievements:

- Started as a pilot in 2004, the **Reading Partners' publisher consortium**, which The Reading Agency leads, is revolutionising the way adult publishers work with libraries. After three years of foundation work, publishers now see libraries as a crucial way to connect readers to writers, and are starting to send big-name authors like Rageh Omaar and Nick Hornby to meet readers in libraries all over the country.
- The Reading Agency's **Big Book Share programme helps parents in prison support their children's reading** development. Librarians run sessions at which prisoners talk about and choose children's books to read on tape for their children. The prisons run special family visit sessions at which prisoners give books and tapes to their children. We piloted this in Nottingham prison, and it now runs in 21 prisons.
 - *"It let me give my kids some books and that made me feel a lot better, as they love to read the books as I sent to them and that helps them read a lot better than before – it helps them at school."* Prisoner, HMP Nottingham
 - *"It made me feel like a parent again."* Prisoner, HMP Magilligan, Northern Ireland.
- Started as an experiment, The Reading Agency's **Summer Reading Challenge** now reaches 650,000 children a year, and is the largest national reading promotion for four to 11 year olds. It happens through 97% of UK library authorities through the summer holidays, and is supported by leading children's publishers. Children borrow and read up to six books, collecting stickers for each book they read. At the end of the summer they get a certificate recording their achievement, and a medal if they have completed the Summer Reading Challenge. Research shows it improves children's reading confidence and enjoyment.

- ***The Summer Reading Challenge is great – it gives you things to do over the summer holidays. I love reading when you can't put the book down and no one else is allowed into it.*** Jonah Taylor, aged ten, from Chelmsford, Essex.
- ***"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 this year.
- The Reading Agency runs a programme called **The Vital Link** which helps library authorities offer a **strong support service for adults trying to improve their literacy skills**. It focuses on how reading for pleasure can motivate students and engage new learners. Since its early experimental days, the programme has now developed an improvement framework which is being used by 80% of public libraries in England. It has set up a unique online searchable database of book titles for emergent adult readers (www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk) – there are 2,000 downloads of booklists each month. The work now has the interest and support of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. Resources have been created to help readers use Quick Reads titles – there are 5,000 downloads of these a month.
 - ***"The students didn't think they could learn through reading. It's been a revelation to them that they could enjoy a book and still be learning,"*** Jill Harrison, Family Learning Tutor, Tameside.

Future work:

- The 2008 National Year of Reading will be a big and important piece of work for The Reading Agency. We were delighted to be appointed to project manage the Year, with The National Literacy Trust, on behalf of the Department for Children, Schools and Families. We will be mobilising libraries to make the most of the National Year of Reading, weaving our partnerships through the year's activities and contributing to strategy.
- Work is well under way for The Reading Agency's March 2008 launch of a **new website** to give young people aged 13+ years a dynamic social network through which to share their reading and writing passions.
- The Reading Agency will be inspiring new thinking around reading and writing through a **new research and events programme**. This includes research into black and minority ethnic readers to be launched at a conference on 22 November 2007, chaired by Rageh Omaar and run with The Bookseller magazine. Other events include a conference with the Local Government Association on Libraries on "reading, libraries and community engagement" and a 12 March 2008 conference on adult literacy.
- We will be rolling out our HeadSpace programme, a visionary new kind of library provision developed with young people. Prototypes have just been launched in Bolton by Amir Khan and by Nick Hornby in Lyme Regis. From November 2007 onwards, a new HeadSpace will be launched each month in 18 other locations, offering teenagers new kind of library spaces where they can chill out and enjoy cutting-edge reading experiences. Some of the most

innovative elements of the project, such as the idea of being served drinks and books of their choice by a specially-trained volunteer „book waiter“ came from the young people.

- ***We'll be there in the library for when a child or teenager comes in – we will be talking to them about books and suggesting books that we think they will really like. HeadSpace is going to make a difference because we've got our own corner of the library where we can promote books. It's also a great chance to make new friends, because all the people using HeadSpace will love books and be talking about books, so you can meet people who like the same things as you.*** Sameeha Patel, volunteer at HeadSpace Bolton (opened August 2007)
- The Reading Agency supports adults who want to improve their literacy skills. In September 2007 we announced the launch of a national Six Book Challenge, in association with the Costa Book Awards. This invites adult literacy learners to read six books whilst supporting them with incentives and creative reading activities. It will be delivered through libraries working in partnership with adult learning organisations, from January to May 2008.
 - ***“To read six books is quite hard for some people. But once you've read one you have to go on to another to compare them. It makes you appreciate books. You get a buzz out of it.”*** Tina Hewitt, adult learner from Hull, where the Six Book Challenge was piloted in 2006.
- For more general information about The Reading Agency, please visit: www.readingagency.org.uk

It's time to stop reading. It's time to get someone else to start.