

Andy McNab in special mission to celebrate reading success

Launched in 2008 by independent charity The Reading Agency, the annual Six Book Challenge encourages less confident readers to develop a new reading habit and improve their skills at the same time. Participants are invited to pick six reads of their choice and complete a reading diary in order to receive incentives along the way and a certificate.

Six Book Challenge activity at McVitie's Manchester was linked to the biscuit factory's successful Learning At Work Day (19 May 2011) thanks to partnership working by management, trade union USDAW's workplace unionlearn representatives and a special relationship with Stockport Council's library service. 50 McVitie's Manchester employees took part in the Challenge this year; the third year McVitie's have run it.

Andy McNab did a question and answer session and signed copies of his new book *Dead Centre*, which then went on sale in the factory's Learn 4 U Centre. Following his visit, Andy said: "Reading and literacy changed my life. So it is wonderful to see partnerships such as the one at McVitie's working so successfully to promote and encourage reading through programmes like the Six Book Challenge."

"It's been a coup to have both a real life hero and successful author visit the Learn 4 U centre at McVitie's. The event with Andy McNab resulted in a real buzz within the factory," said Jonathan Waterhouse, USDAW learning rep coordinator at McVitie's Manchester. "The Six Book Challenge is another great example of how USDAW unionlearn representatives at McVitie's have engaged with our union members, allowing us to reinvigorate or start a reading culture with the support of both The Reading Agency and Stockport Libraries. It was also great to have Paddy Lillis, deputy general secretary of USDAW, in attendance to see what's been achieved."

"The Six Book Challenge has gone from strength to strength here at McVitie's Manchester and it's great to see so many employees not only enjoying this challenge but generally expanding their learning through the support of the Learn 4 U Centre and everyone here who is committed to making this a success," said Helen Day, factory general manager at McVitie's Manchester.

'Andy McNab' is the pseudonym of a former Special Air Service (SAS) operative and soldier. He first came to public prominence with *Bravo Two Zero*, his account of the failed SAS patrol for which he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal in 1991, to add to medals he had won previously in action, becoming the British Army's most highly decorated serving soldier when he finally left the SAS in February 1993.

He has written two other autobiographies and several fiction books including Quick Reads. Dead Centre is his latest thriller in the bestselling Nick Stone series.

"McVitie's have been fantastic supporters of the Six Book Challenge together with Stockport Council's library services," says The Reading Agency's adult literacy specialist Genevieve Clarke. "We're thrilled that they won this annual draw that we run with the Campaign for Learning, and we're very grateful to Transworld Publishers for bringing Andy McNab to meet McVitie's staff who have taken part in the Challenge. It's been a real boost for everyone."

18,000 young people and adults across the UK registered for the Six Book Challenge this year through libraries, colleges, adult education, prisons and workplaces with potentially life-changing results. Impact research into the Six Book Challenge has found that 94% of respondents felt a sense of achievement, 88% said they gained from the experience and 60% reported an improvement in their skills.

The main activity for the Six Book Challenge 2012 will run from January to September, but organisations are welcome to run it at any time that suits them during the year. The Reading Agency will also continue to work with the TUC's learning arm unionlearn to encourage more workplaces to get involved. Around 90 did so in 2011 including McVitie's Manchester, Merseytravel, Boots, Transport for London, Wincanton Logistics, and over 20 NHS Trusts.

Councillor Dave Goddard, Leader of Stockport Council, said: "The Six Book Challenge is a great way to encourage people to read more and to discover a love of reading. I'm delighted that the council's library service has been able to support this scheme to help local people discover the joy of reading and promote the many facilities that Stockport Council's excellent libraries offer."

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Notes to editors:

- The Reading Agency is an independent charity working to inspire more people to read more. It is funded by the Arts Council and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. It has a formal partnership with public library services, nearly two-thirds of which support the Six Book Challenge each year. (www.readingagency.org.uk)
- Further Six Book Challenge information: visit www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk or contact Genevieve Clarke: genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk
- See www.readingagency.org.uk/adults/reading-for-pleasure-impact/ for the Six Book Challenge 2008 impact report

- United Biscuits (UB) is the leading manufacturer and marketer of biscuits in the UK and second largest in the Netherlands, France, Belgium and Ireland. Among UB's popular brand names are McVitie's, Penguin, go ahead!, McVitie's Jaffa Cakes, Jacob's, Jacob's Cream Crackers, Twiglets, Hula Hoops, Skips, Mini Cheddars, McCoy's, and KP Nuts.
- McVitie's is among the best known brands in the UK. UB's branded biscuits were purchased by 96% of UK households in 2010. McVitie's Manchester is one of UB's 11 manufacturing facilities in the UK. UB employs around 8,900 people of whom 7,000 work in the UK.
- Quick Reads are short books by bestselling writers and celebrities. See www.quickreads.org.uk
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