

Embargoed until 0800, Tuesday 18 January 2011

The Reading Agency announces new funding for libraries' work with disadvantaged young people

Independent charity The Reading Agency is delighted to announce the success of recent funding bids to support libraries' work with young people in 22 local authorities through its MyVoice programme. This offers 34,500 disadvantaged young people new opportunities to engage with reading and writing, and to work alongside library staff to shape future provision over the next three years.

Reading Agency director Miranda McKearney says: "At a time of great pressure on libraries, this is a heartening vote of confidence in their vital community work."

MyVoice young people's programme supported by the Big Lottery

The Big Lottery Fund's Reaching Communities programme has awarded £346,500 over three years to support 30,000 young people aged 11-19 to get involved in their local branches and youth spaces by choosing books for their peers, managing a budget, interviewing staff and developing ideas online.

The goal is to encourage better life chances through a programme of training and life skills development, building on research that shows reading for pleasure improves people's skills whilst increasing their motivation to read and learn.

The Reading Agency will work with 20 library services in the North West, London, South East and North East each year to deliver the project, and will also develop young people's local participation through volunteering opportunities.

"Young people will be supported to get involved in running activities in their local libraries and youth spaces, develop ideas online, choose books and help inspire other young people to read. With our library partners, we'll create 6,000 new volunteering opportunities that will be part of accredited award schemes and support links into employment and apprenticeships for young people in the areas of creative writing and literacy," says Miranda McKearney.

MyVoice roadshows supported by Grants for the arts

A new kind of roadshow forms one element of the national MyVoice programme, and has received £86,500 from Grants for the arts. The reading and writing roadshows are led by young people.

Events with a mixture of reading and writing workshops, exhibitions and performances will take place from 23 - 30 July 2011 at five different library venues in Weymouth, Great Yarmouth, St Helens, Sunderland and Westminster, reaching 4,500 young people.

The roadshows will be programmed and promoted by disadvantaged young people who would not normally engage with literature. They will learn new digital, design and event management skills.

MyVoice digital reading clubs supported by The Rayne Foundation

Rayne Foundation funding will create five digital reading clubs in deprived areas. They are for socially excluded young people, including those Not in Employment Education and Training (NEET). The clubs will train young people in the production and editing of video and audio and equip them to become reporters on reading and writing issues.

Miranda McKearney says: "We're delighted by these awards to enable us to launch MyVoice with our library partners. The programme is led by young people and will unlock the joy of reading, and the life chances that brings. It's fantastic to have this funding to be able to continue our vital work with young people, especially as the overall funding situation remains so very uncertain. We will continue to push for sustained investment in the life-changing opportunities that libraries and reading offer".

For more media information, please contact:

Debbie Hyde, 07956 320 486 or debbie.hyde@oasismedia.co.uk

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. information about MyVoice is at: www.readingagency.org.uk/young/myvoice
- The authorities involved in the MyVoice programme are:
 - North West: Blackpool, Halton, Lancashire, St Helens, Warrington
 - London: Croydon, Hackney, Hounslow, Merton, Sutton, Westminster
 - South East: Isle of Wight, Kent, Portsmouth, Slough
 - South West: Dorset
 - East of England: Norfolk
 - North East: Middlesbrough, Newcastle, South Tyneside, Sunderland, Gateshead
- The young people benefitting from the MyVoice programme are from socially deprived wards of England where educational attainment and employment is typically low. Groups targeted by local library authorities include Roma, looked after children, young offenders and teenage parents.
- Under its Reaching Communities programme, the Big Lottery Fund (BIG) awards grants to projects that offer people better life chances, build stronger communities, develop improved rural and urban environments and improve health and well being. The Big Lottery Fund, the largest distributor of National Lottery good cause funding, is responsible for giving out half the money raised for good causes by the National Lottery (www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/prog_reaching_communities.htm)
- Grants for the arts funds arts activities that engage people in England, or that help artist and arts organisations carry out their work (www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/grants-arts/)
- The Rayne Foundation helps and encourages inspiring individuals and organisations who can help build bridges within our complex world (www.raynefoundation.org.uk)