

14 September 2011

## **Six Book Challenge:** **improving skills and changing lives**

The Reading Agency is calling for colleges, libraries, prisons and workplaces to reach out to those less confident adult readers who are most likely to benefit from its increasingly-popular Six Book Challenge, which launches its 2012 programme today. This comes as the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)'s new independent inquiry into adult literacy calls for more innovative work to help the five million adults in England who lack the literacy skills they need for everyday life. (See "Notes to editors")

Launched in 2008, 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, a certificate and the chance to enter a national prize draw. Impact research 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 - a finding endorsed each year by tutors. (See "Notes to editors")

"We're launching a new look Six Book Challenge for 2012, with new materials available," says The Reading Agency's adult literacy specialist Genevieve Clarke. "And we'll be building on the fabulous success we've had so far through a whole range of organisations using this simple scheme to make a big difference to people's lives."

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.

Keith Orrell was knocked down in a road accident as a young man and lost the ability to read and write. He now studies at Bolton College where he took part in the Six Book Challenge. "When I got my certificate I was over the moon - it is the first certificate I have ever got for anything and I couldn't believe it, but it gave me a lot of confidence. I gave a speech at the ceremony where we got our certificates - I really want to encourage more people to do the Six Book Challenge and to learn how to read and write."

Principal Marie Gilluley hosted the award ceremony held at Bolton College to honour Keith and other Six Book Challenge completers: "I was moved by the stories of those involved who described how proud they were of themselves, of setting examples for their children, of their increased confidence and most of all their determination to keep reading and progress in their studies. The Six Book

Challenge provides a uniquely accessible and enjoyable way to stimulate interest and improve literacy. We're delighted to be involved."

Prisons are a particular target for the Six Book Challenge with the Government having stated that improving the skills of offenders is critical to reducing re-offending. Participation in the Six Book Challenge doubled this year with around 100 institutions taking part, among them HMP Wandsworth.

"The Six Book Challenge provided a sense of achievement and improved literacy, confidence and self-esteem for those offenders who took part," says David Taylor, governor at HMP Wandsworth, where 35 prisoners completed the scheme with support from the prison library.

Use of the Six Book Challenge in prisons is set to rise again in 2012 due to two new projects. The Reading Agency has been awarded new funding by the City Bridge Fund which will enable nearly 1100 offenders in London prisons to take part in the Six Book Challenge in 2012 rising to over 1800 in 2014. There will also be an exciting new Six Book Challenge prisons project funded by the Clarissa Luard Award which, as part of the David Cohen Prize for a lifetime's achievement in literature, was donated to The Reading Agency by its winner this year, bestselling author Julian Barnes. This will enable 900 offenders and 100 prison staff in ten young offenders' institutions to benefit from the Six Book Challenge.

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 Merseytravel, Boots, Transport for London, Wincanton Logistics, over 20 NHS Trusts and McVitie's in Manchester.

"The Six Book Challenge gives HR, team managers and shop floor workers the chance to work on a common goal, which in these difficult times is a win-win," comments McVitie's training manager Lesley Flood.

- Look out for further news about the Six Book Challenge in October when we will be announcing new prizes for 2012.
- Six Book Challenge information: visit [www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk](http://www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk) or contact Genevieve Clarke: [genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk](mailto:genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk)

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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](http://www.readingagency.org.uk))

- The main activity for the Six Book Challenge 2012 will run from January to September to include increased involvement for families over the summer in conjunction with The Reading Agency's Summer Reading Challenge. But organisations are welcome to run it at any time that suits them during the year. More Six Book Challenge information can be found at: [www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk](http://www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk)
- Packs of materials are now available to order from [www.readingagency.org.uk/shop](http://www.readingagency.org.uk/shop) with discounts for multiple packs and an "Early Bird" offer running until 12 October. Packs include reading diaries, certificates, fliers, bookmarks and a new participant leaflet. Incentives available for purchase include branded pens, key rings, notepads, mugs and new cotton bags.
- Details of NIACE'S independent inquiry into adult literacy, Work, Society and Lifelong Learning can be found at: [www.niace.org.uk/news/inquiry%E2%80%99s-recommendations-to-improve-adult-literacy?src=fpist-more](http://www.niace.org.uk/news/inquiry%E2%80%99s-recommendations-to-improve-adult-literacy?src=fpist-more)
- See [www.readingagency.org.uk/adults/reading-for-pleasure-impact/](http://www.readingagency.org.uk/adults/reading-for-pleasure-impact/) for the Six Book Challenge 2008 impact report
- The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Ministry of Justice published Making Prisons Work: Skills for Rehabilitation in May 2011 setting out the Government's reform programme for offender learning. [www.bis.gov.uk/news/topstories/2011/May/offender-learning-review](http://www.bis.gov.uk/news/topstories/2011/May/offender-learning-review)
- The Reading Agency is offering training on 14 October 2011 in London for those running the Six Book Challenge, drawing on a range of transferable models from around the country.
- The Reading Agency works closely with other related initiatives such as the Quick Reads in order to maximise the impact of the Six Book Challenge. See [www.quickreads.org.uk](http://www.quickreads.org.uk)