

# the reading agency

## Public Library Reading and Health Programme

As part of our shared work plan with the Society of Chief Librarians, The Reading Agency is helping public libraries develop their reading and health offer. We aim to raise the profile of libraries' strategic contribution to the local authority's health and well-being agenda and make them partners of choice for delivering health and social care services. This paper:

- Seeks expressions of interest from two SCL regions/sub regions wanting to work with us to roll out the public library health offer recently piloted with SCL West Midlands
- Provides information on general Reading Agency support for your work in this area

### Background

Recent research has identified that public libraries have not to date fully articulated their health and well-being contribution. The research recommends the development of a core public library health and well-being offer as a key tool to change this.<sup>1</sup>

Working with West Midlands SCL, we have acted on this recommendation by developing a template laying out the public library contribution to the health and well-being agenda. This integrates information, referral services and creative reading. It illustrates the impact of local and regional evidence and has an advocacy toolkit with evidence and arguments to support partnerships between libraries and the health and social care sectors.

We are also developing a range of other support for your health work. Page 2 has more detail.

- Staff training, skills share days with health partners and consultancy support for developing health strategies.
- An annual Mood Boosting Books promotion in October to co-incide with Mental Health Week;
- The Six Book Challenge which is increasingly being used in health settings
- Author events and support for health linked reading groups through Reading Groups for Everyone

### 1. Want to roll out the library health offer?

In 2011/12 we hope to work with two library regions or sub regions to develop the public library health offer and embed its use with libraries and their partners.

In recognition of the national significance of this piece of work, we are using our strategic funding from MLA to offer each partnering region, 17 days of senior Reading Agency personnel time to the value of £7,000. We are asking partners to match this with support in kind - help with mapping work, local co-ordination, evidence collection/ case study development, administration of events and action planning.

**Methodology.** We will:

---

<sup>1</sup> *Public Library Activity in the Areas of Health and Well-Being*, Hicks, D., Creaser, C., Greenwood, H., Spezi, V., White, S. and Frude, N., MLA, 2010

- Work with you to map local library activity, partnerships and key stakeholders, build the evidence base and help develop a public library health and social care partnership offer for the public and partners.
- Customise the tool kit to include local/regional data including case studies. Update content to include new policy developments, health legislation and evidence.
- Deliver a library sector consultation and development event to build ownership of the offer and embed its delivery.
- Deliver a partnership skills share event with key stakeholders to launch offer, showcase activity and kick start joint action planning.
- Facilitate the signing of a formal library/health sector partnership Memorandum of Understanding
- Provide follow on telephone consultation and advice

### **Outputs/outcomes**

- A regional public library health offer to develop new work with health and social care partners, leading to a formal partnership agreement
- Increased awareness and ownership of the public library health offer within libraries
- A raised profile for libraries' health offer with local authority and other key stakeholders

### **Criteria for selecting regions/sub regions**

- Spread – geographically and types of authority
- An established track record of regional working and delivery, and infrastructure for regional reader development work
- An existing focus on reading and health as a development area, with a senior representative in a position to drive the work forward
- An emerging network of health and social care partners
- The ability to support the programme with local resources and support
- The ability to advocate outcomes on national platforms

### **Submissions**

Brief expressions of interest responding to the above criteria and outlining the potential value and impact of this piece of work for your region/sub region should be sent to Debbie Hicks by **19 August**.

## **2. Supporting health and well-being services from The Reading Agency**

### **Strategy, partnerships and workforce development**

- Consultancy advice and support on local partnership development/ reading and health strategy work (telephone, face to face)
- Reading and health skills share events – showcasing library activity to local partners, promoting the library offer offered either as stand alone training, or with supporting mapping and development work
- Bespoke staff training and development – mapping the library service health offer, mapping partnerships, identifying priorities, action planning

## Creative tools

- **Mood boosting books promotion:** research shows that reading improves mental health and well-being.<sup>2</sup> We are working with reading groups around the country to identify a selection of Mood-boosting Books. The books chosen make up a booklist, which forms the centre of the promotion. The booklist is supplemented with promotional material. We will be delivering an annual mood boosting books promotion in October each year supported by specialist lists targetting specific groups e.g. carers, older people
- **The Six Book Challenge** is being used to good effect in health settings – by mental health service user groups and residential homes with clients and by NHS Trust Libraries with hospital staff. *“NHS library information services in the North West have seen a lot of interest in the Six Book Challenge this year. The results have been good and it is a great scheme to show people what libraries can offer.”* David Stewart, director of health libraries North West.
- **Author events** and support for reading groups through **Reading groups for everyone**

## Research and evidence

- Working with LISU at Loughborough University we have undertaken research on the evidence base for public libraries’ contribution to the health and well being agenda. This evidence is available to library services at [www.readingagency.org.uk/new-thinking/health](http://www.readingagency.org.uk/new-thinking/health)

Contact: [debbie.hicks@readingagency.org.uk](mailto:debbie.hicks@readingagency.org.uk) 0871 7501203

---

<sup>2</sup> See *The West Midlands Public Library Health and Well Being Partnership Toolkit*, Debbie Hicks, 2010