

Summer Reading Challenge Volunteering 2012

Summary

- The Summer Reading Challenge is the UK's biggest children's reading programme, run by the charity The Reading Agency in partnership with public libraries. It inspires children aged 4 to 12 to join their local library and read six books in the summer holidays. 98% of UK library authorities run the programme, engaging 750,000 children in sustained reading during the break from school. By making reading really fun, the Challenge improves children's reading range, motivation and confidence. It helps prevent the holiday dip in literacy levels skills.
- An increasing number of *Reading Activists*, young people aged 11-24, are volunteering in their local library to help children do the Challenge. The Reading Agency provides quality frameworks, training and resources to support this growth in volunteering opportunities, with funding from the Cabinet Office's Social Action Fund and the John Laing Charitable Foundation.
- In 2013 The Reading Agency is working with the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians to extend the *Reading Activists* programme and develop year round library volunteering opportunities for young people, with the help of Arts Council funding.

2012 Headline Figures

- 4,382 young volunteers aged 11-24 years recruited in libraries
- 49% increase in the number of volunteers recruited compared with 2011
- 97% of volunteers gained new skills and experience through volunteering
- 85% of volunteers said they would like to keep volunteering in a library
- 750,000 children participated in the Summer Reading Challenge
- In 2011, 117 library authorities involved volunteers in 1,000 libraries. In 2012 this rose to 139 library authorities and 1,271 libraries.

What volunteers say

Library volunteering has DEFINITELY changed me! Before being involved, I would never have dreamed I could help organize author events or interview people; I would have been really scared and worried. There's so

many skills I've learnt, and things it's opened me up to do. I'm much better at reading now, and more confident all round.

Tom Hotston, 13, Warrington

It's been a truly fantastic opportunity. I've had the chance to work closely with children - something I've never really done before. There's something great about seeing their eyes light up when you've read and enjoyed a book that they love.

Katya Moffatt, 17, Milton Keynes

I really enjoyed working with the Summer Reading Challenge. The library staff were very welcoming and it felt great to be contributing to the community.

Anindita Nag, 15, Kingston upon Thames

1. Development of a three year programme

The Reading Agency has been working with public libraries on a three year programme from 2011-2013 to develop Summer Reading Challenge volunteering. This has been funded by the John Laing Charitable Trust and the Cabinet Office's Social Action Fund.

Overall the programme aims to provide young people with a quality volunteering experience which can improve their confidence and build skills to help them move into paid employment. It also aims to open their eyes to the value of reading and libraries as both a joy and a lifelong resource.

At the same time, the volunteering programme can give children aged 4-12 individual attention from young people acting as role models as they progress through the Challenge. It can also help them to enjoy reading more. Furthermore it provides library staff with support for running the Challenge, and the opportunity to talk to young people and become more aware of their perspective on libraries.

2. The 2012 Programme

Aims

In addition to the overarching aims outlined above, the 2012 volunteering programme aimed to

- increase numbers of volunteers to 4000
- increase accreditation opportunities for young people
- increase young people's awareness and usage of libraries
- encourage more children and young people to enjoy reading

The 2012 Challenge was called StoryLab. All UK library authorities were offered training and resources. Library services in turn recruited and trained volunteers in each of their libraries to support the Challenge.

The Reading Agency ran nine free training days in each English region except the East Midlands. There was also a training day in Carmarthen for the South Wales and Mid Wales regional group. This provided libraries with advice on establishing a volunteering strategy and working with young people, and included case studies from library services in each region.

The Reading Agency provided libraries with a Volunteering Handbook; Volunteering Templates (e.g. creating a Volunteering Policy Risk Assessment, Identifying Volunteering Roles); Summer Reading Challenge Volunteering certificates; and free badges for volunteers.

Volunteers were recruited through the *vinspired* website, advertising in the library, word of mouth and through links with local schools and organisations. Recruitment processes varied, but libraries usually asked potential volunteers to fill out application forms, followed by short informal interviews, before completing CRB forms. Once volunteers had been recruited, libraries were encouraged to support them in the following ways:

- Run **training sessions** for the volunteers before the Challenge started. The sessions outlined the summer ahead and introduced the roles for the volunteers.
- Provide **roles for volunteers** who wanted to develop particular skills. Suggested roles were: SRC Team Leaders, Story Lab Reporters, and Story Lab Assistants.
- Provide **accreditation opportunities** where possible and support links to accreditation schemes such as v50, ASDAN or Duke of Edinburgh.
- Encourage **year-round volunteering**, and offer volunteers opportunities in the library after the Challenge finished.

In addition, volunteers used the Reading Agency's *young people's* blogsite to share their experiences, tips and resources during the Challenge. Here are some of the young people who were involved, and some of the ways they got involved. <http://readingagency.org.uk/young-people/002-showcase/star-storylab-reporters.html>

One of the young volunteers, Hannah from South Gloucestershire, even created her own [children's book](#) during her volunteering work, which she read to groups of children at storytime events.

3. Results and Evaluation

I'd recommend to anyone who is thinking about volunteering for StoryLab or next year's Summer Reading Challenge to do so, as it is great fun, although it means missing a few hours of summer holiday, it is well worth it to give something back to the community you live in.

Katie, Redhill

A range of methods was used to evaluate the programme:

- 669 young people completed a pre-volunteering survey and registration form
- 412 young people filled in a post-volunteering survey

- 205 library authorities completed the Story Lab Evaluation form

In addition ad-hoc feedback and qualitative evaluation was collected through interviews with volunteers and librarians. Regular contact was maintained with libraries services over the Challenge period, and feedback collated from visits, emails and phone conversations. The Reading Agency explored the impact and involvement of volunteers through four individual case studies.

3.1 Numerical Results

- 4,382 volunteers aged 11-24 years were recruited by library authorities over the summer, an increase of 49% over last year.
- 25% of volunteers recruited (across all ages) had not volunteered in a library before

Key demographics

- 19.5% of volunteers were from Black and Other Minority Ethnic backgrounds.
- 8% of volunteers are not in education, employment or training.
- 2.2% of volunteers are in care

Most volunteering took place in England, with 54 volunteers in Scotland and 11 in Wales.

3.2 Impact on skills and confidence

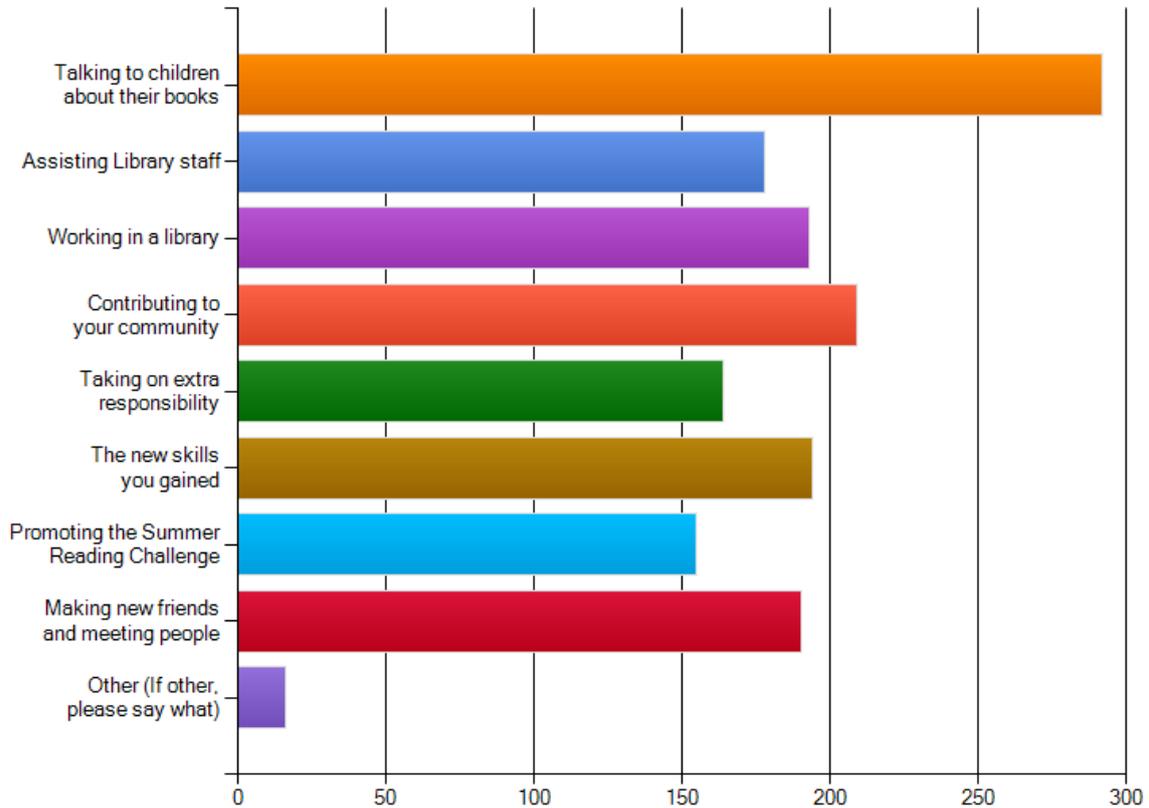
Volunteers reported gains in skills and confidence. 97% in total said they gained new skills and experience.

Levels of confidence	% of volunteers before volunteering	% of volunteers after having volunteered
Very Confident	38	63.4
Confident	59.8	99.5
Not confident	3.3	0.5

Main skill breakdown by area

Skill gained	Percentage of volunteers gaining skill
Experience of working with children	86.9
Communication	81.1
People skills	75.3
Organisation	46.9
Management	18.9

What did you enjoy most about volunteering with the Summer Reading Challenge?



It was great fun and I learned a lot of confidence out of it, especially more as I have done it 2 years running now and each year I am getting better at communicating with others and having bigger senses of responsibility. I can't wait for next year.

Siobhan, 13, Tameside

Running different events in the library was different as we had more of an interaction with the public and getting to know other volunteers was great fun.

Hareeka, 17, Hounslow

3.3 Increased awareness and usage of libraries

66.8% of the volunteers said they intended to increase their use of the library after volunteering. They cited an increased awareness and appreciation of the following areas:

- the range of services and resources
- the friendliness and helpfulness of staff
- the library's atmosphere and as a community space

- the library as a place for study and helping with college work

Some volunteers were new to the library and what it could offer them, while others had used the libraries when they were younger, and had been thrilled to rediscover the wide range of resources available to them as a teenager.

Because I understand the effort and dedication needed from library staff to deliver great service and I want to help out as much as I can.

Alice, 16, Derby City

There are many resources in the libraries which we take for granted and since working in a library I understand how much hard work the staff put into maintaining the library for our benefit. Getting to know the staff has been a privilege and is much appreciated.

Hareeka, 17, Hounslow

I realise how valuable they are to the community

Kate, 14, Kidderminster

3.4 Encouraging more children and young people to read more

52.8% of volunteers felt that they were more interested in books and reading as a result of being involved with the Summer Reading Challenge. They attributed this increase to the exposure to books and new genres, but also to the impact of speaking with people and children about books, and sharing their own views.

I've seen the variety of books at the library and I'm interesting in reading them.

Imogen, 15, Torquay

After speaking to library staff about books and reading, I am now more open to trying out new genres and types of books.

Abigail, 16, Essex

Spending time in the library has helped to remind me how much I love reading for leisure and not just for my course at university.

Emily, 19, West Berkshire

I have witnessed first hand the positive impact that reading has on young children which has inspired me greatly to pursue my own reading.

Georgia, 17, Gloucestershire

3.5 Increased accreditation opportunities for young people

The total number of young people whose volunteering was counted towards accreditation schemes was reported as 521. The top three types of accreditation were

- Essex County Council – I Will award: 200
- Duke of Edinburgh award: 153
- Vinspired: 70

Other types included the Children’s University, ASDAN, Welsh Bacc, Youth Achievement Award, the Dorset Award and the Saltire Award

In addition to accreditation, volunteers’ achievements were recognised across the programme through certificates from The Reading Agency, and in some authorities certificates from the local council. For example Bedford volunteers were presented with the Bedford Libraries Volunteer Certificate, while volunteers in Bristol libraries received a certificate from Bristol City Council. Libraries also showed their appreciation at celebration events: for example, in Southampton volunteers were given book tokens and were thanked personally by the Mayor

3.6 Increasing the number of children completing the Challenge

84% of library authorities said the volunteers helped more children to complete the Challenge by reading six books. Authorities who saw increases in their completion rate commented as below:

Proved very successful, enjoyed by the volunteers and extremely helpful and useful to the library staff. They were very enthusiastic and got fully involved in registering children, helping with craft activities, talking to children and parents about the challenge and reading and encouraging children to keep going and finish.

Mark Heaton, Rotherham Libraries

They encouraged children to join the Challenge and to progress. They were able to focus on the Challenge when staff had to serve other customers, or carry out other tasks.

Sue Ball, Staffordshire Libraries

Families report that having volunteers for their children to discuss their reading with was really beneficial and adds value to the scheme

Russell Allen, West Sussex

3.7 Continuation and Employment

85% of volunteers said they would like to keep volunteering in a library after the Summer Reading Challenge has finished.

65% of library authorities have offered volunteers opportunities to continue volunteering in the library or the community after the summer, with offers made to at least 1,023 volunteers. These opportunities include:

- Helping with family fun days; manga group; craft events; Bookstart; promoting self service machines

- Helping with book groups, helping with activities, helping with the home library service, helping with an adult listening group
- Helping at homework clubs and with children's activities
- Supporting staff with half-term and weekend events
- Peer Mentoring project with Home Work club, Youth consultancy projects to buy stock
- Helping with Family Learning Festival, rhymetimes, holiday activities
- Arts Award – Bronze level. As part of this, next year they will be assisting with children's events.

In addition, 15 library authorities offered 27 job opportunities to volunteers.

4. Lessons learnt

Feedback on the volunteering experience was very positive from both libraries and volunteers. Nonetheless some volunteers and librarians identified areas that they found challenging, and areas where they would like to see some improvement. The main difficulties were:

- Recruiting volunteers, especially as some early recruits dropped out before the holidays started, since they found summer jobs
- Occupying volunteers in quiet periods
- Difficulties using Vinspired website to recruit and lack of young people's awareness of the website
- Cascading training to other staff, as opportunities are more limited with restrictions on training and travel budgets
- Providing a quick and easy way to reward volunteers via accreditation
- Supervising of volunteers especially in the case of younger volunteers

Suggestions from volunteers

Volunteers largely reported very well on their time volunteering.

'I don't think it can be improved!'

'Well organised programme. I felt comfortable, appreciated and well-informed throughout.'

'I don't think there was any way to improve it, it was brilliant.'

They had suggestions :

- *"Make it easier to get dates to volunteer on."*

- “More activities for slow/quiet days”
- “Advertising the volunteering challenge at schools”
- “Give them opportunities to do more things in the library instead of the reading challenge.”
- “Do more hands on activities, such as arts and crafts so volunteers can have more contact with the children and encourage them more about the reading challenge.”
- “More training”

Learning and recommendations

- It is important that libraries provide a clear structure and communication about when volunteers are needed in libraries and what their roles are
- The incentivising of volunteers needs further developing – e.g. libraries can put volunteers forward for awards
- Planning should include opportunities to keep volunteers engaged through other roles

5. Next steps for The Reading Agency

- The Reading Agency will extend the programme to work with more library authorities in 2013/14, especially in Scotland and Wales. The resources, training and Facebook page will be developed earlier.
- The Reading Agency will develop new volunteer roles, both as part of the schools engagement plan to increase the number of children undertaking the Challenge, and to give young people who have volunteered for the Challenge before the chance to develop their skills and experience. Provisionally, these roles will be: Schools Ambassador and Volunteer Leader.
- The charity will integrate *Reading Activists* volunteering opportunities into all the charity’s programmes with young people and children to support year-round volunteering
- The learning and models will be integrated into the Universal Reading Offer strategy being developed by the Society of Chief Librarians and The Reading Agency. This includes 2012/13 development work with the Association of Senior Children’s and Education Librarians to involve more young people in helping shape library services, funded



Young Volunteers at No.11 Downing Street , January 2013

by the Arts Council.

- Further support will be given to libraries who request it , to develop year round accreditation and volunteer opportunities, including the Arts Award.

More information about Reading Activists online can be found on www.readingagency.org.uk/young-people

Contact

Miranda McKearney OBE

Director, The Reading Agency

miranda.mckearney@readingagency.org.uk / 07500 010 740