

SPRING 2017

Newsletter for
volunteers
and schools

Schoolreaders

Welcome to the newsletter from the charity that improves childhood literacy by providing one-to-one reading sessions in schools. In this issue we examine some of the stories putting literacy in the headlines, we meet two very different volunteers, and we talk to a headteacher who says that Schoolreaders has shown his pupils the joy of reading.

Putting the fun into FUNDRAISING

From bookclubs to yard-sales, our supporters are coming up with ever-more ingenious ways of raising funds for Schoolreaders. Thanks go to London schoolgirl, Flossie, who used the opportunity of a house move to hold a yard sale and raised a fantastic £133 by selling unwanted china, furniture, pictures and toys. Thanks also to the ladies of a

Bedfordshire book club, who raised £160 by holding a whip-round at their pre-Christmas get-together.



Schoolreaders takes to the airwaves

Listeners to BBC Three Counties Radio may have heard our first ever broadcast appeal in December 2016.



Schoolreaders Chairman, Jane Whitbread, together with volunteer Chris Cernik, talked to DJ Nick Coffer about the charity and made a successful appeal for new volunteers.

From zero to 180,000 sessions in three years!

Last year was a spectacular year of growth for Schoolreaders and we're anticipating an even more exciting 2017. Thanks to your efforts:

"Our current volunteers will provide 180,000 ten-minute reading sessions in one academic year"

"94% of our schools rate the volunteer impact on the children as good or excellent"

"99% of Schoolreaders say they have a positive school experience"

Thanks to the generosity of our volunteers who give their time for nothing, it still costs only £15 to support a child for a year. If you know anyone who might like to sponsor a child, please direct them to our website where they can make a donation.

COUNTY AMBASSADORS

We are delighted to have appointed two Schoolreaders 'County Ambassadors'.

Gavin Howard in Cambridgeshire, and Belinda Chambers in Hertfordshire will help to raise our profile, encourage volunteer recruitment and spread the Schoolreaders message in local media. We are very pleased to welcome them both.



Gender and reading

The reading habits of more than a million British children have been analysed in two extensive new studies from the University of Dundee. Researchers found that boys of all ages read less thoroughly than girls, regularly skipping parts of books and often choosing reading material that is too easy for them.

THE LITERACY PLEDGE

On 2nd December 2016, The Daily Telegraph printed a letter signed by 41 key figures from the corporate world calling for the whole business sector to take action to tackle the UK's literacy challenge. The so-called 'Vision for Literacy Business Pledge', aims to get big business to help close the literacy gap and boost social mobility through tangible action. Boots Opticians was a lead signatory of the pledge. Seen here is Ben Fletcher, Managing Director, with his copy of the pledge.



Photo © National Literacy Trust

The 30-million-word gap

A report produced by researchers at the University of Kansas shows the huge impact that verbal exchanges within families have on a child's language and vocabulary development. Forty-two families from all backgrounds were assessed at monthly hour-long observations, and the findings showed marked disparities between the sheer number of words spoken as well as the types of messages conveyed. After four years, these differences in parent-child interactions produced significant discrepancies not only in children's knowledge, but also in their skills and experiences. Children from high-income families were exposed to a staggering 30 million more words than children from families on benefits.

Forthcoming LITERARY EVENTS

WICKED YOUNG WRITERS AWARDS

Children and young people aged between 5 and 25 are invited to enter this award, which was launched in 2010 by the team behind the long-running musical Wicked. There is no set subject matter; simply write 750 words on a subject close to your heart, and submit it by 13th March 2017. The judges include Michael Morpurgo and Cressida Cowell. www.wickedyoungwriterawards.com

THE OXFORD LITERARY FESTIVAL

Saturday 25th March to Sunday 2nd April. Literary figures including Vikram Seth, Alexander McCall Smith and Hilary Mantel will be taking part. For a full programme of events, visit www.oxfordliteraryfestival.org

STRATFORD UPON AVON LITERARY FESTIVAL

Stratford stages its tenth festival from Sunday 23rd April to Sunday 30th April 2017. An exciting mixture of debate, ideas, celebrity author events, workshops, humour and educational events in local schools. New for this year is a competition to find the next big children's author/illustrator.

www.stratfordliteraryfestival.co.uk



Photo © Stratford-upon-Avon Literary Festival

Meet the volunteers

Dayna Melton and Kathleen Evans

Profiles of two of our team show that there are no rules about background, experience or age, when it comes to being a great Schoolreader. Enthusiasm and dedication are all that really matters...and it's not just the children who benefit.

Dayna Melton, at 24 one of our youngest volunteers, joined Schoolreaders in 2014, when she had left full-time education and was wondering where to go in life. It turned out that she had found her niche. Kingsmoor Lower School in Bedfordshire is a busy environment with 7 classrooms, which has been rated 'good' by OFSTED in its two most recent inspections. The children, 16% of whom receive the Pupil Premium (additional funding from government to raise attainment of disadvantaged pupils), come from all sorts of backgrounds. Dayna saw five pupils each week, spending around ten minutes with each child. She enjoyed the experience so much that it convinced her that a career in childcare would suit her. As a direct result of her time as a Schoolreader - and the boost that it gave to her CV - Dayna was offered a job at a nursery in Bedford. She is loving her new work supervising a baby unit, has just been promoted, but is sadly no longer able to volunteer with us.

Once a week, Kathleen Evans, an energetic 88-year-old, makes the trip from home in Princes Risborough to her local primary school, St John's C of E School, to spend a couple of hours as a Schoolreader. In a delightful piece of symmetry, her teaching career began almost sixty years ago in another school named St John's C of E, this one in Islington. The intervening six decades saw Mrs Evans rise



Dayna Melton

through the teaching profession, from training in Southampton to headships of two schools in Hertfordshire. In the late 1960s she emigrated to Canada and got the change of scene she had desired with a tough teaching post in an



Kathleen Evans

Indian reservation in Alberta. There she taught children of all ages, relying on textbooks that had travelled out in her suitcase from England. Each 3-month long summer holiday saw her take to the road in a travelling library bus in which she visited the far-flung farmsteads of rural Alberta, in case her students should let their reading lapse before school restarted. It was the high-point of the week for many of the children in these isolated spots, and Mrs Evans is still in contact with a number of those she visited, many of whom turned into passionate readers as a result of her work. Mrs Evans was delighted to join Schoolreaders early last year, and relishes the fact that the expertise built up over 58 years of teaching and mentoring is still of huge value. She has built up real friendships with the children she helps at St John's. She classifies them into two groups; the hesitant readers who require careful encouragement, and the more confident ones - even these are inclined to skip the odd difficult word - but the eagle-eyed Mrs Evans prides herself on the fact that they never get away with it!

A HEADTEACHER'S VIEW

Paul Stanyard, Headteacher of Camestone Lower School in Bedfordshire, has been involved with Schoolreaders since its foundation in 2013, and credits the scheme with teaching his pupils the joys of reading.

Paul Stanyard is one of Schoolreaders' most passionate advocates, having seen the benefits the scheme has brought to his school in more than three years of partnership. Camestone Lower is a two-form entry school in Kempston with 295 pupils from 4 to 9 years old. The children come from a wide variety of ethnicities and home backgrounds, and have mixed educational abilities. Schoolreaders initially provided Paul with three volunteers in September 2013. Having given them a bit of training so that their approach tied in with that being used by his teachers, Paul gave them each a small group of pupils to work with for a whole term. The volunteers saw the children for ten-minute sessions once a week for the whole term, and this continuity meant that they built up really trusting and friendly relationships with the children and achieved very positive literacy results as a consequence. The children typically read a 'home-reader' or library book. Paul says, 'We have seen many benefits from the scheme during the past 3 years; pupils have gained

confidence with their reading, as well as increased fluency and comprehension skills'. Two of Camestone's original volunteers, Jean and Stephanie, are still visiting the school regularly and love their contact with the children.

And the children are happy too. One of Paul's pupils says, 'Sometimes the lady helps me with words I don't know then when I read again I can read the word on my own', succinctly summing up one of the benefits of having a Schoolreader at your side.



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