

Schoolreaders

improving literacy • increasing life chances

Welcome to our latest newsletter. This has been a landmark year for Schoolreaders. We now have more than 1,100 volunteers and are looking forward to delivering more than 400,000 free reading support sessions this academic year. Without the support of our wonderful volunteers, funders and staff none of this would have been possible.

11,000 children supported each week!

Since this time last year, a further 200 schools are benefiting from Schoolreaders volunteers. We now have volunteers in more than 580 schools.

Introducing Onjali Raúf



Thanks to our partnership with the Oxford Literary Festival around 150 Oxfordshire school children will have the chance to meet rising star of children's literature Onjali Raúf at next year's event. Onjali has spent a number of years working with refugees in Syria and Calais, but it was only when recuperating from an operation that she had time to write a book set against

this difficult backdrop. The events which confront Onjali's fictional hero, an 11-year-old called Ahmet, are those she imagined happening to a baby she encountered in the Calais camps. Raehan had been born in circumstances so desperate that his young mother Zainab was forced to scavenge for food in litter bins. Onjali was extraordinarily moved by their plight, but in the chaos of the camps she tragically lost track of mother and child and wrote her book as a response to this loss. 'The Boy at the Back of the Class' became an instant bestseller when it was published last year.

Visit www.oxfordliteraryfestival.org to find out more about next year's event, which runs from late March to early April.

Lunch with Joanna Trollope



Best-selling novelist and champion of good literacy Joanna Trollope joined Schoolreaders for a special lunch at Woburn Abbey in early December. 200 guests enjoyed hearing about her writing methods. Joanna says that she can settle down almost anywhere, getting things down in longhand on a A4 pad, usually

using a humble Bic biro. Early chapters are completed first, then the ending is decided, and finally Joanna lets the bits in between 'write themselves'. Joanna's new novel 'Mum & Dad' will be published in early 2020.

Rotary fundraisers



We are very grateful to a group of Rotarians who recently got together to raise money for us and will be funding reading support for 18 children this academic year. As they said, 'The plight of youngsters whose future is compromised through a difficulty with reading at an early age is desperately sad. The Schoolreaders scheme ensures that even modest help and financial assistance can bring so much benefit to so many'.

How are we doing?

With the help of the University of Bedfordshire we've conducted feedback research that shows how brilliantly our volunteers are performing and how greatly their schools value their support:

95% of schools rated the volunteer impact on children as good or excellent.

95% of schools rated the skills and competency of our volunteers as good or excellent.

98% of volunteers commented on the positive effect of being a Schoolreaders volunteer on them personally.

99% of our volunteers would recommend Schoolreaders to someone wanting to volunteer.

In our 2019 feedback research we asked schools to assess any improvements in their children's reading age as a result of the Schoolreaders intervention. We are delighted to report as follows:

37% of school respondents said that over 1 year their pupils made on average **1-3 months** additional progress in reading.

46% of schools said that our support added **3-6 months** of progress and **12%** said **6+ months**.

Meet a volunteer: **Mike Perrott**

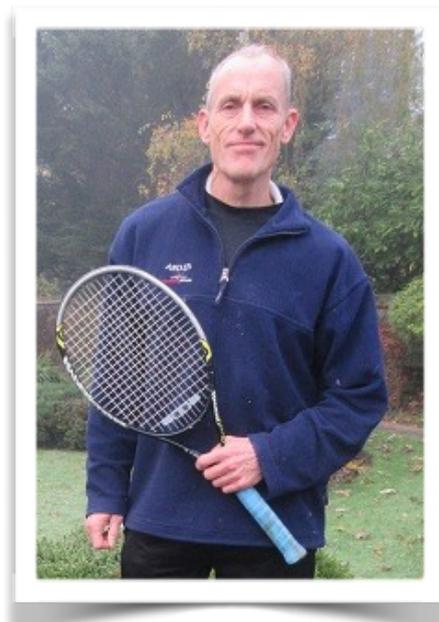
On retiring from a career in corporate IT three years ago, Mike Perrott was looking for opportunities that would allow him to make a positive contribution to the north London community where he lives.

Volunteering for Schoolreaders fitted the bill, but what Mike wasn't expecting was how much pleasure he would get from it. He tells us that his wife says he's 'super-cheerful' when he returns home from his school visits and he says that the experience has brought back vivid memories of the fun of reading with his own children, who are now grown up.

Mike spends Friday afternoons at Chater Junior School in Watford where the children come from many cultures and where, Mike believes, other languages as well as English are often spoken at home. Mike is delighted to be able to step in. He feels that his enthusiasm and support are properly appreciated by staff at the school, who go out of their way to make him feel welcome, and he is in regular contact with the Deputy Head who is the Schoolreaders co-ordinator. He has been included in Christmas festivities and theatre events and feels very much part of school life.

Mike spent his first two years as a Schoolreader with the same group of children, happily seeing them improve their reading fluency and comprehension as they progressed up the school. He describes how they went from tentatively blending sounds in their first year with him, to confidently tackling whole books by the end of their second year. He has now moved on to help a new group of children and is finding it an equally rewarding experience.

Mike's visit to Chater on Friday afternoons overlaps with the school's 'golden time' - the precious extra half hour of playtime. Mike is always impressed how the children, when it is their turn to read, will still break off from their busy play with their friends. Mike remembers one occasion when one rather reluctant little boy was sent in to read during golden time; Mike, in sympathy at this hardship, decided simply to read to the child, rather than making him do any sounding out. To his satisfaction, Mike saw this boy's resistance to being kept indoors gradually melt away - he became thoroughly absorbed in the story, and without apparently noticing it, started reading ahead of Mike, leaving him in delighted silence. For Mike these 'breakthrough' moments are a powerful reminder of why his work as a Schoolreader is so valuable.



Could you have been a Bletchley Park codebreaker?

It's well known that many military intelligence heroes of the second World War were crossword fanatics. Less well known is how a Daily Telegraph puzzle from 1942 helped to win the war. Readers were invited to come to the paper's offices and complete the cryptic crossword under time-trial conditions. Little did they know that the War Office was watching proceedings, and those who finished in under 12 minutes were approached as potential Bletchley recruits. Here are some of the questions - how would you have fared?

13a, Much that could be got from a timber merchant (5,4)

17a, Is this town ready for a flood? (6)

33a, A sport in a hurry (6)

34a, Is the part of a workshop that turns out this part of a motor a hush-hush affair? (8)

11d, Business with the end in sight (6)

Answers are on the back page. You can see the whole puzzle and answers on our blog at www.schoolreaders.org/blog

CASE-STUDY

A life without literacy

It is all too easy to take literacy for granted. For those who progress easily through their schooling to easy fluency, reading soon begins to feel as natural as breathing. But that is not true for everyone. We gain an insight into how missing out on literacy skills as a child can profoundly shape the opportunities available in adult life by talking to David, a young father from Bedfordshire, whose school years left him ill-prepared for the future.

David is a likeable and engaging 31-year old. In common with so many of his generation, he's trying to do the right thing, working hard and raising a family. But his lack of reading skills means that his path is often a difficult or circuitous one, and his attempts to move forward are often blocked by the obstacle of his illiteracy.



David entered the world of work in 2004 without a single qualification and now works as a roofer and sometime-gardener. He jokes that neither of his jobs requires him to read anything more complicated than a tape measure, but his illiteracy means that, in spite of his obvious intelligence, he can't be considered for more responsible or technically challenging work.

David's lack of reading skills has other serious consequences; he admits that he can't organise travel plans without a visit to buy tickets in person, and he is unable to fill out

any kind of form, including his tax return. He avoids moments where he might be expected to read in front of others, and often calls on his wife for help.

David was born in Birmingham. His mother left the family when he was around five years old, and David's father struggled to raise his four young sons. David never saw books at home, and he recalls that by the time he started at primary school he already felt resistant to the idea of reading. He readily admits that he wasn't engaged during these primary years, and had started to behave badly by the time he reached the age of 11 and was due to transfer to secondary school. His ADHD was recognised at this stage, and diagnosis meant that David started taking medication and was moved out of mainstream education and into special schooling. Perhaps things might have been turned round at this stage; David says that the small class sizes at his new school were a help and he did start to achieve positive results. Despite this he lost whatever focus he had and spent his final years at school waiting for the moment he would be old enough to leave education.

David's three children are of primary school age, and their progress towards reading fluency causes him to reflect on his own situation. His daughter, aged 6, attends a school which benefits from Schoolreaders volunteers. David feels that the lack of sustained adult attention either at home or at school during his chaotic childhood was what prevented him gaining reading skills and that the legacy of those early years is still with him in very many ways, not least in his inability to read.

(All names in this article have been changed)

What our schools say about Schoolreaders:

"The reading volunteers are invaluable to our school. They give so freely of their time! They have made such positive relationships, the children really look forward to reading with them."

- Partner School, Hertfordshire

Many thanks to our wonderful supporters

We are very grateful to our valued supporters and volunteers. These include: The Harpur Trust, The CHK Foundation, Adrian Swire Charitable Trust, Suffolk Community Foundation, The Philip and Marjorie Robinson Charitable Trust (who supported our Joanna Trollope lunch) and the Longmores Charitable Foundation. We also thank our many generous individual donors.

Meet a literacy hero Claire Taylor

Claire Taylor is Producer of the BBC's flagship children's programme 'Bedtime Stories'. We've chosen her as our latest Literacy Hero because her show is introducing so many young families to the joys of exploring a good book together at bedtime, and reinforcing the love of stories in homes where bedtime reading is already a tradition.

Many of the programme's viewers aren't yet old enough to be learning to read, but inspiring a love of books at this early stage prepares them for a lifetime of learning and enjoyment through reading. 'Bedtime Stories' primes them to listen to and enjoy language. It teaches them about words and sentence formation, and introduces them to concepts like colours, letters and numbers. It's certainly true that 'Bedtime Stories' is seen by many tired parents as the oasis moment when they can switch off and out-source the reading to an expert, but lots report that the programme is an important part of their winding down routine, and that it stimulates their children to ask for further stories to read together as bedtime approaches.

The programme is broadcast every weeknight in a regular 6.45pm slot on the CBeebies channel and each episode features a celebrity reading a bedtime story straight to the camera. Shots of the reader are interspersed with illustrations from the book itself. It's a format that works well, regularly drawing in audiences of 500,000. Part of the secret of the show's popularity has been Claire's success at persuading A-listers to read the stories for her. Tom Hardy, star of action films including Ridley Scott's 'Black Hawk Down', was one of her first high-profile readers, and took up the opportunity at the suggestion of his wife, who wanted him to be in something that was suitable for his young children to watch. Other celebrity readers have included Elton John, Dolly Parton, David Hasselhof, Tim Peake, Jessica Ennis-Hill and Nadiya Hussain. Claire now has stars clamouring to be allowed a slot on the show.

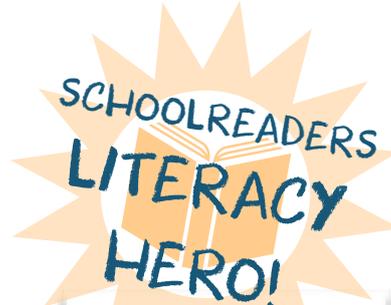


Image © BBC



Orlando Bloom reads for 'Bedtime Stories'

The process of making the programme is a simple one. Books are sometimes chosen by the celebrities themselves, and sometimes by Claire, and the stories often reflect topical themes. The celebrities read four or five stories on a typical day's shoot and they can be surprisingly nervous. Integrity to the original book is key, and no deviation from the text is allowed. We applaud Claire's achievements in using 'Bedtime Stories' to make the enjoyment of books part of the daily routine of millions of children and their parents.

What our volunteers say about Schoolreaders:

"Volunteering in the Early Years...is the highlight of my week. I am always made to feel welcome and valued and they are so appreciative. I look forward to seeing the children each week and love seeing them progress with their reading."
- A Schoolreaders Volunteer, Essex

Your support is invaluable!

Schoolreaders has to raise funds to cover the cost of placing volunteers in schools across the country. If you feel able to support us, or might consider making a gift to Schoolreaders in your Will, please contact Fiona or Natalie on 01234 924333 or visit our website. Thank you for any support you feel able to give.

Q: Much that could be got from a timber merchant. A: Great deal
Q: Is this town ready for a flood? A: Newark
Q: A sport in a hurry. A: racing

Q: Is the part of a workshop that turns out this part of a motor a hush-hush affair? A: Silencer
Q: Business with the end in sight. A: Agenda

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