

## Reading Friends Wales

### Case Study



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| <b>Title</b>                      | <b>Reading Friends Wales</b>  |
| Subtitle                          | n/a   |
| Short Description                 | <p>Reading Friends is the exciting new UK-wide programme from The Reading Agency aimed at tackling loneliness and isolation. Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, Reading Friends connects people by starting conversations through reading.</p> <p>Reading Friends has been co-created with older people and tested for the past year with local project partners. Our groups meet regularly in venues including libraries, care homes and community centres. Our projects also arrange one-to-one sessions.</p>   |
| Link to external web page         | <p><a href="https://www.literaturewales.org/our-projects/reading-friends/">https://www.literaturewales.org/our-projects/reading-friends/</a></p> <p><a href="https://readingfriends.org.uk/">https://readingfriends.org.uk/</a></p>   |
| Primary Author (s)                | Bob Gelsthorpe (Literature Wales)   |
| Additional authors                | N/A   |
| Publication date                  | 8/3/19  |
| Extended description (1000 words) | <p><b>Purpose</b></p> <p>Reading Friends brings people together to read, share stories, meet new friends and have fun. We use reading – whether books, magazines, newspapers, or anything else – to start everyone chatting.</p> <p>We work with volunteers of all ages to build social connections, using reading to spark conversations. Together, we reach some of the most vulnerable members of our society: older people, people with dementia and carers.</p> <p><b>Aims</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reduce feelings of Social Isolation and Loneliness</li> <li>- Building social connections in isolated communities</li> </ul> |

- Reach and engage with vulnerable members of society
- Improve mental and physical health and wellbeing
- Increase participants' social networks and connection to the wider community
- Support older people to engage in reading

### **Participants**

- Patients at Singleton Hospital, in particular those unable to return home due to poor or non-existent support structures
- People experiencing social isolation and loneliness
- People aged 65+
- People suffering from Alzheimers and Dementia
- People with poor Mental Health

### **Outcomes**

- When asked about the project, a number of stakeholders in the project gave feedback. Responses to the question "How do you feel about Reading Friends?", a number responded: "Positive", "Excited", "Interesting" and "I think it's a wonderful Idea"
- A volunteer remarked during feedback that "I just love reading and have seen lonely people at first hand. I anticipate that I will get as much out of it as they do!". Anecdotal feedback such as this is a key indicator of the willingness to build up communities in socially isolated areas, and is an important measure of demand.
- The main reason cited amongst volunteers for becoming a Reading Friend Volunteer is that they wanted 'to meet and support isolated/lonely people' and 'to give something back to the local area' – reducing the feelings of social isolation and loneliness have been a key trait in the project thus far.
- The project is constantly being evaluated, and a full report at the end of the project will give an accurate forecast of exact outcomes achieved.

### **Evaluation**

Evaluation is collected by a combination of Volunteers, Project managers at both Swansea and Conwy, and then collated and submitted to Renaisi, a research and enterprise company for evaluation.

Materials and processes to collect and analyse information has been developed in partnership with The Reading Agency, Renaisi and all Reading Friends partners throughout the UK.

The data from the test phase in Conwy has formed part of the overall Reading Friends UK test phase report, produced by Renaisi and viewable here: [https://tra-resources.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/entries/document/3056/Reading\\_Friends\\_evaluation\\_summary.pdf](https://tra-resources.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/entries/document/3056/Reading_Friends_evaluation_summary.pdf)

A report was commissioned in 2018 by the Reading Agency, to assess the potential impact of reading on loneliness, mental health problems, dementia and social (im)mobility. The report, 'A Society of Readers' from thinktank Demos creates an important understanding of the contexts surrounding issues of social isolation and loneliness. The report is viewable in full here: <https://demosuk.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/A-Society-of-Readers-Formatted.pdf>

**Cost** – For 2017 – 2018 the project in Conwy had a total cost of £10,000

It should be noted that this figure mainly represents start up project costs.


Cost of the current project is still in progress, and so would not be suitable to report on at this stage, without appropriate evaluation figures in place.

**Outputs –**

- Throughout the test phase (2017 – 2018) Conwy delivered extensive safeguarding and bespoke training for 9 volunteers.
- Amongst these 9 volunteers, they delivered 4 sessions, for a total of 4 hours to 7 participants
- 9 Volunteers were recruited, trained and put through sufficient safeguarding processes during the test phase in Conwy, with many more recruited throughout Conwy and Swansea to date.
- Policies were developed by Conwy Library Service in collaboration with CVSC to cover volunteering.
- All materials were compliant with the Welsh Language Act
- The project is constantly being evaluated, and a full report at the end of the project will give an accurate forecast of exact outcomes achieved.

**Quality Indicators –**

- To ensure that high quality was achieved throughout the projects, an open tender was initially put out for a first round of expressions of interest.
- Following this first round, Conwy Library Service was invited to deliver the inaugural Reading Friends Wales project.
- During the pilot phase, we invited expressions of interest again, and Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board were selected to deliver the second project in Wales.
- The selection process has been developed in partnership with The Reading Agency and reflects a geographic and social spread as well as varying methodology for project approach.
- Literature Wales has a notable track record of delivering projects with health and wellbeing aims and objectives.

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| <p>Image</p>                                 |    |
| <p>Supporters<br/>/partners<br/>/funders</p> | <p><b>Core Partners</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Reading Agency</li> <li>- Conwy Library Service</li> <li>- Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board</li> </ul> <p><b>Funders</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The National Lottery Community Fund</li> <li>- Welsh Government</li> <li>- Arts Council Wales</li> </ul> <p><b>Supporters:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Earth Science Partnership Ltd</li> <li>- Discovery (Swansea University)</li> <li>- Swansea Central Library</li> <li>- Community and Voluntary Support Conwy</li> <li>- Llys Elian Care Home</li> <li>- Age Connect Conwy</li> </ul> |