

case study

Reading Partners activity profile: Charley Boorman library event

Reading Partners is a consortium transforming the way publishers and libraries work together, creating successful and exciting events and activities for readers. It is led by The Reading Agency, the independent charity working to inspire more people to read more.

In October 2008 actor, adventurer and travel writer Charley Boorman appeared at The Mitchell Library in Glasgow to read from, talk about and sign copies of his book *By Any Means*. Published by Little, Brown the book charts how Boorman travelled from County Wicklow in Ireland to Sydney, Australia using whatever different forms of local transportation were available along the way. His journey was also made into a BBC TV series.

A capacity crowd of 370 people attended and 60 books were sold. What made the event such a success?

“Librarians are great to work with,” says publicist Moira McMillan, who does Scottish publicity for Little, Brown. “Many of them love books, and are really enthusiastic about making an author event work. They have great mailing lists – all Culture and Sport Glasgow employees were emailed about the Charley Boorman event – and they can help us tap into their reading group networks.”

“We’ve built a really good relationship with Moira,” continues Mary Greenshields, Reader Development Co-ordinator for Culture and Sport Glasgow. “From a library point of view, when you’re working with a good publicist like her, it helps you to cover all publicity angles in and getting people to the event. For example, for Charley Boorman Moira quickly picked up on the biker angle, contacting Strathclyde Police and a lot of motorbike garages and clubs, and the result was an influx of bikers. It definitely helps us to reach new audiences who might not otherwise use a library”.

There was also a partnership with Borders, who not only sold books at the event but advertised the event in-store and on their website, selling 100 advance tickets.

“It’s a win situation all round,” says Moira McMillan. “The library got a big name author, a big attendance and people coming into the library for the first time. The bookshop got to sell books, and the publisher and author got a great venue. Everyone pulled together to make the event work. I’ve been really happy with the Reading Partners link that’s working to promote activity like this.”

Mary Greenshields agrees that Reading Partners, which has built close relationships with both publishers and library services, has helped promote what each can offer the other: “Before I was involved with Reading Partners I used to think that publishers had the authors and the books, and that I had to plead to get them. Now I’m confident that we’ve got good venues and reader networks to offer publishers, and I’ve found that once you’ve

delivered a good event, they will come back to you directly. We have Jeffrey Deaver coming to us because Moira recommended The Mitchell as a venue to another publicist, and Charley Boorman will be returning to The Mitchell with his latest book, *By Any Means 2*.

“And for new authors or authors who aren’t likely to deliver a big audience and fill a venue like The Mitchell, we can offer different formats of events, such as opening up a book group meeting and inviting the authors and others to attend,” she continues. “It might be the author and a dozen members of a book group, but for new writers that can be a really good start.”

Attendee feedback from the Charley Boorman event was excellent, with many readers keen to come back for more.

“As someone who does not attend many literary events, the attraction of this one was my interest in travel and adventure, and Charley Boorman certainly entertained his audience,” says Fiona Taylor. “He talked as if it was just a normal conversation about his adventures, and he made me want to visit all the places he has been.”

Book group member Beth Leckie liked seeing the library opened up to a new audience, as did Lynn Crawford, who has since been back to The Mitchell Library for events involving Michael Meighan and also Alexander McCall Smith.

“I think it's a great way for people to meet the authors whose books we read,” she says. “I think you can gain so much more from meeting the author and learning to understand how they write and where they get their ideas from. It's great that a local library can organise these events.”

“To any publicist feeling nervous about doing author events with libraries I would definitely say give it a go,” says Moira McMillan. “Reading Partners is on hand to give you advice, and when you find a librarian who really gets behind an event with you, you can go on and do really good work for the future.”

Reading Partners involves the whole UK public library network and ten major adult publishers. A children’s version of the scheme was set up in May 2008 involving 12 children’s publishers, The Publishers Association and the main children’s library bodies. For more information, please contact Sandeep Mahal on 0871 223 2041 or sandeep.mahal@readingagency.org.uk

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