



Reading for pleasure

Ideas to inspire people in prisons and young offender institutions



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'The National Year of Reading gives us a great opportunity to work together to promote reading for pleasure to adults who are improving their skills.'

*David Lammy MP, Minister for Skills,
Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills*

'If you read, the world has never been more accessible and more exciting. If you don't, the door on opportunity has never been more firmly shut. By starting with what people love – be it sport, music, film, family history, magazines or adventure gaming – the National Year of Reading is a perfect opportunity to weave a rich variety of reading into all your work with learners.'

Honor Wilson-Fletcher, Project Director, National Year of Reading

'I can underestimate learners' understanding until they tell me about a book they have read.' *Adult literacy tutor*

Start with what you love. This is the message of the National Year of Reading. And this is the message for adult learners as much as for any other audience.

The Vital Link libraries and adult literacy programme, together with the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), have created this series of ideas packs for practitioners working with adults in a range of different settings. **This pack contains ideas to inspire people in prisons and young offender institutions. There is a full list of all the packs available on page 9.**

The aim is to support you in introducing learners to reading in all its forms – books, magazines, websites, lyrics – not just this year, but every year. We need to widen people's concept of reading so that they can think of themselves as 'readers' whatever kind of reading they enjoy. We know that learners can get the reading bug if they are encouraged to choose what they read and can share their experience of reading with others. Reading needs to fit into their lives, be relevant to their interests and concerns but also to surprise them with new ideas and ways of looking at the world.

Research tells us that reading for pleasure 'helps to increase enjoyment, self-confidence, motivation and the acquisition of functional literacy skills'. Libraries are ideally placed to support learners as they discover an enjoyment of reading of all kinds. But other organisations also have expertise and resources to offer, which can help to engage people in a love of reading. Local authorities, colleges, prisons, trade unions, businesses and voluntary organisations have all made a commitment to use the National Year of Reading to create new readers.

Please make good use of these ideas while the profile for reading is high and help us to make 2008 an exciting point in their reading journey for adult learners across the country.

Genevieve Clarke, The Vital Link and **Jenny Cobley**, NIACE

See www.yearofreading.org.uk for more information about the National Year of Reading.

Introduction

Offenders may be in male or female adult prisons or in young offender institutions. Each have their own needs and interests and their reading ability and attitudes to reading will vary enormously. But it's worth remembering the strong correlations between low levels of literacy and the high incidence of dyslexia in prisons. Those who can read and write find their skills in demand by those who need help and you may be able to facilitate this process through peer partnership schemes that benefit both mentor and learner alike. However, you will always need to take into account frequent transfers of offenders.

Ideally staff from the prison library and education department can work together to promote reading for pleasure with the help of a writer or reader in residence if the prison has one. In addition, it helps to involve other prison staff so that books are integrated into the everyday life in the prison workshops and the gym, on the wings and into resettlement activities.

Reading and writing can help in sustaining relationships with partners and children and allow offenders to support their children's development. Maintaining such relationships can be vital to their emotional well-being and rehabilitation. Schemes such as Storybook Dad and the Big Book Share have been found to have huge benefits for the whole family.

Programme leaders may need to adapt activities for readers whose concentration is affected by mental health problems, or who are on drug rehabilitation programmes and associated medication. Linking reading to practical activities is always a good idea.

For some offenders, the opportunity to improve their reading and writing skills is one of the more positive aspects of being in prison. It's also important to find a way to sustain offenders' interest in reading once they have left prison. Prison libraries, most of which are provided by local authority library services, are developing ways to enable ex-offenders to join their own local library once they have returned home.

Top ten ideas

- 1.** Make sure that books and other reading materials are freely available throughout the prison – on the wings, in the health centre and in workshops as well as in more obvious places such as the prison library. Make sure to display posters of people reading and book reviews wherever possible.
- 2.** Build specific time into literacy and communications classes to introduce the idea of reading more widely. Begin with an informal discussion about people's likes and dislikes, perhaps with a display of book covers that everyone can comment on whether or not they are regular readers. See the ideas packs for working with beginner and emergent readers for more activities on organising reading activities in a classroom setting.
- 3.** Some people will be very wary about reading if they find it difficult or just feel it's not for them. Show them a range of material from magazines to short stories or graphic novels to see what might interest them. Or encourage them to tell or write their own stories to share with others.
- 4.** Prison librarians could start a reading group. A book that might engage everyone's interests, such as John Bird's *How to Change your Life in 7 Steps* from the Quick Reads series could be read and discussed, or offenders could choose individual books and then report back on them in later sessions. More fluent readers could help those who are less confident.
- 5.** Parents or other family members can read and record on a CD or tape a story for children to listen to at home. See Resources section for schemes that promote this activity.
- 6.** Parents could make a scrapbook or a story sack for their children to take home. If they have access to craft workshops, they may be able to make toys and games to include in the sacks.
- 7.** Use art workshops to create picture stories. These could be in the style of Manga graphic novels or as comic strips that offenders' children can enjoy.
- 8.** Run a poetry workshop. Love poetry can be popular with prisoners – they enjoy reading, copying or writing their own love poems to send to their partners.
- 9.** Work with the football campaign 'Show Racism the Red Card'. Offenders can explore football chants and produce chants and raps around this theme, and record them (see Resources).
- 10.** Adapt a story and make it into a play. This could be recorded, or put on as a live performance for the Governor or prison visitors.

Case study 1: Creating poetry CDs

A group of six offenders from HMP Birmingham were given the opportunity to work in the prison library with the 2007 Birmingham Poet Laureate Giovanni 'Spoz' Esposito and creative artist Michael Steer to write and record a poem or short story for their children. Through the use of IT and library resources they were able to select images and use the 'Windows Moviemaker' software in the Library Learning Centre to create a CD-ROM of their words and images. The CD-ROMs were sent home to the children.

Two of them had written poetry before, but the others hadn't. None of them had ever used the software and all of them approached the project with a certain amount of trepidation. It was also new territory for the library staff as the project involved bringing a lot of IT resources into the prison – always a sensitive area from a security point of view.

An informal meeting was held with the offenders to outline exactly what was going to happen and what the project hoped to achieve. This broke the ice and everyone got started on their poem, with help from Spoz and Michael. The enthusiasm from the prisoners was plain to see next morning – they had all worked on their poems overnight and, by the end of the first day, all of the poems were finished and recorded.

The next day was taken up with matching images to the poems and developing the finished product using the PCs in the Library Learning Centre. They quickly grasped the technology and came up with some stunning effects.

Each of the poems written was personal to themselves and to their children and the recorded work produced, often very touching, reflected their life, hopes and dreams. Feedback from the men who took part was very positive. One said 'It was great fun and we got to meet some great guys who, with their spectacular knowledge showed us that there is another side to us, which hopefully will help others in the future.'

It is hoped that the participants will carry on with reading and writing activities and continue to use the prison library. Ideally the children and families receiving the recordings will also be inspired to read and write and use them as a creative tool in their own personal development.

Case study 2: Bringing Reading to Life

I work as Writer-in-Residence at HMP/YOI Styal and I decided to set up a Readers' Group in the prison library. However, it soon became apparent that I could not run this group in a conventional way. There was a great variance of reading levels amongst the offenders and some members would only be with the group for a few weeks. Also I could not always get multiple copies of the book.

Instead, I chose to read out loud during the sessions. We chose a book, talked about the text and the characters and then one member of the group would volunteer to read on a few chapters for the next session. The next time she would fill us in with what had happened and then I would read aloud again for another session. This way we experienced the book together without excluding emergent or non-readers.

On one occasion, we had a non-reader in our group who listened avidly each week to my reading and followed the words with her finger in another copy of the book. She then decided to learn to read by working with the Toe by Toe group in the prison. She was so excited at being able to hear a book like this and to be included in the discussions about it. She had by far the most astute comments to make about the plot and characters as, being a non-reader, her listening skills were really sharp.

I remember hearing excerpts from books on the radio when I was a child and believe that if you've heard something read well, you are more likely to persevere with reading yourself. One prisoner commented that she'd had problems 'getting into books' in the past but now could 'hear' them in my voice and it helped. This is how it was for me as a child and I'm glad I was able to pass it on.

Resources

Toe by Toe is a peer mentoring scheme now used in several prisons to encourage more able offenders to help others to improve their reading and writing skills – see www.toe-by-toe.co.uk/prison_project.html

Publications produced by the **Fatherhood Institute** are designed to help agencies to engage more effectively with fathers. *Toolkit for Father-Inclusive Practice* is a key resource that takes you through eight key steps to father-inclusive practice. The website has a section about fathers in prison. You can read research and case studies, and find resources on www.fatherhoodinstitute.org

Prison Reading Champions offers a flexible and motivational framework designed to engage both prisoners and staff in developing a reading culture. Each Reading Champion receives a 32 page journal which offers tips and ideas on how to champion reading as well as space to record his activities. The offender then has a record of his work to take with him through transfer and release. www.literacytrust.org.uk/campaign/Champions/prison.html

Storybook Dads is a project based at Dartmoor prison which enables prisoners to record books and their own stories to be sent to their children. Read all about it on their web site www.storybookdads.co.uk/

Safe Ground is a charity that educates prisoners and young people at risk in the community. Its two courses, Family Man and Fathers Inside, use drama and story-telling to improve family relationships and parenting skills. www.safeground.org.uk

The Big Book Share is run by The Reading Agency. Prison and public librarians help offenders choose books to read on CD or tape for their children. Special family book sharing visits are arranged and the parent in prison is able to support their children's reading. On release, prisoners are encouraged and helped to join their local library for continued support and family reading experiences. www.readingagency.org.uk/adults/big-book-share/big-book-share/

For **storsack materials** see www.storsack.com

Quick Reads books for emergent readers are listed on www.quickreads.org.uk. Downloadable files providing ideas for using the books can be found at www.vitallink.org.uk. If internet access is difficult, a CD containing learning resources to support the Quick Reads published in 2006 and 2007 can be ordered from DIUS Publications on 0845 6022260 (ref SFLQRCD).

Lifelines is a series of stories around prison themes from New Leaf Books, a publisher specialising in books written by and for adult learners. <http://www.newleafbooks.org.uk/prisonwritings.html>

Avanti Books Resources Guide A useful guide to the huge variety of basic skills support materials, including those produced by Avanti and by other publishers. www.avantibooks.com

Gatehouse Media publishes Gatehouse Books – adult beginner reader books and resources for use in adult Literacy and ESOL, and also audio-cassettes, interactive CD-ROMs and educational resources. www.gatehousebooks.co.uk/beginner

Resources cont...

Show Racism the Red Card is a national campaign to stamp out racism in football. It has an attractive website and resources. www.srtrc.org

If you want to write a **rap** but are not sure how to get started, there is a lesson plan on http://www.readinga-z.com/poetry/lesson_plans/rap/rap_print.html and on <http://www.poetryteachers.com/poetclass/lessons/raplyrics.html>

Playscripts are good for group reading. The Livewire series (Hodder and Stoughton in association with The Basic Skills Agency) has produced scripts for emergent readers. Simple stories lend themselves to dramatisations, for example *Mad Weekend* by Roddy Doyle (New Island) about three lads visiting Liverpool.

The **Six Book Challenge** is a national scheme for emergent readers run by The Reading Agency as part of The Vital Link programme. This is working particularly well in prison settings. www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk

Please also see the resources listed in the packs for New readers 1 and 2.

Full list of *Ideas to inspire packs*

New readers 1 (up to Adult Literacy Entry Level 2)

New readers 2 (Adult Literacy Entry Level 3 – Level 2)

Parents and carers of young children

Dads and male carers of young children

ESOL learners

People in prisons and young offender institutions

People in the workplace

FE college students

HE students

Readers with additional needs

These packs are available to download as individual PDF files from www.vitallink.org.uk
or www.niace.org.uk

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Photographs of braille reading and flower-seller reading novel by Sim Canetty-Clarke

We welcome all feedback on these ideas and on how you are promoting reading to your learners. Please contact genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk



The Vital Link libraries and adult literacy programme is run by The Reading Agency in partnership with the National Literacy Trust. See www.vitallink.org.uk



NIACE is a non-governmental organisation working for more and different learners. See www.niace.org.uk