



Reading for pleasure

Ideas to inspire readers with additional needs



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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 readers who may need extra support because of additional needs such as physical disabilities, health conditions, sensory impairments or learning differences such as dyslexia. 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 busy 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

Readers with additional needs, such as physical disabilities, health conditions, sensory impairments and learning differences such as dyslexia, are just like any other readers. They have the same wide range of interests and may be reading texts at any level from beginner to postgraduate. The challenge is to enable everybody to read by providing a good range of interesting texts and adapted materials where that is necessary. It is crucial to remember that readers with additional needs are all individuals, and need individualised services and support. This guide is written in order to help you consider some of the many resources and approaches that readers may need in order to get the most from reading. It is by no means an exhaustive list.

Anyone working with adult readers who need extra support should try to form a partnership with their public library service, as libraries usually have specialist stock such as large print and audio books and computers with adaptive tools or sometimes 'read aloud' software. It may be possible to hold sessions in the library as well as to borrow materials from them.

Physical access to libraries and texts

Library buildings include access via ramps and automatic doors, adapted toilets, height adjustable desks and large screen monitors. For the hearing-impaired, library counters may have induction loops. Library stock includes audio books on cassette and CD, large print books, music and films on tape or DVD. These may be useful for people with impaired sight and there are organisations such as National Talking Newspapers that transfer newspaper material onto tape (see Resources).

Libraries and other learning environments should be able to offer 'Big Keys' keyboards, key guards, a tracker mouse ball or touch screen monitor for the computer as well as adaptive technologies and software to help those with particular needs to use the computers. Ask the library staff for advice in accessing these resources.

Hand-held magnifiers should also be available in libraries. Be ready to change screen properties for readers. Some readers with dyslexia experience 'visual instability' where the contrast of black print on white paper or a white screen can be uncomfortable and difficult to read. Providing a selection of coloured overlays or showing readers how to change the colour and font preferences on screen can make a real difference. Text that is well spaced, and that uses a sans-serif font is also easier to access.

Choice of texts

Readers with additional needs may be reading at any level and in any context, so the suggestions in the two ideas packs for new readers may be useful. Readers with some health conditions, those taking medication, and some people with dyslexia, attention deficit disorder and so on, may have an impaired ability to concentrate. Quick Reads books have slightly larger text, with small pages that are easy to handle. They are suitable for readers at Adult Literacy Entry Level 3 and above, with quite straightforward, but compelling, storylines. Many readers have reported that a Quick Reads title is the first book that they have finished reading in adult life, and many say they feel more confident in tackling other titles having had that success.

Readers may well be interested in some of the mainstream reader development programmes supported by libraries such as the Orange Prize and Richard & Judy. There are also a growing number of reading groups that cater for visually impaired readers.

Top ten ideas

- 1.** Use libraries. If you cannot get your readers to the library, can the library come to you? See <http://www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk/discover/findLibrary.do> to find your nearest branch. A librarian might visit your group, the mobile library might visit your centre or you might be able to borrow book stock to take to your setting. Some readers may lack confidence in accessing a library. Arranging a pre-visit or going in a group may give confidence to those with concerns about accessibility.
- 2.** Encourage children and adults to work together. Family learning groups may be able to produce storybags for families with disabled members. ClearVision is a UK postal lending library of adapted mainstream children's books. All books have Braille, print and pictures, making them suitable for visually-impaired and sighted children and adults to share. www.clearvisionproject.org/
- 3.** Promote a specialist collection. Some libraries have a Deaf Collection, for example, which includes books, videos, magazines and useful guides for deaf and hearing-impaired readers.
- 4.** Make use of signing and subtitles. Libraries carry, or can obtain for you, books and videos on sign language, including BSL course BSL Works on CD-ROM. Make use of the subtitles on DVDs.
- 5.** Make use of podcasts. You can check the availability of BBC podcasts on www.bbc.co.uk/radio/podcasts/directory/. *Open Book* is just one of many programmes where new books are discussed. NIACE has interviews with Quick Read authors www.niace.org.uk/news/podcasts/default.htm. On the poetry archive you can listen to poets reading their work www.poetryarchive.org
- 6.** Use art. The Living Paintings Trust is a registered charity that offers a completely free service for visually impaired people of all ages, their families, carers and schools. They loan specialist touch and sound packs that explain a wide variety of fun, interesting and educational pictures for those who cannot see. Packs are sent to all corners of the UK and Eire and there is no charge. www.livingpaintings.org
- 7.** Inclusive reading groups. The Speaking Volumes website is all about inclusive practice in libraries. It is based in Yorkshire, with local groups and activities, but the online community is available to all and includes reading suggestions, reviews of talking books and a noticeboard to give readers the chance to swap views and opinions with other readers. You can hear a reading group in action. www.speakingvolumesonline.org.uk

Top ten ideas cont...

- 8.** Make use of the BBC. Many physically disabled people find the BBC websites particularly useful for news, entertainment and research. Go to 'My Web My Way' to see how some have been using the site (case studies) and to get advice on adaptive features.

- 9.** Read Yourself Well. The East Ayrshire Library Service is one example of a library service that has set up a 'bibliotherapy' service to help people with milder mental health problems. A trained person arranges to meet the client and introduce them to a range of self-help books which have been selected for their potential to help in conditions such as anxiety, bereavement, depression, lack of self-esteem and stress. This service won an award from CILIP and you can see a video about it on their website. www.cilip.org.uk

- 10.** News and magazines. The BBC sites make the news more accessible for disabled learners. Talking news and magazines are available (see Resources). There is a lot on the BBC for sports fans, and your readers might like to look at the sports site <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/606/default.stm>

Case study 1: Reading group for people with a visual impairment

Wendy Jewitt, Cultural Officer: Reader Development at Wakefield Libraries, decided to take a different approach to setting up a reading group for people with a visual impairment. Instead of starting a group from scratch she visited an existing social group of people brought together because of their loss of sight – a few have some sight but others have none. The group of up to 30 people has a get-together one evening a week at the Labour Club in Wakefield. Thanks to Wendy's encouragement, one of these meetings each month now has a thriving reading group with 10 or 12 people regularly attending. And with a good mix of men and women aged between their mid-twenties and mid-seventies from a range of backgrounds, the membership is more varied than that of many reading groups. Plus there are the guide dogs to cater for.

Wakefield Libraries is one of the 15 Yorkshire library authorities which helped to develop the Speaking Volumes website at www.speakingvolumesonline.org and to maintain it through subscription. This means that they can order multiple copies of audio books to be used by the reading group. The leader of the group already had some involvement with the library as a volunteer, helping visually impaired people to use the computers, so had some awareness of the resources on offer.

Belonging to the group has opened much wider reading opportunities for its members who otherwise would have to rely on more limited reading recommendations. Wendy can suggest different authors or bring news of recently-released titles by established favourites. One member has become a Joanne Harris fan after being introduced to *Blackberry Wine*. Another leapt on the latest Inspector Banks mystery by Peter Robinson.

'Our first meeting was taken up with members telling me about their loss of sight and its impact on their lives,' reports Wendy. 'We've now moved on from that. Our last session developed into a lively discussion about how it was possible to take a narrow boat across the English Channel – a topic inspired by our reading of Terry Darlington's *Narrow Dog to Carcassone*.'

Case study 2:

Reading group for people with aphasia

When Nottinghamshire Libraries signed up to the Regional Reading Group Pilot Project in the East Midlands we committed to setting up reading groups for socially excluded and hard to reach groups.

In spring 2007, I was contacted by a lady wanting to start a reading group for sufferers of aphasia. This is a disorder caused by damage to the parts of the brain that control language. It can make it hard for you to read, write and say what you mean to say and is most common in adults who have had a stroke. I arranged to meet her in a quiet corner and provide a cup of tea and plenty of time to talk.

It took at least three months to get from that meeting to our first session. The group leader and instigator was a meticulous planner and it was very important to her that the group should be run like any other group. On reflection, it might have been better to have started not with a book but with a small amount of text or even no text at all. It could also have been useful to have had a discussion about reading in general, of what had been lost and might be partially restored – speech, concentration – and also what was lost and would probably never be restored – a casual taking for granted of reading.

I offered to support the group in whatever way they felt appropriate. Sometimes that meant ordering multiple copies. At other times I simply wrote titles and authors' names on a whiteboard for people to copy.

The hardest thing about aphasia is that it makes everything difficult, including being patient with other sufferers. I noticed that several people found it easiest to relate to whoever was leading the discussion rather than to each other. The difficulty of remembering words and communicating simple ideas can provoke strong emotions and enormous frustration.

There are about six people who attend regularly with others coming occasionally. It would be difficult to have more in the group because of the problems involved, although having said that we do achieve an easy-going atmosphere and enjoy our time together.

At the last meeting one member announced with great pride that he had read his first full book in several years – an Alexander McCall Smith. We also did a short session on Shakespeare where I read some famous speeches and we discussed our individual experiences of Shakespeare at school. I'm planning to share some Penguin classics too. The aim is to include the group in a reading community. Better to hear one page than to miss out altogether.

Reading short texts aloud mitigates the difficulties some people have in reading independently. Poems work well as it is possible to spend a long time reading together to tease out meaning and potentially to 'soak up' some of the ambient emotion.

At the end of a session, even where I have done very little, I am always exhausted. But the openness with which members of the group express their enjoyment and thanks goes a long way to making this worthwhile.

The East Midlands Libraries Reading Group pilot project won an Opening Doors to Adult Learners Award from NIACE in Adult Learners' Week 2008.

Resources

Access for All is a document that accompanies the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum in England. The introduction gives an overview of a range of learning difficulties and disabilities, and how they may impact on learning (including reading). It is downloadable from www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/bank.cfm?section=555

My Web My Way is a BBC site that explains how disabled users can change their browser, computer keyboard and mouse settings to make the web more accessible. It includes sections about using podcasts and has some case studies. www.bbc.co.uk/accessibility

Talklets is software that lets you listen to any web text in clear, lifelike speech with a choice of accents and languages. Talklets is available to website owners to add to any site to provide talking web pages to all website visitors without downloads or special software. Individuals can also subscribe to Talklets to allow any website visited to be brought to life with speech. www.talklets.com

Gateway is a charity that provides a single point of contact for people with visual impairment and staff who support them, regarding library services. They produce a 'Guide to Running Inclusive Reading Groups for Visually Impaired People'. www.gateway-uk.org

RNIB is a national charity for people with impaired sight. The RNIB national catalogue has over 200,000 items available for loan – <http://librarycatalogue.rnib.org.uk/> There is a talking books service to which readers may subscribe www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicWebsite/public_talkingbooks.hcsp and also a Telephone Book Club scheme www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicwebsite/public_phonebkclubs.hcsp

CALIBRE is the Cassette Library for the Blind and Print Disabled. Their library has the largest lending collection of audio books in the UK in open format, which means you don't need special playback equipment. Now that cassettes are being discontinued, they have produced a leaflet about alternative audio formats, and have set up a website to update information. www.readingthroughaudio.org.uk

National Talking Newspapers and Magazines provide national newspapers and magazines in audio on tape, CD, DAISY CD and by MP3 download, and in digital full-text format by e-mail, download and CD-ROM for visually impaired and print disabled people who find reading a strain. www.tnauk.org.uk

You can find out about Quick Read titles and download resources from www.quickreads.org.uk. Audio versions are available from libraries or W F Howes Ltd as part of their Clipper Emergent Reader programme (sales@wfhowes.co.uk 01664 423000). Large print versions of several of the Quick Reads titles are available from BBC Audiobooks Ltd (library.sales@bbc.com 01225 335336). There is a set of web quests linked to some of the titles on www.quickreadsideas.org.uk which encourages readers to find out more about the subjects or about other similar titles.

The **British Dyslexia Association** has information about reading and dyslexia, including some information about the use of assistive technology. www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/reading.html

The **National Literacy Trust** has a range of suggestions for supporting readers with additional needs, and many useful links. It's worth noting that some resources are aimed at those working with children and may not, therefore, be suitable for adults. www.literacytrust.org.uk/Database/SENres.html

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

Ideas to inspire readers with additional needs

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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