



Reading Group models from around the East Midlands

As part of the Regional Reading Group Project we have been gathering information about how different library services in the East Midlands support reading groups and readers. There are many ways in which an effective reading group service can be run/resourced and staff from all 9 library authorities have expressed an interest in learning more from each other. While the aim of the progression framework is to help promote a good service to reading groups across the region, one of our strengths is the variation in local delivery and supporting groups with different needs in different places.

All 9 authorities are introducing the Books Connect Reading pack from autumn 2006 and using the branding wherever possible on material produced for reading groups across the region.

As a starter, here are 6 case studies from different local authorities. We hope to add more as the project develops. This is seen as a working document, and the information included will alter over time as reading group services develop.

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Contents:

- 1. Services for Readers' Groups provided by Lincolnshire Library Service..... 2
- 2. Reading Group Activity in Nottinghamshire..... 3
- 3. Leicester Libraries – Reading Group services..... 4
- 4. Support for Reading Groups in Derbyshire 6
- 5. Leicestershire Reading Groups 8
- 6. Rutland Reading Groups 9

1. Services for Readers' Groups provided by Lincolnshire Library Service

The Readers' Group Collection

Most of the reading groups registered with the Library Service use the centrally maintained Readers' Group Collection. Currently 115 adult groups subscribe to this service paying £10 per year per group. This entitles them to book titles up to a year in advance, and guarantees the required number of copies being delivered for them every month to a library of their choice.

The Readers' Group Collection consists of approximately 100 titles, and includes fiction, classics, poetry, biography, history and travel writing. About one third of the list is changed every year with new stock bought specifically for the collection, and multiple copies bought for other promotions such as Orange prize or Richard & Judy. All stock bought for the collection goes into normal library stock when it comes off the list.

Only titles available in paperback are chosen for the list. 25 copies of each title are bought for use by subscribing reading groups, and kept at Library Support Services. The reading groups vary in size between 6 members and 20+, and often normal library stock has to be brought in to supplement this stock when there is heavy demand for a title, or copies are not returned in time.

Where a large print or audio version of a title is available, copies will be purchased. However, due to pressures on funds, the audio and large print copies are put into normal stock and pulled in as required. More and more groups are now asking for these formats.

Issues and returns are dealt with on a daily basis at the Library Support Services. Sets are issued for a 6-week period, and all readers' group boxes have distinctive red address and return labels to ensure priority delivery. All items are issued centrally, so that branch staff have only to hand over the boxes.

The current list of titles is available via the library website, which also has information on how to set up a Reading Group, subscribe to the Readers Group Collection and contact details for local Reading Groups.

Some Readers Groups are run by library staff and meet in libraries, but the majority are self-running and meet in a variety of venues. The contact person for the group may deal directly with staff at Library Support Services, or through their local contact library.

Other groups

Reading Groups that do not wish to subscribe to the Readers' Group Collection (approx. 15) are able to choose and reserve for free copies of their chosen title (provided there are enough in stock in the County) through their local library. Groups that operate this way understand that while every effort will be made to get them enough copies of the required title in time for their meeting, it cannot be guaranteed.

One visually impaired group uses audio books.

Newsletter

A quarterly newsletter *Read On* is produced specifically for adult Readers Groups in Lincolnshire. It contains information on reading related websites, awards and initiatives that may be of interest to Groups, housekeeping issues related to the Readers' Group Collection and meeting reports and book reviews sent in by Reading Groups themselves.

For more information contact:: Nicola.rogers@lincolnshire.gov.uk

2. Reading Group Activity in Nottinghamshire

Reading groups have been formally supported in Nottinghamshire since 1999. There are now about forty groups in the county who borrow sets of books on a monthly basis. We are in contact with other groups who borrow their books individually or buy them but still like contact with the library.

We spend approximately £3,000 per annum on new titles. Sets of twelve titles are held centrally and distributed by a senior librarian in Support Services. Groups can choose titles for up to a year ahead from the list supplied by the senior librarian.

Lettings fees are waived for reading groups meeting in libraries. All members of reading groups are entitled to a free book reservation per month.

For the most part these groups are not run by members of staff. In some cases where they were originally led by members of staff this is still the case but new groups are set up to run independently.

Development Activities

We run regular events involving reading groups. For example we run events for the Orange Prize and the Man Booker Prize to which local reading groups are invited. We also run one-off reading groups around the county at which readers are encouraged to think about setting up their own reading groups.

One of our reading groups was chosen as one of the forty-eight focus groups working with Tom Palmer at the Reading Agency. So far they have been involved in three initiatives, with Vintage, Faber and Pan Macmillan.

Readers groups are consulted regularly, for example in the planning of our Annual Readers Day and it is hoped to develop this working relationship further in the future.

In smaller libraries or where readers are not so confident we have successfully run reading chains which have been very well supported.

We are at present in the process of setting up a reading group in a prison, and one for users of mental health services. We have recently run a series of reading group events in a centre for adults with learning difficulties which was very successful. We are looking at ways of taking the reading group model into less conventional settings, drawing on the positive image and media coverage of reading groups.

For further information contact: sheelagh.gallagher@nottscc.gov.uk

3. Leicester Libraries – Reading Group services

Conventional groups

There are 19 of these groups and we make no charge for the service.

The majority of these groups conform to the following specifications:

- Members meet in someone's home on a monthly basis
- There are approximately 10 members
- They select their books from listings provided centrally
- The lists are titles where we have 10 plus copies. We don't include material which is currently in Top Ten in these lists. Lists are provided for fiction, non-fiction and teenage reading and we add in the number of pages. Many of the groups don't like to read anything which is too long.
- We organise reserving material centrally and delivery to a library of their choice
- They are well established groups that have been going for 4 + years.
- They like to read newish books that have been very popular or controversial i.e. "Tipping the Velvet" and "We need to talk about Kevin".

However amongst these groups are the following, which have been established in the last year or so and don't quite fit the conventional mould:

- A Skills for Life Group that meets in Beaumont Leys Library
- A group of writers that want to read children's books, the younger as well as the older end of the market.
- A group connected to the Toddler Times sessions which consist of parents and grans and is run by a Toddler Times worker in the Library and sometimes in the local wine bar. There are 15 members and they like to read the same type of material as listed above.

Less conventional groups

- Punjabi poetry group
20 -30 members who meet in St. Barnabas Library on a monthly basis. They write their own poetry but they also read from items in stock. Very successful events involving outside speakers have been organised for this group. Audience figures have reached approximately 60.
- After school 5-8 year olds reading group about 6 people. Meet at Westcotes library run by a library assistant. Consists of parents and children who pick stock from the children's library.
- Primary School Book of the Year – just about to start involves groups from year 5 and 6 in most of the city primary schools. Libraries main organisers stock specifically ordered by the libraries for this – approximately 5 titles 300 copies bought of each.
- Secondary School Book of the Year. There are 13 city secondary schools reading groups involved. The groups are of variable size and often involve more teenagers than those directly involved with the award. Leicester is planning to work with Creative Partnerships as part of the 2007 award to build a creative reading group network. Literature Development Officer is heavily involved with this. Annual winner's event involving the short listed authors and schools.
- New Communities Group organised by library staff and held in the Central Libraries. Numbers vary but can consist of up to 20 people. Tend to read information/texts relating to Citizenship in the UK and Skills for Life.

- Coffee morning groups – regular meetings in the library mainly looking at new books with library staff.
 - One already at Evington Library – about 5 people
 - One planned at Highfields Library to start in a month or so.
 - One planned at St. Matthews’s library in a month or so specifically for Emergent Readers

For more information contact: chris.hodgson@leicestercity.gov.uk

4. Support for Reading Groups in Derbyshire

The Book Chat scheme

This was set up in 1998-9 to support reading groups in the county and help library staff set up and run new ones. The scheme is free to all reading groups, wherever they meet, and offers:

- A Book Chat information pack on how to set up a group, resources etc
- Book chat list of over 100 titles available in reading group sets of 10, plus audio/Large print when available
- Book chat ticket for each group with free reservations
- Support from local library staff in ordering books, recommending books
- Offer of a library venue and some staff support when appropriate
- Opportunity to go on the Book Chat Reader Group contact list
- Regular updates/newsletter on literary/reader events in Derbyshire/region
- An opportunity to recommend books for the Book Chat list and comment on service
- A regular programme of events, promotions, reader activities and an annual readers' day
- All the information and Book Chat resources available on DCC website, including reading guides to many titles

There are currently around 120 groups on our Book Chat mailing list, some affiliated loosely eg meeting in their own homes, borrowing some books, but not for all their meetings, from the local library. Other groups (approx.30) meet regularly in a library venue (not necessarily led by staff members, but some staff who started groups continue to be part of the group) and order most of their books from the Book Chat List/general stock. Several groups are served by the mobile library service.

We also have groups that meet in old people's sheltered accommodation, pubs, community centres, work places, schools etc. Due to the success of the scheme, and to ease pressure on stock, we are now offering groups a maximum of 8 choices a year from the Book Chat List, and local staff help organise other choices from general stock or books previously bought for promotions eg Richard and Judy; Reading Africa; Laughter Lines. Quite a lot of our groups already "do their own thing" and choose books outside the list several times a year already.

The Book Chat List is a mix of fiction, poetry, biography, travel, teenage, new authors, graphic novels, short stories, books in translation, and the odd prize winner. All books are recently published paperback editions, we don't include classics as they can be ordered from general stock. Books are recommended each year by staff and readers, and annually 10 – 20 books are added to replace 10 -20 titles that have been on the list for several years and ready to be moved elsewhere. The Book Chat stock is stored at HQ and the booking, administration and distribution organised by a member of the Acquisitions team.

The Book Chat system will continue in Derbyshire, but we are now switching to the new Books Connect Reading Pack and branding, in line with all the other library authorities in E Midlands as part of the reading group project.

Additional groups

We also support 4 Visually Impaired Listening groups. These meet in the library at approx 6 week intervals, community transport is provided and meetings run by local library staff. There are 3 Chatterbooks groups, several teenage reading groups, 3 poetry groups, a crime reading group, an international reading group and 2 emergent readers' groups. We ran a group for people with mental health issues for a year, in partnership with a local mental health worker and local arts group, and are now planning to expand this work in other areas, linked to the Books on

Prescription scheme. There are plans for 3 coffee and book clubs, (book cafés) and more work with teenagers and young people eg a Graphic novel reading group has just started. A wider range of groups for different types of readers is a major aim for Derbyshire as part of the regional reader group project. Much of this expansion will come through partnership working and be linked to national initiatives such as RaW/Vital Link, making use of eg Quick Reads which are suitable for a wide range of audiences.

Another innovation this year has been the development of some pilot intergenerational reading groups based in older people's homes, sheltered accommodation and day centres. Young people from local schools are meeting older readers to share their enjoyment of books, and the scheme will include author visits and possibly a CD of their joint experiences as part of the evaluation process.

Reading groups and audience development

As in other authorities, all these groups make up a large audience for the range of additional literary/author events, readers' days, Prize promotions/events, workshops, Between the Covers events that we run across the county. Two Derbyshire groups have been involved in the forty eight focus groups for Reading Partners project, one of them a visually impaired group at Chesterfield. Both groups took part in the Vintage Top 15 initiative, and also helped choose the poetry selection for Faber's From One Reader to Another.

Reader activities

Over the years groups have contributed to the Penguin Readers website, writing web diaries and reviewing books; the Orange Prize website again providing a diary of their shadowing of the prize; one group was filmed for the first series of the Richard and Judy Book Club.

As the groups have gained confidence and expanded in number, they are now often responsible for initiating reader activities or events. For example last October a reading group in Derbyshire Dales organised their own Booker night at the local village hall. The library service provided books and they did the rest. Members of reading groups are also excellent champions of the service, and can be powerful advocates for the public library in the community as well as turning out to support their local library on numerous occasions.

For further information contact: Priscilla.baily@derbyshire.gov.uk

5. Leicestershire Reading Groups

- There are currently 78 reading groups which use titles offered by the library service.
- There is a catalogue of 187 titles, of which ten copies each are held centrally at County reserve.
- The collection is mostly fiction but also features travel writing, poetry, biography, history, and includes several titles by small presses.
- The library service spends about £1500/year on new sets of titles.
- The Literature Officer makes choices and provides information about each new title.
- An updated catalogue with new stock featured, is produced each autumn. It contains details of all the titles, including no. of pages, genre, a review.
- Groups choose six titles from the list, to be read during alternate months for the coming year. They also make six 'second choices'.
- The Literature Officer and a colleague from bibliographical services allocate books to the groups for the coming year, attempting to give as many first choices to each group as is possible.
- The books are then issued for a six week period, throughout the year, ensuring an eight week turnaround for each title.
- Books are delivered to the library closest to the base for each group, and are collected and deposited by a group member.
- Enquiries from individuals wishing to join a group or start a new group are directed to the literature officer, who then provides relevant information.
- There is a waiting list of groups that are offered, at the start of the year, a choice from the titles which have not been requested by the subscribing groups.
- Reading groups in schools are supported by Library Services for Education.
- Reading groups in prisons are run by individual prison librarians, with support from the Literature Officer when requested.
- Sets of twelve of the Quick Reads titles have been bought with the intention of developing/ supporting reading groups for basic skills students over the coming year

For further information contact: KFeatherstone@leics.gov.uk

6. Rutland Reading Groups

Rutland participates in the Leicestershire Libraries reading group scheme through our partnership arrangements.

Library Reading Groups

There are two adult reading groups affiliated to Oakham Library, which are open to any member of the public. One meets in the library each month and the other meets at each other's homes. Both groups select 6 books a year from the Leicestershire list. For the remaining months they can request multiple copies of a particular work, author or theme from Oakham Library which we endeavour to supply.

There are also a further 5 reading groups in the county which are run privately but which participate in the Leicestershire scheme.

An Orange Chatterbooks Reading Group for 7-10 year olds meets monthly in Oakham Library to discuss books, play games and do craft work.

Other Reading Groups

Any reading group can register for a library ticket and receive the benefits of free reservations and no overdues for their books. We supply multiple copies of a title from stock, wherever possible.

For further information contact: pabeever@rutland.gov.uk