

Appendix 5 – Libraries engagement with children, young people and schools, and Read Manchester

Libraries and Read Manchester work together to promote reading for pleasure and the outcomes of literacy, wellbeing, and life skills, which lead to improved health, educational attainment and jobs. The library offer spans all age groups from baby storytimes and rhyme and an active partnership in Baby Week, right through to young people in our high schools, and hopefully retaining them as our adult readers and library users of the future.

Our library offer starts with the very youngest children, and the offer of regular storytime activities across our libraries. We also deliver the Bookstart programme and work closely with Early Years colleagues on the Start Well Board and in Sure Start Children's Centres to deliver programmes and books to target families with literacy support. Through our Read Manchester hub we have extensive expertise and community reach through our Early Years Literacy Champions and have also supported a targeted offer around Early Words Matter, which is being delivered via the National Literacy Trust in the Gorton and Abbey Hey ward. Working with practitioners we have distributed free dual language picture books (grant funded) in a variety of languages to various settings, with the aim of encouraging families to read together.

Manchester Libraries and BookTrust continue to gift book packs to babies and 3-4 year olds every year to encourage family reading and an early and enduring love of books. The Manchester Libraries' partnership with Booktrust is hugely successful and has been running for over 25 years now. The baby pack goes to every baby in the city via the Registrars, whilst the Toddler and Preschooler are targeted via the Early Years partners. In 2024 we delivered over 12,000 Bookstart Baby, Toddler, Preschooler, Additional Needs packs and resources to families across the city. At Christmas, Booktrust donate between 400-500 Festive Packs containing quality books and resources which are bespoke for different age groups. Our colleagues over at Read Manchester ensure that these reach our most vulnerable Manchester children, working with Foodbanks, local charities, women's refuges, children in care and various other organisations to make this happen.

Central Library and the Friends' Meeting House were the venues for the launch of Baby Week on 8 July. Sessions included Artful Playground, story sessions and our regular storytimes, plus a prize draw. We gave away 300 board books plus 600 reading calendars and booklets.

Engagement with schools has continued to grow. During the academic year September 2023 to July 2024, 139 schools engaged with libraries (66% of total schools). Almost 60,000 children attended 1,380 sessions including class visits (in-person and virtual) in

the academic year 2023/24. Read Manchester's book gifting programme supported schools and pupils by giving them over 38,000 brand new books as part of their transition read and other book gifting programmes.

We have a regular programme of children's author, illustrator and poetry events which are free to schools, and we link into to all major national literacy programmes. This includes the Summer Reading Challenge, World Book Day and Empathy Day, as well as National Storytelling Week and local literacy events including the Festival of Libraries and the Manchester Literature Festival. Once again, in 2024, Manchester Libraries hosted the national live event for Empathy Day, featuring top children's authors at the Stoller Hall and an audience of 400 local schoolchildren, as well as a musical performance to welcome pupils to this cultural venue.



Children at a World Children's Day event at Central Library, linking in with the Rights of the Child.

Libraries are integral to the culture offer of the city, and this includes our involvement in the Big Imaginations network, which brings high quality theatre and performance for our younger audiences into our libraries and arts venues.



Children at a session at Withington exploring anti-bullying ideas and how we view ourselves and others

The Summer Reading Challenge supports 4-11 year olds to continue reading over the summer holidays and avoid the literacy slide that can occur during the break from school. Libraries worked with 10 primary schools to sign up their pupils directly to the challenge and receive materials in school to support this. Children from all other schools were able to join via their local libraries, as part of our universal offer. Over 18,000 books were read by the 5,600 children taking part.

The HAF (Holiday Activities and Food) programme has once again been rolled out across Manchester Libraries. These sessions are targeted at children 11-15, eligible for free school meals. The summer holidays saw us roll out 50 sessions at six of our libraries, (Abraham Moss, Forum, Gorton, Longsight, Newton Heath and Withington) with events including skateboarding, a comedy shop and Zoolab, as well as craft sessions. Events also took place at Easter and Christmas.

This year we have also developed a new focus on youth voice and encouraging young people to help us develop youth library standards, a programme of activity and an offer that they will want to engage with. A consultation form has been developed and funding obtained for a piece of work to encourage young people to explore and use their libraries. Young people from the Youth Forums and Young Carers have been actively inputting into our future plans for libraries and programming.

Read Manchester

For the last eight years Libraries and Education have worked together to support literacy and reading for pleasure through the Read Manchester campaign, a partnership with the National Literacy Trust. This helps us work with all age groups, from children to adults, and focus certain campaigns on specific areas to provide maximum impact. We improve literacy levels across different ages and communities in Manchester.

Ensuring equal access to books through our bookgifting campaign has been a central aspect of this offer. These have been donated by publishers and have been given to residents via community groups, foodbanks, youth groups, churches and refugee groups. As far as possible, choice of books is encouraged so that recipients can choose books that appeal to them; owning a book has been shown to be important in encouraging enjoyment of reading. Over Christmas alone, 60 organisations have requested books for gifting to children and families, and we have gifted 12,500 books to these organisations. One group told us - *'These books will be given to children who come from families who struggle and can't afford a lot and will be lovely for children to have books'*. Over the whole of 2024 we have gifted over 80,000 books plus magazines and other resources to families and communities in Manchester. This equates to approximately £500,000 of free resources donated to Manchester residents..

Take 10 is a core campaign of Read Manchester. It encourages people to read for at least 10 minutes a day to support mental wellbeing and literacy. This year, our focus was a series of Take 10 events across the week. World Mental Health Day is celebrated every year on 10 October, and the day is about raising awareness of the importance of mental health and enabling discussions around the topic. The 2024 theme was mental health in the workplace. To mark the day, we visited two hospitals - Royal Manchester Children's Hospital and The Christie - across the week to distribute free new books to staff and patients and held conversations about how reading supports mental wellbeing. This initiative even won the 'You Made a Difference Award' at The Christie for October 2024. This award is given to services that made a difference to patients and staff.



Take 10 at The Christie

Blue Peter Book Club Live took place from May 18th to August 31st. Thanks to funding from Arts Council England and a partnership between Manchester Libraries, BBC Blue Peter and the Reading Agency, we took the Blue Peter Book Club out and about to communities, parks and libraries across the city. Central Library hosted the launch event on 18th May with the three Blue Peter presenters and Henry the Blue Peter dog, an event which drew in over 7,500 visitors. Cultural partners in the city hosted the book badge trail in their settings and 10,000 children from local schools took part in an art and literacy event – Reading sets us free – making book birds to go on display in the library. Book hunts also took place in local parks, supported by Literacy Champions, and we encouraged children to apply for their own Blue Peter Book Badge.



Our Empathy Day programme saw hundreds of pupils joining children's authors at a special event at the Stoller Hall on the eve of Empathy Day in June, to learn all about empathy and how important it is to practice this in everyday life. Authors E.L. Norry, and author-illustrators Tom Percival and Steve Lenton joined poet Paul Jenkins to share their books and stories about empathy with pupils from five schools. The authors visited other schools and libraries on the days around the Empathy event, which was the highlight live event nationally for EmpathyLab.

Our *See Myself in Books* collection went from strength to strength with the addition of another collection under this banner. We have developed a neurodiverse collection for primary pupils, including books about characters with a range of neurodivergence including ADHD, autism and dyslexia. Teachers told us they would welcome these collections as *We would plan to use the neurodiverse books in a similar way to help aid understanding of differences, promote discussion and also help some of our children really see their part in our diverse community.* So far, collections have been gifted to 40 primary schools. Through leveraging social value support we have been able to

purchase additional sets of both our collections and also have received help to distribute these collections.

Additionally, we are planning our very first See Myself in Books festival, to take place in March 2025 in the lead-up to the Black British Book Festival at Central Library. Beginning with a day at the Stoller Hall to bring together some of the authors from our ethnically diverse *See Myself in Books* collection, we will then offer a variety of authors from both collections to speak to schools at events taking place in libraries and schools.

Bidding for funding has also enabled us to expand our offer to partners and the community. Manchester Central Library Development Trust secured £8,000 to support a new dual language book gifting initiative being developed by Read Manchester and Manchester Libraries. The grant, from the national lottery funded Community Fund, complemented a recent £1,000 grant from the Our Legacy Fund, distributed by the We Love Manchester charity. User feedback from the successful book gifting programme demonstrated a real need for dual language books in community languages, and characters and settings which reflect the city's diverse communities. Thanks to this new funding, thousands of dual language books for young children were purchased and distributed across Manchester, specifically targeting those areas where there is a high ethnically diverse population.

2024 marked the fifth year of our year 6/7 Transition Read and the second year of our Early Years Transition Read. This year, pupils helped choose the year 6 read and the selected book was 'Quiet Storm' by local author Kimberly Whittam. All year 6 pupils received a copy of the books to keep at the transition sessions into their new high schools. Children who were moving from primary school to high school this September were invited to join her at Moss Side Powerhouse Library, Avenue Library and Learning Centre, Manchester Central Library, Hulme, Didsbury and Longsight Libraries and at Z-Arts over the summer, as well as online school sessions in the autumn term.

For our Early Years 'Transition Read, the chosen book was Benjamin Zephaniah's 'People Need People.' Moving up to school is a big step for children, and the idea behind the transition read is to support and encourage families to chat and spend time together. The beautifully detailed illustrations of scenes which will be familiar to children encourage families to talk about the pictures as well as enjoying the poem. A 'Take 10 Minutes Everyday' leaflet has been produced to support the programme, with top tips for families about sharing stories. These are available to download in English and nine other community languages – Arabic, Bengali, Farsi, French, Kurdish, Oromo, Polish, Romanian and Urdu.



Kimberly Whittam with her book, Quiet Storm