National Literacy Trust

Change your story

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ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND
LOTTERY FUNDED

Connecting Stories

Changing Lives

Connecting Stories

Despite overwhelming evidence that reading boosts educational achievement, future earnings, mental wellbeing, and social mobility, reading is in steep decline across the UK. Only **34%** of children and young people now read for pleasure in their free time – a figure that drops even lower among secondary school pupils and boys.

However, in 21 of the most deprived areas across the UK where National Literacy Trust has pioneered a place-based approach focused on reading and literacy, working intensively at ward level, we are **reversing this trend**. Evidence from English areas show:

The children we work with are:

17%–22%

More likely to read for pleasure than the national average

22%

More likely to use their public library

Families tell us they are:

83%

More aware of how to support their child(ren)'s literacy

78%

More aware of other local literacy activities

People supported by our Literacy Champions[1], say they are:

80%

More likely to read more

73%

More likely to read with their family

[1] Literacy Champions are from our communities and reflect the diversity and lived experiences of our families. We train and support them to go on to design and delivery activities on the ground.

And we see the impact of this sustained and targeted work on attainment with schools in these areas who were reporting results significantly below national average two years ago, now reporting **an 8.6 percentage point improvement in Key Stage Two attainment**[2] – meaning they are in line with the national average and putting those children on a path to success.

A significant contribution to this success has been thanks to investment from Arts Council England in 14 of our 21 Hubs through Connecting Stories. Firmly aligning with Let's Create and the principles of Creative People and Places, our locally based teams have worked with communities, volunteers and partners in delivering a range of longer-term and one-off projects which in combination have engaged over 190,000 people in two years. Our work is informed by a deep understanding of behaviour change models and a significant proportion of families have engaged with us multiple times as a result.

Repeat event engagements	Total audience
4 or more	72,083
5 or more	41,652
6 or more	24,211

[2] Combined Reading, Writing and Maths scores

At the National Literacy Trust, we understand the power of community and our model is centred on community-based collective impact and partnership working. A national approach that is tailored to the individual communities through working with a network **of 900 + local partners** ranging from HAF providers and foodbanks to sports clubs and faith groups alongside our local volunteers.

NCVO reports a steady decline in volunteer numbers nationally, while ours have increased by almost 300% in two years, now numbering over 1,500 and shows no sign of slowing. More importantly, our volunteers are from the communities we serve with **56% living in wards in IMD 1-3**, meaning they share a lived experience with families we are supporting. This also ensures we have credible voices informing our strategy and delivery, so our resources are used to meet the aspirations communities set.

Working in this focused way we reach people who traditionally do not easily engage and through building their confidence encourage them to engage with both reading and the various cultural offers in their community including libraries, museums and galleries.

Our approach brings together public, private and philanthropic funding, directing it to areas of significant need which are often areas where local funding is limited. **Arts Council England** have invested £5.6m over five years[3] in 14 of our areas, enabling us to unlock over £8.5m from business and other funders like the BUPA Foundation, TikTok, Morrisons and Fidelity and a further £4.5m supporting the other seven places, showing the vision that sustained funding can produce real impact.

Local authorities in Middlesbrough, Manchester, Swindon, Suffolk and Salford support staff and activity costs where they can, in recognition of the unique value this works brings and the **publishing sector** has directly invested over £250,000 along with donating books valued at over £3m in the last 24 months alone.

Prioritising these areas we've secured additional national funding, to benefit the same communities, for example a further £3.5m to improve primary school libraries. Our work ensures authors, books and our work reaches places that others do not. As one major UK publisher told us:

> **"The tour [organised as part of our place-based work] helped the profile of the author, the profile of the book, reaching readers, and going into areas we probably wouldn't, geographically. One of the places he went to was Newport. Well, I've never been to Newport with a book event, and I've worked in books for 20 years, so things like that, also the Big Boro Book Bash [in Middlesbrough], you know, that's epic. It's not a place we'd usually go, it probably does depend on where bookshops are, where the author is based and the numbers that could attend."**

[3] First amount was awarded FY 20/21 (Dec) and figures include funding for 25/26 FY

We have achieved this impact by focussing on the local, on a national scale. We recognise that a one-size-fits-all approach is doomed to fail. We empower communities by ensuring that our services are relevant to local needs and challenges, and we get results. Our focus on place-based working is successful because we work in partnership with government, business, communities and civil society at local, regional and national levels. We are clear that everyone has a role to play to ensure that all children, regardless of their background, can reach their full potential. This aim reflects the government's ambition, and this mutual agenda is key to the success of mission-led government.

Example

Nabeelah lives in a Victorian terrace in the Manningham area of Bradford with her Mum, Dad and two younger brothers. Her grandparents came from Pakistan in the 70s and live a few doors down.

She enjoys school but, like many in her Year five class, her reading is a little behind where it should be and so the school invited her to join the Little Big Book Club. This is offered by the National Literacy Trust to selected schools with support from HarperCollins. Nabeelah's Mum can join the afterschool sessions as her youngest is now in nursery and together they took part in six sessions where they have stories read to them by a Literacy Champion, get tea and biscuits and books to take home and keep. These are the first new books that Nabeelah owns. The school is also on the Libraries for Primaries programme and children and teachers are planning for the upgraded library that will be installed during the school holiday providing 500 new books for the whole school to enjoy.

Nabeelah's reading is starting to improve now her Mum is more confident with what she can do to support, and it is benefiting her other children too.

During half-term some Literacy Champions arranged a 'look for a book' activity in Lister Park and included in the book packs they find is an invitation to the park at the weekend where the Bradford Stories Bus will bring a local author running free sessions for the whole family. The event is supported by Cartwright Hall and having met the staff at the bus event, the family decided to explore the Hall for the first time.

Nabeelah's Mum has started following the local Facebook group and along with ideas about literacy, including encouraging her to join the library, she also keeps tabs on other Literacy Champions events for the family.

Because of Connecting Stories, Nabeelah's school joined three online author events during the year and will be getting a school visit by the Bradford Stories Bus too. From having no books at home, Nabeelah now has six, and by the end of the year will have met two authors in person and seen three online. Her family are better able to support her and with ongoing contact with the National Literacy Trust her confidence and skills can continue to grow.

Nabeelah is one of more than 30,000 children in similar neighbourhoods across the UK who now have books of their own, enjoy reading more and are on track to have the literacy skills they need. This is only possible with the National Literacy Trust's unique combination of community planned activities, access to resources, work through schools and partners and sustained investment over many years.

The National Literacy Trust is committed long-term to our priority areas, and we are open to new partners and investors who want to help make a difference in our communities. Our teams also work outside our Hubs through our consultancy offer and as delivery experts on funded projects.

For more information about how you can support our work, to commission us or just to find out more about our approach, please contact Jason.vit@literacytrust.org.uk.