

“The Young Readers Programme has changed so many of our pupils’ attitudes towards reading. The majority of our pupils are now motivated and excited about reading. They are now reading for pleasure both at school and at home.”

The National Literacy Trust's Young Readers Programme reached approximately 8,000 children in 2011-12 working in partnership with over 110 schools, libraries and early years centres across the UK. These headline statistics and quotations are taken from our Annual Review of project delivery, completed by 85% of participating project coordinators, representing 7,680 children.

Overview of the programme

The National Literacy Trust's Young Readers Programme improves children and young people's literacy by motivating them to read for pleasure. According to the OECD *Reading for Change* report, one of the most effective ways to develop children's literacy skills is to engage them in reading for pleasure.

The programme uses a series of three fun literacy events to help children acquire the skills they need to become avid and successful readers. Children learn strategies for making good book choices, and then practice and perfect these strategies at the events by choosing new books to keep. For many children, these are the first books they will own. Book ownership is an integral aspect of the programme as research shows that book ownership increases reading frequency, enjoyment of reading and attainment.

“Although we may assume that most children have access to books and other reading materials, we often find that, for one reason or another, this is not always the case. This is highlighted by the excitement of the children – ‘Can we REALLY take these home?’ – and the eagerness with which they look forward to the next event. This kind of project is invaluable in supporting our roles as educators.”

Need for the Young Readers Programme

In the UK today, one in six people struggle with literacy, meaning their reading and/or writing skills are below what is expected of an 11-year-old. Poor literacy has its root in childhood: one in five children don't reach the expected level at age 11, impacting on their

ability to access the curriculum at secondary school. Problems with literacy pervade all aspects of people's lives. People with poor literacy skills are more likely to be unemployed, living in inadequate housing, in poor health and dissatisfied with their lives.

Three in 10 children and young people say that they do not own a book of their own. A recent study (Evans et al., 2010) found that the number of books in the home has as great an impact on children's attainment as parental education levels. The 20-year study by Evans and her colleagues found that having as few as 20 books in the home still has a significant impact on propelling a child to a higher level of education, and the more books you add, the greater the benefit.

“Many of the children in this area simply don't get other opportunities to engage with books and reading in this way, particularly the high percentage of kids with non-English speaking families. Many of the children who take part in this project feel really special as a result of the books they receive and I'm sure that for these children it isn't just a boost to their reading, it's a boost to their well-being and self-esteem in a much broader sense.”

Impact on children

100% of children who began with low reading More than 95% of children with initial low interest were reported by their project and average interest in reading, were coordinator or class teacher to have had a reported after the programme to be better positive change in their enjoyment of reading, able to choose a book at their reading level, motivation to read and frequency of reading. and one that was personally interesting.

“Teachers at the school I have been working with told me about one student who had taken part in the project. Ordinarily he doesn't like reading and would much rather do other activities. However, teachers related that when walking back to school from one of the Young Reader sessions he had his head in a book all the way. They even had to tell him to put the book away for a few minutes until they got back to school so that he could walk safely! It's wonderful to hear that the project can help to change attitudes!”

“One boy (from a family of seven) now goes to the library to read and complete homework after talking with his mother at a Young Readers Programme event. His older sister takes him and some of the older children in the family. He loves books and the space to read them away from his siblings and this all happened because he sat and shared a book with his mother and then took it home to read to the family.

Young Readers Programme books are not just inspiring and entertaining one child but whole families.”

Impact on coordinators

97% of project coordinators said their involvement with the programme was valuable for their professional development.

80% of coordinators said the programme improved their strategies for supporting choice and interest in reading and 84% said they had a better understanding of the reading preferences of the children.

“Although I was already aware of the importance of reading for pleasure, participation in this project has given me a much better understanding of the factors that affect kids' reading choices and their perception of reading, and increased my practical skills in supporting their choices.”

“My knowledge of the children's preferences improved significantly, it was fantastic to see how the children responded to certain titles.”

Impact on schools

78% of schools agreed reading and 61% of schools agreed there is greater reading for pleasure seem to be higher on awareness of the importance of reading the agenda as a result of the programme. for pleasure.

“As Deputy Head Teacher it has made me realise the importance of reading for pleasure and that we had, as a new build school, put this fairly low down on our priority list. The impact of the book events has made me very aware that we must now put in place a programme to address this. It has also made me more aware that if our children do not get access to good quality books at home, then we need to plug the gaps at school. The book events also allowed the school to make links with the local community in a way we would have found difficult prior to them and this will give us something to build on.”

Impact on libraries

79% of library coordinators reported that the programme generated greater library events with the schools they worked with 94% of library coordinators said they were the planning or had already planned additional footfall through the programme.

“Children from the school have visited the library in their spare time, bringing their parents who weren't members and getting them to join.”

“One school would not bring classes to the library even though they are across the road; there was no relationship. This project has won us massive points and secured us contacts inside the school.”

Impact on parents

Although not a requirement of the programme, a third of projects had parents attend a session.

90% of project coordinators reported increased awareness among parents of the variety of reading. 79% reported increased awareness among parents of the importance of parental involvement in sharing reading with their child.

“One mother who attended an event with her son, was delighted that he and the other children were able to choose their own books from such a huge variety. By the end of the event she had decided to start using their local library again and make finding good books for him something they can do together.”

Moving forward

“It is so important that children from more disadvantaged areas are given every opportunity to increase not only their life chances but their life enjoyment. Some of these children have never been read to and live in environments that do not value education or reading, where they would never see reading for pleasure happen. These projects made the children feel good about the choices they were making around books and gave them an opportunity to see people who weren't teachers sharing their love of books with them. Another thing that can't be underestimated is the value of giving these children a book to own, something that is theirs.”