



National Literacy Trust Hub in Middlesbrough

Five years of improving literacy and life chances



Changing life stories

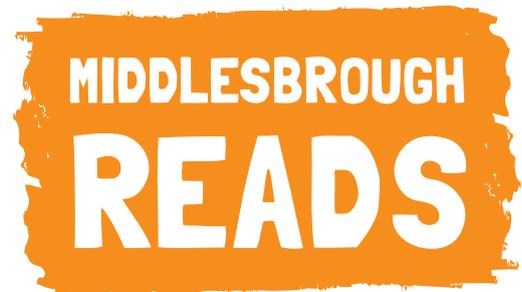
The first National Literacy Trust Hub was established in Middlesbrough in 2013 to break the cycle of poverty and intergenerational low literacy that was impacting on local children's life chances. After extensive scoping activity to identify the town's specific literacy challenges, the National Literacy Trust brought together local businesses, health, schools, housing, sport and cultural partners to deliver a range of bespoke programmes and initiatives to improve literacy levels in the town.

The early years was identified as a key focus for the Hub, with five-year-olds in Middlesbrough starting school with some of the lowest communication, language and literacy skills in the country. Targeted programmatic activity has been supported by an integrated campaign, which raises awareness of the importance of reading with children from day one and making books part of family life.

The National Literacy Trust Hub in Middlesbrough spearheaded a pioneering place-based approach to improving literacy levels in the UK. It has been the inspiration for a further six National Literacy Trust Hubs across the country in Bradford, Peterborough, Stoke-on-Trent, Swindon, Nottingham and the North Yorkshire Coast. Initiatives developed as part of the Middlesbrough Hub have been rolled out in other areas nationally and internationally with great success.

What is a National Literacy Trust Hub?

National Literacy Trust Hubs work with local partners at a community level to tackle low literacy levels that are seriously impacting on people's lives. Our approach is different in each place we work because every community has different needs and this is the best way to create long-lasting change.



Working with





In numbers



We have worked with more than **40,000** children and families in Middlesbrough



60,000 flyers have been distributed to our target audiences with key campaign messaging



We have given away **59,000** free books worth more than **£500,000**



We have convened over **100** local partners in support of the Hub

Revolutionising family communication in the town

We delivered the National Literacy Trust's Early Words Together programme in Middlesbrough between 2013 and 2017. The programme uses local volunteers to work with the poorest parents in the community, giving them the tools to support their pre-school children's literacy.

- 2013 to 2015: The programme helped the number of children from participating settings who reached the expected communication and language level to increase by 43% - more than three times the national percentage increase.
- 2016 to 2017: In the 13 participating primary schools, there was a 13% increase in the number of children who achieved an overall good level of development at age five – more than double the increase seen among children from other Middlesbrough schools.

Books and bonding on neonatal wards

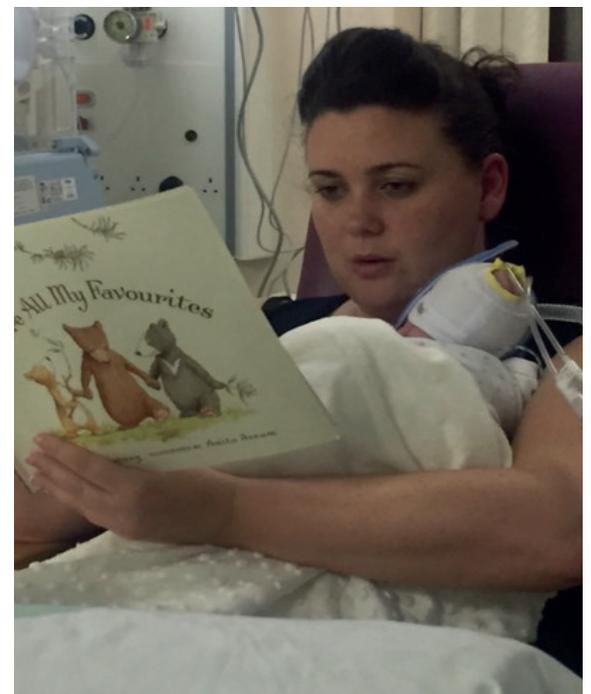
We worked with James Cook University Hospital and charity Bliss to support parents of premature babies in the Middlesbrough Hub, gifting them story packs. Each pack contains a copy of *Guess How Much I Love You* by Sam McBratney, donated by Walker Books, and guidance on the importance of touching, singing, talking and reading to newborn babies. This project was highly commended by the Third Sector Charity Business Awards and shortlisted in the Charity Times Awards. It has since been rolled out in Stoke-on-Trent and Bradford.

Building on our work with the most vulnerable young babies in the community, we have also developed book packs for children admitted to James Cook University Hospital and those visiting family members on a regular basis. These contain reading materials, an activity book, pencils, and information about reading and local libraries. 3,000 of these packs have been given out to date, bringing the joy and escapism of stories to children who have to spend time in hospital.

Attainment improvements across the town

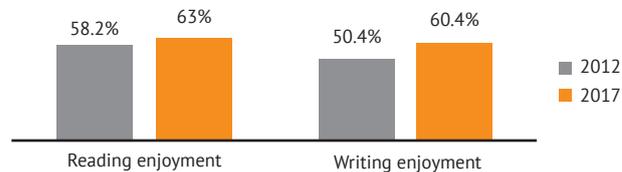
Since the National Literacy Trust Hub in Middlesbrough launched, we have seen significant improvements to children's literacy attainment across the town. This indicates that the Hub, along with local government, school and other partner initiatives, is having a real impact.

- The percentage of children in Middlesbrough achieving the expected level in communication and language at age five has increased from 55.4% in 2013 to 72.7% in 2017; double the rate of national improvement.
- The gap between the number of children in Middlesbrough and nationally who reached the expected level in reading at Key Stage 2 halved between 2013 and 2017.



Boosting reading and writing attitudes and behaviours

The National Literacy Trust's annual literacy survey indicates improvements in reading and writing for pupils aged 8 to 14 in Middlesbrough between 2012 and 2017.



The findings show a 10 percentage point (pp) increase (or 19.8% increase) in the number of pupils who enjoy writing. Over the same time period there was a 4.8 pp increase (8.2% increase) in reading enjoyment.



Embedding literacy messaging throughout the community

The Hub's public campaign promotes reading and talk with babies and children, with posters displayed on Middlesbrough's public screens and bus shelters around the town. Literacy messaging is embedded in every child's health journey through partnerships with Public Health and Stronger Families:

- At antenatal sessions, expectant parents are given books provided by the Hub and advice on singing, talking and reading to their bump.
- A flyer on the importance of reading, singing and talking is included in every child's personal health booklet and given out when a birth is registered.
- A nursery rhyme booklet produced by the Hub is gifted to families at the 6 to 8 week health visitor check, along with messaging to encourage singing to their baby.
- Additional books provided by the Hub are given to parents at baby weighing clinics to support BookTrust's Book, Bath, Bed campaign.

Using the power of football to get the town reading

Over the past five years, we have developed a strong partnership with Middlesbrough Football Club. Players have promoted the importance of reading and sharing stories on the club website, social media platforms and in the local press. Match days at the Riverside Stadium have regularly featured books giveaways in the Generation Red Family Zone and the club has helped to encourage parents and carers to share stories with their children.

Raising the profile of reading across the town with BookBenches

The Middlesbrough Hub teamed up with the Middlesbrough Achievement Partnership to ask pupils in the town to choose their top 100 books. Four age-specific leaflets were produced and sent to every school in Middlesbrough. Over the summer, residents voted for their top 10 titles which were brought to life on a series of unique, decorated BookBenches which are displayed in the Community Hubs.

Middlesbrough in the media

Since the National Literacy Trust Hub in Middlesbrough launched, we have formed partnerships with key local media outlets. We have achieved **103 pieces** of media coverage with a reach of **5 million** and equivalent advertising value of **£110,754**.



Key partners:



In the words of:

Edward Kunonga, Director of Public Health at Middlesbrough Council:

“Public Health has been behind the National Literacy Trust Hub in Middlesbrough from the very start. Literacy skills are incredibly important to health and well-being outcomes and the programmes in James Cook University Hospital have had a real impact on the lives of families, helping to shape communication patterns from birth. I look forward to what we will deliver through the Hub in the years to come.”

Jon Hall, Green Lane Primary School: “Over the past five years the National Literacy Trust Hub in Middlesbrough has been an excellent support in developing both reading practice and reading for pleasure at Green Lane. The Early Words Together programme has been effective in engaging families in reading and building community links. The supply of free books, reading leaflets and BookBenches have helped improve our reading environment and promote reading for pleasure.”

Sue Willoughby, NEPACS: “Our partnership with the National Literacy Trust Hub in Middlesbrough has provided a fantastic opportunity for children of local prisoners to receive a book as a gift from their family member, complete with special message. We love to promote reading as a family activity and that is why our relationship with the Hub is so special.”

Yvonne Ferguson, Head of Supporter Services at Middlesbrough Football Club: “Middlesbrough Football Club are delighted to work with the National Literacy Trust Hub throughout the season in our Generation Red Family Zone encouraging our supporters to read. MFC believe reading is very important in the development of a child.”

Looking ahead to the next five years:

- We will be extending our work into newly-arrived communities, who form a significant group within the town. We will begin a pilot programme of Early Words Together at Two working with Roma families in June, with a view to a larger scale programme next year.
- We will increase engagement with cultural organisations across the town to provide pupils with new opportunities and inspire their writing and reading. We are running a pilot of Our Stories, a poetry-based programme to improve writing attainment which was first developed in our Bradford Hub, in Middlesbrough schools with local poets.
- The Middlesbrough Hub will continue to play a central role in our Read North East campaign, with programmes and campaigns developed in the town underpinning our work across the region.
- Working with Public Health and our other partners in the town, we will continue to deliver our successful existing programmes, extending their reach to even more disadvantaged children.
- Our new Regional Development Manager for Yorkshire and the North East has dedicated capacity to fundraise and develop local business partnerships which will ensure the sustainability of the Hub.