

New Chapters

Evaluation report

February 2022

With support from the Rothschild Foundation, New Chapters is able to inspire the young people in HMP Aylesbury to read and write for pleasure and make meaningful use of their time in custody. HMP Aylesbury is a long-term, high security prison in Buckinghamshire for 17-21 year olds. It has a 400-person capacity but housed approximately 200 young people for the duration of the project, due to the prison being placed under Special Measures in February 2019. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were unable to access the prison in person from March 2020 until October 2021 and, once we were able to deliver in-person events, the number of attendees had to be limited. This report compiles evaluations from the three years of the programme.

Year one evaluation (2018-19)

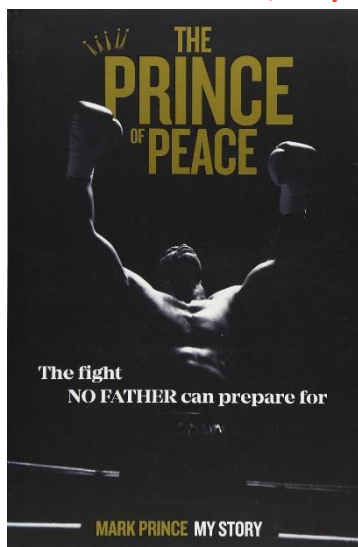
Wing libraries

In the first year of the programme, with generous support from publishers including Hachette, Pan Macmillan, Simon & Schuster, Own It!, Knights Of and Penguin, 900 books from a total of 40 authors were donated to the wing libraries in HMP Aylesbury. The wing libraries were established on a rolling basis throughout the year, once each wing had been refurbished following the prison going into Special Measures. Four wing libraries were established and stocked with books, with a goal for the remaining two to be purchased when the wings were prepared for them. An additional cabinet was provided for the segregation unit. Each cabinet was given a checking in and out book, to monitor use.

Author events

Three events were organised in the first year of New Chapters, featuring a total of six authors, a publisher and a sports presenter. Working with the Head of Learning and Skills, as well as the prison librarians, a section of shelves in the library were dedicated to New Chapters, showcasing the book of the next author(s) visiting and housing our creative writing sheets.

Dr Mark Prince OBE, May 2019



Mark Prince spoke to 18 residents and numerous staff members about his book *The Prince of Peace*, his experience of turning his life around to become a professional boxer, and the loss of his son to knife crime.

The residents had the opportunity to ask Mark questions and were given a copy of the book to take away from the event. Staff commented that holding the residents' attention for such a sustained period was almost unheard of, and that it was clear how engaged they were. One librarian commented on the engagement of residents as:

"When Mark Prince was talking about his son being stabbed, you could hear a pin drop."

Author panel show, 11 July 2019

The main event of the first year was a panel made up of four authors – LJ Flanders (*Cell Workout*), Robyn Travis (*Prisoner to the Streets*), Carl Cattermole (*Prison: A Survival Guide*) and Mark Maciver (celebrity barber and author of *Shaping Up Culture*) – as well as a representative from Hachette publishers. The event was hosted and recorded by National Prison Radio. Approximately 30 residents attended the event, along with prison staff and external supporters from the Rothschild Foundation and BACO (Bucks Association for the Care of Offenders).

We promoted the event via word of mouth among prison staff and with posters displayed on the wings and in the library. We were delighted that a representative from BACO also attended this event.

The event was very well received by the residents. The staff reported that the residents talked about it for days afterwards, and discussed and swapped the books. The residents also requested for Robyn Travis' other books to be sent to the library as *Prisoner to the Streets* was so popular. This positive perception was evident from residents' and staff members' comments.

"It was good because it was motivational. We are all inmates and all have a release date and it is good to hear about other inmates who have gone through the same journey." (Panel attendee)

"Hearing these stories gives them confidence." (Staff member)

“They all wanted to talk about it afterwards – it took them longer to get them back into their cells.” (Staff member)

Carl Cattermole, ex-prisoner and author of *Prison: A Survival Guide*, said:

“Discovering books really helped me explore the world and expand my imagination in a whole new way. Reading made my mind feel razor sharp, it helped me to learn about history and even helped me sleep at night. It made me feel better as a person and want to live a positive lifestyle when I was released. Reading is not a one stop answer, but for me it sparked a constructive change in me and that’s something I wanted to get across during the panel discussion. I wanted to show that channelling your energy and spending your time developing your mind can have a lasting and positive impact on not just young people, but everyone in this situation.”

Catherine Bentley, Learning and Skills Manager, said:

“The Inside Stories discussion panel was a great chance to show the career opportunities that books, reading and writing opened up for the panellists that came along. We’d like to thank them very much for coming in to speak to the group. The day went really well and everyone was pleased with the outcome. Our Head of Reducing Reoffending was really pleased with how the afternoon went and is looking forward to the next events.”

We were able to secure positive coverage of the panel event in the Bucks Herald and Inside Time magazine. In addition, the audio from the event which was recorded for broadcast on National Prison Radio won the Prison Radio Association a Gold Award at the Arias.

Sports Reporting, 10 September 2019

The poster is for an event titled "INSIDE STORIES SPORTS REPORTING". It features a dark blue background with white and yellow text. At the top, it says "INSIDE STORIES" in large white letters, with "SPORTS REPORTING" below it. The event is with Michael Calvin and Leon Mann. The venue is the Library, on Tuesday 10 September, from 2.30pm to 4.30pm. The poster lists several bullet points: "Hear about what it's like to interview some of the biggest sports stars", "Learn about how to get started in sports reporting", "Listen to Michael and Leon's tips on presenting and narrating stories", and "All attendees receive a copy of one of Michael's books". It also mentions a competition judged by Michael and Leon. Below this, it says "Please complete a General Application and return to the Activity Hub to register your interest in attending this event by Thursday 5th September." The bottom section is titled "PANELLISTS" and features two photos with brief bios. Michael Calvin is described as one of the UK's most successful sportswriters, and Leon Mann is a leading TV sports presenter and filmmaker. The poster includes the National Literacy Trust logo at the bottom.

Based on focus groups at the start of the project, in which the residents expressed an interest in reading and writing about sport, an event was organised which focused on sports reporting and journalism. The event was attended by Michael Calvin, one of the UK’s most accomplished sports writers, Leon Mann, a leading sports presenter and filmmaker, and was chaired by Hilary Ineomo-Marcus, who trained with National Prison Radio and now hosts his own NPR and BBC radio shows.

The event was attended by numerous staff members and residents who had been selected because of their involvement with the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award.

We collected feedback from residents after the session to find out the impact of event. Overall, 11 residents provided their thoughts, and the findings show that:

- 9 of the 11 attendees took away a book at the end of the event
- 6 out of 11 attendees said the event encouraged them to read more
- 5 out of 11 attendees said it encouraged them to write more

Comments from the attendees show that they found the event engaging.

"I found it very insightful. It was interesting to hear about their personal experiences with big stars." (Sports Reporting session attendee)

"I found the talk to be motivational for when I leave prison. I've learned that as long as I have a drive and passion I should go for it." (Sports Reporting session attendee)

"I thought it was very interesting. They had a lot to talk about and opened my eyes to other opportunities." (Sports Reporting session attendee)

Michael Calvin, award-winning author and sportswriter, said:

"It was great to spend time with the group discussing all the things that have been really essential to my career – a passion for people's stories, a deep inner drive and, of course, communications skills. Creativity breaks down barriers, and they were all really involved in the discussion. It is rewarding to generate the sort of debate which highlights career paths that these young men may not have considered before. Sport has the power of positivity."

The event also received coverage in the Bucks Herald newspaper and the prison Governor was "delighted" that the prison was being reported on positively. Leon Mann, sports presenter and filmmaker, said:

"I really enjoyed the session with the guys at Aylesbury YOI. I wanted to get across that there's a place for everyone, you just have to persevere. I've worked really hard to promote diversity in sports media in the UK to show that everyone is welcome in the industry. I hope my hunger for positive and inclusive change encourages them to reflect on their own ambitions and aspirations for the future."

Other programme activity

Partnership with Staffordshire University

New Chapters additionally partnered with Cartoon and Comic Arts MA students at Staffordshire University to create a bespoke comic book full of creative writing produced by the residents at HMP Aylesbury, as well as some pieces from Medway Secure Training Centre.

In return for their writing, residents at the prison received a copy of a popular manga title to keep. The final product was professionally printed and sent to the participating residents ahead of their family celebration day in December.

Encouraging creative writing

Through the author events, residents were encouraged to tell their own stories through creative writing. Following the panel event and the sports reporting event, we handed out writing sheets which featured hints and tips for getting started.

INSIDE STORIES
National Literacy Trust

CREATIVE WRITING - GETTING STARTED

"When we write, we get to build worlds. We get to do magic. We get to fall in love. Writing gives us the ability to become anyone and do anything. It's the ultimate playground."
- Tomi Adeyemi, author of New York Times bestseller *Children of Blood and Bone*

Sometimes it can be hard to know where to start with a piece of creative writing. It's important to remember that writing is for everyone and can be about anything. You might already have an idea for something you want to write or a story you want to tell, but if you're not sure, overleaf are some ideas to get you started.

IDEA 1: SET A SCENE
Sometimes describing a scene is a good place to start. You can either describe your surroundings, imagine a different place you know, or make up somewhere completely imaginary. Start by describing what you see. Then think about what you can hear and smell. Once you've written your description, see if you can write a scene that takes place there.

IDEA 2: TAKE ON THE VOICE OF SOMEONE ELSE
Why not trying writing as if you're someone else? It could be a famous person, a fictional character or someone who has a particular job like a train driver or stunt person. Do they have a story they want to tell us? Are they talking to someone?

IDEA 3: WRITE ABOUT AN OBJECT
Pick an object. It can be something you use every day, or something strange that you've never seen in real life. Start by describing it – its colour, size, smell, how it feels to hold or touch, what it reminds you of. Then write a scene that features the object, or even write from its point of view.

IDEA 4: A LETTER TO YOUR PAST OR FUTURE SELF
What would you tell yourself if you could speak to yourself five years ago, or ten years ago? And what would you like to say to your future self?

GUIDELINES
Please write a maximum two sides of A4. You can submit any type of writing – it could be your life story, the start of a novel, a poem, a short story, song lyrics or part of a play.

Health and wellbeing day

The National Literacy Trust attended the prison's first health and wellbeing day in September, in order to promote New Chapters events among residents and staff.

Representatives met with each wing in turn and spoke to the majority of residents on each one, raising the profile of the events and the wing libraries. Residents were also given information relating to the work with Staffordshire University and received some creative writing submissions on the day.

The health and wellbeing day provided an opportunity to speak to staff about the events, inviting them to promote the events on the wing and to come along and attend themselves. Feedback from staff who had already attended events was incredibly positive.

Conclusion: Year one evaluation (2018-19)

The first year of New Chapters in HMP Aylesbury was a real success, despite operating under the challenging circumstances of the prison adjusting to Special Measures status and the ongoing refurbishment work delaying the establishment of the wing libraries. Strong relationships were built with key staff in both the education team and the library, and the programme was supported by numerous publishers and authors. Feedback from the residents indicated that the events were interesting and inspiring, and encouraged them to read and write more.

Year two evaluation (2019-20)

During the second year of delivery, 900 books were donated to HMYOI Feltham. Seven wing libraries were set up, providing easy access to books. At the beginning of 2020, cabinets were moved out of the locked association rooms and onto the units themselves. 40 sets of children's books were also provided for residents and their children at home (a copy was sent to a resident's home and one was given to them, enabling them to read to their children over the phone).

Staff attended an in-person event as audience members prior to lockdown, and had a chance to see how engaged the residents were. When the lockdown started, officers continued to support the programme by distributing paper-based resources on the wings and collecting responses. Many also commented that the wing libraries have been a lifeline for the residents.

Author events

In January 2020, Michael Maisey, author of *Young Offender*, visited the prison for an event in the library. Twelve residents listened to Michael speak about his life, then had the opportunity to ask questions. The conversation was varied and engaging, and one young person in their feedback commented:

"His story was good. An inspiration. Makes me feel like I've got more of a chance."

All of the residents had their book signed by Michael. Numerous staff members, including two officers, the prison librarian, two tutors and the Head of Learning and Skills, also attended the

event and got involved in the discussion, asked questions, and encouraged the young people, supporting improved awareness and attitudes of staff on the value of reading for pleasure.

Activity Packs

At the start of lockdown in 2020, activity packs for residents were created, which included a range of literacy challenges and puzzles. Residents also had the opportunity to take part in a creative writing competition which was judged by editorial staff at Hachette UK. All entries received a prize and the winner in each category was recorded by a former National Prison Radio producer and broadcast via NPR. We wrote to each young person directly to inform them when their work would be broadcast.

Other programme activity

Partnerships

In the second year of delivery, the team met regularly with a prison literacy stakeholder group, which was attended by a range of organisations who support literacy in the criminal justice space. In partnership with Staffordshire University, residents at HMYOI Aylesbury produced creative writing which was then illustrated by the students. The comic was printed and two copies were sent to each resident – one for them to keep and one to share with friends or family – and a stock was also placed in the library to be shared with the rest of the prison. The creative writing submitted ranged from lyrics about love to dramatic short stories about life on the streets.



National Prison Radio

We worked closely with National Prison Radio (NPR) to bring new audio content to the residents in HMYOI Aylesbury, as well as the custodial estate more widely, in order to ensure access to relevant and inspiring literature at a time when accessing physical books was more challenging. During lockdown, we broadcast *Young Offender* by Michael Maisey, *Prisoner to the Streets* by Robyn Travis, *That Reminds Me* by Derek Owusu and *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race* by Reni Eddo-Lodge.

Creative writing competition

In collaboration with NPR and Hachette UK, a creative writing competition was run during lockdown. Hachette generously agreed to judge the competition, and individual feedback from two judges was sent directly to each young person. The winners of each category in the

competition were then recorded by former NPR producers and broadcast every Friday afternoon for two months.

Penguin Random House

Finally, an agreement was secured with Penguin Random House to provide 600 additional books per year to the New Chapters project, to be split evenly between HMYOI Aylesbury and HMYOI Feltham. With such a large and varied list, this enabled a great range of titles to be donated to the prison, including:

- *Ask an Astronaut* by Tim Peake
- *Rapthology: Lessons in Lyrics and Life* by Wretch 32
- *A Few Kind Words and a Loaded Gun: The Autobiography of a Career Criminal* by Noel Smith
- *Noughts & Crosses* by Malorie Blackman
- *Battle Scars: A Story of War and All That Follows* by Jason Fox and Matt Allen
- *Surge* by Jay Bernard
- *Behind the Mask* by Tyson Fury
- *Eskiboy* by Wiley
- *Dreaming in a Nightmare* by Jeremiah Emmanuel
- *Believe* by Nicola Adams

Conclusion: Year two evaluation (2019-20)

Overall, the second year of delivery was particularly challenging as it marked the onset of the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of prison staff were off-site for many months following the outbreak in March 2020 and, when they did return, engaging them in the programme was more challenging than pre-COVID-19, when we had been able to invite them along to in-person events, get them involved and discuss the project with them face to face. Likewise, community organisations and other stakeholders in the sector, who would typically attend events, were unable to do so. However, the fact that we were able to continue to deliver activities during lockdown is a testament to the value that staff see in the offer. We were hugely supported to get resources onto the wings.

Year three evaluation (2020-21)

In the third year of delivery, we continued to face issues with access as a result of the pandemic. In spite of this, we continued to provide paper-based resources, such as book request sheets and creative writing exercises to residents, as well as distributing feedback forms to ensure the wing libraries were still working effectively at improving access to books in the prison. We also organised book drops, which enabled staff and residents to read and discuss the same text.

Wing library consultation

Feedback forms were circulated within the prison in December 2020 in order to get a better understanding of awareness of the wing libraries, their importance and how they could be improved. We received a total of 28 responses. All respondents were offered a wordsearch, crossword or sudoku book and a chocolate bar as a thank you for providing feedback. We received a number of specific book requests to support our book selection which we were delighted to fulfil thanks to donations from publishers.

Key findings showed that:

- **75%** (n=21) of the residents consulted were aware of the library on their wing
- **61%** (n=17) regularly borrowed books from the wing library
- **75%** (n=21) said that having access to books had been important during lockdown

Half (50%) of the respondents (n=14) felt that in general, reading was important for mental wellbeing. Indeed, some residents told us that having access to books via the wing libraries has been valuable for supporting their mental wellbeing.

“It has been important because it is good for mental health. What I mean is if you're struggling with reality, you can get lost within a book and it gives you a break from reality.” (Wing library user)

“I read a book about Tyson Fury's redemption from poor mental health to becoming a world heavyweight boxing champ. I took some ideas and inspiration and it has helped me along the way to progress in my own personal battle against mental illness.” (Wing library user)

Our consultation survey also showed that 29% (n=8) of the residents thought that reading helps them to feel inspired while 57% (n=16) said it supports them to learn new things. Notably however, nearly **9 in 10** (86%, n=24) said that reading keeps them occupied. Indeed, many commented on the benefit of the wing libraries as improving their access to books, keeping them occupied and distracted, and helping them to pass the time.

“With the library on the wing it is easier to get a book than waiting a week for our library session.” (Wing library user)

“Keeps me distracted through these tough times.” (Wing library user)

“Passes time quicker.” (Wing library user)

“There's no education and reading books helps keep your knowledge up, and it keeps me occupied.” (Wing library user)

“Prevents us from being stuck with nothing to do but think. Keeps me busy.” (Wing library user)

Book drops

HMP Aylesbury received a book drop of 300 copies of *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, to encourage both staff and residents to read the same text and discuss it. Alongside the book drops, HMP Aylesbury also received flyers to distribute — one aimed at staff and one aimed at residents – providing information about the importance of reading for pleasure and how to encourage it.

We additionally donated 12 titles for the prison’s Black History Month reading groups, working alongside the Safer Custody team. Ten copies of each title were placed in every wing library in the prison so that young people could read a book ahead of a discussion that was planned for the end of October. Unfortunately, the prison went into a circuit breaker lockdown for the last two weeks of October and the event was cancelled.

READ ANYTHING YOU WANT

- Try reading lots of different sorts of books.** Stories are great but it is also good to read magazines, newspapers, comics or fact books.
- Read as much as you can** Go to the library or check out your wing library and get exploring!
- Read together** Talking about books is a great way to improve your communication skills and feel connected to others. Why not read the same book as a member of your friends or family and find time to talk about the plot and characters? You could even ask your key worker.
- Stop reading books you don't like** A great way to find out if you will like a book is to pick a random page and read it. If you don't like what you're reading, stop and pick something else.
- Ask your friends what they are reading** It can sometimes be hard to find books you want to read, so ask your friends, parents, teachers, key worker and librarian for some ideas.
- Read out loud** If you have younger siblings or your own children why not read to them over the phone, on a visit or record a Storybook Dads CD. It can be great fun to use different voices for different characters and do sound effects.
- Challenge yourself!** Why don't you read for 10 minutes a day or 12 books in a year?

The National Literacy Trust is a registered charity no. 1116260 (England and Wales) and SC042944 (Scotland).

TIPS TO PROMOTE READING

- Encourage residents to make use of the mini libraries located on the wings – there are Easy Read titles and graphic novels for less confident readers.
- Suggest that you read the same book as a young person – challenge them to read a chapter a day and then have a chat about what you both thought.
- Look out for National Literacy Trust posters advertising New Chapters author events and creative writing workshops and suggest that residents sign up.
- If a young person isn't interested in reading, talk to them about their interests and see if you can find them a book on the same topic.
- Reading for enjoyment doesn't have to mean reading books – encourage young people to read magazines, comics and articles as well.
- If you'd like to request a book on behalf of a young person, or have any suggestions, please email us at criminaljustice@literacytrust.org.uk

The National Literacy Trust is a registered charity no. 1116260 (England and Wales) and SC042944 (Scotland).

Audio book club

In lieu of being able to arrange a book club in person, we ran an audio book club to tie in with the broadcast of Michael Maisey’s *Young Offender* on NPR. Each week we circulated a worksheet which asked the residents to comment on the book and send in questions for Michael. In return, respondents received a copy of the book to keep. Michael then answered the questions residents had sent in via an interview with an NPR producer, creating a dialogue between residents and author. One of the audiobook club members asked:

“Michael Maisey, what was your time like inside? How do you feel?”

We have since been running the audio book club across HMP Aylesbury, HMP Grendon/Springhill, HMP/YOI Feltham and HMP Bullingdon.

Creative writing workshop

We ran a series of four creative writing workshops with Brenda Birungi (AKA. Lady Unchained), a writer and broadcaster who found her love for poetry when she was serving time in prison. The young people were encouraged to tell their stories, with the ultimate goal of their work being recorded for broadcast on National Prison Radio in a fifth celebration session.

Following the sessions, we gathered feedback from all five young people who attended. These responses show that all five enjoyed the session, with 3 out of 5 saying they didn't like creative writing before the project. All five also felt more confident about writing, felt inspired to tell their story, and wanted to write more in their spare time, after the project.

Participants' comments showed that they valued trying something different and being able to share their story with others in their situation.

“I enjoyed trying something different and talking about our experience in jail. I also enjoyed performing and hearing my fellow residents perform too.”
(Creative writing attendee)

“I liked the fact that I will be able to tell my story to people about not glorifying prison.” (Creative writing attendee)

“I liked how everyone had a different story to tell/express and we were all encouraging each other.” (Creative writing attendee)

Their comments also show that the writing workshop helped participants learn how to write a poem and express themselves, and allowed them to be more open to new experiences.

“I've learnt how to write a poem. How to put something on paper.” (Creative writing attendee)

“I've learnt to be able to express my words and that it's better to let things out than bottle it up.” (Creative writing attendee)

“I learn to be open-minded. I'm not gonna lie, I enjoyed it.” (Creative writing attendee)

The staff highlighted that the overall feedback they had received from residents was positive. In addition, they saw the workshop as a valuable initiative for the residents.

“It has been great to see the residents commit to something new and different, producing some fantastic work!” (Member of the Safer Custody team)

“It’s great to see them engaging in something positive. You see them in a different light.” (Prison Officer)

Conclusion: Year three evaluation (2020-21)

Overall, in spite of the challenges of the pandemic, residents were provided with effective resources and activities to complete in lockdown. Multiple residents expressed a new interest in reading, writing or listening as a result of taking part in the creative writing workshop, audio book club or book drops. The value of the programme overall was summarised by a librarian in HMP Aylesbury as:

“The continuing efforts of the National Literacy Trust to support our residents through complementing the development of our prison library collection remain noteworthy and we appreciate your team for this.”

Overall conclusion

While New Chapters was impacted significantly by the COVID-19 pandemic, the project was able to bring books, audio content and literacy activities to the young people in HMP Aylesbury at an incredibly challenging time. The project was also incredibly valuable not only as a means of bringing reading and writing opportunities to the prison, but for piloting a range of activities, assessing their popularity and impact and applying those learnings to future work.

Most crucially, the importance and impact of involving authors and facilitators with lived experience of the criminal justice system was clearly demonstrated. The outcomes of the creative writing workshops with Lady Unchained in the final year of the project were also a clear indication of the power of having the opportunity to share your personal story and feeling that it is valued. These learnings, in addition to consultation with young people and staff, have formed the basis of the next three years of New Chapters which will continue to be delivered in HMP Aylesbury, as well as in Oakhill Secure Training Centre, through Buckinghamshire Youth Offending Service, and in HMP Brixton and HMYOI Swinfen Hall.