

To: Communities Policy Overview Committee – 25 March 2009

By: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member, Amanda Honey, Managing Director

Subject: National Year of Reading (NYR): a Legacy beyond 2008

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary

This report highlights achievements and activity in Kent during of the National Year of Reading (NYR) with a particular focus on the contribution made by services in Communities. It also confirms proposals to develop and implement a Reading and Literacy Strategy in order to maintain the momentum that has been developed.

Recommendations

Members are asked to

- (i) NOTE the activity that has taken place in Kent during the National Year of Reading and the continuing momentum of this work
- (ii) ADVISE on ways in which KCC elected Members might act as ambassadors for literacy and reading in their local communities

FOR INFORMATION AND CONSULTATION

Background

1. In April 2008 the National Year of Reading was launched, in Kent, under the banner *Kent: a Great Place to Read* and an evaluation of the national programme has been taking place in 30 local authorities, including Kent, as the year draws to a close. The local campaign has been led jointly by the Communities and Children, Families and Education (CFE) Directorates, with the lead in Communities being taken by Libraries and Archives, working closely with Kent Adult Education.

2. The campaign has centred around the four themes listed below and examples of the action that has been taking place under each is described in more detail in Appendix 1.

- (i) Developing new and imaginative ways of encouraging reading;
- (ii) Building partnerships (for example with the NHS, the BBC and Probation Service)
- (iii) Developing new audiences (for example amongst adults with learning disabilities) and
- (iv) Giving new momentum to existing well tested literacy programmes such “*Reach out and Read*”, “*6 Book Challenge*”, “*Time2Give*”.

3. There has already been national recognition of Kent's work and the final evaluation report will be brought to this Committee in due course. In the meantime, given the links between reading, literacy and the achievement of other goals, and the evidence in Kent of 'need' and of successful initiatives, there is a commitment within both Directorates and amongst partners, to continue the momentum that has been achieved. This rationale is outlined in the following sections.

A National Legacy

4. The DCSF has always expected that NYR would be the catalyst for a longer-term legacy and the on-going commitment and campaign will be called *Reading for Life*. It will be led by the Literacy Trust and The Reading Agency and some of the drivers highlighted in *Literacy Changes Lives*

(www.literacytrust.org.uk/research/Literacy_changes_lives.pdf) include the facts that:

95% of jobs require literacy skills;

70% of pupils permanently excluded from school have difficulties in basic literacy skills;

25% of young offenders have reading skills below those of the average seven year old;

60% of the prison population has difficulties in basic literacy skills and

one in six of adults cannot read at the level expected on an eleven year old.

Research into attitudes towards reading commissioned by DCSF has also highlighted that only 24% of C2DE parents see the link between reading and success in life.

[www.yearofreading.org.uk/wikireadia/index.php?title=Attitudes to Reading in England](http://www.yearofreading.org.uk/wikireadia/index.php?title=Attitudes_to_Reading_in_England)

A Local Legacy – Reading for Success

5. There are a number of other drivers for continuing the momentum in Kent, not least the economic benefits of having a fully literate population. This is especially important in the current economic climate, and will complement the long-term need to up-skill the workforce of Kent. Improving literacy will also underpin *Kent Regeneration Framework, Unlocking Kent's Potential and Backing Kent's Business*. To exemplify this point, the Kent and Medway workforce has the lowest qualification level of any area within the South East Region. (source: LSC Kent and Medway Annual Plan 2007-08) and the overall percentage of adults in Kent and Medway who have skill levels below level 1 in literacy and numeracy across Kent is 47%, rising to over 50% in Gravesham, Swale and Thanet.

6. There is also evidence that literacy and reading contribute to individual confidence, effective parenting and child development as well as to wider aspirations such as community cohesion and integration. Elements of this include:

Bonding: sharing a book is one of the most intimate and rewarding activities for a parent and child. It contributes to good parenting and it fosters a love of books from the earliest age.

Social skills: attending a Baby Rhyme Time or any reading activity with other families encourages listening and communication skills.

Readiness for school: a child who loves books will have developed some key skills including manual dexterity, an understanding of story, and confidence to take part and share with others.

Skills for work: literacy builds confidence and enables people to apply for jobs and work effectively.

Involvement: a comprehensive reading strategy will enable more opportunities for people to get involved through volunteering to help us reach our target audiences.

Health and wellbeing: reading can provide an escape from loneliness, isolation and depression. It will make a vital contribution to an ageing population.

Giving reading and literacy continued priority will consequently contribute to the achievement of nine of the National Targets by which Kent will be assessed in future, as well as to the Children and Young People's Plan.

7.. The campaign in Kent has also been a powerful catalyst for new partnerships to develop and test new approaches and this is further good reason for continuing momentum. For example:

(i) Developing literacy skills to support people who are homeless or in danger of losing their homes due to the recession has been a partnership project with Ashford Borough Council, a national trailblazer in this field;

(ii) Supporting the Public Health-led *House* initiative which provides an access point for teenagers to activities, information and services that relate to their wellbeing;

(iii) Developing a Text Reading Group for teenagers through a partnership between Swale Borough Council

(iv) Supporting new reading groups and reading activities for people with mental health conditions and other special needs and continuing to grow the number and range of volunteering opportunities we offer through Libraries and Archives Time2Give.

Next steps

8. A recent conference, on 10 March 2009, jointly hosted by Communities and CFE, brought together 130 of Kent's leaders and partners from across all sectors to mark the end of the National Year of Reading and build on its momentum. Feedback about the conference has been very positive and there was enthusiasm amongst those attending for the development of a Reading and Literacy Strategy to drive continued action, with the long term aspiration of achieving 100% literacy in Kent.

9. Many Members have supported the National Year of Reading at local level by attending events and providing grants. Seven Local Boards have also considered it on their agendas where direct connection could be made between reading skills, crime and safety, active ageing and urban deprivation. Continued advocacy by members within their local communities to promote literacy and reading would be very much welcomed as will the involvement of this Committee in shaping the strategy, and in monitoring progress.

Resource implications

10. Momentum will be continued within existing resources. The Strategic Manager (Innovation) in Libraries and Archives has been nominated to take the lead on developing the Strategy working closely with other colleagues in the Authority.

Recommendations

11. Members are asked to

(i) NOTE the activity that has taken place in Kent during the National Year of Reading and the continuing momentum of this work

(ii) ADVISE on how KCC elected Members might act as ambassadors for literacy and reading in their local communities

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Kent: a Great Place to Read

Examples of projects and action undertaken during the National Year of Reading, presented under the 4 priority themes, with a particular focus on activity led within Communities

1. New approaches

- **Outdoor venues to promote reading and literacy:** our Library in the Park in Dartford sought to attract more people to use a rather intimidating and seriously underused Victorian library. It attracted over 1000 visitors and ran regular activities to encourage families to take the first steps on the path to literacy.

'My children and I have found it a fantastic introduction to using the library' (a parent visiting Dartford Library in the Park).

- **A Doorstep Library in Sheerness** where volunteers from Seashells Children's Centre read stories to children in streets and in their homes. The project aims to reach families in our most deprived communities who do not use public services. There is growing interest in developing Doorstep Libraries beyond this pilot in Folkestone and Thanet.
- **The Kent Story:** 12 books with the opening paragraphs of a story, written by the leader of KCC, have circulated around schools enabling the children to continue the tale before passing it on to the next school
- Renowned children's writer Nigel Hinton wrote a new short story ***Beaver Towers Mission to Kent*** which was read simultaneously in our primary schools in October. Feedback has been positive including *'we asked the parents to take part, regardless of their ability to read/read aloud..... the whole session was a complete success, and the children were full of ideas and suggestions as to further adventures and possibilities for Flipip and Baby B!'*
- **Guys grab a Grown up** was a Family Learning Treasure Hunt in all four Playing for Success centres where children searched for sections of a story.

2. New partners

- **The NHS** has supported Read Yourself Well and Recovery through Reading, library-led projects with mental health patients at 2 Kent hospitals.
- **The British Dyslexia Association's** Best Practice Guide for Libraries will help us support adults and children with dyslexia, their carers and their families.
- **The BBC** worked with Adult Education and Libraries and Archives, developing a joint offer to support Kent's businesses to develop employee literacy skills. Our offer was distributed by the Kent and Medway Local Skills for Productivity Alliance. BBC Radio Kent ran a monthly Book Club supported by Libraries and Archives.

- **The Probation Service** is piloting a programme of visits to Gravesend and Sheerness Libraries with trained mentors to support and promote library use.

3. New audiences

- **Adults with learning disabilities:** Sevenoaks Library won an award for its work to support the District Partnership. Benefits include special Makaton signage in libraries, the use of libraries as meeting spaces, weekly Biblio Hour, and books specially selected by and for this audience. We are also using Bag Books, multi-sensory story-packs which offer accessible stories for adults and children with learning disabilities.
- **Reading Groups for people with special needs** include new groups for visually impaired people, a telephone reading group for Home Library Service users, and MIND Reading Groups for mental health patients in Maidstone, Gravesend and Tunbridge Wells.

'Wish you could be a fly on the wall at our group.when I asked them if they would like to carry on for another year, the positive impact of the group was overwhelming. The carers' responsibilities vary from one who looks after a severely autistic son in his 20's to our oldest....., now in his late 80's, who looks after his 50-something daughter with learning disabilities..... Several have husbands with dementiaunanimously; they said how much they value the group and the opportunity it provides to escape their caring responsibilities, just for an hour or two' (Maidstone Carers' Group).

4. A renewed focus for existing programmes

- Achievement of the **GO Award** (Get On in Local Government), a national initiative led by our Adult Education service, will lead by example by raising standards of literacy and numeracy of our workforce
- Adult Education is also leading on the national **Skills Pledge** initiative, which will support Kent's businesses by providing the opportunity for staff to work towards or obtain their first full Level 2 qualification
- **Family Language Literacy and Numeracy** programmes enable adults to achieve Skills for Life qualifications and support the achievement of their children
- **Reach out and Read:** a partnership between Looked After Children Advisers Team, the Fostering and Volunteering Team and Volunteer Reading Help used the ROAR scheme to monitor training for 48 carers and provided volunteers to work with 42 LACs outside school hours for one week.
- The **Teachers as Readers** national pilot encouraged teachers to act as role models for reading e.g. Games Teachers, Science teachers etc (not just the English Dept who are always seen reading). We are continuing to roll out the scheme.
- **Week 53** has provided a list of reading activities for participating schools who each received £250 to support their work

- Bookstart and other DCSF funded initiatives are achieving significant results in Kent by promoting literacy and library use to children from birth
- **Test the Organisation sessions:** Adult Education tutors have worked with employers to improve workforce literacy skills including Eurostar, B.T., Kent police, Boots Distribution Centre, school catering staff, P&O ferries, a paper mill and a Jobcentre.
- **6 Book Challenge** helped adults on Sheppey to build reading confidence in partnership with SkillsPlus, the Prison Service and Libraries and Archives.
- **Time2Give:** Libraries and Archives' award-winning volunteering programme managed by CSV has attracted new volunteers to support NYR activities.

'it's given me a real opportunity to use the skills that I developed during my degree in a real world context - writing a play from some source material with a specific audience in mind.the link with the adult literacy learners is also quite appropriate as I'm just about to start a PGCE in English' (a volunteer at the Canterbury Cathedral Archives).

- **Kent Sport, Leisure and Olympics** were the major partner for the Summer Reading Challenge *Team Read*. 7537 children completed the challenge to read 6 books during the school holiday; an increase of 6% over 2007-08.
- **Kent's prisons** have taken an active part in NYR. Activities have included Story Book Dads/ Mums which has enabled prisoners to develop their reading skills to enable them to record a story to be sent home to their child.

'It has encouraged me to read books again... I think I may be hooked!' (A prisoner at HMP Sutton Park).

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