

June 2015



## Reading Well Books on Prescription Using the reach of libraries to secure better public health

Reading Well Books on Prescription helps people manage their mental health and well-being by providing accredited self-help reading through public libraries. Books can be prescribed by GPs or other health professionals but are also available on self-referral for anyone to borrow. There are book lists available for common mental health conditions and dementia, and a young people's mental health list is being developed.

The scheme, launched in June 2013, works because it brings together a quality assured book list that is endorsed by health bodies and can be trusted by health professionals, with the unique ability of libraries to reach a wide range of people, encouraging self-management and early intervention.

### How it works: the national framework

Local library authorities can make use of the national Reading Well Books on Prescription scheme, which is delivered by the Reading Agency and the Society of Chief Librarians. These partners work with health bodies including the Royal Colleges of GPs, Nursing and Psychiatrists, the British Psychological Society and IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies), [among many others](#), to develop the book lists and deliver the scheme. They also provide promotional materials including leaflets for the public and health professionals and a range of other resources for local library services to use. There is also a public facing website, <http://reading-well.org.uk>.

### How it works: local commissioning

Ninety-six percent of the 151 library services across England offer the Reading Well Books on Prescription Service. A recent survey linked to the launch of the new dementia scheme showed that almost half of responding authorities had received local health commissioning funding to deliver the scheme. Commissioners usually fund the purchase of book collections and/or promotional leaflets, and have occasionally funded events, activities and launches. They also often help by publicising the scheme among colleagues and local health practitioners in order to encourage referrals.

### Usage of the scheme and the difference it makes

Commissioners, library services and national partners alike see the scheme as highly successful.

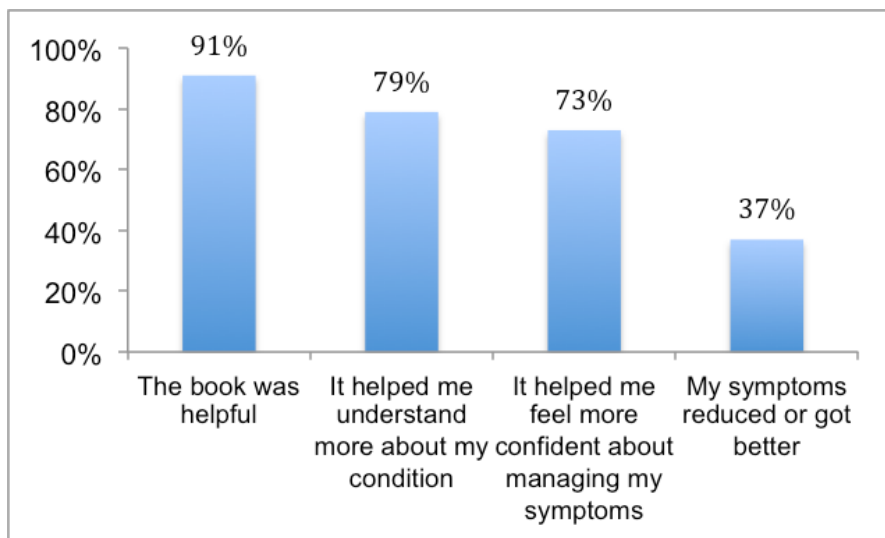
*'Books on Prescription is of immense value. The way people are empowered is through credible, validated information. This is a mechanism for changing their situation and putting them in a better position to manage their dementia.'* – Charles Alessi, Dementia Lead for Public Health England

The scheme is founded on [pre-existing evidence](#) that self-help reading can help people with common mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression.

The [national evaluation](#) of the first year of the scheme (2013-14) showed that 275,000 people borrowed a book from the list (an increase of 113% on the previous year for core list titles). There was also a 70% increase in publisher sales of the titles on the list. All prescribers surveyed said the scheme had been useful in helping people understand more about their conditions. As the chart shows, nine out of ten readers found the books helpful, and over one third said that their symptoms reduced. Book issues for the dementia scheme have also increased by 286% since its launch in January 2015.



### **The difference the scheme made: what readers said about books for common mental health problems**



Source: reader survey presented in national evaluation (2013-14)

### **The value of a national quality-assured framework**

Many local library services were already delivering a books on prescription scheme with book lists that had been developed locally before the national Reading Well scheme was set up. However, the national scheme was helpful in enabling local areas to secure endorsement from national bodies such as the Royal Colleges, which assured commissioners of quality and helped to secure buy-in from health professionals. The established framework enabled library services to share an evidence base, and also made the scheme easy to commission.

*'A key learning is to make sure you engage with national bodies who'll endorse a product. So we can say to local GPs or IAPT "this list is endorsed by your professional body"'* – Martin Burton, Community Cultural Services Manager, South Gloucestershire County Council

### **Promoting the unique strengths of libraries**

The scheme illustrates the benefits of identifying, drawing on and promoting the strengths of a cultural service in promoting health. Libraries are ideal venues for delivering public health information and services because of their unique reach, which can be far broader than public health services. They are also non-stigmatised settings for those wishing to seek information about mental or physical health problems.

*'Libraries are universal services, they're accessed by large numbers of people, they promote self-management and independent access to information. They tick all the boxes.'* – Steve Spiers, Public Health Programme Lead (Mental Health & Emotional Well Being), South Gloucestershire

The scheme can also signpost people to other aspects of the cultural offer delivering health and well-being benefits, such as reading groups, recreational and learning activity and volunteering.

### **Building relationships with local commissioners**

Building strong relationships with local commissioners is important for those seeking to be commissioned. Advice from commissioners includes taking time to build a trusting relationship (including collaborating on projects before seeking commissions); showing a commitment to public health (for example, by putting on displays for mental health awareness week, inviting health commissioners to relevant public events, and attending meetings about public health); and showing a willingness to contribute from library resources to the scheme. Library services stressed the importance of networking and tenacity in order to find the right commissioner to talk to. Commissioners said that evidence of effectiveness was important:

*'Go and meet the commissioner. Public Health people thrive on using data, so take some data with you. In Public Health, our reason for being is to reduce health inequalities and improve the health of the population. If you can demonstrate that the people who use libraries are from lower socio-economic groups, and that you have a product that contributes to our objectives then Public Health should be interested.'* – Tracey Polak, Assistant Director of Public Health, Devon County Council

*'We trust the partner. I buy into Books on Prescription, but it was as much about them coming forward and saying "what joint work can we develop?" If there is one point I could make, it's about proactive building of relationships'* – Steve Spiers, Public Health Programme Lead (Mental Health & Emotional Well Being), South Gloucestershire

The Reading Agency provides resources to help local libraries open conversations with commissioners, including a guide for commissioners, and a template for showing national and local evidence.

## Reading Well Books on Prescription in Devon

### Key facts

**Commissioner:** Devon Public Health

**Funding:** £25-30k per year for the last 3 years (since 2013)

**Coverage:** A full set of books in all 57 local libraries and mobile and prison libraries

**Readership:** 4,000 people borrowed a BoP book in 2014

The Reading Well Books on Prescription scheme in Devon was established by Ciara Eastell, the Head of Libraries, Culture and Heritage in partnership with Devon Public Health. Tracey Polak, the Assistant Director of Public Health, decided to fund the scheme for several reasons:

- The quality assurance offered by the national framework (which is critical)
- The book themes are in line with local JSNA [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment] priorities
- Within a large, predominantly rural area, a partnership with libraries is an excellent way of reaching people in all areas and from all socio-economic groups

*'When we talked to Public Health, we offered interventions through this scheme in all communities, including prisons. The value of libraries to partners is our potentially universal reach.'* – Ciara Eastell, Head of Libraries, Culture and Heritage

Public Health conducted data analysis after the first year of the scheme, using the data collected by the library service showing book loans by postcode. This analysis demonstrated:

- That the people Public Health hoped to reach are reading the books – there have been higher rates of book loans in towns with a higher than average incidence of mental health problems
- That people from all socio-economic groups are reading the books
- This (together with the national evaluation) confirmed the value of the scheme for Tracey and Devon Public Health

Following the success of the first year of funding, Public Health were confident that they could work with the library services on a range of health and well-being related projects.

*'The library service subsequently offered Public Health a package of ideas that led to a programme delivering four different projects. Over the last three years (through to 2016) this support from Public Health will amount to nearly £200,000.'* – Ciara Eastell

Alongside Reading Well Books on Prescription, this programme includes the Six Book Challenge (which aims to improve adult literacy in prisons and the wider community), and a Bookstart outreach officer reaching targeted families to help improve family literacy.

It is hoped that this partnership will continue: *'It's a really good relationship, very innovative. We're looking to expand what we can do together'* – Tracey Polak, Assistant Director of Public Health

## Building evidence

To meet commissioners' requirements and secure funding for future years, evidence of usage, impact and effectiveness is essential. This is made easier for local library services because the books lists are expert endorsed and evidence based, and because the [national evaluation](#) can be used as evidence by local schemes.

*'The evaluation was vital for me to argue the case for continued funding to our Director. It's a combination of knowing the books chosen were approved, knowing from the national evaluation how many people were reading the books and whether it makes them feel better, and knowing locally whether it's hitting our target groups.'* – Tracey Polak, Assistant Director of Public Health, Devon County Council

The national partners are currently seeking funding for an in-depth clinical evaluation of the scheme.





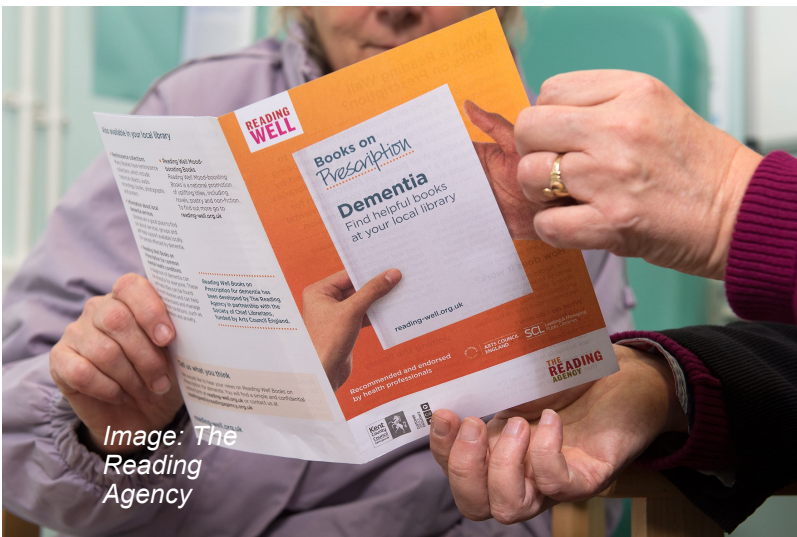


Image: The Reading Agency

## Developing, learning and improving the scheme

Ideas for the future include developing collections that can be accessed by a wider range of people including those with lower literacy levels or English as a second language, for example more audio-books, e-books available for e-lending and books in different languages; further exploring the role of digital information; and developing stronger links with other creative and cultural partners, for example with work in museums around dementia.

One aspiration is that the scheme can secure long-term national funding from the health sector alongside local commissioning, to ensure its sustainability and continuing development. The national partners also want to continue to share best practice to support those library authorities that have not secured local commissioning support.

## Books on Prescription in Warwickshire

### Key facts

**Commissioners:** The Mental Health Supported Capital Fund, the Children and Young People's Mental Health commissioner, Public Health and Adult Social Care.

**Funding:** £70,000 to set up and run the scheme in the first two years (2009-11), followed by smaller amounts for new book collections (2011 onwards)

**Coverage:** A full set of books in all 32 libraries

**Readership:** 11,113 loans of BoP books from Jan 2010 to Sept 2011

Warwickshire set up their own local books on prescription scheme in 2009, before the national Reading Well scheme was developed. Adult Social Care approached the library service with the idea, and Libraries closely worked with Public Health to develop the scheme and, along with other partners, agreed the initial list of books to include in the collection.

*'Public Health reviewed the evidence regarding bibliotherapy and Books on Prescription schemes, and this convinced us that there was good merit in working with partners to develop a local scheme in Warwickshire. We also saw opportunities to integrate a Books on Prescription Service with our other local services, including the Wellbeing Hubs and the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies service' - Paula Mawson, Health Improvement Lead, Public Health, Warwickshire County Council*

As the scheme evolved, additional funding was secured for dementia and young people's mental health book lists. When the national scheme was developed, the local list supported the promotion of the national scheme. The most popular titles from the local list are promoted alongside the national list, based on evidence of usage and a detailed Books on Prescription User Survey of library readers and partners and client feedback.

Being able to demonstrate usage and impact to health partners was essential to ensure continuing with the scheme and securing further funding from Libraries and Public Health, Adult Social Care and Children's and Young People's Mental Health Commissioning. Comments were collected on an ongoing basis as part of project development, as well as through the detailed Books on Prescription User Survey.

*'In the first year to 18 months, we were astounded by the level of response in terms of the numbers of issues the library service was making from the Books on Prescription collection.'* – Paula Mawson

The scheme has now been mainstreamed into the library service's strategic work as initially intended. Public Health continues to sit on the steering group which meets annually.

The strong relationship developed between the library service and Public Health has led to further joint work, for example, joint-purchasing sets of the Pictures to Share picture books for people with dementia, both for libraries and care homes.

*Since the inception of the project, the relationship with Public Health has developed strongly with the potential for further joint work. The value of libraries has been proved in terms of footfall, our access and reach to all areas of the community and to partners so it would be fantastic to build on this for future collaboration.* - Deborah Hateley, Senior Librarian Priority Groups.

## Seeking further opportunities for collaboration

All of the library services interviewed for this case study went on to be involved in other partnerships with Public Health, and an important lesson from them is to continue to seek new opportunities for collaboration. The national partners also continue to explore ways of developing their public health work:

*'We're beginning to attract new funding from the health sector and develop new partnerships, it's been really positive. We're meeting our aim around the strategic positioning of libraries and their community health offer.'* – Debbie Hicks, Director of Research at the Reading Agency

The experience of Books on Prescription shows that arts and cultural organisations like libraries can play an invaluable role in delivering public health services. This is perhaps a role that can only increase in the future:

*'We're getting to understand more and more that sometimes the best way of giving people healthcare messages is not through health routes. There's a real interest in other routes, including arts and cultural organisations.'* – Charles Alessi, Dementia Lead for Public Health England

### Books on Prescription in South Gloucestershire

#### Key facts

**Commissioners:** IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies; common mental health conditions), Public Health (dementia) and Learning Difficulties Development Fund (children and young people)

**Funding:** Around £4-5k per year (2013/14 to 2015/16)

**Coverage:** A full set of books in all 13 libraries

**Readership:** Around 2000 issues of books from the Reading Well Books on Prescription list on common mental health conditions to 900 people over the first year of the scheme (2013/14)

In South Gloucestershire, Community Cultural Services Manager Martin Burton secured funding from a number of partners by having conversations with all of those commissioners he thought would benefit from the scheme. He and commissioner Steve Spiers both stress the importance of building strong relationships: a strong relationship between Public Health and the library service already existed before the Books on Prescription scheme commenced, and the trust that this inspired was one of the reasons that Public Health funded the scheme.

*'They've made it clear they want to make the library service relevant to other agendas. Whenever there are meetings relating to issues around inclusion, mental health and linked agendas, the library service always puts someone forward.'* – Steve Spiers, Public Health Programme Lead (Mental Health & Emotional Well Being)

For Martin, securing money was a way to ensure the commitment of commissioners to the scheme:

*'By getting the commissioners to support the project with funding, they were more committed to delivering the scheme. So one of our partners, IAPT, supported the delivery of the scheme through GP surgeries, and through inclusion of their logo on the leaflet demonstrated the joint working with libraries.'* – Martin Burton, Community Cultural Services Manager

The library service offered to buy the book collection but sought money for the promotional leaflets, and the relatively small amounts of money involved made this an attractive offer for the commissioners:

*'They were putting their own resource in, so we knew they were serious about the agenda. They met us halfway with staff training and offers of time, so we were happy to meet them half way.'* – Steve Spiers

The library service continues to seek opportunities for collaborative work. It recently submitted a successful joint bid with Public Health and Adult Social Care to deliver arts and mental health sessions in libraries.

*'They were very willing to listen to our suggestions on outcomes measures, they linked in with our frameworks, were open to partnership working – a nice innovation can come when people bring together knowledge of arts and vulnerable groups.'* – Steve Spiers

#### Further information

The Reading Agency's website includes information, resources and evidence about the Reading Well Books on Prescription scheme <http://readingagency.org.uk/adults/quick-guides/reading-well/>

For more information and resources on Cultural Commissioning visit <http://www.ncvo.org/CCProg>

Case study written by Juliette Hough