

2026 – Schoolreaders and The National Year of Reading

By Penny Hubbard, Norfolk County Ambassador for Schoolreaders

Change the lives of our local children through love of reading

Following our articles in February and March highlighting the Government's National Year of Reading, we encourage you to spare an hour or two a week to make a huge difference for local children.



The literacy charity, Schoolreaders, has been sending volunteers into primary schools to provide much needed reading support for over 10 years and are looking for volunteers in our area.

One in four children are leaving primary school unable to read to the expected standard. This means they are unable to fully participate in their secondary education, which can have lifelong consequences. There are currently 6.6 million adults in the UK who are classed as functionally illiterate, and would struggle when reading a medicine packet or bus timetable. Intervening early, particularly in areas of disadvantage where children may most need this support, can make all the difference to a child not becoming part of that statistic.

Research also suggests that children who are most engaged with reading and writing are three times more likely to have higher levels of mental wellbeing than children who are the least engaged.

As the largest in-school literacy charity in the country, Schoolreaders recruits, places and assists volunteers to go into local primary schools and provide FREE, weekly, one-to-one reading support for children, prioritising those who need this extra help the most.

One quarter of primary schools are registered with Schoolreaders requesting volunteers. They currently support more than 35,000 children one-to-one every week. Last year they delivered one million reading support sessions and have pledged to deliver one and a half million sessions in The National Year of Reading. Could you be one of their volunteers?

Jane Whitbread, the founder of Schoolreaders says: "Reading out loud helps children develop their vocabulary and pronunciation and enables our volunteers to correct mispronunciation or gently check that a child understands what a word means. It opens discussion, increases a child's confidence and develops a love of reading. Reading enjoyment is the largest indicator of future success. The wonderful thing about what we do is that everyone benefits – the children enjoy reading – the schools are very grateful for the extra resource, and the volunteers get fulfilment from seeing they are really making a difference. It also gives children valuable time with an adult who is not a teacher or parent which aids their social skills."

Penny Hubbard, author of this article and volunteer Norfolk County Ambassador, reads in Hunstanton primary school for two hours a week and confirms this from her own experience.

"It is a win-win for everyone – reading with the children is one of the most rewarding things I have ever done. I love seeing how they progress and the confidence they gain. It is particularly special when a child starts off being reluctant to read out loud but after a few weeks is racing to raise their hand to be first. The teachers give me a wide range of abilities to read with – they decide who they think will benefit the most from the one-to-one time. Some have no reading practice at home – perhaps because their parent(s) cannot read themselves or are too busy; some need their confidence built up and others are suggested because they are quiet and can get overlooked. The teachers do an amazing job but are really grateful for the extra help."

Schoolreaders has already partnered with 57 schools in Norfolk. It is looking for more volunteers who can commit for a year, but the school will usually be flexible if you have a holiday booked during term time.

Penny continues: "Schoolreaders make the process very easy. You apply online at www.schoolreaders.org to tell them a bit about yourself and how far you are able to travel (some people want to walk to school but I was happy to drive up to fifteen minutes) You have a short telephone interview with one of the friendly team and they match you to a local school whose timetable suits the time you are available."

"There is a short online safeguarding course, and the school will also brief you on their safeguarding policies; but it isn't complicated and you will read in a public space (I read in the library area). The school will help you complete a DBS check which is free for volunteers. The Schoolreaders team offer support, top tips and answer any questions. You do not need to be a teacher – simply have a good grasp of English and enjoy reading. There is a private Facebook page where volunteers share experiences and advice and there is always someone on hand to answer questions. It is a supportive community and best of all – it is great fun!"

If you are interested in volunteering or supporting Schoolreaders they would love to hear from you.

www.schoolreaders.org



Penny goes into school once a week to read with children – photo credit Jo Anthony

A reminder for Marlpit readers from Coltishall Primary School that you can also express interest in volunteering as a Reading Champion at the school by emailing the school office on office@coltishall.norfolk.sch.uk.

Home, residential and sheltered library service

Our local Home Library Service provides a books on wheels service to the homes of people who like to use the library but are unable to get to a branch or mobile library due to age, disability or mobility. The service is totally free.

Thanks to volunteers from the Royal Voluntary Service books are delivered on a set day, on a regular monthly basis. The borrower fills in a short questionnaire about their personal likes, favourite authors, subjects that they are most interested in, and whether they need books to be provided in standard or Large Print or even as audio books on CD. The library issues the books to the borrower's library card. The library then removes the books from their card when they are returned via the volunteer. There are no overdue fines with items issued through this service, and there are also no hire charges for audio books.

The service can prove to be valuable for the recipient but also rewarding for the volunteers delivering the books. One of the volunteers offered some of her experiences and thoughts about the service, and what she felt it means to those she visits.

"The home library service is really appreciated by the people I visit, not just for the obvious thing, a nice monthly selection of books to read and enjoy but also a chance to have a friendly chat. I often get to do some small things for them like opening a bottle or tin that they can't manage to open, making a cup of tea, or even picking up some dropped stitches in their knitting when their sight isn't very clear.

"I've made many long-lasting friendships. I've been greeted with cups of tea, freshly dug vegetables from their garden and I've also been given homemade jam and plants for my garden! But most of all, it has been just seeing the genuine appreciation and pleasure people get from a regular visit with a new selection of books. I do love my job.

"I feel that some of them are almost part of my family. I've worried over them, celebrated with them including a hundredth birthday, met visiting relations, and listened to their news. But most of all it is the satisfaction that I am providing a useful service to someone who is housebound, and as you can see both parties benefit from this free service offered by the library."

If you are someone who might benefit from the home library service, or you know of someone who might, contact Wroxham Library on 01603 782560 to ask to be added to a local delivery route.

Or visit the Royal Voluntary Service website, www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk if you would like to volunteer to help deliver the Home Library Service.