

**PAUL HAMLYN FOUNDATION
READING AND LIBRARIES CHALLENGE FUND**

RIGHT TO READ 2001 - 2005

Summary of the current outcomes

“I want to join the library. Then I can be like Matilda in the book. She had lots of books and did magic”

Child in a residential home

BACKGROUND

Most Looked After Children (LAC) achieve well below their potential in education. There are many possible explanations for this. Schools and carers may have low expectations of them and fail to motivate them towards goals. Many LAC have few, if any, books of their own, or opportunities to share books with the adults who care for them. Libraries, where books, resources and a wide range of informal learning opportunities can be had for free, can offer enormous benefits for LAC of all ages and for their carers. However, until the advent of Right to Read in 2001, libraries were not playing a leading role in opening up new routes into reading for these young people.

The Paul Hamlyn Foundation set up the Right to Read Fund to change all this: to get looked after children and their carers excited about books and to ensure that libraries were reaching out to LAC and providing them with the tailored support they needed. We encouraged libraries to work in partnership with Social/Children’s Services and with Education Departments and to develop long-term, sustainable strategies for engaging LAC with books and reading.

Sometimes it has been an uphill struggle. We have learned that foster carers and residential workers are often ill-equipped to support the reading of those in their care. And the scheme has highlighted some of the barriers to LAC accessing libraries and shown how difficult it can be for Libraries, Social Services and Education to work together.

Initially we had to work quite hard to secure applications of quality from local authority partners. We funded a special training programme for librarians to help them better serve the needs of looked after children and we set up training days ourselves to share good practice.

We believe that our efforts have paid off. Twenty two of the **forty five projects** funded have now been completed and externally evaluated (a full list of the projects is available on request.) Outlined below are some of the outcomes and evidence of impact which are emerging. Further evaluation reports will follow.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

Looked After Children

- All (100%) of the projects reported that positive attitudes have been developed towards books, reading and libraries. They also said that children were inspired to engage in other creative activities, through reading and related activities.
- All (100%) of the projects also reported that the children's social skills, confidence and self-esteem had been increased through their involvement in the projects. Through reading activities, the children also improved their communication and literacy skills.
- Book ownership by the young people had been increased in 86% of projects.
- Library membership and use had increased in 56% of the projects, but many of them were unable to track the use by looked after children, because they had not yet allocated a specific borrower category to them. Anecdotally, they also felt that there had been an increase in use, but were unable to evidence it, as yet. Some projects quoted that somewhere between 46-53% of the children contacted went on to become regular library users. In a few authorities this percentage has been higher than the general population of children.
- A few projects have worked with looked after young people excluded from school and provided a valuable service.
- Virtually all (97%) of projects say that they have helped young people view themselves with confidence as readers. They now talk willingly about their reading experiences and preferences, they request specific books, they express how reading makes them feel and they actively seek out books through use of the library service independently.

“We have hopefully been able to show the young people that libraries are warm, friendly, welcoming places for them and their friends to visit and use as they need. This has shown to be the case quite recently, when a young person whom I had met at the very first event came into the library asking to speak to me as she needed someone to talk to. I listened as she told me about the very tough time that she was having since recently leaving the care system. She had most of her possessions destroyed in a fire, including her C.V. which she was most upset about, as she had spent considerable time producing it. She needed it for applying for jobs and was at a loss as what to do next. I was able to take her to the Learning Shop in the Central Library and they helped her produce another. Although this is a relatively small example, I was pleased that she had felt able to come into the library and ask for help, because she had met me at an event.”

Children's Librarian

The Library Service

- 56% of Library Services involved in a *Right to Read* project reported that they had undertaken a review of their procedures and revised or abolished their requirements for proof of identity and the guarantor role. It is likely that others had already done so and did not report it.
- 43% of services had already created a new borrower category for looked after children, so that they could track the usage made of library services and ensure that charges were not imposed and a further 20% reported that they were planning to do so.
- At the same time, they also waived fines, fees and charges for damaged or lost books for looked after children. Where there were no fines fees and charges for children, the cut- off point was often extended for looked after young people or care leavers, in one case up to young people aged 25 years.
- 65% of the projects said that library staff have become more aware of the need to work flexibly when dealing with looked after children.
- Library staff generally felt that they had gained a much greater understanding of the needs of looked after children and an insight into their situation. This often gave them renewed energy and enthusiasm for the fact that books and reading do matter and are important to the quality of life of everyone.

"I feel that I have gained more of an insight into the lives of children in care and it has given me a wider perspective and tolerance for all social groups. I realised that just providing a different environment for these children for a while was enough. I have never knowingly met a child who was in care before, so that has been a real plus. I hope that it has increased my understanding of what they have to deal with"

Member of Library Staff

Social Services/Children's Service

- 86% of projects reported that Social Services managers now have an understanding of the important and unique opportunities that Library services can offer to the children in their care.
- 87% of projects said that Social Services staff have seen evidence of the increase in self esteem and confidence that books and reading can give to looked after children.

- 91% of the projects report that they have raised awareness of the importance of reading and access to good quality and appropriate reading materials with foster carers and/or residential social workers.
- 56% of projects report that they have provided a foster carer's ticket and/or a special loan of some kind for residential homes and that there is increased use of public libraries by staff in residential homes and foster carers.
- 69% of projects have provided advice and/or training for care workers and foster carers which has given them confidence in choosing and using books with the children.

“The input from the project has assisted the Fostering Service in providing information and raising awareness among foster carers of ways in which the availability of books and other materials in the home can help to meet a child's developmental needs and foster a child's sense of achievement. This collaborative working also contributes to the service meeting aspects of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and to improved outcomes for children and young people as expressed in Every Child Matters.”

Team Manager, Family Finding Long Term Fostering Team

Education Department

- School can be a trial for looked after children, especially when placements have moved them from one school to another. *Right to Read* has sometimes been a refuge for children and some projects had deliberately avoided using the school route to reach children.
- Probably as a result of this, only 17% of projects said that they felt that there had been an impact on schools as organisations. However, many projects had representation from the Education Department on their steering group and those representatives felt that they now had a greater understanding of the capacity for informal learning via reading to be just as, if not more, effective in boosting some children's confidence and self belief.
- Projects have often given the children the chance to become involved in a number of creative activities, which has increased their sense of achievement and helped at school. 56% of projects reported that they had organised wider arts and creative events for the children and 21% reported that they had undertaken IT based activities which had improved the children's IT skills.
- Projects have provided an informal learning environment where young people gain valuable skills, building their self esteem and challenging social exclusion. One or two projects mentioned that the SAT's results of

looked after children within the authority had improved during the life of the project, but were unable to provide any evidence of the specific role of the project in this improvement (see the attached case study). However, given the evidence outlined above it would be fair to assume that the observed impact on the children did play a part.

- One project which focussed on the under- fives, attempted to undertake a longitudinal study of a cohort of children, against a baseline figure established in 2001. However, the cohort diminished over time as a result of successful adoption placements and movement to more permanent outside placements.
- They therefore decided to report figures on the 2005 reception year for the remaining looked after project cohort against the baseline score from looked after children in 2001 who were not part of the project.
- The results show an overall percentage increase of achievement in the PSE early learning goals; from 51% in the original set to 72% in 2005. The results were particularly encouraging in relation to increased confidence, self esteem and an ability to form positive relationships with both adults and peers.
- In relation to communication, language and literacy, in the original set, 32% of the goals were reached overall, but in 2005, 59% were met. It was particularly significant that there was an increase from 21% of children to 92% of children achieving level CLL 15 which is: *know that print carries meaning and, in English, is read from left to right and top to bottom.*
- Similarly, 57% more children could *retell narratives in the correct sequence, drawing on the language pattern of stories.*
- Another project which worked with the older age group commented that GCSE grades improved over the life of the project, from 48 looked after children with 1 or more GCSEs at grades A-G in 2001 to 80 with the same in 2003.

“I want to say how worthwhile it has been working with libraries. Library people come in from the perspective of enjoying reading, rather than just learning it. It’s a different approach. The combination of both is beneficial to children. Children and young people choosing books has been a very positive experience. The tremendous support and encouragement our young people have got from libraries has been wonderful. I feel very confident that the relationship will continue and benefit our children”

Senior Teacher, Looked After Children Education Team.

Improved partnership working

- 92% of projects reported improved partnership working with both Social Services and Education Departments and felt that libraries had a better profile with them corporately
- Many library services now had representation on the Looked after Children steering group, either directly or via the project steering group.
- All projects which had used the PHF evaluation guidelines for their reports and therefore commented on the “bigger picture”, were able to demonstrate clearly that the project had delivered against *Framework for the Future*, the *Shared Priorities* and *Every Child Matters*.

“The Director of Social Care and Health agreed to put some funding aside annually to buy resources for residential units. The Library Service will manage this funding and also contribute funding of its own, with a commitment to engage looked after children in deciding what to buy.”

Quote from the final report of a project, when looking at sustainability.

CONCLUSIONS

Several projects have committed themselves to longitudinal studies of the children who have participated in their project, in order to assess the impact more accurately, but the results of those studies will not be available for some time. Some projects have commented that the SATs results of looked after children in their local authority have improved since the initiation of the project, but it is impossible to isolate the interventions which have brought about that improvement.

What is undeniable is that all the projects and the workers involved in them, whether librarians, carers or teachers have observed the beneficial effects of better access to books and reading opportunities and the sense of achievement and enthusiasm which is generated by the simple act of reading for enjoyment. As it is impossible to give a real insight into the projects in a generic report of this kind, a brief case study is attached.

It is particularly gratifying to note that virtually every project states that sustainability will be achieved by fundamental changes in the ways in which the library service operates in relation to looked after children and their carers and by their commitment to sustaining the powerful partnerships which have been created, during the lifetime of the project. In fact, 47% of authorities said that the project had either been mainstreamed,

including in a few cases the project worker's post, or that additional funding had been promised to sustain the main aspects of the work, which bodes well for looked after children's *Right to Read*.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the key findings and outcomes from Right to Read, the following recommendations outline the changes and processes need to ensure that all LAC have the opportunity to access books, reading and libraries from an early age and so be able to read for pleasure and personal advancement.

Local authorities must demonstrate their commitment to the value and importance of children accessing books in the 'home'

Learning begins and is reinforced by the 'home' environment. The experiences of children within the 'corporate family' will have a profound influence on their learning and life chances. Basic to achievement and attainment is the opportunity and the right to read – for information, for pleasure, for learning, for life. The corporate family needs to be effective and integrated in delivering the right level of support through policy and practice to help children achieve their potential as learners.

Designated Resources

New resources must be found, or changes in the way funding is prioritised be made, to ensure that LAC have books of their own and that there are well-stocked libraries in every residential home.

Training for carers

Induction and ongoing training for foster carers and residential workers must include the importance of books, reading and library membership and equip participants with the skills to support the reading of LAC. This should be underpinned by ongoing support and expectations that will help them fulfill their role. Facilitating visits to the local library for LAC should be seen as an essential part of the carer's role. Residential workers should facilitate home visits by the library service for reader development activities and book borrowing.

Involving the Library Service

Authorities should acknowledge libraries' contribution to the reading and learning agendas and to Every Child Matters and involve them in initiatives around multi-agency working and generic skills development.

Library managers should be included on the LAC steering group.

The DfES should talk to DCMS about encouraging all libraries to learn the lessons of Right to Read in the interests of improving the educational prospects for LAC

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About the Paul Hamlyn Foundation

The Paul Hamlyn Foundation is one of the larger independent grantmaking foundations in the UK.

It makes grants to organisations which aim to maximise opportunities for individuals to experience a full quality of life, both now and in the future. In particular it is concerned with children and young people, and others who are disadvantaged.

It prefers to support work which others may find hard to fund, perhaps because it is breaks new ground, is too risky or is unpopular.

It also take initiatives itself where new thinking is required or where it believes there are important unexplored opportunities.

The Foundation current programme is focused on the arts and education. However, it is developing a strategic plan and expects to launch a new programme in September 2006.

