



# Reading for Wellbeing

Sponsored by Ann Cleaves





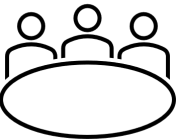

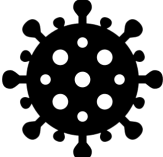
# Learning Report

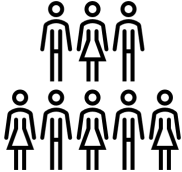

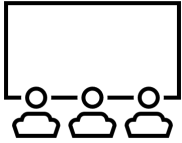

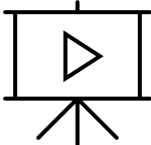



February 2023

## Background

In 2020, author Ann Cleaves presented as the key-note speaker at the North East Public Health England annual conference. She talked about her passion for reading as a means to improving wellbeing and ended her speech with a challenge. She would pledge funding to set up a Reading Worker project, funding two workers. Local authorities across the North East were approached to express an interest to be involved on a match fund basis and the Applied Research Collaborative (ARC) were engaged to evaluate the programme. Six local authorities came forward and a regional steering group was established. The project, set up as a one year pilot, was coordinated by Public Health England (now Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID)) North East and VONNE (Voluntary Organisations Network North East).

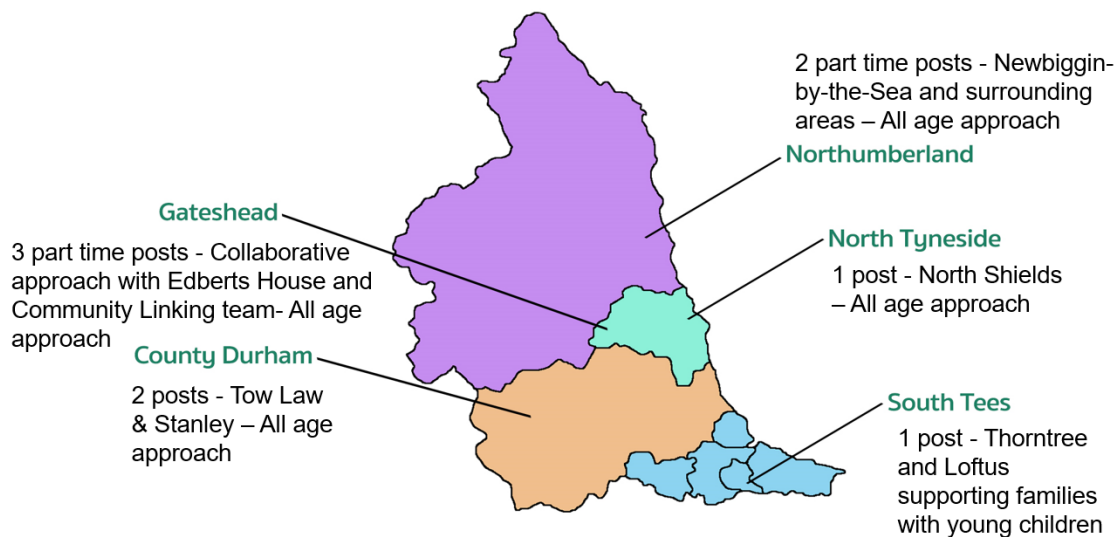
### Timeline:

2020		<b>Funding pledged by Ann Cleaves at North East PHE Regional Conference</b>
		<b>6 North East Local Authorities committed to match fund and establish Reading for Wellbeing Worker posts – partnerships between public health, libraries, community and culture</b>
		<b>Regional Steering Group formed under the ICS Population Health and Prevention Board supported by VONNE and PHE/OHID</b>
		<b>Supported by evaluation from NIHR ARC academic team</b>
		<b>COVID-19 meant the project was delayed in getting started – project relies heavily on face to face engagement</b>

2021		<p><b>9 Reading for Wellbeing Workers employed across 6 LA areas</b></p>
		<p><b>Bespoke induction training commissioned and delivered to all workers by Opening the Book</b></p>
		<p><b>Official launch of project at Gala Theatre in Durham – September 2021</b></p>
2022		<p><b>Project Engagement using a variety of different approaches across the different areas</b></p>
2023		<p><b>Celebration Event held to demonstrate impact inviting range of stakeholders</b></p>
		<p><b>Academic Evaluation due to be published April 2023</b></p>
		<p><b>Further North East areas commit to future roll out of project</b></p>
		<p><b>National interest in the approach via Arts Council and National Association for Social Prescribing</b></p>

## Local Projects- North East

### Reading for Wellbeing Localities



## The Approach

Each area delivered the project with a slightly different approach, targeting different communities and geographical focus. The project was designed to be people centred – never about numbers but about engaging people and developing relationships with people and communities not currently accessing libraries and other mainstream services, tackling social isolation and loneliness and using books and conversations about reading to support wider health and wellbeing outcomes.

The Community Reading Workers support access to stories and reading, including audio books, to help improve the health and wellbeing of those in need of support. They provide a holistic and personalised approach to empower and motivate each person or family to take proactive steps to improve their wellbeing. This could include spaces and places for reading, emotional support and other tools to help mental and physical wellbeing.

The workers go out into the community, engaging with local organisations and individuals. They use reading as a way of starting conversations and making connections. They can then provide tailored, practical help. Talking about reading is a non-threatening way of starting discussion, which can then lead on to wider conversations about health and wellbeing.

## Gateshead

Managed through a partnership between libraries and Edbert House (Community organisation and host for social prescribing link workers). The project had three workers initially – equating to one full time equivalent post – all existing library staff. Participants were identified through Edberts House and the Community Linking project.

New groups have been established to bring together people to talk about reading and books they enjoy. Strong friendships and connections have been created through the development of regular groups and for many a rediscovery of reading for pleasure.

*“If Mam calls, tell her we’re too busy being authors”*

*Codie, 13*

Sessions at Pattinson House with young people aged 8-14 have included book themed content and activities and opportunity for young people to choose books to take home each week. Workshops with poets and artists also saw the young people creating a pro-reading poem and poster artwork campaign.

The workers deliver outreach sessions at independent living homes. Sessions use reminiscence resources, book chat and word and music games to encourage social interaction. Residents are signposted to the Readers at Home service and Borrowbox.

The project is closely aligned the ‘Thrive’ agenda – ensuring Gateshead is a place where everyone thrives and Gateshead Council are committed to mainstreaming the project as part of core library provision.



## County Durham

There are two part time workers (new posts). The project is operationally managed by Culture, Sport and Tourism and delivered in two areas of the County – Tow Law and Stanley.

In Tow Law an all age approach has been taken based on the needs and interests of the local community. Having a worker based there has offered a key service in a rural community without access to a local library. Referral relationships have also been successfully developed with local social prescribing link workers .

In Stanley strong links have been made with local VCSE organisations as a means to engage local people. This includes working with Pact House, Think Postive (with a focus on mental health) and Just for Women. A family group has been established to support parents and children with additional needs and working with Freedom Zone engaging LGBTQ young people aged 18-24 the project has ensured access to good quality queer fiction which has been an important part of their journey and wellbeing.

### **Northumberland**

Managed by the library service, two part time workers were recruited to work initially in Newbiggin but the reach has been expanded to surrounding areas. Good links have been made with Social Prescribing, following an awareness session with local Link Workers to promote the project and is now receiving lots of referrals. Telephone support is provided to ensure that those living in rural areas can still access the project due to rurality issues and the reach of the workers across a vast area.

The workers have engaged children and families through story time sessions and hold regular after school sessions.

### **North Tyneside**

Managed by Libraries there is one part time worker (who was full time at the start of the project, but decreased her hours by choice) from the existing library workforce. The project targets families in the two of the most deprived areas of the borough, engaging parents in reading for pleasure to embed reading as a family activity.

As one example, the Reading Worker engaged a group of parents at a local children's centre. The parents were dropping their children off at nursery and the worker used a taster session on reading to make a connection. The group quickly began to enjoy the sessions and set up a Whatsapp group to keep in touch. They now run independently, with minimal support. As their children are now starting school, the parents have promoted the group to the school with the hope of extending it.

### **South Tees**

Managed by the public health team (joint across Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland local authorities) one Reading Worker (new post) works in two defined neighbourhoods – Thorntree in Middlesbrough and Loftus in Redcar and Cleveland. The emphasis is on links with parents and families with young children, particularly on those where babies were born during lockdown. Through existing local partnerships links with health visiting and early years teams, families were targeted to engage in the

project. Following one to one support provided, the participants requested opportunities to come together in weekly groups to bring them and their young children together to talk about books and reading and continue their reading journey with support. The worker also provides drop in sessions in libraries and 1:1 sessions and support.

### Key Learning:



- The different approaches taken by local authorities provided valuable insight during the test and learn pilot phase
- There isn't a 'gold standard' approach to delivering the project and is very dependent on local arrangements, infrastructure and partnerships
- Lots of opportunities and activity happening at place to link this work into (ie libraries as warm spaces, existing community engagement/ health promotion library posts, library review and restructures, existing engagement activities etc) – it doesn't necessarily need to rely on new posts
- Whilst providing valuable insight and learning, the different approaches have proved hard to evaluate the overall programme as not comparing like for like

## Reading Workers

A total of 9 Reading Workers are in post across the region to support access to books as a means to supporting improved health outcomes. Bespoke induction training was commissioned by Ann Cleeves and developed and delivered by *Opening the Book* to facilitate conversations about the unique role and how to maximise engagement with people and communities the project aimed to reach. Buddying up the workers from different localities during the training proved effective and this peer network and support has continued throughout the project.

***In lieu of having [a physical library space] that's me! I am the library in Tow Law and I provide everything that you would hope a good library does ...***

***Hazel, Reading Worker, Durham***

### Key Learning:



- Buddying up workers across areas and mix of skills (libraries and community development) proved effective during the induction training and throughout the programme
- The commitment and passion shown by all of the workers has been hugely significant to the impact in each locality – getting the right person for the role is critical
- Making links with existing groups and professionals already engaged with the target audience in each locality has been key

## Achievements

During the initial test and learn phase the following achievements have been seen:

- ❖ Funding pledged from Ann and 6 Local Authorities to establish Reading for Wellbeing Project
- ❖ Regional support infrastructure including steering group, operational group and peer support network
- ❖ Bespoke Induction training programme developed and delivered
- ❖ Concept developed and local approaches established
- ❖ 9 Reading Workers in post across 6 LA areas
- ❖ Partnerships established at local, regional and national level
- ❖ Book gifting enabled via Borderline Books and Pan Macmillan
- ❖ Social Prescribing links promoted and sustained effectively
- ❖ Range of activity taking place across the programme engaging people of all ages across a range of settings
- ❖ New areas coming on board following Celebration Event

### Key Learning:



- Support and backing by Ann Cleaves has added real value – the ‘Ann Cleaves’ brand has been effective
- It takes time to embed the approach and to develop relationships
- Links with social prescribing teams and subsequent referrals worked best in areas where awareness sessions were delivered to properly create partnerships and increase understanding about the project



## Impact

The project has engaged people of all ages from targeted communities across the 6 local authority areas.

Through conversations about reading and books it has enabled a range of positive wellbeing outcomes:

- ❖ Making connections between people, tackling social isolation and loneliness

*“Because I have a husband with dementia at home and in 2021 I had breast cancer and went through a horrible, horrible year... it just changes your life really because you don’t feel alone.... You know you’ve got something to look forward to every week..”*

*Marie, participant*

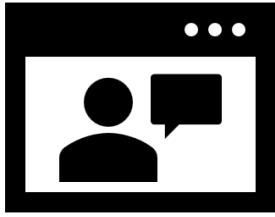
- ❖ A sense of purpose – attending an activity gives participants routine and structure

- ❖ Escapism from day-to-day worries, supporting improved mental health

*“And it’s nice to escape... the book club itself does that for me because the people I meet there are totally unrelated to the problems I’ve had in the last year so I can just be myself with them”*

*Angela, participant*

- ❖ Improved partnership working – strengthening connections with social prescribing and libraries for example



## Impact in video

The following videos show the impact from a range of perspectives...

### [Ian's story](#)

Ian Kirby, participant from Gateshead shared his story at the celebration event in February 2023. We are so grateful to Ian for his personal reflection.

### [Project in action](#)

An overview of the project and the voice of the workers and participants.

## Further Information

[Conference video](#) – Reading for Wellbeing Celebrating Success and Telling the Story Event, Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> February, 2023

For any further information please contact:



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