

PLA Conference 2022

Delivering a family reading challenge with The Reading Agency

- Pilot project started in 2021
- Tackling life's big challenges through the proven power of reading
- Focus on connected communities, life skills and learning, health and wellbeing
- Improve literacy and communication skills, promote joint reading and positive family connections and relationships to support good mental health, encourage peer-to-peer activity and leadership skills
- How it works:
 - Combines two well-established programmes:
 - Reading Ahead (supporting emergent adult readers)
 - Summer Reading Challenge (incentivised programme for 4-11-year-olds)
 - Parents and children read together during visits and calls. The model is built around 6 visits. Parents and children both complete bespoke support resources during the challenge; parents reflect on sessions and access peer support; parents and children receive rewards for taking part.
- Resources:
 - Children: Summer Reading Challenge pack, stickers, books to read, and completion reward
 - Parents: Reading diary, Quick Reads book, information leaflet, certificate, feedback form, peer toolkit
 - Staff: Delivery toolkit, selection of support resources, evaluation form
- Who was involved?
 - HMP Oakwood and Featherstone
 - 29 parents and 31 children
- Other community settings are trialling the model.
- There was huge interest in the workshop, with many prison educators expressing the utility of a project like this and asking how and when the Reading Agency can get to their prisons to implement this.
- Funding from Bromley Trust to evaluate the pilot, which found:
 - increased engagement with reading amongst children and parents (particularly less confident readers)
 - encouraged peer to peer support
 - enhanced participant-staff relationships

- improved meaningful connections between parents and children, bringing them closer together (this was the most significant finding) – ‘a life raft to cling to’ and conversations to discuss and maintain
- A case study was shared of a man who previously didn’t know what to say to his children. However, the medal earned after the programme proved valuable to the child who completed the programme with her dad. She refused to take the medal off because she was so proud of what she accomplished together with her dad.
- One learner went from basic and poor relationships with staff, to writing a book after this programme.
- Benefits to staff involved as well - encouraging peer networking within prisons
- Challenges:
 - Supporting those who are neurodiverse and those who are not literate - (especially prevalent in the prison population). In such cases, the organisation signposts to other organisations, or supports bonding over pictures in books.
 - Logistics of coordination
 - Funding
- Potential to create own stories to include representation (ethnic minorities) or to include original stories that relate to prisoners themselves, and books for those with different literacy abilities?