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Executive summary

Over 18 months, Connecting Stories Two has engaged more than 500,000 people with literacy activities helping to create readers and writers in some of the most disadvantaged communities in the country. The work has had a measurable impact on children in the most deprived communities within our Hubs. When compared to the national average, among children from our high-priority groups:

- 40% more use their public library
- 22% more enjoy reading at school
- 37% more write daily in their spare time.

Not only this, but children in our Hubs, but who are not in our highest priority areas, also reported better outcomes across the board than the national average. In short, the children we have worked with are now more likely to be reading, writing, and engaging with local literary and cultural offers.

This has not been achieved by the staff team alone. Over 700 organisations that do not have literacy as a core part of their work are now working with us. They are building literacy into their daily offers for employees, customers and service users. Alongside them are more than 600 people from our communities, who have volunteered to become Literacy Champions, taking literacy into the heart of communities. This is a major movement, responding to a national literacy challenge at a community level.

In summary, we have:

- Reached over 500,000 people with online author sessions, competitions and public events and directly engaged over 180,000 people through local projects and activities.
- Reached more than 95 million people through our media work and local, behaviour change campaigns.
- Mobilised 600+ people who live and work in our priority communities to become volunteers through our Literacy Champions programme – contributing more than 125,000 hours to engage and encourage readers and writers. They take literacy into the heart of communities and make it accessible to people in places they feel comfortable.
- Delivered a total project value of £4,541,829 including match funding and £829,512 of in-kind support and donated books.
- Maintained a rigorous focus on equality, diversity and inclusion across all our work.
- Worked with 43 publishers of all sizes and 158 authors, illustrators, storytellers and creatives. Together we have responded to the fact that 33% of children don't see themselves in books, rising to 40% of children from ethnic minority backgrounds. We have engaged authors representing a huge range of diversity and identity, helping to raise the profile of their work and connect young people with reading.
- Delivered community led projects with the support of over 800 organisations, ranging from public libraries and cultural partners to food poverty charities, community groups and businesses – including increasing library membership and use.

Overview

Arts Council England's investment in Connecting Stories Two has impacted access to literature across 14 of our National Literacy Trust Hubs, which serve some of the most deprived areas in the country. Over the last 18 months we have been able to engage 183,911 people through locally designed literacy activities and 517,358 young people have taken part in virtual author sessions, draw-a-longs and competitions. The programme has helped them engage with authors, stories and books and created chances for them to build literacy into their lives. These behaviour changes have been supported through a major national campaign, which has reached nearly 95 million people via the media.

This scale of delivery would not have been possible without the growing number of volunteers from our communities, Literacy Champions. Now numbering more than 600, they are people of all ages and backgrounds who live and work in our communities. Between them they have done everything from handing out books at events, learning and then teaching others how to tell stories, designed competitions, and created amazing online content.

At the heart of all our planning have been our community consultation groups, who have now decided to change their name to community engagement groups to better reflect the important role they have in all parts of our planning and development. This aligns with our strategic direction since Connecting Stories One to embed community voices firmly at the centre of our work. They are another set of community volunteers who give voice to the needs, interests and challenges faced by their communities. Our Hub managers and Literacy Champions officer work closely with them, ensuring that the resources we bring meet our audience's needs.

The final major factor in our work is the support of partner organisations. This includes the publishing industry, who as a body, have supported all our work on Connecting Stories. They have provided more than 250,000 free books and magazines, helped connect us to fantastic authors and got to know our communities alongside us. As a result, they have invested directly in programmes like the Big Little Book Club (HarperCollins), LitUp in Hastings (Bloomsbury) and in other Arts Council support programmes, including World of Stories. Together we have been able to champion authors from diverse backgrounds and stories which speak to the many identities and rich heritage of our families – many of whom have struggled in the past to see themselves in books. For many of these publishers, the cost-of-living crisis and ongoing effects of the pandemic cannot be understated, with many reducing their output of titles and number of books printed. Despite this, support from independent publishers has persisted and all partners continue to offer generous book donations, time and resources to support Connecting Stories. This, in turn, has supported publishers as authors can celebrate their titles and share their work with children across our Hub areas, which boosts the profile and helps them to reach new audiences.

Across our Hubs we can point to more than 800 Connecting Stories local partners. These include food banks and poverty alleviation charities, meaning we reach families on the

margins of society with little or no access to books. We also work with environmental groups and outdoor organisations, which have come to see the role that authors, and their work can play in promoting health, wellbeing and activity. We have learnt from schools, including those serving our highest priority communities, who help us to tailor offers to the children and young people they teach. Cultural groups have enabled us to incorporate plays, performance and art into the journey we can offer families, and of course libraries, where we are able to prove an increase of sign-ups thanks to our Annual Literacy Survey.

Connecting Stories was designed to create readers in disadvantaged and diverse communities. The work was planned and delivered around six core aims:

- Improve attitudes and behaviour towards reading for pleasure by increasing access and participation in literary activities in our most disadvantaged communities.
- Strengthen diversity and inclusion through deeper and targeted messaging and engagement so that groups that may not otherwise engage in literary activities are actively engaged as creators, participants, and audiences of literature.
- Catalyse new partnerships and leverage existing ones to create a sustainable cross-sectoral coalition that work directly with local people to reach target audiences and deliver sustainable literature experiences.
- Support the role of local and central libraries and librarians as community anchors by embedding them throughout our wider cross-sectoral partnerships.
- Grow relationships between publishers and places that promote thriving communities with reading at their heart.
- Demonstrate the strategic importance of a place-based approach to grow demand and change local systems to ensure there are no barriers to engaging with literature.

To assess the impact of our work, we used a mixed method approach, collecting both quantitative (surveys of children, young people, adults and community partners, as well as audits) and qualitative (community consultations, interviews, case studies) insight from our various stakeholders to help us understand whether we have achieved what we set out to achieve.

To demonstrate this, we have approached the evaluation from several angles at once: post event feedback, engagement and reach metric, community audits and surveys and the greater detail from surveying children and young people through the Annual Literacy Survey (ALS). To evidence change for children and young people we relied on annual data we collect nationally from a large cohort of children and young people aged eight to 18. Now in its eighteenth year, the Annual Literacy Survey asks children and young people about their enjoyment of reading and writing, the frequency with which they engage in reading and writing, their attitudes towards reading and writing as well as their motivations for engaging in these activities. We also collect background data from these children and young people about their gender, age, whether or not they receive free school meals and ethnic background. Additionally, because the survey is completed through schools, we also collect data about the school they are attending, where it is located, what type of school it is, the

free school meal uptake at that school, and crucially, whether it is a school we work with as part of our Hub work.

In 2023, 64,066 eight to 18-year-olds across the country participated in this survey. 5.4% (n = 3,453) of these children and young people attended schools in our high priority wards, which are the schools that we have worked most closely with through Connecting Stories Two. This work focused on increasing literacy experiences and access to books, through virtual author visits, creative writing competitions, book donations, and other cultural activities. 18.5% of respondents (n = 11,826) came from schools within our 14 Hub areas, which are characterised by our community level work, including bespoke interventions, training and volunteering opportunities, and a variety of literacy events. Finally, 76.2% (n = 48,787) of respondents came from children in schools not within our Hubs, nor within our high priority wards. This group became our national comparison to provide a context for the children and young people we are working with.

We were able to use these three groups to compare behaviours, attitudes and engagement with literacy and culture, of those we supported in school directly (high priority wards), those we supported via their community (the Hubs) and those we did not directly support (non-Hub areas). For our Connecting Stories work to show great success, we would hope to see positive behaviours and attitudes, as well as access and participation in literacy and cultural activities, to be most prominent among the children we worked most closely with.

Free school meal (FSM) breakdown

The National Literacy Trust focuses its work on schools and communities facing high levels of disadvantage. Free school meal status is used as our key indicator of economic disadvantage for children and young people, and collecting such information enables us to develop a sense of differences in literacy behaviours and attitudes across these groups. As such, those we worked most closely with (our high priority wards) were characterised by a high proportion of free school meal eligibility (37.7%). Free school meal eligibility for those in our Hub areas (25.6%) was still higher than our national group, but slightly lower than in our high priority wards. Finally, our non-Hub areas comparison showed a lower proportion of free school meal eligibility (15.5%).

In 2022, our research established a widening gap in reading enjoyment between children who did (43.8%) and did not (48.8%) receive free school meals (Cole et al., 2022). However, our analysis found that more of the children and young people in our high priority wards (characterised by a higher percentage of free school meal eligibility) said that they enjoyed reading in their spare time (53.5%), compared with those in our non-Hub areas (44.0%; see Table 1). Additionally, more said that they wrote daily (25.1% vs 18.3%). As such, the results tell us that the work of Connecting Stories reaching as many children as possible in our Hubs but with a special focus on those in our priority wards, has made a significant difference in their development to becoming readers writers and consumers of culture.

Table 1: Connecting Stories Two – General impact.

	High priority wards	Hubs	Non-Hub areas
Enjoy reading at school	53.5%	44.2%	44.0%
Enjoy reading in their spare time	46.3%	41.3%	43.7%
Write daily	25.1%	21.9%	18.3%
Attend public library	32.6%	25.2%	23.3%

Table 2 shows in greater detail that across almost all questions, children and young people from our high-priority communities responded the most favourably, with those from our Hubs but outside our high-priority communities the second and last are children and young people from the rest of the country. It is notable that children and young people from our high-priority communities are also more likely to be entitled to free school meals and be from a non-white background.

The table also shows that across our communities, more individuals felt empowered to support their children’s literacy and more engaged in literacy, including creative writing activities.

The partners we worked with equally felt empowered to reach new groups within their local community, with a better understanding of their specific literacy challenges. The place-based tool, which is used annually to understand how effective each area is against the eight principles of place-based working, shows that Hubs have made improvements in key areas across the network. This reflects not only how the Hub itself is working and delivering change, but also takes account of how partner organisations are benefiting from working directly with one another.

“The Hub has provided resources that would not have been available to us. We have also been given guidance on best practice.”

Table 2: Key stats

<p>2023 Annual Literacy Survey</p>	<p>More children and young people from our high-priority schools, compared with their peers from our local area lower priority schools, and national schools, showed positive attitudes and behaviours towards reading and writing.</p> <p>Respectively,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More said that they enjoyed reading at school (53.5% vs 44.2% vs 44.0%) and in their spare time (46.3% vs 41.3% vs 43.7%). • More said that they write daily (25.1% vs 21.9% vs 18.3%). • More said that they were confident in their reading (80.2% vs 75.3% vs 77.4%) and writing (73.7% vs 67.6% vs 67.7%) abilities. • More said that they talked about what they were reading with friends (35.4% vs 30.7% vs 30.3%) and family (44.1% vs 41.0% vs 40.5%). • More wrote for different reasons, for example, to relax (35.2% vs 27.9% vs 22.8%) or to feel creative (49.7% vs 44.9% vs 40.8%). • More read for different reasons, for example, to learn about new things (55.7% vs 48.4% vs 44.3%) or to understand the views of others (39.9% vs 33.2% vs 31.0%). • More said that they carry on writing even when they find it difficult (53.3% vs 45.6% vs 41.3%). • More engaged in literary events, for example, creative writing groups (18.9% vs 16.9% vs 14.6%) or storyteller events (14.4% vs 10.6% vs 8.4%). • More attended their school library (56.9% vs 48.6% vs 50.9%) and local library (32.6% vs 25.2% vs 23.3%).
<p>Community survey</p>	<p>Community members from across our network shared what had changed over the last six months for them in terms of their reading and writing confidence, and engagement with local cultural activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More felt very confident about writing now (44.8%) compared with six months ago (40.2%). • More than 4 in 5 (81.8%) parents felt very confident reading with their child, compared with 3 in 4 (75.0%) six months ago. • More community members visited cultural spaces very/quite regularly, compared with six months ago: For example, more now visit their local bookshop (50.8%) and library (48.9% vs 44.6%).

Partners survey	<p>Partners had positive views towards the impact of working with the National Literacy Trust.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 97.0% (n=32) agreed that since working with the National Literacy Trust, they are using more local assets to achieve aims. • 91.0% (n=30) agreed that since working with the National Literacy Trust, they better understand the specific literacy challenges in the community and have reached new groups within the local community. • 100% (n= 33) agreed that any issue that arose during the process was jointly and proactively resolved with the National Literacy Trust. • 96.9% (n=31) agreed that the success of the project in meeting the agreed outcomes was clearly communicated.
Place-based working tool	<p>Partners used the place-based working tool, which outlines the eight principles of effective place-based working, to assess how effectively they had been implemented in each Hub over the past year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A majority of Hubs (60%) indicated improvements against most of the eight principles over the past year. • The two Hubs that remained largely unchanged were mature ones that were already performing well. <p>Comments from the Hubs provided more insight into the changes they experienced over the past year. For example, one Hub told us:</p> <p>“The Hub has a strong vision and brings together an array of partners who can support that and add further local context. The Hub is open to new partners and actively looking for them, meaning that the agenda is being strengthened and supported.”</p>
Literacy Champions	<p>Literacy Champions shared a variety of benefits of engaging with the programme, and outlined some of the impact they thought their volunteering had on their community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost all agreed that they have encouraged others to engage with literacy (94.2%) and have helped others in their community to access resources to support reading (93.2%). • Almost 9 in 10 agreed that they have modelled positive literacy behaviour to others in their community (87.2%) and feel that they have had a positive impact on literacy in their community (86.3%). • More than 3 in 4 agreed that being a Literacy Champion has improved their confidence to deliver informal literacy provision in their community (77.7%), and has increased their understanding of the importance of literacy (77.4%).

Publishers and authors

Our work with publishers has strengthened over the 18 months of the work. We have cultivated the links that were established between publishers and individual Hubs in Connecting Stories One and they have continued to support with book donations and access to their authors. With donations of books standing at over 160,000 during the last 18 months, the industry has made a concerted effort to support this work, which has enabled us to respond to the growing poverty barrier that families face when accessing books and literature. The authors are also valuable parts of the behaviour change journey which we want to take children on. The attendance figures at virtual author events (697,617) and the testimonials from children (see below) show how important it is in helping children connect with literacy:

"The girls were so inspired by meeting Maeeda, hearing her story and being motivated to go for their dreams. They are fascinated by the theme of Jinns in *Nura* and *The Immortal Palace*. Such a treat, we are extremely grateful for, as you know budget cuts, have restricted us from offering such experiences. They will all (150) be reading Maeeda's book over the summer."

Headteacher, Belle Vue Girls School

Walker Books worked with our Hub in Middlesbrough to gift 500 copies of *Loki: A Bad God's Guide to Being Good* by author **Louie Stowell** as part of a partnership festival developed by the Hub and local council, with support from Walker called the 'Big Boro Book Bash'. Authors Louie Stowell, **Chitra Soundar** and **Jamie Russell**, and local writers **Gabrielle Kent** and **James Harris** all took part in workshops for children from priority neighbourhoods in the town. This is the second time the festival had taken place, the first being under Connecting Stories One and there are now plans for it to become an annual celebration of books and literacy in the town. The support of a major UK publisher has been critical in making this possible.

"James Harris is sooooo funny and did you know he's actually from Middlesbrough? I want to be exactly the same as him when I get older."

"I got to talk to my favourite author! It was amazing!"

"It was the best trip of Year 5."

"I really enjoyed getting to ask real authors questions. I found them really interesting."

"We got a free book - awesome!"

Walker Books also supported our work in Bradford by launching their bestselling title, *Nura and the Immortal Palace*, in our Hub, providing funding for the Bradford Stories Bus, donating books to communities and providing author-time for free. They chose to do so due to relevance of the book to Bradford communities as it celebrates Muslim culture and traditions. The author, **Maeeda T. Khan**, visited from the US. This is significant given that book launches of this scale usually generate income and press for the publisher and title,

especially US-based authors. Their decision to instead fund our work and support our communities demonstrates commitment to championing diverse and representative voices.

Bloomsbury has continued their support for work in Hastings through a major new project in the seaside town, LitUp. This is a partnership between the publisher, the Hub and the Brighton Academy Trust, which manages seven schools in the town. Alongside an investment of £50,000 (renewed for the new financial year 2023/24), Bloomsbury has also donated books and provided authors for events such as **Bali Rai**. The LitUp project was co-designed with Bloomsbury, teachers and with input from children and young people. It runs over half an academic year and has three main strands:

- Teacher training and developing their knowledge of children’s literature to help them use a wider range of texts in their work
- A programme of activities to promote reading for enjoyment among children and young people
- Family engagement activities based around schools to champions reading at home.

Thanks to the wider work supported by Connecting Stories, Bloomsbury has also helped support a community-run library in the Ore area of Hastings and provided additional books for refugees and other people in temporary accommodation in the town.

HarperCollins’ Little Big Book Club was launched under Connecting Stories One and ran in Stoke-on-Trent, Blackpool and Manchester. Under Connecting Stories Two, this has been expanded to support then entire network of 14 Hubs. It has retained the same approach of working with five priority primary schools to engage reluctant readers and their parents. The groups are normally small, which gives them time and space to explore new books together and encourage parents to build a strong home learning environment. This initiative is only possible with the contribution of books and support from HarperCollins, the local teams’ insight and links with schools and families, and funding from ACE.

Quotes from children who took part:

“Little big book club was lots of fun and I enjoyed reading all the books.”

“I liked how every week we read different books and we got to take books home.”

When asked ‘What was your favourite thing about Little Big Book Club?’:

- *“Reading with my Mum.”*

- *“Reading with my Dad.”*

- *“Picking new books because I love reading and I liked that I had a go at trying new things. Before, I didn’t like book club and it has encouraged me to read more and now I love reading.”*

As well as the major publishing houses, a major focus of our time has been on working with independent and small publishers. 84% of our supporting publishers are independent and six are based in our Hubs:

- UCLan Publishing, Blackpool
- Owlet Press, the Black Country
- Emma Press, Birmingham
- Child's Play, Swindon
- Aseda Press, Nottingham
- HopeRoad Publishing, Manchester

Faber Children's Books initially supported our work in Doncaster and were an instrumental partner in the development of the Mexborough literacy lab, based in Ted Hughes' former primary school. Faber granted us free use of Hughes's poems and illustrations to support an ongoing programme of author events, poetry competitions and resources. Since its opening Faber has sent four authors and poets to the literacy lab to engage and inspire children from local primary schools around Mexborough and have helped stock the new bookshelves with lots of exciting titles and decorations. With Faber's support we have engaged over 350 children in Mexborough in events and competitions.

Faber are also committed to building and strengthening their link with our Bradford Hub in the coming months. This has come from a series of events and engagements supporting their local author **Harry Heape**, who has now reached over 1,250 children across Connecting Stories One and Two. The work in Bradford to support Harry was acknowledged by Faber this year as a great success, resulting in their decision to launch Harry's latest title on the Bradford Bus for two schools in target wards rather than opting for a more traditional book launch. Both Harry Heape and Faber have made financial donations towards the Bradford Bus. This partnership has grown stronger each year and as a result, Faber have agreed to partner with us to launch a major poetry title from **Max Porter** in our Birmingham Hub as part of Connecting Stories Three. Involving workshops for young people and funding to support local poets, with all ticket sales being donated by Faber to Birmingham Stories.

Owlet Press is an independent children's publishers committed to changing children's futures through inclusive, inspiring and imaginative books. They are committed to supporting debut authors from diverse and underrepresented communities, and securing national and international acclaim for their titles. **Owlet Press** joined Connecting Stories Two to support our work in the Black Country, choosing to support the Hub as many of their authors live in the area. In June 2021, founder and author **Sam Langley-Swain** joined families in Sandwell Library to celebrate Pride. Sam shared *What Wesley Wore*, a picture-book promoting positive messaging around accepting yourself and being proud of who you are, and led a craft activity for families to create their own wardrobe for Wesley. They provided a generous discount on books to ensure each child left the session with a copy of the book. In 2022, their authors **Monika Singh Gangotra** and **Tarah L. Gear** visited several schools across target wards reaching collectively around 300 children. Their books *The*

Sunflower Sisters and *The Brownest Mouse* in town were chosen to share based on feedback from consultation groups asking for books to boost confidence around skin-colour and heritage and encouraging children to be proud of who they are. Monika read from her book and discussed issues of colourism, sharing the characters celebrations of each other's Nigerian and South Asian traditions and communities. Each child created their own sunflower in the sessions, writing a positive affirmation about themselves on each petal. **Owlet Press** has continued to support our work with generous discounts, author time and donations. Our connections to schools and communities that are local to their authors and as well as our commitment to championing diverse voices, stories and representation in books have allowed us to boost their profile and connect them with key audiences. As a result of our work in the last year, we are now discussing a wider donation of their books across our Hub areas.

Authors and the work are fundamental to our equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) work. Those with backgrounds rooted in other cultures and languages can connect with audiences in powerful ways. Authors like **Burhana Islam** shared the importance of championing diverse voices during her Manchester event in June:

“When I was growing up I didn’t see myself in books...which is why I wrote my book about a Bengali Muslim family. When you see yourself in a book you feel like you belong”.

Our relationship with schools and communities across the country has allowed us to connect highly relevant authors and books with audiences who share identities and experiences and promote empathy. Young adults like Rinnah (Year 9) from Middlesbrough commented after attending an event that the authors shared positive messaging around *“accepting your race and reading books”*. They felt that the event was:

“...very inspiring and I really adore the fact that they told us to accept ourselves no matter what. This is not just helping people feel confident, but it is also true. No matter who you are, your race, who you believe in or not believe, who you identify, you are a human and you should be treated and respected as one”.

Marketing and Communications

The Connecting Stories Two marketing and communications plan has been delivered against three interlocking strands of audience development.

Building awareness – using a range of media channels to ensure increased awareness of the value of books and reading, the universality of their appeal and what is available through us and our partners. This has been done to great effect with media reach figures of 94.8million over the life of the campaign. This is also where our work on major national moments including Take10 and spotlight moments around Black History Month and Pride has taken priority.

Targeted campaigning - drawing heavily on our Experian data and insight from local partners and staff. The most effective activity happened at a hyper-local level range from in-person storytelling sessions for refugee families in Swindon, to events on the Bradford Stories Bus. These efforts have been supported by targeted (and tailored) activity on our local social media channels to maintain engagement with audiences.

Activities through partners and communities - such as collaborating on the series of summer park events in Stoke that resulted in the sign-up of 500 new library members. The campaign has been very successful in building a behaviour change journey for children, young people and families.

Take 10

Take 10 promotes the link between reading for pleasure and good mental wellbeing, and supports the aims of the 2020-2030 Arts Council strategy. It is now a major calendar moment across our Hubs network and while it is not the only event during which the Hubs champion reading and wellbeing, it is the most high-profile.

In the latest moment at 10am on Monday 10 October (World Mental Health Day), over 58,000 people across the UK took part in the National Literacy Trust's **#Take10ToRead challenge**, which encouraged everyone to drop everything and read for ten minutes to boost their mood.

Over 23,700 children from schools and early years settings tuned in to a digital event with author and performer **Jordan Stephens** and illustrator **Beth Suzanna**, who read their story *The Missing Piece* (**Bloomsbury Children's Books**). The duo discussed how they created the story together, sharing their favourite moments, and encouraged participation from the audience.

A further 34,500 children aged 7 – 12 tuned in to a second virtual event with **Natalie Costa**, author of *Love Being You* and *Know Your Feelings* (**b small publishing**). Natalie discussed the creative process behind her books before sharing her top tips for looking after our minds. She then called upon all attendees to spend 10 minutes on self-led reading time after the event.

This is one of the major public moments that will continue in Connecting Stories Three.

Black History Month

This year Connecting Stories and the wider National Literacy Trust showed its support for Black History month by spotlighting some of our favourite black authors, illustrators and characters from children's books. We were keen to reflect and speak to the many different audiences within our communities.

Lack of diversity is widespread in the creative industries, including publishing. We first included questions about diversity and reading in our 2020 Annual Literacy Survey, which told us that that 1 in 3 (32.7%) children and young people aged nine to 18 said they didn't see themselves in what they read. This percentage increased for younger children, children from ethnic minority backgrounds, children from lower income homes and those who preferred to describe their gender as other than 'boy' or 'girl' (Best et al., 2020).

The publishing industry is making significant efforts to increase representation of minority ethnic characters in children's books. It notes that while the percentage of books featuring minority ethnic characters has risen - from just 4% in 2017 to 20% in 2022 - there is some way to go before books are truly reflective of the UK population.

To help with this, Connecting Stories developed resources for:

- Children ages five to seven based on 'Iconic black characters'
- Children ages seven to 11 with a 'Did you know?' research project about black writers and illustrators, focusing on speaking and listening
- Children ages 11-14 using the same 'Did you know?' theme, but with a focus on persuasive writing as the outcome.

There were also Black History and Black Lives Matter book lists, and a project in Manchester called 'See Myself in Books'.

World Book Day

World Book Day and National Literacy Trust research shows that many of the children we focus on through World Book Day activities are least likely to visit a shop to redeem their £1 book token, which is gifted as part of the annual celebrations.

Working with World Book Day we developed a major programme of engagement activities with authors (both virtual and in person), worked with our Literacy Champions, local libraries and other partners to get World Book Day books into the hands of children. We also supported a messaging campaign in schools to champion 'recycle and reuse' rather than encouraging expensive dressing up.

Across the country we achieved:

- **338** pieces of coverage across national and regional media, reaching an audience of over **205 million**.
- **92,898** visits to our World Book Day webpage.
- **18,845** resource downloads.
- **320,000** children and young people attending our virtual events.

- **1,000** children attending in-person flagship events in Hubs and in partnership with World Book Day
- In total, **over 12,500** children took part in World Book Day Hub events.

Delivery with communities

The people living in our Hub areas across the country, while being some of the most disadvantaged in the country, are also dynamic, creative, and often inspiring. Our work is planned and delivered according to three guiding principles.

- Diversity and inclusion is at the centre of and shapes our work
- Community activation, through volunteers, community voices and partners drives our work and makes it sustainable
- Partnerships give our work greater reach and more impact.

Over the 18 months of Connecting Stories Two, these three principles have been at the heart of our successes. We now have more and more-representative voices shaping our work through our community engagement groups and a huge growth in our number of Literacy Champions. Projects delivered for the first time under Connecting Stories One have been repeated with embedded partner support, including the Big Boro Book Bash, Eco Literacy Champions (supported by Siemens), the Faber Author in residence programmes in Doncaster and the Great Green Read in Doncaster and Nottingham. Local partners like Ore Community Library credit the support of Connecting Stories Two with expanding their reach and work with communities and the library service in Stoke points to our joint events giving a massive boost to library members.

“We gave 500 books away in the Family Zone marquee at Doncaster Pride and talked to the children about the joys of reading! We helped them to choose a book that was suitable for them and converted a few teenage boys, who said they didn't like to read and went away with a book that they hopefully enjoyed. Dr Bev read my book to a group of children, who really enjoyed the experience, and we did activities with the children too to encourage them to get creative. There was a great atmosphere throughout the day and everyone was happy to leave with a complimentary book.”

As well as diversity in our volunteers, the schools that we worked directly with also showed significant diversity in terms of ethnicity and children receiving free school meals, as exemplified by responses to our Annual Literacy Survey in early 2023. See table 3.

Table 3: Demographic information¹, by priority group

	Schools we worked with (Priority schools)	Schools we did not work with directly (lower-priority schools), but are located in a Hub	Schools we did not work with directly (non-priority schools), and are not located a Hub (non-Hubs)
Boy	44.8%	46.9%	50.1%
Girl	55.2%	53.1%	49.9%
FSM	37.7%	25.6%	15.5%
Non-FSM	62.3%	74.4%	84.5%
Key Stage 2	54.7%	29.4%	9.8%
Key Stage 3	34.3%	56.1%	71.1%
Key Stage 4	10.9%	13.5%	15.8%
Key Stage 5	0.1%	0.9%	3.4%
White	44.5%	72.5%	71.7%
Mixed	5.9%	6.5%	6.4%
Asian	40.8%	13.6%	14.2%
Black	7.1%	5.7%	6.0%
Middle Eastern	1.6%	1.7%	1.7%

¹ Of those who responded to our Annual Literacy Survey

Festivals and mass engagement events

Part of the work across Hubs has been to celebrate reading, authors, books and engage large numbers of children and their families in public and invited events. Each Hub has planned their activities with the support of local organisations and their community engagement groups to tap into local assets, moments and interests. They often feature local creatives and storytellers, and profile local partners such as the library service.

Some highlighted examples are below.

Birmingham

In July 2022, the Birmingham Hub hosted its first ever festival, **'My Commonwealth Story'**, in advance of **The Commonwealth Games**. It used the excitement and passion surrounding the Commonwealth Games to motivate and inspire people of all ages to engage with literacy.

Through a packed agenda of talks, workshops and panel discussions, attendees had the opportunity to engage with high profile speakers, showcase their literacy skills and think about what the Commonwealth Games mean to them. Attendees were able to hear from authors, discover new academic research, exchange stories and create new connections through networking.

All attendees received a goody bag and a free book of their choice from the Birmingham Stories team. Over 1,000 books were gifted to young people and adults across the week.

Consultation played a key part in the shaping of the festival. **The Commonwealth Games** was a major motivating factor for many local charities and partners. Schools were very much in favour of event opportunities in the lead up to, rather than during **The Commonwealth Games**. **The University of Birmingham** also wanted to investigate assumptions of the word 'commonwealth'. This helped us to shape the programme to appeal to people with connections to commonwealth countries and celebrate under-represented voices.

The Hub also hosted a variety of 'story exchanges' - a group workshop with the objective of increasing empathy levels through sharing stories- based on the theme of commonwealth. These took place at **The Black British Book Festival**, an Islamic women's group (**Smart Light**), with an **Age Concern** group of veterans, and **Birmingham Adult Education Service** students. They all responded to the question – "What does the commonwealth mean to you?"

Since the festival, we have developed connections with schools, who have signed up to hear about our offers. They are now more likely to engage with book donations and attend more events, building on a culture of literacy and learning in their settings.

Middlesbrough

A celebration of children's literature took place in Centre Square and used surrounding venues including Central Library and Middlesbrough Town Hall on 14 July 2022, the Big Boro Book Bash.

Over 470 children from 12 participating primary schools took part in a series of author-lead workshops, with each child receiving a Big Boro Book Bash branded goody bag containing a copy of *Loki: A Bad God's Guide to Being Good* by author Louis Stowell.

Bestselling authors Louie Stowell, Chitra Soundar, Jamie Russell, Gabrielle Kent and James Harris took part in workshops for the pupils throughout the day. In addition, there was a recycling and environmental sustainability-themed workshop provided by Middlesbrough Council's environment team, tying into some themes discussed by author Chitra Soundar.

The pupils created their very own Norse God with Louie Stowell, learnt all about what inspired Chitra Soundar to become an author, drew fantastical monsters with James Harris, asked themselves 'what if?' with Gabrielle Kent, and discovered why video games are actually good for you with Jamie Russell.

Feedback from schools and participating pupils was universally positive, with all schools rating the event as 'excellent' and expressing their desire for this to become an annual celebration of reading and children's literature.

"We would be delighted to attend another Big Boro Book Bash. We thoroughly enjoyed the day and found it very aspirational. Some of our children had read the books previously and felt they were meeting someone really famous. Some of them were very much in awe. It was lovely to see an author from Middlesbrough - I think this really made a difference and relatable for our children. They could see that they too, if desired, could become an author."

Stoke-on-Trent (for full case study see appendix)

In partnership with Stoke-on-Trent Libraries, Stoke Reads delivered seven storytelling festivals in parks across the six towns of Stoke-on-Trent during the summer holidays. The aims were to:

- Inspire families to enjoy stories together and develop a love of reading
- Provide a free, fun day of family activities
- Direct families to use their local libraries as a sustainable way to engage with literacy
- Support the health and wellbeing of families by encouraging an active and healthy lifestyle.

A major focus was the partnership with the library service and driving sign ups. This was executed at each of the summer activities in public parks and resulted in more than 500 new members.

Table 4: Engagement breakdown

Event locations	Date	Number of children/books	New library members
Tunstall Park	Fri 29 July	1000	93
Burslem Park	Tues 2 August	500	34
Yeaman Street Park	Fri 5 August	450	45
Fenton Park	Tues 9 August	600	63
Hanley Park	Fri 12 August	500	46

Longton Park	Tues 16 August	900	112
Bucknall Park	Fri 19 August	700	109
Total		4650	502

Feedback from families was positive in person and on social media:

Mum - Great organisation, so many things for the children to try, and a bonus that it was all free! It is great that reading is being encouraged in such a way. Loved the storyteller and he was great at involving the children. ... all in all a great success, thank you for all your efforts 😊

Grandmother - Fabulous day out. Thank you so much, my granddaughter loved the stories and activities.

Mum - We managed to get to 3 had a lovely time at each one every time, effort and kindness put in to ensure the children have a lovely time is a credit to everyone involved. Thank you for helping us have fun during the summer holidays 😊❤️

Mum - A fantastic family event! Thank you to everyone involved. A fantastic day at Tunstall 'Tales In The Park' thank you for putting on such a brilliant event with so many activities! It was lovely to explore a local park that we have never even visited before.

Mum - This was a fantastic day thank you so much my little girl loves her books she received today

Dad - Hi 😊 we've been to your event at Burslem Park today and it was brilliant. Thank you, you all deserve massive credit for organising such good events!

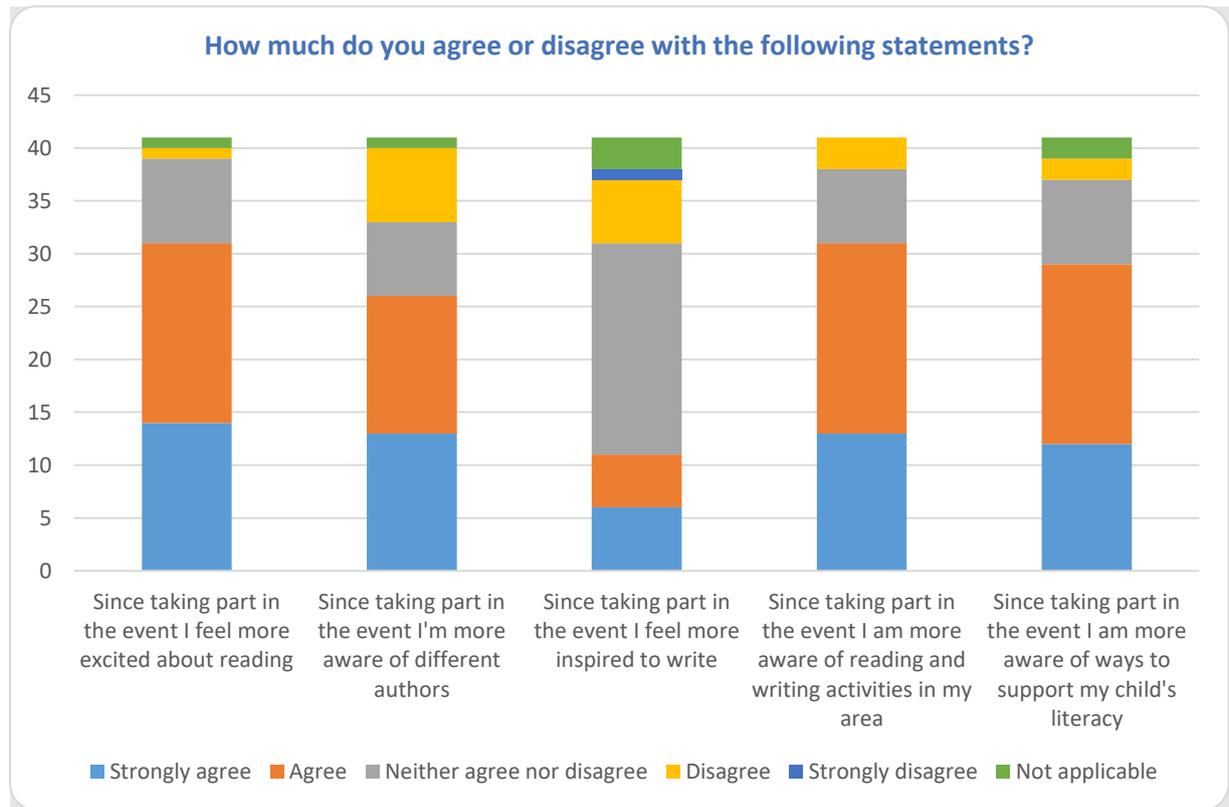
Mum - Was a brilliant event thank you my twins got there first books 📖📖 xx





Feedback from families was positive. A significant majority of people responded that the events had made them more excited about reading, more aware of different authors and activities in their local area, and how to support their child(ren's) literacy (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Impact of the event on participants



Co-developed partnership programmes

Working with partners at strategic, delivery and local level is integral to both effective place-based work and sustainability and our efforts to enhance and mobilise community assets. The examples below highlight some of the ways in which Connecting Stories Two has been able to enhance the capacity of partners in the Hubs and help them reach communities who might otherwise be excluded.

Hastings

Hastings is a fantastic example of how support from Connecting Stories has enabled a local community library to expand its reach into the local and wider community, build new partnerships and increase the number of active members it has. **Ore Community Library** is a volunteer led library situated in an area of high deprivation in Hastings. The library is run by **Ore Community Library Group (OCLG)**, a registered charity, which established itself in direct response to the planned closure of the library in 2020.

The **OCLG** recognised the value of the library, as it was and is, the only community resource in Ore that directly supports local people to improve their literacy. The library opened its doors to the public in May 2021 and the Hastings Hub has been working in partnership with Ore Community Library to achieve their aims of growing the library membership, improving literacy levels and generating a love of reading among local residents.

Outputs of our partnership working

- **Book gifting** – since March 2022 we have donated 1,170 books
- Integral member of **Hastings Hub Steering Group** – representatives from the library provide insight on local needs and contribute to the design and delivery of literacy activities in Hastings.
- Three Literacy Champions are now situated in the library, developing and delivering literacy initiatives including audiobook story time sessions, writing competitions, World Book Day book gifting, Christmas book gifting and ‘look for a book’ activities.

Outcomes and legacy

- Working in partnership with the National Literacy Trust for World Book Day in 2022, they received and distributed 400 World Book Day titles, attracted 94 visitors on the day (41 adults, 53 children) and enlisted 12 new library members (compared to 26 visitors the previous year).
- Increased community activation through Literacy Champions in their immediate area - Literacy Champions have designed and delivered writing competitions, audio storytelling sessions, the Summer Reading Challenge and facilitated Christmas book gifting to those most in need.
- Increased library footfall and membership by being able to offer good quality resources as incentives for activities and initiatives. For example, library membership has increased active members up to 750 and cite World Book Day as one of the reasons for this.

- Book gifting has enabled them to develop a more diverse, quality book stock and develop partnerships with other organisations in Ore, including **Dom's Food Mission**, **The Salvation Army (Hastings Citadel)** and **Morrisons** community team. This allows them to deliver a range of targeted and community outreach activities including storytelling, and reading and writing for pleasure activities.
- Their involvement in the OSG has helped them to connect and work collaboratively with others in the community to support literacy improvements and share best practice.

Blackpool

Both **Blackpool Libraries** and **The Blackpool Grand Theatre** wanted to make their work more meaningful to young people, especially teenagers. We know that many of our culture partners struggle to engage this age group, so in consultation with young people, the Hub team devised a new project. We linked the libraries and the Grand Theatre with three youth organisations, who work with young people in areas of high literacy need in our priority wards:

- **Boathouse Youth** – Blackpool's leading youth charity with centres in Bloomfield (South Shore) and Grange Park
- **The Magic Club** – a youth club serving young people in Claremont
- **URPotential** – a community interest company supporting individuals of all ages to reach their potential, through training, volunteering, consultancy and youth and community work.

We invited theatre company **20 Stories High** to perform [Touchy](#), a series of five short films told through the mediums of poetry, drama, hip hop, animation and music. The production engages with topics at the forefront of young people's minds: racism, consent, relationships and mental health. Based on these themes, the Hub facilitated workshops which were hosted at **Blackpool Central Library**. The participants were introduced to the library and had a large space to move around in and express themselves. Each partner youth organisation was able to bring a small group to make a total of 55-60 participants, who were all aged 13-16 years.

Local creative practitioners facilitated the workshops:

- **Rob Bradley** works for **Get it Loud in Libraries** and delivered a workshop about rap performance, incorporating writing, performance, language and creating rhymes.
- **Nathan Parker** is a spoken word performer and self-published young adult author. He led a workshop, which put personal experiences, feelings and thoughts at its heart.
- **Ruth Coburn** delivered a workshop about writing and performing monologues. This included creating a story about an item as its central theme, as well as wider performance techniques.

Some of the issues which *Touchy* deals with include experiences which many of the young people had lived experience of. However, through establishing a place of respect, open-mindedness, trust and empathy in the workshops, we received excellent feedback from

young people about how much they gained from this experience; especially about creatively expressing challenging issues.

The workshops set the scene for the performance of *Touchy* at **The Blackpool Grand Theatre**, which was attended by 55 young people. After the show, young people were invited to take part in a 'post show jam'. This included a variety of artistic, musical and dramatic performances. We published a [highlights video on Facebook](#) of the project.

The Hub is dedicated to embedding literacy into existing projects taking place in the town. Since the project's completion, **The Blackpool Grand Theatre** has developed a similar model to deliver another performance and workshop opportunity for young people in the future. This is vital for the legacy of our work, enabling more young people across the town to develop their confidence and engage in storytelling and other styles of word performance.



Swindon

Swindon Stories works with families through a range of programmes and close links with the library service. At the start of Connecting Stories Two, some of our partners highlighted unmet needs among some groups, especially children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This came very strongly from families who are involved in Swindon SEND Family Voice (SSFV).

Our engagement with the group highlighted issues faced by many children and families, such as feeling excluded from the Summer Reading Challenge (SRC) – a major calendar moment supported by most public library services. The barrier they identified was a lack of explicit guidance on what 'reading' can mean and therefore children and families feeling that it 'wasn't for them'.

Working with SSFV, Swindon libraries and The Reading Agency, we developed a new resource to address these concerns and speak more directly to families with children with SEND or a disability. These were disseminated across all Swindon libraries and more widely through other council teams to reach as many families as possible.

Responding to the advice of SSFV, the Hub arranged a series of storytelling events with Swindon Libraries especially for families who have children with a special education need or disability.

Over 1,118 SRC packs were given to families in Swindon and were well received by staff, who commented that this would be very useful for children who used their libraries.

“It certainly encouraged people who thought their child would be unable to do it because of their needs and who otherwise wouldn’t have signed up.”

“Families sometimes tell me they are at a loss with how to engage and help their child with reading...it would be lovely to have a general sheet in the children’s library.”

“It made the Summer Reading Challenge more inclusive.”

Feedback from a SSFV family

“We were pleased to see the inclusive SRC, as I loved doing reading challenges as a child and wanted my children (both autistic, but not able to read yet) to be able to participate. The ideas on the inclusive sheet were great and we explored some of them in our own way...”

Further work

To strengthen these partnerships, the Hub is planning further storytelling and other workshops with SSFV and Swindon Libraries. Alongside this, we are working with other partners to reach under-represented groups, such as the Gypsy and Traveller community. This includes working with Richard O’Neill, a writer and storyteller brought up in a nomadic Romani Gypsy family, who has been part of Connecting Stories events before.

Literacy Champions

Our Literacy Champions are credible peer-voices in our communities. With more than 600 trained and active across the network, these people are taking literacy into the hearts of communities. They are trained and supported by the local team to develop their own ideas to promote literacy in their neighbourhoods and communities and help with major events, like World Book Day, or our community celebration events. Our Literacy Champions fall into three broad categories (see Table 5).

1. Community Literacy Champions, who face-to-face with groups or individuals
2. Digital Literacy Champions, who help create and promote online content
3. Youth Literacy Champions, who are aged 14-21 and work in youth groups or schools

Table 5: Key Literacy Champions statistics

Community Literacy Champions	Digital Literacy Champions	Youth Literacy Champions	Total
394	87	123	604
Average number of people reached per week	Average number of the SAME people reached per week (repeat engagement)	Average number of volunteer hours per week	
27	25	4	

Based on these averages, our Literacy Champions are **donating over 2,400 hours per week or over 125,000 hours per year across the country**. The [Value of Volunteering](#) report calculates the average value of volunteering as £13.70 per hour, and this puts the **value of our volunteers at £1,712,500**. This also shows Literacy Champions are working with the same children and young people on a regular basis, so helping them to develop as readers, writers, and consumers of literature.

The range of activities which Literacy Champions undertake is vast, including:

- creating online videos, posts and helping with multi-lingual storytelling
- integrating book gifting into their other roles as prizes, for use with gardening clubs or at the local city farm
- setting up and managing community bookshelves and book swaps
- helping to design competitions and run workshops for children and families.

All of these are ways that co-created activities are brought to life, with people who know and understand their communities.

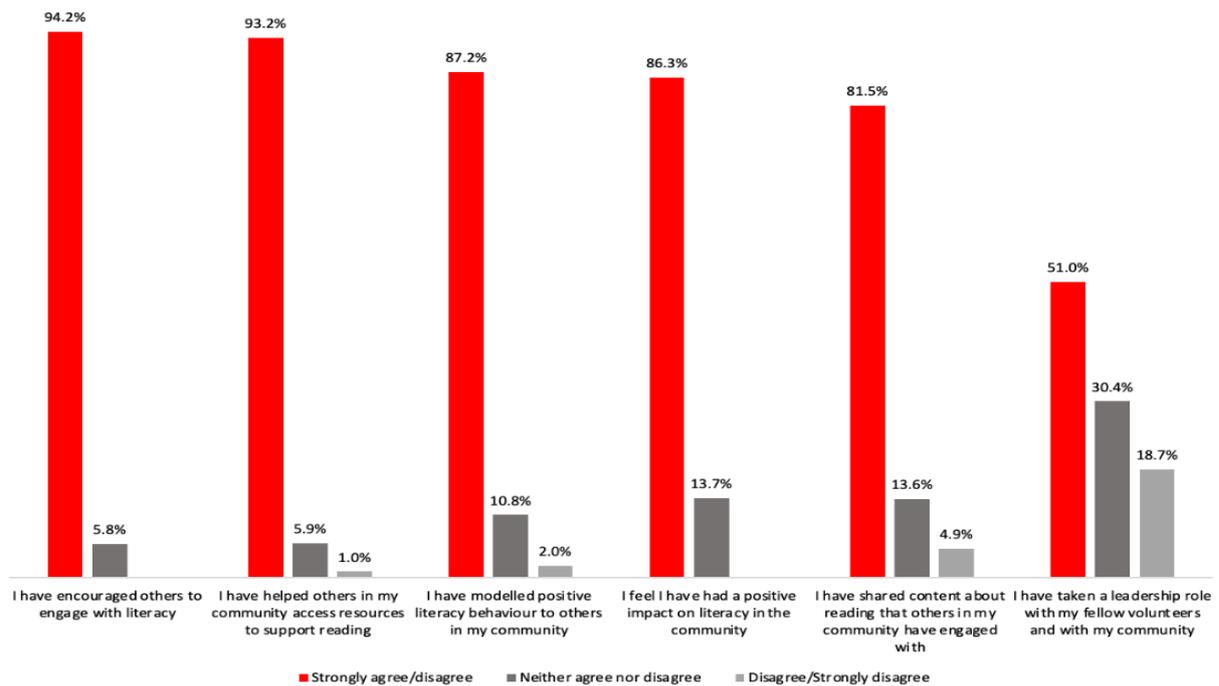
A major area of growth among our Literacy Champions during Connecting Stories Two has been Youth Literacy Champions - young people (mostly aged 16-21, but some younger) who are taking on leadership roles to help promote literacy.

Literacy Champions are also a huge asset in meeting our diversity and inclusion ambitions. Many of the communities we serve in our Hubs are ethnically and linguistically diverse. This means that people who become Literacy Champions often have connections to communities we may find it more difficult to engage otherwise, as well as language skills and insights which make our work more impactful.

“I work in a deprived area with families in disadvantaged situations, where kids get little help or support from parents for reading and literacy. Our sessions provide a fun time to interact together as a family and with others too. Everyone gets to own a book after the sessions and swaps it in the next session if they want to. Kids have the opportunity to read aloud a short story they have written on their own or with parents' help, building confidence and improving reading and writing skills.” (Literacy Champion)

143 Literacy Champions across 11 locations responded to our survey to find out more about their experience. Considering the importance of community, almost all agreed that they have encouraged others to engage with literacy (94.2%) and have helped others in their community to access resources to support reading (93.2%; see Figure 2). Just less than 9 in 10 agreed that they have modelled positive literacy behaviour to others in their community (87.2%) and feel that they have had a positive impact on literacy in their community (86.3%). Finally, 4 in 5 (81.5%) agreed that they have shared content about reading that others in the community have engaged with, while half (51.0%) agreed that they have taken a leadership role with fellow volunteers and the community.

Figure 2: 'In my role as Literacy Champion...'



Stoke-on-Trent - Six-towns stories – Youth Literacy Champions

Six-towns Stories (STS) was developed between the Hub, a Literacy Champion named Kirsty and Youth Literacy Champions from the Co-Op Academy. The Youth Literacy Champions (YLCs) took part in creative writing sessions with Kirsty and developed a competition for primary school-aged children. The YLCs set the topic, entry condition and used their experience with Kirsty to create workshop activities for priority primary schools.

Around 240 children took part in the sessions, with each one supported by the YLCs, who also created two activities, Blob and Superhero writing.

Blob: where a child draws a shape and then uses it to create a character with prompts about who they might be, who their family is and what they do.

Spiral writing: Designed for children who may struggle with the process of writing. The worksheet has a spiral on the page and the child starts from the inside and writes outwards. It can be anything, often just a stream of words.

The competition was open to every school in the city, promoted through social media and featured in the local paper. Individual children, home-schooled children and schools all entered. The competition closed in early March with around 100 entries.

Several families emailed to say how much they enjoyed the competition:

“Creative writing stretches your mind, improves your imagination and gets you to think about new ideas, not copying other people. That's good for everything in life because it helps you to think for yourself and make your own decisions - for example, don't just do the job everyone else wants to do, as

there will be too much competition for those jobs and you might not enjoy it. Use your imagination and find something interesting and unusual to do. The competition will get the KS2 students to go into their imagination. They might learn new words and ideas from us and the adults. They will learn research skills by finding out more about the theme, so they can pick an unusual part of the theme to write about”.



Birmingham

The **Birmingham Stories Afra Manga Book Club** launched in January 2023. With ideas generated from our Literacy Champions, it exemplifies how our Hubs tap into the cultural touchpoints of the different communities we work with.

The idea stemmed from Literacy Champion Natalie, who noticed that her son and his friends were generally quite reluctant readers, but were interested in Manga stories. Natalie, who also founded the **Black Heritage Support Service (BHSS)**, consulted with her son and his friends to find out what comics they liked and what would work in a book club, which informed the scheme of work. Hence, the six-week club was developed as part of a portfolio of work, which offers resources, advocacy, and opportunities for young Black people. The key motivation for the book club was reading engagement through an existing 'hook' of interest in comics.

The club sessions took part in **The Lighthouse Youth Centre**, which is situated in Aston, one of the Hub's priority wards due to high literacy need. Initially, the club recruited its members through social media advertising, youth centres and school announcements. There are 10 members of the book club, with seven taking part repeatedly. The 10 boys who take part in the club get together to discuss the comics, and even try creating their own manga illustration. This element is led by a student from **The University of Birmingham**,

who creates their own Manga art. Reading Afra-Manga allows its members to discover characters with a similar ethnic background to themselves, which is hugely powerful for their connection with the stories.

To support the book club, the Birmingham Hub created resources including discussion prompts to support the goals of the club. The Hub also provided a specific book donation to kickstart the project. However, **Peter's Ltd** (a national bookstore) is interested in funding books for the project in the future, which would enable it to run with lower costs. The Hub has also been approached by Comic Boom, an education podcast exploring the use of comics in education, to talk about the book club.

Conclusion

Connecting Stories was an ambitious project to increase access to literature in places where people are most likely to be facing poverty, have low social capital and poor literacy skills. This required us to galvanise the publishing industry at scale, both nationally and locally, as well as through education, cultural and local authority partners, and deliver 14 localised offers designed around the needs and wants of incredibly diverse communities. With the support of Arts Council England and ideas from our partners, we are delighted to have done this.

Targets for reach and engagement of new audiences, the number of authors and other creatives supporting our work, media reach and volunteers have been exceeded. Young people we work with now report better outcomes across the board in comparison to other children in their area and, from across the country. Our approach has engaged more than 800 partners and over 600 volunteers, who together are improving literacy and access to literature and culture across the country.

The drive and enthusiasm we see from within our communities and from our volunteers, has already driving forward our work on Connecting Stories Three. Community voices are stronger than ever, both in our local work and in the charity overall. Literacy Champions have run sessions at our staff away days, spoken with the senior management team to feed into our strategy and continue to be our best links into communities. Through Connecting Stories, we are maintaining our focus on inclusion and diversity, celebrating different identities, and encouraging new readers and writers.

Connecting Stories Two has fulfilled the objectives set out at the start and gone beyond that to firmly establish community led, partnership working in 14 of the most deprived parts of the country, work that is raising the profile of literacy and engaging more people with reading and writing. We are excited for the next two years under Connecting Stories Three where our partnerships will build on this success and continue to change life stories.

Appendix

Full evaluation

Connecting Stories Two aimed to improve attitudes and behaviour towards reading for pleasure in disadvantaged communities, increase engagement among groups that may not otherwise engage in literary activities, enhance literacy levels, promote parental engagement and the home learning environment, and improve diversity in literature.

To evaluate the success of Connecting Stories in meeting these outcomes, different tools were used to collect information from various stakeholders. These tools included surveys targeting children and young people (Annual Literacy Survey), community members (Community Survey) and community partners (partner survey and Literacy Champion survey). Additionally, a place-based self-assessment tool was used to track community change over time.

Annual Literacy Survey

Over 64,000 children and young people aged eight to 18 responded to our Annual Literacy Survey from January to March 2023. For the purposes of this report, we focused on responses of three specific groups:

- 1) **High-priority:** Children and young people (n = 3,543) who attended schools we class as high priority. They serve the communities from our high-priority wards in Hubs and are therefore in the UK's most disadvantaged communities, and we work with them directly and intensively.
- 2) **Local area, lower priority:** Children and young people (n = 11,826) who attended schools in the local areas we work (Hubs) and received some of our offer, author events and access to public activities, but that are classified as lower priority.
- 3) **National:** Children and young people (n = 48,787) who attended schools we didn't work with directly and that are not located in the local areas we work in.

The following analysis compares these three groups to identify any differences in literacy attitudes and behaviours. Our analysis found that the differences observed across these three groups were prevalent regardless of gender, age, free school meal status, or ethnicity.

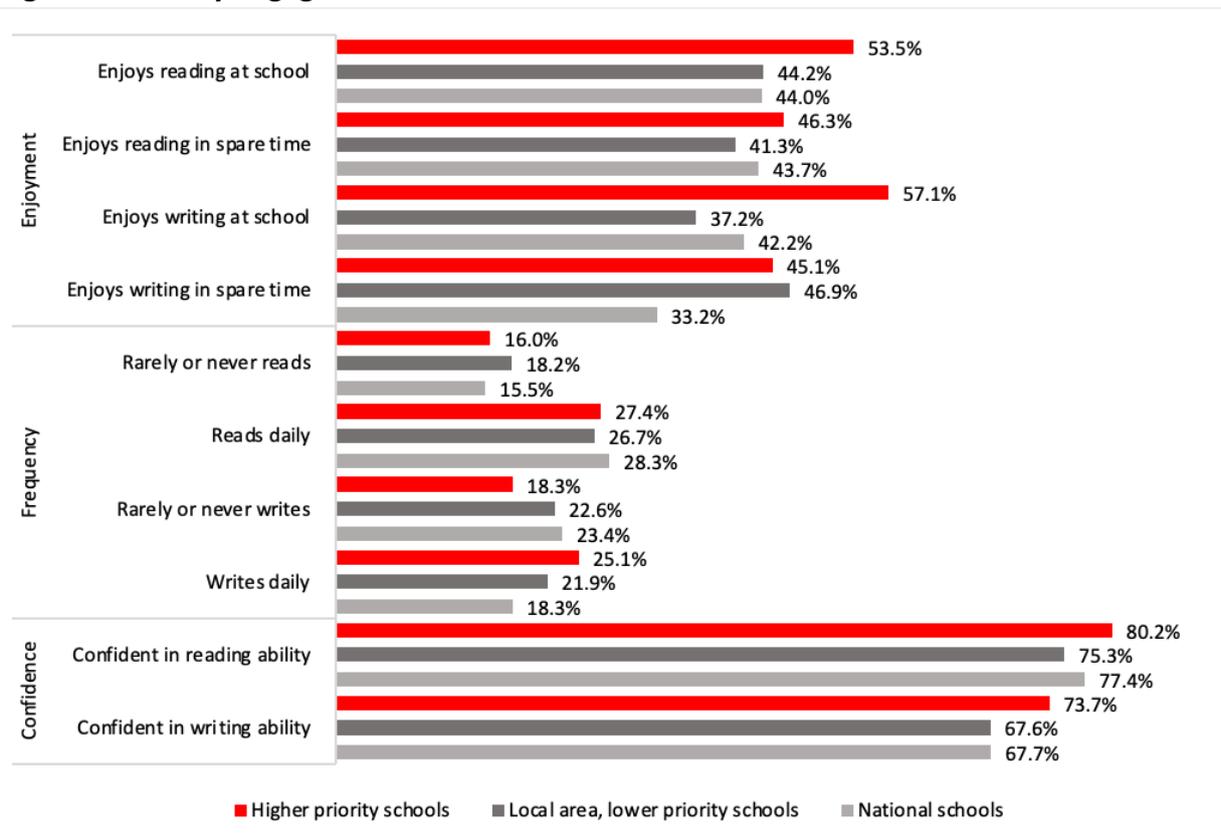
As shown in Figure 3, more children and young people from our high-priority schools told us that they enjoyed reading at school (53.5%) and in their spare time (46.3%) than their peers in our local area lower priority schools (44.2% and 41.3%) or their peers nationally (44.0% vs 43.7%).

While the frequency of reading was similar across the three groups, more children and young people from our high-priority schools said that they write daily (25.1%) compared with their peers from other schools in our Hubs areas (21.9%) or their peers nationally (18.3%).

Finally, more children and young people from our high-priority schools were confident in their reading (80.2%) and writing (73.7%) ability compared with peers from other schools in our Hub areas (75.3% and 67.6%) or their peers nationally (77.4% and 67.7%).

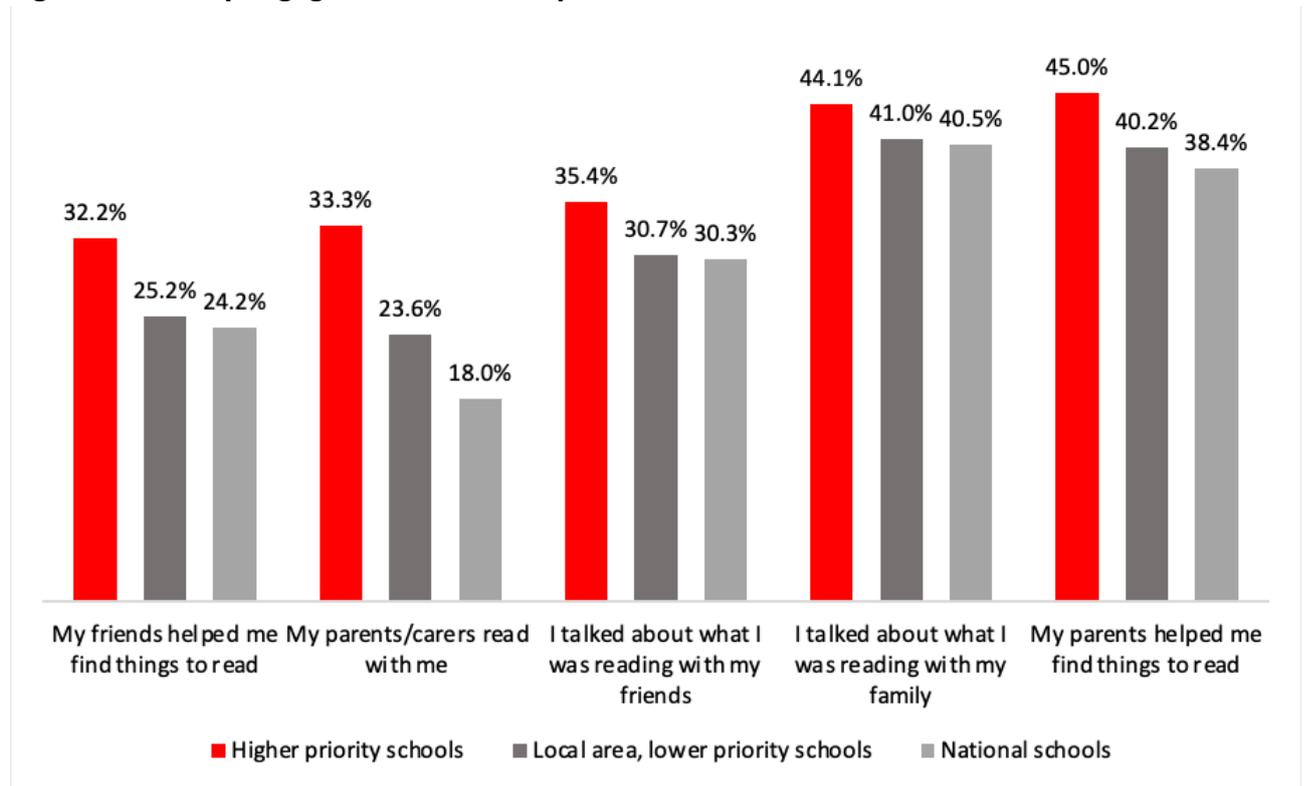
This clearly demonstrates the cumulative effect of the work of Connecting Stories is having on developing new readers and writers. The children and young people who completed this survey from our high-priority schools are, overall, more likely to be receiving free school meals and more likely to be from a non-white background, as detailed on page 16.

Figure 3: Literacy engagement



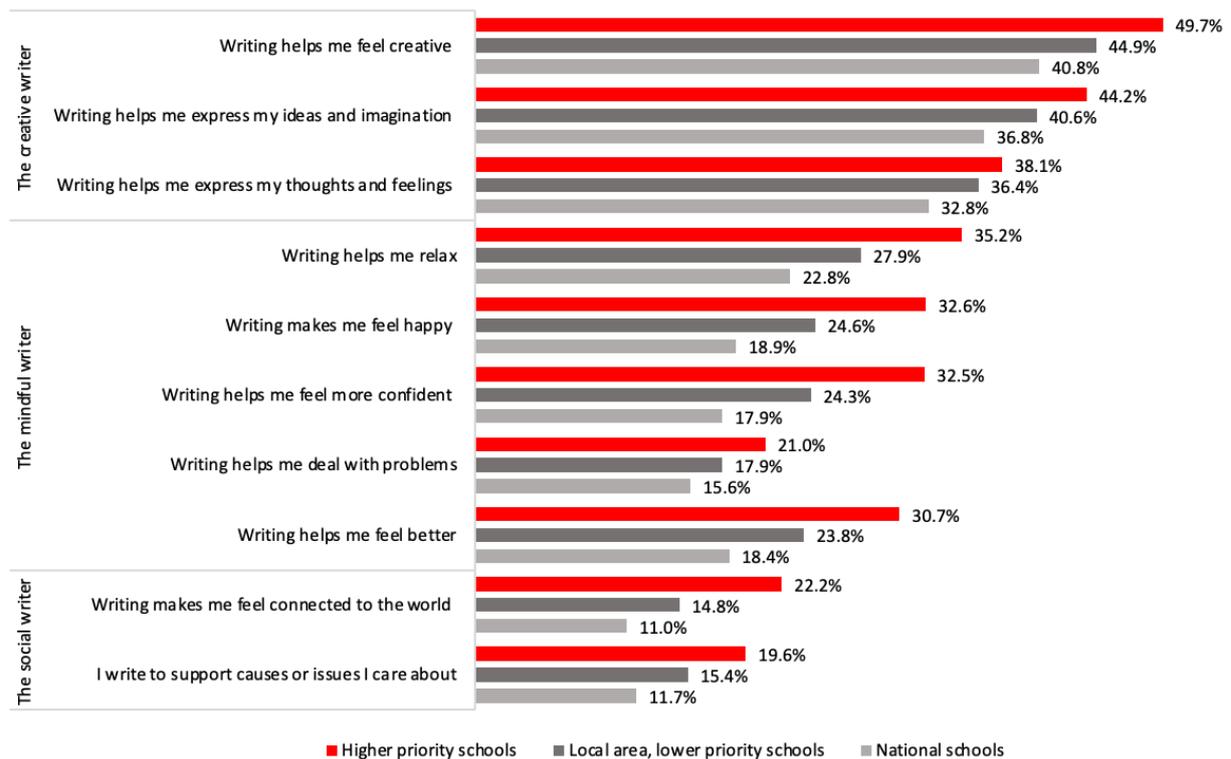
More children from our high-priority schools said they had engaged with literacy with their family and friends (see Figure 4). Indeed, more said that their friends (32.2%) and family (45.0%) helped them find things to read compared with their peers from other schools in our Hub areas (25.2% and 40.2%), or peers from schools nationally (24.2% and 38.4%). Additionally, more said that they had talked about what they were reading with their friends (35.4%) and family (44.1%) compared with their peers from other schools in our Hub areas (30.7% and 41.0%), or peers from schools nationally (30.3% and 40.5%). Finally, 1 in 3 children and young people from our high-priority schools said that their parents or carers read with them (33.3%) compared with fewer than 1 in 4 (23.6%) of their peers from other schools in our Hub areas, and less than 1 in 5 (18.0%) of their peers from schools nationally.

Figure 4: Literacy engagement with family and friends



More of those from our high-priority schools agreed that they wrote for different purposes (see Figure 5). For example, compared with both peers from other schools in our Hub areas, and peers from schools nationally, more children and young people said that they write to feel creative (49.7% vs 44.9% vs 40.8%), to relax (35.2% vs 27.9% vs 22.8%), and to feel connected to the world (22.2% vs 14.8% vs 11.0%).

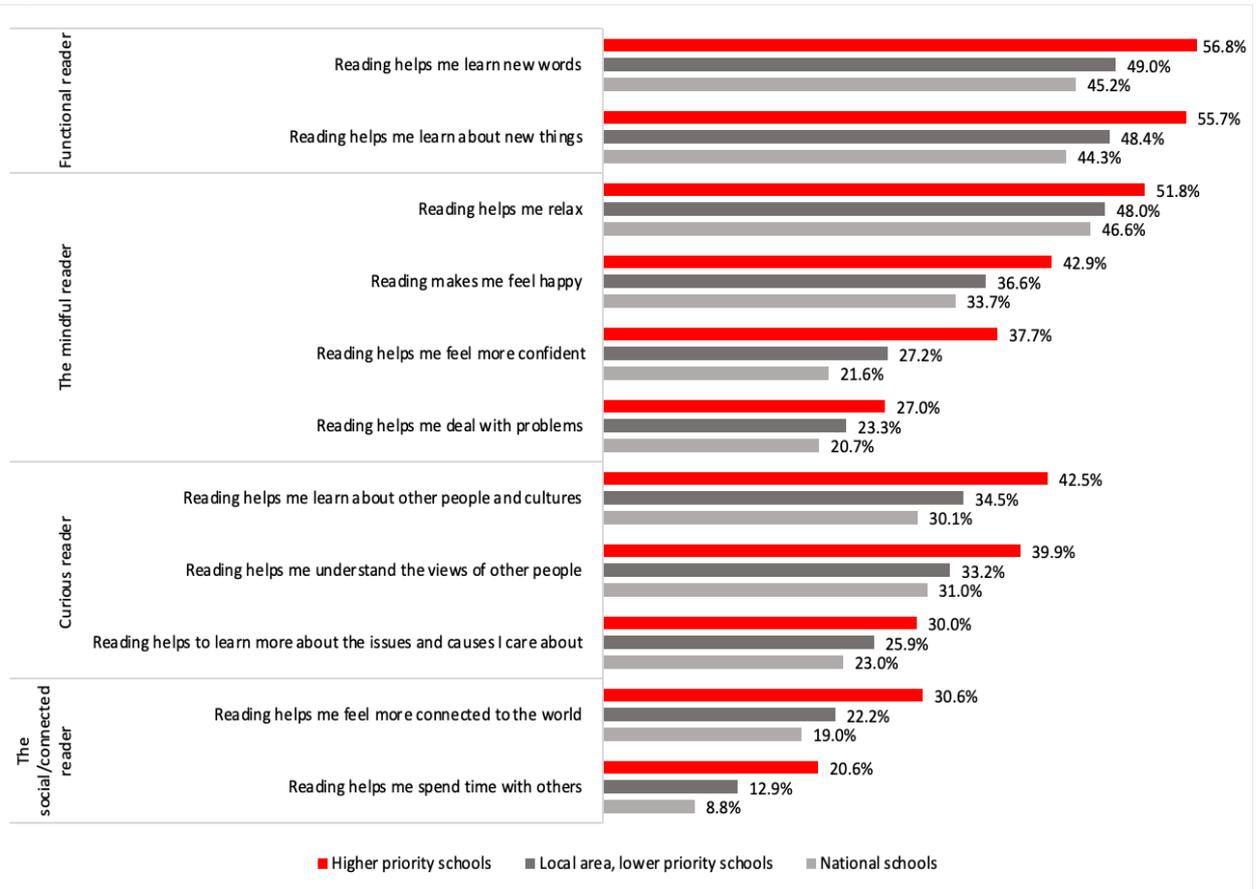
Figure 5: Motivations to write



As with motivations to write, more of those from our high-priority schools agreed they read for different purposes (see Figure 6). For example, compared with both peers from other schools in our Hub areas and peers nationally, more children and young people said they read to learn new words (56.8% vs 49.0% vs 45.2%), to feel more confident (37.7% vs 27.2% vs 21.6%), to learn about other people and cultures (42.5% vs 34.5% vs 30.1%), and to spend time with others (20.6% vs 12.9% vs 8.8%).

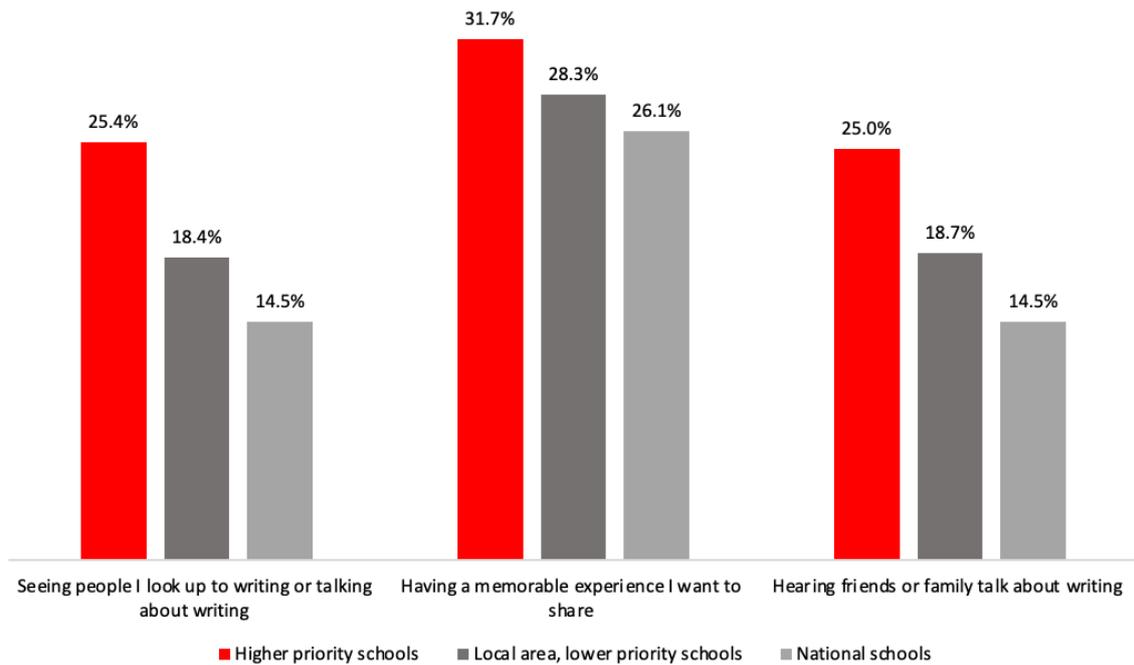
While the survey does not enable us to draw explicit conclusions about what activities or campaign messaging has influenced some of these motivations to read and write, the focus of our work on diversity and empathy do appear to be playing out in the responses of children and young people.

Figure 6: Motivations to read



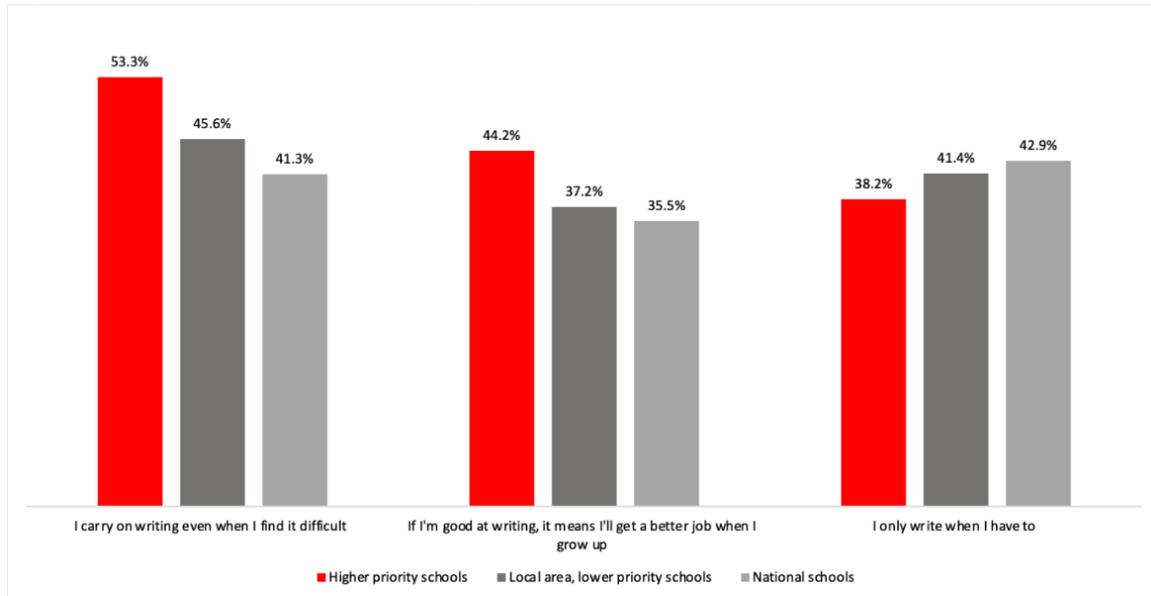
More children and young people in our high-priority schools agreed that seeing people they look up to writing or talking about writing motivates them to write (25.4%) compared with their peers from other schools in our Hub areas (18.4%) or peers nationally (14.5%; see Figure 7). More also agreed that having a memorable experience that they want to share motivates them to write (31.7% vs 28.3% vs 26.1%), as does hearing friends or family talk about writing (25.0% vs 18.7% vs 14.5%).

Figure 7: 'What makes you want to write?'



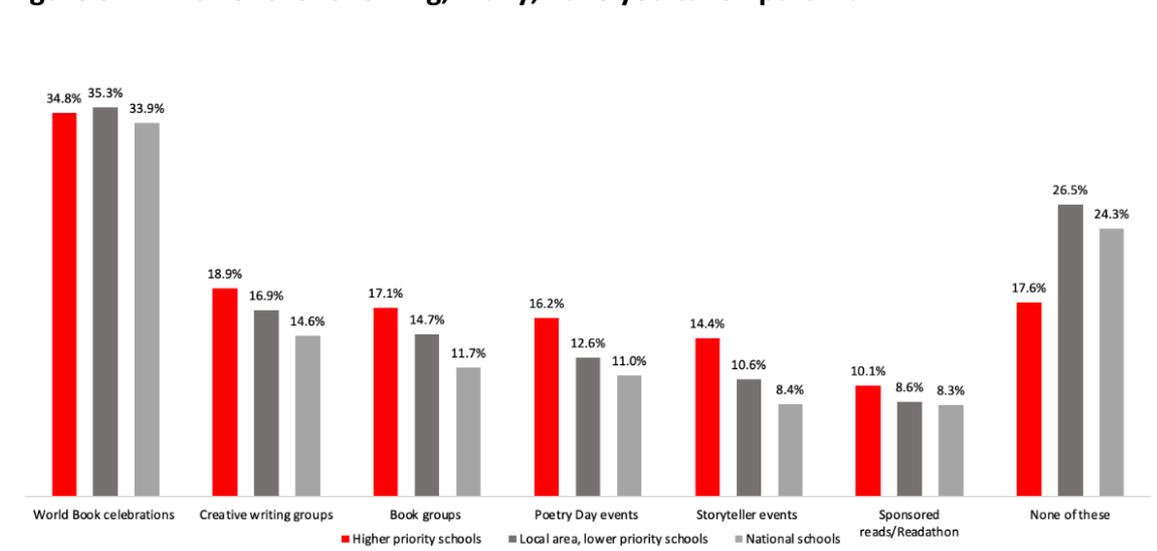
Children and young people in our high-priority schools showed more positive attitudes towards reading (see Figure 8), with more agreeing that they carry on writing even when they find it difficult (53.3%), compared with their peers from other schools in our Hub areas (45.6%) and peers from schools nationally (41.3%). Additionally, more agreed that if they are good at writing, they'll get a better job when they grow up (44.2% vs 37.2% vs 35.5%). Finally, fewer of those in our high-priority schools agreed that they only write when they have to (38.2%), compared with their peers from other schools in our Hubs (41.4%) and peers nationally (42.9%).

Figure 8: 'Attitudes towards writing'



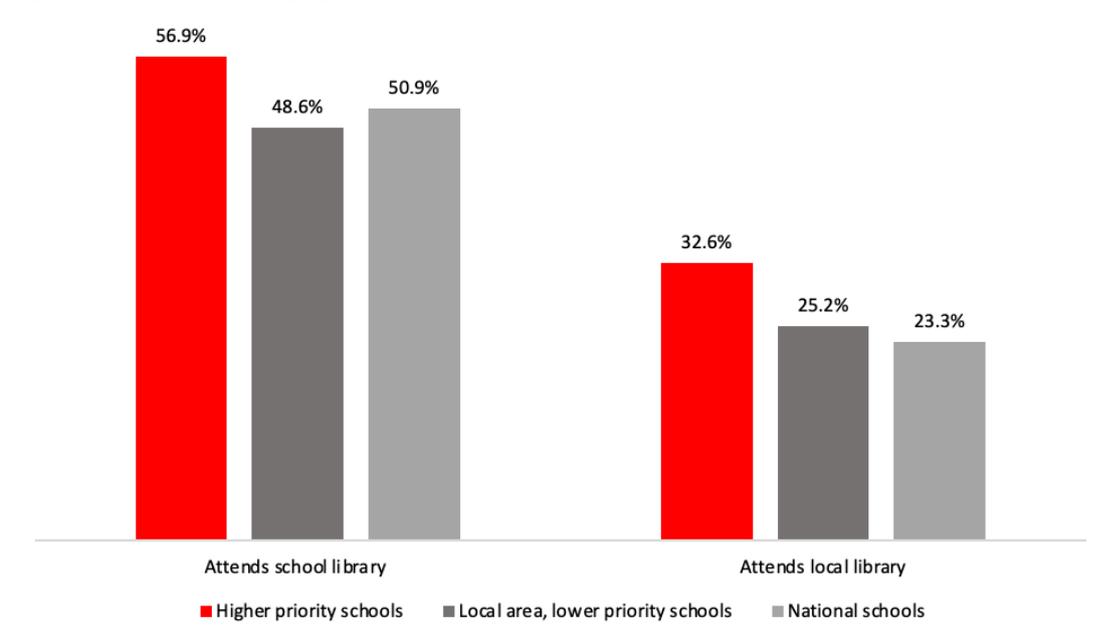
While a similar percentage of children and young people across the three groups engaged in World Book Day celebrations, more of those in our high-priority schools took part in all other mentioned activities or events (see Figure 9). For example, 18.9% of children and young people from our high-priority schools took part in creative writing groups compared with 16.9% of their peers from other schools in our Hub areas, and 14.6% of peers nationally. The same was found for book poetry groups (17.1% vs 14.7% vs 11.7%), poetry day events (16.2% vs 12.6% vs 11.0%), storyteller events (14.4% vs 10.6% vs 8.4%), and sponsored reads or readathons (10.1% vs 8.6% vs 8.3%). Finally, only around 1 in 6 (17.6%) children and young people from our high-priority schools said that they hadn't taken part in any of the events, compared with around 1 in 4 children and young people from other schools in our Hubs (26.5%), and schools nationally (24.3%).

Figure 9: 'Which of the following, if any, have you taken part in?'



Library engagement was highest for those in our high-priority schools (see Figure 10), with more saying that they attend their school (56.9%) or local (32.6%) compared with their peers from other schools in our Hub areas (48.6% and 25.2%), and those from schools nationally (50.9% and 23.3%).

Figure 10: Library engagement

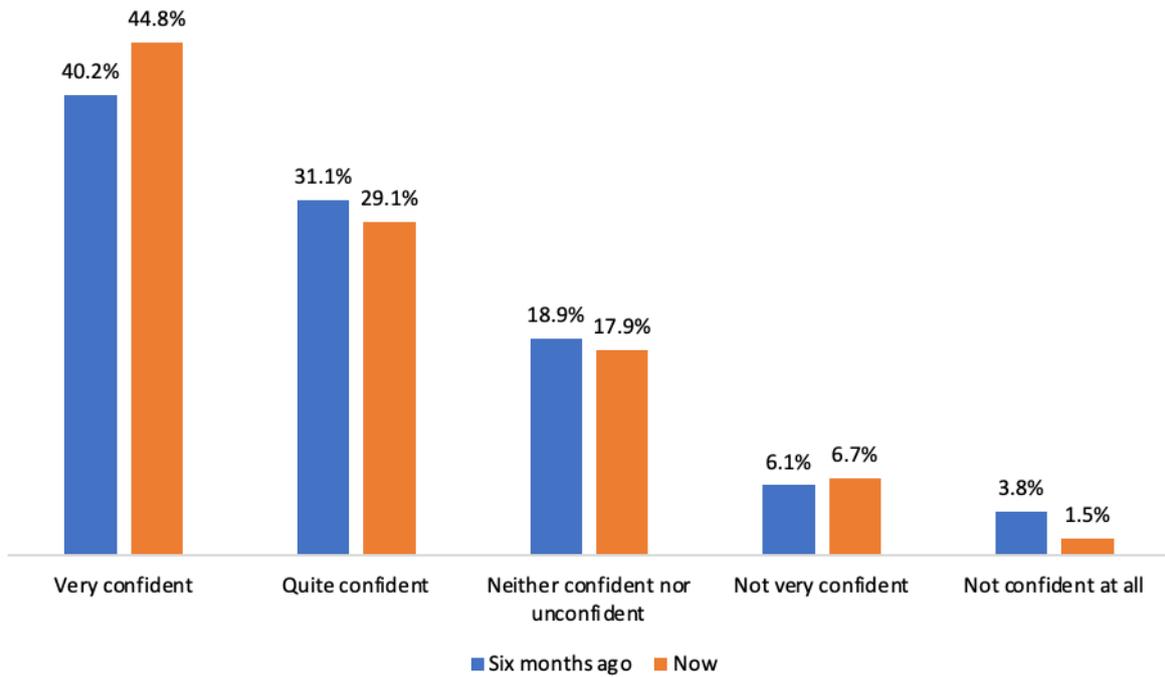


Community survey

178 community members from a cross-section of our Hubs across England answered questions about their reading and writing, and engagement with cultural events in their area.

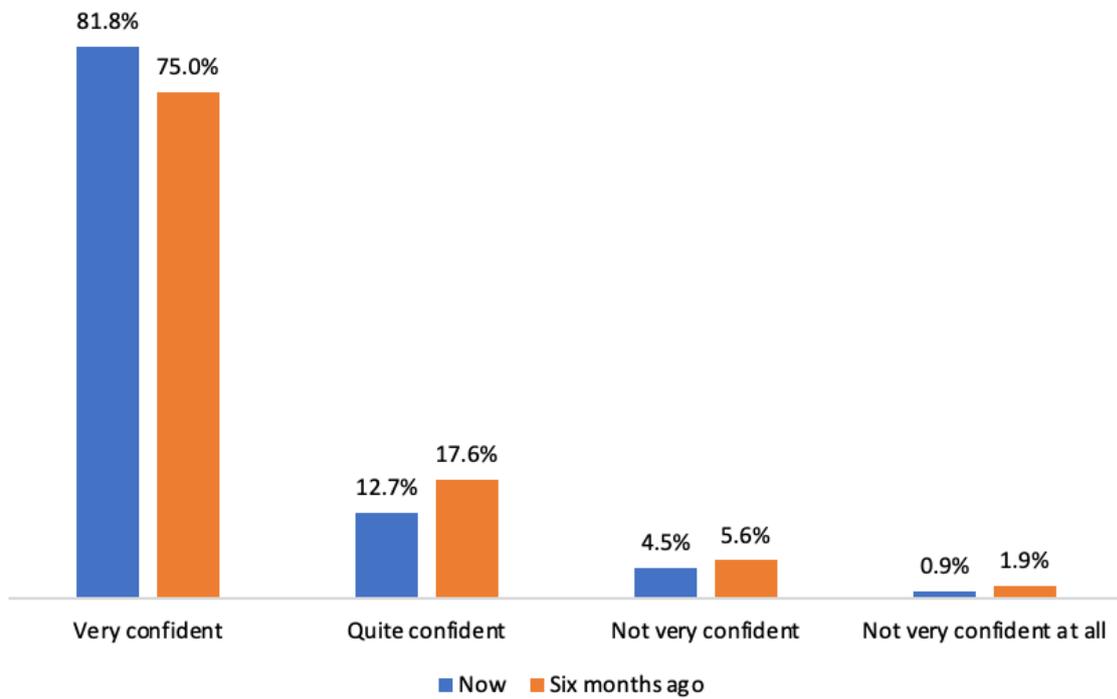
As shown in Figure 11, more community members agreed that they felt very confident (44.8%) about writing now compared with six months ago (40.2%). At the same time, fewer felt not confident at all (1.5%) compared with six months ago (3.8%).

Figure 11: 'How confident do you feel about writing?'



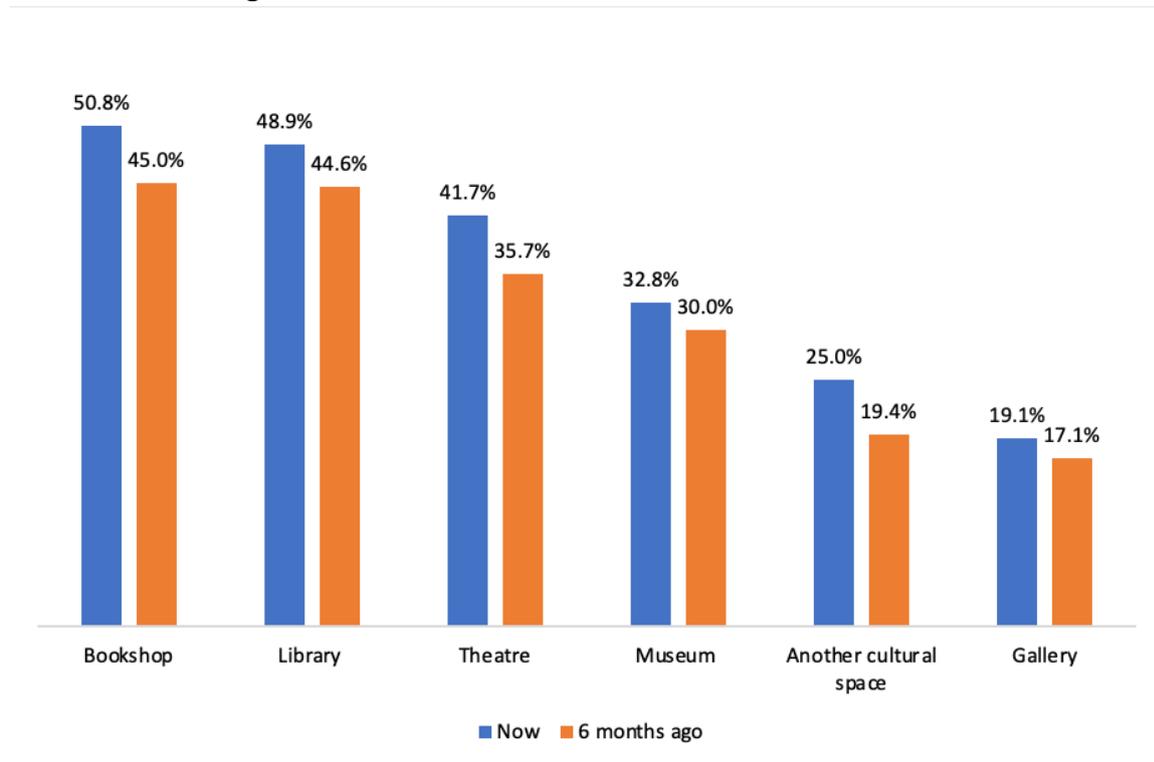
At the same time, confidence in reading with children also improved (see Figure 12). More than 4 in 5 (81.8%) parents shared that they feel very confident reading to their child compared with 3 in 4 (75.0%) six months ago.

Figure 12: 'How confident do you feel about reading to your child?', now compared with six months ago



More community members shared that they visit cultural spaces very or quite regularly compared with six months ago (see Figure 13). Indeed, more said that they now visit the bookshop (50.8% vs 45.0%), library (48.9% vs 44.6%), theatre (41.7% vs 35.7%), museum (32.8% vs 30.0%), gallery (19.1% vs 17.1%), or another cultural space (25.0% vs 19.4%), very/quite regularly compared with six months ago.

Figure 13: Percentage that visit the following places very/quite regularly, now compared with six months ago

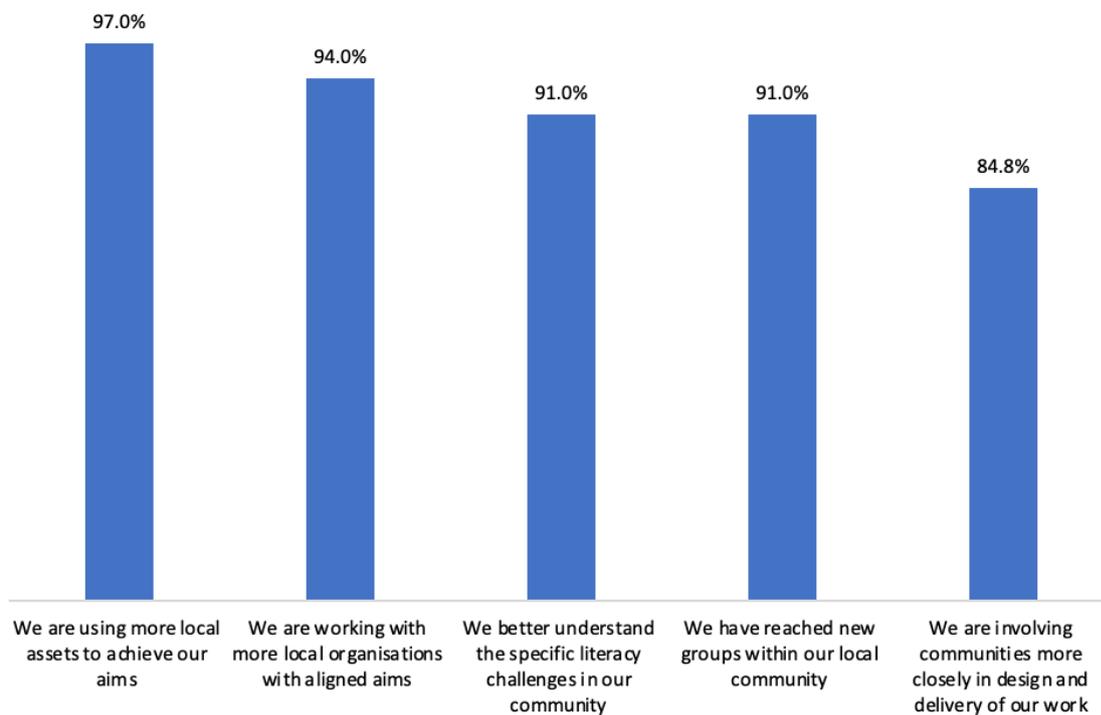


Partner survey

We surveyed 72 partners from eight different locations. 2 in 3 (66.7%) had been working with the National Literacy Trust in their area for more than 12 months, 3 in 10 (30.3%) for between six and 12 months, and only 3.0% for between three to six months. 9 in 10 (90.9%) said that they used a place-based approach to some (27.3%), or to a great (63.6%) extent, compared with 3 in 4 (75.8%) a year ago.

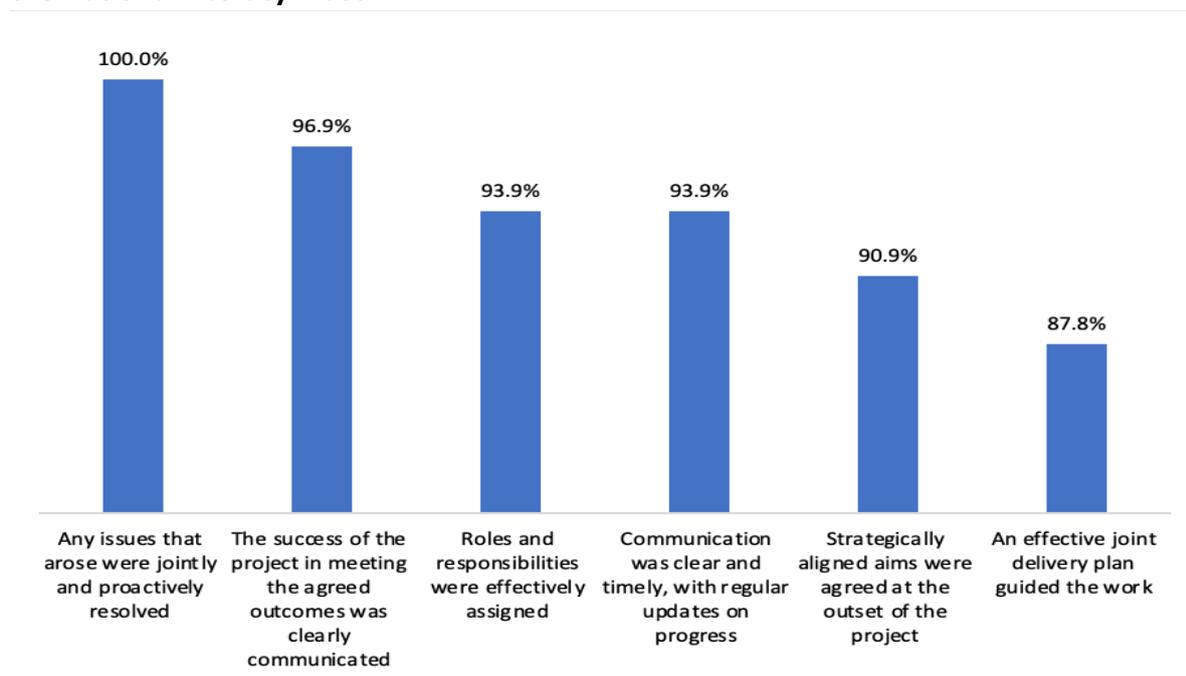
Partners had positive views towards the impact and benefits of working with The National Literacy Trust (see Figure 14). 97.0% (n=32) agreed that since working with the National Literacy Trust, they are using more local assets to achieve aims and 94.0% (n=31) are working with more local organisations with aligned aims. 91.0% (n=30) agreed that since working with the National Literacy Trust, they better understand the specific literacy challenges in the community and have reached new groups within the local community. Finally, 84.8% (n=28) agreed that since working with the National Literacy Trust, they are involving communities more closely in the design and delivery of their work.

Figure 14: 'Since working with the National Literacy Trust...'



Partners shared positive views towards working with the National Literacy Trust. As shown in Figure 15, all (n=33) partners agreed that any issues that arose were jointly and proactively resolved. 96.9% (n=31) agreed that the success of the project in meeting the agreed outcomes was clearly communicated. 93.9% (n=31) agreed that roles and responsibilities were effectively assigned, and that communication was clear and timely with regular updates on progress. Finally, 9 in 10 (90.9%, n=30) agreed that strategically aligned aims were agreed upon at the outset of the project, while just less than 9 in 10 (87.8%, n=29) agreed that an effective joint delivery plan guided the work.

Figure 15: ‘How much do you agree with the following statements about your work with the National Literacy Trust’



Partners also told us what they found most beneficial about working with the National Literacy Trust:

“I have thoroughly enjoyed working with the team at **Stoke Reads**. As a result of our partnership a truly amazing project was developed with local children and young people in the city. The feedback received has been amazing and has clearly made a huge difference for many in terms of their engagement in creative writing and self-confidence. The team were always available for regular chats, support with proofreading, providing opportunities to take the project to the next level and so much more.”

“Working with *National Literacy Trust* has meant being able to connect the community with another beneficial local service. Closure of libraries, prioritising budget, ill health and mobility issues can exclude some sections of the community from access to books. Our collaboration with NLT has provided a much-appreciated service to our users.”

Place-based working survey

To demonstrate the strategic importance of place-based working and understand how effectively it has been implemented in Connecting Stories Two, each local area used a self-assessed tool against the eight characteristics of place-based working:

- **Common agenda:** We define a strategic vision for our work with key partners, based on a thorough understanding of the local context.
- **Shared measurement:** We define success in terms of clear, agreed outcomes for our work, and having a plan for measurement.
- **Mutually reinforcing activities:** We plan our work based on an understanding of local assets and clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of partners in achieving our goals.

- **Continuous communication:** We communicate effectively with partners, keeping them informed and motivated, and reach our target families and communities using the best methods available.
- **Backbone support:** Our work is supported by a strong organisation and proactive leadership, including sufficient resources to deliver our projects.
- **Medium-term commitment:** We consider the medium-term sustainability of our work, including proactively identifying ways to secure further investment.
- **Multi-sector approach:** A clear strategy is in place to coordinate the efforts of partners, and we collaborate effectively with those partners to deliver projects in the community
- **Community involvement:** We proactively engage our target families and communities, and our work is designed and delivered with them.

Respondents from each local area completed the place-based working tool in 2022 and 2023, meaning we were able to track any progress across each of the eight characteristics across this time (see Table 6). The tool reflects both the work of the Hub and its catalysing effect on place-based working in the Hub more generally. A ‘Common agenda’, for example is not only about the members of the Hub and their joint working but also about other work in the area, such as city strategies.

The table below shows an overall picture of positive development as most Hubs (60%) indicated improvements against most of the eight principles over the past year. Some Hubs, notably Peterborough and Nottingham, have more areas ranked the same as last year rather than improving. In these cases, it reflects mature Hubs that were already performing well. Community involvement, in both is support by large numbers of active Literacy Champions, regular community engagement and listening events and a local team who involve and advocate very well for their communities in planning. Black Country has a lower rank for community involvement this year than last, which is primarily owing to entering a major delivery phase of an early years programme this year. Changing this is a priority for the Hub going forward.

Table 6: Place-based working, movements from 2022 to 2023^{2*}

	Common agenda	Shared measurement	Mutually reinforcing activities	Continuous communication	Backbone support	Medium term commitment	Multi-sector approach	Community involvement
Birmingham	✓	⊗	⊗	✓	⊗	⊗	✓	✓
Blackpool	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Manchester	✓	↓	✓	⊗	✓	✓	✓	✓

² In addition to the Hubs in Table 6, we also worked with Doncaster, Middlesbrough, North Yorkshire Coast, Swindon, Bradford and Hastings. However, we were unable to match their data to that of the previous year, and hence haven't included them in this table.

Nottingham	↓	↓	↓	⊗	✓	⊗	⊗	⊗
Peterborough	⊗	↓	⊗	✓	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Stoke	✓	✓	✓	✓	⊗	⊗	⊗	✓
The Black Country	⊗	↓	⊗	✓	⊗	↓	✓	↓

* ✓ indicates improvements from 2022 to 2023, ⊗

indicates that the characteristic has remained steady over this time, and ↓ indicates that the characteristic has reduced over this time.

The toolkit continues to provide valuable insights, enabling each Hub to focus on areas where place-based working can be strengthened.

Respondents also shared open-ended comments relating to how well they felt their area had achieved each of the characteristics:

“Care and consideration is taken to ensure support is offered where most beneficial.”

“Strong communication with ourselves and other partners allows us all to see the vision and planning in place before opting into a programme.”

“Hub staff meet regularly with us as partners to keep us up to date. They are supportive of our programmes and offer support when available. Hub staff offered extra support when the library service struggled with unplanned staffing capacity issues over the summer. This was much appreciated and enabled family events to go ahead as planned.”

“As a community library run completely by volunteers, our mission is to reach out to the community to provide resources and to encourage everyone to read. We aim to provide a wide selection of reading matter and the Hub has been brilliant in helping with this. We have engaged with the local primary schools, and preschool nurseries and groups, and the books and resources donated from the Hub have made this a really positive project.”

“The Hub has provided resources that would not have been available to us or resources we would not have known about. We have also been given guidance on best practice.”

“Our Community Library is situated in an area widely recognised as a deprived area and has been for many years. It is important to give encouragement and motivation to families who are slipping through the net and have been for several generations. I would hope that this resource would be continuing for the long term, rather than medium term but recognition by government of support for this vital resource is necessary.”

“Strong and varied partners - contributing in ways which reflect their strengths and assets, contributing to reach and impact.”

“Literacy champions are a prime example where the breadth of ideas is unique and bespoke support is planned with each group. We liaise with community and school leaders, asking them to identify their own challenges and seeking their steer and ideas on how we address these together.”

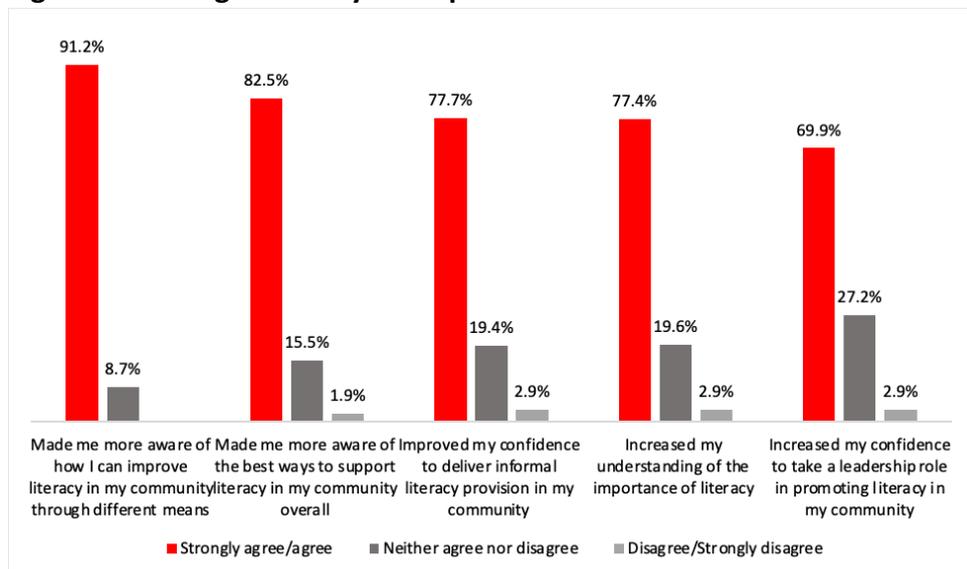
“The Hub has a strong vision and brings together an array of partners who can support that and add further local context. The Hub is open to new partners and actively looking for them, meaning that the agenda is being strengthened and supported”.

Literacy Champions

We received feedback from 143 Literacy Champions across 11 locations in the UK, supporting in a mix of school libraries (1%), public libraries (9.8%), schools (16.7%), nurseries (2.9%) and other community settings (34.3%). Before becoming a Literacy Champion, only 1 in 5 (21.3%) would describe themselves as ‘very involved’ in supporting their community.

Literacy Champions shared a variety of benefits of their role, both personal to themselves, and to those that they were able to support (see Figure 16). 9 in 10 (91.2%) agreed that being a Literacy Champion made them more aware of how they can improve literacy in their community through different means, while more than 3 in 4 agreed that it increased their personal understanding of the importance of literacy (77.4%), and their confidence to deliver informal literacy provision in their community (77.7%). 4 in 5 (82.5%) agreed that being a Literacy Champion made them more aware of the best ways to support literacy in their community overall, and 7 in 10 (69.9%) that it increased their confidence to take a leadership role in promoting literacy in their community.

Figure 16: ‘Being a Literacy Champion has...’



Literacy Champions also shared examples of the brilliant work they have done with the support of the National Literacy Trust team:

“Our Baby Bank provides vulnerable families with everything they need when they first have their baby. Every bundle that goes out has a book donated by the National Literacy Trust. This will probably be that child's very first book.”

“As a public library representative, we were able to work well with the team to encourage more than 500 people to become members of their local libraries - this will provide families benefits for years to come as they are able to access reading materials (free - which is an incredibly important barrier to overcome in a time of cost-of-living crisis). Public Library access also provides storytelling and modelling of best practise in how to engage children with reading and stories”.

“One of the most impactful events we have taken part in thanks to the Literacy Champions programme is the 'Look for a Book'. I teach in a CAMHS (child and adolescent mental health services) inpatient ward which is secure, so it is a really challenging environment to create a 'buzz' and excitement around most activities, but especially around reading for pleasure. Each patient/student on the ward received their own book thanks to the National Literacy Trust and it was the first time they've actively engaged with finding books and reading in a positive way. For some of our students, it was the first brand-new book they'd ever had, and I know that it really boosted their self-esteem, and engagement and changed their idea of themselves being 'a reader'.”

“This is the most recent feedback I have received. 'I just wanted to thank you so much for the books you gave to the children's team. I gave them to 2 children, and they were so overjoyed. The one little boy is 10 and he said he'd never been so excited about books before and could not wait to take them home to read with his mum. I also gave one to a 10-year-old girl who said it was the best surprise ever. Thank you for the joy you gave them!’”

“With the cost of living and people buying the essentials, books are a luxury and I feel they are getting pushed down the compulsory list. Giving books out in the community and promoting reading with little ones gives their families that bonding time and takes that pressure off. It's so difficult, people from all walks of life are struggling, and when I'm out in the community giving books and promoting literacy, I feel it restores faith in one another and that builds people's opportunity to talk, and people want to read just finding that connection”.

“We have given out free books to families at family days. Families have been super grateful. We have encouraged families to read together in our Art Library - books associated with cultural festivals, at faith celebrations such as Diwali, Vaisakhi, Holi and Eid. I have advocated for literacy and activities to foster a love of reading to my fellow senior managers.”

Hub case studies – additional information

Stoke-on-Trent

In partnership with Stoke-on-Trent libraries, Stoke Reads delivered seven storytelling festivals in parks across the six towns of Stoke-on-Trent during the summer holidays. The aims were to:

- Inspire families to enjoy stories together and develop a love of reading
- Provide a free, fun day of family activities
- Direct families to use their local libraries as a sustainable way to engage with literacy
- Support the health and wellbeing of families by encouraging an active and healthy lifestyle

Tales in the Park summary

The team at Stoke Reads are exceedingly proud of the Tales in the Parks events this summer. Thanks to the support of Harper Collins, over 4,600 local children were gifted a book of their choosing and over 500 new library members were recruited in just seven events. Since taking part in the events:

- 75% of families felt more excited about reading and more aware of local literacy activities
- 71% of parents are more aware of ways to support their child's literacy

Table 7: Families enjoyed the following activities

Storytelling	Circus skills	Bouncy castle and ball pit
Little library van	Face painting	Rhyme time
Stormtroopers	The Canal and River Trust	Bubbles
Messy play	Creative poetry	Crafts
Pop up sports	Forest School	Lego

The team was blown away by the amount of support and positivity received city-wide. We want to thank our partners, providers and supporters for their input, hard work and commitment to the literacy of children in this beautiful city. Most importantly, we would like to thank all the families who attended our Tales in the Park events and helped to make this summer so incredibly magical. Your smiles and laughter made all the hard work worthwhile.

Table 8: Engagement breakdown

Event locations	Date	Number of children/books	New library members
Tunstall Park	Fri 29 July	1,000	93
Burslem Park	Tues 2 August	500	34
Yeaman Street Park	Fri 5 August	450	45
Fenton Park	Tues 9 August	600	63
Hanley Park	Fri 12 August	500	46
Longton Park	Tues 16 August	900	112
Bucknall Park	Fri 19 August	700	109
Total		4,650	502

Repeat engagement from loyalty cards

291 completed forms with 53 repeat engagements recorded.

Media coverage

We achieved an equivalent advertising value of £786, reaching 65,578 people through coverage in The Sentinel and on BBC Radio Stoke.

The Stoke Reads Facebook page saw a 12% increase in users from July to August, reaching 2,002 likes.

Partner feedback

Mum and Literacy Champion

We attended six of the Stoke Reads Tales in the Park events and because of this, we engaged with approximately 1,100 more people this summer than we would normally. This in led to:

- More pre-nursery-age children at our sensory play groups
- more members joining our online support groups and engaging in online content
- more donations of used baby items for low-income families
- more people contacting us for support.



As well as this, we got to offer some really practical advice during the sessions, which included everything from weaning advice to treating a sore bum! We've engaged with other organisations that we are looking to collaborate with in the future, and have been booked two other sessions in the next couple of weeks.

"Personally, I thoroughly enjoyed every single session. Stoke Mums started in the parks and it was so lovely to get back out there and engage with so many amazing people. Thank you so much for including us in your line up, and thank you for the hard work and organisation of the most amazing summer sessions! Stoke is very lucky to have you."

Storyteller, Yeaman Street Park Chairman and Literacy Champion

Just another incredible day today. A great turnout, the park busy as anyone has ever seen it. This is what the city needs - events that appeal to the public at prices they can afford, (in this case, free), that have the whole family at heart and bring people together in a friendly, warm, positive atmosphere. They were not merely an audience, but active participants. It's been a privilege to be involved in my own, small way. Thanks for asking me.



Stormtrooper in a Teacup and Literacy Champion

We had an absolutely awesome day today, thank you to everyone who came and took part and thanks to everyone who had their photo taken with us, your all awesome. See you next week in Burslem park. May the force be with you always and books.

Family Feedback – received on Facebook

Mum - Great organisation, so many things for the children to try, and a bonus that it was all free! It is great that reading is being encouraged in such a way. Loved the storyteller and he was great at involving the children. ... all in all a great success, thank you for all your efforts 😊

Grandmother - Fabulous day out. Thank you so much, my granddaughter loved the stories and activities.

Mum - We managed to get to 3 had a lovely time at each one every time, effort and kindness put in to ensure the children have a lovely time is a credit to everyone involved. Thank you for helping us have fun during the summer holidays 😊❤️

Grandmother - We had a lovely time today, our grandchildren have got back and one book is read already! Thank you all.

Mum - A fantastic family event! Thank you to everyone involved. A fantastic day at Tunstall 'Tales In The Park' thank you for putting on such a brilliant event with so many activities! It was lovely to explore a local park that we have never even visited before.

Mum - This was a fantastic day thank you so much my little girl loves her books she received today

Mum - It was a fantastic event and we look forward to the next one ❤️

Mum - What a fantastic day. Thank you 😊 we all had a lovely time x

Mum - Had a lovely day, thank you so much. Kids loved it and so many freebies

Dad - Hi 😊 we've been to your event at Burslem Park today and it was brilliant. Thank you, you all deserve massive credit for organising such good events!

Mum - Was a brilliant event thank you my twins got there first books 📖📖 xx





Stoke-on-Trent - Six-towns stories – Youth Literacy Champions

The idea for Six-towns Stories (STS) began with a local creative, Kirsty from Kreative Foundation. Kreative Foundation is an 'alternative education and community development company' which delivers arts-based activities to support vulnerable and potentially vulnerable groups including, young people and Youth Voice workshops for people with Alzheimer's. Based on their success working with local groups and organisations the team decided to see if there was a way to link them with some of our priority groups to deliver a programme.

The team went back to some of the schools they were already working with and put forward the idea of a joint project with young people becoming Youth Literacy Champions and leading on large parts of the project. STS was designed with two main elements:

- To promote literacy among pupils in Stoke, engaging them with creative writing, reading for enjoyment and increasing awareness of local partners linked with literacy (i.e. the public libraries, local potteries)
- To train and support Youth Literacy Champions from a secondary school and put them in the driving seat of shaping and delivering the approach, giving them the chance to learn new skills.

11 Youth Literacy Champions from Years 7 and 8 were recruited from the Co-Op Academy, which serves one of our high priority communities, along with two members of staff to be involved in designing and delivering the project. This aligned with their existing Youth Ambassadors programme which is aimed at giving young people the chance to widen their skills and grow their confidence.

The young people were trained by the Hub team on effective volunteering, the safeguarding information appropriate to them and story-telling training. They then took part in a creative writing workshop run by Kreative Foundation which was after school, so in their own time. The purpose of this session was to model good practice in running workshops so they would be able to take the lead with younger children later on. The YLCs explored challenges or issues they face with reading and writing helping them think critically about barriers which other people might face. One output from the session was a word bank they created which they then used in the sessions they ran with younger children.

With some guidance from the Hub team the YLCs decided that a writing competition was the best way to engage a lot of young people but that it should be supported by the sort of workshops which they had taken part in. The Hub team worked with them to go through possible themes, what support the children might need and how to engage them. The YLCs made three key decisions as a group to shape the activities.

1. They started with three themes and in the end, selected journeys and adventure
2. It would be for a Key Stage 2 audience and the young people thought it would be valuable for children transferring from primary to secondary school (Years 5 and 6)
3. They also decided not to have a word count, but instead that the entries could be two pages. This was because they wanted to make sure it was open to children who were less confident writers and might want to add illustrations or 'just write bigger'.

To support the young people, the YLC created writing prompts, which were sent out with the competition entry form and rules. One of the YLCs included doodles as they said they would not be inspired by word prompts alone.

The YLCs hosted a series of workshops for Year and 6 classes from three priority primary schools in the recently opened public library. Around 240 children took part. The YLCs who also created two of the activities, Blob and Superhero writing.

Blob: where a child draws a shape and then uses it to create a character with prompts about who they might be, who their family is and what they do.

Spiral Writing: Designed for children who may struggle with the process of writing. The worksheet has a spiral on the page and the child starts from the inside and writes outwards, it can be anything, often just a stream of words.

The competition was open to every school in the city, promoted through social media and featured in the local paper. Individual children, home-schooled children and schools have all entered. The competition closed in early March with around 100 entries. By launching the competition online and having it open to the public and families took part with several emailing to say how much they enjoyed the competition and how much their children enjoyed it.

The last major role for the YLCs has been to judge the competition entries and select the winners. The winners will have their work printed in an anthology and displayed at Tunstall library, Middleport Pottery and Co-op Academy. The overall winner will receive books for themselves and their class and a visit from a local storyteller.

The entire team have been blown away by the talent and creativity that the Youth Literacy Champions have brought to the project. Plans for next year have not been finalised, but there is clearly an appetite to do more. Kreative Foundations was a new partner for this project, and Co-op Academy had some links with the Hub already, but the school is now fully engaged and has recently installed a community bookshelf in their main reception for parents or visitors to take books, which the YLCs are responsible for maintaining.

Every YLC and child who took part in the workshops received a book (written by Marcus Rashford) and the book prizes were donations from a publishing partner.

Feedback from some of the Youth Literacy Champions about why they wanted to be involved.

"I took part in the 'City of Kindness' writing competition when I was in Year 5. I wrote a poem and really enjoyed thinking about the ideas and working on the poem until it was good enough. Because I enjoyed that, while I've been in Year 7, I've entered Greenpeace's 'Poem for the planet' competition too. I thought it would be good to help other students enjoy creative writing as much as I do."

"I would like to get experience in helping people. I think helping the younger students will give me confidence. It sounds fun because we'll get to work with children from the primary schools we went to. We can share our memories of their school and tell them what the Academy is like."

"Creative writing stretches your mind, improves your imagination and gets you to think about new ideas, not copying other people. That's good for everything in life because it helps you to think for yourself and make your own decisions - for example, don't just do the job everyone else wants to do, as there will be too much competition for those jobs and you might not enjoy it."

Use your imagination and find something interesting and unusual to do. The competition will get the KS2 students to go into their imagination. They might learn new words and ideas from us and the adults. They will learn research skills by finding out more about the theme, so they can pick an unusual part of the theme to write about.”

“Being creative can make you feel good because it helps you think your way around a problem - maybe in maths, but maybe just in everyday life - and find a solution. It makes you feel confident if you work a problem out by yourself, or find an answer when no one else can find one. That would have helped me when I was younger - and will still help me now.”



World of Stories case studies

Case study 1: Harnessing World of Stories schools to promote Connecting Stories community activity.

In November 2022, [Read North East delivered an author festival](#) with four coordinated events taking place in community venues in Newcastle, Gateshead, Redcar and Stockton over consecutive weekends. Read North East used the opportunities provided by World of Stories autumn networking sessions in Stockton and Redcar to promote local author events to participating schools.

An overview of each other event was provided to participating schools by the Programme Manager as part of the event, with schools being encouraged to share information with families and encourage participation. Schools were given an overview of the Connecting Stories project and its aims, and gained a greater understanding of the role of Read North East in developing and delivering events and activities in community spaces in target areas. Each school was then sent a follow up email with booking links and additional information.

While families were not directly asked to indicate which school their child attended as part of the event registration, after promoting the author events with schools there was an increase in sign-ups from local families. At least two teachers from World of Stories schools also attended the events with their own families, and both suggested that local families had indicated to them that they would also be attending. In the future families will be asked how they heard about the events to ensure the attendance of families after promoting the events in World of Stories schools can be recorded.

The World of Stories schools viewed promoting the author festival as an opportunity to increase parental awareness about the importance of reading as a family activity, and to build on the work done in schools to promote the benefits of reading for pleasure. Schools participating in the World of Stories networking sessions recognised that these type of author events were of huge benefit to the families of the children they are responsible for and therefore sought to gain participation in the events from families via targeted promotion. Going forward, Read North East will continue to explore additional incentives for schools who support community event promotion, for example, book bundles donated to schools who secure a certain number of family bookings to events.

Case Study 2: Benefiting from both World of Stories and Connecting Stories projects in Blackpool

Hawes Side Academy in Blackpool participated in World of Stories in the academic year 2021/22. Before World of Stories, the school library was “*plain*” and did not have specific areas for activity. The walls were white and the library had no displays, and the stock was unorganised and uninviting. In fact, as one teacher, Kirsty Randles, describes, it was used as a “*dumping ground for lost property and no pupils used the library*”. After participating in World of Stories, the books are organised, furniture is being used effectively and there are displays on authors and what is happening in the library. Most crucially, children now want

to visit the library. The school is also trying to source a nice chair for adults to sit and read with children, more specifically grandparents of children coming to the library to read with groups of children.

As part of World of Stories, the school also received a set of new books to the library. Continuing to build their stock, the school is using their English budget to keep the books to up to date. They have also hosted two book fairs and used the money raised to purchase more books. The school asks the children which books they'd like to have in the library and in their class libraries, ensuring the books are interesting and relevant to children.

The same year as World of Stories, the school also delivered another National Literacy Trust initiative, Little Big Book Club, an after-school book club delivered as part of Connecting Stories to engage children and their parents in reading. While the programme has not yet been delivered in the new library, Kirsty Randles highlights that the books children received as part of the Little Big Book Club have *“helped to encourage the children to look at the books from World of Stories. It also encouraged the families to look at other books in our library”*. Indeed, it is clear that running the two projects simultaneously has allowed the school to focus on reading more. The benefit of the programmes was summarised by Kirsty Randles as:

“By running both projects it has enhanced the library and also highlighted the advantages of running a book club that involves pupils and families. The projects have allowed the library to be focused on and not used as another area in the school for extra class space. It has given ideas and allowed myself to make the library a good space that is welcoming and organised. It has also helped to train pupils more effectively as librarians and give the pupils in the school more ownership on their class and school libraries.”

Case Study 3: Inspiring reading with a new library and author events in Swindon Case

“We have loved working with you and are keen to continue for as long as you'll have us”.

Before taking part in World of Stories, this school in Swindon had “a library with no organisation and it was constantly a mess”. The library was distributed across the school into class book areas, which were busy and overwhelming. The stock was chosen based on what staff thought children would enjoy reading and children were frustrated as it was challenging to locate books they are interested in or even knowing whether the library stocks them. The school now has a library that has been “completely overhauled”, with a library system that has an online library and an app where children can search for books they'd like to borrow and reserve them before going to the library to take them out. The books in the library are updated regularly based on recommendations from a reading group one of the teachers attends regularly and the school also allows children to request specific titles. They have also established small class libraries where children choose books that are then taken from the main library termly to match to each class's topics.

The words used by one of the teachers in this school to describe the key changes in the library include:

“Child-led, up-to-date, diverse, organised, inspiring”.

While planning specific activities that take place in the library is still work in progress as the school is waiting to be granted a new building for the library, the school has been able to support pupils’ reading enjoyment with events organised as part of another National Literacy Trust initiative, Connecting Stories. The school participated in a Harry Potter draw-along and Wendy Shearer’s storytelling event, which were very positively received throughout the school and one of the teachers reports that their pupils still talk about the events. The children were excited to take part in the chest relay activity as part of the Harry Potter draw-along, where they received a special copy of the book, other activities and had the opportunity to write messages in the book to be then sent to other schools. The children also “loved the virtual [Harry Potter] studio tour and workshops” according to their teacher. Most crucially, the teacher had noticed a change in the children who are now “inspired to read”, “talk about books and authors and get excited about them”, indicating that such events, alongside the good-quality school library, have supported positive reading outcomes in the school. Indeed, the excitement generated by the events has also been visible in the new library: children have used the new system to search for books by the authors in the events, to make sure the books they discovered in the events are available for them.