

Books Unlocked Impact Report 2018–2019

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Programme overview

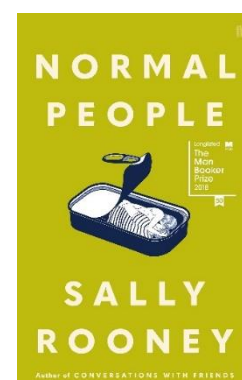
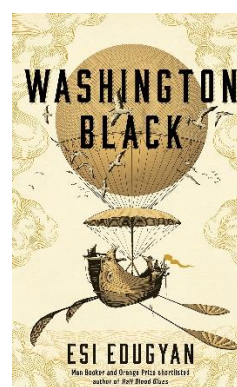
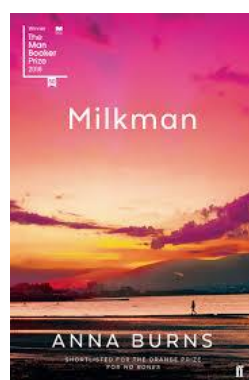
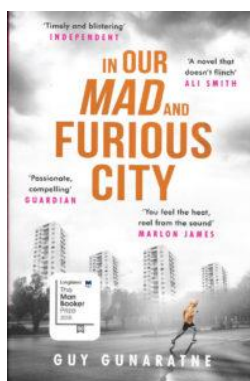
Since 2012, Books Unlocked has supported people in prisons and young offender institutions to read for enjoyment, to read more often, and to engage with literature. The programme is made possible thanks to funding from the Booker Prize Foundation, and builds on the prize's history of celebrating the best in contemporary literature by increasing disadvantaged communities' access to high-quality writing. We support prisons across the country by:

- Donating copies of shortlisted and longlisted Booker Prize titles to reading groups
- Serialising audio books via the Books Unlocked radio programme on National Prison Radio
- Arranging inspirational author visits to prison reading groups

In 2018/19, we distributed a record **2,294** books to **75** settings in England, Scotland and Wales.

"Books Unlocked was a really fantastic experience. It got me out of my comfort zone. I didn't just read a new book, I talked about it, shared my opinion and learned from other people's perspectives. It allows you to engage with more than just prison life (socially, thinking-wise etc.) and that is so important for your own development and preparation for your release."

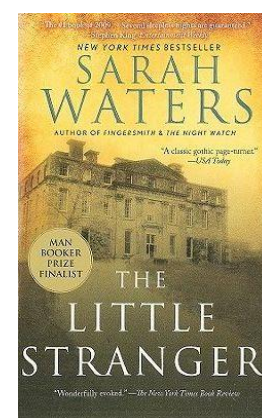
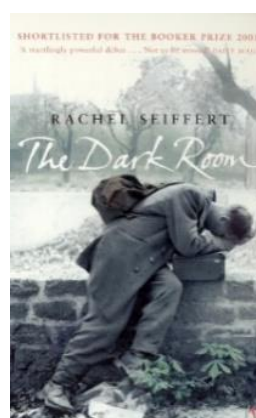
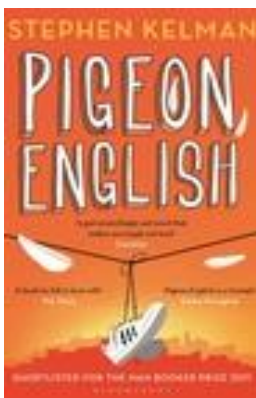
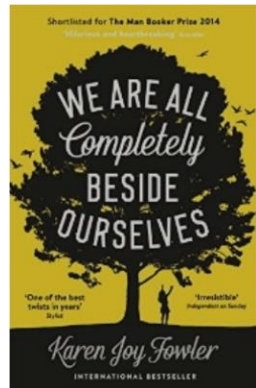
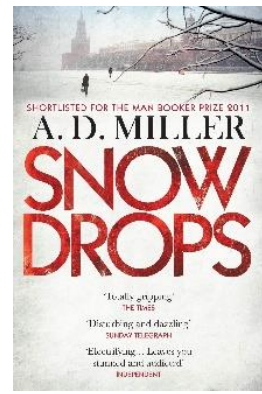
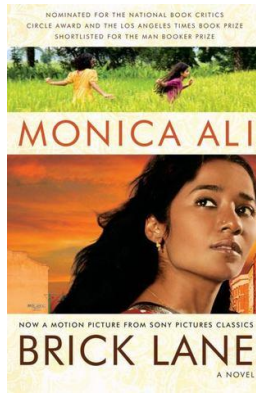
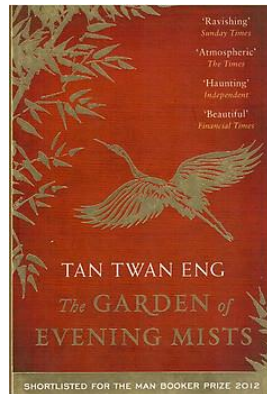
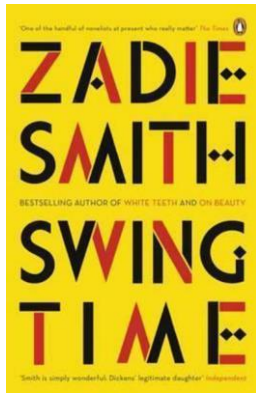
Titles for 2018/19



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Key findings

This evaluation evidences the outstanding impact of the Books Unlocked programme. The data gathered through both qualitative and quantitative methods strongly suggests that the programme was effective in achieving a range of literacy outcomes and in improving wellbeing levels for beneficiaries. Feedback on specific activities was also analysed, with the aim to build an evidence base as to how this specific delivery model can successfully improve literacy within the criminal justice system.

In terms of skills development, the data clearly shows a positive impact of the programme on the reading, listening and communication capabilities of beneficiaries. The report also explores how the programme improved attitudes towards reading, by promoting reading for enjoyment across the facilities. These shifts in attitudes are complemented by behaviour change, since the data suggests that participants are now more likely to engage in behaviours that are known to enhance literacy and oracy.

Finally, the programme also seems to have improved subjective wellbeing for the participants. The beneficiaries reported that the programme was beneficial to their mood, and encouraged a more positive social environment in the prison.

Some of the key findings include:

Key finding	Key statistic
As a result of Books Unlocked the participants have improved their listening and communications skills .	8 in 10 (80%) told us their listening skills had improved. 62% reported that their communication skills had improved as a result of the programme.
As a result of Books Unlocked participants reported improvements in their reading abilities .	Almost 7 in 10 (67%) said their reading skills have improved after taking part in the programme.
Participants are more likely to discuss reading and talk about books following the programme.	Almost 7 in 10 (67%) of participants reported they now talk more about reading.
As a result of the programme participants are reading and writing more frequently .	Almost half (48%) of participants told us that they now read and write more frequently as a result of Books Unlocked.
Participants have increased reading confidence as a result of Books Unlocked.	Almost half (48%) of people said they were more confident in their reading than they were before.
The evidence suggests that the project had a positive impact on the subjective wellbeing of participants.	67% reported higher levels of wellbeing as a result of taking part in the programme.

As funding cuts continue to limit what can be delivered by prison librarians, and prison staff more widely, the need for Books Unlocked is greater than ever. In practical terms, it overcomes the barrier often faced by librarians who are not able to secure multiple copies of

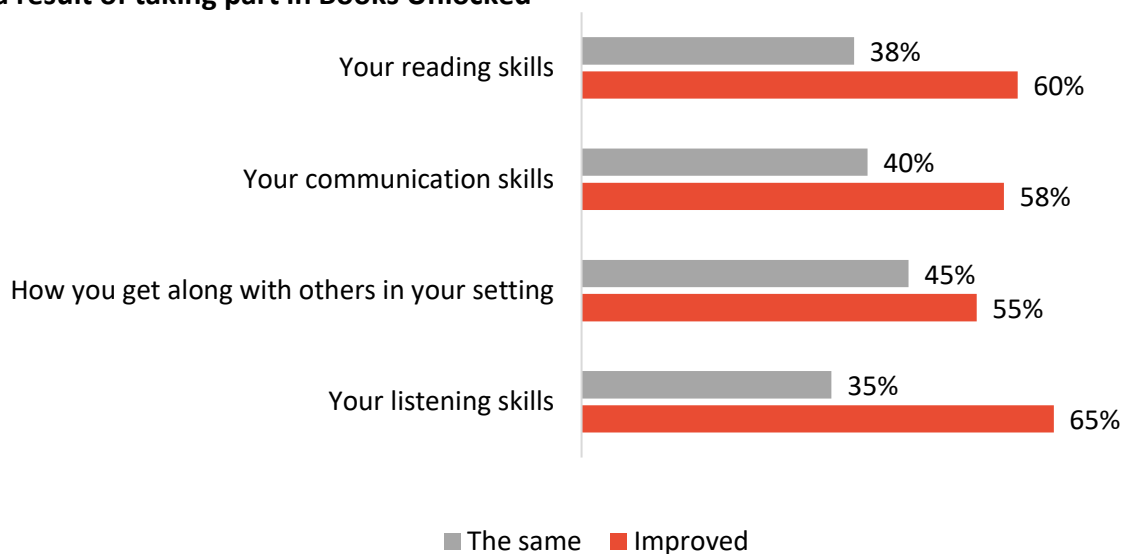
the same title in order to hold a book group. For participants, not only does the programme enable them to read more widely, it also has a greater impact on them as an individual – boosting confidence, improving literacy skills and offering a tool with which to forge new relationships. This year’s report clearly demonstrates the power that reading and talking about books can have on a person’s perception of themselves and their skills; in this way, Books Unlocked is supporting people across the prison estate to feel like “more than just a prisoner”.

Focus on skill improvements

The survey asked participants to reflect on their skills progression since taking part in Books Unlocked. As seen in Figure 1, beneficiaries who took part in the programme reported a positive impact on their literacy and oracy skills. This data not only provides some evidence of skills progression, but also suggests an increase in the confidence levels of participants in these specific areas.

Indeed, one of the biggest improvements has been in listening skills, with 65% of respondents reporting that they are better listeners since taking part in the programme. Similarly, 58% of respondents also report an improvement in communication skills and 60% of participants feel that they are better readers since taking part in the programme.

Figure 1. Participants’ self-reported improvements in literacy and communication skills as a result of taking part in Books Unlocked



Qualitative comments repeat these findings. For example:

“I think it is a good thing because it encourages people to read more. It also helps to build your confidence, social and communication skills.”

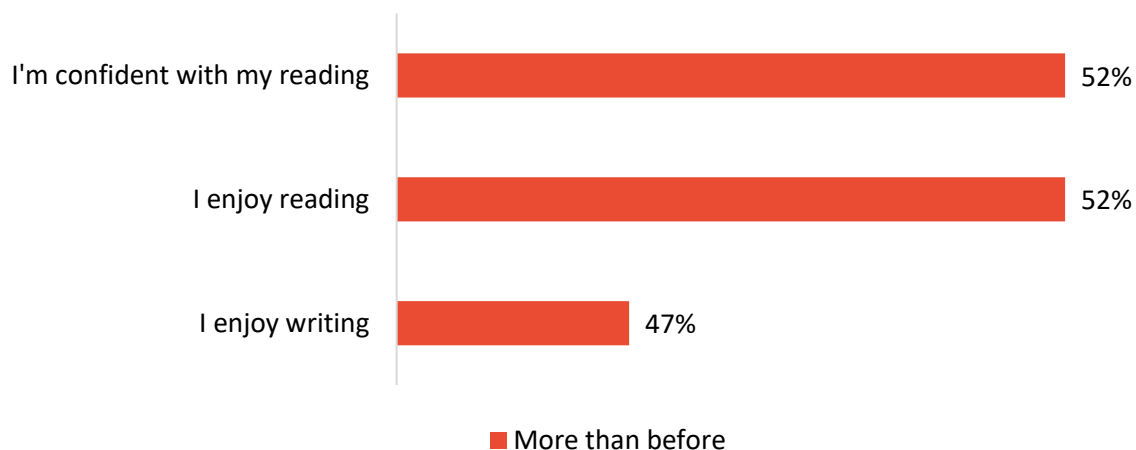
The project also seems to have had a positive impact on participants' social skills, and how they interact with other people in their settings, with more than half of respondents (55%) telling us they now get along better with others in their setting.

Focus on attitudes and behaviours

The data suggests that beneficiaries of the project have improved attitudes towards literacy, and that these are supported by a shift in behaviours. In fact, an increase in reading enjoyment and confidence seems to go hand-in-hand with an increase in behaviours that promote literacy and communication skills.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of participants who reported an improvement in their attitudes as result of the programme. Specifically, over half (52%) say they now are more confident at reading, and enjoy reading "more than before".

Figure 2. Self-reported impact on participants' attitudes towards literacy



The shift in attitudes was also one of the most salient themes in the qualitative findings. When asked to comment openly on the Books Unlocked Programme, 10 respondents said that they 'enjoyed' it and also enjoyed reading more:

"I enjoyed coming out of my comfort zone and reading books that I may not pick normally. I then found that I enjoyed to read more. I learned new things on a different subject matter which got me thinking and forming opinions for the better. I also enjoyed talking to others about the book."

Confidence was another dominant theme in the comments, with some participants linking their increased confidence levels directly to the programme activities, evidencing the efficacy of the delivery model:

"The most important aspect of Books Unlocked for me is the reading group. The reason being it helps me to improve my confidence of speaking in front of a large group. It also helps me to be more confident with my reading."

One comment specifically explored the impact of the book club:

“I really enjoyed coming to the Breaking Barriers book club, reading the book and sharing perspectives with the other men. I particularly enjoyed how the group was made accessible to all through creative means and art, music etc. You could see people gain confidence as the group progressed.”

For others it was having the support of the other people around them which boosted their confidence:

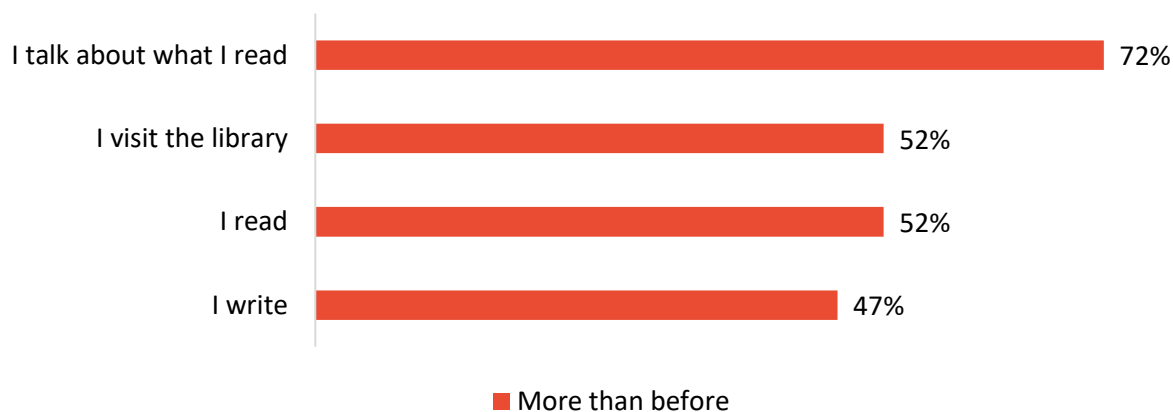
“I enjoyed engaging with others. It was really nice to talk to people who were not prisoners and listen to the things they had to say about the book. Reading the book together has given me more confidence to read.”

Another inmate thought this new experience was to be recommended to others:

“I have never been involved in anything like it and I would like to do it again because it has helped me with my confidence and I would recommend it to the other guys here.”

The data also suggests that participants are more likely to engage in behaviours that promote literacy. As seen in Figure 3, almost 3 in 4 (72%) participants told us that they are more likely to talk about reading as a result of Books Unlocked. Participants are also making use of the facilities that promote literacy, with half of respondents (52%) telling us that they visit the library more than before. 47% of participants also told us that they write more and 52% read more as a result of taking part in Books Unlocked.

Figure 3. Self-reported changes in literacy promoting behaviours

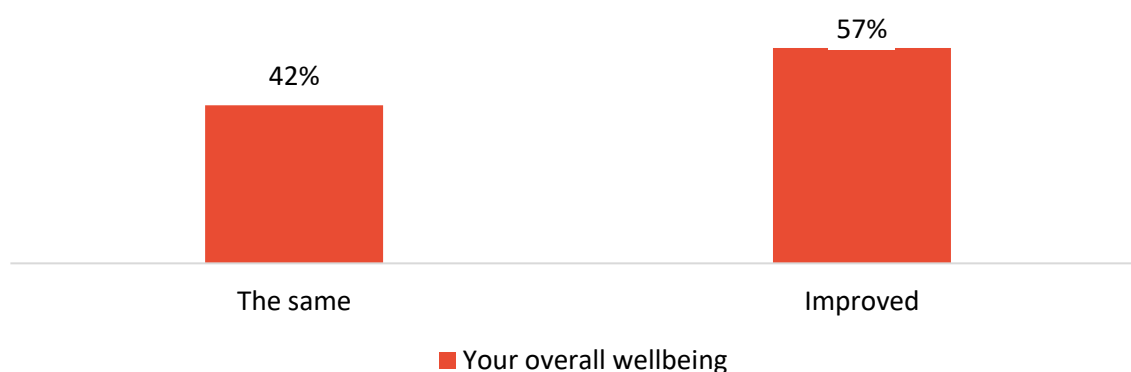


Focus on wellbeing improvements

It is important to highlight that for many beneficiaries this programme was about more than just reading. As with feedback from previous years, participants highlighted the importance of conversing with their peers about books, developing a potential new interest and having the opportunity, via the community model, to exchange views and opinions with people from outside of the prison.

Indeed, alongside literacy outcomes, the data suggests that the intervention was also beneficial for the participants' wellbeing levels. As illustrated in Figure 3, 57% of respondents told us that their overall wellbeing had improved as a result of taking part in Books Unlocked.

Figure 3. Self-reported improvement in participants' wellbeing



The qualitative comments provide a more in-depth insight into how the programme was positive for the participants' mental health. For instance, one respondent told us about how the programme has the potential to help with mental health problems:

“Reading has been extremely beneficial to me in terms of my personal and educational development whilst in prison as well as giving me something to focus on, which is important for people in prison who can become depressed and anxious. Thank you.”

It is also important to understand that this programme helped connect people in the facilities through a love of reading. Participants valued the opportunity to have a structured conversation around a text, as outlined very effectively in these comments:

“Connection with like-minded people.”

“I enjoyed it because I could talk about books and writing with other people who otherwise are not easy to pick out within the prison population.”

Others told us how reading helps them to de-stress:

“Reading makes me relax.”

One person gave a detailed account of their positive experience with Books Unlocked which talked about how it went beyond reading a book and actually supported with the wider skills development necessary in the run up to release:

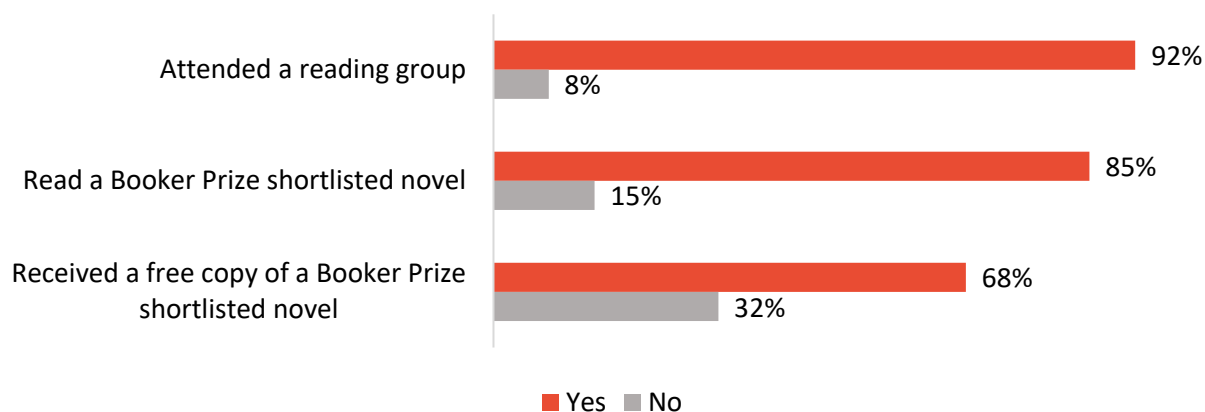
“Books Unlocked was a really fantastic experience. It got me out of my comfort zone. I didn't just read a new book, I talked about it, shared my opinion and learned from other people's perspectives. It's such a great event because it allows you to engage with more than just prison life (socially,

thinking-wise etc.) and that is so important for your own development and preparation for your release.”

Activities and events

Figure 4 shows the percentage of people who had a part in each Books Unlocked activity. Most people attended a reading group, with 92% saying they had. 85% of people had read a Booker Prize shortlisted novel, and 68% had received one for free.

Figure 4. Percentage of people attending Books Unlocked events



As mentioned previously, the reading group seemed to be an important aspect of the programme, which was beneficial for participants’ wellbeing, and gave them a new opportunity to socialise and connect:

“Books Unlocked allowed the Breaking Barriers book club to happen. I think there should be more joined up working because it increases the morale of everybody involved.”

When asked what they enjoyed about Books Unlocked some people mentioned the author meets:

“Discovering new authors, assisting/mentoring in reading groups and meeting the authors.”

“It was a few things. Taking part in a reading group, stepping out of my comfort zone and sharing opinions, engaging in debates. Feeling that I am more than just a prisoner. Debating and meeting the author also deepened my perspective on things.”

42% of people had heard of the Booker Prize before they took part in Books Unlocked (see Figure 5). This programme has exposed them to new books and expanded their knowledge of the book community.

Figure 5. Had you ever heard of the Booker Prize before taking part in Books Unlocked?

