

# Readconnect in HMP Swaleside: Year 2 report

## Introduction

Readconnect is a storytelling project which is being delivered at HMP Swaleside, a category B prison where half of the population are serving a sentence of more than 10 years.

The programme supports participants to bond with their children and young family members while they are in prison, through storytelling. Participants attend sessions to build their confidence and learn new skills such as creative writing for children, telling stories over the phone and reading aloud. Following the workshops, participants use their new skills on visits, family day sessions and over the phone with their children and young family members.

In addition to workshops, Readconnect provides resource packs for the wider prison estate. These resource packs consist of different activities to help support people in prison with storytelling and literacy, including how to write a poem to your child, top tips on reading bedtime stories, and creative writing session plans. The resource packs are based around the age of the child and can be accessed through the Family Services Lead.

As part of the programme, we invited all participants to share their feedback after the workshops. In the second year of delivery, 44 participants provided feedback after the workshops (up from 30 participants in year 1). We also received feedback from a member of staff at Swaleside, who had been involved in the programme.

## Changes for participants following the programme

The project's second year was successful in bringing about change for participants. The sessions gave all the participants (100%, n= 40) ideas for promoting their child(ren)'s learning, as well as for storytelling and reading activities to use with their child(ren) (see Figure 1). All participants (100%, n=41) expressed a desire to become more involved in their child(ren)'s education going forward, and all felt inspired to support their child(ren)'s learning. Nearly all participants (95%, n= 41) felt more confident to support their child(ren)'s education, through storytelling and reading aloud to them.

### Figure 1: Changes for participants following the workshops

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The most common themes amongst participants, when asked about the impact of the programme, were the ways in which it inspired them to find ways to connect with their children, and gave them more confidence to communicate with them:

**“It was so inspiring, what a great time we had that will help the children immensely<sup>1</sup>”**

**“I feel more confident to talk about feelings with my child”**

**“Just looking forward to have the topic conversation with my child”**

The member of staff agreed that following Readconnect, participants seemed more confident in sharing stories with their child(ren) and felt more empowered to support them during visits and phone calls. When providing feedback about the impact on participants, they highlighted one prisoner in particular.

**“One prisoner came out of his shell when talking about children within his family. I believe it opened his eyes about different styles of interactions he could have even if they were not face to face and you could see a stronger connection and ideas developing.”**

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations are included verbatim.

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## Workshop feedback

9 in 10 participants in prison (90%, n= 44) rated the workshop that they attended as 'excellent', while the remaining 10% rated it as 'good'. The staff member also rated the programme as excellent.

When asked what they liked most about the sessions, many participants told us in their comments that the sessions were enjoyable and made them feel positive:

**"It was positive and reminded me of the past. I really enjoyed it and it was quite emotional also"**

**"I feel great, thoroughly enjoyable"**

**"It was enjoyable and interactive"**

**"It was good helps me feel free, its good to express yourself through writing"**

**"It was highly amusing and fun"**

**"It made me feel good and boosted confidence"**

Many participants identified the importance of coming together as a group, discussing a range of topics and hearing each other's perspectives:

**"Really interesting subject and how thought provoking the whole group session was and how it opened up the group"**

**"The diversity of the conversations, interesting topics"**

**"I enjoyed the activity to listen and hear other people's perspectives"**

**"The discussion and everybody's different points of view"**

**"Getting everyone involved and take everyone out of [their] comfort zones"**

Many of the participants talked about the positive impact that the author facilitating the session had on them, their creativity and their confidence:

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**“Patrice Lawrence was fantastic, she's a really imaginative storyteller and the ideas she gave us for coming up with stories were really valuable”**

**“Wendy made it really fun and interactive, and there was lots of opportunity for creativity and it was just a really entertaining session”**

**“Really loved the stories that Wendy made up and her one from the book – brilliant”**

**“It was really interesting to meet Ciaran and Demetri and hear about their work, the workshop was a great opportunity to open up and discuss different issues”**

For many it was a place to learn about the creative process, inspiring their own creativity:

**“Loved the session, time disappeared, and thought we could be anywhere in the world, inspiring”**

**“The knowledge and inspiration from the staff was fantastic. Learning new styles of thought was great and I will use it”**

**“It was really good to be given the opportunity to think outside of the box”**

When asked whether there was anything participants didn't like, the most common response was “No”. However, many participants would have liked more sessions or to be able to spend more time in workshops:

**“Made me feel confident & was so much fun. Bit of a let down it's one session tho”**

**“Give us more time in the class”**

**“Not enough time”**

**“Short session”**

Overall, the value of the workshops to the participants was evident throughout the feedback received, and their desire for the sessions to continue.

**“It's really valuable for us to get these opportunities, so I'm very thankful that you run these workshops”**

**“Readconnect workshops have been a fantastic opportunity and I hope you keep running them in future”**

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**“Thank you so much for continuing to run the Readconnect program, it's been such a unique opportunity and every session brings something new!”**

## Conclusion

This report demonstrates that Readconnect, following its second year of delivery, remains very popular amongst participants and is effective in creating change for those who attend the workshops. It was particularly effective in giving participants ideas around how to be creative with their child(ren), equipping them with the confidence to read to their child(ren) and assist their learning, and inspiring them to become more involved in their child(ren)'s education.