

Research shows a decline in parents across all income groups reading with their children from birth to teenage years and the increased use of social media. Many parents do not know that they need to read with their children throughout their childhood to make **reading for pleasure** happen. Reading aloud with children is a vital contribution towards children's development; and is more important to their academic success than their parents' socio-economic status. Children who read for pleasure daily, or nearly every day, are a year ahead in their reading performance compared to those who never do.

Let's Talk Reading's work in communities is to raise awareness of reading amongst parents, carers, children, young people and professionals; promote the importance of children reading for pleasure, and the impact on their reading and communication.



Examples of our Community Work

Ipswich Job Centre

Regular school holiday sessions to talk to parents and children about reading and offer free books.

The Let's Talk Reading Coordinator and volunteers have been working with Ipswich Job Centre since 2018 to offer families free books for their children, an opportunity to talk about reading and to offer help to adults who need to improve their reading for work and pleasure.

We set up a stall covered in books, designed to attract attention from visitors, in the Job Centre foyer for a morning during the school holidays. We offer craft activities, book talk and a free BookBag for children with quality books covering all ages from 0 to Young Adult. Our partner charity, **Read Easy Ipswich**, are available to talk to adults who struggle to read and might be interested in free one-to-one support to build their confidence.



**Over 200
quality books
gifted to
children**

Many parents and their children are enthusiastic about coming to look at the books and choosing one to take home; some parents are initially reluctant and then persuaded by their children. Those families who stop on the way into their appointment are able to choose **free books** for their children to read while their parent is being interviewed; often families are rushing to get there on time, so pause on the way out. We have found that parents with babies and children under 2 are the least likely to come forward, however once approached they are just as keen to talk and often don't realise how early they can start read with their children. Each session attracts between 10 and 20 people, and the Job Centre staff often suggest to claimants that they come over and talk to us.

Let's Talk Reading's most successful morning to date was in February half-term 2020. Our display had about 60 books for children of all ages from birth to young adult. Right from setting up we had a steady flow of interested families throughout the morning. Although we had taken about 15 board books for the youngest children, their popularity amongst children and parents that morning meant we had to take a trip to the office to get more books. Our volunteers had long and detailed conversations with a number of parents about their children's reading: discussions about dual language families; reading with babies; and children who wanted the same book over and over again. We talked with adults about their own reading and what was available to support adults who struggle to read. Some children chose familiar books, others spent a long time choosing and discussing what they liked with their parent and the LTR volunteer. That morning, we spoke to over 50 adults and 45 children, and 46 children took a BookBag home containing a quality free book, information about Let's Talk Reading and Read Easy Ipswich, and details of other books which might be of interest.

Gainsborough Community Fun Day

A summer community event organised by the Gainsborough People's Forum and Gainsborough Library.

Gainsborough People's Forum put on a Community Fun Day in July 2019. Fortunately, it was a hot, sunny day, and there was a great turn out! Let's Talk Reading and Read Easy Ipswich were alongside Suffolk Babies and Suffolk Libraries - a great way of making sure that families knew about what was available locally and expanding their awareness about what was available for them to do with their children locally.

We had a wide range of **free books** to give away for children of all ages; a 'Tiger Who Came to Tea' **Storytime**; and Tiger craft activities for children. From start to finish, our 7 volunteers were constantly occupied talking to children and their parents about **reading**; offering free books, running Storytime sessions, and helping children with Tiger activities. Some children stayed at the stall for a long time, others came and went. Children who had been given books went and found their friends to bring them to the stall, some came back and asked if they could swap their book because they'd changed their minds.



One notable success was with Bentley and his mum. Bentley was 4 months, and his mum thought it was too early to introduce him to books. One of our volunteers showed her a board book with felt flaps that lifted up, and Bentley discovered that he could swipe the felt and see what was underneath. His face lit up, and he did it **again, and again, and again**. Bentley's mum was delighted, and they went away happily holding the book...to the Suffolk Libraries stall where she found out about baby sessions at Gainsborough Library... and to the Suffolk Babies staff to play and discover the local free classes that they offer in that area.

Two children spent the afternoon sitting on the 'Tiger Who Came to Tea' mat, reading the book to themselves and playing with the tea set and play food between the **Storytime** sessions.

Our Read Easy Ipswich volunteer talked to parents and children about reading and we distributed free copies of **'Teach a Friend to Read'** to people who were interested in helping friends and family to improve their reading.



Everywhere we looked, children were holding 'Let's Talk Reading' bags. We estimate that we talked to around 200 families at the Fun Day and gave away over 150 books...but we were so busy that we lost count by the end of the afternoon!

Over 150 quality books gifted to children in one afternoon!



Storytime at a Women's Centre

Summer holiday Storytime visits to support the well-being of families in crises.

Let's Talk Reading have held several Storytime sessions in a Women's Centre to engage mothers and their pre-school and school age children in reading. These families have been through tough times, need **support with their emotional well-being** and extra help for their children's education.

Let's Talk Reading went in as part of the **summer holiday activities**, with Storysacks, library books and activities for children of all ages.

The LTR volunteers found that they were reading with about 12 children ranging in age from 1 to 14. We introduced the Storysacks and quickly found that the older children wanted to read to each other and to the younger children; so **the Storytime was taken over by the children themselves**.

Two older boys, who had not been participating in the Centre's events, were on the edge of the group, and **began to use the puppets in the Storysacks to act a story themselves**, then joined in with the rest of the group.



The **children read aloud to each other** from the selection of library books and some Roald Dahl rhymes and stories that the volunteers had brought. We talked with the children about books they liked. Then LTR invited the children to **choose a book of their own**, from the selection the volunteers had brought to gift, which were eagerly taken up by all of them.

When the Centre staff announced that the session was ending, the **children stayed in the room, still looking through books and playing with the toys**.

We asked the staff for feedback on the session, and a few days later the playworker contacted the lead volunteer to say that they **hadn't realised how important books could be in the children's lives**.

As a result of Let's Talk Reading's visit, the older children had decided that they would like the Centre to put an **appeal on social media for books** they wanted to read. The Centre had a great response and were able to create a library of books for older children. They bought a bookshelf to hold the gifted books, and placed it just outside the office, so that the older children had easy access at all times to the books they had asked for. The children were really proud of the appeal they'd initiated and the results.

Let's Talk Reading's input to the Women's Centre had a **direct impact on staff and children**: creating a safe and stimulating environment; raising awareness of the importance of reading for well-being and connecting with one another; and the way in which **reading for pleasure** could transport children, for a short time, from the stresses they had experienced into the world of books.

