

<b>Institution:</b> University of Liverpool
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 29 – English Language and Literature
<b>Title of case study:</b> <i>The Reader Organisation</i> : Reading in the Community, Reading for Health and Well-Being
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>This study outlines the nationwide impacts of a community reading programme, ‘Get into Reading’, pioneered by <i>The Reader Organisation</i>, which has grown out of research and praxis carried out in the Department of English at Liverpool and Continuing Education (Professor Phil Davis, Dr Josie Billington, Dr Jane Davis).</p> <p><i>The Reader Organisation</i> became a spin-out organisation in 2008, continuing its close working collaboration with English staff (Davis, Billington) whose research has continued to underpin its trajectory. It has grown significantly since then, developing a high profile geographic and social reach, employing 78 staff and 125 volunteers, and delivering over 360 groups nationally for shared reading aloud for health and well-being in hospitals, prisons, care homes, GP surgeries, libraries, community and mental health centres, with 30% of its employees being graduates of the Department of English. <i>The Reader Organisation’s</i> activities benefit large numbers of care and therapeutic service providers and their client groups: training has been provided to 900 health and social care staff and ‘Get into Reading’ has been delivered to thousands of individual participants in a wide range of settings in the UK, and is also now influencing practice in other countries.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The research underpinning the impact falls into two phases: (a) literary research undertaken in the Department of English which helped to found <i>The Reader Organisation</i> and develop its read-aloud model, ‘Get into Reading’; and (b) research which has helped sustain ‘Get into Reading’ and its mental health impacts which has founded a new field of study in community reading and health.</p> <p><b>a) Founding Research: 1997-2007 Laying the foundations of <i>The Reader Organisation’s</i> practice</b></p> <p><i>The Reader Organisation’s</i> mission ‘to renew the lost sense of literature as a life-enhancing creative power’ and its shared reading aloud model, ‘Get into Reading’, originated in, and has been continuously validated by, Professor Philip Davis’ (Department of English 1980-2011) concern with ‘the experience of reading’ (Davis, 1991). It was first modelled in a postgraduate degree, now entitled ‘Reading in Practice’, based in and validated by the Department of English, components of which are still taught by past and current Department of English staff (Hamer, Gonzalez-Diaz). The ethos embodied in the MA has its most representative public expression in <i>Real Voices on Reading</i> (ed. Davis, 1997). Davis’ emphasis on shared reading, and on narrowing the gap between professional English studies and the general reader, helped spawn directly <i>The Reader</i> magazine, the written voice of <i>The Reader Organisation</i>, which he currently edits (issued twice yearly since 1997, quarterly since 2003) and for which members of the Department of English regularly submit articles; and subsequently the community reading model ‘Get into Reading’, first implemented in 2001.</p> <p><b>b) Sustaining Research: Post-2007 Studying the outcomes and effects of <i>The Reader Organisation’s</i> practice</b></p> <p>Davis et al (2007) demonstrated that reading a literary text aloud harnesses the power of reading as both an individual cognitive process and a socially coalescing presence. Further study (Billington et al, 2010; 2012), arising from a two-year research project funded by Liverpool Health Inequalities Research Institute, found a statistically significant reduction in depressive symptoms in ‘Get into Reading’ participants.</p> <p>Since 2007, the observed effects of ‘Get into Reading’ on low mood have created strong interest</p>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

from NHS commissioners and a demand for evidence-based research. A new interdisciplinary field of research has evolved as a result, involving the collaboration of English (P Davis, J Billington) with colleagues in Medicine (Professor of Primary Care, Christopher Dowrick), Clinical Psychology (Professor Peter Kinderman and Professor Richard Bentall), and Health Sciences (Professor Jude Robinson), recently formalised as the *Centre for Reading Research* (CRILS, Director, Davis; Deputy Director, Billington). Billington and Davis currently lead a cluster of interdisciplinary research projects studying the benefits of reading in relation to mental/physical conditions (depression, dementia, chronic pain) and diverse populations (women prisoners, looked after children, care home residents). Funders include the AHRC (£40k x2, Jan-Dec 2011, Jan-Dec 2012; Collaborative Doctoral Award, 2009-12); Cultural Value Project (£50k, Sept 2013-May 2014), the DCMS/Public Engagement Foundation (£30k, July 2012-June 2013), the Ministry of Justice (£50k, July 2012-June 2013) and the Headley Trust (£20k, Oct 2011-April 2012). Findings have been published in relation to reading in the community (Billington, 2011, see 5 below), in prisons (Billington, 2012, see 5 below) and with dementia sufferers (Billington & Davis (2012) *A literature-based intervention for older people living with dementia (Perspectives in Public Health)*).

The ground-breaking quality of the LivHIR-funded investigation of 'therapeutic effects of 'Get Into Reading' for depression sufferers' was recognised by a commendation for innovation in arts and health research (Royal Society for Public Health, 2009). This research has been disseminated at UK/US health practitioner conferences and fora: 'Narrative Practitioner', University of Keele, 2009 (20 psychiatrists/mental health professionals); Reading and Writing in Prisons, Edinburgh Napier University, 2010 (25 prisoner officers/forensic mental health specialists); Medical Humanities seminar series, University of Hull, 2011 (12 health professionals); Medical Humanities Workgroup Conference, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, 2011 (100 US health practitioners); United Kingdom Literacy Association, Greenwich University, 2009, Chester University, 2011 (20 practitioners in field of child/adult health/education); *The Reader Organisation* Annual National Conference, Liverpool, 2010, 2011, London, 2012, 2013.

Davis' related ground-breaking work on reading and the brain has attracted strong media interest, including BBC World News (13 January 2013) and *The Sunday Telegraph*. Davis is also the general editor of a new paperback series from OUP, *The Literary Agenda*, in defence of the literary humanities, and is the author of its initial volume *Reading and the Reader* (featured on Start the Week, 14 October 2013). This work has also received attention from other academics: see, e.g. G. G. Harpham, President, National Humanities Center (USA) *Creating Consilience*, OUP, 2011.

### 3. References to the research

Davis, P. (ed.) (1997) *Real Voices: On Reading*. London: Macmillan.  
(Contributors: George Steiner, George Craig, Joseph Brodsky, Les Murray, Douglas Oliver, Hester Jones, John Bayley, Gabriel Josipovici, Raymond Tallis, Michael Irwin, Josie Billington, Doris Lessing.) ISBN: 0-333-67003-5. (Can be made available to REF team.)

Hodge, S., Robinson, J., Davis, P. (2007) Reading between the lines: the experience of taking part in a community reading project. *Medical Humanities* 33: 100-104. DOI:10.1136/jmh.2006.000256

Davis, P., Thierry G., Martin, C.D., Gonzalez-Diaz, V., Rezaie, R., Roberts, N., Davis, (2008) Event-related potential characterisation of the Shakespearean functional shift in narrative sentence structure. *NeuroImage* 40: 923-931. doi:10.1016/j.neuroimage.2007.12.006.

Billington, J., Sperlinger, T. (2011) Where Does Literary Study Happen? *Teaching in Higher Education*. Special Issue *Leaving the Academy*. 16:5, 505-16. DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2011.570439.

Billington, J., Dowrick, C., Robinson, J., Hamer, A., Williams, C. (2012) Get into Reading as an intervention for common mental health problems: exploring catalysts for change. *Medical Humanities* 38:15-20. DOI: 10.1136/medhum-2011-010083.

Billington, J. (2012) Reading for Life: prison reading groups in practice and theory. *Critical Survey*, Special Issue, *Reading and Writing in Prisons* 23:3, 67–85.

#### Cited Research Award

'An Investigation into the Therapeutic Benefits of Shared Reading in Relation to Depression and Well-Being', Liverpool Institute of Health Inequalities Research, (£50k), commencing January 2009 (2 year study).

#### 4. Details of the impact

##### Launching and developing *The Reader Organisation*

[The Reader Organisation](#) grew from the successful launch of *The Reader* magazine, edited initially by J Davis, *The Reader Organisation's* current director (1997-2008) and P Davis, (editor 2008-present), which currently has c.600 subscriptions. Since 2001 *The Reader Organisation* has delivered 'Get into Reading', a community outreach programme running reading groups in diverse settings: homeless hostels, secure units, GP surgeries, neurological centres, libraries. 'Get into Reading' is a distinctive model of shared reading of serious literature where participants read aloud together, with regular pauses for discussion. In 2008 *The Reader Organisation* delivered, in collaboration with the Department of English, *The Shipping Lines Festival* (core funding from the University of Liverpool of £52k) which reached over 1,000 attendees through 60 events.

From its base and research underpinnings in the Department of English *The Reader Organisation* was spun out of the University in 2008. *The Reader Organisation* currently runs over 360 'Get into Reading' groups nationally, with 6,000 beneficiaries per annum and now employs 78 people and 125 volunteers, with an annual budget of £2m and staff located in hubs in Merseyside, London, South West England, Glasgow and Belfast. 'Get into Reading' is also developing in Denmark, Belgium and Australia.

*The Reader Organisation* was [awarded](#) the Morgan Foundation Best Charity in 2010, secured the social enterprise mark in 2011, and in 2012 was one of 50 Nesta/Observer New Radicals, organisations actively changing communities for the good.

##### Social and Health Impacts

Our [own research](#) in 2010 consistently demonstrated increased wellbeing following from participation in 'Get into Reading'. The reading and depression study, by demonstrating the benefits to mental health of 'Get into Reading', has been a critical factor enabling *The Reader Organisation* to extend its activities by accessing organisational and funding support. Through the dissemination described in section 2 above (to over 700 delegates, from health, government, public services, charity/volunteer organisations) and via *The Reader Organisation's* connections with strategic commissioning and policy-making bodies nationally, the reading and depression study has contributed to securing two-year commissions for *The Reader Organisation* to implement 'Get into Reading' as a health intervention from: 5 Boroughs Partnership Trust (2012, £90k); West London Mental Health Trust (2011, £80k); Liverpool PCT (2011, £60k); Southwark Borough Council (2012, £48k); Cheshire and Wirral Partnership Trust (2012, £30k). This research also helped to secure a one-year commission for *The Reader Organisation* from the North West Strategic Health Authority (2012, £150k). 1500 beneficiaries of these commissions have reported improvements in mental health/well-being. One evaluation of the economic benefits of 'Get into Reading', conducted on the Wirral by the Centre for Public Health at Liverpool John Moores University (May 2013), [calculated](#) that every £1 of investment into 'Get into Reading' generated a *social return average* of £6.47. The Centre for Research into Reading (CRILS) at the University of Liverpool recognises the significance and potential impact of cross disciplinary enquiry and is continuing *The Reader Organisation's* tradition of public service and engagement. A research networking event, 'Reading with Children and Families' (April, 2012), invited 12 looked after children and their carers to receive awards for their reading achievement. At *The Reader*

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

*Organisation's* most recent international conferences (British Library, May, 2012; May, 2013), CRILS' research findings were translated into training material for future 'Get into Reading' project workers. The research has also contributed to the training and continuing professional development of the 78 project workers internal to *The Reader Organisation* and to the training of 900 external health and social care staff.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

1. The [website](#) of the *Centre for Research into Reading, Information and Linguistic Systems* (CRILS) and the linked [research webpage of The Reader Organisation](#) attests to the origins of the ethos of *The Reader Organisation*, and the model of 'Get into Reading', details CRILS' partnership with *The Reader Organisation* and carries a [downloadable version](#) of the *Reading and Depression* report (2010).
2. The Founder and Director of *The Reader Organisation* can be contacted to verify the influence of CRILS' research on recent TRO commissions (specifically, to date, the contribution of the reading and depression study, 2011).
3. The Medical Director and Deputy Chief Executive of the *Mersey Care NHS Trust* can be contacted to verify the value of CRILS' research regarding the growing reputation of 'Get Into Reading' as a recognised health intervention. Mersey Care runs 'Get Into Reading' groups throughout the Trust and the Medical Director ran a reading group in Ashworth Hospital for three years. He is currently co-supervising an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award with Billington and Davis.
4. The Director of Public Health, Policy and Performance, Wirral Borough Council, has commissioned GIR since 2010 and currently commissions 117 weekly GIR groups (at cost of 157.5k) for people suffering from, or at risk of mental health issues, in community settings, care homes, criminal justice contexts and homeless hostels and can be contacted to attest to the wellbeing/quality of life benefits of GIR for these populations.
5. Upstairs@83 is a mental drop-in centre which was the site for one of the reading groups in the reading and depression study. Its Manager can be contacted to verify the study's direct impact on service-users.
6. The views of participants of 'Get Into Reading' groups [can be found here](#). These statements corroborate the quantitative findings of *The Reader Organisation* evaluations.