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| ***`Proposed Publication date*** | ***Organisation*** |
| *16/03/20* | *Read Easy*  |

Changing Lives Through Reading

Most of us take the ability to read for granted and are unaware that there are approximately 2.4 million adults in the UK who cannot read at all. There are a further 5.4 million adults who are significantly challenged by reading and writing, a basic skill and requirement for daily life. That means that one in five people are functionally illiterate.

Oxford can be described as a well-educated city, an estimated 43% of the population is qualified to degree level or above compared to an average for England of 27%. In addition, 24% of the city's adult population are in full-time education (30,000 people) which is the highest proportion in England and Wales

However, there is a significant proportion of Oxford's population, around 22%, that have no or low qualifications.

Low literacy rates are associated with social exclusion, offending, unemployment and lack of access to training and skills.

Not being able to read significantly holds people back in life. It prevents them from accessing further and higher education. It impairs their ability to find meaningful work. It impacts their health, safety and overall well-being: imagine not being able to read the instructions on a prescription. Most of all, not being able to read significantly impacts the self-confidence and self-esteem of those facing this barrier. Low literacy undermines an individual’s confidence, happiness and resilience.

Read Easy is a national adult literacy charity that helps adults learn to read. Lynn Dowler Lynn Dowler, Chair of Read Easy Oxford East says, “I have had the honour of leading our local affiliate group, Read Easy Oxford East, since 2017. Our model is simple and effective. We train volunteer coaches living in Oxford to coach functionally illiterate adults twice a week on a one-to-one basis. Our readers and their coaches meet for reading lessons. This creates a gentle, supportive leaning environment for readers, allowing them to learn at their own pace. The progress our readers has made is both impressive and inspiring. Our coaches know that they are making a difference by helping someone in their community learn how to read.” She goes on to say “If you are looking to volunteer in the community in 2020, please consider joining us.

Recent Oxford East success stories include a grandmother who can now read stories to her granddaughter, a father who can now read Horrid Henry stories with his son and a reader who recently completed her first simple crossword! One Read Easy reader has told us “Once you start reading, you just want to go on and on. It’s changed my life. It’s really changed my life.”

Readers are referred to the organisation by local agencies, including homeless charities, schools and the probation service. Recent estimates suggest 70% of the prison population is functionally illiterate. Read easy are currently supporting 20 readers and there is a growing waiting list. Read easy need your help!

A former coach tells us “It’s rewarding for the reader because he can now read but it’s also rewarding for the coach because it’s quite satisfying, when you can see the difference that has occurred for the reader and the change in lifestyle that he will experience from now onwards.”

Read Easy Oxford East is recruiting two volunteer co-ordinators and new coaches. The co-ordinator role involves giving us one day a week whilst the coach role necessitates two half hour sessions a week. They provide free training with a qualified adult literacy instructor for both roles and can provide prospective volunteers with a full role description. For further information please visit oxonvolunteers.org and type in “Read Easy” in the search bar or email: oxfordeast@readeasy.org.uk or telephone 07947131883