

# Islington Reads Strategy

## Why Reading is Important for Communities 2016 – 2019





“I liked the fact that there was a reading challenge because I love reading so I enjoyed it. Reading takes me to lots of different places in my imagination.”

Summer Reading Challenge completer, aged 9

## 1. Introduction

In 2011, the Islington Fairness Commission recommended the creation of Islington Reads, a community collaboration between public, voluntary and arts sector organisations. The aim of the partnership was to share reading skills across Islington's communities, and raise aspirations and achievements for residents through the promotion of reading across the borough, with a particular emphasis on children and young people. This was the vision for the Islington Reads Strategy 2012, which also recognised that reading is a basic skill associated with higher academic achievement, better mental health and improved employability. Islington Reads also supports the wider Council priorities of improving social mobility and creating a fairer borough.

This revised Islington Reads Strategy, updated in September 2016, incorporates the most up-to-date academic research and evidence, showcases the successes of the respective community organisations since its launch and sets out objectives for the future.

## 2. The Current Extent of Reading

The Reading Agency, the principal national organisation that campaigns for reading, states:<sup>1</sup>

**“We are a charity whose mission is to inspire more people to read more, encourage them to share their enjoyment of reading and celebrate the difference that reading makes to all our lives. We support people at all stages of their reading journey. Because everything changes when we read.”**

Reports from a wide range of organisations, including the Reading Agency, supports this vision, with evidence that reading can have benefits on both physical and mental health, social relationships, employability, job satisfaction as well as general levels of happiness. Reading is still a very popular activity, with 28% of people reading a physical book every day and another 22% reading at least once a week, and over 70% of them saying that they enjoy reading very much or quite a lot.<sup>2</sup>

However, there are many adults who report that they do not find reading easy or enjoyable, with one in six people in the UK struggling with reading<sup>3</sup> and one in three never reading for pleasure.<sup>4</sup> 35% of adults also say it is difficult to find the time to read. Significantly, there are wide variations in reading ability between social classes, with 62% of those in higher socio-economic groups reading daily or weekly compared to only 42% of those in lower groups.<sup>5</sup>

Many reports also suggest this has an impact on attitudes to reading and reading ability amongst children and young people. In a National Literacy Trust survey (17,000 young people aged 8 – 16) it was found that access to books and parental attitudes to reading had a strong correlation with a child's reading ability and interests.<sup>6</sup> This is particularly significant given the impact of reading upon educational attainment, and the importance of this to lifelong achievement, wellbeing and breaking the cycle of poverty.<sup>7</sup>

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1 [www.readingagency.org.uk](http://www.readingagency.org.uk)

2 Gleed, A. (2013). *Booktrust Reading Habits Survey 2013: a national survey of reading habits and attitudes to books amongst adults in England*. [pdf] DJS Research Limited, p.9. Available at: <http://www.booktrust.org.uk/user/library/documents/main/1576-booktrust-reading-habits-report-final.pdf> [Accessed 3 Aug. 2016].

3 Williams, J. (2003). *The Skills for Life survey; a national needs and impact survey of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills*. [pdf] Norwich: DfES Publications, p.1. Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RB490.pdf> [Accessed 11 Aug. 2016].

4 Billington, J. and Quick Reads (2015). *Reading Between the Lines: the Benefits of Reading for Pleasure*. [pdf] Liverpool: University of Liverpool, p.3. Available at: [http://www.thereader.org.uk/media/118690/The\\_Benefits\\_of\\_Reading\\_for\\_Pleasure.pdf](http://www.thereader.org.uk/media/118690/The_Benefits_of_Reading_for_Pleasure.pdf) [Accessed 3 Aug. 2016].

5 Gleed, Booktrust Reading Habits, p.9.

6 Clark, C. and Hawkins, L. (2010). *Young People's Reading: The Importance of the Home Environment and Family Support: More Findings from our National Survey*, [online] p.5. Available at: [http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0000/4954/Young\\_People\\_s\\_Reading\\_2010.pdf](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0000/4954/Young_People_s_Reading_2010.pdf) [Accessed 3 Aug. 2016].

7 NHS Islington (2010). *Closing the gap; tackling health inequalities in Islington 2010–2030*. [pdf] London: NHS Islington, p.69. Available at: [https://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/Islington\\_0.pdf](https://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/Islington_0.pdf) [Accessed 4 Aug. 2016].



There has been a growing emphasis on the importance of reading over the past decade for a number of reasons: as a factor in employability and employment prospects; a key issue in the development of children; a tool for social mobility and as an element of social prescribing (especially for mental health).

### 3. Aim of Islington Reads

The purpose of Islington Reads is to promote awareness of the importance of reading for educational achievement, the value of reading for pleasure and to increase the uptake of reading amongst residents. Islington Reads was included in Islington Council's 'Fairness Commission' report, which states:<sup>8</sup>

**"Islington Reads – a new community collaboration should be set up, organised by a partnership of public sector and voluntary sector organisations, to share reading skills across communities in Islington. This will help both children and adults to improve their literacy."**

We aim to do this through a community collaboration partnership which will:

1. Work with early years' settings, schools and other educational providers to help raise the aspiration and achievement of all children and young people by creating an environment that supports reading and the sharing of good practice between providers.
2. Demonstrate the benefits of reading to all Islington residents and school pupils by encouraging first steps and enhancing reading experiences particularly for children, young people and vulnerable adults including older people, adults with literacy needs, people at risk of, or experiencing ill health and individuals who face barriers to reading through a sensory impairment or dyslexia.
3. Enhance workforce skills and practices to support the delivery of the strategy including the use of volunteers and reading champions in the delivery and support of reading across the borough.
4. Ensure that the value of reading for pleasure is recognised across the work of Islington Council and its partners and is embedded in its corporate approach. Islington Reads was commended as resulting in a 'major literacy drive' and successful implementation of 'The Fairness Commission' in the follow up analysis in November 2014. Language and literacy skills were also acknowledged in Islington Council's 'Employment Commission 2015' as a significant factor preventing people from getting into work.
5. Ensure that the work of Islington Reads reflects the ideals and principles of The Fairness Commission and the Council's Corporate Priorities, especially.<sup>9</sup>
  - Make Islington fairer
  - Helping children to achieve their potential
  - Helping residents to live healthy, active, independent lives

The Islington Reads steering group reviews progress on the delivery of the strategic aims on a regular basis.

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8 *The Islington Fairness Commission (2011). Closing the gap. London, [online] p.29. Available at: [https://www.islington.gov.uk/publicrecords/library/Democracy/Quality-and-performance/Reporting/2011-2012/\(2012-03-03\)-IFC-Final-Report-Closing-The-Gap.pdf](https://www.islington.gov.uk/publicrecords/library/Democracy/Quality-and-performance/Reporting/2011-2012/(2012-03-03)-IFC-Final-Report-Closing-The-Gap.pdf) [Accessed 4 Aug. 2016].*

9 *Islington Council (2015). Towards a Fairer Islington: Our Commitment. Corporate Plan 2015-2019. London, [online] pp.2, 8. Available at: <https://www.threeboroughdigital.com/storage/app/media/2015-10-27-islington-corporate-plan-oct-2015-resident.pdf> [Accessed 4 Aug. 2016].*

## 4. How Reading Makes a Difference

The benefits of reading are numerous and well-documented, and we can see the positive impact that reading has upon individuals, communities and the country as a whole. This is why there are increasing numbers of initiatives that seek to encourage book ownership and reading, and inspire partnership investment in helping to support all families. These initiatives have focused on new and creative ways to get people reading – from reading challenges to author events, reading groups to baby bounce sessions or establishing festivals such as Islington’s own annual Word Festival.

### For individuals

Reading can lead to improved life chances and overall improvements in health and wellbeing for individuals. In regard to employability, those with functional literacy skills earn, on average, 16% more than those with lower literacy skills.<sup>10</sup> Research published by Oxford University in 2011<sup>11</sup> found that girls who read regularly till the age of 16 had a 39% probability of being in a professional or managerial post by their mid-thirties (but only a 25% chance if they were not regular readers). For boys, the figures were 58% and 48% respectively.

These figures are especially important in regards to ending the enduring cycle of poverty, at a time when 1 in 5 children in the UK are living in poverty.<sup>12</sup> Clarke and Dugdale in *Literacy Changes Lives* (NLT, 2008), said:

**“Low levels of literacy and living in poverty create a mutually reinforcing cycle that is difficult to break. People with low levels of literacy are more likely to earn less and experience poverty.”**

Reading for pleasure is highlighted as a key method of overcoming this cycle, as evidence suggests that access to books can reduce the effects of living in poverty for children and mitigate the impacts of household income or parental education. It also improves reading achievement and longer engagement in the education system.

Beyond education and employment, good reading levels can also impact upon an individual’s health and wellbeing. For physical health, reading can improve understanding of medical information and symptoms and develop critical skills, which aid people with tasks like reading food labels, self-regulating their medication and understanding public health campaigns. Low literacy results in someone being 18 times less likely to be able to identify their medicine or take their prescriptions correctly.<sup>13</sup>

For mental health, the benefits of reading are only now starting to be fully understood, although initial research suggests that reading can have a hugely positive impact upon mental health conditions and general wellbeing.<sup>14</sup>

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10 Morrisroe, J. (2014). *Literacy changes lives 2014: A new perspective on health, employment and crime*. [pdf] London: National Literacy Trust, p.9. Available at: [http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0002/3684/Literacy\\_changes\\_lives\\_2014.pdf](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0002/3684/Literacy_changes_lives_2014.pdf) [Accessed 3 Aug. 2016].

11 University of Oxford. “Reading at 16 linked to better job prospects.” *ScienceDaily*. ScienceDaily, 9 May 2011. Available at: [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/110504150539.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/110504150539.htm). [Accessed 3 Aug. 2016]

12 McCoy, E. (2013). *Lost for Words: Poor literacy, the hidden issue in child poverty*. [pdf] London: National Literacy Trust, p.4. Available at: [http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0001/7863/Lost\\_for\\_Words\\_-\\_child\\_poverty\\_policy\\_paper.pdf](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0001/7863/Lost_for_Words_-_child_poverty_policy_paper.pdf) [Accessed 3 Aug. 2016].

13 Morrisroe, *Literacy Changes Lives*, p. 18.

14 Prime Minister’s Office (2016). *Prime Minister pledges a revolution in mental health treatment*. [Press release] Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-pledges-a-revolution-in-mental-health-treatment> [Accessed 3 Aug. 2016].

Reading has been linked to greater wellbeing, life satisfaction, social connectedness, community spirit and helping to protect against life's difficulties, with readers being 18% more likely to have higher self-esteem than non-readers.<sup>15</sup> Nearly 50% of adults say reading makes them more empathetic people, whilst 20% have been inspired to take better care of their own health<sup>16</sup>– aided by projects such as Reading Well: Books on Prescription and Mood-Boosting Books, which allow people to self-manage their own conditions. For day to day benefits, reading has been shown to reduce stress levels after just six minutes<sup>17</sup>

### For communities

There is strong evidence to suggest that reading builds social capital for communities. In addition to being healthier and happier, readers are more likely to be engaged in their communities and different reports explore how reading impacts upon the lives of families, groups and communities in a number of ways.

The community aspect of reading, such as joining a reading group, can make a big difference to people's lives. In a Reading Agency report people said being in a reading group provided an opportunity for pure enjoyment. Being part of a Reading Group also:

**““...supports learning, develops individual confidence and self-esteem, builds a feeling of longing and inclusion and can provide a lifeline in difficult circumstances.”<sup>18</sup>**

Other social benefits include greater community cohesion amongst readers, with higher levels of club or society membership. One in five people say they read because it stops them feeling lonely, but readers also have better social confidence: those who read for just 30 minutes a week are 27% more likely to find it easy to start a conversation with a stranger and 50% more likely to enjoy it; they are also 72% more likely to have greater community spirit and 37% more likely to get pleasure out of their social life.<sup>19</sup>

### For the UK

Improving literacy levels across the population would have significant benefits to the country as a whole. Health and social inequalities, often underpinned by poor literacy and educational attainment, impact upon economic growth, NHS costs, prison populations, levels of homelessness or unemployment, civic engagement and more. An Arts Council England report estimated that the beneficial impact of libraries and books upon people's wellbeing saves the NHS £27.5 million a year.<sup>20</sup> There are also links between low literacy levels and the factors that link to crime such as low educational attainment, exclusion or truancy from school and limited employment prospects. 48% of offenders in custody have a reading age at or below the expected level of an 11 year old.<sup>21</sup>

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15 Billington, *Reading Between the Lines*, p.17.

16 Quick Reads and University of Liverpool (2016). *The Untold Power of the Book*. [pdf] Liverpool: Quick Reads, p.6. Available at: <https://readingagency.org.uk/news/GALAXY%20Quick%20Reads%20Report%202016%20FINAL.pdf> [Accessed 3 Aug. 2016].

17 The Telegraph (2009). Reading 'can help reduce stress' 30 Mar. 2009, London: The Telegraph [online] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/healthnews/5070874/Reading-can-help-reduce-stress.html#> [Accessed 3 Aug. 2016].

18 The Reading Agency (2004) A National Public Library Development Programme for Reading Groups [pdf] p.9. Available at: [https://readingagency.org.uk/about/Programme\\_for\\_reading\\_groups.pdf](https://readingagency.org.uk/about/Programme_for_reading_groups.pdf) [Accessed 15 Aug. 2016].

19 Billington, *Reading Between the Lines*, p.8.

20 Fujiwara, D., Lawton, R. and Mourato, S. (2015). *The health and wellbeing benefits of public libraries*. [pdf] London: Arts Council, p.7. Available at: <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/The%20health%20and%20wellbeing%20benefits%20of%20public%20libraries.pdf> [Accessed 3 Aug. 2016].

21 Clark, C. and Dugdale, G. (2008). *Literacy Changes Lives; The role of literacy in offending behaviour*. [pdf] London: National Literacy Trust, p.6. Available at: [http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0000/0422/Literacy\\_changes\\_lives\\_\\_prisons.pdf](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0000/0422/Literacy_changes_lives__prisons.pdf) [Accessed 3 Aug. 2016].

**“This was my first time doing the reading challenge and it has encouraged me to read more books. As English is my second language I found the challenge increased my confidence in reading and has improved my English skills.”**

**Islington Reading Ahead completer**

## **5. The Needs of Readers**

There are different types of readers, and through reader development activities we can actively open up choices for each individual.

**Pre-Readers** – Babies and younger children starting out on the road to reading can enjoy books through hearing stories read to them by their parents and carers and “reading” the story through the illustrations. Songs and rhymes are also ways in which pre-readers get into reading and communication by listening to patterned language.

**Basic Skills Readers** – these readers have no history of reading for pleasure because they find reading a difficult and frustrating task. Activities must engage curiosity, promote the idea of reading as a fun activity and ultimately enhance their life skills.

**Reluctant Readers** – these people rarely engage in the reading experience, never use libraries and have no concept of reading for pleasure. We need to reach these people through outreach programmes in order to start the reading experience.

**Emerging Readers** – these readers have begun to master the technical aspects of reading and need to be encouraged to continue to explore reading and enjoy it as a pleasurable activity, enhancing their reading confidence and self-esteem.

**Experienced Readers** – a reader centred approach can help experienced readers to widen their reading choices and develop new interests. Experienced readers can also act as informal mentors to other readers, by writing reviews and making recommendations.

Islington Council is directly involved in promoting reading with considerable support provided through:

- Islington Library and Heritage Service – with ten libraries, a prison library, the Home Library Service and Islington Education Library Service which provides collections of books, artefacts and costumes to local schools.
- Education – through early years settings, schools and the various services provided by Children’s Services (especially the Schools Improvement Service), City and Islington College and Islington Adult and Community Learning.
- Health Services – working with the health sector and Islington Public Health directorate on joint projects that improve people’s health through bibliotherapy.
- Young People Services – working with the sector on joint projects that engage young people in the pleasure of reading and raising standards of literacy.
- Creative Sector – working with organisations such as community arts groups or Free Word on joint projects that raise reading standards and promote the pleasure of reading.
- Voluntary Sector – providing community activities and special reading programmes and projects.
- Private Sector – particularly through the provision of reading partners and volunteer reading schemes in schools.



**“It is a fantastic way to motivate children and parents to carry on reading throughout the 6 week school holidays. It also gives the children the opportunity to discover other things going on in the area as well as to appreciate the wonderful resource that the library is.”**

**Parent/Carer, Summer Reading Challenge, Archway Library**

## **6. Headline Data for Islington**

The data in this section seeks to paint a picture of the situation in Islington at the start of 2016, and provide a background to the objectives and accomplishments outlined in the following section.

### **Children’s learning and attainment**

Reading for pleasure is more important than wealth or social class as an indicator of success at school. In research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation:

**“...children concluded that a key factor was the relationship between confidence, self-esteem and literacy skills, with children who had been able to develop reading confidence outside school having a strong advantage.”<sup>22</sup>**

Islington Reads has prioritised improving reading standards in schools over the past four years.

- At GCSE, the percentage of pupils making expected levels of progress in English has risen to 80% in 2015, which is 10% above national average. This places Islington as the 2nd out of all inner London boroughs for progress in English, and 7th out of 150 in the country.<sup>23</sup>
- There are still gaps in overall attainment between pupils who are or are not eligible for Free School Meals. In 2014, at Early Years Foundation Stage this gap was 17% points, 4% at KS2 and 9% at KS4, which suggests that mitigating and improving initiatives are having some beneficial effect, but not as much as is necessary.<sup>24</sup>
- An estimated 30% of Islington school children have Special Educational Needs.<sup>25</sup>
- In English teacher/leader network meetings and training, there has been a new emphasis on how to promote reading for pleasure. Book lists have been compiled and shared to help students choose books more effectively as this had been identified as a barrier. Schools have also shared good practice around ways of promoting reading for pleasure. Several English curriculum projects have been developed which aim to promote parental engagement, through discussion and shared activities relating to texts.

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22 Hirsch, D. (2007). Experiences of poverty and educational disadvantage. [pdf] York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, pp.4–5. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/2123.pdf> [Accessed 4 Aug. 2016].

23 Islington Council (2015). Education in Islington, Annual Report 2015. [pdf] London: Islington Council p.20. Available at: <http://democracy.islington.gov.uk/documents/s7812/Education%20in%20Islington%20Appendix.pdf> [Accessed 15 Aug. 2016]

24 White, A. (2015). Focus on... education, attainment and learning. [pdf] London: Islington Evidence Hub, p.2. Available at: [http://www.islington.gov.uk/publicrecords/library/Education-and-skills/Information/Factsheets/2014-2015/\(2015-03-09\)-Education-and-Attainment-Factsheet-2014.pdf](http://www.islington.gov.uk/publicrecords/library/Education-and-skills/Information/Factsheets/2014-2015/(2015-03-09)-Education-and-Attainment-Factsheet-2014.pdf) [Accessed 4 Aug. 2016].

25 NHS Islington, *Closing the Gap*, p.69.

## Active citizenship

People who enjoy reading and have higher literacy levels are more likely to vote and be involved in local community organisations.<sup>26</sup> The social benefits of reading also includes increased empathy and knowledge of other cultures,<sup>27</sup> better community cohesion and greater social and cultural capital, all of which make an individual more likely to engage with others, especially for altruistic initiatives such as volunteering.

- Individuals with good literacy are far more likely to be involved in community participation. Among those with level 2 literacy 21% of men and 29% of women actively participate in community activities.<sup>28</sup>
- People are more likely to vote as well as engage overall in more forms of political participation.<sup>29</sup> In the 2015 general election voter turnout in Islington North and Islington South and Finsbury was in line with the national average of 66.2%.<sup>30</sup>
- More than one in five Islington residents volunteer at least once a month, which is in line with the rest of the country. However the borough has nearly three times more volunteer organisations than the national average, suggesting that the demand for volunteers is considerably greater.<sup>31</sup>

Democratic engagement could still be improved, especially amongst certain groups such as young people or refugees, where linked reading and citizenship campaigns could be specifically targeted. There is also a need to encourage volunteering across the borough for the 80% of the population who do not volunteer at least once a month. Reading programmes are often a popular option for volunteering.

## Adult literacy and employability

Reading for pleasure improves literacy learners' self-confidence and motivation and builds skills for employability.

- In 2014, the Islington Employment Commission found Islington had 155,000 working age residents, of which 105,000 (67%) were employed. This means 33% of eligible residents were not working, compared to 31% of Londoners and 29% across England. This statistic is especially concerning when there are 1.34 jobs in Islington for every resident.<sup>32</sup>
- 21,000 residents were claiming out-of-work benefits (13%) and 12,400 were claiming sickness benefits (8% – and highest in London).<sup>33</sup> There is some evidence linking poor health to low literacy skills, as people with entry level literacy are three times more likely to have daily activity limited by poor health than those with functional literacy, and are also three times more likely to report deteriorating health.<sup>34</sup>

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26 Clark & Dugdale, *Literacy Changes Lives*, p.3.

27 BOP Consulting, *Literature Review*, pp. 18, 31.

28 Clark & Dugdale, *Literacy Changes Lives*, p.7.

29 EFA Global Monitoring Report team (2006). *Education for All; literacy for life*. [pdf] Paris: UNESCO, pp.138-139. Available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001416/141639e.pdf> [Accessed 4 Aug. 2016].

30 House of Commons Library (2015). *Briefing paper Number CBP7186. General Election 2015*. [pdf] London: House of Commons, pp.67, 93. Available at: <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7186/CBP-7186.pdf> [Accessed 4 Aug. 2016].

31 Donahue, K. (2016). *Unlocking the potential: Volunteers in Islington*. [pdf] London: Cripplegate Foundation, pp.4, 11. Available at: [http://www.cripplegate.org/wp-content/uploads/Volunteers\\_in\\_Islington.pdf](http://www.cripplegate.org/wp-content/uploads/Volunteers_in_Islington.pdf) [Accessed 4 Aug. 2016].

32 Islington Employment Commission (2014). *Working Better; The final report of the Islington Employment Commission*. [pdf] London: Islington Council, pp.29, 59. Available at: [https://www.islington.gov.uk/publicrecords/library/Community-and-living/Quality-and-performance/Reporting/2014-2015/\(2014-11-24\)-Final-report-of-the-Employment-Commission.pdf](https://www.islington.gov.uk/publicrecords/library/Community-and-living/Quality-and-performance/Reporting/2014-2015/(2014-11-24)-Final-report-of-the-Employment-Commission.pdf) [Accessed 4 Aug. 2016].

33 *ibid*, pp.8, 19.

34 Morrisroe, *Literacy Changes Lives*, p.18.

- There is also a comparatively greater impact on women, with greater chances of homelessness, lower employment rates or spells of unemployment and lower earnings once in a job.<sup>35</sup> Islington has a particularly high proportion (23% compared to London's 17%) of single parent households where the parent has never worked or is long-term unemployed.<sup>36</sup>
- There are also some concerns that poor literacy has a greater impact upon older adults, with a Nuffield Foundation report claiming: *"Older adults with low literacy were more likely to report that they did not regard their salary as adequate; they were also less likely to have opportunities to develop their skills. Older adults with low literacy were more likely to work in jobs of relatively poor quality."*<sup>37</sup> However, only 8% of Islington's unemployed adults are in the 55-64 age bracket, although residents aged 50-59 are four times more likely to be sick or long-term disabled (compared to Islington average of 18%).<sup>38</sup>
- In the most recent NEET data the 16-18 year old rate is 10.2% whilst the 19-24 year old rate is 15.4% (overall 16-24 rate for England is 13.8%).<sup>39</sup> The second highest proportion of Islington residents claiming Job Seekers Allowance are 18-24 year olds (20%) whilst the highest group are 25-34 year olds (30%).<sup>40</sup>

These statistics have been highlighted amongst others from the Employment Commission as areas where reading engagement and promotion initiatives could have an impact upon improving the literacy levels that underpin adult learning and employability, especially for young people. Islington Adult and Community Learning have been working in these areas alongside the broader Islington Learning and Working.

### Quality of life/social capital

Although difficult to quantify, there is growing evidence of the impact reading, and especially social reading and reading for pleasure, can have upon an individual's quality of life. This impact can be felt across generations, and possibly generate the greatest improvements for those most in need. Reading for pleasure is associated with higher levels of self-esteem, a greater ability to cope with difficult situations as well as better imagination, relaxation and enjoyment.<sup>41</sup>

- Parents reading to their children has been lauded as *"the most important determinant of language and emergent literacy"*<sup>42</sup> as well as a shared activity that *"helps attachment and bonding and builds strong and loving relationships."*<sup>43</sup> Evaluation of the Bookstart programme found that, of the parents and carers taking part in the scheme, 45% of them reported spending more quality time with their children as a result and 82% of them said reading was a good way of spending time together.<sup>44</sup>

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35 Ibid, pp.9-11.

36 Khera-Butler, T., Clifford, D. et al. (2014). *The picture of unemployment in Islington*. [pdf] London: Islington Employment Commission, p.5. Available at: [http://www.islington.gov.uk/publicrecords/library/Public-health/Quality-and-performance/Profiles/2013-2014/\(2014-02-10\)-Paper-1-The-Unemployment-Picture-In-Islington.pdf](http://www.islington.gov.uk/publicrecords/library/Public-health/Quality-and-performance/Profiles/2013-2014/(2014-02-10)-Paper-1-The-Unemployment-Picture-In-Islington.pdf) [Accessed 5 Aug. 2016].

37 Jenkins, A., Ackerman, R., Frumkin, L., Salter, E. and Vorhaus, J. (2011). *Literacy, numeracy and disadvantage among older adults in England*. [pdf] London: Institute of Education, University of London, p.42. Available at: <http://goo.gl/w983t2> [Accessed 5 Aug. 2016].

38 Khera-Butler, *The picture of unemployment in Islington*, p.4.

39 NEET statistics quarterly brief: July to September 2015. (2015). [pdf] Department for Education. p.8. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/478391/NEET\\_Brief\\_Q3-2015.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478391/NEET_Brief_Q3-2015.pdf) [Accessed 5 Aug. 2016].

40 Khera-Butler, *The picture of unemployment in Islington*, p.3.

41 BOP Consulting, *Literature Review*, p.10.

42 Bonci, A., Mottram, E., McCoy, E. and Cole, J. (2008, revised 2011). *A research review: the importance of families and the home environment*. [pdf] London: National Literacy Trust, p.6. Available at: [http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0000/7901/Research\\_review-importance\\_of\\_families\\_and\\_home.pdf](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0000/7901/Research_review-importance_of_families_and_home.pdf) [Accessed 3 Aug. 2016].

43 Just Economics LLP (2010). *Bookstart: Investing in the future of all our children. Social Return on Investment 2009/10*. [pdf] London: Booktrust, p.2. Available at: [http://www.euread.com/downloads/bookstart\\_sroi\\_executive\\_summary-1-1.pdf](http://www.euread.com/downloads/bookstart_sroi_executive_summary-1-1.pdf) [Accessed 5 Aug. 2016].

44 BOP Consulting, *Literature Review*, p.21.

- The importance of embedding early reading practices via parents takes on additional significance when considered in the context of Islington's child poverty statistics: it has the 2nd highest rate of child poverty in the country, with 41% (over 19,000 children aged 0–19) living in poverty, 86% of which are also in workless households. Overall Islington is the 14th most deprived area in the country.<sup>45</sup>
- This goes on to impact the lives of young people in terms of their school experience and education: 9% of very poor readers are persistent truants,<sup>46</sup> and 70% of pupils permanently excluded from school have difficulties in basic literacy skills.<sup>47</sup> These are two of the influencing factors linked to crime in later life, with only 50% of prisoners having functional literacy compared to 85% of the population.<sup>48</sup>
- A wider consideration for quality of life is social isolation, which is particularly prevalent for older people, with 250,000 Londoners aged 65 or over not seeing a friend, neighbour or family member at least once a week. The Nuffield Foundation report found that quality of life amongst older adults was strongly associated with literacy,<sup>49</sup> especially the social elements such as library usage – 89% of people still believe that libraries are an important part of a community.<sup>50</sup>
- Reading also impacts upon quality of life in a myriad of other small ways: 43% of readers say they get a better night's sleep after reading, and 48% say they have higher creativity.<sup>51</sup> Over a third of people say that reading is their ultimate stress remedy and that books comfort them when they are feeling down!<sup>52</sup>

## Health and wellbeing

Recent research has given literacy and reading a central role in improving public health. The 2012 European Health Literacy Survey found serious problems across Europe; in the UK, a third of older adults have difficulty reading and understanding basic health related information, which then influences rates of misuse of medications, complications and mortality rates. The World Health Organization has now advocated local literacy initiatives (with libraries featured heavily) as the best means of understanding and targeting local community needs with the aim of improving public health.

- Health literacy skills should now be considered a fundamental part of any public health strategy, as they act to “*empower communities, reduce health inequalities and reduce pressure on our public services.*” Literacy skills are necessary to learning about “*disease prevention and health promotion, and how to follow health care routines and communicate about health messages with other people.*”<sup>53</sup>

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45 Islington Council (2014). Fairness for Families: Tackling Child Poverty in Islington. [pdf] London: Islington Council, Available at: [http://www.islington.gov.uk/publicrecords/library/Democracy/Information/Guidance/2013-2014/\(2013-10-11\)-Overview-Diagram.pdf](http://www.islington.gov.uk/publicrecords/library/Democracy/Information/Guidance/2013-2014/(2013-10-11)-Overview-Diagram.pdf) [Accessed 4 Aug. 2016].

46 Morrisroe, *Literacy Changes Lives*, p.23.

47 Clark, *Literacy Changes Lives*, p.6.

48 Creese, B. (2015). *An Assessment of the English and Maths Skills Levels of Prisoners in England*, (Centre for Education in the Criminal Justice System, [pdf] London: UCL Institute of Education, p.5. Available at: <http://www.nrdc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/An-assessment-of-the-English-and-maths-skills-levels-of-prisoners-in-England1.pdf> [Accessed 8 Aug. 2016].

49 Jenkins, *Literacy, numeracy and disadvantage*, pp.42, 72.

50 Axiell (2015). *The Library of the Future; meeting the public's needs*. [pdf] Nottingham: Axiell, p.9. Available from: <http://goo.gl/VX7IEg> [Accessed 8 Aug. 2016].

51 Billington, *Reading Between the Lines*, p.9.

52 Quick Reads, *The Untold Power of the Book*, p.7.

53 Morrisroe, J. (2015). *National Literacy Trust Hubs: Understanding the role of literacy in public health*. [pdf] London: National Literacy Trust, p.2. Available at: [http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0002/7394/National\\_Literacy\\_Trust\\_Hubs\\_health\\_and\\_literacy\\_paper\\_FINAL\\_updated.pdf](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0002/7394/National_Literacy_Trust_Hubs_health_and_literacy_paper_FINAL_updated.pdf) [Accessed 11 Aug. 2016].

- In 2014 Islington had the highest rate of people with depression (over 22,000) in London, and the highest percentage of patients with recorded serious mental illness (schizophrenia, bipolar disease and other psychoses) in the country. Islington's 2012 suicide rate was the third highest in London, and cases of dementia are strongly predicted to rise due to the ageing of the borough's population.<sup>54</sup>
- Reading for pleasure is increasingly becoming linked with preventing or improving mental health conditions. Non-readers are 28% more likely to report feelings of depression<sup>55</sup> and reading is identified as having a positive impact upon dementia as a form of mental stimulation, especially when reading fiction as well as newspapers or magazines. Unfortunately nearly a fifth of people still say they never read at all.<sup>56</sup>

Islington has high levels of deprivation, with significant levels of poor mental health and other health issues. Reading can play a role in providing mental stimulation, relieve stress and reduce the sense of isolation.

## 7. Objectives and Case Studies

We aim to ensure that Islington Reads is a success through:

- Raising aspiration and **achievement** in children and young people through the promotion of reading
- **Promoting** the benefits of reading to all Islington residents
- Improving **access** to reading materials
- Increasing the **choice** of reading materials
- **Supporting** those who cannot read or experience barriers to reading

### Achievement

Raising aspiration and **achievement** in children and young people through the promotion of reading. We will work with schools to ensure they meet the targets set for key stages.

We will deliver this objective by:

- disseminating successful practice
- supporting Adult and Community Learning to work with identified families to support their literacy development and ability to support their children's reading.
- maximise the use of volunteers to support children's reading in schools by promoting a range of volunteering schemes.

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<sup>54</sup> Islington Council (2014). *Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2014/2015; executive summary*. [pdf] London: Islington Council, p. 16. Available at: [http://www.islington.gov.uk/publicrecords/library/Public-health/Information/Factsheets/2014-2015/\(2014-11-04\)-Joint-Strategic-Needs-Assessment-Executive-Summary-2014.pdf](http://www.islington.gov.uk/publicrecords/library/Public-health/Information/Factsheets/2014-2015/(2014-11-04)-Joint-Strategic-Needs-Assessment-Executive-Summary-2014.pdf) [Accessed 11 Aug. 2016].

<sup>55</sup> Billington, *Reading Between the Lines*, p.6.

<sup>56</sup> Gleed, *Booktrust Reading Habits*, p.8.



## Case Study – The Summer Reading Challenge

The Summer Reading Challenge (a national reading programme by The Reading Agency) takes place every year during the summer school holiday. It is the UK's biggest reading event for children in libraries, and encourages children aged 4-11 to read 6 books over the summer, with fun materials and other rewards.

Islington has been involved in the Summer Reading Challenge since 2001 and has seen a consistent overall upwards trend in numbers both taking part and completing the Challenge. In 2015 Islington had a completion rate of 45.1% after nearly 2,000 sign-ups, with 886 reading all six books. Islington also saw an increase in the number of children who joined their local library to take part in the Challenge (178) and the number of boys completing the challenge, which were both targets for Islington Reads.

The beneficial impacts of the Summer Reading Challenge are documented by both The Reading Agency and Islington Libraries:

"This is a wonderful initiative to encourage reading. We enjoyed the Summer Reading Challenge as it highlighted and emphasised the same message we give our children all the time, that reading is fun!" – *Parent/carer, Central Library*

"63% read a book about people with different lives from them and 59% found out something from a book they didn't know before."<sup>57</sup>

"Thank you for The Summer Reading Challenge. It encourages children to have the great habit of reading. This is a good habit for life" – *Parent/carer, Archway Library*

## Case Study – Reading buddies scheme

The Reading Buddies scheme is an established programme in several secondary schools across Islington. Older students are trained to act as 'reading buddies' for young students: to support reading through regular sessions once or twice a week, with a specific focus on encouraging confidence and enjoyment of reading and improvements in pronunciation. The older students then reported improvements in their own reading, as well as better social skills, patience, confidence and sense of wellbeing and altruism.

Mount Carmel and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson were two schools that took part in the scheme. Their 2015 evaluations found that 50% of younger students and 71% of older students enjoyed it 'very much', and the benefits included 'learning how to be a better reader', 'become more confident' and that reading aloud 'helped your English'.<sup>58</sup>

"I enjoyed being a buddy reader because I could learn more words that I read wrong. My buddy helps me read it." – *Younger student*

"I helped my buddy gain her confidence. She became more comfortable with me as well as everyone else." – *Older student*

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<sup>57</sup> BOP Consulting, *Literature Review*, p18

<sup>58</sup> Evaluations provided by Islington Learning and Schools Team.

## Promotion

**Promoting** the benefits of reading to all Islington residents. We will support the promotion of reading across communities through community collaboration to encourage reading for pleasure and to show reading can be fun, life-enhancing, enabling and empowering.

We will deliver this objective by:

- promoting Islington Reads on the council's website, through the Islington Reads website and implementing a Reading Champions scheme
- promoting Islington Reads through its own recognised branding and one which can be used by all partners

### Case Study – Teen Read Vote

The Teen Read Vote is aimed at 11-18 year olds in Islington and is one of the most popular yearly events in the Islington Reads programme of activities designed to get Islington reading. Students in Islington's secondary schools select a shortlist of their favourite titles which then goes to a vote among young people, with the winning book announced at a special invitation-only event at Islington Green Waterstones for World Book Day. There are other associated prizes, author talks and signings and creative writing inspiration aimed solely at young people, to emphasize the many ways reading can be exciting and life-enhancing. The competition is extremely popular for its focus on young people and is an excellent example of the benefits of closer working between Islington's libraries and local secondary schools, and in particular with school librarians.

"...bringing focus to the vital role reading plays in young people's lives. We look forward to the 2016 event!" – *Emma Wallace, St Mary Magdalene Academy Librarian*

### Case Study – The Word Festival

The Word Festival (a joint collaboration between Islington Library and Heritage Service, Islington Arts Service, All Change Arts and Free Word ) and is widely recognised as an Islington Reads flagship programme. The month long festival is a "celebration of words and their power to transform lives" and features an array of curated events and activities, from art projects and plays to author interactions and reading performances. The festival is designed to encourage residents of all ages across Islington to develop their enjoyment in reading, writing and freedom of expression, with a particular emphasis on the impact reading and writing can have on mental health and wellbeing.

"My favourite moment was when I read one of my personal writing pieces and got encouraging feedback, and being in a team doing fun activities" – *Participant, Cardboard Citizens performance project at The Word Festival 2015*

## Access

Improving **access** to reading materials. We're committed to giving everyone in the community access to reading materials in a variety of different venues and by supporting new developments such as e-books and e-audio.

We will deliver this objective by:

- reviewing current provision and develop further opportunities to promote reading
- working with the community collaboration to identify venues which could support collections of reading materials
- encouraging book ownership and sharing

### Case Study – e-offers

Increasing the digital offer of libraries is part of a modern library service, to meet customer expectations and ensure that access to reading materials is as broad and easy as possible. This is a growing trend across the country, with only 5% of libraries having internet access in 1997, but by 2004 this had increased to over 67%.<sup>59</sup> In addition to moving library interaction points online, Islington has vastly increased its digital e-offer, with over 1200 e-books and e-audio books available for free, as well as other online resources such as newspapers and magazines, research or academic articles and business and law resources. A key element of a digital strategy for libraries is increasing the range of devices that reading materials can be accessed via; as a National Literacy Trust trial of an e-books platform for children proved, this can have an enormous impact:

*In terms of attainment, the children participating in the trial achieved 8 months' worth of reading progress in a short amount of time (the boys showed 8.4 months of improvement, the girls 7.2) with distinct trends showing greater improvement linked to greater usage. Improvements in attitudes were also noted across the board, but most especially for boys who had started with the lowest levels of reading enjoyment (a rise from 49.2% to 64.2% for reading with technology, and from 10% to 40% for reading on paper).<sup>60</sup>*

### Case Study – Libraries and Book Swaps

The Book Swap scheme has been a very popular initiative over the past few years, with 'book swap' points established across the borough in community centres, leisure centres and children's adventure playgrounds. This easy-access scheme helps bring reading out of the library and into the daily routines of people's lives.

Book swaps are also being developed in centres across the borough which provide drop-ins for homeless, people at risk of loneliness and vulnerable adults.

The Book Swap scheme has received wide acclaim.

*"It creates a buzz around reading and books in unexpected places across the borough"*  
– Andy Ryan, director of Cityread London

*"Waterside is no longer just a place to play and do arts and crafts, it's now a place to chill out and read, which I love doing."* – Reading Champion, speaking of one of the new Book Swaps at Waterside Play and Youth project.

<sup>59</sup> Axiell, *The Library of the Future*, p.6.

<sup>60</sup> Picton, I. and Clark, C. (2015). *The Impact of E-Books on the Reading Motivation and Reading Skills of Children and Young People: a study of schools using RM Books.* [pdf] London: National Literacy Trust, p.20. Available at: [http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0002/9076/The\\_Impact\\_of\\_Ebooks\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0002/9076/The_Impact_of_Ebooks_final_report.pdf) [Accessed 8 Aug. 2016].

## Choice

Increasing the **choice** of reading materials. We want everyone in the community to have access to the widest choice of reading materials which includes a diverse range in terms of level, format and content.

We will deliver this objective by:

- assessing community need in order to provide a range of reading materials suitable to their needs and their interests
- encouraging library membership and free access to the widest choice of reading materials
- providing information that supports choice in selecting reading materials

### Case Study – Reading for Pleasure Book Club

Mount Carmel Catholic College for Girls established a very popular Year 7 'Reading for Pleasure' Book Club. The objective was to promote enjoyment through reading for fun and to support the development of students' self-confidence, self-esteem and well-being. The students read aloud a book together and then attended a theatre production related to the book at the end of term. It also helps bring the book alive for students, by encouraging book discussion and understanding to develop a deeper comprehension of the story, and instil a 'love of reading'. This diverse format helps celebrate collaborative reading and allows students to relate to the written text on an emotional, visual and aural level as well.

The end of year evaluation confirmed that students had responded positively to the unusual approach, with all but one student rating it as 10/10. One student felt more confident about her reading ability because *"I have more self-belief from reading to a bigger crowd. I'm not as shy to discuss what I feel is right."* Whilst another student especially enjoyed the book club because *"I like to read and it's a good chance to interact with new people and make new friends."*

### Case Study – Reading Well: Books on Prescription

The Books on Prescription scheme involves making readily available and accessible books on 'mild mental health conditions', and along with the Mood Boosting Books constitute the 'Reading Well' emphasis of The Reading Agency on enabling people to self-manage their own chronic or long-term conditions. The collections cover issues such as dementia, cancer care, mental health experiences as well as a collection supporting carers. In 2014-2015 the scheme had an estimated 170,000 users nationwide. 90% of these found the books helpful for understanding more about their condition, 85% felt more confident about managing their symptoms and 55% said their symptoms had reduced. For the dementia scheme (users mainly carers or family members) 92% found it helpful overall and 73% helpful for improving specific understanding.<sup>61</sup>

Due to the personal nature of the scheme it is difficult to acquire quantitative supporting data, but anecdotal evidence in Islington suggests that, along with mood-boosting books, these collections are very popular and of special importance to those who don't have the ability to access such resources elsewhere. 'Reading Well' is a priority section on the new Islington Reads website to reflect this community need.

In July 2016 the Library service launched its Reading for Wellbeing: Autism collection providing an invaluable resource for parents, carers and people with Autism in the borough.

<sup>61</sup> BOP Consulting (2015). *Reading Well: Books on Prescription Evaluation 2014-15*. [pdf] p.4. The Reading Agency and Society of Chief Librarians. Available at: <https://readingagency.org.uk/news/RWBOPEvaluationReport2015.pdf> [Accessed 11 Aug. 2016].

## Support

**Supporting** those who cannot read or experience barriers to reading. We will support reading activities, including the use of volunteers in reading.

We will deliver this objective by:

- fostering closer collaboration between reading volunteers across Islington and providing this service in a variety of different venues
- ensuring examples of good practice are shared and extended
- working with partners and the voluntary sector to bid for resources with the voluntary sector and other partners
- using Islington Reads strategy as a component to strengthen any bids that will benefit and strengthen reading
- establishing a steering group that will provide support and advice to community collaborations

### Case Study – Reading Ahead

Reading Ahead (previously the Six Book Challenge) is a national adult reading scheme for less confident and reluctant readers that seek to change people's perception of reading, opening them up to new opportunities and building their confidence. The yearly programme, invites participants to pick six reads and record, rate and review them in a diary. Those who complete receive a certificate and entered into a national prize draw. Over 48,000 people took part in 2014-15 (bringing the overall total to 200,000 in eight years), and 92% of survey respondents in 2015 said they felt more confident about reading after taking part, registering an increase in their enjoyment of reading rising from 82% to 95%. Nearly half of participants said they had gained better reading skills; and 54% had gone on to continue reading.<sup>62</sup>

In 2016 the number of completers had more than trebled in two years from 37 in 2014 to 129 in 2016. The largest percentage of participants were women aged 25-44 with 77% of all participants joining Islington libraries or City and Islington College libraries.<sup>63</sup>

"I was proud to get my certificate. I've got more confidence and I use the library now. I read Roald Dahl and listened to audio books." – *Local resident*

"I gained the confidence of serious reading. I also began regular reading and it seems like a habit. I want to read more. I loved this challenge!" – *Islington GCSE English student*

62 Holman, T. (2015). *Six Book Challenge Impact Report 2015*. [pdf] The Reading Agency, p.7. Available at: [https://readingagency.org.uk/adults/Six\\_Book\\_Challenge\\_evaluation\\_Full\\_Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://readingagency.org.uk/adults/Six_Book_Challenge_evaluation_Full_Report_FINAL.pdf) [Accessed 11 Aug. 2016].

63 Islington Council (2015). *Islington Readers Complete Six Book Challenge*. [Online] Available at [http://www.islington.media/r/6176/islington\\_readers\\_complete\\_six\\_book\\_challenge\\_2015](http://www.islington.media/r/6176/islington_readers_complete_six_book_challenge_2015) [Accessed 02 Aug 16].



## Case Study – Reading Partners

The Reading Partners scheme is a prime example of a successful volunteer-led reading support scheme, overseen by Islington Schools Improvement Service and the BIG Alliance. Corporate volunteers from local businesses spend 30 minutes one morning a week mentoring a young person in reading skills, aiming to improve ability and confidence as well as inspire ambition and a joy in reading. This dedicated 1:1 time, making use of volunteer resources, has already seen marked improvements for individual students, such as this reading partner pair from Holloway school:

“I work with my mentor and find him very helpful. He understands me and allows me to work at my own pace, which is good because it means I understand the work more. I hope I can continue to work with him because he has been very supportive. I would like him to work with me until I take my GCSEs.” – *Meron Zekarias, Holloway School, Year 11*

“Volunteering as a reading mentor at Holloway School has very quickly become one of the highlights of my week. My student has been so enthusiastic and eager to learn, and I hope our short time together has been helpful for him. I’ve noticed that his confidence and willingness to express himself have been increasing and it’s been fantastic getting to know him!” – *Volunteer*

## 8. Accumulated Learning and Next Steps

Updating the Islington Reads Strategy with new research and evidence provided an opportunity for reflection amongst partners on their accumulated learning, the successes of past approaches and potential next steps, especially against a context of ever-declining resources. The overall approaches suggested by the collaborative partnership have been included below, and will be reflected in the Islington Reads action plan:

- Continue to work with schools to ensure that good practice and success is shared and that schools access the full range of services to support reading that are available for them.
- Recognise that schools have a key role to play in the delivery of the reading agenda. Action plans exist in schools and the Schools Improvement Service to challenge and support progress and attainment at all key stages. Schools will also play a key role in raising awareness and delivering reading projects to the wider community, and the specific focus for them will be about parental engagement and also the use of volunteers. This will help model the key aspects of reading for pleasure and purpose.
- Collaborate, wherever possible, with voluntary organisations through sharing and securing resources.
- Involve the council, its staff and the community as active contributors, who can help to design and deliver the programme through volunteering their time and resources.
- Coordinate current activities in a more joined-up manner, to ensure what is already in place is used to maximum effect.
- Concentrate efforts and resources where they will have the greatest impact, this means concentrating on early intervention where possible.
- Encourage and support ownership of Islington Reads with all partner organisations, especially to assist in reaching isolated individuals and groups.

The Council and its partners will do all they can to make opportunities for reading available. Our aim is encourage ever more of Islington to join us in recognising that reading matters!



**ISLINGTON**

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