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Reading Groups - a University Outreach

2006 was a summer of change in Information Services and one idea that emerged was creating a Reading Group with the aim of engaging the University with the local community and improving confidence with literacy.



After discussions with Community Volunteers, a potential opportunity was identified in the form of the Northampton YWCA. A few months later we found ourselves perched on tiny plastic chairs amongst the squeals and tears of a Mums and Tots session. Not the ideal location to discuss literature, you might think, but an hour later we emerged triumphant with a list of names of young mothers who wanted to participate. So, we were enthusiastic, the young women were keen and thanks to funding from Widening Participation, we were all set...

We began by visiting the YWCA in January 2007 armed with fresh fruit and cakes (always an incentive!). Through discussion and with a little help from Amazon, Waterstone's and the legendary Richard and Judy book club (!) we compiled a list of potential reads from which we voted for our favourites.

Meeting once a month for two hours allows us to spend the first hour discussing the latest book, working through a series of structured questions, whilst the second hour is set aside for activities including: debates, quizzes, analysis of poetry and lyrics and more recently we've taken to introducing a period of quiet time for making a start on the next book. Eighteen months, one short story, seventeen books and three babies later and the group are thriving – initial attendance of five participants has now more than doubled!



Levels of confidence amongst group members have soared, fuelling regular lively discussions based upon a range of books, not just the ones actively selected. Many of the group have realised that they can find some precious time and space to read, they are also discovering that lifelong learning needn't be difficult or scary but can be an enjoyable experience.



“My reading material is more varied now; I never used to read fiction. It's broadened my horizons.”

“I have so much more confidence in voicing my opinions”

Group members



“The young women look forward to coming in for the sessions and they are often heard discussing the book content ...they now make time to read and for some it has created some relaxing ‘me time’ which is important for young mums.”

“The young women enjoy the Reading Group sessions very much.”

YWCA staff



Titles read so far:

- Connor and Jenny - A short story by Kate Peterson
- The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas by John Boyne
- A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier by Ishmael Beah
- Getting Rid of Matthew by Jane Fallon
- Little Face by Sophie Hannah
- The Raw Shark Texts by Steven Hall
- Shame by Javinder Singh
- A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hosseini
- The Fairy Godmother by Mercedes Lackey
- The Wasp Factory by Iain Banks
- She's Come Undone by Wally Lamb
- The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time by Mark Haddon
- The Secret of Crickley Hall by James Herbert
- The Woods of Harlan Coben
- Tears at Bedtime by Tom Wilson
- Then We Came to the End by Joshua Ferris
- A Quiet Belief in Angels by R.J. Ellory
- Crippen: A Novel of Murder by John Boyne

Future reads include:

- Duma Key by Stephen King
- In Foreign Fields by Dan Collins