



This work has been submitted to **NECTAR**, the **Northampton Electronic Collection of Theses and Research**.

Article

Title: Novel beginnings

Creators: MacLellan, F. and Townend, J.

Example citation: MacLellan, F. and Townend, J. (2007) Novel beginnings. *Bibliotech. Autumn*, pp. 6-7.

Version: Submitted version

<http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/4260/>



2006 was a summer of change in Information Services and one idea that emerged was creating a Reading Group to engage members of the local community with the aim of improving confidence with literacy and show the University in a friendly light. After discussions with Linda Davis in Community Volunteers she identified a potential opportunity.

A few months later we found ourselves perched on tiny plastic chairs amongst the squeals and tears of a Mums and Tots session at the Northampton YWCA. 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 '07 armed with fresh fruit and cakes (always an incentive!). Through discussion and with a little help from Amazon, Waterstones 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 whilst the second hours is set aside for other activities including: debates, quizzes and analysis of poetry and lyrics (oh and of course there are those cakes we mentioned...)

Seven months, seven books, one short story and one baby boy 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 life long learning needn't be difficult or scary but can be an enjoyable experience.

The Reading Group has encouraged a positive interaction between the University and the general public and we are so inspired by its success that we plan to extend the project into other areas of the local community.

For further details about the project or its future expansion please contact Fiona MacLellan (Fiona.MacLellan@northampton.ac.uk) or Jenny Townend (Jenny.Townend@northampton.ac.uk).

Highlighted comments for box

“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”

And a word from a YWCA staff members:

“The young women look forward to coming in for the sessions, they are often heard discussing the book content and I encourage them to save the discussion for the session...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.”

“They enjoy being able to keep the books and the snacks are always appreciated!”

Titles we've read:

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 Jasvinder Singh
A thousand splendid suns by Khaled Hosseini

Future reads:

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 by Harlan Coben