

RAYS

reading and you service



Promoting well being,
relaxation and friendship
through books and
reading



You open a book,
you feel warm...

Reading is a creative experience. It is a dialogue between the author and the reader's imagination. Arts projects in the health sector have shown that if creativity is stifled it has detrimental effects on our physical and mental health. It is also acknowledged that self-expression, the sharing of experiences and social interaction all contribute to happier, healthier and more confident individuals.

RAYS is a Kirklees Libraries project which promotes the benefits of reading and the use of libraries for people experiencing mild to moderate depression, stress or anxiety, or social isolation. Kirklees Libraries have a history of excellent and innovative work in reader and literature development, and RAYS is fundamental to this.

In October 2000, three bibliotherapists were appointed, each operating at a local level, working with libraries and neighbouring health and community centres with the following objectives:

- to promote the idea of reading (particularly fiction) as an alternative to drugs, in the achievement of mental and physical well-being.
- to encourage greater use and awareness of the library service by all, but especially those suffering from social isolation.
- to support and empower the individual to improve confidence and self - esteem and to improve learning and inter-personal skills by reading, discussing and debating in small informal groups.
- to facilitate a programme of readers' advice 'surgeries' and conversations about books and reading with members of the public using local health centres and other centres.
- to develop the idea of reading as a social /group/ community activity.
- to give people a positive and non-threatening experience of reading and the library service.
- to raise awareness amongst library staff and health professionals of the benefits of reading.
- to continue to collect hard evidence and examples of the benefits of reading for general mental and physical well-being

Working across Kirklees, in urban, rural and small town settings, using libraries as our base, we have

- built partnerships with health and other professionals
- worked with individuals - referred by practitioners or self-referred
- worked with groups in libraries, hospitals, community and day centres
- organised reading events.

RAYS is valued by a wide range of mental health professionals in Kirklees for its contribution to the range of creative services available to people affected by mental illness; by the large number of patients who enjoy reading, talking about books, using books as a springboard to relaxation and new relationships. RAYS has illuminated the work and possibilities of libraries – open, free, accessible, crammed with stories and poetry, and as Ursula Le Guin says, *words make the souls of ... readers stronger, brighter, deeper.*

(Le Guin, *A Few Words for a Young Writer*
www.ursulaklequin.com/WordsYoungWriter.html)

RAYS Activities

A description of the working methods of the Kirklees bibliotherapists.

Books are always the main focus of everything we do in the Reading and You Service, particularly fiction and poetry, but our sessions vary a great deal according to client/group requirements. The types of activities are always discussed fully beforehand and arranged according to mutual agreement. Set out below are just some examples of the kind of work we engage in.

One to one sessions:

- Simple discussion about reading habits and favourite authors etc. Client takes book(s) and we meet at a later date to discuss.
- Client reads to RAYS worker, followed by discussion.
- RAYS worker reads to client, followed by discussion, especially if there is a literacy or sight problem.
- Client uses lap-top computer to access Internet reader sites and other useful information re: books and the library service.
- Client uses lap-top to do word processing; book reviewing, autobiographical writing, reminiscing, creative writing, writing letters to authors/poets.
- RAYS worker assists client in getting to know their way around the library and helps with book choices.

Group sessions:

- Group takes part in various ice-breaker, book related games/activities.
- Group discusses current reading matter then chooses book(s) which they would like to take away to read, followed by discussion on these choices at next meeting.
- Group writing exercises following a theme, style or structure from published poetry or prose.
- RAYS worker or group members choose a theme and listen to short readings from poems or short stories followed by discussion or writing sessions.
- RAYS worker facilitates a workshop session on making handmade books, creative writing, calligraphy or making paper.

We also run hour-long drop-in sessions called Bookchat, which are more informal. People can stay for as long as they like and join in or just sit and listen to others. Refreshments are always served. We have occasionally run evening entertainments on different themes, eg Victorian, The Brontes, Love, Health, Springtime.

You open a book, you feel warm...

...and other quotations from RAYS participants.

I'm getting goosepimples on my arms just talking to you about the book!

That poem (*My Work* by Raymond Carver) - I was sitting listening to it, thinking, *Don't stop, this is telling me something real!*

I'm reading Nureyev's autobiography: I'm dancing with him!

I'm bringing your book back, sweetheart. My husband won't let me have a light on at night

This reading (*Mental Fight* by Ben Okri) felt like holding hands.

I don't mind reading Stephen King, about things coming out the ground, because that's not real. But this - about wanting to throw stones at somebody's window - scares me, because that's something that's happened to me.

On every page through the book he kept making mistakes, and I wanted to stop him and shout No! You can't do that! but he just couldn't see it. It really got me fired up. (*How late it was, how late* by James Kelman)

I've shown this poem (*The Door* by Miroslav Holub) to everyone on the ward - staff as well as patients - and asked them what the door means to them.

I'm going to frame that poem (*The Bee's Last Journey to the Rose* by Brian Patten) and hang it on my bedroom wall, and look at it first thing every morning!

Reading is wonderful and talking about it and laughing makes my heart sing.

I'm really enjoying *Misery*.

When you stretch your mind with a book it never goes back to the same shape.

and one from a writer...

**Readers are just as important as writers,
and often a lot lonelier.**

Alasdair Gray *Mr Meikle* (Bloomsbury 1993)

If somebody is suffering from depression, it's an obvious thing to say: *Well, have you read that particular self-help book on depression?* I think most people would think of that. Not many people think about reading fiction and a lot of people who come into libraries, if they are feeling depressed they don't really want to *wade* through non-fiction at home. Especially some of them which are very...didactic, they're saying: *you should be doing this, you should be doing that.* And I think in that way fiction can help in a way that non-fiction can't.

Catherine Morris, Assistant Head of Culture & Leisure Services. Catherine imagined, and led RAYS until it was well established

They want to get out of the peculiar state they're in and get back to a normal life, and so that's what we say we are offering, it's not therapy, but normality.

Elaine Harrison

I was stuck in traffic feeling hot, tired and frustrated. As I glared out of my window, I caught sight of a man, who sat in a deckchair in his garden, reading a book. He was totally absorbed, oblivious to the traffic jam 300 yards away. and radiated an air of absolute peace. Just looking at him made me feel calm. It also made me think about what a gift a good book can be. Reading is a way of transforming our lives for the odd half hour, restoring some order to our chaotic world, a balm for a stressed-out mind. It occurred to me that reading could be advertised as an alternative therapy, on a par with reflexology and the like. After all, it has much the same effects, detoxing our mind, cleansing our spirit and calming our fraught emotions. Yoga without all the backbreaking contortions...it must be the cheapest form of therapy going - completely free if you join the library.

Jo Haslam

in putting it into words it makes it more real and by saying so to someone else, it's more real by having the response acknowledged and affirmed. Then that puts them in a partnership with the author, which they didn't know they had before.

Reading expands your world, you can try out different versions of yourself by joining in, by role playing and identification (or by playing God). really good writing is when the reader sees the world through the writer's eyes and says *Yes! that's it! I've been looking for this for so long! or I never thought of it like that!*

It is a conspiracy between the writer and the reader. You pick up a book. The writer says, *I'm going to pretend that this is true.* You say *I'm going to pretend that this is true, too!* If it works, you do believe it (even for a little while). This is an intricate and intimate relationship - as complicated and as real in its effects as your relationship with partner, parent or child.

John Duffy

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