

St Helens Reading Activists

Hubs:

St Helens Central Library

About the authority:

St Helens, like any town, has its affluent areas, but they are few. It's a fairly deprived area – it is in the Top 20 in the UK for deprivation. Virtually all of the young people currently involved with Reading Activists live in the town centre or areas of severe deprivation. Unemployment, worklessness, teenage pregnancy rates etc. are all high.



Example event: Reading Activists' road show

The Reading Activists' road show was a full day event at St Helens Central Library in July last year. We worked with the young people on its content – the author Bali Rai came, we had a comics workshop and a digital skills workshop in which young people got to work on the Apple Macs in our IT hub and produce digital images, a performance by a cheerleading troupe and lots more. In the evening there was a live performance by the band Dutch Uncles, who are getting pretty well known on the music scene. Our young people helped us plan it all. They helped with timings and working out where in the library various activities were going to be held. They interviewed the band and took them refreshments – they were amazing!

Number of young people involved:

1,389 young people aged 11 to 19

What young people and staff say:

Shaun, 13, St Helens: I enjoy Reading Activists as otherwise I would be sat in my house bored with nothing to do. I'm also off the street and not getting in trouble. I've made new friends as I didn't know anyone in the group.

Kathryn Boothroyd, Community Development Manager, St Helens: In some cases, Reading Activists can, and has, made a difference.

One of our girls is now 15 and is the St Helens rep for the UK Youth Parliament (UKYP). She was one of several young people who had been demonstrating antisocial behaviour in our central library. We managed to get this girl involved with Reading Activists, and we have seen a real change in her, a growth in confidence and a maturing. She told us that, without having got involved with Reading Activists and helping to organise events and make decisions about what happens for young people in her local library, she would never have had the confidence to apply to be our UKYP rep.



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We also had boys on an Acceptable Behaviour Contract (ABC), which is the precursor to getting an ASBO. These are teenagers, but they are young lads – young adult males – they are known to the police, whom we have a really good relationship with. Eighteen months on we're really pleased to say that the antisocial behaviour has been almost completely eradicated, not just with him but with other young people too, due to the work we have done with them; we feel like we have made quite an impact. We feel that we've given them somewhere – the library – to come even if it is secretly, where they can talk about what is going on in their lives. We've worked hard to gain their trust.

To find out more about our Reading Activists programme for young people visit www.readingagency.org.uk/young-people

Alternatively get in touch at info@readingagency.org.uk we are happy to answer any questions you might have about running projects based on reading for young people.