

Gateshead Reading Activists

Almost 1,000 young people aged 13-18 attended events and clubs at Gateshead Central Library in 2011. With the library on target to smash this record in 2012, it's clear that something very special is attracting more teenagers.

Young People in Gateshead have shaped their own space and service at Gateshead Central Library through The Reading Agency's innovative Reading Activist programme, funded by Big Lottery in 18 authorities across 4 regions.

Every Tuesday twelve Reading Activists, aged 13-19, meet in Gateshead Central Library to plan events, manage publicity, eat snacks and generally have fun. There are no rules, no parameters and most importantly, the group decide what they want to do. They are not dictated to by the library service...they dictate to the library!

Over the last 18 months the group have hosted a live gig night with performing arts students from Gateshead College, waved farewell to Harry Potter in style with their Muggle Mania event, celebrated the cult film and poem The Nightmare Before Christmas and turned the library pink and sparkly for a Prom Fayre; complete with fashion shows, hair demonstrations from Toni and Guy, makeovers from the Body Shop and tutorials from Lush. They promote their events in schools and on social media, attracting 100+ peers from across the North East. They created fantastic online video reviews for SJ Watson's bestseller "Before I Go to Sleep" and Andre Fukuda's 'The hunt'. They were invited to London to present their work to publishers and senior librarians, resulting in Skype interviews with authors R J Palacio and Lesley Downer.

Gateshead Central Library Reading Activists have inspired similar groups in Birtley and Blaydon libraries. The project is led by an extremely able community engagement worker who has developed young people's confidence to influence service planning. The project is widely recognised by senior Council officers and politicians as an excellent example of youth engagement. It has changed the way libraries work with young people and given them a voice. Skills have been shared across the service, to embed and sustain engagement activities beyond the funding period.

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