

Using Reading Well Books on Prescription in a mental health service

Alex Hegazy is a psychological wellbeing practitioner at [iCope](#) - Islington Psychological Therapies and Wellbeing Service. iCope is working in partnership with [Islington Libraries](#) to run our Reading Well Books on Prescription scheme.



Since the launch of [Reading Well Books on Prescription](#) in June, Alex has been using the national scheme with his service users. "If somebody has come to me with a specific problem," says Alex, "I've been able to offer people treatment options and I've always let them know about Reading Well Books on Prescription."

Many uses

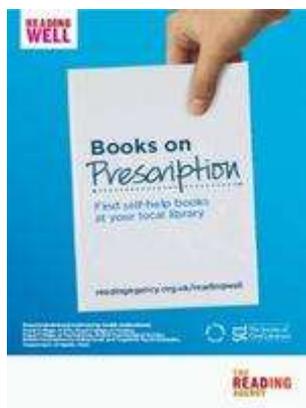
He believes that using the books can help people get more information about their conditions. "People can go into more depth than they would in the session. They often find that they can learn something new as well."

Alex suggests that the books can also be used while waiting to see a health professional. "You might just read one thing that makes a massive difference so it can be instantaneous, whereas you could be waiting weeks or months for therapy."

Alex adds that if the condition is mild to moderate anxiety, stress, low mood or depression, then psychological wellbeing practitioners can also offer guided self-help sessions using the Chris Williams series of books. "The books provide people with regular sessions to attend where they can work towards agreed goals and obtain extra support around understanding the material," says Alex. "This also gives them the motivation and support necessary to make positive and practical changes to aid the recovery process and reduce psychological distress."

However, if the books on the Reading Well Books on Prescription list aren't quite right for individuals, or they don't want to read them, there is also the possibility of using them with carers. "One way I've been able to use the list recently is with a mother whose son has chronic fatigue. The son doesn't particularly want help but at least she's got the opportunity to try and help him so in that sense it's good for carers."

Libraries as open, social spaces



Alex has found the [Reading Well resources](#) helpful in prescribing the books: "What's really useful about the [new Reading Agency list](#) is that there's a ready-made prescription attached to the leaflet - all you have to do is tick the box, rather than write out the book's details, which is all time-saving. It's clear and well presented." Additionally, the link with local libraries means that the books are readily accessible: "It's about the library, which is an open, social space, and anyone can go into it."

The endorsements from health professionals have also given the scheme a welcome stamp of approval: "You know it's been approved by a whole range of different health professionals and impressive organisations, as well as libraries. It's really well thought out."



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Opportunities for development

The Reading Well scheme is in its early days in Islington but Alex thinks there are ways of developing it both locally and nationally. There could, for example, be reading groups in which the books are discussed. Alex also believes that having a wider range of editions available would be helpful. "Translations and large print would be useful, particularly in London, where having translations is so important."

Benefits of reading

However, in general, Alex has found that having good, quality-assured books available to prescribe can have health benefits. "Reading is definitely a distraction technique," says Alex. "Particularly for worry and rumination, if you start reading, it helps you focus on something else. And you're not only focusing on something else, but also on something that's beneficial."

Follow the links to find out more about our Reading Well programme or get in touch at info@readingagency.org.uk we are happy to answer any questions you might have about our Reading Well programme.