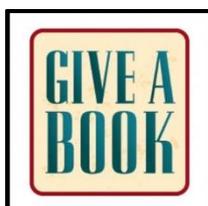


PRG FAMILY DAYS REPORT

2015



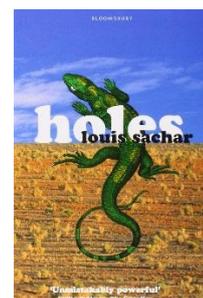
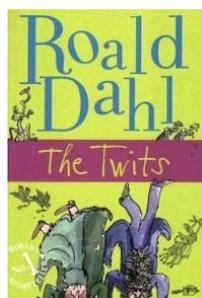
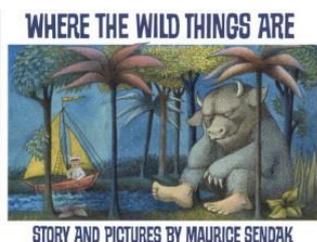
'I read it with my papa. Reading is brill'

'It gave my son a chance to read with his dad. It's the first time they've done that'

'I loved reading with my boy'

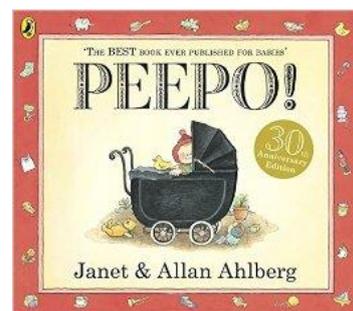
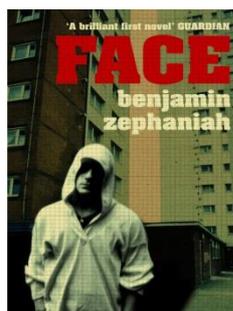
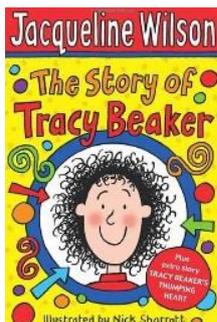
'It's a great initiative for the prisoners and kids to spend quality time together as a family'

'Some of them told me they can't afford books at home, so this was really special'



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Introduction

In 2015 Prison Reading Groups (PRG) initiated a new project to support Family Days in prisons. With generous sponsorship from the Siobhan Dowd Trust and Give a Book, PRG provided children's books and book bags for 478 children visiting their parents across twelve prisons nationwide. The book bags also contained a Give a Book notebook, bookmark and pencil; in some bags we were able to include a Phoenix comic donated by the publishers. The project involved a volunteer team of University of Roehampton graduate students who worked together on book choices, support for the prison Family Day staff teams, and volunteering on the days.

The Aims

Research confirms that regular contact with families reduces re-offending by up to 39% (Ministry of Justice, 2007). It is also a crucial factor in maintaining the emotional wellbeing of prisoners' children (University of Huddersfield, 2013). There is extensive evidence for the positive effects of parental involvement on children's reading skills and pleasure (National Literacy Trust, 2007). Our project was designed to address all of these objectives.

The Project

Initial Contact

We began by approaching prisons that PRG already works with to identify whether books and volunteer assistance would be welcome. We asked each interested respondent to fill out a form with some basic questions:

- How many Family Days do you run per year, and how many children attend on average?
- What support do you already provide for the days, including any other external agencies or charities?
- Do you have a book corner or any activities scheduled for your days?
 - o Are the parents involved in these activities?
- Would you like a volunteer to come in on the day itself to help you out?
 - o If so, what security clearance will they require and how will this be facilitated?
- We would like to collect feedback on the day on the books and book bags we provide. Can you advise us on what method would work best in your particular setting?

The forms returned to us were then followed up with a more in-depth phone call to assess the needs of each prison. From experience, PRG knows that prisons work differently, and we wanted to tailor what we offered as much as possible to the local organisation of each Family Day. We finalised arrangements with twelve prisons and agreed to support one Family Day at each one.

The Volunteers

We contacted University of Roehampton colleagues with responsibility for postgraduate Children's Literature students. They posted messages to current and past students and we held a preliminary meeting with those who responded so we could outline the project in detail.

Once the prisons were finalised we matched each one with a volunteer based on proximity and how far people were able to travel. The volunteers who could not attend on the day provided invaluable remote assistance.

After introducing the volunteers to their prison contacts, we then allowed them to continue dialogue between themselves on the set up and delivery of the day. We pooled all volunteers onto a shared online spreadsheet and Facebook group for book choice ideas and book corner activities. They were able to talk via these remote methods and support each other in their volunteer journey by exchanging tips, suggestions, and advice.

Books & Logistics

Prisons confirmed with their volunteers the exact number, gender and ages of the children attending so that the volunteer could choose an appropriate book for each one. We ordered these from Amazon to be delivered direct to the prisons.

Separately, we sent a box of bags, notepads, bookmarks and pencils donated by Give a Book, together with comics donated by Phoenix Comics. On the day itself the volunteers arrived early enough to assemble and name the book bags so that each child received the right one.

Feedback

The volunteers devised separate feedback forms for children/parents and staff (see Appendix 3). In addition, volunteers completed individual reports on their experience of the day (see Appendix 5). Getting the feedback from the families was not always easy, either because of the competing excitements of the day or, as in a few cases, where the prison did not allow the book bags to be distributed until families were leaving. The responses we received confirmed the pleasure and benefits of the books and bags.

Children

The children's comments tended to be brief but enthusiastic:

'I'm going to read it tonight!'

'I love it 'cause it's about time travel'

'I love this book because Jacqueline Wilson is my fave programme!'

Parents

Parents were delighted to have time and space to read with their children.

'It gave my son a chance to read with his dad. It's the first time they've done that'

'My kid will remember that he got this book visiting his dad. It's made us all closer'

'We got Noodle Loves to Cuddle. We liked it – we cuddled'

They also expressed pride in their children's reading abilities: 'It gives me a chance to see how my daughter can read'

In at least one case, the book acted as a catalyst for the parent's own reading. A volunteer reported a conversation with the mother of an older boy who was visiting her: 'We talked about reading and despite saying she wasn't really into fiction, she expressed interest in reading the book her son was given.'

Staff

Staff provided detailed and very supportive feedback. The writer in residence at a men's maximum security prison commented in depth on the effect of the book bags and especially on the idea of the book as a gift from parent to child.

'We have the last hour of the day as story time when the children can share a story with their dad and relax at the end of a busy day, rather like a book at bedtime... We gave the PRG books to the dads to give as gifts to the children... It was the first time Dad had been able to physically hand them a gift and this attached huge meaning to the books. One boy approached me to tell me his dad had given him a book and he showed it to me, told me how great the book looked and asked if there was something he could give his dad in return'

The power of the book as gift was echoed by a mother in a women's prison: "We can't give our children presents so it's nice they get something to take home."

The bags too were a great success: "One girl who was plainly delighted with the book and the bag told us how she would be able to take the bag to the library and carry home her books in it."

Volunteers

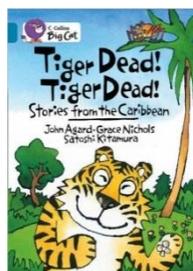
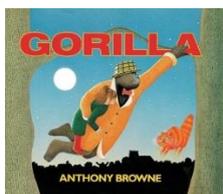
The volunteers brought expertise and enthusiasm to the project and their support was invaluable.

'There was one girl who loves reading and reads well above her age – we swapped her book so she had something more challenging and she was very happy indeed'

'The kids were absolutely thrilled to discover their names were written on the inside of their books. The parents said it was such a nice, personal touch'

Prisons are complicated places and getting things done requires patience, persistence and ingenuity. The volunteers rose to this brilliantly and they found the experience rewarding.

'I also really wanted to thank you for giving me the opportunity to help with these prison Family Days. It has been such a great experience for me. I love combining my love and knowledge of books with doing something that feels really worthwhile. I am so enjoying being involved. So if you are asking if volunteers get anything out of it, for me the answer is a resounding YES!'



Challenges

The first challenge we faced was identifying the best person within the prison to liaise with. All prisons are different: some employ their Visits Officer to organise the day, some their Family Services Liaison; some use outside charities and agencies such as Spurgeons or Barnardo's, and some are supported by the Writer in Residence. In general, PRG's established prison contact is the librarian so in some cases we were 'passed around' quite a lot until we found the right person to work with.

Another issue was security clearance for the volunteers. Again, procedures differ greatly from prison to prison: some require only an Intent to Visit and passport I.D. on the day; at the opposite end of the scale, other prisons require a full Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. This could involve a separate visit to the prison before the day itself, which was costly in volunteer time and travel expenses. This is a problem experienced by those working for many prison charities. A study of volunteers in prisons is currently being carried out by Clinks, the national umbrella body for organisations working with offenders and their families. PRG has contributed to the consultation and we hope their report will result in clearer prison guidelines and a more uniform and streamlined process across the whole prison estate.

Despite our best efforts, it was also difficult in some cases to obtain the information we needed with enough time to place orders for delivery, allowing for potential lost or failed deliveries and last minute addition of children to the attendee list. Some of the prisons were not able to give us number, ages or genders of children scheduled to attend until a week or less before the day itself. This left a very tight window for choosing the titles, ordering them, and allowing for delivery time. In future we will use the book database developed by the students to order in stocks of a range of books for different ages so we can send them directly to the prisons.

We are also working with our volunteers to produce a toolkit that will help prisons understand and plan the logistics more easily: notifying PRG of the children coming; receiving the books and bags; assembling them; enabling prisoner parents to personalise the book plates; supervising distribution of the bags to the children; creating space for children and parents to read together on the day; and collecting feedback.

Next Steps

PRG plans to develop the Family Days project in 2016, subject to funding and uptake from prisons. We would also like to build on the 'book as gift' idea by devising name plates for the inside cover to be filled in by the prisoner parent: 'This book is a present for _____ from _____'

Exceptionally, we supported two Family Days at HMP Wandsworth. After the first one, we realised that there needed to be more encouragement for children and parents to visit the book corner and read together. So for the second day we supplemented the book bags with a selection of books that will remain in the book corner for future Family Days, to enhance the space and draw people in. We hope to extend this to more prisons in the future.

About PRG and our Family Day Partners

PRG

Prison Reading Groups (PRG) helps establish, fund and support reading groups in prisons. For prisoners the groups can be an important route to desistance. They encourage empathy with the lives of others through reading; they encourage critical self-reflection and the mutual respect fostered in group discussion; and they help connect prisoners with family and the wider culture outside.

PRG currently supports over forty groups in more than thirty-five prisons nationwide. Our groups are varied and aimed at a range of target memberships: experienced or emergent readers; young offenders or older prisoners; vulnerable prisoners and those with mental health issues. All groups choose what they read and new copies of the books are provided for members to keep or pass on to family or other prisoners. Wherever possible, groups are run by outside volunteers with support from the prison library.

www.prison-reading-groups.org.uk

Give a Book

Give a Book was set up in 2011 in memory of writer and playwright Simon Gray who loved to read and share his reading. GAB facilitates the gift of books to selected charities and other organisations. Donations are used to source new books at cost price, then package and post the books to the selected charities. Every donation buys and distributes a book to someone who – for differing reasons – might need one.

www.giveabook.org.uk

Siobhan Dowd

The Siobhan Dowd Trust works to give young people the opportunity to read and enjoy literature. It is the money earned through royalties and foreign sales of Siobhan Dowd's books that allows the trust to support deserving projects. We exist to fund any person or groups that: Take stories to children and young people without stories; Bring the joy of reading and books to children and young people deprived of access to books and of the opportunity to read; Fund and support disadvantaged young readers where there is no funding or support.

www.siobhandowdtrust.com

Phoenix Comics

The Phoenix is a weekly 32-page comic for children aged 6 – 12, featuring 7 or more exciting story strips, a puzzle competition and a new non-fiction strip every week of the year. At The Phoenix we're very passionate about improving literacy among children. It is our hope that even the most reluctant readers will be drawn in by our engaging story strips.

www.thephoenixcomic.co.uk

About our Volunteer Team

<p>Sinead Moriarty Sinead is originally from Ireland and moved to the UK in 2010 to begin a Masters in Children's Literature. She is now studying towards a PhD at the National Centre for Research in Children's Literature at the University of Roehampton, focusing on wilderness and the Antarctic in children's literature.</p>	
<p>Suzanne Curley Suzanne is studying for the Children's Literature MA at the University of Roehampton, following her BA in English Literature at Aberystwyth University. She has a particular interest in 19th century children's books, and Victorian culture as a whole.</p>	
<p>Kay Waddilove Kay is a PhD student at Roehampton University and teaches literature in secondary schools. She has also worked in public and school libraries promoting reading, organising literary events and supporting the development of literacy skills in children and adults. As a committed believer in the importance of reading, both as a lifelong skill and as a source of inspiration and pleasure, Kay enjoys participating in the invaluable activities of PRG.</p>	
<p>Francesca Clarke Francesca has taught English for twenty years and never predicted that an MA in Children's Literature would take her into prisons! She tries to combine passive pursuits such as reading and theatre with more active ones, particularly running and cycling.</p>	
<p>Sarah Pyke Sarah is a second-year PhD student at Roehampton University, investigating LGBTQ adults' memories of reading in childhood and adolescence as part of a project called Memories of Fiction, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. She also runs a monthly PRG reading group at HMP Isis in South London with fellow doctoral student and volunteer Sinead.</p>	

<p>Catherine Randall Catherine is an editor, writer and mother of three teenagers, currently working on her first historical novel for children aged 9 – 12. She has lots of experience working with children at her local church, from running toddler services to helping at the youth group, and she loves reading, seeing her friends, her writing group, her ballet classes, and playing tennis (badly).</p>	
<p>Eleanor Hamblen Since completing her MA in Children's Literature at Roehampton, Eleanor has been teaching in a primary school in South London. She's passionate about children's books, and getting kids into reading.</p>	
<p>Shireen Babul Shireen is a teacher, a librarian, a writer and most of all, a mum. She has a B.Ed. from McGill and a Masters in Children's Literature from Roehampton. She formerly taught in a primary school in Tower Hamlets and worked as a school librarian in Brent. Now her days are happily filled with school runs, nappy changes and playdates, as a stay-at-home mum (or Domestic Engineer, as she loves to call herself). Sharing books has always been such a joy for Shireen.</p>	
<p>Melanie McGilloway Melanie was born and bred in France but has lived in the UK for twenty years, where she qualified as a librarian. She has been working in school libraries since 1997. Melanie has a great passion for children's literature, running a long-standing blog and having been involved in several charities which encourage reading for pleasure, including the Federation of Children's Book Groups and Booktrust.</p>	

Appendices

Appendix 1: Prisons We Worked With

HMP Bristol	HMP Bronzefield
HMP Dovegate	HMP Erlestoke
HMP Exeter	HMP Full Sutton
HMP Grendon	HMP High Down
HMP Lewes	HMP Preston
HMP Wandsworth (two days)	HMP Wormwood Scrubs

Appendix 2: Example of Data in the Book Database:

	Title	Author
Age: 0 - 3 yrs		
	The Very Hungry Caterpillar	Eric Carle
	Where's Bear?	Emily Gravett
	Peep Inside: Zoo (or any in that series)	Anna Milbourne & Simona Dimitri
	Noodle loves to eat (or any in that series)	Marion Billet
	My Book of Numbers, Shapes and Colours	Kali Stileman
	Ten Little Fingers Ten Little Toes	Mem Fox & Helen Oxenbury
	Babies Babies Babies	Catherine & Laurence Anholt
	That's not my train (or any in series)	Fiona Watts & Rachel Wells
	We're Going on a Bear Hunt	Michael Rosen & Helen Oxenbury
	Each, Peach, Pear, Plum	Janet and Allan Ahlberg
	Dear Zoo	Rod Campbell
	Avocado Baby	John Burningham
	The Elephant and the Bad Baby	Elfrida Vipont and Raymond Briggs
	In the Night Kitchen	Maurice Sendak
	Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?	Eric Carle and Bill Martin
	The Very Busy Spider	Eric Carle
	Mr Gumpy's Outing	John Burningham
	Mister Magnolia	Quentin Blake
Age: 3 - 6 yrs		
	The Tiger Who Came to Tea	Judith Kerr
	George and the Dragon	Chris Wormell
	Where the Wild Things Are	Maurice Sendak
	I will not ever never eat a tomato	Lauren Child
	This is not my hat	Jon Klassen
	I want my hat back	Jon Klassen
	Frog and Toad Together	Arnold Lobel
	Lost and Found	Oliver Jeffers
	Bear Counts	Karma Wilson & Jane Chapman
	Press Here	Hervé Tullet
	Lulu Loves the Library	Anna McQuinn & Rosalind Beardshaw
	Puffin Peter	Petr Horacek
	Shhh! We Have a Plan!	Chris Haughton

Appendix 5: Volunteer Reports (extracts)

Before the day began, we put fliers on all the tables telling children to come and get their free book and book bag. Although there was no room for a book corner by the existing bookshelves, staff set up chairs for us at one side of the hall and we displayed the children's books there. Sam and I spent most of the morning distributing these books, either when children came over to fetch them or by going off and finding the children who had not yet come. We found that the younger children were more likely to come than the teenagers, who probably didn't realise that there were books for them. Everyone was extremely grateful and responded very positively to being given a book...I was pleased to see that the Guinness Book of Records that I had ordered for the book corner was very well used by two families and on the whole I was pleased with my choice of books for the children, although I didn't get it right for all the teenagers!

Catherine Randall

In total, there were about ten women with their children, five from the mother and baby unit (including one three-week old baby!) and five whose children had come in to visit. The first one through the door was an older teenage boy, who promptly picked up a Scrabble game and sat in the book corner to play with his mum. I chatted to them and found this was what they did every month. They were both friendly and the mother was interested to know what I was doing there. We talked about reading and despite saying she wasn't really into fiction, she expressed interest in reading the book her son was given at the end of the morning...I am keen to volunteer again, having learnt much from this first experience and would feel more confident about trying out activities...

My second Family Day proved an interesting contrast to the other prison I visited. This one had a very different feel, more relaxed and less intense. The day was longer, there was so much on offer and generally supervised by an adult so that the children could wander around by themselves giving parents the opportunity to spend time together... All the parents were very grateful for the books; some even asked how much they had to pay!

Francesca Clarke

The visit went well although there was a good bit of chaos because one of the orders from Amazon only arrived twenty minutes before I did. I got a phone call on the way in asking me to pick up books for kids who had been recently added so I had to hunt down a WH Smiths! But in the end there were books and bags for all of the kids.... All in all the day was really lovely and there were some great moments seeing the kids engaging with the books and reading with their parents. There was one girl who loves reading and was reading well above her age so we were able to do a swap to make sure she had a challenging book. Overall the parents were very grateful to have the books and the children were very enthusiastic and interested too.

Sinead Moriarty

The feedback from families was immensely positive, with all children being thrilled with their title, and especially thrilled with the discovery that their name was on the inside cover. There was one child who loved Jacqueline Wilson and she received one of her titles – she was elated and her parents were both really happy. Parents commented that for one day it didn't feel like they were in prison, that the books gave their spouses and children something positive and bonding to do for the day, and that it had really helped make the day feel family-orientated.

Sam Dodd

The children and their parents were surprised and very grateful to receive their bags. A lot of the children started reading their books or writing in their notebooks during the day itself. The feedback forms included some really positive comments. One mum said 'it gives a chance to show how my daughter can read' and another: 'it allows us to do something like we would at home'... Despite the slightly stressful scramble to get the bags together, it was a great day and really wonderful to watch families enjoying the books together (some said they didn't have any at home). I would like to thank PRG for the opportunity to get involved with your work on family days.

Eleanor Hamblen

It was a really interesting experience. I hadn't appreciated quite how much symbolic value it would have for each dad to be able their kids a present - it was a really nice way to organise it, and it was great to see families reading together in the last hour of the day.

Sarah Pyke

Lunch was served at 12 o'clock, and this seemed a good time to distribute the gift bags – especially as we knew that a surprise visit by Father Christmas was planned for immediately after lunch. This proved a wise choice, as families were sitting together to eat, instead of rushing from activity to activity. We talked about the books in the bags, discussing the choices we had selected with both generations and this made it a productive part of the day. Both children and fathers were very pleased to receive their packs, and the children we talked to enjoyed discussing the books they liked to read, and the opportunity (in many cases) to discover new stories/series/authors through the content of their gifts. The fathers whom we chatted with at this stage were immensely proud to talk about their child's reading prowess; often they contrasted this (jokingly) with their own lack of skills. In the informal one-to-one chats earlier in the morning, at least two fathers had mentioned at the reading corner that they weren't readers, so it felt very positive that their pride in their children acknowledged the value of reading.

Kay Waddilove

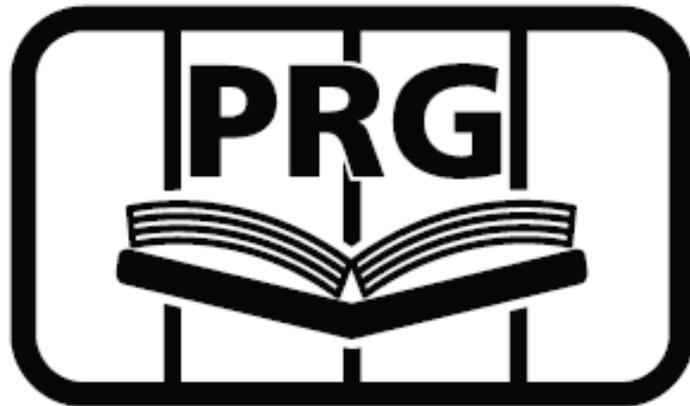


Prison Reading Groups (PRG) gratefully acknowledges the generous sponsorship of The Siobhan Dowd Trust and Give a Book, and the support of Phoenix Comics.

The project was brilliantly managed by Sam Dodd, PRG Administrator. This report is largely her work.

Sarah Turvey
Director, Prison Reading Groups
January 2016

www.prison-reading-groups.org.uk



Prison Reading Groups

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