



TEABOOKS ACTIVITY REPORT 2019/20

Book groups for older people in Oxfordshire

"Reading makes immigrants of us all. It takes us away from home, but more important, it finds homes for us everywhere."

Jean Rhys



INTRODUCTION

With the arrival of Coronavirus in the UK in Spring 2020, it has not been possible to evaluate the TeaBooks project in the usual way for the year August 2019 – July 2020, as it has not been possible to send out questionnaires to participants. This report therefore aims to provide an overview in place of the annual evaluation, outlining the status of the project in the run up to March, and the actions taken to keep the project alive and the members supported since then.

Overview

From August 2019 to February 2020, TeaBooks carried on much as in its previous 10 years, providing sociable, supportive book groups for around 130 of Oxfordshire's older residents via a network of supported, trained volunteers and enabled by a special borrowing scheme from Oxfordshire Library Service. An overview of the reach of the project is included on page 3.

By mid-March, with Coronavirus infections rising rapidly, the Bookfeast team asked all TeaBooks volunteers to cancel groups until future notice. With the national lockdown announced a few days later, Bookfeast realised that the network of volunteers, who were already supporting some of the county's loneliest and most vulnerable people, could continue to contact these older individuals, many of whom were shielding, and support them in whatever way they could. A more detailed overview of how this is progressing can be seen on page 7.

2019/20: Summary

22 groups active within the year

Groups in all five Oxfordshire districts

149 sessions held to March 2020: on track for around 200 sessions (214 in 2018/19)

817 attendances to March 2020: on track for around 1144 attendances (1288 in 2018/19)

As is the case most years, there was a 10% churn in groups. One new group opened in Summertown Library and another new group in a nursing home in Headington was due to open in Spring 2020. Meanwhile, two groups closed: one due to change of setting management, the second due to declining numbers and poor health of group members.

The Need for TeaBooks

It is now widely accepted that many UK residents suffer with loneliness. Older adults are particularly at risk, often being socially isolated. Loneliness is not only a threat to mental health, leading to depression and anxiety, it has also been linked to cardiovascular disease, a weakened immune system and memory problems. Shared interest groups have been shown to be one of the best ways of combatting loneliness in older age groups, and reading - fiction in particular - has been proved to positively impact mental and physical health. Links to the relevant studies can be made available by contacting Bookfeast at contactus@bookfeast.net



GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD AND TYPE OF SETTING

West Oxfordshire: 3 groups

- Carterton Library
- Highlands Day Centre, Chipping Norton
- Swinbrook Court Sheltered Housing, Witney (closed September 2019)



Cherwell: 5 groups

- Kidlington Library
- Kidlington Library II
- WRVS Banbury
- Moorside Place Extra Care Housing, Kidlington
- Bicester Library

City: 6 groups

- Headington Library
- Old Marston Library
- Fairfield residential home
- Summertown Library
- Summertown Library II (started November 2019)
- Parmoor Court Sheltered Housing, Summertown

VWH: 6 Groups

- Mayott House Extra Care Housing, Abingdon
- Bridge House care home, Abingdon
- Richmond Village, Letcombe Regis
- The Bear Hotel, Wantage
- Pegasus Sheltered Accommodation, Wantage
- Field House, Sheltered Accommodation, Botley (closed January 2020)

South Oxfordshire: 2 groups

- Rumsey's Café, Thame
- Cornerstone Arts Café, Didcot

Summary: 22 groups active during 2019/20

- 8 in libraries
- 4 in community settings (cafes/pubs etc)
- 2 in residential homes
- 7 in sheltered or supported accommodation
- 1 in a day centre



PROFILE OF MEMBERS

Without the results from the annual questionnaire, it isn't possible to accurately describe the profile of TeaBooks Group members. However, year to year, the profile remains broadly stable, and recent years' results suggest that:

- over half TeaBooks group members are over 80 years old
- around a quarter have an illness or disability
- >90% enjoy the social aspect of TeaBooks
- c30% feel they are lonely some of the time
- all group members intend to keep coming along to their TeaBooks group





ACTIVITY AUGUST 2019 TO SEPTEMBER 2020

Volunteer training/networking: September 2019

Annual training/networking event was held at Harris Manchester college on 26th September with 10 (out of 19) volunteers plus Oxfordshire Library Services. The morning was divided into two parts.

1. Basic training from Make Every Contact Count NHS campaign team, delivered with the aim of giving TeaBooks volunteers confidence to embark on “healthy conversations” with their group members, and feel confident about signposting.
2. Presentation from Professor Kirsten Shepherd-Barr from Oxford University Faculty of English, who presented the new LitHits app, designed to introduce a wide range of literature to its users through curated excerpts. She invited the volunteers to suggest their favourite passages and help with trialling the app when it reached a more finished version.



10 of the 20 volunteers attended .

E-books trial: September 2019

With funding from Oxfordshire Community Fund, TeaBooks was able to purchase 4 x Kindle Fire tablets so that groups could trial e-books. With less availability of large print books from Oxfordshire Libraries, it was hoped that the e-readers would provide an alternative, with group members able to download e-books and adjust print size. The trial was of limited success. Whilst two groups found members who were prepared to try the e-readers, all other group leaders encountered a high degree of reluctance from the groups. The success for those groups who did try was limited by the fact that the book chosen for the month was not always available in e-book form, or the single “copy” of the e-book was already on loan. Once groups return to meeting normally, more training will be offered to the groups to encourage take-up.

Let's Talk Loneliness Conference: October 2019



TeaBooks was invited to take part in the Age UK Oxfordshire's *Let's Talk Loneliness: unlocking the power of communities* conference held in Oxford in October.

The TeaBooks Co-ordinator presented an interactive workshop to around 30 delegates in the afternoon, examining the ways in which shared interests, such as reading, forged connections and built communities.

Launch of SnackBooks Intergenerational Project: October 2019



On Friday 11th October, Bookfeast launched the intergenerational project SnackBooks – a spinoff from the original TeaBooks project. SnackBooks was inspired by Channel 4's series "Care Home for Four Year Olds".

Seven sessions were delivered at Moorside Place Extra Care Housing in Kidlington, involving residents and children from nearby Magpies Pre-School.

Around 12 residents and up to 8 children attended each session which were led by arts practitioner Rhonda Sparrey. Sessions involved songs, play, art, craft and sharing stories around a theme.

The sessions were a great success with children and adults alike drawing great pleasure from the interactions. A further seven sessions were planned from January – March. Five of these were delivered before lockdown, with the final two being cancelled. A Covid update on the project is detailed below.

New Summertown Library Group opens: November 2019

Due to increasing size of the original Summertown Library group, a new Summertown Library group opened, meeting monthly on a Monday.

Christmas drinks: December 2019

Bookfeast held its annual Christmas drinks in early December at Trinity College, Oxford, for TeaBooks volunteers and Bookfeast staff and supporters.

Swinbrook Court and Field House groups close: January 2020

Two of TeaBooks sheltered housing groups closed in the new year. Swinbrook Court in Witney appointed a new manager who reorganised activities, and the group at Field House decided to close after one of its three regular members goes into a care-home.

St Luke's Hospital Care Home set to open: March 2020

Following a visit by TeaBooks Co-ordinator to St Luke's in Headington, the activities co-ordinator was keen to set up a group in the home, possibly with communal sessions where excerpts from the audio book is played, in addition to more able residents having printed copies of the book.



COVID RESPONSE

On 16th March, TeaBooks advised all volunteers to suspend meetings until further notice and national lockdown began a week later on March 23rd 2020.

Very quickly the Bookfeast team realised that TeaBooks could be a vital lifeline to isolated and elderly members of the community during lockdown. Although groups couldn't continue, volunteers were encouraged to keep in touch with their members by phone and email.

Newsletter



Between 23rd March and 31st July, the TeaBooks co-ordinator produced seven newsletters (approximately every three weeks) The newsletters were designed to be forwarded or posted to group members if possible, or to provide conversation topics for volunteers who were phoning group members. The focus of the newsletters was news and activities that do not require internet access, as many of our group members are not online at all, or only use the internet to access emails. Topics covered have included:

- information about how to access Covid support via Age UK's helpline
- a listing of local bookshops that were taking telephone orders
- literary treats to listen out for on the radio as well as highlighting forthcoming TV adaptations
- information about how to access more radio content (Radio 4 Extra and the RNIB radio station) via Freeview TV.
- cultural projects such as the King Lear Prize for people over 70 and the Oxford Covid quilt project.
- book reviews from group members (later issues)

A version of the TeaBooks newsletter was included in the Age UK Oxfordshire Lockdown pack. It was also shared on the Bookfeast website and twitter and via the Healthy Abingdon social media channels and website.

Survey

In the first two weeks of June 2020, TeaBooks invited all the group leaders to complete a SurveyMonkey survey to ascertain levels of contact during the 10 weeks of lockdown which revealed that:

- volunteers were keeping in touch with around 80% of TeaBooks participants
- 12 volunteers were keeping in contact with their groups by phone or email or a combination of both.

- 6 volunteers were keeping in contact using phone, email and post.
- 2 volunteers had tried Zoom meetings with some success.
- 75% of volunteers found the newsletter of interest
- there were two main obstacles to contacting group members: absence of personal details for some members and the fact that many were not online, so couldn't be contacted by email. It also transpired that some only used the internet in public libraries, so couldn't access emails whilst libraries were closed.

The survey also asked for feedback from volunteers about the extent to which group members found contact helpful. Comments included:

Maintaining contact has been very welcome, they have all been delighted when I ring. I have encouraged them to ring each other as I am aware that some get very lonely. They all still feel part of the group and are looking forward to meeting again.

So far, we have discussed (using an email "trail") what they have read and favourite childhood books and a film of a book we had recently read which came on TV (The Guernsey Literary and Potato peel Pie Society). I am gratified that there is still a bond.

Postcard Packs

In mid-June, TeaBooks assembled postcard packs sent out to six volunteers who requested them, encouraging members to feedback thoughts on anything they had been reading.

Volunteer Zoom meetings



In June, Teabooks started a monthly Zoom meeting for volunteers, to keep them in touch with one another, update them on any developments and provide support to any who themselves were lonely or isolated.



THE TEABOOKS PROJECT

Background

TeaBooks is a project for older residents of Oxfordshire, run by Oxford based charity Bookfeast. It was started in 2010 with great support from Age UK (Oxfordshire) and Oxfordshire County Libraries. It is run by two part time staff, responsible for fundraising and co-ordination of the project. There are currently 20 volunteers running the book groups.

After a successful pilot project in 2010, TeaBooks was rolled out across the county, with the aim of setting up 20 groups. The project currently has 21 groups.

How the project works

TeaBooks groups are situated in a variety of locations including community settings (eg cafes and arts centres) libraries, sheltered housing, extra care housing, residential homes and one day centre run by AGE UK.

Each group is facilitated by a trained Group Leader who volunteers to co-ordinate between 12 and 16 sessions per year, held monthly or every three weeks, depending on the wishes of the group. The Group Leader role consists of planning and facilitating sessions, helping select the books to be read, and ordering and collecting books from the library in various formats. In 2018/19 the project had between 19 and 20 volunteers.

The TeaBooks project is only viable due to the support of Oxfordshire libraries, who provide invaluable support with a specially-designed borrowing scheme and a central co-ordinator to oversee the scheme. In addition, library managers across the county assist volunteer Group Leaders in choosing and ordering books and help to track down titles in audio and large print formats where required.

All our groups operate in the same way as a traditional book group, with all members taking and reading the same title, and coming together to discuss the book at the next session. Some groups also incorporate a read-aloud session within the meeting, sharing poetry and book reviews.

The Charity

TeaBooks is a project of the charity Bookfeast. Bookfeast is passionate about providing opportunities for everyone, no matter what their age or background, to enjoy writing, reading and talking about books. Bookfeast was founded in June 2010 by Angie Prysor-Jones. Until July 2019, it also ran the Lunchbox project (reading groups in primary schools), and the annual Bookfeast schools festival in Oxford. In Autumn 2019, Bookfeast launched the first pilot of intergenerational reading project in Kidlington, bringing 4 year olds into an Extra Care Housing Scheme, to share stories and books together.

With thanks to:

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For more information about Bookfeast's work or the TeaBooks project in particular, please contact:

Bookfeast
301 Woodstock Road
Oxford OX2 7HN
01865 514149
contactus@bookfeast.net