

## READING IS GOOD FOR YOU

### A literature review

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#### Executive Summary

Reading is good for you and literacy changes lives. It affects personal and social development, happiness, behaviour, relationships, education, employment, financial well-being, health, and community and cultural participation.

Reading for pleasure has been revealed as the most important indicator of the future success of a child (OECD 2002) and improvements in literacy, at any point in life, can have a profound effect on an individual. The research reveals that the number of children and adults engaged in reading for pleasure has dropped over the last decade and it recommends action to ensure both children and adults have access to literacy programs from an early age. The influence of parents, family, school, child care, and the community is essential for creating readers.

Low literacy levels are a barrier to social justice. Literacy has a significant relationship with a person's happiness and success. It presents an indication of the dangers of poor literacy and also the benefits of improving literacy for the individual, the community, the workforce and the nation.

A constant theme and finding from the research is that literacy skills do not just enable educational attainment; they underpin strong family relationships, better health choices and an individual's capacity (and confidence) to gain employment. Parents' involvement in their own literacy skills and their understanding of the hugely important role they play in developing their children's education and outcomes are crucial in breaking the cycle of poverty.

The research findings have been grouped under the following broad headings:

1. Literacy and reading for pleasure play a significant role in a person's happiness and success
2. Reading for pleasure is important for personal development and awareness and educational aspirations and success
3. Reading for pleasure improves lives
4. Reading and literacy is good for your health
5. Children who grow up in poverty have lower literacy, education and health levels parents' involvement in their child's education is crucial
6. Increasing literacy and numeracy skills have a positive and significant effect on jobs and wages
7. Investing in Upskilling: Increased literacy skills will create a healthier, wealthier, more engaged and more equitable society

8. Reading and literacy can help children escape poverty
9. Literacy is a key part of any crime prevention strategy
10. Getting children reading is a job for us all

## **Brief**

This literature review is comprised of 18 research reports and news articles on the topic of adult and children's reading, reading for pleasure, the impact of reading on blind and partially sighted adults, literacy and its effects on personal and social development, education, financial aspirations and well-being, health, escaping poverty, recidivism, and community and cultural participation. It also includes a Bibliotherapy comprised of 56 pages with abstracts from recent research and news articles on the value and impact of reading from Australian and international sources. An additional report, [Read On Get On: A Strategy to get England's Children Reading<sup>1</sup>](#), has been added to the literature.

A summary of each research report is included.

## **1. Literacy and reading for pleasure play a significant role in a person's happiness and success**

[Literacy Changes Lives: An Advocacy Resource<sup>2</sup>](#) presents an overall summary of the wider benefits of literacy. Low literacy levels are a barrier to social justice. Literacy has a significant relationship with a person's happiness and success. It presents an indication of the dangers of poor literacy and also the benefits of improving literacy for the individual, the community, the workforce and the nation.

Reading for pleasure has been revealed as the most important indicator of the future success of a child (OECD, 2002), and improvements in literacy, at any point in life, can have a profound effect on an individual. There are diverse reasons why people from all ages struggle with their literacy, ranging from severe educational needs to a disaffection from learning and low aspirations.

This paper does not provide guidance on how to address low literacy. It collects information about the tangible associations between literacy and various aspects of person's life. It notes the prominence of poor literacy in the profile of disadvantaged adult lives, suggesting it is part of a vicious cycle of socio-economic factors that lead to economic and personal deprivation. Socio-economic background and many other factors may be outside the control of an individual; advocates addressing literacy skills to overcome other related factors that lock individuals into a cycle of disadvantage.

It includes some statements on the impact of low literacy on the individual, ranging from home ownership, family, having children, use of computer/technology, divorce rates, community and a literate nation.

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<sup>1</sup> Read On. Get On. A strategy to get England's children reading, Save the Children Fund, 2016

<sup>2</sup> Literacy Changes Lives: An Advocacy Resource, National Literacy Trust, 2008

Addressing the national literacy challenge is a priority: the literacy agenda sits at the heart of the desire to improve personal well-being, it creates safer and stronger communities and the drive to future economic success.

## **2. Reading for pleasure is important for personal development and awareness and educational aspirations and success**

[The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment<sup>3</sup>](#) collates and summarises research findings relating to non-literacy outcomes for ‘reading for pleasure’ or ‘empowerment (also referred to as recreational reading)’. Overall there is a strong and growing range of research findings which show how and why reading for pleasure can bring a range of benefits to individuals and society.

Key themes

- Reading is closely linked to increasing understanding of our own identities (identity development).
- Recreational reading is for distraction, relaxation, knowledge development.

A key finding is the need for a strategic approach to research and evaluation within the reading and literacy sector to improve the quality of evidence across diverse interventions seeking to achieve positive broader impacts.

Adding to this research, Professor Emeritus Keith Oatley of the University of Toronto Department of Applied Psychology and Human Development ([Trends in Cognitive Sciences](#))<sup>4</sup> found that readers develop empathy by living the lives and feel the emotions of characters on the page thereby experiencing emotions they might not feel in their own day-to-day lives. When reading novels about cultures and races different to their own, participants were seen to develop greater empathy towards those cultures and races.

Prof Oatley measured a participant’s degree of empathy by a new approach, ‘Mind of the Eyes Test’. Participants see 36 photographs of people’s eye; told to view the photograph and deduce what the person is feeling or thinking. The participant is given four emotions to choose from for each photograph. The results revealed participants who read works of narrative fiction received “significantly higher” scores in the test than those who read non-fiction. Results even higher when the subject’s personality and base character differences were accounted for.

## **3. Reading for pleasure improves lives**

[Dept of Education: Research evidence of reading for pleasure<sup>5</sup>](#) is a review of recent research from the UK on the benefits of reading for pleasure, illustrating the importance of reading for pleasure for both educational purposes as well as personal development (cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006). Evidence suggests that there is a positive relationship between reading frequency, reading enjoyment and attainment (Clark 2011; Clark and Douglas 2011).

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<sup>3</sup> The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment, The Reading Agency, 2015

<sup>4</sup> Trends in Cognitive Sciences, University of Toronto, 2016

<sup>5</sup> Department of Education: Research evidence of reading for pleasure, Dept of Education, 2012

Reading enjoyment has been reported as more important for children's educational success than their family's socio-economic status (OECD, 2002). Regularly reading stories or novels outside of school is associated with higher scores in reading assessments (PIRLS, 2006; PISA, 2009). US evidence supports these findings, and suggests reading for pleasure is an activity that has emotional and social consequences (Clark and Rumbold, 2006).

The majority of children say that they do enjoy reading (Clark and Rumbold, 2006). In 2010, 22% of children said they enjoyed reading very much; 27% said they enjoyed it quite a lot; 39% said they enjoyed it quite a bit, and 12% reported that they did not enjoy reading at all (Clark 2011).

Compared with international evidence, children in England report less frequent reading for pleasure outside of school than children in many other countries (Twist et al, 2007), and that children enjoy reading less as they get older (Topping, 2010; Clark and Osborne, 2008; Clark and Douglas 2011). However, some evidence suggests that while the frequency with which young people read declines with age, the length for which they read when they read increases with age (Clark 2011).

Studies have shown that boys enjoy reading less than girls; and that children from lower socio-economic backgrounds read less for enjoyment than children from more privileged social classes (Clark and Rumbold, 2006; Clark and Douglas 2011). Some evidence has shown children from Asian background have more positive attitudes to reading and read more frequently than children from White, mixed or Black backgrounds (Clark and Douglas 2011).

### **Changes in numbers of children reading for pleasure over time**

Research is accumulating that suggests that a growing number of children do not read for pleasure (Clark and Rumbold, 2006). Between 2000 and 2009, on average across OECD countries the percentage of children who report reading for enjoyment daily dropped by 5% (OECD, 2010). This is supported by evidence from PIRLS 2006 (Twist et al, 2007) which found a decline in attitudes towards reading amongst children.

### **Children's perceptions of readers**

A greater percentage of primary than secondary aged children view themselves as 'a reader' (Clark and Osborne, 2008). A greater proportion of primary aged readers and non-readers (than secondary aged) believed that their friends saw readers as happy and people with a lot of friends (Clark and Osborne, 2008).

**The scope of the types of reading has changed considerably over the last decade.** Text messages, magazines, websites and emails have been found to be the most common reading choices for young people. Fiction is read outside the class by two-fifths of young people (Clark and Douglas 2011).

### **Strategies to improve independent reading**

Access to resources and having books of their own has an impact on children's attainment. There is a positive relationship between the estimated number of books in the home and attainment (Clark 2011). Children who have books of their own enjoy reading more and read more frequently (Clark and Poulton 2011).

## Library use and reading for pleasure

Research shows a link between library use and reading for pleasure; young people that use their public library are nearly twice as likely to be reading outside of class every day (Clark and Hawkins, 2011). Reading for pleasure is strongly influenced by relationships between teachers and children, and children and families (Cremin et al, 2009).

Parents and the home environment are essential to the early teaching of reading and fostering a love of reading; children are more likely to continue to be readers in homes where books and reading are valued (Clark and Rumbold, 2006).

Scholastic Australia's [Kids & Family Reading Report](#)<sup>6</sup> studies the impact of reading for pleasure on kids and family and explores behaviours around reading books for fun. The key findings of this research are as follows:

- More than half of children aged 6–17 (58%) believe reading books for fun is extremely or very important and 60% of kids also say they love reading books for fun or like it a lot.
- Just over one-third of children aged 6–17 (37%) report they are frequent readers, with kids aged 6–8 being the most likely to read 5–7 days a week.
- As children grow older, reading competes with many screen-related activities, and 75% of parents with kids aged 6–17 agree: “I wish my child would do more things that did not involve screen time.”
- Across ages, three-quarters of children (76%) say they know they should read more books for fun; a similar number of parents (78%) wish their child would read more books for fun.

This survey also presents data on parents' involvement in a child's reading life, from reading aloud at home at various stages of a child's development to reading in school and print books in a digital world. “For children aged 6-11 additional predictors of reading frequency include where they read books for fun, parental involvement in encouraging reading, and how early they started being read books aloud.”

This theme is prevalent in many of the research reports, including [Reading for Pleasure: A research overview](#)<sup>7</sup>, which finds reading for pleasure offers numerous benefits and that encouraging a love of reading and motivation to read is a desirable goal. This literature review up to 2006 explores reading for pleasure, its importance, and its impact on literacy attainment and other outcomes. The National Literacy Trust is dedicated to building a literate nation and stresses the importance of reading for pleasure as one way to advance literacy attainment in children.

Reading is an important gateway to personal development, and to social, economic and civic life (Holden, 2004). It allows us to learn “about other people, about history and social studies, the language arts, science, mathematics, and the other content subjects that must be mastered in school” (Lyon, 1997).

The data goes back to 1977 and questions the impact of technology on children's reading habits, which have decreased for both girls and boys over the years. It outlines evidence

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<sup>6</sup> Kids & Family Reading Report, Scholastic Australia, 2016

<sup>7</sup> Reading for Pleasure: A research overview, National Literacy Trust, 2006

about the importance and benefits of reading for pleasure, includes statistics for reading for pleasure, questions whether there has been a decline in reading (inconclusive evidence in 2006) and also investigates reading preferences and reasons for reading. It looks at the role of parents and their influence in creating readers at an early age.

A growing number of young people do not read for pleasure. As above, a number of studies have shown that boys enjoy reading less and therefore read less than girls (e.g. Clark and Foster, 2005), while children from lower socio-economic backgrounds read less for enjoyment than children from more privileged social classes (e.g. Clark and Akerman, 2006).

Reading enjoyment is more important for children's educational success than their family's socio-economic status (OECD, 2002). Reading for pleasure could therefore be one important way to help combat social exclusion and raise educational standards.

If reading is to become a lifelong habit then people must see themselves as participants in a community that views reading as a significant and enjoyable activity. Overall, the research highlights:

- Children who know adults who read for pleasure take it for granted that reading is a valuable and worthwhile activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991)
- The home environment exerts a significant effect on academic motivation, which is over and above that predicted by socio-economic status (Gottfried, Fleming & Gottfried, 1998). Thus, children whose home environment is more cognitively stimulating have higher academic motivation than children whose home is lacking such stimulation
- Parents who believe that reading is a source of entertainment have children with more positive views about reading than parents who only emphasise the skills aspect of reading (e.g. Sonnenschein et al., 2000)
- Children of parents who believed that reading is a source of pleasure had greater reading motivation scores in primary school (Baker & Scher, 2002) and
- Children are more likely to continue to be readers in homes where books and reading are valued (Baker & Scher, 2002).

Reading plays a significant role in helping blind and partially sighted adults cope with life's pressures, including bereavement, and maintaining a quality of life. [Assessing the Impact of Reading for Blind and Partially Sighted Adults](#)<sup>8</sup> shows that reading plays a key role in maintaining a quality of life that helps people with visual impairment to overcome some daily limitations. It delivers mental well-being and learning skills. 95% of participants read for pleasure more than once a week. Over half read more than 10 hours a week. This result was higher than the general population although comparisons should be treated with caution.

The majority of participants (82%) stated that reading for pleasure was very important; it made them feel good; enabled them to learn about new things; gave insight into other peoples' lives and cultures; reduced stress; provided an escape from real life into fantasy.

Reading for pleasure has a significant impact on learning and skills development for blind and partially sighted readers; participants read to obtain information, improve knowledge

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<sup>8</sup> Assessing the Impact of Reading for Blind and Partially Sighted Adult, Report to RNIB, 2012

and for general interest. Many blind and partially sighted people suffer from social isolation and reading groups provide social interaction, community support and connection to sighted world as well as the benefits of reading for pleasure. Prefer many formats. Two of the most used formats were Daisy audio and audiobooks on CD. Choice related to preference, navigation and convenience. Ebooks used by just 5% but on the increase as participants acknowledge they make a difference to the accessibility of reading materials.

It wasn't part of the research but many participants said not being able to read would leave a destabilising void in their lives.

#### **4. Reading and literacy is good for your health**

[National Literacy Trust Hubs: Understanding the role of literacy in public health<sup>9</sup>](#) found that low literacy negatively impacts on the health of communities. It impacts an individual's ability to learn about disease prevention and health promotion, follow health care regimens, and communicate about health messages. In 2012, the European Health Literacy Survey found that nearly half of all adults across eight European countries have inadequate or problematic health literacy that adversely affects their health. Evidence shows the direct relationship between literacy and health literacy and it is widely recognised that educational interventions play a central role in promoting and strengthening health literacy.

The report makes the case for local area literacy and health strategies and examines the National Literacy Trust Hubs, local area approaches to embed literacy support within communities. It recommends building the foundations for health literacy in early child development, developing and supporting health-promoting school approaches (including building literacy, numeracy and ICT skills). Other sources show that qualifications are the most important driver of health literacy. It maintains individuals develop and learn within the social environments in which they live. Embedding activity into everyday life is an essential strategy to access individuals in need of support.

Read On. Get On. recommends three key priorities; investing in the early education workforce, strengthening support for parents, and tracking improvements in young children's language skills.

University of Sussex research [Reading Can Help Reduce Stress<sup>10</sup>](#) found that reading can help reduce stress. Psychologists believe this is because the human mind has to concentrate on reading and the distraction of being taken into a literary world eases the tensions in muscles and the heart.

It works better and faster than listening to music, going for a walk or settling down with a cup of tea. Reading works best to reduce stress levels by 68 per cent (cognitive neuropsychologist Dr David Lewis). Listening to music reduced the levels by 61 per cent, a cup of tea or coffee lowered them by 54 per cent and taking a walk by 42 per cent.

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<sup>9</sup> National Literacy Trust Hubs: Understanding the role of literacy in public health, National Literacy Trust Hubs, 2015

<sup>10</sup> Reading Can Help Reduce Stress, University of Sussex, 2009

### [Brain function boosted for days after reading a novel<sup>11</sup>](#)

Research carried out at Emory University in the US found that reading books, writing and participating in brain-stimulating activities at any age may preserve memory. Reading a gripping novel causes biological changes in the brain which last for days as the mind is transported into the body of the protagonist. It causes heightened connectivity in the brain and neurological changes that persist in a similar way to muscle memory.

### [Lighting Up Your Brains<sup>12</sup>](#)

The first five years of a child's life are crucial. It's not only genes that determine their brain and language development; parents, carers and nurseries have the biggest influence on their child's early learning. In this time a child's brain develops rapidly, driven by a mix of experience, environment and genes. Children will continue to develop throughout childhood and into adulthood, but in the early years their brains are particularly sensitive. By contrast, the science shows that as a child grows older it becomes much more difficult to influence the way their brain processes information.

It also maintains that the experiences and environments that support the interactive process of early language and brain development are also critical. Childcare is playing an increasingly significant role in children's development. The government needs to do much more to invest in good-quality childcare.

## **5. Children who grow up in poverty have lower literacy, education and health levels and parents' involvement in their child's education is crucial**

[Literacy: A route to addressing child poverty<sup>13</sup>](#) found that children who grow up in poverty are more likely to do worse on a number of outcomes, including literacy, education and health. Children from poorer backgrounds also face much less advantageous 'early childhood caring environments' than children from better-off families.

One of the most accurate predictors of a child's achievement is the extent to which parents are able to create a home environment that encourages learning and communicates high, yet reasonable, expectations for achievement and future careers.

This research also highlighted the importance of parents' involvement in their child's education, echoing findings in many of these research reports. Family involvement in school matters most for children whose mothers have less education. Increases in family involvement in the school have been found to predict increases in literacy achievement for low income families.

Young people's aspirations and those of their parents influence their educational attainment and later life outcomes. Parental aspiration may be even more important for socially disadvantaged young people and crucial if young people are to realise their full academic potential.

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<sup>11</sup> Brain function boosted for days after reading, Emory University, 2013

<sup>12</sup> Lighting Up Your Brains, Save the Children, 2016

<sup>13</sup> Literacy: A route to addressing child poverty, National Literacy Trust, 2011



Parents' beliefs in their own abilities are also key to raising the aspirations they hold for their children. It's vital that those working in disadvantaged areas are aware that they may be in a position to encourage parents to aim high for their children, to help empower parents to see their aspirations for themselves and their children realised.

Current government policy sees entrenched poverty as resting on low achievement, low aspiration and lack of employment. Literacy has a vital role to play in addressing all of these.

Research shows that literacy skills do not just enable educational attainment; they underpin strong family relationships, better health choices and an individual's capacity (and confidence) to gain employment.

Socio-economic background and many other factors may be outside the control of an individual. However, what matters is that for many, addressing literacy skills is a key first step in beginning to address and overcome other related factors that lock individuals into a cycle of disadvantage.

Parents' involvement in their own literacy skills and their understanding of the important role they play in developing their children's education and outcomes are crucial in breaking the cycle of poverty.

## **6. Increasing literacy and numeracy skills have a positive and significant effect on jobs and wages**

### [Productivity Commission: Links between Literacy and Numeracy Skills and Labour Market Outcomes](#)<sup>14</sup>

Australia's Productivity Commission explored links between functional literacy and numeracy skills and labour market outcomes in 2006 and it showed that skills typically: decrease with age; are higher for more educated people; are lower for people born in a non-English speaking country. People with higher skills are more likely to participate in the labour force, be employed in higher-skilled occupations, and earn more, compared to people with lower skills. Econometric models were used to formally estimate the effect of functional literacy and numeracy skills on labour force participation and on hourly wages (which is an indicator of productivity).

It revealed that education has a positive effect on labour market participation and wages and it is likely to improve a person's human capital, of which literacy and numeracy is one component. Literacy and numeracy skills are developed through education, but they can also be enhanced in other ways. Schooling develops skills other than functional literacy and numeracy, which are also rewarded in the labour market. Such skills may be vocational or job-specific.

It found that increasing literacy and numeracy skills had a positive, statistically significant effect on both labour force participation and hourly wages. Thus, from a policy perspective, if people's literacy and numeracy skills can be improved, then they will tend to achieve

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<sup>14</sup> Productivity Commission: Links between Literacy and Numeracy Skills and Labour Market Outcomes, Productivity Commission Staff Working Paper, 2010

better labour market outcomes. The effect of literacy and numeracy skills was different for men and women — improving skills had a larger impact on participation for women than for men, but had a larger impact on hourly wage rates for men compared with women.

Raising the skills of lower-skilled people had a larger effect on increasing participation, compared with further improving high-skilled workers' ability. There is a larger payoff to labour market outcomes from improving skills. People born in a non-English speaking country are more likely to have lower functional skills than people born in Australia or a main English speaking country. This was the case regardless of a person's educational attainment.

### [Bibliotherapy<sup>15</sup>](#)

This 56-page literature review is comprised of a range of abstracts on research papers and articles, ranging from economic well-being, dealing with stress by reading poetry, reading and living longer; Do Books Furnish the Mind?; The cognitive value of fiction; Health benefits of bibliotherapy; Balzac as Balm, Franzen as pharmaceutical; etc.

- The more leisure books people read, the more literate they become, and the more prosperous and equitable the society they inhabit.
- Librarians should create a more robust culture of reading and play a stronger advocacy role for books in libraries.
- No one has yet examined government reports about literacy in relation to studies on the impact of pleasure reading. The implications of this combined research highlight the fact that pleasure reading benefits societies as well as individuals, a finding that has significant implications for the future direction of libraries.

## **7. Investing in Upskilling: Increased literacy skills will create a healthier, wealthier, more engaged and more equitable society**

This Canadian research shows that increased literacy skills would create a healthier, wealthier, more engaged and more equitable society. It maintains that individuals who receive skills upgrading stand to: increase their market earnings; reduce the burden of unemployment and illness on their quality of life; and reduce their need for, and dependence upon social welfare.

Employers stand to gain: access to a more productive, globally competitive workforce; access to a larger pool of skilled workers from which to recruit; fewer days lost to workplace illness or accident; and the possibility of reduced premiums for Employment Insurance and Workers Compensation systems and lower taxes to support the Social Assistance system.

Governments stand to gain from: a more productive and participatory citizenry; reduced income support payments; reductions in premium and program costs to support the Employment Insurance, Workers Compensation and Social Assistance systems.

Findings highlight a strong relationship between receipt of benefits and lower literacy. Investment in upskilling programs could raise literacy which would in turn raise earnings and therefore decrease employment insurance and social benefit insurances

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<sup>15</sup> Bibliotherapy, various abstracts

## 8. Reading and literacy can help children escape poverty

[Literacy: A route to addressing child poverty<sup>16</sup>](#) found that children who grow up in poverty are more likely to do worse on a number of outcomes, including literacy, wider education and health. Children from poorer backgrounds also face much less advantageous 'early childhood caring environments' than children from better-off families.

One of the most accurate predictors of a child's achievement is the extent to which parents are able to create a home environment that encourages learning and communicates high, yet reasonable, expectations for achievement and future careers.

Parents involvement in their child's education is also key. In fact, family involvement in school matters most for children whose mothers have less education. Increases in family involvement in the school have been found to predict increases in literacy achievement for low income families.

Young people's aspirations and those of their parents influence their educational attainment and later life outcomes. Parental aspiration may be even more important for socially disadvantaged young people and crucial if young people are to realise their full academic potential.

Parents' beliefs in their own abilities are also key to raising the aspirations they hold for their children. It's vital that those working in disadvantaged areas are aware that they may be in a position to encourage parents to aim high for their children, to help empower parents to see their aspirations for themselves and their children realised.

Current government policy sees entrenched poverty as resting on low achievement, low aspiration and lack of employment. Literacy has a vital role to play in addressing all of these. Research shows that literacy skills do not just enable educational attainment; they underpin strong family relationships, better health choices and an individual's capacity (and confidence) to gain employment.

Socio-economic background and many other factors may be outside the control of an individual. However, what matters is that for many, addressing literacy skills is a key first step in beginning to address and overcome other related factors that lock individuals into a cycle of disadvantage. Parents' involvement in their own literacy skills and their understanding of the hugely important role they play in developing their children's education and outcomes are crucial in breaking the cycle of poverty.

[Read On. Get On. How reading can help children escape poverty<sup>17</sup>](#) and [Read On Get On: A Strategy to get England's Children Reading<sup>18</sup>](#)

Read On. Get On. is a coalition of charities and education organisations in England with the aim of getting all children to read well by age of 11 and by 2025. The interim goal, for 2020,

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<sup>16</sup> Literacy: A route to addressing child poverty, National Literacy Trust, 2011

<sup>17</sup> Read On. Get On. How reading can help children escape poverty, Save the Children, 2017

<sup>18</sup> Read On. Get On. A strategy to get England's children reading, Save the Children Fund, 2016

is that all children will achieve good levels of language, early literacy and reading development by the age of five. The report includes the following findings:

- Children living in poverty are less likely to be able to read well at school than their classmates – and this has the potential to be devastating for their future lives.
- Reading is the key to unlocking every child’s full potential and opens up a world of possibilities. A good education is about much more than just reading. But being able to read well is the foundation on which so much else depends: children first ‘learn to read’ and then they ‘read to learn’.
- Reading and poverty are directly linked. In England, struggling to read is more closely linked to low pay and unemployment (or this risk) than in any other developed country, including the USA.
- Around one in four people earning less than £10,000 were not functionally literate – this compared with fewer than one in 25 of those earning over £30,000.
- Each child left behind at age 11 is a child facing a difficult time at school and potentially a future cut short before it has started.
- New research for this report shows how, if a child does not learn to read well when young, they can turn away from education as they get older, get poor qualifications and struggle in the world of work.

READ ON. GET ON. has developed the following campaign actions:

- Reading: Parents, carers and anyone with a child in their life can make a huge difference by reading for just ten minutes a day.
- Volunteering: People can give their time across the whole of the UK to schemes that help children with reading and language. Employers and schools can play a vital enabling role.
- Innovating: The voluntary sector, schools, policy-makers and the private sector should look to develop programmes, interventions and partnerships to help all to read.
- Leading the way locally: Schools, often working in partnership, across the country already make a huge difference – they can sign up to the 2025 ambition and set their own ambitious local goals.
- Last year a quarter of all children left primary education without reading well each year, rising to two in five poorer children.
- 45% of low-income, white British boys were not reading well by the age of 11.
- Low-income, white British boys, who have English as their first language, are even less likely to be reading well by the age of 11 than many low-income groups for whom English is not their first language.
- The reading gap between boys and girls in England is one of the widest in the developed world: boys are twice as likely to fall below even a very basic reading level.
- Public libraries, in providing free access to books for families who struggle to afford them, have a key role to play.

## **9. Literacy is a key part of any crime prevention strategy**

[Literacy Changes Lives: The Role of Literacy in Offending Behaviour<sup>19</sup>](#)

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<sup>19</sup> Literacy Changes Lives: The Role of Literacy in Offending Behaviour, National Literacy Trust, 2008

This research discusses claims that low literacy is related to unemployment, lack of aspirations, poor physical and mental health, and/or great deprivation, which can lead to crime. Therefore, it is said that literacy is a key part of any crime prevention strategy. The picture that emerges points to the prominence of poor literacy in the profile of disadvantaged adult lives.

However, this paper cautions about the link between literacy and criminal behaviour being overstated. A multitude of data is available about the benefits of literacy to recidivism, employment rates after prison and other post-prison outcomes.

The acute shortage of literacy skills amongst prisoners are predictably reflected in qualification levels. Prisoners have poor literacy compared to the general population, and literacy is essential for an individual's success. Literacy is thought to be linked to criminality and literacy interventions in prisons are frequently seen to be the solution to the problems.

The reality is more complicated and the relationship between literacy and crime needs to be looked at in a different light. Prisoners are not representative of the general population. Analyses have shown that prisoners do not necessarily have lower literacy than the populations from which they are drawn. Evidence to this effect has been found within the UK and internationally.

The UK's Every Child A Reader programme makes it clear that basic literacy is essential to future success. 25% of young offenders are said to have reading skills below those of the average seven-year-old. 60% of the prison population is said to have difficulties in basic literacy skills.

## **10. Getting children reading is a job for us all**

### [City of Literature bid for Melbourne to become UNESCO City of Literature 2008<sup>20</sup>](#)

This submission outlines the role of the community in creating a love of reading and an appreciation of literature and the establishment of literary infrastructure, and funding, to support reading.

Melbourne was successful in its bid to become a UNESCO City of Literature. The submission includes information on Melbourne's cultural life, its vibrant writing, publishing and bookselling environment, its literary festivals, State Library, public libraries and general literary infrastructure, including the Premier's Awards for Literature. It articulates the Victorian Government and City of Melbourne's support for cultural development and exchange, and details plans for the future. Notable is the State Government's increased commitment and funding for literature.

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<sup>20</sup> City of Literature bid for Melbourne to become UNESCO City of Literature, Arts Victoria, 2008

## Bibliography

- 1. Literacy and reading for pleasure play a significant role in a person's happiness and success**  
[Literacy Changes Lives: An Advocacy Resource](#)
- 2. Reading for pleasure is important for personal development and awareness and educational aspirations and success**  
[The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment](#)  
[Trends in Cognitive Sciences\)](#)
- 3. Reading for pleasure improves lives**  
[Dept of Education: Research evidence of reading for pleasure](#)  
[Kids & Family Reading Report](#)  
[Reading for Pleasure: A research overview](#)  
[Assessing the Impact of Reading for Blind and Partially Sighted Adults](#)
- 4. Reading and literacy is good for your health**  
[National Literacy Trust Hubs: Understanding the role of literacy in public health](#)  
[Reading Can Help Reduce Stress](#)  
[Brain function boosted for days after reading a novel](#)  
[Lighting Up Your Brains](#)
- 5. Children who grow up in poverty have lower literacy, education and health levels parents' involvement in their child's education is crucial**  
[Literacy: A route to addressing child poverty](#)
- 6. Increasing literacy and numeracy skills have a positive and significant effect on jobs and wages**  
[Productivity Commission: Links between Literacy and Numeracy Skills and Labour Market Outcomes](#)  
[Bibliotherapy](#)
- 7. Investing in Upskilling: Increased literacy skills will create a healthier, wealthier, more engaged and more equitable society**
- 8. Reading and literacy can help children escape poverty**  
[Literacy: A route to addressing child poverty](#)  
[Read On. Get On. How reading can help children escape poverty](#)  
[Read On Get On: A Strategy to get England's Children Reading](#)
- 9. Literacy is a key part of any crime prevention strategy**  
[Literacy Changes Lives: The Role of Literacy in Offending Behaviour](#)
- 10. Getting children reading is a job for us all**  
[City of Literature bid for Melbourne to become UNESCO City of Literature](#)

