

SHANNON TRUST - APPLICATION FOR FUNDING

BACKGROUND AND AIMS:

Shannon Trust (registered charity no. 1117249) runs a UK-wide reading programme in prisons where prisoners who can read teach those who cannot. We specifically target prisoners who are disaffected from formal education and aim to engage prisoners in the learning process, ensuring it is a positive experience while giving them a fundamental life skill that equips them to engage in the rehabilitation journey and live as contributing members of society.

THE NEED AND OUR APPROACH

Almost half of all prisoners (nearly 40,000) have reading skills below that expected of an 11-year old. Prisoners with poor reading skills face multiple challenges. Often presenting a defensive exterior, many non-reading prisoners describe feelings of hopelessness and isolation. Those who are unable to read are ineligible for 96% of paid employment. Thus, following release they can be frustrated in their plans to live a different life, often turning to other means for survival. Ministry of Justice statistics show that ex-offenders are three times more likely to re-offend when unemployed. The overwhelming evidence is that non-reading prisoners need to be engaged as a matter of priority to develop literacy and other life skills that foster self-belief and a desire for positive change.

The Shannon Trust Reading Plan (STRP) uses a phonics-based reading programme, Turning Pages. It currently runs in 124 out of 127 prisons in England, Wales and NI, 10 of which are in the South West. The Reading Plan is delivered one-to-one, "by prisoners, for prisoners", with prisoners who are able to read acting as mentors. Shannon Trust provides all reading resources and promotional materials free of charge. Our staff and volunteers work with individual prisons providing training, support and expert advice.

Most non-reading prisoners believe they were let down or humiliated at school and refuse to attend education classes. The STRP appeals to non-reading prisoners, because they can learn at their own pace, supported by another prisoner, in a safe, confidential environment.

The impact of teaching a prisoner to read is profound. Staff regularly report upon the positive effect the Reading Plan has on a Learner's self-confidence, behaviour and ability to communicate. Many learners take up education, skills training and rehabilitative programmes previously unavailable to them because of their inability to read. In our 2014 evaluation, 85% of Learners said that their reading skills had improved and 59% said that they wanted to go onto further learning. Mentors also report developing self-confidence, interpersonal skills and a sense of purpose, with over 60% of Mentors telling us that they had gained new skills and improved self-confidence.

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT: THE NATIONAL READING NETWORK

We are implementing a National Reading Network (NRN) for prisoners, through a strategic partnership with the National Offenders Management Service (NOMS). The purpose of the NRN is to ensure that every non-reading prisoner is given the best possible opportunity to learn to read and to engage in the rehabilitation journey. In practical terms, we will be working in partnership with every public prison in England and Wales, to deliver the STRP, so that non-reading prisoners can access the reading plan for 20 minutes a day, five days a week, throughout each prison. The project will embed the STRP in every prison, transforming our ability to engage and support far greater numbers of non-reading prisoners. It will also allow us to track prisoners following inter-prison transfers, improving continuity of learning and ensuring that prisoners are not "lost" from the programme. Private prisons are not formally part of the NRN, but all have embraced the model.

The core elements of the NRN are:

- The Reading Plan is a "Core-day" activity: Non-reading prisoners will be able to participate in the Reading Plan throughout the working day, including free time and evening activities.
- In each prison, a Senior Management Team member will champion the Reading Plan, with a designated Prison Officer to coordinate it (6 hrs/week). NOMS has committed to providing this in every public prison.
- Our volunteer Local Prison Representatives will liaise with staff to provide mentor training and advice.