



MEDIA RELEASE – Tuesday 8 May 2018

## Charity seeks volunteers to help lonely and isolated older people across Bristol

In partnership with Bristol Ageing Better, The Reader, a national charity which builds stronger, healthier communities through *Shared Reading*, has announced an exciting new volunteer-led programme which will create meaningful shared experiences and stronger social networks for the over 50s across Bristol.

Over the next two years, The Reader will work with organisations across the area to establish 30 new *Shared Reading* groups and train 60 new volunteers from the community and partner organisations to bring *Shared Reading* into hospital wards, sheltered housing sites, care homes, libraries, community centres and various other settings. This project has been developed in partnership with Bristol City Council Sheltered Housing, Brunelcare, Fresh Arts at Southmead Hospital and Bristol City Council Libraries who will each host groups across the city. We invite any further organisations, who want to support the wellbeing of their service users through *Shared Reading* groups to please come forward, get in contact and get involved.

The Reader, who have pioneered *Shared Reading* groups as a means to better health and well-being since 2008, previously worked with Bristol Ageing Better as part of a one-year pilot. The charity already delivers over 55 weekly groups across the South West, bringing people of diverse ages and backgrounds together to read aloud a story and poem, in a welcoming environment. Group each week. *Shared Reading* group members report finding personal meaning in the literature, improved emotional well-being and stronger social connections with others.

Funded by the Big Lottery Fund, Bristol Ageing Better aims to reduce social isolation and loneliness among older people, empowering them to live fulfilling lives and feel more connected within their local community. Working closely with partner organisations in the Bristol Ageing Better programme, The Reader is seeking to recruit 60 new volunteers who can help the charity bring *Shared Reading* groups to socially isolated older people in the area.

The Reader's founder and director Jane Davis said: "*We're delighted to work with Bristol Ageing Better again. Loneliness is a huge social problem across the UK but it's one that we can do something about. Shared Reading groups are a simple way to bring people together and create a meaningful, shared experience that creates real, personal connections. It's our ambition to make Shared Reading part of the national fabric so that everyone, no matter who or where they are, can find a group near them.*"

Adam Rees, Programme Director of Bristol Aging Better said: "*The aim of Bristol Ageing Better is to find the best ways of reducing social isolation and loneliness. We have funded The Reader to undertake this work to explore how older people can get more social contact through local group activities. We are delighted to support the development of Shared Reading groups to meet these aims.*"

Simon, a Reader Volunteer running a weekly *Shared Reading* group in Bristol said: "*Leading a Shared Reading group is a highlight of the week for me and I know it is for a lot of people who come along. It's a really stimulating activity, sharing the thoughts and experiences that come from reading a wide variety of texts. It's something that doesn't require any preparation for attenders, so it's dead easy to be a part of the group, either regularly or occasionally. There's a real sense of companionship and fun to the sessions and I always learn so much.*"

Anyone interested in finding out more about volunteering with The Reader in Bristol is invited to drop in to an upcoming Volunteer Information Day in Bristol:

Friday 11 May, 10am-1pm, The Foyer, Bristol Central Library, College Green, BS1 5TL

or

Wednesday 23 May, 11am-2pm, Bishopston Library, Gloucester Road, Bishopston, BS7 8BN

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

For further information, please contact: Samantha Weaver, Bristol Project Coordinator: [samanthaweaver@thereader.org.uk](mailto:samanthaweaver@thereader.org.uk) 07812 238 532

**About The Reader** [www.thereader.org.uk](http://www.thereader.org.uk)

Supported using public funding by Arts Council England, The Reader is an award-winning, charitable social enterprise which brings people together, changes lives and builds communities through sharing great literature. Our unique Shared Reading model brings small groups together each week to read aloud poetry, short stories, novels or plays with informal, personal group discussion led by a trained Reader Leader.

For over a decade The Reader has been working in partnership with CCGs, Public Health Bodies and NHS Trusts across the UK to support thousands of people with a wide range of health and social issues including, mental health conditions, dementia, chronic pain, isolation and recovery from substance misuse.

Whether delivered by volunteers or Reader staff, Shared Reading offers people a practical way to improve well-being, build confidence and connect with others.

SOCIAL - [@thereaderorg](https://twitter.com/thereaderorg) [#SharedReading](https://twitter.com/thereaderorg)

The Reader - Charity Number 1126806 (SCO43054 Scotland)

**About Bristol Ageing Better** [www.bristolageingbetter.org.uk](http://www.bristolageingbetter.org.uk)

Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) is a partnership of individuals and organisations working together to reduce isolation and loneliness among older people in Bristol.

BAB's partners represent a very wide spectrum of organisations, including statutory, voluntary and commercial organisations.

The programme is funded by the Big Lottery fund and aims to reduce isolation and loneliness in older people in Bristol through over 16 projects across 4 main themes:

1. Creating the Conditions to reduce and prevent loneliness
2. Identifying and Informing older people at risk of loneliness
3. Working with Communities to increase the services and activities available
4. Supporting Individuals to live fulfilling lives