

Case Study: Jacqueline Hale, Librarian & Literacy Coordinator, St Hilda's CE High School

Outreach for vulnerable pupils

Librarian and Literacy co-ordinator, Jacqueline Hale, started a book club for vulnerable pupils following an interest in how the library, and reading, can help to tackle mental health issues in young people.

After discovering that the Liverpool Families Program were funding similar reading clubs across the city, Jacqueline looked to set up the group in-keeping with the funding parameters; this required that 70% of the group were Looked After, on a Child in Need or Protection Plan, on an Early Help Assessment Tool or with attendance below 95%. Of the 30 pupils chosen, 20 of them had attendance below 95%, 3 were Looked After and the others were going through issues including bereavement, sexuality issues, anxiety, depression and other mental health issues.

The pupils were introduced to each other at a "book tasting". They were brought out of lessons, to the library, where a table full of drinks and snacks were waiting for them. They filled their plates, got comfortable and started chatting to each other. While they ate, Jacqueline read them the first chapter of several different books, which had a main character dealing with issues such as eating disorders, anxiety, sexual orientation, self-harm, suicide, family breakdown and other issues. Most left the session having borrowed a book – when many of them hadn't borrowed anything for years, if ever.

When the Scholastic Book Fair was in school each member of the group chose a book they liked, which Jacqueline paid for with the funding from Liverpool Families Program. Many of these pupils had never owned a book before and were thrilled to have one to take home with them – even the pupils who hadn't seemed as interested in the group as others. Many of them decided to take the same book, so that they could all talk about it when they had finished reading.

Jacqueline also introduced a reward scheme with loyalty cards with pupils receiving a



Library book club zone, "a quiet place to get away from everything."

stamp each time they attended a meeting, borrowed a book and once their card was full they chose a book to keep, purchased for them by the library.

The book club sought to give pupils books of their own, with recent research from the National Literacy Trust demonstrating that children who say they own a book are 15 times more likely to read above the level expected for their age.

The improvement in attendance and reading / literacy levels of the pupils involved benefitted the whole school and the personal benefits for the individual pupils were far reaching. Of the 20 pupils with poor attendance, 17 of them increased their attendance, some of them considerably, and 2 of them moved up above 95%. 18 of the 30 had increased library borrowing rates during the two months and 11 of them continue to borrow books regularly.

Providing a place to go and a group of people who had an idea of what they were going through was just what some of these pupils needed, and something they hadn't realised was there until the library reached out to them with this book club. They knew they weren't alone and they knew they could come to the library when they needed a place of refuge, which made them more likely to come into school.

Since the introduction of the book club many more pupils have started to recognise the links between reading and improved mental wellbeing.