



Words Take You Places

Our Impact 2020



Hello

We are Doorstep Library. We believe in the power of words to take you places. We are a not-for-profit community organisation dedicated to bringing the gift of books and the joy of reading into the homes of families across London who most need our support. We read with them and their children to inspire a love of books, of stories and storytelling, and to instil a lifelong passion for reading.

Our story: 2020

Our network in 2020

- 14 Doorstep Libraries in London boroughs
- Reading with 500 children from 250 families
- More than 130 Home Reading Volunteers
- Lending 20,000 books a year

A passion for reading

- Children enjoy reading 36% more now
- Young readers now rate their reading ability as 4.7/5
- 94% report increased confidence reading

Education and the community

- 69% of families share positive school reports
- 70% of parents say their child is more ready for school
- Families are 30% more aware of local support services

Reading with families since 2007

Equipped with a reading stool and a supply of books, our volunteers are right on the doorstep, ready to use books to fuel children's natural love of stories, fire their imaginations, and encourage their appreciation of reading. Our goal is to help each child develop the self-confidence and essential skills they need to access all the opportunities that will come their way in life.

Our own story started back in 2007 with a three-year pilot project supporting low-income families across Hammersmith & Fulham to increase their engagement with books and with local services designed around their needs. We celebrated our 10th anniversary in 2020 after becoming a charity in October 2010, and have continued to grow during that time, expanding into Lambeth and Westminster. In 2014 we changed our structure and registered as a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO).

Now active across three London boroughs our volunteers regularly visit 250 families and more than 500 children up to the age of 11. With Covid-19 impacting the way children interact, and how they play and learn, we know that our core approach is now more important than ever, yet we also recognise the need to offer support to our families safely at this time. As our short-term plans change to reflect the current environment we continue to plan for the future and want to expand our operations to more boroughs, engaging and inspiring more families, over the coming years.



Helping children
connect with
reading

The Issue

Reading for enjoyment may be viewed as a simple pleasure. But it is also something that has the potential to alleviate so many issues – whether that’s boosting vocabulary, improving

behaviours in the learning environment, or overcoming wider social barriers. We use the information across these pages and more to guide our work.



Home learning environment

Learning begins at home, it reinforces school-learning and develops the right behaviours to succeed at school. For a school setting it's important that children can retain information, resist distraction and impulsive behaviours, and switch easily between activities. Our families tell us that their biggest successes are that their child is ready for the weekly sessions, more focused while reading and less likely to respond to distractions, all skills which transfer well to nursery and school settings.

Improving attainment

While our primary focus is on encouraging a positive relationship with reading we know that this also creates positive learning outcomes. We have volunteers who are also teachers and who see this first-hand. A Department for Education report in 2012 highlighted that reading for pleasure had a greater educational outcome than the family's socio-economic status. A similar study in Australia showed that frequent reading at age 4-5 led to higher educational scores at age 8-9.

Vocabulary

Just one story a day can expose a child to almost 300,000 words by age 5. Five books a day and that jumps to 1.4 million words. An independent reader in Year 5 will read around 1 million words a year – 20,000 of which will be unfamiliar to them. This is important for the child's development and social interactions especially among families where English is often a second language. Studies have shown children with a poor vocabulary at age 5 are twice as likely to be unemployed at age 34.



Confidence

We look to build reading confidence for the child and the parent. Families tell us that their own lack of confidence impacts how they enjoy books and their ability to read with their own children. For the younger children we want them to engage with books, enjoying the story and the book itself, and having the confidence to read aloud, or to choose their own stories. This all creates an environment where families are able to read together.



Social inclusion & Wellbeing

Our families also tell us how important our support is for them personally. The facts are stark, whether its reading for pleasure to combat social exclusion among young people, or that reading can enable parent/carer to increase their sense of purpose, alleviate loneliness and create social connections. Our volunteers build trusting relationships with their families, helping where they can and signposting other local support they can access.

Economic barriers

We operate in London boroughs affected by high levels of poverty. In these settings encouraging a positive relationship with reading can lead to longer term benefits. A 2018 DEMOS study found that children from disadvantaged areas who read often tend to score better than more privileged pupils who do not read. These barriers are often even higher for boys from disadvantaged areas, while young people accessing free school meals are unlikely to read fiction in the home.

Covid-19

The pandemic and resulting lockdowns have affected the way we support our families. It also means our support will be needed more in the future – tackling the resulting social, educational and wellbeing issues.

The Sutton Trust published research that we're using to guide our planning:

50% of parents without higher qualifications are not confident home-schooling

15% of families in most deprived areas do not have adequate technology for home-learning

8% of schools in the least advantaged areas are receiving $\frac{3}{4}$ of completed home-learning tasks

Taking You Places

We believe that words can take you places, inspiring and firing your imagination and creating opportunities in life.

We want children and their parents to connect with books positively and together where they can. Our 'doorstep' approach is designed to overcome the reasons that keep people disconnected from reading; face to face sessions on the doorstep, in the home or now online, providing access to books, increasing reading confidence, tackling distractions, and providing reading material in different languages. If these barriers remain unchallenged so many young people will grow up missing the joy that reading can bring, as well as the lasting benefits for them individually, during their education and on into the workplace.





Creating a passion for reading among young people



Inspiring a love of reading that encourages individual development



Using the power of words to benefit learning and future careers



Creating opportunities to engage with wider support networks

Reading Engagement

Personal Development

Education

Community Support

Engaging with our Sessions

Our Theory of Change

Working with so many vulnerable families we wanted to ensure that we understand fully their situation, how our support is best provided and the key outputs and outcomes we can target.

We completed a Theory of Change assessment that mapped out the way we work and tested our critical thinking. This model has been used to shape how we position the role we play, our delivery processes, and the way we measure and report impact.

RATIONALE / NEED FOR INTERVENTION

Doorstep Library helps children to reach their full potential in life through reading, helping to overcome the barriers faced by some of London's most deprived communities. Almost 25% of 11-year-olds in the UK's poorest families have fewer than 10 books in their home. In order to help a child discover the world of reading, they need inspiring stories, interaction and encouragement from a supportive caregiver, and a positive home learning environment.

Theory of Change

To provide a home based reading service that encourages children to read for pleasure in order to:

- ★ Support children in reading in the home
- ★ Improve literacy levels in children
- ★ Improve parental understanding of and engagement in reading
- ★ Increase social inclusion
- ★ Increase health and wellbeing

Inputs

- ★ Core training for volunteers run by staff
- ★ Expert training in specialised areas
- ★ Supervision by staff
- ★ Dissemination of external training back to volunteers, including leaflets and info sheets
- ★ Provision of books / stools / backpacks / tablets (per every 4-6 families)
- ★ Resource packs of books and tips for parents

Enabling factors/conditions for success

- ★ Ability of organisation to recruit, train and retain enough volunteers to meet the needs of families on our waiting list
- ★ Requirement of trained / expert staff to support training and monitoring of volunteers

LONG TERM OUTCOMES / IMPACTS

- ★ Increased child literacy / better school preparedness
- ★ Increased prevalence of children reading for pleasure
- ★ Parental engagement and understanding of value of books and reading continues to improve
- ★ Greater educational progression for children - leading to improved life chances
- ★ Increased child communication skills / critical thinking / language / self-efficacy
- ★ Happier individuals / families leading to improved mental health and wellbeing

Activities

- ★ Monthly Training Sessions for all new volunteers
- ★ Additional specialised training for existing volunteers
- ★ Ongoing mentoring for volunteers
- ★ Weekly visits to families
- ★ Weekly book lending to families
- ★ Signposting services to families (2 / 3 times a term or tailored)
- ★ Handing out additional resources to families

Outputs

- ★ 60% of parents engaging with sessions
- ★ 80% of children choose books each week
- ★ Children being read to and reading to the volunteer
- ★ Children are able to borrow 2 new books each week
- ★ Parent-child reading together in-between sessions
- ★ Families accessing signposted services / activities
- ★ Parents feel less isolated and more connected to their local community

Short term outcomes / mediators

- ★ Children's engagement and enjoyment of reading starts to improve
- ★ Children able to stay focused for a time / increased attention span
- ★ Parents start to see reading with their child as a fun activity
- ★ Children start to have increased confidence, critical thinking and communication skills
- ★ Parents start to understand 'how to' read / share stories with young children
- ★ Parent's engagement with sessions and reading with children starts to increase
- ★ Increased bonding time for parents and children through enjoying stories together
- ★ Parents start to see the value of reading as part of home learning environment

- ★ Effectiveness of cascading training and knowledge down to all volunteers
- ★ Reluctance of families from disadvantaged areas to engage fully with Doorstep Library's range of services

Reading Doorstep by Doorstep

Our families join us in a number of different ways. For some the first they hear about us is a knock at the door from one of our volunteers. Others are directed to us through community referrals, some come by word of mouth from other parents, and sometimes the school, nursery or playgroup may mention us.

Once the family has agreed to join Doorstep Library we match a pair of volunteers suited to support them. During term-time these volunteers will visit the family weekly, reading with the child or children for around 20-30 minutes. They arrive with a backpack full of books and are happy reading on the step or in the family home.

Children in Poverty

Westminster: **27.3%**

Lambeth: **23.4%**

Hammersmith & Fulham: **20.6%**

England average: **17.0%**



English is not the First Language for any Parent in the Family Home

Westminster: **22.4%**

Hammersmith & Fulham: **14.5%**

Lambeth: **12.1%**

England average: **4.4%**

Sessions are structured to make the family feel comfortable and to encourage both child and parental engagement. While our volunteers often choose and read the books at first, over time we see the children taking more of a lead, with parents also being drawn in. Our aim is to create a connection with reading that continues between the sessions and beyond the support of the volunteer.

The range of books selected by our volunteers reflect the age ranges, ability and interests of those involved and over time, as their confidence grows, the children will begin choosing the books themselves. While fiction is often the first choice, many of our readers will choose material that links to their school subjects, or that fits with their own interests. Familiarity with books, or language can be a barrier, so we look to provide reading material that reflects the people we support. Fact books, graphic novels, joke books, foreign language books, all help increase engagement.



1 in 8 of the nation's most disadvantaged children don't own a single book

Our Impact

To understand the impact of our work we considered information and data from a number of sources.

We reviewed the project data we capture and more than 120 self-assessment surveys were completed by parents, volunteers and our young readers. The output from these surveys was analysed and is included over the following pages. To supplement this, interviews were completed with Doorstep Library staff and Trustees, and semi-structured interviews with parents and volunteers provided an additional level of insight to the issues faced by those involved and the outcomes realised. The data generated across these aspects has been reviewed against the five aspects we look to influence – reading engagement, personal development, education, community support and engagement with our sessions. The following pages of this report present this analysis.

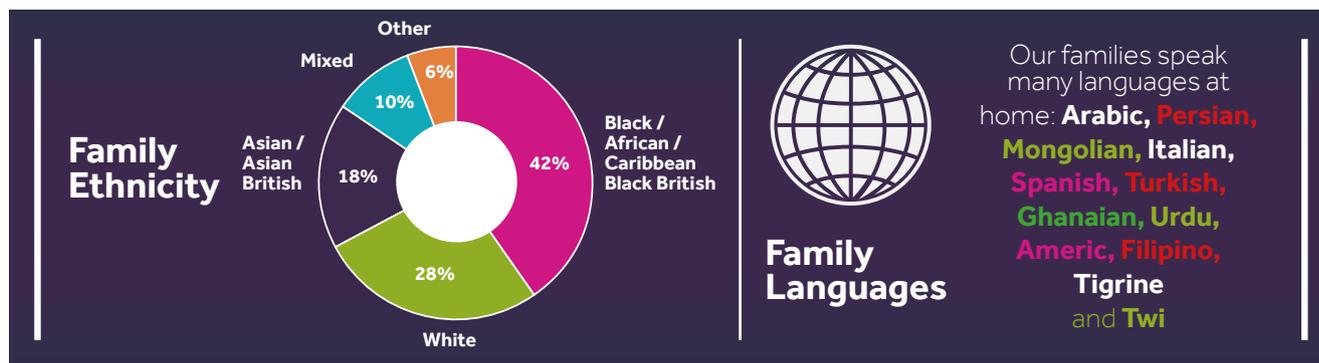
For **52%** of our families English is not their first language

48% have English as a main language

A **third** of whom have a parent whose first language isn't English



Our reach



Reading Engagement

Creating a connection with books, inspiring a lifelong passion for reading.

With one family we could be creating a positive experience for pre-schoolers, immersing them into the story but also the look, feel and structure of the book itself. With another we could be preparing primary students for their move to secondary school and a more analytical and structured reading experience.

We want them all to strengthen the way they see books, recognising the value and benefit that reading can bring individually, educationally and beyond into the workplace.



A love of books

We see the young children we support change the way they see books. At first all we want to create is an excitement about the stories being read, building anticipation for future sessions where the children choose the books themselves, before they get more and more involved in the storytelling itself.

After joining Doorstep Library children rate their enjoyment of reading as 4.8 out of 5

Children find it easier to make time to read – 4.5 out of 5 after our support as opposed to 3.3 out of 5 prior to joining

87% of volunteers either Strongly Agree or Agree that children continue reading between sessions

Parents see their children's engagement with books increase by 30%

With our support parents report a 26% increase in their children's enjoyment of books

44% of young readers engage with sessions in the first 6 months, 28% take 6-12 months

An Ongoing Story

Our aim is to encourage reading, young children reading for pleasure and families sharing stories between the sessions. We provide books they can borrow and signpost families to libraries and other reading activities and events.

- ★ Children report a 45% increase in their willingness to talk about books with family and friends
- ★ 58% of volunteers observe parents continuing to read with their children between sessions
- ★ 25% increase in families saying they enjoy reading together



Overcoming Barriers

Many parents struggle to encourage their children to read. This can be due to a lack of time or children having conflicting interests, it can be linked to language barriers or a lack of familiarity with books, or their own lack of confidence with reading can have an effect. We aim to overcome these barriers and help parents increase the way that they, and their children, engage with books.

Reported reduction in barriers to reading after joining Doorstep Library



Personal Development

Creating personal development opportunities through positive interventions.

Everyone reads differently. Some quickly, some more slowly, some love fiction while others prefer something more factual. But what is consistent is that reading provides a way of learning new

behaviours and changing the way we approach tasks and activities.

We want young people to develop the skills and attitudes that help them read and enjoy books, but that also offer benefits in the classroom and other settings.

Boosting Confidence

Increasing your vocabulary can have a knock-on impact on your confidence, increasing your willingness to read and to relay information to others. Confidence when reading is generally low

among our new readers and so we look to gradually support the development of each individual ensuring they reach a place where they are comfortable yet challenged.



With our support our young readers rate their reading confidence as 4.7 out of 5

94% of our volunteers Strongly Agree or Agree that confidence increases among the children they read with

Parents report that their children are around 20% more confident at nursery or school

76% of volunteers Strongly Agree or Agree that parental confidence increases following support from Doorstep Library

Positive Behaviours

It's not just confidence reading, understanding or sharing a story that is important. It is also the behaviours that our young readers develop while reading that provide lasting positive

outcomes. Being able to sit and listen, to ask questions without interrupting, or just simply demonstrating a curiosity to learn, are all valuable skills that we have monitored.

★ **Our volunteers report that 84% of young children improve their focus and concentration following the sessions**

★ **Parents report that their children's ability to focus increases by 26%**

★ **This is slightly higher among boys, at 29%**



Family Feedback

Sarah's family has been with Doorstep Library for three years. While her family has seen improvements in their connection to reading one of the biggest outcomes has been behavioural. They may not always read each week, but the children anticipate the visit, are attentive and have learned how to behave in other settings. Sarah also recognises how the children show more respect for the books themselves, and that all these aspects have helped prepare her children for school.

Volunteer Viewpoint

The behavioural aspects are echoed among our volunteers. Lina, a volunteer with 6 years' experience, sees numerous positive outcomes. With some families the process of choosing a book, of talking about the cover and imagining what will follow, supports increased focus and understanding. Some of the children she has supported have only ever known visits from Doorstep Library and as a result her position as volunteer is recognised as a trusted adult relationship.

Education

Developing transferrable skills that support academic outcomes.

We want our families to be set up for success. While academic progression is not something that we use as a measure of success – we prioritise reading for pleasure – we know that it happens and that it can

provide lasting benefits to the young children we support.

Our approach also looks at how we can help young children prepare for the school environment, giving them the behaviours and the confidence to make the most of their learning opportunity.

School Readiness

Transition can be such a critical issue within education. Starting nursery, moving to primary school or preparing for secondary school can all be

difficult times. We look to support these aspects by helping young children develop the skills and attitudes required to succeed within these settings.



Parents rate their children's school's positivity about their relationship with books as 4.7 out of 5



The parents of boys see a bigger increase in the way their children engage with books in the school environment



70% of volunteers Strongly Agree or Agree that the children they support are now more ready for nursery or school

Volunteer Viewpoint

Grace is a volunteer but also a primary school teacher. She recognises that while it can take a while to build a relationship with the family, the attitude and behaviours, like improved concentration, that are developed transfer well into the classroom. Grace believes Doorstep Library's approach to making books fun is a real differentiator!

Academic Progression

Our aim is to encourage a passion for reading, but we recognise this can then support development in the classroom. We don't measure progression in the same way a school

would, instead we look to our volunteers and families to share with us how they feel their children are developing.

We asked our young readers to tell us how well they read at school before and after being part of Doorstep Library

3.7/5 Before ➔ 4.7/5 After

Parents report
25%
improvement in
completing homework
tasks as a family

69% of families
share positive feedback
from the school about
their child's reading

56% of volunteers see children
asking for books related to their
school work

Family Feedback

We've been reading with Liya's family for eight years and over that time all three of her children have been involved. While she now reads with her children every night her own accent initially made it difficult for them to understand. She likes the way Doorstep Library helps the children connect with stories in a way that is fun but that is also similar to their experience at school.

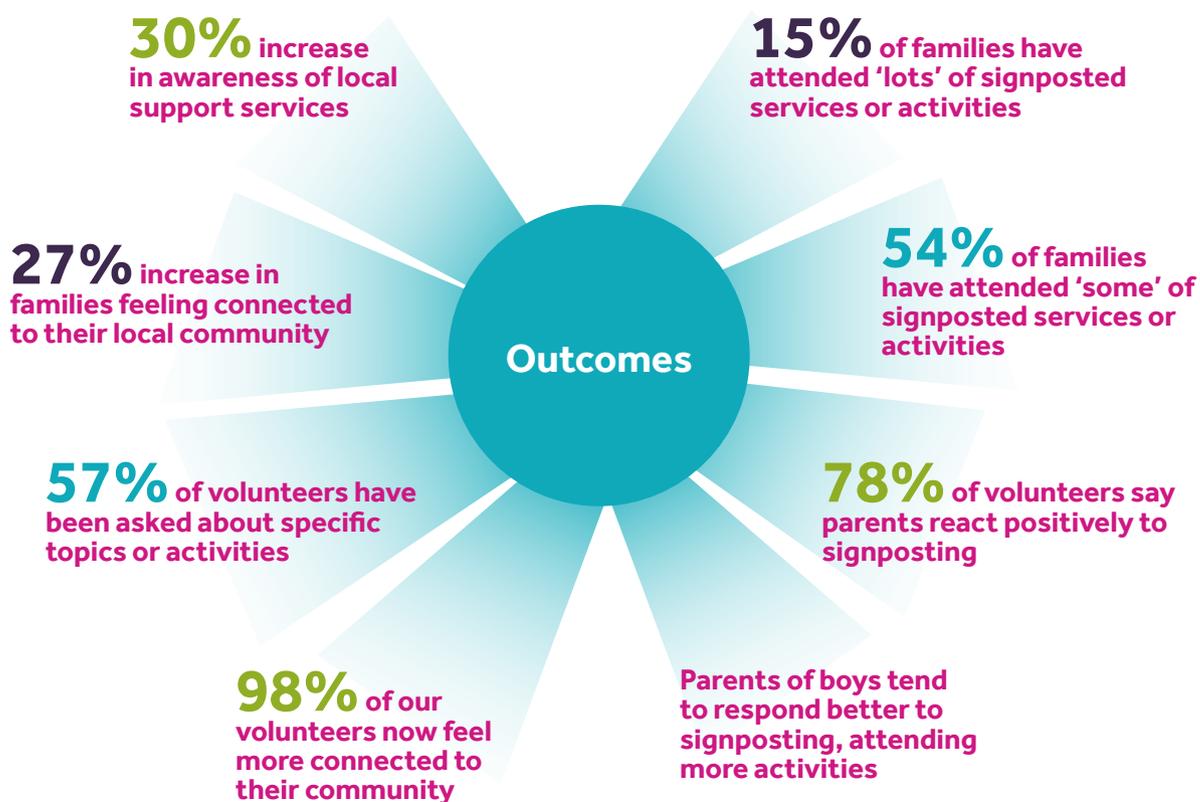
Community Support

Connecting our families to local support where it is needed.

So many of our families need much more support than our sessions can provide. The strength of the relationship and the trust we develop with each family means we are able to guide our families to

other organisations that can continue helping them.

We know that confidence is often low, and that language barriers or not being familiar with the local area, can stop our families asking for help. Our approach reflects that and we offer information and advice where we can.



Engaging With Our Sessions

Captivating and inspiring young people and their families.

We want every family to have a positive experience of Doorstep Library. We want them to look forward to their next session, engage with the stories and leave feeling more connected to books.

Our volunteers are so important in this process, from the first time they knock on the door, they and the wonderful stories they bring to life, are what Doorstep Library is all about. We know it can take time for families to adjust and build trust, and we're happy reading on the doorstep, around the family table or wherever they feel comfortable.

91% of parents actively engage in the weekly session

97% of our young readers rate us as Great! Yay! or Really Good

Families engage at different paces; 50% engaged within 6 months, 16% take up to a year

98% of parents look forward to the weekly sessions

93% of parents rate us as Excellent



Our Unfolding Story

For us, the 'happy ever after' is when we know the power of literacy and the joy of reading are helping a child change their own story for good.

Finding common ground:
a love of reading and of books. Equipping every child with a superpower, the tools they need to learn, enjoy and understand the world around them

Beyond the page:
creating connections through books. We bring families together, create relationships with our volunteers, and connecting out to the community

Passion to turn the page:
empowering new lives. Nurturing a love of reading to enrich lives, inspire imaginations and trigger ideas that create stepping stones to new opportunities

Actions for 2021

Growing our Network:
reading with 700 children from 350 families, supported by 180 volunteers

Extending our Reach:
establishing projects in Camden and exploring opportunities in other boroughs

Refreshing our Platform: responding to a changing world and creating digital connections with our families

Building our capacity:
strengthening our organisation and raising our voice so our message continues to be heard

Why not grab a reading stool, pick up your favourite book, and help us write a new story that will continue to inspire future generations for years to come.

Reading with Doorstep Library helped me at school 100%! It boosted my knowledge, helped me learn how to 'read' and understand text and got me ahead of my class. Would I recommend Doorstep Library to others – a 1,000% yes!

Doorstep Library Graduate, Age 18



"I see volunteering as both an escape and a balance to my work; once a week I pry myself away from my desk from the ever-shifting, ever-stressful world of work, and do something that feels smaller, simpler and unequivocally good."

Doorstep Library Volunteer

What do you think about Doorstep Library?

"I am grateful for the variety of books that suit my son who has special needs which I couldn't get from our local library."

Doorstep Library Parent

"Doorstep Library made us all a happy family, reading together."

Doorstep Library Parent



"I'm always excited when you come. Whatever books you bring, there is something I love. Thank you so much for your visits."

Doorstep Library Child Age 10

"Teachers have commented on how much my son loves books, and I put this down to your visits."

Doorstep Library Parent



This year we produced our award-winning volunteer film #WordsTakeYouPlaces. Working closely with partners Media Trust, John Lyon's Charity, Director Michaela Lowe and an amazing group of actors and crew, we have seen so much skill, commitment and passion. The finished film is beautifully shot and paints a truly heart-warming picture of one family's journey with Doorstep Library and reading. Since launching, the film has picked up three major awards including:

Third Sector Awards – Best Charity Film
Charity Film Awards – Silver

Syn International Film Festival – Special Mention for Excellence in filmmaking and for inspiring millions of people to act on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

We hope that watching it will inspire more people to join our growing team of volunteers, helping us to continue to reach those families who now more than ever, need our support.



Katie Bareham, Director, Doorstep Library



This report, and the evaluation supporting it, was completed by Future Proof Impact Ltd, an independent social enterprise supporting charities to quantify their impact while inspiring young people to a more creative, healthier and positive future.