

Words With Wanderers



Supporting mental health for the homeless through reading

What is our project?

- ❖ A collaborative reading group between Exeter students and local homeless individuals
- ❖ A subsection of Exeter Student Volunteers (ESV)



Project aims

- ❖ To improve mental well-being among the homeless through focusing on reading fiction for pleasure and escapism
- ❖ To strengthen ties between Exeter's community and the university

This Week's Tasks

- ❖ To explore local projects in place in Exeter for supporting the homeless
+ Food Action Project + St Petrock's
- ❖ To explore other national and international projects that use reading specifically to help the homeless
+ Manchester library + Queens Library in New York City
- ❖ To contact local organisations that could help us in our projects
+ Exeter Library + Boston Tea Party + The Reading Agency + CoLab
+ Exeter Student Volunteers
- ❖ To investigate the process of setting up a new sub-society within ESV
- ❖ To organise the running of the reading groups, including interesting lists for a homeless-focused reading group



Why do we need this project?

- ❖ In 2017, Shelter estimated that 1 in every 367 people in Exeter are homeless. (ITV, 2017)
- ❖ Exeter has the second highest rate of rough sleeping outside London. (ITV, 2017)
- ❖ Homeless individuals are twice as likely to have a mental health issue compared to the general population. (Crisis, 2009)
 - In 2014 one study found that 45% of participants had been diagnosed with a mental health issue. (Homeless Link, 2014)
 - But 80% of participants reported suffering from a mental health issue. (Homeless Link, 2014)
- ❖ Research suggests that reading for just six minutes could reduce stress levels by up to 68%. (Telegraph, 2009)



What's already being done in Exeter for the homeless?

❖ Exeter

- St Petrock's - Local homeless shelter.
- Local businesses - Boston Tea Party - involved in homeless community and providing food.

❖ Exeter Library

- Providing reading, computer use and charging phones.
- Give out leaflets to homeless with advertisements of facilities.

❖ Exeter Student Volunteers

- Food Action Project - take unsold fresh food from campus outlets, and redistribute it to those who need it most.



What's already being done elsewhere for the homeless?

- ❖ Manchester, UK
 - Homeless Library project
- ❖ Shoreditch, UK
 - Homeless book club
- ❖ Auckland, New Zealand
 - Provide a space for homeless people to leave their books overnight, so they can continue reading on next visit
- ❖ Canberra, Australia
 - Registered charity to sign up for a library card, but only with permission of the charity
- ❖ Queens, New York City, USA
 - Offers a summer reading club



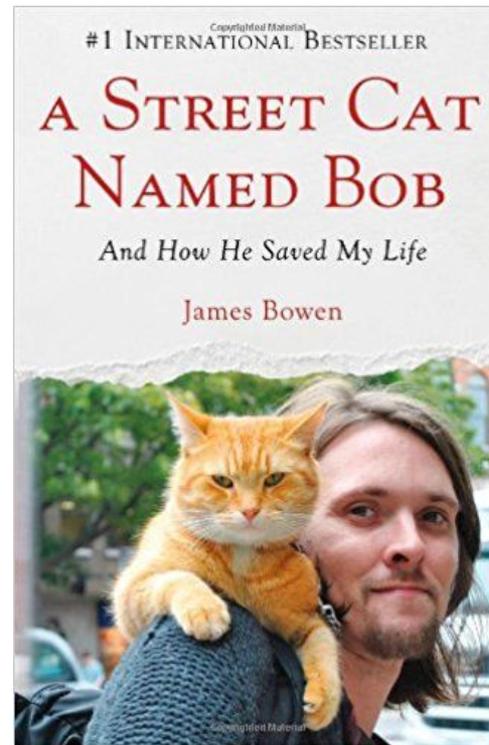
Who would be involved?

- ❖ Exeter Library
 - Currently run a reading group to help boost mental health (in accordance with the Reading Agency) and are interested in hosting/providing the venue for our group
 - Would also help us to connect with other local organisations and charities
 - Help provide advertising and promotion for the project
- ❖ Exeter Student Volunteers
 - Confirmed they would be interested in exploring this project in the following academic term, provided we could find group leaders for the project
- ❖ FredPublishing
 - Linked to a further creative writing project, and providing possible texts for our proposed reading list
- ❖ St Petrock's
 - Promoting our project - posters, etc.



How the project will run

- ❖ Weekly sessions, 1 hour per week
- ❖ Ran primarily by ESV, but with support from other organisations (such as Exeter Public Library)
- ❖ Mental Health Training from The Reader Organisation
- ❖ Focus on inclusivity
 - Reading aloud, braille books, audio books
- ❖ Mood-boosting books
 - Quick Reads for those less confident
 - Mood-boosting lists as endorsed by the Reading Agency



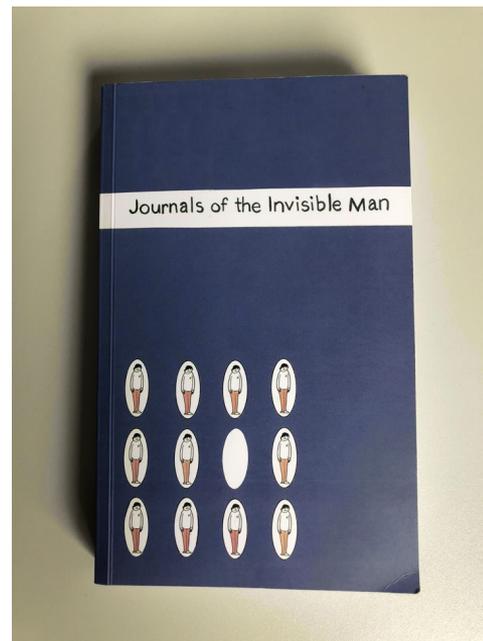
Future Aims of the Project

Phase 1:

- ❖ To establish confirmed connections with the partners we have been talking to this week, looking at providing food at the events
- ❖ To work with the reading agency to create a clinically approved reading list; could be researched by university students

Phase 2:

- ❖ To also incorporate creative writing into the reading group where individuals will be able to share stories
- ❖ To publish some of the written accounts and creative work by group participants in a book or magazine, supported by Fred Publishing
- ❖ To expand beyond Exeter, either through other universities, or through our connections with homelessness groups



Evaluating the Project

- ❖ Issues with interviewing the homeless
 - Scheduling issues
 - Issues of consent
- ❖ Timing issues for the project
 - Term-time availability
 - Frequency of sessions
 - Seeing the project through
- ❖ Demand for the project
 - Expected turnout
 - Equality for the homeless - Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie “library anxiety”
 - Comparison with other already established societies.



Thank you for listening!

We are happy to answer any questions!
Please come and visit us in the showcase, where we will have additional materials.



Team Members: Jakub, Vilde, Emily, Nina, Cecily, Liem, Chet and Holly

WORDS WITH WANDERERS

Supporting mental health of the homeless through reading

80% of homeless reported some form of mental health issue, diagnosed or undiagnosed.

45% had been diagnosed with a mental health issue, compared with 25% of the general population.

2017: Exeter 2nd highest rate of rough sleepers outside London

Last 5 years: 38% increase in the number of visits to St Petrock's Homeless centre in Exeter

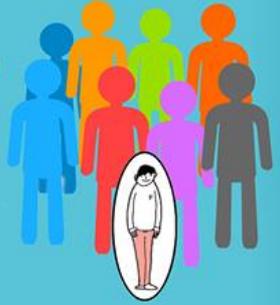
Common mental health condition booklist helps to better understand a condition and improve symptoms

6-minutes of reading can reduce stress by up to 68%

COLLABORATIVE READING GROUP:



THE READING AGENCY



"You're treated as an alien."
- Andy, 56, formerly homeless

FUTURE AIMS:

- 📖 Creative writing and publishing
- 📖 Spreading across UK



"We need to know we are not alone."
- C.S. Lewis

Group project poster available in Forum Showcase

References

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