



Prison Reading Champions

"I like to work with others and help others to learn. By doing so, it just made me feel good in myself." **Prison Reading Champion**

Prison Reading Champions is a framework designed to engage both prisoners and prison staff in reading. The framework was originally part of a national government-funded initiative for schools called Reading Champions. This project came to an end in March 2011, but prisons are still encouraged to continue the project independently in their own institution.

How the project works

Reading Champions is a way for prisons to motivate prisoners to read more and to enjoy reading. The prison librarian or project leader identifies a group of prisoners who carry a measure of status with their peers to become Reading Champions. These Reading Champions encourage others to get into reading by promoting or helping to organise activities such as reading promotions or book clubs. By following the framework prisoners can be nominated for bronze, silver and gold awards, which provide recognition for their achievements and help to keep them motivated. Staff members are also encouraged to get involved.

The Reading Champions framework

Reading Champions work towards three levels of achievement - bronze, silver and gold. There are suggestions for how Reading Champions could qualify based on the three levels of award below. However, to make sure the project is flexible and relevant to all prisons, the librarian or project leader needs to set up their own criteria for each level.

When the librarian or project leader feels happy that a new level has been reached by the prisoner, they can award a certificate to the prisoner. This is a simple framework which prisoners can own and develop as they grow in confidence, with support and encouragement from staff.

Please note that, since the funding for Reading Champions came to an end we are no longer able to provide these certificates for free, but project leaders can produce certificates themselves or purchase a pack from the National Literacy Trust (www.literacytrust.org.uk/resources/our_new_resources/reading_champions_resource_pack)

Examples of activity for nomination at the different levels:

- A **bronze** Reading Champion stands up and declares their enthusiasm for reading: for example, writing book reviews or recommendations.
- A **silver** Reading Champion is involved in schemes to encourage other prisoners to read: for example, helping to organise a recommended reading display, making screensavers if there is a computer in the library or contributing to a prison magazine with book reviews or favourite reads.



- A **gold** Reading Champion makes an outstanding contribution to the reading culture across the prison: for example, setting up a reading event, book club or buddying scheme.
- A **staff** Reading Champion helps to build a reading culture within the prison: for example setting up a reading group.

Why the framework works

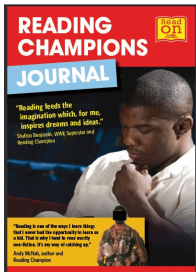
The framework draws on lessons learnt from successful boys' reading schemes and contains these key elements:

- Flexibility - the project fits a variety of different types of prisons and secure units
- Ownership - the men have a say in how the project is delivered
- Support materials - welcome pack, journals, framework of activities, celebrity role models, certificates and badges as rewards.

"I think the framework is good in that it is flexible enough to meet the needs of different types of prison and to take into account local variations in policy and practice."

Sue Wilkinson, Librarian HMP Birmingham

Reading Champions resources for prisons



Reading Champions journal

A 32 page journal which offers tips and ideas on how to champion reading and also contains blank pages to record any reading activity that takes place. The prisoner then has a record of his work to take with him through transfer and release.

Download the journal:

www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0000/5318/ReadingChampionsjournal.pdf

Please note that this journal was produced whilst the government funded Reading Champions initiative was still active, and therefore some information in the journal may not be current.

Case studies

Click on the link below to find out Reading Champions has made an impact in other prisons and young offenders institutions, and pick up some ideas for how you can make a difference where you are.

www.literacytrust.org.uk/case_studies/3792_case_study-prison_reading_champions

Good luck with introducing the Reading Champions framework in your institution. If you'd like to share your experiences with us please get in touch at susie.musgrove@literacytrust.org.uk.