

‘We’re helping others start a new chapter’

Through our partnership with the National Literacy Trust, GH has met four inspiring Literacy Champions - women like you who have found an encyclopaedia of ways to encourage more people to read





‘Reading opens up confidence’

Suzanne Tuck, 61, from Peterborough has ploughed her love of poetry and performing into helping others

I like to make people laugh, and if I can do that while encouraging them to open a book or turn another page, that makes me very happy.

Reading, for me, is the key to life. It opens up confidence and curiosity and unlocks an understanding of so many other important subjects. A fun approach from an early age can be the spark to ignite the reading flame. That’s how I approach being a Literacy Champion.

I was already working in a secondary school, helping children who need extra support with their reading, when I started volunteering nearly four years ago. My two sons, Sam, 29, and Lewis, 26, had left home, so I had a bit more time on my hands. When I read that my city, Peterborough, had become one of the National Literacy Trust’s Literacy Hubs, I offered to help, without really being sure what that meant.

What I did know is that I love

performing and writing poetry. I can read stories to children and bring them to life. The hub’s project officer, Emma Morton, asked if I’d like to be a Literacy Champion and I’ve enjoyed and embraced it ever since.

I write upbeat rhymes about all kinds of things, from pancakes to Harry Potter, and they are filmed. I did one earlier this year about Mother’s Day, asking local children what they loved about their mums, then I turned it into a poem. The videos go online on the National Literacy Trust site.

It’s great fun, especially when I enlist my great-nieces and great-nephew, Lucy, 12, Ruby, eight, and Charlie, five, to read with me.

If there is an event coming up where I can add something, whether by writing something for it or performing at it, then I let Emma know. The joy of

volunteering as a Literacy Champion is the flexibility it provides.

The only pressure I feel is to create something that people enjoy. On the outside I seem quite confident, but as soon as I stop videoing, I turn to my husband, Steve, desperate for reassurance that I’ve got it right. He’s always supportive.

Being a Literacy Champion is the perfect fit with my day job and also with my hobbies. I’ve always been into amateur dramatics and writing poetry. When I was younger, it was heavy, soul-searching stuff, but now my writing is much lighter and more humorous. Sometimes people liken me to the poet Pam Ayres – a comparison I’m flattered by.

I even took my one-woman show to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe five years ago. It was scary standing up in front of an audience every night, but energising, too. I had treatment for a benign brain tumour more than a decade ago and, if that scary experience taught me anything, it’s that you must make space in your life for the things you really love doing.

Through my work in the school, I know what a difference reading can make. It gives children curiosity, allows them to escape, to take themselves to another world.

I get an enormous amount out of it, too. I love having an outlet for my creativity and I’m also constantly learning myself, finding out the right way to film things or what material is the best to share.

I also found myself at The King’s Coronation earlier this year, because of my role as a Literacy Champion. A

group from the National Literacy Trust joined people from other causes that The King supports and watched the event from a special reception in St Margaret’s Church next to Westminster Abbey. It was a real pinch-myself moment and I felt immensely privileged to be there.

I’ve never had a big plan about how to encourage reading or a love of books, but I’ll do anything I can to make someone more willing to turn over a page or open a book. If a child asks me to read another chapter, it’s music to my ears.

Reading, for me, is the key to life

SUZANNE WEARS: SHIRT, WITH NOTHING UNDERNEATH. TROUSERS, MARELLA AT FENWICK. RING, YAA YAA LONDON. SHOES, NEXT

‘I show people you don’t need to read perfectly to enjoy books’

Linda Duffy, 57, from Manchester, has struggled to read all her life – but that hasn’t stopped her becoming a Literacy Champion

At school I was put in the ‘stupid class’. Of course, I can see now that my classmates and I weren’t stupid at all. We just didn’t fit into the system, and we’d play up rather than admit we couldn’t do something. Anything that involved reading was hard for me.

It was another 30 years of difficulty, embarrassment and hiding, before I found out I was dyslexic. I went to college in my 40s to try to better myself and my tutors suggested I get assessed. The results were clear – I had severe challenges with reading.

I’ve worked my whole career in retail, but I’ve never really progressed because I couldn’t read or spell very well. But one area where I found my skills were valued was volunteering and, alongside work, I’ve helped a lot in my community over the years. Most recently at my local community centre, where I started volunteering three and a half years ago and, for the last year, have had a paid job as a community development officer.

There has been a real push to improve the literacy of people in the area but when I was asked to be a Literacy Champion, I really couldn’t see it working because my own reading and writing were so poor. But I was encouraged to give it a go and now I can see that actually it’s a strength I bring to the role rather than a weakness. I show people you don’t need to be able to read perfectly to enjoy books.

I run a free library at the community centre, as well as a weekly reading group for children of all ages, from tots to teenagers, and their families, too. I can hardly believe that I am the one who sits there reading the books out loud. I make mistakes all the time, and often the children correct me, but that allows parents to see that it’s okay if you don’t get it right all the time.

I have a puppet called Stan, who makes the reading sessions fun. The people who come to the centre might

have a language barrier or struggle with their own reading, so hopefully I am showing them that anyone can give it a go.

I have seen children really blossom through coming to the group, making friends, introducing one another to books, and reading together. Everybody’s reading journey is different.

My biggest champions have been my daughters, Chloe, 31, and Mollyann, 20. I used to read them bedtime stories, but would often change words or names I couldn’t read, or even make up my own version of the story.

Chloe was the one who encouraged

me. I read my first whole book – an adventure story for children – when I was in my late 30s. I still really struggle to read a book, and I have to have complete silence, but I love the power of a good book to take you to a different place – and that’s what I try to encourage with the children I read to. Some come from difficult backgrounds and they need that escape.

Being a Literacy Champion has helped me to see how important

reading is, and how special it can be. I don’t see myself as a role model, but I just think you should help people if you can.

I’ve spent my whole life winging it with reading, but I don’t hide in shame any more. I am not stupid or broken, just because my

brain works differently. I know now that no matter how difficult you find reading, you can still make a story come alive. And that’s a magical power to have.

Everybody’s reading journey is different



LINDA WEARS: DRESS, ZARA. BELT, HOBBS. BRACELET, ACCESSORIZE... SHOES, PRIMARK



'When you pick up a book, you step into a special place'

Janice Firth, 68, from Bradford, retired from teaching seven years ago but she is still inspiring young minds today

After 41 years as a primary school teacher, I know a thing or two about the power of reading. For me, it's about the shared moments it creates. When you pick up a book and read it with others, you step into a special place. There are no phones or TV, it's just you and the story.

Reading doesn't need to feel like a duty or task. Just a few minutes here and there or visiting a library can give children a lifelong love of reading. As a Literacy Champion for my city, Bradford, it's a real honour to help with that.

I got involved after the project co-ordinator from the National Literacy Trust in Bradford brought her own daughter to the preschool story time session I run. I didn't have to think twice when she asked if I'd be willing to take on the role.

At that point, I'd been running the story group for around six years. It takes place in a community library that was opened after the old council facility was closed. It's gone from strength

to strength, and I can't bear to turn anyone away.

Around 25-30 preschool children come along each Monday with their mums and dads, grandparents and childminders. Once we've sung the welcome song, we move on to a story, followed by some more singing and nursery rhymes. Thanks to the National Literacy Trust, we get extra goodies to give out to the children, such as books, pens or notebooks.

Like everywhere else, we had to shut when the pandemic hit, so I started posting videos of me reading on the library's Facebook page. One day I'd be

sitting in my bunny ears doing an Easter tale, the next I'd be in my pyjamas sharing a bedtime story.

As a result, quite a few of my former pupils, who had grown up and had children of their own, connected with me. When I think about those I've helped learn to read over the years, and about what some of them are doing now, I feel so proud.

Becoming a Literacy Champion is a bonus for me. The National Literacy Trust just wants you to give as much as you can. There are no set hours, no targets to meet, and, best of all, the children get so much out of it.

As well as promoting reading through story time, I do other activities around town. Our city has a converted yellow New York school bus that is now Bradford's Stories Bus. I love being on board, going around the city and promoting reading.

Books have always been a huge part of my life. As a child growing up in the 1950s, we didn't have many. My mum took me to the library, and I could read before I went to school. My husband, Douglas, is a retired secondary school English teacher, so he's mad about books and poetry. We passed that love on to our son, Jonathan, and daughter, Katie, and now on to her children, Sonny, five, and Jesse, three.

I would encourage anybody to be a Literacy Champion. You don't need to be a teacher like me. You just need to love books. Working with children has been my life and I have a chance to carry on passing learning to others.

I feel proud when I think about those I've helped



I remember my teacher reading to us under a mango tree

'People take books for granted, but they can do so much'

Placing a recipe book in a food parcel is one of the many ways that Shanine Fasasi, 36, from Nottingham, shares her love of books

I grew up in St Vincent and the Grenadines, a multi-island nation in the eastern Caribbean, where every afternoon, our teacher would read aloud to us under the mango tree. Miss Minors read with such passion that you couldn't fail to be moved. I have such fond memories of her reading *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. Even today, when I am reading out loud, I think of Miss Minors.

I may be far from that Caribbean life, but one thing that spurs me on to make a difference to people comes from my roots in that upbringing – the sense of community, of supporting one another.

I moved to the UK in 2003 when I was 16, with a husband in the armed forces. I remember that first winter, walking down the street in the snow, and asking myself how on earth I would cope.

But cope I did, and now after a divorce and five children, aged 20, 19, 14, nine and seven, and marrying my second

husband, Lateef, I'm proud to be helping my community, promoting diversity, understanding and, of course, reading.

I qualified as a primary teacher in 2018 but realised that my real passion lay outside the classroom, where I felt I could make a real difference. So, while still studying, I set up my community interest company Diversify Education and Communities to celebrate different

cultures, bring communities together and break the taboo around mental health. I started volunteering with the charity Changing Lives, giving out food parcels in places such as women's refuges.

I moved to Nottingham and continued with the food parcels and when I heard, three years ago, that the National Literacy Trust was looking for Literacy Champions, it seemed a good fit.

I began putting a variety of books donated by the charity into the food bags. Having a book alongside groceries is a way of creating an opportunity, whether that's the chance to follow a recipe or escape into a different world. More practically, it helps people use the food they get. I was recently sent a photo of banana muffins one woman had made from the Paul Hollywood cookery book we sent.

Being a Literacy Champion has benefited the community centre I run as we have a snug where anyone can curl up with a book the charity has donated.

We also run women's groups, teaching skills such as sewing and beauty therapy, as well a group for boys and men. At one of the recent men's sessions, after a game of football and a hot meal, we gave out copies of Marcus Rashford's *You Can Do It*, given by the National Literacy Trust. It was great to see different generations reading together.

One of my proudest achievements as a Literacy Champion is placing story boxes in public areas in Nottingham. They look like mini houses and are packed with around 40 different books.

A few months ago, I tracked down my old teacher Miss Minors in St Vincent. We were both emotional when I told her, via Zoom, about the impact she'd had on me.

Now I can pass on that love of reading. People can take books for granted but they are powerful, and can do so much.

YOU COULD BECOME A LITERACY CHAMPION

- There are around 700 people already supporting their communities by reading, writing, speaking and listening.
- Volunteers can be anyone in the community: youth workers, child-minders, midwives, sports

coaches, electricians, students or parents. Whether it's hosting a reading or writing group, sharing literacy activities or resources, or spreading the magic of books through book swaps and community bookshelves, anyone can champion literacy.

• Visit literacytrust.org.uk/volunteer
HELP IN OTHER WAYS:
Half a million children in the UK don't have a book of their own at home. With just £15, you could give them the gift of reading. To donate, visit literacytrust.org.uk/goodhousekeeping

JANICE WEARS: JACKET; TROUSERS: BOTH PHASE EIGHT; TOP: GAP; EARRINGS: TOO LALLY; SHOES: MATALAN. OPPOSITE PAGE: SHANINE WEARS: DRESS: RO & ZO; EARRINGS: KAREN MILLEN; SHOES: FITFLOP; INTERVIEWS: MEL HUNTER PHOTOGRAPHY; ANTONIO PETRONZIO; FASHION STYLING: HELEN JOHNSON; MAKEUP: CAROLINE PIASECKI; LINDSEY POOLE; HAIR: DEBORAH LOLA; SET STYLING: ALEX TEAL

FIRST PAGE: SHANINE WEARS: JUMPSUIT; PHASE EIGHT; SHOES: EARRINGS: BOTH MATALAN; LINDA WEARS: JEANS; NRBY; SHIRT: BRACELETS; LINDA'S OWN; SANDALS: SOLE BLISS; SUZANNE WEARS: BLAZER, ME+EM; CARDIGAN, MARKS & SPENCER; SKIRT, AGNES B; TRAINERS, JOHN LEWIS & PARTNERS. JANICE WEARS: BLOUSE, TED BAKER; TROUSERS, H&M; EARRINGS, YAA YAA LONDON; BRACELET, FENWICK; SHOES, NATURALIZER; CHILDREN: POSED BY MODELS; CHILDREN'S CLOTHES WITH THANKS TO ANYDAY AT JOHN LEWIS & PARTNERS; BODEN, MARKS & SPENCER; MATALAN NEXT; WHISTLES