

## The Reader – Shared Reading Groups

The groups meet weekly and focus on stories and poems being read aloud, meaning they are entirely inclusive and can often involve people who have not been living in the country long and don't have English as their first language. The emphasis is entirely on the literature being read within the group and helps to improve people's relationship with reading and literature, but also encourages new social connections, stimulates health and wellbeing and improves confidence. As they are set within the environments of the library – close in reach to many people and free of any expectations – the shared reading groups offer a safe place for refugees to be welcomed, absorbed in the deeply human and shared act of reading, as well as helping break down barriers that may exist within the wider community:

- 81% of our readers in library settings enjoy the opportunity to develop relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds
- 95% enjoy meeting people whom they wouldn't usually meet in their day-to-day life

Here are a couple of examples of stories from our members who have joined shared reading groups in libraries since coming to the UK from other countries:

“M is an Iranian man who immigrated to the UK from the Netherlands. He is a widower and his only child was coming to live in the UK so he decided to join him here. M attended two groups over a two year period. Initially he was tentative about being with us, very apologetic about his English and reluctant to read. At times it did take a little more effort to understand him when he spoke but mostly we were all able to do so. M was warmly welcomed by other group members and began to read aloud and over time improved largely due to an increase in confidence. He often asked what a word or phrase would mean and group members enjoyed describing to him some of the oddities of our language and culture. On several occasions M joined the group for social events including theatre trips and film evenings – after we had read a book. It was heartening to see him relax and become a group member in the same way as everyone else was.”

Shad's Story – Shad is Kurdish, originally from the north of Iraq. He has been attending one of our library groups in London for several years. His story is on [The Reader website](#).

You might also be interested to know about *The Unforgotten Coat*, a short story written especially for The Reader by award-winning author and screenwriter Frank Cottrell Boyce. *The Unforgotten Coat* has been read by many of our shared reading groups in libraries and communities, by people of all ages and backgrounds, and has provoked much discussion and inclusive thinking on refugees. We have read the story both with refugees and UK citizens, and have found that it opens up discussion – a wonderful example of the power of books to make a difference to outlooks on life and personal thinking. Frank recently took the book to Germany where it garnered a huge response in relation to the current refugee crisis, and he wrote about the experience on our blog: <http://thereaderonline.co.uk/2015/09/24/the-magic-of-story-the-unforgotten-coat-in-germany/>.

Information provided by Lisa Spurgin, Online Communications Assistant, The Reader, October 2015.