

**TEABOOKS EVALUATION 2016/17**  
**Book groups for older people in**  
**Oxfordshire**

"Books and doors are the same thing. You open them, and you go through into another world."

Jeanette Winterson





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## SUMMARY

### From August 2016 – July 2017

- 19 – 20 groups ran throughout the year
- Groups in all five Oxfordshire districts
- Total of 250 sessions held (5% increase on 2015/16)
- Total of 1513 attendances (4% increase on 2015/16)
- Cost remains same whilst project continues to grow
- Almost half participants aged 80+ and 18% over 90
- 100% plan to continue coming to TeaBooks
- More than three-quarters of participants feel that coming to a TeaBooks group helps them to stay cheerful

*“I love the book club and really look forward to coming each month”*



## QUESTIONS ABOUT TEABOOKS

### **Why can't older people form their own book groups or join a library group?**

Most of our participants are over 80 years, most have never been in a book group and many had no idea what a book group entails. Setting up a group specifically for them, in a venue which is fully accessible and often in a place where they live (sheltered accommodation /extra care housing/residential homes) or where they often go (health and wellbeing centres) increases the likelihood of them joining in this inclusive social activity with a guaranteed degree of mental stimulation.

### **Why do the groups need a volunteer leader?**

There are two key reasons why the volunteer group leader is essential for the success of the groups. The first is the ordering of books from library in the correct format. Few older people are comfortable with reading or listening to books electronically, so providing large print and audio copies from the library, as well as sufficient normal print copies, is essential to make the groups as inclusive as possible. Sourcing books from the library also keeps costs down, avoiding another entry barrier.

The second key reason why a volunteer is essential is the role he/she plays in facilitating group discussions, ensuring everyone feels welcome and included.

### **Can't the members run the group themselves after a while?**

Where groups are physically and mentally active, and where they are already meeting in community settings (cafes and libraries), we are always happy to explore the possibility of them becoming an independent group, either using Oxfordshire Libraries' own reading group scheme or sourcing books in another way.

In 2016/17, the Henley TeaBooks group became a library group after their volunteer left to begin a full-time job. The TeaBooks Co-ordinator and the Oxfordshire Libraries' Librarian for Reading, Health and Culture supported the group in making the transition and choosing titles for their first annual order. However, in the past, other attempts to move groups on to a self-managing footing have not been successful, and with no-one to organise the books and arrange meetings, the groups have folded.

### **Is there any evidence that book groups improve the wellbeing of older people?**

There are a number of studies which clearly demonstrate the health risks associated with loneliness and/or social isolation and the wellbeing boost from being involved in group activities. Additionally, other studies show that reading can increase life expectancy and overall wellbeing. Further details of these studies can be found on page 8.

### **Are TeaBooks groups suitable for people living with dementia?**

Most of the TeaBooks groups are run on the lines of a conventional book group, with all the members taking away a copy of the same book to read and then meeting again to discuss it a month later. Reading and recalling an entire book can be difficult for people with memory loss. However, as much of the sessions can be spent reminiscing on themes prompted by the book, or in general discussion about other books enjoyed in the past, some people with a degree of dementia may find the sessions stimulating and enjoyable. In 2017, TeaBooks arranged training with Dementia Oxfordshire for its volunteers, to ensure the groups are as dementia friendly as possible.

In 2016/17 there were 4 groups which focussed on reading aloud or reminiscing and producing poetry, which were more suitable for people living with dementia.

### **Why does TeaBooks need a paid co-ordinator?**

The co-ordinator's role is to recruit, train and support volunteers, as well as to explore possibilities of new settings. Volunteer retention is good, with 100% retention in 2015/16 and the loss of only one volunteer in 2016/17. Two thirds (12/18) of the volunteers have been with the project for over four years. Volunteers are supported with training and networking opportunities, quarterly newsletters, shared information on books enjoyed by other groups and cover for sessions if they are on holiday. The co-ordinator was contracted for days in 2016/17 and is additionally supported by the Bookfeast Director, who is responsible for strategy, funding and accounts.

### **How is TeaBooks funded?**

Funding comes from grants from charitable trusts and from Bookfeast's own fundraising. In addition, participants contribute £1 per session to help towards administration costs. For some groups, this is paid for by the setting (eg residential home) out of an activities budget. TeaBooks costs in the region of £10,000pa to run.

### **How many groups does TeaBooks plan for the future?**

Whilst in theory there is no upper limit on the number groups, in reality, managing more than 20 groups on a part time basis is challenging for the co-ordinator.



## Report from TeaBooks Project Co-ordinator

As funding cuts continue to bite, 2016/17 proved a challenging year for TeaBooks. Wantage Health and Wellbeing Centre closed, and with it the TeaBooks group who met there. Two more centres (Abingdon and Oxford Options) are revising the profile of the people they care for, which means these groups too are likely to close.

At the same time, further studies showed the importance of the arts and cultural involvement on health and wellbeing (see page 8) and the possible link between social isolation and developing dementia, further underlining the need for projects such as TeaBooks.

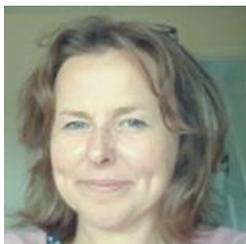
With inclusion at the heart of the project, TeaBooks this year organised training with Dementia Oxfordshire for the group leaders, in order to make the groups as dementia friendly as possible, despite the fact the core activity is essentially aimed at mentally active older people. The training was taken up by over half the volunteers, who all found it helpful, with another session planned for the New Year.

This year also saw one TeaBooks group decide to self-manage and with the support of Oxfordshire Libraries and the TeaBooks co-ordinator, they registered as a Library Book Group. Nine months on, they are still going strong, and may become a model for transitioning other community-based groups in the future.

Heading into the Autumn 2017, demand remains high for TeaBooks groups in a variety of settings, and the project is set to open another four groups. We are also exploring the possibilities of dementia friendly poetry events across the county in association with Oxfordshire Libraries and investigating an intergenerational story-sharing pilot, keeping the written word at the heart of tackling social isolation among Oxfordshire's older population.

Amanda Ferguson

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October 2017

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## THE TEABOOKS PROJECT

### History

TeaBooks is a project for older residents of Oxfordshire, run by Oxford based charity Bookfeast. It was started in 2010 with great support from Age UK (Oxfordshire) and Oxfordshire County Libraries. It is run by two part time staff, responsible for fundraising and co-ordination of the project. There are currently 17 volunteers running the book groups.

After a successful pilot project in 2010, TeaBooks was rolled out across the county, with the aim of setting up 20 groups. The project currently has 19 groups.

### How the project works

TeaBooks groups are situated in a variety of locations including community settings (eg cafes and museums), libraries, Health and Wellbeing Centres (formerly Day Centres), sheltered housing, extra care housing and residential homes.

Each group is facilitated by a trained Group Leader who volunteers to co-ordinate between 12 and 16 sessions per year, held monthly or every three weeks. The Group Leader role consists of planning and facilitating sessions, helping select the books to be read, and ordering and collecting books from the library in various formats. In 2016/17 the project had between 18 and 20 volunteers.

The TeaBooks project is only viable due to the support of Oxfordshire libraries, who provide invaluable support with a specially-designed borrowing scheme and a central co-ordinator to oversee the scheme. In addition, library managers across the county assist volunteer Group Leaders in choosing and ordering books.

Most groups operate in the same way as a traditional book group, with all members taking and reading the same title, and coming together to discuss the book at the next session. Two groups, where members are very frail, now find reading a whole book too difficult, and sessions focus on reading aloud and shared poetry. Another group based at a Health and Wellbeing Centre found almost all the participants had some cognitive difficulties. This group now enjoys writing poetry together.

### The Charity

Bookfeast is passionate about providing opportunities for everyone, no matter what their age or background to enjoy writing, reading and talking about books. Bookfeast was founded in June 2010 by Angie Pryor-Jones. It also runs the Lunchbox project (reading groups in primary schools), and the annual Bookfeast schools festival in Oxford.

*"I have read some great books this year –thanks!"*



## THE NEED FOR TEABOOKS

There have been a number of studies in the last decade examining the health and welfare impacts of social isolation and loneliness in the elderly. Most studies are careful to differentiate between loneliness and social isolation, but most agree there is some overlap between the two.

Almost all the research suggests that around 30% of older people are lonely sometimes, a figure which increases as the age of the survey respondents increases. This correlates with the findings from this year's participant feedback questionnaire, where 33% of respondents agreed they had felt lonely at some point during the past year.

***33% of TeaBooks survey respondent  
agreed with the statement  
“I have felt lonely at some point in the  
past year”.***

AGE UK's 2014 evidence review summarises the findings of studies on the health implication of feeling lonely, which has been shown to:

- increase blood pressure and risk of cardiovascular diseases
- elevate cortisol and stress levels which weakens the immune system
- impairs sleep quality (which causes memory problems) leading to negative effects on metabolic, neural and hormonal regulations,
- heighten feelings of depression, anxiety, and increased vulnerability

***“The social aspect is comforting to me”***



## THE NEED FOR TEABOOKS (cont'd)

Group activities and cultural engagement have been widely identified as being effective at improving overall health and wellbeing. A new study (Creative Health: the Arts for Health and Wellbeing) published in July 2017 by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing highlighted the importance of cultural involvement for wellbeing at all ages.

Additionally Age UK's 2014 overview cites a 2010 review of groups undertaking activities with older people, from art to exercise to writing, which found that 95 per cent of the participants (mean age of 80) reported that their feelings of loneliness were reduced (Savikko, N., et al. (2010) 'Psychosocial group rehabilitation for lonely older people: favourable processes and mediating factors of the intervention leading to alleviated loneliness'. *International Journal of Older People Nursing*, vol 5, no 1, pp. 16–24. )

Feedback from TeaBooks participants indicates they provide a boost to wellbeing: 96% of survey respondents enjoyed the social aspects of the sessions, 78% agreed that the group helped them to feel cheerful, and 98% said they would recommend TeaBooks to someone else who was feeling lonely.

### **The benefits of reading**

A new study published last year found that reading for 30 minutes a day was linked to an increase in life expectancy of 23 months. "Compared to non-book readers, book readers had a 23-month survival advantage at the point of 80% survival in the unadjusted model. A survival advantage persisted after adjustment for all covariates ...indicating book readers experienced a 20% reduction in risk of mortality over the 12 years of follow up compared to non-book readers." (Yale University School of Public Health: A Chapter a Day: Association of Book Reading With Longevity: July 2016).

Another 2016 study, commissioned by The Reader Organisation, showed that there was a discernible benefit of shared reading for dementia sufferers, with a measurable increase in cognitive ability and increased wellbeing. (Longden, E., Davis, P., Carroll, J., Billington, J.:An evaluation of shared reading groups for adults living with dementia: Preliminary Findings. *Journal of Public Health* 2016).

*"Would recommend the book group to someone who was feeling lonely"*



## THE EVALUATION PROCESS

Annual evaluation began the year beginning July 2011. Previous years' evaluations are available by contacting Bookfeast on [contactus@bookfeast.net](mailto:contactus@bookfeast.net).

### Aims

In previous years, the evaluation has aimed to assess whether TeaBooks is meeting the aims of the project. Initially, those aims were to give the participants the opportunity to join a group and to encourage/support participants to read more widely. Last year, the aim has broadened to include providing participants with the opportunity to improve their overall wellbeing through social interaction.

### Methodology

The 2016/17 Evaluation involved gathering and analysing three sources of information – Participant Survey, Group Leader feedback and participant/volunteer case study.

1. The Participant Survey aimed to capture participant feedback about their book group with a particular focus on the impact on their wellbeing as well as their reading habits. Participants were also asked to give their overall perceptions of the group. It is understood that participant feedback will continue to be collected on an annual basis. 58 participant surveys were completed for the 2016/17 evaluation. A copy of the survey is included in Appendix A.
2. Group Leader feedback was captured via a quarterly evaluation through which they recorded useful statistics for the group including numbers of attendees, gender split and library requirements – i.e. different book formats (large print/audio). They also fed back on specific challenges they had experienced and suggestions for improvements.
3. The case study was written following an interview with the group member who went on to help run the group when the original leader stepped aside.

### Limitations to methodology

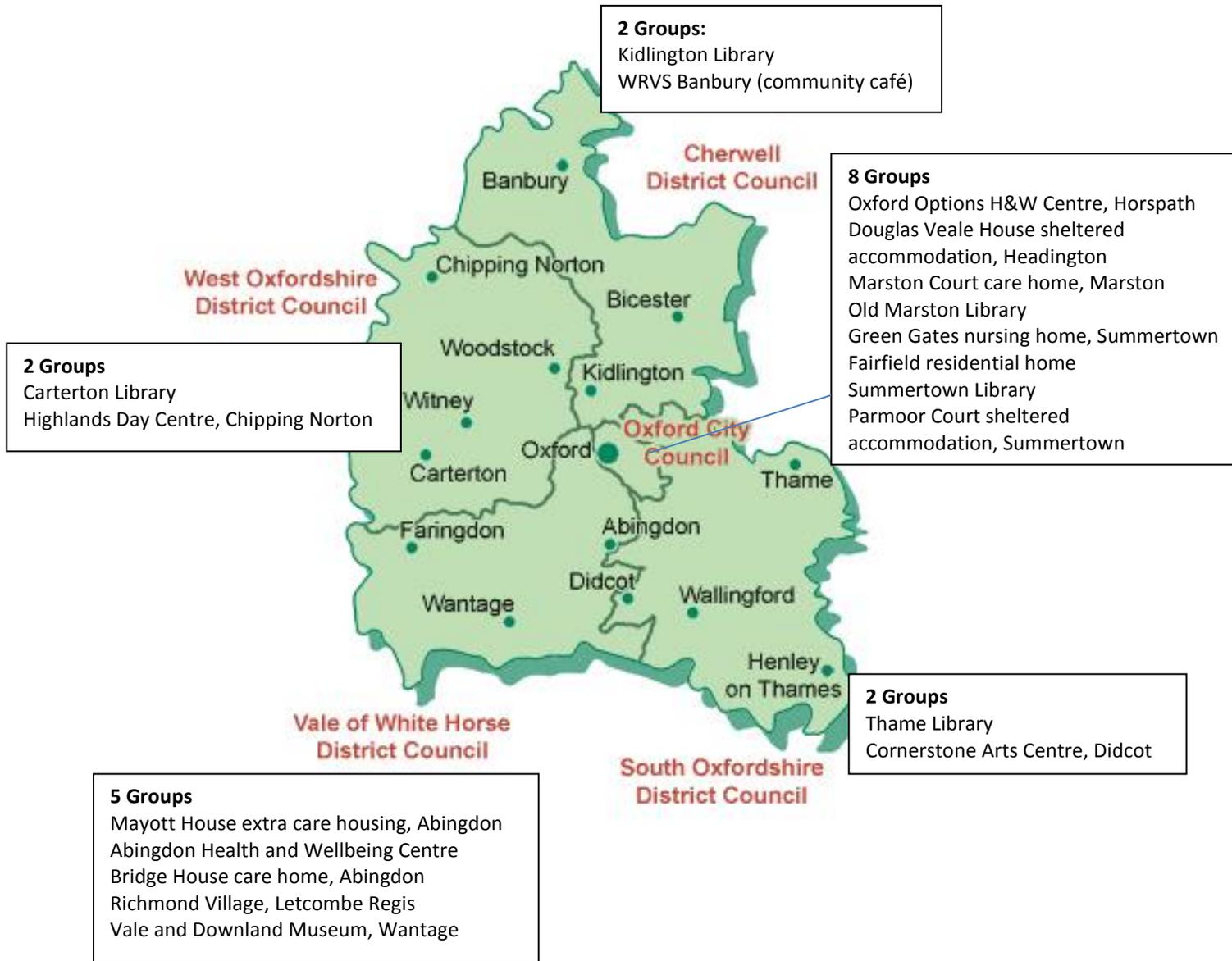
All groups are asked to complete the participant feedback, but only around 50% of the groups actually do so. This means that some data, notably the profile section, will be skewed by the overall profile of the groups who return the questionnaires.

*“Very friendly! Keeps me going!”*



## GROUP STRUCTURE

### Geographical coverage



### Two groups closed in 2016/17

Henley Hot Gossip group decided to self-manage and become part of the libraries reading group network when their group leader left.

Wantage Health and Wellbeing Centre closed in Autumn 2016 as part of the OCC budget cuts.

*"I have met really interesting new people."*



## GROUP STRUCTURE (cont'd)

### Breakdown by setting type

Sheltered accommodation/extra-care/supported living	4
Residential/nursing home	4
Library	5
Community space (café/museum/arts centre)	3
Health and Wellbeing centre/day centre	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>

### Group numbers

A total of 250 sessions were held this year (up from 237 in 15/16).

A total of 1513 attendances were recorded, an increase of 5% (up from 1455 in 15/16).

The average size of the groups remained at just over six.

The figures indicate that there is still room for increasing the reach of the project, without necessarily increasing the number of TeaBooks groups.

*“Sometimes the books are a “hit” and sometimes a “miss”, but that doesn't seem to trouble the group either way. They simply enjoy the chat which stems from the title.”*

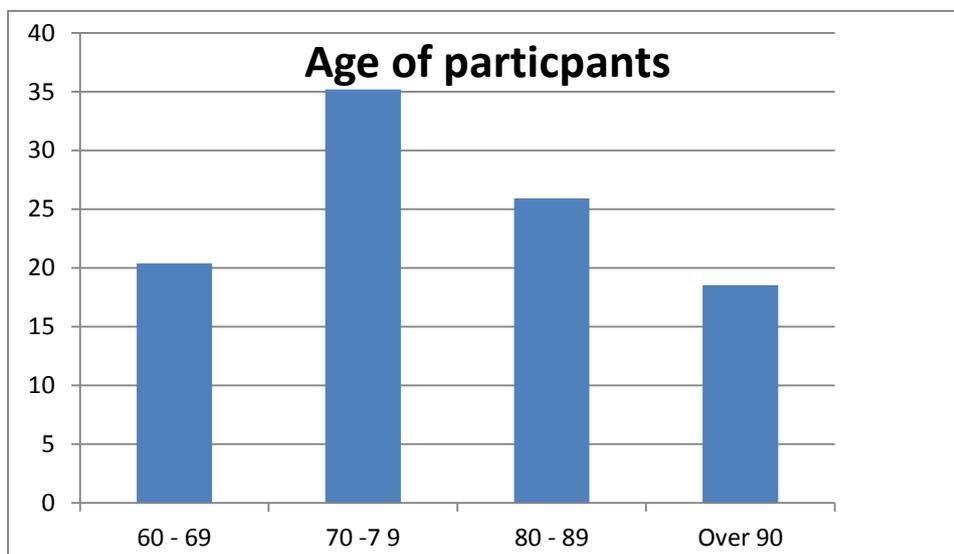


## PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

(The following information is based on data provided via the 58 Participant Survey questionnaires completed Summer 2017).

### Age and Gender

As with previous years' evaluations, the survey responses show that TeaBooks groups are mainly attended by older females, with women accounting for 90% of the participants. In terms of age, the groups continue to engage a significant number of the over 90s, often classified as a 'hard to reach' demographic. Anecdotal feedback suggests there are now several members of TeaBooks who are over 100.



### Health and Dependency

Those who reported suffering from a longstanding illness or disability stayed almost the same as last year (38%/36%) although far fewer (just 40% compared with last year's 90%) of these said it limited their activities.

The percentage of those respondents who live in a residential home or who have a carer dropped to 18% (39% last year), although this can be accounted for by different groups completing the feedback forms.

6% of survey respondents considered themselves to be a carer for someone else. (5% in 2014/15)

Increasing age and intermittent ill health of members pose a challenge to Group Leaders, with frailty and fluctuating numbers being regularly raised in the quarterly feedback again this year.

*"As a carer, it gives me distraction and time out"*



## PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS (cont'd)

### Reading habits

Overall, the feedback from this section of the questionnaire indicates that belonging to a TeaBooks group has a positive impact on members' reading habits.

98% of participants agreed with the statement "I enjoy discussing books at book group".

96% agreed that they read more widely than they would have done before coming to TeaBooks.

62% agreed that they thought more about what they were reading since joining.

In addition, 53% said they found reading more enjoyable and 50% said they take more interest in book reviews since joining.

*"Because now I have others to talk to about a book I have read, I make more time to read and have enjoyed reading more books in the last six months than I have in the last six years. "*



## THE IMPACT OF TEABOOKS ON WELLBEING

With so much focus on wellbeing and mental health in the media, the TeaBooks evaluation also aims to capture the emotional effect of the project on participants.

96% of survey respondents enjoyed the social aspect of the group, with 100% agreeing that they always felt welcome and included at book group.

A third of survey respondents confirmed that they had felt lonely at some point in the past year (this proportion is in line with similarly studies – see page 7). Almost all (98%) said they would recommend TeaBooks to someone who was feeling lonely.

98% of survey respondents felt they had made friends at the book group meetings and 78% agreed that the group helped them to feel cheerful.

Qualitative feedback from the Group Leaders reinforces these figures. When asked ‘What is working well for your group?’ replies included:

- *Social aspect is very endearing - they have a really good chat about all sorts of things - not just books - we make a lot of noise and I'm glad the library staff are very understanding!*
- *Getting on with each other....everyone contributing opinion and thoughts.*
- *Lots of lively conversations and a varied age group. All seem to join in.*
- *The ladies are really enjoying getting to know each other.*

*“I have read books that I would not have given a second glance!”*



## CHALLENGES

### Group size and location

34% (35% in 2015/16) of the participants said they would like to see more people join their TeaBooks group, with one group highlighting they would like more men. The same group leader highlighted shrinking group size in her quarterly feedback due to ill health of the very elderly group. Although the average size of a TeaBooks group in 2016/17 remains at six, there are fewer very large and very small groups this year. Anecdotal feedback suggests that six is about the right size of the group.

Less than 2% thought they would like fewer members in a group.

12% of participants indicated they would like a quieter venue and Group Leaders also highlighted a problem with activities occasionally clashing in some settings. However, other Group Leaders praised their setting and the support from setting and library staff.

### Book choices

32% of participants indicated they would like a wider choice of titles, almost the same as last year (33%). One reason for this may be that the choice available to the Group Leader is often limited by the number of sufficient books in suitable formats, and the demand for different formats is steadily increasing. 9 of the 19 groups need one or more large print or audio versions (up from 8 last year), and 3 groups need large print **and** audio of each title chosen (up from 2 groups last year).

This continues to be a problem for Group Leaders who must try and find enough suitable titles within the library catalogue. Bookfeast understands that book purchasing budgets have reduced at OCC libraries, exacerbating the problem. E-readers offer one solution, but feedback from the Group Leaders suggests that there are still only four groups have one or more members happy to use ebooks. The support of the library staff in finding suitable copies is invaluable.

Audio and large print books are key to the success of the project, and have made a real difference to some members.

*“Really enjoy the meetings. Lively discussion and good company.”*



## VOLUNTEERS

### TRAINING

Although TeaBooks is not a charity which specifically aims to help people living with dementia, due to the age profile of the participants, some groups have members who are displaying early signs of dementia or memory loss. Some will be longtime group members, others may be residents who come along and want to join in. With this in mind, TeaBooks organised a training session in May, run by Dementia Oxfordshire, to make our groups as dementia friendly as possible, whilst keeping within the TeaBooks remit.

10 volunteers attended and all found it helpful and informative.

### RETENTION

One volunteer left this year in order to take up a full time job. A second volunteer, whose setting at Wantage Health and Wellbeing Centre closed down, remains interested in working with TeaBooks in the future. All the other volunteers remained in role. There were between 18 and 20 volunteers working with the project throughout the year.

*“Our volunteer puts a lot of work & effort into making the group so positive!”*



## Case Study : volunteer

Jenny had been widowed for six months when she first heard about TeaBooks. In fact, she only came to the initial meeting at the museum café because her neighbour had misread the poster, and thought it was a poetry reading by Pam Ayres, something that perhaps they would both enjoy. When the two friends turned up at the TeaBooks meeting, they were greeted by the small, friendly group who explained how the book group worked, handed them a copy of Pam Ayres autobiography, and started chatting about childhood memories of Oxfordshire.

Jenny and her neighbour continued coming, enjoying the company and the mental stimulation. When the volunteer group leader stepped down, Jenny agreed to become a joint group leader, and now enjoys choosing and ordering the books for the group from the online library catalogue.

She says "Over the 4 years I have been coming to the group, I feel I have made real and lasting friends. I never thought I would be able to run something like this, but my confidence has really grown, and we get lots of support from the project manager, as well as useful training and the chance to meet other group leaders. It's now a really important date on my calendar."



# APPENDIX A

## TeaBooks participant feedback survey

## TeaBooks participant feedback survey

2017



### ABOUT THIS FORM

Please help us by filling in as much of this form as you can – it looks like a lot of questions but we hope it won't take too much time.

We will be using the information you provide to help us review the Teabooks project.

We do not need your name or address and the information you provide on this form will remain anonymous.

Thank you for your help.

---

1. Which Book group do you attend?

---

2. What is the name of your group leader?

---

3. Today's date

---

### YOUR TEABOOKS GROUP

4. How long have you been going to your TeaBooks group? Please circle

---

Less than 6 months

6 months to a year

More than a year

---

## READING HABITS

5. We'd like to know a bit about your reading habits. Please circle whether you agree or disagree with the sentences below:

<b>I enjoy discussing books at book group</b>	Disagree	Agree	Neither
<b>I find reading more enjoyable since coming to book group</b>	Disagree	Agree	Neither
<b>I take more interest in book reviews since coming to book group</b>	Disagree	Agree	Neither
<b>I think more about what I'm reading since coming to book group</b>	Disagree	Agree	Neither
<b>Book group has encouraged me to read books I wouldn't have read otherwise</b>	Disagree	Agree	Neither
<b>Book group has made no difference to my reading habits</b>	Disagree	Agree	Neither

6. If coming to book group has affected your reading habits in any other way please tell us how here:

## **SOCIAL IMPACT OF TEABOOKS**

**7. We'd like to know about the social side of TeaBooks. Please circle whether you agree or disagree with the sentences below:**

<b>I enjoy the social aspect of book group</b>	Disagree	Agree	Neither
<b>I feel I have made friends with the other members of the group</b>	Disagree	Agree	Neither
<b>During the past year I have felt lonely at some point</b>	Disagree	Agree	Neither
<b>I always feel welcome and included at book group</b>	Disagree	Agree	Neither
<b>I would recommend book group to someone who was feeling lonely</b>	Disagree	Agree	Neither
<b>I come to book group mainly to give me something to do</b>	Disagree	Agree	Neither
<b>Attending book group helps me to feel cheerful</b>	Disagree	Agree	Neither

**8. Please tell us anything else about how book group makes you feel or affects you (positive or negative)**

---

---

## IN THE FUTURE

9. We'd like to know your thoughts on the future of the book group. Please circle whether you agree or disagree with the sentences below:

---

I would like the book group to have more members	Disagree	Agree	Neither
--	----------	-------	---------

---

I would like the book group to have fewer members	Disagree	Agree	Neither
---	----------	-------	---------

---

I would like the book group to be held in a quieter venue	Disagree	Agree	Neither
---	----------	-------	---------

---

I plan to continue coming to book group	Disagree	Agree	Neither
---	----------	-------	---------

---

I would like to read a wider range of books at book group	Disagree	Agree	Neither
---	----------	-------	---------

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10. If you'd like to see changes made to any aspect of your book group please tell us about them here:

---

## ABOUT YOU

To help us to understand how different groups of people feel that Teabooks has benefited them, we would like to ask you a few questions about yourself.

**Your information will be kept confidential.**

If you do not feel comfortable answering any of these questions please move on to the following question.

**11. Gender**

_____	_____
Male	Female
_____	_____

**12. Age Group - Circle one only**

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Under 50	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90 or over
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

**13. Are you suffering from a long-standing illness or disability? (long standing means that it has or is likely to affect you over a period of time)**  
Please circle

_____	_____
Yes	No
_____	_____

**14. If YES does this illness or disability limit your activities in any way?**  
Please circle

_____	_____
Yes	No
_____	_____

**15. Are you a carer for anyone? – i.e. does anyone rely on you for day to day care and attention?** Please circle

_____	_____
Yes	No
_____	_____

**16. Do you live in a residential home or do you have a carer?** Please circle

_____	_____
Yes	No
_____	_____

**\*\*\*THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP\*\*\***



## Appendix B

### Research References

#### **Age UK Loneliness and Isolation Evidence Review**

[https://www.ageuk.org.uk/documents/en-gb/for-professionals/evidence\\_review\\_loneliness\\_and\\_isolation.pdf?dtrk=true](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/documents/en-gb/for-professionals/evidence_review_loneliness_and_isolation.pdf?dtrk=true)

#### **All Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing: Creative Health: the Arts for Health and Wellbeing**

<http://www.artshealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/>

#### **Yale University School of Public Health: A Chapter a day: Association of book reading with longevity**

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27471129>

#### **University of Liverpool/Reader Organisation: An evaluation of shared reading groups for adults living with dementia**

<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/JPMH-06-2015-0023>