

TEABOOKS EVALUATION 2017/18
Book groups for older people in
Oxfordshire

"Reading brings us unknown friends"

Honoré de Balzac





What they say...

"I love book club and look forward to it every month. I don't always enjoy the book, but will try to finish it in order to discuss. We have a lovely, friendly group."

"Very valuable at my time of life – nearly 101!"

"I'm spending a lot of time in bed, so it's nice to have books to listen to."

"As a full time carer, the book group is of great benefit to me."

"The book group is the reason I opted to come to the day centre on a Friday. I looked after my husband until he died earlier this year."

"I now read a lot on my Kindle Fire and occasionally write a review! I have many hours of enjoyment reading."

"I have low vision. Book club has introduced me to audio books. I am grateful for that. "

"New friends and a monthly group to look forward to!"

"The group I run is entirely made up of widows, apart from our one man. Almost all of them have confided to me that it is the highlight of their month. We never stick to the hour, but always stay chatting afterwards, and I have seen many friendships form over the past few years. It is very rewarding. "



Who they are...

M once ran a book club herself and has always been an avid reader. Although her sheltered accommodation is centrally located in town, and not far from the library, she is visually impaired and finds getting out and about difficult. She says that TeaBooks is great as it an activity she doesn't have to worry about getting to. In addition, the volunteer group leader has been able to find a range of titles on audio that she wouldn't have thought to try.

K was a biology teacher for years and is a great believer in the power of education. She married late and had no children but was devoted to her husband who died shortly after they moved to the retirement village. She has since moved to a smaller flat where she now has regular help from carers. The book group has been a constant for the past five years, and she never misses a meeting. She reads voraciously and will often write a short review of the book to read aloud. She finds the group very stimulating and is very grateful to have found a group who share her interest.

S lives with her husband in a flat in the complex. He has dementia and she is his main carer. The book group is the highlight of her month, giving her a valuable activity that is just moments away in the communal lounge, which provides her with stimulating chat with good friends.

R has faced a number of health challenges and caring responsibilities over the last few years. She now has some time to give but is wary of taking on too much. She took on the role of group leader earlier this year, and despite having never been a huge reader herself, discovered lots of new authors along with her group, and thoroughly enjoys the monthly meetings. When there was heavy snow earlier in the year and the roads were impassable, she donned walking boots and a rucksack full of books and walked the mile to the setting, because she could see how much the sessions mean to her group. She says the book group has given her some structure and is now more confident about looking for a part time job.



CONTENTS

Summary	5
Report from TeaBooks Project Co-ordinator	6
The TeaBooks Project	7
The Need for TeaBooks	8
The Evaluation Process	10
Group Structure (geographical)	11
Group Structure (by setting)	12
Profile of Participants	13
Challenges	15
Volunteers	16
Appendix A: Participant feedback survey	
Appendix B: Questions about TeaBooks	
Appendix C: Research references	



SUMMARY

From August 2017 – July 2018

- 23 groups were active during the year
- Groups in all five Oxfordshire districts
- Total of 197 sessions held
- Total of 1134 attendances
- Half of our participants are aged 80+ and 12% are over 90
- 98% plan to continue coming to TeaBooks

Report from TeaBooks Project Co-ordinator

This year, the number of TeaBooks groups operating has remained stable and interest remains high. Despite the challenges, the project recorded over 1000 contact hours during the year, with almost 200 meetings taking place across the county, enabling Oxfordshire's older people – including the oldest old (usually classified as 85 plus – see page 6) - to participate in stimulating discussions and enjoy regular, welcoming and mood-boosting social interactions.

Nevertheless, after 5 years of steady growth, 2017-2018 proved a challenging year for TeaBooks in terms of numbers. Three of our longest running and biggest groups closed. Two of these were based in Health and Wellbeing Centres, which have seen their funding slashed and their client profile dramatically changed, so that TeaBooks was no longer a suitable activity for those members of the community who could come.

Working alongside Oxfordshire libraries is key to the success of the project, and this year's annual volunteer event was held at the newly refurbished County Library. A tour and a lively discussion about group dynamics and surprise reads made for an interesting morning.

Looking forward to 2018/19, the TeaBooks team would like to expand the number of groups in sheltered accommodation/extra care housing, where need is high and residents often isolated by physical disabilities. We opened three new groups in SA/ECH already and have two new groups in such settings in the pipeline, as well as two new groups launching in libraries this Autumn.

We would also like to look at ways to reach the "hard to reach" older people, by potentially working in tandem with volunteer library visitors, who deliver books into the homes of older people who cannot access a library. We are also keen to examine ways in which technology can overcome the challenges of sourcing audio and large print books, by fundraising for TeaBooks Tablets, onto which electronic versions can be downloaded, enabling more of Oxfordshire's older people to enjoy the social interaction, intellectual stimulation and wellbeing benefits that being part of book group can bring.

Amanda Ferguson

TeaBooks Manager



October 2018



THE TEABOOKS PROJECT

Background

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 arts centres) libraries, sheltered housing, extra care housing, residential homes and one day centre run by AGE UK.

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, depending on the wishes of the group. 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 2017/18 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 and help to track down titles in audio and large print formats where required.

All our 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. Some groups also incorporate a read-aloud session within the meeting, sharing poetry and book reviews.

The Charity

TeaBooks is a project of the charity Bookfeast. 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.



THE NEED FOR TEABOOKS

Loneliness and social exclusion

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.

In 2017, the press highlighted research conducted by Sheffield Hallam University entitled *The Oldest Old and the Risk of Social Isolation* which examined the risk of social exclusion among the those who are over 85. Using data from Understanding Society, the research found that the Oldest Old have a higher likelihood of experiencing social exclusion than people aged 65-84 and examined some of the challenges this presents to Western societies which feature ageing populations.

Also in 2017, Age Scotland and Mental Health Scotland published a policy document entitled *Loneliness: The Public Health Challenge of our Times* which stated:

“Loneliness is one of the leading public health challenges of our time. Research suggests more than 100,000 older people in Scotland are “chronically lonely” and it’s as damaging to health as smoking 15 cigarettes per day. If we are serious about ensuring older people enjoy a good quality of life then the prevalence of loneliness must be fully recognised and addressed.”

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 31% of respondents agreed they had felt lonely at some point during the past year.

***31% of TeaBooks survey respondents
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
- impair 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 NEED FOR TEABOOKS (cont'd)

The Benefit of Cultural Engagement

Once again this year, group activities and involvement in the arts have been identified as having a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing. In April 2018, Age UK's policy and research department published fascinating research on the impact of cultural and creative involvement in later life on wellbeing in a document entitled ***Creative and Cultural Activities and Wellbeing in Later Life***. The research found that not only was staying active and connected essential to wellbeing in later life, but "more striking was our finding that creative and cultural participation was the single factor that contributed the most out of all 40 of the factors we found to significantly contribute to wellbeing. "

These findings were echoed in a new study in America showed that older adults who create art and attend arts events have better health outcomes than adults who do neither. The report, published by National Endowment for the Arts is entitled ***Staying Engaged: Health Patterns of Older Americans Who Engage in the Arts*** and presents the first detailed look at arts participation habits, attitudes toward the arts, and related health characteristics of adults aged 55 and older. *Staying Engaged* is based on results from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS), conducted by the University of Michigan with primary support from the National Institute on Ageing within the National Institutes of Health.

Also of interest was a paper published in the journal Health and Social Care entitled ***What do older people experiencing loneliness think about primary care or community based interventions to reduce loneliness? A qualitative study in England***. Crucially, the paper made two new observations about interventions to prevent loneliness which are relevant to the TeaBooks project. The first is that older people with characteristics of loneliness generally know about local resources but do not consider services they perceive as being for 'lonely older people' as desirable or helpful, and the second is that **group-based activities with a shared interest** (exactly what TeaBooks provides) are preferred to one-to-one support or social groups.

Feedback from TeaBooks participants indicates that the groups, which are designed to stimulate intellectual and emotional responses to books, provide a boost to wellbeing: 96% of survey respondents enjoyed the social aspects of the sessions and 84% agreed that they always felt welcome and included at book group.

Links to all research can be found in Appendix C.



THE EVALUATION PROCESS

There has been an annual evaluation since July 2011. Previous years' evaluations are available by contacting Bookfeast on contactus@bookfeast.net.

Aims

The evaluation is designed to assess how well the project is meeting its stated aims. At the outset of the project, those aims were to provide the opportunity for older people to join a book group and to encourage them to return to reading or to read more widely. However, it became clear over time that one of the key benefits of the project is to increase social connection. For the past two years, the evaluation has tried to capture the uplift in wellbeing that this creates.

Methodology

The 2017/18 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. 53 participant surveys were completed for the 2017/18 evaluation. A copy of the survey is included in Appendix A.
2. Group Leader feedback was captured via a quarterly evaluation which recorded useful statistics for the group including numbers of attendees and gender split. Leaders also fed back on specific challenges they had experienced and suggestions for improvements.
3. The case histories were supplied by a group leader based on her conversations within the group.

Limitations to methodology

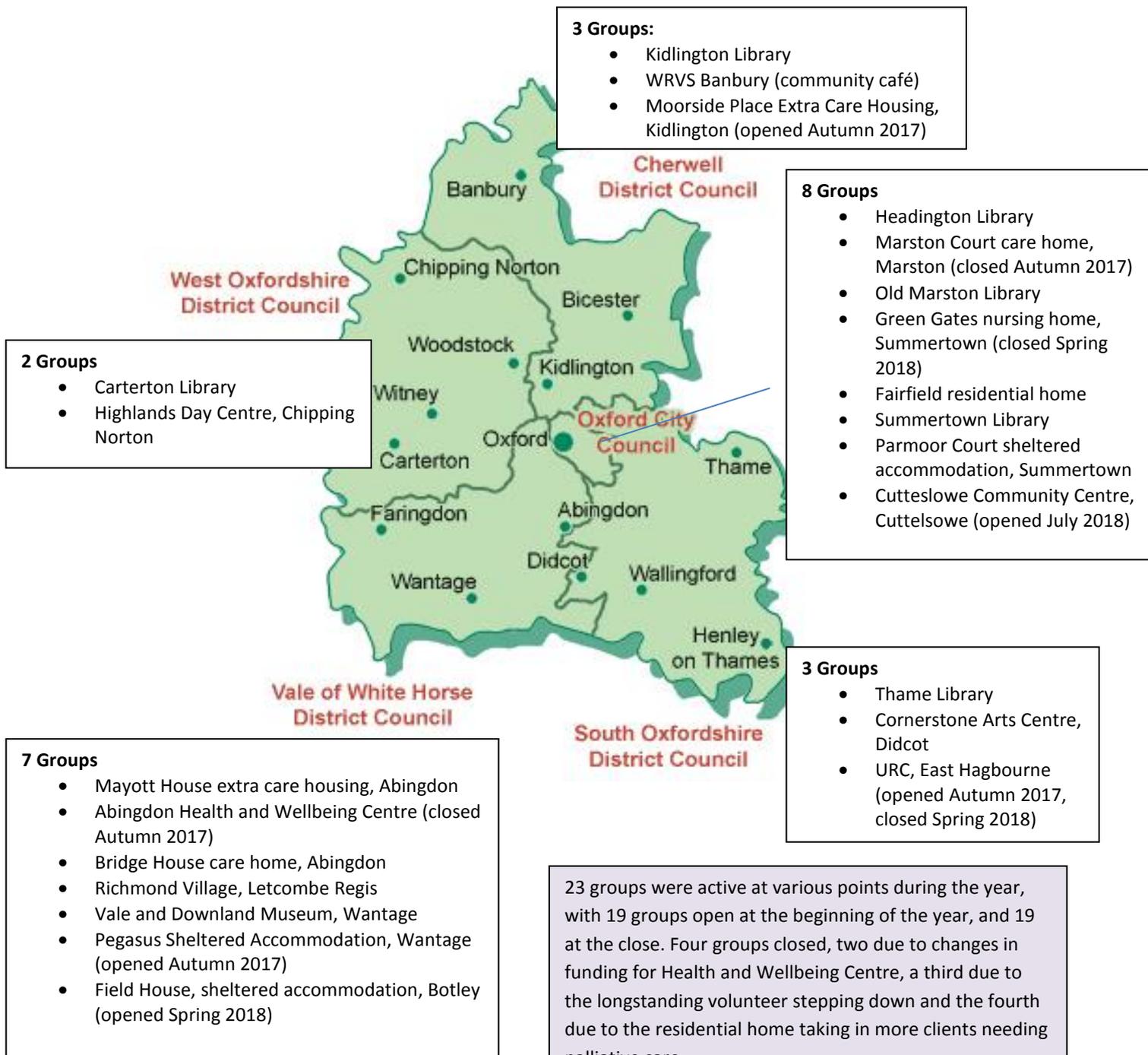
All groups are asked to complete the participant feedback, but only around 50% of the groups actually do so. This means that some data, notably the profile section, will be skewed by the profile of the groups who return the questionnaires.

Additionally, there is an issue with some respondents, who have been members of TeaBooks groups for some years and who take very little care over the evaluation form as they feel it is rather a tedious exercise that they have completed several times before. This may mean the methodology needs to be redesigned going forward.



GROUP STRUCTURE

Geographical coverage (August 2017 – July 2018)



23 groups were active at various points during the year, with 19 groups open at the beginning of the year, and 19 at the close. Four groups closed, two due to changes in funding for Health and Wellbeing Centre, a third due to the longstanding volunteer stepping down and the fourth due to the residential home taking in more clients needing palliative care.

Four groups opened, three in sheltered accommodation and one in a community centre. Another group associated with the United Reform Church opened and closed within six months.



GROUP STRUCTURE (cont'd)

Breakdown by setting type (groups running at various points throughout the year)

Sheltered accommodation/extra-care/supported living	6
Residential/nursing home	3
Library	6
Community space (café/museum/arts centre)	5
Health and Wellbeing centre/day centre	3
Total	23

Group numbers

A total of 197 sessions were held this year.

A total of 1134 attendances were recorded.

The average size of the groups is just under 6.

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

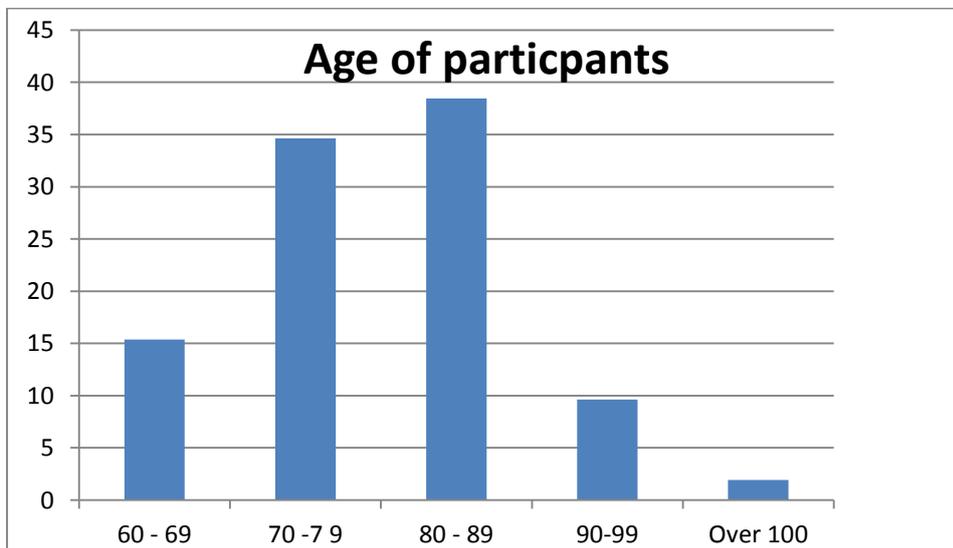


PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

(The following information is based on data provided via the 53 Participant Survey questionnaires completed Summer 2018).

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.



Health and Dependency

Those who reported suffering from a longstanding illness or disability dropped slightly from last year at 32%, but more of these respondents said that the illness or disability limited their activity (70% of those with an illness or disability this year compared with 40% last year).

The percentage of those respondents who live in a residential home or who have a carer dropped to 14% (18% last year), although this may be accounted for by different groups completing the feedback forms.

6% of survey respondents considered themselves to be a carer for someone else (same as 2016/17).

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.



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.

94% of participants agreed with the statement "I enjoy discussing books at book group".

83% agreed that they read more widely than they would have done before coming to TeaBooks.

58% agreed that they thought more about what they were reading since joining.

In addition, 37% said they found reading more enjoyable and 54% said they take more interest in book reviews since joining.



CHALLENGES

Group size and location

29% (34% in 2015/16) of the participants said they would like to see more people join their TeaBooks group. The average size of a TeaBooks group is a little under 6, which has fallen slightly this year. Although members are less concerned about the size, feedback from Group Leaders suggests that some groups would benefit from more members.

This year, no-one asked for the group to be held in a quieter setting or for more members.

Book choices

Only 19% of participants indicated they would like a wider choice of titles (32% last year). This may be because group leaders are now more experienced at searching the library catalogue for large print titles. Also, a change in library policy has meant that although fewer large print titles are being bought by OCC each year (as fewer are published), they are buying more copies of each title, making it easier for group leaders who have more than one member needing large print. A bigger issue has been sourcing audio copies for an increasing number of participants with significant visual impairment.

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

Reporting

Obtaining regular feedback from some group leaders (a small number) has been difficult at various points in the year. Also, some of the participants are unwilling to complete the annual questionnaire, resulting in < 50% response rate.



VOLUNTEERS

TRAINING

New volunteers are trained by the Co-ordinator and are invited to shadow other groups leaders for as long as necessary.

This year, we also arranged for volunteers to meet for a library update at the new County Library in March. 8 volunteers attended.

RETENTION

Three of the volunteers who started with the project seven years ago left this year, two after their groups were disbanded due to cuts in funding for Health and Wellbeing Centres. The third had suffered a family bereavement and wanted more time to herself.

Four new volunteers were recruited, three to run groups in sheltered accommodation/extra care housing, and a fourth to a community setting. All the other volunteers remained in role. There were between 18 and 20 volunteers working with the project throughout the year.

Appendix A



TEABOOKS SURVEY 2017/18.

To help us find out if the TeaBooks project is working well, we ask all our group members to complete an annual survey. This helps us to plan how to manage the project. It also helps us to explain the benefits of TeaBooks to potential funders.

Please only answer the questions which you feel comfortable answering.

All information is anonymous and individual forms will be destroyed once the figures are analysed.

1. How long have you been coming to the TeaBooks book group?

- Less than 6 months.
- 6 months to a year.
- More than a year.

READING HABITS

2. Please tick any of the statements with which you agree. If you disagree or don't feel strongly either way, please leave blank.

- I enjoy discussing books at book group.
- I find reading more enjoyable since coming to book group.
- I take more interest in book reviews since coming to book group.
- I think more about what I'm reading since coming to book group.
- Book group has encouraged me to read books I wouldn't have read otherwise.
- Book group has made no difference to my reading habits.

3. Please let us know if book group has changed your reading habits in any other way.

SOCIAL IMPACT

4. Please tick any of the statements with which you agree. If you disagree or don't feel strongly either way, please leave blank.

- I enjoy the social aspect of book group.
- I feel I have made friends with other members of the group.
- During the past year I have felt lonely at some point.
- I always feel welcome and included at book group.
- I would recommend book group to someone who was feeling lonely.
- I only come to book group when there is nothing else to do.
- I look forward to coming to book group.

5. Please tell us anything else about how book club makes you feel or how it affects you (positively or negatively).

CHANGES TO THE GROUP

6. Please tick any of the statements with which you agree. If you disagree or don't feel strongly either way, please leave blank.

- I would like the book group to have more members.
- I would like the book group to have fewer members.
- I would like the book group to be held in a quieter venue.
- I plan to continue coming to book group.
- I would like to read a wider range of titles at book group.

7. Please tell us about any other changes you would like.

ABOUT YOU

It helps us to know about the range of different people that come to TeaBooks book groups. **THIS INFORMATION IS ANONYMOUS AND CONFIDENTIAL.** Please only answer the questions that you feel comfortable answering.

8. Please tick the boxes which apply to you.

Male

Female

I suffer from a longstanding illness or disability.

I have a longstanding illness or disability that limits my activities in some way.

I am a carer for someone else (ie someone else relies on me for day to day care)

I live in a residential home.

I have a carer who visits me at home.

9. Please circle your age range:

Under 50

50-59

60-69

70-79

80-89

90-99

100 or over

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!

Appendix B

Common 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.

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

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. 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 62 days in 2017/18 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.

Appendix C

Links to Research

Sheffield Hallam report

<http://shura.shu.ac.uk/14239/1/Culliney%20-%20oldest%20old%20and%20the%20risk%20of%20social%20exclusion.pdf>

University of Michigan with primary support from the National Institute on Ageing within the National Institutes of Health.

<https://www.arts.gov/news/2017/new-report-reveals-findings-about-arts-and-health-older-adults>

Mental Health Foundation Scotland and Age Scotland: Loneliness: The Public Health Challenge of our Times

<https://email.1and1.co.uk/appsuite/api/mail/Loneliness%20and%20Mental%20Health%20Scotland%20report%202018.pdf?action=attachment&folder=default0%2FINBOX&id=1539244710173773848&attachment=2&user=11&context=57431667&decrypt=&sequence=1&delivery=view>

Age UK: Creative and Cultural Activities and Wellbeing in Later Life.

https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/health--wellbeing/rb_apr18_creative_and_cultural_activities_wellbeing.pdf

Health And Social Care paper

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/hsc.12438>

Age UK evidence review 2014

https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/health--wellbeing/rb_june15_lonelines_in_later_life_evidence_review.pdf