

## Case studies: How have culture and creativity been supporting people in health, care and other institutions during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Project: Prison Reading Groups

Organisation: Give a Book

Region: National

Designed for: People serving sentences in prison

“Cellmates have joked about swapping their books when they've finished and made decisions together about what to pick.”

“Prisoners have been happy to receive a book, they are even more grateful when told that they can keep it. Even a few that initially refused changed their mind due to considering the limited time out of cell at the moment due to Covid.”

### Introduction

Give a Book is a charity which promotes books and reading for pleasure in the hardest places. It works mainly with schools and prisons. Prison Reading Groups became part of Give a Book in 2017, and runs reading groups in over 50 prisons.

Our aim during lockdown has been to make sure that people in prison continue to have access to books, and that the pleasure of reading is promoted in prisons. We have done this in various ways, by adapting our existing prison projects to work remotely where possible, including Prison Reading Groups, Books for First Nighters, Making it Up, Family Days and book rooms.

We sent consignments of 80-100 books to 45 prisons we work with, to be distributed directly on the wings to make up for lack of library access. We responded to requests for specific books, both for prisoners to read and to share with their families, including children's books to be read over the phone and on video calls.

Prison Reading Groups have not been able to meet face to face since March. But 26 of the 45 groups we supported before lockdown have been adapted to run remotely, with PRG providing sets of books to be distributed to members along with discussion resources and feedback forms. We have also been sending weekly “Bookstuff” handouts, with short stories, poems, book trivia and quizzes to our prison contacts, which they print and hand out along with other resources.

### Who is it for?

People in prisons across the UK.

### Are these people you have worked with before, or new participants?

### How many people took/are taking part?

An estimated 20 people per prison, so up to 800 people.

### Where is it happening?

People in prisons across the UK.

## For how long has it been happening?

Ongoing.

## What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

Combating boredom, encouraging reading for pleasure, supporting staff with specific resources they could not otherwise access.

## Have you adapted existing work to make this happen? If so, how?

We adapted several of our projects based on the information we received from prisons. This primarily meant replacing the volunteer/facilitator aspect of the project with written resources which could be distributed by prison staff.

## Evaluation & Feedback

Prison staff have been distributing evaluation forms and resource sheets to participants along with the books we provide. Quantitative research is particularly difficult to gather due the nature of our projects and the outcomes we hope to achieve. We get a large amount of feedback forms with written comments from staff and participants which allows us to evaluate the success and popularity of the project. Some feedback quotes below:

HMP Brixton

“Prisoners have been happy to receive a book, they are even more grateful when told that they can keep it. Even a few that initially refused changed their mind due to considering the limited time out of cell at the moment due to Covid.”

“Cellmates have joked about swapping their books when they've finished and made decisions together about what to pick.”

HMP Garth

“When I spoke to the orderlies, they asked me to pass on their thanks that they were being thought of with such a kind gesture during these unprecedented times.”

## Further information

<http://giveabook.org.uk/>