

## Pilotlight case study – Reading Quest



### What they do

Reading Quest teaches young children in Oxfordshire struggling with literacy to read with skill, confidence and enthusiasm. Low literacy levels are linked to long-term problems including unemployment, poverty, crime, poor health, and social and emotional instability.

According to research, 22% of men and 30% of women with low levels of literacy live in non-working households.<sup>1</sup> Of those with low literacy levels who are working, nearly half the men and over half the women are on very low wages.<sup>2</sup> Research also shows that 43% of the prison population read poorly, in comparison to 21–23% of the general population. Statistical evidence also highlights the link to poor health, with those with poor literacy skills being two to three times more likely to smoke heavily, drink alcohol more than once a week and be obese.<sup>3</sup>

Reading Quest works with children individually in schools, and involves parents and carers in the child's learning. Many of the children the charity works with live in conditions of considerable social disadvantage, such as those living in care, those living in poverty and those for whom English is an additional language.

### Skills, tools and resources

Reading Quest worked with Pilotlight from April 2007 to November 2008. The relationship helped the charity to develop its strategic clarity and write a business plan, as well as helping with the recruitment of a Director to lead the organisation. Reading Quest also improved its financial management, marketing and wrote a communication plan. This communication work gave the organisation confidence and a sense of credibility when promoting itself.

Reading Quest's founder and Project Manager Penny Tyack felt like she'd "been through another stage of her education", and said overall, Reading Quest is much closer to reaching its potential – which was "a dream" before working with Pilotlight.

### People helped and change in lives and communities

On average, children working with Reading Quest raise their reading age by 0.6 years in a six weeks, bringing them up to the average level for their age. Since working with Pilotlight Reading Quest has made significant steps towards its goal of extending these benefits to 10,000 children throughout the UK, by training tutors outside Oxford, in London and Birmingham. If achieved this would represent a major increase on the 213 children Reading Quest supported in 2006/07 when it applied to Pilotlight.

Improved literacy reduces the chance that an individual will suffer from the issues outlined above, such as unemployment, lower wages and poor health. Literacy also has a clear positive impact across the wider community. One conservative estimate

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<sup>1</sup> George Dugdale and Christina Clark, *Literacy Changes Lives: An Advocacy Resource: Executive Summary*, National Literacy Trust (2008), p.2.

<sup>2</sup> J Bynner and S Parsons, *It doesn't get any better*, The Basic Skills Agency (London, 1997), cited in below.

<sup>3</sup> *The Long Term Costs of Literacy Difficulties*, The KPMG Foundation (2006), p14

suggests that individuals with a low level of literacy up to the age of 37 cost a minimum of £1.37 billion to £1.62 billion in public funds<sup>4</sup>.

Other benefits include a healthier nation, with lower levels of drinking and smoking, and improved mental health, increased participation in the democratic process and a more skilled and flexible workforce.<sup>5</sup>

Pilotlight has helped Reading Quest consolidate its operations and plan for expansion, which will enable the charity to make these benefits accessible to more children in the coming years.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.26.

<sup>5</sup> *Literacy Changes Lives*, p. 3.