



HOSPITAL PROGRAMME IMPACT REPORT 2025

Bringing the magic of books and stories to children in hospital



This year's key achievements:

100,860

children and
young people
supported

28,254

brand-new
books
delivered

247

days of
professional
storytelling

Welcome

Read for Good's Hospital Programme empowers young people to make their own reading choices and helps children connect with the people around them through books and stories. It gives young patients time and support to discover (or rediscover) a love of reading.

We are proud of the scale and impact of our work in hospitals. For more than 15 years, our books and stories have been a constant in our 31 partner hospitals, uplifting young patients and their families, bringing joy and hope during difficult days, and supporting disrupted learning. We are a trusted partner, working alongside Hospital Education and Play Teams to bring laughter and comfort to the children's wards.

"The best thing about Read for Good books and Storytellers is all the moments (and they happen every day) that a child is lifted with the joy of a story."

– Gail Beaumont, Curriculum Lead for Reading, Sheffield Children's Hospital School



It's often hard to explain the difference that Read for Good's work in hospitals makes. Sometimes the wards come alive with laughter, noise and excitement when our Storytellers visit. The change in atmosphere is tangible and the joy is clear to see.

But often the real magic they bring is revealed in smaller, quieter ways, through tiny gestures: a look, a smile, a word, a tear.

There are so many, many small moments like this that show the deep impact of a simple story and a gifted book.

Our Storytellers

Our 11 professional Storytellers support children in 31 hospitals across the UK.



Gerry Durkin

- Aberdeen
- Edinburgh
- Glasgow
- Newcastle



Steve Lally

- Belfast



Chelsea Morgan

- Manchester



Amanda Smith

- Leeds
- Sheffield
- Nottingham
- Hull



Marion Leeper

- Norwich



Jennifer Lunn

- Royal Free
- Evelina London
- Brighton



Wilf Merttens

- Great Ormond Street
- Chelsea & Westminster
- Bristol
- Leicester
- Cambridge



Adele Moss

- Oxford



Fiona McMorow

- Southampton
- Reading



Michael Loader

- Swansea
- Cardiff
- Birmingham
- Gloucester
- Exeter
- Truro



Fiona Collins

- Liverpool
- Rhyl
- Bangor



Our Storytellers have a huge 125 years of combined storytelling experience!

This year we welcomed two new Storytellers – Chelsea Morgan in Royal Manchester Children's Hospital, and Marion Leeper in Jenny Lind Children's Hospital, Norwich. Even with so much experience, working in hospitals has been a steep learning curve for them!

“There's been so much to learn – finding my way round, getting used to the hygiene requirements, and learning how to drive the book trolley! I'm beginning to build up my storytelling ‘box of tricks’ – the kinds of strategies that work in different situations – each session has been richer, more fun and more rewarding.” – Marion Leeper



The nurses asked us to visit a teenage girl who was unable to get out of bed. They told us she didn't speak and looked out of the window all day. She seemed so sad, clearly dreaming of being outside. Our Storyteller told a story to help her travel elsewhere in her imagination. She listened quietly, with shining eyes, smiling the whole time. At the end, our Storyteller asked what she thought of the story. In the tiniest, hardly audible voice, she just said, 'it's perfect'. The story will stay with her and give her somewhere else to visit in her mind, and the book she chose will remind her of that wonderful distraction.

Bringing joy to the wards...



100%

of hospital staff said
Read for Good books
and Storytellers bring
joy to children in
hospital

Being in hospital can be scary, lonely and distressing. Our books and Storytellers offer entertainment, comfort, distraction and the chance to escape into worlds of imagination. They bring laughter, connection and moments of real joy during difficult times.

“When we were in hospital we saw the Read for Good trolley on the ward – it felt like a little beacon of hope, shining out in the middle of the night.”

– Parent, John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford

...and beyond

The benefits are felt long beyond a child's hospital stay. The small kindness of being gifted a book at a difficult time has a huge impact on families.

The book is a tangible link to a happy memory – laughing with a Storyteller, choosing their book, feeling seen and valued. Often this time with our Storyteller becomes their over-riding memory of their time in hospital, forming a positive association that will last a lifetime.

“The positive impact of being given a new book in hospital likely extends beyond childhood and the young person's relationship with reading. Indeed, it's often the start of a healthier relationship with accessing health care throughout life, be that in childhood or even as a parent in the future. That one book, and the demonstration of kindness in being given it, breaks down so many barriers.” – Dr Victoria Dublon, Paediatric Consultant, Royal Free

Parents tell us that re-reading the book becomes a way to remember hospital experiences. It prompts conversations which help their child to understand and process what happened to them.

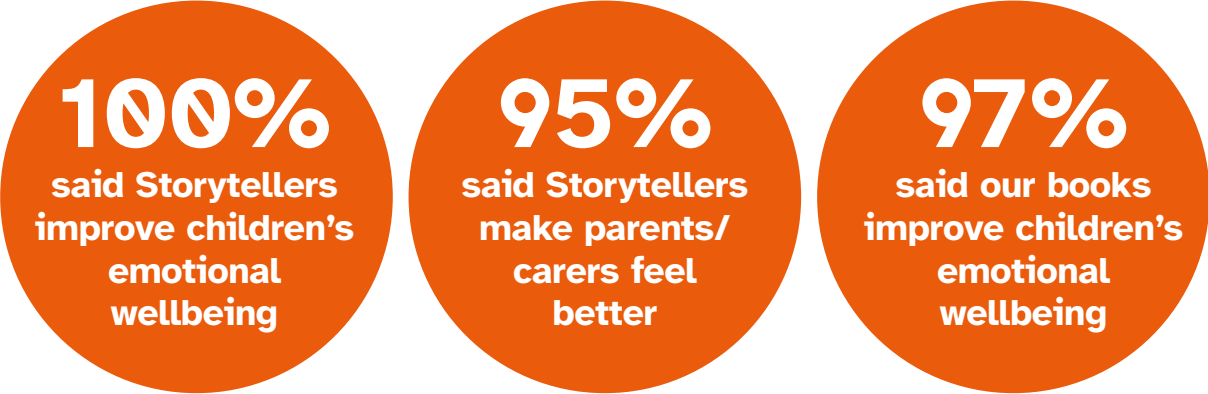
“Leo always pulls out *Please, Mr Panda* and *Gorilla Loves Vanilla*, books that he chose from the Read for Good bookcase. He has made a positive link between the books and his time in hospital. He opens them to see the Read for Good sticker which prompts a conversation about when and why he was given the book.”

– Parent, Gloucestershire Royal Hospital

Supporting wellbeing



Results from our 2025 survey of healthcare, education and play professionals in the hospitals where we work:



“My daughter was very scared and anxious to be staying overnight in hospital, and hearing the Storyteller and reading the books made her feel safe and happy.”

– Parent, Reading

“Thank you for bringing some normality during such an upsetting and anxious time for both us parents and our children. You are absolutely amazing.” – Parent, Truro

“Thank you for making my day and for making me laugh. The story was really funny and good. I also got a fantastic book to cheer me up!” – 11-year old patient, Brighton

How staff in hospital describe Read for Good’s programmes:

reliable distracting friendly
encouraging varied
day-brightening exciting fun
imaginative wonderful
fantastic engaging
pleasurable essential inspiring
joyful educational magical



We put on gowns, masks and gloves to visit one girl who was in isolation. When we knocked on her door, Dad told us she was sleeping following a bad night. As we backed out, she suddenly sat up, swung out of bed, and rushed to reach us before the door closed, still attached to a drip. She chose a book from the bookcase to keep and told our Storyteller that she was pretending to sleep because she thought we might be doctors. She was so excited to have a visitor who had come to see her without a medical reason, and her conspiratorial smile spoke volumes.

Supporting young people's mental health

Hospitals have seen a significant and ongoing rise in the number, nature and complexity of mental health issues that children and young people experience. Staff tell us that admissions also escalate at certain times of the year, such as during exams or at Christmas.

Provision for these children varies dramatically by location, from new purpose-built centres filled with natural light and with access to gardens, to dark repurposed buildings with small, high windows and limited access to outdoor spaces. Our Storytellers increasingly encounter children in protective isolation in bare, empty rooms, with restricted access and security measures. While designed to keep the children safe, these spaces can feel intimidating and clinical.



“Over the last three or four years we have seen a marked increase in the number of students admitted for mental health reasons. Their stays are often very long and recurring. The reasons for admittance have become more complex and severe.”

– Sheffield Children's Hospital

“We are seeing more young people that are suffering from mental health, that's why having a safe space where young people can attend and get to know the non-clinical staff is so important. As soon as they see the red t-shirt for our team, or the orange t-shirt from the Read for Good team, the young person knows that the visit is about fun.” – *Play Team member*

81%

of the hospitals where we work told us that they're seeing more children and young people with mental health admissions year-on-year

In these places, and for these young people, our programmes are a life-line. Our books can create a sense of community, uniting children and young people who are physically distanced. Our Storytellers are skilled at connecting with children and young people who are emotionally isolated.

The Beacon Unit (CAMHS), Leicester

Our regular hospital programme is complemented by our Brilliant Boxes of Books, which we send to other medical settings. Sophie Lem, Ward Sister at the Beacon Unit (CAMHS) in Leicester told us

“We are deeply grateful to Read for Good for their incredibly generous donation of books and comics to the Beacon Unit, our children and adolescent mental health facility. The children have come together to create a beautiful ‘book nook’ – a peaceful space to read, relax, and unwind. It's truly inspiring to see how these books are providing not just entertainment, but a sense of calm and comfort to those who need it most.

Your support is making a real difference in their lives. Being in hospital can be really difficult for our young people, sometimes [they] need a low stimulus area off the ward to spend some time distracted and engaged in other activities. Our new reading corner will be really helpful for our young people wanting to distract their minds.”



Reducing isolation and supporting social connections

A hospital stay can be lonely, with time away from routine and friends. Parents often have to juggle work and day-to-day pressures. Visits may be infrequent, particularly for children receiving specialist care far from home. Children at high risk of infection are physically isolated, so our Storytellers help create some normality and a sense of human connection.

“The books offer a distraction in a really busy/isolating environment and allow families to share positive time together. Our storyteller is incredibly flexible and adapts to the needs of the pupils in the moment.” – *Healthcare professional*

In our 2025 Hospital Survey:

100%

said our
**Storytellers make
children feel less
isolated**

86%

said our
**books make
children feel less
isolated**

92%

said Read for Good
encourages parents
to read with their
children

As well as the immediate connection between the Storyteller and the young person, our books and stories provide shared activities and experiences for families - cuddling up together with a book, or retelling a story can help while away long hours and bring families together. Social bonds often underpin reading for fun. These moments of connection make it more likely that children will feel positive about reading and choose to read in their leisure time.

“I’m stuck in hospital having chemotherapy, I only see my parents or the doctors and nurses. It was so nice to chat and make up a story with the Storyteller today. I didn’t think about my cancer.”

– *Teenage patient, Exeter*



SMALL
MOMENTS
BIG
IMPACT!



Our Storyteller told stories to a boy who was packed and waiting to go home. He was laughing, gesturing and offering suggestions for how the story should go. The energy (and volume) in his cubicle rose and rose! Mum stepped away, watching from a distance with tears in her eyes. She was clearly so relieved to see her boy animated and happy.



Reinforcing children's choices & identity

Families tell us that children in hospital can feel reduced to their diagnosis and treatment. Our Storytellers work with each child to assess exactly what they need, from quiet conversation to silly games, a challenge, a song or a story tailored to the child's possessions or interests. This reminder of their own identity is a powerful gift. The

children and young people feel that someone is interested in them, that their views are important, that they matter.

"They bring choice to young people who, on admission to hospital, have little to no say during their care for their own health." – *Healthcare professional*

"The Storytellers empower young people with a vital reminder of their identity. When asked to select a book, they are more than a patient. They have likes, dislikes and interests."

– *Healthcare professional*

Being offered a choice from the bookcase – a choice that will be respected and validated, no matter what they select – also gives children some agency in a situation over which they have very little control.

"Thank you for helping my boy smile and laugh for the first time since visiting the hospital. Your Storyteller told a personalised story to our son who had a whale of a time. He is severely disabled, under palliative care, and is non-verbal, but he was so engaged and was vocalising and using eye contact to ask for more and join in throughout. It's been a long time since I've seen [our son] so engaged and happy. Thank you."
– *Parent, Swansea*



We met a boy in the corridor in a wheelchair. He offered his hand to shake, then pulled it away at the last minute, leaving us hanging! He was delighted to have tricked us! He definitely didn't want a book, under any circumstances, but spent a lot of time examining the bookcase. He eventually chose a book, then decided he really didn't want it and returned it. After a few more jokes, story challenges and stickers, we moved on. He quickly grabbed the book back before we left. For him, being able to take a book on his own terms was clearly important. He was in control and that mattered.

Supporting Education and Positive Reading Behaviours

We work alongside the Hospital Education Teams to support children in hospital to access learning. Encouraging children to read books they have chosen, at their own pace, helps to offset the effects of missed education. We enable children to choose and keep their own book – sometimes for the first time. In response to our 2025 survey:

95%

said our hospital programmes support children's education

89%

said we encourage children to read more

97%

said we provide access & ownership to those who have few or no books at home

The hospital education teams increasingly tell us about the important role our books and Storytellers play in supporting their work. Because children can keep our books, they can be used safely by children at risk of infection. Hospital budgets mean that sometimes these are the only resources available to the most vulnerable and isolated children.

Because our Storytellers have no agenda beyond providing a positive experience, they are often able to connect with children and young people who are finding it hard to engage with hospital staff. Making reading fun can form new habits which will last a lifetime.

“The Storytellers can be the ‘way in’ for some students and support ongoing learning with us.” – Trudi Scott, Gloucestershire Royal Hospital



92%

of hospital staff said that our programmes help them reach children who find it difficult to engage

“The Read for Good books and Storytellers are integral to our offering. It's a wonderful way to interact with children and get to know them.”

– Fiona Fletcher,
Teacher, Royal Cornwall Hospital



SMALL
MOMENTS
BIG
IMPACT!



Chatting to a teenage boy we discovered a mutual friend – he'd met Gerry, one of our other Storytellers, in another hospital. After our story, the boy responded by telling the story Gerry had told him. He didn't falter. He'd remembered every detail. It really illustrated how deeply young people engage with the stories that are shared with them, and how they become part of their own stories of their time in hospital.

Inspiring Stories

Encouraging children to tell their own stories

From September 2024, we have trialled a new approach in four London hospitals. Alongside our books and storytelling visits, our Storytellers, Wilf and Jen, have been working with small groups of children to help them create and share their own stories. From friends on the dialysis ward, to an after-school diabetes group and patients in a mental health centre, these stories demonstrate the creativity and resilience of children in hospital.



The Magic of Stories

The new film showcasing Read for Good's work in hospitals

This year we have been fortunate to work with Media Trust. They match organisations like Read for Good with film directors who volunteer their time to help tell the story of the charities' work.

This short film was recorded in Liverpool and at Royal Manchester Children's Hospital. It captures the magic that Read for Good's books and Storytellers bring to children in hospital on a daily basis.



STORIES FROM ROYAL FREE HOSPITAL CHILDREN'S SCHOOL

Jasper's Story

by Jannat, age 7

Once upon a time there was a budgerigar. He was eating millet in his flat. Then his sister, Luna, flew to him and was staring at him. Then there was a BIG FIGHT!!!

A few feathers flew off them in the fight and flooded down on the floor. The feathers were exquisite because Luna's feathers were blue and Jasper's feathers were green.

I spoke to them both softly and told them Luna is going to be inside the cage for one hour because she's apprehensive. And Jasper is going outside because he's audacious (brave!) and then they were happy ever after in their cage.

The Princess Who Lived In A Castle

by Lyta, age 5

Once upon a time there was a princess called Alina. One day she went off into the Princess Park to have a picnic. She ate strawberries and cucumbers for her picnic, and then she went back to the castle to have a play date with her friend Princess Sophia. They played with their princess toys.

Then the king went away to work on his computer and the queen was only left to look after the princesses. Then a baddie came, and he ran and kicked the castle. Then the castle collapsed.

CRASH! CRASH! BOOM!

The princess fell, but they didn't hurt themselves because they were brave. They ran quickly to their new castle. The baddie hurt his leg when he kicked the castle so he couldn't get to the new castle. Princess Alina got a new dress and it looked like her friend Princess Sophia's dress. And they lived happily ever after.

To watch our film please scan this QR code or visit:
www.readforgood.org/the-magic-of-stories-film



THANK YOU

Thank you to all the grant-makers, donors and individuals who have helped make our work possible.





**“The Read for Good books
brighten every day on the wards
for our young people. They are
a source of joy and distraction
for our children and their families.
The wards would be a much
less vibrant and interactive
space without them.”**

*– Gail Beaumont, Curriculum Lead
for Reading, Sheffield*

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