



Volunteer Handbook

Your guide to becoming a
Read With Me Volunteer!





Hello and welcome!
It's great to have you on board.



Thank you for choosing to volunteer with us. We appreciate that your time is **valuable** and are **grateful** that you've chosen to spend a couple of hours each week helping children gain confidence in their reading abilities.

Read With Me is a small organisation with **a big impact** – and this is thanks to the dedication of our volunteers. People like **you** are the reason we have been able to **change the lives** of so many children by helping them learn to **read well**.

This handbook includes all the information you will need, including some helpful tips and tricks as well as some important reminders. However, if you still have any questions then don't worry, we are always **here to help**. All that's left to say is, we hope you enjoy being a part of our **community** and are ready to make **a real difference** to the children of Gloucestershire.

Thank you,

The **Read With Me** Team

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Where it all started

Read With Me was founded by Linda Cohen in 2020, amidst the Covid pandemic and changing educational landscape, with one clear mission: to help every child in Gloucestershire learn to read well.

Linda had begun to understand, through work in Somerset, the terrible **disadvantage** that **not being heard to read or read to at home** can deliver to our children. The statistics below demonstrate that, even before the pandemic, the UK was facing **a children's literacy crisis**.

1 in 4

five year olds struggle with basic vocabulary

96%

of primary school teachers are concerned about pupils' speech and language.

200,000

children leave primary school unable to read every year.

Of course, Covid made everything even harder for schools, parents and children. With this in mind, **Read With Me** was created to alleviate some of the pressure on schools by providing pupils with much needed **one-to-one reading time**.

These sessions were designed not only to improve pupils' **literacy skills** but also to build their **confidence** and **communication skills**, both vital in order for them to reach their **full potential**.

Providing **one-to-one** reading sessions, twice a week, is a simple intervention that ensures the futures of our talented children aren't written or indeed written off by the **age of 7**.

Where we are now

We now have over 250 volunteers and work with schools across the county. We hear thousands of children read every week and we have seen outstanding results.

Case study:

In a Year 1 class where only **45%** were achieving the expected standard in Reception.



By the end of Year 1 and with the help of our **volunteers**, **80%** had reached the **standard expected**.



The importance of our reading sessions, and our reading volunteers, cannot be overstated.

Alongside our reading sessions, we now offer **Not So Secret Book Clubs** during the school holidays, **Rhyme With Me** sessions for younger children and their parents, as well as after-school support. Our services are always **free at the point of access**; we believe that fostering a love for reading shouldn't cost the earth. That's why we give away thousands of pre-loved books during the school holidays at our **Not So Secret Book Clubs**.

Where we're going

Read With Me is perfectly positioned to bridge the gap in the children's literacy crisis.

Over the past three years we have made significant progress, but our journey is **far from over**.

We are being contacted **every day** by schools in Gloucestershire who need our help. By becoming a **Read With Me volunteer** you are helping to give the children in your community the future they deserve – and we are sure you will **have fun** taking part too!



How do we work?

Read With Me

As a **non-profit organisation**, we are only able to offer our service thanks to the **generosity** of others. Everything we do is in the interest of the **children** we work with and the **wider community**.

Due to our small but mighty team, we can provide excellent **value for money**. It costs us just **£50** to hear a child read, twice a week, for an **entire year**. That's less than **£5 a month** – the cost of a coffee and pastry on your way to work. So, where does this money come from?

Our funding

We're lucky enough to receive external funding from our partners, local businesses and individuals like you.

We are incredibly thankful to have the support of brilliant organisations, like **Gloucestershire Gateway Trust**, who provide us with financial support as well as guidance. We are also very proud of our links with local businesses, big and small. Our **corporate volunteer scheme** allows employees to spend their volunteer hours hearing children read, as well as organising fundraising events. We also receive regular donations from generous individuals as part of our **Gift of Reading** scheme. If you'd like to find out more about our funders, we have a dedicated page on our website thanking each and every one of our supporters.

However, external funding is just half the story. **In-house fundraising** is an integral part of what we do here at **Read With Me**.

Fundraising



We keep ourselves busy!

We like to make sure our calendar is **jam-packed** with events that allow us to raise funds **in-house**; from Town Hall teas to 10Ks, we are always busy planning our **next event**.

Fundraising is most effective when **everybody** comes together and **takes part**. However, we understand not everyone has the time to bake cakes or jump out of aeroplanes, that's why we've made it **easy** for **everyone to get involved**.

We are keen to make **fundraising work for you** and would love to discuss any ideas you have – we are only an email, phone call or chat away.

Meet our team

Now you know a bit more about us, we can't wait to introduce you to our small (but mighty) team.



Linda Cohen
Director and Founder



Julie Jenner
Volunteer Liaison Manger

Volunteer Co-ordinators



Natasha Bruce



Rachel Hinds



Sam Phillips



Sarah Cocker
Training Manager



Crystal Jones
Fundraising and Marketing Manager

Volunteering with us

What to expect

Now you know who we are and what we do, we'd like to let you know what **you can expect** as a **Read With Me volunteer** and also what is **expected of you**.

Our **Volunteer Liaison Manager** will provide all the information you need before your first session. After that, you will receive a **weekly newsletter**, including a **timetable** every **Wednesday** with all the information you need for the upcoming week.

You'll also take part in an **induction** which will be carried out by one of our team members – this session will answer any additional questions you have about the logistics of volunteering and what to expect at school.



Your **volunteer pack** will include all the essentials: lanyard, pens, phonics sheets, bookmarks and most importantly – stickers! If you need anything **topped up** at any point then just let one of our **Volunteer Co-ordinators** or **Volunteer Liaison Manager** know.

Volunteering with us

Every child is unique and there is no 'right' way to approach each session. However, we have compiled some handy tips and tricks to help you find your feet during your first few sessions:

Enthuse – Children are more likely to develop a **love of reading** if they feel **excited** about what they are reading. Take a look at the front cover **together** – what might the story be about? Have they read a little of the story already? Can they tell you what has happened so far? Are they enjoying the book, can they tell you why?

Recap – It is important to check that the children **understand what they are reading**; it's a good idea to ask them to **recap** what has just happened in the **last page** or **paragraph**. Can they **summarise** it for you? Were there any words they struggled with, do they know what it means? Can they think of any similar words? Or words that mean the opposite?

Repeat – Developing **expression** is **crucial** when creating **confident** and **fluent** readers. Try and read sentences back to the reader and ask them to repeat it with **enthusiasm** or **feeling**. You can also talk about how characters might be feeling when reading speech. What would they sound like? Can they change their voice slightly to help add more expression?



Bonus tip: In order to boost reading confidence and enjoyment, always try to find something **positive** to say at the end of the session – you will be really surprised how far a 'you tried really hard today' goes!

Volunteering with us

Our volunteers tell us that the best part of being a Read With Me volunteer is getting to know each child individually and working out which approach works best for them. But don't just take our word for it:

“

“I love getting to know the children and having time to chat with them as well as hear them read. The class teacher is so pleased that I do that as they don't always have the time to chat, discuss and widen the children's knowledge of what they are reading about. Or find out what the child already knows and what they are really interested in!”

– **Chris, Volunteer**

In order for you and the children to **get the most** out of our sessions, we ask that you're **committed to volunteering** with us for **at least 12 months**. This will provide ample time for you to get to know each child and see their confidence grow from term to term.



We are partnered with some brilliant **independent bookshops** across Gloucestershire, that provide us with reviews and recommendations of the latest children's books.

Keep an eye on our **social media** pages for regular updates!

The serious bits

Policies and Procedures

As with any new experience, there are a few things you will need to do to make sure you're **ready for your first session**. You'll need to familiarise yourself with **phonics** – don't worry, we'll provide all the resources you need, including a **video** you can refer back to it at any time. We understand that phonics can be a bit tricky to get to grips with at first, so we've made it as **simple as possible** by having the children teach you themselves! And remember, our **Training Manager** is always on hand if you encounter any issues.

As well as completing our **online safeguarding course**, it's really important that you familiarise yourself with our **Safeguarding Policy**. This will be sent to you along with our **Equal Opportunities Policy, Code of Conduct** and **Volunteer Agreement**. Make sure you have read these documents carefully and once you're happy, sign them and return them to us. We want **Read With Me** to be an **inclusive and happy place for everyone** involved; this means adhering to our policies and procedures which are designed to keep you, and everyone else, **safe**.

All of our partner schools have a **Health & Safety Policy** which will be made available to you, including instructions for emergency procedures (e.g., fire alarm, evacuation) and any safety aspects associated with particular tasks. Again, if you are **unsure about anything** or **have any concerns**, then please do not hesitate to **speak to a Volunteer Co-ordinator** or our **Volunteer Liaison Manager**. We want our volunteers to feel confident that they are equipped with the information they need to be the best volunteer they can be.

The serious bits

Who to speak to

We are incredibly **proud of the partnerships** we have cultivated with our partner schools and want to ensure that they are maintained in the future. To minimise any issues, we ask that **your first line of communication is always with the Read With Me team**. Please **do not contact schools directly** with queries or if you're unable to attend a session, just let our **Volunteer Liaison Manager** know with as much notice as possible – we'll try our best to keep the session running as expected.

The **safety** and **wellbeing** of our volunteers and the children they interact with is something we take **very seriously**. All our volunteers work under the **supervision** of a teacher or full-time member of staff. Teachers retain **ultimate responsibility** for **pupils at all times**, including the pupils' behaviour and the activities they are undertaking. If you have any concerns about being left unsupervised then do **get in touch**.



If you encounter any issues with a pupil/teacher/staff member/volunteer then please let a **senior Read With Me team member know as soon as possible**.

If you have a concern regarding **safeguarding** then this should be discussed with the **Designated Safeguarding Lead** and then reported to our **Volunteer Liaison Manager** and **NOT** discussed with the **parents of the child**.

The serious bits



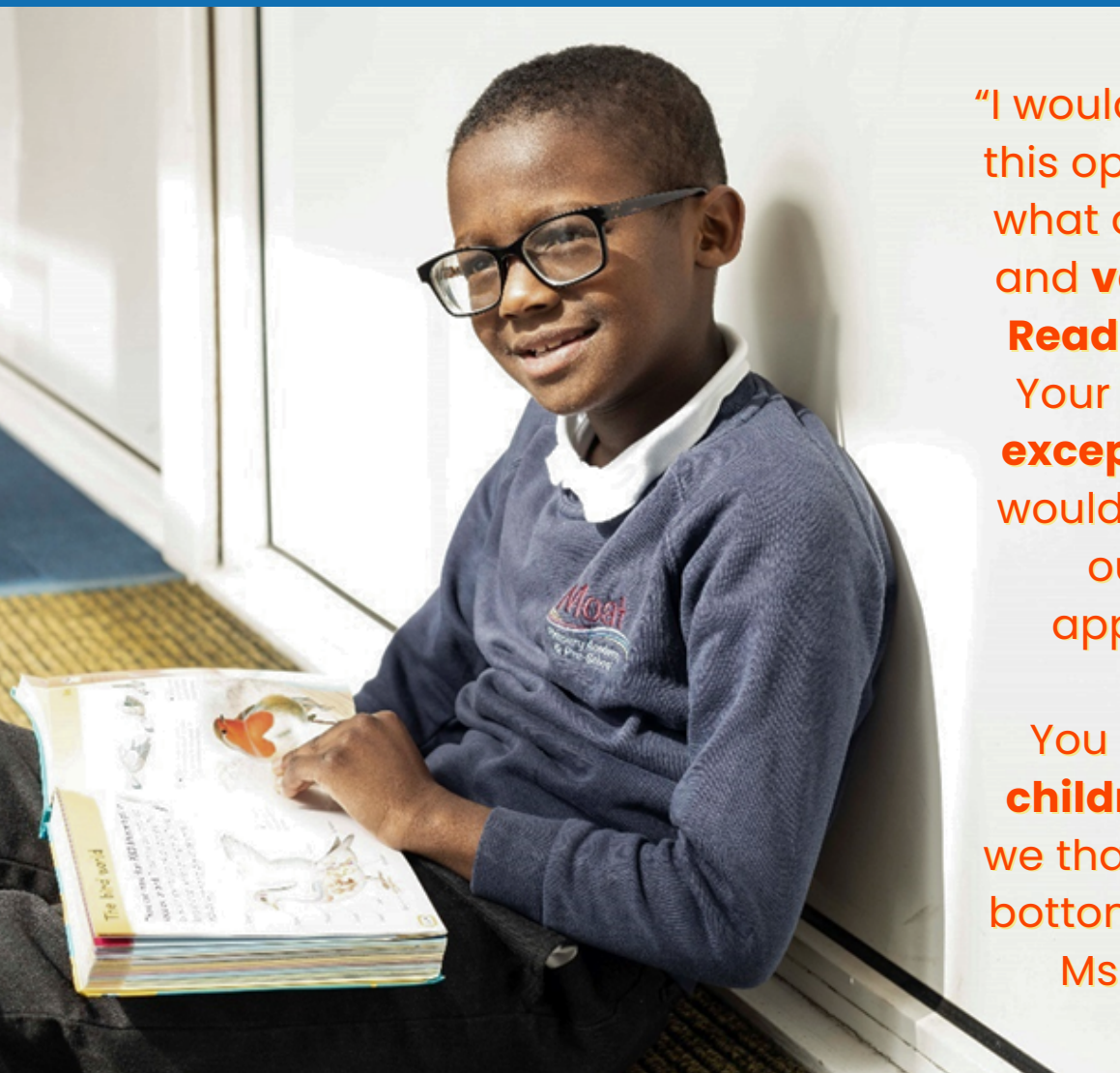
Some things to remember:

- Please **turn your phone off** whilst you're in school – keep it out of sight, especially when with the children.
- Aside from bookmarks, stickers and other reading related gifts, please **don't give personal gifts** to the children you read with. It may encourage favouritism and set unrealistic expectations of our reading volunteers in the future.
- Make sure you **dress appropriately** for your sessions (including wearing your **Read With Me** lanyard) – we want you to remain **comfortable** whilst following school dress codes.
- As a **Read With Me volunteer** you are representing the **Read With Me brand** – we ask that you do so in a **positive** manner and act according to our **values**.
- If a child discloses something to you that raises **concerns** about their **safety** or **well-being**, please report the issue **immediately** to the **Designated Safeguarding Lead** within your school and inform the **Volunteer Liaison Manager** as detailed in our **Safeguarding Children policy** – we'll take it from there.

The serious bits

It's important to us that volunteering is **accessible to everyone**, so we have made sure that we can deliver our courses in alternative formats, depending on **your needs**. Although you may be feeling overwhelmed with information about forms and courses, we promise **it is worth it!** Our **Volunteer Liaison Manager** and **Training Manager** will be on hand to help throughout the process.

By becoming a **Read With Me** volunteer you will be making a real difference to the children in your local community. Our partner schools regularly tell us what a difference our volunteers make to their pupils.



"I would just like to take this opportunity to say what a truly **amazing** and **valued** provision **Read With Me** offer.

Your volunteers are **exceptional**, and we would like to express our personal appreciation to them all...

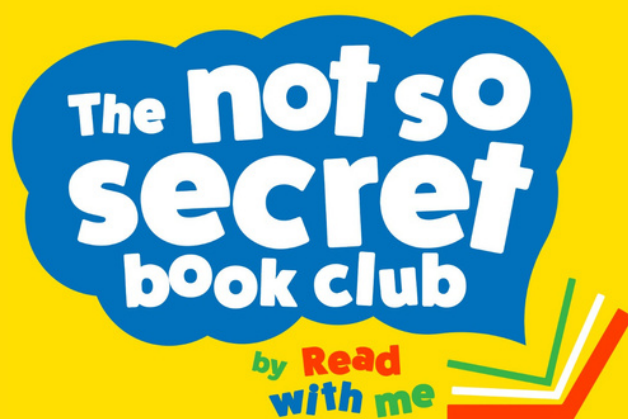
You are **changing children's lives**, and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts."

Ms F - Teacher

What's next?

Although we have come a long way since our inception, the demand for our service is growing every day. With your help, we can continue to scale our provision and ensure every child leaves primary school ready to take a full part in education.

Hearing children read is just one of the ways we support children in the local community. **Read With Me** also offers provision during the school holidays in the form of **Not So Secret Book Clubs** that are always free to attend and great fun for everyone from tinies to teens.



We also run after-school sessions as well as **Rhyme With Me** sessions for younger children. We offer **free books** at all of our events to anyone who would like them, provide resources and materials for activities and so much more. We would not be able to offer these services without the help of our **wonderful volunteers**.



How can you get involved?

Here are just some of the ways you can get involved as a **Read With Me** volunteer:

- **Donate** any pre-loved children's **books** you have lying around – or even better, organise a **book collection** with your friends and family to give them a new lease of life!
- Help out at a **Not So Secret Book Club** during the school holidays – a free event for children of all ages!
- Do you have a **skill** you could **share** with the children? It could be making balloon animals, playing the guitar, or organising a panto – we'd love to hear from you!
- Are you a **craft connoisseur**? We are always looking for new and exciting **ideas** for craft activities as well as preloved craft **materials**.
- Make a collection of all your old greetings cards to be made into **bookmarks** for the children.
- Want to help us run one of our **fundraising events**? We always need volunteers on the day to help with set-up and logistics.
- Could you **organise** your **own fundraising event**? A sponsored run, a music night, or even a pub quiz – the sky is the limit!
- **Spread the word** about what we do – we'll even provide you with **posters and leaflets** to leave a lasting impression!



This list is just a **starting point** – if you have an **idea** you would like to share with us then please speak to **Linda** or any member of the team.

Thank you!



We know we've said it already, but we truly are **grateful** for your **support** and we hope you will enjoy being a part of our **community**. We host regular **volunteer meetups** that are a great way to get to know your fellow volunteers – lunch is always provided as a way of saying **thank you** for all your hard work, and we also provide an interactive training session!

You're joining us at a **crucial** (and exciting) moment in our development and we are **thrilled** to have you on board for the next leg of our journey!

Linda and the
Read With Me team.



We would love for you to share your **experience** of being a **Read With Me volunteer** with as many people as you can, including on **social media**. Check out our **Social Media Policy** for more guidance on how to do so responsibly.

Get in touch!

Don't forget to follow us on **social media** so you can see what we get up to behind the scenes. Our **website** also contains **resources for volunteers** and other useful information.

We also have a dedicated **Facebook group** for our volunteers to chat, discuss any advice they have or even recommend a great book. Visit www.facebook.com/groups/rwmvolunteers/ or scan the **QR code** using your phone!

 Readwithme.org.uk

 [Readwithmeorg](https://www.instagram.com/Readwithmeorg)

 [Readwithme2020](https://www.facebook.com/Readwithme2020)

 [Read_with_me_](https://twitter.com/Read_with_me_)



For volunteering queries, please contact:

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 **07765800231**

To discuss fundraising, the Read With Me brand or anything else, please contact:

 Linda@readwithme.org.uk

 **07791110906**

