

## Paired Reading Programme for SMEs

This fully funded employee volunteering scheme builds on a highly successful initiative run by Business in the Community (BITC) Scotland, bringing together business volunteers and local schools to improve standards in literacy through regular in-school reading sessions.

### The Programme

This new programme is free to SMEs who want to make a difference to primary school children in their local community by helping them improve their reading. It is supported by the Robertson Trust, the Barrack Charitable Trust and the Ernest Cook Trust.



Image credits: Sandy Young Photography/People's Postcode Lottery

Our role is to make it easier for businesses like yours to engage with a school that's local to you. We will broker the relationship between you and the school and will provide your business with all the training and support you need to build a successful partnership that can change the lives of children by improving their reading.

Paired reading entails listening to and supporting children to read on a one-to-one basis or in small groups. Reading partners can also serve as a positive role model more generally for pupils, helping them to gain confidence as well as skills.

### The context: why is reading so important?

Reading is a fundamental skill every child needs to get on in life and achieve their full potential. However, attainment in literacy is often adversely affected by deprivation and other issues from early in primary school. Paired reading schemes are recognised as a demonstrably high value intervention to help to improve pupils' reading skills.

Employee volunteering schemes are a way to channel skills, experience and enthusiasm directly from the workplace into local communities to great effect. Whilst many large companies now have established responsible business and employee volunteering schemes in place, it can be harder for SMEs to make the investment required to establish these. BITC Scotland can take much of the hard work out of this for you, free of charge, no matter how many or few people you employ.

### How it works

Anyone can join the scheme but it best suits those who can manage their schedule to meet a regular weekly commitment at a certain time. We will:

- find you a school reading partner
- help you set up your scheme
- train your volunteers
- administer PVG applications to Disclosure Scotland.

Volunteers visit together in small groups at the same time each week for at least one school term. Many continue for much longer. They spend approx. 45 minutes in school, reading one-to-one or in small groups with children who have been selected by the school as those who would benefit from additional reading support. This could be children who lack confidence, who don't receive support with reading at home, or who simply need more practice. Volunteers read with the same children each week, helping children to improve their confidence, reading fluency and enjoyment.

### What's in it for you and your business?

- Improved job satisfaction, skills and confidence amongst participating employees
- A motivated workforce and lower staff turnover through increased engagement
- Demonstrate your organisation's values in action
- Practical support for the community served by your business, where your team live and work
- A low maintenance, high impact programme.

*"It's great to have the opportunity to take part in such a worthwhile scheme with BITC. The reading sessions are so much fun and the team looks forward to them each and every week. I'd definitely encourage any businesses looking for any volunteering opportunities to take part, you won't regret it!"*

**Laura Anderson, Head of Human Resources, People's Postcode Lottery**

### What's in it for pupils?

The benefits to participating pupils are visible, demonstrable and sustained:

- Improved literacy skills across all reading abilities
- More confidence in and enjoyment of reading, a critical life skill
- Raised aspirations and ambitions for the future
- A positive insight into the world of work.

*"The paired reading programme not only benefits our pupils in terms of significantly improving their literacy skills but also does wonders for their self-confidence and self-esteem. In some cases, children who were reluctant readers at the start have gone on to develop a real love of reading. To be able to have the individual targeted support of an adult from outside school for 30 minutes each week is a tremendous boost to any child's learning and development. Through working alongside people from the business community, children are able to make the link between their learning in school and developing skills for life and work. Working in partnership with the business community gives schools the opportunities to raise aspirations, broaden horizons and make learning more meaningful."*

**Fiona Murray, Head Teacher, Prestonfield Primary School, Edinburgh**

## Find out more

For more information, **contact Alison Jones on 07713 878035 or email [alison.jones@bitc.org.uk](mailto:alison.jones@bitc.org.uk)**

