



SPRING UPDATE 2025

A lot has happened here at the charity over the last five years and to shine a light on our life-changing literacy work we are launching an exciting Big Give Match Funding Campaign. It is also pleasing to be able to share news of our expansion in the Midlands and our partnerships with Multi Academy Trusts. As well as updates on all our 'Lab' news, we turn the spotlight on one of our incredible expert tutors and salute the extraordinary work they do in closing the literacy gap for the children who are furthest behind.

In this issue...

**LIFE-
CHANGING
LITERACY
CAMPAIGN**

**FOCUS ON
OUR WORK
IN THE
MIDLANDS**

**RUNAWAY
STORY LAB**

Celebrating Five Years of Life-changing Literacy

Over the last five years, The Children's Literacy Charity has gone from strength to strength and this year we will be working in **over 40 partner schools**, delivering our expert programmes to more than 1100 children.

However, we remember only too well that five years ago, in March 2020, schools across the country closed at the start of the Covid pandemic.

While children, families and all those involved in education have worked hard to make up for lost time, sadly, the impact of lockdowns and missed schooling is still being felt today. A 2023 Centre for Social Justice report showed that 57% of children from disadvantaged backgrounds are leaving primary school without the necessary literacy skills.

In response to the increased need for specialist literacy support, in 2021 we launched Reading Lab, our 1:3, 10-week catch up programme for older pupils and in 2022 started delivering a 1:3 Literacy Lab option, to help schools support more younger primary school children needing extra help. Both interventions have remarkable outcomes in closing the literacy gap and our goal is to help as many children as we can who need our expert support, giving them the opportunity to engage with learning, grow in confidence and realise their full potential.



To mark the achievements of our tutors and children as well as celebrate our partnership with schools and funders over the last five years, on 5 March we are launching our Big Give Match Funding 'Life-Changing Literacy' Campaign.



With the attainment gap the widest it has been for a decade, our work supporting children from disadvantaged backgrounds is needed now more than ever before.

We can only do this though with the generous support of our funders and the hard work of the fundraising team here at the charity and that's why we are running a **Big Give Match Funding Campaign aiming to raise £50,000.**

ONE DONATION, TWICE THE IMPACT

Launching on 5 March, the campaign lasts for one month and for every pound donated through the Big Give platform up until 5 April, the donation will be doubled until we reach our campaign target, helping us to support even more children with our life-changing literacy work.

Do please share the news of our campaign with friends, family and colleagues when it goes live on 5 March and follow us on social media for updates.

BIG GIVE CAMPAIGN

Here is how just one child has benefited from our expertise in closing the literacy gap, helping them not just to catch up but also step ahead with confidence and skills which will last a life time.

Six-year-old Kasha is a lively character. However, her chatty nature and tendency to become distracted makes it difficult for her to focus on the task in hand. Her school referred Kasha to our Literacy Lab in March 2024 as her self-esteem was very low and she was struggling amid the distractions of the classroom.

Our baseline assessment highlighted a large discrepancy (18 months) between her reading accuracy and her reading comprehension: although she read quite fluently this was not translating into understanding or making connections.

It was immediately apparent that she benefited from the quieter, nurturing 'Lab' environment and activities were kept short and interactive to build her attention skills, with movement breaks and a visual timetable to help her stay on task.

The charity's expert tutor - trained in how to tailor our intervention to individual needs and work with hard-to-reach children – began by helping Kasha practice responding to simple literal questions: Who? and Where?

With the support of visual prompts, Kasha progressed to being able to tackle a wider range of questions. To make it more engaging, the tutor introduced a magnifying glass, creating the role of Detective Kasha searching for answers in the books being read. Kasha's enjoyment in reading has grown significantly and she eagerly asks for the magnifying glass as soon as reading starts. Having a real object in her hands helps to keep her focused and engaged.

After just one term of Literacy Lab Kasha had made significant progress, closing her comprehension gap by 12 months and growing in confidence as a result.

Julie Taylor, Education Lead, commented:

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While the rigorous focus on phonics teaching has led to many young children developing strong decoding skills, this can sometimes result in children simply reading words aloud without truly understanding or enjoying the text.

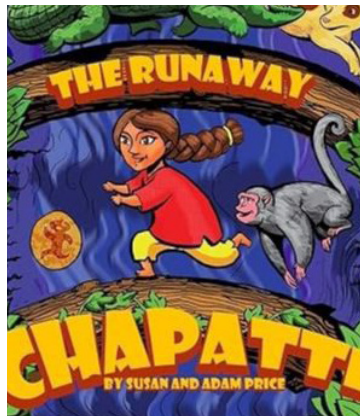
At The Children's Literacy Charity, our expert tutors are trained to use a variety of strategies to fully engage those children who are far behind age-related expectations in reading and comprehension. Through the use of visuals, props, thoughtful questioning, and modelled 'Book Talk', our tutors encourage a more interactive approach, helping children become fluent, confident readers who comprehend and connect with what they read. Above all, we nurture a love of reading that extends beyond decoding, fostering a lifelong enjoyment of books.

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The Runaway Story Lab!

The charity's trial of Story Lab, its new Early Years programme, kicked off in four London schools in January and initial feedback has been very encouraging.

Fifty-five children from reception classes have so far taken part in the small group storytelling sessions delivered by the charity's expert tutors, pictured below after their Story Lab training.



As well as running Story Lab information sessions for class teachers, the charity's parent introduction sessions have been well attended.

Throughout the **12-week programme**, every family receives their own copies of the five books being used in Story Lab, plus a pack of home activity ideas and videos of the story being read. A key facet of Story Lab is using storytelling to support a child's early language and emotional development and helping parents to engage with the programme, encouraging talk and story interaction at home.



A parent from Hollydale School commented:

My daughter has loved Story Lab so far! She always talks about how much she loves her teacher Miss Georgina and although she has only been doing it for a few weeks she has already been given two certificates for doing so well. As a mum this has shown me how much she is benefitting and she always comes home with lots to talk about. We enjoy reading the books together, especially just before bed time!

Chloe Coady, Early Years Foundation Stage Lead - Nightingale Primary, commented:

We have loved incorporating Story Lab into our timetable where the children needing extra help get additional support offered to them by the charity's highly skilled tutor. The free books for parents allows them to read at home with their child which is hugely beneficial.



Tutor Georgina Hanson said: "The children have engaged brilliantly with Story Lab so far. It's been wonderful to witness their enthusiasm for the stories and see their confidence grow each week!"

Feedback has also been positive from all the partner schools for this project: Larkhall, Nightingale, Hollydale and St Mark's C of E Primary schools.



Education Lead Julie Taylor said: "Story Lab has generated a real buzz in our partner schools with much enthusiasm from children and real engagement with the families. We are looking forward to extending the trial into four nurseries next term".

A Focus on Multi Academy Trusts

Reading Lab a 'resounding success' at the St. Bart's Multi Academy Trust



In the Summer term of 2024, we started a new partnership with Stoke-on-Trent based St Bart's Multi-Academy Trust (SBMAT), delivering our Reading Lab intervention in five of their schools, expanding to eight in the autumn term last year.

We are fortunate to have recruited exceptional tutors who fully immerse themselves in the programme, delivering engaging and enjoyable sessions that inspire a love of reading in children. By the end of this academic year we will have supported over 500 pupils across SBMAT schools in Staffordshire and East Cheshire.

Eva Cerioni, School Improvement Lead at the Trust feels the 10-week Reading Lab programme has been particularly impactful for pupils who had previously fallen behind in their reading development and had a limited interest in reading for pleasure:

Feedback from parents who attended the Reading Lab Celebration Assemblies run by the charity at the end of each 10-week block of tuition was overwhelmingly positive, with many reporting an improvement in their children's attitudes towards reading at home.



Julie Taylor, Education Lead at the charity added: "We are delighted that our partnership with the St Bart's MAT school will continue in the 25/26 academic year. Alongside improving reading motivation, our Reading Lab intervention boosts the skills necessary for pupils to access disciplinary literacy which is of vital importance as they progress to secondary school."

St Bart's Multi Academy Trust CEO Lisa Sarikaya commented:

I am delighted to reflect on the success of the Reading Lab Programme, which has been running across a group St Bart's MAT academies. The focus has been to boost literacy skills, foster a love of reading, and provide targeted support to pupils in Key Stage 2, especially those who were falling behind age-related expectations.

The impact has been great. Not only have we seen improvements in reading fluency, comprehension and confidence, but the programme also succeeded in reigniting a passion for reading in many pupils, particularly those who had previously struggled or lacked interest. Teacher feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with increased engagement and enthusiasm observed across the board.

A key component of this success has been the collaboration with families. Parental involvement through workshops and resources has played an important role in reinforcing (or in some cases introducing) reading habits at home.

The dedication and professionalism of the Reading Lab tutors has been central to the programme's success. Their expertise, positive relationships with pupils, and commitment to providing high-quality, personalised interventions outside the classroom have truly made a difference.

Overall, the Reading Lab Programme has been a resounding success, not only in improving literacy outcomes but also in fostering a deeper love of reading among pupils. This initiative exemplifies our continued commitment to improving standards across the Trust and ensuring that every pupil has the tools and support they need to thrive.

Regional Expansion with a New Academy Trust in the West Midlands

We are delighted to welcome two schools from The Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust this spring term. Based in the Black Country of the West Midlands, the dynamic multi-academy Trust is dedicated to nurturing talent and fostering innovation.



Both new partner schools are in Wednesbury: Holyhead Primary School is taking both our Reading Lab and Literacy Lab interventions and Wallbrook Primary Academy has our Reading Lab programme.

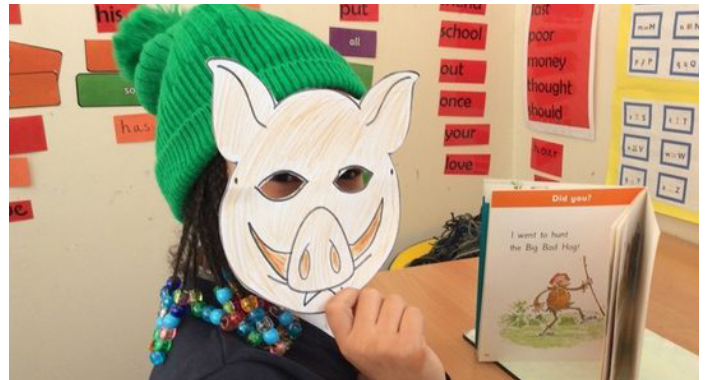


We are looking forward to delivering our Reader Leader training programme across many of the Trust schools and continuing our partnership in the long term.



The Power of Storytelling

February in our Literacy Labs kicked off with an immersive journey into stories as part of our Storytelling Week celebrations. Building on this year's theme: Reimagine Your World, our tutors encouraged creativity and exploration with a diverse set of resources—including story dice, story maps, and images of portals and extraordinary doors—to spark imagination and inspire storytelling.



Education Lead Julie commented: "while the focus of our specialist tuition is on effectively building literacy skills, we also want children to experience the joy of books and develop a love of reading, whether it is being swept up in a story or marvelling over mind-boggling facts. Storytelling Week is a great opportunity to bring to life the power of reading for pleasure".



Profile of An Expert Tutor

Clare Deacon was appointed as the Larkhall Primary School Literacy Lab tutor in September 2023 although her relationship with the charity goes back a long way as she first started as one of our tutors back in 1998! During her time with us she completed a diploma in teaching children with specific literacy difficulties and seven years later she decided to return to full time education, embarking on a four-year degree in speech and language therapy.



We are delighted to have welcomed back such an experienced teacher and it is no surprise that with her extensive speech and language skills Clare is an outstanding tutor, delivering strong results.

That said, she feels that one of the most important aspects of Literacy Lab is the social and emotional support it provides through the consistent support of a dedicated adult who is able to build strong relationships with the children being tutored. Clare comments:

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The face-to-face environment is so important, allowing children to progress at their own pace, yet working within a clear structure for teaching all elements of literacy.

It is a joy to watch and interact with the children as they change and grow in confidence, not only when reading but also as they start to express opinions, create sentences orally, re-tell stories and explore the meaning of new vocabulary.

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But Clare is not the only one to have returned to the charity as Larkhall Primary School is also a returning school. Larkhall has a vibrant and diverse school community yet many children face complex barriers to learning: the school is in the top quintile for deprivation, with a high proportion of Pupil Premium children.

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Ceinwen Adeusi, Assistant Headteacher and SENCo at Larkhall school says:

One of the reasons that Literacy Lab has had such an impact at our school is because of Clare's dedication to working closely with class teachers to understand the 'whole child', not just their literacy needs.

Clare then tailors sessions which not only link with class topics but also take account of what motivates the children she tutors. Literacy Lab does not feel like a stand-alone intervention but through regular dialogue between Clare and class teachers she helps children to develop strategies which can then be transferred into the classroom.

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Please follow us on social media:



For more information about our school partnerships or supporting our vital work please contact:

info@thelc.org.uk

The Children's Literacy Charity works in socially and economically disadvantaged areas, helping to close the literacy gap for children who have the greatest need. Our provision of one to one and small group tuition helps children realise their true potential.

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