

Annual Review 2025

Registered charity number 1149664

Who we are

Give a Book is a charity dedicated to promoting books and the pleasure of reading in the hardest places.

Where the need for books is great or the access limited, our projects provide comfort, community and connection.

Our core belief is that to pass on a good read – to give a book – is a transaction of lasting worth. This is at the heart of everything we do.

‘Made me think positively about my future.’

‘It’s nice they can bring something home that connects them to their dad. Learning and having something to speak to their Dad about on the phone.’

Prisoner parent

Books:

1100+ for school projects

1600+ for Off the Record/Children Heard & Seen/Secure Children’s Homes/ Reading Ahead

4800+ for Books in the Nick

7450+ for Books for First Nighters

7500+ for Prison Reading Groups

8550+ for Family Days

9700+ for Raising Readers

Cover image at HMP Wormwood Scrubs. Cover © Artwork by Justin Rollins author of *The Lost Boyz*

What we’ve been doing in 2025

This year, along with Coram Beanstalk and Chapter One, we have been instrumental in the formation of **The Literacy Link**, a network of children’s reading charities and aligned partners working together to strengthen collaboration between literacy organisations with a shared common goal – to get children and young people reading more. And we will **Go All In** in 2026 for **The National Year of Reading**.



We welcome a fabulous group of Give a Book **Ambassadors**: Akin Alleyne, Simon Callow, Kit de Waal, Freddie Fox, Ali Smith, Toby Stephens, and Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliff. We are honoured that they have agreed to join the Give a Book family.

Ben Compton KC and the Outer Temple hosted a brilliant **fundraising** event for us, where speakers included Her Honour Wendy Joseph KC, David R, a former reading group member, and our own David Kendall (pictured).



We were delighted to see **The Book Rooms** in HMP Wormwood Scrubs mentioned – and pictured – so warmly in the recent HM Prison Inspector’s Report. And that **Raising Readers** was mentioned in the Justice Committee report on ending the cycle of reoffending as one resource prison libraries can draw on to help strengthen family ties and thereby support desistance.

Meanwhile, our other projects continue.

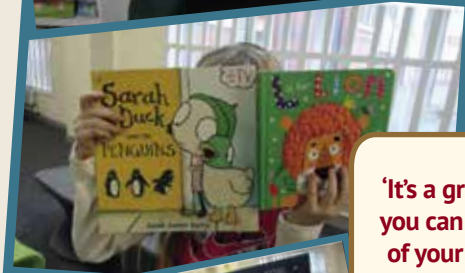
Family Days

Prisons organise Family Days to help prisoner parents bond with their children and partners. Give a Book supports these days with books for families to enjoy together and for children to take home. We send new, carefully chosen books covering a wide age range, ensuring our books are engaging, accessible and representative of the community we are working with. Where possible we also provide volunteers to encourage parents and children to read together. This year we supported 214 family days in 48 prisons, sending 8560 books.



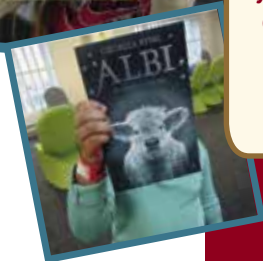
'It was brilliant seeing their little faces getting a book. [My daughter] read me a few pages and she's going to read it to me tonight on the phone. Great Idea. It was a bit of normality.'

Prisoner parent



'It's a great idea because you can see the progress of your children as they grow up.'

Prisoner parent



FOR PARENTS

Please tell us what you think of the book scheme. Did your child enjoy getting a book? And if you looked at it together, was it a good way to spend time on a Family Day?

*The childrens faces lit up
😊 Very Happy.*

Raising Readers

Raising Readers gives parents in prison the opportunity to form a tangible connection with their children through books and reading.

Parents in prison choose a book to send home to their child, writing a message on one of our custom bookplates to stick in the book and turn it into a personal gift. We provide duplicates of every book, so the prisoner parent can keep a copy of the same book for themselves. This allows the parent to read with their child over the phone, maintain connection and stay involved in their child's reading journey: whether it's reading bedtime stories over the phone or helping their child learn to read themselves.

This is a wonderful initiative, what a fantastic way to encourage literacy and bonding between parents and their children.

LinkedIn



What a truly gorgeous initiative. As a parent this brought tears to my eyes. Well done.

LinkedIn

'They ask me to read most nights.'

Prisoner parent



'Recommended it to everyone already, made my nephew think he enjoys reading.'

Prisoner uncle

'A good talking point for me and the kids and nice to still be part of bed-time with them.'

Prisoner parent

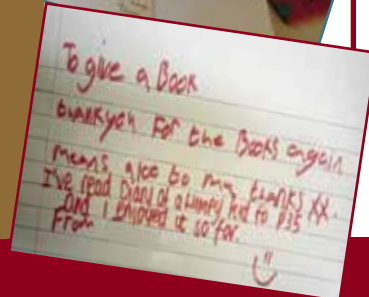
Secure Accommodation Network

Give a Book provides specially chosen books every half term for children in secure accommodation across the UK. Last Christmas, we sent books for staff to organise a Jolabokaflod event with the children, an Icelandic tradition where books are exchanged on Christmas Eve. Each child received a wrapped, personally selected book, with a message written from their core team.



'Christmas can be a tricky time and some of our children didn't have visits or gifts, except what they received from us. Books are also a great way for us to build relationships and show we understand something about them.'

Head of English & Literacy



Mother and Baby Units

Give a Book provides Mother and Baby Units (MBUs) in prisons with books for mothers to read to their children in challenging circumstances. We regularly supply all six MBUs in the UK with picture books, chewy books and touchy-feely books to engage babies and very young children in the delights of reading together.

'We are really happy with the service and it has helped to enrich many babies' and children's lives who may not have had the opportunity otherwise to be surrounded by such a range of books.'

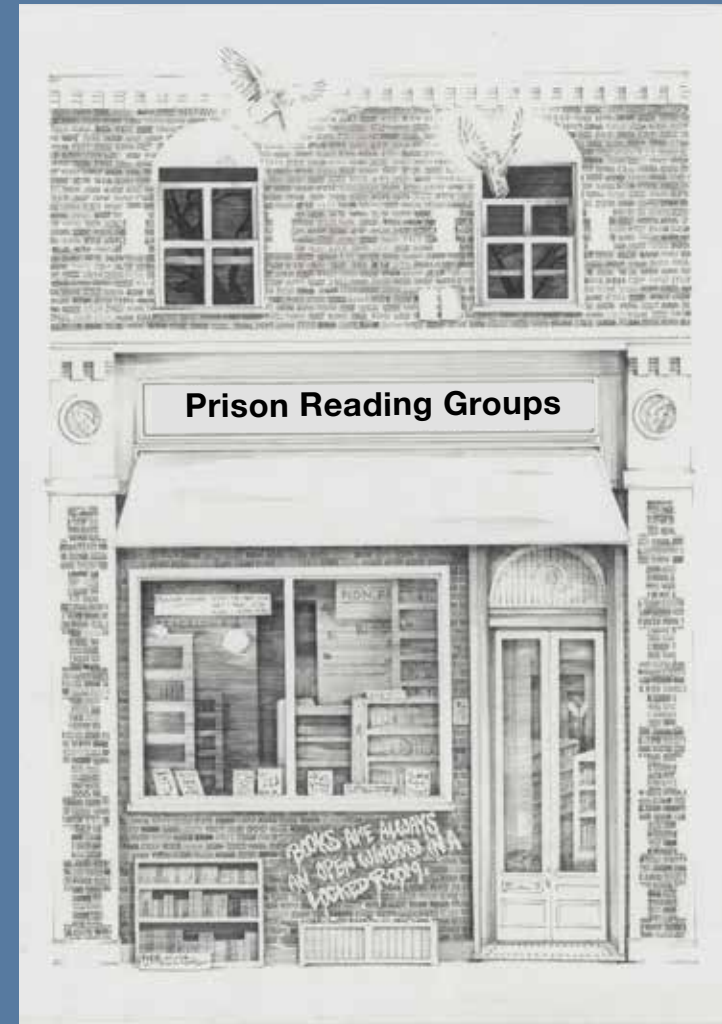
MBU worker

'Our mums and babies were extremely grateful. The inclusion of books was a great idea and will enable some mums to be able to read to their children in their home language'

MBU worker



Prison Reading Groups 2025



What we do

'Book club allows the exercise of mental muscles that would otherwise weaken.'

Member

In 2025:
7500+
books

75+
groups in

50+
prisons

Reading groups

PRG has been setting up, funding and supporting reading groups for over 25 years. The groups are voluntary and flexible so they can be adapted to individual prison needs. There are no tests and no right/wrong answers, just a chance to get together for sociable book talk. Groups choose the books they read and members are given new copies to keep or pass on to others.



Reading the Way

These are targeted groups for prisoners who feel they struggle with reading and lack confidence. The groups use short texts and those who want to are encouraged to read aloud. But the emphasis is also on discussion in a relaxed setting and with others who also feel they need support.



'The group makes you feel more like you belong.'

Member

Community, Connection and Change

PRG evaluation report

The evaluation was commissioned to test out the aims of PRG and to learn more about what members enjoy and value about the groups. The findings confirm core PRG principles and provide rich individual responses.



Becoming a reader

Choosing what they read increases the sense of agency and participation, and being given a brand new book can have far-reaching effects.

'A clean copy makes me feel I have some ownership of my opinions.'



Community

The groups create supportive communities that help overcome the isolation of prison and build relationships based on better understanding of other people's views.

'I see myself as a more open-minded person who can relate to others.'

Connection

Family

The groups help strengthen family bonds. Book talk can break the ice in phone calls and create common ground.

'My partner reads a lot and now we have more to talk about.'

'I don't want to give up reading after this. My mum thanked me for reading again – she got the audio book to read along with me.'

The wider world

Prisoners are cut off from wider society and this can lead to a loss of interest in it. Reading, discussion and debate are forms of participation that connect members with the world outside and the issues we all face as citizens.

'It keeps us reminded that we are still part of a wider society.'

The report was launched at the House of Lords for an audience that included ministers, MPs and policy makers from the Ministry of Justice.

Challenge, confidence and change

The isolation of prison can disconnect prisoners from a sense of themselves and this has damaging effects on mental health and rehabilitation.

'The group has reminded me who I am.'

Reading groups build confidence and a belief in the possibility of change. They also foster the reflection needed to turn a life around.

'I am more confident, I can speak my mind more and I matter.'

'I never saw myself as a reader of books and am now proud to think that I am and recognise how this has helped me to expand my horizons and myself.'



What Groups Read



The wide variety of book choices confirms the ambition of PRG groups and their determination to 'get out of the comfort zone'.

Disagreement is the lifeblood of any good discussion and there's always plenty of it, from 'best book we've ever read in the group' to 'I'd rather eat my own eyeballs than have to read this again'.

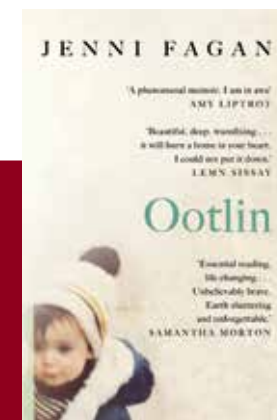
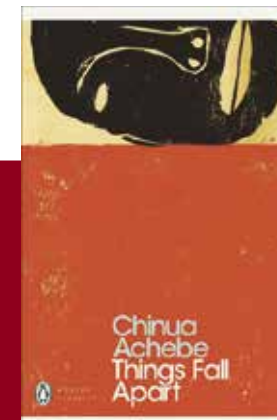
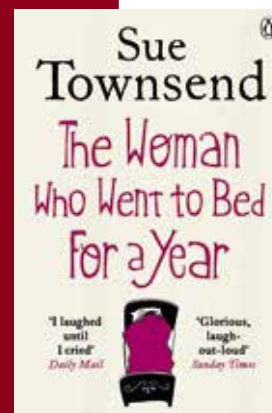
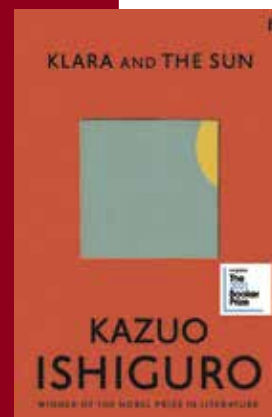
Here's a snapshot of recent books from two monthly groups.

Category B men's prison

Claire Keegan, *Small Things Like These*
Kazuo Ishiguro, *Klara and the Sun*
Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men*
Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

Women's prison

Peter James, *One of Us is Dead*
Jenni Fagan, *Ootlin*
Claire Keegan, *Small Things Like These*
Sue Townsend, *The Woman Who Went to Bed for a Year*



PRG resources



PRG provides resources to promote reading throughout the prison.

Bookstuff is our fortnightly handout of book trivia that prisoners can pick up from the library or the wings. We have produced over 100 of these, many put together by PRG volunteers.

Finding a Good Read is our monthly column in Inside Time, the national newspaper for prisoners. Each one highlights a genre or a theme or a single writer and gives thumbnail sketches of a range of related titles. Every quarter we welcome a Fellow from the **Royal Society of Literature** as guest editor.

Feedback from the groups is PRG's lifeblood and we share it in **Reading Group Roundup**, another Inside Time column that spotlights a different group each time and offers a snapshot of the discussion and lively debate.

Book Talk is a monthly website resource that highlights two book titles that groups might want to consider. Alongside a brief summary of each book there are discussion questions for those who want them. It's especially useful for remote PRG groups which can't meet face to face but want to share views.



Finding a Good Read
A column to help you find intriguing books



Libraries and volunteers



Sebastian Faulks and HMP Wandsworth

Libraries are at the heart of all good prisons and library staff are key partners for PRG. Their commitment to spreading the pleasures and benefits of reading ensure that our reading groups are well-publicised and promoted. They are crucial inside contacts and they often run the groups themselves with infectious enthusiasm. The feedback from one of our librarians after a play-reading with the group says it all:

'One of the best mornings ever
– I was literally crying with
laughter...And one of the men
said afterwards "such good fun
– who would have thought it?"'

We also support library staff to put on **author events** for the whole prison. This year visitors have included Robert Harris, Sebastian Faulks and Helen Lederer.

'The prisoners found themselves reflecting on thought-provoking questions about morality, humanity and ultimately what defines us as human beings... a lot to think about!'

Library staff member on a visit from Sebastian Faulks (pictured)

PRG volunteers are invaluable and we are very grateful for their determination and commitment even in the face of lockdowns, clearance delays and regime changes. They produce resources and they facilitate many of the groups. Our evaluation report confirms how important they are to prisoners as a link to the outside world and re-assurance that they haven't been forgotten.

'Our volunteer brings knowledge, civility and calm into a place that struggles to be any of these things.'



www.prisonreadinggroups.org.uk

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Prison Reading Groups is part of Give a Book.
Registered charity number 1149664.



Tower Hamlets Schools

During 2025 we worked with the school library service at Tower Hamlets to deliver a reading for pleasure programme for nine primary schools. This included three elements:

- ✓ A book grant for new books chosen by the children and staff.
- ✓ Picture Book Club, a peer-led project for year 5s to read aloud picture books to year 1 and chat about the story and images. Each box includes 15 carefully selected books and resources.
- ✓ Page to Picture is a creative book design project – each child is given a mystery book with the front cover hidden. The children then read the book and design their own front cover.



StPaul'sWhitechapel @St...1d ...
Our Year 1 and Year 5 classes are continuing their joint weekly reading activity. Both classes look forward to it so much!

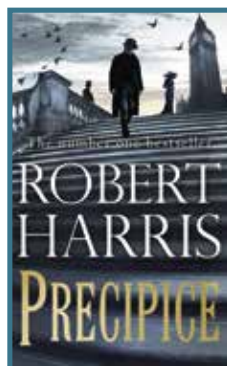
Thanks to [@giveabookorg](https://www.giveabook.org) for the wonderful book selection!



Pleasure of Reading Prize

Winner 2025: Robert Harris

Robert Harris is the author of 16 bestselling novels, including the Cicero Trilogy, *Fatherland* and *Pompeii*. His work has been translated into 40 languages and nine of his books have been adapted for cinema and television.

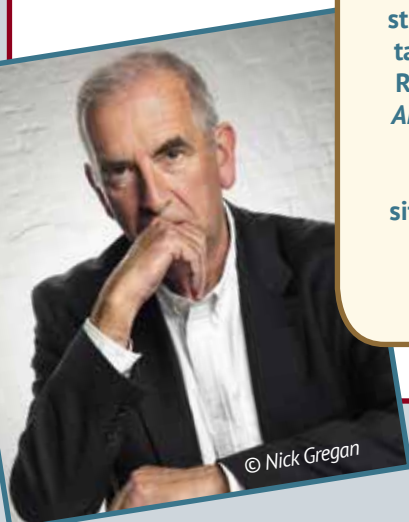


'I keep a quotation on my desk from Evelyn Waugh: "It cannot be said too often or too loudly – that all Art is the art of pleasing." I don't think Waugh meant by this that all novels must have happy endings – most of his don't – but that they should stimulate, engross, entertain and generally engage the reader from beginning to end. That is not an easy task, but it has been my overriding ambition.'

Robert Harris

'Robert Harris is one of Britain's most deeply and repeatedly engaging novelists, known for his strong storytelling, sharp eye for history and canny take on politics. [...] From the intrigues of Ancient Rome in the Cicero Trilogy to the Dreyfus affair in *An Officer and a Spy*, Harris has a talent for turning complex historical events into page-turning narratives. [...] Nothing is more enticing than sitting down with a new Robert Harris to hand and opening that first inviting page.'

Pleasure of Reading Prize Judges



© Nick Gegan

Books in the Nick

Books in the Nick supplies police custody suites with books for detainees to read while they are being held and to keep when they leave, along with one of our bookmarks detailing how to sign-up to your local library. We choose books to cater to everyone from emergent to avid readers. We hope the books serve as a calming distraction during what can be a scary and distressing time.



'Can I take this with me?'

'Can't put this book down.'

'Books have the power to comfort, distract, and inspire. Reading has a calming and restorative effect, and initiatives such as Books in the Nick contribute meaningfully to the wellbeing of those in custody. Thank you, Give a Book, for your compassion and commitment to making a difference.'

Merseyside Police Commissioner



Books for First Nighters

© Andy Atchison

'Brilliant to be able to get something to read the moment I was inside, completely distracted me...'

Give a Book provides books for those on their first night in custody with the aim of offering some comfort, mental release to the new arrivals and also hopefully facilitating the relationship between staff and prisoners. We feel that the act of giving the new prisoner a book – or letting him/her choose a book – goes some way to ease the difficult and traumatic transition into prison life.

We send a mixture of fiction, non-fiction, poetry and Quick Reads – we always try and select the books that seem appropriate for the new prisoners. The prisoners can keep the book as theirs, if they wish, to take with them to their designated wing. We are now running the scheme in over 80 prisons, refreshing the shelves quarterly.



Fundraising and Volunteering for Give a Book



We receive no statutory funding and rely on the generosity of philanthropic organisations and individuals.

Could you run 10k, host a coffee morning, run a quiz night?

Easyfundraising

Easyfundraising partners with over 7,000 brands who donate part of what you spend to Give a Book. The cost is covered by the brand to raise money as you shop online: www.easyfundraising.org.uk

There are many ways to volunteer, both in person and remotely – get in touch with alison@giveabook.org.uk to have a chat.

Prison Reading Groups

Volunteers work with prison staff to deliver regular book group sessions with the focus on reading for pleasure.

Remote Opportunities

Develop content for prison resources, book reviews and blogs.

Family Days

Could you volunteer to create an inviting display of books, help children choose and encourage families to read together – thanks to the MOJ for their support.

Store Days

Help us pack books at our book cave in Brentford. Meet the team over a cup of coffee and a flapjack. Bring your work team or your friends – it's fun and informative and we have had great volunteers from VMO2, NatWest and Ipsos.



A message from our Executive Director

Never have I felt the need for GAB as now. The demands for our services have never been greater and we feel it on the coalface where we can do most good. We have always valued collaboration with partners, supporters, organisations and many individuals without whom we could do none of it. We give heartfelt thanks to the many writers and others who have 'given' us a Book of the Month, to the publishers who support us, to our hard working volunteers.

Our generous supporters include: Bernard Lewis Family Charitable Trust, Charlotte Aitken Trust, Clothworkers' Foundation, Craginsh Trust, Drapers' Charitable Fund, Ennismore Foundation, Eranda Rothschild Foundation, Forte Charitable Foundation, Golden Bottle Trust, Hawthornden Foundation, HMPPS, Howberry Charitable Trust, Julia Rausing Trust, Leigh Trust, Lightbulb Trust, Lund Trust, Make My Day Better, Maria Björnson Memorial Fund, Marks Family Charitable Trust, Neighbourly Foundation, Portal Trust, Rothschild Foundation, Schroder Trust, Sheila Whitley Trust, Sigrid Rausing Trust, Siobhan Dowd Trust, Turvey Family Foundation, WoB Foundation, many individuals and those who prefer to remain anonymous.

The small but mighty GAB team, ably supported by the Trustee and Advisory Boards, and our incomparable Patron, will be seeing some changes in the coming year as we welcome new members. We remain good humoured, determined, energetic and forever grateful to be able to do what we do with all your help. Thank you.

Victoria Gray

A final word from our Patron

As Patron of Give a Book I am continually inspired by the simple yet transformative power of placing books into the hands of those who need them most. A book can open a window onto new worlds, offer comfort, spark curiosity, and remind us that we are never alone. Give a Book works with quiet determination and great heart, and I am proud to support its mission to spread the joy, solace, and opportunity that reading brings.

Lady Antonia Fraser





Patron

Lady Antonia Fraser, CH, DBE

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Adeela Khan

Eleni Meleagrou

Sarah Moorehead (Chair)

Sarah Turvey OBE

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