

So, it's back to school and the smell of autumn is in the air. We have had a very busy summer and are delighted to update you on all that has been going on at Reading Force.

### Book Requests

During 2021 we have posted around 3,000 books and scrapbooks to Forces children, both in the UK and overseas. Around two thirds of these are new to Reading Force. We've also seen an increase in the number of teenagers taking part – and this looks to be a consistent trend.

'There are a lot of emotions that people can feel, angry, happy, love, unwell, tired, relaxed and sad, frustrated, confused – these are our emotions because of lockdown. Reading Force has helped us feel more joyful.'

How these book requests reach us varies:

**Social media posts** on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram; weekly book giveaways on Facebook; sharing links and word-of-mouth recommendations between families

**Features in quarterly issues** of *Envoy* (RAF), *Homeport* (Navy/Marines) and *Army&You* magazines run by the Families' Federations, distributed free to thousands of Forces families. Children review new titles and are featured in our regular Reading Force book club pages

**A campaign in March linked in World Book Day 2021** with a book giveaway marathon on Facebook. We were made official givers, and inserted WBD £1 tokens in our free book parcels and alongside our columns in Forces magazines. We received over 400 book requests during this one week!

The one consistent thing is that the more places through which they have heard of us, the more likely they are to take part – hence our desire to reach Forces families through as many routes as possible.

### Collaborations

We continue to seek to work with others supporting the Forces, so our funds go to those who benefit rather than on duplicated administration.

Over 300 children and young adults at the Army Welfare Service Tri-Service residential summer camps in Devon, Derbyshire and Berkshire received RF scrapbooks and bundles of books to share.



"The young people had a great week on Residential with exciting and challenging outdoor activities, but in their down time young people were able to be creative and find quiet time to reflect while reading a reading force book, and looked forward to taking them home to finish on their journey home at the end of the week." Community Development Worker, AWS

## Scrapbook competition

We continue to receive a steady supply of completed scrapbooks which demonstrate creative engagement and fun had by families:

‘Thank you very much for sending us books to read and to distract us while Daddy is away. We enjoy face-timing him and reading or telling him what happened in our own words.’

‘I have loved reading my book with my big sister and baby brother. Mummy also read it so many times to me at bedtime. I read it to my grandma as well and made all the dinosaurs sounds to her, she was scared and she loved the book a lot. It was so funny.’

## Teen resources

We have recently produced a new reading journal as an alternative to our scrapbook for teenagers. Working through weekly meetings with a group of teens and young adults from Forces families, the journal contains cartoons, inspirational quotes, emoji stickers, and a book review insert (to return to RF with feedback), all designed by the team of youngsters. The project was funded by the Armed Forces Education Trust and the Peter Cruddas Foundation; a highly targeted campaign to distribute the journals is currently being rolled out.



## Online Book Clubs

We started our [online book clubs](#) in March 2021, recruiting coordinators from a variety of backgrounds, and helping them set up new book groups. There are three main categories:

- Veterans ages from 30 to 75
- Spouses – meeting online means no worries about childcare if their spouse is away
- Junior children ages 7-10 – keeping connected with children who have moved away.

Feedback from all groups has been very positive. Veterans have found this particularly beneficial:

‘It’s a way of filling your head with other things less unpleasant than the things that take up residence uninvited’

‘On top of the book is a once a month meeting with like-minded people to chin wag’

## Visits to schools and military support organisations

The last year has of course been so challenging in terms of being able to visit organisations and schools in person, but contact have been maintained in new ways. We continue to get to pre-deployment briefings, enabling the Unit Welfare Team to offer a resource to families, both those living locally and those further away. We have helped with activity packs for families during deployment and talked to veterans about how they too can get involved:

‘It’s been a great service for our members. Fiona came onto our zoom to give us some information about the project and our members really invested in it. In current times being able to connect with kids, grandkids etc is essential for all their wellbeing...the kids have loved getting their books and scrapbooks through the door....something for them and it is equally as special for the veteran to see the enjoyment in the kids’ faces. Sharing the reading experience has been good for our members as they are having a positive impact on the learning and development of the children’.

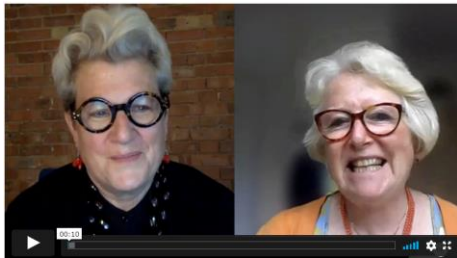
## Reflections on 10 years of Reading Force

We held two events to mark Reading Force's 10<sup>th</sup> birthday in June 2021.

An online presentation attracted nearly 300 acceptances, with contributions from the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir Nick Carter, and Sir Michael Morpurgo. It was a splendid event and much enjoyed.



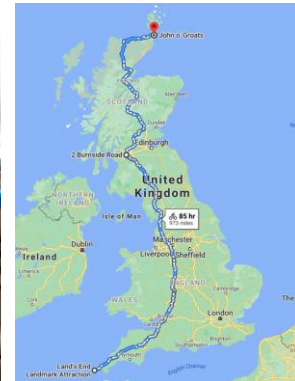
Meg Rosoff and Alison Baverstock in conversation (46 minutes).



Later the same week we were invited by the Headteacher Amanda Rowley to go back to Aldershot – to Wavell School, where it all began. We had a terrific event with award-winning children's author Meg Rosoff, who had launched Reading Force there ten years ago. This time her presentation was relayed to the entire school of 500 young people and hugely appreciated.

## **Funding**

It won't be news to you that right now the climate for fundraising is so hard. So many charities have found it difficult to collect and this has affected their grant-giving capability (on which we and other organisations rely). We have applied for new funding from several sources, including some government options, and remain proactive in search of new opportunities. We've also been fundraising ourselves, with a sponsored [cycle ride](#) from Land's End to John o'Groats (Alison acting as support vehicle and [reporting back on their 16 day challenge](#)).



As ever we strive to keep Reading Force free to all with a Forces connection (serving, reservists veterans, injured and families, including those separated by relationship breakdown or divorce). We know the project continues to meet needs and encourage positive mental health and general wellbeing. Do please continue to support us.

Very best wishes as ever, Alison, Hattie, Elaine, Fiona, Judith and Paula