

Words in Mind

EVALUATION REPORT

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SUMMARY

1. Words in Mind is a three-year Big Lottery funded bibliotherapy project, operating in Kirklees and managed by Third Sector Leaders Kirklees. Bibliotherapy group sessions are delivered by trained volunteers. Groups are mainly delivered with the aim of improving outcomes for people with mental health issues and/or dementia, with some community groups.
2. This report evaluates how this approach is working in practice, using a multi-method qualitative approach to: a. investigate therapeutic benefits of the Words in Mind bibliotherapy groups in Kirklees; b. increase understanding of what makes the Words in Mind groups work well and what could be improved, to inform current practice and future interventions.
3. Data presented are drawn from 21 reflective structured observations of practice and interviews with 15 relevant stakeholders.
4. There was not one model of a Words in Mind group; groups took diverse approaches tailored to the needs of group members.
5. Words in Mind provided immediate and longer-term therapeutic benefits for group participants and volunteers.
6. Immediate benefits variously included opportunities to interact, increased confidence, engagement with literature, reminiscence, engagement with new interests, relaxation, a sense of pride or achievement and opportunity for reflection and self-expression.
7. Longer-term benefits are difficult to determine given the length of this evaluation. However, they again included increased confidence, as well as increased social interaction and reduced isolation, and recognising the contribution of group members.
8. In practice, while the great diversity in approach taken by Words in Mind group facilitators was a strength of the approach, this diversity and flexibility presented some challenges, mostly in promoting Words in Mind to external organisations.

9. Resources used as part of Words in Mind groups varied and group facilitators were responsive to interests of the group members. This approach was a particular strength of Words in Mind.
10. Words in Mind groups often operated in partnership with different organisations and existing groups, including in care homes and organisations providing mental health support. The strength of these relationships was vital to the success of groups.
11. Although there is a Service Level Agreement in place between Words in Mind and partner organisations, staff in a number of organisations where sessions are delivered do not appear clear about basic levels of support or involvement required.
12. On the other hand, there were also examples of external organisational staff becoming very actively involved in groups and supporting Words in Mind volunteers, including providing opportunities to debrief, and using knowledge of group participants to help the group facilitator to prompt greater involvement.
13. The volunteering model was well-organised, well-supported and enabled volunteers to participate flexibly. The support, coordination and resourcing is one of the project's strengths.
14. Points were identified where coordinating the volunteering model presented challenges, for example, in taking up opportunities to follow on from public library outreach work.
15. Volunteers reported different experiences, and acknowledged different facilitation skills were required, in groups for people with dementia or groups for people with mental health difficulties.
16. Sustainability of the Words in Mind approach beyond the funded period was considered. Some opportunities and challenges were identified.
17. Words in Mind should be defined by its ethos, rather than a prescriptive list of its activities. As an approach to bibliotherapy, it is person-centred; often co-produced with group participants; is about making a contribution (in a variety of ways); emphasises social connection; and avoids value judgements of texts and responses to them.

18. Recommendations for Words in Mind and Third Sector Leaders Kirklees are:

- a. Continue to offer Words in Mind groups across a range of settings because the benefits are clear.
- b. Think about how to continue to support volunteers as this is crucial.
- c. Support knowledge development in the bibliotherapy sector by sharing what the project is doing as widely as possible.

19. Recommendations for working with partner organisations are:

- a. Be more explicit about the support partner organisations can provide.
- b. Produce resources that explain the project and potential benefits in language likely to resonate with staff working in care homes.
- c. Exploit partnerships to support the spread of Words in Mind.

INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the findings from a research project examining the Words in Mind bibliotherapy project, which operates in Kirklees in the UK. Written by academics from Lancaster University and Manchester Metropolitan University, it draws on observations, interviews and documents to understand the therapeutic outcomes of Words in Mind in their context, and in practice.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON BIBLIOTHERAPY

Bibliotherapy is the use of books to help people to improve their mental health and well-being.¹ These texts can be informational and/or educational, or imaginative literature, e.g. fiction and poetry, and the approach to bibliotherapy varies depending on the type of text used. Since 2001, many UK public libraries have operated programmes offering self-help type resources to connect readers with information.² Much previous research on bibliotherapy focuses on establishing the effectiveness of these kind of resources on symptoms of diagnosable mental health or physical health problems.

Schemes working with fiction and poetry are becoming increasingly common, though still not delivered at scale across the UK. Often these schemes work with groups of people rather than an individual reader. Despite increasing interest, there has been little in-depth evaluation of the effectiveness of these initiatives. Previous research has established that reading has the potential to be relaxing, transportive and escapist.^{3,4} It can also facilitate an emotional connection between reader and text.^{5,6} In a group setting, the relationship between the group members also has a role to play in establishing therapeutic outcomes.⁷⁻⁹ Increased confidence and social inclusion have also been reported as outcomes.¹⁰

These outcomes, which are reported across different models of delivering bibliotherapy using fiction and poetry, are widely established, but there is still disagreement about how best to deliver bibliotherapy: who the audience should be, what texts and resources should be used and who should facilitate the groups.

WORDS IN MIND: DELIVERING BIBLIOTHERAPY

Third Sector Leaders Kirklees, an organisation which manages a number of volunteer schemes, runs a bibliotherapy scheme using fiction, poetry and other creative resources in Kirklees. This scheme, Words in Mind, has three years of Big Lottery funding (2018-2021) and has been operating for around 18 months at time of writing. Words in Mind builds on a longer history of bibliotherapy in Kirklees delivered by the public library service since 2000.¹¹ Kirklees public library service was innovative in being the only public library service in the UK to employ bibliotherapists with a specific remit to deliver group sessions; in 2016 this role was dissolved and it became part of the librarians' outreach work to deliver bibliotherapy sessions in a six session group model.

Words in Mind evolved from this shared history of bibliotherapy and works alongside the library service to deliver bibliotherapy across the district. The Words in Mind service is delivered by volunteers and sessional workers, who are trained to run reading groups for people with dementia and/or people with mental health problems around Kirklees. At time of writing, groups are run in various locations: NHS care settings including an inpatient rehabilitation unit for people with severe mental health problems; community centres; residential care homes; public libraries; in partnership with organisations that support recovery from mental health problems including as part of the Recovery College; and as part of established groups such as a group for people with young onset dementia.

In April 2019, there were 31 different Words in Mind sessions (being delivered by 28 different volunteers/ group leaders) in different areas of Kirklees with a wide variety of sessions being delivered in a wide range of settings (14 dementia groups and 17 mental health). This number fluctuates as groups start up and others wind down, depending on participant numbers and volunteer availability. By November 2019, there were 25 trained staff and 35 active volunteers running 47 groups (table 1).

Table 1: Bibliotherapy groups run by Words in Mind, November 2019

Type of session	Number
Mental health (community setting)	12
Mental health (ward setting)	3
Dementia (community setting)	4
Dementia (care home setting)	11
General group (community settings, including former carers group, mixed groups)	3
General group (library setting, including social prescription group and community cohesion group)	14
TOTAL	47

Volunteers and sessional workers are trained by one of the former bibliotherapists, who delivers introductory training, as well as training accredited to level one of the UK qualifications framework. The project manager also provides training and support to volunteers. This means that the Words in Mind approach is allied to, and draws on, the previous approach to bibliotherapy in Kirklees. Unlike other approaches to bibliotherapy, which emerged from an English literature/ education ethos, or from a healthcare setting, Words in Mind takes a more open and diverse approach to the question: what is bibliotherapy?

RESEARCH AIMS

This evaluation report reviews how this approach is working in practice. It explores how Words in Mind is working in Kirklees to improve mental health and wellbeing in its groups. The project used a multi-method qualitative approach to:

- Investigate therapeutic benefits of the Words in Mind bibliotherapy groups in Kirklees
- Increase understanding of what makes the Words in Mind groups work well and what could be improved, which will inform current practice and future interventions.

METHODOLOGY

A multi-method qualitative approach was chosen to consider the impact of Words in Mind, which is difficult to quantify, but visible via qualitative research methods. The main methods of data collection were reflective observations of the groups, and interviews with relevant stakeholders. Alongside this, we also collected relevant materials - brief email reflections, examples of promotional materials for different groups, session plans, lists of materials, plus writing produced within groups/ by group members and shared with permission. To facilitate our understanding, we also attended some group sessions with permission, though these were not a formal method of data collection.

REFLECTIVE OBSERVATIONS BY CO-RESEARCHERS

Following an initial meeting with the Words in Mind project coordinator, we designed an evaluation which engaged volunteers and sessional workers as co-researchers. Co-researchers were asked to use an observation template (see appendix 1) to structure reflections on their views and experiences of Words in Mind. Between June 2019 and September 2019, seven volunteers completed twenty-one structured observations of their practice. These observations were conducted as soon as possible after the sessions, giving a detailed account, including outcomes for participants and practical challenges of delivering the sessions.

Throughout this process, we worked with the co-researchers to reflect on the running of Words in Mind groups, and the evaluation process, in a series of workshops. In the first workshop, we identified appropriate methods for evaluation; in the second we had a mid-point 'check-in'; in the third, we presented some remaining questions to co-researchers and identified some preliminary themes in the data. This was to allow us to 'sense-check' our preliminary analysis and to clarify whether identified themes resonated with co-researchers.

INTERVIEWS

We interviewed 15 stakeholders, including staff from Third Sector Leaders, sessional workers and volunteers, residential care home activity coordinators, public library staff, community centre managers and mental health organisation support workers. Around half of these interviews took place face-to-face, with seven conducted over the

telephone. Interviews lasted 15-45 minutes, with most averaging around 30 minutes and all interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed. One limitation of the research was that due to the practical limitations of the research project, we did not interview group participants.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical approval for the research was granted by Lancaster University Faculty of Health and Medicine Research Ethics Committee. Data were managed in line with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). All participants gave informed consent to be interviewed. Co-researchers participated in a short training session, in which we discussed and agreed the principles of ethical research. Structured observations of their practice were anonymised and no identifiable information was collected about group members. Information about the research was provided to groups where a facilitator was conducting observations, to give them the opportunity to opt out of having any information at all recorded about them.

DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis was conducted using a data-driven constant comparison approach to foreground experience.¹² Data were managed using NVivo 12 software. The sources of data were analysed separately, then brought together to identify commonalities and differences, using themes developed from the data and concepts from the literature as a sensitising framework.¹³ This allowed us to draw conclusions about current practice in Words in Mind groups that will be transferrable to other settings and can help to shape the future delivery of the service.

FINDINGS

Our findings reinforce outcomes from the academic literature and previous evaluation reports on bibliotherapy, noting therapeutic outcomes that are similar to other bibliotherapy initiatives. We found some evidence of immediate therapeutic benefits, but also some longer-term outcomes. Aligned with our aim of increasing understanding of what makes Words in Mind groups work well, and what could be improved, we have focused on the context and practice of the intervention, considering the volunteering model, and understanding different impacts for different audiences.

DEFINING A WORDS IN MIND GROUP

Throughout our evaluation, we encountered multiple versions of a Words in Mind group. Fundamentally, the direction of a Words in Mind group was shaped by the group members, guided by the group facilitator, and was tailored to their needs and interests. This tailoring made it a diverse and versatile intervention, but ultimately made it difficult to firmly pin down what a Words in Mind group might, or should, look like. Diversity was particularly clear when examining materials designed to promote the different groups (appendix 2).

The publicity materials variously emphasised different aspects of the groups: from engagement with poetry, stories, and ‘wondrous’ ideas, through social reading, sharing, chatting and community, to well-being and reminiscence. The variety of group sessions can be seen as a strength of Words in Mind, in that it allows facilitators to meet particular needs and be responsive to the group. As an interviewee explained:

“We don’t like to be prescriptive, because what works for one person might not work for another, and it’s dangerous to start making assumptions that if you’re working with people who have depression, well, this will work well with them, because they’re not a lump of depressed people, they’re individuals, who are experiencing their depression in different ways. So I think it’s very dangerous to sort of be prescriptive like that.” (interview, 10)

Indeed, there was an awareness that even within one group, the experience could vary week by week depending on the mood of those attending.

“Some weeks, people really want to read Wordsworth and go deep into what it’s all about, and other times, people really don’t, and they just kind of want to really

talk about the old jingles that used to be on the radio 20 years ago!” (interview, 05)

Responding to group participants' interests and requirements meant that some groups focused on a model of sharing reading aloud, while others relied on the facilitator to read poems and prose aloud. In some groups there was a lot of time given over to sharing of experiences in relation to the resources, while others focused more on the content of the resources shared and left less time for reflection. There was scope to engage with images, sensory resources (things to smell or touch), and reviewing song lyrics (and singing or listening to the song) alongside more traditional poems and short stories. In some groups, there was a mixture of reading and writing, with participants sharing their own creative writing as well as engaging with resources brought by the group facilitator. In some, this was a strong feature of the group, whereas in other cases it happened on a more occasional basis. This led to a feeling that there was a clear sense of 'ownership' for some of the groups; the group belonged to them and could be shaped by their needs.

WORDS IN MIND: THERAPEUTIC OUTCOMES

As part of the reflection templates, facilitators were asked to reflect on the social, creative/cultural and health/wellbeing benefits of each session. They were asked to record positive effects (table 2) as well as challenges (summarised elsewhere in this report).

Table 2: Outcomes observed in bibliotherapy group sessions

Outcome	Number of reflective observations recorded (n=21)
Social outcomes	
Contribute to discussions	9
Respect/support for others and other opinions	8
Relaxed/comfortable atmosphere	6
Confidence building	6
Increased social contact	4
Continued conversations/friendships after the session	3
Creative/cultural outcomes	
Discussing cultural/creative issues (e.g. authors' lives, local history)	8
Opportunities for group members to share texts with others	7
Producing own creative writing and gaining encouragement	6
Appreciation of different genres	3
Joining in with readings	2
Spending time outside sessions engaging with texts to bring to the group	2
Health/wellbeing outcomes	
Relaxation/soothing/stress release/escape from day-to-day concerns	9
Reminiscence opportunities	3
Uplifting	3
Prompting discussion of wellbeing issues	3
Motor skills (e.g. accompanying poetry reading)	1

IMMEDIATE BENEFITS

Interviewees expanded on the themes identified via the session observations. One of the most obvious social benefits was increased opportunities to interact with other people, especially for participants who may lack opportunities to do so at other times of the week. The sessions provide a safe space for people where they appear to feel relaxed, comfortable and respected. An interviewee described the session as a place where *“you’re treated as a human being with value and that you’re cared about, and that whatever you’re feeling are important and worth sharing with people”* (interview, 05). Participants in many of the groups had become friends and supported each other in numerous ways.

Another important benefit of Words in Mind for many participants was increased confidence, for example, confidence to read aloud, especially for people with health conditions that might mean this was challenging. For participants with dementia, simply being aware and making eye contact during the session could be an important outcome. In groups where participants shared their own writing, this was seen as a beneficial outcome for many, who grew in confidence as they felt more able to share short pieces of writing and express their thoughts in a format they previously might not have engaged with.

Facilitators reported increased interest in and engagement with literature, and culture more generally, amongst participants who, for example, might select texts to bring along to sessions. In some groups, participants also write their own poetry or creative writing to share within the group. A facilitator commented that there was evidence that participants: *“think about the topic outside of the group and put some time aside each week in order to prepare for the session”* (Reflective Observation, 2019-08-05). For many participants, it was the first time they had engaged with literature since school.

The benefits were not limited to group members who had previously engaged with reading and literature; one repeated comment from people who worked alongside the groups was that they had an appeal that transcended expectations. A support worker who worked alongside Words in Mind commented: *“You’d be surprised how people enjoy it. I’m surprised myself, for the people who go to it, because I wouldn’t have expected them to enjoy it.”* (interview, 09)

Amongst people living with dementia, some of the texts, especially poems, might bring a sense of recognition and stimulate memories, for example, remembering poems they had read at school. An interviewee described a situation they had experienced:

“...so I was reading [I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud] and then they just joined in, and I were quite amazed that, from being a group that seemed quite... not too interactive, if you like, they just seemed to come alive, and they were saying the words, and they knew all the words, all the way through, and I were just taken aback by it, and then, from speaking to them, they were the poems that they’d learnt at school.” (interview, 04)

It was not simply about making connections with the past; in the dementia groups, the main outcomes for participants were usually described in terms of conversation and promoting social interaction through connections made with the various texts. Words in Mind is exploring ways to move the focus away from reminiscence (which can bring its own stresses for those with memory problems). A care home activity co-ordinator who was interviewed emphasised the opportunity to learn something new:

“And they’ve got an interest in learning new things: just because they’re of an age, they don’t need to just sit in a chair; they’re all up for learning new things.” (interview, 06)

A sense of calm and relaxation was an important therapeutic benefit of the Words in Mind group for many participants. The session was a *“chance to switch off from their problems and become someone else for an hour; you forget what’s going on”* (interview, 01). Another interviewee compared the sessions to meditation, when after an hour *“absorbed by what’s going on in the group”* (interview, 04), the texts or the conversation, participants left refreshed.

Another benefit was a sense of pride that participants might feel, for example, through sharing their knowledge in a quiz or through other group members showing appreciation for something they said or wrote.

When asked about the differences between Words in Mind and other creative activities, several interviewees highlighted the potential the sessions offered for more in depth conversations; through literature, participants were able to reflect on their own lives in different ways. As one explained, *“...when we talk about the lyrics to a song or the words to a poem, people can kind of share how they’re feeling and why it was important”* and through this, develop a *“connection to other people in a way that goes a bit deeper than just a general chat”* (interview, 14). Participants might identify with a character or an emotion, but they might also find ways to express themselves through literature; as an interviewee explained, *“it’s almost like people have got those words for you when you couldn’t find them”* (interview, 01). Another interviewee pointed out that literature could offer participants a means of talking about how they were feeling, but with a degree of distance:

“They may be more inclined to talk about an issue, maybe that a character’s going through in a book or in a story, or a feeling that’s expressed in a poem, that they can talk about that almost in the third person in an abstract way, and then it’s hoping that that connects with something that they feel, and that they start to feel better or have a greater understanding, maybe, of something that they’re going through.” (interview, 12)

LONGER TERM BENEFITS

In addition to immediate outcomes, there were also numerous examples of longer-term impacts of involvement in Words in Mind. Again, increasing confidence was an important theme. For example, one interviewee had witnessed participants performing in front of a larger, unfamiliar audience. As they commented, *“I’m not sure if they particularly would have done that at the beginning, before they came to Words in Mind”* (interview, 15). In another case, a participant had been given an award by her employer because she had grown in confidence and was more comfortable to speak at meetings as a result of attending Words in Mind sessions.

Facilitators often encouraged participants to continue activities from the sessions afterwards, for example, by giving them copies of poems to take away; creative writing or journaling prompts; or information about other local services such as writing groups and libraries.

Within the dementia groups too, there could be longer-term impacts as participants appeared to recall the emotion of a session, if not specific details, for example, by remaining less agitated afterwards or being pleased to see the facilitator again.

“I think a chance to share, really: I think that’s what makes a difference. Because when we talk about the lyrics to a song or the words to a poem, people can kind of share how they’re feeling and why it was important. We read an article about ice-cream men, that ice-cream men are disappearing, or something, and so people could talk about their childhood experiences of going and getting ice cream from the ice-cream man in a way that was quite connecting. So I think sort of the connection to other people in a way that goes a bit deeper than just a general chat, you know?” (interview, 14)

Another longer-term benefit, which was seen especially in groups in a mental health setting, but also in some of the open/ general groups, centred on the relationship between reading and writing. At points, people described the groups as a nice way to

pass the time, or a source of relaxation: an immediate benefit. Relaxation was still seen as making an important impact on those who participated in the groups, particularly in areas of socio-economic deprivation or in care homes where few relaxing activities took place, but the longer-term impact of Words in Mind was seen to go further. The idea of being able to make a contribution and relate to literature and each other was also important.

“So I think that there’s that real need that there’s a different offer there for people, but also, I think there’s something about poetry and stories and words that make connections; I think people get a lot of out painting glass and feel very proud of what they’ve done, but they don’t make those connections with people in the group in the same way as people sharing the experience of “That really said something to me,” or “This is what it means to me”. So, I think it can take people much further than just being a pleasurable way of passing an hour, really.”
(interview, 11)

In discussion of Words in Mind groups, reading and writing were seen as creative and imaginative acts but they were often placed in contrast to other creative activities, which were seen as more individual. For example, in one community location which had many creative activities on offer, the Words in Mind group facilitated longer-term social connections as well as engagement with resources.

“But for people to come together and do the group thing, and share experiences as well, and what I can see, as well, is it’s people who don’t necessarily sit together and chat: you’ve got different people who are sitting together and chatting, so they’re getting these little friendships which you wouldn’t necessarily see, because they don’t really sit together.” (interview, 09)

This social connection was seen as something that extended beyond the immediate reach of the groups.

WORDS IN MIND: CONTEXT AND PRACTICE

Our research aimed to increase understanding of what makes the Words in Mind groups work well and what could be improved, to inform current practice and consider future directions for the service. This led to considerations of intervention identity, resources, organisational staff involvement, the volunteering model, and specific challenges in the dementia setting and the mental health setting.

WORDS IN MIND: INTERVENTION IDENTITY

As discussed above (Defining a Words in Mind group), there was great diversity in the approaches taken by Words in Mind group facilitators. This responsiveness to group members' needs was a strength of the approach. However, this diversity and flexibility also presented some challenges, mostly at a more organisational level. For example, explaining to different organisations what to expect from a Words in Mind group, what the benefits are and how a group may be implemented in their setting may be more difficult if there is not one single Words in Mind approach. Similarly, in recruiting participants to groups, it may be harder to explain or 'sell' the benefits of joining a session. Defining expectations could also present a challenge; some volunteers spoke of new group participants expecting something more akin to a traditional book group, while others discussed how the overlap with creative writing groups meant that sometimes participants wanted to focus on their own work rather than engaging with some of the resources shared by the group facilitator.

However, the diversity and flexibility of the Words in Mind model meant that it could be adapted to fit in with existing group needs and settings. For example, one group that met at a community centre had other activities throughout the day, supplemented by a Words in Mind session. Another group, which met weekly, had a Words in Mind session once a month as part of their regular meeting. Fitting into existing group settings worked well, with a ready-made group already cohering and regularly attending. Attending a pre-established group sometimes meant group facilitators could get to know group members via other channels such as link workers or care home activity coordinators.

Discussion of where Words in Mind groups were working less well often centred around the initial set up phase, trying to establish regular group membership and build a core of participants. There was a sense that it took time to get to know new groups and establish likes and dislikes. Trying to overcome this barrier to establishing new groups had led to some innovative approaches, such as combining Words in Mind with other

services (e.g. IT support). There was a feeling that this made the groups more viable, as it provided another incentive to attend.

Group size also differed, with reflective observations variously recording between one and 15 participants in a session. When asked about the ideal size for a group, group facilitators suggested that a group with between 6-8 members gave everyone time to talk and enabled them to feel comfortable sharing as the group was not too large. A larger group (10-12) sometimes made it harder for people to have the opportunity to contribute to the discussion. Bigger groups (12-15) could also work, but tended to be less interactive or to split into several separate smaller discussions. Facilitators noted that a group could work with one or two people, and often gave a different quality or focus to the discussion.

Despite this diversity, those involved in Words in Mind were able to clearly define what makes Words in Mind different from other activities. This centred on the use of words to drive the discussion, and how this facilitated an emotional connection between the resources used, the people in the group, and people's experiences.

"It's a chance to express, and it's a chance to listen to words that have already been thought through and crafted. I mean, poetry can just sum up – in a poem – how you might be feeling, whereas you're not going to get that from a craft group, are you? You're not going to get, or a chance to write down how you feel and put it in a poem. And I just think just the words just really uplift, it can be very uplifting for some people, and they think, "Oh, yeah, that's how I feel"." (interview, 01)

Overall, the diversity of Words in Mind can be seen as part of its appeal; by tailoring the group to its members' needs, there was the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution. Nevertheless, the challenges this presented in terms of defining the approach have also led to challenges in terms of its potential to spread across the region.

RESOURCES

One of the key aspects of Words in Mind that separates it from other activities are the resources used. The range of resources, both in terms of type and format reinforced the flexibility of the approach. Facilitators clearly put a great deal of time and effort into the section of resources for their sessions. Most Words in Mind sessions make use of a wide variety of texts and resources. These vary from session to session of course, but commonly include 'classic' or well-known books and poems; less widely known texts;

'popular' texts (e.g. funny poems); lyrics; quotes; images; newspaper/magazine articles; local history resources; short stories/ quick reads; and (auto)biographies. Facilitators did not place value judgements on the resources; it was more about encouraging engagement.

“And there are no right answers to what is good or what everybody should like, and it isn't high culture – although if something's good, then that's fine, people enjoy it – but reading a page of Mills & Boon – which I have done! – if it's going to get the group talking and engaging and disagreeing, then that is important.”
(interview, 03)

Furthermore, as a facilitator commented, the fact that a text had not worked well with a particular group did not necessarily mean it would not be appreciated by another group:

“Texts work differently with different groups. It's tempting to go home and think, “They didn't like that poem; I won't read it again”. But then it might be loved by a different group.” (Reflective observation, 2019-08-29)

Another facilitator emphasised that it was not just down to the text as to how well it was received by a group, it was also in the way it was presented by a facilitator. Texts could read or performed, and the facilitator could encouraged the group to engage with them: *“So I can't think of a type of book which doesn't work; I think it's how well the thing is written and how well I read it.”* (interview, 03)

Many facilitators bring printed copies of some of the texts they intended to read for participants to follow along and take away if they wish. Sessions in care homes, in particular, typically include a range of media, such as images, objects/ props, large print/ picture books and reminiscence resources. As these groups bed in, facilitators are finding out more about what works in terms of both type and amount of material - balancing the need to provide stimulus without being overwhelming and ensuring objects are suitable for the group. Facilitators also try to provide a range of resources, for example, reflecting different cultures and genders. In addition, the resources selected for sessions vary in length and complexity. Some facilitators have a fall back resource, such as a poetry anthology, which they can use if they need additional material, or if the session goes slightly off track.

Whilst other programmes have run bibliotherapy sessions specifically for people with dementia, Words in Mind has focused on the use of different media and types of resource within these sessions. This makes it markedly different from models such as Shared Reading, for example, which places strong emphasis on the importance of written texts, only recommending visual imagery and song to “help those who cannot

follow the reading material.”¹⁴ A Words in Mind interviewee described the care home sessions as being “*more hands-on*” (interview, 01) in comparison to community-based or mental health groups. This might mean that the session included games and singing for example, or simple activities like the creation of a ‘memory jar.’ Facilitators also make use of objects, particularly those that might stimulate a range of senses, for example, flowers to smell, pebbles to touch or fruit to taste. An interviewee explained, “*By using different senses, it helps them to engage with the whole experience and to engage with the words, so they’re not just hearing them or seeing them on the page*” (interview, 07).

The pace of the session, and the number of resources used, can vary considerably from session to session, and is difficult to predict. As facilitators pointed out, you always needed to take a lot of material, even if, in practice, you only used one poem. Judging when to step in and move the session on, and when to step back and allow people more time to reflect on a text is a key skill for facilitators.

The value of sharing resources was mentioned by several facilitators; as one commented, “*it would be lovely if we had a resource bank*” (interview, 01) to save time curating resources for different themes and groups. These resources would still need to be ‘customised’ or adapted by individuals to suit the way in which they facilitate sessions. As another facilitator said, “*I wouldn’t want us all going out with the same packs*” (interview, 02).

Importantly, resources are not only provided by the facilitator, but for often by group members too. Reflecting on a session with a mental health support group, a facilitator commented:

“I think all members brought something to the session - from quotes from Sci-fi books and films, to books they are reading at the moment to quizzes. [The co-facilitator] and I took a step back and it feels like it is their group. They have gelled together so well. We have a group of core members who return each week and bring things to read – that’s great!” (Reflective observation, 2019-08-29)

Most sessions have a theme, often chosen by the group themselves. These vary widely including, for example, animals, musicals, books, gardening, sci-fi, happiness, the sea and dance. Furthermore, themes are regarded as starting point and often interpreted quite widely. As one facilitator commented:

“I don’t think the subject’s as important: I think it’s just like a catalyst to get the conversations going, sort of thing, and then they go off on their own from that.” (interview, 04)

Reflective observations show that groups often include more general discussions too, for example, books group members are currently reading. For facilitators, having a theme is seen as helpful as a way of bringing the discussion back on track if it goes off course, or became too intense. However, on other occasions “*you just have to abandon the theme*” (interview, 01) and respond to the mood of the group instead. Some care is needed when selecting themes; experienced facilitators reported negative experiences with themes such as war, but were also aware that it was impossible to know for certain whether a particular theme or resources might trigger upsetting memories or reactions for individuals.

Some sessions also include other activities, for example, quizzes. Although these are more common in the dementia or care home groups, they also take place in the mental health and community groups where, for example, group members might write their own quizzes. As a facilitator pointed out, deciding whether or not to include an activity such as a quiz required a good knowledge of the group:

“Quizzes – love ‘em or hate ‘em. They are a bit like marmite. I have learned it is about knowing your group. I have tried quizzes at my Words in Mind sessions in care homes and have usually given up after a few questions [...] My library group enjoy quizzes about general knowledge but wouldn’t want one every week. So I think it’s about knowing your group, encouraging people to write quizzes if they want to and recognises when a quiz is not working and just move on.” (Reflective observation, 2019-08-29)

ORGANISATIONAL STAFF INVOLVEMENT

As an interviewee pointed out, “*words and reading are a very universal thing*” (interview, 08) and “*everyone loves a story*” (interview, 11), giving Words in Mind potentially a broad appeal to diverse audiences. However, the term ‘bibliotherapy’ is not widely recognised, and as Words in Mind is inherently flexible (as explained above), staff in partner organisations often may not have a shared understanding of what a Words in Mind session is likely to involve.

Engaging staff in care homes has been particularly challenging. Where there is a dedicated Activity Co-ordinator who understands and supports the project, it has been much easier, but not all care homes have someone in this role. The care homes where Words in Mind might perhaps make the greatest impact often lack a member of staff who can offer the support required to ensure the success of sessions. This presented a

challenge for the volunteering model if staff and residents did not seem to appreciate the effort required to run a group. An interviewee who was supporting a volunteer placed in a care home setting commented:

“The volunteer’s not getting any feedback or anything, so she actually phoned up and said, “Can I just put it on hold?” but I knew she’d lost interest, because she wasn’t getting anything. You just need that support of the organisation.” (interview, 13)

Although there is a Service Level Agreement in place between Words in Mind and partner organisations, staff in a number of organisations where sessions are delivered do not appear clear about basic levels of support or involvement required. For example, one facilitator reported:

“Care homes can be hard. You sometimes don’t get much support. You can go in to run a group and you’ll see the staff go, “Right, someone’s here, we can go,” so it’s almost getting across that we’re not staff, and you should be here, really. If not here, sit at the back and do some written work, but you should be here, for health and safety and safeguarding, anyway.” (interview, 02)

Furthermore, there is evidence of poor communication on a number of occasions, for example, participants going on a trip on the day of a session and the facilitator not being informed. On occasions, the absence of staff support has presented potential health and safety or safeguarding issues where Words in Mind facilitators were able to enter particular settings and run a session without organisational staff even being aware they were there. In addition, there are frequent reports of disruption to the sessions, for example, staff chatting or serving tea in the middle of a session. Care home staff appear to be supportive of Words in Mind and enthusiastic about the overall benefits of participating for their residents, but are not always aware of the practicalities of a session. This is unsurprising as bibliotherapy is not likely to be a term they are familiar with, so it will take time to develop greater understanding around knowing what to expect; how they can best support a session; and how to encourage residents to attend.

One of the facilitators described how she changed the language used to describe the sessions to help care home staff better understand what was involved.

“Sometimes I change it a little bit: I might call it Memory Lane, I just tweak – just because, even for the care staff or the home to get their head round what it is, you know.” (interview, 02)

This approach met with some success, with the same facilitator producing packs for care home staff to use so groups could be continued.

“I did one at [care home X] and the staff really got involved there and the activity coordinator, everyone joined in, and I left quite a lot of resources there, copied resources, so that they could carry on the groups without us being there, because they saw the benefit.” (interview, 02)

Within the health sector too, it could be difficult for staff to understand what Words in Mind has to offer, especially if this type of non-medical support was not normally part of their job. One interviewee suggested *“making it a bit more real for staff”* (interview, 08) through directly involving them in bibliotherapy groups: *“I think when people don’t see directly themselves the benefits of things, sometimes they just don’t necessarily get it really.”* (interview, 08)

Another issue was that staff might not be aware of the need to provide Words in Mind facilitators with basic information about participants that could have an impact on their participation in the sessions. For example, one interviewee mentioned a participant who she initially thought was simply quiet, but in fact did not speak English. As the facilitator commented, had she known this she would be organised sessions differently. Another interviewee commented that it would have been useful to have general information about participants’ interests prior to the sessions.

“I would have liked to maybe known a bit more...about the individuals and a little bit about their background because that can make a difference as well if you know something about what their background and their interests are, then that can help you...pick the themes; it can help you to...draw them in...if you know someone’s got a garden, you know that you can...you can draw on that and you can give prompts a little bit.” (interview, 07)

To try to improve understanding of bibliotherapy within partner organisations, Words in Mind offers training to staff. While it could be difficult to persuade staff, especially from care homes, to attend, for those who had attended, *“it changes the whole process of supporting the volunteer...put value on it”* (interview, 13). This could lead to more active involvement in sessions from organisational staff. There are also many examples of more informal discussions with organisational staff to explain what Words in Mind could offer their users; as an interviewee explained, *“it’s spending time with people to actually explain what it is”* (interview, 13).

Words in Mind facilitators interviewed felt that, in some cases, organisational staff might underestimate, or make assumptions about, the likelihood of individuals being interested, or able to participate, in the group.

“Sometimes staff will identify people who they think, “Oh, they’re not going to be interested, they’re not going to be interested in that,” and I’m like, “But why? On what basis have you made that decision about that person, because actually you don’t really know what we’re going to do in the session today.”” (interview, 05)

However, in organisations where staff had a better understanding of the benefits of Words in Mind, this appeared less likely to be the case. For example, one interviewee explained how he adapted the way in which he talked about the project to encourage those who might initially be less interested.

“Me personally, I offer it to everyone. If someone says that they’re not into it, I’d kind of be like, “Oh, you know, come along, give it a try!” If they’re not necessarily into poetry and stories, I kind of say, “Well, it’s about having conversations and opening up those conversations and being able to reflect on different things: it’s not necessarily just about the poetry.” (interview, 15)

Differences in approach or ethos between Words in Mind and partner organisations was another potential issue. For instance, as an interviewee pointed out, it could be challenging if *“you’re delivering on a ward and you’ve got to sort of...abide by their rules”* (interview, 10), including whether particular patients were allowed to take part in a Words in Mind session.

In some groups, although someone from the organisation does attend to support, *“we never seem to see the same person”* (interview, 01). This can mean that the support provided can vary considerably: some *“really make a difference”* (interview, 01), but others might be much less actively involved.

Another issue around collaborating with established organisations with their own models of working was that this meant that for some group members, there was a lack of continuity in their engagement with Words in Mind. For example, some groups ran in settings (e.g. secure mental health settings or six-week Recovery College models) that meant that group members could not continue to access the benefits after they had left this setting. In some cases, there was the potential to join another community- or organisation-based group, but this relied on there being an accessible/ local group, and sometimes relied on appropriate follow up by the community mental health team, which was varied.

Although there were challenges in working with partner organisations, there were many examples of positive support which contributed to the smooth-running and positive impacts of the sessions. The following are some examples of good organisational support.

- In some organisations, staff or volunteers supporting the Words in Mind group have become very actively involved, for example, bringing in texts to read as part of the session.
- In one organisation which supported people with mental health difficulties, there was a structure which supported Words in Mind volunteers: the team had a debrief with organisational staff after each session to discuss how individuals and the group as a whole responded, what worked well, and to share strategies for handling tricky situations.
- A member of staff from a care home joined in with the group and used her knowledge of the group members (e.g. their hobbies and earlier lives) to prompt greater involvement.
- Ward staff do a pre-brief and de-brief to give facilitators an overview of the mood of the ward and updates on anything which might affect the session.

VOLUNTEERING MODEL

As outlined in the introduction, Words in Mind is a supported volunteering organisation. Volunteers ranged in age and background, from university students to retired people. Many spoke about being interested in reading or in English literature, or having previous experience in the education sector. Sometimes volunteers had lived experience of mental health issues or of being a carer for someone with dementia, which had motivated them to get involved. In some cases, volunteers had been members of Words in Mind groups before deciding to train as a group facilitator.

For example, one interviewee drew on their own previous experiences to explore why they could see the value in volunteering for Words in Mind.

“I found reading quite powerful and I remember in my own experience of mental ill-health there being years when I wasn’t able to read, and at the time, I think if there’d been a project like Words in Mind, I could have still participated in reading, whereas I think those years when I was too sedated with medications to

be able to take in a paragraph, at the time felt like, "I might never read again."
(interview, 05)

There was a feeling that having some interest in reading and an awareness of mental health or dementia were important aspects of being a Words in Mind volunteer. Others suggested specific qualities that helped a Words in Mind volunteer to deliver a successful session.

"Someone who's open, non-judgemental, obviously, flexible. Depending on where you're delivering, if you're delivering in clinical settings, you need to be able to think fast on your feet, because what you've planned, sometimes in two seconds of sitting down you know that's not going to work today, so you need to do something else." (interview, 10)

Group facilitators took various roles in the group, depending on what they felt was needed by the group. Some groups seemed to be more self-sufficient, bringing their own writing, sourcing their own resources and choosing their own themes. Others required more input and structure, with the facilitator preparing quite a significant amount of material on the theme. Discussion with group facilitators allowed for reflection on what was needed: sometimes to start or shape a conversation on a particular topic, other times to be a 'performer', engaging the group with the words of a poem or song. Facilitating in a care home often seemed to be more of a performing role, while a more conversational style was taken in many of the mental health settings.

One suggestion was that running a Words in Mind group was a form of 'facilitated coproduction.' The opportunity for coproduction varied depending on the group. For example, one support worker at a mental health service gave spoke about how a group facilitator took their suggestion of having a theme of 'endings' (when a group member was going to move on from the service) and framed it as a theme of 'new beginnings'. This guiding from a potentially negative theme to a more positive one was seen as a welcome interpretation of ideas. It was acknowledged that there was a need to co-produce differently with different groups and more traditional models of coproduction may not be appropriate for all groups. For example, with groups for people living with dementia, asking an open question: 'what do you want to do next time?', unsurprisingly did not receive any response.

Altruism, or the desire to help people was often a key part of the motivation for volunteering. There was a feeling that working with the group was the key factor, rather than doing things for, or to, participants. One interviewee commented that: *"You're not 'doing good' to people, you're sharing something which is really interesting and enjoyable."* (interview, 03)

An important aspect of the volunteering model was the support given by the project co-ordinator to the volunteers. This work was sometimes less visible, but incredibly valuable in ensuring the sustainability of the model.

“Some volunteers are OK if the organisation where they’re going into supports them. I can maybe give them a little bit less support. When I first took on this job and I thought, “Care homes, you’ve got a captive audience, how hard can that be? I’ll get a volunteer, off they go,” but actually they’ve turned out to be the hardest to recruit and keep volunteers for, because, I think, the lack of staff within care homes, the lack of well-paid staff as professionals. Not many of the staff seem to value what the volunteers are doing.” (interview, 13)

The support, coordination and resourcing of the project was one of its strengths. Volunteers spoke of how they appreciated the approach taken. For new volunteers, a mentoring model was used, where they were paired with the project co-ordinator, a paid sessional worker or an experienced volunteer while they gained experience and confidence. This increased the sustainability of the volunteering model, as people were able to pass on ideas and share resources.

Nevertheless, there is an inevitable drop-out rate in volunteering, which needs to be managed. Words in Mind has a relatively low drop-out rate compared to some volunteering interventions, with a retention level of around 75% (i.e. 25% drop out). However, this turnover of volunteers – with accompanying training costs and loss of expertise and experience – is higher than would be expected in a setting with paid staff.

Importantly, the Words in Mind project is able to adapt to support volunteers who may be experiencing mental health difficulties and there is a recognition that, at points, they might need additional support to participate. For example, an interviewee described how they had been unable to make the initial training sessions because they had been unwell, but this was not perceived as a lack of commitment and the project co-ordinator made arrangements for them to attend another session at a later date. This also involved some flexibility about volunteers stepping in and out of the project as they needed to take time out to maintain their own mental health, and ensuring that there was time to debrief following sessions.

Points were identified where coordinating the volunteering model presented challenges. For example, in Kirklees, the public library service were still providing short-term bibliotherapy engagement across different organisations as part of their outreach work. This six-session model establishes organisational contacts and interest in bibliotherapy for different communities, and initial plans for Words in Mind aimed to harness this outreach work, bringing in a volunteer to run a group in the same location on a longer

term basis. In practice, however, coordinating this proved more challenging than anticipated, as it was difficult to match up volunteers with enough experience to take over to the right groups at the right time.

VOLUNTEERING IN DEMENTIA GROUPS

Whilst many of the evaluation findings applied across the range of organisations involved in Words in Mind, others are specific to a particular setting. For a number of volunteers, working with dementia groups was more challenging than mental health groups. Many volunteers had personal experience of the latter and felt reasonably familiar with the way in which they worked. As one volunteer commented, *“It’s been a steep learning curve for the ones in care homes for me, because I feel more at home with the mental health”* (interview, 01).

Others were more familiar with the environment, but still perceived a marked difference between the care home and mental health groups. There was a feeling amongst some volunteers that participants in the mental health groups *“seem to bring more to the session”*, for example, bringing their own writing or taking turns to read, whereas in care homes, *“they’re very happy to listen”* (interview, 01). As another facilitator described, in a care home *“it’s almost like you’re performing”* (interview, 02). At times, this could be difficult as it might appear that participants were not listening, but several interviewees spoke about how they had been surprised by participants’ unexpected responses:

“You’ve mentioned something and a lady’s just put her head up and told you the whole poem because they memorised it at school. And those days are fab and they happen quite a lot.” (interview, 02)

This facilitator also described how her own reactions to someone sleeping during a session had changed and she had come to view this as a positive response: *“people will always nod off, because it’s relaxing...quite a compliment”* (interview, 02).

Several facilitators reflected on the skills needed to work with a group with participants with dementia. For example, different presentations of dementia required different approaches; sometimes if group members were agitated or aggressive, they required closer support to be able to participate.

A member of staff from a care home explained how ‘involvement’ might look different for these groups compared to those within a community or healthcare setting:

“I don’t really need to ask them if they enjoyed it, because I know, because if they hadn’t, they would have got up and left....nobody’s fallen asleep, they’ve been aware, they’ve made eye contact, and it’s a definite good sign” (interview, 06).

Furthermore, participants in the care home groups may also bring their own contributions to the session a little differently than might be the case in other groups, for example, by spontaneously singing or reciting (rather than preparing something to bring along in advance). There was also, as a facilitator acknowledged, a difference between the texts chosen: those for the mental health groups tended to be “*more edgy*”, whereas the care home group “*tend to like sunny and lighter things*” (interview, 01). Another interviewee also commented on the differences between texts chosen for care home groups, but stressed:

“I don’t think we should underestimate them because they’ve got dementia and think it’s got to be simplistic, but...having a short extract or something familiar or a poem, it just makes it a bit more manageable” (interview, 07).

VOLUNTEERING IN MENTAL HEALTH GROUPS

The groups operating in various types of mental health settings presented some different issues. For these groups, getting the balance right (particularly not allowing the conversation to get ‘too dark’) was a key issue. However, interviewees acknowledged that the groups needed to offer a space for people to discuss difficult experiences.

“There’s something about that kind of experience as being more universal than you would think they were, and poetry kind of giving people a chance to say, “Oh, no, actually, me, too, that happened to me”. So I think it gives people room to talk about kind of difficult experiences.” (interview, 05)

Within mental health settings, it was generally easier to adopt a more co-produced or participant-led approach, where the facilitator acted as a group member, rather than a group leader. For a number of these groups, there is a strong focus on participants bringing their own contributions and their own writing.

Volunteers with lived experience of mental health issues were able to offer a greater insight into the needs of participants and the health care systems they are working in. Volunteers were keen to point out that there were a number of benefits to participating: being able to recognise the impact of books and reading in their own recovery, and to

appreciate the effect of the groups on other people were both mentioned as important motivations for continued participation.

“I knew that books had done so much for me, reading. I suffer from depression, and I know that reading really, really has helped me. Just listening to other people’s words and experiences, and taking a break from feeling rubbish sometimes, yeah, and uplifting, reading uplifting books, and I just thought it was a way to help other people. I really see, I really get it.” (interview, 01)

There was a feeling of equality and positive contribution within some groups, which again added to the benefits of volunteering for people to work with people with lived experience of mental health issues.

“You’re just one of the people who’s facilitating: you’re just one of the members of the group, and I think you can bring things along and you can share things that people haven’t heard before and they can evaluate, you can listen to what people have got to offer and learn so much as well. I think as a facilitator for the groups, you get as much, if not more, than the people that attend, I think, genuinely. When you’ve had a really good session, for me, I come away and I feel really uplifted.” (interview, 04)

As described above, in these settings, it was often easier to secure active staff involvement. One interviewee felt that it may be easier to engage mental health staff than care home staff in Words in Mind because it could be easier to demonstrate the benefits: *“people with mental health issues are able to describe the importance that the groups or reading or books had in their recovery”* (interview, 11). In contrast, when working with people with dementia, there was an awareness that they would be less able to voice their experiences and the notion of a ‘recovery journey’ was not applicable.

Another possible factor in securing staff involvement is staff education and training: mental health teams tended to be more highly-educated professionals, whereas care homes usually employed more lower-paid, less highly-educated staff who may not have come across theories around arts and health in their previous education or training.

There were still challenges, however. Discussing how Words in Mind operated within a secure ward setting, an interviewee felt that some staff might not initially engage with the project because it offered a social model of support, rather than a medical benefit, and this might be less familiar to them as part of their everyday work. The same interviewee suggested that directly involving staff in sessions might be one way to ensure greater buy-in as they would then be able to see the benefits for themselves.

Another difficulty experienced within the mental health settings was that of continuity when moving between health care settings, specifically, the wider problem of a lack of community mental health staff to support people leaving mental health wards:

“There are people who will say, “Oh, I’d really like to join a spoken word poetry group, and I know there’s one at the pub, but I’m too scared to go,” and then it’s a real shame that although the ward staff will be really supportive about that, the community services around here, there are just not enough mental health staff to do that with people. So we’ll get people go, “Oh, I’d really like to build on the progress I’ve made being here” but then that drops when they leave.” (interview, 05)

One interviewee suggested the development of peer-led model may be one way to help to support people given the current time and resource constraints in the sector.

SUSTAINABILITY

As discussed above, two challenges of running a bibliotherapy scheme with volunteers are the potential for drop out of volunteers and a need for their ongoing support. At points, those interviewed reflected on the challenges of sustaining the service after the end of the funded period. Access to materials and an appropriate resource level to deliver a high-quality service was seen as a strength of Words in Mind; there were reflections on how this might not be sustainable in an era of austerity, but how it was incredibly valuable in an area of low socioeconomic status.

“As a volunteer, I look for projects that have got some kind of funding and that the materials we’d be using would be nice! There’s nothing worse than going and doing an activity with people in the community and everything you’re using is kind of tatty and I was really encouraged that [project manager] had a budget for materials and for training and wanted to provide something that was of quality to people, as well, because I think with austerity, people have to do more with less. So that kind of attracted me to it.” (interview, 05)

There were some suggestions of what could be done to ensure sustainability, with recognition of the challenges:

- Established links to the public library and other organisations via the local steering group were seen as a particular strength in maintaining the profile and focus on bibliotherapy locally.

- Cascading training and the approach to staff working in organisations was also seen as an approach that could sustain the Words in Mind groups in some settings. Observations and interviews suggested that this could work well in some organisations, but in others there was less engagement.
- Peer support had become an important aspect of the volunteering model, with more experienced mentors supporting newer volunteers. Some volunteers had taken this into an online community that helped to create a sense of community and could help to ensure sustainability. However, as discussed above, support for volunteers and some flexibility in their commitment to delivering groups was vital to ensuring they were able to continue. Peer support alone is unlikely to be enough support to sustain this.

CONCLUSIONS

As an inherently flexible and adaptable approach to bibliotherapy, Words in Mind is best defined by its ethos, rather than a prescriptive list of its activities. It is an approach to bibliotherapy which is: person-centred; often co-produced with group participants; about making a contribution (in a variety of ways); emphasises social connection; and avoids value judgements of texts and responses to them.

PERSON-CENTRED

Words in Mind groups take diverse approaches, tailored to the needs of participants in each group. The starting point in planning a session is the needs of participants (rather than the literature or other texts which are used). As this report has emphasised, there is no single model: some groups bring their own texts; some produce their own writing; some include more discussion; some make regular use of other media or activities; and some adopt a shared reading approach, while in others the facilitator reads.

CO-PRODUCED

Words in Mind sessions are co-produced between facilitators and participants. In some groups, this is more evident, for example, where facilitators acted more as a group member, sharing their own writing alongside other group members. In addition, participants frequently brought along texts to read at the sessions or helped to devise other activities such as quizzes. In other groups (particularly those in care homes), co-production was not as obvious; however, co-production could still occur, usually in more spontaneous ways.

MAKING A CONTRIBUTION

The idea of making a contribution, and relating to literature and each other, is central to Words in Mind. Contribution could take many different forms: it might be reading parts of a text aloud; bringing texts along to the session; contributing to discussions; or supporting other group members. Participants can decide how they wish to contribute, and all contributions are valued.

EMPHASISES SOCIAL CONNECTION

For many participants, Words in Mind offers a vital opportunity for social interaction and connection. In many cases, this connection extended beyond the sessions themselves. Crucially, Words in Mind allows people to make a “connection to other people in a way that goes a bit deeper than just a general chat”. Through engagement with literature,

participants were able to make connections not only to the texts read, but to each other as they shared their reactions and their own experiences.

AVOIDS VALUE JUDGEMENTS OF TEXTS AND RESPONSES TO THEM

Words in Mind sessions offer a space where all positive contributions are valued and respected. This has helped many participants to develop in confidence. Whilst the sessions encourage greater awareness and understanding of literature and culture, this is defined widely and intended to be inclusive, including for people who may not consider themselves to be readers. The notion of 'text' or 'literature' includes a wider range of materials and media than is often the case in bibliotherapy interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our research, we can identify some operational recommendations for Words in Mind and Third Sector Leaders, and for working with partner organisations.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WORDS IN MIND

- Continue to offer Words in Mind groups across a range of settings because the benefits are clear.
- Think about how to continue to support volunteers as this is crucial. Possibilities include:
 - A resource bank or other form of resource-sharing
 - Identify 'expert' volunteers in specific areas (e.g. different settings)
 - Paired delivery to provide support (e.g. debriefing) and to allow volunteers to drop-in/drop-out with minimal disruption to participants
 - Opportunities for volunteers to share their experiences and discuss ways to address common issues (face-to-face and/or online).
- Support knowledge development in the bibliotherapy sector by sharing what the project is doing as widely as possible because it differs in some important ways from other bibliotherapy approaches – and from other activities offered to mental health/ dementia support groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WORKING WITH PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

- Be more explicit about the support partner organisations need to provide (e.g. ensuring safeguarding) and also more creative ways in which they can support Words in Mind facilitators (e.g. contributing to sessions, co-delivering, establishing mini-libraries for participants to access between sessions).
- Extend the practice of producing specific publicity materials for different settings to care homes by producing resources that explain the project and potential benefits in language likely to resonate with staff working in that sector (ideally in consultation with a supportive care home manager).
- Exploit partnerships to support the spread of Words in Mind (e.g. co-ordination across library/ Words in Mind groups; social prescribing agenda).

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APPENDIX 1: REFLECTIVE OBSERVATION TEMPLATE

Reflective observations: Words in Mind Kirklees

Reminder: please do not use this template to record any information that could personally identify a member of the group.

Date	
Group nickname	
Location	
Number of participants/ age range/ gender	
Resources used	
Brief description of the session plan	
Comments on the atmosphere at the start of the session (e.g. chatty, quiet, enthusiastic, distracted)	
What aspects of the session worked particularly well?	
Challenges faced and any actions taken (what didn't work as expected)	

<p>Positive outcomes from the session</p>	<p><i>Social</i></p> <p><i>Creative/cultural</i></p> <p><i>Health/wellbeing</i></p>
<p>Comments on the atmosphere of the group at the end of the session (was the mood of the group different from the start?)</p>	
<p>Anything you might do differently if you were to run the same activity again?</p>	
<p>Anything else to note?</p>	

APPENDIX 2: EXAMPLE PUBLICITY MATERIALS

WORD Up

Stories and poems can take you to other places. For reading, discussing or just listening, this group is a relaxed space for you to enjoy literature.

All welcome
Wednesday
5th, 12th, 19th December
1.30pm - 2.30pm

Huddersfield Mission
W M WORDS IN MIND

Meltham Library

Enjoy poetry and stories?

Whether you like reading, listening to or writing poems and stories why not come along to the next library meet up.

Forget your cares and worries for a while and join the conversation

Every fortnight
Wednesdays
6th and 20th March
3rd and 17th April

Social Reading Group
Bringing people together through words and reminiscence.

Free Refreshments
10.15am - 11.15 am

Want more details?
Ask in Meltham Library or
Contact: Lu on 01484 854029

W M WORDS IN MIND

Kirkwood Coffee Shop
Inside Denby Dale Community Library

Community Coffee Morning

music poetry
having fun making friends
chattin' socialising songs

Sharing together for pleasure and wellbeing

We meet every other Wednesday from 11am until 1pm

Everyone Welcome!

September 18th
October 2nd, 16th & 30th November 6th & 20th

W M WORDS IN MIND Kirkwood The Republic for Kids

BIBLIOTHERAPY

Bibliotherapy, what is it? What does it mean?
Words in Mind, is one way it's seen.
Psychological therapy may sound too clinical,
I honestly hope this does not make you cynical!

A book club, a chat, the meeting of minds,
Is what it is really, it's what you will find!
It could be literature, a poem or a song,
Your favourite childhood rhyme, it doesn't need to be long!

English may not be your strong point, but please don't despair,
Non readers, dyslexic, all levels you'll find there!
The focus is meeting and the sharing of words,
Fun, chat and laughter, is all that is heard!

So this was an effort, indeed such a schlep,
As I don't normally write this in my best rhyme yet!
I hope this was helpful and would really like to know,
After reading this, now, please will you give it a go?

By David Flint 9th October 2018

Tuesdays 10am to 11:30am
@Jo Cox House, Batley

For more information please contact:
communityconnections@yccuk.org.uk
Christine Wilson - 07849 306710

All Welcome! First session Tuesday 29th January 2019

Stories help us to connect.
They build bridges between strangers.....

...And open doors to our feelings.

Could you help out as a friendly, local reading group, share stories, read poems and help to promote discussion?

Reading is often seen as a solitary thing to do, but there is growing evidence that coming together to talk about a story or poem can really help people who are stressed or withdrawn.

A new project 'Words in Mind' needs volunteers and workers to help create friendly, informal reading groups, working with people living with dementia or mental health issues and their "It is a chance to set aside our IQ for a short time and forget my troubles."

Free training, introducing bibliotherapy, how to run a session, use resources and continued ongoing support will be given, with opportunities for further accredited training.

"Bibliotherapy changed my life - I've made friends, developed new skills and gained valuable experience."

This 2 day introductory training runs Mon 13th & Tues 20th March (9.30am-4pm) Venue: TIC

For more information and to book on to the training, please contact **ELAINE DUFFY**.
Email: elaine.d@kirklees.org.uk Tel: 01484 5295518

Volunteering Skills

Words in Mind

Words can take you to other places.
For reading, discussing or just listening, this group is a relaxed social space for you to discuss wondrous ideas.

Tuesday, 1st October, Oceans
Tuesday, 8th October, Skies
Tuesday, 15th October, Cities
Tuesday, 22nd October, Wilderness

1.30pm - 2.30pm Free tea and Coffee

Huddersfield Mission
W M WORDS IN MIND

Mirfield Library

Do you enjoy stories and poems?

Whether you like reading, listening or even writing poetry and stories you will enjoy this new free group.

Forget your cares and worries for a while and join in the conversation

Social Reading Group
Bringing people together through words and reminiscence.

Newcomers welcome
Just come along to Mirfield Library at 2.30pm - 3.30pm

Want more details?
Ask in Mirfield Library or
Contact: Elaine Duffy
0777658822 or
www.sgrbooks.org.uk

Free refreshments

Wednesdays 6th February
Wednesdays 20th March
Wednesdays 27th April
Wednesdays 11th May

W M WORDS IN MIND

DO YOU WORK IN THE COMMUNITY? COULD YOU HOST A THERAPEUTIC READING GROUP IN A:
care home, library, day care centre, community centre, place of worship, residential home, in-patient ward?

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT, AND HOW WE CAN HELP YOU SET UP A GROUP, CONTACT:
Elaine Duffy
elaine.d@kirklees.org.uk
07776 588 692

W M WORDS IN MIND

BIBLIOTHERAPY Words in Mind

Bibliotherapy, what is it? What does it mean?
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I hope this was helpful and would really like to know,
After reading this, now, please will you give it a go?

By David Flint 9th October 2018
(Inspired by Christine Wilson (VOC Manager))

Fridays 1pm to 2:30pm
@Cleckheaton Library

For more information please contact:
David.Flint@swyt.nhs.uk - 07486 862229

All Welcome! First session Friday 16th November 2018

