Case Study: Anne De'Ath, School Librarian

Reading for Pleasure and Care in the Community

During my career as a secondary school Librarian I ran various initiatives to encourage reading. One I repeated as it was so successful was following the CLIC Sergeant Readathon programme. To begin with I ran this informally with a few English teachers at Eastwood High School but by 2013 it was run as a formalised, yearly event with the involvement of the whole English department. To give it added gravitas I included it in my Library Development Plan; this document was read by the Headteacher, who was also my Line Manager.

Sometime prior to the event I spoke to the Head of English and each teacher involved which gave us time to iron out any concerns before the Readathon began. We made the event part of the pupils' S2 course and all of them (about 140) knew they were expected to participate in it for 5weeks. All S2 pupils had organised fortnightly Library visits; during this time they undertook a Library Skills programme but the Readathon helped encourage them to borrow Library books too.

The aims of the Readathon were to:

a) encourage "reading for pleasure" through a formalised approach to develop the reading habit.
b) raise money (through sponsorship from friends and family) for the CLIC Sergeant Cancer Charity. I used the sponsor cards the charity had produced and showed their film to the pupils.

All parents were officially informed about the Readathon. They, and the pupils, also learnt how their money would be used by the charity.

Pupils were encouraged to read books from the School Library but their own books were allowed. However, each English teacher regularly checked the quality of reading matter and made sure it was appropriate for the pupil. I also accepted the Readathon challenge. This meant if the pupils raised £1000 from the Readathon one pupil would get the chance to play with the violinist Nicola Bernadetti at Glasgow's Concert Hall.

To help motivate pupils I organised various prizes including book tokens for the most money raised by an individual and sweets for the class who raised the most. I also talked to the staff involved as it was important to get their feedback on a regular basis. With this information I then awarded prizes to pupils who had taken the Readathon seriously. Throughout the event I would speak to the pupils and give them updates on how much money had been raised.

Thankfully a number of the classes became incredibly competitive and we raised over £1500 with the winning class being photographed for the local paper and a pupil did play a violin concerto with Nicola Bernadetti. However, it cost me a fortune in prizes but the pupils who had participated seriously went on to actively develop their reading and continued using the Library so it was a win-win event. Nevertheless, I could not have run it so successfully without the English department's support.

Following on from the Readathon, each S2 pupil had to choose 1 book (read during the Readathon) and talk about it to their English class in a lesson. The pupil had to speak for about 2 minutes and their mission was not to tell the story of the book but to encourage members of the class to read it. In other words they had to sell the item. By doing this the pupils gained more knowledge of what their peers had read recently.

To add a bit of theatre to this activity they were judged by 3 people from their class on such things as: content, quality of speech, engagement, etc. As some pupils found this very nerve-wracking we held the presentations in their classroom but on the whole most pupils had a go. Again many of them also had a chance to act as judges. This idea was developed by a member of the English department; indeed Sylvia McLaughlin was incredibly positive about strengthening links between the department and the Library.