

'My grandmother would be proud'

Prisoners teach fellow inmates how to read

Darren has been in prison for five years. Until 12 months ago he couldn't read. "I just blagged my way through this reading thing," he said. "I would say things like 'I've forgotten my glasses' or 'my vision is a bit blurred' when I was asked to read."

When he was around other people he would "pretend" to read letters just to feel "normal," but since he discovered that one of his fellow prisoners, Stuart, was a Shannon Trust reading plan mentor he has started to ask for help.

"Since I have been working with him it has changed my life for the better because I can now read letters and reply to my family and friends," he said.

The Shannon Trust is an organisation that inspires prisoners who can read to teach those who cannot.

It was founded in 1997 by Christopher Morgan, a Sussex farmer who had gained an insight into prison life and inmates' low levels of literacy through correspondence with

life prisoner Tom Shannon in a pen-friend scheme.

Its peer-mentored approach allows prisoners to progress at their own pace and gain self-confidence as they develop reading skills.

Darren can now read information sent by the prison to inmates. "In the past something would happen and I would kick off and say no one told us it was going to happen when in fact a notice had been put out but I wasn't able to read it," he said.

Embarrassed

Angela Cairns, CEO of the Shannon Trust said that prisoners who cannot read often feel embarrassed, vulnerable and isolated when faced with being unable to read letters from home, not knowing what to choose from the meal menu or when they make an application for healthcare.

"We also have people who are released on licence who can't really read their licence requirements," she said.

Not being able to read reduces prisoners' access to training and rehabilitation programmes and on release non-readers are precluded

from 90 per cent of jobs, reducing their chances of successful rehabilitation.

Gina, a reading plan mentor who is serving her first prison sentence said: "As much as I'm helping people the reading plan has also helped me. Being useful can make you feel so much better about yourself."

Gina has worked with women who could not read at all when they entered prison but who left being able to read. She said those learners "had pride", particularly one who was able to read to her daughter for the first time.

The Shannon Trust's reading plans were praised in an independent review of education in prison recently by Dame Sally Coates, who said the scope for prisoners to assist others in their learning is "huge" and far from fully realised.

Darren is grateful to the Shannon Trust and to his friend and mentor Stuart for the work he has put in. "I honestly think that if my grandmother was still alive she would be so proud that I've done this."

KELLY MATTISON

NEWS IN BRIEF

UNIVERSAL INCOME

Growing support for a universal basic income – available unconditionally to all citizens – has manifested in Silicon Valley with a pilot study of 100 families in Oakland, California. Y Combinator is giving each family between \$1,000 (£730) and \$2,000 (£1,460) a month for up to a year. The start-up funder says Oakland is a city of concentrated wealth but considerable inequality.

VERBAL HISTORY

Yorkshire poet Ian McMillan, *Game of Thrones* actor Gemma Whelan and comedian Vic Reeves are giving a voice to statues in Leeds. The talking statues project, part of the Yorkshire Festival, allows smartphone users to scan a code and receive a call from the statue, voiced by the actors, explaining the story behind it. The project will be in place for the next year. *

CHILD SEX ABUSE

More than eight children a day are victims of sexual offences, according to the NSPCC. Its figures come from a Freedom of Information request that garnered data from 38 out of 43 police forces – but they are estimated to be much higher in reality. More than 270 offences involved children under 10 and more than 100 rapes had links to online abuse.

OPT-OUT ORGANS

Doctors are lobbying to introduce an opt-out system for organ donation. One-thousand deaths a year are caused by organ shortages and the British Medical Association is calling on ministers to prevent them by following the lead of Wales, which introduced presumed consent last year. The opt-out system presumes people have consented to their organs being transplanted after death unless expressly stating otherwise.

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Tribute to Manchester vendor



Stefan Traian, well known on his pitch at Selfridges. Photo: Jason Lock

Friends, family and staff in the Manchester office have paid tribute to Big Issue North vendor Stefan Traian, who has died at the age of 46.

Traian began selling *Big Issue North* when he moved to Manchester from Romania in 2007, and was well known to customers on his pitch outside Selfridges in the city centre.

"Despite facing numerous challenges during his time in the UK he was extremely resilient and his spirit was never dampened," said Josh Cross, *Big Issue North* sales and services co-ordinator, speaking on behalf of his colleagues.

"He was a valued vendor who will be missed by staff, vendors and his customers. Stefan was a very positive person; he always had a smile on his face and was well known and well liked."



*Visit the Features section of bigissuenorth.com to read our interview with Ian McMillan and the Centre Stage section for more on the Yorkshire Festival