



Blokes on Board

The Blokes on Board project grew from a joint idea between ROWA! and Neil McClelland, former director of the National Literacy Trust. The idea was first mooted in 2005 when working with fathers attracted national interest and the project's aim was for ROWA! to work in local communities using the ROWA! bus as an engaging tool; thus the title of Blokes on Board.

The idea was eventually taken up in February 2006 and the decision was taken to work in the Erewash area of Derbyshire and to link in with an ESF project called 'Engaging Erewash'. As part of this project, ROWA! worked closely with a group of five schools who were part of the Long Eaton Extended Schools Project.

Aims of the Project

The aim of the project was to work, in partnership with the NLT, to promote adult, Male Reading Champions in and around schools. Male Reading Champions act as role models to encourage reluctant or emergent readers to enjoy reading and literacy. Although the project was interested in engaging all readers, it was primarily focused on engaging boy readers. Boys and men tend to be less enthusiastic about literacy, and specifically reading; the gap starts early in KS1 and widens in KS2. There are thought to be many reasons for this but one may be due to the lack of male role models. Thus the key aims of the project were to:

- ~ Increase awareness of the benefits of reading for pleasure
- ~ Recognise and celebrate the work of existing male reading models
- ~ Inspire other males to become champions for reading
- ~ Change the negative perception of, and overturn the myths associated with, reading
- ~ Foster and support communities that value reading
- ~ Disseminate good practice for promoting reading for pleasure

How it was done

- ~ Created a working partnership with the NLT - Stephen Torsi was first appointed and he worked closely with ROWA! When Stephen left the NLT near to the end of the project, Jim Sells and Corin Freshwater-Turner took over.
- ~ Contacted the Heads of the five schools in the Long Eaton Extended Schools project and invited them to take part in the project. After a series of three

meetings, four of the Heads declared themselves to be committed to the project.

- ~ Each Head was given a sum of money to use to engage and mobilise their own potential Male Reading Champions.
- ~ A launch event was organised to take place on 1st March at which ROWA! and the NLT would inspire and motivate the potential Male Reading Champions to 'sign up' and commit themselves to working in school to promote reading.

Result

- ~ Four schools - Draycott, Longmoor, Dovedale and The Grange committed to the project.
- ~ Draycott already had two Male Reading Champions - John Cox and Lewis Blackburn. Both John and Lewis are Rotarians and they confirmed that many Rotarians are committed to promoting learning and progression for children and young people; they agreed to approach other Rotarians with the idea of becoming Male Reading Champions.
- ~ The Grange organised an event at the local bowls club to encourage potential Male Reading Champions and Dovedale and Longmoor approached groups of males in the community, such as Rugby players, Aikido group, governors and dads with children at the school.
- ~ The event took place on 1st March and was opened by Jim Sells from the NLT followed by a workshop and poetry reading from Crispin Thomas, the footballer poet. Richard Maltby told stories using puppets and scenery, and refreshments were supplied by the cook at The Grange School. The ROWA! bus came along and all those who attended were invited 'onboard' to help themselves to a free, grown-up book provided by the NLT. All of the Male Reading Champions were given a raffle ticket and one of them won free Derby County tickets for himself and his child, kindly donated by Simon Carnell from Derby County. Each Male Reading Champion also took home a copy of 'Max and Lara's Amazing Travelling Space Circus' from the RaW campaign. The schools were also given a pack of 20 books, purchased from Gemma Books, for the Male Reading Champions to read with children in school; all the books had a 'male' focus.
- ~ The event was attended by 12 Male Reading Champions, 4 heads/school representatives, 3 people from the National Literacy Trust, Simon Carnell from Derby County, Crispin and 4 ROWA! staff members.
- ~ Sally Buckewicz from Longmoor has engaged a few more Male Reading Champions but they were unable to attend the event.

Successes (in no particular order)

- ~ Positive (and fun) working relationship between the NLT and ROWA!
- ~ Commitment and enthusiasm from the four schools who were part of the project.

- ~ At least 12 adult males have been engaged as Male Reading Champions, all of whom will offer their services within school.
- ~ All of the schools were given a free copy of the NLT's Reading Champion Toolkit and are committed to running a buddy reading scheme for their children - closer links with the NLT.
- ~ Inspired schools to find other ways of engaging male learning champions to come into school to work with the children.
- ~ Engaged the interest of the Long Eaton Rotary club members - John Cox has several potential Male Reading Champions and he is going to talk to them about the project in August. They have expressed an interest in working in Longmoor, Dovedale and The Grange.
- ~ Achieved a lot on a very small budget and limited staff availability.

Challenges

- ~ Late start to the project - everything was a bit rushed and a summer, barbeque event would possibly have been more successful.
- ~ Limited number of hours available to ROWA! staff member to work on the project - the project would have been more successful if she could have worked more closely with the Heads on a one-to-one basis; some of them would have appreciated more support with recruiting male volunteers.
- ~ Small budget, and no budget to follow up - this project would benefit from follow up action, such as visit to the Rotarians to help John Cox to recruit.

What now?

At the moment there is no further budget to continue with this project. The original intention was to 'get the ball rolling' with regard to engaging Male Reading Champions and then for it to become a self-sustaining project. However, it would benefit from some further input from ROWA! to ensure that the Male Reading Champions are properly engaged and supported. Furthermore it is hoped that with such a positive working relationship between the NLT and ROWA!, further work to promote Reading and Literacy in schools and Children's Centres throughout Derbyshire can be achieved together in the future.

Download the NLT publication [*Getting the Blokes on Board*](#) to read more about the ROWA! project and other "Dads" projects and tips. (pdf)