

# 'Jay Blades Effect' Boosts Sign-Ups to Adult Literacy Programme

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Literacy charity Read Easy UK (<https://www.readeasy.org.uk>) has reported a record 104% increase in sign-ups to its adult reading programme in 2022, fuelled by the BBC TV show 'Jay Blades: Learning to Read at 51'. The charity also saw a surge in interest from new volunteers and those who wanted to pioneer a new Read Easy group in their area. Read Easy UK now has 65 affiliated groups and 16 Pioneering groups around the UK, with over 1350 volunteers providing free one-to-one reading coaching for adults who are unable to read.

'Jay Blades: Learning to Read at 51' aired on 26th January 2022, and followed Repair Shop presenter Jay Blades' experience of learning to read as an adult, using Read Easy UK's 1-1 coaching programme. Readers meet volunteer coaches twice a week to follow 'Turning Pages' – an adult reading programme originally developed for prisons.

Jay concealed his inability to read until he was in his 30s, after he struggled to learn to read as a child. Jay is not alone - a quarter of all children in England leave primary school (1), like Blades, unable to read to the expected level. Nearly seven million adults in the UK have very poor literacy skills (2).

In the programme Jay met other people who were on the same journey with Read Easy – like Jeff George, 33, who is making brilliant progress and is now working within level 5, the final stage of the programme. Jeff wanted to be able to read stories with his son and open up his career options.

He also met Jacky Smith who had just started to learn to read in her 60s. Her main motivation was being able to read with her 8-year-old granddaughter and help her sister who is partially sighted. Jacky is now working within level three of the programme and continues to make great progress towards her goals.

According to Jacky "I am now able to make my own notes in my reading sessions, which I can refer back to, and I even wrote my own short story recently. Most importantly I am able to read with my grand-daughter which I absolutely love being able to do – even if she does tell me off from time to time if I get something wrong!".

Speaking about the impact the TV programme had on so many people's lives last year, Jay Blades has a message for anyone in the same position in 2023, "The first thing I would say to you is, it's never too late to learn. It's scary to face up to your fears, to be vulnerable, and to admit you can't read, but learning to read is one of the best things I've ever done. As a dad there's nothing more beautiful than being able to share a story with my daughter. If I can do it, then so can you. Just pick up the phone - call Read Easy, or ask someone to send an email, it's that simple".

Carla Priddon, CEO of Read Easy UK, said "2022 was a fantastic year for Read Easy UK and we are so grateful to Jay for sharing his experience, which has raised much-needed awareness and reduced the stigma around not being able to read as an adult. Research shows that 2.4m adults in England can't read at all, or can barely read (3). In 2023, we want to ensure even more adults receive the support they need

to learn to read. We are always keen to hear from anyone interested in pioneering a Read Easy group, however we are specifically looking to launch new groups in the North East and Yorkshire. We are also interested in hearing from volunteers who might have some spare time to support someone's reading journey. Finally, we would urge any adult who is not able to read properly to have the courage to come forward, like Jay, to ask for our help."

To find out more about learning to read as an adult with Read Easy visit [www.readeasy.org.uk](http://www.readeasy.org.uk)

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1. Department for Education, National Curriculum Assessments at Key Stage 2 2012-2013
2. 'Paying the Price: The Cost of Very Poor Adult Literacy', Pro Bono Economics, September 2021
3. Skills for Life Survey, 2011, Dept BIS

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