

Two case studies of parents who came to That Reading thing ashamed they couldn't help their children due to their poor literacy. These are written by Stef Boyle of Port Reach in Ellesmere Port. Stef is a youth & community worker and a senior That Reading Thing trainer.

CM

CM is a mother of two children aged 5 and 2. She was older than we expected to be working with but was referred by the local college community programme. She was on a 6-week functional maths programme and too scared to tackle English or any other courses.

CM missed a large amount of school due to tonsillitis and was too timid in school to explain to anybody that she was struggling. Now she has children and wants to help them with their reading she is stuck. Although she reads bedtime stories to them, it is always from the same 5 books that she is comfortable with and that she knows – like “The Very Hungry Caterpillar”.

She did in the past manage to get her level 1 English, but she would not sign up for the level 2 because she struggled so much with the first one. CM's goal in working with us was to boost her confidence ready for Level 2 English and to be able to read more books with her sons – especially Harry Potter, as her eldest son believed he was named after the character.

When we first tested CM had the reading age of 8 years and one month. CM made steady and solid progress although when meeting a new word in reading her panic tended to set in before she could apply the techniques we had learned. We quite quickly increased the ‘real reading’ section of TRT and we started reading Harry Potter together. The signs of CM's improved confidence came week after week – first it was that she had borrowed a book from her Aunt (a Josephine Cox book) to practice reading at home. Then it was that she was trying to spell words when her Mum and sister said “how do you spell...?” CM would respond by getting a pen and paper and saying “hold on, just let me work it out”. The next sign of improvement was that she started to let her children pick the books at bed-time instead of limiting their choices.

By the end of our time together she was giving her children free rein in the library to choose any book they wanted her to read, she had signed up for her next English course (to start in September) and most telling, she was taking time to fill out feedback forms (after a play therapy session for her youngest) where in the past she would have just ticked the “everything was okay” box and run away.

We worked together for 19 sessions, but we tested at session 15 (again we weren't sure how many more session we would get) and CM had a reading age of 10 years and 9 months. CM had improved by 32 months in the 15 hours we had spent together – a real testament to how hard she worked and how motivated she was to improve.

RJ

RJ is a woman in her early forties - really struggled in school (possibly dyslexic) and left school with nothing. Had a few dead-end jobs but has never managed to hold anything down. Married and has two kids.

She was referred by her eldest child - her daughter aged 17 who we met through local youth work. She was worried about her mum but thought she would jump at the chance to learn to read especially as her mum's youngest child, a boy (aged 5) was now in school and struggling to read.

We have been working together for 10 sessions and last week (session 9) my learner said this.

"I am reading every night with my son. We read his school books together before bed. If there is a word I don't know we work on it together, he gives me a bit of a funny look but I just say 'lets say the sounds together' I even find myself doing for him, what you do for me, I recap the sentence if he is struggling so that he doesn't lose the meaning. It's great reading his school books as I am going to improve as he improves, we are going to improve together."

With RJ's permission, I then contacted her son's school. The conversation I had with the Year 1 teacher was very encouraging. PJ had shown no interest in reading or writing throughout Reception, and it was clear from the reading records coming back from home, that nothing was being done there. But this term, PJ's first in Year 1, it was like working with a different family; the reading records were being completed at home each week and PJ, who had started the term in September just making marks on paper (not even wanting to form letters) was now attempting to write words and sentences. In fact, the week I spoke to the teacher (week 6 of the Autumn Term) PJ had just won a Head Teacher's Award for writing as he had written a whole sentence. The teacher was able to identify a noticeable difference in attitude and ability in PJ, since we started working with RJ."

In 9 hours over 13 weeks (including a slower schedule over the school holidays) we have significantly changed this woman's attitude to reading and significantly improved her child's life chances.

Note from Tricia. *I had the privilege of meeting RJ at a That Reading Thing celebration event. When she first met Stef, she'd had a life of hiding what she considered to be her shameful problem. She told me that she couldn't read the word 'of' at her first lesson and couldn't speak about reading without crying. That evening she stood in front of a crowd to tell us about how far she'd come and how life had changed.*