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Alan Johnson delivers new reading parcel
to help children in care transform their lives

Booktrust, Britain's largest reading charity announces a new patron and unwraps its latest reading parcel to inspire fun ways of learning for children in care.



The Rt Hon Alan Johnson MP has become patron to Booktrust's targeted reading programme, Letterbox Club.

He launched its latest book parcel, Letterbox Orange at an event in Portcullis House in Westminster, yesterday.

The pack is a new addition to the award-winning Letterbox Club, which provides children in care with fun ways to enjoy reading and maths, in order to help them perform better at school.

Letterbox Orange, aimed at five to seven year olds, includes books, maths games, stationery and other educational

surprises in personally addressed parcels, delivered to their homes.

Booktrust's Letterbox Club programme has won widespread praise for helping vulnerable children feel special and increase their confidence, while improving their literacy and numeracy.

'I thought WOW when I got the parcel because I have never ever had a package or a parcel in my entire life,' said Shannon, aged 10, who is in care.

Mr Alan Johnson, whose sister persuaded authorities not to put him in care after their mother died, said: 'The Letterbox Club provides the means for disadvantaged children to escape into another world and, through doing so, helps to transform their lives.'

The brightly coloured parcels – Orange, Blue, Red, Green and Yellow – covering four different age groups and children with special educational needs are sent out once a month for six months and eagerly anticipated by children in care.

Postcards sent by children to Booktrust reveal the positive and special impact of Letterbox Club.

'Thank you for all I get sent, I don't usually enjoy reading but this month I got sent a book, it is called Diary of a Wimpy Kid by Jeff Kinney. So far I am up to page 79 and am hoping to finish the book soon,' wrote one 13-year-old.

A 9 -year-old said: 'Thank you for all the wonderful gifts, I now know that it's not all bad in care and I love reading so all the books come in handy.'

Speaking at the launch, Booktrust chief executive Viv Bird said: ‘Too many children in care underachieve in education. Letterbox Club’s parcels are designed to encourage fun learning. Research shows that many children are making significant gains in their standardised reading scores and improving their maths.

‘Carers tell us time and time again how excited children are when the parcel arrives, how much the children enjoy reading their own books, and how Letterbox Club helps improve literacy and numeracy skills.’

Children in care have poorer educational outcomes and the gap in attainment at primary and secondary school is still large. Just 15 per cent achieve five GCSEs, including English and maths, compared with 58 per cent of children overall.

Looked-after children are twice as likely to be permanently excluded from school and three times more likely to have a fixed-term exclusion.^[1]

-ENDS-

For more information and interview requests contact Harriet Jackson in the Booktrust press team on harriet.jackson@booktrust.org.uk / 0208 875 4827/ 07870 636099.

Notes for Editors

Almost 7,500 children in care are members of Booktrust’s Letterbox Club. They are sent one brightly coloured parcel a month for six months. The parcel is addressed to the child and includes a personalised letter, two books, stationery including pencils, an exercise or drawing book, bookmark or stickers, and maths games at starter and expert levels. Sometimes there is a CD to accompany a book as well as custom illustrations and letters from well-known authors and illustrators.

Parcels are usually sent from May to October to cover the summer holiday period, when many children change foster carer and where there can be a dip in attainment.

Letterbox Club which began as a postal club for looked-after children aged 7 to 9 (Letterbox Blue) and 9 to 11 (Letterbox Red). This was extended in 2011 to cover children aged 11 to 13 (Letterbox Green). Children aged 7 to 9 with additional educational needs receive Letterbox Yellow.

Letterbox Club is available on a subscription basis and each child is enrolled by participating local authorities and schools.

The programme, managed by Booktrust, started in Leicester when foster carer and maths teacher, Rose Griffiths, wanted to find an enjoyable way of helping children in care to improve their reading and maths and to support foster carers who wanted to help the children they looked after.

[1] Outcomes for children looked after by Local Authorities (2013) Department for Education

About Booktrust

Booktrust is Britain's largest reading charity. It has a vision of a society where nobody misses out on the life-changing benefits that reading can bring. Booktrust is responsible for a number of successful national reading promotions, sponsored book prizes and creative reading projects aimed at encouraging readers to discover and enjoy books. www.booktrust.org.uk