

Our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Commitment

'If you don't understand, ask questions. If you're uncomfortable about asking questions, say you are uncomfortable about asking questions and then ask anyway. It's easy to tell when a question is coming from a good place. Then listen some more. Sometimes people just want to feel heard. Here's to possibilities of friendship and connection and understanding.'

From *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Jemma Guerrier Managing Director, Katie Clark Director of Literature, Anita Marsland Chair Co-Statement:

The Reader believes that everyone should have the opportunity to experience the power of literature to survive and live well. From our twenty-year history, we know that the power of Shared Reading can help build connection between people from diverse backgrounds and grow our ability to think in different ways and better understand different experiences and perspectives.

Whilst inclusion is integral to our work, we know that we can do more to make our belief that Shared Reading can be for everyone a reality.

Over the last three years, The Reader's conscious commitment to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion has grown. In particular, we want to help ensure that racism is eliminated from the world and feel we have a small but vital part to play in that change.

Our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) work, including our commitment to addressing racism and racial diversity, covers all aspects of our organisation and focuses on how we ensure that:

- Our ways of working treat people fairly and enable everyone to participate.
- We can be more representative of our communities – considering our Board, staff, volunteers and participants in our work.
- Everyone coming to The Reader feels that they 'belong'.
- Great literature from writers with diverse backgrounds and experiences is enjoyed across our Shared Reading and programming.

In particular, over the period of our current three-year business plan which takes us to March 2026, we aim to increase the representation of black, Asian and ethnic minority communities in our staff team, volunteers and participants in our work by 50%.

We recognise that creating meaningful and lasting change is ongoing and complex work, which requires us to have conversations that feel difficult for many of us and to raise questions that we might not yet know the answers to. But this will not deter us from our commitment to building a diverse and inclusive Shared Reading movement, and ensuring that all our employees, volunteers and participants feel welcome and safe, and are treated

with fairness and respect regardless of race, age, sex or gender, disability, sexual orientation, social class, religion and belief.

We have embedded Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in our current business plan across all aspects of our delivery, reach and how The Reader is run. Accountability for EDI is held by Directors Group with regular reporting to our Board of Trustees, and targets set to increase the racial diversity of our staff, volunteers and participants.

Our progress in 2023/24 towards achieving these goals is outlined below:

- We adapted our recruitment processes to make them more inclusive. This included removing educational background questions, enabling candidates to apply via different methods; removing 'Desirable criteria' from all job descriptions and sending interview questions out in advance.
- Diversified our recruitment networks by having three inclusive networks as part of our standard recruitment, and a further eight networks that we can use within budget.
- Begun the development of an internal EDI training offer for all staff that will be rolled out in 24/25.
- Signed up to the Care Leaver Covenant, enabling ways to connect our opportunities with the care leaver community.
- We have developed principles for Shared Reading practice in relation to issues around race and racism (and related EDI issues) that can arise in literature and in group discussions to ensure that our Shared Reading groups are welcoming, inclusive and impactful for people from all communities and backgrounds. In 2024/25, we will start to implement this through our training for all Reader Leaders.
- We continued to focus on diversity in the literature we read, using our annual Bookshelf, in-house anthologies and volunteer support sessions to promote use of diverse texts to our Reader Leaders who run Shared Reading groups. The 2023/24 Weathering the Storm Bookshelf included *Small Island* by Andrea Levy, *Potiki* by Patricia Grace, *Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri and *This Same Sky: A Collection of Poetry from Around the World* edited by Naomi Shihab Nye.
- Worked with artist Sumuyya Khader to produce her artwork "Now We Sit With It" which is now on permanent display at our home in the Mansion House at Calderstones Park in Liverpool. This formed part of the "Diverse Connections" project, funded by National Heritage Lottery Fund to explore the history of the house and research the history and connections of the past owners to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. More about this project is [here](#)
- Established twelve ESOL Shared Reading Groups for asylum seekers and refugees and/or those who have English as an additional language.

Looking forward, in 2024/25 our key priorities are:

- Review new staff and volunteer demographic survey data to identify progress against our targets to increase the ethnic diversity of our People. Further develop and

implement the recommendations to improve our recruitment communications and continue to build more diverse recruitment networks.

- Finalise core EDI training offer for all staff, pilot with a group of staff, and roll out to new starters and all staff.
- Roll out new guidance developed in 23/24 on "How we read about racism and difference" to all Reader Leaders running Shared Reading groups and deliver practical workshops and ongoing support around this area.
- Continue to create internal space for reflection, learning, support and challenge around EDI through our staff Diversity Advocates Group and our staff equalities networks, looking specifically this year at their development and feedback mechanisms.
- Explore how we can widen the diversity of voices in the design and decision-making process for programming for Calderstones.
- Work more with partners and volunteers with diverse backgrounds and experiences to learn and improve our approach to inclusion in Shared Reading and increase our reach.
- As well as continuing to diversify the texts we read and share via the Bookshelf, Monthly Poems and Stories and resources available on the Online Community Hub, we will produce an anthology of readings and reflections to share with our movement and beyond, exploring texts inspired by our staff 'Just Us' groups, which were set up with the aim of opening up conversations about racism and difference through the literature read. We will consult with a diverse group of Reader Leaders- both staff and volunteers, to collate reading suggestions to include in this.
- Following on from the research into the history of Calderstones Mansion House, the launch of the painting *Now We Sit With It*, and the accompanying anthology, we will continue to explore unheard voices of the past in our work, through what we read and who we read with. We are committed to sharing books that help us uncover stories and voices that often go unheard, and to 'sitting with' those stories together.

If you have any comments, questions or suggestions for this work, please contact Katie Clark, Director of Literature on katieclark@thereader.org.uk