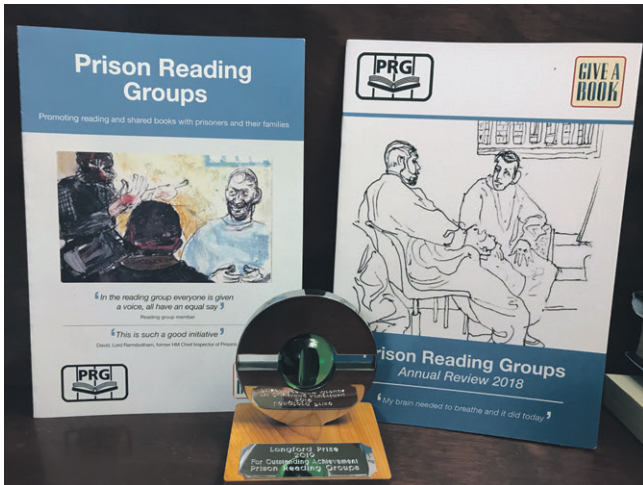




# Reading Group Round-Up

Promoting reading and reading groups in prisons



## PRG celebrates a birthday and a Longford Trust Award

Prison Reading Groups (PRG) celebrated our 20th birthday this year. We began in 1999 with reading groups in two prisons; today we support 50 groups in more than 40 prisons nationwide.

We were also delighted to be awarded one of the 2019 Longford Trust prizes for Outstanding Contribution to Prison Reform - a great birthday present! In her acceptance speech, PRG director Sarah Turvey commended both librarians and volunteers: 'Our work relies on the commitment and energy of the prison librarians who run so many of the projects that bring confidence and ambition to prisoners and help make prisons more socialised and civilised places. Our volunteers are extraordinary. They bring in the outside world and an infectious delight in books, reading and other people.'

Her highest praise went to the prisoner members of our groups: 'Above all, this award belongs to our members. Everyone here this evening and everyone listening live through National Prison Radio knows how daunting prison can be. Joining a reading group can feel very risky, especially for an inexperienced reader who may never have read a book before. But it can also be a first step towards lasting change.'

The principles of PRG are simple: groups are voluntary and informal - no certificates, no

tests and no right or wrong answers. The emphasis above all is on the pleasure of reading and getting together to talk about books. Becoming a reader is about choice, so the groups themselves choose what they read. Our funding means that members receive new copies, which are theirs to keep or pass on to others on the wing or to family outside.

The books chosen are varied and ambitious. A few recent choices and comments from different groups give a good sense of this variety and the lively conversations the books provoke.



**Tom Rob Smith, *Child 44*: Stalinist Russia and a serial child-killer.**

'Glad I opened myself up to something I wouldn't normally read.'

'Russia under Stalin, just like in here: you can't challenge authority, they're never in the wrong. When I leave I'm going to blow the lid off.'

Daphne du Maurier, Jamaica Inn: chosen by a men's group who wanted something from a woman's point of view 'we don't get much of that in here'.

'I loved the way the whole book zoned in on Mary's feelings.'

'You could really feel that squelchy bog-land on the moor.'

'I was watching football but reading it at the same time. That's how good it was.'

**George Orwell, 1984:** Orwell's classic dystopian novel that gave us so many iconic phrases: 'Big Brother', 'Room 101', the 'Ministry of Truth', the 'Two-Minute Hate'.

'It's not exactly a laugh.'

'I thought it was brilliant but I had to push myself through - a great book but hard reading.'

'The first time I read it was down the block for something that wasn't my fault. I couldn't believe how it captured what I was thinking and feeling.'

**Christy Lefteri, *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*: Refugees rebuilding their lives after fleeing Syria.**

'We're all aware of the situation in Syria but reading it in this novel made it all the more powerful.'

'When the young boy asked 'Are we going to drown', I thought about how I would answer my own son.'

'I've read 10 books now in this reading group and this is the one with the greatest impact for me.'

**Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol***

'Interesting for me, I'm from Poland and had never heard of this story.'

'It's about second chances, we all know about that in here. I love it at the end when Scrooge realises he can start again and begins jiggling around like a lunatic.'

*If your prison doesn't have a reading group, encourage your librarian to look at the Prison Reading Groups website [www.prisonreadinggroups.org.uk](http://www.prisonreadinggroups.org.uk).*



## Love Songs and Letters

National Prison Radio

What are your New Year's resolutions? Maybe to keep your pad tidy? To use the gym more often? Or maybe it's to do better at keeping your relationships going. If you've got people on the outside that you care about, it's important to keep feeding these relationships with good stuff - lots of warm words and love.

National Prison Radio has a show just for that, and this month it's going to be bigger and better. Love Bug, supported by Shannon Trust, is an hour of love songs,

broadcasting from the NPR studios every Friday evening at 5pm, straight after NPR Friday. And if you miss that broadcast, it's also on every Sunday night at 10pm, after Motherland Music.

But it's not just straight love songs. We've also got tips and advice for writing those letters home. It's not always easy to know where to start with a letter and it can be difficult to find the right words. The NPR presenters will give you good advice and tips for finding the right words to tell your people on the outside how and what you're doing and how you're feeling.

People on the outside love

receiving letters - just like you love receiving them inside. When someone takes the time to write to you, it's a special way of telling them that they have a place in your heart. And if you know someone who finds reading and writing difficult, how about telling them how they can get help with their reading from a Shannon Trust Mentor? They're the people in prison who help others improve their reading, so they could soon be reading and writing letters too.

Keep it locked to National Prison Radio in 2020 for hundreds of radio programmes made by prisoners, for prisoners. It could change your life!

## A Long Stretch

National Prison Radio is proud to be teaming up once again with the Prison Phoenix Trust to bring you an hour of yoga and meditation every week. Freedom Inside brings you voices from inside and outside prison, along with guided yoga and meditation sessions - an activity you can do safely in your cell, and which can improve your physical and mental health.

Yoga and meditation have proven benefits, like improving your sleep and reducing anxiety, and Freedom Inside will introduce you to some techniques that can help you start your yoga practice, or improve your practice if you already have some experience.

In each programme we hear dialogue between people inside and outside prison, all of whom have experience of yoga. The show's team of yoga instructors will also lead you through a session, each one with a different focus.

Tune in to Freedom Inside with the Prison Phoenix Trust on NPR every Friday afternoon at 3pm, repeated on Sundays at 8am and 5pm.

See our  
page in the  
'Jailbreak' section



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Write to The Prison Phoenix Trust  
P.O. Box 328, Oxford, OX2 7HF.

We'd love to hear from you anytime and have several free books and CDs, which could help you build and maintain a daily practice.