



OPEN BOOK 2025-2026

IMPACT REPORT Open Book

INTRODUCTION

Founded in 2013, Open Book has spent the last thirteen years bringing books and people together through our shared reading and creative writing groups. Every year, we deliver approximately 1000 sessions in around 70 locations, reaching a diverse range of community and public participants across Scotland. By providing a safe space to relax and enjoy stories and poems together, as well as write in response to them, our readers forge connections and build community.

Alongside our shared reading and creative writing groups, our festival visits programme and Unbound programme aim to deepen participants' connection with literature and each other. Every year, we offer each group the opportunity to visit a literary festival or event (at no cost to them), allowing participants to feel part of Scotland's vibrant cultural landscape. Our Unbound programme seeks to platform new and diverse voices as well as providing alternative, accessible ways for people to engage with Open Book through podcasts, a weekly newsletter, and other opportunities.

BRINGING PEOPLE AND BOOKS TOGETHER

As a charity focused on bringing people together through reading and creative writing, creating a supportive community is one of our core values. We aim to support our staff, lead readers and group participants to have positive interactions, grow in confidence and feel valued, respected and welcomed in their communities. The Open Book model is also one of openness, diversity and inclusion, and our participants hail from across Scotland and the globe representing a diverse range of communities. We believe that being open to everyone enriches our experiences and our understanding of each other.

Our 2025/2026 project year was our first year as a Creative Scotland Multiyear Funded organisation, presenting us with new opportunities to grow and improve our programme. This year, we added three new creative writing groups to our programme, published our seventh poetry pamphlet featuring words from our groups, and delivered our fifth Lead Reader Conference.

Happy Reading,
The Open Book Team

OUR MISSION AND VALUES



'Open Book is a lifeline'

OUR GROUPS

(as of April 2026)

Multicultural Groups

Aberdeen Library (ESOL group)
Maryhill Integration Network,
Glasgow
MILK Cafe, Glasgow
POC (People of Colour) (online)
Shakti Women's Aid, Edinburgh

Prisons

HMP Barlinnie
HMP Dumfries
HMP Glenochil
HMP Greenock
HMP Low Moss
HMP & YOI Polmont

Other Languages

Scots Shared Reading
(online)
Scots Creative Writing
(online)
Gaelic Shared Reading
(online)
Gaelic Creative Writing
(online)
Arabic Shared Reading
(online)

Public Groups

Eyemouth Community Centre
National Galleries, Edinburgh
Images & Words (online)
Inverurie Community Campus
Millennium Centre, Stranraer
National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh
Off the Beaten Track (SR&CW) (online)
Open Groups (SR&CW) (online)
Polmont Community Hub
Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh
Well Versed (SR&CW) (online)

Islands and Villages Groups

Breadalbane Library, Aberfeldy
Brora Learning Zone
Coigach Community Centre
Dingwall Library
Kirkwall Library, Orkney
Penpont (Three Villages), D&G
Portree Library, Isle of Skye
Shetland (online)
Ullapool Library

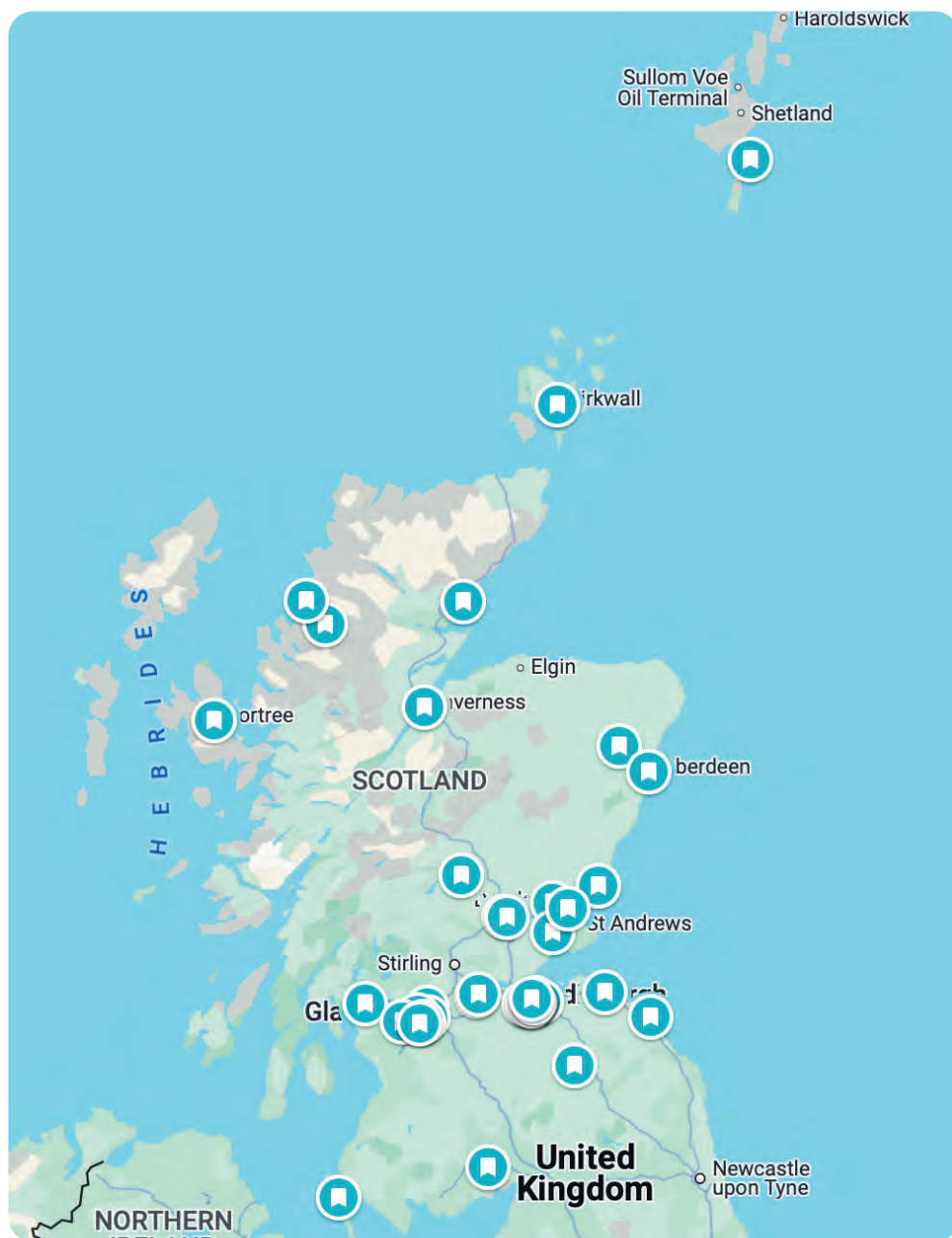
Community Groups

Bethany Christian Trust, Edinburgh
Category Is Books, Glasgow
Chronic Illness (online)
Eric Liddell Centre, Edinburgh
Grassmarket Community Project, Edinburgh
(SR&CW)
LGBT Health and Wellbeing, Leith
Next Chapters (60+) (online)
Neurodivergent (online)
Our Community Kitchen, Haddington
Social Bite, Glasgow
Southside Community Centre, Edinburgh
Spinal Injuries (online)
Letham, Perth

Libraries

A K Bell Library, Perth
Arbroath Library
Coldside Library, Dundee
Corstorphine Library, Edinburgh
Cupar Library
Dunbar Library
Galashiels Library
Glasgow Women's Library
Inverness Library
Lochee Library, Dundee
Morningside Library, Edinburgh
Paisley Central Library

WHERE YOU CAN FIND US...



2025-2026 PROJECT YEAR IN NUMBERS

1798 **Tickets booked** via Eventbrite for Open Book Sessions and Events

963 Shared Reading and Creative Writing **Sessions Delivered**

408 **Books borrowed** from the Open Book Library

300 Members **attending a Festival** or Literary event with Open Book

70 **Groups meeting** scross Scotland and online

35 Groups contributing **poems** to our 2025 pamphlet *Plans for Better Times*

12 Pieces of **new writing** featured as part of our Unbound Programme

1 **Conference** bringing together our Lead Readers and sharing knowledge

2025-2026 PROJECT YEAR IN WORDS



Open Book was the first activity we signed up for when we returned to Edinburgh 6 years ago and has become an integral part of our lives. It has encouraged me to read more widely (I was previously dismissive of short stories). It has led to deepening friendships and a focus for my week.



Thank you so much for your warm welcome on Thursday morning. I very much enjoyed the session and being part of the group. It was so good to listen to such creative thought and shared responses. 'Open Book' is a wonderful initiative. I hope it continues to be financially supported and enables the project to go from strength to strength across Scotland.



This is more than a poetry class, this helps me get in touch with my feelings about what life is about. It helps us express and find the right words and I always feel good. I never want to miss these sessions, it's about what life is about.



I have enjoyed the way our group stirs up memories of my childhood so much that I am now writing my memoirs. I am so inspired. I have no family left and nothing will be left of me or the life I have lived if I don't. You have honoured our memories treating each like a treasure. It makes me feel like I actually do have value and that my life has mattered.



The Things We Carry by the Social Bite Group

We carry our families,
we travel with our belongings
our keys open opportunities and
passports hold tight to who we are.

We carry the weight
of laughter, tears, bank cards
and all the things
that make us unique.

Our bags are packed
with phones, bus passes,
wallets, chargers. We have
suitcases filled with imagination.

We carry our tears
our anxieties, pain and stress.
We hold love and laughter
and happiness.

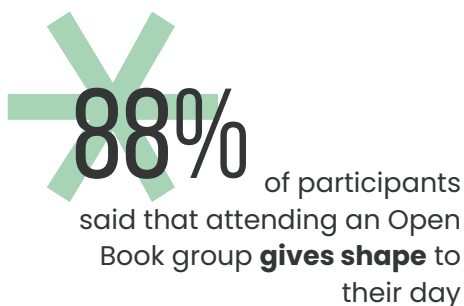
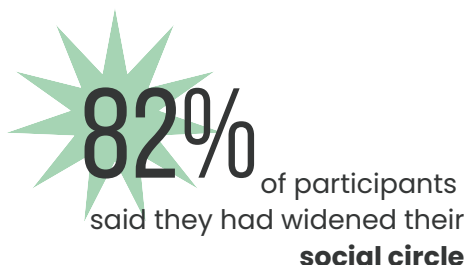
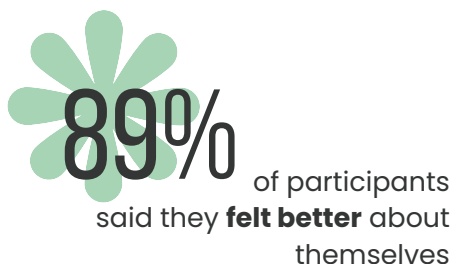
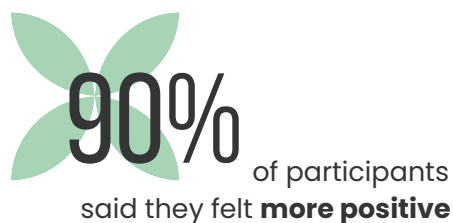
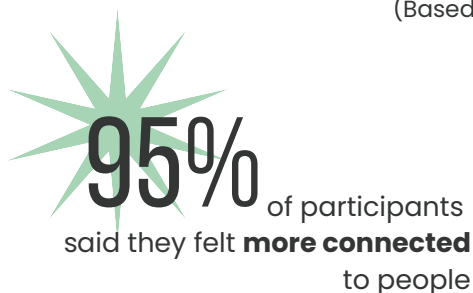
We carry our joy
both in our arms
and in our souls.
This is how we carry a life.



OUR 2026 EVALUATION SURVEY FOUND THAT:

As a result of taking part in an Open Book session...

(Based on feedback from 237 Open Book Members)



"These sessions have helped me put words to feelings and thoughts I have struggled with for very long."

"I love how the sessions allow me to open up and find interesting stories and writing that I never knew were inside me."

"It's lovely to find a community to be involved in just in general but also creatively. It's a wholesome and welcoming atmosphere that I greatly appreciate."

82%

of participants
said they try
to attend an
Open Book group
as regularly as
they can

93%

of participants
said 8 or higher
when asked on a
scale of 1-10 how
likely they are to
recommend
Open Book to
others

What do our members value most about Open Book?

"It has become an essential part of my week, keeping my mind active and enriching it with friendships "

"The chance to broaden my mind and rekindle a love of literature, with the opportunity to meet new friends."

"I enjoy the diversity and the carefree safety I feel in writing whatever I feel like without judgment from myself or others."

"It gives me inspiration & motivation to face the coming days."

"Having the chance to meet other people and exchange experiences and opinions."

"Gets me thinking and gives me a 'creative' break from my usual grind. I live with several chronic health conditions so this provides a positive filler for my tank."

"Sharing thoughts and ideas."



Photo credit: Karere Wedekind

OPEN BOOK'S LEAD READERS

At the heart of Open Book is our incredible team of Lead Readers. Each of our groups is run by one, two, or sometimes three Lead Readers who are passionate and dedicated in helping people to connect with each other through reading and writing. They do a fantastic job year round making our groups warm, safe spaces to read, discuss and create together. Whether they are part of our funded or volunteer programme, Open Book simply could not run without them!

70+

Lead Readers



“

I've now been with Open Book for seven years. It's a great organisation and one I am very happy to be associated with. There's a richness to the thought behind it and I know what it means to the people who attend both groups I run. Open Book – good for the soul.

”

“

I'm really grateful for the opportunity to run my group. I've met some lovely people who have shared amazing stories with me. It's a real privilege and has enhanced my skills as a facilitator.

”

“

Watching confidence build within the group when it comes to voicing opinions on the poems and sharing work is always a joy, but my real highlight has been watching real friendships develop between the participants. It's very much a social group as much as a creative group, and I learn a lot from watching how very different people can come together with kindness and humour.

”



2025 Lead Reader Conference

Our 2025 annual Lead Reader Conference took place at the Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh. **42 Lead Readers** attended the one-day conference either in person or by joining sessions online.

Over the course of the day, Lead Readers had the opportunity to attend workshops led by the Open Book Office Team and by external organisations including SAMH and Mindroom. During the breaks between workshops, Lead Readers were able to catch up with each other and share their experiences of leading their groups.

Sessions included:

- Generation Game: Prompt Building Session (for Creative Writers)
- It Takes All Kinds of Minds: Neurodiversity Workshop
- Suicide Awareness with SAMH
- Building Your Community

“I loved the conference. It was so good to connect with others and compare practices. It's really valuable to hear what other people are doing and what works well for them. Operating alone can sometimes feel a little isolating so I think bringing readers together in this way offers support and encouragement. We are actively promoting a sense of community in our sessions, so it was really special for us to experience that same camaraderie at the conference!”

The Open Book Office Team

The Open Book Office Team oversee the day-to-day running of the organisation and keep things running smoothly. The team includes (from left to right): Lizzie, Operations Manager; Jess, Co-Director; Marjorie, Co-founder and Co-Director (stepping down as of April 2026); Claire, Co-Director and Co-founder; Amy, Office Manager.



OPEN BOOK FESTIVAL VISITS 2025-2026

Every year, we support our groups to attend a literary event whether at a festival, library or local bookshop. Attending a literary event supports Open Book's members to feel part of Scotland's literary landscape and allows them to deepen their connection with reading and with the other members of their group.

In our 2025–2026 project year...

300

- **300 Members** attended a literary festival or event

53

- **53 Groups** attended a literary festival or event

18

- Open Book groups were present at **18 Scottish literary festivals and events**

- Edinburgh International Book Festival
- StAnza International Poetry Festival
- Further From Festival
- National Theatre of Scotland
- Duns Play Fest
- The Bookhouse, Broughty Ferry
- Dundee Book Festival
- St Magnus International Festival
- Nairn Book & Arts Festival
- Open the Door Festival
- Perth Theatre and Concert Hall
- WayWord Festival
- Open Book Online Gaelic Event
- Perth Museum
- AyeWrite Festival
- Night Owl Books, East Linton
- Push The Boat Out Festival
- Granite Noir



What do our members enjoy most about festival visits?

"The atmosphere, attending as a group, the chat about the events afterwards in the cafe."

“

"The insights of creative people as they discuss their work, and then listening to them read their work. I find this very inspirational."

”

"Discussion with others attending (mainly from Open Book groups). Attended event I would not have chosen. Seeing friends made through Open Book."

“

"Many inspiring ideas, they inspire me to have more deep reflection about various issues including what is nature, what is climate change."

”

"Everything!"

95%

of attendees said they would attend a festival/literary event with Open Book again.*

60%

Said they would not/might not have attended the festival/literary event without Open Book.*

“

Thank you for making it possible to attend a poetry festival with the Open Book group. I could not have done this without the group and it was a very inspiring day.

”

*Based on feedback collected from 80 attendees during festival visits between 2025 and 2026



UNBOUND PROGRAMME

Month	Theme
October	One Last Time
November	Comfort
December	Measuring
January 2026	Rediscovery
February	Caring
March	Planting
April	Wonder
May	Growing Up
June	Swimming
July	Craft
August	Cafés
September	Dreams

Open Book's Unbound Programme seeks to help our community stay connected and platform new and diverse voices. Every year, we select 12 new pieces of writing from our paid submissions call out to be featured in our Unbound newsletter. The new writing also inspires a theme that Open Book creative writing groups explore for that month, sometimes even producing a collaborative 'group' poem inspired by that theme.

The new writing is also featured and read aloud in the Unbound Podcast. Our podcast provides alternative access to the Open Book model for those who may not be able to attend a session.

1,242
Podcast
Listens

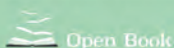
1,027
Newsletter
Subscribers



READ, LISTEN,
SUBSCRIBE



Unbound Podcast
March 2026: Planting



Phone Calls From My Mother
by Anna Martin

It is hot. The garden grows at an astonishing pace, bursting and unfurling so fast I swear I see the plants moving. Whilst I can, I dig out weeds, endlessly, then in the evenings I sit heavily into a white plastic chair, move my hands in circles over my growing belly. The low sun reflects on the laurel leaves; ferns quiver in the warm breeze.

I collect names in a small brown notebook smudged with wet and dirt:

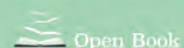
Laurel: dark, broad, poisonous in enclosed spaces.

Fern: low, plenty, secretive.

Naming a human is hard.



Unbound Podcast
May 2026: Growing Up



OPEN BOOK PAMPHLET

Every year, we ask our creative writing groups to produce at least one group poem together. These poems offer a chance for our groups to pool their creativity and create something a little different. The poems are compiled into a pamphlet, published by Open Book, giving our group members the opportunity to see their words in print.

Our 2025 pamphlet, *Plans for Better Times*, included poems from 35 of our creative writing groups and covered themes from our Unbound Programme such as One Last Time, Comfort, and Friendship.



200+

Members contributed words to our 2025/26 pamphlet



One Last Time by the Brora Creative Writing Group

Let's pack our suitcases one last time
Dark blue sails in contrast with the sky
Switch off our phones and
Spontaneously sail along
Watch the Milky Way spiral
Harmonising between this world
And our dreams
The Boat sailing briskly into distance
A faraway whistle
Let's totally kickback and crack open
the hip flask!



BRINGING PEOPLE AND BOOKS TOGETHER

For more information or to find out how you can get involved visit www.openbookreading.com



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ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL