

Newsletter

07746 371353
Forest **R**ead **E**asy **D**eal



May 2021

Well, here at last is the latest newsletter! As restrictions are being lifted and people are getting their vaccinations, we are looking forward to a return to face to face coaching over the next few weeks. The good news is that everyone seems to be keen to get going again and I also have some new referrals to follow up. If anyone has any queries or concerns, please contact me on the usual email address: sheilapriest49@gmail.com

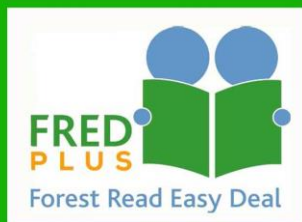
Contents	Page		Page
Message from Roger	1	Keeping in Touch – Anne Holt	5
10 th Anniversary	2	Changes to the Committee	5
Volunteers Week	2	Resilience – Dean Writers Circle	6
Facebook and Covid	3	Radio interviews	6
Venues Update	4	Looking to the future	7
Gloucestershire Digibus	5	Crossing the River	7

A Message from Roger Deeks – FRED Chair



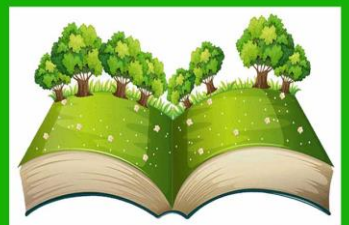
The pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for FRED and other non-statutory community learning organisations. In addition to inhibiting much of our coaching work, new referrals were very thin on the ground. We were not alone in this respect, as other reading support organisations in rural areas experienced the same dip. Why people came forward in urban areas but were reticent in rural places, is something we can only speculate about and hope to understand when properly researched, but rural isolation, transport and IT skills preparedness are all likely to have impacted on people’s confidence.

We know statistically and anecdotally that there are still many people who have difficulty reading and writing and our challenge is always to support individuals to take the first step and approach us. We have undertaken broadcasts with Radio Gloucestershire, Dean Radio and we are grateful to Claire Peach, who has led our social media development. This effort has paid off with 3 people coming forward to offer support having seen our Facebook page. There are also about 5 possible new readers waiting to get started once restrictions are lifted. We have ambitions to extend our catchment area (see Malcom’s update below) which will hopefully attract more readers. We have learned a great deal about coping strategies and risk management in the pandemic and hope to go forward with confidence in the future.



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10
YEARS
Anniversary

10 years of Forest Read Easy Deal

Forest Read Easy Deal (FRED) was born in July 2010, thanks to the inspiration of Julie Carthy, a literacy teacher for the Shannon Trust who moved to the Forest of Dean and wanted to help non-reading adults in the community. Since then FRED coaches have given more than 120 people the chance to improve their lives and well being, through improved literacy skills, but there are still many Forest people needing help.

We had hoped to celebrate our 10th anniversary in 2020, with some high profile events but Covid prevented that. Worse still, over the past year, although potentially people have had more time on their hands for learning, fewer people than usual have taken the difficult first step towards seeking help from FRED. Sadly, this seems to be a country wide effect, as Read Easy UK has also seen a decline in people seeking help, despite the boost given by the Channel 4 programme 'The Write Offs' - yet another aspect of Covid affecting some of those members of the community who would benefit the most.

<https://www.facebook.com/forestreadeasydeal/posts/185903139659832>



Volunteers Week takes place 1-7 June every year. It's a chance to recognise the fantastic contribution volunteers make to our communities and say thank you.

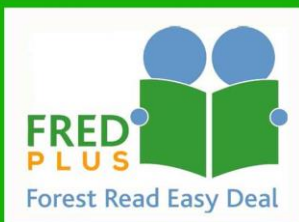
Volunteers' Week is supported and celebrated by small grassroots organisations as well as larger, household-name charities, who together run hundreds of activities across the UK. These activities showcase and celebrate volunteers and the contribution volunteering makes in our communities.

Volunteers' Week 2021 is a time to say thanks. It goes without saying that volunteers have played a key role in the pandemic response. During an exceptionally difficult year, people from all walks of life around the UK have taken the time to volunteer and make a huge difference their communities – just as they do every year. This is a time for us to come together and thank all volunteers for their invaluable contribution. There is more information on the website: <https://volunteersweek.org/>

The link below offers discounts in certain shops to volunteers working with charities. Hopefully, some of you will find something for yourself. <https://www.charityworkerdiscounts.com/>

We are discussing how to thank all our FRED volunteers for their ongoing support and are planning a tea party in June or July, probably at Kris's house in Yorkley. More details to come.





Newsletter

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Facebook and the challenge of Covid – Claire Peach



In early 2020 we launched the FRED Facebook page as planned, but then Covid struck! Being primarily a face-to-face support service for people with limited literacy skills, lockdown brought

FRED's usual work to a standstill, as coaches could not meet up with their readers.

It was hoped that with adequate protection, readers and coaches would soon be able to get together again, but with the anxiety and stress being caused by Covid in many other aspects of peoples' lives, readers and coaches were reluctant to meet, even with protection.

Many of our readers have health and other issues that magnified the impact of Covid, and we were very concerned about their welfare, but most coaches managed to keep in touch with their readers remotely throughout the pandemic. It was mainly by phone, as few of our readers have the confidence to use computers or phones to access the resources that are available, and learning to read was not a priority.

With little direct news to publish on Facebook, we decided to use FRED's Facebook page as a support and information service for both our readers and coaches, and the general public. With this in mind, Malcom and I have been publishing regular posts on a wide range of reading related topics.

With Covid disrupting almost every aspect of our lives, there have been vast quantities of information published on line, but much of it

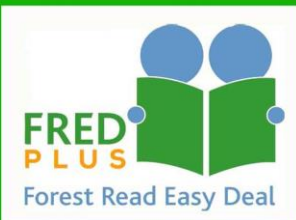
has kept changing. This has been bad enough for capable readers to keep up with, but an enormous challenge for poor readers. Our posts to help cope with this have included summaries of the latest information, notification of where local help is available (eg vaccination centres), new services such as library services for home-schooling, free training courses, and mental health services as well as some humour, such as a limerick competition, to lighten the mood. (Popular posts)

We have also used Facebook to reach out to the general public and remind them of the extra challenges faced by people with limited reading skills, and that despite Covid, FRED has still been available to help them. We have shared FRED posts on a number of local Facebook community pages and encouraged people to talk about FRED and encourage friends and relatives to contact FRED. Also many of our posts have audio or video links which make the information more accessible to people with limited reading skills.

Last autumn the Channel 4 TV program 'The Write Offs', which thanks to the courageous people who told their stories, did a lot to help counteract the misguided belief that being unable to read means you must be stupid. Even so, many people who need help continue to feel ashamed of their difficulty and hide it from all but closest family.

If you use Facebook, you can help FRED by sharing our Facebook posts and encouraging people to talk about the help that FRED can offer to local people, especially now lockdown is easing.

www.facebook.com/forestreadeasydeal/



Newsletter

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Some of the most popular Facebook posts from during the past year

INTERVIEW ABOUT FRED ON DEAN RADIO

<https://www.facebook.com/forestreadeasydeal/videos/710112626256037>

GOOD NEWS FOR 2021 & HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

<https://www.facebook.com/forestreadeasydeal/posts/243264210590391>

LAUNCH OF RESILIENCE

<https://www.facebook.com/forestreadeasydeal/posts/204023084514504>

THERAPEUTIC 'ESSAY' WRITING

<https://www.facebook.com/forestreadeasydeal/posts/2596778815615697>

COVID 19 CREATES AN OPPORTUNITY

<https://www.facebook.com/forestreadeasydeal/posts/169392781310868>

HOW THEY ACHIEVED MORE THAN THEY BELIEVED POSSIBLE

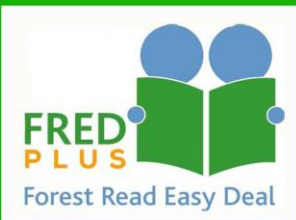
<https://www.facebook.com/forestreadeasydeal/posts/185903139659832>

A LITTLE LIGHT RELIEF - A LIMERICK COMPETITION!

<https://www.facebook.com/forestreadeasydeal/posts/143297827253697>

Venues Update

- **The Council Offices in Lydney** are not open yet for use by the public until June, they are awaiting more government guidance.
- **Lydney Hub** is renovating new premises above the café at 71 Newerne St. There will be a suitable room available to book for use by coaches and readers during the cafe's opening hours - should be finished in June and the rest of the work by September.
- **Primrose Hill Church** in Lydney may have a room suitable for use when community drop in coffee mornings start but no date set for these yet.
- **Forest Road Centre, Cinderford** - currently updating their computers and doing some other general maintenance work so do not anticipate opening up until June.
- **Mad Nana's Tearooms in Littledean** are hoping to open in June.
- **The Good News Centre** in Newent – the room we use has been taken over for storage during the lockdown but will be ready in June.
- **Libraries** – According to staff at Cinderford Library, there is a meeting in early June when hopefully arrangements regarding FRED will be discussed.



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Gloucestershire DigiBus

This is a new project to support and connect digitally excluded communities in Gloucestershire who have been made vulnerable since the Covid -19 pandemic began.

The digital divide is very real and separates the rich and the poor, affecting all ages from school children to unemployed people to older people. As society becomes increasingly online people lacking the skills or ability to access services and information are falling behind in society.



The DigiBus is a mobile digital lab in an accessible converted double-decker bus, fitted with computers, laptops, tablets, 3-D printer, robotics and coding and a virtual reality system.

Visitors will benefit from one-to-one tuition based on their individual needs, learn new skills and practise with the latest technologies. There will be no charge for these sessions or workshops.

A number of sites have been located across Gloucestershire, including the Forest of Dean and it is planned to start the service in August. We hope to have some information about FRED on the DigiBus and possibly some representation in person occasionally.

Changes to the committee

Our longstanding Treasurer Janet Williams is retiring and we are very grateful for her enormous accounting, budgeting contributions and wisdom that she has brought to the committee during her stay with FRED. She is succeeded by Chris Warren, a coach who understands the organisation and our challenges.

Keeping in touch – Anne Holt



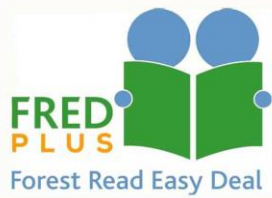
Over the last year through the lockdowns and during last summer my reader and I kept in contact using the telephone or by meeting outside when permitted. Our

telephone conversations were useful in keeping our relationship going and we were able to keep working so long as we both had copies of the same book and of course Turning Pages. We also kept in touch by post; I would send a worksheet or just a card or note to encourage her to read it and to write back to me. This developed her confidence in addressing an envelope and writing her own sentences. It also gave me an insight into some of the problems she was having in writing as well as reading.

My reader is incredibly motivated and has kept trying to improve her skills at this difficult time. We also tried using a dictaphone for me to record text so that she could practise at home. There proved to be some technical difficulties in using the machine (the delete button is too accessible!) but we have done more practice on this and are giving it another go! Providing new material has also been a challenge but overall this has been a very positive experience as it has enabled my reader to practise independently and to try a new way of learning.

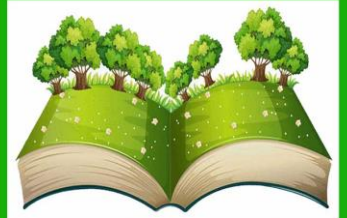
This is what my reader said about the year:

"I have been really fed up this year not being able to go out. I haven't liked not meeting up, better to meet rather than talk over the phone. I need somebody there to help me when I get stuck. I try not to let things get to me and keep going."



Newsletter

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Forest Read Easy Deal



SUPPORT FROM THE DEAN WRITERS CIRCLE



In 2020, prompted by the Covid crisis, the Dean Writers Circle invited local writers and poets to submit work for a prose and poetry anthology. They had a great response and the resulting anthology, 'Resilience,' had a ZOOM launch last December. We were delighted when we heard that the Dean Writers Circle would be donating all profits from the sales, to FRED.

In early February, thanks to the DWC and all the people who contributed to or bought 'Resilience', FRED received a cheque for £425.

For more about the DWC or to get a copy of 'Resilience' see:

<http://deanwriterscircle.com/resilience-anthology-sales/?fbclid=IwAR29DSuC-R0hkz5IHExnjKL8vLQY79HYU1xDYSGbiyNLxLeb1DGMQXIBG2U>

LOCAL RADIO HELPING TO PROMOTE FRED

BBC RADIO
Gloucestershire

Following our limerick competition on Facebook last May, Roger talked to Jules on Dean Radio's 'Dean Magazine' programme. He explained how FRED helps people who have difficulty with reading and writing and that even during lockdown, FRED is supporting current learners and new people can self-refer. We were able to share the recording as several videos on Facebook.

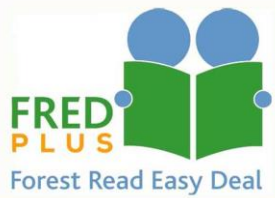
On April 5th this year, Roger and Sheila took part in the BBC Radio Gloucestershire programme 'Mid-Morning'. Roger talked about how FRED has been helping Forest people even during lockdown. Sheila 'the voice of FRED' explained what happens when someone calls 07746 371353 for help. You can listen to the conversation here:

You can listen to Sheila here:

<https://make.headliner.app/download/d80e6a53-7277-40d6-8eb2-1d5fd0ab34f9>

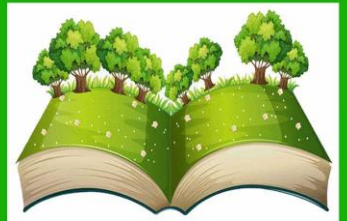
and if you have Facebook, you can listen to Roger here:

<https://www.facebook.com/forestreadeasydeal/posts/300712734845538>



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Looking to the Future

“Crossing the River” – Malcom Vine, Contacts Coordinator



At a FRED committee meeting earlier in the year we agreed to explore expanding FRED activities beyond our existing Forest of Dean boundaries. People in real life don't confine themselves within local authority boundaries. This is particularly true in a rural area such as ours. We have trained FRED coaches living in communities where it is just as easy to travel to Chepstow, Monmouth or Ross as it is to parts of the Forest of Dean. There are no Read Easy groups in Monmouthshire or Herefordshire and none planned at present.



Official statistics point to the fact that there is a similar proportion of adults having problems with literacy in these counties as in Gloucestershire.

We will be taking a cautious approach to this expansion so that we don't over promise. Initially we will be contacting communities in and around Chepstow and Monmouth to build up a network of organisations that can signpost potential new readers to us. I have contacted Monmouthshire County Council and Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations to find local support agencies that may have clients who could benefit from FRED assistance. Once more facilities are open after lockdown I will explore potential sites for leaflets and posters across the Wye.

If you are familiar with any support organisations in Monmouthshire and/or know of any sites that would be good for displaying FRED publicity material please let me know - vine895@btinternet.com

Contact Info

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