



Speaking volumes for over 60 years



# ANNUAL REVIEW 2019-20

An audiobook service for children and adults with an illness, disability, specific learning difficulty or mental health condition that impacts on their ability to read.

Registered charity no. 264221

## Director

Bill Dee

## Trustees

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Gillian M. Howarth

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Stephen Fry

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# A Word from Gillian Howarth, Chair



No one but the most prescient could have imagined the circumstances in which Listening Books finds itself at this moment, along with the rest of the country. But thanks to the exceptional dedication of our staff and the strategic preparation and response of Bill Dee, our Director, we have been able to continue our service for our members, who may be relying on it even more at the moment. The words of our patron Stephen Fry seem more relevant than ever; “The companionship

and delight of a voice telling stories is incomparable. 2  
Listening Books distributes pure, undiluted pleasure and friendship.”

Thanks to 21st century technology, many of our members who download or stream their titles have been able to access their books which may have helped to pass time in isolation and perhaps add some necessary element of escape to their day. For the small minority of our CD members who do not have access to the internet or a device, we have been able to fundraise and source tablets which we pre-loaded with audiobooks. We provided assistance for any members who needed guiding through the teething process, to make sure they have the comfort that a good book can provide. So, for the present, we are maintaining the personal service that makes us so much more than a mere provider of books.

We ended the last financial year with a small deficit, but March is usually the month when we expect a considerable boost. This year, of course, that was not to be as lockdown disrupted normal patterns of grant giving. But many other generous funders managed to remain active and loyal supporters and we are sanguine they will want us to continue to flourish. Looking to the future, they will have cause to celebrate the new IT system we had been developing before lockdown. It is a particularly timely step

and one which will not only build our resilience, but opens up the possibility of reaching many more potential members who could enjoy our service but are yet to know about it. It has been a slow and, at times, challenging process, but I hope that very soon now our members will see its many benefits.

As ever, we also owe so much to the generosity of publishers. They have enabled us to expand our catalogue and grow the range of choices available, whether people's interests lie in crime, historical biography or the exploration of the natural world.

From their homes, staff have been keeping in touch with members and indeed increasing their contact by responding to many added needs and concerns. When they themselves return to Lant Street, it will be to an office which has been recently upgraded in key respects. It is absolutely what they and our faithful and skilled volunteers deserve. I hope very much that this return may have come about by the time this report is circulating. This has been and continues to be an anxious, and for some, a grief stricken time. I hope that the future will be a happier one for all of us and that Listening Books will have an important part to play in that recovery.





# Our Service

## Listening Books History

Listening Books was founded in 1959 by Norma Skemp after a car accident caused her to virtually lose her sight. When she applied to another charity for help, they said they couldn't assist her because she had retained some of her vision. Norma immediately recognised a gap in provision for people with disabilities. She set up Listening Books with the goal to provide audiobooks to anyone who finds reading difficult due to a print impairment.

Since then we've grown to serve over 100,000 members with a library of over 9,000 titles. Our continuing aim is to ensure that anyone with an illness, disability, specific learning difficulty or mental health condition that impacts on their ability to read can still access the world of literature through our wide-ranging selection of high-quality audiobooks.



## Our Library

Our extensive catalogue includes books from a varied range of genres, and features best-selling authors including James Patterson, Margaret Atwood, J.K. Rowling, Ian Rankin, Roald Dahl, Malorie Blackman, M.C. Beaton, Kazuo Ishiguro, David Walliams and Santa Montefiore - just to name a few!

Approximately 10% of our catalogue consists of in-house titles we have recorded in our studios, the rest of the audiobooks we have bought from publishers with whom we have built strong relationships over the years. It is down to the generosity of both publishers and funders that we are able to have such a diverse library.

Our service is easy to use and our members can borrow titles either online or via MP3 CD. Our CDs are sent out through the post and members can borrow up to four at once.

We use download platform Overdrive to host our online titles, and members who use this service can log on to download or stream up to ten audio books a week. Our online service is a fantastic



option for many different types of members; for those who are housebound and not able to return CDs, or for those who listen to audiobooks on a portable device when they are out and about.

We charge a small, heavily-subsidised fee that starts at just £20 a year. We also receive funding to provide free memberships to those that would find the fee a barrier to joining the service. We have a small, dedicated library team that are always on hand to answer enquiries from members and provide any assistance needed with using Listening Books.



Like many charities, 2020 presented us with some unique obstacles we had to overcome in order to continue delivering our service. During the lockdown period, we decided the safest option was to close our office, which meant we were not able to access our CD library and send the discs out to members. We knew that, particularly for our members who were shielding, our audiobooks would be needed more than ever during this time.

Firstly we offered everyone on the CD service free access to our online library, providing step-by-step, over-the-phone guidance if needed. For those without internet access, we bought a number of tablets to pre-load with audiobooks to send to their homes. We were so grateful to the funders and publishers who made it possible for us to offer our service in an alternative way, at a time when many of our members would find it a great comfort and relief.

From June our CD service partially resumed as one member of staff was able to safely go to the office to dispatch CDs. However, as this is normally the work of at least two people, the service remains reduced and members will keep the tablets until we are able to have a full service in place again.

“...thank you for managing to maintain your audio-book service during this pandemic. You have been seriously impressive in making sure every member has been able to access audiobooks in some way: giving all members access to the 'Downloadable' service and even providing tablets preloaded with audiobooks for members with no internet access is amazing! It has been and continues to be a scary time but still being able to access books has, for me at least, given me both a sense of normality and an escape...”

**Amy, Listening Books Member**



# Our Studios

Our in-house studios have always been primarily dedicated to recording previously inaccessible works, making them available to those who would find it difficult to read them in print. Since 2002, we have focussed our studio work solely on our Sound Learning project, the recording of educational titles that are not available in audio elsewhere. This means that for many pupils, Listening Books is the only place they can access many texts that are beneficial to their studies. This year we've recorded a number of inspiring books for children and young adults including **Free as a Bird** by Lina Maslo, **The Good Guys** by Rob Kemp and **What is Race?** by Nikesh Shukla and Claire Heuchan.

In March, we decided the safest option was to close our studios for the lockdown period and for the remainder of 2020. However, we have still been able to record remotely, completing a number of Sound Learning projects. We've also been able to continue working with independent publishers, producing audiobooks for them via our commercial arm, Listening Books Productions, all profits from which go back to the charity.





# The Impact of Audio

As our patron, Stephen Fry, puts it; 'The companionship and delight of a voice telling stories is incomparable.'

For some members, companionship is one of the key benefits of listening to audiobooks. For older members particularly, or those we serve receiving hospice care, audiobooks can for some provide welcome relief from pain, boredom and loneliness, lifting them out of what are often challenging circumstances. In more recent times especially, audiobooks have been a great comfort to many who've had to cope with a very different way of life.

For our school-age members, audiobooks allow them to listen to the same books their friends and peers are reading, improve comprehension and word recognition as well as helping to instil a greater understanding and enjoyment of literature.

Anyone can develop a print impairment, and audiobooks mean that those who have started to find reading print more difficult never have to miss out on their favourite author's new book, widening their knowledge with non-fiction or revisiting an old classic.

## Member Quotes

'This is a wonderful service that really helped my children, who both struggle with dyslexia, to engage with novels and to get through their GCSEs. I can't recommend it enough to other families.' **Sarah, mother of member**

'Listening to books allow me to get lost in the story and forget my aches, pains and woes, thank you Listening Books.' **Jill, member**

'Listening books is a fantastic service. Listening to books helps keep me mentally healthy as well as educated and entertained.' **Paul, member**



# Our Work in Hospitals

We have continued to provide our audiobook service to children's hospitals via our partnership with Read For Good. 28 children's hospitals across the UK now have access to the Listening Books online catalogue.

We made the difficult decision in February to pause visits to hospitals in light of the approaching pandemic. During the height of lockdown most of the hospital schools and play teams we work with had to change their way of working, either going off site completely or no longer working on the wards. We offered temporary usernames and passwords so the children in the hospital could add the service to their own device and continue listening to audiobooks.

As teams have gone back into hospitals, it transpired that many were working with reduced IT staff. It became necessary to provide our service without the stable internet connection needed to stream books, whilst keeping both Listening Books and hospital staff safe. With permission from publisher Harper Collins we pre-loaded tablets with children's books to be used in hospital settings, deliveries will be couriered and training will be offered via Zoom.



# Financial Statement for the Year Ending March 2020

## LISTENING BOOKS STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (including income and Expenditure Account) FOR THE YEAR ENDED MARCH 31<sup>ST</sup> 2020

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2020 Total £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2019 Total £
<b>Income from:</b>						
Donations and legacies	390,456	865,890	<b>1,256,346</b>	138,978	526,746	665,724
Charitable activities	65,827	-	65,827	56,718	-	56,718
Other trading activities	39,060	-	39,060	20,157	-	20,157
<b>Total income</b>	<b>495,343</b>	<b>865,890</b>	<b>1,361,233</b>	<b>215,853</b>	<b>526,746</b>	<b>742,599</b>
<b>Expenditure on:</b>						
Raising funds	45,999	-	45,999	36,635	-	36,635
Charitable activities	415,080	955,134	1,370,214	300,067	454,545	754,612
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>461,079</b>	<b>955,134</b>	<b>1,416,213</b>	<b>336,702</b>	<b>454,545</b>	<b>791,247</b>
Net gains on investments	1,298	-	1,298	29,578	-	29,578
<b>Net (expenditure)/income</b>	<b>35,562</b>	<b>( 89,244)</b>	<b>( 53,682)</b>	<b>( 91,271)</b>	<b>72,201</b>	<b>( 19,070)</b>
Transfers between funds	-	-	-	( 70)	70	-
<b>Net movement in funds</b>	<b>35,562</b>	<b>( 89,244)</b>	<b>( 53,682)</b>	<b>( 91,341)</b>	<b>72,271</b>	<b>( 19,070)</b>
Funds brought forward at 1st April 2019	538,866	305,100	843,966	630,207	232,829	863,036
Funds carried forward at 31st March 2020	<b>574,428</b>	<b>215,856</b>	<b>790,284</b>	<b>538,866</b>	<b>305,100</b>	<b>843,966</b>



# Balance Sheet March 31st 2020

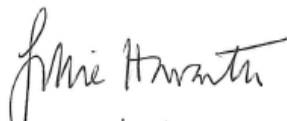
## LISTENING BOOKS BALANCE SHEET AS AT MARCH 31ST 2020

		2020	2019
		£	£
<b>FIXED ASSETS</b>			
Tangible Fixed Assets		106,281	95,708
Investments		280,643	279,345
		<hr/>	<hr/>
		386,924	375,053
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>			
Debtors	168,508		268,437
Cash at bank and in hand	274,823		224,879
	<hr/>		<hr/>
	443,331		493,316
<b>Creditors:</b> Amounts falling due within one year	39,971		24,403
	<hr/>		<hr/>
<b>NET CURRENT ASSETS</b>		403,360	468,913
<b>NET ASSETS</b>		<hr/>	<hr/>
		790,284	843,966
<b>FUNDS</b>			
Unrestricted		574,428	538,866
Restricted		215,856	305,100
		<hr/>	<hr/>
		790,284	843,966

This summary financial statement is a summary of information extracted from the annual financial statements of Listening Books for the year ended 31 March 2020 and have been submitted to the Charity Commission and Registrar of Companies. The auditors' report on those financial statements was unqualified.

For further information the full annual financial statements, the auditors' report on those statements and the report of the council of management should be consulted. Copies of the full annual report and financial statements for 2020 can be obtained from the charity office.

Signed on behalf of the trustees



G Howarth – Chairman

#### **Independent auditors' statement to the trustees of Listening Books for the year ended 31 March 2020**

We have examined the summary financial statement of Listening Books for the year ended 31 March 2020 which comprises the Statement of Financial Activities and the Balance Sheet.

#### **Respective responsibilities of the trustees and the auditor**

The charity's trustees are responsible for preparing the summary financial statement in accordance with applicable United Kingdom law. Our responsibility is to report to you our opinion on the consistency of the summary financial statement with the full annual financial statements, and its compliance with the relevant requirements of section 427 of the Companies Act 2006 and the regulations made thereunder.

We conducted our work in accordance with Bulletin 2008/3 issued by the Auditing Practices Board. Our report on the company's full annual financial statements describes the basis of our opinion on those financial statements.

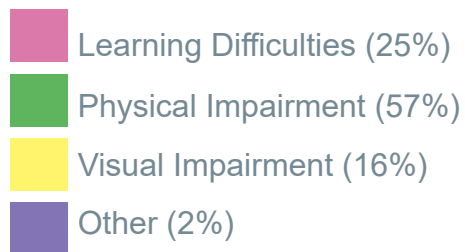
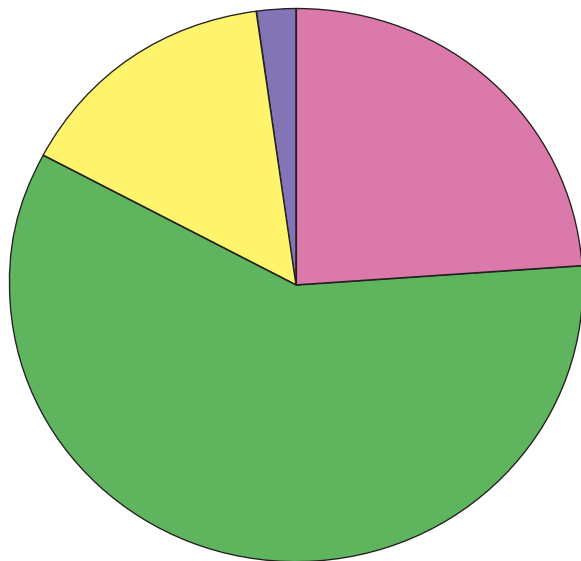
#### **Opinion**

In our opinion the summary financial statement is consistent with the full annual financial statements of Listening Books for the year ended 31 March 2020 and complies with the applicable requirements of section 427 of the Companies Act 2006, and the regulations made thereunder.

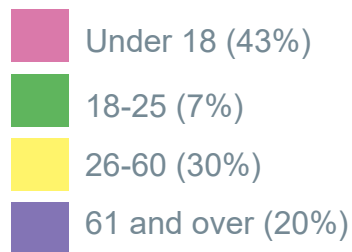
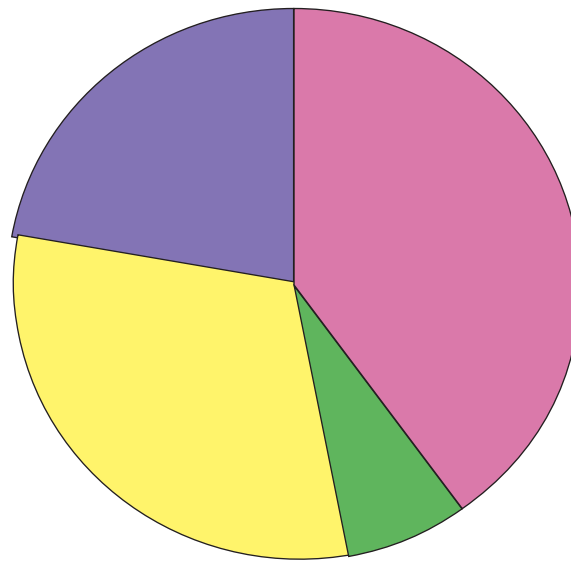
Jacob Cavenagh & Skeet, Chartered Accountants and Statutory Auditor 5 Robin Hood Lane, Sutton,  
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# Membership Breakdown October 2020

## Disability Groups



## Membership Ages





# Contact Us

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The companionship and delight of a voice telling stories is incomparable. Listening Books distributes pure, undiluted pleasure and friendship. Not many schemes can make such a claim.'

Stephen Fry, patron

Stephen has been patron of Listening Books since 2005. As a creator and lover of literature, and reader of the bestselling 'Harry Potter' audiobook series, he understands the importance of promoting the spoken word for all.