



ANNUAL REVIEW 2022-23

An audiobook lending charity for those who find their illness, mental health, physical or learning disability affects their ability to read the printed word or hold a book.

SINCE  1959
LISTENING BOOKS
Registered charity no. 264221

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Books Chair

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Stephen Fry

Auditors

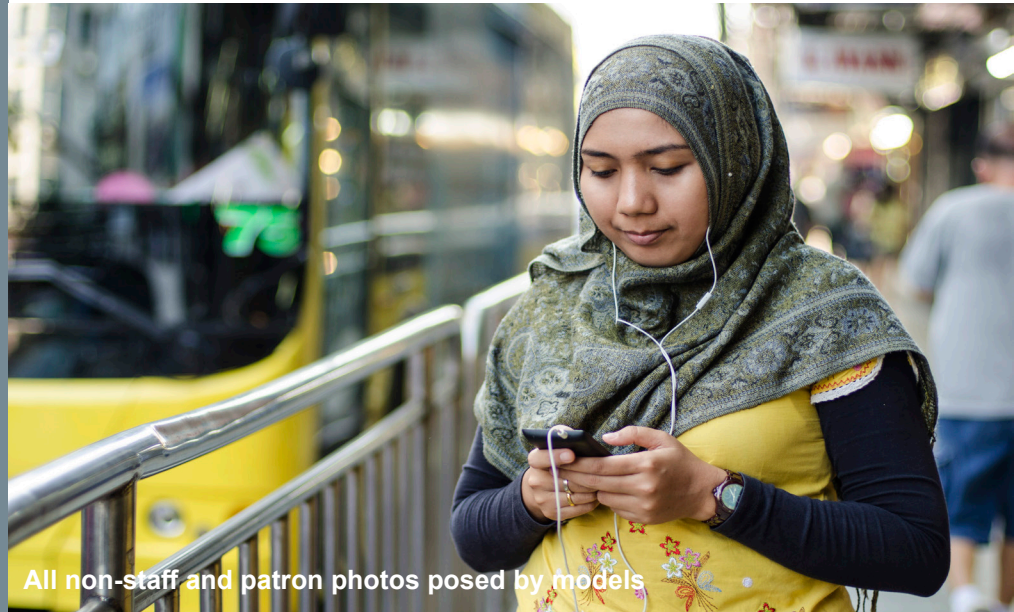
Jacob Cavenagh & Skeet

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All non-staff and patron photos posed by models

A Word from Gillian Howarth, Chair



Uncertainty continues to be a predominant factor in 2023, both in the UK and internationally. Rising ocean temperatures, wildfires, wars in Ukraine, Iran and Ethiopia. At home, food banks running short of supplies, and longer-than-ever waiting lists for hospital appointments. For Listening Books too, it has not been the easiest year on the financial front, but one thing is always a source of reassurance; our long-serving and dedicated staff. I would like to pay tribute to them at the

beginning, rather than at the end of this message, because it is they who make the service we give what it is. They seek out the books which will give most delight, they negotiate with our ever-generous publishers, they respond to members' queries and try to ensure any technical hurdles are overcome. We are blessed to have such staff who believe passionately in the value of what they are doing, and whose faith in the difference it makes to so many lives is sustained by the wonderful messages they receive from our members.

For our younger members, many of whom have Specific Learning Difficulties, it is about the excitement of discovering that stories do not have to be decoded from elusive text, but can be enjoyed curled up in a chair. Maybe even with their eyes closed! For students at school or college, it is being able to access the texts they need for their studies. For our adult members, contending maybe with the frustrations of chronic fatigue, Crohn's Disease or arthritis, it may be the delight of listening to the last of a favourite series. As our patron Stephen Fry emphasises, the companionship of another voice telling us stories is incomparable. And what an expansion of our lives too, taking us beyond the limitations of our own circumstances to share in the hopes and fears, setbacks and triumphs of others,

whether in Mumbai or Manchester, in 2023 or in 1789.

While income has, for the first time for some years now, been slower to secure, many aspects of the charity's work have been very positive this year. Our membership is at its highest in our history meaning more members at home, in school or in hospitals and hospices are enjoying listening. More members too are discovering the benefit of PressReader, giving them access to a very wide range of newspapers and magazines. And we are delighted that our new membership options for schools have been well received. In the past year we have also become a service provider for The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, giving participating students the opportunity to see how our service helps people with a very wide range of disabilities.

So, despite all the difficulties we face in these times, I was reminded recently of how much we have to be grateful for. Reading about the extraordinary Olaudah Equiano, sold many times over as a slave but finally buying his freedom in 1766, I learned how he wrote in his autobiography about the first time he saw a sailor reading a book.

Not knowing of reading, he assumed the man was talking to the text. He tells us; "I have often taken up a book and have talked to it and then put my ears to it, when alone, in the hopes it would answer me and I have been very much concerned when I found it remained silent."

How lucky we are to live in times when books can indeed talk to us, and Equiano's dream has been realised.



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 more than 120,000 members with a collection of over 10,700 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 Audio Collection

Our extensive catalogue includes literary prize-winners like **Girl, Woman Other** by Bernardine Evaristo and **Shuggie Bain** by Douglas Stuart, popular crime series like **Ruth Galloway** by Elly Griffiths and **Cormoron Strike** by Robert Galbraith, best-selling adapted books like the **Bridgerton** series, and many other titles from the great classics to books by new, emerging authors.

Approximately 10% of our audiobooks are in-house, educational titles we record in our studios, the rest we have bought from publishers with whom we have built strong relationships over the years. It is due to the generosity of both publishers and funders that we are able to have such a diverse collection of titles. Between April 2022 and March 2023 we added over 450 new titles!

Our members can easily borrow titles either online via our website or via MP3 CD. For our members that join via a school, teachers have a dedicated dashboard from where they can add or



change students who are able to have access to our service, monitor titles listened to, and download resources such as letters for parents and audiobook reading challenges.

At no additional cost, a Listening Books membership also includes access to audio versions of thousands of newspapers and magazines via PressReader such as The Times, The Guardian, GQ, Rolling Stone, Good Housekeeping and many more!

Our membership costs start at just £20 a year. This is a heavily subsidised fee, and we receive funding to provide free memberships to those that would find the fee a barrier to joining the service.

Our Projects

We run a number of projects across the UK to ensure our service reaches those who may not be able to arrange their own membership, or may not have access to a device or the internet.

Our service can be found in hundreds of hospices and hospitals across the UK, with patients listening to audiobooks via tablets provided by us. They can either use the tablets to access the full online service on our website, or for those organisations with intermittent internet connection, we can provide devices pre-loaded with a selection of titles.

Our work with hospices began when we started our Books for Hospices project back in 2010, where we provided 'mini-libraries' of 300 CD audiobooks to UK hospices. We've since expanded this service to include our digital catalogue and now, over 192 hospices have a Listening Books membership and use either tablets or the CD mini-libraries.

More recently, we have established a number of partnerships with other organisations to provide tablets

to those who identify as isolated or lonely.

We wanted to really focus on reaching this section of society, and created partnerships with a number of local charities who specifically work with people who identify as lonely or isolated, which allowed us to offer our service directly into their homes. We are currently working with CISFA, Link Age Southwark, Reading Friends, Voluntary Network, VASL and the Marmalade Trust.



The Duke of Edinburgh's Award

In 2023 we became an Approved Activity Provider for The Duke of Edinburgh Award. We now offer young people who are at their bronze level a skill in Audiobook Reviewing and Presenting.

Each young person that chooses our skill will be guided through how to listen analytically to an audiobook and then write a review. Once the review is written, we will show them how to turn that review into a presentation that they can either record visually or as audio.

By completing the skill, young people will demonstrate their analytical skills, as well as learning how to record, edit and present. All whilst enjoying a great book!



**APPROVED
ACTIVITY
PROVIDER**

Our Studios

We know that teachers and students need the best tools to reach their literacy objectives, and we are passionate about providing access to texts, study guides and educational resources that may not be found anywhere else in audio format. That's why we dedicate our time spent in our in-house studios to recording educational audiobooks for our Sound Learning project. Our goal is to record national curriculum books and titles supporting wider reading, ensuring that students are able to access these texts that are so beneficial to their studies.

Recently we have recorded audio versions of the award-winning poetry book, **Yapping Away** by Joshua Seigal, **Cat Eyes and Dog Whistles**, a biology book about the senses by Cathy Evans, and **Badger's Parting Gifts**, a book that teaches children about grief, by Susan Varley.

We've also continued to operate our commercial arm, Listening Books Productions. Over the last year we worked again with publishers Canelo and Arachne Press to produce novels, dramatisations and poetry. All profits made from Listening Books Productions 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.

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

'Listening Books has dramatically improved my quality of life. I'm able to read so much more than I could manage before.' **Lucy Watts, member**

'Joining Listening Books has been a revelation. As a Parkinsons sufferer i was finding it increasingly difficult to read traditional books owing to my 'shaking', I had resigned myself to the fact that I would no longer be able to access books. As a widower, living on my own, Listening Books fills a massive void in my life.' **Mike, member**

The Listening Books have been really popular here on the Children's Ward at Ipswich Hospital...Thank you for providing this service to our young people, it is an invaluable resource.'

Kate Kingsford-Bere, Ipswich Hospital



Our Work With Authors

At Listening Books we love to connect our members with the writers that they love. We always include author interviews in our bi-annual audio newsletter for members, Connect, and over the last year we have interviewed authors John Marrs, Paul Pilkington and Jacquie Bloese (pictured). We were also delighted to start working with Virtual Village Hall, to bring live author online Q&A's to book lovers, for free! Our first two Q&A's were with Rivers of London author Ben Aaronovitch, and journalist and author of the book **12 Birds to Save Your Life**, Charlie Corbett.

Ben Aaronovitch is certainly a popular author with our members, as he won our second annual Members' Choice Award, where our members vote for their favourite audiobook of that year, based on a shortlist consisting of the most borrowed books from our catalogue. Ben won for the 9th book in his Rivers of London series, **Amongst Our Weapons**.

Our Podcast

This year saw the fourth series of The Listening Books Podcast, which included interviews with narrators Annie Aldington and Gordon Griffin, author and psychologist Dr Julie Smith, crime writer Jonathan Whitelaw, nature writer Florence Wilkinson, novelist Emilie Pine, editors of Slightly Foxed magazine Gail Pirkis and Hazel Wood, and Natasha Lipman, who writes about her experiences with chronic illness.



Financial Statement for the Year Ending March 2023

LISTENING BOOKS STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (including Income and Expenditure Account) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

	Notes	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 Total £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2022 Total £
Income from:	1e-h						
Donations and legacies		266,506	532,325	798,831	253,208	540,351	793,559
Charitable activities		61,967	-	61,967	59,263	-	59,263
Other trading activities		16,522	-	16,522	42,884	-	42,884
Total income	2	344,995	532,325	877,320	355,355	540,351	895,706
Expenditure on:	1j-k						
Raising funds		41,829	-	41,829	42,155	-	42,155
Charitable activities		513,166	482,445	995,611	351,180	609,070	960,250
Total expenditure	3	554,995	482,445	1,037,440	393,335	609,070	1,002,405
Net gains/(losses) on investments	6	(13,991)	-	(13,991)	40,171	-	40,171
Net income/(expenditure)		(223,991)	49,880	(174,111)	2,191	(68,719)	(66,528)
Transfers between funds		(145)	145	-	-	-	-
Net movement in funds		(224,136)	50,025	(174,111)	2,191	(68,719)	(66,528)
Funds brought forward at 1 April 2022		663,932	106,665	770,597	661,741	175,384	837,125
Funds carried forward at 31 March 2023		439,796	156,690	596,486	663,932	106,665	770,597

The independent auditor of Listening Books, Jacob Cavenagh & Skeet, has issued an un-qualified audit opinion on the full financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2023.

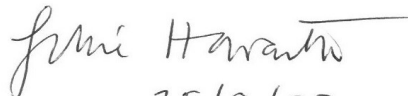
Balance Sheet March 31st 2023

	Notes	2023 £	2022 £
FIXED ASSETS			
Tangible fixed assets	5	51,244	88,634
Investments	6	303,835	387,826
		<u>355,079</u>	<u>476,460</u>
CURRENT ASSETS			
Debtors	7	94,597	149,112
Cash at bank and in hand		180,070	181,660
		<u>274,667</u>	<u>330,772</u>
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	8	33,260	36,635
NET CURRENT ASSETS		<u>241,407</u>	<u>294,137</u>
NET ASSETS		<u>596,486</u>	<u>770,597</u>
FUNDS			
Unrestricted	12	439,796	663,932
Restricted	11	156,690	106,665
NET ASSETS		<u>596,486</u>	<u>770,597</u>

Approved by the Council of Management and signed on its behalf by:

G Howarth
Chairman

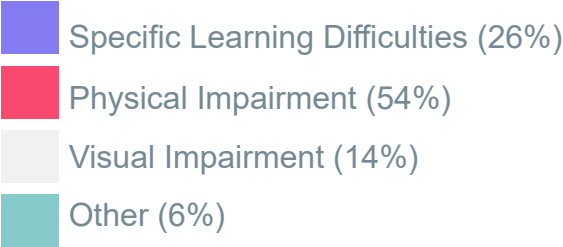
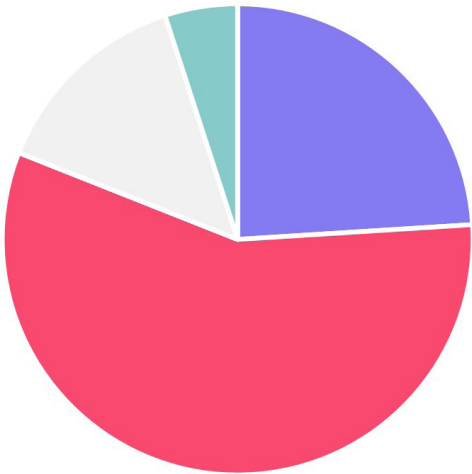
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25/9/23

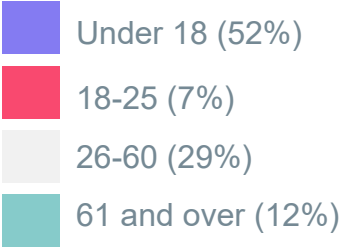
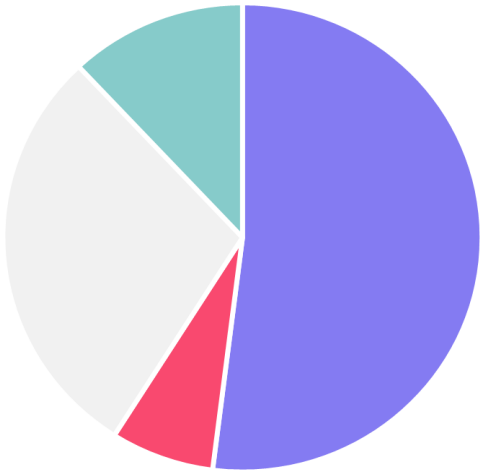
Company Registration No: 01056004

Membership Breakdown September 2023

Disability Groups



Membership Ages



Contact Us

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 listeningbooks

 @ListeningBooks





'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.