



SINCE



1959

LISTENING BOOKS

ANNUAL REVIEW 2024 - 2025

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

Registered charity no. 264221

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LISTENING BOOKS

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Nick Forster

David O'Neill

Sayra Tekin

Helen Grant

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Gillian M. Howarth

Treasurer

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Patron

Sir Stephen Fry

Auditors

Xeinadin Audit Limited

5 Robin Hood Lane

Sutton

Surrey

SM1 2SW



All non-staff and patron photos posed by models

A Word from Gillian Howarth, Chair



In a year which has been difficult financially for many charities, we have not been immune. But as I write, there are good reasons to be both proud of what we have been achieving and sanguine about the future. This is particularly down to the dedication of the staff, the leadership of our Director Bill Dee and the collective wisdom of the Trustees. Among the latter, it was a great sadness to lose Christopher Sinclair-Stevenson, the legendary publisher, who died in January this year aged 85, and is sorely missed.

In September last year our Treasurer, Ann-Marie Williams, resigned from her post before moving to the Lake District. We have always believed in having a small board of Trustees working closely together, contributing their particular expertise, so the loss of anyone leaves a big gap. The charity owes much to both Christopher and Ann-Marie and I would like to take this opportunity of recognising all they have both done to bring us to this positive moment in our history. I would also like to extend a very warm welcome to our three new Trustees, Charlotte Bainbridge - taking over the onerous role of Treasurer, Helen Grant and Sayra Tekin, who is already familiar with Listening Books as a member.

The big news of this year was our move from our offices in Lant Street to The Foundry near the Oval. As with any such move, it placed a considerable extra burden on the staff and I would like to thank them specially for their management of the move while maintaining and indeed improving our service to members. It was, of course, a sad decision in some ways because Lant Street held so many memories - not least of our founder Norma Skemp who would visit often in the early days. But The Foundry offers many advantages - considerably reduced costs,

maintenance of the building managed by the landlord - a great saving of our time - and an altogether more comfortable environment for our staff.

Given the pressures of the move it is especially gratifying to report on our record membership figures - individual membership standing in March at 10,995 and knowing that through our group membership we are reaching over 100,000. Such bold figures do not, however, do justice to the qualitative difference the service is making to the lives of so many varied people. It opens up the delight of stories to our younger members and can reduce the exclusion caused by a physical disability or dyslexia. It levels up the playing field for students and, at the other end of the spectrum, provides stimulus, entertainment and solace to older members for whom reading print has, for one reason or another, become exhausting or even impossible.

We know how important it is to keep updating our titles and we are grateful to those members, who through our Members' Forum, provide us with title suggestions. We now have 9,900 audiobooks to choose from along with many newspapers and magazines through PressReader.

It is lovely that more and more members are discovering the benefits of this relatively new service – with the number of members using it having doubled over the past year.

Thank you to all those who have recognised and supported our work; trusts, publishers, partner organisations and most importantly, our members. I know I speak for us all in saying we shall earnestly continue in our endeavours to provide you with the most personal and imaginative service we can.



Our Service

Listening Books' History

Listening Books was founded by Norma Skemp in 1959. When Norma lost most of her vision after an accident, she applied to a charity for help. They said they weren't able to assist her because she had retained some of her eyesight. Norma immediately recognised a gap in provision for people with disabilities and set up Listening Books, with the goal to provide audiobooks to anyone who finds their reading ability is affected by a print impairment.

The way we deliver our service has changed a lot over the last 65 years, from 8-track tapes to cassettes, to CDs and digital downloads. But our aim has always remained the same, to provide essential access to the world of literature through our wide-ranging selection of high-quality audiobooks.

Through both individual memberships and those who have joined via an organisation, we now reach more than 100,000 people with an illness, disability, specific learning difficulty or mental health condition that impacts on their ability to read or hold a book. 4

Membership and Service Options

Our membership fees start at just £25 a year which gives access to our catalogue of over 9,900 audiobooks. This is a heavily subsidised fee, and we receive funding to provide free memberships to those who would find the fee a barrier to joining the service. We are delighted to report that between March 2024 and March 2025, our individual membership rose by 31.9%.

At no additional cost, membership also includes access to PressReader, which has thousands of narrated newspapers and magazines such as BBC Good Food, Empire, Marie Claire, The Economist and many more! Between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025, the number of PressReader unique users increased by 88% from the same period in the previous year.

Schools that sign up for an organisational membership benefit from a dedicated dashboard where they can add or change students who are able to have access to our service, monitor usage and download helpful resources.

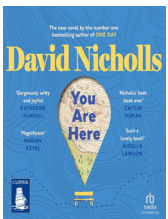
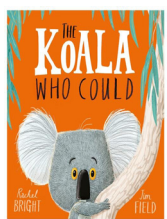
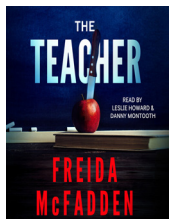
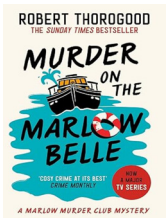
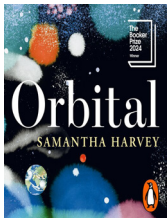
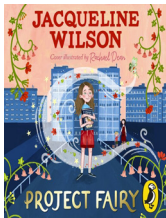
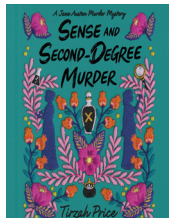
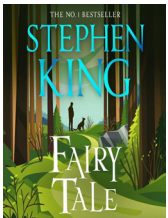
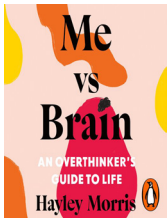
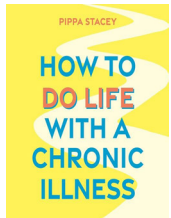
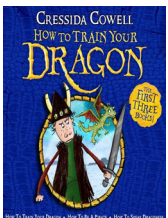
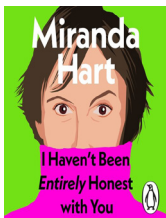
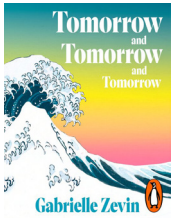
Our Audiobook Catalogue

Our extensive catalogue includes titles by long-term favourites such as Stephen King, Marian Keyes, M.C. Beaton, Malorie Blackman, Ian Rankin, Philip Pullman and Philippa Gregory, and newer best-sellers including Taylor Jenkins Reid, Rebecca Yarros, Abir Mukherjee, Frieda McFaddon, R.F. Kuang and Gabrielle Zevin.

We have over 300 audiobooks in our collection that we've recorded in-house, the rest have been 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 2024 and March 2025 we added over a thousand new audiobooks to our catalogue!

Our collection is member-led and we believe it is vital that our catalogue fully represents our members' diverse range of interests and tastes. This is why we actively encourage members to get in touch and tell us which titles they'd like to request, and which authors and genres they'd like to see more of in the catalogue.

A selection of titles added over the last year



Hospital and Hospice Projects

Listening Books have been regularly supplying audiobooks to hospices across the UK since 2010. Since 2017, we have been providing tablets so that hospices can access the thousands of titles in our online catalogue.

We're currently serving 56 adults' hospices and 40 children's hospices. We're also currently providing our service to 106 children's wards or hospitals. We are delighted to have been able to provide Listening Books to hospices and hospitals free of charge, through the generous donations of our funders.



The Impact of Audio

Many of our members have health conditions that affect their wellbeing. We recently conducted a survey to find out how our members are benefitting from our service, and of the 141 that responded;



98% of members said having access to and listening to audiobooks helps them escape for a while and forget about everyday problems.



92% of members said that, since being a member of Listening Books, their feelings of happiness had increased.



96% of members said having access to audiobooks has increased their feelings of wellbeing.



93% of members said accessing audiobooks has increased their book knowledge

99% of members said that in any contact with Listening Books staff members they have found the response time and customer service to be good



94% of members said membership of Listening Books has improved their mental health.



We are thrilled that our service has such a significant, positive impact and we will continue to regularly communicate with our members to ascertain how we can improve the service for them.

Member Testimonies

We love receiving member feedback and hearing how our service has helped them through difficult times, with their studies, or to reconnect with literature. Here are some of our members' stories;

'All my life I have been a voracious reader - books have been my escape, my reward and my consolation. I hold 2 masters degrees from Trinity College, Dublin and University of Cardiff - I was 3 years into a research doctorate at Chester University when cancer returned for the second time. Following surgery and chemo I developed M.E. which came with a significant brain fog and loss of cognitive function - primarily my ability to read.

Listening Books have been such a consolation to me in this situation. I have brief periods of clarity when I pick up a physical book or my kindle but most of my literature comes now from your wonderful resource ... it really is a lifeline to me. I am so grateful for this service and would be lost without it. I am still an eclectic reader and regularly pick a book to listen to at random times - it keeps life interesting!

Gary - Listening Books member

'I live for audiobooks, they've changed my life. There are so many things that I can't do, but I've gone on so many adventures through listening to audiobooks. I've always had quite a good imagination. I've also learnt so much through them. I enjoy thrillers and cosy crime best. I have a problem with both my eyes and my hands, so I can't read or hold printed books.

I grew up as a reader. As an only child, reading was my thing. Stories just take me away and I'm never alone. My membership was especially important during covid when I couldn't go out. Listening Books has been my friend for such a long time. I had to give up work due to my health, so being able to access the service for free is so helpful, as I just couldn't afford it otherwise.'

Natalie, Listening Books member



'I have spoken with my daughter in the past about reading and listening in general. She prefers to listen to stories because she finds reading texts difficult and sometimes tiring. However she is a capable reader and very bright. But I think listening to audiobooks allows her more mental and imaginative freedom, because she can concentrate on the story (and all of the different components - character, plot, atmosphere, words, etc) without the strain of having to decipher and decode each word.

I think that she also likes the theatrical element of audiobooks - sound effects, different voices, etc. Audiobooks are comforting and soothing for her - they also recall I think her younger years of being read to before bed (although we still do this!)

Finally, they are an excellent antidote and alternative to screens and video games, which can be distracting and addictive as we know. Thank you for bringing the Listening Books service to us; we both definitely appreciate it.'

Parent of a Listening Books Member



Our Work With Authors

At Listening Books we know that our members love hearing from their favourite writers, so we regularly interview authors to provide extra fun and insightful content. We primarily interview writers in two ways. Firstly, we aim to feature two pre-recorded author interviews in our bi-annual member newsletter, Connect. Secondly, thanks to our partnership with the Royal Voluntary Service's Virtual Village Hall, we are also able to regularly hold online author Q&A sessions which are streamed live on Facebook and YouTube. Over the past year just some of the authors we've spoken to include Simon Brett (pictured), Sally Gardner, Beverley Watts and Libby Page.

Rebecca Yarros was the winner of our fourth 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. Rebecca won for **Iron Flame**, the second book in her

Our Podcast

This year saw the sixth series of The Listening Books Podcast, which included in-depth conversations with the author of the Canary Club series Louise Hare, author of **A Very Typical Family** Sierra Godfrey and Becca Caddy, a writer and journalist who explores the human side of technology, her book **Screen Time** offering the information and guidance to help us take back control over our digital lives.



Financial Statement for the Year Ending March 2025

LISTENING BOOKS STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (including Income and Expenditure Account) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025

	Notes	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2025 Total £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 Total £
Income from:	1e-h						
Donations and legacies		226,373	803,786	1,030,159	223,400	723,001	946,401
Charitable activities		82,217	-	82,217	73,887	-	73,887
Investment income		680	-	680	744	-	744
Other trading activities		-	-	-	13,374	-	13,374
Total income	2	309,270	803,786	1,113,056	311,405	723,001	1,034,406
Expenditure on:	1j-k						
Raising funds		32,431	-	32,431	40,829	-	40,829
Charitable activities		323,534	868,724	1,192,258	438,046	667,362	1,105,408
Total expenditure	3	355,965	868,724	1,224,689	478,875	667,362	1,146,237
Net (losses)/gains on investments	6	(1,874)	-	(1,874)	34,136	-	34,136
Net income/(expenditure)		(48,569)	(64,938)	(113,507)	(133,334)	55,639	(77,695)
Transfers between funds		8,287	(8,287)	-	(1,500)	1,500	-
Net movement in funds		(40,282)	(73,225)	(113,507)	(134,834)	57,139	(77,695)
Funds brought forward at 1 April 2024		304,962	213,829	518,791	439,796	156,690	596,486
Funds carried forward at 31 March 2025		264,680	140,604	405,284	304,962	213,829	518,791

The independent auditor of Listening Books, Xeinadin Audit Limited, has issued an unqualified audit opinion on the full financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2025.

Balance Sheet March 31st 2025

	Notes	2025 £	2024 £
FIXED ASSETS			
Tangible fixed assets	5	14,562	34,391
Investments	6	126,097	267,971
		140,659	302,362
CURRENT ASSETS			
Debtors	7	145,345	117,744
Cash at bank and in hand		154,063	140,458
		299,408	258,202
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	8	34,783	41,773
NET CURRENT ASSETS		264,625	216,429
NET ASSETS		405,284	518,791
FUNDS	11		
Unrestricted		264,680	304,962
Restricted	10	140,604	213,829
NET ASSETS		405,284	518,791

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to entities subject to the small companies regime.

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

G Howarth

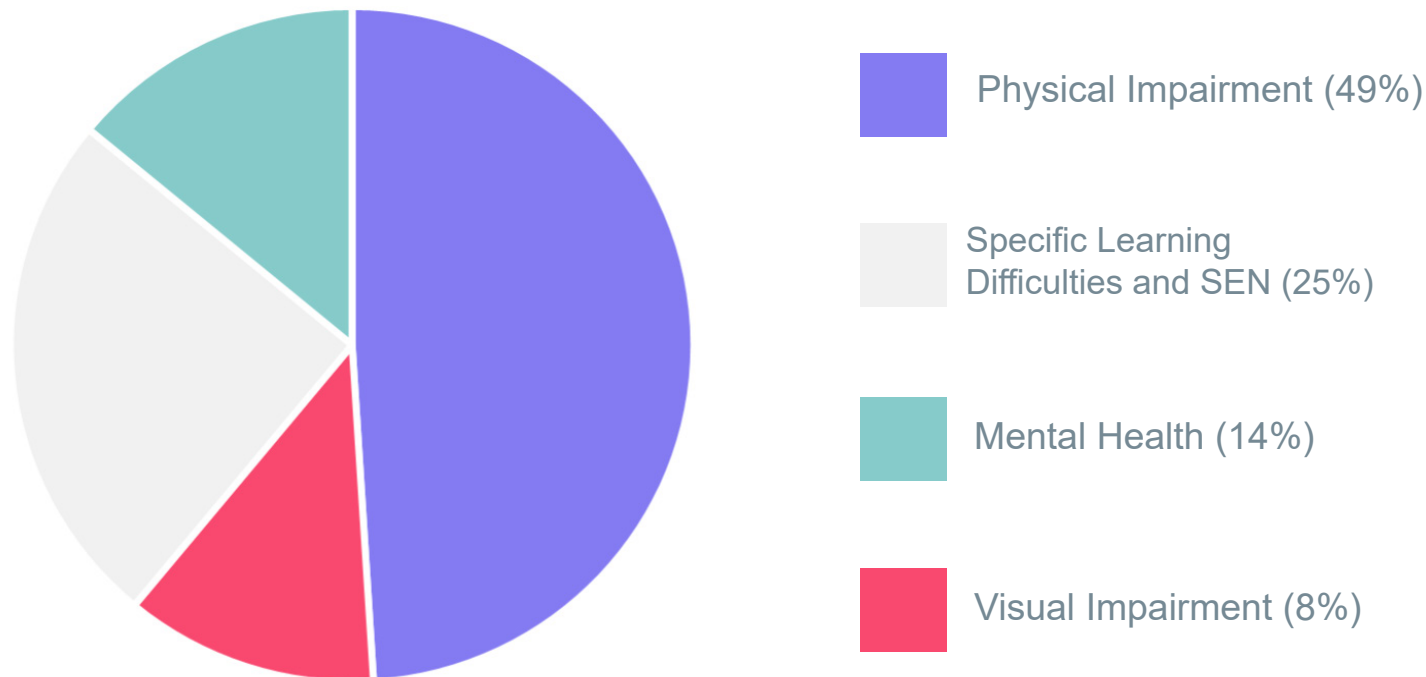
G Howarth
Chairman

Date: 1/10/2025

Company Registration No: 01056004

Our Reach

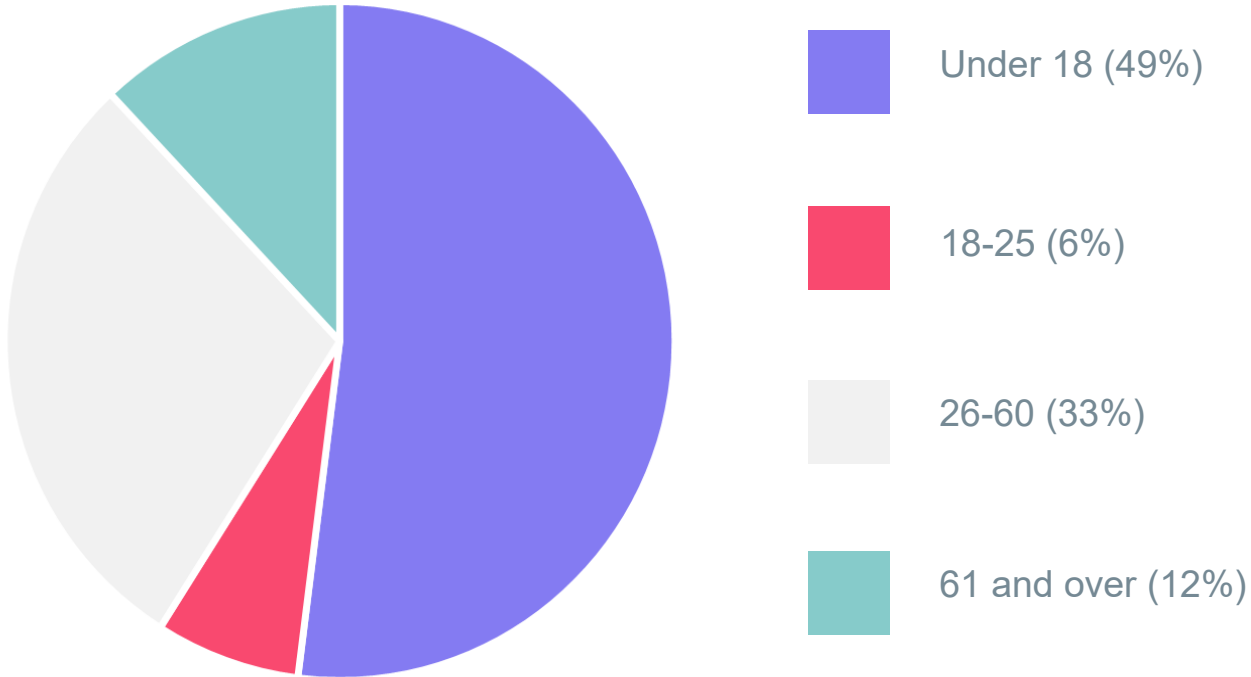
Impairment Groups (Oct 2025)



These figures provide an overview of our total membership. Many of our members have multiple impairments across the groups and the organisations we serve support a wide range of people.

Our Reach

Membership Ages (Oct 2025)



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.'

Sir 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.