



our right to read

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**31 DECEMBER 2007**

**Our Right to Read  
The Oxford Reading Centre  
Standingford House  
26 Cave Street Unit 7  
Oxford  
OX4 1BA**

**OUR RIGHT TO READ**  
(By Guarantee)

**Trustees Report for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2007**

**Companies House**  
**Registration: 05003647**

**Our Right to Read.**  
**Registered Charity: 11067327**

Location of services:

2007: **Our Right to Read. Oxford Reading Centre**  
**Standingford House**  
**26 Cave Street, Unit 7, Oxford, OX4 1BA**

Registered Address for correspondence at 31 December 2007:  
**The Tree House, Chatterpie Lane, Combe (OXON) OX29 8PG**

Trustees are: Secretary/Director: Professor J. D. McGuinness, Directors: Anita Weare, Geraldine Carter

Other Personnel include:

Director of Services: Fiona Nevola.

Accountant and Independent Examiner: John Gould  
J and A Accountancy Services Ltd.  
51 Henley Avenue, Oxford, OX4 4DJ

**Background**

Our Right to Read was incorporated on 24 December 2003 as a company with charitable objectives, limited by guarantee. On 15 October the Charity Commission granted the company Charity status provisionally, and this was made official in December 2004.

The inspiration behind the charity was the success of Fiona Nevola (an experienced qualified teacher) in developing and teaching the “*Sound Reading System*,” a method based on the work of Professor Diane McGuinness (with her permission). It takes into account the logic and complexity of the English alphabet code: 1) The 40+ sounds (‘phonemes’) in the English language are the basis for our writing system (what is *encoded*),. 2) These 40+ sounds are represented by only 26 letters of the alphabet, which are used singly and in combination (what has to be *decoded* to decipher the message.). Not only this, but nearly every sound is represented by more than one spelling (350-400 spellings altogether). However, 176 of these spellings account 90% of words in print. SRS teaches these spellings in carefully sequenced steps, insuring that critical skills, like auditory/phoneme analysis, segmenting and blending, are put in place. SRS is an advanced form of ‘synthetic phonics,’ one of the very few methods that teaches all common spellings for sounds in our language.

When children are taught this logic in a carefully sequenced way, *every* child or adult learns to read and spell in a short space of time (18 hours or less). The impetus for the Charity was the awareness that this amazing tool was out of reach for families who could not afford tutoring fees.

The success of the more than 400 students we have taught to read with this method, shows clearly that learning to read and spell is a skill, not a genetically determined endowment, and it is the right of every citizen to be taught this skill successfully.

## **Structure, Governance and Management**

### **Aims and Objectives**

The aims of Our Right to Read have remained unaltered from its inception except in one important facet of growth and development in 2006 (see below). The original aims and objectives have been slightly modified to add greater specificity and a sharper focus.

1. To advance literacy by a new method which teaches all major elements of the English spelling code as *the key* to learning to read.
2. To offer children and young people the opportunity to learn to read which has been denied to them and to provide grants for those who need financial help with the cost of tuition.
3. To establish a reading centre in Oxford to teach reading on a remedial one-to-one basis. (A previous goal of establishing multiple reading centres in Oxford, London, and elsewhere proved to be overly optimistic and has been abandoned.)
4. To encourage parents and carers to participate in the child's remedial learning process by attending teaching sessions and actively supporting the methodology between lessons. This not only speeds learning, but introduces parents to the method. This, plus access to our teaching materials, enables parents to teach other family members.
5. To provide grants for teachers and other professional to attend certified training courses for teaching the "*Sound Reading System*."
6. To demonstrate, by example, advocacy, and with rigorous testing, that nearly every child (including people with serious cognitive delays) can learn to read. Of the 450 clients taught to date, *none have failed to learn to read*. Gains average 2 years on nationally normed, standardized tests of reading, spelling, and reading comprehension, in about 18 hours of tutoring (range 12-24 hours). Older students often make larger gains, as much as 3 to 4 years in the same period of time.

## Activities During the Year.

There are three main strands to the charity's activities:

1. To run a reading clinic where approved teachers teach on a one-to-one basis.
2. To provide grants to pupils who cannot afford the full fees for lessons.
3. To provide grants to teachers and other professionals to train in the "*Sound Reading System*" methodology.

In 2003, the first reading clinic was established in Oxford at Fiona Nevola's house. By the close of 2006 it remained at that location. In August, 2006 an application and proposal was filed with the Oxford City Council to rent space in Oxford City Council's Business Enterprise premises. Rents were well below market rates, and access to these offices is competitive. We were successful in our application, and the ***Oxford Reading Centre*** opened on 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2007. A large resonant space was converted to quiet tutoring cubicles and an office. This was made possible by a grant from the Kinmont Foundation.

There are 7 qualified teachers on staff at the Oxford Reading Centre. All are experienced teachers who have attended a 5-day training on SRS and passed the examination. Nearly all our teachers have been with us since 2004.

In the first full year of the Charity's operation (2005), only 5 students were on grant aid. That changed dramatically in 2006, largely by word of mouth and by a new 'schools initiative' instituted under the previous Board. When the current Board took over in January 2007 grant expenditure was unsustainable given the reserves and the revenue stream. In April, the Board initiated a new policy: 1) Reduce reserves set aside by the previous board (£50,000) to £20,000. 2) Sharply reduce the income level to qualify for grants to at or below UK median household income. (Previously, this level had been set at £35,000 net per annum.) 3) Set a sustainable baseline ratio for grants to full fees. Currently, this ratio (given our operating costs and income) is 25% grant aided/75% full fees. This ratio is flexible and will alter with student numbers and the amount of funds available.

In 2006, we provided grants to 25 families for tutoring services. In 2007, this number was 38, with half on full grants and half on partial grants. In the early part of 2007, 40% of our students were on grants. By the end of the year this was reduced to 25%.

Trainings in the Sound Reading Method are provided by Fiona Nevola and are not a business operation of the Charity. However, the Charity provide bursaries to individuals and to Institutions who qualify under our guidelines. In 2007 we jointly funded a training for Basic Skills teachers working in the Warwickshire /Leicestershire area in Further Education Colleges and Probation Centres in conjunction with the Adult Basic Skills Unit at the University of Warwick. In addition, private individuals were given grant support to take the trainings on the basis that: 1) neither the applicant or the school could afford full fees, 2) the grantee would be introducing this method into their classroom and/or school.

Oxford schools are showing an interest in our work. In 2006, we began a collaboration with St. Thomas More RC Primary School, Our Lady RC Primary School, the Edward Feild Primary School, and the Iffley Mead Special Needs School. Primary schools are introducing the method in Reception and Primary 1. Schools received funding for one-to-one tutoring for poor readers whose families cannot afford to pay full fees. These sessions also operate as demonstration lessons for special needs teachers. Funding to extend these services for 2008 was provided by a generous grant from the Ernest Cook Trust.

Currently (2008) we are setting up projects in four Institutions with the goal of establishing Centres of Excellence in the most extreme environments: Youth Offending Institutions, Basic Skills Probationary Services, Special Needs Schools. Tutoring at these units is already ongoing with outstanding results.

### **Income and Expenditure.**

In 2007, ORR received income from three primary sources: Service fees paid by tutors who teach in the Oxford Reading Centre, donations from the public, and from Charitable Foundations. Service fees cover the ORC overhead. The previous ORR board was extremely successful in fundraising. However, their inadequate business plan led to a serious imbalance between restricted and unrestricted funds. This became a crisis in June, 2006. The new Board took over in December 2006 and is still grappling with this. It should be noted, that these financial constraints had no bearing whatsoever on the delivery of our services.

Of the £112,000 donated or pledged for 2005/2006, £79,000 was restricted to ORR's specific charitable aims. In July, 2006 salaried staff had to be let go, and since that time, no one has been employed by ORR. Under the scheme set up by the current Board, our teachers are independent contractors. They contribute a service fee per client-hour that goes towards running costs. The result is a sustainable business operation that runs (more or less) at break even.

In December, 2007, the Board began to develop ideas for a new project. We are currently seeking salaries for a Project Director and part-time administrator to run the Special Projects Initiative described above. Fundraising efforts will be ongoing throughout 2008 to make this a reality. This project is anticipated to last 2 to 3 years.

In 2007, ORR received £19,000 in restricted funds. £2,000 came from a private donor to go towards repairs, paint, carpet, etc. for 3 years wear and tear at the home where the previous reading centre was located. £7,000 was provided by Fondation Adelman for the editing, production, and publication of the *Sound Reading System* teaching programme. This is now complete.

£10,000 was provided by the Ernest Cook Trust for our work in schools. This money is currently being used at the Iffley Mead Special Needs School in Iffley, Oxford and at Our Lady's RC Primary school in Cowley, Oxford.

A list of our donors for mid 2005 to end 2007 is provided below. We are extremely grateful for their support.

Garfield Weston Foundation (£5,000)  
CHK Charities (£3,000)  
Oxfordshire Freemasons (£3,000)  
Dulverton Trust (£2,500)  
The Esmee Fairbairn Foundation ® (£20,000) for Grants to Children  
United Parcel Service International Grant ® (£33,000) for Grants & Teacher Training  
The Schuster Charitable Trust (£1,000)  
The Ernest Cook Foundation ® (£10,000) for Teacher Training  
The Kinmont Foundation ® (£10,000) for Reading Centre  
The Elizabeth Finn Trust (£1,000)  
The DLM Charitable Trust (5,000)  
The Charlotte Bonham-Carter Foundation (£750)  
The Woodward Charitable Trust (£6,000)  
The Benham Charitable Settlement (£400)  
The Sammermar Trust (£5,000)  
The Dragon School Oxford (£1,600)  
Fondation Adelman ® (£7,000) Publication of Teaching Materials  
Ernest Cook Trust ® (£10,000) Tutoring in Schools

® Restricted funds.

### **Reserves Policy**

In the Annual Report for 2005, the board stated their intention to create a Reserve Fund of £50,000 or more "over the next five years." By the end of 2006 that target had already been reached. In that Report, it was predicted that "a Reserve fund of £50,000 would provide two months worth of operating costs." Yet there were factors at work to make this impossible (see above).

The goal for the future of ORR is to maintain reserves above the £20,000 level, while keeping operating costs to a minimum.

*At the same time, fundraising is essential for both restricted and unrestricted funds. An urgent requirement is to get the Special Projects initiative off the ground and secure funding for two salaries, plus videos of the teacher training and tutoring sessions to implement the 5 day training for tutors.*

## Future Developments

### Short Term

Despite the need for organizational and financial restructuring, this had no effect on our services. For a young charity, ORR has been extremely successful on two levels. First, the support we receive from the public and the generous giving from Charitable Foundations, is remarkable. Illiteracy is a wide-spread problem and nearly everyone is touched by it – via a family member, friend, or neighbour. We now know from various surveys that the functional illiteracy rate in the English speaking world is around 30-40%. It should be noted, that this rate is NOT found in countries with a well-behaved writing system, like Italy, Spain, Germany, Finland, Sweden, and Korea, where ALL children learn to read to read and spell nearly perfectly during the first year of school.

We are becoming more and more aware of the enormous damage that illiteracy can cause to self-esteem and behaviour as children grow up. These are the young people who cause trouble at home, at school, and in their neighbourhoods. These are the young men who crowd our jails and probationary services, where staff have virtually no training in how to teach reading, and can only provide support in methods that have been unsuccessful. Finding a clear, logical, and simple way to teach ALL children and adults to read is an extraordinary achievement, and everyone deserves to know about it and benefit from it.

The second level of our success, therefore, is about what we do and how we do it. The *Sound Reading System* is so powerful that people trained in how to use **it can teach anyone to read and spell** to a very high level. This means youngsters can get back on track and reach their potential. It means that older students and young offenders can suddenly find their feet and begin to make their way in life as fully participating citizens. And we can do this in the minimum amount of time – about 18 one-hour lessons in all.

Meanwhile, our policy of having a parent or carer sit in on lessons means *they* learn the method by watching it work. They not only can help their child succeed, but other family members as well. Similarly, teachers who sit in on individual lessons in schools, simply by watching our tutors at work, can gain valuable knowledge in how to assist another child, or in how to teach these same lessons to an entire class.

From our perspective, the most important short-term “future development” is to see this programme, and others like it, being brought into mainstream classrooms so that no child would ever be “left behind” in the first place. Already, we are succeeding in several schools projects around the country, in Kibblesworth, Gateshead, in Chelsea, London, in Kidlington Oxon, and other area schools. In a Los Angeles school where a classroom version of this programme was being trialed, the end of year 1 results (June, 2007) showed that nearly all children in two reception classes scored above the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile on a standardized reading test. Most were reading 2 or more years above age norms.

The Head Teacher at the Kibblesworth school reported he had never seen anything like this in all his years of teaching –where every child was able to access the curriculum and

enjoy learning. Several children leaving Primary KS1 were reading and spelling three to four years above age norms. Previously, students at this school were typically below national norms. Today, no student is below average.

We have no doubt that teaching young men who have fallen afoul of the law to be competent readers and spellers, dramatically changes lives. We know this, because our tutors witness it on a regular basis. The increase in these young men's sense of self-worth is unbelievable, especially as it occurs in a short space of time. Suddenly, they realize they aren't "thick," and this isn't the reason they failed to learn to read. The most frequent questions our tutors hear are: "Why wasn't I taught to read like this in the first place?" and "If you know this method that works, why doesn't anyone else know it?"

The ultimate goal of ORR is to lead everyone to an understanding of how the English alphabet code works and how it should be taught.

### **Long Term Goals.**

Proving that a method works is one thing, but implementing it on a large scale is quite another. Nevertheless, we are committed to the ultimate goal of bringing this method or one like it into every Reception and Primary KS1 classroom as the *normal* way to teaching reading. ORR is working hard to make this happen. No one is more aware than we are of how slowly things progress when poor readers must be taught one child at a time, especially when unnecessary bad habits need to be unraveled. This is hugely wasteful in terms of resources and manpower and will never solve our illiteracy problem. The scale is simply too large.

For this reason the ORR board has set up the Special Projects Initiative as a way of showing the world that young people, even in the most extreme environment (such as a Youth Offending Institution) can be taught to read just as quickly and as well as any student at our clinic, or any primary school which uses this method. Our present limitation is personnel to administer this project, hence salaries. We are working hard to secure these funds.

For and on behalf of the Trustees

Dr. Diane McGuinness  
Chair of the Trustees