

Ada Varley

The longest serving volunteer at the Newham Bookshop



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Ada Varley was born in a working-class family in Liverpool in 1919. Her mother was a housewife and her father worked in the building trade. As a child, Ada wasn't surrounded by many books at home, however she loved going to the libraries to borrow books. She also acted out parts of a book, *Little Women*, with her sister. Even if her family didn't have much money Ada worked hard to get a scholarship to a grammar school.

When Ada left school, she became an office girl at the Liverpool Overseas League Club. She joined the war efforts at the outbreak of World War Two in 1945. Ada was living in a little village in Blackpool before the 1970s, when she moved to Newham to be closer to her daughter after she got divorced.

Living just around the corner from the bookshop, Ada noticed a sign asking for volunteers to help teach adults to read. She began volunteering as a literacy tutor and studied courses on basic literacy and numeracy. One of her students was a young man who was slightly disabled. He was struggling with his reading and writing, but enjoyed the social aspect of her class. There was another young man who failed his exams many times, but he was very imaginative and enjoyed writing stories. Because of the bookshop many families in Newham were provided with English dictionaries, school resources and whatever books they might want to read for fun.

Ada kept on volunteering at the bookshop for many years. During her time there she met many authors and poets such as Michael Rosen, Benjamin Zephaniah and Gilda O'Neill. She enjoyed being part of a reading group and made friends.

Ada finally stopped volunteering at the shop when she turned 90 years old.