

#BWS – buy your books at a charity shop

Contributed by The Charity Retail Association

With Book Week Scotland kicking off this week, the annual event once again aims to help more Scots enjoy the benefits of reading. This is a celebration of the authors, poets, playwrights, storytellers and illustrators who grasp the imagination of young and old. It is the perfect time to consider a fun and affordable way to fill your book shelves.

There are over 960 charity shops in Scotland, and, this Book Week, the Charity Retail Association is calling on Scots to think about where they buy their next book. Most charity shops offer a great selection of title, and some charities taking it further with shops entirely dedicated to selling books.

The Shelter book shop in Stockbridge, Edinburgh has been a treat for avid readers in the capital for fourteen years. Step over the old Buttercup Dairy mosaic doorstep and dive into endless shelves of fiction, history, politics, antiquarian, religion, children's, reference books as well as maps, comics and much more.



In the era of e-books and online shopping, many shoppers have not forgotten the joy of having a rummage through the shelves of a traditional book shop. On the cold November afternoon when I visited the Shelter book shop, there was no shortage of customers. City and town centres across the country are changing while charity shops remain a key player for bringing footfall and variety to our high streets.

Benefiting from being amongst several charity shops on Raeburn Place, the book shop attracts customers to the area who can enjoy a good browse through a unique selection of products. Research by the Charity Retail Association (the trade body for charity shops in the UK, representing 80% of the sector) shows that a diversity of products on our high street is what shoppers want which is why charity shops can provide such a satisfying experience. The book shop is in the unit next door to the main Shelter store which sells general goods including clothing and homewares. This works well for the operation, as volunteers with an interest in books can give their time in the book shop.

Volunteers are vital to charity shop operations. There are advantages for the volunteers themselves, the charity and the local community. People who volunteer in charity shops cite boosts in self-esteem and confidence as key reasons to continue contributing their time. Gaining work experience, skills and socialising are further benefits noted in volunteer feedback.

The Assistant Manager of the book shop, Jack pointed out that a lot of their success lies within the specialist books on the shelves. These appeal to people with particular interests such as art or poetry books. The staff and volunteers get to know regular customers and what appeals to them. This enables them to let customers know when they've had a large donation of books covering their special interest.

There is something for children in the book shop too – charity shopping can be a family affair. The shop stocks books for children of all ages and levels. The selection is kept up to date by savvy volunteers keeping an eye on changes in trends. As an added benefit, buying second hand from a charity can set a good example for children to be environmentally friendly and contribute to a deserving cause.

Environmental impact is becoming more important to shoppers, and buying second hand is guilt free for the environmentally conscious. Charity shops play a huge part in keeping products in the economy for longer and out of landfill. UK charity shops' reuse and recycling activity helps reduce carbon dioxide emissions by about 7m tonnes per annum.

Being a rebel is the theme of Book Week Scotland 2018 so do something different this year and head to your favourite charity shop. Boost your local high street, say hello to the volunteers, and take some satisfaction in finding your next read.



Drag Queen Nancy Clench with the Book Week Scotland Rebel Book at The Edinburgh Central Library.
Photograph by Martin Shields