

# Social Isolation Poses Health Risk Comparable to Smoking—Worcester Library Program Offers a Powerful Local Solution

*Partnership between Worcester Talking Book Library and Reading2Connect expands connection for seniors across assisted living communities*

WORCESTER, MA, UNITED STATES, May 7, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As concerns grow nationwide about the health impacts of loneliness, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warns that social isolation significantly increases the risk of premature death—on par with well-known risks such as smoking and obesity.

In Worcester, Massachusetts, a local initiative is directly addressing this crisis—one conversation at a time.



Senior group helping each other and reading together

The [Worcester Public Library](#), through its [Worcester Talking Book Library](#), is expanding an innovative partnership with [Reading2Connect](#) to bring age/dementia-accessible, discussion-

based book programs to seniors and individuals with disabilities across the city. Designed specifically for those who can no longer read standard print, the program is transforming reading into a tool for connection, engagement, and improved well-being.

“

Seeing the level of engagement and connection among participants in the Reading2Connect book clubs is truly inspiring.”

*Lee Anne Hooley, Head of Talking Book Services*

Already active at the Worcester Senior Center and multiple assisted living communities, the program is gaining momentum as demand for meaningful, inclusive social experiences grows.

Social isolation remains a persistent challenge in senior living environments, where mobility limitations, vision loss, and other health conditions can make participation in traditional activities difficult. Without consistent opportunities for engagement, many older adults face not only emotional hardship but also increased health risks.



Group of seniors engaging and laughing with each other

This program offers a simple yet powerful intervention.

By combining accessible books with spontaneous discussion, participants are given the opportunity to engage in shared experiences, stimulate memory, and build relationships—all within a format designed for full accessibility.

“The Worcester Talking Book Library has proudly partnered with Reading2Connect for the past year, and we’ve been pleased with the community’s enthusiastic response,” said Lee Anne Hooley, Head of Talking Book Services.

“We are currently facilitating book groups at the Worcester Senior Center and at two assisted living communities across the city. As we look ahead, we’re excited to expand this collaboration and bring this meaningful service to even more residents. Seeing the level of engagement and connection among participants in the Reading2Connect book clubs is truly inspiring.”

Unlike traditional book clubs, these sessions are intentionally designed to remove barriers to participation. Using curated, dementia-accessible materials, older adults can engage independently or within the group, regardless of cognitive or physical challenges.

The model is both scalable and replicable, offering a blueprint for how libraries and community organizations can evolve to meet one of today’s most pressing public health challenges.

As libraries across the country rethink their role, Worcester Public Library’s approach highlights a broader shift—from institutions focused solely on information access to essential hubs for social connection, health, and community well-being.

#### About Worcester Talking Book Library

The Worcester Public Library provides access to information, education, and community programming for residents of Worcester, Massachusetts. With multiple branches and inclusive

services, the library is committed to serving a diverse population. The Worcester Talking Book Library offers free library services to Massachusetts residents who cannot read standard print due to visual or physical disabilities. Services include audiobooks, braille, and assistive technologies.

#### About Reading2Connect

Reading2Connect® is a dementia-accessible reading and engagement program for older adults that uses intentionally designed books to support independent interaction with adult literature. Used in senior living communities, libraries, and Memory Cafés, the program enables people living with dementia to read on their own or with others—without staff direction—promoting autonomy, emotional well-being, and meaningful connection while reducing social isolation.

Susan Ostrowski

Reading2Connect

+1 860-235-4348

susan@reading2connect.com

Visit us on social media:

[LinkedIn](#)

[Facebook](#)

---

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/911102923>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2026 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.