

Evaluation of Bookstart England: Bookstart Corner

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Executive Summary

Bookstart Corner

Booktrust has identified the need to ensure that their programmes and resources fit the needs of children, families, practitioners and stakeholders. This report on the evaluation of the impact of Bookstart Corner adds to this evidence base.

Bookstart Corner is a service located in Children's Centres and is targeted towards socially and economically disadvantaged families. These factors along with the age range of children and extensive mode of delivery guidance clearly distinguishes Bookstart Corner from the Universal Bookstart programmes. Bookstart Corner supports Children's Centres across England to help families that need the most support to develop a love of stories, books and rhymes. Aimed at families with children aged 12-30 months, the programme allows centres to offer intensive support for parents and carers so that they may read together for pleasure with their children with confidence.

The programme involves families taking part in a series of four Bookstart Corner sessions utilising carefully selected resources and focused on stories, books and rhymes. The sessions generally involve a member of staff at the Children's Centre visiting the family at home, but on occasion take place in the Children's Centre. The resources used in the Bookstart Corner sessions are as follows:

- A rhyme sheet and DVD for parents
- A green bag containing: 'Wow said the Owl' and 'If you're happy and you know it' picture books, an information sheet about each picture book, a 'Fun with numbers' sheet, a 'My first marks' pad and crayons and a DVD for parents about sharing stories
- Small 'Busy Bear' booklet, accompanying fluffy finger puppet and cardboard finger puppet, and a sheet of 'top tips' about using puppets

Research methods

The research sought to investigate the impact of engaging in Bookstart Corner on parents/carers. Specifically it looked at:

- How many families regularly shared books, stories and rhymes with their child
- The confidence of parents/carers sharing books, stories and rhymes with their child,
- Engagement of families with local services (including Children's Centres, Bookstart bear club, public library)
- Practitioner perspectives on the impact of the programme on families

The methodological approach was to conduct a randomised before (pre-intervention) and after (post-intervention) self-completion survey with families to whom the Bookstart Corner programme was being delivered. In other words families were asked to complete a survey before receiving the Bookstart Corner sessions and after receiving the Bookstart Corner sessions, which allowed a comparative analysis of survey data to investigate any changes in the factors listed above.

Findings

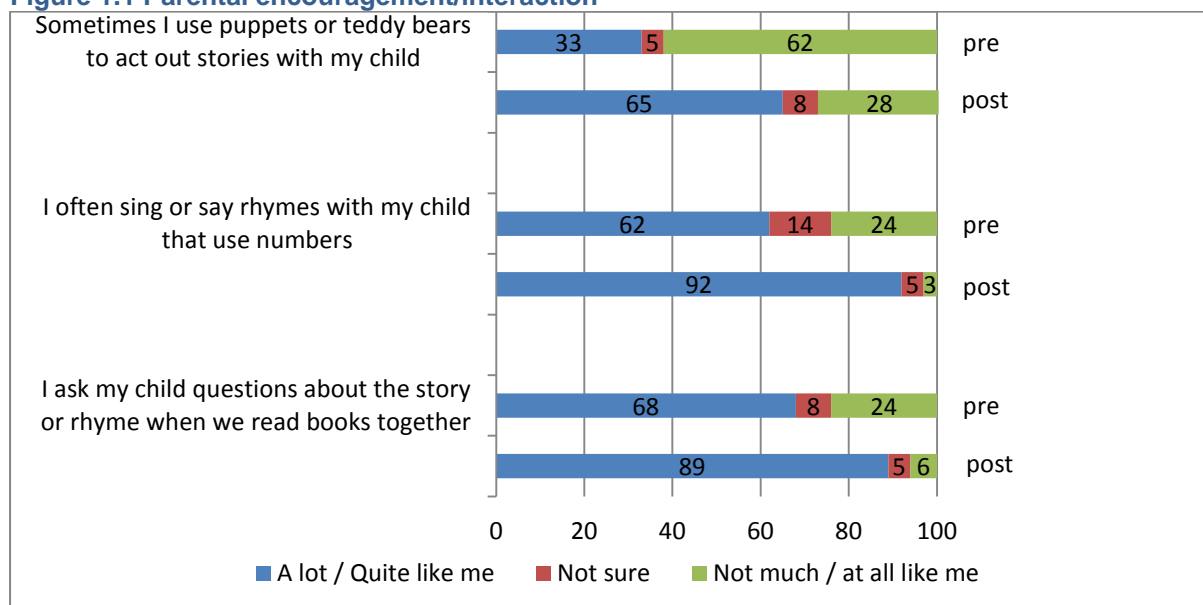
The analysis of the survey data indicated that the Bookstart Corner programme is highly valued amongst parents and practitioners and this is further reflected in the open comments made by both parents and practitioners. Notably, very high numbers of parents/carers

reported that they used and liked the resources they received (98%) and that they and their child enjoyed taking part in Bookstart Corner (94%). Moreover, the evidence indicates that the Bookstart Corner programme exerts a positive influence on a wide range of factors for the families receiving the programme.

The questions in the parental questionnaire were summarised under four composite outcomes all related to books, stories and rhymes; parental encouragement/interaction with their child; parent confidence and enjoyment; child engagement and enjoyment and child interest. Statistically significant changes were seen across all four composite outcomes. The main report details findings across all items, the figures below highlight the areas where the largest changes were seen.

Figure 1.1 below shows the items where the largest changes occurred in terms of parental encouragement/interaction with their child. Following the Bookstart Corner sessions parents were more likely to use puppets/toys to act out stories with their child, sing or say rhymes with their child using numbers, and ask their child questions about stories and rhymes when they read books together.

Figure 1.1 Parental encouragement/interaction



This was also evident from the open comments made by parents who indicated how they had learned new ways of reading with their children:

- *We have learnt some new songs we didn't know and it has encouraged us to sing a lot more* (parent)
- *Loved learning other ways to make the story more fun and interactive- puppets and drawing* (parent)

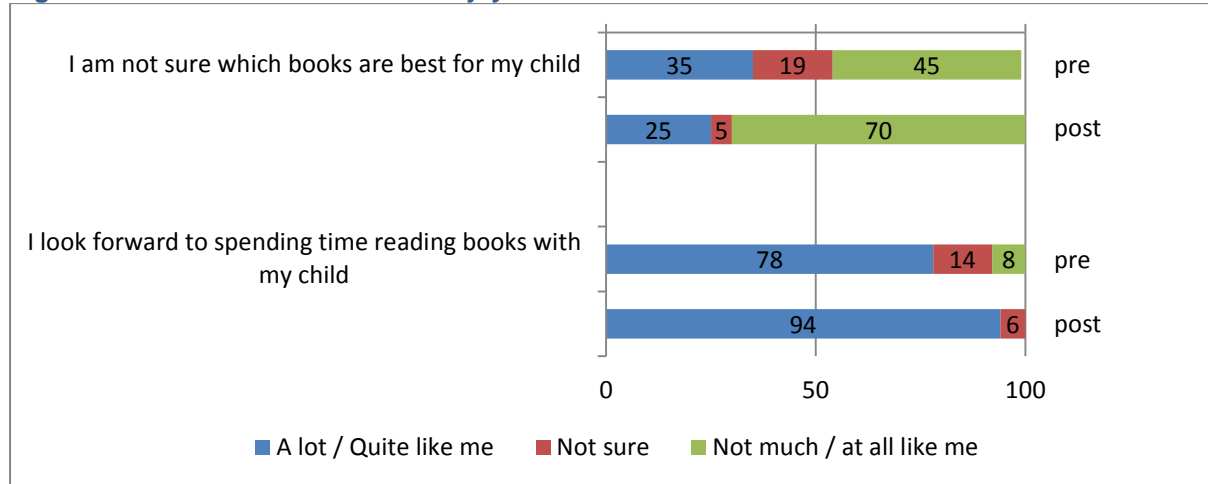
In addition, practitioners revealed that following Bookstart Corner sessions, parents were now sharing books, stories or rhymes with their child outside of the sessions:

- *Mum is using books and story time as a special time to spend with Child* (practitioner)
- *The child has since started singing and repeating rhymes and actions, also using the little Bookstart finger puppet* (practitioner)

Furthermore, analysis from the practitioner monitoring forms showed a marked change in practitioner views about family behaviours; following Bookstart Corner the majority of practitioners (62%) believed the family to be playing and engaging as a normal part of daily life after the visits compared with 23% who were doing this at the point of the first visit.

The statistical evidence also suggests that parents felt more confident about reading with their child and gained more enjoyment out of this following the Bookstart Corner sessions. In particular parents felt more confident about knowing which books are best for their child, and were more likely to indicate that they looked forward to spending time reading books with their child after the Bookstart Corner sessions (figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2 Parent confidence and enjoyment



This increase in confidence and enjoyment was also apparent from parent responses in the follow up questionnaire which asked direct questions about the impact of the programme, where 94% indicated an increase in confidence, and also from the open comments made by both practitioners and parents:

- *Very helpful in giving confidence to read to my child. Nice to speak to professional about concern* (parent)
- *I did not believe reading with my child could be so enjoyable. Only that Bookstart was brought to my attention otherwise I would not have done it* (parent)
- *Mum has grown in confidence and it has been lovely to watch the child enjoy stories and rhymes with mum* (practitioner)

The comparative analysis showed positive significant changes in parental perceptions of their child's engagement and enjoyment in reading, and of their interest in reading. Figures 1.3 and 1.4 show the items where a large change was seen subsequent to the Bookstart Corner sessions. Following the sessions parents were more likely to state that their child has a favourite book, that reading books together is important to their child and that their child likes to look at/follow the words in a story or rhyme (figure 1.3). In terms of child interest, after the Bookstart Corner sessions parents were more likely to state that their child likes to talk about stories and rhymes, and they were less likely to indicate that books do not interest their child or that their child doesn't often ask for stories to be read to them.

Figure 1.3 Child engagement and enjoyment

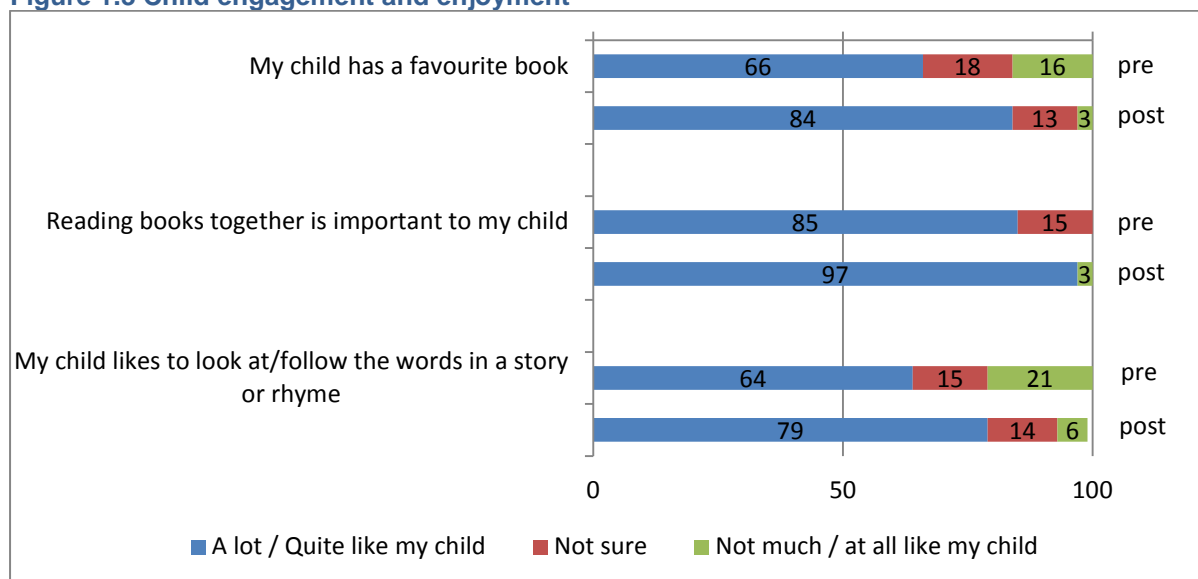
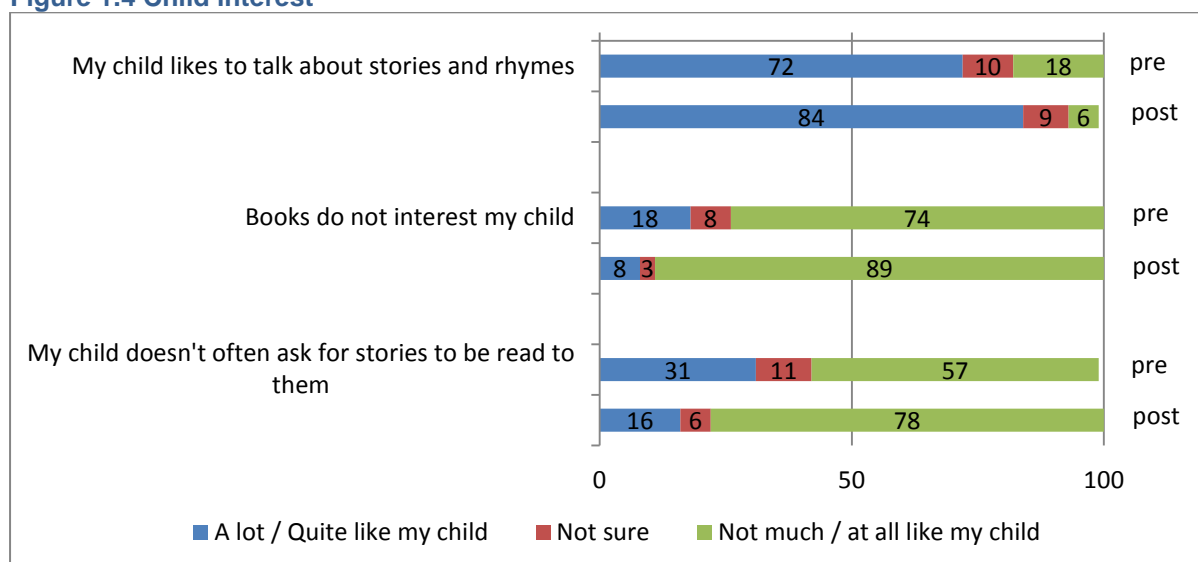


Figure 1.4 Child interest



An increase in child enjoyment and interest was also noted in the open comments by both parents and practitioners:

- *Brilliant, it's helped a lot with my child's reading* (parent)
- *Child's confidence has noticeably improved at Bookstart and at preschool, mum has noticed this too* (practitioner)

Following the Bookstart Corner sessions, a significant increase was seen in child book ownership for both number of books in the home and number of books bought in the last month. This was statistically significant for both male and female children, although a sharper increase in books bought in the last month was seen for female children compared with male children.

In terms of how often parents read to their child, there was a notable difference between mothers/female carers and fathers/male carers. Before the Bookstart Corner sessions, 54% of mothers/female carers reported reading every day with their child compared with just 5%

of fathers. After the sessions this increased to 67% of mothers/female carers, and 22% of fathers/male carers, so a sharper increase was seen for fathers/male carers. Despite this increase, mothers/female carers still remain by far the most likely to read with their child. This higher involvement from mothers/female carers is also evident in the practitioner responses which indicated that nearly all sessions involved the mother/female carer whereas only 9% involved the father/male carer.

Parent responses and practitioner responses all indicate that subsequent to the Bookstart Corner sessions, parents were more likely to participate in local services such as the library, the Children's Centre and the Bookstart Bear Club. The comparative analysis indicated that the increase was sharpest for child membership of the library and the Bookstart Bear Club. In addition, parents/carers were significantly more likely to report regularly attending rhyme/story time with their child at either a Children's Centre or library.

Increased use of the library and other services were noted by some practitioners in their free response comments:

- *The family were not keen to take part at the beginning, by the end she was enthusiastic with reading and rhymes and is talking about joining the local library (practitioner)*
- *Mum has accessed support and advice around separation and divorce at Children's Centre. Have now joined the library and ordered books online for loan to encourage conversations about this with her daughter and use books to help her with this transition (practitioner)*

Conclusion

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that Bookstart Corner is highly valued by practitioners and parents and the programme seems to have a positive influence on participating families across a range of areas. The analysis indicates that the programme encourages positive relationships with books, stories and rhymes across the following areas: parental encouragement/interaction with their child; parent confidence and enjoyment; child engagement and enjoyment; and child interest. Furthermore, Bookstart Corner seems to encourage book ownership, promote increased frequency of reading and encourage use of services such as the library and the Children's Centre.

However, as we note in the report, whilst the analyses take account of random variation through the use of tests of statistical significance and confidence intervals, a statistically significant finding does not necessarily indicate that the Bookstart Corner programme has had a *causal* impact on parents and children. Statistically significant change over time *may* have occurred regardless of the intervention, although this is unlikely given that change is seen over such a wide range of factors. To be able to confidently attribute this change to the Bookstart Corner programme, a control group would be required to take account of any natural temporal change. The analyses should be seen as an indication of impact rather than proof - and as emerging rather than causal evidence.

The positive evidence of impact supports the view that this programme has significant value for those involved, and therefore it is worth considering conducting a controlled trial based on the tool developed for this study to test this view further. However given the issues with response rates and the hard to reach nature of the group conducting a controlled trial could be somewhat difficult in practice, hence the methodology would need careful consideration.