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Bookstart Corner Online Audit 2013

Bookstart Corner is a targeted programme aimed at families with children aged 12-30 months. Bookstart supports children's centres across England to help the families that need the most support to develop a love of stories, books and rhymes. The programme offers a range of tailor-made learning resources and activities to these families during four home visits. The programme aims to help build parents/carers confidence around sharing books, stories and rhymes with their child, enabling them to support their child's early learning, language and development.

The Bookstart Corner online audit was emailed out to all children's centres who had received Bookstart Corner resources between April 2012 and March 2013. The audit was open from 23 April 2013 to 7 June 2013. The deadline was extended by three weeks in order to maximise responses and contacts were sent several email reminders during the survey period. About 1,500 children's centres were emailed and asked to complete the online audit and responses were received from 1,038 centres, a response rate of 69%.

This report summarises the findings from the audit including sections on the impact of the programme, identification of families to take part, programme delivery, the number of families involved and contextual information about the staff involved in the programme and their children's centre.

Please note: When asked whether they had delivered the Bookstart Corner programme to any families between 1 April 2012 and 31 March 2013 the majority of respondents stated that they had (81%). Those who had not delivered the programme to any families were not asked any questions about their delivery of the programme as these would not have been applicable to them. The reasons most respondents who had not delivered the programme to any families gave were that they did not have enough staff time to deliver the programme (55%) and they did not receive the resources in time to start delivering the programme before the end of March 2013 (30%).

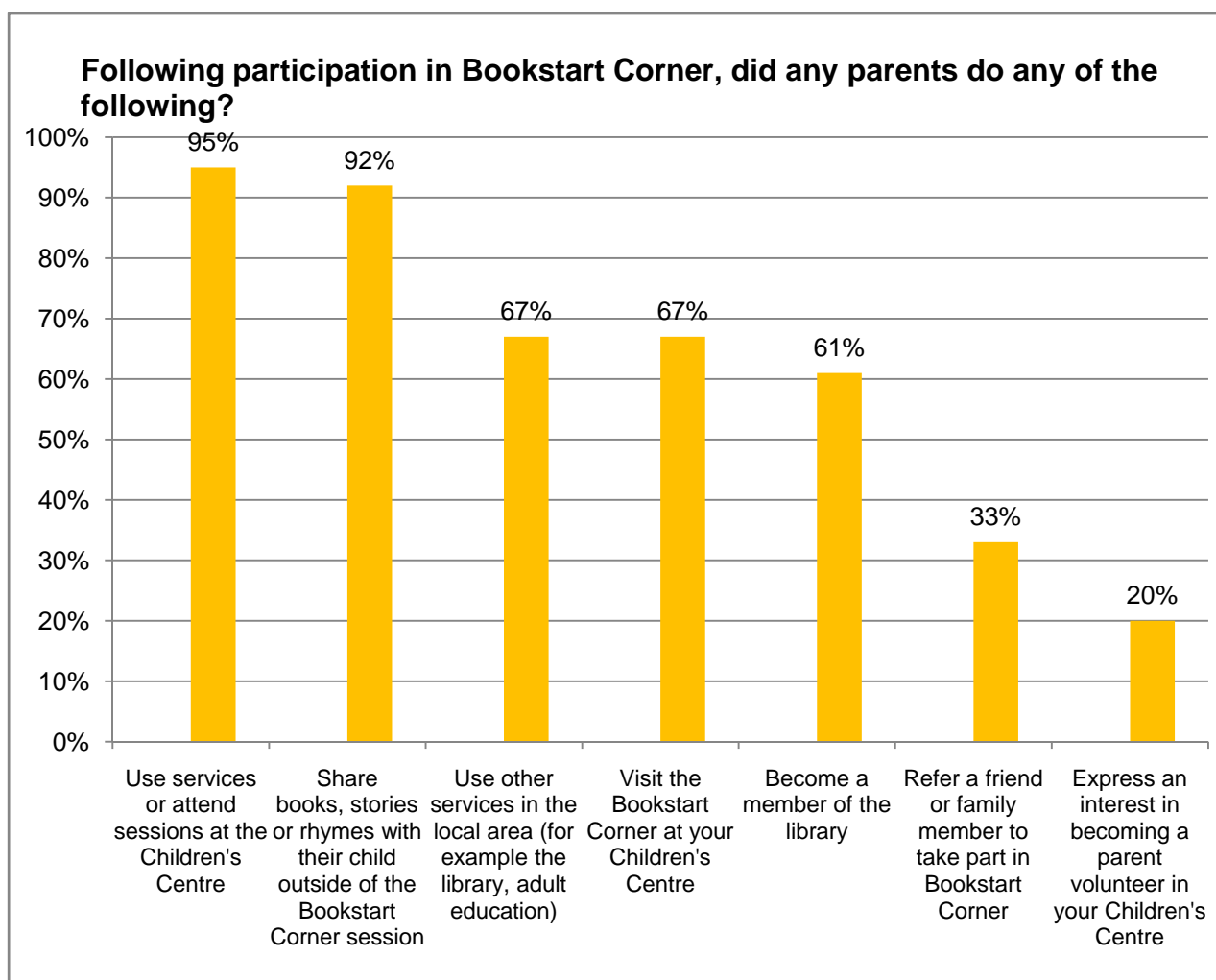


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Impact of Bookstart Corner

The vast majority of respondents reported that following participation in Bookstart Corner parents used services or attended sessions at the children's centre (95%) and shared books, stories or rhymes with their child outside of the Bookstart Corner session (92%). Two thirds of respondents stated that parents involved had used other services in the local area (such as the library or adult education) and visited the Bookstart Corner at the children's centre. The majority of respondents also reported that parents involved had become members of the library (61%). This indicates that Bookstart Corner is achieving two of its central aims: encouraging use of the children's centre and other services, and promoting book sharing in the home.

Encouragingly, a third stated that following participation in Bookstart Corner parents had referred a friend or family member to the programme and 20% said parents were interested in becoming a parent volunteer in the children's centre. The fact that parents are recommending the programme to others demonstrates that it is very well received. The programme also has wider benefits to children's centres if it encourages parents to volunteer at the children's centre in the future.





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These and other outcomes as a result of participating in Bookstart Corner were also highlighted in respondents' open responses:

'Fantastic opportunity for children and families which is well received by the families and other professionals we work with. We are picking up families that have never attended a children's centre group previously.'

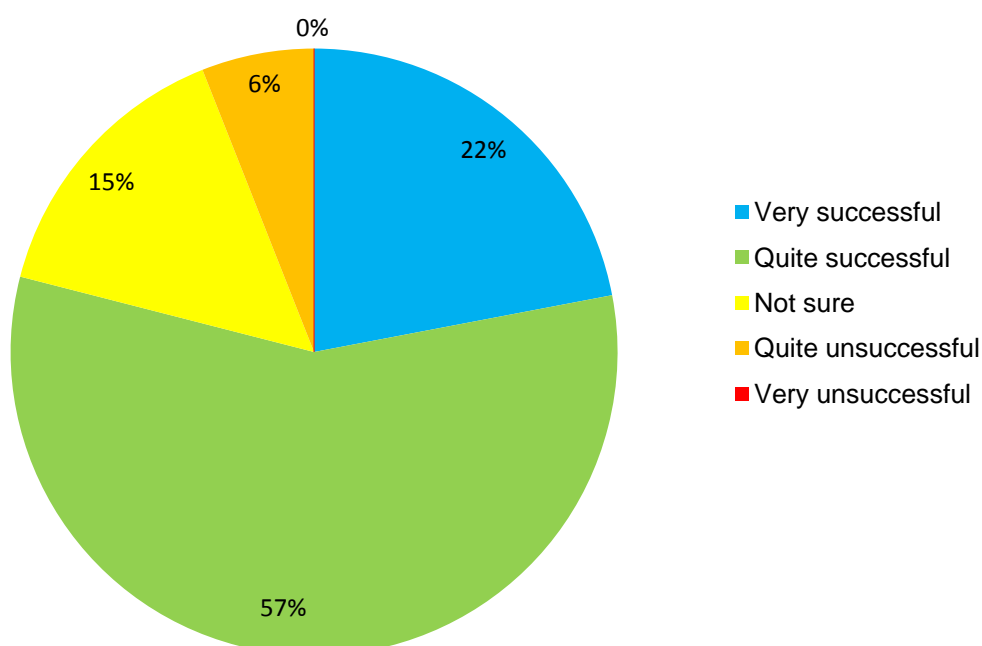
'Helps establish relationships between Children's Centre and new families. Parents are realising the importance of singing and rhymes in supporting children's communication and language and becoming more confident in their ability to share books with their children.'

'It also is an excellent way to build relationships with parents and to identify any potential speech and language problems and make referrals to the Speech and Language Therapist. We have had excellent feedback from all parents who have participated in Bookcorner.'

'Parents are loving this resource and all have said their confidence has grown in reading to their children. One mum who is dyslexic has grown hugely in confidence in reading to her child and has started a college course. Even those parents who profess to reading regularly to their children say they have learnt new skills and use more techniques eg discuss what's going on in the pictures.'

79% of respondents reported that Bookstart Corner had been either very successful or quite successful for their children's centre and no-one stated that it had been very unsuccessful.

How successful would you say that Bookstart Corner is for your Children's Centre?





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Many respondents commented positively on the range of resources and guidance provided and the high quality of the resources:

'It has always been very well received by families. The pack has been described as 'beautiful' and 'brilliant.'

'The quality of the resources is excellent, parents/carers have commented that they find the resources very useful as a way of engaging with their child and supporting their development. Children appear to really get absorbed by the contents of the packs. The session planning/delivery guide has proved an excellent source of guidance.'

However, there were a few suggestions for the improvement of a couple of elements:

'Re format the learning stair. The wording is quite harsh/insulting.'

'I find it quite difficult to watch the DVD with a family I haven't previously met. In some cases the family do not own a DVD player. I feel it would be better to have a booklet for families explaining what bookstart is about.'



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Overall, the overwhelming majority of respondents expressed that both they and the families they had engaged with had really enjoyed and valued the programme. Respondents reported that the programme had resulted in a range of very positive outcomes for the families involved:

'The Bookstart corner programme has been a fundamental tool in reaching the most hard to reach families in our area. The programme has not only enabled workers to explore the habits of book sharing, songs and rhymes but it has also enabled workers to extend and discuss issues around routine, speech and language etc. This has subsequently led to families exploring other programmes in the home or at the centre. A very simple but effective tool.'

'All our families expressed how much they had enjoyed the sessions and how it had increased their confidence in reading/singing to their children'

'I am very committed to this programme, the young parents that I am working with at the moment have shown huge interest in the programme and sharing books with their children at home, reading stories before they go to bed and other times. Also taking books home from centre on regular basis to borrow. They have also attended a Rhymetime Session of which I plan to do more of.'

'All the children I have visited at home have really enjoyed the sessions and their parents have said how much they look forward to the next week. The resources are attractive and the books are delightful.'

'Families involved have made brilliant positive changes to their home environment, following an improved awareness of the importance of books and singing. Parents report feeling more confident in sharing books and interacting with their child on a daily basis.'

'The resources are wonderful and it has been a great way to give home support in a very gentle way. It is very positive that the approach can be adapted and we have found the contents of the bookstart corner really works well as a group session as well as individually. Have seen some very positive results with parents more actively sharing books with their children.'

One practitioner also included two quotes from parents themselves highlighting the positive impact that Bookstart Corner has had on themselves and their children:

'Lots of fun. Nice time to share with my son. The sessions are amazing, we all enjoyed them very much from singing to stories, colouring and puppets.'

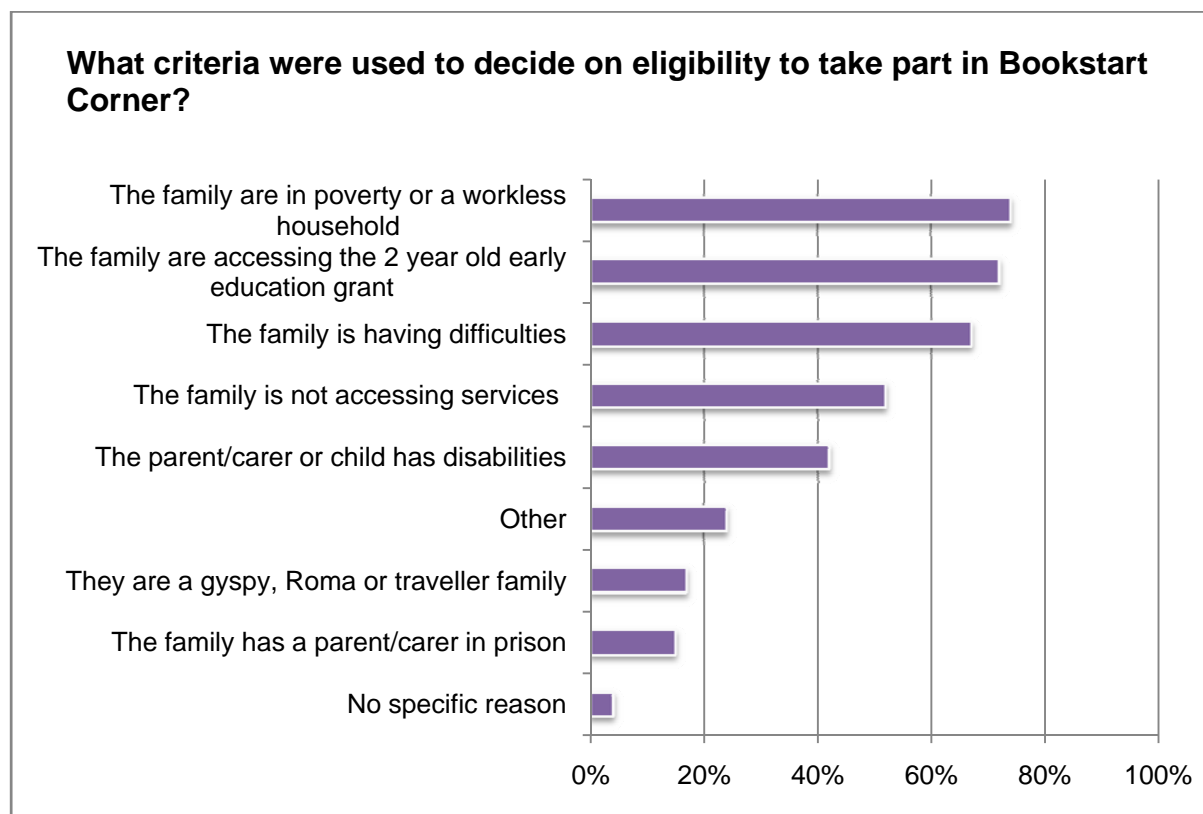
'My daughter likes to read more books than before. She is enjoying more books and it encourages me to read to them more confidently.'



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Identifying families for Bookstart Corner

Respondents used a variety of criteria to decide on eligibility to take part in Bookstart Corner with the most popular reasons being: 'the family are in poverty or a workless household' (74%), 'the family are accessing the 2 year old early education grant' (72%) and 'the family is having difficulties' (67%).



The majority of families were referred to take part in Bookstart Corner by other children's centre practitioners (79%), as an ongoing package of support for the family (74%) or referred by external partners (56%). Almost a third stated that families had asked to take part (31%).

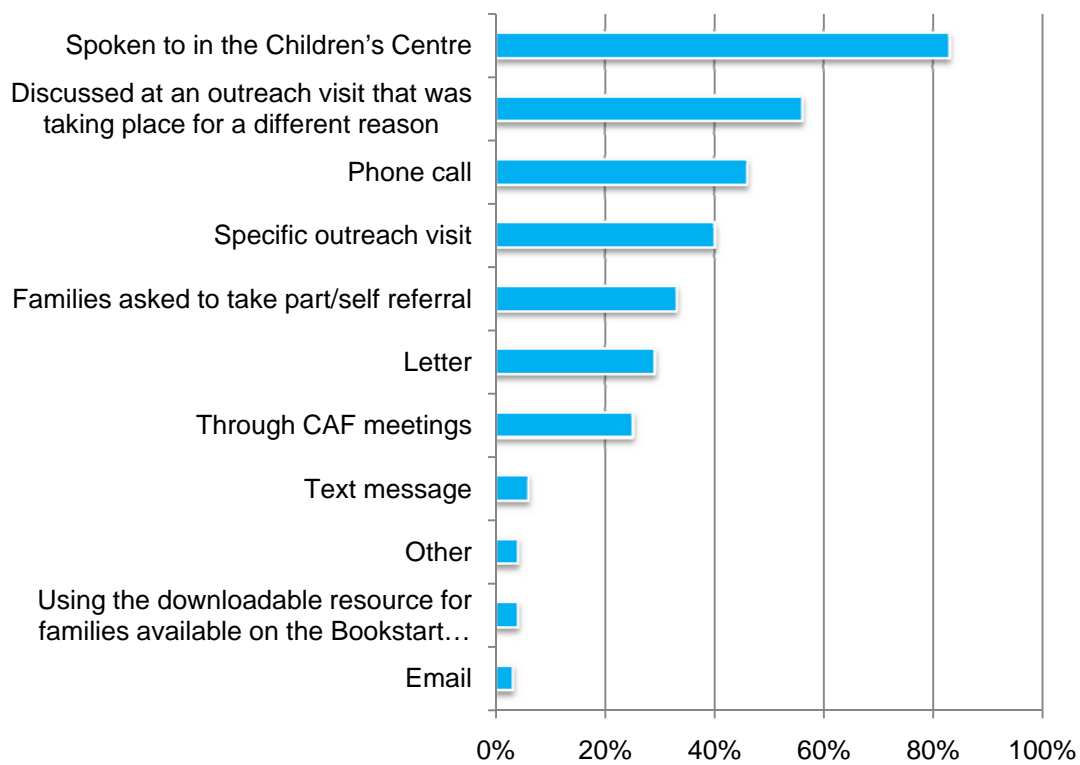
The other children's centre practitioners involved in referring families for Bookstart Corner were reported to be: family support workers (74%), outreach workers (49%), other children's centre staff (48%) and early years childcare practitioners (48%). The external partners involved were most often health visitors (89%). Other external partners who were involved included early years partners (48%), speech and language partners (39%) and health partners (33%).

The majority of families were initially approached to take part in Bookstart Corner by being spoken to in the children's centre (83%) while 56% of respondents stated that they discussed it at an outreach visit that was taking place for a different reason, 46% made a phone call to the family and 40% discussed it at a specific outreach visit about Bookstart Corner. One third stated that families asked to take part in Bookstart Corner and 29% approached families by letter. A quarter stated that families were approached through CAF (Common Assessment Framework) meetings.



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How were families initially approached to take part in Bookstart Corner?





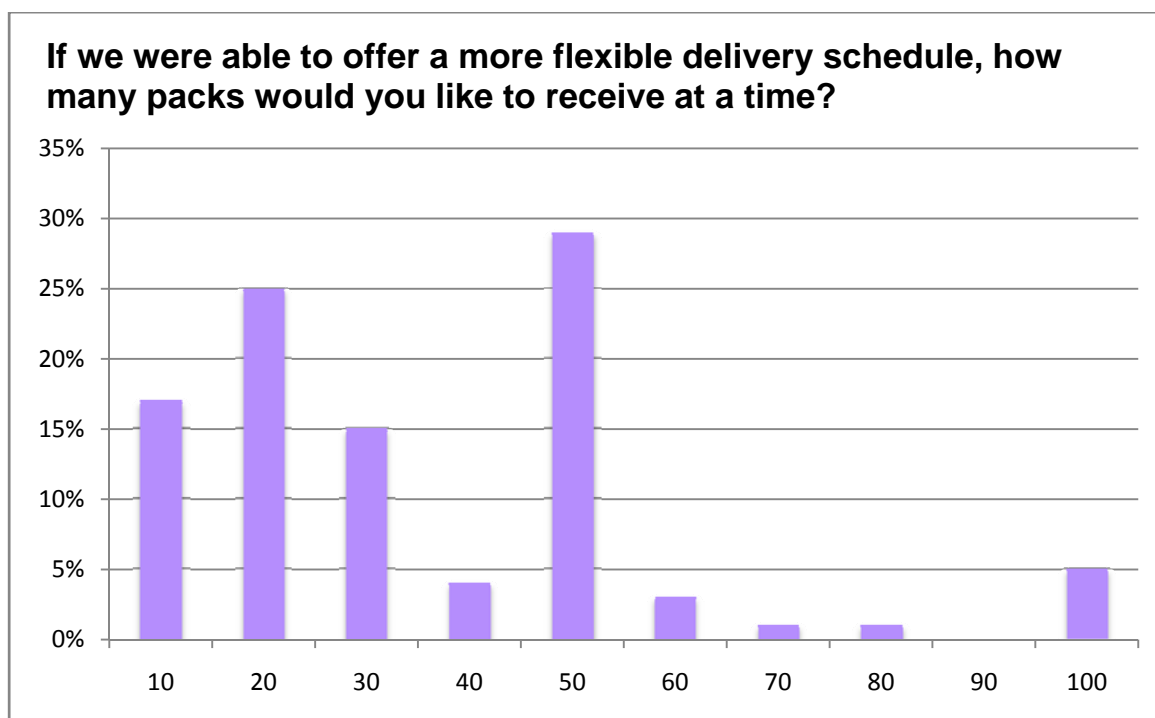
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Programme delivery

Between April 2012 and March 2013 the total number of packs received by respondents to the audit was 52,754. This was an average of around 54 per children's centre. As children's centres can receive 50 packs at a time, this means that most children's centres received one delivery during this period while a smaller number received more than one delivery. In total respondents to the audit gave out 21,506 packs to families, which is an average of 26 per children's centre.

When asked how many packs children's centres would like to receive if we were able to offer a more flexible delivery schedule the most popular amount was 50 packs (stated by 29% of respondents) followed by 20 packs (20%), 10 packs (17%) and 30 packs (15%). Only 10% of respondents asked for over 50 packs at a time.

These results suggest that the current delivery structure where children's centres receive 50 packs at a time is appropriate, but potentially including the option to receive a smaller number of packs (around 20) would be welcomed.



In open responses, it was also highlighted that different children's centres would appreciate being able to order different numbers of packs to suit their individual needs:



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'As we are a small centre with a small staff team a more flexible delivery system would benefit us as we do not have the capacity to store a large number of packs or distribute them to their full potential at the moment. Saying that, I really value the Bookstart resources and will continue to deliver them to the best of my capabilities and in line with the families needs.'

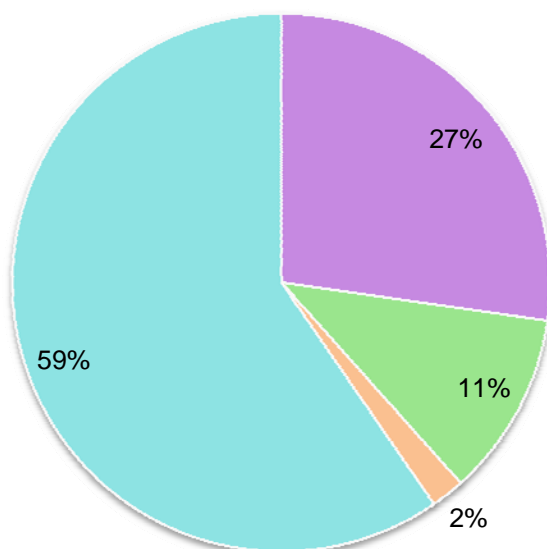
'In future it would be beneficial to be able to request a delivery of resources for when we need them, and in the numbers we need (e.g. 10-15 a month)'

'We have very limited storage so a few smaller deliveries would help.'

'We are a large Children's Centre, with two main services (Family Support and Nursery) and mainly the families are from underprivileged backgrounds, we have a 100 children on roll in the nursery and a varied number who attend regularly to our Family Support sessions. So if possible could we be supplied with more Bookstart resources. Thank you'

Just over a quarter of respondents stated that all families involved in the programme receive home visits (27%) while 11% stated that all families attend group sessions in the children's centre and only 2% stated that all families attend one-to-one sessions in the children's centre. The majority of respondents reported that families receive a mixture of these approaches (59%), with 82% of these stating that different families receive different delivery methods.

How are you delivering the Bookstart Corner programme?



- All families receive Home Visits
- All families attend group sessions in the Children's Centre or a community venue
- All families attend one to one sessions in the Children's Centre or a community venue
- A mixture of the above approaches

Open responses provided some insight into the reasons respondents use a mixture of delivery methods, with a lack of capacity in terms of staffing and time often cited as a reason for providing group sessions in the children's centre as well as, or instead of, home visits:

'A more flexible approach may be needed in the light of budget cuts as children's centres are no longer as well staffed as they were previously. Home visits are very costly in terms of time and staff resources. We have found that a group approach works more effectively with home visits available for those families whom are reluctant to visit the centre or whom have specific levels of need.'

'I think that it is slightly too prescriptive to use in the same way with all families, so the more flexible the better. It would be helpful to have some basic direction of delivering the programme in bigger groups. We have not found that home visits work well for us because we tend to use home visits when a family is in crisis. However we do feel that it has had a really positive impact for the child when we have used it and will continue to do so.'

However, some practitioners praised the home visiting ethos of the programme, as it allows them to access families who are harder to reach and build a trusting relationship over the course of the programme:

'At these visits you pick up lots of other issues that the parent may need support on and it is an opportunity to earn the families/carers trust and then you can encourage them to attend the Centres.'

'The visits have been a key resource to gain access to families who have been harder to reach, and who have previously refused a home visit. By using the bookstart resources the family have got to know staff from the children centre, and have felt more comfortable in accessing services here, or further supportive home visits.'

The majority of respondents reported that, on average, families received or attended either four or three visits/sessions (40% and 23% respectively). Only 8% stated that families only received one visit/session, 16% said families received two visits/sessions and 12% stated that families received more than four visits/sessions.

There were various different factors which influenced the number of visits/sessions that families received. The most popular factor was the willingness of the family to receive visits or come to the children's centre, reported by two thirds of respondents. This was followed by the perceived need of the family and available staff resource which were both mentioned by almost half of respondents and the progress of the family from the initial visit (mentioned by 39%).

The majority of respondents reported that they delivered the programme to each family over a period of one visit or session per week, on average.

In open comments some respondents asked for further guidance on developing the sessions or administering the sessions in a different way:



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'As you can see we are using the Bookstart Corner in groups. We would very much appreciate guidance on how to do this. The reason for doing it in groups is because of families living rurally and we have very limited staff time.'

'The delivery sessions need to be shortened and to be able to deliver the programme in a group setting in the children's centre as there are not enough staff to do individual visits for the family.'



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Number of families involved

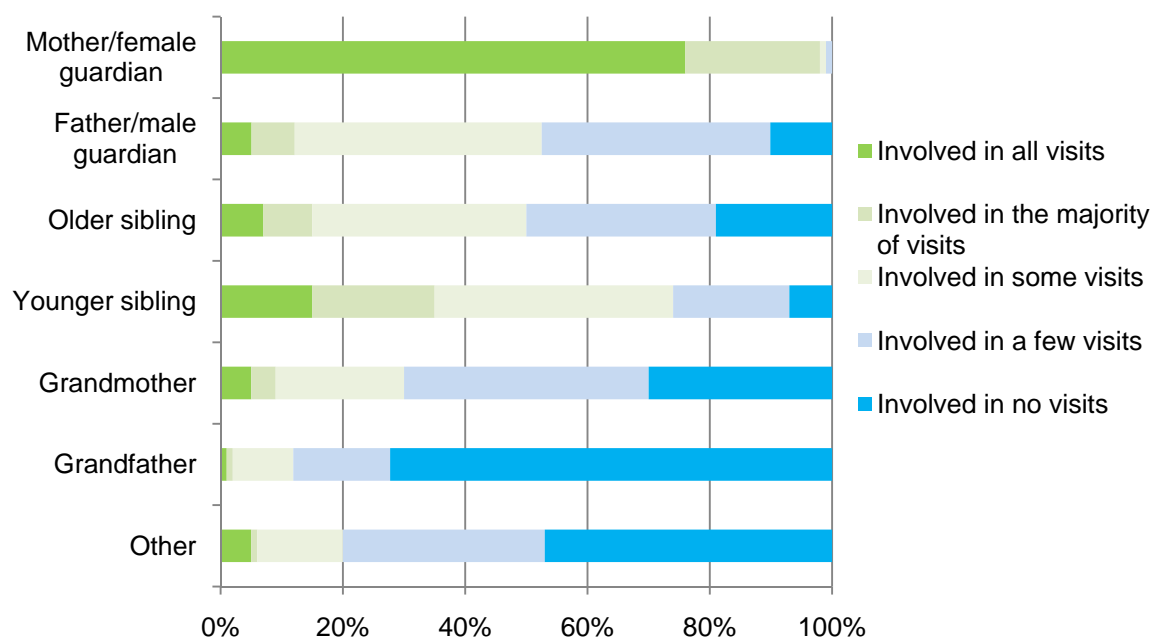
In total 28,039 families were approached to take part in Bookstart Corner. This is an average of 35 families per children's centre.

A total of 20,314¹ families took part in Bookstart Corner, which is an average of 25 families per children's centre.

A total of 15,867 families completed the programme, which is an average of 20 families per children's centre.

The majority of respondents reported that the child's mother/female guardian was involved in all visits (76%). The majority of respondents reported that the child's father/male guardian was involved in some visits or a few visits (40% and 37% respectively). Older and younger siblings tended to be reported to be involved in some visits (35% and 39% respectively) or a few visits (31% and 19% respectively). Generally grandparents tended to be involved less frequently with 73% saying grandfathers were involved in no visits and 70% stating that grandmothers were involved in a few visits or no visits.

Thinking across all of the Bookstart Corner visits you have undertaken with families, which family members of the child were involved in the visits?



¹ This is a smaller number to the figure for number of packs given out due to the fact that fewer respondents answered this question.



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About you and your children's centre

Overall, 90% of respondents had completed the online training for Bookstart Corner. 59% of respondents stated that a colleague had also completed the online training, with the majority of these reporting that one or two other colleagues had completed it (32% and 24% respectively). Of those respondents who had completed the training, 76% agreed that it had increased their knowledge about the importance of parents/carers sharing books, stories and rhymes with their child from an early age and 80% agreed that it had given them more confidence to talk to parents/carers about the importance of sharing books, stories and rhymes with their child from an early age. This indicates that the training meets the needs of children's centre practitioners well.

Respondents also reported positively on the training and guidance provided as part of the programme in their open responses:

'Resources are fantastic and the training and ethos around the programme are very good.'

'The range of resources and the support, extensive information and practical guidance tips is exemplary.'

The majority of respondents reported that a physical Bookstart Corner had been established in their children's centre (70%). The majority of those who had not established a physical Bookstart Corner stated that this was because they already have a reading area (46%), they do not have space (35%) or they have not had time to do this (21%). 11% also stated that they deliver services in a community venue as they do not have their own children's centre. Only 1% or less stated that they did not think their families would use it, that they did not like the materials provided or that they did not think it would benefit their families.

Respondents reported a variety of different job titles with the most frequently selected being family support worker (21%), outreach worker (19%), children's centre manager (19%), children's centre worker (18%) and early years practitioner (15%). 74% of respondents stated that other staff members are involved in delivering Bookstart Corner. Where it was reported that other members of staff were involved in Bookstart Corner, this was on average three staff members per children's centre and the roles of other members of staff were similar to the respondents role, including family support workers (39%), outreach workers (33%), children's centre workers (29%) and early years practitioners (26%).

Just over half of respondents reported that they work with their Bookstart coordinator on Bookstart Corner (53%). Of those who did not work with their Bookstart coordinator on Bookstart Corner 55% reported that they would like us to put them in touch with the Bookstart coordinator for their local authority.



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Conclusion

Overall, the findings of the Bookstart Corner online audit are very positive: 79% of respondents reported that the programme had been either very successful or quite successful for their children's centre and no-one stated that it had been very unsuccessful. Respondents reported that a total of 20,314 families took part in Bookstart Corner between April 2012 and March 2013, which is an average of 25 families per children's centre. The overwhelming majority of open responses were very positive about the resources provided and the impact of the programme on the children and parents/carers involved. There were also some constructive suggestions for improvements to the programme, mostly in terms of flexibility of programme delivery.