

An Evaluation of the Bookstart Corner Programme

Practitioners' Report

Final Report

prepared for

Booktrust

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1. Introduction and Objectives

Introduction

Booktrust is an independent reading and writing charity, which delivers learning and literacy programmes through a unique public/private partnership that involves health, children's services and libraries. Its range of literacy programmes for children and adults of all ages and cultures predominantly focuses on children of school age and below.

The flagship programme in Booktrust's portfolio of children's book gifting initiatives is Bookstart. Every baby and pre-school child receives free book packs, guidance and support via health visitors, library services and early years settings in England. The programme is currently in its twenty-second year, having first started in 1992, and, to date, over 30 million books have been gifted to children. By encouraging parents and carers to share books, stories and rhymes with their children, Bookstart aims to help families to adopt enduring reading habits throughout a child's lifetime.

In November 2011, Booktrust launched a new, targeted programme called Bookstart Corner for babies and young children, which was specifically targeted at disadvantaged families.

Background to Bookstart Corner

Bookstart Corner is a learning and literacy programme delivered through children's centres across England and originally designed for babies and children of 12-30 months. The programme is designed to encourage parents to share stories and rhymes with their children, especially those, who through lack of confidence or other reasons, find it difficult to read with their child/children. The programme also seeks to enhance existing outreach work and provide new outreach opportunities in the local communities served by each children's centre.

Bookstart Corner aims to impact on the following aspects of reading between families and children:

- The number of families regularly sharing books
- The confidence of parents in sharing books and stories with their children
- Practitioners' confidence and ability to share books/stories and working with families to help them do this
- Parents' propensity to join public libraries and attend story-time with their children
- The number of families engaged with the children's centre and local services.

The programme targets the most disadvantaged families and provides a comprehensive package to enable children's centres to offer guidance and support to parents and carers to promote reading and sharing of books, stories and rhymes. It was originally intended that the initiative would be delivered through a series of four home visits to families with children between the ages of 12 and 30 months. However, in practice, a range of delivery methods have been used by centres.

During the home visit, parents receive different resources, including picture books, DVDs, finger puppets and rhyme sheets, as well as support from a children's centre practitioner.

Each of the sessions has a different focus, and relevant resources are gifted at each of the visits to encourage parents/carers to develop positive reading behaviours in the home. The first visit gives the practitioner the opportunity to get to know the family and has an emphasis on the importance of rhymes. At the second visit the Bookstart Corner pack itself is gifted and the practitioner models the contents, with a focus on picture books and daily reading. The third visit, is all about establishing a bedtime routine and uses finger puppets and a small booklet to help bring the story to life. The fourth and final visit places an emphasis on early mark making and provides an opportunity to signpost the family to the children's centre and/or library. All visits offer practitioner support and encouragement to children and their families.

Booktrust has recently reduced the top age for the targeted age range for Bookstart Corner from 30 to 24 months, and has just introduced a new pack for two year olds, which is available to families eligible for the two-year funded early learning places.

There have been two independent evaluations of the Bookstart Corner programme since it started in November 2011. The first, an initial preliminary qualitative evaluation, was carried out by ActionPoint Marketing Solutions during the first three months to review the Bookstart Corner resources and provide initial feedback on the programme. The second, an impact evaluation, was conducted by Sheffield Hallam University, and assessed how the programme was impacting the reading behaviour and attitudes of the families who participated in the programme. The results of this second evaluation indicated that the programme had improved parents' confidence around sharing stories and rhymes with their children, for those who completed the 'before and after' evaluations.

Booktrust has also conducted its own internal audit with 1,500 participating children's centres in March 2013, to which 69 per cent of centres responded. This showed that, on average, each of these centres received 54 packs to gift to parents between April 2012 and March 2013, with an average of 26 packs given out per centre.

Although the previous research evaluations have provided insight on the effectiveness of the programme, they were conducted at an early stage in its development and have provided relatively limited insight into parents' and practitioners' perceptions of the programme over a longer period. ActionPoint Marketing Solutions has been commissioned to undertake a two-part, mixed-methodology evaluation of the programme to address these issues.

The main part of the project is a quantitative survey with those parents who have completed Bookstart Corner at least one month prior to the interview. This is complemented by a smaller scale qualitative evaluation, which aims to understand practitioner views of the programme and its benefits to parents. It will also look at the issues encountered in delivering it within the children's centre environment.

The reporting for this work is in two parts: the parents' survey report and a practitioners' report, together with a combined Executive Summary.

Bookstart Corner Practitioner Evaluation – Objectives

This practitioners' evaluation of the Bookstart Corner programme focuses on practitioners' views of the programme, including the period after families have completed the programme.

The specific objectives of the evaluation are as follows:

To understand:

- How home visits are working as a delivery method for the programme
- What happens to families after the programme
- Ways the programme could be improved
 - Parents' use of their children's centre
 - Parents' behaviour and accessing other services
 - Follow-up by children's centres after the programme.

To review whether Bookstart Corner has an influence on the following:

- The programme provides opportunities to address wider issues with families
- It allows children's centres to access families that aren't accessing children's centre services
- The programme has encouraged families to take up the free nursery entitlement for eligible two year olds.

The limitations of the evaluation are as follows:

- The evaluation involves practitioners from just 20 children's centres and is designed as a qualitative (in-depth) evaluation, so the findings may not be representative across all children's centres taking part in the programme.
- Sample recruitment focussed on those who are currently delivering the Bookstart Corner programme, so that an understanding of the issues involved with delivering the programme and any benefits from the programme could be highlighted. To obtain a more representative picture across England, a random, larger scale telephone survey with practitioners is required.

This report gives an overview of practitioners' impressions of the Bookstart Corner programme, highlighting its perceived strengths and weaknesses and their suggestions of how the programme could be improved. It then evaluates the various delivery routes that practitioners are using to deliver the programme, with specific focus on the in-home delivery method. This is followed by a review of what happens after a parent has completed the programme.

The final sections look at Bookstart Corner's influence on the specific areas listed in the objectives above.

2. Methodology and Children's Centre Background

Methodology overview

The Bookstart Corner programme is delivered through children's centres in England via children's centre practitioners who oversee and co-ordinate the programme. It is, therefore, these personnel who are the most appropriate contacts for this evaluation, and the focus of this research is on in-depth interviews purely with children's centre practitioners.

Practitioners may be supported by a wider team to deliver the Bookstart Corner programme, or they may work alone, or with just one other. For this evaluation, we interviewed the main co-ordinator/manager of the programme at the children's centre, or, in some cases, the practitioner who manages the programme for a group of centres or cluster.

Twenty in-depth interviews were conducted; 18 of these were via telephone, two face-to-face at the children's centre. An additional pilot (face-to-face) interview was also completed at the beginning of the evaluation.

Each children's centre was contacted by telephone to book an appointment for an in-depth interview. Since ActionPoint were concurrently conducting a parents' survey, which also required contacting children's centres, we were able to recruit practitioners at the same time.

We recruited practitioners only at centres where they were actively engaged with the programme. This would give maximum insight into how the programme was operating in each centre, but we recognise that it may give a slightly more positive bias than is the reality.

If a selected practitioner agreed to an interview, an appointment was made to visit/call at a specific time. In general, they were very willing to take part and discuss the programme.

The initial sample base used for recruitment was children's centres which had responded to Booktrust's 2012 audit. Since there were no geographic boundaries due to a focus predominantly on telephone interviews, we aimed to get a regional spread of interviews around the country. Our final sample covered the nine different English counties/metropolitan areas listed below; a full list giving the number of interviews in each with the relevant regions can be seen in appendix 1.

- London
- Kent
- Suffolk
- Hertfordshire
- Nottinghamshire
- Derbyshire
- West Midlands
- Manchester
- Liverpool

The interviews were completed between November 8th 2013 and February 10th 2014. Face-to-face interviews were usually 45-50 minutes duration and those completed via the telephone were 30-40 minutes. Incentives were not offered for these interviews.

Of the 20 interviews conducted, 16 practitioners represented an individual children's centre, whilst the remaining four had responsibility for a cluster of centres (see section below), numbering between two and nine children's centres. Four of the 20 had been interviewed before; originally for ActionPoint's initial review of the programme in May 2012 and also for this evaluation. In these cases, some comparisons between the two interviews have been made.

All practitioners interviewed were responsible for co-ordinating the Bookstart Corner programme at their centre or cluster of centres. Family support or outreach workers were the most likely practitioners to be responsible for delivering the programme at each centre, however there was also a range of other job roles that managed Bookstart Corner at different centres within this study. See appendix 1 for the full list.

Children's centre background

The children's centres represented by the practitioners in this survey ranged in size in terms of staff resources, from four personnel (usually only one was full time), to 25 staff across nine centres, all of whom worked across the entire cluster. Five to seven personnel per centre was typical.

Since significant changes to children's centre structure have occurred in some local authorities over the past 18 months, children's centre clusters are now more common. Just less than one third of the centres in this sample were part of a cluster, meaning that staff who are employed across a cluster of centres might work at different centres on different days.

The catchment areas of the children's centres ranged from those in the 10 per cent most deprived areas in the country (phase one centres – in the first tier of designated children's centres in 2006) to phase three centres based in more affluent areas where only pockets of deprivation exist. Seven of the children's centres were located in these highly deprived areas where 100 per cent of the catchment families were in the hard-to-reach groups. These areas were ethnically very diverse, with a high proportion of families from black, minority or ethnic (BME) groups. Nine of the centres were located in the 30 per cent most deprived area of the country, with the remaining four located in places with lower levels of deprivation.

Typical issues mentioned by practitioners in these areas were widespread unemployment and single parenthood, with the majority on benefits e.g. in receipt of housing benefit and entitled to free nursery education. In the most disadvantaged areas, there were high levels of poverty with frequent use of food banks, and issues relating to domestic violence, drugs and substance misuse, and child protection.

The 13 centres in less deprived areas still faced many of the same issues, particularly domestic violence and low income and unemployment, but in pockets rather than universally across the catchment.

3. Overview and Impressions of the Bookstart Corner Programme

All 20 of the practitioners in this research study had been involved with the Bookstart Corner programme since its launch in November 2011. They gave their overall impressions of the programme and reflected on its key strengths and weaknesses.

Initial impressions of the programme

Practitioners' views of the Bookstart Corner programme were overwhelmingly positive. The ethos of the programme promoting reading and literacy in children at an early age was applauded and also the opportunity it offers to engage with families not accessing services.

The free resources are a useful route into parents' homes who are often reluctant to allow practitioners access. Parents always like a free gift and a pack with such quality resources would provide an effective additional route to engaging with them.

The high quality book pack and bag was as one practitioner said truly '*ready to deliver*':

*I thought great, this is an excellent programme, it will really get people into reading and it's lovely we can give such excellent resources away. **London***

Working with the programme - key strengths

Positive outcomes for parents and their child/children

Practitioners were very positive about the benefits for both parents and their children. A more detailed appraisal of the benefits to parents can be seen in Section 6 and how the benefits for children can be seen in the separate parents' survey report.

The programme is very helpful in showing parents how to engage with their child much more effectively when story-telling and singing songs and rhymes. This, in turn, encourages more regular 'book time' with their child and consequently generates a greater interest in books:

I think it's a brilliant programme. I go into children's homes and some of these children are in real poverty and parents don't read to them so we're showing parents how to look at and share a book with their child.

Blackpool

It is the change that can be brought about in young children's lives for the long term as a result of the programme that is so encouraging for practitioners;

*The Bookstart Corner pack and approach works extremely well as part of our Home-Talk speech and language initiative. We are trying to boost parent's confidence and skills in supporting their children and learning to talk and Bookstart Corner resources are a big part in that. **Nottinghamshire***

Delivery methods

Practitioners mentioned positives for both the in-home and in-centre methods of delivery.

The minority, who focussed solely on home visits for their delivery method, were very pleased with the relationship building opportunities this method brings. For example, when a family is subject to a review such as a Child Protection order or they are undergoing a Common Assessment Framework (CAF), Bookstart Corner can be seen as a positive intervention amongst these other reviews which can feel very negative for the family.

Others felt the programme worked better in sessions in the centre compared to their attempts at the in-home delivery method.

Resources

Other positive comments focussed on the book bag and resources.

*The resources are brilliant. I love the ethos and think it is a good programme. **Hertfordshire***

*The pack is now fantastic the parents really enjoy them. **West Midlands***

Virtually all aspects of the resources were regarded very positively. In particular, the song and rhyme sheets and finger puppets.

The demonstration and modelling activities showing parents how to interact with their child and bring stories and rhymes to life were also highly praised and seen as a very positive aspect of the programme.

Working with the programme - key weaknesses

Lack of staff resources to deliver the programme

Although practitioners' reactions were very positive, there were concerns, the main one being a lack of staff resources to deliver the programme.

In many regions there have been severe cuts and organisational changes to children's centres as part of a cost reduction programme by local authorities, and this has put added pressure on children's centres.

*Time was an issue as I'm the only teacher; I just didn't have the capacity to deliver Bookstart Corner in home widely. There were no concerns in going ahead but I knew I wouldn't be able to do the in home visits, so we took the decision to deliver it to every toddler group. **Kent***

Therefore, many have found having 50 packs to distribute, each gifted within a Bookstart Corner programme, very difficult to achieve.

To continue to offer Bookstart Corner, a myriad of different delivery methods have developed to fit in with individual children's centre situations (including lack of staff resource) and parent issues. Whether this is representative on a national scale is not known. However, from both surveys (practitioners and parents) conducted by ActionPoint, it seems that many centres have struggled to distribute packs within the programme guidelines.

Some of the centres in the research group initially tried home visits as prescribed in 2012, but this proved to be too arduous in the first year. One centre worked hard on delivering Bookstart Corner with 30 families by this route and then stopped the programme for 12 months due to lack of resources, restarting in Sept 2013 using a different delivery method.

It is also clear from both the parents' survey and this practitioners' survey that some centres give out packs to interested parents with no formal session i.e. with no guidance or training. There are two in the practitioners' research group that have distributed at least some of their packs in this way and they are unable to say how many/the proportion given out this way within the total packs distributed.

Concerns on how to introduce the programme to families

Where a centre had many parents with literacy issues or English as a second language, there were concerns about how the programme could be introduced. However the home delivery method is an advantage here, as it enables more one-to-one guidance and tailoring of the course when parents are not confident in reading.

Concern about accessing parents who met the criteria

Some centres, found it challenging to find parents who they thought would benefit from the programme. This was usually those in more affluent areas with only pockets of disadvantaged families.

In contrast, those centres located in areas of high disadvantage have found many families who would benefit from the programme in their area, however they highlighted that there are still other issues to overcome. These parents may have wider issues, e.g. they may already be in contact with social services, and, thus, wary of practitioners. Some are reluctant to let practitioners into their homes.

Difficulties engaging with families that would benefit

Many have found it harder than they initially thought to engage parents and, although the free resources are an attraction, they still do not overcome the inherent difficulties working with vulnerable families: unreliability, lack of commitment and communication difficulties are typical issues.

Lack of interest/engagement in the programme

Several centres have had trouble recruiting and engaging parents, gaining enough interest to participate. It has been difficult to communicate the importance of sharing books and story-telling with some families.

I don't think it has worked that well because it has been hard to recruit and engage with families and get them to commit to coming to us.....it's not Bookstart, it's just difficult to get people to commit to doing anything
Hertfordshire

Resources

The only aspect of the resources seen as a weakness (independently highlighted by five centres), was the DVD. The drawbacks were thought to be parents' dislike of sitting and watching it with the practitioner, (they would prefer to hear from him/her rather than watch the screen) and also the perception of a slightly condescending attitude.

It doesn't add anything because all that's said is also said verbally by the practitioner. **Hertfordshire**

This issue has been previously highlighted to Booktrust and has already been addressed; the 2014 programme does not contain the DVD. Other individual mentions involved the observation forms completed after a session; a feeling they are a waste of time with some questions being irrelevant to ask every week.

Comparing initial and current impressions of the programme – four children’ centres

There were four practitioners who were interviewed at the start of the programme in 2012 for a previous evaluation and then again for this evaluation in 2013/2014. They have had mixed experiences of the programme.

One practitioner had been very successful; the programme had really worked for the centre with 59 families completing the programme all via the home visit method. For a second, it had worked well but with fewer families completing than expected – 25 over 20 months.

The remaining two practitioners, who had been so positive and excited about the programme in May 2012, had found it very difficult and struggled because of major resource limitations and difficulties in engagement. Even so, one had managed 25 home visits, plus other families within an existing Homestart programme. The fourth practitioner had done only five visits, plus three within an existing session.

Three of the four centres we re-visited had found it difficult to get parents interested and committed to the course.

4. Delivering the Programme

Review of delivery methods

Our review of the different delivery methods showed that there are so many different 'variations on a theme' in the ways centres are delivering the Bookstart Corner programme. The 20 centres represented in this research have developed and adapted the programme to suit their centre's situation, their available resources, especially staff, and the types of families within their catchment area. Each children's centre situation is very different. Over the 18-20 months of the programme, some centres have tried one method and then changed to another, while others have stayed with the same route, but all had tried to deliver the programme at some level.

The table below shows the variations of delivery methods used.

Range of methods used for delivering Bookstart Corner

Summary of method	Delivery method - Details	No of centres delivering via this method
Home visits / Home visit focus	4 visits in-home or 3 in-home and one in library	5
Home visit/CC sessions 50:50	Equal mix of 2 visits in-home 2 in-centre or 2 visits in-centre 1 at home (50:50 or 25:75) or 1 in each	5
All sessions in the CC	All Bookstart Corner sessions in the CC	5
Within an existing group session at the CC	Bookstart Corner is introduced as part of an ongoing session e.g. stay & play session/Homestart	4
Given pack at centre then follow-up with 1 or 2 visits	Families coming into centre are given pack emphasis on sharing books with the children rather than course	2
Within an existing structured language programme	Within an existing structured programme Chatterbox /Home-Talk/PEEP either at home or centre	3

Note: several centres deliver by several different methods, hence there are multi-mentions in the above

CC= children's centre

A summary of the numbers of Bookstart Corner courses completed are shown in the table below.

No. of Bookstart Corner Programmes completed	No. of Centres
Over 50	10
31-50	4
20-30	4
Below 20	2

Note some of these numbers refer to packs gifted, rather than full Bookstart Corner courses.

Further details of the numbers of Bookstart Corner programmes delivered and the different routes used at each centre can be seen in Appendix 2.

Home visits

A minority of centres were delivering the programme in-home by the originally prescribed route, and only two centres of the 20 completed home visits as their single delivery method for the programme. These two centres completed three visits in the home and a final one in the library or children's centre. Another three centres used the in home delivery method as one of their two main methods, depending on the needs and situation of the family.

The two centres which used home visits as their sole method of delivering the programme had been very successful and were really positive about how this method worked for them. However, only one of these was delivering it as a stand-alone programme. One of the reasons for it being so successful was the presence of existing delivery vehicles run by the children's centre; e.g. a one to one support programme and parenting courses.

*We rarely deliver Bookstart Corner as a stand-alone programme. **London***

These practitioners were very passionate about the programme and had a real enthusiasm for the difference the programme could make. Both centres were working very closely with partner organisations i.e. with midwives, child protection officers and health visitors, who provided a significant proportion of their referrals for the programme.

As mentioned above, the London-based centre was not, in fact, offering Bookstart Corner as a stand-alone in-home course, but as part of a one-to-one support programme, which had been operating prior to the introduction of the Bookstart Corner programme. Typically this course would include special educational needs (SEN) and speech and language training.

*It's worked really well. It hasn't seemed a challenge because it's fitted so smoothly into what we already do, we've just taken it and run with it **London***

The relationship building opportunities of the home visit approach are valued. This delivery route can also provide opportunity for wider issues to be highlighted as demonstrated in section 6. Where families get to know the practitioner one-to-one they are more likely to open up in an in-home situation rather than at the children's centre.

*It has definitely worked really well for us; it helps our engagement with our families **Hertfordshire***

Whether there is a difference in the effectiveness of the programme compared to in-centre sessions is not known. It is hoped to give an indication whether different methods have more or less effect on parent views/child benefits when we analyse the results of the parents' survey which looks at parent views of the Bookstart Corner. Specifically, the changes in their reading activity with their children and their engagement with the children's centre after completing the programme

Most of the centres completing home visits as a stand-alone programme used the fourth visit as an opportunity to go to the library or meet other parents at the centre.

Sessions in the Children's Centre

Children's centre-based sessions formed the core of the various adaptations seen across our sample of 20 centres. These sessions were run either as dedicated Bookstart Corner sessions or within an existing group concentrated during one part of a session each week, or for one full session within an ongoing series of other sessions. Sometimes this existing session was a specialist speech and language course (for more details on this see the next section on page 15).

At least three centres were also delivering home visits as an alternative method of delivery to children's centre sessions. These were typically with the more vulnerable families, particularly new families who were not accustomed to coming to the centre.

The flexibility to run at least some, if not all, sessions in the children centre was one of the main reasons why most practitioners have been able to 'make BSC work for their centre'.

Four home visits per family is just not possible by one person, so we do it as three sessions at the children's centre- we decided to do it as three not four sessions as families struggle with commitment to more than that **London**

Children' centre-based sessions were seen as a more efficient use of time and resources and were often targeted at those who were already coming to the centre for other groups and activities. One participant explained her reason for using the group method:

'...it seemed a good way to kick the programme off at the time. [It is] more time-efficient than one at a time. Parents have been very keen to come along' **Suffolk**

Furthermore, a few of the centres in very disadvantaged areas highlighted that some families felt uncomfortable allowing workers into homes. The practitioner explained:

They don't always like people to go into their houses, to be judgemental, so they might refuse **London**

Drawbacks of in-centre sessions

Even though the majority of centres were running some form of in-centre session and found these the 'best way for them', this was not universal. A few centres highlighted they had tried four in-centre sessions, but lack of interest and low numbers had meant a return to the home visit delivery method, or a mix of the two.

Children's centre sessions are usually made up of six to 10 families. Levels of commitment are variable, and in a few locations practitioners had gifted the book pack on the last session to encourage families to stay the full course. This has already been highlighted to Booktrust, and after consideration they felt that giving the packs out earlier in the programme was preferable so parents would at least have the books rather than not getting them at all.

In centre formats vary, with some centres holding all four sessions in the centre, some holding a first session in-home with the remaining three in the centre, or even a session in the centre followed by a session in-home.

Other adaptations included just three sessions at the children's centre with practitioners combining sessions three and four.

Sessions completed within an existing language/family development programme

Three centres were running Bookstart Corner very successfully within existing speech and language programmes using a combination of in-home and centre-based sessions. The flexibility of Bookstart Corner to be incorporated in such sessions was seen as a real advantage, and the Bookstart Corner resources have been found to complement and enhance the existing programme. The three programmes highlighted by centres in this research were;

- Home-Talk (Notts)
- Chatterbox (West Midlands)
- PEEP –Parent Early Education Partnership (Derbyshire)

The six-session Home-Talk language programme is delivered by a children's centre worker with enhanced language training. It normally takes place in different environments including the home, outdoors and the children's centre, and covers routines, messy play and target setting. One of the sessions focuses on books and specifically the resources in the BSC pack.

*We have found the Bookstart Corner resources enhanced and neatly complemented what we were already doing. **Derbyshire***

Packs are given out either by the Home-Talk family support workers or speech and language therapists (SLTs). The SLTs work with those families who have more complex and deep-seated speech and language difficulties.

For the Chatterbox programme, the Bookstart Corner forms the first session in-home on books and language learning, followed by Chatterbox sessions in the children's centre. The main advantage of Bookstart Corner is its flexibility to enable them to respond to parents' needs.

The PEEP programme run by a centre in Derbyshire is a children's centre-based rolling programme which prepares children and parents for school. The staff were keen to get Bookstart Corner to more families and it fitted well into the existing structure of their PEEP programme. The Bookstart Corner is used as a model for interacting with the child and the resources for focussed play or modelling to the parent. Again six to 10 families per session were recruited by family support workers.

Adaptations to the content of programme

Since practitioners have been working with the Bookstart Corner material over 18 months, many have developed, adapted and added to the programme to suit the situations and parents at their children's centre.

Several had adapted the content to suit a different age group, depending on the need. One centre had identified a need at the three-year stage when children were entering nursery. They have adapted Bookstart Corner for this age and worked with the parents to help them understand the importance of their involvement with their child's learning. Although the programme itself had only been modified a little, it had been made more age-appropriate. For example, in session 2 with mark making, they have introduced other stories and an activity where children choose an animal to draw from the story.

*This gets over to parents how communication, literacy and language work together **Hertfordshire***

The parent then reads the story with the child and they talk about it.

*So it's about the child telling the parent about what's happening so there's a lot more imagination being used **Hertfordshire***

The centre extends the content if a group are ready or, if a parent needs more support, slows down and extends the number of sessions.

Further details on the Booktrust guidelines for the content of the sessions can be seen in appendix 4.

5. The Post-Completion Stage – after Bookstart Corner

The Bookstart Corner programme is designed for delivery as a four-week programme; with a recommendation for follow-up with families six weeks after completion of the programme. Booktrust has little information on whether individual children's centres have implemented their own system or programme for this period, or the extent to which there is any follow-up provided to individual families after parents complete the programme.

Our research explored whether centres had implemented a structured follow-up programme with parents and whether there had been any level of post-programme evaluation with them. We also reviewed whether centres feel Booktrust can assist in any way at this stage to inform Booktrust's future development of the programme.

Follow-up after the programme

Individual follow-up

There appears to be very limited follow-up with families after Bookstart Corner by the Children's Centres. Of the 20 centres in this research, there were only three which had any formal plan in place and only one of these was delivering Bookstart Corner as a stand-alone course. It was, therefore, difficult for centres to assess whether parents had continued reading and rhyming activities with their children after the programme.

One of the centres had two follow-up routes, depending on whether the parent was in contact with the children's centre. For those not in contact with the centre (following the programme); the centre conducted a follow up phone call to discuss how they were progressing with story time and reading/rhyming, and to encourage the parent to engage in the centre's activities. For those coming to the centre, this took the form of an in-centre chat about behaviours and changes in reading/story time habits with their child due to the programme. Summaries of the three follow-up procedures are shown in the table below.

London	West Midlands	North Notts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow-up telephone call at six weeks if not using centre If using centre, arrange a specific chat about the behaviours and changes they have continued with after the programme They would like to do a second follow-up, but at the time of interviewing (Winter '13) this has not been implemented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Records kept of status at beginning of programme and when they leave/complete Records made of confidence in parenting skills, reading with child etc. then assess where they have benefitted A questionnaire is also given out after every Bookstart Corner session – using the standard Booktrust form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bookstart Corner is provided within the HomeTalk course. Parents are asked to rate their confidence at the beginning & the end Review of families after three months All families are contacted after the course whether it has been completed in the children's centre or in the home

General follow-up to encourage continued engagement

Although most centres do not have a formal evaluation procedure in place, the majority actively encourage and signpost parents to existing activities at their children's centre. All centres have related groups and sessions available on an on-going basis, which parents are encouraged to attend after completing the programme.

Parents are particularly encouraged to attend the rhyme-time sessions, which continue the theme of parents singing songs and rhymes with their children. Examples of sessions highlighted by practitioners, usually those with a singing and rhyming theme, are: Jo Jingles, Musical Toddlers, Talking Tots, Play & Learn and music and rhyme sessions.

However, after this initial contact and encouragement at the end of the programme, further contact to encourage/chase up is usually limited and it is 'left to the parent' to decide whether they attend groups/sessions at the centre.

*We are a small centre and we only have one room. I haven't got the staff to keep going back over everything, the idea is that I hope to get the parent and child interested in books and after we've done that over a period of time they sustain that and realise the importance of books in their children's lives **London***

The centres also signpost to the library and many will make a group visit on the final session. This can be either part of the fourth session or as an additional visit.

Practitioners are confident that many of their Bookstart Corner parents come to the centre for at least a short period after completing the programme. However, in the group of 20 centres, only seven indicated that 80 per cent or more of their parents had accessed children's centre services after completing the programme. Eight centres felt that only half or less than half had stayed in touch with the centre. Section 6 highlights that many parents completing Bookstart Corner are already known to the centre, which means that continued contact is more likely after the programme.

*Because they are families we already have a relationship with, we tend to carry on the relationship **Liverpool***

Centres who focused predominantly, or entirely, on home visits as their method of delivery, (particularly when a high proportion of parents were hard to reach) found it difficult to bring parents into regular contact with the centre after the programme.

It is however, important to highlight that even though parents may initially keep in contact, it is natural once the child goes to nursery, (which they can do from two years of age), that parents are likely to stop accessing children's centre services, unless they have a younger child coming through. Therefore centres which target Bookstart Corner at the two-year stage, usually, find most of their children go straight onto nursery after the programme.

The table below summarises practitioners' views on the proportion of families that had accessed children's centre services after the programme.

Proportion accessing CC services after completing BSC	No of centres	No of centres who have formal evaluation
80% +	7	1
Over 50%	4	2
Approx 50%	4	0
Less than 50%	4	0
Don't know	1	0
	20	3

Accessing the library since completing the programme

As highlighted earlier, practitioners who deliver Bookstart Corner actively encourage parents who have not joined the library to become members. The last visit of the programme may be held in the library, depending on the location and ease of getting there, or a specific visit arranged after the completion of the course. If they are unable to do this, they will give out forms to apply for membership.

To make the process of applying easier, one centre had tried to set up a scheme for parents to visit the library with a letter from the children's centre verifying they were registered. This would avoid them having to take copies of ID, which can be a barrier to joining. A visit to the library as part of the programme was also included.

There was a very wide range of views on whether the Bookstart Corner programme is a motivator for parents to join the library. Most do not record whether parents or their children are library members before they start the Bookstart Corner course, so this makes it difficult to estimate the effects of the programme in doing this. Since few carry out formal evaluations after the course as highlighted earlier, it is very difficult for them to assess the effectiveness of the Bookstart Corner in encouraging access for the first time.

The parents' survey covers this aspect from a parents' viewpoint and shows how many parents visited and indeed joined the library for themselves or their children after completing the Bookstart Corner programme.

Seven practitioners were able to give estimates of how many parents had accessed the library due to the programme. Three estimated there were 50 per cent or more of families accessing the library for the first time due to completing the Bookstart Corner programme, one estimated 60 per cent and the remaining three estimated below forty per cent of families accessing the library for the first time since the programme.

I'd say 60 per cent are accessing our mini libraries regularly when they might not be at all but for our book focus supported by BSC Kent

Of 59 families seven-eight have accessed the library for the first time due to BSC. However it has also been helpful in getting families who have already registered but not gone since to start visiting regularly.

Hertfordshire

On the less positive side, there was a small minority who struggled to get parents to access the library; these centres were those whose catchment was only disadvantaged families.

We struggle to get parents to access the library, a lot of them will not step foot in the library and we don't know why. **Lancashire**

Can Booktrust help with follow-up activities?

Since most centres have a range of activities for Bookstart Corner parents to attend after the course, many of which are speech and language related, most feel that any additional planned activities for the programme are not necessary.

There are also many centres where there are relatively small numbers who have completed the programme and, thus, a formal follow-up course or programme would be unlikely to work.

Specific follow-up activities aren't necessary as we have relevant activities on an on-going basis. There are also song and rhyming times at the end of most sessions and literacy comes into many of the courses. Literacy is a big thing here. **Hertfordshire**

I'm not sure [whether Bookstart can help with follow-up activities]; I think the Bookstart Corner programme works well in introducing families to other services if we can provide the programme. **Manchester**

There were very few suggestions from practitioners for Booktrust prompted follow-up; however, one of the few suggested was a new book or top tips for parents targeted at their three-month review stage. This could also be tied in with a three-month evaluation questionnaire.

At our three-month review we could take something else along as a reminder. New books and some top up tips for parents. If Booktrust sent a follow-up evaluation questionnaire we could give the parents this at a three-month follow-up. **Nottinghamshire**

At the current time, these practitioners feel signposting parents to existing activities is the most practical and effective route after parents have completed the Bookstart Corner programme.

There appears to be very limited evaluation of impacts and outcomes by practitioners in the centres researched, particularly for those where they are delivering it as a stand-alone programme. Such evaluations, besides being a valuable evaluation tool for centres, it may also give parents encouragement to show them that their story-telling and sharing rhymes and stories is having an impact on their child. Whether this is feasible and realistic, given the resources at many children's centres, is unclear and is outside the scope of this evaluation.

6. Impacts and Effects of the Programme

Benefits to parents

The Bookstart Corner programme was thought to have had a range of positive effects for both parents and children. The benefits to children are discussed in the parents' survey report, and the benefits to parents are discussed in this section.

Practitioners highlight the main benefit as the increased confidence of parents around reading and sharing books with their child. As part of the programme, practitioners show parents that there is so much more than just sitting and reading a book, and that it's not necessary for children to sit through a story, for story-telling and rhymes to have a benefit.

Parents starting the programme often feel a lack of confidence when reading with their children, and some may not be confident with reading themselves. Some even chastise themselves for not being able to get their child to sit and read quietly, whilst others are simply not aware of the importance of books and may not even have them in the home. Indeed, in some cultures books are rarely seen in homes, with conversation being the main form of communication. Also, many of these families rarely sit and play with their children and do not realise the importance of doing this.

The main benefit seen is an increase in parents' confidence around books, which is shown in a range of ways:

- Increased confidence in parenting generally
- Better bonding with their child
- Increased focus on the importance of books
- Increase in likelihood of sticking to story routines
- Understanding the importance of routines around regular reading activities
- Increased sharing of stories and rhymes with their child
- Spending more time sharing with their child.

Practitioners were very positive about the way the programme helps parents to understand how much they can affect the child's learning and literacy, and how it shows that there is much more to reading than just sitting and reading a book. It highlights the creative use of books and shows that they can be a prop for explorative and collaborative talk.

*It empowers parents to have the knowledge they need to assist their children and gives them ideas on how to share books with their children **Kent***

Practitioners felt that the increased confidence in parents can also have benefits later down the line, as they will make more effort with story-telling, reading and rhymes over a longer period with corresponding benefits.

The fact that the parents have more confidence in reading means they are more likely to do it, and the fact that they read to the child means the child is prepared and ready to start school Bookstart Corner, gives them the confidence to try **West Midlands**

Throughout the programme, practitioners give tips on different aspects of reading such as ‘you don’t have to read every word’ and ‘it’s OK to sit and look at the pictures together’, which builds up confidence week by week.

Several of the practitioners highlighted that if the packs are given out without the advice and guidance from an early years practitioner, they are much more likely to have a limited impact, providing only quality reading material for the child.

If the packs are just given out it puts the emphasis on the parent having to read through the literature finding out how it works. **Suffolk**

Parents are unlikely to gain benefit if the packs are given out without guidance; if a practitioner does not take them through the guidelines face-to-face, they may have neither the motivation nor the knowledge to realise the importance and possible impact of reading and rhyming with their child.

These parents need a conversation; they need to be hand-held through learning so they can be better teachers for their children **Suffolk**

The families appreciate getting the bags with the books but more importantly there is someone to talk to them about reading books **Nottinghamshire**

How delivering Bookstart Corner in homes increases the benefits for parents

Those practitioners who were delivering the programme in-home were particularly positive about the increased benefits of being able to provide better targeted advice to parents in the in-home environment. In a home environment, the practitioner can identify if there are any routines in the household and then suggest adding a story-time to the bedtime routine; they can imply the importance of this becoming a daily occurrence.

Being in the home gives useful opportunities for signposting to appropriate activities and services, and it can also enable the practitioner to provide more targeted advice which may not be feasible within a group at the children’s centre.

It gives us opportunities for signposting parents to different services because we see more being in their own homes **London**

Impact of the Free Nursery Entitlement

From September 2013, local authorities have had a statutory duty to provide free early education to disadvantaged two-year-olds. Eligible families are entitled to 570 hours per year of free early education for their two-year-old. From September this year (2014), the number of places will be extended to 260,000. The two target groups of children are those eligible for free school meals and looked-after children, with local targeting allowed if the target groups do not fill the places.

The Bookstart Corner programme is targeted at disadvantaged children from targeted groups, which is a similar group to those receiving this free educational entitlement.

This group aligns well with the Bookstart Corner priorities for targeting, including accessing the two-year-old early education entitlement to build confidence and skill. It would also support the development of a home learning environment, which is key if target families have been found to be not accessing their early education entitlement fully. We, therefore, investigated as part of this evaluation, whether practitioners had seen any evidence that Bookstart Corner had encouraged families to take up their entitlement.

Encourages take up in areas where awareness is low

In areas where many parents don't know about the two-year programme, Bookstart Corner had been used as a means of talking about the free nursery entitlement and it had influenced take up. The Bookstart Corner programme can be a good way of getting into homes in order to talk about the free offer and ensure parents take the application form at the same time.

*I feel it has definitely helped. Most families that are entitled to free funding have sought a place. We also generally promote the free nursery place for entitled two-year-olds. **Manchester***

Limited influence where take up is high

However the majority of the practitioners did not think Bookstart Corner had encouraged take-up of the free educational entitlement, largely because in most instances they already had a high take-up and it had not been a problem in encouraging families to do so. This was particularly the case in those children's centres where the catchment covered a high proportion of disadvantaged families and, therefore, a large number were eligible for this offer. In these areas, there had been widespread publicity, and, thus, awareness of the scheme was high. In fact, it was typical for such centres to use Bookstart Corner as an identifier for parents; they would take up their place and the centre would then suggest the Bookstart Corner programme.

*The programme hasn't been sold as an incentive to get onto the nursery programme, once they've filled in their form for the funding and been allocated a place we would then go in with Bookstart Corner **London***

In a few cases, the local pre-school or nursery had actively encouraged Bookstart Corner involvement, knowing its positive impact on improving the outcomes in the nursery environment.

Better prepared for nursery and pre-school environment

For those families with children who have completed the Bookstart Corner programme prior to going to nursery, it has been excellent in preparing children for this:

It (the Bookstart Corner programme) definitely does help better prepare the children for the nursery system London

Overall, there is an indication that, in areas where there is low awareness of the educational entitlement, the Bookstart Corner can have a positive impact in two ways. Firstly, promoting the free offer of nursery education when going in with Bookstart Corner is a definite advantage and secondly, children who have completed the programme have been better prepared for nursery.

In highly disadvantaged areas where the majority of families are eligible for the new scheme, Bookstart Corner is still an asset in getting parents used to sharing and reading with their child; an important requirement once the child is at nursery.

Does Bookstart Corner give access to disadvantaged families?

The Bookstart Corner programme is targeted at disadvantaged families who fulfil one or more of the deprivation indicators, (see appendix 3); an effective way of focussing the programme on those who need it most.

Indeed, this fits in with the focus and remit of children's centres activities, advice and training which are typically aimed at families who fulfil at least one of the following indicators:

- Unemployment
- English is their second language
- Low educational achievement
- Poor literacy
- Isolation and depression.

The families who had completed the Bookstart Corner programme with the children's centres covered in this evaluation were more likely to be disadvantaged, but there was a significant minority who were not.

The centres showed a range of policy on this aspect from those who were offering the programme widely to 'any interested' (only two of our sample of 20) to those who were only completing the programme with targeted families. Where centres were not located in areas of high disadvantage (rather pockets of disadvantage), many found Bookstart Corner of limited value in accessing the target group (see overleaf for further details).

An important factor in being able to offer the programme solely to those targeted is the children's centre location. If the centre's catchment area covers families almost all of whom fulfil the eligibility guidelines then there is a much bigger pool of eligible families to draw from than a centre situated where there are only pockets of deprivation. Of our 20 centres, half reported that all their 'BSC families' fulfilled at least one of the above indicators.

There is a mix of disadvantaged to universal parents completing the course. The disadvantaged parents have been unemployed, had mental health issues were single parents and those with English as a second language.

Suffolk

Targeting those who fitted the criteria for free nursery place funding at two years was common and in this case no other criteria was applied.

The remaining half of centres were not applying any criteria to delivery of the Bookstart Corner and the families who had completed the programme were a mix of those who were disadvantaged and those who were not. In fact, in a few cases where there were many packs to be given out, then any families interested were encouraged to participate, usually in an organised session at the centre. However, this was not typical and in most centres at least half fulfilled the disadvantaged criteria.

Difficulties in engagement of the families Bookstart Corner is designed for

In many instances, the families who are at the highest level of need tend to find it difficult to engage with the programme or see a need for it. This issue was originally recognised by Booktrust in the development phase of the programme and was the key reason why they recommended the home delivery method.

Two centres mentioned that their families found commitment very difficult, and even when they had agreed to come they still didn't turn up to the centre when reminded and called. Although one of these was holding sessions in the centre, the other was attempting the home visit route and still had had difficulties with commitment. Although only three practitioners spontaneously mentioned this in our group of 20, it is thought it could be a widespread issue.

For families who meet the targeted criteria I do encourage them to come along to it. Unfortunately with our targeted families, they do sign up but they don't come even when you call them or email to chase them **London**

This centre is planning to target a lower level of need in the future, due to these earlier difficulties. Typical issues were speech and language delay, and lack of confidence in reading and sharing with children.

Some centres would welcome guidance in how to communicate the value of the programme to parents more effectively – this is highlighted in section 7; 'improvements'.

Lack of commitment, chaotic lives and a lack of awareness of the importance of reading and literacy are typical characteristics of the hardest to reach families. These families would especially benefit from the programme and so it was disappointing that the in-home delivery method was not available to them due to the lack of staff resources available to do three-four visits per family.

This issue was also evident in the recruitment and fieldwork stage of the parents' survey. These difficulties were mentioned as a barrier for getting parents together for interviewing during a session at the children's centre and indeed during the fieldwork many interviewing sessions were poorly attended because parents didn't turn up.

Does Bookstart Corner give an opportunity to address wider issues?

Many practitioners agreed that the Bookstart Corner programme did give an opportunity for highlighting wider issues, although this was not universal amongst all. Interestingly, it wasn't just the home visit delivery method that gives this opportunity; examples were also given of in-centre sessions, which had also enabled wider issues to be addressed.

Home visits provide a more personal private environment in which to discuss and get to know a practitioner. In this situation, there is a chance to build a stronger relationship which generates trust in the practitioner. This encourages greater openness and, thus, more opportunity for other issues to be brought into the open. Examples were given of housing issues which had been raised by a parent and an unknown speech delay had also been highlighted in such a situation.

Families do build up trust with you especially in their home environment. Some parents will start to talk about other issues once you've built up a bit of a relationship **Hertfordshire**

There is also an opportunity for children's centre staff to be alerted to other issues during Bookstart Corner sessions delivered at the children's centre. One family support worker identified a possible issue during such a session which prompted a home visit and then led to a Common Assessment Framework (CAF) plan being put in place.

Bookstart Corner does give opportunities to discover other issues, even though in-home visits, everything might seem fine, but in group sessions you pick up other issues, how parents are managing the child's behaviour, or how parents interact with their child, or might be isolated, so other things might become apparent
Hertfordshire

At some of the centres which were situated in areas where most or all of their catchment comprised disadvantaged families, practitioners had found that Bookstart Corner wasn't the driver to reveal wider issues. It wasn't because they disagreed with the possibility, but that they were already dealing with 'wider issues' every day. Staff in such areas identify problems early and are already reaching out to such parents. In these cases, Bookstart Corner is used as an additional resource and enables continued engagement rather than being a vehicle for addressing other issues.

Success and effectiveness of targeting those who do not access the Children's Centre

The Bookstart Corner programme was originally designed for families who were not engaged or accessing local services and it was thought it could be a good way of encouraging them to use the centre facilities, advice and resources available. After over 18 months of running the Bookstart Corner programme practitioners were in a good position to see whether it had in reality enabled more 'new' parents to access the facilities available at their centre.

Bookstart Corner can help with accessing families in some cases

On a positive note there was a minority who felt that the programme had acted as a 'door opener' as a way to build up engagement with families 'so they don't feel they are being checked up on'.

Yes, BSC has helped getting vulnerable families to access the centre – it has really strengthened this group accessing the centre **Suffolk**

Most practitioners felt that the programme had not increased access to these parents, as in fact the majority of parents completing the programme were already known to their children's centre. In addition to internal referrals, other referrals were typically received from the health visitor, the family support worker or nursery, so the children's centre was already in touch with them in at least some way. Parents are also referred when practitioners see behaviours which suggest there may be a need for speech and language assistance.

*Not really to be honest – the families we target have usually been introduced to us in some way and then we try and work with them when we've got them **London***

Can the Bookstart Corner be used as a 'door opener'?

There appears to be mixed views on whether it is useful to use Bookstart Corner in initial engagements with families. Some centres find it is more effective to get to know a family first and build up a relationship with them before introducing Bookstart Corner

*Yes definitely, it opens lots of doors due to the home visits. **Hertfordshire***

Others use Bookstart Corner to give their hard-to-reach parents a reason to engage, providing encouragement through the offer of free course and a free book pack.

*It has been a good way to build up engagement with families, a nice way so they don't feel you are checking up on them **Hertfordshire***

Practitioners seem divided on this and both views were evident in our evaluation. Since the majority were working with families they knew, it had been mainly used in a strengthening role; more for reinforcing and enabling. It had also improved the effectiveness of the two-year review, which is one of the vehicles to get practitioners 'through the door'.

In summary, the programme can be used as a door opener in some cases and even for those who had not seen this, the Bookstart Corner programme was seen as a way of strengthening existing relationships. Thus, the programme can encourage those on the fringes of the children's centre community, who attend infrequently to engage more effectively with children's centre services.

7. Suggested Improvements to the Programme

The 20 practitioners gave a range of suggestions for improvement to Bookstart Corner involving the programme delivery and targeting, programme development and content of the programme itself. Suggestions made by more than one practitioner include:

Bookstart Corner Programme delivery and development

- Ensure continued flexibility to deliver the programme in the way(s) best for each children's centre. Booktrust should review the feasibility of children's centres carrying out four home visits and continue to be open to other methods of delivery
- Develop a pre-12 month Bookstart Corner – Bookstart Corner for Babies (more structured/formal approach than the current Bookstart for babies given out by health visitors). Parents then realise the importance of books and rhyming at an earlier age than the current Bookstart Corner starting ages of 12 months

I think the Bookstart Corner could be with younger babies. Hertfordshire

- Consider doing Bookstart Corner at three years when the child enters school, perhaps instead of Bookstart Treasure Chest
- More ideas from Booktrust on how to get parents engaged initially and communicate the value of the programme
- Promote Bookstart to other agencies so partners are aware of its value. It would, therefore, be easier to get partners 'on board' e.g. Include a resources pack for early years providers/DVD for professionals. This would help with getting more referrals for the programme which some centres struggle with.

To me it feels there you go, get on with it; you get the referrals from other agencies. I haven't got the time to be doing that so they need to do that [give children's centres more help to promote Bookstart Corner to other agencies]Derbyshire

Booktrust already do this via Bookstart Coordinators and health partners however in the above region there was a lack of awareness that these stakeholders can help.

Suggestions made by only one practitioner were:

- Ideas (from Booktrust) to promote commitment to attend for three or four consecutive sessions
- Review the paperwork required at the end of each session. The same questions are asked and no guidance is give on what to do with it and so there is no opportunity to see the development of the child
- Consider a Bookstart Corner for adults – to take place without the child present
- Raise awareness of Bookstart Corner on a national level, including publishing research to ensure Bookstart Corner is more widely known. It would help promoting the programme to partners and other agencies.

Improvement to the content of the Bookstart Corner Pack

From more than one practitioner:

- More books – many practitioners have to take additional books, board books and puppets/toys with them

From individual practitioners:

- More rhyme sheets
- A DVD with nursery rhymes and stories perhaps with animation and cartoon characters
- More props e.g. puppets to help the stories come to life
- More suggestions for parents on how they can bring stories to life
- More pictures which can be used to talk about the story and not just rely on the words (useful for those who have English as a second language)
- Different books each year to give greater variety or continue a theme with different versions each year
- More follow-on resources for the most vulnerable and more follow-on books for those who have little in the home.
- Consider more display boards (those which are used in the Bookstart Corner area of the children's centre). When the Bookstart Corner programme is delivered in two or more venues within a cluster it is difficult moving these as well as lots of books and reading resources.

8. Key Conclusions

The following top-line conclusions are from the practitioners' part of the evaluation of the Bookstart Corner programme. A fuller version, with recommendations, will be provided in an executive summary for the project as a whole.

The following conclusions are based on the qualitative practitioners' research from in-depth interviews with 20 practitioners:

- Most practitioners are very enthusiastic about the Bookstart Corner programme and are keen to deliver it to parents via a method within their time and resource capability.
- The programme was praised for increasing parents' confidence around reading and sharing books with their child. Additional benefits include: increased bonding, increased focus on the importance of books and spending more time sharing books stories and rhymes with their child.
- The prescribed delivery method of four sessions in-home over four weeks is costly on staff resources and time; relatively few are delivering the programme by this method.
- The programme is however being delivered in a variety of other ways:
 - A focus on in-centre sessions, either dedicated to Bookstart Corner, or part of an existing session with one or two home visits.
 - Many children's centres use not only different methods for different groups but also different methods within a programme e.g. three sessions in-centre one in-home, two sessions in-home one in-centre.
 - Staff are very keen for flexibility to continue, so they can deliver the programme in the best way for their centre.
- The delivery of 50 packs to each centre (to be gifted within the Bookstart Corner Programme) is too many for some centres, particularly considering the number of courses they already organise at their centres. Pressure to gift these may have, in part, contributed to the variety of delivery methods that have developed. To 'make use of them' some packs have been given out with very little, if any, training/guidance from a practitioner. (Booktrust was already aware that this was an issue and there is now an option to receive 25 packs.)
- The home visits provide a good relationship building environment in which wider issues can be highlighted/emerge.
- Some centres find that in-centre sessions also provide access to wider issues in a less threatening environment than a home visit.
- Although the programme was not noted for giving the children's centre access to 'new' parents, it was praised for strengthening relationships with 'existing' parents. Some centres also found it acted as a 'door opener'.

- There appears to be little formal evaluation of parent outcomes – only three centres conducted follow-up evaluation after the programme, and for two of these this was within an existing programme.
- There is rarely any local follow-up after a programme other than signposting to different activities. However, many parents do initially stay in contact after the course mainly due to them already accessing the children’s centre before the programme.
- Centres have had difficulty in engaging parents – both in gaining initial interest to participate in a course and also to instil commitment once a course is started. Centres in less disadvantaged areas can find it very hard to engage parents, especially if they do not have strong links for referrals from partner agencies.
- Links with partner agencies are important for referrals for the programme if the children’s centre is not to rely on ‘existing parents’. In cases where links are weak, the centre normally relies on existing families who already access the centre.
- Where awareness of the free nursery entitlement is low, (often in the less disadvantaged areas), Bookstart Corner appears to influence take-up by providing a useful route to raising awareness (of the entitlement) amongst eligible families. However there is a ceiling effect and therefore limited impact of the programme where awareness of the offer is already high, in highly disadvantaged areas.
- There is strong indication that those children who have completed the Bookstart Corner programme are better prepared for the nursery environment. Indeed, some nurseries encourage parents to complete the course. They have noticed that children who have completed the programme are more likely to be at the age appropriate level when starting their nursery education.

9. Appendices

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Appendix 1

The Bookstart Corner programme is usually delivered by family support workers and (family) outreach workers, but a range of other practitioner roles are also commonly seen. Even at the 20 centres covered in this research there were over 10 different job titles named. The table below shows the variability.

Different Roles delivering the Bookstart Corner Programme

Role /title of practitioner	Number of centres with this role in their Bookstart Corner team*
Family Support Worker	6
Outreach Worker (including Family/Community Outreach Worker)	5
Children's Centre Manager	3
Community Involvement Worker	1
Early Outcomes Officers	1
Nursery Workers	2
Early Years Practitioner	2
Play Worker/CC Workers/Activity Worker	5
Community Development Worker	2
Child-minder Co-ordinators	1
Speech and Language therapists (gifting packs when working in-home as part of the Home-Talk programme)	1

Geographic and Regional Locations for practitioner interviews

Geographically, the centres were spread across eight English counties covering four regions. The split for the 20 centres is shown below.

County	Region	No. of interviews
London	London & south	4
Kent	London & south	1
Suffolk	East	1
Hertfordshire	East	6
Nottinghamshire	Midlands	2
Derbyshire	Midlands	2
West Midlands	Midlands	1
Manchester	North west	2
Liverpool	North west	1
Total		20

An additional pilot interview was also conducted in Derbyshire

Appendix 2

Numbers of Bookstart Corner programmes delivered at each centre

Ref no.	Number of BSC's Completed	Category
1	Session 1: 9 families June 2012 (all in 1 session in CC) Session 2 & 3: 11 families in total, over June 2013 & November 2013 (over 3 weeks x 2, all in CC)	20-30
2	25 families – April – Dec 2012 Jan 2013 onwards... 13 families completed via the Homestart and 6 families did 3 sessions as part of Rhyme time. Plus 5 other BSCs in-home.	30-50
3	Wave 1 - 30 families (all completed via 4 Home Visits) Wave 2 – 10 families (all within stay and play session in the CC) Also completed some aspects within the 4 week school readiness course (2-3 yr olds)	30-50
4	4 visits – 30 or so have attended 1 or 2 or 3, but none would have come to 4 as they do not run 4 visits (see above)	30-50
5	4 sessions: 10 families; 3 sessions: 2 families; 2 sessions: 6 families; 1 session: 1 family = 19 families	Below 20
6	Did the full set (of 50) in 2012, had to check computer not working, thinks about 30-35 this year	Over 50
7	In 6 months between April and Sept 2012 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 27 packs were given out through Home-Talk - 4 packs were given out through Speech Therapy - = 31 packs distributed In 6 months between April and September 2013 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 32 packs were given out through Home-Talk - 8 packs were given out through Speech Therapy - = 40 packs distributed 	Over 50
8	In year 1 – April to July 2012, 30 children completed programme. Sept to July 13 – 40 children completed programme, Sept 13 – current 15 children so far 3 or 4 groups ready to start Have adapted to fit families working with. Groups have children of same age	Over 50
9	Worked with 66 families at home between March 2012 - Dec 2013	Over 50
10	I've delivered the BSC to 16-20 families over the last two years, 40% via 4 sessions at the centre to a group, and 40% via 4 sessions in parents' own homes. 8 parents have completed from coming to 4 sessions at the centre, and 12 parents have received the 4 home visits, as ideally intended, for BSC. Those parents have tended to be more disadvantaged.	20-30
11	Mix of PEEP, 10 week programme & handing out to any of those interested.	30-50
12	75-80 families have begun the course. 85% have completed (so around 68). It is quite rare that we lose families once embarked on the course. It is only if they move or have to start a different job. We try to be as flexible as possible to accommodate them. We typically deliver 3 sessions in-home & the last at the CC or at the library.	Over 50

13	<p>- In 2013, there were 42 referrals, 11 have completed the BSC course, 7 have initial visits booked, 6 are on waiting lists, 4 have been left messages with (so waiting for a response) & 8 have failed.</p> <p>- It was similar numbers in 2012. Only a quarter of referrals successfully completed the 4 sessions, 20 families altogether.</p> <p>- The biggest difficulty is making contact with the families; they often do not have voice-message facilities on their phones, are reluctant to call numbers they don't recognise, don't return calls & change numbers.</p>	20-30
14	<p>Hundreds probably (c. 300) have received BSC training & the packs from attending the Centre for Bookworm sessions or other toddler groups.</p> <p>Approximately 20 have received it in-home.</p>	Over 50
15	<p><i>"We have a tracking & monitoring that we do for all of them, for follow-up & off the top of my head I think we've done over 100 books"</i> i.e. started the programme</p> <p>Estimates over ½ have had the whole 4 sessions</p>	Over 50
16	<p>70 families since April 2012. Half have done 4 sessions, half 2 sessions</p> <p>90% have done a mix of home and centre sessions, the first one usually being at home, then if they're fine with coming to the centre, the rest done there.</p> <p>5% in-home only (particularly if the parents have literacy issues of their own), and 5% in-centre only</p>	Over 50
17	<p>A total of 25 families have completed the programme since May 2012</p> <p>Of these 20 have been completed via home visits. Approx one third (six families via 4 home visits and the remainder via 3 home visits).</p> <p>They have found it quite easy/satisfactory to get the programme into 3 visits as they do the signposting information in the 3rd session.</p>	20-30
18	<p>In total she has done only 5 home visits plus 3 delivered within an existing session.</p>	Below 20
19	<p>59 families in total since May 2012.</p> <p>These have virtually all completed via home visits. There are few time when its not appropriate (e.g when dad had just come out of prison) but generally all via HV.</p>	Over 50
20	<p>50 + 30 from other local CC – all in ways of delivery as described. Now waiting for new packs to arrive to start again (2 types of pack, inc one for 2 years – 50 for each, so 100 in total)</p>	Over 50

Appendix 3

Booktrust's Criteria for Disadvantaged Families

This is the suggested criteria used to identify families that would benefit most from participation. It is not a definitive list and is deliberately flexible as the children's centres will have the expertise to identify the local families with the greatest need.

- Children that have never attended a **health check**
- Children entitled to the free **2 year old early education grant**
- Expectant parents participating in the **Family Nurse Partnership** programme
- Where there are concerns around **domestic violence, drug or alcohol misuse or maternal mental health**
- Families on **low income or living in poor quality or over crowded housing**
- Where a child or at least one parent has a **longstanding illness or disability**.
If a child is hearing or sight impaired ask your Bookstart Coordinator about Booktouch and Bookshine or additional needs packs.
- Via **referrals from health**, social services, GP or other local professionals
- **Lone parent** families
- Families where a **parent is serving a custodial sentence**

Appendix 4

Overview of visits (information for practitioners, taken from the website)

Home visit 1: Making time for rhyme

On your first visit you'll be getting to know the parent. Take the chance to promote their role in developing their child's language and communication skills through sharing books, stories and rhymes.

Resources:

- Parental DVD
- Rhyme Sheet with 2 x rhymes and parental guidance.

Home visit 2: Sharing books and stories

On your second visit you will introduce the Bookstart Corner pack, and model how it can be used to have fun together as a family and support the activity of sharing of books, stories and rhymes.

Resource: Bookstart Corner Pack, containing

- 2 x picture books (*Dear Zoo* and *If you're happy and you know it*)
- Book sharing tips focused on the 2 book titles

Home visit 3: Making stories come alive

On your third visit you'll be making stories even more fun and engaging by using props and other storytelling techniques.

Resources:

- Bookstart Baby Bear and Adult Bear finger puppets
- The 'Busy Bear' booklet, illustrated by John Prater
- Storytelling top tip sheet – includes how to bring the story to life with puppets.

Home visit 4: Mark making and signposting opportunities

For your final visit it's time to get parents involved with sharing rhymes, books and stories. You'll focus on signposting further opportunities, such as joining the library, family learning, Bookstart Bear Club, and more.

Resources:

- Mark making pad
- Crayons
- Complete our handy template, which we will provide, to promote your local opportunities