



Letterbox Club

Impact Report 2023

November 2023





When you first welcome a foster child into your home, a first challenge can be that they don't trust you. Even if they might not like their parents' actions, they'll feel loyal towards them. Sometimes it takes longer for a foster child to allow you in, because that's seen as going against their parents. They often won't want to read a book that I've bought for them, for example. I find they're much more open to the books in BookTrust's Letterbox Club parcels. Those books have been sent to them in the post, rather than given to them by me. They are more than happy to read through the Letterbox Club books - because the parcel is something that's theirs. I tend to let the children take the Letterbox Club parcels away to their room so they can open them in their own space. I'll already know what's in there and have had a look.



Foster carer whose child receives Letterbox Club parcels

About BookTrust

As the UK's largest children's reading charity, we want every child to read regularly and by choice. We reach millions of children and families every year, especially those from low-income families or vulnerable backgrounds, inspiring them with books and resources to get them started on their reading journey.

Children who choose to read and who read regularly are happier and healthier. They form stronger bonds and relationships. They do better at school and are more creative. They enjoy more success in life.

This is why we work with families, supporting them to start sharing stories and books together from the earliest possible age.

Our carefully selected books and well-researched programmes are delivered by thousands of local partners, bringing the magic of reading to children in every local community in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Letterbox Club

Letterbox Club is a key part of BookTrust's commitment to supporting children from the most vulnerable family backgrounds. Letterbox Club is delivered in 87% of local authority areas across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Last year we reached over 13,000 children aged 3-13, mostly children in the care system, but also other children from vulnerable or disadvantaged backgrounds who schools and local authorities felt would benefit from the parcels. Early indications for our reach in 2023 are similar to these figures.



Contact us

queries@booktrust.org.uk

booktrust.org.uk

Follow us on social: @BookTrust

©2023 BookTrust. Charity no: 313343



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Introduction

About Letterbox Club

Across the UK, children are enrolled for the Letterbox Club by local authorities, schools and other settings. Each child receives their own colourful parcel of books, maths games, stationery and other high-quality materials once every month for six months. The normal parcel distribution cycle is from May to October although we are happy to discuss alternative delivery schedules that work best for our stakeholders.

We're committed to learning with children, families and practitioners. Between October 2022 and May 2023, we've heard from 376 children in care in England and Wales receiving Blue (aimed at children aged 7-9), Red (aged 9-11), and Green (aged 11-13) Letterbox Club parcels. We also received postcards from 151 children in 2021 and 2022 (see appendix for age breakdown), describing their experiences and views of Letterbox Club.

We would like to say thank you to the families and children who shared their views with us and participating partners for their ongoing support in enabling us to hear from them.

Benefits of Reading

Through Letterbox Club we want to support a range of vulnerable children, including (but not limited to) those who are looked after, previously looked after, on the edge of care, or with a social worker, to experience the long-term benefits of reading in childhood. These benefits include school readiness and attainment, mental health and wellbeing, and family bonding, which all contribute to improved long term life outcomes.

Reading for pleasure in the early years has four times more powerful an impact on a child's progress across the curriculum at age 16 than parental education or socioeconomic status.¹

Shared reading brings immediate benefits to families too. It can support bonding between children and their parents, carers, or other family members², boost parental positivity and improve children's sleep.³ When children experience disruption or difficulties at home, reading can be especially transformative. It provides escapism and relaxation which can act as a protective factor against adversity⁴; a sense of stability which can help children settle into new routines and environments; a mechanism for discussing difficult and charged issues; and a way of reconnecting with experiences and emotions.⁵



Read our research into the **Benefits of Reading**

Overview of key findings

Key findings

Responses to our survey tell us that...

96%

of children reported that they like or love Letterbox Club

86%

of children reported that they like or love the books in their parcels

68%

of children reported reading more on their own after receiving Letterbox Club parcels

Key takeaways

1

Children enjoy and value Letterbox Club. The vast majority of children say they either love or like Letterbox Club and the arrival of a new parcel creates joy and excitement for families, making children feel special and valued.

2

Children enjoy the contents of their parcels, with 86% reporting that they love or like the books. Children particularly like or love the stationary (99%), but we found that the number games, while overall still fairly well received (63% like or loved these), were less popular compared to the other items included in the parcels.

3

Letterbox Club has a positive impact on reading habits. Children report that parcels support their confidence in reading and have expanded their interests. 68% of children say they read more on their own since receiving Letterbox Club parcels.

4

Beyond reading, there are indications that Letterbox Club supports children's wellbeing and relationships with their carer families. We know from our evaluations that parcels encourage valuable one-on-one time between children and carers.



Feedback

““ The letter box club has help[ed] me feel like I can conquer anything. ””

Child aged 12 receiving Green parcels

““ Letterbox has made my reading confidence grow it has also made me use my imagination. ””

Child aged 11 receiving Red parcels

““ We have really enjoyed all the contents and have spent many afternoons playing the maths games. It has sparked an interest in his reading and he now regularly asks to read before bedtime. ””

Carer whose child receives Letterbox Club parcels

““ Now, each time, I'll say, "Doug, you've got another red parcel!" and he just lights up. ””

Foster carer whose child receives Red parcels (name has been edited to ensure anonymity)



Conclusion

Conclusion

The feedback from children through the survey highlights the strengths of Letterbox Club and its impact on reading behaviours. The majority of children who use Letterbox Club enjoy receiving the parcels, like each of the different items within them, and say they are reading more as a result.

Nevertheless, we are continuously looking to improve our offer to make Letterbox Club the best possible experience for children. This includes conducting a review of the maths games.



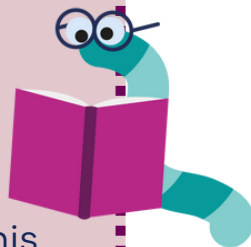
Find out more

If you would like to receive a sample pack or find out more about BookTrust, including our other offers and services for children and families in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland please contact us at:

queries@booktrust.org.uk

You can also sign up for our monthly newsletters using this link:

<https://secure.booktrust.org.uk/newsletters/>



What next?

We have big ambitions to develop our work in this area and reach more children from vulnerable family backgrounds with shared reading support. We're working with partners such as Adoption Focus, The Fostering Network, Kinship and St Christopher's Fellowship to hear directly from children and families. We ensure that direct input from children and families shapes the design of our offers, so they truly meet the changing needs of carers and the children they look after.

Appendix

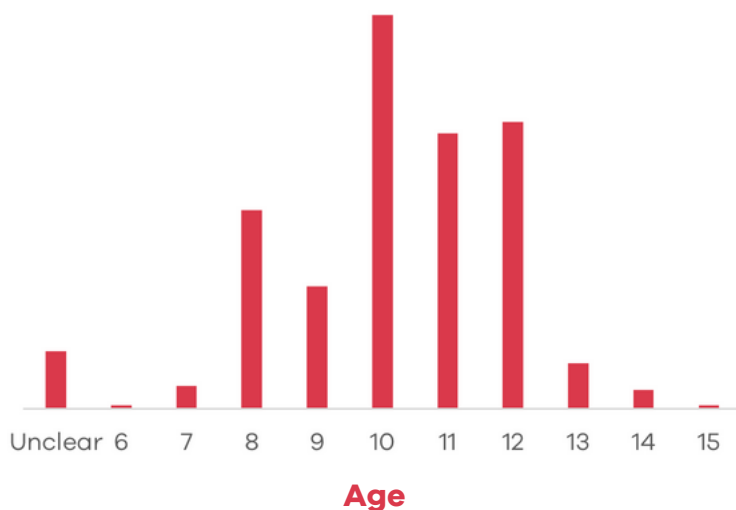
Our research approach

We distributed 4,845 paper copies of the children's survey in all local authorities in England and Wales who opted-in to the survey (3,929 questionnaires in England and 916 in Wales). Children receiving Blue, Red and Green parcels received the questionnaire enclosed in their fourth Letterbox Club parcel. They had the option to fill in and return the survey to BookTrust by freepost or complete an online version via a QR code in the parcel.

Age

The survey was distributed to primarily reach children aged 7 to 13. However, since Letterbox Club is designed to be used flexibly by local authorities, children outside of this age bracket may receive a parcel if deemed appropriate for their reading age. As a result, although most children we heard from were aged 7 to 13, we also received a small number of responses from children either older or younger.

Number of responses per age group



Parcel breakdown



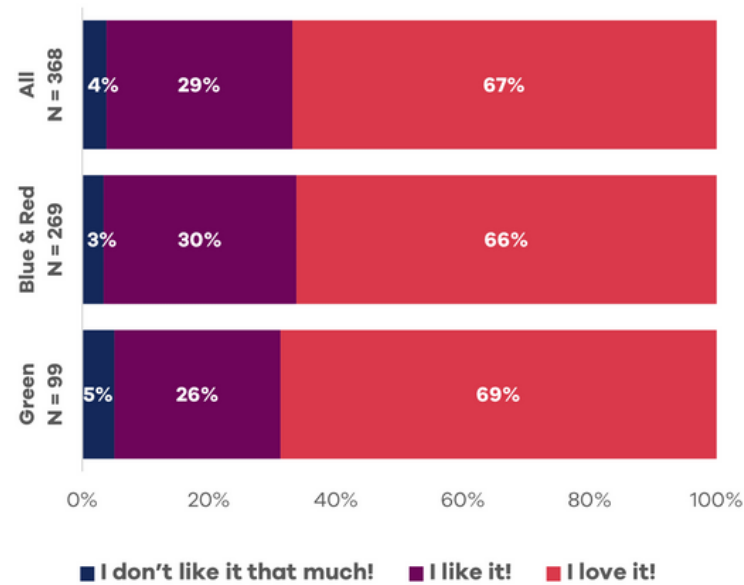
We received a total of 374 responses from children:

- 273 responses from children receiving either Blue or Red parcels (Children receiving Red and Blue parcels received the same version of the survey questionnaire)
- 112 responses from children receiving Blue club parcels (aimed at children aged 7-9)
- 157 responses from children receiving Red parcels (aimed at children aged 9-11)
- 101 responses from children receiving Green parcels (aimed at children aged 11-13 years).



Appendix

Results by parcel type: Enjoyment

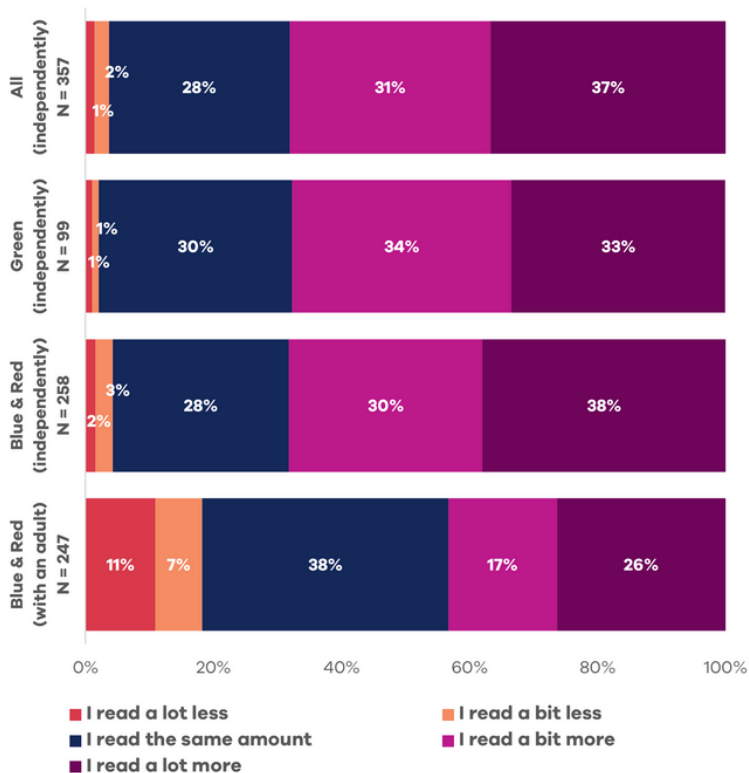


Postcard breakdown

We have also received a total of 151 postcards from children:

- 52 responses from children receiving Blue parcels
- 35 responses from children receiving Red parcels
- 20 responses from children receiving Green parcels
- 44 responses from children receiving other-coloured parcels (Yellow, Orange and Purple)

Results by parcel type: Impact on reading



Limitations

While we received responses from a range of children, we cannot be certain that those who responded to our survey are representative of all Letterbox Club recipients. In particular it is important for our ongoing and future evaluation work to listen to children who are less interested in reading and also those who are harder to reach than other children via our various research and evaluation activities. A small minority of local authorities also request to not include BookTrust surveys in the packs they receive, meaning our sample is not entirely representative of all regions that receive Letterbox Club.

For further breakdowns of the data in this report, please contact queries@booktrust.org.uk.