

Bookstart Corner Online Audit 2013-14

Introduction

Bookstart Corner is a targeted programme aimed at families with children aged 12-24 months. Bookstart supports children's centres across England to help the families that need the most support to develop a love of stories, books and rhymes. The programme offers a range of tailor-made learning resources and activities to these families during four home visits. The programme aims to help build parent/carer confidence around sharing books, stories and rhymes with their child, enabling them to support their child's early learning, language and development.

This year the Bookstart 2-year-old pack was launched. Children's centres who are signed up to Bookstart Corner received 2-year-old packs alongside their Bookstart Corner packs. The Bookstart 2-year-old pack contains two books, a rhyme sheet and CD and a card game and is available to families whose children are eligible for the 2-year-old early education grant. For families who have received four Bookstart Corner home visits, this could potentially be their fifth intervention and can be gifted at home or in the setting.

The Bookstart Corner online audit was emailed out to all children's centres who had received Bookstart Corner resources between April 2013 and March 2014. The audit was open from 29 April 2013 to 25 June 2013. The deadline was extended by about a month in order to maximise responses and contacts were sent several email reminders during the survey period. About 1500 children's centres were emailed and asked to complete the online audit and responses were received from 850 children's centres, a response rate of 57%. Respondents held a variety of roles including family support worker (20%), children's centre worker (20%), children's centre manager (17%), outreach worker (15%) and early years practitioner (12%).

This report summarises the findings from the audit including sections on the impact of the programme, identification of families to take part, programme delivery, the number of families involved and contextual information about the staff involved in the programme and their children's centre. Findings from questions about the new 2-year-old pack are also included.

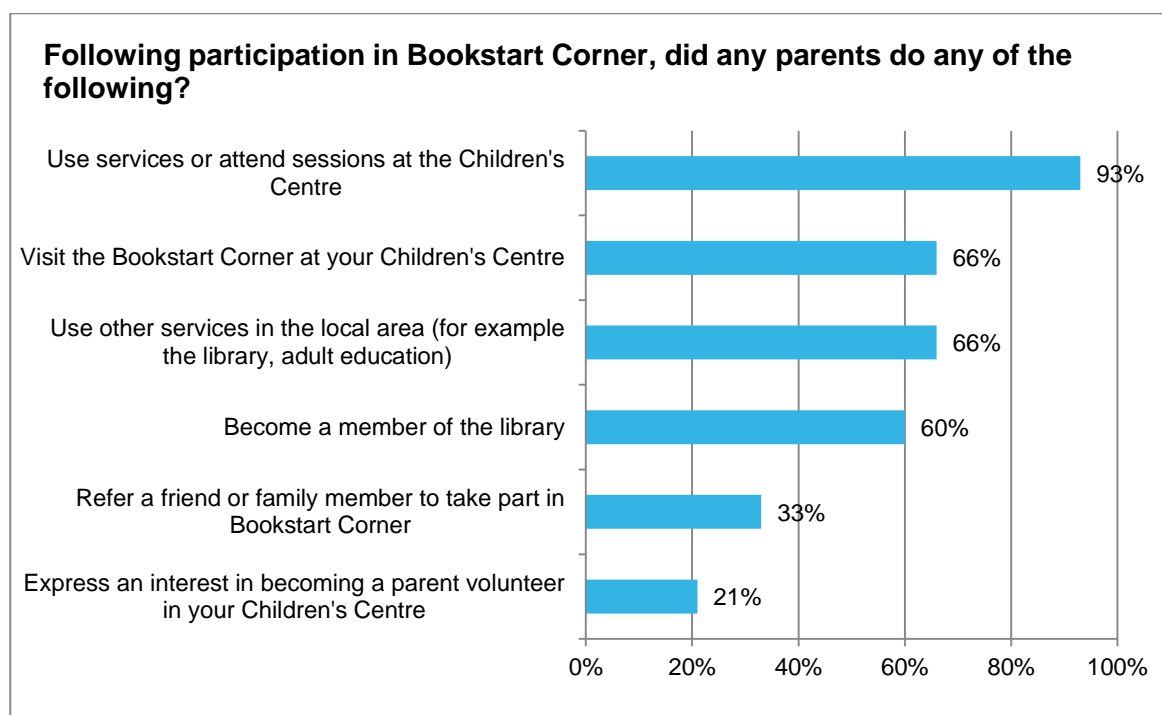
Please note: When asked whether they had delivered the Bookstart Corner programme to any families between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014 the majority of respondents stated that they had (77%). Those who had not delivered the programme to any families were not asked any questions about their delivery of the programme as these would not have been applicable to them. The reasons most respondents who had not delivered the programme to any families gave, were that they did not have enough staff time to deliver the programme (44%), they had only recently signed up to Bookstart Corner (27%) or they did not receive resources in time to begin delivery before 31 March 2014 (22%).

Impact of Bookstart Corner

The vast majority of respondents reported that following participation in Bookstart Corner parents and carers shared books, stories or rhymes with their child outside of the Bookstart Corner session (93%) and used services or attended sessions at the children's centre

(93%). Two thirds of respondents stated that parents involved had used other services in the local area (such as the library or adult education) and visited the Bookstart Corner at the children’s centre. The majority of respondents also reported that parents involved had become members of the library (60%). This indicates that Bookstart Corner is achieving two of its central aims: encouraging use of the children’s centre and other services, and promoting book sharing in the home.

Encouragingly, a third stated that following participation in Bookstart Corner parents had referred a friend or family member to the programme and 22% said parents were interested in becoming a parent volunteer in the children’s centre. The fact that parents are recommending the programme to others demonstrates that it is very well received. The programme also has wider benefits to children’s centres if it encourages parents to volunteer at the children’s centre in the future, as parental participation and parent volunteers are actively encouraged but not always successful.



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

‘As a Centre we have received good support from the local library and local authority. Bookstart corner is an excellent tool to engage families that are otherwise reluctant to engage in services. We have had several families who are now regular visitors to the Centre and who now engage in activities and family support.’

‘Bookstart Corner has made a massive difference to some of our families. One family had never been to the children’s centre before thinking that we were part of social services. After an initial home visit, the family attended Book corner and are now accessing other services at the children centre.’

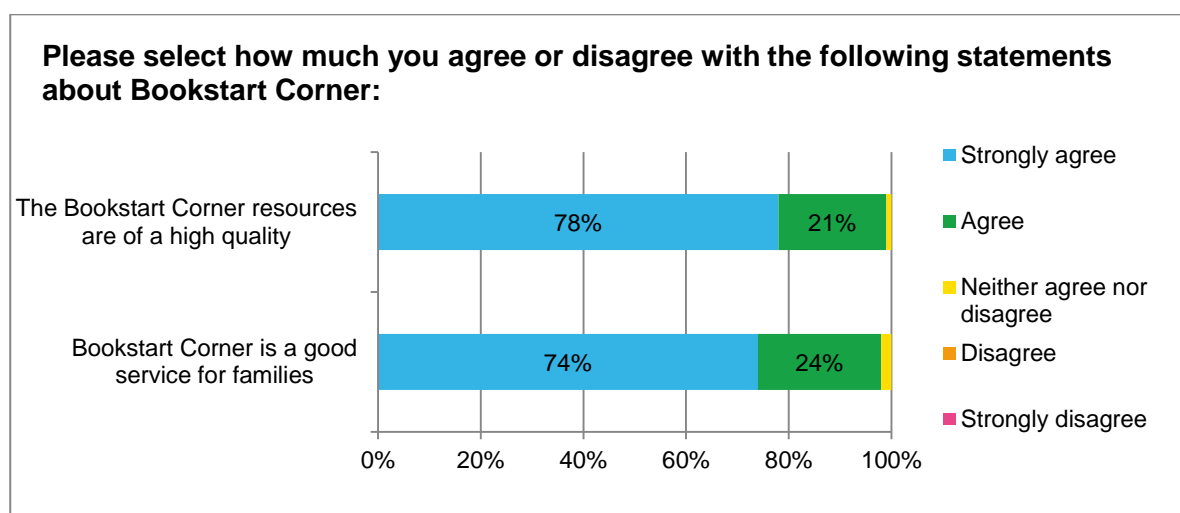
‘Bookstart Corner has benefitted many of our families with English as an additional language to be more confident and to get more involved in their children’s learning and development. Many of our families are attending other services at different centres and visiting the library regularly. Some of our families have built their own bookstart corner at home and are regularly



sharing books and learning new rhymes which they share with us at stay and play sessions.'

'Parents have commented on how much they appreciated the sessions, that they hadn't realised how important it is to read and sing to children. Staff have commented on how well families engaged even though some parents found it difficult at first they participated well by the final session and many have continued to use the library. Some parents access the centre for the first time following doing the programme at home.'

Respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the programme with 98% agreeing that Bookstart Corner is a good service for families and 99% agreeing that the Bookstart Corner resources are of a high quality.



Practitioners also expressed very positive opinions of the programme in their open comments, reporting that the resources were of a very high quality and provided numerous benefits for families, such as changing families' attitudes towards and confidence about reading and helping with the development of skills in children, such as speech and language, and concentration and listening skills. Practitioners also reported that the programme has helped families to bond and spend quality time together, and develop a love of reading:

'Bookstart Corner is fantastic for engaging with families and getting them involved in their child's early learning. It's vital that parents understand the importance of sharing books with their children to promote their child's speech and language development and this programme is getting this message across to them in a very positive way. The resources in the packs are fantastic.'

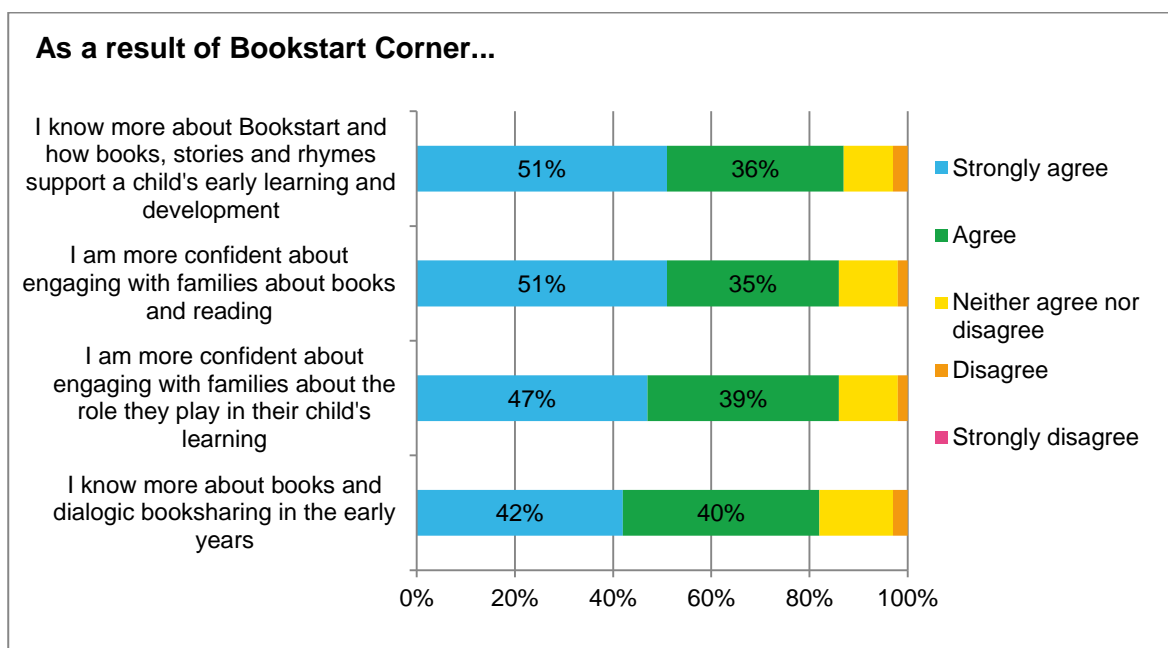
'Bookstart is a great way to encourage families to learn about the benefits of rhymes and reading, all the families involved have enjoyed the course and have left feeling confident to continue reading and singing with their children. I hold one of the 4 sessions within the local library which is a great way of introducing the families to the bookstart bear club, and encouraging them to sign up to the library. This audit is now making me think about the questions i am asking my families at the end of the sessions, and how i now need to adapt it for the next year. Thank you'

'I have used the sessions with children who have some kind of speech delay and parents have fed back to me that they found the resources really useful. One mum said that she found the puppets useful as her child was really engaged with it when reading the story that went with it. She said she usually struggled to get him to listen to stories but he was engaged when she used the puppet.'



'I really enjoy doing the Bookstart visits and can see that the progress made both by parent and child is excellent. It does take small steps to progress but the way the Bookstart sessions run are a really good way for this to happen. Books are so precious and the chance for carer/parent to enjoy time together developing lots of skills such as listening and reading and responding to each other are skills for life. It's a pleasure participating in the Bookstart scheme.'

Additionally the majority of respondents agreed that, as a result of Bookstart Corner: they knew more about Bookstart and how books, stories and rhymes support a child's early learning and development (87%); they were more confident about engaging with families about books and reading (86%); they were more confident about engaging with families about the role they play in their child's learning (86%); and they knew more about books and dialogic booksharing in the early years (82%).



Some practitioners expressed in their open comments that the programme had helped them to develop their confidence in delivering programmes and had offered them an opportunity for personal development, and to be able to support families further:

'It is a wonderful and fantastic scheme!, a colleague went to the Bookstart event in Exeter in March and came back full of enthusiasm and ideas. I think the resources allow you to be adaptable. How we deliver the programme means we can offer a flexible approach to meet individual needs and circumstances. Practitioners have developed in confidence to use the resources more creatively and in a way that meets individual needs i.e. we have a number of parents that had home visits who now feel confident to use the library, or children's centre and other community groups. It is wonderful to be able to give the resources for the children to keep.'

'The benefit of book start corner is the manual to guide you through the weeks so you remember to include key information and advice. Parents like the programme they understand what you are trying to get across to them e.g. after the first session they have learnt the 2 rhymes. Taking the bear each time is an ice breaker. Parents are proud to tell you what they have done with their child since your last visit.'

'The Bookstart corner has also encouraged myself to attend other Speech and language development courses to support my personal development and enhance my ability to deliver quality sessions.'

'The programme is a great way to get to know families who may not normally attend any Children's Centre activities. The resources are fantastic and have been a really good resource for both my personal learning, and to share with parents. Parents love the resources and become more confident and aware of the positive aspects of parenting, as well as how they can support their child's learning at home without worksheets etc.!'

'The resources are really lovely and the children love to look through the bag and discover each item. Bookstart corner is a flexible way of engaging parents in their child's reading and development and encouraging them to spend quality time together and seems to be really popular with parents and children alike. As a practitioner it's great that there is guidance as to how to plan each session but then the resources can also be put together to deliver fewer sessions or too meet the families' needs in other ways.'

Some practitioners also expressed, in their open responses, that they felt that Bookstart Corner had helped them to engage with parents who may be hard to reach and to build up good relationships with parents. Practitioners praised the way the programme allowed them to deliver messages about reading to families in a positive way, which is not perceived by families as being judgmental or an intervention:

'Amazing packs! [...] My families love them and it's such a good way to get into the household and get them talking, as well as identifying families that need extra support or 2 year funding.'

'Bookstart Corner has really been a success in working with hard to reach parents in the comfort of their own home and where they are able to build up a good relationship with the practitioner which has then enabled them to feel more confident in accessing other interventions in the children's centre to help with the learning and development of their children.'

'Bookstart has been used in a number of ways to engage families. It is a non-threatening intervention which has proved valuable in supporting families who have children with additional needs, families who are not accessing the children's centre and families who are not engaging in child led play with their children. I have observed relationships between parent and child develop due to BSC and children's behaviour and speech improve. Thank you'

'The Bookstart Corner has been very beneficial especially for hard to reach families that would not have attended any Children's Centre activities. Parents have shared through our evaluations how they have gained confidence in supporting their children's communication and language skills. Children's language and personal and social skills have also increased.'

Programme development

Respondents were asked if they had any suggestions to improve Bookstart Corner in the future. A lot of respondents did not include any suggestions, while some reported that they were happy with the programme as it is. However, some suggestions for improvements were made:

- Several respondents suggested that they felt the DVD should be removed from the pack as they did not feel it was beneficial, they preferred to talk through the



information themselves or parents had found the DVD patronising. There were several suggestions that the DVD could be replaced with a CD of rhymes to help parents who were unfamiliar with rhymes or lacked confidence in sharing rhymes:

'A couple of parents have commented that the DVD is a bit patronising.'

'I believe a CD of rhymes in the first session would be more beneficial than the DVD. There also needs to be something specifically for the child in the first pack. This is why I give out Bookstart books left over from special events e.g. Busy Bear's Party.'

'I don't think the DVDs are of great benefit-although they are informative I feel talking to parents is more effective.'

'The DVDs are not a resource used by the parents. It would be great however if you could include a singing CD in the main green packs as this would nicely compliment the first visit and it is something they frequently ask for.'

- Several respondents also reported that they would like to receive guidance on delivering the programme more flexibly (e.g. via sessions in the children's centre, condensing the programme into fewer visits, etc.). Some of these respondents reported that they were unable to deliver the programme using the recommended delivery guidance due to time and staffing constraints:

'Compact the sessions in line with families' commitments and life styles. Parents are happy to sign up for two sessions but will not commit to more.'

'Have more than 1 model of delivery. Children's centres are all very different and unique so it isn't a one size fit all.'

'It is difficult for our centre to deliver the required Home visits and so we have had to adapt the programme to provide the support to the families within the session in the children's centre. I hope that this will not be seen as not meeting the requirements of the programme as we have had a lot of success delivering in this way, even though we do understand the benefits of meeting families on a one-to-one basis in their home environment.'

'It's nice to see that the questions in the audit this time reflect a more flexible approach to delivering the packs. 4 Home visits required on previous occasions was unrealistic for one practitioner across 5 children's centres targeting 250 vulnerable families.'

'More suggestions for how to deliver the programme through groups, as this seems to be the only realistic way we can do so in future, with the budget cuts and reduced staffing we face.'

- Some respondents also reported that they had found it difficult to target families without feeling that they were singling them out and excluding others. Respondents reported that they would like to be able to offer Bookstart Corner to a wider range of families, including older and younger children:



'We have a lot of parents express an interest in the Bookstart scheme who may not meet the criteria to receive the sessions and book pack. It would be lovely to include parents into a group held at the Children's centre who enjoy reading to their children as peer support. I think the uptake for the sessions may be higher if there was a mix of parents. Some parents feel they are being singled out and are reluctant to come to the centre or receive home visits. We are going to try delivering the sessions during a play and learn session which parents have attended without feeling pressured into coming.'

'It is hard to run targeted groups without stigmatising families. Supplying Bookstart universally would be expensive, but if it was offered through open access groups I think we could involve more targeted families. This works well for Baby Massage, for example.'

'The only comment I would make is that some three year olds would also benefit from this programme.'

'In Tamworth we feel that we should be supporting families of children from 6 months. the earlier we get into work with the families the more impact we can have. Is there any chance of rolling out Book[start] Corner to even younger families?'

- Some respondents reported that they would like to see more ideas for additional activities to be included, such as games, crafts and extra cloth finger puppets:

'A game linked to one of the stories such as bingo, snap etc would be a useful resource that I think parents would eagerly engage with. I take these resources along as part of my own visits but I am unable to leave them with the parents.'

'Is it possible do you think to have some guidance on making story sacks to go with the stories. We have made our own but some further suggestions would be great.'

'I believe it is a good program and I am intending to run it throughout the year as a small group session. Maybe a list/pictures of various activities for families to do throughout the week based on the theme of the session ie: puppets- ideas on making different puppets/props and how to use them in a range of environments.'

'There could be more suggestions for mark making activities. I don't think the cut out finger puppet is age appropriate.'

'To create a better link for home visit to library, could a reading initiative with stickers that links to Bookstart corner be made? For the Rhyme challenge, we created a sticker card and a sticker for each rhyme, they had to collect al 5 stickers (we do 5 rhymes for autumn and 5 for spring) to collect their certificate. This has been hugely popular with children and parents, as they want children to complete their sticker card so keep returning to group for that. This has also been successful in home visits.'

'It may be useful to have ideas for additional activities as some of the activities go quite quickly e.g. I know one children's centre make a bottle shaker during the first visit to make more of the visit. I think the emphasis could be taken away from the written advice sheets as parents may not have the time or literacy skills to engage in these.'



- A few respondents stated that they would like to see more variety in the books included the pack to maintain interest across the four visits, and to prevent siblings receiving the same book:

'I have only been delivering BSC for a couple of months so not sure if you change the books. Dear Zoo is great but it may be an idea to have another book in a few years so that younger siblings who may receive a pack receive a different book.'

'More variety of books in pack so not all the same book.'

- A few respondents stated that they would benefit from having a better means of evaluating the impact of the programme in their children's centre:

'An evaluation of impact is useful - I created a Family Star where the parent rates their knowledge before our input and then again at the end of a Bookstart session.'

'Better evaluation forms for recording outcomes'

'Proforma of audit tool at the beginning of each period.'

- A few respondents also requested dual language and additional needs resources:

'Dual language books available to be distributed through children's centres and the guides to reading books in English for those who have English as a second language.'

'Dual language and sensory books for babies would be very useful.'

About you and your children's centre

28% of respondents reported that they, or a colleague, had attended a Bookstart stakeholder event in the last 12 months. Of those who had not attended a large proportion stated that this was because they were not aware of the event (47%), they were unable to take time out of work (25%) or they were unavailable on the day of the event (20%). Encouragingly, only 1% of respondents said that they did not think the event would be useful.

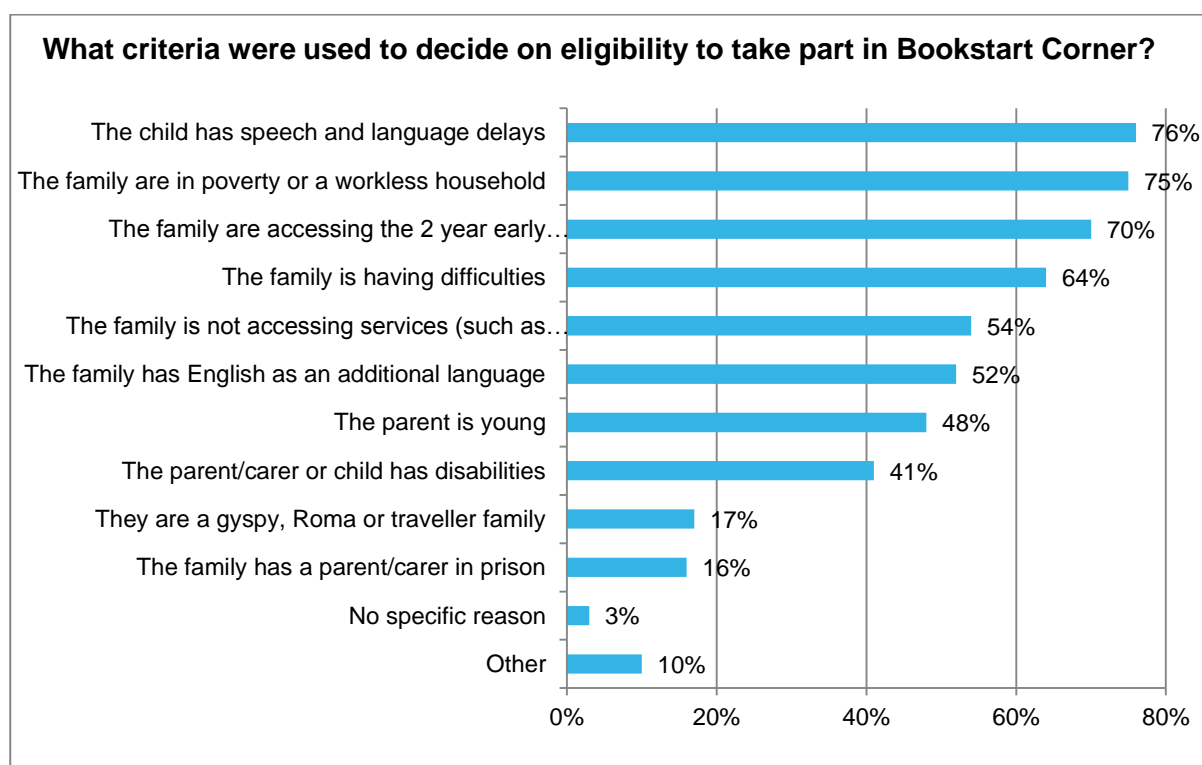
Respondents reported that an average of three staff members per children's centre deliver Bookstart Corner, and an average of two staff members per children's centre had completed the online training for Bookstart Corner.

Just over half of respondents reported that they work with the Bookstart coordinator in their local authority on Bookstart Corner (55%).

Identifying families for Bookstart Corner

Respondents used a variety of criteria to decide on eligibility to take part in Bookstart Corner with the most popular reasons being: 'the child has speech and language delays' (76%), 'the family are in poverty or a workless household' (75%), 'the family are accessing the 2 year old early education grant' (70%) and 'the family is having difficulties' (64%). Additionally about half of respondents reported that the criteria they used included: 'the family is not accessing

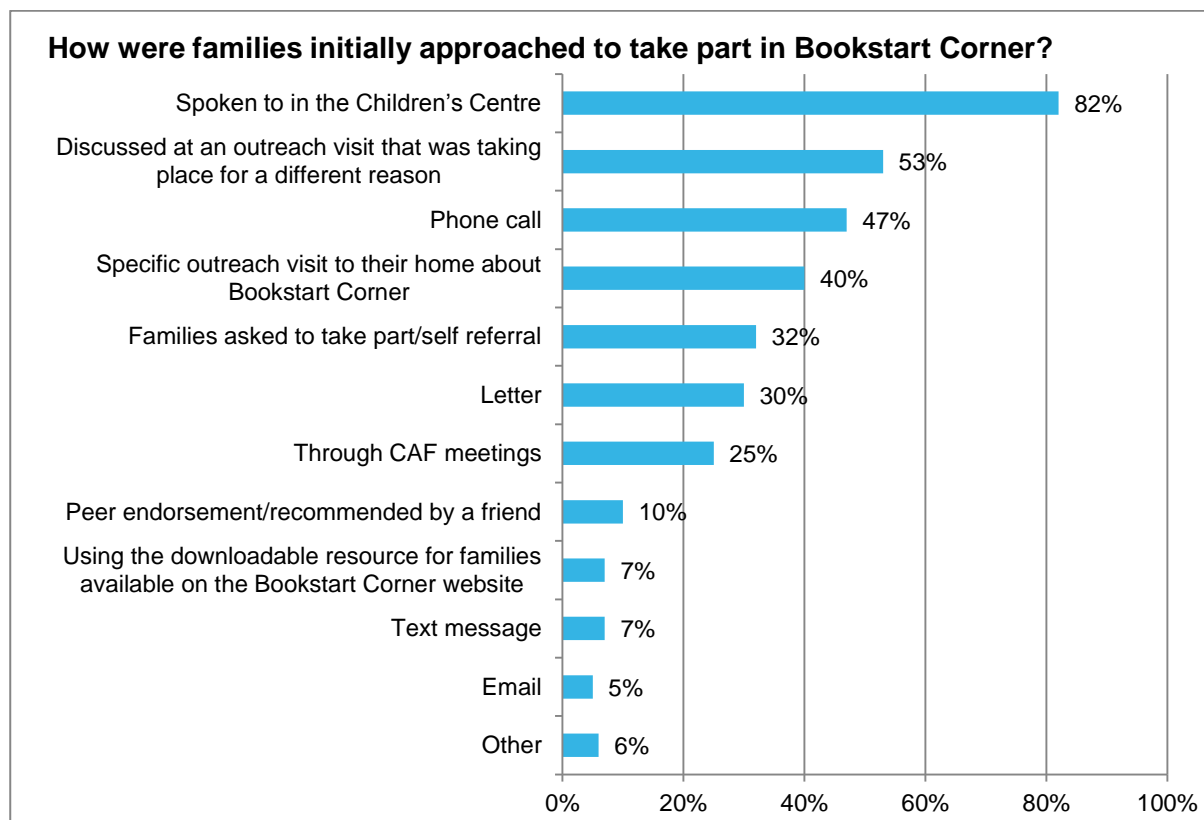
services' (54%), 'the family has English as an additional language' (52%) and 'the parent is young' (48%).



The majority of families were referred to take part in Bookstart Corner by other children's centre practitioners (79%), as part of an ongoing package of support for the family (71%) or referred by external partners (58%). A third stated that families had asked to take part (33%) and 10% were referred by a friend.

The external partners involved in referrals were most often health visitors (86%). Other external partners who were involved included early years partners (56%), speech and language partners (39%), other health partners (38%) and social services (28%). Lower numbers of coordinators reported that families were referred by Bookstart coordinators (16%), Home-Start (12%), Family Nurse Partnership (11%) or GPs (1%).

The majority of families were initially approached to take part in Bookstart Corner by being spoken to in the children's centre (82%) while 53% of respondents stated that they discussed it at an outreach visit that was taking place for a different reason, 47% made a phone call to the family and 40% discussed it at a specific outreach visit about Bookstart Corner. 32% stated that families asked to take part in Bookstart Corner and 30% approached families by letter. A quarter stated that families were approached through CAF (Common Assessment Framework) meetings. Low numbers of respondents stated that families were recommended by a friend (10%), or were approached using the downloadable resource for families on the Bookstart website (7%), via text message (7%) or via email (5%).

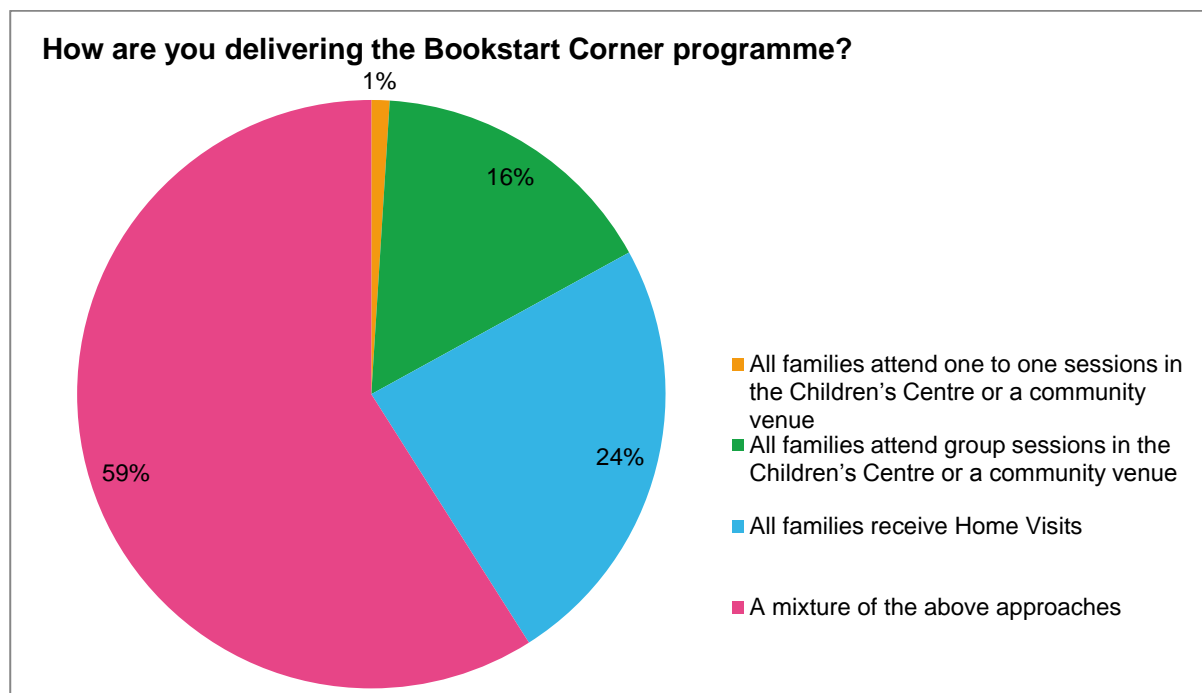


60% of respondents reported that they delivered Bookstart Corner as part of other programmes or interventions and 77% of these stated that Bookstart Corner was delivered as part of other family sessions (e.g. Rhymetimes, Stay and Play, etc.). Lower proportions of respondents stated that Bookstart Corner was delivered as part of Speech and Language therapy (24%), parenting programmes (17%), Every Child a Talker (12%), PEEP (10%) or Family Nurse Partnership (3%). However, 21% of respondents selected 'other'. Those who had selected 'other' reported that Bookstart Corner was delivered through a variety of different programmes, including at speech and language sessions, Universal Plus Pathways programme, Talking Together programme, Parents as First Teachers home visiting programme, and as part of general outreach work/family support programmes.

Programme delivery

Between April 2013 and March 2014 the total number of packs received by respondents to the audit was 40,272. This was an average of around 49 packs per children's centre.

Around a quarter of respondents stated that all families involved in the programme receive home visits (24%) while 16% stated that all families attend group sessions in the children's centre and only 1% stated that all families attend one-to-one sessions in the children's centre. The majority of respondents reported that families receive a mixture of these approaches (59%), with 83% of these stating that different families receive different delivery methods.



The majority of respondents reported that, on average, families received or attended either four or three visits/sessions (41% and 21% respectively). Only 13% stated that families only received one visit/session, 15% said families received two visits/sessions and 10% stated that families received more than four visits/sessions. Those respondents who reported that families received or attended more than four visits/sessions delivered the programme over an average of six visits/sessions, ranging from five to 12.

There were various different factors which influenced the number of visits/sessions that families received. The most popular factor was the willingness of the family to receive visits or come to the children's centre, reported by 66% of respondents. This was followed by the perceived need of the family (50%), available staff resource (46%) and the progress of the family from the initial visit (39%).

The majority of respondents reported that they delivered the programme to each family over a period of one visit or session per week, on average (63%).

The majority of respondents reported that, to their knowledge, no additional items were added to the Bookstart Corner packs before families receive them (85%). The minority of respondents who stated that additional items were added to the packs reported that various items were added including library information, children's centre activity programme, rhyme booklets or rhyme challenge sheets, tips for reading, finger puppets, speech and language information, or additional items related to the books.

Number of families involved

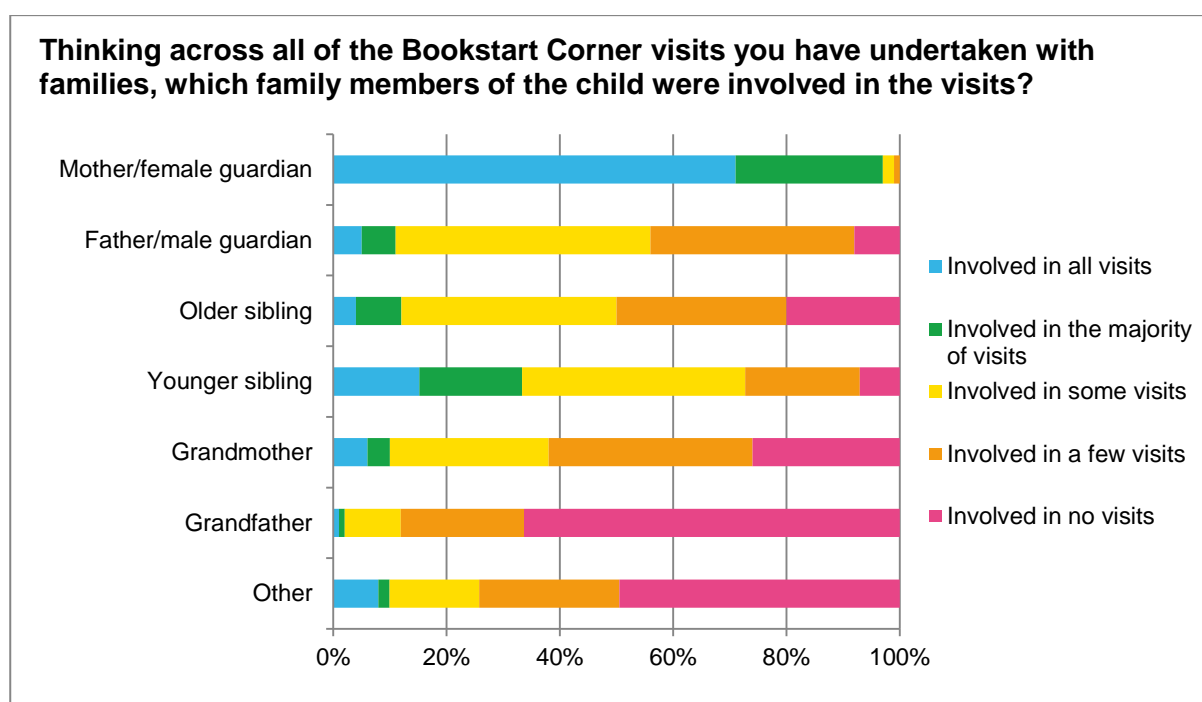
In total 23,062 families were approached by respondents to take part in Bookstart Corner during 2013-14. This is an average of 40 families per children's centre¹.

¹ Average excludes children's centres who had not delivered the programme to any families.

A total of 16,504 families took part in Bookstart Corner, which is an average of 27 families per children's centre.

A total of 13,173 families completed the programme, which is an average of 22 families per children's centre.

The majority of respondents reported that the child's mother/female guardian was involved in all visits (71%). The majority of respondents reported that the child's father/male guardian was involved in some visits or a few visits (45% and 36% respectively). Older and younger siblings tended to be reported to be involved in some visits (38% and 39% respectively) or a few visits (30% and 20% respectively). Generally grandparents tended to be involved less frequently but 38% of respondents did state that grandmothers were involved in at least some visits and 12% said that grandfathers were involved in at least some visits.

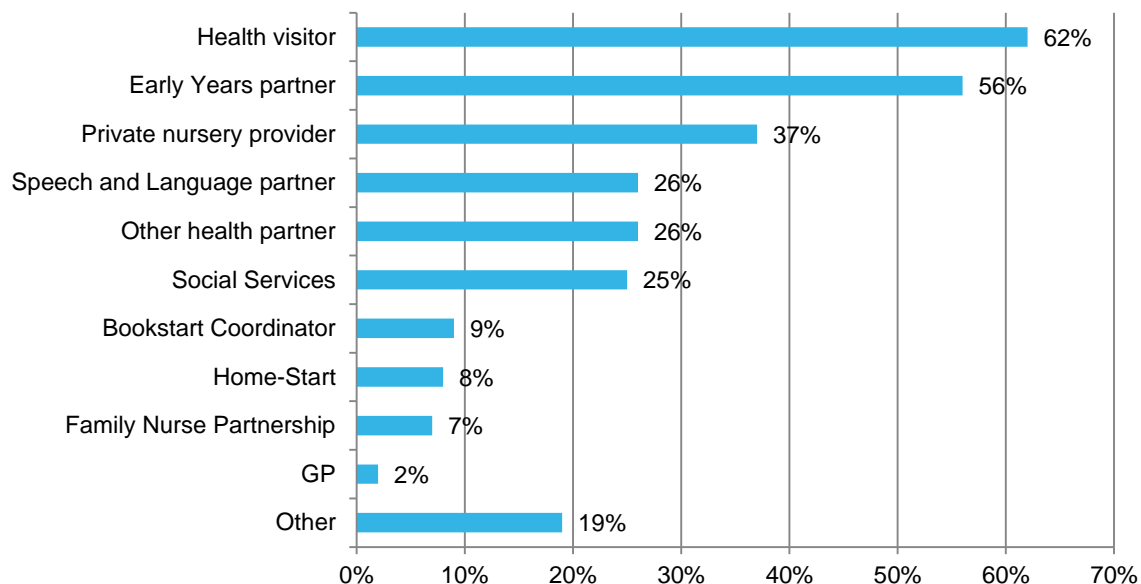


2-Year-Old Pack

Just over half of respondents reported that they had delivered some 2-year-old packs to families. Of these, a total of 8,968 2-year-old packs had been given out, which is an average of 22 per children's centre.

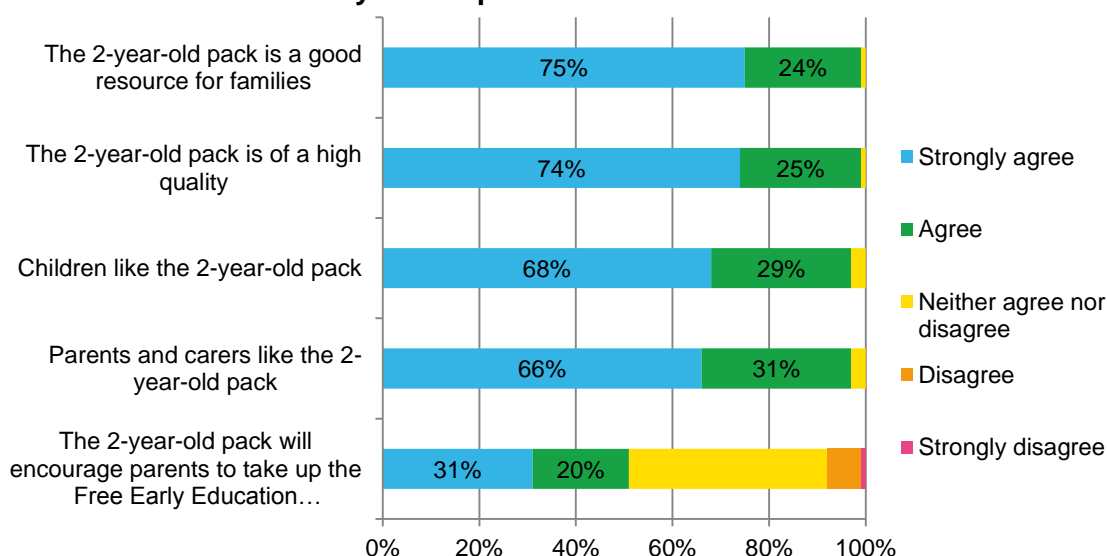
Respondents reported working with various partners to identify 2-year-olds eligible for the 2-year-old early education grant with the most popular being health visitors (62%), followed by early years partners (56%), private nursery providers (37%), speech and language partners (26%), other health partners (26%) and social services (25%). 19% of respondents also selected 'other'. Of these respondents reported that they had worked with various other partners to identify 2-year-olds eligible for the early education grant, including the local authority, DWP, family services (such as the family information service, the FEET team and family support workers), children's centre staff, schools and nurseries.

Which partners have you worked with to identify 2-year-olds eligible for the 2 year early education grant?



Respondents were extremely positive about the 2-year-old pack with 99% of respondents agreeing that the pack is of a high quality and is a good resource for families, and 97% agreeing that children and parents/carers like the pack. Just over half of respondents agreed that the 2-year-old pack would encourage parents to take up the free Early Education Entitlement for their child.

Please select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about the 2-year-old packs:



Conclusion

In general, practitioners were very enthusiastic about the Bookstart Corner programme with 98% agreeing that Bookstart Corner is a good service for families and 99% agreeing that the resources are of a high quality. Additionally, the vast majority of practitioners reported that since taking part in Bookstart Corner parents had used services or attended sessions at the children's centre (93%). Practitioners also reported that the programme had impacted on their practice in a positive way with 86% stating that they were more confident about engaging with families about books, reading and the role they play in their child's learning.

Practitioners open responses also demonstrated that practitioners were very positive about the programme with staff reporting that they really appreciated the programme in terms of the resources provided and the way in which it allows them to build trusting relationships families who may have been reluctant to attend sessions or access services previously. Practitioners also made some useful suggestions for programme development in the future.

Additionally, initial feedback on the 2-year-old pack appears to be extremely positive. Over 90% of respondents agreed that it is high quality, a good resource for families and that children and parents like it.