

Bookstart National Impact Evaluation 2009



bookstart
est. by booktrust 1992

Executive summary

Bookstart has been the subject of a number of studies since its inception in 1992. As a pioneering initiative in children's book gifting the programme has attracted considerable attention from researchers interested in investigating its impact on language and literacy development in babies and toddlers. Most of these studies, however, were undertaken several years ago. Sensitive to the need to refresh evidence on the impact of Bookstart we decided to undertake a short duration longitudinal study of Bookstart families. Parents were asked to report on reading practices and attitudes in two interviews, first, at the point of receiving a Bookstart pack, and, second, three months later. Questions covered the frequency of shared reading in the home, attitudes towards reading with young children and reading-related activities such as use of local libraries.

A total of 694 parents were interviewed at the Phase 1 interview and 440 of those parents completed the Phase 2 follow-up interview. Interviews were conducted in 26 local authorities across the nine government regions in England in April and July 2008 respectively.

Key findings:

Overall impact

Comparing results from Phase 1 and Phase 2 interviews gave valuable insight into the possible influence of receiving the pack on family reading behaviours. Consistent improvement was not apparent across the overall sample, with fairly static figures on reading frequency not showing any consistent trend. However, whereas aggregate reading results remained relatively unchanged, library membership did show significant improvement.

Improved library membership

- reported library membership increased 7% from 76% at the time of receiving the pack to 83% three months later

Impact on 'less active' reading families

In depth analysis of the parent sample revealed some significant improvement even if evidence of impact on the overall sample was generally inconclusive or limited. Parents who reported having relatively few children's books in the home and reported infrequent reading habits showed signs of improvement across a range of indicators where improvement had been negligible for the parent sample as a whole. This group of 'less active' reading parents identified at the Phase 1 interviews reported positive attitudes towards book sharing but did not translate that into reading practices.

improved shared reading frequency for 'less active' reading families

Parents who reported having relatively few children's books in the home and reported infrequent reading habits showed significant signs of improvement across the three month period in reading frequency, attitude towards reading and library membership :

When these families received the Bookstart pack...

- all of these parents reported reading to their child only "a few times a week' or less.

Three months later...

- 30% of these families reported reading "once a day" to their child
- parents reporting that they were "very interested" in their attitude towards reading increased from 38% to 41%
- parents reporting that they or their children were library members increased from 59% to 68%



Bookstart National Impact Evaluation 2008

Introduction

Booktrust has long recognised the importance of providing robust evidence that demonstrates the impact of its book gifting programmes. Gifting book packs is only credible to the extent that it makes a real difference to children's and families' reading habits. It is of course important that the packs are well received by parents and that children enjoy the books. But ultimately it is the fact of children being encouraged by the packs to engage more with books that is the true indicator of success. A book gifting programme undoubtedly fulfils its mission when it effects significant and lasting behavioural change in this respect.

Bookstart, the flagship of Booktrust's book gifting programmes, has been well served by studies that evaluate the impact on children who have received its book packs. As a pioneer in gifting books to young children, the Bookstart pilot project in Birmingham attracted considerable interest from academic researchers in the field of early education and literacy. Two distinguished academics from Birmingham, Barry Wade and Maggie Moore, undertook a series of studies that investigated the effect of involvement in the project on engagement with books, reading-related activities such as library membership and language and literacy skills (Moore & Wade, 1997, Wade & Moore, 1993, 1996a, 1996b, 1998, 2000). By comparing the experience of a group of Bookstart children against a control group Wade and Moore were able to point to strong indications of an impact on children's reading habits and progress in learning to read. Tracking the children as they grew up and went on to attend primary school the researchers uncovered longitudinal evidence that involvement in the programme gave children a significant and sustained advantage over their counterparts. The evidence suggested that Bookstart encouraged children to engage with books and gave a significant and lasting boost to their language and literacy skills. According to the studies, Bookstart children acquired this advantage at an early age and seemed to retain it at least as far as Key Stage 1, age 7. The message from Wade and Moore was clear: Bookstart made a difference and this difference seemed to last well into early childhood.

The rigour and scope of Wade and Moore's studies on the impact of Bookstart made their work the benchmark for future research on the programme. With the completion of three major studies by 2000 covering a range of outcomes including speech and language skills, reading habits, educational attainment, family learning and library usage, the Wade and Moore studies spoke with an unrivalled authority on the value of the programme. Education specialists responded positively to the research applauding the insight into an innovative book 'intervention'. While generally supportive, commentators nonetheless on occasion pointed out possible limitations of the research. One concern mentioned was the small size of the sample group of families. Bailey, Harrison and Brooks (2000), for example, made the point that the sample size of 41 families made it difficult to identify a strong link between receiving the pack and the positive behaviours recorded. It was not clear, they argued, that these differences were not attributable to some other difference in experience between the Bookstart and the non-Bookstart groups. To make a strong case for the influence of the programme on these positive behavioural changes, Bailey, Harrison and Brooks suggested, it would be desirable to use a larger sample group.

Despite the completion of other studies since Wade and Moore, to a significant respect this criticism still remains valid. The large majority of these studies were not longitudinal in format and used instead one-off interviews and observations to evaluate impact. The one study that was longitudinal (National Centre for Research in Children's Literature, (2001) used a sample of 105 parents. Although this sample is significantly greater than that used by Wade and Moore it remains relatively small in statistical terms and is probably insufficient to eliminate the possibility that other factors are influencing results.

It is against this background that the current study was proposed. There has been growing sentiment in recent years, both within the Bookstart team and among stakeholders, that it would be timely to refresh evidence concerning the impact of the programme. In addition, many have argued for the importance of the type of robust evidence that would be produced by larger sample groups.

It was in response to these concerns that the Bookstart National Impact Evaluation was set up. The idea was that, in the absence of a major academic study, Bookstart itself could undertake a short duration longitudinal study that attempted to measure sustained reading outcomes.¹ Without the resources or expertise available to academic researchers, the study would be limited in certain respects. We would clearly have to focus on readily measurable outcomes, recording, for example, reading behaviour and reading-related activities rather than educational attainment. For similar reasons, the study would also have to rely on behaviour and activities *reported* by parents rather than actual observations. On the plus side, the use of interviews would allow us to evaluate a relatively large sample of parents across diverse locations. Despite its limitations the study promised to provide statistically robust insight into the likely impact of the programme.

Methodology

The key evaluative tool used by the study was therefore comparing reading-related behaviour reported at one point to that reported at a later point by which time families were likely to have been exposed to the book packs. This 'before' and 'after' format was set up by undertaking the Phase 1 interviews of parents within a month of them receiving a Bookstart pack, and then completing a follow-up Phase 2 interview three months later.

The responses of parents interviewed at these two points would indicate, assuming there was no uniform interfering factor, the likely impact if any of receiving the pack.

The questions were also designed to elicit information on the usage of the different packs and on the delivery of the different packs by gifters.

Phase 1 interviews

We recruited interviewers across the nine government regions in the following 26 local authorities:

¹ In recent months Bookstart has secured funding for a major longitudinal study of the impact of Bookstart, Booktime and Booked Up. The study aims to track reading behaviours and the language and literacy skills of selected families over a number of years using in-depth interviews, assessments and surveys. The study is expected to commence in late 2009.

South East Kent (Margate) Hampshire (Waterlooville) East Sussex (Hailsham)	South West Cornwall Devon (Torbay) Wiltshire	London Bromley Barnet Greenwich
East Midlands Derby City Leicestershire (Loughborough) Nottinghamshire (Mansfield)	West Midlands Coventry Wolverhampton Warwickshire (Stratford) Staffordshire (Stoke)	East of England Luton Norfolk (Thetford) Suffolk (Newmarket)
Yorkshire & Humber Barnsley North Yorkshire (Scarborough)	North East South Tyneside Stockton-on-Tees	North West Rochdale Lancashire (Preston) Stockport

Each interviewer was instructed to conduct interviews of a minimum of 25 different parents in the local authority they had been designated. Interviewers were given clear instructions that only parents who had received a Bookstart pack within the last four weeks were eligible for the interview. To avoid distorting the sample, interviewers were asked to avoid conducting interviews in 'reading-friendly' locations such as libraries.

A total of 694 parents were interviewed across England in the Phase 1 interviews during April 2008. Parents were randomly approached in public spaces- parks and playgrounds- and community centres.

The questionnaire consisted of questions that assessed attitudes towards reading with young children, child's attitude towards reading, reading frequency, reading-related practices (library membership, library usage, visits to library events), numbers of childrens' books in the house and the opinion of the parent as to whether receiving the pack had encouraged more frequent reading with the child. Additional questions asked which pack had been received, whether a message had accompanied gifting of the pack, and whether and how the pack had been used since receiving it.

At the end of the interview, interviewees were invited to agree to a follow-up phone interview three months later, 91% of those interviewed agreed to be contacted for the Phase 2 interview.

Phase 2 interviews

The Phase 2 interview followed the same format as the earlier interview but dropped questions that were unlikely to register any change, for example, the number of childrens' books in the home and whether the pack had been used.

A total of 440 of the parent sample were contacted by phone and completed interviews during August 2008.

For the purposes of longitudinal comparison we decided to only analyse those cases where both Phase 1 and Phase 2 interviews had been completed: 440 parents completed both Phases of interviews.

Findings

Profile of users – (based on all Phase 1 respondents)

As well as providing a basis for examining the potential impact of the packs, the questions provide a rich source of data on the reading habits and attributes of families receiving the packs. This information provides valuable insight into the target population that a programme like Bookstart is aiming at. For example, how engaged with reading are these young families at home and how connected are they with their local libraries?

Overall the parent responses painted a somewhat mixed picture. On the positive side, the overwhelming majority of parents seemed to hold supportive attitudes towards reading with their young children and acted upon these views by reading frequently with them. On the more negative side, however, a sizeable minority of parents were not able to translate their pro-reading attitude into action. Despite 92% of parents indicating that they were either “very” or “quite” interested in reading with their baby or toddler, a quarter of parents (26%) reported that they read to their children less frequently than every day. Information on reading-related attributes and activities seemed to corroborate this picture of families divided into a sizeable group of what we might call ‘active reading’ families and a minority but not insubstantial group of ‘less active reading’ families.

Fig. 1.1

- **Frequency of reading to children**

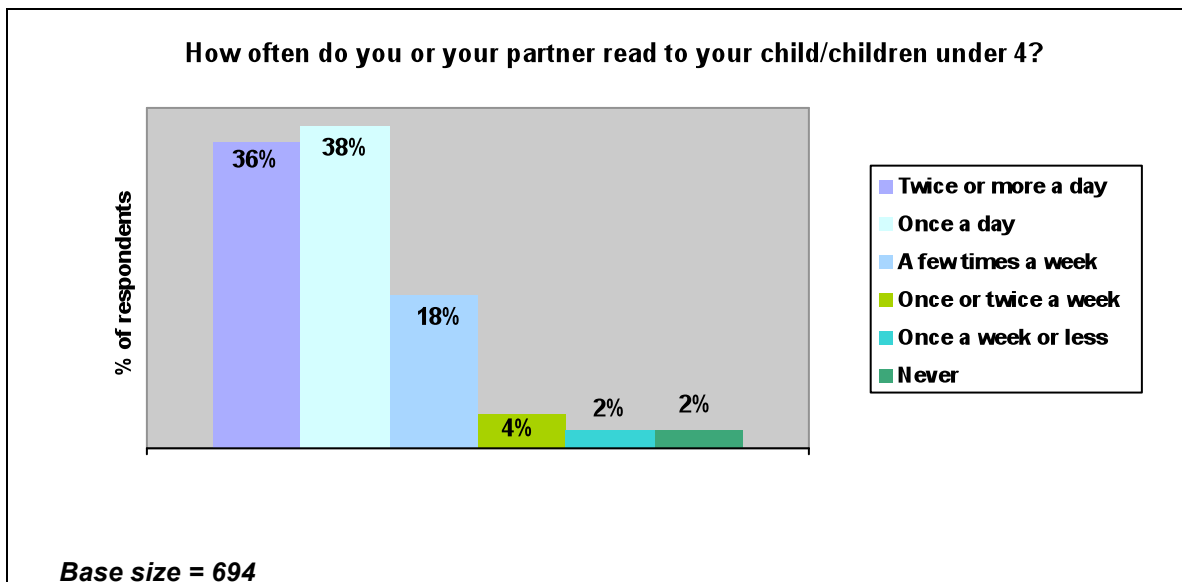


Fig 1.2

- Books in the home

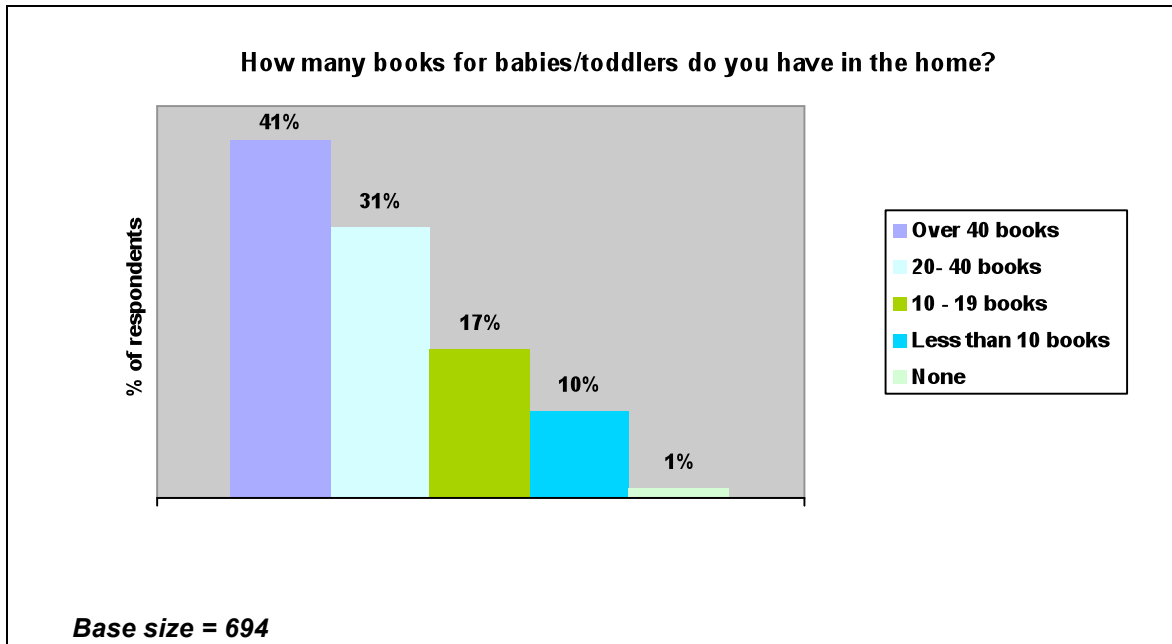


Fig 1.3

- Child's attitude

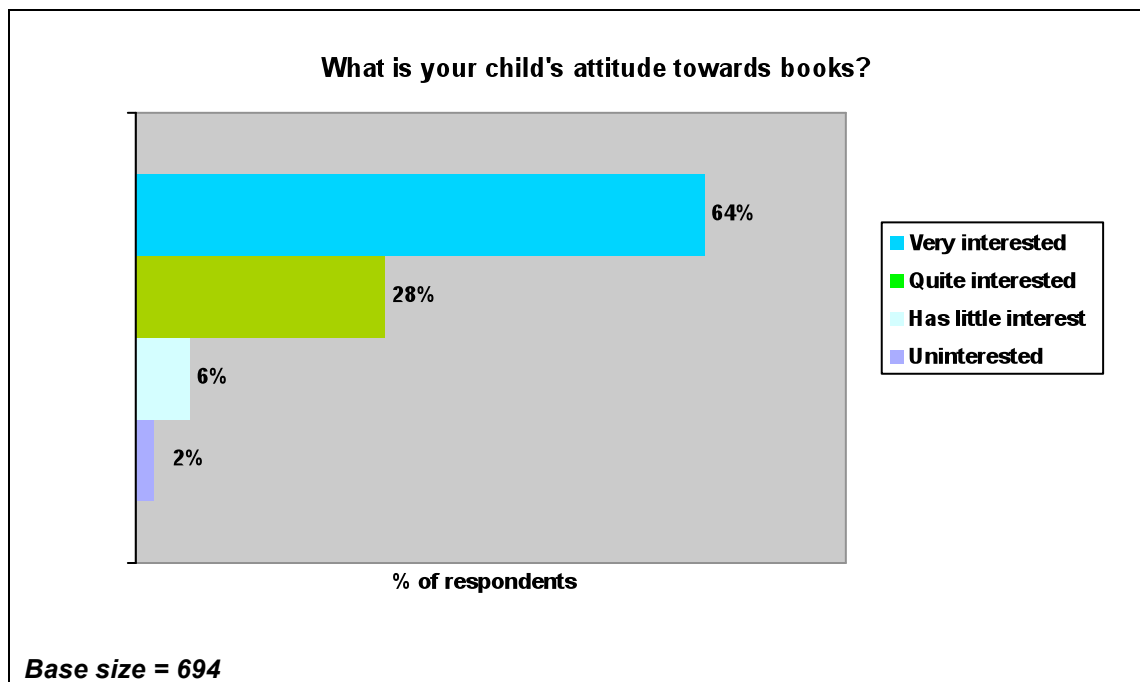


Fig 1.4

- Parent's attitude

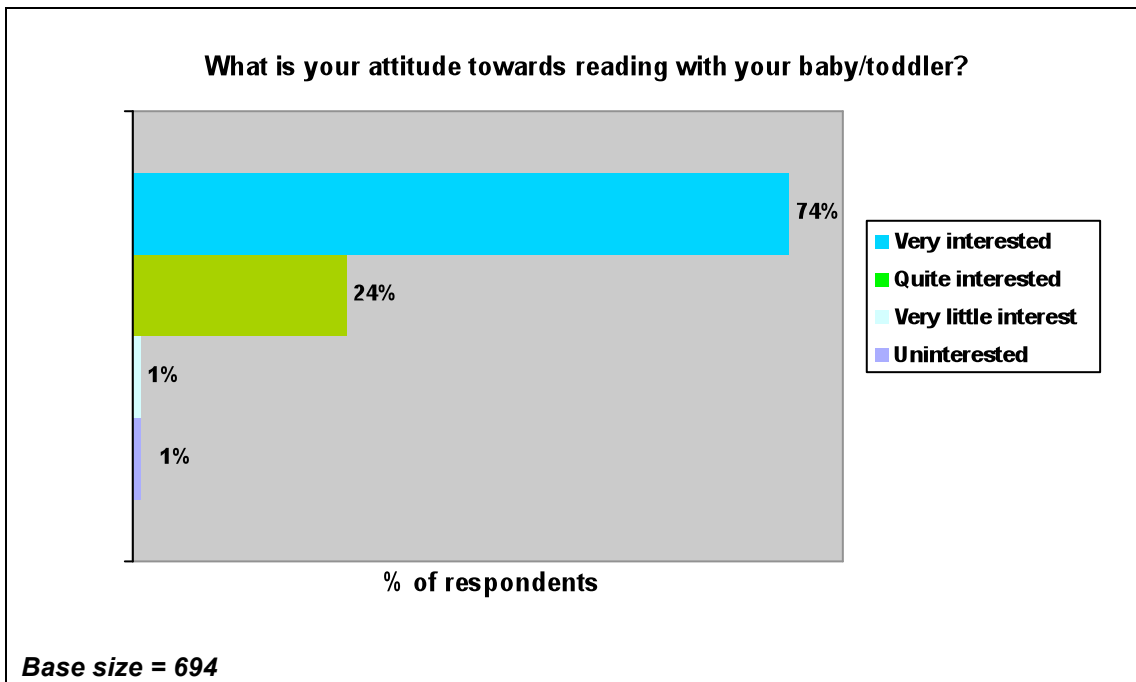


Fig 1.5

- Library membership

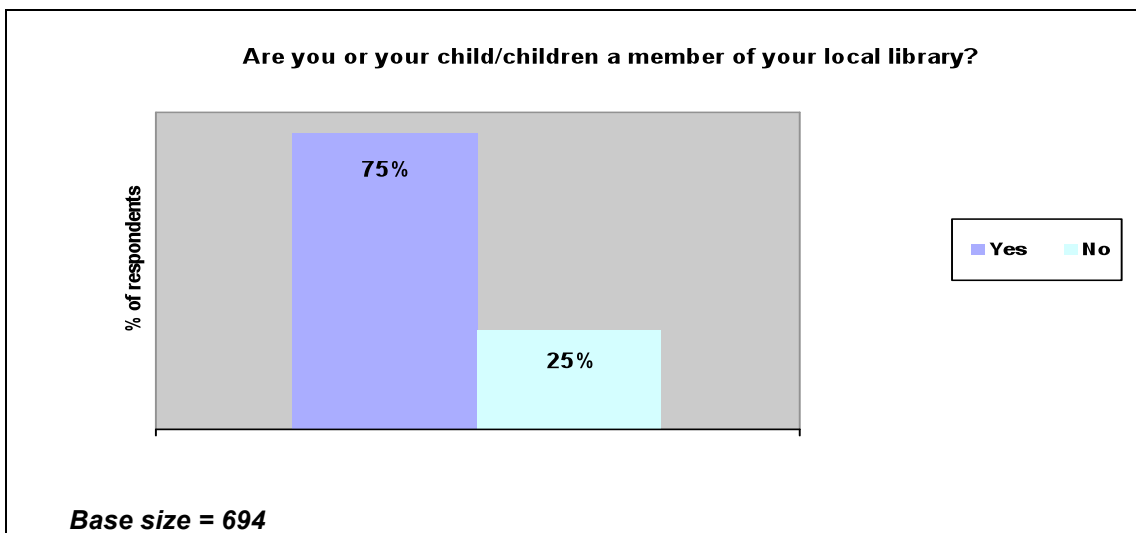


Fig 1.6

- **Borrowing of library materials**

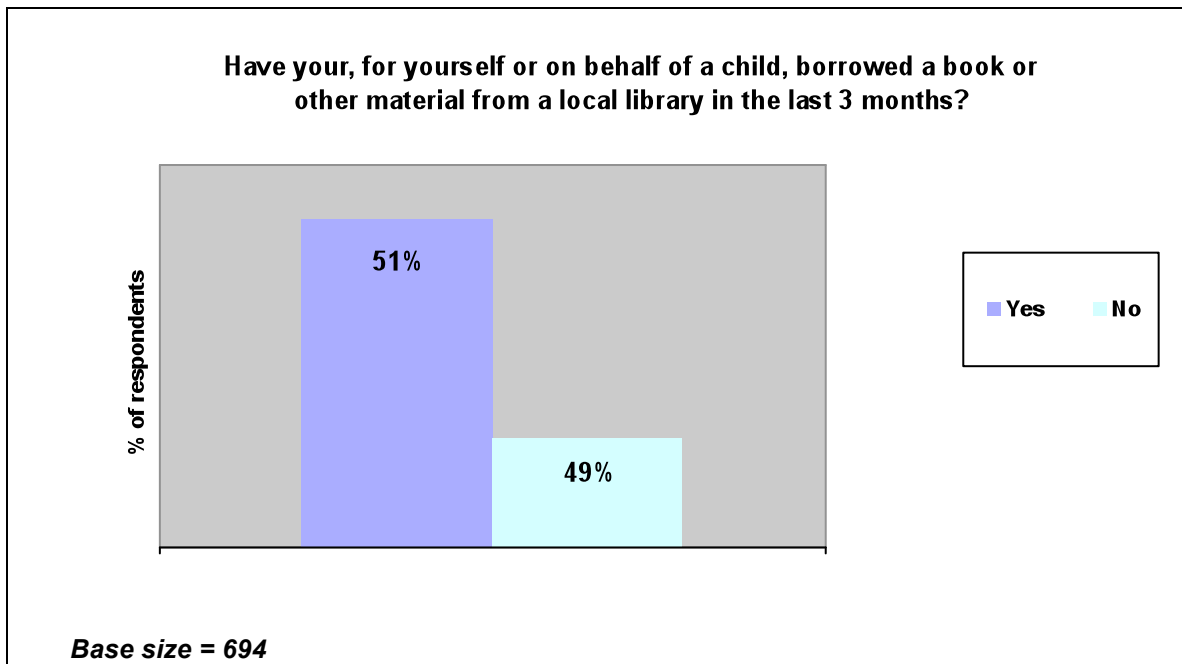


Fig 1.7

- **Attendance at library events**

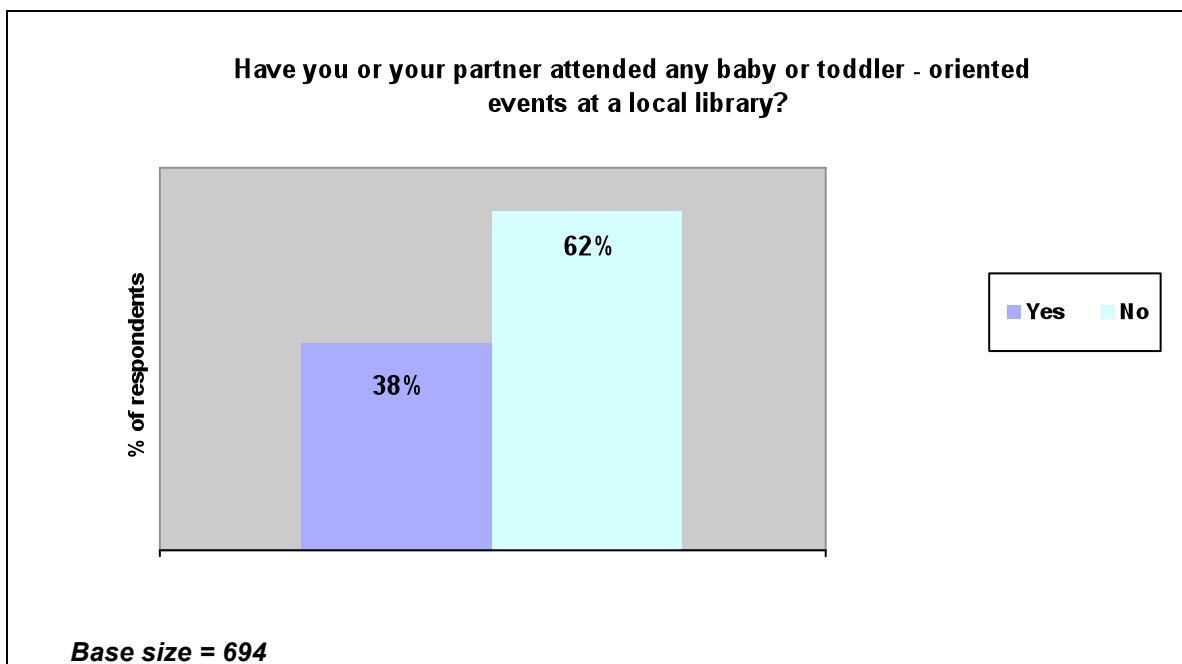


Fig 1.8

- Which Bookstart pack received

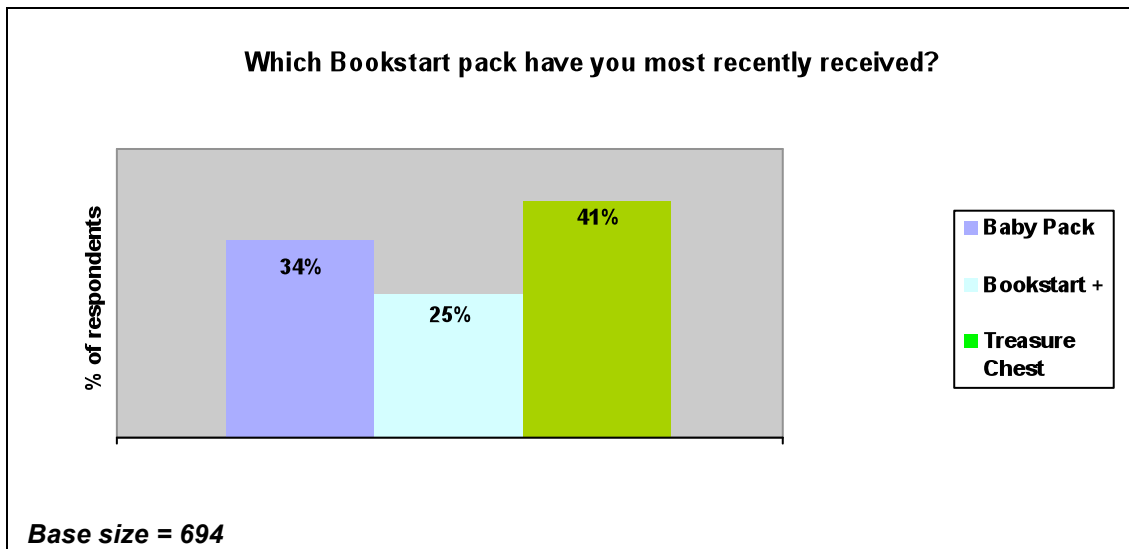
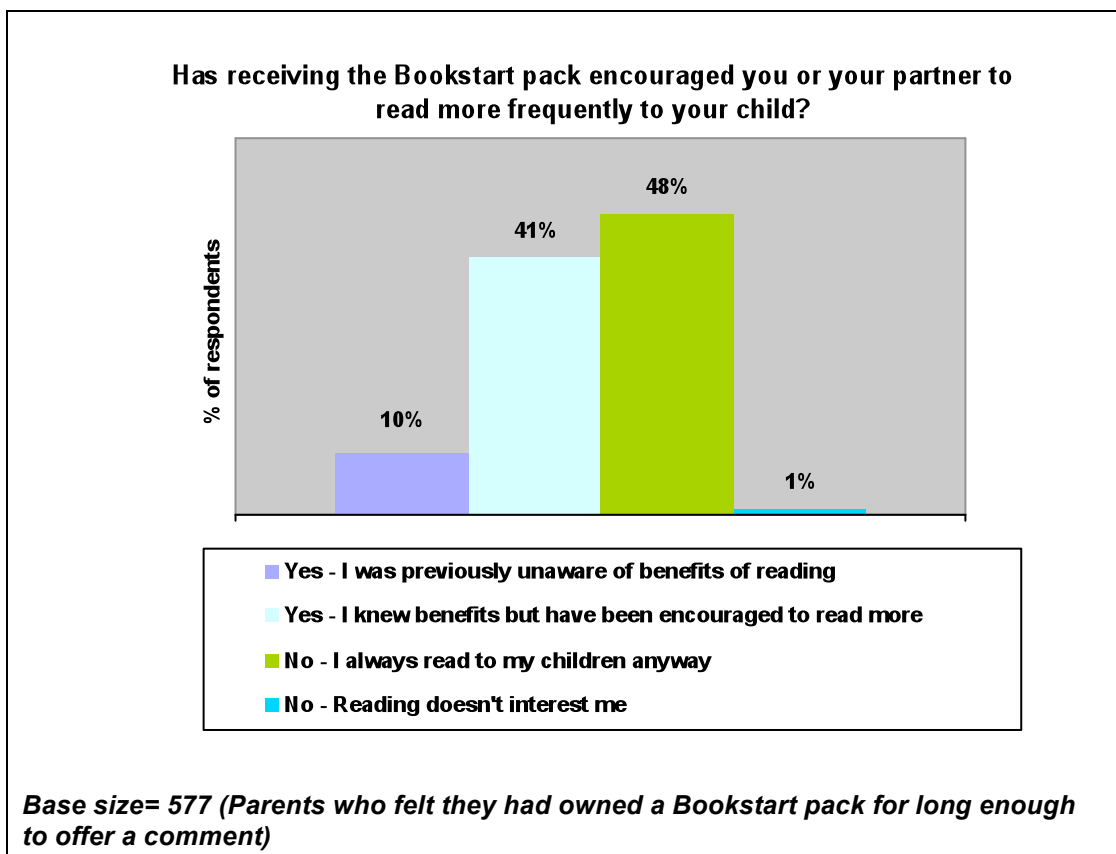


Fig 1.9

- Impact of Bookstart packs on frequency of reading



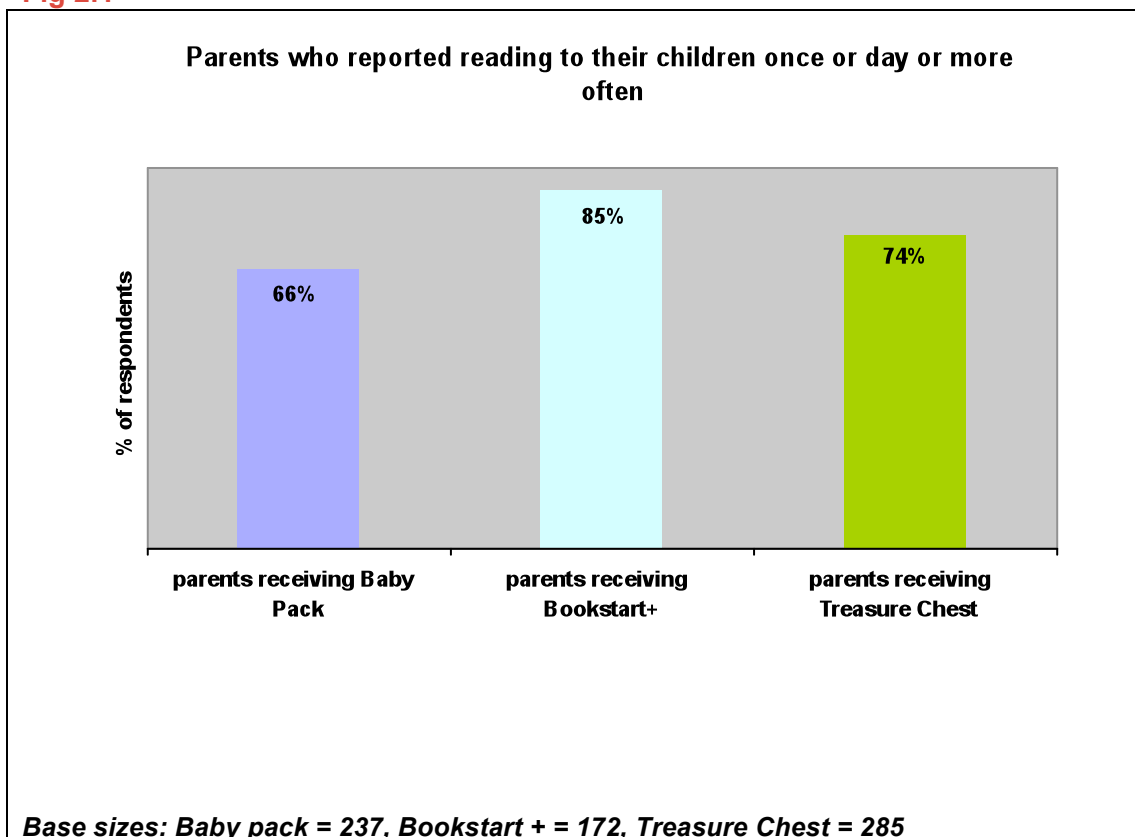
Usage and delivery of different packs

Because parents were asked to specify which of the three packs they had recently received we were able to investigate whether there were any differences between the packs in terms of reading-related behaviours. This information, of course, would not necessarily indicate that the pack itself led to the behaviours reported. A more likely explanation is simply that the age ranges for the different packs might be associated with different types of reading behaviours and activities.

Bookstart+ and high reading-related outcomes

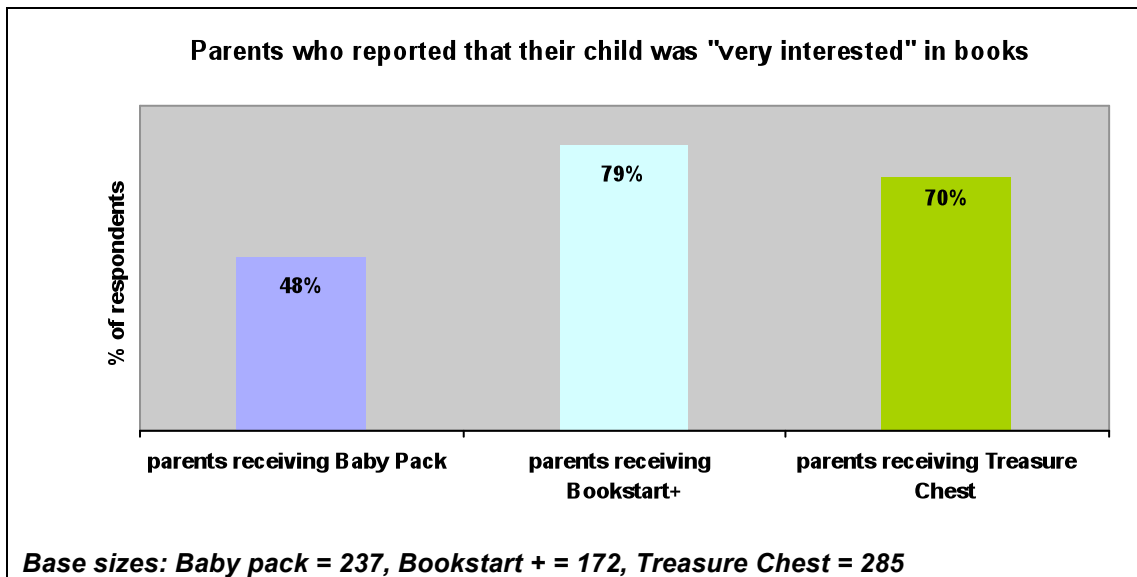
Examining the relationship between each of the packs and reading behaviours the overall trend was that Bookstart+ was linked to higher levels of reading-related activities. Results for the key reading question, “How often do you or your partner read to your child/children under 4?”, showed that parents who had received Bookstart+ were significantly more likely than recipients of the other packs to read with their young children once a day or more often.

Fig 2.1



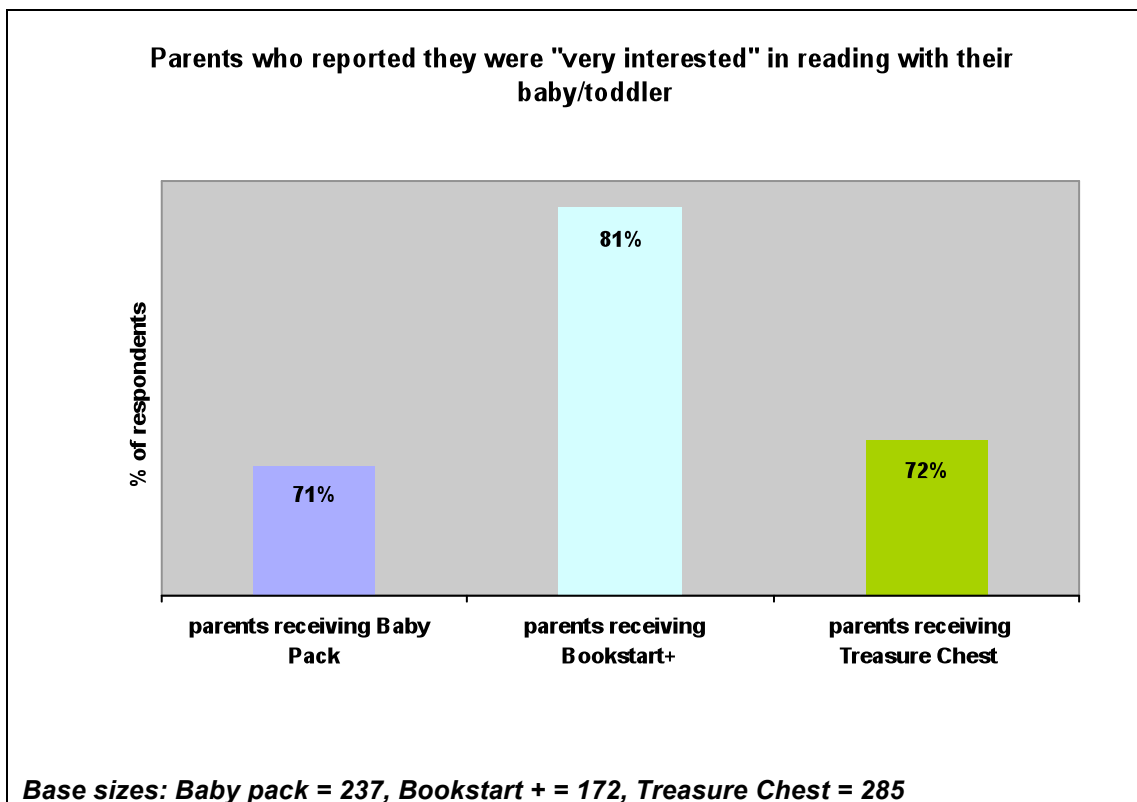
Answers to other questions suggested that Bookstart+ children also seemed to be more engaged with books and reading.

Fig 2.2



Answers from those parents receiving Bookstart+ also indicated that they were more likely to be “very interested” in reading with their baby or toddler. Bookstart+ parents were 10% higher than their Baby Pack counterparts and 9% higher than their Treasure Chest counterparts.

Fig 2.3



Reading-related activities were also reported at higher rates for recipients of Bookstart+ than recipients of the other packs.

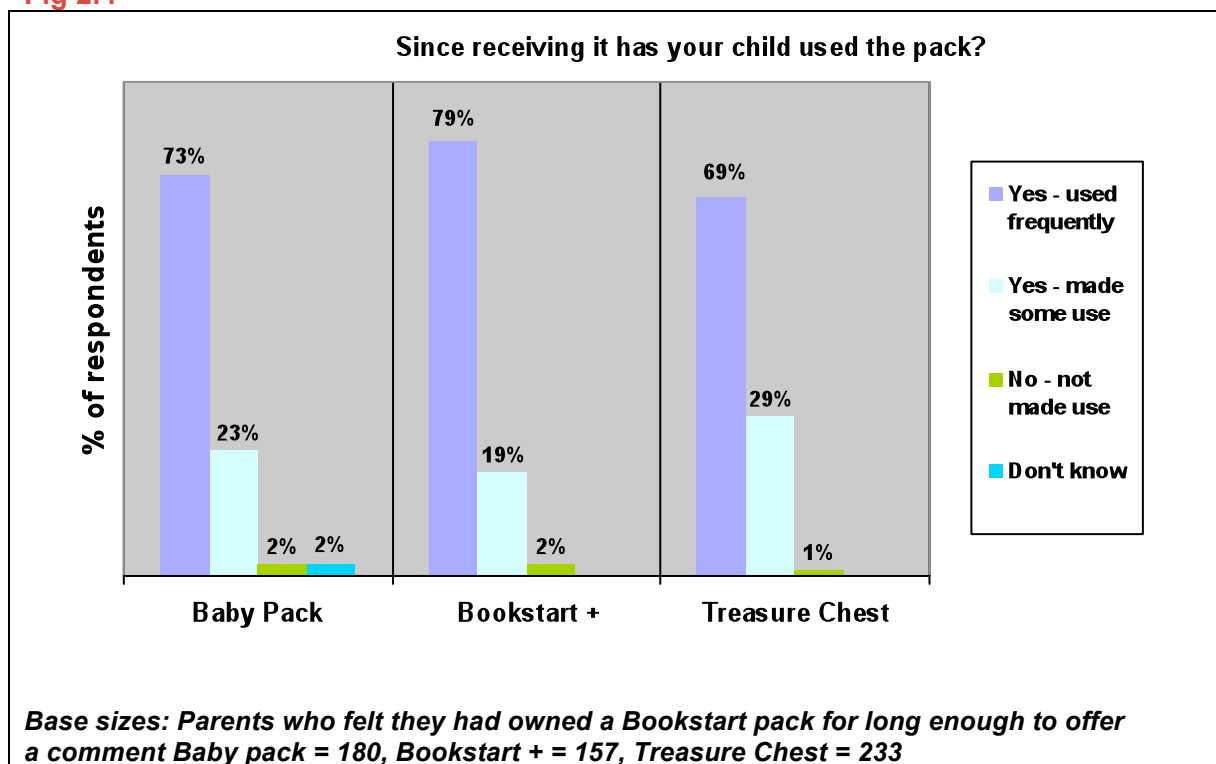
Families receiving Bookstart+ were...

- more likely to be members of their local library
- more likely to have recently borrowed material from a library
- more likely to have attended a baby or toddler event at a local library
- reported attending more baby/toddler events in the previous three months

Use of Bookstart packs

Parents receiving the Bookstart+ pack were also more likely to report child's use of the pack: 79% reported "frequent use" compared to 73% for the Baby Pack and 69% for Treasure Chest.

Fig 2.4



Why then, are Bookstart+ children more likely to be engaged in reading and more active in reading-related activities? Answers from another question suggest these differences are probably not attributable to the pack itself. There is not strong evidence that Bookstart+ is significantly better than the other packs in engaging children with books and reading. If that were the case we would expect more positive results from Bookstart+ parents when asked if receiving the pack has encouraged them to read more frequently to their child. As the table below indicates, Baby Pack parents consistently acknowledged greater 'encouragement' across the interviews than the Bookstart+ parents. The figures quoted in the table below are based only on those parents who participated in both Phase 1 and Phase 2.

In your own estimation, has receiving the Bookstart pack encouraged you or your partner to read more frequently to your child?

Fig 2.5

	Baby pack		Bookstart +		Treasure chest	
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 1	Phase 2
Yes – previously unaware of benefits of reading with babies/toddlers	11%	6%	6%	3%	7%	4%
Yes – knew of benefits, but encouraged by packs to read more	45%	56%	42%	44%	25%	47%
No – I have always read to my children	25%	36%	45%	52%	48%	44%
No – reading does not interest me	0	1%	0	1%	1%	2%
Not applicable	19%	0	6%	0	18%	2%

Base sizes:

Baby Pack: Phase 1 = 156, Phase 2 = 156

Bookstart +: Phase 1 = 109, Phase 2 = 109

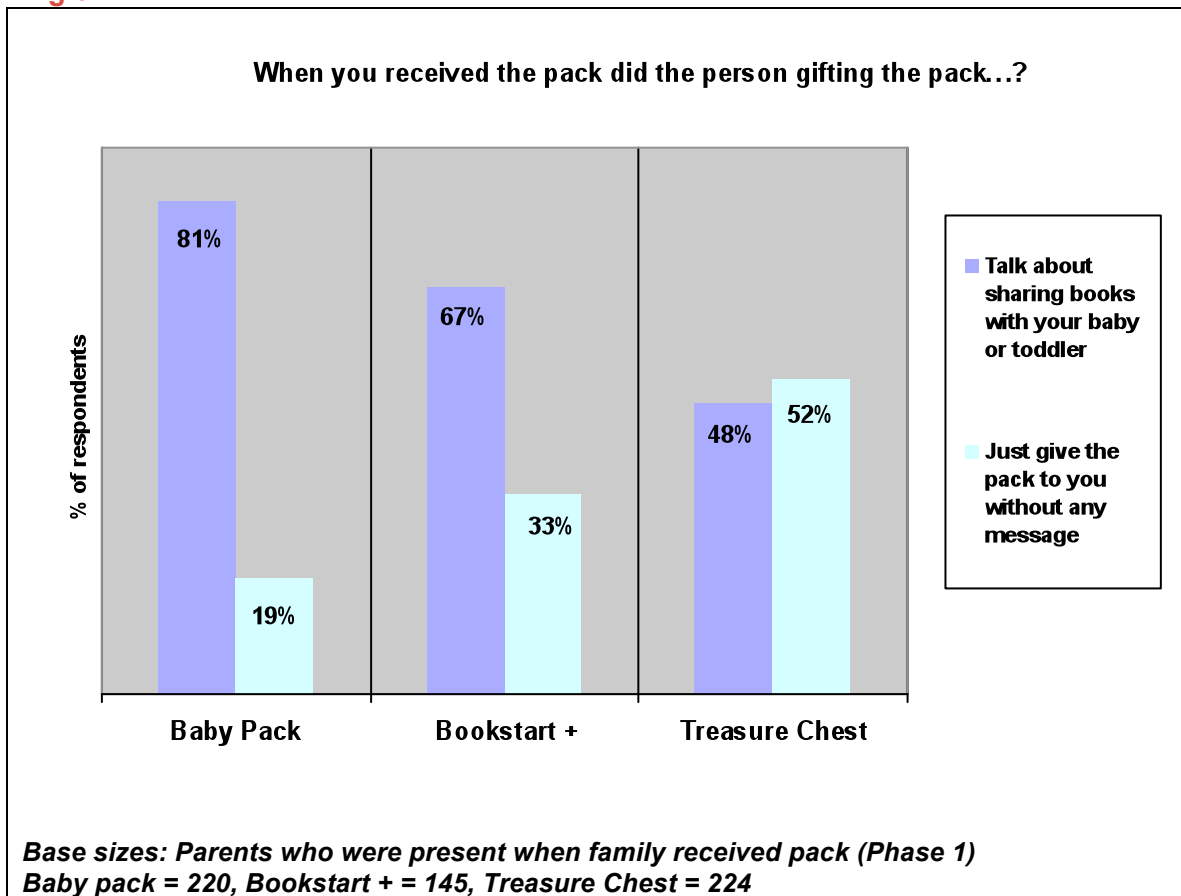
Treasure Chest: Phase 1 = 175, Phase 2 = 175

Giving the Bookstart message

One of the distinguishing features of Bookstart as a book gifting programme is the fact that the packs are personally delivered to the parent. Personal delivery gives an opportunity for the professional gifters to talk through the contents of the pack and convey some of the pleasure of book sharing with a young child. A parent who receives an inspiring message about book sharing, we believe, is more likely to actually make use of the pack. Delivering the message is therefore a key aspect of the Bookstart programme and is supported by training and guidance provided to the schemes. However, we recognise that the fact of giving the message is down to the initiative of individual gifters. Health visitors, librarians and nursery workers gift the packs in addition to their regular work responsibilities. With this in mind, it is crucial that Bookstart gathers information on the extent to which a message is being given to parents and whether this varies according to the type of pack.

The findings from the parent interviews were illuminating. Parents were asked to recollect whether the person gifting the pack had talked to them in any way about sharing books with their baby or toddler or whether the pack had been given to them without any message. Baby Pack parents reported much higher rates of receiving a message from their gifter than the other two packs; 81% compared to 67% and 48% for Bookstart+ and Treasure Chest respectively. The high rate for Baby Pack would confirm the understanding that Health Visitors (the principal delivery agent for that pack) usually gift the pack to parents during a home visit. A conversation in the home probably affords more of an opportunity for delivering a message about book sharing than the more formal settings of health clinics and nurseries where the other two packs are generally gifted. Nonetheless, it remains a particular disappointment that only a minority of nursery gifters are reported as delivering a message.

Fig 3.1



We also examined the impact of receiving the message by comparing the responses to the reading frequency questions across the two Phases by parents who reported they had received a message and parents who reported they had not. As shown in Fig 3.2 results were generally inconclusive. There were not conclusive signs of superior improvement for families that received a message about shared reading with their Bookstart pack. Of families that received a message 34% reported reading “once a day” at the point of receiving the pack compared to 44% three months later, an increase of 10%. This compared to 32% at the point of receiving the pack and 41% three months later- an increase of 9%- for families that report not having received a message.



Fig 3.2

How often do you or your partner read to your child/children under 4?

Frequency of reading compared to whether a message was received when given the Bookstart pack

	Message received		No message received	
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 1	Phase 2
On two or more occasions every day	41%	35%	46%	37%
Once a day	34%	44%	32%	41%
A few times a week	17%	16%	14%	16%
Maybe once or twice a week	4%	2%	6%	3%
Maybe once a week or less	2%	3%	1%	3%
Never	3%	0.5%	1%	0

Base sizes: Parents who received a message Phase 1 = 257, Phase 2 = 257

Parents who received no message Phase 1 = 183, Phase 2 = 183

Impact Evaluation – Comparing Phase 1 and Phase 2

The comparison of answers across the two interviews provided the most important source of data on the impact of the programme. By allowing the families the time to be exposed to the packs the comparison between parents' answers across the two interviews promised to give important insight into whether the packs could be linked to any behavioural changes.

Analysis of the responses indeed yielded some interesting findings. Looking at the parent sample as a whole, many of the reported behaviours remained more or less unchanged. The reading frequency question, however, perhaps the key performance indicator of the study, did register some change but not always in the desired direction. Encouragingly, parents reporting that they read "once a day" increased from 35% to 44%, but those indicating they read "on two or more occasions every day" decreased from 40% to 33%. Of course this type of question is in reality a rather blunt measure of what is actually happening in people's homes. It is perhaps unrealistic to expect individuals to accurately assess the frequency of routine activities. Moreover, an additional problem is that a different parent may have in many instances completed the follow-up phone interview and this may have led to very different estimation of the regularity of shared reading. However, these inaccuracies should not preclude positive findings if results show change consistently in a certain direction. After all, reporting inaccuracies are likely to be fairly random in the type of behaviours they report. We should therefore take seriously results that show an across the board trend in a certain direction.

Fig 4.1

How often do you or your partner read to your child/children under 4?

	PHASE 1	PHASE 2
On two or more occasions every day	40%	33%
Once a day	35%	44%
A few times a week	17%	17%
Maybe once or twice a week	5%	2%
Maybe once a week or less	2%	3%
Never	2%	1%

Base sizes: Phase 1 = 440, Phase 2 = 440

Similarly mixed results were evident from the attitudinal question, “What is your attitude towards reading with your baby/toddler?” (Fig 4.2). The proportion of parents answering “quite interested” increased slightly from 22% to 26% but those answering “very interested” decreased slightly from 77% to 72%.

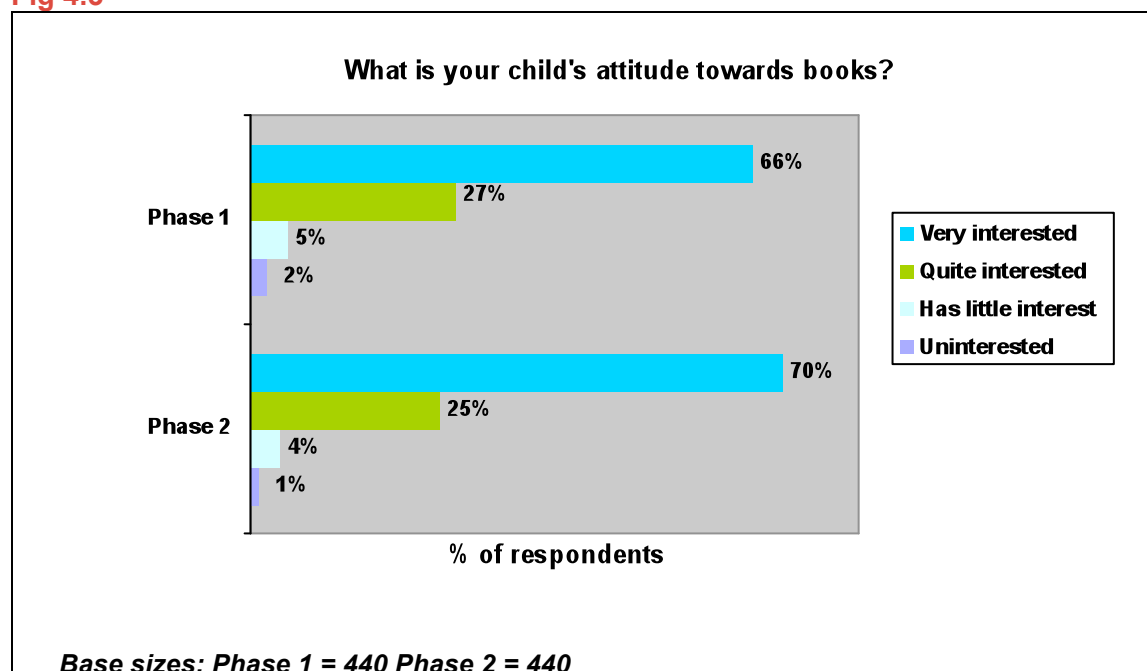
Fig 4.2
What is your attitude towards reading with your baby/toddler?

	PHASE 1	PHASE 2
Uninterested	0	1%
Very little interest	1%	1%
Quite interested	22%	26%
Very interested	77%	72%

Base sizes: Phase 1 = 440, Phase 2 = 440

More consistent signs of improvement were evident in the answers to “what is your child’s attitude towards books?” A slight shift towards “Very interested” was apparent, with responses in this category increasing from 66% to 70% and a corresponding decrease in “quite interested” and “little interested” responses.

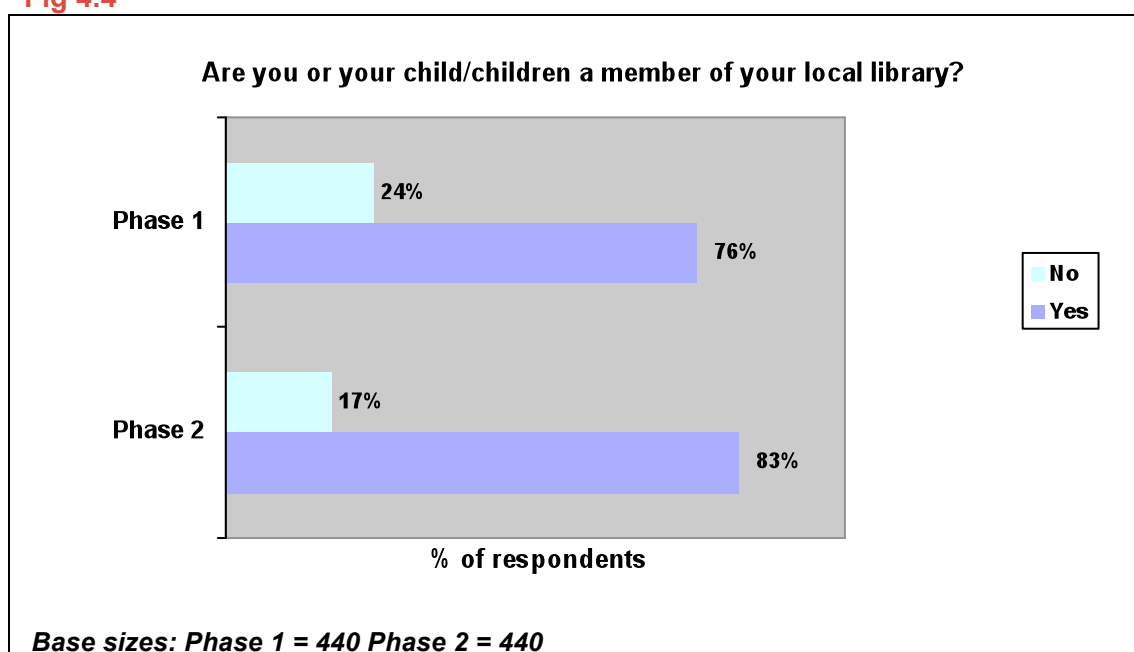
Fig 4.3



- **Library membership**

Library membership saw a significant increase between the two time frames: 76% of families reporting library membership in the first interview and 83% in the second, an increase of eight percentage points.

Fig 4.4



Analysing the total sample is of course only part of the story in considering the potential impact of the packs. Even if major changes were not evident when we looked at the sample as a whole, changes might be discernible when the aggregate group was broken down. Findings for the aggregate sample, for example, might well be masking changes occurring within certain sub-groups.

Less active reading subset

To investigate further potential impact we input various filters to the dataset to create various sub-groups of cases which met certain characteristics. In particular, we were interested in testing for impact on families who reported characteristics not associated with active reading habits. Using responses from parents at the first interview we created a 'less active' reading subset from the sample of families who fulfilled both of the following conditions:

- Parents who read to their child 'a few times a week' or less frequently
- Parents who had 19 or fewer books for babies and toddlers in the home

We decided to use questions about behaviours and attributes rather than attitudes, as we felt this gave more of a robust indication of a family's status in terms of actual reading practices.

Again, to provide a statistically valid point of comparison we have removed the 254 respondents in Phase 1 who did not participate in Phase 2. This allows us to compare the same 440 parents between the two phases. This 'less active' subset was 56 parents in total, 8% of the overall Phase 1 sample, and 13% of the 440 parents who took part in both Phase 1 and Phase 2.

Throughout the impact evaluation, we have compared results for the 'less active' subset against results for the rest of the sample (excluding this less active group).

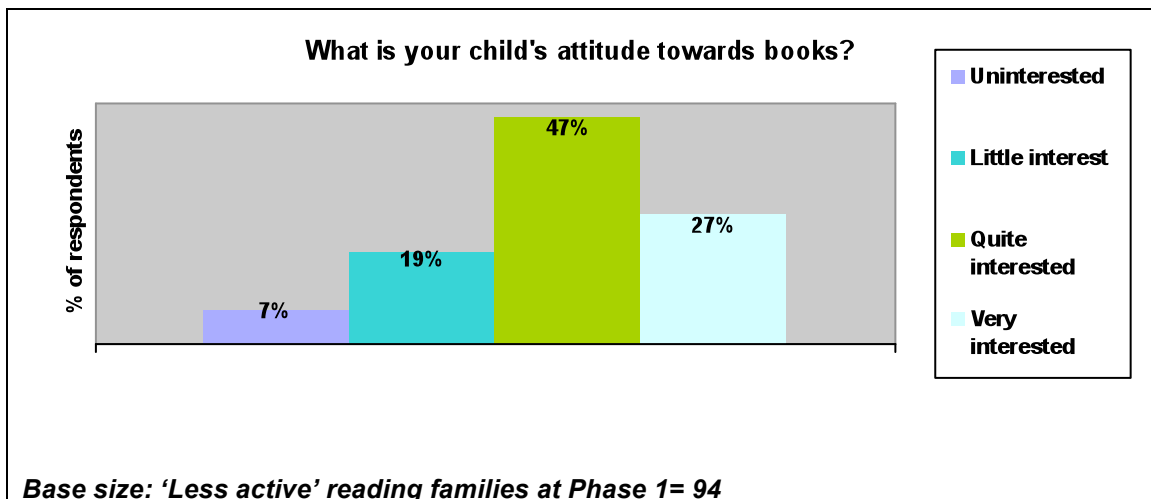
This helped to demonstrate any particularly marked improvements. Please see Appendix 1 for the full tables.

'Less active' reading families at Phase 1 - Overview

Attitudes

Parents within the 'less active' reading subset reported that their children had a positive attitude towards books. Of the 94 parents in this subgroup, 47% said that their children were "quite interested" in books, and 27% said that their children were "very interested" in books. This demonstrates that amongst almost three-quarters of these families, the child's interest in books was present.

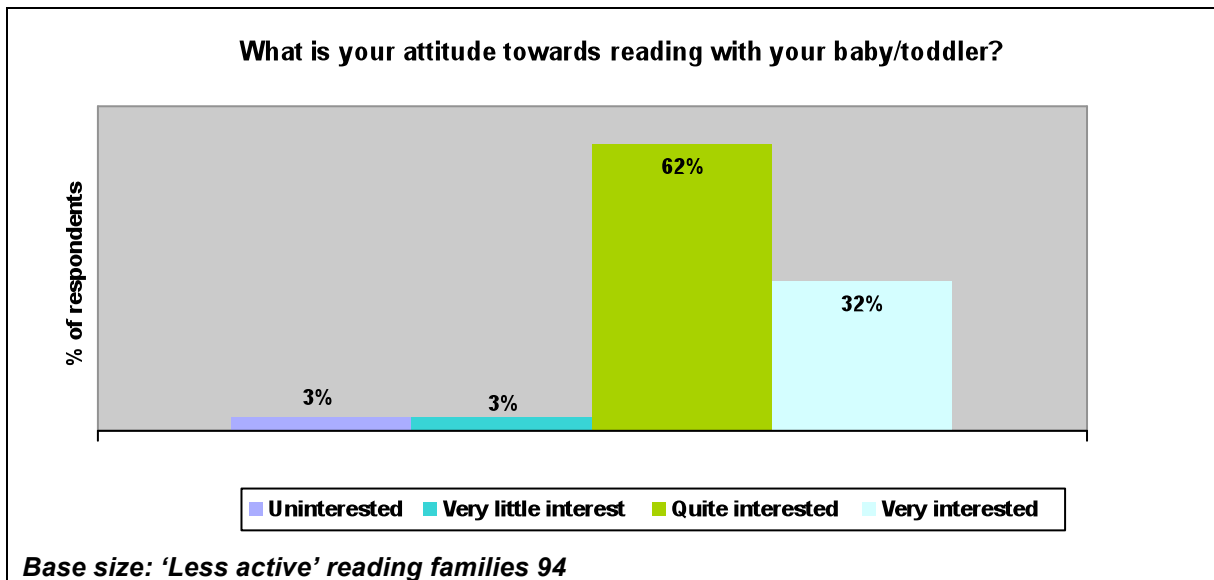
Fig 5.1



The attitudes reported by these parents clearly suggested that it was not lack of attitudinal support that explained infrequent reading practices. Of the 94 parents in this group, very few (6%) reported to have "very little" or "no" interest in reading with their baby/toddler. The large majority of parents in this subset were interested in reading with their children (94%), with 32% reporting that they were "very interested".

It is interesting to compare this to the attitudes of all the other parents in the sample (ie the rest of the sample, excluding the 'less active' reading families). Of these parents, nearly all (99%) reported that they were in some way interested in reading with their children, with 81% reporting that they were "very interested". Whereas the majority of parents in the 'less active' subset reported to be "quite interested" in reading with their children, the rest of the sample leaned towards being "very interested".

Fig 5.2



Library usage

Just over half of the 'less active' reading parents were members of a local library (57%) compared to three quarters (78%) of the rest of the sample of parents.

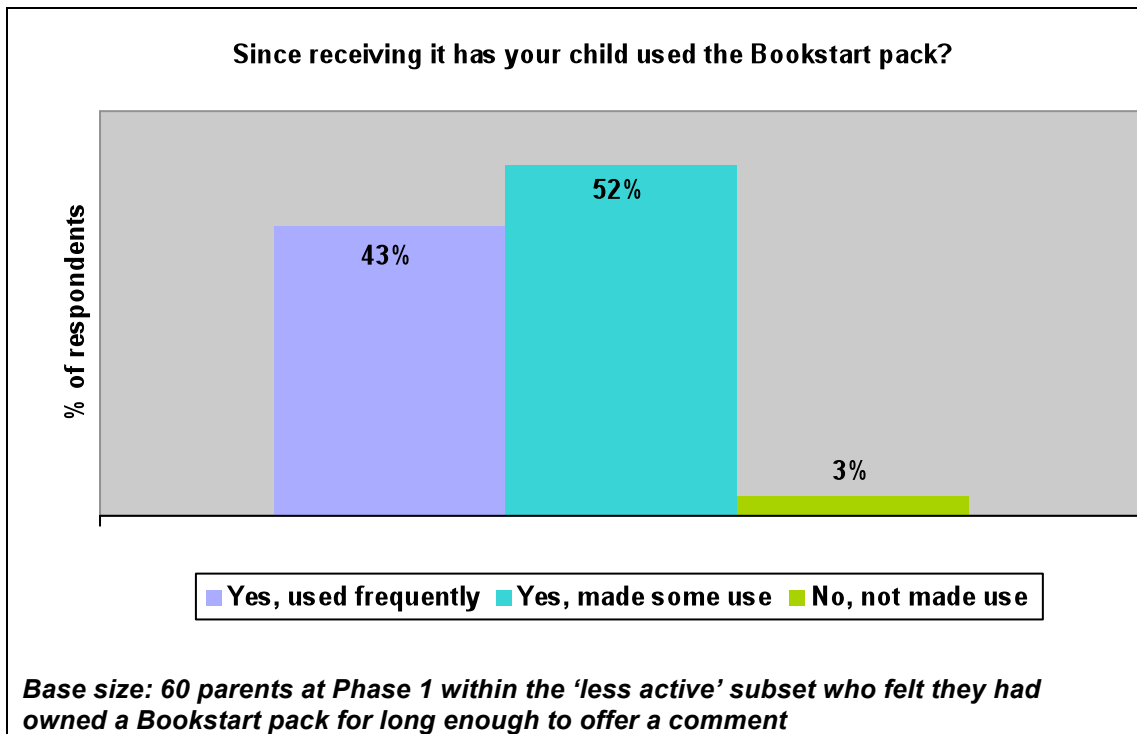
Similar differences between these two groups were apparent when we looked at library usage. Parents in the 'less active' sub-group reported significantly lower levels of borrowing activity than other parents. Only 26% of parents in this sub-group had borrowed a book or other material from a local library in the last three months compared to 54% of the other parents. Library baby/toddler events were similarly under-attended by 'less active' reading families. Just 11% of the parents in this sub-group reported having attended a baby or toddler-oriented events at a local library in the last three months, compared to 42% of the other parents. These responses highlight that, even when these families are members of the library, they tend to use the resources significantly less than other families. For some reason it seems that these families are not taking advantage of the opportunities for family reading that libraries offer despite their expressed interest in reading to their young children.

Bookstart packs

Despite this mixed record on library usage, 95% of parents in the 'less active' reading subset did report making at least some use of the Bookstart packs. Of these parents, 52% reported that their children had made some use of the books provided in the packs, and 43% reported that they used the books frequently.

This figure compares favourably to other parents in the sample, 98% of which reported making at least some use of the pack or using the pack frequently. It seems that even though a slightly smaller proportion of these 'less active' reading families actually used the pack a majority of these families were motivated to use them in some way.

Fig 5.3

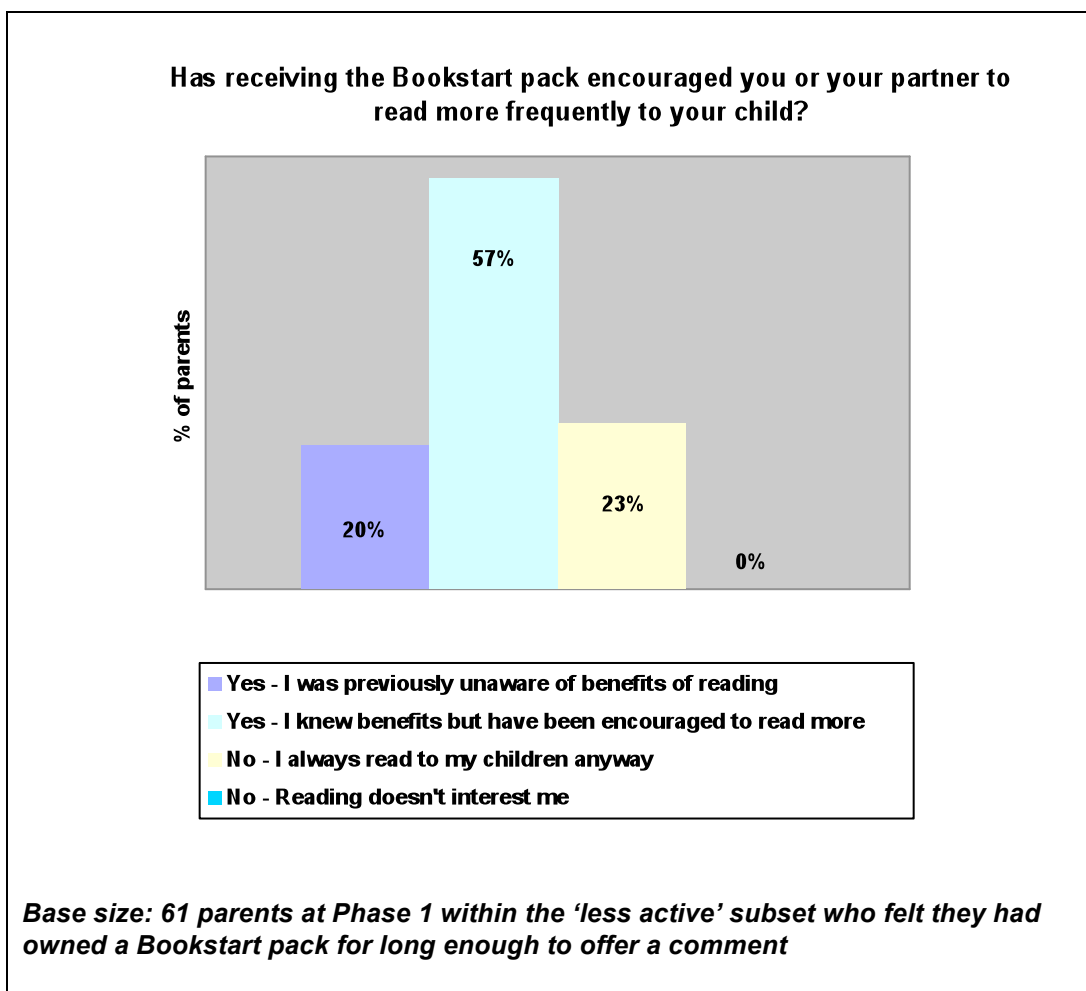


Has receiving the Bookstart pack encouraged you or your partner to read more frequently to your children?

Parents from the 'less active' reading sub-group repeated signs of an affinity to the Bookstart packs in their responses to the impact question. When asked about the impact of receiving the pack on frequency of reading to children, 57% answered that they felt that the packs had encouraged them to become more engaged in reading with their young children even though they had previously been aware of its benefits. The number of parents that gave this answer in the rest of the sample was lower at 39%.

Not surprisingly perhaps, a greater proportion of parents from the 'less active' sub-group reported that they had been encouraged to read more frequently with their babies or toddlers because they had been unaware of its benefits: 20% of 'less active' parents compared to 9% of parents in the rest of the sample. At least in terms of self-reporting, it seems that Bookstart is having a more pronounced impact on raising awareness and helping to change reading behaviour among 'less active' reading families.





'Less active' reading families – before and after? Comparing responses from Phase 1 and Phase 2

Our before and after comparisons are based solely on the 56 parents within the less active subset who took part in both interviews; Phase 1 and Phase 2. This ensures that comparisons are being made before and after amongst the same population of parents. Any changes occurring are seen in context, by focusing on only those parents who participated in both phases.

These longitudinal findings for the 'less active' sub-group are encouraging but the most significant test of the impact of the packs is the difference between behaviours reported between the two interviews: did this group report changed reading behaviours when the overall parent sample remained relatively unmoved by exposure to the Bookstart pack?

Our examination of the data revealed some evidence that Bookstart had made a significant impact on these 'less active' reading families. These results were qualified by a reduction in sample size of the sub-group. Of the 94 original 'less active' sample, 56 completed the Phase 2 interview because not all parents agreed to be re-contacted, and, of those who did, not all were successfully reached. The findings explored below focus on only these 56 parents who completed both Phase 1 and Phase 2 interviews.

Overall the findings were generally positive showing increases in reported frequency of reading to children and in numbers of library members.

Frequency of reading to children

A comparison of results from the two interviews showed an aggregate shift from less to more frequent reading habits. Parents who reported “never” reading to their child or reading “once or twice a week” decreased between the interviews: “never” declining from 14% to 2%, and “a few times a week” declining from 57% to 38%. Corresponding increases were evident in the more frequent reading categories: “once a day” increasing from 0% to 30% and “twice or more a day” increasing from 0% to 7%. In other words, three months after receiving the pack, about a third of these formerly ‘less active’ reading parents had become relatively frequent readers with their young children. These findings are all the more impressive when set against the responses from the other parents at the two interviews. As Fig. 5.6 below indicates, when we removed the ‘less active’ sub-group from the sample, parents reported only minor change in reading frequency between the two interviews.

Given the general reluctance of these families to engage with other reading resources available in their community, these findings provide evidence of the efficacy of Bookstart among this group: receiving the Bookstart packs seemed to have most pronounced impact among those families who formerly did not often engage in shared reading with their baby or toddler. Bookstart seems to have reminded them of its importance and provided them with the resources to act on this knowledge.

Given the absence of socio-economic information on the parents interviewed we cannot draw any firm conclusions about the social profile of these ‘less active’ reading families. It seems likely, however, that this group includes a high proportion of families at risk of social exclusion.



Fig 5.5

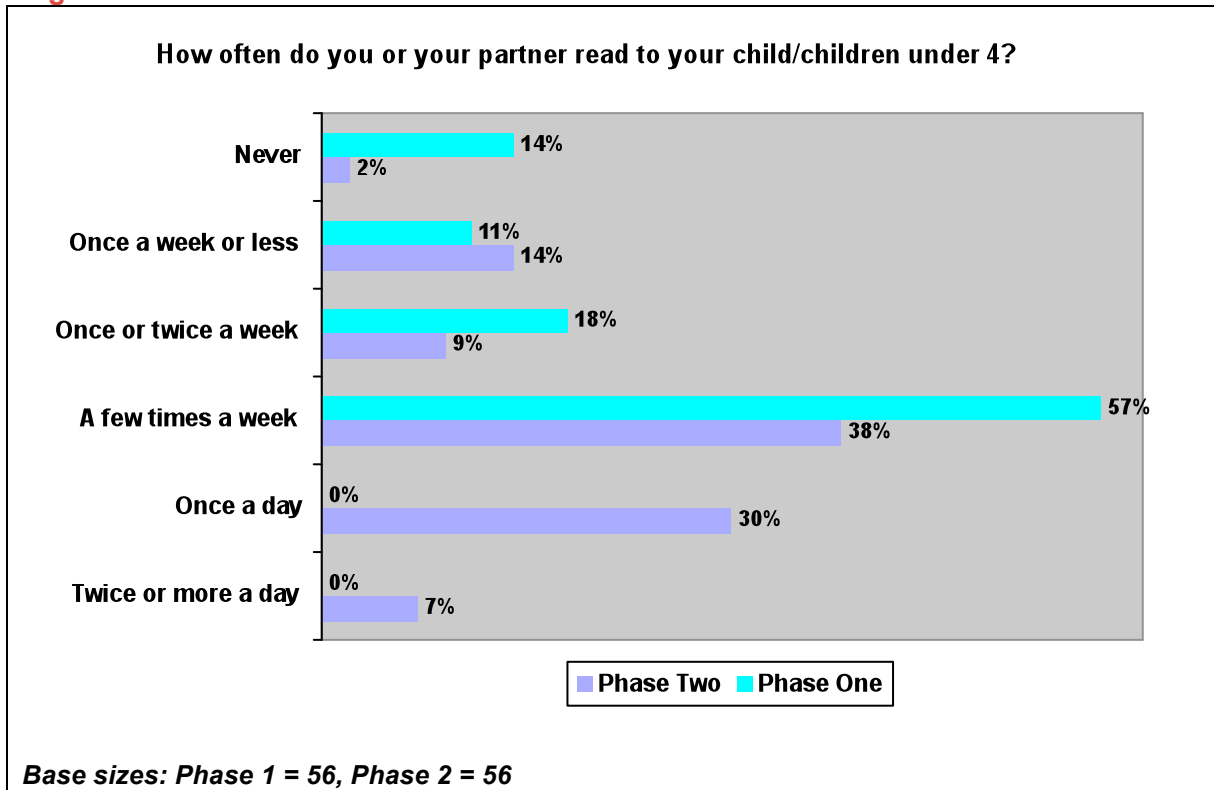


Fig 5.6

“How often do you or your partner read to your child/children under 4”? non-‘less active’ reading parents only

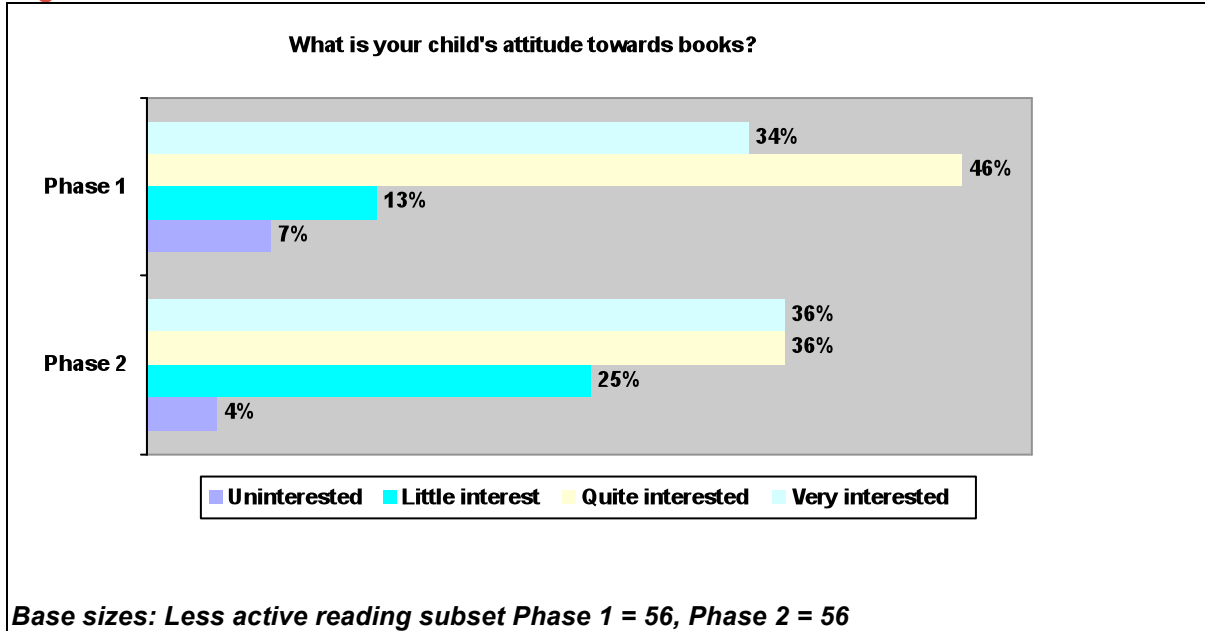
	PHASE 1	PHASE 2
On two or more occasions every day	46%	37%
Once a day	40%	46%
A few times a week	11%	14%
Maybe once or twice a week	3%	1%
Maybe once a week or less	0	1%
Never	0	0

Base sizes: Non-‘less active’ reading parents only Phase 1 = 384, Phase 2 = 384

Childrens’ attitudes towards books

Responses from this question were much less conclusive. The number of ‘less active’ reading parents reporting that their children were “very interested” in books rose only slightly from 34% at Phase 1 to 36% at Phase 2. The rest of the sample showed a slightly better improvement rising from 71% at Phase 1 to 75% at Phase 2.

Fig 5.7



Parents' attitude towards reading with babies/toddlers

Responses from parents in the 'less active' subset did not show any significant improvement between the two interviews. Parents who said that they were "very interested" in reading with their children actually decreased slightly from 41% to 38% of the group (Fig. 5.8). Parents in the rest of the sample similarly decreased slightly from 82% to 77% (Fig. 5.9).

Fig 5.8

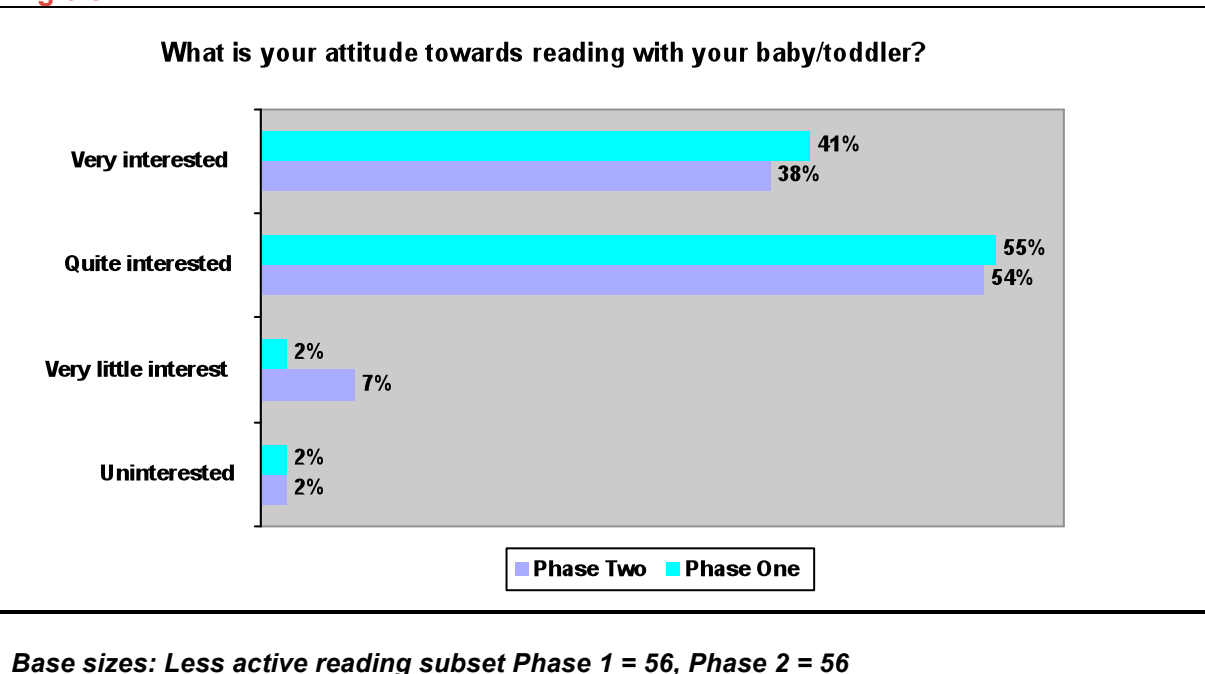


Fig. 5.9

“What is your attitude towards reading with your baby/toddler”? non-‘less active’ reading parents only

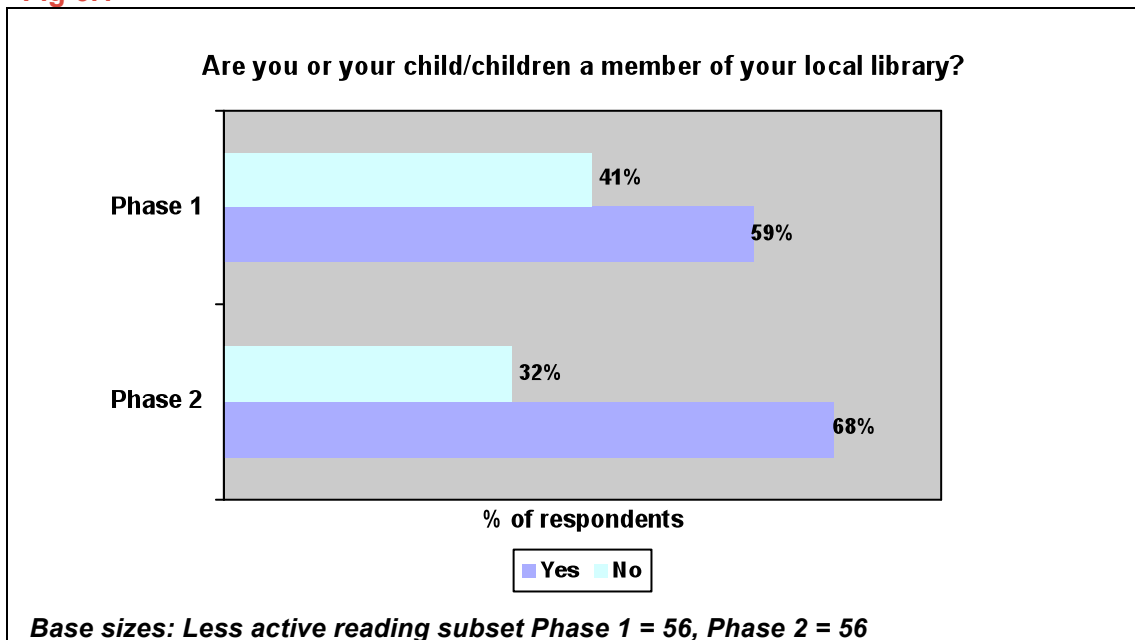
	PHASE 1	PHASE 2
Uninterested	0	1%
Very little interest	1%	1%
Quite interested	17%	22%
Very interested	82%	77%

Base sizes: Non-‘less active’ reading parents only Phase 1 = 384, Phase 2 = 384

Library membership

Despite the low levels of library membership and usage reported by ‘less active’ reading families at the Phase 1 interview, parents in the sub-group did report significant increases in library membership between the two interviews. The percentage of parents reporting that they or their children were library members increased from 59% to 68% (Fig 6.1). There was a more modest increase recorded among the rest of the sample, from 79% to 85%.

Fig 6.1



Conclusion

The 2008 National Impact Evaluation was largely successful in achieving its objective of providing credible insight into the possible impact of the Bookstart programme. The sample size of 694 parents at the Phase 1 interview and 440 parents at the Phase 2 interview was sufficiently robust to make findings statistically valid. Furthermore the distribution of interviews across the nine government regions of England and the inclusion of urban and rural local authorities make this a particularly strong sample group. Alongside these strengths we fully acknowledge the drawbacks of relying wholly on parent reporting for evidence of behavioural change. Parents' estimation of reading practices in the home and, for example, their knowledge of library usage by other members of the family, may sometimes be unreliable and is likely to give only a broad indication of what is actually happening. We also acknowledge the limitations of not providing a control group that could test for intervening factors that might be contributing to positive reading behaviours. We should treat results with appropriate caution. Nonetheless, the findings make some interesting suggestions as to possible patterns of impact on young children and their families.

Reading profile of the families that the packs reached

Results from the Phase 1 interviews showed parents generally held supportive attitudes towards reading with their baby or toddler but were not always able to translate that into actual reading practice.

A majority of parents indicated supportive attitudes and reported that they read frequently to their child:

- 98% of parents reported that they were either “very” or “quite” interested in reading with their baby or toddler.
- 74% of parents reported that they read to their baby or toddler “once a day” or “twice or more a day”.

However, a significant minority of parents indicated that they did not read frequently to their child

- 26% reported that they read to their child less frequently than every day.

Overall impact

Comparing results from Phase 1 and Phase 2 interviews gave valuable insight into the possible influence of receiving the pack on family reading behaviours. Consistent improvement was not apparent across the overall sample, with fairly static figures on reading frequency not showing any consistent trend. However, if aggregate reading results remained relatively unchanged, library membership did show significant improvement.

- reported library membership increased from 76% at the time of receiving the pack to 83% three months later

Impact on 'less active' reading families

In depth analysis of the parent sample revealed some definite patterns even if evidence of impact on the overall sample was generally inconclusive or limited. Parents who reported having relatively few children's books in the home and reported infrequent reading habits showed signs of improvement across a range of indicators where improvement had been negligible for the parent sample as a whole. This group of 'less active' reading parents reported positive attitudes towards book sharing and yet did not translate that into reading practices:

- all of these parents reported reading to their child only "a few times a week' or less and yet 94% reported that they were interested in reading with their child.

This pattern of positive attitudes but weak practices was repeated in the responses of these parents to questions about library usage:

'less active' reading families were...

- significantly less likely to be members of a local library (57% compared to 78% of rest of sample)

and when these families were library members, they were likely to report significantly less usage...

- only 26% of 'less active' reading families reported borrowing a book or other material from a local library in the last three months compared to 54% of other parents.
- just 11% of these parents reported having attended a baby or toddler event at a local library in the last three months, compared to 42% of other parents.

The results suggested that although many of these parents were positive about reading with their young children they were not generally taking advantage of library services in the community. These families were not integrating libraries into their lives in the way that other families did. This finding begged the question whether this pattern was also apparent in these families' use and reaction to the Bookstart packs: were 'less active' families similarly left uninspired by the packs or was a different kind of response evident in reported behaviours?

The results from this analysis were pleasing. There was consistent evidence across a range of indicators that Bookstart motivated engagement with books among these 'less active' reading families:

'less active' families use the packs...

- a majority (61%) of 'less active' families reported that they had made some use of the Bookstart pack, comparing favourably with the 83% reported by other families.

...and they themselves were significantly more likely to report that receiving the pack had encouraged them to become more engaged in reading with their children (57% reporting this compared to 39% of other parents)

...read with their children more frequently three months after receiving the pack...

- 30% report reading “once a day” to their child, up from none.

...parents show an improved attitude towards reading with their children

- parents reporting they were “very interested” increased from 38% to 41%

...showed improved library membership

- parents reporting that they or their children were library members increased from 59% to 68%

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For further details on studies of Bookstart please go to the Bookstart website:

www.bookstart.co.uk/Press-and-Research/Research

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Overview - excluding the 'less active' reading subset within the 440 parents completing both Phase 1 and Phase 2

Base size = Phase 1 = 384 Phase 2 = 384

How often do you or your partner read to your child/children under 4?

	PHASE 1	PHASE 2
On two or more occasions every day	46%	37%
Once a day	40%	46%
A few times a week	11%	14%
Maybe once or twice a week	3%	1%
Maybe once a week or less	0	1%
Never	0	0

How many books for babies or toddlers do you have in the home? PHASE 1 ONLY

	PHASE 1
Over 40 books	51%
Between 20-40 books	34%
Between 10-19 books	12%
Less than 10 books	4%
None	0

What is your child's attitude towards books?

	PHASE 1	PHASE 2
Uninterested	1%	1%
Little interest	4%	1%
Quite interested	25%	23%
Very interested	71%	75%

What is your attitude towards reading with your baby/toddler?

	PHASE 1	PHASE 2
Uninterested	0	1%
Very little interest	1%	1%
Quite interested	17%	22%
Very interested	82%	77%

Are you or your child/children a member of your local library?

	PHASE 1	PHASE 2
Yes	79%	85%
No	21%	15%

Have you, for yourself or on behalf of a child, borrowed a book or other material from a local library in the last 3 months? PHASE 1 ONLY

	PHASE 1
Yes	55%
No	45%
Don't know	0

Have you or your partner attended any baby or toddler-oriented events at a local library?

	PHASE 1	PHASE 2
Yes	43%	31%
No	57%	60%
Don't know	0	9%

How many times have you attended baby or toddler – oriented events at a library in the past 3 months? PHASE 2 ONLY

	PHASE 2
Between 1 to 5 times	52%
Between 6 to 10 times	12%
Between 11 to 15 times	33%
Over 15 times	3%

Which Bookstart pack have you most recently received? PHASE 1 ONLY

	PHASE 1
Baby pack	32%
Bookstart +	28%
My Treasure Chest	40%

Has your family received a Bookstart pack before? PHASE 1 ONLY

	PHASE 1
Yes	72%
No	28%
Don't know	0

Were you present when your family received the pack? PHASE 1 ONLY

	PHASE 1
Yes	88%
No	12%

When you received the pack did the person gifting the pack... PHASE 1 ONLY
Based only on those who were present (339)

	PHASE 1
Talk about sharing books with your baby or toddler	65%
Just give the pack to you without any message	35%

Since receiving it has your child used the pack? PHASE 1 ONLY

	PHASE 1
Yes – used frequently	69%
Yes – made some use	16%
No – not made use	1%
Don't know	0
Not applicable	14%

In your own estimation, has receiving the Bookstart pack encouraged you or your partner to read more frequently to your child?

	PHASE 1	PHASE 2
Yes – previously unaware of benefits of reading with babies/toddlers	7%	3%
Yes – knew of benefits, but encouraged by packs to read more	36%	48%
No – I have always read to my children	44%	47%
No – reading does not interest me	1%	1%
Not applicable	13%	1%

Base sizes: Phase 1 = 384, Phase 2 = 384

Excluding 'less active subset'; from within the 440 parents who completed both Phase 1 and Phase 2 interviews.

