

# BookTrust Early Years offers: Year one evaluation findings



## Summary findings from BookTrust research with early years families and delivery partners

### Introduction

BookTrust is the UK's **largest children's reading charity**. Each year, we reach **over 1.5 million children**, inspiring them with books, resources and support designed to help families get started on their reading journeys. We provide more targeted support to low-income families in the early years (with children aged 0-7). We know that these families stand to benefit most from the immediate and [longer-term transformative benefits](#) of sharing books and stories together.

### About this briefing

This briefing summarises lessons from the first year of the new BookTrust Early Years offers (Bookstart Toddler / Bookstart 1-2 Years and Bookstart Pre-schooler / Bookstart 3-4 years). We have heard from many within our network of early years delivery partners that they are keen to see what we have learnt and are sharing these findings at the start of delivery of the 2023-2024 programme.

We are grateful to all our partners for their work to deliver the first year of the pilot and for taking the time to share their experiences with us. We're very excited to be doing it all again with you this year!

The findings are based on an online survey of 224 delivery partners and 589 families, learning visits to settings, and interviews with partners and families.

### About our Early Years offers

BookTrust is a **learning organisation**, placing evidence, our partners and our families at the heart of our programme design and evaluation. The design of the Early Years offers was informed by our knowledge of [early years shared reading](#), external evidence on behaviour change and habit formation, and extensive learning and testing with partners and families.

The evaluation of the first year of the new BookTrust Early Years offers measured their success against several **impact indicators**. The evaluation finds that the offer is working to spark families' enthusiasm and knowledge about the benefits of reading and different ways to share books and stories together.



## We reached nearly 400,000 children aged 1-4 in the first year of the pilot.

Our Early Years offers are one part of BookTrust's Early Years reading journey for families. The Early Years offers include:

- Bookstart Toddler (Bookstart 1-2 years in Wales), a family pack containing two books, a finger puppet, and ideas for further activities, and how to share stories and rhymes together.
- Bookstart Pre-schooler (Bookstart 3-4 years in Wales), a family pack containing two books, a headband to colour in (crayons provided), and ideas for further activities, and how to share stories and rhymes together.
- Storyteller resources for partners (a kit with 10 books perfect for sharing with 1-4 year olds, including the titles from the family packs)<sup>1</sup>
- A range of online content to support partners and families to share stories.

Our Early Years offer is a **targetted programme**, designed with a particular focus on supporting low-income families.<sup>2</sup> We work closely with our delivery partners to identify families who will benefit the most from the programme or who may need more help to make shared reading a regular part of their lives.

**By taking an active role in our Early Years programme, you are part of an amazing network of delivery partners providing over 6,000 routes to families across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Together, we have helped almost 400,000 children aged 1-4 to experience the benefits of early shared reading. At least 70% of these children are from low-income families, who stand to benefit the most from your support.**

## What have we learnt from the first year of the offers?

### Children are learning something new.

**85%** of families said their child learnt something new from the pack about the world around them. We heard from families how the packs prompted children's exploration, fine motor skills development, and learning of new words and rhymes.

Lower-income families were more likely to say they learnt something new from the pack, either about the **benefits of reading (77%**, versus 67% of families overall) or **different ways** they could **share stories** with their children (**82%**, versus 78% of families overall).

“

The packs are a lovely idea. My son loves them and it inspires me to make more time exploring stories rather than just getting through them quickly for bedtime.

**Low-income family receiving Bookstart Pre-schooler (3-4 years), England**

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### Repetition, repetition, repetition!

The more families had used each book, the more likely they were to say they had enjoyed the pack, and that their child had learnt something new about the world around them.

Repetition is an **essential** part of developing a reading habit and building skills in the early years. It is positive to see a high proportion of families saying they are using the pack contents on multiple occasions.

<sup>1</sup> Storyteller packs in Wales have 10 books and those in England and Northern Ireland have 11.

<sup>2</sup> We use the term 'low-income' to indicate those living in relative poverty as defined by the Department for Work and Pensions.



“

We love the books. My daughter has already memorised One Banana, Two Bananas! Thank you!

**Family receiving Bookstart Pre-schooler (3-4 years), England**

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### The Early Years offers are supporting families to read more.

Overall, **77%** of families said the packs had prompted them to read and share stories more with their children. The change in reading frequency was particularly pronounced in families reading less than a day a week before they received their pack (**95%** said the pack had prompted them to read more) and for low-income families (**84%** compared to 74% of higher-income families).

“

The pack is brilliant to get children reading with parents. I enjoyed the books which I wouldn't have read to my daughter otherwise.

**Family receiving Bookstart Toddler (1-2 years), England**

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### The Early Years offers are supporting families to continue their reading journeys.

Our Bookstart packs include information on how families can find their local library. Two-thirds of families said that this information had prompted them to not only find their nearest library, but to pay it a visit (**66%**). Perhaps they might have visited one of the **2,400 libraries** across England, Wales and Northern Ireland who take part in BookTrust Storytime or BookTrust Cymru Storytime, our library-based early years offer! You can read more about BookTrust Storytime in our latest [evaluation report](#).



“

Excellent pack received from nursery. My son loves reading and was very excited by all the activities and lovely books. After reading this pack my son asked to join the library and feels very special with his very own library card. Excellent initiative.

**Low-income family receiving Bookstart Pre-schooler (3-4 years), England**

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### Our partners play a crucial role in families' early shared reading journeys.

Families who recalled seeing the Storyteller resources (those designed for use by practitioners) or their family pack being shown to them or talked about by a practitioner were more likely to:

- Learn something new about the benefits of reading (88% v. 71% of those who didn't experience this when they received their pack).
- Learn something new about the different ways to read or share stories with their child (88% v. 77%).
- Read and share stories more with their child (90% v. 75%).

This is wonderful to see and understanding the different ways our early years partners explain the packs to families, encourage and put them at ease, and get them excited about reading will be a **key learning focus** for BookTrust this year.



It was great to have a demonstration on how the book was used, and to be in a learning environment with other parents.

**Family receiving Bookstart Toddler (1-2 years), England**



### **This offer helps partners to build relationships with families.**

Our Early Years offer was designed to support partners and families to establish early shared reading habits. It is great to see the early results suggesting the offer is doing just that. A key part of this was ensuring the resources helped partners to engage families and **9 in 10 partners** said the packs supported them to do this (**88%**).

Some of our partners work with very vulnerable families and we've heard on multiple occasions how our packs are supporting partners to build relationships with families. For example, partners have used the packs as a gift or a non-threatening way to make initial contact with families, or to help them open up to and form bonds with practitioners.



These resources will ensure we can offer a new way to engage families ... a way in when you're dealing with other stressful things.

**Family Empowerment Coordinator, Women's Centre**



This is something we've heard from our partners over a number of years, for example from Health Visitors who deliver our [Bookstart Baby programme](#) to every child aged 0-12 months in England and Wales each year.

### **What's next for our Early Years offers?**

**Thank you** to all the families and partners involved in the first year of Bookstart Toddler / Bookstart 1-2 years and Bookstart Pre-schooler / Bookstart 3-4 years, and to those who took the time to share their experiences with us. We're taking all the feedback and insights on board to evolve this programme and our early years reading journey as a whole.

#### **Our key learning priorities for 23-24 are:**

- Understanding how we can improve the information, support and resources we provide to our valued partners. We know this is a new way of working for many of our partners and we're continuing to invest in our support to you to make delivery easier and more effective. Based on your feedback, we recently launched our new [Partner Resource Guide](#) to support partners to deliver the programme.
- Understanding how our different early years offers are working together to deliver maximum impact for families.
- Understanding how families' experiences receiving Bookstart packs and how the interaction they have with our delivery partners shapes their initial and ongoing engagement with reading.
- Continuing to measure the impact of BookTrust offers, including starting to measure changes in families' reading behaviours over time.





## 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.



### Bookstart

In the last year alone, our Bookstart books and resources reached over 700,000 families with children in their early years in over 5,000 different community settings across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.



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