



centre for research on
families and relationships

Evaluating the impact of Bookbug Bags and Sessions in Scotland

Summary report by the Centre for
Research on Families and Relationships



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1. About this summary report

In May 2015, the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships was commissioned to conduct a two-year evaluation of Bookbug, Scottish Book Trust's Early Years programme. The aim of the study was to examine how, and to what extent, Bookbug impacts on the lives of families in Scotland, and on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of early years professionals.

This summary report provides an overview of the research and its findings. The full report, and short executive summary, is available on Scottish Book Trust's website.

2. The aims of the Bookbug programme

Bookbug is Scottish Book Trust's Early Years programme, encouraging parents and children to share stories, songs and rhymes from birth. It was established in its current form in June 2010, following the rebranding of the Bookstart programme which had operated in Scotland since 2000. The change to Bookbug resulted in a new mascot character, the renaming of Bookstart Rhymetime Sessions to Bookbug Sessions and the development of a bespoke book gifting programme for Scotland.

The programme, in its current form, gifts bags containing books and resources to every baby, toddler, three and five-year-old in Scotland. It also involves Bookbug Sessions, held across the country in libraries and community settings, which provide opportunities for parents, carers and children to meet, cuddle, read, talk and sing together. At the heart of the programme is universalism: this means that Bags and Sessions are free, and available to everyone. Examples of accessibility and inclusivity include the delivery of Sessions in Gaelic in seven local authorities, dedicated titles for children with Additional Support Needs and translated Bookbug information.

In acknowledgement that certain groups need enhanced support to access the benefits of Bookbug, the Outreach Programme (formerly known as Assertive Outreach) began in 2012. Based on targeted universalism, this approach includes Bookbug for the Home which trains professionals to introduce the principles of Bookbug Sessions into the homes of families who face barriers accessing Bookbug. This programme, which has trained over 3,000 early years professionals to date, was subject to separate evaluation in 2013, 2015 and 2016. The Bookbug P1 Family Bag is gifted to every P1 child in Scotland during Book Week Scotland in partnership with Education Scotland and the Scottish Government as part of Read, Write, Count (the national literacy and numeracy campaign). Both the Outreach Programme and the P1 Family Bag are not included in this evaluation.

By providing the foundations for a life time love of reading, the Bookbug programme works towards the following outcomes:

- Families are reading, talking, singing and cuddling more with their babies and children.
- More practitioners are confident and able to communicate the key Bookbug messages.
- Decision makers integrate the Bookbug approach into early years practice.
- More children and families use libraries.

3. Delivery and local implementation

In collaboration with its diverse partners, in 2016-17 the Bookbug programme gifted approximately 180,000 bags across Scotland, and delivered 23,670 Bookbug Sessions to 687,251 adults and children. More than 14,000 vulnerable families have also experienced the Bookbug's Outreach Programme. Scottish Book Trust also supports the local delivery of Bookbug Week and Bookbug's Library Challenge.



The programme is delivered locally by libraries, nurseries, health visiting services, schools, social work services, as well as early years practitioners working in the third sector and local authority settings. Core funding for the Bookbug programme comes from the Scottish Government's Early Years team, Education Scotland and Creative Scotland (Youth Music Initiative), with other national partners including NHS Health Scotland, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Gaelic Books Council, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, CALL Scotland and the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC).

Scottish Book Trust has partnership agreements with each Scottish local authority and cultural trust which set out their commitment to managing and delivering the Bookbug programme, as well as the support offered by Scottish Book Trust to make that delivery effective. At a strategic level, Scottish Book Trust supports the Libraries Early Years Strategy Group, regular Regional Meetings and local Outreach Steering Groups. Within every local authority area, a Bookbug Co-ordinator - usually employed by the local library service - oversees Bookbug Bag gifting to families and the co-ordination of Bookbug Sessions. Examples of activities delivered by the Bookbug Co-ordinator include organising Bookbug Bag deliveries and distribution, the local promotion of Bookbug and organising events.

At the foundation of delivery is Scottish Book Trust training delivered to professionals which enables them to gift the Bookbug Bags effectively; run public Bookbug Sessions; and run targeted one-to-one Bookbug for the Home sessions with families where extra support is needed. Scottish Book Trust also provide 'Train the Trainer' training which enables locally delivered peer training – this was initially run in 2013 and is being delivered again to improve sustainability of the programme and to ensure skills are up-to-date. New, or recently developed training includes the development of courses for practitioners who care for two year olds (community childminders and nurseries with looked after 2s) and the roll-out of Bookbug training courses for students studying professional qualifications (child care, health visiting, midwifery, social care). In 2016/17, the Early Years Team delivered a total of 198 courses, attended by 3,543, across Scotland. The volume of training has grown significantly in the last several years, with both the number of training sessions and trainees increasing by over 3000% since 2010/11.

4. Our approach to the research

The aim of this research has been to consider the impact of the Bookbug programme in Scotland on parents, children and early years professionals. We have specifically focused on the following research questions:

- Are certain groups less able to gain the benefits of the Bookbug programme and if so, why?
- What is the nature of the link between the Bookbug Bags and Bookbug Sessions? Why is such a link important?
- Is there a link between the way Bookbug Bags are gifted and the impact they have on a family?
- Do the bags inform professionals and families' knowledge of Bookbug and Scottish Book Trust and the wider range of services available?

We have used several different ways of exploring parents', carers' and professionals' experiences to assess the impact of the Bookbug programme. These include looking at existing research about book gifting programmes; conducting surveys of parents, carers and professionals; carrying out in depth interviews with individuals and groups; and gathering case study information to gain a detailed picture of how Bookbug works in small geographical areas. In total we surveyed 627 professionals and 4,387 parents & carers. Forty-six of these families were followed up in in-depth telephone interviews. We also completed six area based case studies involving interviews with 55 professionals and 141 parents & carers, as well as observations of 12 Bookbug Sessions and eight parent & toddler / family groups.



The evaluation method used for the study is called Contribution Analysis. Contribution Analysis helps organisations develop a theory of change to explain how a programme is intended to work and what impacts are expected as a result. In recognition that social programmes take place in complex contexts, Contribution Analysis begins to interrogate the assumptions that underpin the programme and the factors in the wider context that support and challenge the programme. With this understanding in place it is easier to analyse whether outcomes result from the programme’s activities or from other influences.

5. Existing evidence on book sharing and book gifting

There is a solid body of evidence showing that home literacy activities in the early years lead to positive outcomes in the areas of emergent literacy, language and cognitive development. Connecting book gifting and book sharing programmes with positive outcomes, with home literacy activity as the mediating factor, is slightly more difficult due to the range and quality of available information.

Book sharing can benefit children irrespective of their parents’ level of education and socio-economic status, however family reading practices vary according to socioeconomic and sociodemographic factors. It appears that fathers in Scotland read less frequently with their young children than do mothers, however the majority do read. Evidence is less well-developed in relation to fathers’ book sharing, with conflicting reports of the difference in style between mothers and fathers.

The power or special nature of book sharing may reside in: the socioemotional context in which it takes place; the talk that happens around the text; the making of connections (intertextuality); as well as learning about narrative, visual image and language.

Much of the research in this field seeks to connect book sharing to learning outcomes, rather than, for example, pleasure in reading together or the quality of parent-child interaction or attachment. Some work has established an effect of wider relationship dynamics on the quality of book sharing practice, suggesting that some pairings may need additional help to scaffold pleasurable and effective interactions. This emphasises the quality of book sharing in addition to occurrence and frequency.

Most of the available evidence is orientated towards the book sharing and book gifting elements of the Bookbug programme, with less information related to song and rhyme sessions outside the home. Rhyme, singing and movement are common elements in childcare practice, with developmental benefits.

6. Headline evidence from the research

6.1 The Bookbug programme’s relationship to policy

A review of the key policy documents shows a complementary fit between the programme and the context for early years and child development support in Scotland. In particular, we can see that the Bookbug programme and the Early Years policy area have come to reflect current research evidence on children’s brain development and the significance of attachment.

The main narratives in current policy thinking – the case for early investment, nurturing attachment and closing the gap – all correspond well to the contribution that Bookbug is seeking to make in early literacy, attachment and reaching out to those in greater need while providing free, universal services.



Professionals responding to the survey, overall, saw Bookbug as having a good strategic ‘fit’ (see table 1). However, they were less likely to agree that Bookbug was supporting efforts to tackle inequalities or build strong community life. This suggests that professionals had a view on how far Bookbug’s fields of influence extended. Some professionals – mainly those in library service – were unaware of the SHANARRI indicators of wellbeing (safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible, included).

Table 1: To what extent does the Bookbug programme support the following wider social and policy objectives?

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Local strategic priorities for the Early Years	96%	4%	<1%	<1%
Getting it Right for Every Child	93%	4%	1%	2%
SHANARRI well-being indicators	75%	8%	0%	17%
Tackling inequalities between parents	79%	15%	2%	4%
Improving families health, happiness and well-being	91%	6%	1%	2%
Building strong, resilient and supportive communities	87%	13%	0%	0%

Table 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Bookbug programme

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Beneficial to my organisation	99%	<1%	<1%	0%
Complements the work of my organisation	97%	2%	1%	0%
An unnecessary burden for my organisation	4%	4%	92%	0%
Creates staffing capacity issues for my organisation	28%	15%	57%	0%
Creates storage capacity issues for my organisation	24%	15%	60%	1%
Helps us to get our message across to parents/carers	97%	2%	1%	0%
Helps my organisation meet its strategic aims	89%	9%	1%	1%

Professionals agreed overwhelmingly on the benefits Bookbug brought to their organisation, and emphasised its complementarity to their work. Additionally, it was largely agreed that Bookbug helps and supports professionals meet their strategic aims and get their ‘message’ across to families (see table 2).

Despite this positivity, professionals across all the data types, voiced concerns about capacity and budget restrictions. This created pressures, and limited practitioners’ abilities to deliver the services they felt were necessary for making the greatest impact on families less able to gain the benefits of Bookbug. Regular quality partnership working with nurseries and outreach in community settings were the most commonly mentioned areas which professionals wished to develop further.

Practitioners highly valued the presence of strategic support for Bookbug at a local level, and where this was absent weaknesses in delivery and impact were identified.



I think we have suffered from Bookbug not being at the heart of the Early Years strategy, we are trying to get across the impact of Bookbug but this requires support from senior management level. (Bookbug Co-ordinator)

There were also notable variations in the role of the Bookbug Co-ordinator, with some authorities having dedicated more resources to this role than others. Co-ordinators across Scotland spent on average 30% of their working hours on Bookbug activities, although this proportion ranged from five to 80%. Additionally, some areas benefitted from having more staff involved in Bookbug co-ordination, an attribute which was not necessarily related to the relative size of the population, or geographical scale of the authority. Several Bookbug co-ordinators commented on the pressure on their role, and the difficulties involved in balancing Bookbug delivery with other parts of their post:

It is often difficult to continue to support and ensure quality standards of gifting as just one person - more resources or support to carry out this role would greatly benefit the initiative. (Librarian)

6.2 Training and the professionals' awareness of Bookbug

Training and skills development is the main way in which Scottish Book Trust equip professionals from a variety of roles and settings to understand the Bookbug message, and effectively deliver it through high quality and consistent gifting practices and session delivery.

Sixty-four per cent (403) of the professionals consulted in the survey had received Bookbug training. This was highest within those working in family support or library services and lowest in nurseries and health services: a finding which reflects the type and frequency of training offered by Scottish Book Trust. The type of training accessed corresponds broadly to an individual's role and sector, although nurseries were more likely to have engaged in a diverse selection of training, reflecting the various roles and types of organisation within this sector (for example, private and state nurseries, toddler and playgroup groups). Not all Bookbug Session leaders had recent Scottish Book Trust training and a minority had not received training. This takes on particular significance when considering the finding that session leaders' qualities and practice have a profound effect on enjoyment and attendance.

Those working in specialist roles (for example, speech and language therapy, community learning and development, and prisons) expressed a desire to have training on how to use Bookbug in their specific settings. These comments may relate to awareness and accessibility of provision, rather than availability of training per se. Others also expressed a desire for more local training, and / or opportunities locally to share and reflect on practice. Existing practices, such as shared practice meetings and 'train the trainer', can be used to address these needs.

The main motivations for attending training was 'to understand the benefits of book gifting / sharing in early years', to gain confidence in delivering bookbug, and to better understand the benefits of song and rhyme in the early years. Motivation for those already delivering sessions or gifting bags was to update or 'freshen up' their existing training, gain new ideas and working practices.

Corresponding with case study interviews, the data suggests that the majority of professionals already come to training with an understanding of the benefits of book sharing. Within only a small number of exceptions, professionals interviewed had strong awareness of the Bookbug 'message', and were able to articulate its key aims. This was reflected in the survey, where almost all respondents stated that they understood the aim of Bookbug, and almost four fifths (79%) felt involved in the programme. Reflecting



evidence from the case studies, lower proportions of professionals felt that Scottish Book Trust understood their role, or felt part of a Bookbug ‘community’ (see table 3).

Table 3: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know
I understand the aims of Bookbug	97%	2%	<1%	<1%
I feel involved in Bookbug	79%	17%	4%	<1%
SBT understands my work and role in Bookbug	58%	30%	5%	7%
I get all the support that I need from SBT	61%	31%	5%	2%
I feel part of a Bookbug community	60%	32%	7%	1%

Note: Due to rounding not all percentages add up to 100%

Those working within the nursery sector were far more likely to state that they did not know whether Scottish Book Trust understood their work and role in the programme. They were also the sector most likely to disagree with the statement ‘I get all the support I need from SBT’ (13% disagree) and ‘I feel part of a Bookbug community’ (13% disagree). Those working in libraries and family support were the sectors most likely to ‘feel part of a Bookbug community’.

6.3 Bookbug Bags and gifting

They're such lovely books and I mean they're proper books, you know they're from authors that you would have bought books from if you see what I mean, they're not just freebie things, which is really nice. (Parent)

I used to play the Baby Bookbug CD to her all the time...I probably wouldn't have done it but he [Health Visitor] just encouraged me and showed me each item in the bag and said oh just cuddle her and dance and move to the beat, and I'm glad I did it cos she loves music now. (Parent)

Eighty-four per cent of professionals responding to the survey reported being personally involved in gifting, or working for an organisation that was. As well as evidencing the core sectors (health visiting services, libraries, nurseries and schools) involvement in gifting, the survey revealed the diversity of practitioners gifting bags.

Scottish Book Trust recommends that Bookbug Bags are gifted at specific points in a child’s life, with the Baby Bag expected to be gifted from birth to 16 weeks; the Toddler Bag between the ages of one and two, and the Explorer (previously Pirate) Bag at age three. For all bag types, the majority of professionals (80%) reported that gifting was taking place at the recommended age ‘all’ or a ‘great deal’ of the time. Sixteen per cent stated that gifting in this timeframe happens only ‘some of the time’, while a small minority (from three to six per cent) felt that this ‘never’ happened.

Parents and carers reported a wide variation in the age of their child when they received the Baby Bag, from a few days old to 8 months old. There was less variation in the gifting of other bags. The majority of families in the toddler sample group received their bags either at their child’s 12-month developmental check or at an immunisation appointment at around 12/13 months. All of the parents in the 3-year-old group said that their children had received their Explorer Bag in a nursery setting. Factors affecting the timing of gifting included:



- Discretion of individual professionals as to when gifting would best suit a family and when the information would most likely have an impact.
- National policy, particularly the Universal Health Visiting Pathway - while for some practitioners the UHVP was making Bookbug a greater priority, others noted that pressures of resources was preventing its implementation.
- Existing local practices ('this is the way it has always been done').

Non-receipt of bags affected a minority of families but was, nonetheless, a source of concern for practitioners delivering Bookbug. Perceived reasons for this included:

- Inconsistent gifting, primarily related to reorganisation of services and increased practitioner workloads.
- Local practices where families or services were required to collect the bags from the library service.
- Individual family circumstances including moving between local authorities and/or not accessing local services.

While practitioners who used the gifting advice found it very useful, the survey shows that a large proportion of practitioners are either unaware (56%), or do not use the advice (8%). The health visiting service, alongside family support workers, were the sectors with the lowest awareness of the advice.

Parents were clear that the way that books are gifted matters. Data suggest that parents appreciated the time taken to explore the bag together (especially the Baby Bag) and that being shown the contents can positively influence how it is subsequently used.

Despite this, none of the parents interviewed whose child had received the Explorer Bag could recall receiving any gifting messages about the purpose of the bag; most reported that the bags had been left on their child's peg or in their tray, or that they were handed out at nursery pick-up time. This is not to say that the nursery is not participating in gifting activities with children, but rather that parents and carers are not always aware of the message being delivered.

The relationship between the gifter and parent/carer is also important. Generally, parents viewed health visitors as a trusted source of advice and information about matters relevant to child development and considered them the most appropriate person to gift the bags. However, where families reported poor relationships with their health visitor, this impacted negatively on their enthusiasm for the Bookbug Bag.

While parents and carers perceive their health visitor's job as supporting the whole family, nurseries main role is perceived as supporting the child. This resulted in some nurseries describing parental attendance and engagement in Bookbug events as challenging. Many parents, it was commented, did not see nurseries as having a role in supporting childcare practices in the home.

Reactions to the bags were overwhelmingly positive, with both practitioners and parents emphasising the quality of the contents. Having a quality product helped professionals establish good relationships, since the Bookbug Bags were a resource which professionals were proud of, and excited to gift. Parents were grateful for the bags and commented that if they were being given such 'nice books' then it must be important to use them with their children.

One key difference in reactions to the Explorer Bag, compared to responses from the baby and toddler sample groups, is that parents' accounts were very focused on their child's reaction to the Bookbug Bag, rather than solely describing their own reactions. Children were generally described as having been very excited about receiving the bag – they tended to view it as getting a present. Overall, the data indicate



that the children receiving the bag had a sense of ownership over it, and parents felt that this was very positive.

6.4 Bookbug Sessions

Positive and rewarding part of the job. You make a difference in people and young children's life. (Library Assistant)

I actually go to two Bookbug Sessions because [daughter] loves them...sounds a bit excessive but she really enjoys it. She likes the interaction with other kids [...] she just loves it, she just lights up. (Parent)

Sixty-five per cent of professionals responding to the survey were involved in Bookbug Sessions, or worked in an organisation that was. The majority were based within library services. A significant number of those involved in sessions were based within family support or 'other' roles, principally delivering Bookbug Sessions through targeted group work or outreach within family homes.

Awareness of sessions is influenced by age, deprivation and whether English is the main language at home. It shows that parents and carers who are older, living in the less deprived areas or who speak English as their first language, are more likely to have heard of Bookbug Sessions.

Becoming aware of sessions is highly dependent on two sources – word of mouth and health visitors. Those in the most deprived areas were more reliant on health visitors for information than those in less deprived areas, where instead, word of mouth and friendships are more significant. Few parents mentioned the information placed in Bookbug Bags as the primary means through which they found out about Bookbug Sessions.

Awareness does not necessarily translate into attendance. Around a third (32%) reported going with their child, a figure which declines by age of child (from 45% for those receiving Baby Bags, to 26% for the Explorer Bag). A small proportion of children attend with another carer, a change associated with age (and likely parental return to work). Younger parents, and those from more deprived areas, are more likely to choose not to attend sessions. However, this was not the case for those parents and carers for whom English is not their first language where awareness of sessions was far more likely to result in attendance.

Within the interviews, there was wide variation in frequency of attendance at Bookbug Sessions, although the majority of parents who currently attended did so once a week. There was also variation in terms of how often and when Bookbug Sessions are offered locally. Sessions in some rural areas, in particular, were reported as running infrequently. Some authorities operated Saturday sessions which the aim of maintaining parental attendance after returning to work, as well as making it possible for both parents to experience Bookbug Sessions. A number of parents expressed frustration at the lack of weekend sessions in their area.

In terms of the content of sessions, the professional survey indicated high levels of consistency in delivery, with the majority of respondents reporting that they include all the recommended elements of a session. The main exception was in the checking whether participants have received their Bookbug Bags, with just over half usually including this. This is broadly corroborated by observations of sessions in case study areas. Observations also recorded the absence of stories, the use of old resources and non-use of Bookbug t-shirts. Although most sessions included 'action' songs, use of lycra was limited, with some staff expressing anxieties over how to use manage such activities in groups of older children.



There were, however, several examples of practitioners introducing different activities and their own specialist knowledge into sessions. Other factors contributing to the quality of the Bookbug Session included the number of participants, the environment in which it was held, the extent to which parents and children were actively involved and approach of the session leader.

Practitioners mostly enjoy delivering the sessions and feel a sense of pride in their role. Others, however, expressed feelings of nervousness and anxiety about delivering sessions and a small number expressed a disinterest or reluctance to participate in Bookbug activities. Many talked about improving session delivery with time and experience, and of gaining confidence in managing sessions in a way that is responsive to challenging group dynamics or behaviour.

Generally, parents expressed very positive reactions to Bookbug Sessions, both on their children's behalf, and in terms of their own experiences. A key theme in the parent interview data is babies' and children's enjoyment of Bookbug Sessions; virtually every parent reported that their child loved going to Bookbug. Parents indicated that their baby/child enjoyed participating in songs and rhymes, and also enjoyed interacting with other babies and children.

For first-time parents in particular, Bookbug Sessions were seen as a good opportunity to get out of the house and meet other parents; they valued the social interaction offered by Bookbug Sessions. Some parents even talked about having made good friends at Bookbug Sessions.

On the whole, Bookbug Session leaders were described as being friendly, welcoming, upbeat and enthusiastic. Parents valued those session leaders who were flexible and responsive to individual children, and those who were relaxed with the unpredictability of children's behaviour. The personal qualities of the Bookbug Session leader were seen as being key to the tone and feel of the sessions, and ultimately, this was connected to how positively Bookbug Sessions were regarded by parents.

Although there are multiple examples of innovative practice and many practitioners sign-posted to the Outreach Programme as a means to address this challenge, there are clear groups of parents who tend not to attend Bookbug Sessions:

- Those who found that session times were not suitable, either due to their own work commitments or because their child now attended playgroup or nursery.
- Those who found the behaviour of their child difficult to manage during Bookbug Sessions.
- Those who expressed a lack of confidence to attend a group session.
- Those who might be disinclined to attend libraries due to preconceptions / past experience.
- Low income and vulnerable families.
- Young parents.
- Children with additional support needs.
- Fathers.



6.5 Impact on parent and carers capacity, knowledge, skills and attitudes

Parents and carers identified several ways in which the Bookbug programme has contributed to the development of their own, and their children's, capacity, knowledge and skills.

In terms of Bookbug Bags, a key theme, particularly for first time parents, was that the Baby Bag introduced parents to the idea that babies have the capacity to enjoy books from birth. The books provided in the bag, and the suggestions offered on the calendar also provided parents with useful information about the types of books that are suitable for young babies, as well as introducing them to authors that they had not previously been familiar with.

Most obviously, parents reported that they and their children had learnt new songs at Bookbug Sessions that they continue to sing at home. Some felt that Bookbug Bags and Sessions increased their confidence in singing at home with their babies and children, and that observing their children's positive response to singing and rhyming encouraged them to do it more.

Learning new songs was seen as particularly beneficial for parents where English is an additional language; they felt that Bookbug Sessions in particular provided a means of integrating themselves, and their children, with the local community.

Bookbug Sessions can contribute to parents' capacity and skill development through modelling play activities which parents can then copy at home:

Things like Old Macdonald, getting out the toys and acting them as puppets, things that you'd think would be natural and normal were things that I hadn't really thought about and it was like oh, I'll do that at home. (Parent)

Bookbug Sessions were also regarded as a good context for babies and children to learn about the norms of social interaction: listening, taking turns, talking to adults, watching other children. Parents also viewed Bookbug Sessions as being very good for children's speech and language development.

In some cases, Bookbug Sessions held in libraries can help contribute to parent and children developing a positive attitude towards libraries in general. The library becomes a familiar and welcoming place that parents/carers and their children enjoy spending time in.

6.6 Impact on professional capacity, knowledge, skills and attitudes

Training is one of the key ways that professionals develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes to the Bookbug programme. Almost all of the professionals surveyed spoke about the training in a positive and enthusiastic way and overwhelmingly found the training useful, 72% described it as 'very useful' and 22% as 'fairly useful'. Key points were that training is of a very high quality; that the trainers are welcoming and supportive; that it provides a forum for sharing experiences; and that it helps to build confidence.

Professionals reported that the training had provided them with new knowledge, resources, skills, and heightened confidence in their role. While not all felt that they had gained new knowledge, the majority felt training had 'refreshed' their understanding about the programme and its benefits.



aware that singing and music were activities babies would enjoy or respond to, nor understanding its significance for child development and bonding. Those for whom English is an additional language reported that the CD (as well as the books) in the bag were useful for their own language development. Comments about the Explorer CD reflected an increase in children's agency, with parents reporting that children themselves would request the CD to be played, or using it alone for 'sing along'.

Similarly, for sessions, parents reported singing new songs & rhymes at home that they had learnt, playing music more often at home in response to seeing how much their babies/children enjoyed it at Bookbug, and putting into practice new play ideas that they had seen modelled by Bookbug Session leaders.

Although it is not possible to make a causal connection, parents themselves attributed greater vocabulary, a greater interest in books, better listening skills and improved abilities in forming relationships, to both bags and sessions. Parents, as a consequence, also reported listening to their children preferences, and greater recognition of their child's positive emotional response to books and stories. Parents reported forming new social networks as a direct result of attending sessions. They also described how they shared songs from the Bookbug Sessions with other family members at home – particularly fathers – who were not able to attend, thus making a connection between Bookbug Sessions and book sharing in the home.

6.8 Practice and behaviour change in professionals

Yes, the Bookbug messages are consistent with other messages that health visitors would be delivering anyway, on speech & language development, brain development, bonding, attachment. I feel that Bookbug is a really good tool for delivering those messages. (Health Visitor)

This evaluation reveals that Bookbug training and resources are highly valued, with Bookbug broadly complementing what practitioners are trying to achieve in their work overall. This reflects a recurrent theme in our overview of the literature; that book sharing programmes contribute within a wider framework of support for family literacy.

The majority of professionals saw the Bookbug programme and message as integrative with their role, and complementary to existing practices. The majority of professionals also felt that Bookbug has helped them better understand the role of book sharing in a child's development and learning (see table 4). Thus, professionals were not only aware of Bookbug's key messages, but saw the Bookbug approach as a tool or resource; supporting and enabling them in their role and providing a non-threatening 'way in' to engaging parents in books, songs and rhymes (see table 4 and 5). Although professionals agreed that investment was needed in work to engage with families who face barriers in accessing Bookbug, almost three-quarters agreed that the programme allows them to reach families that otherwise they would not. Sixty per cent agreed that it helps increase the numbers using core services (see table 5).

Just over half (52%) of the respondents in the survey stated that Bookbug programme resulted in them, or their organisation, working with external partners (such as third sector partners, volunteers, schools, nurseries). Even more – 73% as shown in table 5 - believed that the programme *encouraged* collaboration and joint working with other service providers.



Table 4: To what extent do you agree with the following statements about Bookbug’s impact overall on your professional practice?

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Understand role of book sharing in child development	61%	30%	9%	<1%
Establish positive relationships with parents/carers	63%	30%	6%	1%
Signpost families to other services	54%	33%	12%	1%
Have conversations with parents/carers about child’s development	59%	31%	9%	1%
Understand impact of home environment on children’s learning	55%	32%	11%	1%
Enabled me to link into the Bookbug community	57%	33%	8%	2%

Note: Due to rounding not all percentages add up to 100%

Table 5: To what extent do you agree with the following statements about Bookbug’s impact on your organisation

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Increase number of families using core services	60%	25%	11%	4%
Helps organisation reach disadvantaged children & their families	73%	17%	7%	4%
Provides a resource to engage with families on wider issues	76%	15%	5%	3%
Encourages collaboration and joint working with other service providers	73%	19%	4%	4%
Helps achieve our organisation’s outcomes	84%	12%	2%	3%

Note: Due to rounding not all percentages add up to 100%

Professionals also expressed confidence in the Bookbug brand and mascot. Overall, it was a programme that they felt extremely proud to be part of, and were keen to use all aspects of the programme in their practice wherever possible.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, the evaluation has found that the Bookbug programme is **high quality, understandable, transferable into different local settings**, and **highly respected** by those involved. **Families and professionals value the Bookbug programme** and regard it as **having positive impacts**.

The message and approach being delivered is clearly evidence based and is being delivered in a clear, concise way, complementary to national and local policy objectives. The brand and mascot work are praised for being well respected, recognised and valued.

Bookbug is making an important contribution to positive engagement with families facing barriers to accessing services, with the majority of professionals stating that that the Bookbug programme allowed them to reach families that they otherwise would not.



Main challenges include ensuring quality and consistency across the programme, widening the benefits and coping with sectoral complexities and pressures on resources. The greatest issue is not therefore a question of whether the Bookbug programme can support Scotland's families to read, talk, sing and cuddle more, but rather, that the context of diminishing resources impacts on delivery.

Our recommendations are summarised in the following headings:

7.1. Strategic commitment and collaboration

- **Advocacy work in local authorities and cultural trusts:** Scottish Book Trust should use its advocacy approach to highlight the critical role of the Bookbug co-ordinator, and the need for local authorities and cultural trusts to ensure adequate priority is given to the role. Evidence from the evaluation could be used to highlight the impact that cuts to the Bookbug programme might have on local authorities' ability to deliver national outcomes.
- **Space for sharing practice:** Scottish Book Trust should continue to support opportunities for shared practice, both regionally and locally. Front-line practitioners benefit from being supported to create opportunities to meet and discuss Bookbug with others working locally. Shared practice opportunities should be cross-sectoral and multi-organisational.

7.2. Consistency and quality

- **Awareness and use of gifting advice:** New ways of delivering gifting advice should be considered. This should emphasise both the importance of the timing of gifting and the quality of gifting practices.
- **Build on high quality training programme:**
 - a. Training for session leaders should emphasise:
 - i. a story should be shared at each session;
 - ii. reference to Bookbug Bags should be made in the sessions;
 - iii. Bookbug t-shirts should be worn when leading sessions;
 - iv. provision should be made to ensure 'latecomers' are welcomed, and that those attending first time are acknowledged and encouraged to come back; and
 - v. attendees should be encouraged to stay after the sessions to enjoy the library, and borrow books.
 - b. Training for gifters should emphasise:
 - i. the quality of the gifting experience; and
 - ii. the opportunities for parental engagement in the process of gifting Explorer bags. Good practice examples should be shared.
- **Training in early years professional education:** This is a challenge given the breadth of professional disciplines, and diversity of 'routes' into professional training (especially within the nursery sector). We recommend a mapping exercise to identify the professional routes into employment for each sector, and across Scotland. The results should be used to target training resources on priority areas.
- **Gifting to babies:** Continue research into the most appropriate and timing for gifting the Baby Bag, and explore opportunities and challenges of working with families prenatally via the new Baby Box initiative.



7.3. Widening benefits

- **Support nursery providers to integrate Bookbug into nursery setting:**
 - The Explorer Bag represents an important opportunity to reinforce the Bookbug message.
 - Scottish Book Trust should promote the benefits that Bookbug can offer to nursery practitioners (for example, as complementary to their existing practice and aims: as integrative to the inspection process by offering an opportunity to demonstrate parental engagement).
 - Given the challenges expressed by nurseries, it may be useful to provide specific support to nurseries about how to use the Bookbug programme to engage with parents in the form of a good practice guide including examples of innovative practice from across Scotland.
- **Tackle negative perceptions of libraries:** There is evidence that a small minority of families do not attend libraries due to negative (and often unfounded) perceptions of their local library space.
- **First visits count:** support local libraries to make every visit library positive and welcoming. Libraries may need support to consider how they ensure that they never leave people feeling vulnerable and/or excluded on this initial visit.
- **Practice inclusivity at sessions:** Whilst the majority of session leaders already do this, some parents are more likely to feel uncomfortable or unwelcome at sessions. This issue should be emphasised at training to ensure that Session Leaders are aware of who might feel vulnerable and provide additional support.

7.4. Making the link between gifting, sessions and home

- **Promote the Bookbug as a programme:** Scottish Book Trust advocacy and communication locally should promote Bookbug as a programme and as a potential 'community of interest'. While training should remain focused, it is important that all those trained recognise their part in the wider community, and their responsibility in promoting the programme (i.e. gifters should have information on sessions and encourage families to attend).
- **Improve local marketing:** Families can only attend Bookbug Sessions if they know about them:
 - Gifters should always have current information about the location of local classes.
 - Social media is an important source of information about Bookbug for parents. Scottish Book Trust should support Bookbug Co-ordinators to develop effective and up-to-date social media strategies.
 - Encourage local areas to include more young parents and fathers in their marketing materials, and ensure this is reflected in Scottish Book Trust materials.
 - Encourage Bookbug Co-ordinators to advertise Bookbug Sessions beyond standard locations. This could include play park display boards, shopping centres and dentist surgeries.
- **Information resource for specialist workers:** It may be useful to produce an Information resource for those currently 'outside' the mainstream Bookbug community (e.g. in the third sector) with ideas about how they could engage with the Bookbug programme. This could include examples of innovative practice by, for example, foster parents, prison workers, speech and language therapists, those working with fathers, gypsy traveller communities, those working with migrant families.



7.5. Information and monitoring

- **Improving communication flow:** Scottish Book Trust should support local areas to ensure clarity about what contact and support practitioners can expect to have from the co-ordinator. Data from the mapping exercise can be used to support this process. Other simple ideas include having a sticker on each box of Bookbug Bags with the name and contact details of the Bookbug Co-ordinator.
- **Local mapping of Bookbug:** Scottish Book Trust should consider ways of further supporting local authorities to map the Bookbug Programme locally. Such a mapping exercise would support Scottish Book Trust in identifying priority areas within the context of limited resources. An initial mapping exercise could include:
 - a review of Bookbug Programme – who, what, where, how;
 - a review of logistics and current gifting practices;
 - demographics of those attending Bookbug Sessions (age, gender, additional support needs, English as an additional language, postcode and distance travelled);
 - location and timing of other similar early years activities; and
 - Bookbug’s strategic contribution in local areas.
- **Evidence non-attendance:** Scottish Book Trust should provide advice to local co-ordinators on how to consult with families not currently attending Bookbug Sessions, to understand better why some families do not attend, and identify any potential barriers.

7.6. Resources and capacity

- **Advocacy work in local authorities and cultural trusts:** The mapping exercise outlined above should be used to target advocacy at chief executives, chairs and boards of trusts and elected members within local authorities, emphasising the clear and positive evidence from this research.
- **Additional funding opportunities:** Many of the recommendations have the potential to put extra pressure on practitioners who are already struggling with a lack of capacity. We recommend that Scottish Book Trust support local authorities to look for alternative funding sources to support their Bookbug activities.
- **Develop a culture of shared practice:** We encourage Scottish Book Trust to give consideration to whether shared practice activities (national, regional and local) are as effective as possible. Co-ordinators have ongoing training needs and it may be useful to think about whether shared practice meetings could be more focused to include topics identified by this evaluation and by Scottish Book Trust and Bookbug Co-ordinators on an ongoing basis.
- **Disseminate evidence locally:** We recommend that Scottish Book Trust carefully considers to how best to disseminate these research findings to decision makers, Bookbug Co-ordinators, local practitioners and parents. In particular, when presenting this evaluation to strategic decision-makers, it should be made clear that there is a strong evidence base for the success of the programme. We see a possibility to position Bookbug as an established, flexible and transferable model that offers demonstrable benefits in the current difficult financial context.

Areas for further research may include: use of volunteer Session Leaders to deliver Bookbug; use of community spaces other than libraries to deliver sessions; and transmission of the Bookbug message pre-birth.



8. Moving forward

Overall, the conclusion of the evaluation is that Bookbug benefits professionals, parents & carers and children. There is also evidence of a cumulative impact upon local communities, as well as contributions being made to the relationships between professionals and families, and between professionals working in different sectors.

The message and approach being delivered is clearly evidenced based and is being delivered in a clear, concise way, complementary to national and local policy objectives. For most, Bookbug is viewed a vital tool which provides a robust model for delivering knowledge, information and support to parents, carers and children. One of the key reported benefits of the programme is that it provides a clear structure for delivery which is – to use a word used by several respondents – ‘a leveler’. At the same time, the model has the necessary flexibility to allow it to be adapted to local needs and circumstances.

The brand and mascot work, being well respected, recognised and valued. Similarly, the training is universally praised for being of a very high quality and impactful on professional practice and behaviour.

Positive impacts are identified for parents and carers both at home and in public settings, although it is clear that more work is required to ensure universal access translates into universal benefits. In some areas, the mode of distribution can result in gifting not happening, and there would be benefits in reviewing the means through which participation in training is recorded and monitoring to address gaps. Email communication, both via SBT and local co-ordinators, is in many cases not being cascaded effectively.

The greatest issue is therefore not a question of whether the Bookbug programme is capable of supporting Scotland’s families to read, talk, sing and cuddle more, but rather the impact that diminishing resources will have on councils’ ability to deliver at a local level. To some extent the social consequences of recession and welfare cuts are outwith Scottish Book Trust’s field of influence. However, as a national organisation, delivering a programme in all parts of Scotland, opportunities for influencing political and social processes should be explored.