

Assertive Outreach Programme

Bookbug for the Home Evaluation

Executive Summary

Perhaps unexpectedly, Scottish Book Trust with its Bookbug for the Home programme has taken on an unusual and courageous societal role. They are providing conceptual leadership, helping Scotland to reframe our cultural understanding of reading. The Bookbug for the Home programme is asking us to conceive of reading in its earliest stages not as an academic capacity, but as an emotional one. – Dr Suzanne Zeedyk

The key finding from this evaluation is that the use of Bookbug for the Home with families goes far beyond literacy. Bookbug has a positive impact on improved parent/child or family interaction, language development and positive behavioural change:

Of the professionals introducing Bookbug for the Home with families, 98% said they had seen positive impacts for the families involved.

It is estimated that the 414 people trained in Bookbug for the Home have worked with 548 vulnerable families.

Bookbug for the Home increased the number of people reading daily with their children from 41% to 78%, and in the case of singing or rhyming daily with their children from 53% to 78%.

69% of professionals who had introduced Bookbug for the Home said that families were more likely to engage with their children as a result.

Feedback from families that have been involved has concluded that:

- their twins ‘know how to do a proper cuddle now’ and they ‘tell their parents and brother that they love them’;
- they [the parent] ‘definitely find the interaction easier’ with their small children;
- their child ‘sits and asks for a book. Then it’s like she’s reading to me, trying to recognise the words. It’s made the bond a bit stronger.’

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Scottish Book Trust (SBT) is Scotland's leading agency for the promotion of reading, writing and literature working with writers, children, teachers, librarians and readers from all backgrounds to spread a love of books and reading.
- 1.2 Bookbug is SBT's Early Years programme, encouraging parents and children to read together from birth. The Bookbug programme provides free packs of books and resources to every baby, toddler, three and five year old in Scotland, while Bookbug Sessions are run by libraries and other community settings across Scotland. These sessions provide free opportunities encouraging parents and carers to talk, share books, sing, play and cuddle their babies and children. The aim is that these activities lead to improvements in confidence, social skills, speech and language development and parent and child attachment.
- 1.3 Assertive Outreach (AO) is a Scottish Government funded programme which began in 2012, which trains early years professionals in the principles of Bookbug Sessions in eight local authorities each year, aiming to reach all 32 local authorities over four years.
- 1.4 The objective of Assertive Outreach is to introduce the principles of Bookbug Sessions – talking, singing, cuddling and book sharing with young children – into the homes of the most vulnerable families in Scotland to help them to lead happier, healthier and safer lives. Newly trained early years professionals, who might be family support officers, health visitors, social workers or third sector workers, introduce Bookbug activities to encourage quality interaction between parents and their children in the homes which they visit. It is also hoped that these activities will encourage vulnerable families to attend public Bookbug Sessions or other local early years provision. In the first year 414 early years professionals or volunteers received Bookbug for the Home training.
- 1.5 SBT's Bookbug Programme fits with national initiatives and approaches in Scotland focusing on children's development generally, and more specifically on early years. These include the work of the Early Years Collaborative aiming to accelerate the high level principles set out in GIRFEC (Getting it Right for Every Child) and the Early Years Framework into practical action; namely to deliver tangible improvement in outcomes and reduce inequalities for Scotland's vulnerable children, and to shift the balance of public services towards early intervention and prevention.

2 Evaluation

- 2.1 SBT commissioned Blake Stevenson and Dr Suzanne Zeedyk in autumn 2012 to undertake a year-long evaluation, covering the first year of the Assertive Outreach programme. This involved surveys immediately following Bookbug for the Home leader training, and then follow up surveys 3 months and 6 months later to explore the extent to which the training was being used, and the impacts it was having. In

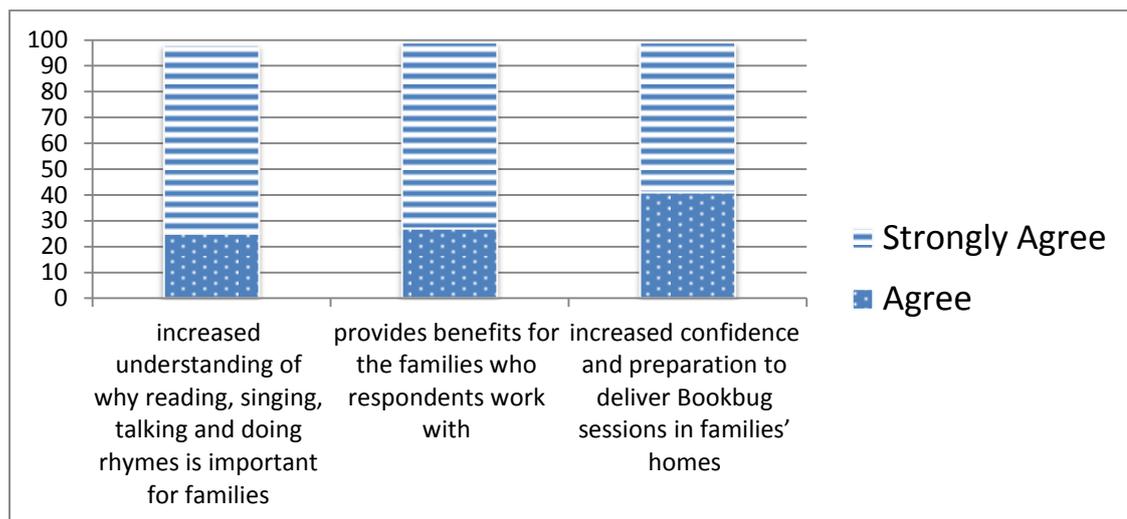
addition, families and Bookbug for the Home leaders also completed diaries of the singing, rhyming and reading activities taking place in the families, before and during the intervention. Case studies were undertaken with three families taking part in Bookbug for the Home sessions and two organisations where staff had received Bookbug for the Home training.

3 Results

Profile of trainees and satisfaction with training

- 3.1 Those receiving Bookbug for the Home training represented diverse roles including Home School Partnership Worker, Family Support Worker, Social Worker, Nursery Worker, Health Visiting Staff Nurse and volunteers amongst others. The main groups of survey respondents were from local authority (37%), third sector (28%) and NHS (26%).
- 3.2 Bookbug for the Home training provided a very high level of satisfaction. The vast majority (95%) of 249 respondents were very satisfied with the training. The remaining 5% were satisfied.
- 3.3 Trainees perceived the training content to be relevant to their roles. 247 respondents (99%) agreed or strongly agreed with this and 99% also felt that attending the training was a good use of their time. Figure 1 shows the benefits trainees perceived in attending training.

Figure 1 The benefits of attending Bookbug for the Home training



Impact on staff practice

- 3.4 98% (239) of respondents surveyed immediately after training said that they planned to apply what they learned in their work. Six months after training in a follow-up survey of 84 trainees, 49% had delivered Bookbug sessions and 51% had not.
- 3.5 Those who have used Bookbug for the Home training in practice, have done so with an average of 2.7 families. Assuming that 49% of people who have been trained in Bookbug for the Home have subsequently used this training with families, and that they have done this with an average of 2.7 families, it is estimated that the 414 people trained in Bookbug for the Home have worked with 548 families.
- 3.6 77% of those who stated that they have not yet used Bookbug for the Home training with families, say that they still intend to do so. Based on the total number of people trained (414), it is estimated that 211 have not yet applied their training. If they were to do so, and to work with the average number of families (2.7), there is the potential for a further 570 families to receive Bookbug Session input as a result of the first year of Bookbug for the Home training.
- 3.7 The most common reason for people not yet having introduced Bookbug for the Home activities was the low level of direct contact which they had with families or the difficulty in finding protected time to deliver Bookbug Sessions. There was some limited demand for follow up training, practice sharing and other forms of support including mentoring in order to support staff to use the training received.
- 3.8 Bookbug for the Home leaders, who have used their training, most commonly use it with families where there was some difficulty for parents engaging with their children. Issues relating to children's speech development and social skills were also identified, along with parents who lacked in confidence, and families who were reluctant to engage with structures and groups.

"A couple of families didn't want to attend Bookbug Sessions or go to the library. I decided to do the home sessions and after one session they could see how much the child enjoyed the sessions. This encouraged the families to read more to their children and have a story at bedtime."

- 3.9 71% of those who had introduced Bookbug for the Home activities said that the Bookbug training had impacted on their professional practice, changing things about the way they did their job. 63% said that they now introduced songs and rhymes to families where they previously would not have done so, and 63% that their confidence in doing so had increased. 50% said that they now introduced books to families where they previously would not have done so, and 53% that their confidence in doing so had increased.

"I feel that once you do a few Bookbug Sessions your confidence grows and you find new ways of delivering the sessions and involving the parents."

Case Studies with organisations

3.10 Case studies in two organisations found many benefits of Bookbug for the Home being described by both staff and parents:

- it offers staff a set of tools and resources to be adapted to organisational and individual family circumstances rather than a prescriptive rigid package;
- it offers staff an opportunity to observe family interaction and to work more closely with them;
- parents become more able to play and interact with their children, through being given new ideas of more engaging play and book sharing;
- parents feel more equipped to play with children and to use Bookbug activities in other settings e.g. to defuse potentially stressful situations;
- children learn from Bookbug Sessions about turn taking, paying attention, creativity, language development and imaginative play amongst other things, and this aids their transition to nursery; and
- important activities are accessible to families who would not access a public Bookbug Session i.e. either in the home or in groups run by organisations.

Staff comments from case studies regarding the impact of Bookbug training and Bookbug for the Home sessions

"A huge benefit for when they [children] go to school"

"It's been hugely helpful to see the kids in their home environment and helped staff to respond to their needs in nursery."

"[Bookbug for the Home is] a good initiative and supports staff to work with families in their homes"

"A practical form of support which is adaptable to suit all service users."

4 Impact on families

- 4.1 Of the Bookbug for the Home leaders who had introduced Bookbug activities in the home, 98% said that they had seen positive impacts on the families involved and some of the ways in which this had been observed are shown in Table 1.
- 4.2 Whilst a large percentage of families were already reading with their children before Bookbug, they were more likely to do this after the Bookbug for the Home sessions with the number reading daily with their children increasing from 41% to 78%. Similarly many parents (53%) were singing or rhyming daily with their children before Bookbug, but this increases to 78% after the Bookbug for the Home sessions.

"I now make an effort to sing with the children and read to them. [Bookbug leader] helped me gain confidence in singing with the children, as well as helped me to remember the words of songs."

Table 1. Bookbug for the Home leaders' views on how Bookbug has impacted on families

	%
I have seen children being happy and engaged during Bookbug activities	93
I have seen parents interacting positively with children during Bookbug activities	90
Parents have reported using books outside of the times I have visited	71
Parents have reported using songs and rhymes outside of the times I have visited	61
Parents have reported having positive interaction with their children doing Bookbug activities outside of the times I have visited	42
Parents have reported that Bookbug activities have had a positive impact on their children's behaviour	29

- 4.3 Evidence from diaries completed by Bookbug leaders shows that they believe there can be sustained changes to the way that adults read, sing and talk with their children as a result of the Bookbug for the Home sessions they have led. 69% believe that there have been some positive changes to parental attitudes which will lead to more of these forms of interaction (Table 2).

Table 2. Early years professionals' perception on the attitudes of and frequency of adults towards reading, singing, talking and/or engaging with their children as a result of Bookbug for the Home sessions

Changes in attitude towards and frequency in engaging with children	%
n/a	12
Less likely	0
No change	19
Slightly more likely to	31
Much more likely to	38

- 4.4 Bookbug for the Home input led to some increased uptake of public Bookbug Sessions and other services. Of 42 respondents who had introduced Bookbug for the Home, eight (19%) had taken a total of 26 families they worked with to a public Bookbug Session. Those who had not taken families to public Bookbug Sessions had not done so because of families' resistance about attending a group session, practical reasons (transport, session availability), the family's current circumstances being a barrier, or because they had encouraged families to attend Bookbug Sessions on their own.
- 4.5 Of the 42 respondents who had introduced Bookbug for the Home, 17 (41%) said that a total of 46 families they worked with had reported attending a public Bookbug Session on their own. Nine respondents (21%) said that families they worked with had reported involvement with services they had previously not engaged with, as a result of Bookbug activities. These included library services, parent and toddler groups, baby massage, nursery-related groups and services and adult learning classes.

"The family felt more confident to attend and less worried about what others would think."

Case Studies with families and family diaries

- 4.6 Case studies were undertaken with three families, where Bookbug for the Home had been introduced because of issues relating to family interaction and/or children's language and behavioural development. The case study interviews provided evidence from both parents and professionals of;
- parents having renewed appreciation of spending time with their children;

- children gaining in confidence and self-expression;
- children improving language and communication skills;
- children improving behaviour;
- children being better prepared to fit in with some of the routines of nursery activities; and
- Bookbug activities providing the foundation for additional themed activities including arts.

Parents comments from case studies on the impact of Bookbug for the Home

For one family, having more adult interactions as a result of Bookbug for the Home, meant the children (twins) started to interact with each other and their family in a more positive way. Comments from the parents included:

“They [twins] know they have to take turns. Before they would have screamed!”

“It teaches rules and structures without them realising”

“We could never have done a family thing like go to the cinema before”. [parent noting that family outings are now an option]

For another family, Bookbug for the Home Sessions have helped the parents and child to form a closer attachment.

“She [child] sits and asks for a book. Then it’s like she’s reading to me, trying to recognise the words. It’s made the bond a bit stronger.”

“They didn’t do that before Bookbug.” [parent referring to children doing role play and imaginative play]

- 4.7 Bookbug Sessions play a role in stimulating activities that link to learning core concepts and to routine as evidenced by quotes from parents’ diaries, which document activities they did with their children during the period of receiving Bookbug Sessions. The science that underpins Bookbug principles, stresses that emotional development is healthiest when the child has extensive experience of sharing interests with another person, whether that relates to events, letters, numbers, or songs. The positive effects of Bookbug Sessions on the ways in which children interact and the positive ways they can relate to people can also be seen as enhancing school readiness, even if this element has not been directly measured in the study.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

- 5.1 Year 1 of the Assertive Outreach programme has successfully pioneered the way for the subsequent three years. It has developed effective training and flexible resources, and motivated and supported diverse early years professionals from public, health and third sectors to introduce singing, rhyming and book sharing activities with the families they work with, both in home and group settings. Where introduced, Bookbug Sessions can change the way in which families interact, as well as encourage access to local Bookbug Sessions and other activities. Challenges remain in introducing the concept to families where there may be other priorities or initial parental resistance, however the programme has shown itself to be a flexible user-friendly resource for workers, adaptable to many different family situations, with families quickly seeing benefits from it. Positive feedback from families about Bookbug's benefits endorses the view that it can impact beyond literacy, into children's wider development, social interaction, relationships and language.
- 5.2 A key element for the future is for SBT to increase understanding of the potential of Bookbug Sessions, and the underlying science. This will help to ensure that the Bookbug for the Home Programme can play a fuller role within the wider early years framework it aims to contribute to as Suzanne Zeedyk, Developmental Psychologist concludes, *'This report points to an exciting expansion of Scottish Book Trust's aims. Perhaps the most significant insight to emerge from the findings is the realisation that Bookbug in the Home staff are instinctively using the programme not simply to teach reading, but to build relationships. All the emerging brain science tells us that this focus on relationships is on target, because services for families cannot be truly effective if they are not based in relationships. Why is that? Because human brains feel safest when they can share rhythms with other human brains. That is what sciences such as Communicative Musicality teach us. Thus, when Bookbug for the Home leaders recite rhymes together with parents and children, they are boosting more than reading capacities — they are boosting the physiological capacity of the family to bond. The Bookbug for the Home programme is therefore encouraged to include much more brain science in the material it delivers to staff, so that staff can increase their confidence and curiosity about the activities of the programme. Perhaps unexpectedly, Scottish Book Trust with its Bookbug for the Home programme has taken on an unusual and courageous societal role. They are providing conceptual leadership, helping Scotland to reframe our cultural understanding of reading. The Bookbug for the Home programme is asking us to conceive of reading in its earliest stages not as an academic capacity, but as an emotional one.'*