



## Case Study

### The Granger Family

*"They were interacting straight away" (Social Worker)*

*NB: Names have been changed to protect the families' anonymity.*

#### The Granger family

Elaine and Kevin Granger live in the Scottish Borders and are respite foster carers for children from East Lothian with severe and complex needs such as severe autism. The couple provides respite care for several children at any one time and all of the children they care for stay at their house for at least one night every week, with others staying for two or three nights a week, or for longer times during school holidays.

Elaine has completed Bookbug training and uses Bookbug activities every day. The case study was completed by interviewing Elaine and a Social Worker from East Lothian Council.

#### How did the Grangers get involved in Bookbug?

The Grangers got involved with Bookbug when Elaine heard about the training through East Lothian Council. She was keen to take part because she already used books in her work with children. She took part in Bookbug training in April 2014.

#### What did this family hope to achieve with Bookbug?

Elaine uses Bookbug to help build relationships with the children she cares for and to help with the children's language, communication and behaviour.

#### How was Bookbug delivered?

Elaine has integrated Bookbug activities into her work with children every day. She has a bag of Bookbug resources and she emphasises to the children that the bag belongs to her and they are not allowed to go into it without her, therefore

creating some boundaries and structure to the use of the resources. She encourages the children to come and ask her when they want to play with something from the bag. Elaine has made laminated sheets with photos of each of the toys so that non-verbal children can point to the toy they want to play with.

Elaine also uses Bookbug resources including books, finger puppets, the Bookbug doll and Lycra regularly. For example, she uses Bookbug activities to help calm the children as part of 'quiet time' before they go to sleep and also in the morning to make sure that the children do not get anxious or bored while waiting for their transport to school.

In addition, Elaine normally meets children for the first time at the child's home before the child starts going to Elaine's house. She uses Bookbug activities at these meetings as an ice breaker to build rapport with the child.





## What worked well about Bookbug sessions with the Grangers?

Elaine said that tactile Bookbug resources such as Lycra, finger puppets and books have been particularly successful at engaging children with communication difficulties because they engage the child's sense of touch and do not rely wholly on verbal or listening skills. Elaine finds Lycra particularly effective and she has used it in various activities, such as bouncing puppets on the Lycra while singing a nursery rhyme.

Another positive element of Bookbug activities that help to engage children is their use of songs, stories and characters that children are familiar with.

## How did the family benefit?

Bookbug has had several benefits for the Grangers in their role as foster carers.

### *Voluntary engagement*

Elaine emphasises to the children that the bag containing the Bookbug resources belongs to her and that they cannot open it without asking her first, but she encourages them to come to her if they want to play with something from the bag. This offers a way for children to show that they want to play or read with Elaine, particularly for those who are non-verbal and cannot explain verbally what they want: *"they know they can't access it on their own, so they don't just pick out the toy - they have to ask and this shows they want engagement"*. She described this *"voluntary engagement"* as *"amazing"* for children with autism.

### *Help with routines*

Elaine said that switching the television off and reading books with children helps to calm them down before going to bed.

### *Improved behaviour*

Bookbug activities have helped to improve children's behaviour. For instance, Elaine cares for two brothers aged eight and ten, both of whom have autism. The two boys used to behave badly in the morning while waiting for the taxi to take them to school. Elaine said this time of the day used to be *"traumatic"* but Bookbug and Lycra have been *"a lifesaver"*. She uses Bookbug activities to keep the boys occupied while waiting for the taxi.

A Social Worker who works with Elaine noted that because the children understand that the Bookbug bag is Elaine's, there are no tantrums when it is taken away. The Social Worker also commented that Bookbug is *"good for turn taking"* by giving children turns to choose toys from Elaine's Bookbug bag.

### *Building relationships*

Bookbug activities have helped Elaine to build rapport with children when she first meets them at the beginning of a placement. For example, Elaine used Bookbug activities the first time she met a six year old boy with *"high functioning autism"*. Elaine had been warned by the boy's teacher and Social Worker that he can be difficult and aggressive and does not normally react well to meeting new people. Elaine used puppets and her Bookbug bag to engage the boy and the boy's mum and Social Worker were pleasantly surprised to see his positive reaction to Elaine and the activities. The Social Worker said the activities *"helped to build the relationship really quickly - they were interacting straight away on the first visit and now he looks forward to Elaine coming"*. The boy's mum told Elaine that she had never seen her son react so positively to any new person.



## What impact did Bookbug have on the foster carers?

Elaine has always used stories and books with children she cares for but the Bookbug training gave her resources and ideas to use. Elaine said that previously she might have read a book suggested by the parent but now she has a stock of Bookbug resources that she can draw on. Elaine liked the Bookbug training because it *“gives you a format to follow but if you deviate off, it’s not a crisis”*.

A Social Worker who works with the family said that *“Elaine is really really good at Bookbug”* and as a result has asked Elaine for ideas for running her own Bookbug sessions. The Social Worker said that it *“has been great”* for her to see Elaine use Bookbug activities.



## Case study reflections

A key element of the success of the Bookbug model in this case study is the Bookbug resource bag and how it is used. The resources are not made openly available to the children – instead the children are encouraged to ask if they want to play with them. This creates a structure and gives the children experience of boundaries and of asking to play, which is shown in this case study as being valuable, particularly for children with autism.

It is important for foster carers to build a positive relationship with the children they will be caring for. The case study provides an example of how Bookbug resources and activities can be used as ice breakers at an initial session, and how

Bookbug can then provide continuity in other settings e.g. when the child subsequently stays with the foster carer.

The case study is also an example of how people who have experience of, and would already use stories and books in their work with children, can still be inspired and better equipped as a result of Bookbug for the Home training, leading to new ideas and more varied activities.