



APPENDIX 4 – BOOKBUG FOR THE HOME CASE STUDIES

Case Study

The Murray Family

“It’s drawn us together as a wee family unit... it makes me and his mum work well together.” (Rob Murray, parent)

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

The Murray family

Carrie and Rob Murray live in a town in Angus. Carrie is a full-time mum who spends time at home with their son Kyle (18 months). Rob is currently serving a custodial sentence in Perth Prison. The case study was completed by interviewing Carrie and Rob independently and the Project Worker who had incorporated Bookbug activities and resources within ‘attachment sessions’ at the prison. These had taken place over a 4 month period in addition to her wider support role with the family e.g. providing transport to enable prison visits to take place and supporting the family while Rob is in prison.

How did the Murrays get involved in Bookbug?

The Murrays’ involvement in Bookbug was through the Barnardos Thrive project which is funded to work with families with a pre-school aged child where there is a family member in prison. The project works to promote the bond between children and their imprisoned parents, and ultimately to improve the outcomes and life chances for children.

Rob Murray was serving a custodial sentence at Perth Prison and made contact with the Thrive Project in order to access attachment sessions with his son Kyle. These offered him the chance for greater interaction with Kyle than would be allowed through a normal prison visit e.g. where he would have to remain on his seat and with restricted physical contact. The attachment session (one hour a week) enabled him to play with Kyle in a more intimate way. This session was part facilitated by a Barnardos Thrive Project Worker who introduced Bookbug activities such

as singing, rhyming and book sharing as some simple structure within the attachment session.

Carrie Murray had previous experience of a Bookbug library session – she had found this positive for her son who was aged 12 months at the time, but the timing of this then clashed with her opportunity for prison visits. She was keen to continue with activities like this and to find ways for Rob to be involved. The concern for both parents was to minimise any negative impact on the father-son bond which might be caused by Rob’s custodial sentence. In Rob’s words, *“That’s my worry. That I’m losing a bond with him.”*

At the same time as the attachment sessions, Carrie was also accessing Bookbug sessions through an Early Years Practitioner who visited her house, and by attending Bookbug Sessions organised by Just Play, a local organisation supporting families affected by offending behaviour, criminality or police involvement where there is a child aged 0-3.



What did Bookbug set out to achieve with this family?

The Bookbug sessions aimed to:

- provide an opportunity for positive interaction and strengthen the bond between father and son; and
- provide a positive activity for the family members to do together in the limited time they were able to spend together;

These aims were identified by both parents and then supported by the project.

How was Bookbug delivered?

Bookbug activities within the one hour attachment session tended to be towards the end of the session as a more settled, focused activity which then ended in a wind-down. The Project Worker saw her role as facilitating some of the play which the family could do together and demonstrating activities which they could then do on their own. In addition Carrie had learned how to use Bookbug activities and resources through sessions she had attended with Kyle. She would also introduce or describe some of these to Rob so that he had the opportunity to play with Kyle in the same way during the attachment sessions, doing activities which they knew Kyle was familiar with and would enjoy.

One of the key things noted by the Project Worker about the particular circumstances of this situation was to get the pace and content of the session right. Given the particular time pressure of a single hour of father-son contact a week, there could be a temptation to pack a lot of content in, however the worker's view was that this "could be overwhelming," and so getting a balance of structure and free time within the attachment session was important.



What worked well about Bookbug sessions with the Murrays?

Rob described how the sessions had "*opened his eyes*" to ways of playing with his son. He noted that previously he would have considered Halloween and Christmas as times to play, but he is "*starting to understand that it needs to be a constant thing*" in the life of his son, and how much Kyle would benefit from that, even at this early stage in life; "*Getting down to his level can only be positive*".

Kyle responded well to songs and rhymes and the sessions provided a way to establish some definite activities which Kyle enjoyed which his dad, even in the limited contact time they had. Rob clearly knew what his son liked; "*He has his favourites – twinkle twinkle definitely,*" and "*Giddy up with the horses – he was in stitches*".

The familiarity of songs also proved helpful in situations outside the Bookbug sessions. Carrie described how Kyle had been screaming but even over the phone had settled "*as soon as Rob starts singing*". Rob said, "*He just stops and listens. Brilliant.*"

Rob commented on the difference between the type of prison visits he had previously experienced and the ones he was now involved in, and could see the contrasting experience for fellow inmates. "*You can see the difference – the guys who are coming back from a [normal] visit and the ones coming back from a Barnardos visit. It's the bond. The peace. The chance to be a Dad for an hour.*"

How did the family benefit?

There were various benefits experienced for the family members involved.



Parents' understanding of their son's development

Both parents noted that prior to the sessions they had underestimated what Kyle could understand. Carrie said, *"I did have books but I thought he was too young,"* while Rob noted *"I tended to 'babify' him. Through Bookbug I've learned. He soaks it up."*

Carrie also commented on how she could see Kyle learning; *"after a couple of weeks of doing clappy handies he was doing it. With the songs I can see him respond. It's the repetition thing."*

Rob took the same view; *"It's made me see that he's capable. Now he's interacting back with me, the eye contact."*

Confidence and knowledge as a parent

Rob noted that the activities had also built his confidence. He had regarded himself as good at singing with his son before, but he said he now had more confidence in understanding about how he could interact more thoroughly with Kyle, and about how his input as a father *"is going to affect him in years to come."*

Rob also sees more clearly the role he has in Kyle's future development. *"It's up to me. It's my responsibility to make books fun for him."*

Carrie also noted that her understanding as a parent had changed as she had found new ways of communicating with Kyle in a manner which he understood; *"We were trying to talk to him... that was our only way of interacting with him."*

The Project Worker noted that because Carrie is seeing the benefits of play and rhyming that she is *"not scared to try anything."*

Father and son bond

Carrie described how the sessions have created a common language despite the family being

separated for the majority of the week. *"As soon as we get to prison Rob is singing the same songs. Rob is part of his [Kyle's] world."*

Rob can see the way in which this form of play builds a stronger connection with Kyle. *"Before I'd have been jumping about and rolling about, but this is more activity. It builds a bond with him, and with his mum as well. We work as a team. It's perfect."* He described the activities as *"things I definitely wouldn't have done – maybe I would have tried to read him a book. It brings me right on to his level."* The sessions end with a quiet time for Rob and Kyle; *"I go a wee walk with him and sing him a song"*.

Structure of the day

Carrie described how she did some Bookbug activities most days at home. *"After I've done everything [chores] I'll do some Bookbug stuff. We'll sit and read a story at night. It's become a big part of his life."*

Child development

In Carrie's view, even at Kyle's young age Bookbug activities are really important. *"I believe it's teaching him. He's taken all of these things in. Without it he wouldn't be so advanced. I believe he'll be quite brainy when he goes to school"*.

The Project Worker noted that Kyle was now using cues and making connections and that he was able to focus and pay attention during activities.

Family relationships

Rob felt that the sessions have had a very positive effect on the family as a whole. *"It's drawn us together as a wee family unit. We've concentrated on him. It makes me and his mum work well together."* He went on to say *"It's all good. I enjoy it, he enjoys it – as a family we enjoy it – perfect."*



Carrie described how she had now involved other family members in taking part in Bookbug activities in the home, encouraging them to play with Kyle in the same way rather than stand around in the kitchen and chat and leave him to play on his own.

Changes in use of local services

Rob is looking forward to getting involved in group Bookbug Sessions in his local town on his release. There are plans for him to attend a Bookbug Session with Kyle organised through Just Play. Rob sees this as being really important to continue the opportunity to play constructively with Kyle but feels the sessions also have a part to play in his rehabilitation on release from prison.

“My worry wasn’t about looking after him – it was about filling the time – giving me positive things to do and giving me positive things to do with him. Two good things.”

What impact did Bookbug have on the staff member and their organisation?

Prior to this job role, the Project Worker noted that her experience was in work with older children and young people. Being newly involved with early years children, she has found it helpful to learn to use activities and resources such as Bookbug to support parent–child interaction. This has provided her with an approach which she can use with other families.

Case study reflections

This case study is an excellent example of the strength of Bookbug activities in creating familiarity for a child in very different settings (from home to prison visiting). It also shows how Bookbug activities can provide the means by

which a bond between father and son can be safeguarded and built on, even during a period where they can spend little time together.

The Bookbug practitioner incorporated Bookbug activities within wider support she provided for the family. She was able to facilitate some of the play which the family was involved in together and demonstrate activities they could do on their own. It was important for the practitioner to judge what the most appropriate activities were in the limited time available, showing the flexibility of the various Bookbug activity options to suit different situations.

The Bookbug activities provided a common language for this small family unit which enabled them to ‘work together’ in their moments together. The activities had also been informative for both parents who had learned more about the development of their son through their play with him, seeing him in a new light in terms of what he was able to do and the concepts he was able to understand.

This case study provides a clear example of Bookbug activities providing a family with a stronger foundation at a potentially difficult time. It has given the family positive ways of interacting in their current situation, as well as motivating them to think positively about community–based Bookbug (and other) activities when their circumstances change.