

## Executive Summary

The Year 2 Evaluation found convincing evidence to show that the Assertive Outreach Programme – Bookbug for the Home – inspires and equips early years professionals in Scotland to support parents in vulnerable families to interact more with their children and to develop a relationship with books. Professionals and parents alike described positive changes in children’s development and family interaction as a result of Bookbug activities, and the programme clearly complements the efforts being made in early years work locally and nationally to improve the life outcomes of children.

The Assertive Outreach Programme is Scottish Book Trust’s Scottish Government funded initiative which trains early years professionals 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. The aim is to support them in encouraging quality interaction between parents and their children.

The Assertive Outreach Programme is being launched in eight new local authorities each year and by the end of Year 2 it was being delivered in 16 local authority areas. The aim is to reach all 32 local authorities in Scotland over four years. The programme has a strong fit with education, social care and health related strategies for families and children in Scotland such as GIRFEC, Early Years Framework, Curriculum for Excellence and the National Parenting Strategy, and has strong links to the growing emphasis on early intervention.

Blake Stevenson was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the Assertive Outreach Programme for the end of Year 2. During its second year, programme delivery took place in Angus, East Lothian, Edinburgh, Highland, Midlothian, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire and mirrored the Year 1 delivery with some minor adjustments to training session structure.

The Year 2 evaluation looked further at the impact of the Assertive Outreach Programme, notably:

- its impact on the practice of early years professionals in their work with families;
- its impact on families, in terms of parents being encouraged to sing, read, talk and play with their children, and any resulting effects of this;
- its impact in terms of families’ wider use of services available to them, including local authority services.

The evaluation was conducted through an online survey to all trainees from Year 1 and Year 2 (225 returns) and telephone interviews (41), gathering feedback from those who had used their training with families and those who had not. We also undertook seven case studies, interviewing the parents involved and the early years professionals who had introduced Bookbug activities to them.

The evaluation found clear evidence that Bookbug for the Home training can inspire and equip early years workers from diverse roles to work in new ways with the families they support with some impressive results:

64% of early years professionals trained in Bookbug for the Home had used their training with families, each doing so with an average of 7.1 families.

81% of those who have delivered Bookbug activities in the home reported that Bookbug training has had an impact on their professional practice.

70% said that they would not have introduced these activities previously. All of these figures show an increase from the figures in Year 1.

It was typical for early years professionals to describe the Bookbug for the Home training as having given them the confidence, motivation and resources to enable them to work with families differently by introducing singing, rhyming and book sharing. They particularly highlighted the value of being able to introduce Bookbug to families where children have behavioural or developmental issues, where parents need support to recognise the value of play and interaction, and where families are reluctant to engage with services.

The evaluation found evidence that Bookbug activities supported early years staff in their wider professional role by supporting relationship building between workers and families and by providing a way in which family interaction was demonstrated. Bookbug was also seen as a good fit with their organisation's priorities and with the wider early years' context. We found evidence that Bookbug is a known 'brand' where professionals understand the work and the potential impact of what is being done with a family if they hear that Bookbug is being introduced.

Those who had not introduced Bookbug for the Home into their work with families had not done so primarily because of a lack of direct contact with families or a lack of time. However 81% of these early years professionals still expected to use their training with families in the future.

The experience of those who have introduced Bookbug for the Home was that parents were often unaware of the benefits of reading, singing and interacting with their child. Furthermore they lacked confidence in doing so, because of their own lack of experience in these areas.

There was clear evidence of impact of Bookbug activities in the home on families, with 93% of early years professionals who delivered the activities observing positive impacts and changes to behaviour within families as a result of doing so.

There was convincing evidence that the Bookbug for the Home approach provides early years professionals with the overall resources and specific tools they need to support parents to see the benefit of talking, book sharing and singing with their children more. 97% of those who have used Bookbug activities in the home reported that this was true for them.

The Year 2 evaluation also found increased involvement of families in public Bookbug Sessions, with 30% of early years professionals accompanying families to these. Furthermore, 22% of early years professionals reported that families they work with had engaged with other services that they had not engaged with prior to Bookbug.

These services included libraries, parenting support initiatives, speech and language therapy, playgroups and parent and child groups. This suggests that the Bookbug for the Home model has been successful not only in signposting families to use other services, but in increasing the confidence of parents in being able to do so.

The Assertive Outreach Programme is at the halfway point in delivering training to early years professionals in all Scottish local authorities. The programme is gathering momentum with a growing cohort of trainees who feel inspired and equipped to introduce Bookbug activities in their work, and who are further encouraged by its positive outcomes for the families they work with.