

Bookstart in Devon

Annual Report
April 2009 - March 2010



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Libraries**
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I am delighted to report that the delivery of the Bookstart Programme in Devon continues to thrive. It is an excellent example of cooperation between Devon Libraries working in partnership with Devon Primary Care Trust and Devon's network of Early Years Settings, to help support the best possible start in life for somewhere in the region of 20,000 of our under 5's and their families.

As an important part of this universal service, we continue to work with our partners to reach out to visually and hearing impaired children, traveller families, women's refuges, prisoner's children, and ethnic minority and refugee families.

Tribute must be paid to the commitment and energy of our Early Years Librarian, other library service colleagues and to the enthusiastic support of the widest range of partners from the Health Service and Early Years who have contributed so much towards making the scheme work and promoting that it's never too early to start loving books.

Cllr Stuart Barker
Cabinet Member for Adult and Community Services,
and Libraries

What is Bookstart?

Bookstart is a national programme which is based on the principle that every child should have the opportunity to enjoy book sharing from as early an age as possible, and it provides three free packs of books for all pre-school children. It promotes quality time spent between children and their parents or carers listening to stories, talking about the pictures, and enjoying the time together.

The educational charity, Booktrust, administers Bookstart and the scheme is funded in England by the DfES, with the help of commercial sponsorship from Red House Books and over 26 children's book publishers. It is delivered locally by Devon Libraries working in partnership with Devon Primary Care Trust and Devon Early Years organisations as well as a number of other agencies. Devon Bookstart covers the whole of the county, excluding Torbay and Plymouth.

- The Devon Early Years Consultants and Early Language Consultants support Bookstart: 'It is a brilliant scheme that offers a great opportunity for parents to share carefully chosen books (including sensory and bilingual books) with their young children and babies. The packs highlight the benefits of sharing books from an early age, promote good quality resources and encourage families to use our library services.'

Comments from parents:

- It's great to be given books that we can take home and keep.
- Sometimes the packs contain books that I wouldn't have thought of choosing myself, but it's been lovely to read them. My son loves 'Dinosaur Roar!' and wants it over and over again.
- It's good that some of the packs are given out by health visitors. It was so exciting to go for a health check and then be given the books.
- I hadn't thought of reading books to my daughter before. I thought she was too young, but we look at books every day now.

Has there been any research into Bookstart?

Bookstart has been thoroughly researched since it began in Birmingham in 1992. For example:

- Longitudinal research conducted in Birmingham by Barrie Wade and Maggie Moore has produced a wealth of information regarding Bookstart outcomes. For example, children who had Bookstart were shown to be clearly ahead in both literacy and numeracy upon entering school (Wade and Moore, 1998). Further research (2000) showed that this head start was maintained through Key Stage 1 as Bookstart children performed significantly better than their counterparts in both teacher assessment and test results.
- The 2001 University of Surrey Roehampton study of the programme showed for instance that Bookstart families had better book-sharing

skills, were more likely to join the library and were more aware of the role reading can play in speech/language development.

- More recent research has underlined the contribution the programme makes to encouraging families with young children to share books. The 2009 National Impact Evaluation provided evidence that this impact is particularly strong among 'less actively reading' families. A third of families who reported sharing books with their young children less than once a day before receiving a Bookstart pack, reported reading every day with their children three months after receiving the pack.

Further details are available on the Bookstart website.

How is Bookstart delivered in Devon?

The Bookstart programme is supported and administered by Devon Libraries, for the benefit of all young children and their parents in the county. One of the key aims of our library service is to foster a love of reading, and by presenting pre-school children with three free packs of books and advice for their parents, we are providing them all with the opportunity to enjoy books at an early age. Health Visitors within Devon Primary Care Trust are also strongly committed to Bookstart, and they work in partnership with Devon Libraries to deliver the first two packs. They use the packs to assist them in their work with the parents of young children on early literacy, and are delighted to have these free resources at their disposal. However 2009-2010 has been another difficult year for health visitor staffing levels and in some areas has temporarily affected the number of health checks being carried out.

Bookstart Baby packs

Until the current year, these were handed out to babies when they visited their health visitor for the seven to nine month health check, but this is now carried out when babies are between nine and twelve months. This has obviously resulted in fewer packs handed out, because health visitors have had a delay while the new cohort of babies came forward. Despite this, 6,498 packs were handed out during the year, which represents 90% of the birth rate.

- 'Parents love the packs. When I hand out the second pack, parents often talk about the first pack and tell me about their child's favourite book. Bookstart helps parents focus on the need for them to share books with their children. It reminds them that it's important and that it can affect their child's future.'

South Hams Health Visitor



Bookstart Plus packs

These packs are the follow on to the Bookstart Baby packs, but their distribution is more difficult because of the gradual move away from universal health checks for two year olds. In the past year health visitors have also delayed the timing of this health check from two years until nearer two and a half years, which again has affected distribution. A new poster has been designed to promote Bookstart Plus, which is being displayed in early years settings. It has resulted in more parents coming in to libraries to ask for a pack. In the year 2009-2010, 6,199 packs were handed out, which is 85 % of the birth rate.

- I have used Bookstart successfully in my local area and have found it an invaluable resource that can be used universally. Parents express their thanks and delight at receiving the packs both at the pre 1 year check and at the 2.5 year developmental check. Some parents claim they enjoy looking at books together while others have honestly said they felt their baby was too young for books. Having the pack to demonstrate the baby's response to the book has proved very useful, I encourage parents to share the experience and explain that this will develop language skills and encourages bonding with their child. I also encourage Dads to participate and this has been especially useful as some Dads feel embarrassed to read but the lovely books encourage them to be involved.

Working in an area of high deprivation I have noticed that the books have been well received and used and I encourage all families to use the library.

The 2.5 year book bags also provide a valuable tool when assessing speech and language skills, the children are keen to choose their favourite colour and the excitement they show when they receive their bags is so rewarding. I would like to thank Book start and yourself for providing this service to all of us and hope that funding for Bookstart continues.

Student Health Visitor, North Devon



Treasure Chest packs

The Treasure Chest packs for three year olds are distributed through pre-schools. Each area of the county is supplied once a year and all the three year olds in that location receive their packs on that one occasion. Particular thanks must be passed on to the Children's Centres who have helped considerably with this, by offering premises and staff to assist with the distribution of packs in each of their areas. Information for parents about the new schools admissions procedures is included with the packs on behalf of DCC Schools Admissions Team. During the year, 7,180 packs were sent out in total, which is 99% of the birth rate.

One pre-school commented,

- 'All our parents were thrilled and delighted when their children received their Treasure Chests. They were very impressed with the packs and the quality of the books, as were all our members of staff. The books are beautiful and certainly encourage the development of language'.



Children who have missed receiving any of these packs through the normal channels are welcome to call in to their local library where staff will be pleased to order in a pack for them.

Minority groups

Travellers' children

With the help of the Traveller Education Service, Bookstart has continued to ensure that travellers' children receive all three Bookstart packs.

- We have not had huge numbers of EY Travellers this year but the families we have given the book packs to have been very pleased to receive them. Many of the families have very low literacy skills and would be very unlikely to go to a library to draw out books or participate in Story times or attend sessions in Children's Centres. This is partly because the families are highly mobile and usually on roadside encampments, which means they are often swiftly evicted.

**Learning Development Partnership
Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Achievement**

Families supported by Homestart

As a result of meeting with Home Start staff in Devon, their volunteers are now handing out Bookstart packs and Library information to the families they work with.

- Bookstart Packs have been distributed to all Home-Start schemes across Devon. By using these packs we have been able to demonstrate to the volunteers the massive benefits to children and their families by using this wonderful resource. Volunteers have been made aware of the existence of the three packs and are actively encouraging and assisting families to ensure they have their own packs at home. Volunteers have been able to talk to families about the benefits of joining their local library and all the resources available. Volunteers have gone to the library with the families they support and encouraged them to use the library service regularly. At Home-Start we have been able to increase our knowledge of the specialist packs available and have informed volunteers and families of their existence. The packs have been a valuable tool for volunteers, encouraging parents and carers to spend quality time together reading with their children and opening up a world of learning through fun for the children. The packs are so well presented and children love them! I feel that by working closely Bookstart and Home-Start have together increased learning opportunities for children, increased the access to the Bookstart packs and hopefully encouraged more families to access the wonderful local resource that is the library!

Homestart South West Regional Consultant

Women's Refuges

Arrangements have been made to supply each of the three Women's Refuges in Devon with Bookstart packs, as well as for them to access books and other library resources through a group membership ticket.

- I have now included the Bookstart packs with our induction; mums have been delighted receive to them and children too! Families often come to us with limited toys/books. It is also a good way to introduce a discussion about the fabulous library facilities, which I have been doing - however it has been quite hard to engage with some of the mums.

Children and Young Person's (CYP) Support Worker

Prisoners' children

During recent months discussions have taken place with the Prison Librarians in Devon's three prisons, so that we could make Bookstart packs available to fathers on Family Days when their children come to visit.

- The Bookstart initiative has proved a real success with the fathers of young children. For security reasons the packs have to be handed out at the end of a visit but Dads say that "it feels really good" to be able to hand them a gift when they say goodbye and that the contents are something they can talk about the next time. Sometimes it can be difficult for absent fathers to know what to say to young children when they haven't seen them for weeks but the packs give them that link with

all the family. "Did you like the books that Daddy gave you? Did Mummy read them to you? What did you like best?" and similar questions breaks the ice when meeting again after some time. I was a bit dubious about starting the project thinking we were duplicating what Bookstart already does but, in a prison setting, it has proved its worth as a bond that all the family enjoy.

Prison Librarian

Ethnic families

Bookstart has always supported families in which languages other than English are spoken, and dual language books for each of the three packs are currently available in 26 different languages: Albanian, Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, Chinese, Czech, Farsi, French, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Punjabi, Polish, Portugese, Romanian, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Tamil, Turkish, Urdu and Vietnamese. 176 titles in eighteen languages have been sent out to children in the county, of which Polish has been the most frequently requested followed by French, then Arabic and Spanish.

- I would just like to say how much our mums love the dual language books. They are really impressed that we can get copies for them and it encourages them to continue speaking two languages to their children. As I am sure you are aware speaking two languages can increase a child's ability to learn. This is a wonderful service which encourages the parents to read to their children from an early age.

Teignbridge Community Healthworker

- I wanted to say a big thank you to yourself and the team for the wonderful Arabic – English book you gave to my children. It is not easy finding dual language books, especially living in Devon, so this benefited us all as a family. The boys are constantly exposed to my culture and language but it is harder to teach them about my husband's language and background. Books are the perfect way to bridge this gap! Thank you again for the invaluable service you are providing.

Letter from parent sent to Healthworker

Visually impaired children

Booktouch is the pack for children up to the age of four who have a visual impairment. It contains books for children with sight problems, a nursery rhyme book with accompanying CD, together with advice for their parents. Access to the packs is promoted through health visitors, and arrangements have also been made for the West of England School and College for Young People with little or no sight in Exeter to hold a number of packs in stock. During the year 20 packs have been sent out.

- Families have enjoyed the book touch packs they have received. The leaflets provided are very informative, giving parents ideas for family and friends to buy as presents. The families enjoyed sharing the books with their children, exploring together the tactile pages. Parents and children can also join in the actions from the Songbook and CD, helping the children to become aware of their own bodies which can be difficult to

understand if you have a visual Impairment. Recently I took in the 'Toddler Touch' pack into a family receiving Portage. One of the books called 'That's My Monster' became a firm favourite straight away. The child soon learnt where to find the button to make the monster roar! As a Portage Home Visitor, I am supporting the family to support their own child through a range of developmental areas. When a child is interested in books there are so many ways they can be used and this in turn supports the child's development through the Early Years Foundation Stage and beyond.

Portage Home Visitor

Hearing impaired children

The pack for children with a hearing impairment is called Bookshine. It contains two specially chosen books designed to stimulate children's senses (including a touch and feel book and a nursery rhyme book featuring BSL signs), a booklet of advice about sharing books with deaf children, a book guide listing more good books as well as useful organisations and resources, and a nursery rhyme place mat with photographs of babies signing. The pack is available through health visitors, a special needs children's centre in Exeter, the Nursery at Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Children and Devon Portage. Twenty two of these packs have been sent out.

From Spring 2009 there has also been the option of age appropriate books for older and younger children within the age range for both Booktouch and Bookshine.

Devon Libraries can provide other useful resources for children with sight or hearing impairments. These are listed in detail on the following information sheets available in all libraries:

Resources for Children with little or no sight

Resources for Children who are deaf or have a hearing impairment

Events during the year

- National Bookstart Day in October was marked in style because for two weeks we had the use of the Bookstart Bear costume, which duly appeared at ten different events all over the county to the delight and amazement of young children. The theme this time was Nursery Rhymes, and we had some lovely rhyme books that we were able to hand out free to parents. We also ran some free draws for books, and in Exeter Central Library there was a special Gruffalo event. Thanks to all the members of staff who nobly wore the Bear costume, and were very hot!
- Bookstart has been promoted at a number of smaller events in children's centres and libraries, at mother and baby groups, and also at a picnic to support Breastfeeding Awareness Week.
- We now have a new Early Years/Bookstart display which is available for library staff to use, and can also be taken to outside events.

- A new booklet has been put together for staff in pre-schools and for other professionals working with young children. It's entitled 'Enjoying Books', and contains information about Bookstart, the benefits of library membership, hints on how to read a story to a group, tips on choosing suitable books and how the use of books can support the Foundation Stage curriculum. Copies are available from the Early Years Librarian.
- The Every Child a Talker project is underway in Devon, and speech and language consultants are working with a number of pre-schools.

- Elinor Pepperell, Speech and Language Consultant, comments: Being able to express ourselves, our thoughts and feelings is a skill that we, as adults, often take for granted. We rarely give any thought to the complexity of the skill of using speech and language as we open our mouths to speak and words tumble out – our brains processing information and helping us construct appropriate words and sentences with split second timing.

The early years are critical for learning these skills and children rely on us, as adults, to support their development during this time. At present approximately 50 – 84% of all children start Nursery aged 3 with speech and language difficulties that could have been prevented. The links between difficulties with speech, language and communication in the early years and associated difficulties in areas such as behaviour, literacy, youth offending, are well documented and highlight the importance of supporting this area of development as much as possible. We have a responsibility as professionals working with children to enable them to develop speech and language skills to the best of their potential but also to support parents to do the same.

Bookstart makes an enormous contribution in this way as it provides the tools to all parents to enable this to happen – all children, regardless of their circumstances have access to books throughout their early years through the Bookstart process. Parents get a model of the type of book appropriate to the age of their child and it provides a definite opportunity for talk to happen on a regular basis. Parents learn that it is never too early to start sharing books / stories and rhymes and also get the chance to witness the enjoyment their child will have. Stories, books and rhymes are such an important part of the process of learning language as they support early listening and attention skills, vocabulary development, an opportunity to focus on hearing speech sounds as well as developing early phonological awareness.

- Book Crawl, the library joining incentive supported by Booktrust, has run throughout the year in Devon Libraries. Children up to the age of five are able to collect stickers every time they visit the library to borrow books, and they are then entitled to receive a certificate. There are ten attractive certificates each illustrated by a well known children's artist for them to collect. In the year ending in March 2010, 2,686 certificates were presented. In July 2009 we introduced a new Prizewinner certificate for children who had collected all 10 certificates, and 49 children have already received one.

Comments from library staff include:

- 'Children have their certificates pinned up at home and are proud of them.'
- 'Both parents and children enjoy receiving the certificates, and some have even paid to have them laminated.'
- 'It's a fun way of introducing very young children to the library and successful at encouraging them to borrow books.'

And a parent:

- 'It's a brilliant scheme. My daughter is so excited when she receives a certificate, and she enjoys collecting the stickers too.'
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- We are working more closely with children's centres, where staff are increasingly using Bookstart resources to support the groups they work with. For instance, the pilot groups involved in the 2gether Project are all using Bookstart Plus packs which tie in very well with their work on language and literacy. We were also able to supply each of the centres in the county with a small collection of dual language books, supplied free through Booktrust, to use with their families.
 - We have continued to support the work carried out in pre-schools on literacy and book sharing, with resources, advice and talks.
 - A workshop on Bookstart and Devon Libraries was delivered at a Communication Conference for early years professionals across the county.
 - During the Autumn we ran a free books offer together with children's centres. The benefits of early book sharing and library membership were promoted at events for parents of young children in Devon, and parents were all given an information pack which we had put together and which included a free book. This offer resulted in just over 100 parents taking their children to the library to enroll them as library members.
 - Registrars at each of the county's register offices have continued to hand out Bookstart cards to all parents who register the birth of a new baby.
 - Arrangements are now underway for Registrars to hand out library membership cards and information on Devon Libraries to all new parents.
 - The information on Devon Libraries that we include with each of the Bookstart packs have all been redesigned and now feature the new library branding colours.
 - The majority of Devon's libraries run regular Bounce and Rhyme sessions. Parents come along with their small children and enjoy singing

nursery rhymes and action songs, and babies can join in with musical instruments as well. The repetition in the rhymes helps develop early listening skills and the simple actions like clapping and patting encourage co-ordination.

A comment from one parent –

- My husband has been bringing our 2 year old to Rhyme Time in Barnstaple on a Friday morning and I want to thank the staff involved for such a wonderful session. My daughter's speech has improved greatly and I truly believe this is in part due to the sessions at the library. She really loves it and talks about "Bounce and Rhyme" all week. Thank you again.
- The Bookstart Operational Committee met again in March. We now have members representing Devon PCT, Devon Libraries, Devon Pre-School Advisory Teachers, Devon Childminders Association, Devon Speech and Language Therapists, Devon Homestart, Family Education, Nurseries, Trio Childcare, Devon Traveller Education Service and Devon Children and Young Peoples Services. There is also a small Strategic Committee which meets as needed.

Plans for the current year, April 2010 – March 2011

- Improve publicity for Bookstart.
- Continue to ensure that the three Bookstart packs are made available to children who do not receive them through the normal channels.
- Continue to work to increase library membership for children under five.
- Send out the 'Enjoying Books' resource book on early literacy to all pre-schools.
- Introduce a new Book Crawl offer to reward children who collect all ten certificates.

**Sonia Ovenell,
Early Years Librarian
May 2010**

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