



Impact Report

2023/24

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Introduction



Welcome from BookTrust CEO

Welcome to BookTrust's latest impact report. Here we present a summary of our impact last year (2023–2024) in getting children and families reading, so they can experience the critical short and long term benefits of reading in childhood.

Our mission to support children and families, with a particular focus on those from low-income households and vulnerable family backgrounds, has never been more important. There is a rising tide of evidence about the decline in children's reading enjoyment and of attainment gaps between children facing economic disadvantage and those who are not, starting from the earliest moments in childhood. These inequalities in outcomes persist for children through school and beyond. Across the UK, the cost-of-living crisis has pushed more families into poverty and to experience the deep and complex challenges associated with poverty. These impacts weigh most heavily on those who are least able to carry the burden.

We do not pretend that shared reading alone fixes all the problems children and families face, but we do know that it makes a real and immediate difference in childhood and beyond. We know that it helps children to meet speech and language milestones and develop strong relationships. We know it supports socio-emotional development, mental wellbeing, creativity and imagination. It helps children do better in school and, in the longer term, overcome disadvantage. Put simply: ensuring children experience shared reading from the earliest moments is an important part of giving them the best start in life.

Our wide and longstanding body of research and work with families means BookTrust understands what it takes to get and keep children reading. Our evidence-informed programmes, co-created with families and practitioners, are designed to break down barriers to regular reading practice through support, resources and experiences that enable and motivate families. And our learning and evaluation activities with families and partners indicate that these programmes are supporting families to embed reading in everyday family life.

Last year we reached over 1.3 million families, across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We worked hard to support and engage health visitors, early years professionals, community workers, teachers and a myriad of other partners, who bring the magic of reading to families who stand to benefit most from reading support. This unique, embedded partnership network means children in every community benefit from BookTrust support.

With strong evidence of the difference we can make for families, we are ambitious to do more. In Summer 2025 we will be launching our refreshed strategy with plans to continue to expand our impact for this and future generations of children. We enter this next chapter at a time of national challenge and change. A new government, committed to giving children the best start in life and breaking down barriers to opportunity, marks an important moment for the families we seek to serve.

We are deeply thankful to our extensive and diverse network of partners who supported our work last year. And we look forward to evolving our partner base and partnership models to further strengthen support to families at this important moment. Please join us in this vital mission.



Diana Gerald
Chief Executive Officer, BookTrust

Thank you

We extend a huge thank you to the many thousands of BookTrust partners who work with us, and specifically to:

- Our Patron, **Her Majesty the Queen**, for her ongoing patronage and support for the cause of reading, and our **President, Sir Michael Morpurgo**, for his longstanding support and inspiration.
- Our national network of **Bookstart Coordinators, local authorities, practitioners and community partners**, operating in every community in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. To those supporting families in libraries, community organisations, early years settings, health visitors and to local authority and schools partners: thank you for being a crucial part of what we do.
- Our partners in **publishing, authors and illustrators**, who are at the heart of our work to inspire children and families on their reading journeys.

We are grateful for the generous support we receive from those who share our mission to get children and families reading for pleasure:

- Arts Council England
- Llywodraeth Cymru – Welsh Government
- Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Department of Education – Northern Ireland, the Education Authority – Northern Ireland

We would like to thank some of the many individuals, companies, trusts and foundations who generously supported our work in the past year including:

- Accelerated Intelligence Ltd
- Andersen Press
- Bloomsbury Publishing
- Bookshop.org
- BookSpace
- Build-A-Bear Foundation
- Clara E Burgess Charity
- Emerald Publishing Limited
- GMC Trust
- Good Humans
- Hyde Park Place Estate Charity
- Kajima
- MarketingTwentyOne
- Mercury
- Mike Gooley Trailfinders Charity
- Mintaka Trust
- Mohn Westlake Foundation
- Mushens Entertainment
- Oxford University Press
- Panduit
- Peters Ltd
- Princeton University Press
- Promote Your School
- Renaissance
- Rolex
- Sadie Coles HQ
- Simmons & Simmons LLP
- Solution Junkies Limited
- Strand Parishes Trust
- The Alec-Smith Family Trust
- The Alan Greenaway Foundation
- The Bhim Ruia Foundation
- The Catherine Cookson Trust
- The Elizabeth Frankland Moore and Star Foundation
- The Fishburn Family Trust
- The Folio Society
- The George Cadbury Fund
- The Goldsmiths' Company Charity
- The Harris Poll
- The Lawson Trust
- The Pitt-Rivers Charitable Trust
- The Tanlaw Foundation
- Usborne
- Vision Architectural Glazing Installations Ltd
- Waterstones
- Westminster Abbey

We would like to thank our BookTrust Friends and supporters of our appeals, including the families, schools and nurseries who supported the Pyjamarama fundraiser, and everyone who takes part in challenge events on behalf of BookTrust.

BookTrust in 2023/24: At a glance

2023/24 marked the third year of our strategy to support low-income families and children from vulnerable family backgrounds to get reading from the earliest moments in childhood. Our work over this period supported children in every community in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We summarise some of our core activities, reach and impact here:

Our reach in 2023/24:

Families

- We reached over **1.3 million families** across England, Wales and Northern Ireland
- We provided over **1.1 million reading packs** made up of more than **2.7 million books and reading support resources** to families and partners



Practitioner support

- We supported **2,568 libraries** and **over 53,000 children** through BookTrust Storytime
- We had **partnership agreements** in place with **every local authority** in England and Wales



Early years



- Our network of early years delivery partners grew to over **6,200**
- BookTrust Early Years offers reached 408,000 children aged 1–4 and **37% of all low-income families with young children aged 1–4**
- We delivered books and reading resources to **over 90% of families with new babies**
- We provided our Dual Language early years resources to **42,500 families** with 1–4-year-olds who speak **English as an additional language**

I LOVE reading now. Before I didn't like books – but now I do. ”

Child receiving Letterbox Club parcels

Schools



- We sent our Great Books Guide to **every primary school** in England and Northern Ireland
- We wrote and published over **370 book reviews** on our **Bookfinder platform**
- Over a third of state secondary schools and **259,000 pupils** participated in our secondary school Bookbuzz programme

Children from vulnerable family backgrounds



- We supported **more than 11,000 children from vulnerable family backgrounds** – the majority are children aged 3–13 in long-term foster placements

Our impact in 2023/24:

Early years



- **94% of families** taking part in our evaluation rate BookTrust programmes as either **good, very good or excellent**
- **71% of families** receiving Bookstart Baby say the books in the pack were **some of the first they owned** for their baby
- **72% of families** receiving Bookstart Baby **say it made them feel more confident** about reading with their children
- **98% of families** say they **enjoy using BookTrust Early Years resources and activities** with their children
- **84% of low-income families who engage with** BookTrust Early Years programmes say they **prompted them to read more with their children**
- **82% of low-income families** who engage with our Early Years programmes say they **learnt different ways to share stories with their children**
- **67% of parents/carers** have tried to **set up a reading routine at home** as a result of our BookTrust Early Years programmes
- Parents/carers have noticed an impact on their children's **speech, language and communication skills** as a result of participating in BookTrust Early Years programmes. **70% say their child has learnt new words. 59% say their child has spoken or interacted more**

Practitioner support



- **95% of partners** in our early years network say that **BookTrust Early Years** programmes are effective for getting families with young children reading together
- **95% of partners** in our early years network say that our programmes **support them to engage with parents and carers**

Children from vulnerable family backgrounds



- **97% of children in care** receiving Letterbox Club parcels say they **like or love using the resources**
- **70% of children in care** receiving Letterbox Club parcels say they **now read more on their own**

“ The Bookstart Toddler and Bookstart Pre-schooler programmes are invaluable for those children who are missing out. Children who are falling through the gaps need some intervention. The nurseries do a fabulous job, but it's also about getting children reading and developing while they're at home. Bookstart Toddler and Bookstart Pre-schooler create a fabulous way of doing that.”

¹See page 38 for sources of and information on our impact measurement data and approach

Bookstart delivery partner,
North of England

BookTrust 2024/25: What next?

We are pleased to share our progress in 2023/24. While we're making an important difference to children's reading, we know there is much more to do. In our work this year we are continuing to deliver evidence-informed behaviour-change programmes to over 1.3 million children as well as developing new programmes and approaches. Our focus remains on supporting children from low-income and vulnerable family backgrounds, based on our evolving understanding of the mechanisms that drive positive behaviour change in these families.

In Summer 2025 we will be launching our refreshed strategy setting out our detailed plans to continue to deepen and expand our impact for this and future generations of children.

We look forward to continuing to work with our extraordinary network of partners, donors and funders to drive this change.

To discuss how you can work with us as a learning partner, funder or community partner, or to request an early view of our new strategy, please email: impact@booktrust.org.uk



About BookTrust

Introducing BookTrust and our impact model

BookTrust is the UK's largest children's reading charity with a history that stretches back over 100 years. Our focus is to help children and families embed reading in their daily lives, so that they experience the immediate and lifelong [benefits of reading](#). We prioritise support for children from low-income and vulnerable family backgrounds, and early shared reading – since the benefits of reading together in the early years are so transformative.

We operate in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and have long-term partnership agreements in place with every local authority in England and Wales. We are one of Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisations. Our headquarters are in Leeds and we have offices in London, Cardiff and Belfast and staff across the country.

Our mission is ambitious. Each year we reach millions of children and families, inspiring them with books, resources and support to help them start and maintain their reading journeys. We seek deep and sustained impact for families living in different circumstances, facing different challenges with different needs, barriers and motivations.

We aim to achieve impact through four key areas of focus:

- 1. Early years:** Embedding reading in the life of every low-income family
- 2. Children from vulnerable family backgrounds:** Using shared reading to bring enjoyment and stability to vulnerable children
- 3. Practitioner support:** Supporting early years practitioners to promote shared family reading
- 4. Schools:** Supporting schools to foster a love of reading

This report sets out our progress across these four focus areas in the third year in delivering our strategy for 2021–2026.

Focusing our support for impact

While we know that all children benefit from reading, we are committed to offering more focused support to families from low-income and vulnerable backgrounds because we know these children stand to benefit the most from reading regularly and by choice. We use the term 'families in low-income households' to indicate those living in relative poverty as defined by the Department for Work and Pensions. During 2023/24, our support for children from vulnerable family backgrounds focused particularly on children in long-term foster care. Children from vulnerable family backgrounds are also over-represented in low-income households.

Figure 1: BookTrust's impact model

Giving every child the best start in life through the magic and power of reading

BookTrust designs evidence-based behaviour change programmes to get children reading. Our high-quality resources, activities and support are delivered via our extensive partner network. Our delivery partners are selected because of their ability to reach the children and families who are most in need.

BookTrust partners engage with our high-quality resources, content and learning opportunities. They have the tools, confidence and skills to support children and families with reading.

Children and families engage with our programmes throughout the early years and school. We provide a diverse range of expertly selected books, resources and activities that work for children and families, giving them the choice, confidence and inspiration to initiate and nurture reading habits.

Reading becomes a habitual part of everyday life for children and families.



Children from low-income and vulnerable family backgrounds experience the immediate and lifelong benefits of reading



Overcome disadvantage



Develop better mental wellbeing, social skills, and strong relationships



Meet speech and language milestones and do better at school



Develop imagination, empathy and creativity

Our detailed Theory of Change is available [here](#).

Why investing in reading matters

We know from decades of experience of working with tens of millions of children and thousands of local partners, that reading plays a crucial role in helping to achieve good outcomes for children. It has a widely evidenced impact on both immediate and long-term outcomes.

In the short term, reading contributes to bonding and attachment, child and parental wellbeing, children's brain development, their understanding of the world around them and school readiness. Reading supports children to have better literacy, perform better across the curriculum and demonstrate stronger empathy and creativity. In the longer term, reading can mitigate long-term socio-economic inequalities. Investing in children's reading early in childhood means more children get to experience these immediate and long-term benefits.

2023/24 was a challenging period for the families and the partners we support. Increased numbers of families were and are facing economic disadvantage – 30% of all children are now growing up in povertyⁱ, the highest level since 1994/95. And evidence makes clear that the attainment gaps between children growing up facing economic disadvantage and those who are not start from the earliest moments in childhood. We know that children's skills develop highly unequally in the early years, with differences strongly related to family background. At age 3, children in the highest-income families are over three times as likely to have high cognitive ability as children in the lowest-income familiesⁱⁱ. Our delivery

partners, including health visitors, early years professionals, teachers, libraries and community workers report deep challenges facing their work and the families they seek to support. Many continued to see children experiencing the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Language development, literacy and communication skills and children's social and emotional development and wellbeing remain major challenges facing children and their families.

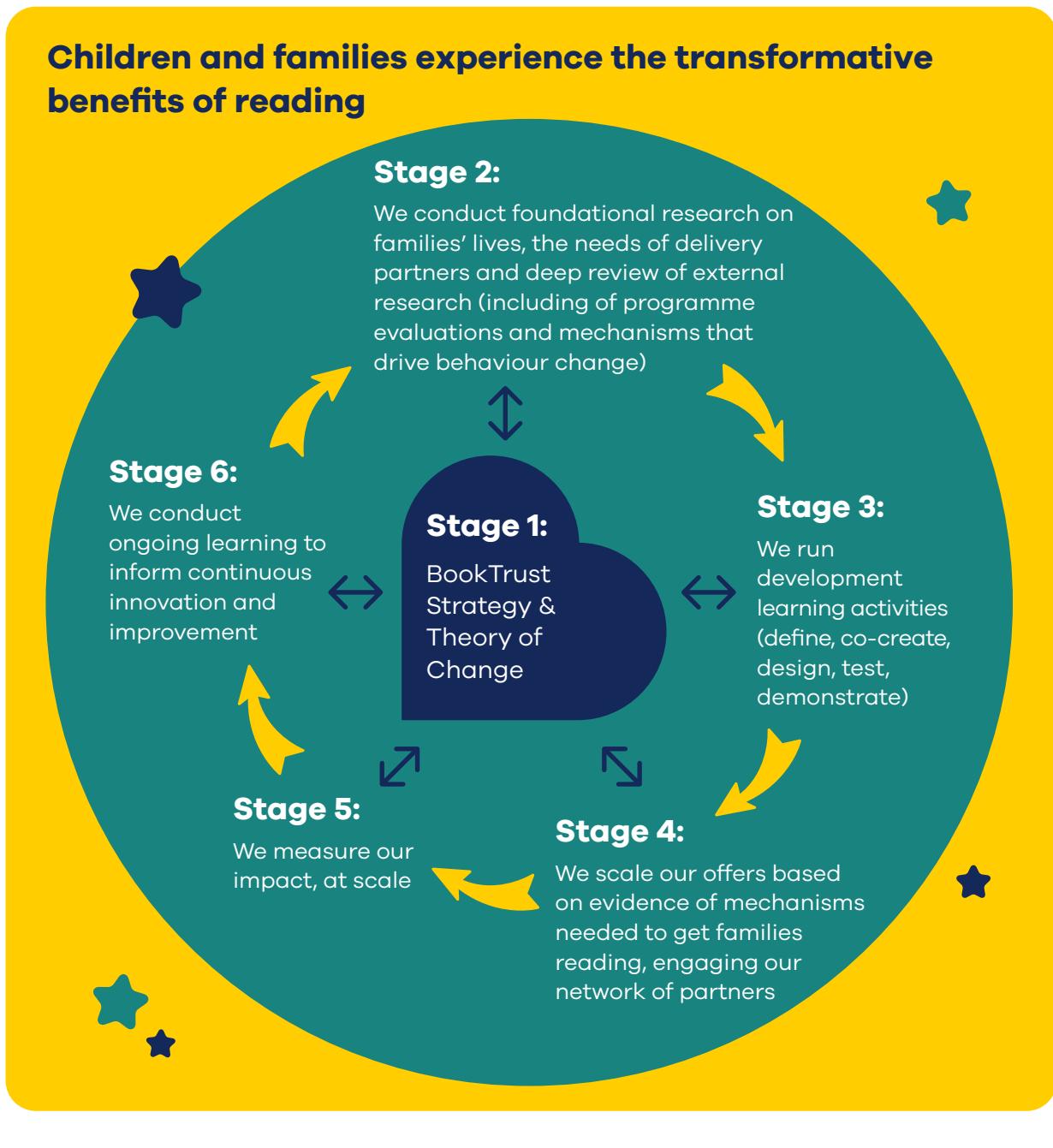


BookTrust's evidence-informed approach to changing children's lives

BookTrust is committed to working as an evidence-informed organisation. To create lasting behaviour-change impact for this generation of children we need to identify, translate and activate insights from families and those who work to support them across our work, and have a solid approach to impact measurement.

Since 2021 we have transformed our approach to learning, development and impact measurement, embedding a robust model to support the delivery of our strategy.

Figure 2: BookTrust's evidence-informed model to changing reading behaviours for children from low-income and vulnerable family backgrounds:



2023/24 marked another major year of learning, research and evaluation for BookTrust. We continued with mixed method evaluations of our major programmes and introduced new learning activities and models to inform our work, including:

- Testing and development learning to inform our new programmes for children **from vulnerable family backgrounds**
- Starting our first **longitudinal study** with 22 families from low-income households who have engaged with our Early Years programmes. The study explores families' reading habits, attitudes, behaviours and the longer-term impact of our programmes
- Piloting our new **BookTrust Partner Survey** for all of our delivery partners to help us better understand our partner network and further improve support to our partners and families
- Establishing new **BookTrust Learning Zones** – seven collaborative learning partnerships between local authorities and BookTrust, that support our place-based learning linked to delivery of our programmes in those areas

Through these learning activities we engaged with **more than 1,200 families** in 2023/24. We are grateful to these children, parents and carers for their involvement as well as to the **600+** delivery partners who participated in our evaluation and research.



We were delighted to see our **learning approach** recognised as winners of the **Market Research Society Activation of Insight award** for our evidence-informed Early Years programme design.



BookTrust: championing early years reading in 2023/24

A major focus of 2023/24 was to raise the profile of early years reading, supported by BookTrust's programmes, research and insights.

BookTrust is committed to conducting and sharing new research with our wide base of delivery and strategic partners, organisations and networks who share our commitment to giving children the best start in life. Last year we made significant progress in this area of our work.



- We launched the [**Reading Together, Changing Children's Lives**](#) campaign
- We produced three new research briefings on key aspects of children's reading, based on new BookTrust research and the wider evidence base:
 - [**Children's reading habits in the early years**](#)
 - [**The role of multiple 'reading Influencers' in supporting children's reading journeys**](#)
 - [**Reading in the Early Years: supporting generational cycles of readers**](#)
- We published a new interactive [**Benefits of Reading tool**](#) which is now used extensively by sector partners, and referenced in Ofsted's Best Start in Life (2024) evidence review

Over the course of the year we shared our research with hundreds of early years professionals and educators through publishing research briefings, media stories, BookTrust and external events including the Childcare and Education Expo, the Open University Reading for Pleasure Symposium and ASCL Literacy Conference. We also ran sessions for United Learning and the Local Government Association.

In January we launched our '[**Reading Together, Changing Children's Lives**](#)' campaign calling for long-term focus on and investment in reading for children under the age of seven. The 'Reading Together' action plan is the distillation of BookTrust's knowledge and understanding about what needs to be done to create the **systemic transformation needed in children's reading**.

The campaign included a national event, media engagement, new research and production of new communications tools.

Supported by our President, Sir Michael Morpurgo, every Waterstones Children's Laureate from the past 25 years and our wider network of delivery and creative partners, 'Reading Together, Changing Children's Lives' generated strong media attention and engagement from policy makers and other key stakeholders. This work continues into this year.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

Children from excluded groups are over-represented in our target audience groups of low-income families and children from vulnerable family backgrounds. For example, 31% of children in poverty are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Over the past year we selected, recommended and distributed thousands of inclusive books with stories and illustrations that are representative of a diverse range of different lives, experiences and cultures. We included diverse perspectives in our research and design activities, and explored new ways to ensure a wide range of voices contribute to our research, design and development.

We supported new creators of colour and arranged face-to-face and virtual events for creators of colour to visit primary and secondary schools to inspire children with their work. We further extended our early years partnership network to improve our access to families in diverse and excluded communities across the UK.

Our Impact

Focus area 1: Early years

Embedding reading in the life of every low-income family

Overview

Getting families reading together from the earliest moments brings unique, immediate and long-term benefits to children and those reading with them and is important for building children's longer-term reading habits. BookTrust's support to early years families comprises a series of established, tested and scaled programmes delivered by our extensive network of early years partners. These programmes help families to embed early shared reading in their daily routines.

BookTrust early years reading journey

Our early years programmes are embedded, at scale, across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, focussing particularly on children from low-income households.



Visual 1: BookTrust's early years portfolio



Spotlight: Mechanisms for impact

Each element of BookTrust's Early Years programmes is designed to spark reading habits. Below we share some features of our model:

1. Our resources help early years partners introduce storytelling in different settings

How this works for partners:

- Flexible resources allow partners to **use them in different situations**, tying into wider conversations with families
- BookTrust books and props allow partners to **show, rather than tell**, which better supports parents/carers' engagement and confidence

How this works for families:

- Role modelling shows how reading can be something **their child enjoys**, motivating them to try it themselves
- Hearing from a **relatable, trusted early years partner** and **seeing other families engage** supports motivation

2. Each item in our early years packs is designed to spark reading habits

How this works for families:

- Information and activities **show how reading can be fun**, and when reading is fun families are motivated to read more
- The **books are carefully selected** to support children's development and foster the interaction which is key to shared reading
- Interactive, relevant, representative and engaging** books make reading more fun. When parents/carers and children see each other's enjoyment, they're motivated to read together more often

3. Gifting our packs – a key element to engaging families in reading

How this works for partners:

- Partners use BookTrust packs as a way to **open up conversations** about reading
- Gifting creates a **celebratory moment**, which supports positive family engagement

How this works for families:

- Hearing the **explanation or demonstration** of how to use BookTrust resources at home creates greater impact on reading habits
- Hearing from a **relatable, trusted early years partner reinforces or builds belief in the importance** of reading
- Information on the benefits of reading is **tailored to what families are thinking about** at each stage of development

“ I think it’s a really good way to encourage new mums to read to their babies. As a first time mum to a 10 week old I thought I’d be silly reading a book to my baby, but when I got this pack I thought I’d give it a try and she loved it. She was cooing and smiling the whole time.”

Bookstart parent/carer, Wales



Our reach and impact

Bookstart Baby

In 2024 we reached over half a million families (90% of all families with new babies) with **Bookstart Baby**. Our longstanding, national programme is designed to initiate shared family reading in all babies' first year of life through helping families to experience interactive, enjoyable reading moments. Combining high-quality, age-appropriate books and reading support and information, with inspiring, confidence building messaging and modelling from practitioners, Bookstart Baby supports early development milestones. Our extensive network of early years partners (predominantly health visitors, but also registrars and librarians) engage families with Bookstart Baby.

“ We absolutely love these [Bookstart] packs, we use them for bedtime reading and fun activities for during the day or bath time.”

Bookstart parent/carer, Midlands



72% of families surveyed said Bookstart Baby made them feel more confident about reading with their child



86% of parents/carers responding to our evaluation survey said the books included in the pack are among the first they own for their child



68% of these families said that Bookstart Baby prompts them to read and share stories more with their child than they otherwise would

2023/24 was the second year of **Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler**, our Early Years programmes for children aged 1–4. These established, national programmes help families to maintain shared reading in the early years, in turn supporting early years development and school readiness. Through Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler 408,000 1–4-year-olds, 310,000 of them from low-income families, accessed reading support and received high-quality book and resources.



- 97% of families participating in evaluation activities reported that they **enjoyed using BookTrust early years books and resources**
- 94% of early years families rate our programmes as either **good, very good or excellent**
- Parents/carers noticed that BookTrust Early Years programmes made a difference to their children's **speech, language and communication skills**:
 - **70%** say their child has **learnt new words**
 - **66%** say their child **pays more attention** when being read to
 - **59%** say their child has **spoken or interacted more**
- **82% of low-income families** receiving BookTrust Early Years offers say they **learnt different ways to share stories with their children**
- 76% of families engaging with BookTrust Early Years programmes said the programmes prompted them to read more with their children. **84% of low-income families** engaging with BookTrust Early Years programmes said they prompted them to read more with their children



“ It is always an exciting time for the children and parents when they are given the BookTrust pack. We keep one of the books in nursery so that the children can make the connection between home and nursery and are able to retell the story themselves and share with their parents. ”

Bookstart delivery partner,
Yorkshire and the Humber, England

“ My son was really excited to get his [Bookstart Pre-schooler] reading pack and we got started as soon as we got home. He really enjoyed talking about the beasts and sitting down to do the colouring pages. ”

Bookstart parent/carer,
South East England

“ This [Bookstart Toddler] has encouraged me to use books. I thought my 1-year-old would have no interest but she was delighted [...] My daughter's attention to the books is unreal and this is going to help her learn so much! ”

Bookstart parent/carer,
Northern Ireland

“ You open up the [Bookstart Toddler] pack and there's writing on all the bits and telling me... you can read this, do funny voices... It did give you some information and different things on how to read. That's not something you naturally kind of do with your kids. I was just reading just normally before. Now I make it fun. I do the different characters. ”

Bookstart parent/carer,
East of England



90% of libraries (2,568 in total) participated in **BookTrust Storytime**. Our national early years libraries programme is designed to bring families into libraries often for the first time and support them to become regular visitors. Families experience engaging group storytelling sessions based on new, high-quality children's books which are specially selected for reading aloud.

In April we celebrated the magic and importance of story sharing for young children at the BookTrust Storytime Prize event, which brought together libraries, authors and illustrators and strategic stakeholders. The Prize was awarded to Gemma Cooper and Carrie Hennon for *Can you Tickle a Tiger?*, one of the six excellent BookTrust Storytime Books which participating libraries shared with families in their communities.

In Wales we continued to deliver Pori Drwy Stori, our bilingual programme for nursery and reception aged children. Aimed at developing literacy, numeracy, speaking and listening skills using physical and digital resources to support Foundation Learning – we reached over 103,000 children and distributed just over 32,000 Welsh Bookstart Early Years packs.

“ The resources are fantastic and are a wonderful way to engage families and ensure books get into every household. ”

Bookstart delivery partner,
Wales

Case study:

BookTrust and early years families

“Brent has one of the highest poverty levels in London. 45% of residents were born outside the UK and 50% speak English as an additional language. We are very conscious that there are still many families with no awareness of libraries at all. Targeted outreach is needed.



We have used BookTrust’s targeted early years strategy for families most in need. We partnered with Brent’s early years team to combine gifting the BookTrust packs with storytelling sessions. This now happens at eight family wellbeing hubs to improve the take-up of the book packs.

It also encourages families to explore the local early years services available to them, as well as library membership and book borrowing. The focus is to show families that sharing stories is important to a child’s learning and development – but also how much fun it can be.”

Sarah Smith, Libraries Development Manager,
London Borough of Brent

Alongside our national scaled programmes, we continued to learn and innovate, for example exploring how to engage families antenatally to embed reading in routines. We experimented with new partnerships and delivery routes to help us reach more families in need – for example through prison family services and third sector community organisations. In February, BookTrust and CBeebies Bedtime Stories launched an exciting new partnership to create CBeebies legacy reading corners and BookTrust Storytime engagement at libraries across the UK. In this project we tested new ways to inspire a love of shared reading, with a focus on under-served areas.



What next?

We will continue to support babies, toddlers and preschoolers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland with programmes based on the strongest evidence on how to create positive shared reading experiences. We will maintain our levels of reach while we try to deepen our impact further. We will continue to explore new delivery routes to best reach low-income families, through Bookstart Toddler, Bookstart Pre-schooler and BookTrust Storytime.

Focus area 2: Children from vulnerable family backgrounds

Using shared reading to bring enjoyment and stability to vulnerable children

Overview

Early shared reading matters for all children. [When babies and children experience disruption or difficulties at home, shared reading can be especially transformative](#). It provides a way for parents and carers to initiate the kind of nurturing interactions that enhance attunement and attachment, it can improve the bond between the parent or carer and child and make children feel secure. A reading routine can also help children regulate and connect with their emotions and nurture the skills they need to connect with others. In many ways reading can act as a protective factor against the adversity some children experience. Representative books allow children to explore aspects of their own lives that they may not have seen accurately or positively represented before, supporting self-identity.

BookTrust is dedicated to supporting children from vulnerable family backgrounds to experience these immediate and longer-term benefits of reading through our longstanding programmes and development of new approaches for these children.

“ Thank you so much for the packages. I love receiving them and reading and using what's inside each one. **”**

Child receiving Letterbox Club parcels

“ We have really enjoyed all the contents... it has sparked an interest in his reading, and he now regularly asks to read before bedtime. **”**

Parent/carer of a child receiving Letterbox Club parcels

“ [She] was very surprised, she has started reading one of the books and was chuffed to have a letter from a real illustrator. Thank you for everything. **”**

Parent/carer of a child receiving Letterbox Club parcels

Our reach and impact

During 2023/24, we continued to build on our long history of supporting children from vulnerable family backgrounds through Letterbox Club, our intensive reading programme for children in long-term foster care. Through partnerships with primary and secondary schools, virtual schools and the Fostering Network in Northern Ireland, 11,439 children received multiple Letterbox Club parcels this year.



96% of children taking part in the Letterbox Club evaluation reported that they liked or loved Letterbox Club



68% of these children reported reading more on their own after receiving Letterbox Club parcels

2023/24 also saw BookTrust test new approaches to working with children in fostering, kinship and adoptive families, piloting a new shared reading offer. We worked with over 400 children and carers to develop new pilot approaches to inform future scaled work and we developed a new partnership with the organisation Kinship as part of the Department for Education funded kinship-carer support contract.

We are exploring how BookTrust can support kinship families to read with children in their care. In our design learning, parents and carers told us what they need to support their children to thrive and where reading fits in family life. We are now building these insights into our design work.

Parents and carers want to:

- Provide a sense of belonging
- Help children feel settled and secure
- Help children cope with difficult emotions
- Develop healthy routines and family rituals

“ [Letterbox Club] has helped me understand being in foster care. ”

Child receiving Letterbox Club parcels



Case study:

BookTrust and children from vulnerable family backgrounds

"I find books really beneficial for talking about emotions. A lot of foster children either struggle with dealing with or understanding their emotions. I think the best way of having a conversation with a child is through a story. I'm not just sticking to that story when I read. I'm unpicking it and talking about it with that child."

I know how much work goes into selecting the BookTrust Letterbox Club books. Some of the books we've chosen are about children that don't live with their families. Knowing that characters in a book have had the same lived experiences is important for children in care."

Amanda, foster carer on BookTrust's Letterbox Club selection panel

 **[Letterbox Club]
has helped me
with my mental health.**

Child receiving Letterbox Club parcels

What next?

We will maintain the delivery and reach of our Letterbox Club programme, both for children in long-term foster care and disadvantaged children where schools feel they would benefit from intensive support.

We will deliver reading support for children in kinship care, as part of our partnership with the charity Kinship, and deepen our learning about the best ways to support these carers to embed reading routines at home. Building on work in 2023/24, our next focus will be the launch of a new shared reading programme for vulnerable children aged 0–7 which we started rolling out to early years families in autumn 2024.

Focus area 3: Practitioner support

Supporting early years practitioners to promote shared family reading

Overview

BookTrust's work to deliver reading behaviour change in families relies on the skill and commitment of partners who work with and are trusted by families. Our partners, including health visitors, children's librarians, early years educators, other community workers and teachers are part of our extensive network across all parts of England, Wales and Northern Ireland. BookTrust has worked closely with these partners for decades and we continue to build our network.

The interactions families have with early years practitioners are important for raising awareness of the benefits of reading and modelling how to share stories. Our research indicates that families who receive early support to read with their baby – for example from health visitors and other professionals – are more likely to read together from the first months of life. When early years practitioners encourage parents/carers to share stories and show them how to do it, they are more motivated and more confident.



Spotlight: BookTrust – Delivering on local and national priorities

Our early years model blends national programmes with local networks to make an impact in every community in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

How it works:

- Our programmes are **embedded in local service provision** which helps to ensure their sustainability and delivery, within the context of partners' wider support to families
- The **flexibility designed into our programmes** means they can be tailored to fit different needs and settings, which is key to delivering impact for families at scale
- We partner with **local networks** to adapt, find new opportunities and reach further into communities
- Our **scaled, mixed methods evaluation** indicates that our research-informed programmes, designed in partnership with practitioners, are meeting their priorities for the families they work with. This work also helps us understand issues facing delivery partners and to highlight opportunities for deepening impact for families

“ I love the packs and the information cards that go alongside them – they are brilliant when working with families. The benefits of sharing books and stories is such an important message to get across in the early years and it is just brilliant to be able to leave a couple of books with families who often don’t have any other books in the house. ”

Bookstart delivery partner, Northern Ireland



“ Well done BookTrust for putting families at the heart of everything you do for their literacy journeys. These wonderful free resources packs help me as a practitioner to promote how important it is to have early literacy skills to help babies and young children to communicate and develop their learning. ”

Bookstart delivery partner,
Yorkshire and the Humber

Our reach and impact

BookTrust supports partners to engage families, inspiring enjoyment and confidence in sharing books and stories together and helping them to embed positive reading practices. During 2023/24, we worked with our amazing network of partners who provide over 6,000 routes to families, in all types of communities across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. For Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler programmes this work involved over 120 family hubs and nearly 4,000 nurseries.

We provided almost 1,500 Storyteller backpacks to our early years delivery partners. This resource comprises a set of expertly curated books, reading support information, activities and props designed to lead children and families on storytelling adventures.



95% of partners feel our Early Years programmes **support them to engage with parents and carers**



95% of partners in our early years network say that the **BookTrust Early Years offers** are effective programmes for getting families with young children reading together



93% of partners in our early years network say that **BookTrust resources are high quality**

Over the year we also continued to evolve our digital resources for practitioners, providing tools, inspiration and evidence to support them in their work. We developed a new online portal to streamline ordering and monitoring, making it easier for partners to work with BookTrust and improving data to support our work.

Regular engagement with early years and other educators is a core focus for BookTrust. Throughout the year we connected with our national networks through a series of channels and events. In November we ran our first national Story Sharer Celebration Week involving over 870 early years partners, and over 500 settings signed up for Big Welsh Rhyme Time. We ran three partner webinars, attended by more than 500 early years partners, and launched three new [research briefings](#) on reading in the early years. We continued to improve our understanding about how we can support our partners, and this has informed the early stages of developing new training for practitioners, to improve their skill and confidence in the best ways to help families share stories.



She [the Bookstart gifting partner] demoed it. She's just very encouraging... to do activities with your child and listen to them and try and encourage them.„

Bookstart parent/carer,
Wales

Case study:

BookTrust in integrated family support systems

Rookery Children's Centre, part of Birmingham's Family Hubs and children's centre network, incorporates various BookTrust programmes into the face-to-face support it offers for families. Its team of early years practitioners have been using the **BookTrust Storytime** programme over the course of six weeks during their Stay and Play sessions. At the end of the six weeks, they deliver **Bookstart Toddler**, which includes books and resources for families to take home with them.

"These sessions are all about parents coming in and understanding how they can support their children with their speech," says Marie Holmes, Language Through Play Worker for Spurgeons, who leads sessions for families at Rookery Children's Centre. "A lot of our work is supported by BookTrust. We've been using BookTrust Storytime and, because we work with a lot of 1-2-year-olds, we've been using the Bookstart Toddler packs with families. They absolutely love it, it's so perfect for our groups."

We do a speech and language screening for each child within the first session. With that screening, parents get resource sheets to take home and work through. We incorporate the BookTrust Toddler books into these resources to show parents how they can share these books with their child. As well as singing and rhymes, stories are a big way of promoting speech and communication. BookTrust has really helped us with that."

Marie Holmes, Language Through Play Worker, Spurgeons

What next?

We will continue to deliver thousands of Storyteller resources to meet the needs of an increasingly varied network of delivery partners, and to develop our digital support and resources for partners and practitioners. Building on learning and planning in 2023/24 we will progress the development of a training model for early years practitioners.

Looking ahead to future development, we will identify the most impactful elements of partner delivery so that in our future work we can provide even better support for the things that make the most difference to families' reading behaviours.

Focus area 4: Schools

Supporting schools to foster a love of reading

Overview

Shared reading continues to act as a catalyst for children's development once they start school. Exposure to a story-rich environment boosts children's speaking and listening skills, knowledge of the world and social development, as well as significantly impacting their capacity to learn to read. [Our evidence](#) shows that reading for enjoyment declines when children start school and that this decline continues throughout childhood. In 2023/24 our focus for schools and school-aged children was to support teachers to encourage early engagement with reading, particularly in the home learning environment, and to help older children to develop their identity as independent readers.

“ We absolutely love Bookbuzz and think it is so important that young people are given the opportunity to select a book that belongs to them. Some of our students cannot get over the fact that it's theirs to keep; it's such an important moment for them. Thank you! ”

Bookbuzz delivery partner,
West Midlands



Our reach and impact

Primary schools

We launched our new platform for primary school teachers, providing support and guidance on how to encourage families to continue sharing stories at home as children start school. As part of our work to ensure accessible signposting to books that help teachers in their work, we continued to share extensive book reviews and recommendations, providing every primary school in England and Northern Ireland with a copy of our 2023 Great Books Guide.

In Northern Ireland, we distributed the P1 Project, funded by the Education Authority and developed with the aim of encouraging children to spend a little time each day with their families reading for fun. The BookTrust Northern Ireland author tour (supported by Lottery Project Funding through Arts Council Northern Ireland) took five celebrated authors/illustrators to schools in communities that don't typically engage with the arts, resulting in 2,086 pupils meeting and being inspired by some of the best creators in children's literature.

“ Sophy was fantastic with the children. She had their attention for over an hour. My class returned to school buzzing and said how much they had enjoyed the [BookTrust Represents] morning.”

BookTrust delivery partner,
Northern Ireland



We know that children need a choice of high-quality and relevant books to develop their preferences and identity as readers, and to stay motivated to read. Seeing themselves and their lives represented in stories and books is important. This is why we support a diverse range of authors and illustrators and promote inclusive books that represent characters from wide-ranging backgrounds and perspectives. Last year we scaled up the BookTrust Represents project. We introduced 54,000 children in 1,800 schools to reading experiences, creators of colour and their work through national online school visits, providing tools to support teachers to bring these experiences to life in their classrooms.

Secondary schools

Last year more than a quarter of a million children (259,771) in Years 7 and 8 engaged with Bookbuzz. This programme, which helps secondary schools to encourage 11–13-year-olds to keep reading for pleasure, gives students choice and ownership of what they read – important factors in independent reading.

Case study:

BookTrust and schools

“The transition from primary to secondary school can be a challenging time for pupils. It’s really important we make them feel safe and part of a community. The Reading for Pleasure Pedagogy talks about reading as a social experience and the importance of having that community of readers. Bookbuzz really helps us to do that.

Bookbuzz is the perfect name for it, because there really is that buzz about books when it’s Bookbuzz time. Staff can have conversations about: ‘What chapter are you on? Did you love that bit? Did you see that happening?’ You get to speak to students on this more informal, social level. This really sparks that love for reading, when it’s not just you reading in a corner silently. It’s something you can share with other people.”

Emma, English Teacher, Arts and Media School, Islington





“ The children love it! They pester their teachers for when the books will arrive for weeks after they've completed their selections. ”

Bookbuzz delivery partner,
East of England

“ [Bookbuzz] has motivated me to read more often and choose books that I wouldn't usually choose to read. ”

Bookbuzz student

What next?

We will continue to support primary schools to engage with our book reviews and resources to get children reading, including with parents and carers at home. We'll continue to run virtual visits and distribute high-quality representative books as part of BookTrust Represents.

We have also been learning with teachers and pupils to help inform our future work in schools. As well as continuing to reach children in Years 7 and 8 through Bookbuzz we are, for example, developing and piloting a new traded School Library Pack to provide secondary schools with a range of new high-quality books suitable for children in key stage 3.

We'll support Waterstones Children's Laureate, Frank Cottrell-Boyce, to promote the importance of children's reading, creativity and storytelling, and the right of every child to enjoy books and stories.

Other highlights in 2023/24

In addition to our four key areas of impact, 2023/24 included a series of other BookTrust activities all linked to getting children reading. We summarise some of these here.

April 2023

Can You Tickle a Tiger? by Gemma Cooper (Bobbie Brooks) and illustrator



Carrie Hennon won the BookTrust **Storytime Prize 2023**. The Prize, a key feature of the BookTrust Storytime libraries programme, celebrates the best new books to get families with children aged 0–5 reading together.

May 2023

In May we published the first in our series of early years research briefings focusing on **children's reading habits in the early years**.

This, and our other children's reading research briefings are available [here](#).

June 2023

We hosted a **round table in Leeds** to promote shared reading support in the early years. We were joined by **Mayor of West Yorkshire Tracy Brabin** and **Mayor of South Yorkshire Oliver Coppard**, and officials from **Leeds City Council, Arts Council England, Sheffield Hallam University** and the **Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians**.



We celebrated our Chief Executive, **Diana Gerald**, receiving an MBE in the King's Birthday Honours, in recognition of services to Reading and Children's Literature.

July 2023

We published evaluation findings from the second year (2022-23) of the **BookTrust Storytime** programme for libraries and announced the **shortlist** for the 2024 Storytime Prize.

August 2023

We published a **feature** with author **Patrice Lawrence** on the importance of **reflecting varied families** in children's books to spark children's engagement with reading.

We ran a story on the role of books in supporting conversations about emotions, particularly for children from vulnerable family backgrounds. This is one intended outcome of our **Letterbox Club programme** which, this year, was awarded as a highly commended resource in the **Teach Primary 2024 awards**.

September 2023

We said goodbye to our Writer in Residence, **SF Said**, and welcomed **Michelle Robinson** into the role.



We announced our **collaboration with foster families from St Christopher's Fellowship**, teaming up for a series of workshops to help design our new reading programme for children from vulnerable family backgrounds.

October 2023

BookTrust partnered with the **University of Exeter, Poetry Society** and the **National Trust** on the UK's first **Biodiversity Storytelling Summit**. This was part of the three year **RENEW partnership** to create measurable biodiversity renewal and increased access to biodiversity through children's literature and poetry. Through this work we continue to explore the role that books can play in supporting greater understanding of biodiversity, and how nature can inspire children to read.

November 2023

We hosted our annual **BookTrust Cymru early years partner conference**, this year focusing on supporting fathers to help children to experience the benefits of reading for pleasure in the early years. We were joined by speakers from The Fatherhood Institute, Cardiff Libraries, Home-Start Cymru, Storybook Dads and **Alex Wharton** (Children's Laureate Wales).

December 2023

We celebrated a **win at the Market Research Society Awards**: the MRS AURA award for activation of insight in our early years work.

We ran our **festive fundraising campaign** to bring the magic of stories to children living in poverty and those from vulnerable family backgrounds.



January 2024

BookTrust President Sir Michael Morpurgo, all 12 current and previous Waterstones Children's Laureates and our wider network of delivery and creative partners supported the launch of 'Reading Together, changing children's lives' (see page 16 for more information).



February 2024

We launched our new **BookTrust Partner Survey** as a pilot in our Learning Zones. This important learning activity is part of our commitment to understanding our amazing network of delivery partners' priorities, experiences and suggestions.

March 2024

We said goodbye to Michelle Robinson and welcomed Rashmi Sirdeshpande as our new Writer in Residence.

Throughout the year...

We supported **organisations around the world** seeking improved reading behaviours. We convened, partnered and shared best practice via:

- **EUREad**
(35 members, 23 countries)
- **Global Network**
(28 members, 25 countries)

We have also initiated the international Researchers' Network to share insights, evidence and best practice on children's reading.

Throughout the year...

We supported **Joseph Coelho** through his exciting term as the Waterstones Children's Laureate. Activities included Poetry Prompts, where he celebrated the power of poetry in all its forms with weekly videos, Bookmaker Like You, encouraging children to see themselves as a bookmaker, and the Library Marathon, Joseph's personal mission to join a library in every local authority in the UK.

References and methodology

BookTrust undertakes extensive research and evaluation with families and children. This research informs our understanding of the role of reading in families' lives, families' and children's reading habits and the barriers and motivations they face. In our evaluation work we regularly seek feedback from families and partners via surveys and in-depth conversations. BookTrust research and evaluation cited in this document includes:

	Learning activity	Audience and sample size
Bookstart Baby Evaluation (2023–24)	Online survey of parents/carers receiving Bookstart Baby	197 parents/carers taking the survey in 2023–24
Bookstart Toddler (1–2 years) and Bookstart Pre-schooler (3–4 years) Evaluation (2023–24)	Mixed methods research of Bookstart Toddler and Bookstart Pre-schooler programmes	339 parents/carers and 176 delivery partners taking part in the programme and completing the survey in 2023–24
BookTrust Letterbox Club Evaluation (2023–24)	Paper survey of children receiving Letterbox Club	306 children aged 6–14

Limitations:

Across all our evaluation work, we hear from diverse groups of families and partners. However, as with all evaluation work, we cannot be certain that the views of those who take part in our learning activities are wholly representative of the wider population of partners and families involved in our work, or of their views and experiences. We invest in mixed methods evaluations to build a rounded and robust assessment of our impact, checking the validity of our findings from multiple sources.

External references

- i. Farquharson, C., McNally, S., Tahir, I. (2022). Lack of progress on closing educational inequalities disadvantaging millions. The IFS Deaton Review
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For a discussion about working with us to give children the best start in life through supporting reading please contact us via: impact@booktrust.org.uk



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