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**BookTrust
Storytime
2024-25**

**Evaluation
findings report**

Thank you



We would like to extend a **huge thank you** to all the BookTrust partners who work with us on BookTrust Storytime:

- The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, Association of Senior Children’s and Education Librarians and Libraries Connected for their support and that of their members in delivering services to children and families.
- Staff in libraries and other early years settings who have partnered with us this year, using their expertise and enthusiasm to support our shared mission to ensure every child benefits from reading.

- The publishers, authors and illustrators who are critical to our work to inspire children and families on their reading journeys.

We would also like to recognise and thank the organisations who generously support our work on BookTrust Storytime:

- Arts Council England
- Garfield Weston Foundation
- Mercury
- The Elizabeth Frankland Moore and Star Foundation
- The Eranda Rothschild Foundation



“I am absolutely over the moon that our *Ten Little Ducklings* has won the BookTrust Storytime Prize. As a children’s author and a Speech and Language Therapist, this project really speaks to my heart and feels both necessary and incredibly important. Libraries (and the experienced, enthusiastic librarians who work in them) are often the centre of local communities, and are vital for our children, families and neighbourhoods.

For me and my family, the library is a place to pop into on the way home from school, a place to do a spot of colouring, a place to join a Lego club and meet friends ... and,

always, the place to go for books!

Libraries champion reading, learning and creativity. They allow access to books for so many people who might not otherwise have access to them and they encourage everyone to be a reader. I would like to thank all the skilled librarians who were part of the BookTrust Storytime programme, who shared our books and brought our stories to life for so many children and families. Thank you.”

Lucy Rowland, author of *Ten Little Ducklings*, winner of the Storytime Prize 2025

Contents

1. Executive Summary	4
2. Introduction	8
2.1. BookTrust’s early years work	8
2.2. About BookTrust Storytime	10
3. BookTrust Storytime: the context	12
4. Key evaluation findings from BookTrust Storytime 2024-25	14
4.1. Overall reach	14
4.2. Partnership working	14
4.3. Partner perceptions of BookTrust Storytime overall	15
4.4. Partner views of our digital resources	16
5. What next for BookTrust Storytime?	18
6. Our learning approach	21
7. References	22

1. Executive summary

This report shares key evaluation insights from BookTrust Storytime in 2024-25.

About BookTrust Storytime and our wider early years work

BookTrust Storytime is our national library programme designed to support families with children aged 0–5 to build positive reading habits, through enjoyable story sharing, in libraries and at home. It is a core element of BookTrust’s portfolio of programmes that help early years families embed reading in everyday life.



Reading in the early years brings **profound and wide-ranging benefits** that can have an immediate and lifelong impact on children’s lives. Enjoyment of shared reading in the early years is important for fostering lifelong reading habits. By encouraging positive early reading experiences, BookTrust Storytime aims to bring the magic of books and sharing stories to a wide range of children and families.

At BookTrust, we prioritise reading for enjoyment in the early years for all families, with a particular focus on those from low-income households who face additional barriers to reading, and who stand to benefit more from extra support. For BookTrust Storytime, we provide an enhanced offer for libraries in areas of higher deprivation.

BookTrust Storytime: the context

Bringing the benefits of reading to families is crucial, given the scale of the challenges facing children in the UK today. Not only is the number of children living in poverty increasing,¹ there is also a widening gap in outcomes between children growing up in families with low incomes and their more affluent peers.

Library staff are concerned about the decline in children’s reading for enjoyment (99%) and they also report strong concerns around speech and language delays (93%), children’s wellbeing and mental health (95%) and delays in socio-emotional development (87%).

BookTrust and our early years partners know that reading and sharing stories can be one part of the solution to these issues. However, too many children are missing out on the transformative benefits of reading. Childhood enjoyment of reading is in decline, leaving England in the bottom third of countries for childhood reading enjoyment.³

From our work with libraries and other early years partners, we are also aware of the challenges facing organisations and networks working to support early years families including lack of engagement with services and the impact of budget cuts.

A quarter of parents/carers find reading with their young children challenging.

Despite 95% of families (from low-income households) knowing it is important to read with their children, only 42% of 0–7-year-olds get a bedtime story.

Source: BookTrust Family Survey (2022)²

Key evaluation findings from BookTrust Storytime 2024-25

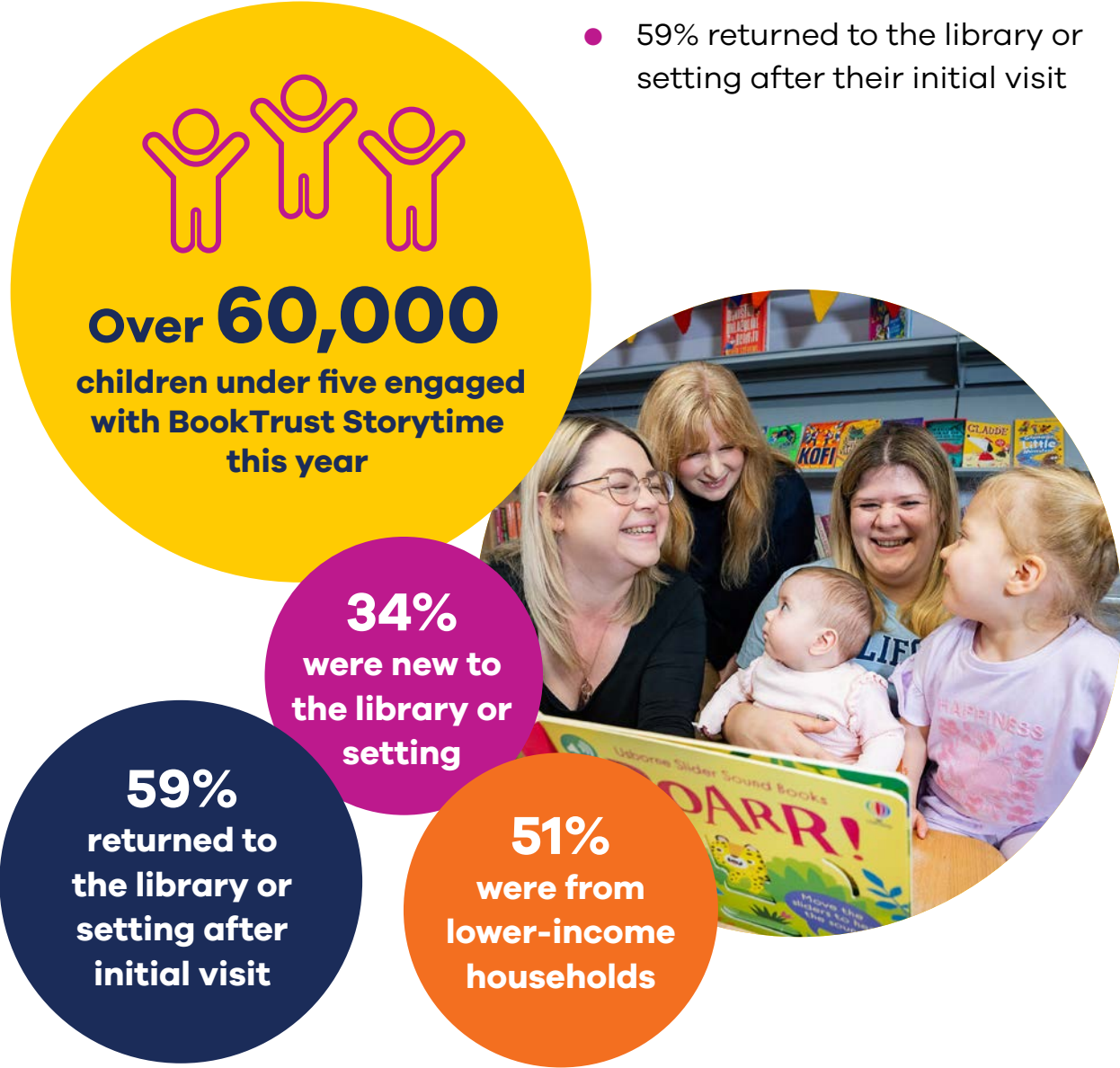
Evaluation data in this report draws on survey responses (123), qualitative feedback from our delivery partners and other programme data.

Overall reach
2,568 libraries in England, Wales and Northern Ireland participated in BookTrust Storytime 2024-25. This equates to approximately 90% of libraries across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In total we estimate that over 60,000 children under five engaged with BookTrust Storytime this year.

Of these children, we estimate that:

- 34% were new to the library or setting
- 51% were from lower-income households
- 59% returned to the library or setting after their initial visit



Partnership working
BookTrust Storytime and our wider portfolio of early years programmes are intended to support community links and multiagency approaches to reading. 83% of BookTrust Storytime partners worked with other organisations to encourage families to engage with the programme this year. BookTrust Storytime supported connections between libraries and Family Hubs, children’s centres or family centres, Early Help teams and Sure Start centres, sometimes as part of local authority-wide early years reading and literacy strategies. Our partners recognise that early shared reading supports child development, health and education outcomes.

Partner perceptions of BookTrust Storytime
The majority of libraries and other partners participating in our evaluation indicate that BookTrust Storytime is making a positive difference in their work and their communities:

- 84% said the programme helped support their library’s work with children under five
- 77% said the programme helped early years families to build shared reading routines
- 70% told us that the programme was effective in supporting families who were new to the library, or who would not normally use library services, to have a positive experience

What next for BookTrust Storytime?

BookTrust is committed to BookTrust Storytime and it remains a key part of our early years portfolio of programmes.

BookTrust is committed to learning and continuous development of our work to strengthen our support to families and our partners. Partner feedback plays a vital role in shaping our work.

Through this evaluation, we have heard valuable feedback from our partners around BookTrust’s Storytime model, resources and prize. We will review the programme in line with partner feedback, with the aim of refreshing the programme for Autumn 2026.

BookTrust is looking forward to working with libraries and other settings on BookTrust Storytime next year, and beyond!

2. Introduction

2.1 BookTrust’s early years work

Getting families reading together from the earliest moments brings both immediate and long-term benefits to children and those reading with them, and is critical to building longer-term reading habits in families.

At BookTrust, we prioritise reading for enjoyment in the early years, recognising its crucial role in fostering lifelong reading habits. Early shared reading supports bonding between children and their parents/carers and stimulates brain development. It can improve child and parental mental health and help children to reach early development goals.

These are challenging times for families, with widening gaps in outcomes between children from low-income families and their more

affluent peers. Reading is one way to make a positive difference, and our ambition is that all children and families can read regularly, and by choice.

At BookTrust, we adopt an evidence-informed, behaviour change approach, designing and developing programmes with the families and partners we support. We focus our support on families with low incomes⁴ and families and children in foster care, kinship care, and adoption, as the evidence is clear that these families face additional barriers and stand to benefit the most from the transformative benefits of reading.

Please refer to the end of the report for further details on our learning approach.



Reading supports children to:

-  Overcome disadvantage
-  Develop better wellbeing, social skills and strong relationships
-  Meet speech and language milestones and do better at school
-  Develop imagination, empathy and creativity



BookTrust currently reaches around 1.1 million children (aged 0-7) across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, through our suite of early years programmes.

Figure 1: BookTrust’s early years portfolio (England programmes shown only)



We are always looking to learn from our delivery partners in libraries, Family Hubs, early years education, health services and other settings about how effective BookTrust programmes are in supporting their priorities for families in their local communities.

2.2 About BookTrust Storytime

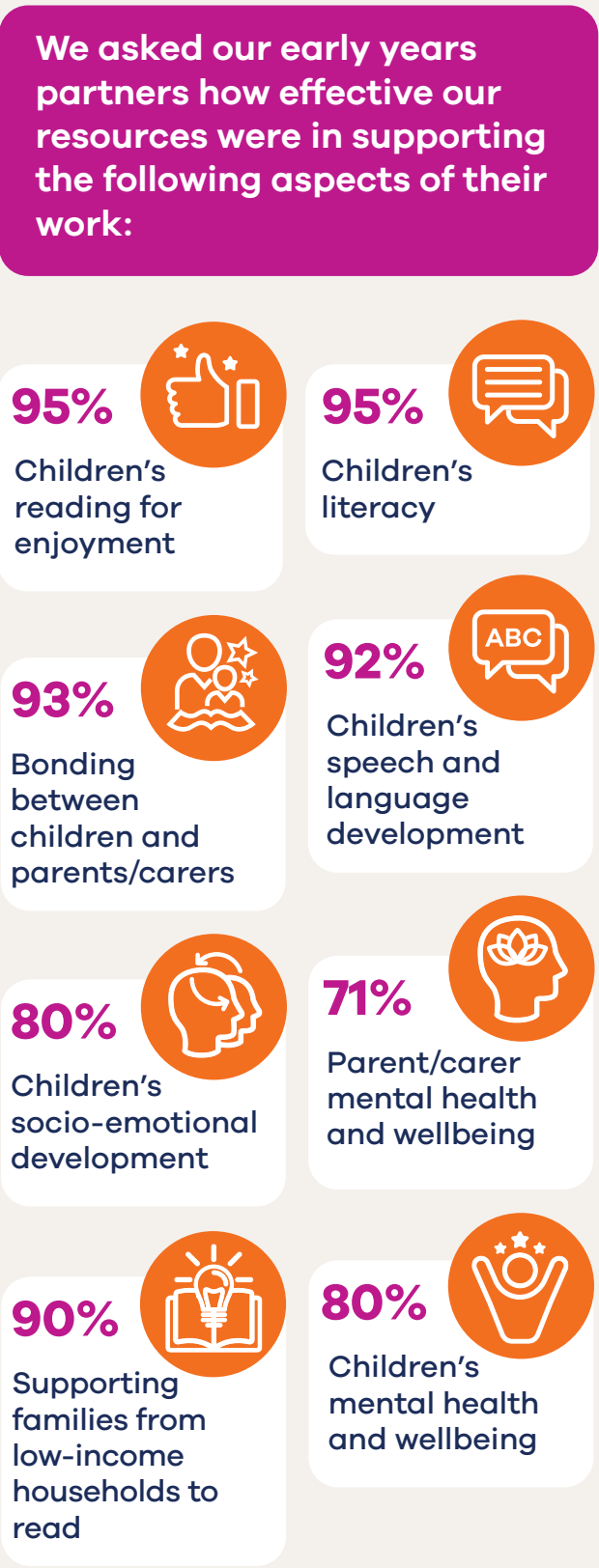
BookTrust Storytime is our national library programme and a core part of our portfolio to help families embed reading in everyday life, from the earliest years. Now in its fourth year, BookTrust Storytime is designed for families with children aged 0-5 to experience enjoyable and inspiring story sharing in libraries and at home.

By encouraging positive early reading experiences, the programme aims to bring the magic of books and sharing stories to a wide range of children and families.

BookTrust Storytime is open to all early years families. It is specifically designed for families who do not usually use library services, with a particular focus on children from lower-income households.

BookTrust Storytime comprises a range of physical and digital resources to support libraries in their work to create engaging, enjoyable and inclusive reading experiences, aiming to lead to repeat visits and reading at home.

Figure 2: BookTrust partners' views on the effectiveness of our early years programmes



Base: BookTrust early years partners for whom each of these areas is a priority (565-577 per statement), BookTrust Partner Survey 2025.

We provide an enhanced offer for libraries in areas of higher deprivation.

The programme celebrates and ensures access to the best new children's books for under-fives and supports modelling and interactive group storytelling.

BookTrust Storytime was co-designed with libraries, families, local authorities and organisations including **Libraries Connected**, **ASCEL**, and **CILIP**.

The programme builds on BookTrust's long-standing and valued relationship with libraries, as well as our network of wider early years partners who work together to support families to access and benefit from BookTrust Storytime.

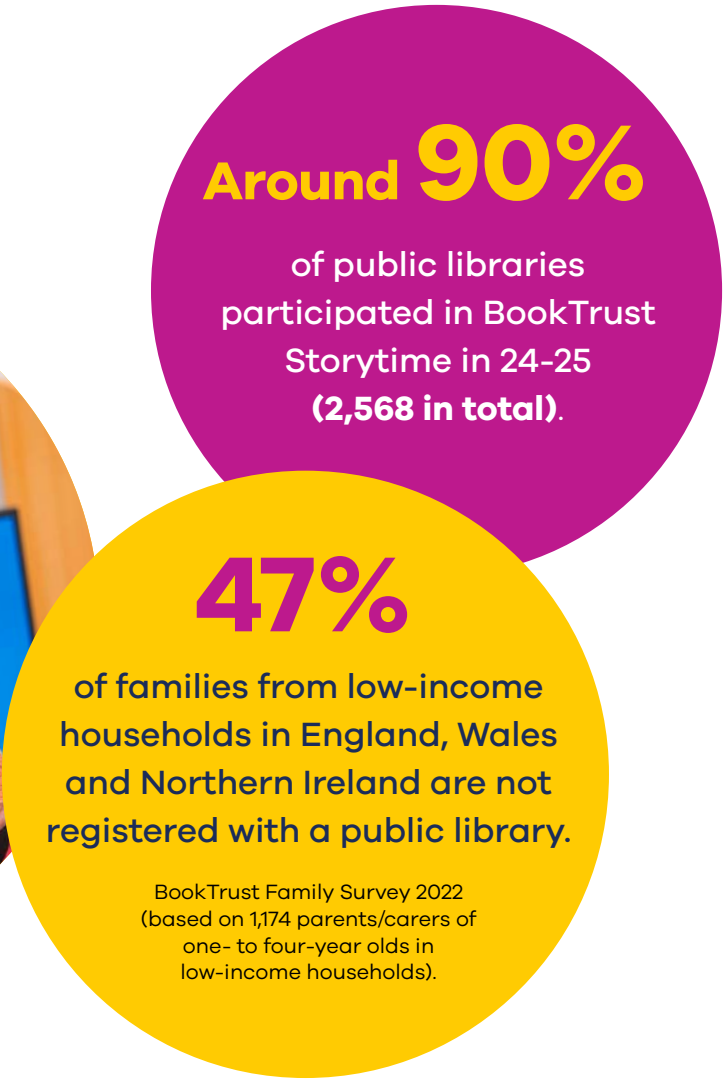


What difference can storytelling sessions make?

Modelling can show parents/carers how reading can be something **their child enjoys**.

A **relatable, trusted storyteller** and **seeing other families engaging** supports parents/carers to give it a go themselves and builds belief in the importance of reading.

Having an **explanation or demonstration** gives parents/carers ideas to try at home.



3. BookTrust Storytime: the context

Bringing the benefits of reading to families is crucial, given the scale of the challenges facing children in the UK today.

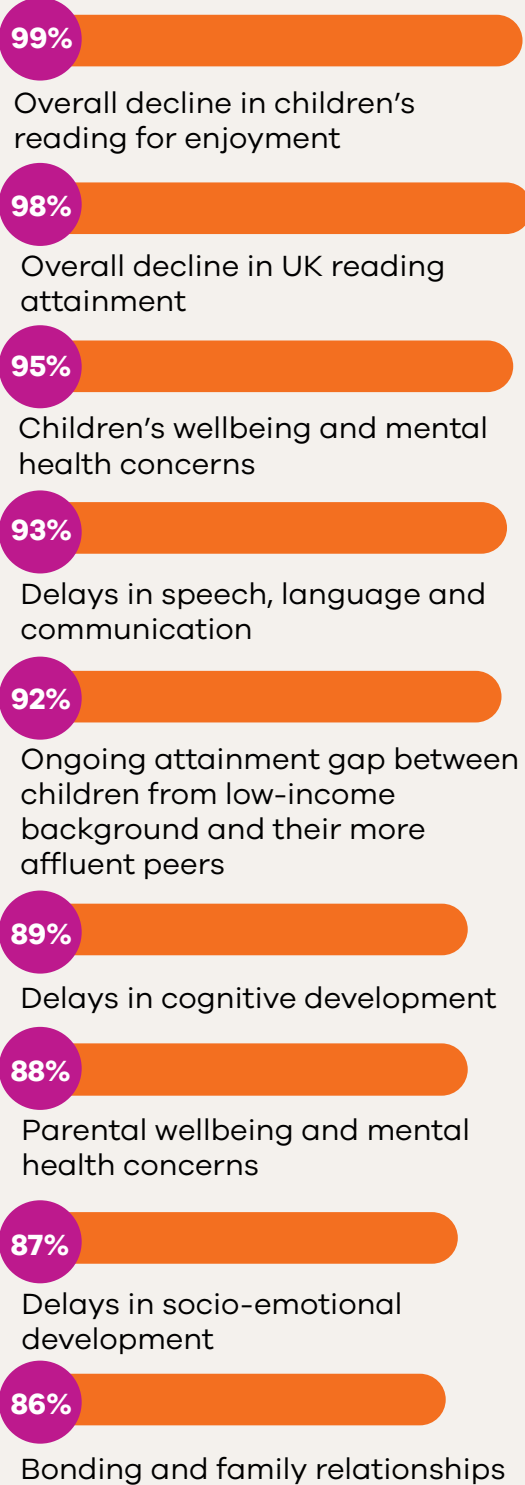
Not only is the number of children living in poverty increasing,⁵ there is a widening gap in outcomes between children growing up in families with low incomes and their more affluent peers.^{6,7}

A wide body of evidence shows that reading is a key element of giving children the best start in life. However, too many children are missing out on its transformative benefits. Our research indicates that only 42% of children aged 0-7 in low-income households get a bedtime story and that a quarter of parents on low incomes find reading with their young children challenging.⁸

Evidence shows that children who enjoy reading tend to read by choice more often, for longer, and become more skilled readers.⁹ However, national and international research shows children's enjoyment of reading is in decline.^{10,11} Almost all of our library partners are concerned about the decline in children's reading for enjoyment (99%) and reading attainment in the UK (98%).

Figure 3: Concerns reported by library staff

% of library staff who are very/fairly concerned by:



Base: All library partners (133)

They are also highly concerned by a range of other challenges facing families in their communities, including delays in speech and language and socio-emotional development, and family wellbeing and mental health.

BookTrust and our early years partners know that reading and sharing stories can be one part of the solution to these issues.

From our extensive research with families, we understand the barriers and challenges many families face to reading and sharing stories with their children, as do many of our library partners.

We asked library staff about the challenges preventing families from engaging in regular shared reading with their children. Nine in ten felt

that parents/carers had too many other things to prioritise before reading (89%) or faced a lack of time (89%).

From our work with libraries and other early years partners, we are also aware of challenges facing organisations and networks working to support early years families. For example, nine in ten library staff are concerned by families' lack of engagement with their services (89%) and 98% of library staff told us they were concerned about the impact of budget cuts.

Figure 4: The barriers preventing families reading more, according to library staff



Base: All library partners (133)

4. Key evaluation findings from BookTrust Storytime 2024-25

4.1 Overall reach

2,568 libraries in England, Wales and Northern Ireland participated in BookTrust Storytime 2024-25. This equates to approximately 90% of libraries across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In total we estimate that over 60,000 children under five engaged with BookTrust Storytime this year.

Figure 5: Families engaging with BookTrust Storytime 24-25

Of the children that took part, we estimate that:



4.2 Partnership working

BookTrust Storytime and our wider portfolio of early years programmes are intended to support community links and multiagency approaches to reading.

Eight in ten BookTrust Storytime partners (83%) said they worked with other organisations to encourage families to engage with the programme this year. A notable number worked with multiagency settings including Family Hubs, children’s centres or family centres (50%) see Figure 6.

From discussions with our partners, we know that BookTrust programmes are supporting local authority-wide early years reading and literacy strategies, recognising that early shared reading supports child development, health and education outcomes.

“The resources have been a vital tool in helping us engage with partner organisations who work directly with families who are facing challenges. They are an excellent way in to then promote our other services.”

Library, North West England

Watch our **video** about how our early years programmes are embedded in the Family Hubs network in Birmingham, supporting multiagency working.

4.3 Partner perceptions of BookTrust Storytime overall

Partners taking part in the evaluation were positive about the programme and the difference it makes to their work and the families they support.

Seven in ten libraries (70%) told us that that the programme was effective in supporting children and families who were new to the library, or who would not normally use library services, to have a positive experience.

From our history of working with libraries and families, we know these initial positive experiences are so crucial in encouraging families to return time and time again.

This feedback shows how BookTrust Storytime plays an important role in libraries, supporting their work with early years children, and helping families to establish shared reading routines.

Figure 6: Who partners worked with to engage families with BookTrust Storytime

% of partners who said they worked with each type of organisation below:



Base: BookTrust Storytime partners (123). 17% of respondents had not worked with other organisations/ answered ‘don’t know’.

"There really is a spike in book borrowing afterwards [...] People may not have been in the library for about ten years, and now they're borrowing books for their family. We know from experience; we keep those people as readers for life."

Jacqueline Condit,
Glengormley Library, Northern Ireland. Read more in the **case study** on our website.

Figure 7: Library partners' views on BookTrust Storytime

% of library partners agreeing with each statement:

87%

BookTrust Storytime is important to my organisation



84%

BookTrust Storytime has helped support my library's work with children under five



77%

BookTrust Storytime helps early years families to build shared reading routines



Base: All library partners using BookTrust Storytime (100)

Through our qualitative work and ongoing discussions with libraries, we hear from some partners who have strong concerns about the challenges associated with BookTrust Storytime being a targeted programme.

We know that reaching new families takes time, outreach and investment in community relationships to support those who have not traditionally seen libraries as spaces for them.

We know that many of our partners are already working in this way. Others highlight challenges associated with reaching new families, particularly given stretched capacity and limited budgets.

We are actively exploring how we can further strengthen BookTrust Storytime to continually increase the programme's impact and to better support libraries and early years families.

4.4 Partner views of our digital resources

As part of the programme, BookTrust Storytime includes digital and downloadable resources. Library staff and other early years partners can also access a wider suite of BookTrust digital resources and support. This includes webinars, **booklists**, **practitioner guides**, and videos, with information about the **benefits of reading**, the **latest research**,

practical tips and key messages to share with children and families to encourage them to start reading or to read more. This content used to be housed on our 'Storyteller Hub' and partners can now find this content on BookTrust's **website**.

Nine in ten library partners had used the BookTrust website (93%), half had used the Storyteller Hub (49%) and half had used our Bookfinder and book reviews (50%). Almost all who used these resources found them helpful.

Overall, nine in ten libraries said our online content was helpful in supporting them with their work with children and families (90%).

In the year ahead we will be doing more to build awareness of our online resources and will continue to strengthen our digital content. We are planning to share more digital content and support soon!

Figure 8: Libraries' views of our digital content



Base: Library partners who used the BookTrust website (124), Storyteller Hub (67*), and Bookfinder or book reviews (66*). *Caution base size under 100.

5. What next for BookTrust Storytime?

BookTrust Storytime remains a key part of our early years portfolio of programmes as we head into our next strategy period.

BookTrust is committed to learning and continuous development of our work to strengthen our support to families and our partners. Partner feedback plays a vital role in shaping our work.

We are reviewing the programme with the aim of refreshing BookTrust Storytime ahead of delivery in Autumn 2026, and we want to bring BookTrust Cymru Storytime to more children and families in Wales.

Below we outline some of changes we plan to make based on feedback from our partners.

Book selection

Overall, participating libraries were very positive about the selection of BookTrust Storytime books, with several commenting that the selection was better than in previous years. We also heard that the selection did not fully meet the needs of a small number of libraries: some asked for more books aimed at older children, while others wanted more for younger children, as they see more



"It is very difficult for us to attract new people to our Storytimes as we only have our social media platforms, newsletters and partners to advertise with - so most of the people our advertising reaches are already library users."

Library, South East England

families with very young children taking part in BookTrust Storytime.

Voting for the Storytime Prize

Many library partners love the voting sheet and say it helps encourage families to get involved and return each week. We have also heard from some library staff that young children do not always understand what they are voting for and that it is not always clear how family and online voting complement one another.

We will share more stories and case studies from libraries on our website and in webinars, talking about how they use voting with families in their communities. We

will also review our Storytime Prize voting guidance (sent to libraries) to see how we can make it clearer.

Encouraging families into the library

Some libraries find it challenging to identify new families who are not already familiar with the library service. Others would like more assets to help bring new families into the library and advertise BookTrust Storytime.

We have a range of digital resources available on our **website** for download, including various posters and social media assets. We will explore how we can further improve our range of communication templates, and will continue to convene library partners to share challenges, solutions and best practice around reaching new families.

Additional resources

Partners have asked for more ideas for activities linked to the books, particularly activities suitable for the youngest children. We have also heard that library partners would like tools to support with their own evaluations of the programme and its impact on footfall and links with other community organisations.

Research and communications

We want to continue learning with libraries and families to improve BookTrust Storytime and to further understand how it can best

work with our other early years programmes to create the most impact for partners and families.

We will continue to share new research on early years reading with all our partners. We will also share research and evaluation with local and national decision and policymakers to further raise awareness of early years reading, the vital role libraries and early years partners play, and the needs and experiences of both families and our early years partners.

BookTrust is looking forward to working with libraries and other early years partners on BookTrust Storytime next year, and beyond!



"More activity suggestions/resources would be welcome, particularly for the shorter board books which have very little text. The ones available on the website are lovely, more of the same!"

Library, West Midlands



"Children loved sharing the books at Storytime and collecting the stickers for their little booklet. They loved getting involved to vote."

Library, South East England

"The voting system doesn't work very well with this age group."

Library, Yorkshire and the Humber

"This year the books were much more suitable to the age range they were meant for. It makes my job much easier when the books are bright, interactive and fun to deliver the session and engage the children and adults."

Library, East of England

"Some of the books don't have enough of a story to engage a group having it read to them. Short board books with more of a story could be helpful."

Library, South East England

6. Our learning approach

BookTrust regularly conducts evaluations of its early years programmes inviting feedback from families and partners.

This report draws on results from our latest BookTrust Partner Survey. 668 of our early years partners in England, Wales and Northern Ireland took the survey between February and May 2025. Our early years partners include libraries, early years education settings, early years health professionals, children's centres, Family Hubs, primary schools in Wales, and many more.

Most of the findings in this report are based on findings from library partners and other settings involved in BookTrust Storytime 24-25 (123). 82% of these partners work in libraries, 19% in other settings, and 48% were Bookstart Coordinators.

With 123 responses, we can draw strong conclusions, though limitations remain given the programme's national scope and diverse library population. We acknowledge that projections in this report involve some degree of estimation.

Research at BookTrust

All our learning is guided by our **Theory of Change** and supported by our **Learning Oversight Group**. Families and partners are at the heart of our work and in 2024/25, we gathered insights from over 1,000 families and 1,000 partners.

See our most recent briefings on reading in the early years, for example:

- **Why starting shared reading early matters**
- **Children's reading habits in the early years**
- **Supporting generational cycles of readers**

Please visit our [website](#) for further information on research, innovation and impact at BookTrust.



7. References

¹ 31% of children live in low-income households (the highest level since 1994-95). **Households Below Average Income**, FYE 2024 (2025), DWP.

² BookTrust Family Survey (2022), online survey of 2,148 parents/carers of 0-7 year olds from low-income households across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. See **Reading Together** for more information.

³ Lindorff, A., Stiff, J. and Kayton, H. (2024) **PIRLS 2021: National Report for England**. Department for Education.

⁴ Households with an income of 60% below the national median (source: **Households Below Average Income dataset**, FYE 2024 (2025) DWP).

⁵ 31% of children live in low-income households (the highest level since 1994-95). **Households Below Average Income**, FYE 2024 (2025), DWP.

⁶ JRF (2013) Does money affect children’s outcomes? Available **online**.

⁷ Farquharson, C., McNally, S., Tahir, I. (2022). Lack of progress on closing educational inequalities disadvantaging millions. **The IFS Deaton Review**

⁸ BookTrust Family Survey (2022), online survey of 2,148 parents/carers of 0-7 year olds from low-income households across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

⁹ McGeown, S., Johnston, R.S., Walker, J., Howatson, K., Stockburn, A., and Dufton, P. (2015). The relationship between young children’s enjoyment of learning to read, reading attitudes, confidence and attainment. *Educational Research*, 57, 389 – 402; Cremin, T. (2014). Reading for pleasure and reader engagement: Reviewing the research; Gambrell, L. B. (2015). Getting Students Hooked on the Reading Habit. *The Reading Teacher*, 69(3), 259–263; Guthrie, J. T., and Wigfield, A. (2000). Engagement and motivation in reading. In M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, P. D. Pearson, and R. Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research*, Vol. 3, pp. 403–422). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

¹⁰ BookTrust Family Survey (2022) online survey of 2,148 parents/carers of 0-7 year olds from low-income households across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. See our **Primary school children’s reading** briefing for further information.

¹¹ Lindorff, A., Stiff, J. and Kayton, H. (2024) **PIRLS 2021: National Report for England**. Department for Education.



“BookTrust and the work, resources and consistent quality of both have been invaluable to me as an early years worker and now as a Children’s Librarian.”

Library, Greater London