

Bookstart Impact Report 2025/26 Executive Summary



The Bookstart Impact Report 2025/26 summarises Bookstart's activity and impact in 2025/26. Bookstart is BookTrust's evidence informed, early years reading support programme for children aged 0–5.

The report draws on feedback from 644 Bookstart partners and 2,155 Bookstart families.

About Bookstart

For more than 30 years, Bookstart has helped families enjoy the benefits of reading together from the earliest moments in childhood, as a critical part of giving children the best start in life.

Shared reading supports children's development. It creates opportunities for connection and communication, helps to build responsive caregiving. It helps to create a positive home learning environment, supporting language development, early literacy skills and wellbeing.

Bookstart is based on extensive national and international evidence of the [benefits of reading](#) and what works to get families reading, a deep understanding of families' lived experiences and insights from decades of working with partners at scale.

Bookstart supports children and families at key stages of early childhood through a series of evidence-informed programmes, all designed to make reading and sharing stories easy, accessible and enjoyable. Bookstart programmes comprise access to free books and resources, evidence-informed guidance and strengths-based messaging for families with support for and from trusted local early years partners.

Bookstart combines national reach with flexible local delivery to respond to local needs and priorities with an established network of almost 30,000 early years partners in family hubs and other multi agency settings, health services, libraries and community organisations. BookTrust works with partners to identify the most effective routes to reach families, delivering support through universal services as well as pathways focused on reaching families on low incomes, children with additional needs or children from vulnerable family backgrounds.

Bookstart in 2025/26

– our reach

- **Over 1.1 million children and families**, across every community in England, Wales and Northern Ireland engaged with Bookstart programmes.
- **Bookstart Baby** reached **568,000 babies (93% of all babies born in 2025/26)**.
- **Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler** reached **445,600 children aged 1–4**, including **37% of all 1–4-year-olds living in low-income households**.
- **Over 60,000 children aged 0–5** engaged with **Bookstart Storytime** in England and Northern Ireland. (Of these, 37% were new to the library, 57% were from low-income households).
- In Wales, **Early Years and Pori Drwy Stori** bilingual programmes reached **71,800 children**.

We know there is more demand than we can currently meet.

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Bookstart in 2025/26

– our impact

1. Building on families' strengths

By encouraging enjoyment and connection through shared reading, Bookstart Baby, Toddler, Pre-Schooler and Storytime help families make reading a regular part of everyday family life:

- **83% of parents and carers** say Bookstart creates more opportunities to spend quality time with their child.
- **85% of parents and carers** say that reading and sharing books in Bookstart packs has helped them to feel closer to their child.
- **97% of parents and carers** enjoyed using Bookstart books and activities.

Selecting books that engage and support a diverse range of families is central to Bookstart's impact. Informed by a wide body of evidence and input from early years experts and families we select books with the features that support enjoyment, make positive and rewarding interactions easier, and encourage repeated sharing.

2. Making shared reading easier

Bookstart supports families to establish reading routines through building confidence, knowledge and making reading feel easier and more achievable:

- **76% of parents and carers** learned something new about ways to read or share books and stories with their child.
- **51% of parents and carers** say the books were some of the first books they owned for their child.
- **80% of parents and carers** receiving Bookstart Baby and **77% of parents and carers** receiving Toddler/Pre-schooler say they now read or share books and stories more with their child.

Greater benefits for families facing greater barriers: Bookstart recognises that some families face greater barriers to shared reading. Evaluation of Bookstart programmes consistently shows even stronger impact where families' resources may be more limited – find the detailed data in the [full report](#).

3. Embedding shared reading within existing family support

By embedding reading support in existing services and community settings Bookstart creates connected opportunities for families to experience reading support. Bookstart builds on the expertise and practice of those already working with families through evidence-informed guidance, tools and support for partners:

- **81% of partners** believe Bookstart helps support their organisation's overall objectives.
- **Over 90% of partners** say Bookstart programmes are important to their organisation – in Wales, 100% of partners say this.

Bookstart supports multi-agency working, helping early years services across sectors align and integrate shared reading with broader family support. Our programmes are designed to be used by these multi-agency settings in ways that best meet their communities' needs. Bookstart is now embedded in over 620 multi-agency settings including (Best Start) family hubs, children's centres, Sure Start centres and Flying Start.

4. Building sustainable reading ecosystems

Through Bookstart, BookTrust provides a national infrastructure for shared reading in the early years, supporting Government policy ambitions across England, Wales and Northern Ireland – including those set out for England in the *Best Start in Life*.

Bookstart Baby is established within health visiting pathways, enabling reading support to be integrated into routine contact with all families with new babies.

Bookstart Toddler/Pre-schooler is embedded within local early years systems, with over 7,400 pathways to reach families on low incomes. In 2025/26 these routes involved 5,950 early education settings, 620 multi-agency settings, 280 health services and 190 charities and community organisations.

Bookstart Storytime is used in over 90% of public libraries in England and Northern Ireland. – 2,400 libraries in total in 2025/26. Partners in libraries work with local organisations including early education settings, family hubs, children's centres, early help services and housing associations to connect families with young children to library services.

Alongside delivering Bookstart, BookTrust convenes and mobilises local, regional, national, and international partners to strengthen the conditions that enable children to benefit from reading in the early years.



In the UK we work to ensure that free, government-funded Bookstart programmes are used as effectively as possible. In partnership with Frank Cottrell-Boyce, BookTrust's Reading Rights Ambassador, our national [Reading Rights](#) campaign advocates for shared reading to be made a fundamental part of childhood. As the early years partner for the National Year of Reading, BookTrust is helping to raise the profile of reading from birth. BookTrust co-chairs [EURead](#), the key voice on children's reading in Europe, and convenes and manages the [Global Network for Early Years Bookgifting](#).

We extend a huge thank you to the Bookstart Coordinators and thousands of early years delivery partners whose support and expertise is central to BookTrust's success, and to the funders, publishers and creators who support storytelling and inspire families on their reading journeys.

We look forward to our ongoing work together, building on evidence of what works and feedback from families and partners to continue to bring the lifelong, transformative benefits of reading to children in all communities across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.



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