



Media Release

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Belfast family support worker wins first BookTrust Story Sharer of the Year Award for inspiring work on reading

A family support worker from Belfast has won the inaugural BookTrust Story Sharer of the Year Award for her outstanding work to bring the magic of books and reading to life.

BookTrust, the UK's largest reading charity, launched the Story Sharer of the Year Award for the first time this year. It aims to find a brilliant Early Years professional who uses BookTrust's programmes in an innovative way to share the joy of stories with children and their families.

Angela McCabe, who works at Beechmount Sure Start in Belfast, was announced as the winner today (Friday 17 October) during Story Sharer Week, an annual event celebrating the work of Early Years professionals.

At Sure Start, Angela runs an imaginative six-week storytelling programme using BookTrust's resources and support to engage children and families in reading. Parents and carers are invited to join morning sessions full of play, exploration, fun and stories.

Her popular sessions are not just focused on promoting sharing of stories, but also on strengthening parent-child bonds through play and communication. They include lots of activities that families can replicate at home, including creating stories of their own and working on a personalised photo album that shows their progress.

Angela's sessions aim to reduce social isolation, increase understanding of child development, and foster a love of reading. Her programme concludes with a trip to the local library, where families can join the service.

On finding out she had won the award, Angela said: *"I'm honestly so honoured to receive this award. Being recognised as a storyteller means so much to me because my passion has always been about sharing the joy of reading - not just the stories themselves but the magic they create between parents and children. I bring the books to life in a way that helps families connect, laugh, imagine and learn together."*

"Through every session, every themed activity and every silly voice or dramatic pause, my goal has always been to make reading fun and meaningful from the start. To be acknowledge for that is incredibly special. I am so grateful to everyone who's joined me on this journey especially the families who show up, get involved and carry the love of stories home with them."

The Story Sharer of the Year Prize was open to partners from across BookTrust's early years network who worked with BookTrust programmes over the previous 12 months. This includes settings like community groups, libraries, nurseries and children's centres.

Angela was picked as the winner by a judging panel featuring author, broadcaster and campaigner Baroness Floella Benjamin and BookTrust Writer in Residence Camilla Reid.

Camilla Reid said: *"It was an absolute honour to be invited to judge the inaugural Story Sharer Prize and to have the chance to celebrate some of the UK's most dedicated champions of books and stories. I think I can speak for all the judges when I say that we were amazed by the passion and commitment evident in every shortlisting. For me, Angela's entry particularly stood out because as well as being an unusually creative and inspiring storyteller with a granular attention to the detail of her craft, the focus of her work is always on encouraging story-sharing at home - because she knows that this is key, both to family happiness and to growing little readers."*

Baroness Floella Benjamin said: *"It was a joy being a judge, although tough to choose a winner as they all shone with delightful enthusiasm, engagement and vision. But Angela stood out that little bit more for her sheer dedication to inspiring a lifelong love of sharing stories among children and families. Her programmes are filled*

with play, exploration, and innovation to fire up the imagination. Angela understands exactly how a sprinkling of storytelling magic can encourage reading, strengthen parent-child bonds, and build community connection at the same time.”

BookTrust has a range of programmes aimed at children in their Early Years. These include the BookTrust Storytime programme, which offers interactive library sessions for families with young children.

Research has shown how reading in the Early Years has a huge range of benefits, from developing better mental welling, social skills and strong relationships to developing speech, language, imagination and creativity.

BookTrust’s Director of Partnerships, Julie Hayward, said: *“Angela is a worthy winner of our first ever Story Sharer of the Year Award. Her brilliant work with families in Belfast shows just how powerful storytelling can be. At BookTrust we know shared reading at an early age can have a lasting impact on a child’s development. Angela’s innovative programmes show a deep understanding of this. Like all the entrants for this award who do such incredible work with our programmes every day, she is providing vital experiences with effects that will last a lifetime.”*

For more information about BookTrust’s programmes, visit www.booktrust.org.uk

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About BookTrust

We get children reading from their earliest days, especially those from low-income families or vulnerable backgrounds. As the UK’s largest children’s reading charity, we know that children who read regularly experience better mental well-being. They form stronger bonds and relationships. They do better at school and are more creative. This is why we work with families, supporting them to start sharing stories and books together from the earliest possible age. We work in every community in England, Wales and Northern Ireland through over 30,000 local partners to reach 1.4 million children every year.