BookTrust Cymru
Ysgogi plant i ddarllen
Getting children reading

Press release – FINAL

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Fears vital early years reading support for Wales' poorest children could disappear amid uncertainty over future funding

BookTrust Cymru has warned that thousands of babies and toddlers across Wales will lose access to vital early years shared reading support, with the end of its flagship Bookstart programmes, following the Welsh Government's decision to stop direct funding to the charity.

From 1 April 2026, funding currently supporting BookTrust's bilingual early years programmes for babies and young children, including Bookstart and Pori Drwy Stori, will be redirected.

This decision means investment in established and impactful universal and targeted support for children, through their first 1,000 days, will instead be used by Adnodd, to commission resources, in their aim to support the teaching and learning of the Curriculum for Wales.

In Wales, where over a quarter of children live in poverty, the charity believes Bookstart programmes play a vital role in reducing inequalities. Its latest impact report shows that 84% of low-income families read more after receiving support. For many families the programmes provide a child's first ever books.

Every year, **over 60,000 families**, with nearly a third of them living in poverty, receive tailored support throughout the children's early years, from one of BookTrust Cymru's bilingual Bookstart programmes.

Sioned Jones, Director BookTrust Cymru, said: "Wales will become the only UK nation not to offer the Bookstart Baby programme to every newborn child. Research shows that getting families reading together from the earliest moments brings unique immediate and long-term benefits.

"Ending valued and impactful early years shared reading programmes without a clear and consulted transition plan risks disadvantaging babies and children for years to come."

BookTrust Cymru is calling on the Welsh Government to publish the child rights and impact assessments that informed its decision to end Bookstart in Wales and provide clarity on how continuity of equally impactful early years shared reading support will be guaranteed beyond April 2026.

Nicola Davies, the Children's Laureate for Wales for 2025-2027, said: "I'm shocked to hear that the Welsh Government is cutting funding to an established programme that has for years enabled the poorest children in Wales to begin their reading journey. BookTrust Cymru provides expert, targeted support in both English and Welsh to give parents and carers the materials and skills they need to read to babies and young children. This early experience of books underpins later educational success and is the cornerstone of social mobility. The idea that the charity's tried and tested programmes, and their delivery via an establish network of frontline teams can be replicated overnight, is foolish. The fact that the effects of this decision will be felt by Wales' most vulnerable children is heartbreaking."

BookTrust Cymru has worked in Wales for over 25 years delivering deeply embedded bilingual shared reading programmes for babies and children as they grow from birth to 5 years old.

That journey starts with the Bookstart Baby programme, which provides books to families, along with help and advice on early reading, often given at one of the health checks in the first nine months of a baby's life.

The charity's research found 72% of parents and carers saying that Bookstart Baby made them feel more confident about reading with their children, and 60% saying it prompted them to read/share stories in Welsh more with their child than they would have done.

The Bookstart programmes, which are evidence-informed and co-designed with partners and families, provide not just inspiring and relevant books and reading resources but also guidance and support for carers. They are delivered in partnership with front line health, libraries, local authority and childcare teams who BookTrust Cymru support in their work.

Delyth Huws, the local authority embedded Bookstart co-ordinator based in Ceredigion, said: "I've seen first-hand how the programmes give families the confidence to read with their children, turning stories into moments of curiosity and joy rather than an obligation. It opens the door for parents who may feel unsure about reading, showing that it's about being playful and building bonds, not following the narrative word for word. The impact is clear."

BookTrust Cymru's work supports a range of Welsh Government priorities, including the First 1000 Days programme, Healthy Child Wales, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, Cymraeg 2050, Curriculum for Wales and Anti-racist Wales.

Sioned Jones, continued: "Our behaviour change led approach is supporting families to read more with their children throughout the early years and beyond. Those we support tell us our programmes make a difference. Ending Bookstart in Wales, with no clear plans on how its vital provisions will be delivered, will impact the poorest families first, and the hardest."

ENDS

For further information and arrange media interviews, please contact Matthew Parr (matthew.parr@workingword.co.uk / 07506 125 016 / 02920 455 182) or Daniel Heard (daniel.heard@workingword.co.uk / 07948 075555 / 02920 455 182) at Working Word.

Editor Notes

About BookTrust

BookTrust gets 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.

BookTrust Cymru is a dedicated team based in Cardiff, who ensure support to families and partners across Wales. They do so by providing culturally relevant programmes and work, influencing devolved policy, building strong local, regional and national partnerships, and engaging in fundraising and advocacy. The team acts as the charity's voice in Wales, ensuring compliance with Welsh legislation and maximising impact through tailored strategies. BookTrust Cymru's programmes are delivered bilingually following many years of experience in producing high quality books and programme materials in this way as well as producing workforce support and training to Health Visitors, Librarians, early Years workers and community settings. This evidence informed approach and co-design with families and partners has created significant impact.

By connecting our programmes in Wales with additional cross-organisation work, the scale of BookTrust, working over 3 nations, provides added value for children, families and partners and funders in Wales. One of the benefits of this is the economies of scale in logistics and purchasing we're able to achieve which enables us to offer high quality interventions in a cost-effective way, whilst also supporting the Welsh publishing industry through localised procurement. It also offers capacity to hold risk, due to the investments needed significantly before the point of delivery, to ensure timely continuity of programme delivery.

Impact-Report.pdf

Reading-in-the-Early-Years.-Why-starting-shared-reading-early-matters-and-the-role-of-Bookstart-Baby.pdf