Hertfordshire Bookstart

Annual Report
April 2017 – March 2018

Jane Mellors / Margaret Street / Michelle Lloyd
Early Years Librarians
Libraries and Heritage Services

www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/libraries
Introduction

Bookstart is a national programme run by the charity BookTrust and funded by the Arts Council.

Bookstart offers the gift of free books to all children at two key ages before they start school to inspire a love of reading that will give children a flying start in life and to help families enjoy reading together every day.

The aim of the Bookstart programme is to encourage and enable parents, and others to enjoy reading regularly to their children. By doing so this will:

- Strengthen the bond between parents and children
- Help children do better at school and in life
- Inspire children and young people to read for pleasure
- Improve literacy and social mobility

The Bookstart programme in Hertfordshire is successful due to the way it is integrated into the countywide early years offer alongside other programmes.

The financial value of the Bookstart programme resources to Hertfordshire in 2017/18 for the universal and targeted programmes was approximately £82,787.

Funding arrangements

Hertfordshire Bookstart is funded jointly by Libraries & Heritage Services and Family Services Commissioning. In 2017/18 Family Services Commissioning continued to provide additional funding to support the Bookstart Corner programme. This joint funding provides the post of Early Years Librarian, who has the responsibility of coordinating the programme in Hertfordshire. It also funds the purchase of extra dual language books and the delivery of packs to early years settings and health clinics.

Performance in 2017/18

The Bookstart programme consists of two universal packs, available for every child and gifted at 0-12 months and Nursery year in Hertfordshire. The aim is to gift the packs to eligible children with the support of health visitors, early years settings and school nurseries. The service level agreement with Family Services Commissioning is for:

- Bookstart Baby Bag – at least 94% coverage
- Bookstart Treasure Pack – at least 97% coverage
The Bookstart Baby Bag is available for all babies across Hertfordshire and is gifted as part of the new birth health check or the six week maternal health check. Health visitors play a key role in explaining the benefits of how sharing books and rhymes can support a baby’s brain development and they link this with Hertfordshire County Council’s “My Baby’s Brain – Five To Thrive” initiative.

They also give parents a “black and white shapes book” and explain how very young babies are attracted to the high contrast colours and shapes. Parents often say that this has encouraged them to start sharing books with their baby.

“The Bookstart books are greatly appreciated and the reaction is without fail very positive. Many parents say they have not thought about sharing books at a young age with their babies. I have also noticed people are sometimes surprised when I explain how the nursery rhymes and games help support their child’s speech development. Many parents are also surprised that they can borrow books for their babies and young children from the library.”

– Health Visitor, Borehamwood

Black and White bookmaking workshops continue to be run by library staff in partnership with Children’s Centre colleagues, to support the “My Baby’s Brain – Five To Thrive” initiative. Health visitors have received positive feedback regarding these sessions.

“Since attending the session Dad has been down to the library to borrow more black and white books”

– Health Visitor

Bookstart Treasure Pack (Nursery year)

Key Facts:
- 15,383 packs gifted over the 2017/18 academic year
- Reaching 100% of eligible children
The Bookstart Treasure Pack is gifted to children during their nursery year through schools and private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings. At this age many children have already discovered a love of picture books through the support of children’s centres and pre-schools. A sample survey was taken at a large early years setting where 78% of families responded that they already looked at books with their child. However, the remaining 22% felt that the Treasure Pack has encouraged them to feel more confident in reading books and singing rhymes with their child.

Even where families were already enjoying sharing books, families told us that it was still very special for their child to receive the Bookstart Treasure Pack.

“It made a bond between us and made my child more interested in reading”
– Parent

“Reinvigorated our love of rhymes”

“My child likes the books very much. He likes the pictures and hearing the stories. The books help him develop his speaking abilities and imagination. Every evening he goes to sleep with a story”
– Parent

**Dual Language Packs**

Where possible a dual language book is given to families as part of their Bookstart Treasure Pack, if required. This enables children to see their home language written down as well as being able to share a story in their home language with extended members of the family. Due to an increase in demand we secured extra resources from Bookstart as well as using some of our funding to buy extra books, enabling us to gift approximately 1,750 dual language books. The most popular languages requested were Polish, Romanian and Urdu. Feedback from families show how this is valued.

“My son was really glad as this is the first bilingual book he has and many times when we read a book in a language he asks me how it is in my other language so we are both really pleased”
– Family who speak Romanian and English
Bookstart packs for children with additional needs

Bookshine packs for children with a hearing impairment: 20 packs gifted
Booktouch packs for children with a visual impairment: 35 packs gifted
Bookstart Star for children with global motor skills delay: 81 packs gifted

Visits were made to a number of special groups and nurseries including visual impairment groups in St Albans, Grove Cottage nursery in Bishop’s Stortford and Heathlands School for the deaf in St Albans to gift the SEN packs. In June visually impaired children from the Stevenage Doves class visited the library for a special storytime to celebrate, “Make a noise in Libraries” (MANIL) and received their Booktouch packs. Visits by the Early Years Librarians to health visiting teams to promote the SEN packs raised awareness of the packs and resulted in an increase in requests from health visitors for specific packs for the children they support.

Time to Read

Time to Read (formerly ‘Booktime’) is a book gifting initiative from BookTrust which provides children aged 4 and 5 in Reception classes with a picture book to keep and advice for parents on book-sharing and supporting their child with reading. Time to Read complements the Bookstart offer, providing an additional universal book pack for young children. BookTrust rely on the support of library authorities to manage the Time to Read programme.

In Hertfordshire, we have previously opted for direct delivery to schools. However, following the review of the Libraries and Heritage Services core offer for schools in 2016, Reception classes were identified as a key intervention point for contact with the public library, with the opportunity to use the link with Time to Read to engage successfully with schools. During her secondment, Early Years Librarian Michelle Lloyd introduced mixed delivery options enabling Library Managers to work with selected schools offering the experience of a library visit with the gifting of the Time to Read pack.

Time to Read Packs 2017/18:
- 4,295 packs gifted in total
- 2,693 packs gifted in libraries
- 47 schools (approximately 70 reception classes) visited libraries
A range of positive feedback was received from schools who took up the offer of a library visit.

“The Reception teacher said how we had ‘gone above and beyond’ what she expected the visit to be like. They hope this to be the beginning of working with us more regularly and will share the experience with her colleagues”
– Harpenden Library

“Children at Hartsfield really enjoyed their visit to the library, inspired to do more reading/sharing books”
– Teacher from Hartsfield School, Baldock

**Bookstart Corner**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key facts:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 2017/18 Bookstart Corner now in its 7th year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 100% Children’s Centre groups engaged with the National Bookstart Programme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Bookstart Corner programme and resources are used by Children’s Centres in a wide range of ways working together with Health visiting and other partners to support families. Centres focus on those eligible for the 2-year-old funding. Many centres use them to explain to parents the value of a good home learning environment, particularly how sharing books and rhymes with their child can help with speech and language development, school readiness and having fun together. Many centres also use the resources when working in partnership with local early years settings to track the progress of the children and to identify any other support the family may need.

**Case Study – Bookstart Corner in Hemel Hempstead East**

During Bookstart setting visits we have also been able to offer a home visit to complete the sessions in an environment that may better suit the child/family need. During one setting visit, a child was showing signs that they were unable to respond to the Bookstart materials and as a result, by the end of the session Dad was not going to come back to session two. We arranged a home visit instead. During this home visit other needs were identified and the family are still supported by our outreach team.

Families in East Hemel have also benefitted from openly discussing what it is to have English as an additional language. The impact this has on children and how Bookstart can help. Our EAL families have given such positive feedback...one mum said she will try to read slower once a week now to pronounce every word so he can hear when one word starts and another word ends.
Children's Centres use the Bookstart Corner programme to support other interventions and programmes they are using with families.

**Case Study – Bookstart Corner, Stort Valley and Villages**

Family where parents speak English as an additional language, Father is Bengali and Mother is Polish. Parents were concerned that their two and a half year-old child has no language yet and does not engage or interact in play with others.

Mother and child attended Bookstart sessions at the town Library. Mum was encouraged to attend Children’s Centre universal play and learn sessions, which she did regularly. Mother and child were supported at the sessions by all staff.

Mother and child also attended Early Talk sessions, led by a Children’s Centre practitioner. The Speech and Language Therapist was also in attendance, giving advice and guidance to encourage speech and sounds.

Through regular attendance the child now knows and understands the structure and routine of the groups. She now sits for a little while for the singing of nursery rhymes and will sit with others at activities. Mother commented that she is now talking to the child more in her own language (Polish). She now sits and reads and looks at books with her as much as she can. Child also likes to sing Nursery Rhymes she has learnt at the sessions.

**National Bookstart week 2017 – “Let’s Explore Outdoors”**

Each year in June, National Bookstart provides free resources to celebrate National Bookstart Week. The theme this year was, “Let’s Explore Outdoors”. Over 95 events were held in libraries across the county including themed Toddler Tales and special storytimes for visiting pre-schools. Several libraries held successful events with partners including a Saturday Stories session with a local RSPB volunteer and Buggy Walks with local Children’s Centres. All children who joined in with the celebrations took home a mini story book entitled ‘Every Bunny Dance’ by Ellie Sandall and bunny ears.

“The book was brilliant and a great one to share aloud. It was great that it enabled the children and staff to act out the story and ‘do the dance’ while wearing their bunny ears”

– Parent

Information stalls were set up at County Hall and Apsley 2 promoting the Bookstart programme and wider library services to the HCC community. As a result we were able to give Bookstart resources to various teams who work with families, including Family safeguarding.
Bookstart 25th Anniversary Awards

BookTrust have been encouraging and supporting families to enjoy books and reading for 25 years with the Bookstart programme. As part of the Bookstart 25th Anniversary celebrations there were three ‘Special Recognition’ awards for colleagues in Hertfordshire to acknowledge their important role in ensuring the Bookstart packs reach their audience.

Margaret Street, Early Years Librarian – received her award for her role in coordinating the Bookstart programme across Hertfordshire for the past 13 years.

Jo Sanford, Early Support Worker for Hemel Hempstead East Children’s Centre Group – gained her award for her dedication when gifting Bookstart Corner to families.

Sally Roberts, Nursery Teacher for Heathlands School for deaf children – recognised for her role in gifting the Bookshine packs.

Key Devine, Regional Manager for BookTrust presented the awards to Margaret and Jo (pictured above) at Hemel Hempstead Library on Friday 8 December.

Kay told the audience, “It is the people who work directly with children and families who turn a simple book pack into a gift for life. They give the inspiring and engaging messages to families about the fun and importance of sharing books together and they find the books and stories that light a spark in someone and makes them want to continue on a reading journey.”

Early Years activities in libraries

Key facts:
- 93,560 visits (children and adults) to Baby Rhyme Times across 33 libraries
- 23,314 visits to Toddler Tales across 33 libraries
- 3,444 visits to Weekend Stories across 13 libraries

Baby Rhyme Times

Baby Rhyme Times run weekly in 33 libraries. They enable parents and carers to have an enjoyable time singing rhymes with their child as well as meeting other parents. In some libraries additional sessions are offered to meet popular demand including some weekend rhyme sessions. This year there was a 4% increase in the number of visitors to Baby Rhyme Times.
“Very happy to attend my first baby rhyme time with my 7-week son. Has helped me, as a new mum to get out of the house and see people. Thank you”
– Parent from Bishop’s Stortford

“I work as a nanny for a child now aged 3 years whom English is a second language. Thanks to the staff who run Baby Rhyme Time my charge is now totally bilingual thanks to him learning nursery rhymes and songs.”
– Carer from St Albans

The recruitment of Early Years Activities volunteers to support staff delivering early years sessions has enabled libraries to enhance the services offered and develop better customer care, particularly at busy Baby Rhyme Time sessions. At the same time members of the community are offered opportunities to develop new skills and experiences which will not only impact on their life but also that of the local community.

“I have always loved to read and been interested in the work of the Library services…Volunteering with Baby Rhyme Time is one of the highlight of my week and the project is a joy to be involved with. The Library staff are a friendly, welcoming group who have gone out of their way to make me feel a valued member of their team. I also feel that through my involvement, I am making a valuable contribution to the local community, getting to know new people along the way. Thank you to Hoddesdon Library for making this possible.”
– Early Years Activities Volunteer at Hoddesdon Library

**Toddler Tales and Weekend Stories**

Toddler Tales sessions are lively mix of interactive stories and rhymes aimed at pre-school children. At the weekend a number of libraries also run a story session with picture book stories that will also appeal to older siblings. In January, libraries introduced “free drawing” sheets at their Toddler Tales sessions. Parents and carers are encouraged to talk with their child about the stories they have heard, helping develop their child’s speech and language as well as supporting them to freely draw or ‘mark make’ an image. Staff have observed that this has engaged some of the more active children and also helped develop imagination.

**Case Study from Early Years Librarian**

“Recently when I read ‘Every Bunny Count’ by Ellie Sandal at a Toddler Tales, I observed a toddler and his Grandma sit to do a picture based on the story. Grandma drew the fox’s snout and then added some whiskers. It was a real pleasure to watch the two of them chatting about what to draw on the picture and to see the toddler choosing the crayons and then putting his marks on the paper. Grandma helped with a ladybird and a bit of grass but her Grandson enjoyed colouring the sun, some sky and some beetles. He was very proud when I asked to make a copy of it to share.”
Some libraries have also been running Active Rhymes for Toddlers sessions. During August 2017 Welwyn Garden City Library ran weekly sessions for pre-schoolers to get everyone on their feet and moving. This has inspired other libraries to run sessions as part of the Hertfordshire Year of Physical Activity 2018.

Bath Book Bed

The Bath Book Bed initiative from BookTrust was launched in April 2017 to support families in developing a bedtime routine. BookTrust provided advice and booklets were distributed in libraries. To mark the launch, 16 libraries hosted Pyjama storytimes and “soft toy sleepovers”. Staff and children dressed in their PJs, brought along their teddies and dolls for a soothing storytime. Special beds were created so the children could also settle down their toys and kiss them goodnight before they went home, leaving their toys to enjoy a good night’s sleep. These sessions proved so popular that they have been repeated throughout the year.

“This is something different we haven’t done before, absolutely lovely idea! When can we do it again?”
– Mum at Stevenage Library

Working in Partnership

Libraries have continued to develop valuable partnerships with Children’s Centres to deliver a range of early years sessions to the local communities. Over the year, 10 libraries have worked in partnership with Children’s Centres.

At Kings Langley, the Baby Rhyme Time is very busy and popular with new parents to the village. The Children’s Centre use the “tummy and toy time” part of the session to enable parents to chat and gain support from staff. In Bovingdon Library, Dacorum Rural Children’s Centres deliver an active Storysack session where they read a very interactive story and children move around the library doing the actions. The Welwyn and Knebworth Children’s Centre group have also delivered weekly story and rhyme sessions using Storysacks and other props at both Welwyn and Knebworth libraries. The impact on families as a result of Children’s Centre sessions in the library is described by one parent.
“The Bookstart session run by Children’s Centre staff: Wow this session is fantastic and my 4 year old actually completed the library summer reading challenge directly as a result of attending the Bookstart sessions. They are a brilliant way to introduce children to the library and books. I’m gutted that due to work commitments I’m unable to attend now, however so pleased my girls now both love the library”

– Parent, Ware Children’s Centre Group

The Early Years Librarians have also supported the volunteers at the community led libraries in Redbourn and Kings Langley to set up their own early years sessions.

**Bookstart Supporting “Narrowing the Gap”**

“Reading for pleasure has been shown over and over again to lead to better life chances, better social mobility and higher confidence and happiness levels”

– Diana Gerald, CEO Booktrust

The Early Years Librarians continue to seek out opportunities to promote the importance of Bookstart and how book sharing supports all children in their learning.

Early Years Librarian, Margaret Street, gave a presentation at the Carers Conference organised by Virtual Schools.

“The feedback we have received – particularly about your presentation – has been really positive and I think we can safely say that the conference was a huge success. I really appreciate you taking the time to speak and share your knowledge with the foster carers who attended. Your contribution will have an impact on their confidence to work in partnership with schools, and make good use of their local library, now that they know what is on offer for them and the children they look after”

– Head of Virtual Schools

We have also presented at Early Years briefings and worked in partnership with Acorns Teaching School Alliance on their “Narrowing the Gap” project, which looked into the progress made by children in pre-schools. Early Years Librarian, Margaret Street, gave an interactive presentation to practitioners in the Watford area about the importance of families sharing books and rhymes at home with their children. Barriers were identified that prevent families from having time to share books and how the practitioners in the early years settings can tailor their positive messages around book sharing to encourage every family to read with their child.

“As a result of the workshops many of the settings are introducing home visits, recognising how important it is to establish this rapport with parents from the outset. Overall it was most pleasing to see that confidence levels when working with parents have increased significantly for every setting. We are following up to see the impact of Margaret’s session this term, which was very positive and lots of wonderful ideas to follow up”

– Head of Acorns Teaching Alliance
The impact of pre-birth black and white book making sessions on library membership

At the start of 2017, Hertfordshire Libraries and Heritage Services received a grant from the Association of Senior Children’s and Education Librarians (ASCEL) to carry out a pilot study assessing the impact of pre-birth black and white book making sessions on library membership. This was part of their “Bump Booster” project.

The Library Service worked in partnership with Stevenage North and Stevenage South Children’s Centre groups, by running a black and white book making activity during their “Preparing for baby” course. The library’s black and white bookmaking activity enhanced their session on baby’s brain development and antenatal bonding, by adding a practical and interactive element alongside the key messages. Seven sessions were delivered to a total of 50 parents-to-be, including 20 fathers.

The aim of the pilot was to track the attendees at these sessions and to identify if they took out library membership for their baby. Unfortunately, the lack of final feedback from attendees meant it was not possible to evidence a direct correlation between attending a black and white bookmaking session and taking out library membership for their baby. However, feedback from the activity itself was very positive, with attendees saying they now knew the benefits of using black and white books and rhymes to stimulate their baby and that it can be helpful for their development.

When asked if they felt any differently about sharing books and rhymes with their bump/baby as a result of attending this activity, the response to this question was overwhelmingly positive with replies such as:

“Yes – I am very interested to join the library and join activities in helping the baby learn rhymes and be more into books.”

“Yes – I don’t feel as silly talking to my bump because I know how much it will benefit bump/baby.”

One participant was new to England from Laos. She told us:

“That is so interesting. I was not aware that babies could pick up on any language. I was going to wait until my child was five until I started teaching them Lao but I will start straight away now.”
Gifting the Bookstart Baby bag at neonatal intensive care units in Hertfordshire

Bookstart Baby Bags were gifted to the neonatal intensive care units (NICU) at Watford General Hospital, Lister Hospital and the Thumbswood Unit in Radlett for women experiencing mental illness associated with childbirth. The resources encourage families to read, sing and talk to their baby, as appropriate. Practitioners value the Bookstart Baby Bag and use it to support the bonding between parents and babies as well as helping to stimulate baby’s hearing, eyesight, and general development. Parents are also encouraged to involve siblings and other family members in sharing the stories and rhymes, “bringing some light relief for families.” (Nursery Nurse Lister Hospital)

Practitioners have observed that:

“The Bookstart baby bag encourages interaction, gives parent something to do with their baby, bringing a semblance of normality into an otherwise unexpected and chaotic life.”

“They spend more time with their baby and less time on their phone.”

“Sharing the books facilitates ‘precious moments’, relieves tension and stress.”

Feedback from parents has shown that they have valued receiving the pack although many had not thought to start sharing books and rhymes at such an early age. All said that they would continue to share books with their baby as a result.

“I think it’s a great idea to receive the Bookstart Baby Bag in the neonatal unit, the books are great for parents and babies forming connections recognising voices and Grandparents can even join in too, thank you.”

– Parent

“I have been encouraging my older child to read and sing nursery rhymes with baby.”

– Parent

For further information on Bookstart in Hertfordshire please contact:

Jane Mellors or Margaret Street, Early Years Librarians (Job Share)

jane.mellors@hertfordshire.gov.uk
margaret.street@hertfordshire.gov.uk

For national information on Bookstart please visit: www.bookstart.org.uk