Bookstart:
Giving babies and children the best start in life

Kent Annual Report 2010–11

Headline News
(all comparisons are with 2009–10 figures unless otherwise stated)

- Bookstart brings resources to the value of £1,110,165 into Kent (£63 per child for the three packs)
- 53,012 Kent children receive Bookstart packs (6% increase)
- 15,512 children take home a Bookstart + pack (10% increase)
- 16,906 certificates awarded to children taking part in the Bookstart Book Crawl, generating an extra 47,168 visits to libraries (230% increase)
- 3,907 events (eg Rhyme Times / Storytimes) were held for pre-school children and their families (11% increase) with a total attendance of 71,565 children and adults (3% increase)
- 50% reduction in funding nationally from 1 April 2011. Most elements of the Bookstart programme able to continue. Bookstart + pack to cease. New targeted Bookstart Corner programme to run via children’s centres – to be launched in 2012.
Bookstart

Bookstart is a national programme that provides free packs of books to every child in the UK at appropriate stages before they start school. All the packs are designed to give children the very best start in life with reading, books and literacy and encourage parents and carers to enjoy books with their children from as early an age as possible.

Bookstart in Kent

The Bookstart Programme in Kent is a partnership project involving Libraries, Registrars, Health Visitors, Children, Families and Education Directorate, Early Years Settings and Extended Services Team and other partners. I am pleased to report the number of packs gifted in 2010-11 has increased once again.

Libraries

Bookstart in Kent is managed by Kent County Council’s Libraries and Archives team. We also offer a great selection of books and other items for babies and toddlers, as well as the rest of the family. Anyone can use our services, no matter how young they are and most of our services are free. For more information see www.kent.gov.uk/libs

Bookstart funding update

In February 2011 Education secretary Michael Gove confirmed that Booktrust will receive £7.5m in 2011–12 and £6m in 2012–2013 to deliver the national bookgifting programmes Bookstart, Booktime and Booked Up. The bookgifting programme will remain a universal offer, but will be enhanced by new elements offering targeted support for disadvantaged children and families.

Faced with the challenge of a significant reduction (50%) in central funding, Booktrust had to make tough decisions about the future shape of the bookgifting programmes – one of which was to lose one of the universal packs (Bookstart+) as part of the Bookstart programme. Booktrust are pleased, however, that they have been able to safeguard the core bookgifting offer, so that every child has access to books at key stages of their development.

Working closely with partners, Bookstart will ensure the continued delivery of a universal offer in a cost effective way and also create new offers targeted to those most in need.

For further information see www.bookstart.org.uk
Bookstart Baby Pack
0 – 12 months
We gift packs to families when they register the birth of their baby. Packs are also available via Libraries and Children’s Centres for families who might otherwise miss out (eg those who move into Kent after their babies have been born elsewhere).

• 17,685 babies received Bookstart packs = 100%

Bookstart +
18 – 30 months
As there is no clear-cut universal gifting route for this age, our families receive packs from a variety of options: via Health Visitors, Libraries, Children’s Centres or Early Years Settings. We worked hard to increase the gifting of this pack.

• 15,512 children received Bookstart + packs = 91%. Up from 87% in 2009-10
• 91% of this age group took one of these packs home – an excellent result.
• NB: this pack has been withdrawn in 2011, following a reduction in the Bookstart funding nationally. See www.bookstart.org.uk for further information

My Bookstart Treasure Chest
36 – 48 months
We gift Treasure Chests mainly through Early Years settings, as most Kent families take up the offer of free places for 3 year olds. Packs are also available via Libraries and Children’s Centres.

• 19,175 children received My Bookstart Treasure Chests =100%
Feedback from Parents

My daughter Evie is not yet six months, but has been exposed to books from being only a few days old. The black and white patterned ‘first books’ captured her interest before sending her a little cross-eyed! Now her favourite book is “That’s Not My Monster” – the bright colours, sturdy pages and repetitive language keeps her riveted for the three or four minutes it takes to look at the book, and she is now starting to actively reach out and touch the textured illustrations. Even at such a young age, it’s lovely to take some time out and look at a book together. The illustrations grab her attention, but I still catch her looking up at my lips as I read, getting used to the shapes they make as I speak.

I can honestly say I underestimated how valuable reading and books are to children below this age, even with my training in my job as an Early Years Professional. I am slowly but surely building up a library for Evie with titles the Booktrust recommend, plus a few timeless classics from my own childhood 30 years ago!

Parent

I hadn’t heard of Bookstart before I went to a Language and Play group. The leader of the session was talking about the packs and had a spare one which she gave me. In the groups we read the stories and did different craft things around the two books from the Bookstart pack – which Jojoe, my two-and-a-half-year-old, loved.

Previously I hadn’t read much with him because I find it hard, but the language and play group showed me that I can look and talk about the pictures to him. Now I really try and share books more often, as I want my little boy to be able to read and like school when he’s older. Jojoe loves it when we sit down together, and laughs at me singing along to the songs on our rhyme CD. He’s getting really clever and knows nearly all the words now! We went on a trip to the library and I have started borrowing books from them. I’d never been in before – I thought it would be scary – but the ladies who work there are lovely and one always helps me find a book that my son likes. Parent
My first thought was that we didn’t really need the (Bookstart Baby) pack as we already have so many books in the house that have been passed down from my older children. Nevertheless, we left with the pack – happy to have been given a little present. I could quite have predicted the impact the little bag was going to have. My five year old had just started bringing books home from school and was very proud of his growing ability to read things ‘all by himself’. “Wow”, he said to the baby, “you’ve got your own book pack already, it’s just like mine!”

Whenever my five year old got his book out, the baby’s book bag would come out too. He would finish reading his book to me, telling the little one to look at the pictures in his book by himself for a while. When he was ready, my elder son would say, “let’s get your special book”, and would then ‘read’ the baby his book, talking all about the pictures. He particularly loved “This Little Baby” with its simple rhyming style and clear relationship between the words and the pictures. It wasn’t long before he was able to read the whole book to the baby without any help.

They both continue to delight at the final page when the baby looks at himself in the mirror! It has been lovely to see how the book bag has encouraged my son to read with his baby brother. Some years ago I remember seeing signs in my local library that said ‘books are for sharing’. I never really thought much about that beyond mums and dads reading to their children. It has been so lovely to see how the gift of the book bag has encouraged my son to read with his baby brother. Receiving a book especially for my baby seemed to spark off a wonderful little reading relationship in my family.  

Parent
Dual language packs
Some of our families benefit from having a Bookstart pack with materials in English and another language.

- 559 children received dual language packs throughout Kent in 35 different languages (an increase of 229 packs since 2009-10)

The books in the pack are great … I didn't have dual language story books, and that is really nice to have. It means I can relate the story for their equivalent meaning, which is not always easy without the translation in front of you. I am not sure who was more excited - my son or myself!”

Parent

Booktouch
For blind/partially-sighted babies and toddlers

Free pack of books and guidance materials for parents / carers of registered blind children up to (and including) the age of four.

- 41 children received Booktouch packs

Bookshine
For deaf babies and toddlers

Free pack of books and guidance materials for parents / carers of deaf children up to (and including) the age of four.

- 28 children received Bookshine packs
Bookstart Book Crawl
Bookstart Book Crawl is a fun activity for families, designed to foster the book sharing and reading habit for pre-school children. It encourages repeat visits to libraries through collecting stickers and certificates, for visits made and books read. For every 4 stickers collected children earn a special certificate and there are lots to collect!

We began collecting statistics online this year, rather than keeping traditional paper ‘five bar gate’ records. The spectacular increase in figures reflects that this has proved to be a much more accurate way of collecting data!

*The lovely bright, well designed Book Crawl Certificates are a good incentive for parents to come along to the sessions.*

*Library staff*

*Oliver was very delighted about reaching his Golden Certificate and did a lap of honour around the library!*

*Library staff*

Outcomes
- All Kent Libraries took part
- 1930 children joined the library at the same time as joining the Book Crawl (an increase of 1,439 children)
- 12,210 children took part (a massive 215% increase from 5,699 in 2009-10)
- We awarded 16,906 Book Crawl certificates (11,792 more than the previous year) as a celebration of 67,624 visits by those pre-school children to the library (47,168 more than 2009-10)

National Bookstart Day
For the first time, National Bookstart Day took place in June instead of October. This year’s theme was ‘At The Seaside’ – free giveaways included specially designed stickers and song sheets.

63 National Bookstart day celebration events were held in libraries and many more took place in children’s centres across Kent (receiving their support material direct from Bookstart for the first time this year).
Activities and Events for Pre-School Children and their Families

Our libraries host regular, fun activities and events for pre-school children and their families: Baby Bounce and Rhyme, Toddler Time and Storytimes. Where appropriate, sessions can sometimes be held at other locations in the community. All these events are designed to introduce library services, make families feel welcome, promote language and literacy, family communication, social interaction, and foster a love of books and reading at all ages. Our staff promote the Bookstart packs and the Bookstart Book Crawl at these sessions. These activities and events continue to be popular with children and their families / carers, and our partners too.

In addition to these regular events, we support many other community based projects and events, such as Doorstep Library, YAPS groups, First Time Parent sessions and sessions with Children’s Centres.

Outcomes

NB: the figures below relate to the total number of sessions held over the year. Many of the children and adults attending will be counted more than once as they attend events on a regular basis. Traditional storytimes are not as popular with customers as they once were and after careful thought (including consulting with our customers) some sessions have now stopped, whereas the popularity of our already successful Baby Rhyme Time sessions continues to grow. Work with our partners eg Children’s Centres continues to develop and increase, with benefits all round.

- **Baby Rhyme Times**
  - 2,307 sessions (307 extra sessions)
  - 49,141 children and adults attended (5% increase)

- **Storytimes and Toddler Times**
  - 1,097 sessions (43 decrease)
  - 10,021 children and adults attended (19% decrease)

- **Other events for pre-school children**
  - eg playgroup visits/Children Centre visits/talks to first time mums etc
  - 503 sessions (increase of 35%)
  - 9890 children and adults attended (25% increase)

- **Total Early Years Activities**
  - 3,907 sessions (11% increase)
  - 71,565 visits by children and adults (3% increase)
Feedback

We came to baby bounce this morning for the first time and just wanted to say thank you for a lovely session. Very welcoming and friendly atmosphere even though it was crazy busy!

Keep up the fab work! Look forward to seeing you next week. Parent

One mum had given birth a few days earlier to a baby girl (her second child). Other Rhyme Time regulars and staff hadn’t expected her to turn up for the session, but soon after we started she arrived with both girls. The groups made her very welcome, all expressing congratulations. The two year old wanted mum to give lots of cuddles and needed reassurance, so we sang a few of the songs she likes best, and this seemed to bring her out a bit. She gave us a big smile!

After we had finished the session, I spoke to the lady and she said she had been feeling very down as her mum had just left to go home, her husband had not been able to take time off work, and the world seemed to be coming in on top of her. But she knew if she came to Rhyme Time, she would feel better as she would find a welcome, and some other mums to talk to who would know how she felt. Library staff
Feedback

One new mum started coming with her baby and her own mother (baby’s grandmother). She would sit at the back, never really talking to the others and not letting her baby crawl on the floor, or play with the toys.

However after a few weeks she started coming on her own, and has now become a real part of the group. She now gets down on the floor with her baby, knows all the songs and says how much they both gain from the group.

This lady is due to start back at work and felt a bit unsure about it. Over the weeks the group has talked about how she would feel, how the baby would feel, and myself and the other mums have tried to help her deal with her feelings.

She was very tearful yesterday and told me how much help and support she has found in coming to Baby Bounce and Rhyme, how she felt that without this it would have been even harder for her to let go, and that she is very grateful for the friendship and support she has received. Library staff
**Something for everyone**

**Services to Children’s Centres, Early Years Settings, Childminders, etc**

In 2010-11 Libraries and Children’s Centres began working more closely together. We mapped good practice and looked at ways to develop this. As a result, Children’s Centre events are often shared with libraries, we gift Bookstart packs through Children’s Centres, and Children’s Centres are encouraged to borrow books for their families – a special ticket is available for this. We promote each other’s services to families too. In 2011-12 Children’s Centres will be even more involved with Bookstart, with the introduction of the new Bookstart Corner, available only through Children’s Centres. See [www.bookstart.org.uk](http://www.bookstart.org.uk) for further information.

Kent’s Early Years settings and childminders have direct involvement with Bookstart including gifting Bookstart + and My Bookstart Treasure Chest packs. In addition, we encourage Early Years settings staff and childminders to use library services and share books with their children – we offer special tickets to help with this.

Libraries welcome playgroups, nurseries and childminders, and we encourage staff where possible to take families to visit their local library and make use of our many services (most of which are free).

Every Child A Talker (ECAT) in Kent focuses on Communication, Language and Literacy development. It encourages parents and practitioners to develop knowledge and skills, increase engagement in promoting children’s language development and learning in the home. There is a new emphasis on strengthening early language development from birth to five too, and all the Bookstart and library services support this, encouraging family communication and sharing stories together. We displayed ECAT posters in libraries and gave families ECAT fridge magnets at Rhyme Times. Settings in Gravesham and Tonbridge took part in Bookstart’s Rhyme Challenge – encouraging children to learn traditional rhymes and rewarding them with special certificates.

**Feedback**

... just shows what a lifeline activities such as BBR can be, and how they increase confidence and even lead to progression – along with everything else they do, and they’re fun!  

*Julie Simmons, ECAT Early Language Consultant and MABD Project Manager (Schools)*

Had my niece for the day so brought her along to a family day. Had a fantastic time – loads to do. She didn’t want to leave. Library and Surestart staff were very helpful. We left with armfuls of things and all for very little money. Thank you! We will be back again.  

*Parent*

When they come in [to pre-school], the children always ask if it’s library day. They love it!  

*Early Years setting manager.*
Actions for the Future

Priorities for 2011-12

We will:

• seek funding to continue to provide Bookstart to all Kent families
• manage the changes to the Bookstart programme
• work hard to increase library book issues
• continue to build partnership working with children’s centres
• seek new ways of working to maximise our services to children and their families
• continue to work with and value our partners so we can be ambassadors for each other’s services

Finally, in a challenging year, thank you to everyone who has worked hard to ensure Bookstart packs and the Bookstart message reach as many children in Kent as possible.

Karen Sillifant
Service Development Librarian (Children 0 - 10)
Libraries & Archives
Kent County Council
Internal: 7698 6211
External: 01843 256211
Email: bookstart@kent.gov.uk