

BookTrust Learning Zone Spotlight report

Working together to get children
reading in Bath and North East
Somerset

May 2026



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1: Introduction

In this section:

- About BookTrust
- About BookTrust's Learning Zones
- About this Spotlight report
- Reflections from BookTrust and Bath and North East Somerset

About BookTrust

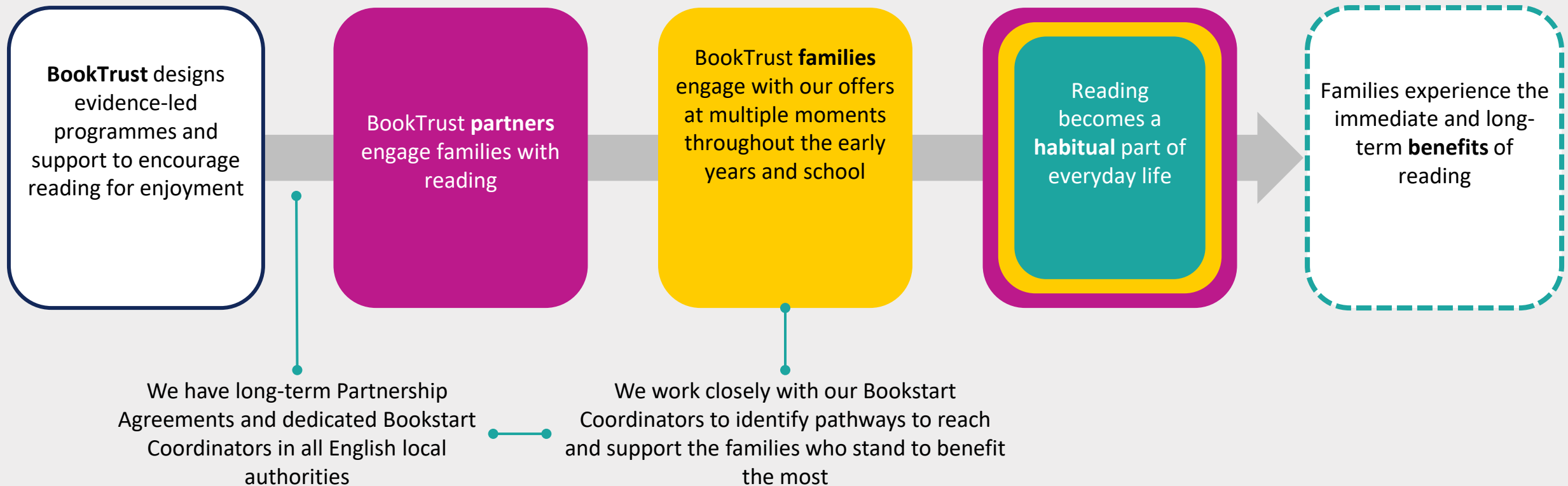
BookTrust is the UK's largest children's reading charity, supporting millions of children to get reading each year. We operate in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and have a network of over 6,000 community-based partners who help us to support families with children from 0-13. Our work is evidence-informed and impact-driven and our research and evaluation capabilities are focused on understanding the life-changing benefits of reading and families' attitudes and behaviours towards reading. This work informs our design and innovation approach which shows how to create sustained reading habits in families.

BookTrust brings together:

- A network of skilled delivery partners including local authorities, health visitors, schools, libraries, social workers and early years practitioners
- A diverse community of children's authors, illustrators and publishers
- National agencies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and book gifting organisations around the world
- Committed and supportive funders, donors and friends



BookTrust is an evidence-led organisation, working with a network of community-based partners to support families to read more



From babies to teenagers, reading brings profound and wide-ranging benefits that can have a lifelong impact on children's lives

Reading supports children to:



Overcome inequalities before they deepen



Bond with their caregivers and experience better mental wellbeing



Meet early development milestones and do better at school



Develop empathy, creativity and imagination



Scan the QR code or click [here](#) to access our interactive tool on the benefits of reading

About BookTrust's Learning Zones

As a national organisation, BookTrust is continuously learning about its work across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The seven Learning Zones are collaborative learning partnerships between local authorities and BookTrust, and are incubators for new BookTrust pilots, experiments and learning, focused on what helps get families reading.

Learning and working together in this way allows us to:

- Showcase best practice examples of how BookTrust programmes support families
- Ensure BookTrust's work is based on a deep, and evolving, understanding of the partner landscape

This ensures that families and partners remain at the heart of our programmes. By collaborating closely with partners throughout our design, evaluation, and ongoing learning, we can better keep their unique needs in mind, ensuring our programmes are effective in diverse local contexts across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Learning Zones represent diversity in terms of regional spread, topographical and economic variation (e.g. coastal, rural, city, London borough, former industrial town), range of demographics, unique local challenges, and a mix of delivery pathways for BookTrust's programmes.

This spotlight report focuses on our work in Bath and North East Somerset.



Reflections from BookTrust and B&NES

“ *The brilliant work of Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES) Library Service’s outreach team showcases how bringing the right resources into place-based, collaborative engagement can deepen both the impact and reach of support to children and families.*

It’s clear these ways of working have been integral to provision of local support for families on lower incomes and those with particular needs, through the library service and beyond. Our evolving learning partnership with B&NES is demonstrating how testing ideas and working closely to practitioners and families has the potential to build impact over time. We are really proud to partner with B&NES as one of our Learning Zones.

”



Julie Hayward
Director of Partnerships
BookTrust

“ *BookTrust resources make a real difference for our youngest families, giving us simple, practical ways to support them right from the start. We know that children on Free School Meals (FSM) and those with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) still face big gaps in attainment locally.*

BookTrust packs help us step in early, offering positive reading experiences before those gaps widen. By sharing these packs through our Sensory Spaces, as well as community partners and mobile library, we can reach families who might otherwise miss out.

”



Clare Morris
Head of Customer Services
and Libraries, B&NES

2: About Bath and North East Somerset: local population data

In this section:

- Summary of key demographics in Bath and North East Somerset
- The main barriers that prevent shared reading
- Local programmes and initiatives

About Bath and NE Somerset: local population data



26,133
children aged 0-15.
16.4% of overall population.¹



4.7%
of overall population children aged
0-4¹



25.9%
of households are single family households
with dependent children¹



4826
Children and young people
(aged 5-18) have support for special
educational needs (15.1% of school aged
population)²



4.9%
People speak English as an additional
language¹



218
Children are in the care of the local
authority (2024)

Deprivation: Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index³ = 10.4%

Indices of Multiple Deprivation⁴ = 265th

The main barriers and challenges that prevent families reading together

66% of parents and carers report at least one challenge to sharing books with their child. Our research with families highlights some of the challenges families face to reading:



Lack of time – 37% of parents/carers report that they lack time for shared reading due to work, caring for multiple children, or competing parenting demands.¹



Lack of confidence – 50% of parents/carers either feel unsure or are not always clear on how to support their child to enjoy reading.¹



Lack of access to children's books at home - 92% of BookTrust's early years partners report this as an important challenge for the families they work with.²

In Bath and North East Somerset, we heard how the Early Years Team address barriers:



Across Bath and North East Somerset's urban and rural communities, we are working together to strengthen early reading and literacy through targeted language programmes and support for the library service, ensuring every child has access to high-quality books.

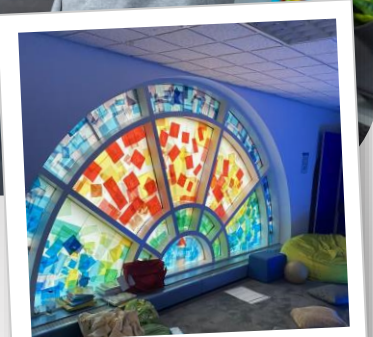
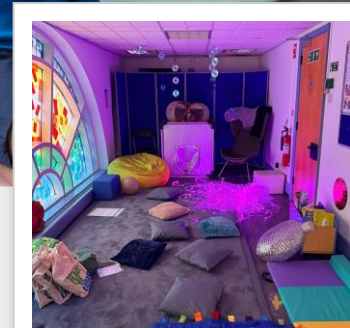
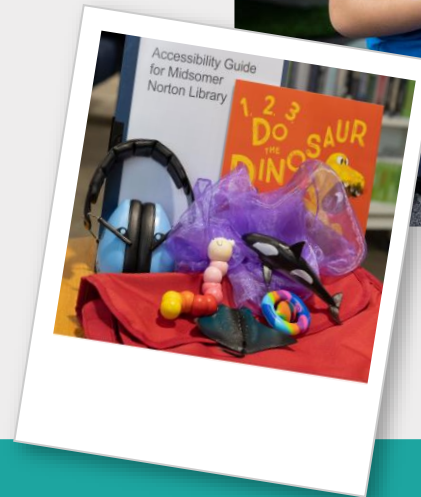
While some children face barriers to early literacy, our shared focus is on reducing these and enabling all children, wherever they live, to thrive as confident, enthusiastic readers.



B&NES Early Years Service

Local Initiatives: Sensory Spaces in Bath and North East Somerset Libraries

- **Sensory Spaces** were first introduced in Bath Central Library in Oct 2022 by Sam Meunier and the Bath team, with further spaces created in Keynsham and Midsomer Norton in the following years
- **Designed thoughtfully for children with additional needs**, they offer a calm, flexible environment for shared reading, play and exploration
- **Knowledgeable and experienced staff librarians are behind the project**, committed to exploring how libraries can reach families with the greatest need
- **BookTrust Star, Touch and Shine packs are embedded throughout the offer**, enabling families to engage with stories in ways that suit different needs. For more on these packs see [here](#).



3: Supporting Bath and North East Somerset families with reading and sharing stories

In this section:

- Overview of BookTrust's programmes
- How many families we reach together in Bath and North East Somerset
- Our work mapping Bath and North East Somerset's Early Years network and plans for the future

About BookTrust's programmes



- **Bookstart Baby:** A universal programme for every newborn baby in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, designed to encourage families to start shared reading early
- **Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler:** Our programme to support 1-4-year-olds from low-income households to start reading or to read more
- **BookTrust Storytime:** Our national library programme, supporting families to experience enjoyable and inspiring story sharing in libraries and at home
- **Bookstart Additional Needs:** Three specialist programmes to support children who are deaf; with vision impairment; and with conditions affecting their fine motor skills
- **Dual Language books:** Book packs that include a dual-language book for families who speak English as an additional language

Our school programmes:

- Bookbuzz – Key Stage 2 and 3
- Bookspark – Key Stage 3
- BookTrust Represents – age 7 to 12
- Great Books Guide
- Letterbox Club
- Northern Ireland Author Tours – age 5-11

Visit [our website](#) to find out more about our school programmes

Together, we reach over 3,800 children in Bath and North East Somerset each year



We work with health visitors to reach 1,545 **newborn babies** with Bookstart Baby every year, via the 6-week health check

The library service and specialist partners help us to support **128 children aged 1-5** each year through our Additional Needs programme



We work with the library service to share our Dual Language books with **29 families** who speak English as an Additional Language

We work with 3 core and at least 1 community-run library in Bath and North East Somerset on our BookTrust Storytime programme. Skilled staff and volunteers use the books and resources to inspire families to share stories in the library and at home.

We estimate that **over 230 children** take part



We work with the Library, Information and Advice Services, Children's Centres and the Mobile Library outreach programme to reach **266 1-2-year olds** and **546 3-4 year olds** with our Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler programme



We work with **4** secondary schools in Bath and North East Somerset to reach **1,010 students** with our Bookbuzz programme

We work with BANES Children's Services to reach **70 Looked After Children aged 3-13** with our Letterbox Club programme

LETTER BOX
the letterbox club

How our partner network delivered our EY programmes in Bath and North East Somerset 24/25

100% of Dual Language programme delivered via the **Library Service and Children's Centres**

100% of Early Years programme for children with additional needs delivered via the **Library Service and specialist partners**

54% of Early Years Pre-Schooler programme delivered via 4 **Children's Centres**

41% of Early Years Pre-Schooler programme delivered directly via the **local authority Housing and Welfare Service and Library Service**

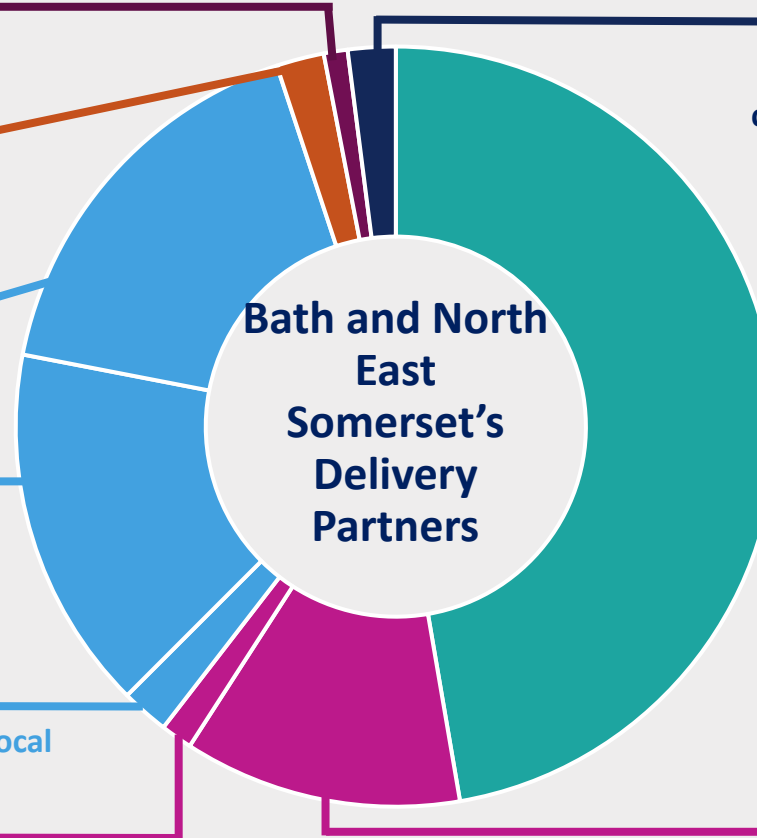
5% of Early Years Pre-Schooler programme delivered through **local children's charities**

19% of Early Years Toddler programme delivered through the **local authority Housing and Welfare Service and Library Service**

100% of Storytime resources were used by **all three core libraries and one community library in Bath and North East Somerset**

100% of Bookstart Baby programme delivered via the **Health Visitor Team**

81% of Early Years Toddler programme delivered via 4 **Children's Centres**



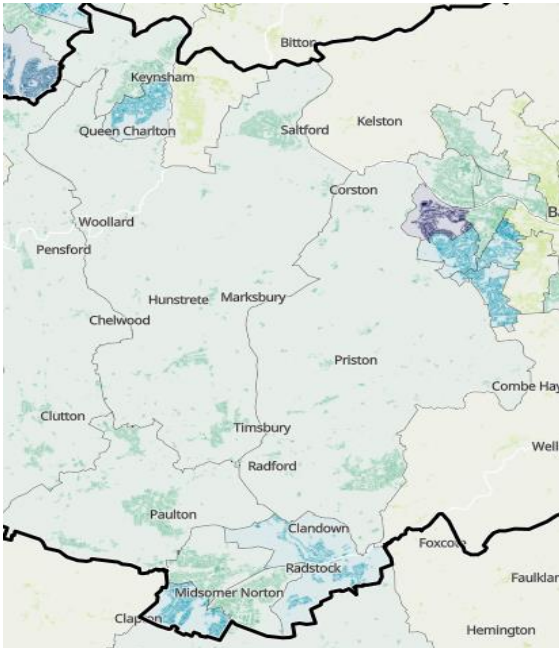
■ Bookstart Baby
 ■ Toddler
 ■ Pre-Schooler
 ■ Bookstart Additional Needs
 ■ Storytime

■ Toddler
 ■ Pre-Schooler
 ■ Pre-Schooler
 ■ Dual Language

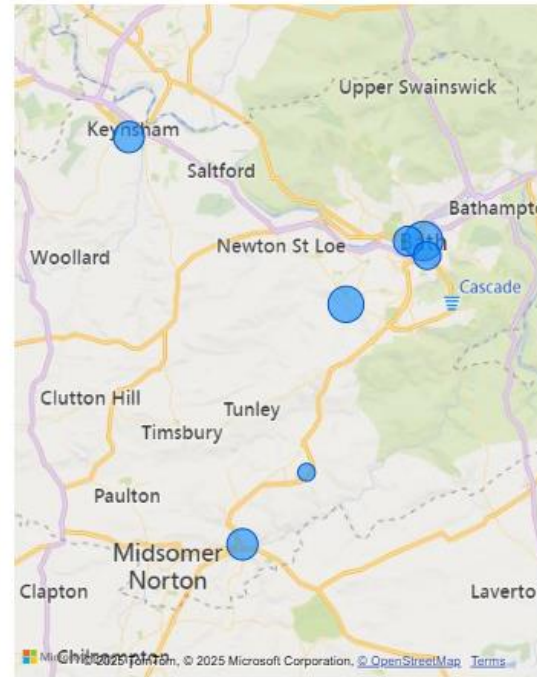
Our targeted EY programmes focus on Bath and North East Somerset families who stand to benefit the most

Working closely with our Bookstart Coordinator, BookTrust's targeted Early Years packs are allocated and gifted via Children's Centres, a local children's charity and to children in settings via targeted outreach programmes across Bath and North East Somerset. BookTrust collates in-depth data on where and via which partners these resources are gifted, and as the below mapping indicates our targeted gifting correlates with the majority of the most deprived neighbourhoods and wards in the Bath and North East Somerset region.

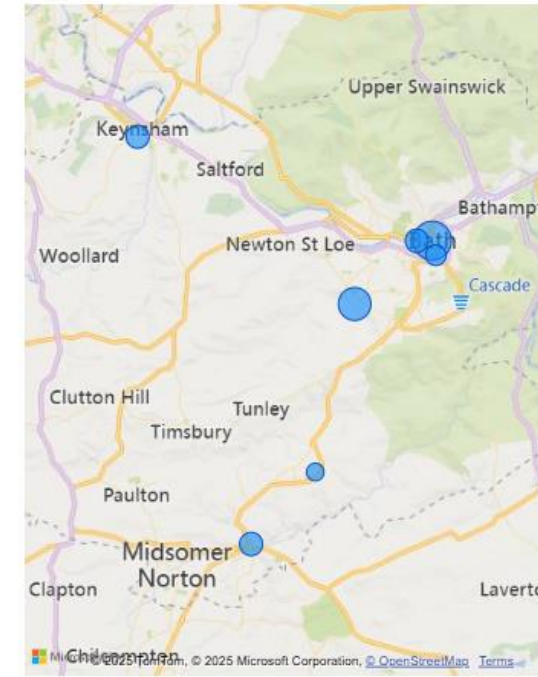
Households in Bath and North East Somerset that are deprived in two dimensions



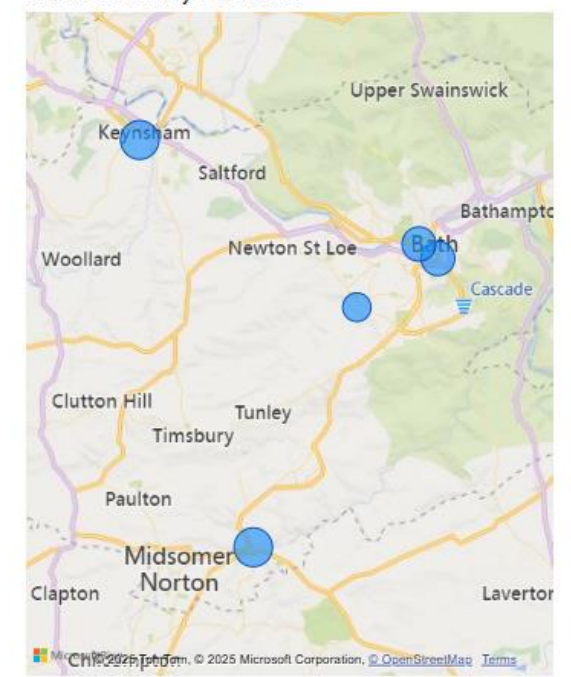
All EYTO Resources by Postcode



Pre-schooler Pack by Postcode



Toddler Pack by Postcode



Story Explorers pilot in Bath and North East Somerset

BookTrust has been working with the Alternate Care Team in B&NES for the past year in connection with the Story Explorers pilot, which supports Kinship families to better understand the benefits of sharing stories as a relational practice

- The programme runs for 6 months, in which time each family receives a total of six story kits to their home address
- 14 kinship families with children aged 2-4 year olds were invited to take part in the programme. BookTrust were able to gift 14 fully funded subscriptions. A kinship carer in Bath said “Sharing the experience of opening the box, exploring the toys and books together, was very bonding. We really enjoyed the stories, many of which I went on to share with our local toddler group.”
- Within B&NES, each kinship family is allocated a worker who has regular touch points with the family. This is a great opportunity for B&NES to find out how the families are using the packs and gain valuable insights while promoting and encouraging families to use the resources



“*Story Explorers is a really lovely opportunity to offer our carers. It provides tangible support that is fun and engaging, while actively promoting attachment and connection.*”

- Cat Reeves, Alternate Care Team

Our outreach community development work in Bath and North East Somerset

In August 2025 our development work kicked off. This was an additional piece of work to our main programmes, and foundational to our evolving learning partnership with Bath and North East Somerset

- Sam and the team were **keen to engage with settings outside of the Library** to promote accessible resources and develop inclusive Storytime offerings
- They connected with a **specialist setting called Bath Opportunity Pre-School (BOP) in Keynsham**, which provides Early Years Education and therapeutic services to children with additional needs
- In December 2025 Sam and Cathy **delivered a bespoke Storytime using BookTrust resources** for a group of children under 5 at BOP



The impact of our outreach community development project

- The session was very well received and a new gifting pathway was established, **strengthening connections between BOP, B&NES Library Service and BookTrust**
- Lots of **insights and learning** were taken from the session. Ideas shared by BOP's team of experienced practitioners were fed back into the Library offer
- Specialist settings like BOP are trusted sources of information for parents and carers – opening a **new means to promote accessible library services to families with additional needs**



Our community development work in Bath and North East Somerset, part 2

- **Building on the learnings from the session at BOP**, the library team developed a Relaxed Storytime model making use of the Sensory Space away from the busy main library floor
- In January 2026 the **first Relaxed Storytime was hosted at Bath Central Library** for families with children on the autism spectrum and other sensory needs, supported by BookTrust resources
- The session was **promoted through a network of partners and settings** working in the SEND space
- **Tactile and engaging titles** from BookTrust were read alongside the library's Story Sacks, an underused fun and interactive storytelling resource. Children who attended were gifted BookTrust STAR packs and BookTrust titles to take home



The impact of our community development project

- Our evolving learning partnership with Bath and North East Somerset demonstrates how **testing ideas and listening closely to families** can reduce barriers to access over time
- Through **close collaboration with specialist partners** such as Bath Opportunity Preschool, the library continues to grow their offering with the confidence that it is credible and needs-led

“*BookTrust’s specialist books, packs and insights enabled us to deliver an enhanced outreach session for BOP, giving us valuable, practical learning. It’s boosted our confidence and directly shaped a format for future events that aim to help SEND families feel welcome and engaged in the library.*”

-Sam Meunier, Development and Outreach Officer (BookTrust Coordinator) B&NES



4: The impact of our programmes

In this section:

- The benefits of early shared reading
- The impact of Bookstart Baby
- The impact of Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler
- The impact of BookTrust Storytime
- Partners' views on BookTrust's programmes and support

The benefits of early shared reading

Early development

Stimulation from reading, playing, talking and singing with caregivers enhances children's cognitive, physical, social and emotional growth

- 1 Better **brain development**, attention and **cognitive ability**
- 2 Improving children's **speech and language development and literacy skills** – from as early as 9 months old
- 3 Improving children's **socio-emotional skills** and **better mental wellbeing and self esteem** from as early as 3 months

Family wellbeing

Growing up in a happy home with a secure relationship to a caregiver is important for children's learning and development

- 1 Shared reading provides important moments for **bonding**
- 2 'Synchronised behaviour' (like shared reading) is associated with **improved maternal mental health**
- 3 Story reading is linked to **less hyperactivity** and emotional / anxiety problems for children aged 3-8 years

Home learning and school readiness

The early home learning environment is key, as the development gap starts early and persists

- 1 Books support **oral language** and **foundational reading skills**
- 2 **Enjoyable** early reading is more likely to lead to a **lifelong habit**
- 3 Telling and re-telling stories helps children to **process emotions** and widen **emotional vocabulary**
- 4 **Joint attention** can help to calm and promote children's **emotional resilience**

The earlier families start reading, the more likely it is that habits will form, and stick

% of children still being read to daily at 5-7 years

66%

First read to in first year

49%

First read to 12months +



Bookstart Baby supports parents and carers to read with their children from the earliest moments



65%

Say the books included in the pack were some the first they owned for their baby

78%

Say Bookstart Baby prompted them to read and share stories more with their children

68%

Say Bookstart Baby made them feel more confident about reading with their child

“ I wouldn't have started reading with my older children until they were about 2 years old. The Bookstart Baby pack did make me think maybe I'm leaving it a bit late. And I did try it earlier when my daughter was 3 months old, and it did work, because now at 2, she absolutely loves her books and is speaking so well.

”
- Parent receiving Bookstart Baby

“ I just don't think we would've started reading with [the baby] from such a young age if it weren't for these books [...] They're babies, they don't really do much - all they do is lie there and stare! You don't really know how much is being absorbed. So I suppose it never really occurred to me that you could sit and read to them so young.

”
- Parent receiving Bookstart Baby

Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler support families to start or continue their reading journeys

33%

of families said these were some of the **first books they owned** for their child

82%

said the programme has created more opportunities for **quality time together**

55%

of families have tried to set up a **reading routine** at home since receiving the pack

71%

said their children have **learned new words** from using the books and activities

56%

say their children have **paid more attention** when being read to since they started using the programme

54%

say their children have **spoken or interacted more** when being read to since they started using the programme

“The packs are a lovely idea. My son loves them and it inspires me to make more time exploring stories rather than just getting through them quickly for bedtime.”

- Parent from a low-income household, Bookstart Pre-schooler

“As a first time mum, I thought I'd be silly reading a book to my baby, but when I got this pack I thought I'd give it a try. She loved it, she was cooing and smiling the whole time.”

- Parent from a low-income household. Bookstart Toddler

Read the latest report and our previous reports on our [website](#)

Through working with over 2,500 libraries, we estimate that over 60,000 children under 5 experienced BookTrust Storytime in 2024-25



Around 3 in 10 were new to the library

Around 5 in 10 were from low-income families

Around 6 in 10 have returned to the library after their initial visit

Around 4 in 10 signed up for library membership

This includes **three core libraries, one mobile library and one community library** in Bath and North East Somerset!



84% of our library partners say BookTrust Storytime has **helped support** their libraries' work with children under 5.

Read the latest report [here](#)

More than 7 in 10 children receiving Letterbox Club are reading more due to the programme

“When he first came to us, he was about two years behind on his reading. He wasn't confident and he didn't like to read. He thought it was boring and a chore. Before bed, I would read five pages to him and he would read one. It can be a bit painful when they're struggling. To see him improve at reading has been awesome. He began to read two pages at a time and I would just read one. We did that for another couple of months.

Now, he reads independently, but he likes to tell me about the story. Since he first came to us, our relationship has changed 100%. Before, he kept me at arms' length. Mums weren't trustworthy people to him – mums were 'over there'. Now, with our lovely night time ritual, including reading stories...he's started saying to me, "Love you, 'Laine," and I'll say, "Love you." It's beautiful.

- Elaine, a foster carer who receives our Letterbox Club parcels for her son, aged 9

96%

of children like or love Letterbox Club and 89% like or love the books in the parcels

73%

of children are reading more, either on their own (72%) or with an adult (47%)

“It has helped me understand being in foster care.

- Child aged 9 receiving Letterbox Club

”



Scan the QR code or click [here](#) to learn more about why reading is so important for children experiencing vulnerability

Bookbuzz supports secondary schools to engage their pupils with independent reading

83%

of schools say Bookbuzz is a useful tool for **helping children transition** into Year 7

98%

of schools say Bookbuzz helps them to develop a **reading for pleasure culture**

93%

of schools say Bookbuzz provides a wide selection of books for **students of all abilities** to choose from

90%

say Bookbuzz **helps their school meet DfE Reading Framework's objectives** on reading for pleasure

“ The school is in a disadvantaged area and it is one of my professional objectives to ensure that as many pupils as possible are able to build up access to books of their choice at home as well as in the library at school. BookBuzz allows the choice and excitement of gifting books new pupils to school and bringing the pleasure back to reading.

- School librarian, West Midlands

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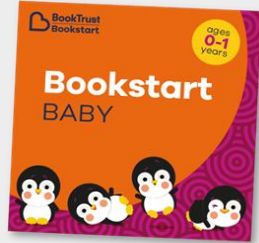
“ The students enjoy listening to your video choosing their OWN book. They have smiles on their faces when they receive them as some children have very little or no books at home. Have encouraged the students to have a book box in their English classes so they can have book swaps.

- School librarian, East of England

”

BookTrust partners' views on our Early Years programmes

Bookstart Baby



94% of partners who used Bookstart Baby say it is effective as a programme designed to support families to **start reading with their children as early as possible**

96% of partners say BookTrust's work supporting children and families to start reading or to read more is impactful

Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler



89% of partners who used Bookstart Toddler or Pre-schooler say it is effective as a programme to get **families with young children reading together**

BookTrust Storytime



70% of partners who used BookTrust Storytime say it is effective as a programme designed to **support children and families who are new to the library**, or who would not normally use library services, to have a **positive library experience**

Our partners tell us that our resources support them to make a difference for families



96%

BookTrust resources help us to engage children/families with reading



90%

BookTrust resources help us to engage children/families from low-income households with reading



88%

BookTrust supports my organisation to meet its overall objectives



87%

BookTrust helps us to better support children/ families from low-income households overall

Our partners tell us that our resources are effective at addressing a range of issues facing families

95% 

Children's reading for enjoyment

95% 

Children's literacy

93% 

Bonding between children and parents/carers

92% 

Children's speech and language development

90% 

Supporting families from low-income households to read

90% 

Encouraging children's creativity and imagination

85% 

Children's school readiness

83% 

Children's home learning environment

80% 

Children's mental health and wellbeing

80% 

Children's socio-emotional development

71% 

Parent/carer wellbeing and mental health

71% 

Supporting delivery of quality childcare provision

5. Case Study

"To work with BookTrust and access all the learning and expertise based on evidence and research, it gave us confidence in what we were trying to do"

-Sam Meunier, Development and Outreach Officer
(BookTrust Coordinator) B&NES

[Click here to read more from Sam about the project on BookTrust's website](#)

