



Impact Report

2022/23

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Introduction



Welcome

2022/23 was a challenging period for the children and families BookTrust supports and the challenges they face continue today. Many more families are living in poverty due to the cost-of-living crisis. Children who missed out on critical development opportunities during the pandemic are falling behind in terms of language development, literacy and communication skills. Their social and emotional well-being has been affected.

BookTrust knows that early shared reading helps give children the best start in life, addressing some of the negative effects of poverty and the pandemic. With the unprecedented challenges facing families and partners who work with them, it is more important than ever to design support based on robust evidence of families' lives and needs. And it is vital that we direct limited resources, including our partners' scarce time, in the most impactful way to support children most in need. This is why we take understanding and improving our impact so seriously.

2022/23 was a pivotal year for BookTrust. It is when we have seen the first promising signs of the impact of our new strategy and our new scaled programmes designed to get families reading. Evaluation with parents and carers demonstrates that we are achieving the outcomes we have designed for: parent/carer and child enjoyment, families learning more about the benefits of reading and new ways to enjoy sharing stories together, and repeated use and engagement with our resources. In turn, more families are spending more time reading together. This means more children are more likely to experience the transformative benefits of reading: reaching early development goals, improved school readiness and attainment, stronger creativity and empathy, improved wellbeing and better understanding of the world.

This work lays strong foundations for this generation of children to experience reading early in childhood, helping to give them the best start in life. We are deeply thankful to our extensive and diverse network of partners who make this possible. Working with thousands of practitioners and community-based organisations, and with the generous support of our current and future funding partners and friends, we can continue to expand our impact for this and future generations of children.

Diana Gerald
Chief Executive Officer, BookTrust

Thank you

We extend a huge thank you to the many thousands of BookTrust partners who work with us, and specifically to:

- Our **Patron, Her Majesty the Queen**, for her ongoing patronage and support for the cause of reading and our **President, Michael Morpurgo**, for his longstanding support and inspiration.
- Our **national network of Bookstart Coordinators, local authorities, practitioners and community partners**, operating in every community in England and Wales, and regionally in Northern Ireland. To those supporting families in libraries, community organisations, early years settings, health visitors and to local authority and schools partners: thank you for being a crucial part of what we do.
- Our **partners in publishing, authors and illustrators**, who are at the heart of our work to inspire children and families on their reading journeys.

“ I really appreciate working with BookTrust. I’m very impressed with the quality of the resources and support offered and we would be unable to offer similar if it weren’t for BookTrust.”

Bookstart Coordinator

“ We had a couple of books [at home], but I’ve learned from coming here how to enjoy reading books to her [my daughter] a lot more. It’s something I probably wouldn’t have done an awful lot of. Now, we’re doing it every night.”

Early years parent,
North West England

We are grateful for the generous support we receive from:

- Arts Council England
- Arts Council Northern Ireland
- Welsh Government
- Northern Ireland Department of Education
- Northern Ireland Education Authority



And we would like to take this opportunity to recognise and thank some of the many **individuals, companies, trusts and foundations** who generously supported our work in the past year including:

- Alex Monroe
- Aquarius Water Solutions Ltd
- Backstop Advisory
- Browns Books
- Build-A-Bear Foundation
- Chartered College of Teaching
- Cirrus
- Clifford Chance Foundation
- Cockayne Grants for the Arts and London Community Foundation
- Dot Foundation
- Elizabeth Frankland Moore and Star Foundation
- Eric Hieltes Stiftelse
- The Folio Society
- Founder's Pledge
- George Cadbury Trust
- GMC Trust
- Halbard Charitable Trust
- Harris Poll
- The Hippocleides Trust
- Hyde Park Place Estate Charity
- Julia and Hans Rausing
- Klaviyo
- KTC Edibles
- LBA books
- MarketingTwentyone Ltd
- Mercury
- Miscellany Foundation
- Mohn Westlake Foundation
- Mushens Entertainment
- Newline Underwriting
- Norton Rose Fulbright LLP
- PDT Partners
- The Pitt-Rivers Charitable Trust
- The Private Office
- Promote Your School
- Reading Mate
- Renaissance Learning
- Roger Raymond Charitable Trust
- RSM UK Foundation
- Selwyn College Fellows' Charities Fund
- ShareGift
- Tanlaw Foundation
- Trevor Chinn Charitable Trust
- Umbrella Foundation
- Vision Arch
- Vitol Foundation
- Wallace LLP
- Waterstones
- Westcoast
- Wyn and Ken Lo Memorial Foundation

Finally, we would like to thank our BookTrust Friends and supporters of our appeals, including the families, schools and nurseries who supported our Pyjamarama fundraiser.

BookTrust in 2022/23: at a glance

2022/23 marked the second year of our new strategy to support low-income families and children from vulnerable family backgrounds to get reading from the earliest moments in childhood. Our work over this period supported children in every community in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We summarise some of our core activities, reach and impact here:

Our reach

Our new early years offer reached almost 400,000 children aged 1–4 and **32% of low-income families with young children aged 1–4**

We delivered books and reading resources to **over 90% of families with new babies**

We provided **over 1.2 million packs** made up of more than **2.4 million books** to families and partners

We had **over 6,000 early years delivery routes** to low-income families with young children

We supported **more than 13,000 children from vulnerable family backgrounds** – the majority of these are children aged 3–13 who are looked after

We supported **2,400 libraries and over 50,000 children** through BookTrust Storytime

“ I have always hated reading and now your books have changed me so thank you for that.”



Letterbox Club, child, age 11

We had **partnership agreements** in place with **every local authority** in England and Wales

We sent our Great Books Guide to **every primary school** in England and Northern Ireland

We wrote and published over **370 book reviews** on our **BookFinder platform**

Over a third of state secondary schools and **272,000 pupils** participated in our Bookbuzz programme

Over 1,400 children and families and 650 partners took part in BookTrust learning activities

In 2022/23 alone, we reached **over 1.9 million families** across England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Our impact



88% of partners in our early years network **say our resources and activities supported them** in their work



78% of partners in our early years network **say BookTrust resources are high quality**



98% of families say they **enjoyed using our new early years resources** and activities with their children



72% of families receiving our Bookstart Baby pack **say it made them feel more confident** about reading with their children



72% of families receiving our Bookstart Baby pack **say it helped them to find new ways to spend time with their child**



92% of families rate our early years **resources as either good or excellent**



82% of low-income families participating in our new early years programmes **say they learnt different ways to share stories with their children**



84% of low-income families participating in our new BookTrust Early Years offers **say these prompted them to read more with their children**



96% of children in care receiving Letterbox Club parcels say they **like or love using the resources**



68% of children in care receiving Letterbox Club parcels say they **now read more on their own**





“ You see children coming into nursery at two years old with very little speech. It makes such a difference to bring their parents in, to go through the BookTrust Toddler packs together and get them involved in a story session. Each week, families will listen to the same rhymes, the same stories, and do the same activities based around the story we’re sharing. You see a change happen over time. I may not be able to do anything about a child’s health needs but in terms of their need for interaction and literacy development, you see that these sessions with the Bookstart Toddler packs making a big, big difference to those children’s language development.”

Early years partner

BookTrust 2024: What next?

We are pleased to share this report which summarises our progress in 2022/23. While our evidence shows that we are making a significant difference to the experiences of children from low-income and vulnerable family backgrounds, the scale of the challenge is great and the need for our work urgent. Across the UK, increasing numbers of children are living in poverty and destitution.¹ More and more children are facing the complex challenges associated with childhood in vulnerable family backgrounds.

Throughout 2022/23, we conducted deep learning with families and partners and insights from this inform our current work. We have set clear and ambitious plans across our key focus areas.

Our priorities for 2023/24 include:

- **Early Years** – Evolve and embed the new Bookstart Toddler and Bookstart Pre-schooler programme, extending its reach to more low-income early years families (in 2022/23 we reached 32% of these families).
- **Vulnerable children** – Continue to reach looked after and other children from vulnerable family backgrounds through Letterbox Club and piloting new offers designed with families, expert practitioners and partners that can maximise the particular benefits of shared reading for vulnerable children.
- **Practitioner support** – Expand our engagement with and support to practitioner partners.
- **Schools** – Support more primary school teachers to engage with our reviews and resources, and develop new digital support for teachers to help get school communities reading at home and at school.

We have a series of organisational priorities to support the delivery of our 2023/24 workplan:

- Prioritisation and strategic planning
- Place-based design for impact
- Robust impact measurement
- Partnership working



We look forward to continuing to work with our extraordinary network of partners, donors and funders to drive this change.

In 2023/24 we have a particular focus on building relationships with new community partners, funders and learning partners in our mission to change lives by supporting families to read together.

Please contact [**impact@booktrust.org.uk**](mailto:impact@booktrust.org.uk) to discuss how you can work with us as a learning partner, funder or community partner.

About BookTrust

Introducing BookTrust and our impact model

BookTrust is the UK's largest children's reading charity. Each year we reach millions of children and families, inspiring them with books, resources and support to get them started on their reading journeys. We operate in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and have long-term partnership agreements in place with every local authority in England and Wales.

In 2021 we launched our new strategy, **The Next Chapter**, which set out our mission to get every child reading regularly and by choice so they can experience **the immediate and long-term benefits of reading**. This strategy describes our ambition to grow as an evidence-led behaviour change organisation, supporting deep and sustained impact at scale for this and future generations of children. In it, we prioritise meeting the needs of children who face the greatest barriers and for whom the benefits of reading can be most transformative.

This report sets out our progress in the second year of delivering this new strategy and the impact it is having on children and families from every community in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.



BookTrust's impact model

Giving every child the best start in life through the magic and power of reading

BookTrust designs evidence-led programmes and support to encourage reading for enjoyment. Our high-quality resources and activities are designed for behaviour change and are shared via our extensive partner network, who are specially selected by BookTrust because of their ability to reach those most in need.

BookTrust partners engage with our high quality resources and have the tools and confidence to engage families with reading, as well as seeing its importance.

BookTrust families engage with our offers at multiple moments throughout the early years and school. We provide a diverse range of high quality books and activities, offering families choice over how to engage with reading, meaning they feel confident and inspired to read.

Reading becomes a habitual part of everyday life for children from low-income and vulnerable family backgrounds.

Families experience the immediate and long-term benefits of reading



Overcoming disadvantage caused by inequalities.

Improved **social mobility** and **economic attainment**.



Being happier and healthier, with better mental wellbeing and self-esteem.

Improved **bonding** and positive **attachment**.



Doing better at school and making more progress across the curriculum.

Improved **speech, language** and **literacy**.



Helping children to develop empathy and creativity.

Improved **imagination**.

Why reading matters

These are challenging times for children. Many more families are now living in poverty due to the cost-of-living crisis.ⁱⁱ Children who missed out on critical development opportunities during the pandemic have fallen behind in terms of language development, literacy and communication skills.ⁱⁱⁱ Their social and emotional wellbeing has also been affected.

We know from decades of experience of working with tens of millions of children and thousands of local partners, that reading plays a crucial role in helping to achieve good outcomes for children. It has a widely evidenced impact on **both immediate and long-term outcomes.**

In the short-term, reading contributes to bonding and attachment, child and parental wellbeing, children's brain development, their understanding of the world around them, and school readiness. As children grow, those who read regularly and by choice are happier and healthier, have better literacy, perform better across the curriculum and demonstrate stronger empathy and creativity. In the longer term, reading can mitigate long-term socio-economic inequalities. In summary: reading has the power to change lives. Investing in children's reading early in childhood means more children get to experience these immediate and long-term benefits.



However, our research shows that while the majority of families with young children know that reading is important some struggle to make it part of family life. 95% of families know it is important to read with their child but 53% of parents and carers of primary-age children have told us that reading does not play a big role in their life as a family.



Only 42% of children had a bedtime story (Sources: BookTrust Family Survey 2021 and 2022).

Our approach to getting families reading

BookTrust wants all families to establish a routine of reading together with their babies as early as possible and to continue this throughout childhood, as children learn to read independently.

Our mission is ambitious. We seek deep and sustained impact across millions of families in England, Wales and Northern Ireland living in different circumstances, facing different challenges with different needs, barriers and motivations. We aim to achieve impact through four key areas of focus:



BookTrust's four areas of focus for getting children reading

Focus Area 1: Early Years

Embedding reading in the life of every low-income family

Activities for 2022/23 included:

- Providing inspiring, high-quality books, resources and reading experiences for low-income families with children in the early years designed to motivate and support them to regularly share stories together, giving children the best start on their reading journeys.
- This included targeted support to 32% of low-income families with children aged 1–4 through the new Bookstart Toddler and Bookstart Pre-schooler programmes.

Focus Area 2: Children from vulnerable family backgrounds

Using shared reading to bring enjoyment and stability to vulnerable children

Activities for 2022/23 included:

- Delivery of Letterbox Club, our long standing, national multibook gift offer for looked after children.
- Launch of an extensive programme of learning to identify how to step-change future reading experiences for a wider cohort of children from vulnerable family backgrounds.

Focus Area 3: Practitioner support

Supporting early years practitioners to promote shared family reading

Activities for 2022/23 included:

- Launching physical and digital Storyteller tools to support community-based practitioners to get families reading.
- Through BookTrust Storytime, supporting 2,400 libraries to engage new families in library-based activities and encourage families to come back again and again.

Focus Area 4: Schools

Supporting schools to foster a love of reading

Activities for 2022/23 included:

- BookTrust Represents programme consisting of inspiring online and in-person author events.
- High-quality resources for reception aged children.
- Development work to inform how to increase our future impact for children who most need reading support.

BookTrust: focusing our support for impact

While we know that all children benefit from reading, we are committed to offering more targeted support to families from low-income and vulnerable backgrounds because we know these children stand to benefit the most from reading regularly and by choice.

We use the term 'low-income families' to indicate those living in relative poverty as defined by the Department for Work and Pensions.

During 2022/23, our support for children from vulnerable family backgrounds focused particularly on children in long-term foster care. Children from vulnerable family backgrounds are also over-represented in low-income households.

Of the 14 million children in the UK, **29% (4.2 million)** live in low-income households.



BookTrust's evidence-led approach to changing children's lives

Our 2021–25 strategy demonstrates the need for BookTrust to grow as an evidence-based organisation. It recognises that to create lasting behaviour-change impact for this generation of children we need to identify, translate and activate insight across all our work and develop a solid approach to impact measurement. Since 2021 we have transformed our approach to learning, development and impact measurement, embedding a robust model to support the delivery of our strategy:

BookTrust's evidence-led model to changing reading behaviours for children from low-income and vulnerable family backgrounds



Learning and impact measurement at BookTrust

The learning model we have applied to our new Bookstart Toddler, Bookstart Pre-schooler and BookTrust Storytime offers exemplifies our wider organisational approach to human-centred design and impact measurement to get families reading:

Stage 1

Our **new strategy** and **theory of change** were informed by extensive research and decades of work with families and partners. Research defined our new target audiences and set out how to embed behaviour change in reading. It made clear the scale of the challenge and our need to pivot from a primary focus on procuring and delivery of books to families, to develop full service propositions, combining resources, support and experiences to inspire behaviour change.

Stage 2

Mixed-methods **foundational discovery research** conducted in 2021 and 2022 further strengthened our understanding of the families we are looking to serve – their lives, priorities and needs, and motivators and barriers to reading. This included a national survey of 2,148 low-income families, focus groups with parents and carers and learning with early years practitioners.

Stage 3

Based on key insights from these activities we embarked on an intense period of **co-creation, design, prototyping and small scale testing** with families and early years experts. This work informed the development of new, impactful ways of reaching and supporting families that would deliver the outcomes set out in our **theory of change**.

Stage 4

We launched the **national pilot of our BookStart Toddler and BookStart Pre-schooler programme**, designed for low-income families, to almost 400,000 children through our network of early years partners. At the same time we developed and launched the BookTrust Storytime offer in over 2,400 libraries. This marked a step change in our support to better meet the needs of low-income and vulnerable families by creating multi-touchpoint reading experiences to drive impact at scale.

Stage 5

We conducted **mixed methods evaluations of our offers** (surveys, qualitative and observational research) to measure their success against the outcomes we designed for. Findings from these evaluations demonstrate the strength of our impact and progress, and identify what more we need to do to make regular shared reading a reality for more families and children.

Stage 6

We continue to **apply insights** from our learning activities to **new innovation and continuous improvement** within our portfolio of support to families. Building on our previous learning we conducted new research to deepen family engagement with reading. In 2022 we delivered a programme of ethnographic research with 24 target audience families to identify new mechanisms for behaviour change impact. Insights from this research help us define and test future opportunities for behaviour change.

2022/23 was a major year of learning for BookTrust. We undertook foundational research via our national family survey of low-income families; we co-designed and tested with families and expert partners to shape and deliver small scale and national pilots; we ran large scale mixed methods monitoring, learning and evaluation of our major programmes, and delivered online ethnographic work with target audience families. These learning activities inform our ongoing programme work, investment priorities and organisational planning.

We present data from our learning and impact measurement approaches throughout this document.



Our Impact

Focus area 1: Early Years

Embedding reading in the life of every low-income family

Overview

Getting families reading together from the earliest moments brings unique immediate and long-term benefits to children and those reading with them, and is critical to building longer term reading habits in families. Early shared reading supports bonding between children and their parents^{iv}, stimulates brain development^v and improves sleep^{vi}. It can improve parental mental health^{vii} and help children to reach early development goals. During 2022/23 we made excellent progress in supporting families in the early years on their reading journeys, with a particular focus on low-income families. Following extensive research of what works to get families reading together we developed and extended our offer for children aged 0–6:

BookTrust Early Years reading journey



Visual 1: BookTrust's Early Years portfolio

“ As soon as we received [Bookstart Baby] he was immediately drawn to the colours and particularly the touch and feel parts which he really enjoyed. I had books but never felt I had enough time to consistently read them with him. As soon as I seen him with the pack I realised how much he enjoyed them and am consistently making an effort every day to read and let him handle them. I think this is a fantastic pack to get new parents thinking of the importance of reading. I also have found it another good bonding tool.”

Early years parent, England



Reach and impact

Bookstart Baby

Bookstart Baby has supported families with newborn babies for over 25 years. In 2022/23 we refreshed our Bookstart Baby packs to ensure the design and contents spark early reading moments in families. We introduced new playful, interactive books and activities.

We worked with health professionals, libraries, registrars and other early years professionals to deliver books and resources to **over 90%** of all newborn babies in England and Wales – gifting more than **half a million** Bookstart Baby packs.



86% of parents responding to our evaluation survey **said the books** included in the pack **were among the first they owned** for their child



68% of parents said that Bookstart Baby prompted them to read and **share stories with their child more** than they may have done otherwise

BookTrust Early Years offers: Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler

We designed and launched Bookstart Toddler, Pre-schooler and our new Storyteller resources for practitioners. (Please see [page 15](#) for details on our design process). These programmes are based on rigorous evidence and provide books, resources and support to inspire and motivate families on low incomes to read regularly. Through our development work, we identified key insights to address in the design of these programmes. We learned, for example, that connecting books to other activities and experiences encourages families to read together, and that when both children and parents enjoy reading together, they want to read together more often. We therefore developed our new resources to include interactive and playful books, activity ideas and props for games based on the themes in the books.

Our evaluation shows that the new offers are getting families reading, delivering on the outcomes we designed for, including family enjoyment and inspiring families with new ways to read together:



In 2022/23, through our network of **early years delivery partners**, in every local authority/council across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, we were able to reach almost **400,000 children aged 1–4**. With more than 6,000 delivery pathways we reached 32% of low-income families with children in this age group.



Our early data shows that the impact of these offers was strong, and greatest for low-income families who were even more likely than families overall to:

- **learn something new** about the benefits of reading (77% of low-income families vs. 67% of families overall)
- learn about **different ways to read and share stories** together (82% of low-income families vs. 78% of families overall)
- be prompted to **read more** (84% of low-income families vs. 74% of families overall)
- 98% of families found the BookTrust Early Years offer resources **exciting and enjoyable**

BookTrust Storytime

BookTrust Storytime is our library-based offer for under 5s developed in collaboration with local authorities, libraries and families. The programme creates engaging and enjoyable reading experiences for families, helping to build parental confidence, improve familiarity with the best books for sharing with young children, and increase families' motivation to share stories at home. BookTrust Storytime supports partners in their work to engage new families, particularly by encouraging those from low-income backgrounds to visit libraries and then return to them again and again.

In 2022/23, **2,400 libraries** in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and an estimated **50,000 children** used or engaged with BookTrust Storytime:



45% of BookTrust Storytime families were from **low-income households**



31% of families who experienced BookTrust Storytime were **new to the library** they visited



70% of families returned to the library after their initial BookTrust Storytime visit



“ The resources are very colourful and interactive, just what staff and parents need to support and encourage reading, they provide an active tool for parents to bond with their child from an early age. All children love to listen to stories even small babies. The resources help support the learning journey encouraging children to ask questions about the world around them.”

Bookstart Coordinator,
North East England

Our work with libraries also involved an innovative pilot with CBeebies as part of World Book Day celebrations, creating memorable story-sharing moments for early years families.

Bookstart Early Years for 2–3-year-olds in Wales

Thanks to funding from the Welsh Government we reached **over 30,000 2–3-year-olds in Wales** with the bilingual Bookstart Early Years pack. This offer is delivered in partnership with health visitors across Wales at families' 27-month health check. It is designed to stimulate young minds and help parents enjoy story sharing with their children.

Pori Drwy Stori

The Pori Drwy Stori programme, funded by the Welsh Government, aims to inspire a love of books, stories and rhymes and supports children to develop speaking, listening and numeracy skills. In 2022/23 we reached 20,000 nursery-age children through Pori Drwy Stori and nearly 34,500 children in reception classes in all schools took part in our exciting bilingual programme, continuing their Pori Drwy Stori journey.



Most teachers participating in the programme and evaluation agreed that **Pori Drwy Stori supported reading for enjoyment in their class/school** (48 out of 67 teachers involved)



64 out of 67 teachers in the Pori Drwy Stori evaluation **rated the quality of the books as good or excellent**

“ I understand the importance that rhythm and rhyme play in language development and the fun the children have in learning new chants, rhymes and songs. The initiative fits in beautifully with our oracy intervention group work also.”

Primary school teacher, Wales



Big Welsh Rhyme Time

Our annual celebration of sharing rhymes, poems and songs, Big Welsh Rhyme Time, returned to libraries, schools and nurseries for the fifth year.

More than 24,000 children aged 0–5 in over 530 early years settings **took part in** the week-long **Big Welsh Rhyme Time** event, designed to create interactive and inspiring reading experiences for children and families.

Bookstart Additional Needs and Dual Language

We work to ensure that every child **gets the best start on their reading journey**. We provide specialist packs for children aged 0–2 and 3–5 who are deaf, blind or partially sighted, and with conditions affecting their fine motor skills. We also offer dual-language books and guidance to families who have English as an additional language (EAL).

In 2022/23, **98% of local authorities** in England used our additional needs books and resources and we provided dual language books in over **30 different languages**.

“ When we give out the dual language books, it is joyful. Honestly. There was a Russian family who had been in this hotel situation for a long time. And I gave the mum a dual language book ... she was really taken aback when she saw it was dual language. Then when she came back to the group, she told me how much they loved the story.”

Welsh Refugee Council



🔍 Case study:

BookTrust Storytime providing bonding moments

North Bridlington Library took part in **BookTrust Storytime**. Librarian Paul spoke to us about how they found it difficult to encourage dads to bring their children to the library during the week, when many of them are at work. The library decided to run extra sessions on the weekends and their community of dads continues to grow.



We spoke to John, one of the dads who attends each week with his two-year-old daughter. He explained how BookTrust Storytime helped him to bond with his daughter.

“ I like the idea that she’ll remember that it was her and Daddy, and that this was our time. Afterwards [...] I can see her already taking some of the stories, the names, the things she picks up. When she’s playing with her Duplo, for example, the story comes out [...] she’ll announce something and everybody else is confused, like: ‘What on earth is she talking about?’ But I’ll know, because it came from a story that we were reading. It does make you feel special, because that’s my thing with her.”

Dad, North East England

Early Years at BookTrust: What are we doing next?

Our new priorities include:

- Continuing to deliver our early years portfolio to over 800,000 families across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, increasing the proportion of low-income families we reach.
- Testing new ways to get families reading together through a new antenatal pilot, and new routes to families including via a prisons-based pilot.

Focus area 2: Children from vulnerable family backgrounds

Using shared reading to bring enjoyment and stability to vulnerable children

Overview

Children from vulnerable family backgrounds face particular challenges in establishing regular shared reading. They may have limited access to engaging and appropriate books, complex and busy lives and circumstances that make regular routines and rituals difficult.

In 2022/23, we continued to build on our long history of supporting children from vulnerable family backgrounds through Letterbox Club, our intensive reading programme for children in long-term foster care. Through Letterbox Club, we support these children with specially, sensitively selected parcels of books and resources delivered at different moments. This approach is designed to encourage reading routines, ensuring children receive and own books in a way that helps them to feel valued.

During 2022/23 our close partnerships with virtual schools, the Fostering Network in Northern Ireland and other looked after children partners ensured children in long-term foster care can access this support. We also worked directly with schools who invest in Letterbox Club to support their looked after pupils and other children facing disadvantage.

BookTrust wants to transform future reading experiences for a wider cohort of children from vulnerable family backgrounds. In 2022/23 we launched an extensive programme of learning to inform our future work.

“ It helps me do my learning and I like the stuff that I get. Reading is really good for your brain and you know a lot of things if you read it over and over again.”

Letterbox Club child, age 8



“ Letterbox has made my reading confidence grow and it has also made me use my imagination. When I was younger I preferred picture books, but now Letterbox varies how much and what style I read.”

Letterbox Club child, age 11

Our impact

During 2022/23, we saw a 10% increase in children registered for Letterbox Club, with more than **13,000 children** receiving Letterbox Club parcels.



96% of children responding to our survey who received a Letterbox Club parcel told us they **like or love it**



68% of children said they **read more on their own** after receiving Letterbox Club parcels

🔍 Case study:

The transformative power of reading for a relationship between a foster carer and foster son

Foster carer Elaine shared with us how Letterbox Club parcels have helped her 9-year-old foster son build his confidence through a daily reading routine, bringing them closer together.

“ 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 9-year-old son

“ The books that you choose are really high quality ... What I love about BookTrust is that you haven't assumed that everyone has a pencil at home ... that's BookTrust thinking outside the box and really understanding.”

Primary school teacher, England



Supporting children from vulnerable backgrounds: What are we doing next?

Our new priorities include:

- Maintaining our support to looked after children, delivering Letterbox Club parcels via virtual schools and other routes.
- Testing new prototypes to deepen reading support to these children and extending our work to a wider cohort of children including previously looked after children, those on the edge of care and in kinship care.
- Establishing new partnerships with specialist organisations who work with vulnerable children and families to further strengthen the reach and impact of our work.

Focus area 3: Practitioner support

Supporting early years practitioners to promote shared family reading

Overview

Families interact with a wide range of practitioners in the early stages of their child's life, including midwives, health visitors, nursery staff, childminders, and early years staff in schools.

BookTrust has worked closely with these practitioner groups for decades and continue to build our network of partners. The interactions families have with early years practitioners are important for raising awareness of the benefits of reading and modelling how to share stories. Families who receive early support to read with their baby – for example from midwives, health visitors and other professionals – are more likely to read together from the first months of life. When early years practitioners encourage parents to share stories and show them how to do it, parents are more motivated and more confident.

During 2022/23, we worked with more early years practitioner partners than ever before. Thanks to our amazing network of partners, we had more than 6,000 routes to families living in the most disadvantaged areas as well as those living in pockets of deprivation in more affluent areas. We also strengthened our support to early years practitioners. Through our evaluation and design work we learnt that some childcare and early education practitioners in our priority areas didn't have access to enough high-quality books and storytelling resources to be able to inspire families with a love of early shared reading. We therefore developed and introduced new Storyteller Kits comprising books, resources, activities, and props for early years practitioners to use to lead children and families on storytelling adventures.

“ The BookTrust resources support parents in their understanding of why reading is good, and they're presented in an easy-to-grasp way, so more people can get on board. The BookTrust books themselves are brilliant – and so is being able to offer them to families who otherwise might not have them at home.”

Early years partner,
South West England



Our impact

Bookstart Toddler, Bookstart Pre-schooler and BookTrust Storytime offers included physical and digital support tools for thousands of health visitors, librarians and early years partners. We shared 3,676 of our new Storyteller Kits for use with families in community settings across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

2,400 libraries received resources including social media tools to reach new families and large format story books for use in libraries in family story sharing sessions. We also piloted real-life mobile book-corners, digital resources and inspirational support from children's authors.

We know from our evaluation with partners and the families they support that these resources are making an important difference to practitioners and, through these, to life in many low-income families.



“ I really appreciate working with BookTrust. I'm very impressed with the quality of the resources and support offered and we would be unable to offer similar if it weren't for BookTrust.”

Bookstart Coordinator,
South West England



83% of library staff responding to the BookTrust Storytime evaluation told us they **liked or loved working with us**



88% of partners across our early years programmes **felt** that **BookTrust** resources **supported them in their work**



78% of practitioners rate our **early years resources** highly in terms of overall quality



81% of Bookstart Coordinators told us that **Bookstart** helps them to support families in the greatest need



71% of library workers told us that **BookTrust Storytime** had helped support their library's work with children under 5

🔍 Case study:

BookTrust Early Years work in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, SureStart Centres are located in areas of high deprivation and aim to support children's development and progress. Our Early Years offers have been incorporated into SureStart activities across the nation. Beechmount SureStart is one of a network of 37 SureStart Centres that are using BookTrust resources to support local children and families on their reading journeys. Angela, a family support worker planned a bespoke programme to share the resources and inspire families to share books and stories with their children.

“ The programmes that BookTrust have designed have really enabled us to deliver our messages to parents in a lovely, easy, friendly manner, where the parents feel welcome. The proof is in the pudding. With some programmes, you'll get ten people come the first week, but then they don't come back. This time, parents have engaged and stayed with the programme.”

Angela McCabe, family support worker at Beechmount SureStart



“ Getting families into the library is hard if they don't already visit us. The BookTrust resources help us to do that.”

Bookstart Coordinator, North England

Supporting practitioners: What are we doing next?

Our new priorities include:

- Continuing the roll out of digital and physical support for practitioners across the early years sector via our Storyteller Hub and our Storyteller resources.
- Developing new training for early years practitioners. This is in response to findings from latest research which identified a need for training to help the sector to promote shared family reading in their communities.

Focus area 4: Schools

Supporting schools to foster a love of reading

Overview

Shared reading continues to act as a catalyst for children's development once they start school. Exposure to a story-rich environment boosts children's speaking and listening skills, knowledge of the world, and social development, as well as significantly impacting their capacity to learn to read.^{viii} Our evidence shows that reading for enjoyment declines when children start school and that this decline continues throughout childhood.

To address this, we are helping families adopt strong, early reading habits that children and parents enjoy. We also remain a key partner for schools, supporting their work and encouraging pupils to love and to keep reading.

In 2022/23, in addition to extending our early years programmes (for children aged 0–6), we continued to support school-aged children across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. 2022/23 was a transition year for our work in schools. We are reviewing how we can better support teachers to motivate families to read together.

“ We have done the Rhyme Challenge for three years now. We deliver a mixture of Welsh and English rhymes and have a cross-curricular rhymes week. It gives an opportunity for parents to be part of the challenge by delivering some in English and Welsh. This is part of the school's calendar for the Foundation Phase, not just reception children. It is a way of getting the school together.”

Primary school teacher, Wales



Our impact

Great Books Guide

As children grow, finding books that respond to their individual interests and choices becomes more important. Teachers play a vital role in helping each child discover the right books for them. However, time pressure is a big challenge for teachers, who need accessible signposting to books that support their work. Our Great Books Guide helps teachers identify books for different ages and stages, covering different themes.

In 2022/23, we distributed our annual Great Books Guide of new book reviews to **17,000 schools in England and Northern Ireland.**



Time to Read

705,000 4–5-year-old children received our Time to Read programme comprising a book and information for parents on the importance of continuing to read with their child once they have started school.

“ I like in this book that it makes me feel happy when I read it. It makes me feel better when I read it and I can see something like me, and I can understand that is not only me like that.”

BookTrust Represents child, primary school age

BookTrust Represents

Children need a choice of high-quality and relevant books to develop their preferences and identity as readers, and to stay motivated to read. They need to see themselves and their lives represented in stories and books. This is why we support a diverse range of authors and illustrators and promote inclusive books that represent characters from wide-ranging backgrounds and perspectives.

In 2022/23 we continued our BookTrust Represents project, introducing nearly **49,000 children at almost 1,700 schools** to creators of colour and their work.



🔍 Case study:

The importance of representation for empowering young people

Johnoi Josephs, Head of Year Eight at Lanfranc Archbishop Academy in Croydon, told us what having a **BookTrust Represents** author visit from Jeffrey Boakye meant for their pupils.

“ During his BookTrust Represents author talk, Jeffrey Boakye spoke about a song by Estelle, ‘1980’. He referenced the part where she raps that she grew up in a household where – and I’m paraphrasing – sometimes she was so cold that she’d have to go under her bed covers. He really brought it home, the fact that some of these students can share that experience. It was a really sobering moment.

For our students to know it’s actually normal to talk about these experiences and not be ashamed of them, that’s so important. It opens up these conversations. For them to have an author come and visit their school who may have had similar experiences or a similar upbringing to them, it allows them to feel a sense of belonging and connection, that they’re not alone.

To have an author come and visit who grew up in South London, who was also part of this diaspora era, that’s something many of our students can use to connect. I think they were really starstruck to see another Black man, who’s an author, who wrote the book that they’re reading. I know they were inspired by it.”

Johnoi, Lanfranc Archbishop Academy, taking part in BookTrust Represents, Croydon

Bookbuzz

Enjoyment of reading declines further as children hit teenage years. Our Bookbuzz programme helps secondary schools to encourage 11–13-year-olds to keep reading for pleasure. Bookbuzz gives young people the chance to choose from carefully selected books that are written specifically for young adults.

In 2022/23 we saw an 8% increase in young people taking part in Bookbuzz, with **over a third of state secondary schools participating and reaching more than 272,000 pupils.**



“ To get books into hands of students who may not have books at home was the best part about Bookbuzz. To see children hug a book after you have told them that it is theirs to keep was a special moment, it made the programme worthwhile.”

Secondary school teacher,
Bookbuzz user

School Library Pack and Special School Library Pack

We distributed our School Library Pack and Special School Library Pack to over 3,000 secondary schools and special schools. The School Library Pack for students in Years 7–9 includes 15 titles to support reading groups, promoting sociable reading experiences and reading for pleasure. The Special School Library Pack for students with additional needs covers themes and topics appropriate for 11–14-year-olds in a variety of accessible formats including sensory books and audio CDs, dyslexia friendly books, short fiction and graphic novels.

Supporting schools to foster a love of reading: What are we doing next?

Our new priorities include:

- Launching a new digital platform for teachers full of resources and tools to support their work to get their pupils reading, with a particular focus on supporting home-school engagement with reading for pleasure.
- Closing the universal Time to Read offer to enable us increase our support to more vulnerable children and those from low-income families.
- Maintaining the long standing Bookbuzz programme across secondary schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- Expanding the reach of the BookTrust Represents programme including by increasing the number of national online events for schools across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Other highlights in 2022/23

In addition to delivering impact on our four key focus areas, 2022/23 included a range of BookTrust activities linked to getting children reading. We summarise some of them here:

2022

April

At the start of the year we were delighted to welcome legendary poet and author **Michael Rosen** as **BookTrust's Writer in Residence...**

...and we moved into our **new Head Office** in Leeds.



May

We developed our revised organisational **Theory of Change**, based on extensive academic evidence and our own research.



June

We said a grateful farewell to **Cressida Cowell** after an amazing three-year tenure as **Waterstones Children's Laureate**.



July

We gave a warm welcome to **Joseph Coelho**, award-winning performance poet, playwright and children's author, as **Waterstones Children's Laureate 2022-24**.



August

We began work on the **Renew Partnership** with the University of Exeter, Poetry Society and National Trust to create measurable biodiversity renewal and increased access to biodiversity through children's literature and poetry.



September

Nick Sharratt, one of the nation's favourite children's author-illustrators, joined us as our first Writer-Illustrator in Residence.



October

The research partnership with the **University of Edinburgh**, on **neurodiversity and narrative fiction** began, also involving Barrington Stoke, National Literacy Trust, Scottish BookTrust and other specialists.



November

BookTrust became an Arts Council England **National Portfolio Organisation**...

...and we released the third BookTrust Represents research report tracking **'Representation of people of colour among children's book creators'**.



December

We ran our **festive fundraising campaign** to bring the magic of stories to children living in poverty and those from vulnerable family backgrounds.



2023

January

We developed our **interactive Benefits of Reading tool** for practitioners and organisations supporting children to have the best start in life.

English; Cymraeg



February

We finalised our business plan and strategic priorities for 2023/24 based on insights from our 2022/23 learning activities.



March

We partnered with **World Book Day** on a series of special events for early years families with authors **Joe Wicks**, **Sophy Henn** and **Tom Percival**.

Our Patron, **Her Majesty the Queen** and **Waterstones Children's Laureate Joseph Coelho** supported the event, sharing their love of books.



Throughout the year...

We supported **organisations around the world** seeking improved reading behaviours, convening and sharing best practice via:

- **EURead**
(35 members, 23 countries)
- **Global Network**
(28 members, 25 countries)



...We look forward to sharing lessons from 2023/24 work with you later in 2024.

For more information on BookTrust's current work, please see **page 9**, **'Reading together, changing children's lives'** and **our website**.



References and Methodology

BookTrust undertakes extensive research and evaluation with families and children. This research informs our understanding of the role of reading in families' lives, families' and children's reading habits, and the barriers and motivations they face. In our evaluation work we regularly seek feedback from partners via surveys and in-depth conversations.

BookTrust research and evaluation cited in this document includes:

	Learning activity	Audience and sample size
BookTrust Family Survey (2022)	Online survey with low-income families	2,148 low-income parents/carers of children aged 0–7
BookTrust Family Survey (2021)	Online survey with families across all income groups	7,871 parents/carers of children aged 0–17 and children aged 7–17, 500 low-income grandparents
BookTrust Early Years Discovery Research (2022/23)	DeepReal online and in person ethnography	66 low-income parents/carers of children aged 0–5
<u>Bookstart Toddler (1–2 years) and Bookstart Pre-schooler (3–4 years) Evaluation (2022/23)</u>	Mixed methods research of Bookstart Toddler and Bookstart Pre-schooler programmes	Over 600 parents/carers of children aged 0–5 and nearly 300 delivery partners
<u>BookTrust Storytime Evaluation (2022/23)</u>	Mixed methods research of library partners delivering BookTrust Storytime	Around 200 library partners
<u>BookTrust Letterbox Club Evaluation (2021/22)</u>	Paper survey of children receiving Letterbox Club	609 children aged 6–14 (across 2 years)

<p><u>Representation of people of colour among children's book creators in the UK, Ramdarshan Bold (2022)</u></p>	<p>Analysis of a database of children's books published in the UK in 2021 and in-depth interviews</p>	<p>20 in-depth interviews with UK-based creators of colour</p>
<p>Bookstart Baby Evaluation (2021/23)</p>	<p>Online survey of parents/carers receiving Bookstart Baby</p>	<p>Over 500 parents/carers of children aged 0–1</p>
<p>Pori Drwy Stori Reception findings (2021/22)</p>	<p>Online survey of primary school teachers</p>	<p>49 primary school teachers</p>

Limitations:

Across all our evaluation work, we hear from diverse groups of families and partners. However, as with all evaluation work, we can never be certain that the views of those who take part in our learning activities are wholly representative of the wider population of partners and families involved in our work. We invest in mixed methods evaluations to build a rounded and robust assessment of our impact, checking the validity of our findings from multiple sources.



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For a discussion about how you can join us to give children the best start in life through the magic of reading please contact us via: impact@booktrust.org.uk



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