



# BookTrust Storytime

Evaluation report 2022-23

**October 2023**



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**BookTrust is the UK's largest children's reading charity.**

**We want every child to read regularly and by choice. Every year, we reach over 1.5 million children and families, especially those from low-income families or vulnerable backgrounds, inspiring them with books and resources to get them started on their reading journey. This report builds on our [summary report \(July 2023\)](#) to provide more detailed findings about BookTrust Storytime 22-23, specifically for our library partners.**

## About BookTrust Storytime

BookTrust Storytime is one element of our evidence based portfolio of early years programmes and support for partners and families. All of this work is designed to provide an engaging and enjoyable experience for families and partners alike, and aims to build longer term reading outcomes and impacts for families.

BookTrust Storytime was developed in collaboration with local authorities, libraries and families. Following a successful year one pilot in 2021, BookTrust partnered with **2,378 libraries**<sup>1</sup> in England and Northern Ireland to deliver BookTrust Storytime for the second time in 2022.

For 2022-23, all BookTrust Storytime libraries received one standard copy of our six shortlisted books, specifically chosen by a panel of families and libraries as the best books for sharing with children under 5. Libraries had access to a range of digital resources, and we worked with local authorities to identify over 900 libraries in areas of high deprivation who would receive additional physical resources.



## About our learning approach

We used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to give library staff a strong voice in the development and ongoing evaluation of BookTrust Storytime. For 22-23, this included:

- Two online surveys
- An online community
- Visits to libraries
- Ad hoc feedback to BookTrust

<sup>1</sup> We are currently piloting BookTrust Storytime in Wales for the first time, with 22 libraries.

# BookTrust Storytime 2022-23: An overview

1

**Thank you for being part of a network of 2,378 libraries who made BookTrust Storytime such a success this year.**

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We estimate that **50,000** children under five used or engaged with BookTrust Storytime this year. Of these, **31%** were new to the library, **45%** were from low-income families and **70%** returned to the library after their initial visit.

The impressive scale of BookTrust Storytime's reach this year reflects the expertise and enthusiasm of our large network of dedicated library partners.

We hope that, together, we can see these numbers grow even further next year!

3

**Using existing relationships with community partners and establishing new ones are key to encouraging new families to visit the library and experience BookTrust Storytime.**

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This year's evaluation shows that **44%** of library staff worked with partner organisations to deliver BookTrust Storytime. BookTrust Storytime is supporting valuable long-term relationships as well as helping libraries to find new partners to connect with. We know we can do more to support more libraries to identify and establish relationships with community partners and this will be a key focus this year for BookTrust our early years programmes.

2

**We've built on a successful pilot last year and will continue to listen to your feedback to improve all of our early years offers.**

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**83%** of library staff liked or loved working on the programme this year, up from **72%** in 2022. Families and partners are at the heart BookTrust's work and we put your feedback directly into action.

We changed the number of resources this year after **63%** of library partners told us they received too many in the previous year. This year, **62%** of library staff said the number of resources was about right. We'll continue to listen to feedback and work closely with library partners to evolve BookTrust Storytime.

4

**We want to evolve and expand BookTrust Storytime to reach even more early years families.**

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In the survey, **20%** of library staff reported using BookTrust Storytime resources with families outside of their library, for example in community settings, playgroups or schools. In 2023-24, we'll be working with a small number of libraries to understand how they take BookTrust Storytime out into their local communities. We'll also be working with a small number of new community organisations to pilot running BookTrust Storytime for the first time in these settings. We're excited to learn more about how we can evolve and expand the programme and to share the findings with you!

# Background

## About BookTrust Storytime

**BookTrust is committed to bringing the benefits of reading to children and achieving long-lasting impact through developing reading habits and behaviours. We offer more targeted support to families from low-income and vulnerable backgrounds – particularly in the early years – because we know that these children stand to **benefit the most** from the wide-ranging benefits of reading.**

Following a successful year one pilot in 2021, BookTrust partnered with 2,378 libraries in England and Northern Ireland to deliver BookTrust Storytime for the second time in 2022.

BookTrust Storytime was developed in collaboration with local authorities, libraries and families. The initiative has now completed its second year, and is supported by library partners including the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians ([ASCEL](#)), the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals ([CILIP](#)) and [Libraries Connected](#).

BookTrust Storytime is designed to support library staff to inspire families with children under five to share stories together and make visiting their local library part of everyday life. BookTrust Storytime is open to all families, but it is specifically designed to engage lower-income families who would not usually use library services, whether they are first time visitors or families who aren't regular users.

The programme culminates with the [BookTrust Storytime Prize](#), where votes from families and library staff are tallied to find the best book for sharing with children under 5.

We listened to feedback from libraries and families on the first year of the pilot to shape this year's offer and ensure BookTrust Storytime continues to be designed with the needs of our families and partners at its core. You can read all about the key lessons from the first year of the pilot [here](#).



**BookTrust Storytime aims to build longer term reading outcomes and impacts for families through:**

- Building BookTrust Storytime partnerships with libraries, supporting them in their work with early years families.
- Delivering engaging experiences which support families on their shared reading journeys.



## The six books shortlisted for Storytime 22-23

In 2022-23, all BookTrust Storytime libraries received one standard copy of our six books, specially chosen by a panel of families and libraries as the best books for sharing with children under five. Libraries also had access to a wide range of digital resources to make the BookTrust Storytime stories come alive throughout the year.

This year, we worked with Local Authorities to identify over 900 libraries in areas of high deprivation that would receive our 'enhanced' offer. They not only received the core BookTrust Storytime books, but also larger copies, perfect for sharing with bigger groups. They also received additional physical resources to make their libraries a more welcoming and interactive space, and activities to keep families coming back to the library.



### Can You Tickle a Tiger?

Bobbie Brooks,  
Carrie Hennon

Storytime  
Prize winner 



### Red Lorry, Yellow Lorry

Michelle Robinson,  
Jez Tuya



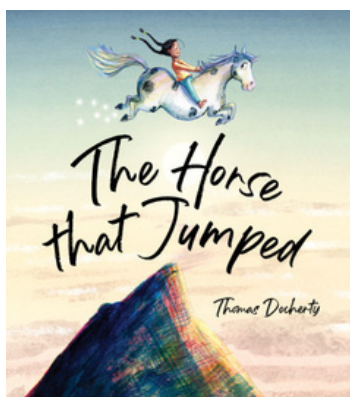
### Nature Trail

Benjamin  
Zephaniah,  
Nila Aye



### The Duck Who Didn't Like Water

Steve Small



### The Horse That Jumped

Thomas  
Docherty



### Zoom: Farm Adventure

Susan Hayes,  
Aviel Basil



## Why is early shared reading important for children?

At a time when families are facing multiple and competing pressures on their time and finances, why is it so important to invest in supporting families to share books and stories?

Reading and sharing stories is proven to bring children profound and wide-ranging benefits that can impact their health, wellbeing, progress at school and their creativity. Shared reading brings immediate benefits to families too. It supports bonding between children and their parents, carers or other family members, boosts parental positivity and improves children's sleep.

Children's brains experience the most growth in their first five years. In these early years, stimulation from books, and using books, stories and rhymes as a focus for playing, talking, and singing enhances the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional growth and development of children that extends far beyond childhood.

We know that if children experience early shared reading they are more likely to continue to read as they grow up. Reading for pleasure in the early years has four times more powerful an impact on a child's progress across the curriculum at age 16 than parental education or socioeconomic status.

Children from low-income backgrounds stand to benefit even more from the immediate and longer-term benefits of early shared reading. Evidence shows that children from disadvantaged backgrounds who achieve highly at the end of primary school are twice as likely to have been read to at home in their early years, compared to their peers. In the long-term, reading has the potential to transform children's future life chances. A child growing up in poverty who is read to at age five has a significantly higher chance of economic success in their 30s than their peers who were not read to.

It is essential that children from low income and vulnerable family backgrounds do not miss out on the transformative benefits of early shared reading. That's why at BookTrust, we provide extra support to these families; ensuring our books, resources and support reach and engage children and families who need us the most.

Read our research into the **Benefits of Reading** or our first **briefing note** based on our research with families from low-income backgrounds

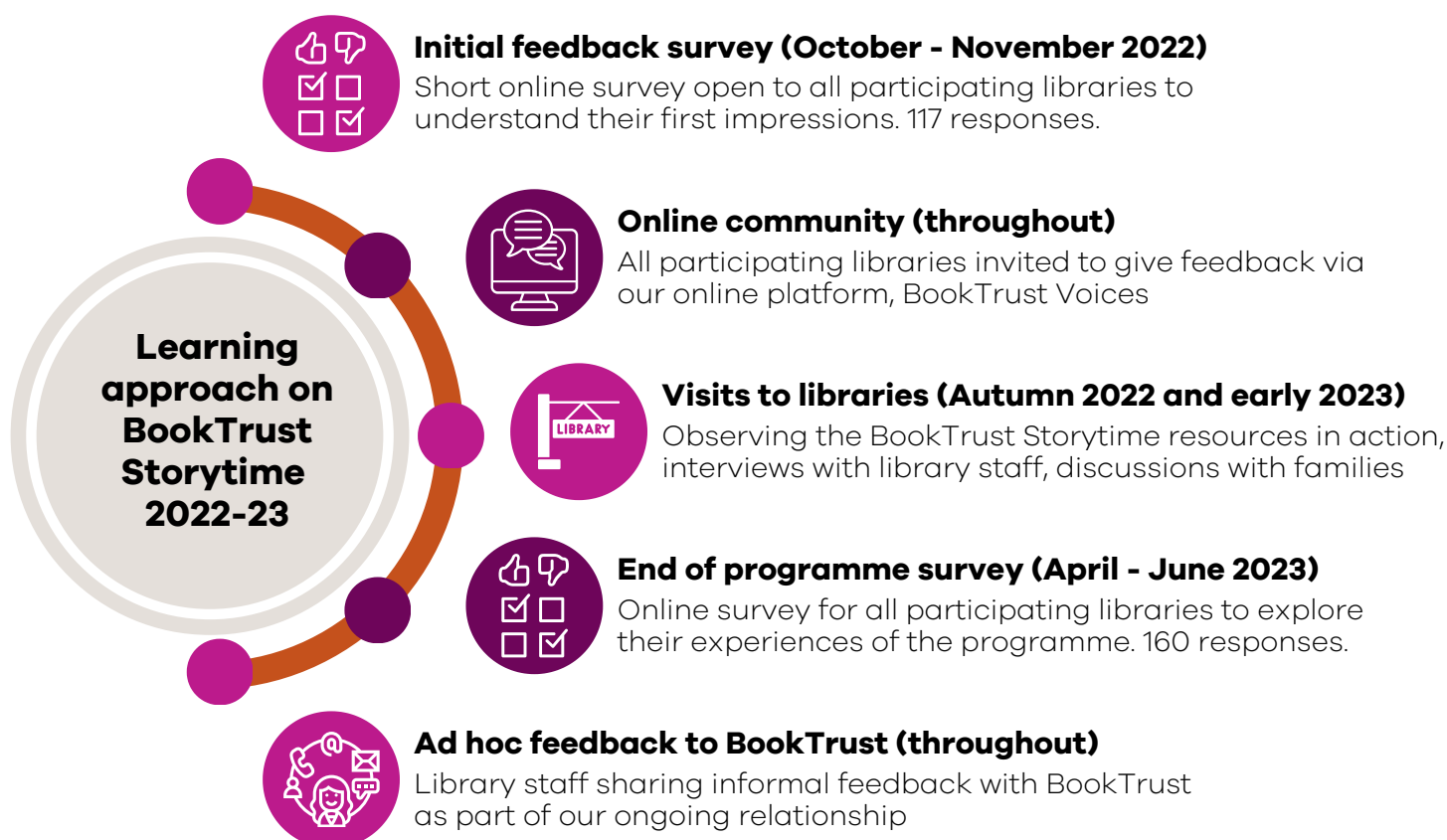


The growing disadvantage gap between children from low-income families and their more affluent peers starts in the early years and persists throughout childhood. As a matter of urgency, any discussion about supporting children in their early years needs to include measures that will motivate and encourage children and families to share stories together so they can experience both the immediate and longer-term benefits of reading. BookTrust is committed to supporting families with impactful and cost-effective interventions so they can enjoy shared reading experiences. Will you join us?

**Diana Gerald, Chief Executive, BookTrust**



As part of BookTrust's wider work in the early years space and our ongoing commitment as a learning organisation, we used a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to give library staff a strong voice in the development and ongoing evaluation of BookTrust Storytime.



## Limitations of our learning approach

We are committed to robust evaluation approaches and sought involvement in our surveys from all participating library practitioners. 160 responses to our final evaluation survey gives us a base from which we can draw strong conclusions.

There are limitations given this is a national programme, involving a diverse library population. We recognise that projections used in this report will involve a degree of estimation. We will continue to learn with libraries, community partners and families across our Early Years offers, further strengthening our learning approach. We are committed to sharing findings with our partners, funders, and the wider Early Years sector.

**We would like to say a heartfelt thank you to all our library partners for their work on BookTrust Storytime and to those who have shared their views and experiences with us!**





The following section summarises what we've learnt on BookTrust Storytime 22-23, covering: the programme's **reach and impact** (p9); how library staff **rated BookTrust Storytime** (p10); how library staff **encouraged families** to get involved with the programme (p10); how libraries **used the resources** (p12); and library staff's thoughts on our online **Storyteller Hub** (p14).

## BookTrust Storytime's reach and impact

Through working with 2,378 libraries in England and Northern Ireland, overall, we estimate that **50,000** children under five used or engaged with BookTrust Storytime this year. Responses to our survey tell us that...

**31%**

of families who engaged with BookTrust Storytime were new to the library

**45%**

of families who engaged with BookTrust Storytime were low-income families

**70%**

of participating families returned to the library after their initial visit

## BookTrust Storytime's impact

We're really pleased to see our library partners telling us that BookTrust Storytime is making a difference in their libraries.

**34%**

of libraries told us that new families came to their libraries because of BookTrust Storytime.

**60%**

of libraries said that new families then signed up to their libraries as a result of attending BookTrust Storytime sessions or using the resources.

**71%**

of libraries told us that BookTrust Storytime had helped support their library's work with children under 5 and **35%** agreed it had helped them to better support low-income families and children.



## How library staff rated BookTrust Storytime



**83%**

of library staff **liked or loved** working on BookTrust Storytime this year, up from **72%** last year.



**79%**

of library staff told us our **online resources supported** them in their work with families.



**68%**

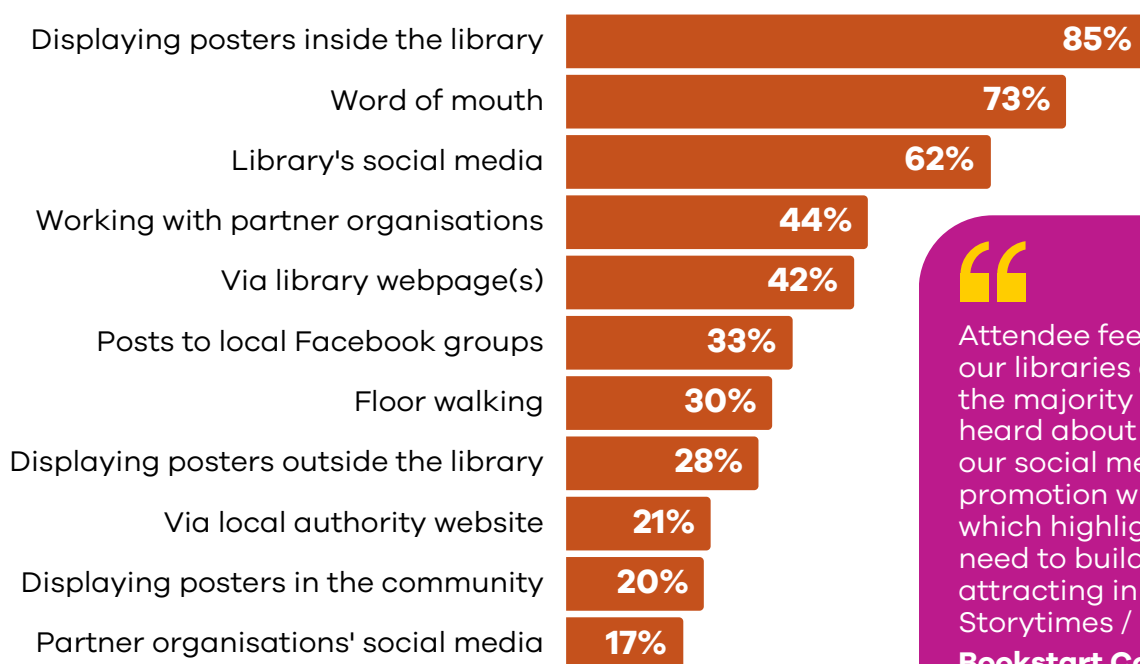
of library staff rated the resources at least **four out of five** in terms of suitability for the families who used them.

Library staff have told us that the BookTrust Storytime books and activities were even more age appropriate this year – all thanks to **direct feedback from library staff** last year which helped us to improve the resources. We're pleased to see that 62% of library staff felt the number of resources this year was 'about right' (compared to last year when 63% of library staff felt they received too many).

## Getting families involved with BookTrust Storytime

Library staff used various methods to encourage families to attend BookTrust Storytime sessions or to use the resources in their libraries. The most common were **displaying posters inside the library** (85%) and **word of mouth** (73%).

### Ways of encouraging families to experience BookTrust Storytime



Attendee feedback from across our libraries and sessions showed the majority of our attendees heard about the sessions from our social media or from promotion within our libraries, which highlights that an area we need to build on next year is attracting in new families to our Storytimes / libraries.

**Bookstart Coordinator,  
Hertfordshire**



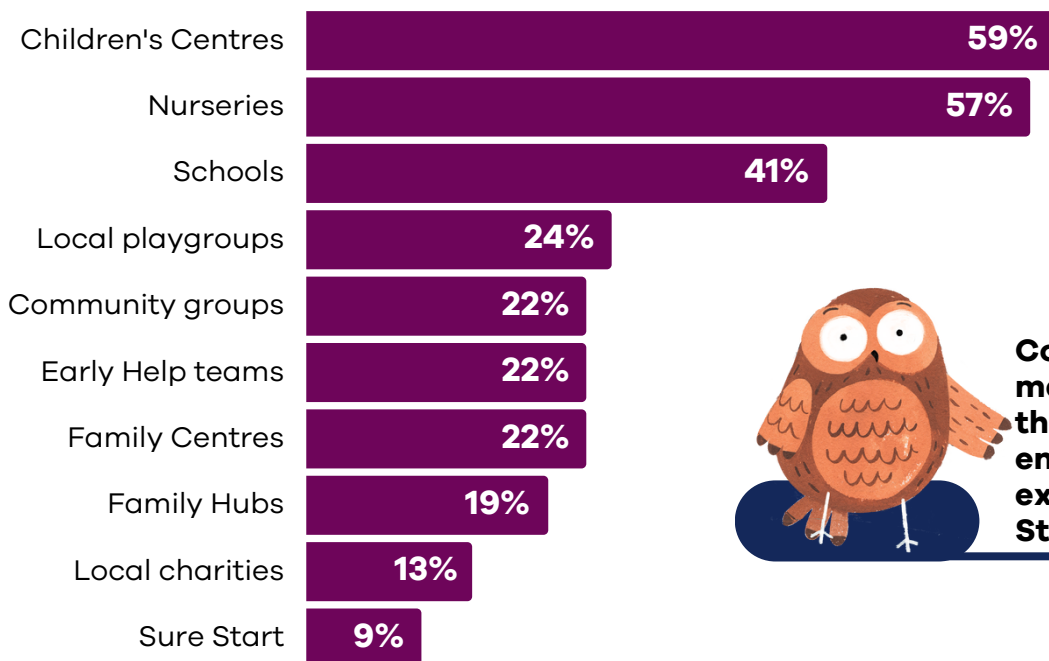
Base: All who work in a library (149). Other (3%), None of the above (3%), and Don't know (1%) not shown.

At the start of the programme (October – November 2022), **48%** of library staff told us they had already **reached out to community partners** to help bring new low-income families to their libraries. **67%** planned to reach out to community partners throughout the programme, meaning that in total, **78%** of libraries had either already reached out to community partners or planned to do so over the course of the programme.

However, by the end of the programme, **44%** of library staff told us that they had actually worked with **partner organisations** to encourage families to use the BookTrust Storytime resources. Our network of library partners have taken the time to talk through some of the challenges and we're working with partners to learn how we can best support in addressing these through our wider early years work.

Of those who had worked with partner organisations (**44%**), the most common were Children's Centres (**59%**) and Nurseries (**57%**).

### Organisations libraries partnered with to encourage BookTrust Storytime participation



**Could your library make links with any of these organisations to encourage families to experience BookTrust Storytime?**

“

We need to find a better way to encourage families in, who wouldn't normally come to a library or share books with their children. I was very excited about this aspect of the BookTrust Storytime, and we did try to reach out to these families via the Children and Family Centre, but had very limited success.

”

**Senior Library Assistant, Cambridgeshire**

Base: All who had partnered with organisations (68). Other (3%) and Don't know (3%) not shown. 'Other' responses included Action for Children, refugee resettlement teams, and Family Learning Teams.

“

I absolutely loved loved loved the Storytime sessions. We made some friends who came to the library for the very first time in their lives and they are coming back as regular borrowers. [...] We have built amazing relationship with The Children's Centre and are more aware of what services they provide for families. We will work together on helping local families with mental health, breastfeeding, and supporting child development.

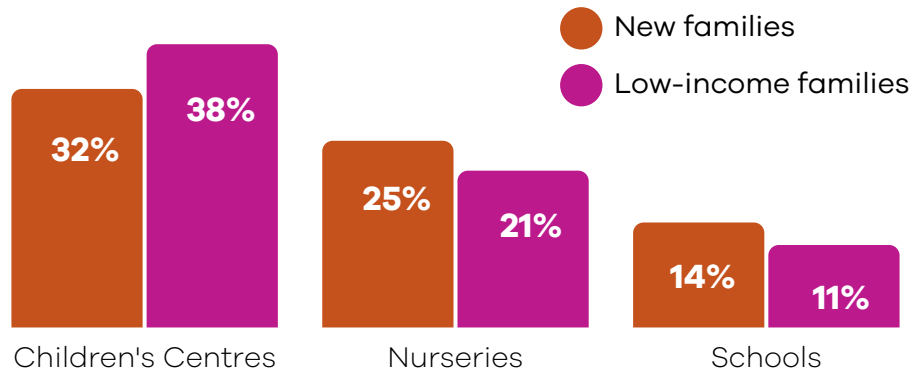
**Librarian, Northamptonshire**

”

**This year's research shows that BookTrust Storytime is helping to support valuable long-term relationships between libraries and other community partners, as well as helping libraries to find new partners to connect with.**

We asked library staff which partner organisations they felt were the **most successful** at encouraging both **new families** and **low-income families** into their libraries. The results were fairly similar for both groups and are shown to the right.

**Most successful partner organisations for encouraging new and low-income families into the library**



Base: All who partnered with organisations and answered the question for new families (65) and low-income families (61). Top three partner organisations shown only.

**How libraries used the resources**

Our library partners used the BookTrust Storytime resources in a variety of ways to engage children and families.

**How libraries used their BookTrust Storytime resources**



Base: All library staff (160)

“

We use the Storytime offer as a year round programme that runs alongside all of our under 5s activities. Some of these are out in the community at children's centres, sessions run by local charities, and also at early years settings.

**Early Years Library Officer, Wokingham**

”





We've heard that some libraries **shared their enhanced resources** amongst libraries in their area. We think this is a **great idea** and library staff explained that doing this:

- helped them to reach more families with the resources across their area
- was more efficient as staff could share props and other activities they had already made
- helped libraries in more remote areas or with lower footfall to offer a new experience for early years families (often in smaller groups due to lower visitor numbers)

Our research tells us that the majority of BookTrust Storytime sessions that were run were open for all families to attend. However, we know that many libraries also chose to run **bespoke sessions** this year, for families they felt would benefit the most. Examples of the sorts of families or groups that library staff ran bespoke sessions for included those:

- who were new to the library
- with special educational needs or disabilities
- with English as an additional language
- from disadvantaged backgrounds
- with speech and language delays
- who had recently moved to the UK (e.g., asylum seekers or resettled refugees)

“

We loved using the Storytime resources. After the 6-week period was up we kept the sessions going in our main library and they continue to run now. The resources inspired us to get Storytime going again which we hadn't done for some time. We have also been able to introduce Storytime in 3 of our other libraries because the resources were so good at inspiring staff to give it a try. Sets such as these really help to demonstrate to staff how easy and how much fun running these sessions can be and having the books chosen really helped us to engage new staff to inspire families.

Librarian, Herefordshire

”

“

We have tried [a standalone session] in the past and struggled to get numbers. What has appeared to work better is reading a story at the beginning of what is essentially a singing session. Where possible I have linked songs to the story we have read.. I would like to be able to have dedicated Storytime sessions with maybe one or two songs, but with some other offering too.

Library Assistant, Suffolk

”

### Creating a bespoke BookTrust Storytime experience in the community

Northumberland Libraries have been working with a local Afghan Community Mum's Group who support women are new to the community, and the country, as part of the government's resettlement scheme. This partnership has evolved into a closed weekly session hosted in a local Family Hub, where English as an Additional Language (EAL) teachers from the resettlement service will be using our BookTrust Storytime resources with the women and their children. We'll be working closely with the resettlement service and Northumberland Libraries and are really looking forward to hearing how this partnership progresses! We'll be sharing a case study on this partnership on our [website](#) soon.

## Using the Storyteller Hub

BookTrust launched the Bookstart Storyteller Hub in September 2022, a dedicated digital hub for BookTrust's early years partners covering all of our early years programmes. The [BookTrust Storytime pages](#) on the Hub include a range of tools, resources and ideas on how to support families on their reading adventures and we're looking to build the content all the time in response to library feedback.

By the end of the programme, **72%** of library partners said they had visited the BookTrust Storytime pages on the Storyteller Hub and a further **12%** said they hadn't personally but someone they worked with had shared information with them. **15%** had not visited the Hub.

Most who had used the Hub had done so more than once (**80%**), and the most common reason library staff visited the Hub was to view BookTrust Storytime resources (**83%**). The other reasons library staff visited the Hub are shown below.

### Reasons library staff had for using the BookTrust Storyteller Hub



The extra resources on the Storyteller Hub were really useful to make the Storytimes more interactive.

Library Manager,  
Wiltshire



Base: All who visited the Storyteller Hub (115)



**80%**

of library staff who had used the Storyteller Hub felt its content supported them in their work with early years families, but we'll be looking at ways we can make it even more useful based on your feedback.



# What's next for BookTrust Storytime 2023-24?

**BookTrust is hugely thankful to all the families, libraries and community partners who have contributed to delivering and learning on BookTrust Storytime in its second year. We are responding to this feedback as we shape our future work through BookTrust Storytime and our other early years programmes.**

In particular, library staff have suggested the following to help engage children and families in the early years:

- More ideas for activities linked to the books. For example, a list of different arts and crafts, treasure hunts, rhymes or songs, which could be tailored by library staff to suit families' needs, number of attendees, and energy levels.
- More activities for younger children, e.g. dot-to-dot drawings.
- Ideas and tips for advertising BookTrust Storytime, community organisations to try to partner with, and advice on how to establish relationships, and inspiration on how to encourage a range of families to join, particularly those who are new to the library.
- To see how others are using BookTrust Storytime in their libraries. We hope this report has given a flavour of how BookTrust Storytime works across the nearly 2,400 libraries involved in the programme, and the [Storyteller Hub](#) includes case studies from different libraries. You can also share the brilliant ways you've been creating memorable and fun sessions at your libraries here, too! By sharing your expertise you could provide some inspiration for others to build on, helping them to develop their own special sessions for their specific libraries.

BookTrust is really excited to be working with libraries again next year. Our key learning priorities for 2023-24 are:

- Continuing to learn how we can better support our partners in bringing our early years programmes together into a cohesive early years reading journey.
- Continuing to learn how we can improve our digital content and sharing more from libraries themselves. You've told us how valuable it is to hear from other libraries and we want to do more to facilitate knowledge sharing.
- Reviewing the programme in response to external trends. We are very conscious that library staff expect a higher proportion of much younger children to be using the resources in future years as government changes to childcare funding are introduced.
- Understanding outreach: the challenges and where this works really well, identifying and working with community partners to bring new families into the library, and how best BookTrust can support.
- Working with a small number of library partners and community organisations to explore how BookTrust Storytime could be taken out of library settings or introduced to non-library settings in the community.

## About BookTrust

As the UK's largest children's reading charity, we want every child to read regularly and by choice. We reach millions of children and families every year, especially those from low-income families or vulnerable backgrounds, inspiring them with books and resources to get them started on their reading journey.

Children who choose to read and who read regularly are happier and healthier. They form stronger bonds and relationships. They do better at school and are more creative. They enjoy more success in life.

This is why we work with families, supporting them to start sharing stories and books together from the earliest possible age.

Our carefully selected books and well-researched programmes are delivered by thousands of local partners, bringing the magic of reading to children in every local community in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

## Bookstart

In the last year alone, our Bookstart books and resources reached over 700,000 families with children in their early years in over 5,000 different community settings across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.



### Contact us

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