



Southwark – Aylesbury Plus

Evaluation

Bookstart Plus



Report July 2003

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Bookstart Plus

Overview of Sure Start Aylesbury Plus and evaluation

The Sure Start Aylesbury Plus programme is now in its third year of operation, and an ongoing process of monitoring, feedback and reviews has ensured that the services delivered to families with children under four have been refined, amended and adjusted so that they meet the stated and evolving needs of the community. The result is that the services provided are well used by a representative section of the Sure Start community.

Having established services that are both popular, ie meet a perceived need, and which help to contribute to a range of Sure Start targets, a specific evaluation project was considered to be necessary to identify the particular elements within a range of services which ensured their success.

This report focuses on the evaluation of the Bookstart service, provided by Southwark Libraries and the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE). The evaluation was undertaken in association with Cordis Bright Ltd.



What is Bookstart Plus?

Bookstart Plus sessions encourage parents/carers to read books with babies and toddlers.

Before each session, the facilitator (who is a trained nursery nurse), sets out a variety of books for different ages, as well as rugs, cushions and chairs for adults and children to sit on. She will read stories to parents/carers and children, encouraging everybody to sing, chant, make actions and join in with the story.

Parents/carers may also be encouraged to make their own books, eg collecting photos and pictures of their children and making an album, with simple words to accompany the pictures. They are then encouraged to share these books with their children at home.

Sessions are held once a week at the Aylesbury Health Centre, alongside the Sure Start Parent/Carer and Toddler group, which is facilitated by the Child Development Workers of the Health Visiting team. This means that parents/carers and children have a choice of where they want to be, eg more active time in the Toddler Group, or quieter time in the Bookstart session.

On a Wednesday, two Bookstart Plus sessions are held in the local library. At these sessions, there is also the opportunity for parents/carers to borrow books or other resources from the Library, as there is a dedicated librarian available for the sessions.

What Sure Start Targets?

These sessions contribute towards the national Sure Start targets which require programmes to:

- Increase the numbers of parents/carers reading with their children
- Increase library membership amongst 0-4 years olds and their parents/carers
- Ensure that 100% of children have access to good quality play and learning opportunities
- Reduce the number of children who need specialist speech and language support by the time they start school

How did we evaluate?

On-going research was conducted between March and June 2003. Sixteen local parents volunteered to act as community surveyors, conducting face-to-face interviews using a questionnaire of approximately 20 minutes duration.

The questionnaire was compiled through consultation with a number of key people, including facilitators, the Sure Start team and, crucially, parents/carers who attend the sessions.

Training was provided by Cordis Bright to standardise the approach and techniques and to ensure that surveyors felt comfortable with the methodology.

Summary of results

The Bookstart Plus service received extremely high levels of satisfaction (100%)

A number of key factors clearly contributed to the success of the service:

- The quality of facilitation, which was regarded as excellent
- The friendly, relaxed atmosphere
- The benefits received by the children
- The range of activities also contributed to the satisfaction levels

- **77%** reported that the Bookstart sessions have strong beneficial impact on children's speech and language development, increasing vocabulary, improving speech and building confidence.
- **73%** also perceive improvement in children's reading capacity, increased interest in books, ability and confidence.
- **14%** more parents and carers read to their children at home as a result of attending the Bookstart Plus sessions – bringing the total doing so up to a maximum of **100%**
- **50%** of parents and carers have become members of the library since joining the Bookstart Plus sessions and **100%** of these make regular use of the library services for both themselves and their children

Who attends the Bookstart Plus sessions?

A total of 22 parents attending the Aylesbury Plus Bookstart services were surveyed. This was a snapshot sample of over fifty families who attend the sessions over the course of a term.

The sample comprised over one quarter (27%) Black British - African ethnic group and just under one fifth White British (18%).

The full breakdown is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Ethnic profile of those attending the Bookstart Plus sessions

Ethnicity	Percentage %
Black/Black British - African	27%
White British	18%
Black/Black British - Caribbean	9%
Other White	9%
Asian - Bangladeshi	9%
Other Asian	5%
Irish	5%
Other Black	5%
Latin American	5%

Which Bookstart Plus sessions do you attend?

Attendance at the three Bookstart Plus sessions shows:

- A preference for morning sessions relative to afternoons
- Higher attendance at the Health Centre relative to the Library

This is detailed in Table 2 below.

Bookstart Plus Session	Percentage %
Tuesday morning, Aylesbury Health Centre	68%
Wednesday morning, Newington Library	46%
Wednesday lunchtime, Newington Library	27%

The reasons for these preferences are detailed on the next page.

Comparison of Venues: Aylesbury Health Centre vs Newington Library

45% of those questioned attend both the Health Centre and the Library sessions
Of these, there is a clear preference for the Aylesbury Health Centre - 60%
(compared to Newington Library - 10%)

This is because of the greater amount of space at the Health Centre, allowing for a wider range of activities. This is shown in the comments in Box 5 below.

If you attend sessions both at the Health Centre and the Library, which do you like best and why?

Health Centre	60%
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>It has more space to play</i>• <i>More toys are available</i>• <i>You have a variety of things: storytelling sessions, then a play area or outside if the weather is nice - and the play area is spacious</i>• <i>There is more space for children to move around and enjoy the books</i>	
Library	10%
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Smaller group and nearer for us</i>	
Both	30%
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Nice to have 2 different environments: Tuesday [Health Centre] is more busy and more activities with playgroup, Wednesday [Library] is more intimate and book orientated</i>• <i>Because Jo [the facilitator] is at sessions on a Tuesday and she is at the Newington Library on a Wednesday</i>	

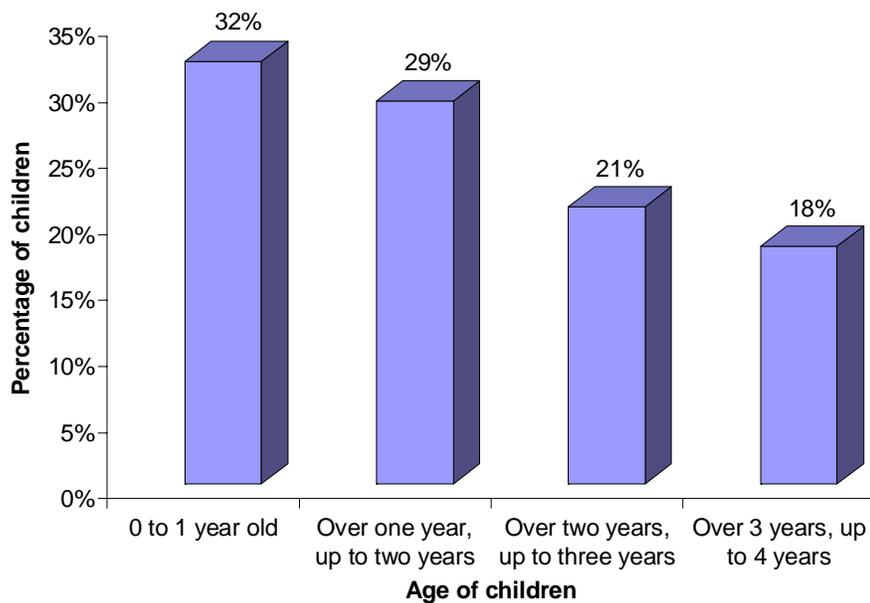
This preference for the Health Centre may go some way towards explaining the higher levels of attendance there (68%) compared to the Library (46% in the morning and 27% in the afternoon).

How many children do you take to the sessions?

- **73%** of parents/carers take one child to the Bookstart Plus sessions
- **27%** take two children

The age range of the children tends towards the younger age brackets, as shown in Chart 1 below.

Age profile of children attending Bookstart Plus sessions



This profile makes sense in terms of the greater range of options – including playgroups, nursery classes and nursery places available to older children.

How often do you come to Bookstart Plus?

**Frequency of attendance at the Bookstart Plus sessions is very high,
with 68% of those questioned attending every week**

- **68%** of parents/carers attend every week
- **18%** attend every other week
- **27%** of respondents attend occasionally

No respondents stated that they 'rarely' attended.

How did you hear about the Bookstart Plus service?

**Health Visitors are the most successful way of promoting
the Bookstart Plus service**

The Bookstart Plus sessions also show comparatively high levels of awareness through word of mouth - a friend or neighbour.

How did you hear about the Bookstart Plus service?	Percentage %
Health Visitor	36%
Friends/ Neighbour	28%
Poster/ Leaflet	12%
Sure Start Team/ Office	12%
Parent-and-toddler Group (Tuesday am)	4%

What makes the service so successful?

The survey clearly demonstrated a number of key factors underlying the success of the service.

Overwhelmingly, the quality of the facilitator was regarded as a key factor in the success of this service

96% of parents/carers stated that the quality of the facilitator is what makes the service successful

This was followed by:

- The friendly and welcoming atmosphere – **73%**
- Benefits to children – **68%**

The breakdown is shown in Table 3 below.

What do you think makes the service successful?	Percentage %
Good facilitator/ storyteller	96%
Friendly, welcoming atmosphere	73%
Seeing the benefits to my children	68%
The range of books and resources	55%
The way the Bookstart area is set up	46%

What do you like most about the Bookstart Plus sessions?

The aspects that were most liked about the service directly reflected the factors stated as making the service a success:

- **63%** - the quality of the facilitation of the sessions
- **23%** - the beneficial impact on children
- **14%** - the friendly and relaxed atmosphere
- **14%** - the access to books and toys

These comments are shown in detail in Box 1 below.

What do you (as the parent/carer) like most about the sessions?

Reading to children/ Facilitation

- *The way the books are read to the children* - **22%**
- *Story time* - **41%**

Impact on children

- *Helps kids with stimulation*
- *Seeing how my child has grown to love books*
- *The activities and meeting other children*
- *There are other kids there of different ages so he can learn to interact with kids*
- *Interacting with other children, my son is encouraged to mix more and this brings him out of his shell*

Atmosphere

- *That it is lively and friendly*
- *Friendly atmosphere*
- *Mixing with other people.*

Access to books/toys

- *I enjoy the vast selection of books and the relaxed atmosphere*
- *Access to books*
- *Toys*

Others

- *Crafts/ Activities/ facilities/ combination of activities* **14%**
- *Singing* **9%**
- *I like almost everything about it*
- *Can also learn English*

Impact of the service on parents/carers

The Bookstart Plus sessions were also perceived to have a beneficial impact on the parents/carers who attended the sessions.

This breakdown is shown in Table 5 below.

What are the most important things that you as a parent/carer have got from the Bookstart Plus sessions?

Benefit to parents	Percentage %
Learning how to read stories to my child	77%
Meeting other parents and carers	77%
Seeing my child enjoying the sessions	77%
Improving my confidence in using books with my child/baby	59%
Finding out what books are suitable for my child/baby	36%

It is clear from this that the Bookstart Plus sessions fulfil a wide range of functions for parents – increasing their confidence in reading to their children, enjoying their children enjoying the sessions and also providing a social outlet for themselves.

What do the children like most about the Bookstart Plus sessions?

Again the perceived preferences of children reflected the attributes that made the service successful, with the facilitation (listening and stories) and social interactions as most highly rated.

These are shown in Box 2 below.

What do you think that your child likes most about the sessions?

Teacher/ listening

- *Listening/ Stories - 50%*
- *The way the teacher is acting - 14%*
- *Copying the teacher*

Social interactions

- *He likes playing with other children - 22%*
- *Exposure to other children and lots of toys to play with*

Others

- *Toys - 23%*
- *Songs - 18%*
- *He can do whatever he wants to do*
- *Creativity*

Impact of the service on children

The Bookstart Plus sessions are making a strong impact on a number of key health factors for both children and parents.

The breakdown of key benefits received by children is shown in Table 5 below.

What are the most important things that your children have got from the Bookstart Plus sessions?

Benefit to children	Percentage %
Meeting other children	86%
Learning to enjoy looking at/ reading books	73%
Enjoying the storytelling sessions	68%
Change from being at home	59%
Opportunity to have different books/toys	41%

Improvement in reading to children at home

Parents/carers stated a 14% increase in reading to children at home since coming to the Bookstart Plus sessions

Whilst this may not sound a high percentage, ***this was the maximum increase possible***, as 86% of parents already read to their children at home - this resulted in 100% of parents/carers questioned having books at home that they read with their children.

96% of parents/carers said that their child read or played with books on their own at home

Impact on speech and language development

77% of parents/carers questioned said that Bookstart Plus had helped with their child's speech and language development

The three key areas in which this was seen to impact was:

- Improving vocabulary
- Improving speech
- Building confidence

Detailed responses are shown in Box 3 below.

In which ways has your child's speech and language development changed?

Vocabulary

- *When Jo read the story last week about 'Little Rabbit Foo-Foo' my 2 yr old son sang at home saying Brum Brum riding his bike through the forest*
- *For example when Jo's singing that song 'head shoulder knees and toes' he would show the parts of his body*
- *Repeat new words*
- *More vocabulary learnt*
- *He chatters a lot more with seemingly understanding*
- *I look at pictures in books and relates it to what he sees out and about*
- *He learns more English*
- *They see things in books and recognise them*

Improving speech

- *He is babbling a lot*
- *I can see her speech improving since we started going*
- *Wants to try and repeat*

Building confidence

- *She looks at books and pretends to read.*
- *Encouraging to speak*
- *She wants to sing*
- *Now he is more interested in learning*

Impact on children's reading

73% of parents/carers questioned said their children's reading habits had changed since coming to Bookstart Plus

The main aspects that Bookstart had impacted on were:

- Increasing children's interest in reading
- Increasing their ability
- Increasing their enjoyment

These comments are detailed in Box 4 below.

In what way/s have your children's reading habits changed?

Increased interest

- *Listen now when reading & points to pictures*
- *Looks at books more often at home*
- *She is opening books on her own now*
- *Now he is more interested in listening to stories*
- *He wants to learn more*

Increased reading ability

- *They can read for themselves now. They now sing along with songs*
- *The way she looks at it and how she turns pages*
- *He goes and sits down to try and read to himself*
- *They start to play and read books more often*
- *He knows all stories at the Tuesday sessions and names of books*

Increased enjoyment

- *When I get the newspapers he would go ripping through the pages. Even my 8 month old girl plays with the papers.*
- *More outgoing play through fun*
- *They sing story time and really enjoy a bedtime story now as I have learnt to read it properly*
- *He would go to his book box and actually get them out himself and turn the pages with enjoyment on his face*
- *They have new favourite books (because of Joe reading them to us)*
- *Because she sees other children playing with books she's more tempted to interact using books. She turns pages, looks at pictures and enjoys herself.*

Impact on library use

Results indicate that the majority of parents/carers questioned use the library service on a regular basis:

- **81%** access the library at least once a fortnight
- **13%** state that they attend occasionally.

Just over half of both parents and children have become members of the library since accessing the Bookstart Plus sessions

- **100%** of these new members make use of their library membership by borrowing books for their children
- **29%** also use the library to borrow books, tapes/CDs for themselves.

Comparison with other storybook sessions

Only 5 respondents have attended a storybook session elsewhere. The other sessions attended are listed below:

- East St Library (2 respondents)
- Walworth Rd Library (2 respondents)
- Newington Library (2 respondents)
- John Howard Library (1 respondent)

These sessions were considered less well planned and less involving for the children. Detailed comments are shown in Box 7 below.

Box 6: How are these Bookstart Plus sessions different?

- *Those [non-Bookstart Plus] sessions are not as well planned, although I'm sure the libraries do their best*
- *These [Bookstart] sessions are more structured, less chaotic, more enjoyable, more personal*
- *More focused on reading, not always time for 'storytelling' [non-Bookstart Plus]*
- *The Bookstart session seems more children friendly, as they get them involved physically*
- *Bookstart sessions are more interesting*

Any suggestions for change?

86% of parents and carers suggested changes to the Bookstart Plus sessions – mainly so they could have more of what's so successful! The suggested changes centred on two aspects of the service - increasing the time and increasing the space.

Parents felt that they would like to see **increased time** for the sessions, both in terms of frequency and duration. This high level of demand (over half of those questioned) for more of the same can be taken as an indicator of the high positive regard of the service.

Relatively fewer (**17%**) requested more **space**, and this was applicable only to the Library session (see Page 7). These are shown in more detail in Box 7 below.

Are there any changes that you would make to the Bookstart Plus sessions?

Time

- *Longer sessions - 28%*
- *More days - 17%*
- *Being able to borrow books at the Tuesday session because I can't always attend the Wednesday one*

Space

- *Wish there was more space available and toilet facilities you need to ask to use them [Library]*
- *The library is a bit tight. Otherwise it is very good as it is.*
- *Create more space for the Wednesday class [Library]*

Content

- *More craft in the Wednesday sessions*
- *More activities should be added to the songs*
- *I will like an increase in assignments for mummies*
- *I would love to see puppets*

Satisfaction with the service

The Bookstart Plus sessions show 100% satisfaction with the service

- **82%** of respondents are 'very satisfied' with the service

**This is an extraordinary level of satisfaction,
indicating a high quality service**

Conclusions

1. The Bookstart Plus service clearly contributes to its stated Sure Start targets of:
 - Increasing the numbers of parents/carers reading to their children at home
 - Increasing library membership and – crucially – library use amongst under fours and their parents/carers
 - Contributes to enhanced speech and language development of children

2. While the parents'/carers' stated outcomes are very child-focused, there is also a very important 77% who stated that 'meeting other parents and carers' was among the most important aspect of the service for them. This confirms the importance of meeting the need for social contact and networking which is provided by Bookstart and other Sure Start services.

3. The importance of the facilitator in providing a quality service is quite clearly brought out in this survey (again bearing out the results of other Sure Start evaluations). The quality of the facilitator overcomes other considerations such as the lack of space and other inconveniences in the library setting.

Recommendations

1. The only changes that parents and carers have suggested, ie more space in the library setting and more time for the sessions – both duration and frequency - reflect the quality of the service and the positive regard in which it is held.

Appendix A: Use of Library

1. Were you or your children members of the library before joining the Bookstart Plus sessions?

Base (Numbers)	22
Yes	54.5%
No	45.5%

2. Have you or your children become members since joining Bookstart Plus?

Base (Numbers)	13
Parents/Carers	7
Yes	57%
No	43%

Children	5
Yes	60%
No	40%

3. If yes, do you make use of the library?

Base (Numbers)	7
Yes	100%
No	0%

4. If yes, in what way?

Base (Numbers)	7
Borrow children's books	100%
Borrow adult books	29%
Borrow music tapes/ CDs	29%

5. How often do you use the library?

Base (Numbers)	16
Once a week	50%
Once a fortnight	31%
Occasionally	13%
Other	6%