

Evaluation of Bookstart Plus (for 2-year olds)

The objective of Bookstart, which is a national scheme, is to encourage parents to share books with their children from a very early age, by offering free books to every child and relevant advice to every parent. Bookstart is based on the belief that it's never too soon to share books with babies and that children exposed to books at an early age will start school with an advantage that can last throughout their life.

Bookstart is an inter-agency project, involving close co-operation between library services and health authorities. It was initiated in 1992 by the independent charity Book Trust in association with Birmingham Library Services, South Birmingham Health Authority and Birmingham University School of Education.

The scheme works by presenting parents with a Bookstart pack that includes a Bookstart bag, free books, advice on sharing books, information about library facilities and activities and an invitation to join. In Tinsley, a member of the local library staff visits the family when the child is aged 7-9 months to present the pack and invite families with babies and toddlers to come along and join the local library and the Babytime sessions.

The Bookstart message comes in three parts:

- Information - how to share books with your baby and the benefits. Bookstart helps to build the foundations of lifelong learning and a lifelong love of books.
- Invitation - for parents to recognise themselves a baby's first, most important and most enduring teacher. Regular book sharing increases bonding, helps towards school readiness and promotes the concept of parent partnership.
- Celebration - Bookstart is about confidence- building, empowerment and fun! Bookstart celebrates what parents already do and encourages them to share books with alacrity, making it a regular part of their family routine.

Wendy Cooling, Senior Bookstart Consultant, says: "Children who are familiar with books from an early age take to reading like ducks to water".

In addition, the arrival of a Bookstart pack can act as a significant prompt for parents with poor basic skills to seek help. Well-informed health visitors are able to offer friendly and non-threatening advice about accessing second opportunities to learn.

Margaret Hodge, the Minister for Children, announced that Bookstart in England would be centrally funded by the Sure Start Unit in 2004/05. This funding support from government and Bookstart's ongoing sponsorship support from their children's publishers and Red House Books means that a Bookstart Pack will be available to every 7-9 month old child. In addition, the government are introducing Bookstart Plus at 18-30 months (see below for what happens in Tinsley now) and Bookstart Treasure Box at 36-48 months. A Bookstart pack for visually impaired children is currently available from the Book Trust, and a special needs pack will be available in 2006.

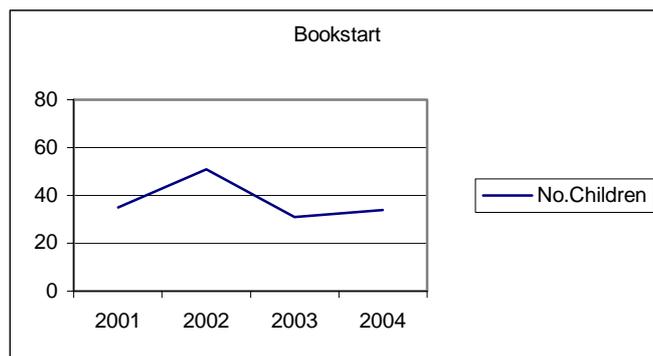
Bookstart Plus in Tinsley builds on Bookstart by delivering another pack to children at 2 years old. This consists of:

- Rucksack
- 2 books (some have dual language)
- Pack of 3 Early Learning Centre jigsaws
- a "Learning to Read should be fun" leaflet.

Bookstart visits

StartDate	EndDate	No.Children	No.Families
01/04/04	31/12/04	34	33
01/04/03	31/03/04	31	31
01/04/02	31/03/03	51	51
01/04/01	31/03/02	35	35
Total		151	150

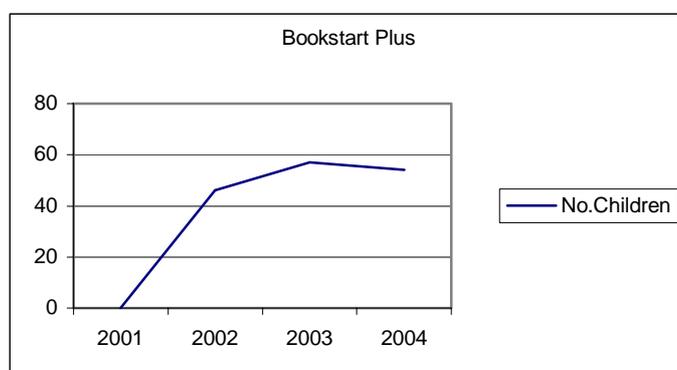
The table above shows the numbers of children aged approximately 7 months old (and their families) contacted by Tinsley library with a Bookstart pack, recorded on the TSS database.



Bookstart Plus visits

StartDate	EndDate	No.Children	No.Families
01/04/04	31/12/04	54	53
01/04/03	31/03/04	57	56
01/04/02	31/03/03	46	45
01/04/01	31/03/02	0	0
Total		157	154

This table shows the numbers of children aged 2 (and their families) visited with the Bookstart Plus pack by Tinsley library staff, recorded on the TSS database.



On the Bookstart Plus visit, parents are asked to complete a short questionnaire with the library staff, where possible (sometimes the pack is left with a relative or neighbour in the parent's absence). Up to the end of September 2004, a total of 163 questionnaires had been completed (24 of them undated). Parents are asked whether they received a Bookstart pack when their child was 7 months old, if they look at books and share books with their children, if they joined the local library and visit it, and if their children have their own books. The table below summarises the responses.

Question	No. Positive Responses	% of Total
Did your child receive a Bookstart pack at 7 months	110	67%
Do you look at books with your child(ren)?	64	39%
Has your child joined the library?	69	42%
Do you and your children visit the library?	69	42%
Do you share books with your children on a regular basis?	37	23%
Do you find this beneficial/easy?	27	17%
Does your child have his/her own books?	99	61%

Parents are invited to add their own comments about the Bookstart project, the library, or any other aspects of their child's reading and development. 72 comments from parents were recorded (this figure includes some observations from library staff). 31 people said

they thought Bookstart Plus was “*very good*”, “*brilliant*”, or “*excellent*”. 15 parents said their children were interested in or loved books. 2 parents said their children loved jigsaws, and 1 loved mark making. 4 people said they went regularly to Babytime at the library, and 7 said they used the library regularly. Other comments included:

- infrequent library users – feel children are too noisy to use library.
- uses 1 book in particular from original pack – Daisy – makes noises of animals and tickles child at appropriate time.
- As a first time mum she didn't know about the benefits of sharing books, but child loves books and she believes this is why his language development is so advanced.

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