Assertive Outreach – Bookbug for the Home
Year 2 Evaluation – Final Report

April 2015
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Executive Summary

The Year 2 Evaluation found convincing evidence to show that the Assertive Outreach Programme – Bookbug for the Home – inspires and equips early years professionals in Scotland to support parents in vulnerable families to interact more with their children and to develop a relationship with books. Professionals and parents alike described positive changes in children’s development and family interaction as a result of Bookbug activities, and the programme clearly complements the efforts being made in early years work locally and nationally to improve the life outcomes of children.

The Assertive Outreach Programme is Scottish Book Trust’s Scottish Government funded initiative which trains early years professionals to introduce the principles of Bookbug Sessions – talking, singing, cuddling and book sharing with young children, into the homes of the most vulnerable families in Scotland. The aim is to support them in encouraging quality interaction between parents and their children.

The Assertive Outreach Programme is being launched in eight new local authorities each year and by the end of Year 2 it was being delivered in 16 local authority areas. The aim is to reach all 32 local authorities in Scotland over four years. The programme has a strong fit with education, social care and health related strategies for families and children in Scotland such as GIRFEC, Early Years Framework, Curriculum for Excellence and the National Parenting Strategy, and has strong links to the growing emphasis on early intervention.

Blake Stevenson was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the Assertive Outreach Programme for the end of Year 2. During its second year, programme delivery took place in Angus, East Lothian, Edinburgh, Highland, Midlothian, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire and mirrored the Year 1 delivery with some minor adjustments to training session structure.

The Year 2 evaluation looked further at the impact of the Assertive Outreach Programme, notably:

- its impact on the practice of early years professionals in their work with families;
- its impact on families, in terms of parents being encouraged to sing, read, talk and play with their children, and any resulting effects of this;
- its impact in terms of families' wider use of services available to them, including local authority services.

The evaluation was conducted through an online survey to all trainees from Year 1 and Year 2 (225 returns) and telephone interviews (41), gathering feedback from those who had used their training with families and those who had not. We also undertook seven case studies, interviewing the parents involved and the early years professionals who had introduced Bookbug activities to them.
The evaluation found clear evidence that Bookbug for the Home training can inspire and equip early years workers from diverse roles to work in new ways with the families they support with some impressive results:

64% of early years professionals trained in Bookbug for the Home had used their training with families, each doing so with an average of 7.1 families.

81% of those who have delivered Bookbug activities in the home reported that Bookbug training has had an impact on their professional practice.

70% said that they would not have introduced these activities previously. All of these figures show an increase from the figures in Year 1.

It was typical for early years professionals to describe the Bookbug for the Home training as having given them the confidence, motivation and resources to enable them to work with families differently by introducing singing, rhyming and book sharing. They particularly highlighted the value of being able to introduce Bookbug to families where children have behavioural or developmental issues, where parents need support to recognise the value of play and interaction, and where families are reluctant to engage with services.

The evaluation found evidence that Bookbug activities supported early years staff in their wider professional role by supporting relationship building between workers and families and by providing a way in which family interaction was demonstrated. Bookbug was also seen as a good fit with their organisation’s priorities and with the wider early years’ context. We found evidence that Bookbug is a known ‘brand’ where professionals understand the work and the potential impact of what is being done with a family if they hear that Bookbug is being introduced.

Those who had not introduced Bookbug for the Home into their work with families had not done so primarily because of a lack of direct contact with families or a lack of time. However 81% of these early years professionals still expected to use their training with families in the future.

The experience of those who have introduced Bookbug for the Home was that parents were often unaware of the benefits of reading, singing and interacting with their child. Furthermore they lacked confidence in doing so, because of their own lack of experience in these areas.

There was clear evidence of impact of Bookbug activities in the home on families, with 93% of early years professionals who delivered the activities observing positive impacts and changes to behaviour within families as a result of doing so.

There was convincing evidence that the Bookbug for the Home approach provides early years professionals with the overall resources and specific tools they need to support parents to see the benefit of talking, book sharing and singing with their children more. 97% of those who have used Bookbug activities in the home reported that this was true for them.
The Year 2 evaluation also found increased involvement of families in public Bookbug Sessions, with 30% of early years professionals accompanying families to these. Furthermore, 22% of early years professionals reported that families they work with had engaged with other services that they had not engaged with prior to Bookbug.

These services included libraries, parenting support initiatives, speech and language therapy, playgroups and parent and child groups. This suggests that the Bookbug for the Home model has been successful not only in signposting families to use other services, but in increasing the confidence of parents in being able to do so.

The Assertive Outreach Programme is at the halfway point in delivering training to early years professionals in all Scottish local authorities. The programme is gathering momentum with a growing cohort of trainees who feel inspired and equipped to introduce Bookbug activities in their work, and who are further encouraged by its positive outcomes for the families they work with.
1. Introduction and context

Introduction

1.1 Blake Stevenson was commissioned by Scottish Book Trust to evaluate the impact of Year 2 of the Assertive Outreach Programme – Bookbug for the Home – on early years professionals and the families they work with.

Background to the Assertive Outreach Programme – Bookbug for the Home

1.2 The Assertive Outreach Programme is a Scottish Government funded programme which began in 2012, training early years professionals in the principles of Bookbug Sessions. It is being launched in eight new local authorities each year and by the end of Year 2 it was being delivered in 16 local authority areas. The aim is to reach all 32 local authorities in Scotland over four years.

1.3 The objective of the Assertive Outreach Programme is to introduce the principles of Bookbug Sessions – talking, singing, cuddling and book sharing with young children – into the homes of the most vulnerable families in Scotland to help them to lead happier, healthier and safer lives. The intention is that the newly trained early years professionals, who might be family support officers, health visitors, social workers or third sector workers, will introduce Bookbug activities to encourage quality interaction between parents and their children in the homes which they visit. It is also hoped that these activities will encourage vulnerable families to attend public Bookbug Sessions or to access other local early years provision which they have not previously accessed.

1.4 As the programme has developed, its reach and its operating context has grown. In this second year it continues to be influenced by a wide range of policy priorities and changes. It has a clear fit with the growing emphasis on early intervention and we have found clear evidence of its impact on young children, including some impacts which will contribute to school readiness tying in with Curriculum for Excellence and the four capacities within it:

- Successful learners
- Confident individuals
- Responsible citizens
- Effective contributors.

1.5 Similarly, the Assertive Outreach Programme fits neatly with the National Parenting Strategy in which there is an emphasis on supporting parents and carers, enabling them to nurture their children to ensure that they have the best start in life and reach their potential, as they develop into happy, confident, and successful individuals.
1.6 There is also a tie-in with the Scottish Government’s Literacy Action Plan which has an overarching vision of raising standards of literacy for all from the early years to adulthood. For many of the participants in the Assertive Outreach Programme there is an early introduction to the benefits of reading with activities aiming to engender a love of books at an early age.

1.7 Through its work to support children’s development, the Assertive Outreach Programme also complements aspects of the Scottish Government’s proposed Education Bill announced in November 2014, notably the launch of a new literacy and numeracy campaign – Read, Write, Count – for children in P1–3, and prioritises the improvement of the educational outcomes of pupils in the most disadvantaged areas of Scotland, through initiatives such as the "Raising Attainment for All" programme.

1.8 The bedrock for all children’s services and for those working with parents and carers which has been developed in recent years is Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC). This is the Scottish Government’s approach to ensure a consistent way for people to work with all children and young people. GIRFEC is being threaded through all existing policy, practice, strategy and legislation affecting children, young people and their families. The GIRFEC approach encourages practitioners across all services for children and adults to meet the needs of children and young people, working together where necessary to ensure they reach their full potential. The Assertive Outreach Programme fits with GIRFEC’s aims of improving the life chances of children, young people and families, and by working with professionals across sectors supports a positive shift in culture, systems and practice.

1.9 Launched in 2008, the Early Years Framework signified the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities’ (COSLA) commitment to giving all children the best possible start in life, and aims to break negative cycles of inequalities in health, education and employment through early and effective intervention. The Early Years Framework sets out 10 elements of transformational change, to be realised over a 10-year time horizon, and covers the period from pre-birth to age 8.

1.10 The Early Years Taskforce Vision and Priorities Paper (2012) sets out the vision for communities, young people and their families, and the people that work with and for them – of what needs to be done to ensure the best possible outcomes for children, for the ways families and communities can help improve these outcomes, and how services can best be targeted to support them. This is based on understanding, amongst other things, that:

- investment in the early years will save money in the future;
- supporting parents to build strong attachments with babies and young children builds resilience and behaviours that will help that child do better in later life;
- play is vital to physical, emotional, social and cognitive development; and
- transformational change will be best achieved by shifting from crisis driven, curative care to preventative and anticipatory care.
1.11 The Assertive Outreach Programme fits with the Early Years Framework’s recognition of the importance of positive interaction between parents and children from day one, offering practical support and ideas on how to create the best foundations for children’s development.

1.12 The Early Years Collaborative (EYC) is a coalition of Community Planning Partners, including social services, health, education, police and third sector professionals working to improve children’s start in life, accelerating the conversion of the GIRFEC and the Early Years Framework high level principles into practical action. It aims to put Scotland squarely on course to shifting the balance of public services towards early intervention and prevention by 2016, and to sustain this change to 2018 and beyond. Key changes which make a difference to EYC work were identified in 2013; these included attachment and child development, and developing parents’ skills, and the link between these and the Bookbug for the Home approach is clear.

1.13 Bookbug activities, and therefore Bookbug for the Home, potentially play a role in two of the EYC’s original three aims. Firstly by the end of 2016, ensuring that 85% of all children in each Community Planning Partnership meet all expected developmental milestones at the child’s 27–30 month child health review. Secondly by the end of 2017, ensuring that 90% of all children in each Community Planning Partnership have reached all expected developmental milestones by the time the child starts primary school.

1.14 Bookbug activities also link strongly to development checks undertaken in the early years as outlined by the Scottish Child Health Programme and referred to in the previous point. This programme provides proactive care and support to all children to help them attain their health and development potential and a 27–30 month review for all children is a core component of this (referred to in the previous point). One of two overall priorities of this universal child health review is the ‘promotion of strong early child development (particularly social/emotional and language/cognitive) within a context of helpful parenting and wider family wellbeing’.

1.15 The driver behind these national initiatives is the increasing information now available about brain development, as well as the economic analyses showing the financial rewards that are afforded to a society by investing in the early years. Science is revealing that neural growth occurs more rapidly during early childhood than at any point later in life. Thus, the Bookbug for the Home approach is about much more than literacy development. It aims to increase children’s self-regulatory systems (the capacity to manage stress and emotions), social interaction and relationships, and language. Where these are not secure prior to starting school, developmental outcomes are weakened. The principles on which Bookbug is founded are thus supported by current scientific theory and empirical evidence.123

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Evaluation of Year 1 and Year 2

1.16 In our evaluation of Year 1 of the programme undertaken in 2013, we found that the Bookbug training developed and delivered to early years professionals across eight local authority areas in Scotland was very well received, with around half of trainees using it in their practice with families, and the majority of the rest intending to use it in the future. Feedback from trainees’ observations of families and from case studies undertaken during the evaluation, identified ways in which the Bookbug approach resulted in greater parent/child interaction in the home.

1.17 Some minor adjustments were made to the programme delivery in Year 2, notably the training being delivered in an initial event and a further follow up event, potentially enabling trainees to begin to integrate Bookbug activities into their practice while still being part of a supportive training environment.

1.18 Year 2 of the Assertive Outreach Programme involved the delivery of training to early years practitioners in a further eight local authority areas: Angus, East Lothian, Edinburgh, Highland, Midlothian, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire.

1.19 The evaluation of Year 2 was commissioned to look further at the impact of the programme on the practice of early years professionals, and with a stronger emphasis on any resulting impacts on children and families with a specific remit to:

- update data on the implementation of Bookbug for the Home by early years professionals, taking account of a new cohort of trainees and the fact that Year 1 trainees have had longer to deliver Bookbug activities with families; and
- explore the impact of Bookbug activities on families, including through the presentation of a selection of case studies.

Evaluation aims and methods

1.20 The purpose of the Year 2 evaluation was to examine the following about the Assertive Outreach Programme – Bookbug for the Home:

- its impact on the practice of early years professionals in their work with families;
- its impact on families, in terms of parents being encouraged to sing, read, talk and play with their children, and any resulting effects of this;
- its impact in terms of families’ wider use of services available to them, including local authority services.

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Evaluation methodology

1.21 The evaluation was conducted through two key stages and there were two key elements to the first stage of the evaluation. Initially we undertook an online survey, with Scottish Book Trust sending an email incorporating a link to all trainees from Year 1 and Year 2. The survey was opened on two occasions to gain interim results and then again at a later date to ensure capture of results from the full cohort of Year 2 trainees. We received 225 survey returns from this exercise, providing a much larger body of evidence than the 88 returns received in Year 1.

1.22 A further link on this survey form enabled survey respondents to register an interest in taking part in a follow up interview. Those who did this also noted whether they had used Bookbug in home settings or not. From this we conducted 41 telephone interviews, 30 with people who had used their Bookbug training in practice with families, and 11 who had not.

1.23 We also intended to undertake case studies of 15 families where Bookbug activities were taking place, with the original intention of meeting families at the outset of their involvement in home-delivered Bookbug sessions and tracking any ongoing impact of these. This was reduced to seven over the course of the evaluation as explained in the section below.

Methodological benefits and limitations

1.24 The survey and request for follow up interviews received a good response and included both Year 1 and Year 2 trainees and within these groups a mix of people who had used their training in practice and those who had not.

1.25 Scottish Book Trust experienced significant challenges in identifying families to take part in the case study element of the evaluation. Initial requests to practitioners at conference events and approaches through named organisations did not produce results. Latterly a further request highlighting incentives was sent to all trainees from Year 1 and Year 2 and this resulted in referrals of case studies being made.

1.26 In total, communication took place with over 25 organisations about the possibility of case studies and this led to a potential list of 18 case study families. However, for a range of reasons (families disengaging, staff changing roles, staff not following through on their case study referral), this reduced and by the completion of the evaluation we had been given access to 7 families.

1.27 It is worth noting that very recently we have had more interest from organisations willing to participate in case studies and anticipate that as the number of actively trained practitioners grows, case studies will become easier to pursue.

Evaluation report

1.28 This report explores the experience of Bookbug for the Home trainees in delivering Bookbug sessions (and the reasons why some have not), practical issues they have encountered and the
impact they have seen on the families they work with, including their engagement with other services. The report also looks at the link between Bookbug and other activities which early years professionals undertake and the role of the Assertive Outreach Programme in the wider early years context.

1.29 The case studies, which can be found in Appendix 4 of this report, explore the reasons why families have become involved in the programme, provide detail about the delivery of Bookbug activities in home settings, and look at the impact which parents experience for themselves, their child and on family interaction more generally.
2. **Impact on the practice of early years professionals**

**Early years professionals involved in Bookbug for the Home**

2.1 In this section we provide an overview of the people who have participated in Bookbug for the Home training and their reasons for doing so. We explore their experience of introducing Bookbug activities to families and challenges encountered in doing so, and look at the impact of the training on their practice with the children and families they support. Finally this section looks at the views of early years professionals on the fit of Bookbug for the Home with their wider work and with the early years context they work in.

2.2 Professionals in a range of sectors are involved in early years work and the Assertive Outreach Programme has provided training across these different areas. Scottish Book Trust figures showed that they have trained 1455 people in two years with the largest complements being from third sector (31%), local authority (social work) (26%), local authority (early years) (18%) and health (14%). Of the 225 evaluation participants, 215 told us where their job was based. Although their responses reflect the same main groupings of staff trained, the balance is different with a higher proportion of local authority (early years) staff (25%) and health (31%) and a lower proportion of third sector (26%) and local authority (social work) staff (7%) having participated. The full breakdown is shown in Appendix 1.

2.3 The largest proportion of evaluation participants reported working in a nursing role (Health Visitor/Assistant, Nursery Nurse, FNP etc.) (51, 23%), followed by local authority family support workers (32, 14%), third sector workers (30, 13%) and local authority early years support workers (24, 11%). Nursery staff (19, 9%) and social workers/social work assistants (15, 7%) were also represented. Other groups which had smaller representation included speech and language therapists, foster carers, volunteers, library staff and teachers.

2.4 We received responses from 21 local authority areas. Dundee City accounts for the largest number of participants (35, 16%). Renfrewshire (24, 11%), Edinburgh (22, 10%) and North Lanarkshire (20, 9%) had the next highest responses. These locations and the others from which responses were received closely match those where Scottish Book Trust have undertaken Bookbug for the Home training, as shown in Appendix 2.

2.5 The majority of interviewees, just over four fifths (165, 82%), had attended training in Year 2, with the remainder (37, 18%) having attended training in Year 1. See Appendix 3.

**Reasons for participating in Bookbug for the Home training**

2.6 We asked interviewees about their motivation for participating in Bookbug for the Home training. Most interviewees told us that it was because they wanted to gain a new skill or “tool”
which would support their work with families and would provide benefits for these families. Comments which illustrate this include:

“The opportunity to have a tool to use in order to provide something for families that they could then replicate in their home” (Local Authority Early Years Worker)

“A new tool to reach families in a different way” (Local Authority Senior Social Work Practitioner)

2.7 Some interviewees told us that they had heard positive reports about Bookbug from their colleagues and other contacts, and were keen to take part in the training as a result.

2.8 A few others noted that they took part in the training because it was offered to them by their managers. In a small number of cases, practitioners took part in the training because they were “told to” by management, although this did not appear to have had an impact on their attitude to the value of the training received.

Impact of training on professionals’ practice

2.9 We sought to establish the impact of Bookbug for the Home training on professionals’ practice, in terms of them integrating Bookbug activities and resources into their other work with families.

2.10 Nearly two-thirds of interviewees (142, 64%) reported that they have already delivered Bookbug activities with families as a result of Bookbug training. This is up from the figure of 49% in Year 1, which is encouraging, and we can anticipate that this figure would continue to rise with a larger group of trainees across a greater number of local authority areas growing in confidence in the practice of delivering Bookbug activities.

2.11 We asked interviewees who had delivered Bookbug in home environments to estimate how many families they have used Bookbug activities with to date. Responses ranged from one to over 50, with an average of 7.1 per worker, up from the figure of 2.7 per worker in Year 1. This is unsurprising but nevertheless very encouraging. It supports the understanding that over a longer period of time and with increased confidence in using new skills, early years practitioners will have introduced Bookbug activities to a greater number of families. If implementation continues to grow at this rate, the reach and influence of Bookbug will become even more significant than it is already as an intervention within early years work.

2.12 The vast majority of interviewees who have delivered Bookbug activities in the home reported that Bookbug training has had an impact on their professional practice (117, 81%), up from the figure of 71% in Year 1. This is clear evidence that Bookbug for the Home training can inspire and equip early years workers in diverse roles to work in new ways with the families they support. It shows that the Assertive Outreach Programme reaches beyond training events and right into the homes of families as it intended.
2.13 Of those who said that Bookbug training had impacted on their professional practice, most (81, 70%) reported that they have been encouraged to use more Bookbug activities as a result of witnessing the positive impact of Bookbug activities on families. Those who already had some experience of using books or songs in their work with families also noted that training had reinforced what they were doing or re-motivated them in this area of their work.

“I have seen a positive impact so I know that the skills I learned and have practised for years are worthwhile.”

“Seeing the positive results with this family has inspired me to use Bookbug sessions where the opportunity arises.”

2.14 Similarly to Year 1, interviewees said that implementing Bookbug activities had influenced their practice positively. Just over two-thirds of interviewees who use Bookbug activities said that they would not previously have used these activities with families (80, 70%). As a respondent said, “I now start my outreach session with certain families with a Bookbug rhyme session which I feel can lighten the mood, include the child and then move on to my work with the parent”. Another said that “Bookbug has provided another avenue to engage with the child”.

![Chart 1: Impact on professional practice as a result of Bookbug training (n=117)](chart1.png)
2.15 As was the case in Year 1, interviewees also reported increased confidence in using songs and rhymes with families (73, 63%):

“As a staff team we are all more confident about using the resources and singing much more throughout our sessions.”

“Bookbug training has taught me that it’s not about your voice, it’s about taking part and introducing new songs and rhymes to the children.”

2.16 Over half of interviewees (61, 53%) reported increased confidence in using books with families. This figure was similar to, but slightly more than, the 50% who reported this in Year 1.

2.17 Other comments from trainees focus on the importance of Bookbug activities in providing staff with a useful tool with which to engage parents and children:

“I use Bookbug to speak about the importance of reading and rhymes on brain development, but also the intimacy that goes along with reading on building strong attachments.”

“I am more informed in my approach to encouraging families to make time for rhymes, songs and books in the home.”

“I feel it has improved my relationship with the children I work with, as Bookbug has given me a way to communicate at their level.”

“I use it as a fun activity and a way of putting learning into a family’s household.”

“I found that the use of songs and rhymes was useful in building concentration and encouraging the child to use a slower speech rate. It also helped him to focus and tune in prior to therapy for his speech sounds.”

2.18 Many practitioners who took part in the training commented that it has supported them in their work with families and that it was now a core part of their work. Several commented that it has helped them become more “confident” and “relaxed” when working with families. A Local Authority Nursery Officer said Bookbug “gave me a bit more confidence that I knew what I was doing”. Others noted that Bookbug has led them to incorporate more singing, reading and rhyming in their practice, thereby enriching their practice.

“It’s all part and parcel [of family support work]” (Family Support Worker).

Practical use of Bookbug for the Home

2.19 We asked people who had used their Bookbug for the Home training about the situations in which they had felt it most suitable to introduce the activities, the preparation they had undertaken in advance and their delivery of Bookbug activities.
2.20 Interviewees commented that Bookbug activities were particularly suitable in the following broad areas:

- where children have behavioural or developmental issues;
- where parents need support to recognise the value of play and interaction;
- where families are reluctant to engage with services.

2.21 Comments from interviewees illustrate that Bookbug activities are particularly suitable in situations where parents need to be convinced of the benefits of talking, book sharing and singing with their children, and where they need to be shown ways of doing this. As one respondent said, “where parents are unsure of benefits of play I have managed to introduce and encourage these activities”. Interviewees described some family situations where Bookbug activities were judged to be relevant and appropriate:

- where there are concerns related to attachment or a lack of play and interaction between parents and children: “families who are trying to build their bond with their child and increase positive interaction”;
- where parents are unsure of how to interact with their child: “where mum might feel it’s something she can’t do”;
- where families are isolated and/or parents have a lack of self-esteem or confidence to go to library Bookbug Sessions: “where the parent (usually the mother) is not confident attending the sessions on their own. Introducing Bookbug and what’s involved gave them confidence to attend as they knew what would happen during the session”;
- where the child has special needs such as communication difficulties: “little girl is selective mute... it has taken four months of weekly sessions and lots of repetition in the activities to finally get a response from her. I think Bookbug has been instrumental in this”; and
- where parents are “keen to encourage their children’s language development”.

Preparing for and delivering Bookbug activities

2.22 We asked interviewees to describe any preparation which has helped them to feel comfortable enough to introduce Bookbug activities to families and the training and resources were most frequently identified as important factors. As one respondent commented, “the bag full of resources helped amazingly”.

2.23 The training is described as both motivational as well as practical in demonstrating how resources can be used. One respondent highlighted how they felt on finishing training; “Really enjoyed it... came away thinking ‘let’s get right into it’,” while another said the “training session
was very useful – highlighted benefits and demonstrations of Bookbug activities and really helped build my confidence to do something with the families I visit”.

2.24 Many practitioners commented that planning Bookbug sessions in advance increased their confidence to deliver the sessions: “Before delivering a Bookbug session I like to write down the song/rhymes and book that I am going to introduce to the family. By doing this I feel organised and well prepared and relaxed to deliver the sessions”.

2.25 Some practitioners said that other professionals played an important role in increasing their confidence to deliver Bookbug activities, for example discussing the activities with other professionals or seeing other professionals delivering sessions before delivering one themselves. A few interviewees said it is helpful to deliver Bookbug activities with a colleague in teams of two.

2.26 Interviewees told us that they used a range of Bookbug activities and resources including stories, puppets, songs, nursery rhymes, the Bookbug empathy doll and Lycra. Interviewees were enthusiastic about all of these activities and resources, especially the puppets and the Lycra. The Bookbug empathy doll also plays a key role at times in drawing children into activities. Some interviewees also said that they used the Bookbug doll in other activities too, for example in a family baking session and to sit alongside children completing homework and ‘take part’ with them.

The role of Bookbug activities within a wider professional role

2.27 Interviewees commented on the way in which Bookbug activities supported their wider professional role by supporting relationship building between workers and families and by providing a way in which family interaction was demonstrated, thus giving insight into important issues.

2.28 Bookbug was described by a few interviewees as a way of enabling workers to build relationships with families before talking about serious matters. One Local Authority Family Support Worker noted that it enables staff to be “involved in a much more informal way”, while an NHS Nursery Nurse said that Bookbug “gets you in the house for a nice reason”. This was seen as being especially helpful with families who may be reluctant to involve services in their lives: “It’s fun... [better than saying] we’re here because we’ve had social work on the phone” (Third Sector Outreach Worker). One Social Work Manager commented that “family learning staff using Bookbug can get access to homes that some of my staff can’t get in to”.

2.29 Once activities are underway Bookbug activities are seen as enabling workers to address issues of interaction and attachment with families “in a nice informal manner” (Speech and Language Therapy Manager), while the sessions have some structure but not too much: “repetitiveness, predictability, a little bit of structure but not too much... fun, easy” (Early Years Worker).
2.30 Bookbug sessions are also seen as a way of providing information for workers, giving them an insight into family life and children’s developmental issues: “you see everything... their behaviour, speech, how mum and dad interact with them” (Early Years Support Worker).

Challenges in delivering Bookbug activities

2.31 We asked interviewees about times when they had found it more difficult to introduce or deliver Bookbug activities and most had some experience of this. The main challenge in delivering Bookbug activities identified by interviewees is a lack of engagement from parents, sometimes linked to their embarrassment regarding low levels of literacy. Interviewees commonly described parents’ reactions as being “quite shy and self-conscious” (Third Sector Early Years Worker) initially, but getting more involved in the sessions as they relax and become less self-conscious. As one Outreach Worker said, “the biggest hurdle is getting mums to join in”. On a positive note interviewees did note how they had experienced parents’ disinterest or disengagement changing when they saw their child’s positive response to Bookbug activities.

2.32 In addition to low levels of literacy, interviewees thought that barriers to parents’ engagement included their own experiences as children i.e. if they were not read or sung to, they were likely to be unfamiliar with common songs and stories and therefore were unsure about how to read or sing to their own child. As a result these parents were also at times unaware of the benefits of doing so.

2.33 Other challenges experienced by staff in delivering Bookbug activities included:

- reluctance from children to engage with the activities – in these cases the experience was that it can be helpful to tailor sessions to the child’s interest;
- children losing focus on the activities;
- distractions such as televisions, music and mobile phones;
- lack of opportunity or time for the professional to deliver activities;
- timing sessions around the child’s routine; and
- children being reluctant to hand the resources back at the end of the session.

2.34 The telephone interviewees we spoke to who have used Bookbug activities (30) all said that they intend to continue using the activities in the future. One Early Years Worker commented, “I will continue as I am and my plan would be to increase the families I’m working with and the amount of time I’m able to do Bookbug”.

Bookbug’s connection to wider early years work

2.35 The evaluation sought to establish if Bookbug for the Home played a part in assisting other organisations to deliver their outcomes for families and to explore any perceived link between the programme and the early years context within which people are working.
Most interviewees who have used Bookbug activities in the home feel that the Bookbug for the Home approach offers a very close fit and complementary activities to their own organisation’s priorities in working with families. Many interviewees said that Bookbug activities assist their work in promoting improved relationships between parents and children.

“It helps to promote a bond and attachment between parents and children and supports the work of the Early Years Collaborative. If we can get parents to respond to babies’ needs – it’s important for parents’ health and babies’ health. Just now the health visitors use Bookbug activities with families ad hoc during normal visits where the family would benefit from it. They are thinking about delivering a taster Bookbug session with every family they work with in the home.” (Health Visitor)

“Bookbug is a very valuable service [and has] given practitioners additional resources that have benefitted our practice directly to the families.” (Nurse Practitioner)

“Fits in really well with my role... I’m going into people’s houses anyway... it’s fun... it fits in perfectly with our work [and] what we stand for. It helps with literacy and trying to get families to do things together – sitting with a book is one of the closest things a parent can do with their child.” (Third Sector Outreach Worker)

Some interviewees observed that Bookbug can assist multi-agency working because social workers, health visitors and education practitioners are all aware of Bookbug and what it is seeking to achieve in its work with families. The Bookbug brand represents a “way of working” which early years professionals understand and are all positive about. If staff in one organisation talk about “doing Bookbug” with a family, professionals elsewhere know what this entails and how it will be providing support.

“A large part of my job is about helping parents to engage with children. [Bookbug is] good as a means of communicating with other professionals. I can share what I’ve been doing and say that she’s [child] really keen on a particular song… The more professionals who have it, there more there is consistency between home, nursery, etc.”

With regard to GIRFEC, Bookbug was described by one Senior Social Work Practitioner as “providing a practical solution” to addressing attachment issues, noting that this can be specified on a care plan where previously staff could only have identified a lack of attachment as something to address.

“It dovetails with all Birth to 3 work, with GIRFEC, Early Years Collaborative etc. It gives us a structure and it’s the same language; when we are at a meeting we can say ‘these are the reasons we are doing Bookbug’ – these are how many sessions, how mum’s responded, how the wee one’s responded.” (Manager, Family Centre)
Furthermore many interviewees described the close fit which they saw Bookbug for the Home having with the wider early years context in their local authority area, identifying specific connection with the Parenting Strategy, GIRFEC and the Early Years Collaborative among other initiatives and programmes.

“We are part of OneGlasgow, and this [Bookbug] links with GIRFEC and Early Years Collaborative. It’s all part of early interest helping to promote attachment and bonding. It’s good as it doesn’t cost and it also ties in with early years education, children becoming familiar with mums and dads sitting and reading with them. One of our outcomes as an organisation is to improve parents’ involvement in their child’s education and this gets them actively involved in it, and this also links with our outcomes to improve parents’ self-esteem.” (Third Sector Family Group Worker)

“It’s a very good fit alongside the PEEP programme – and it fits with early intervention, and the understanding of the importance of attachment, play and interaction with children.” (Local Authority School and Family Development Worker)

Developing Bookbug to further support families and professionals

Interviewees provided some suggestions about ways in which they thought that the Bookbug for the Home approach could be developed to enable professionals to better support families to do more talking, book sharing and singing with their children. Not all of the areas described are within the control of SBT, although where resources allow some of these areas are already being addressed e.g. training and shared practice forums. The suggestions included:

- providing more time for professionals to deliver Bookbug activities;
- providing refresher training and updates for staff;
- providing more resources including books and puppets for parents to keep – one Health Visitor noted that it was difficult to share puppets with different families because of infection control precautions;
- providing bilingual or wordless books to help professionals engage with families whose first language is not English;
- providing forums for practitioners to share information and experiences through events and online routes.

Reasons for not delivering Bookbug activities in the home

We explored why some people had not yet delivered Bookbug activities. Evaluation participants identified a lack of direct contact with families as one of the main reasons (17, 24%). A similar proportion of trainees (18, 25%) identified that a lack of time within their role to additionally deliver Bookbug activities with the families they saw, was the main reason behind them not delivering any. These are very similar results to the Year 1 evaluation. The majority of the results
from the Year 2 evaluation reflected Year 2 trainees. This shows that there are still a proportion of trainees coming forward for this programme who do not have contact with families which would enable them to use their training (this includes those who do work with families but where there are not necessarily under 5s), or who have other priorities with those families in practice which are a barrier to introducing Bookbug activities.

2.41 Evaluation participants also identified a range of things which would have enabled them to deliver Bookbug activities more than they have so far been able to. Given the barriers already described it is unsurprising that two of the most common answers were more time (8, 17%) and having direct contact with families (7, 15%).

2.42 Other things highlighted by evaluation participants which they said would have enabled them to deliver Bookbug activities include having access to follow up or refresher training (7, 15%), having a shared practice meeting or being able to exchange experiences with other trainees (6, 13%), being able to role play difficult situations during the training (5, 10%), and being able to share experiences and practices with other trainees online (5, 10%). It should be noted that for Year 2, SBT restructured the training, delivering it two parts to include a follow up session, in response to similar feedback from the Year 1 evaluation.

2.43 Asked to choose one main form of support which would help them to deliver Bookbug activities in the home, respondents identified being able to have a follow up or refresher training event after the initial training (8, 18%). These included responses from Year 2 participants who would have received training in two parts, suggesting there may be a small level of demand for further follow up training.

2.44 Just over four–fifths of respondents (66, 81%) who have not yet delivered Bookbug activities in the home think that they will do so in the future. Many commented that they have not yet had an opportunity to deliver Bookbug activities in the home but expect to have a chance to do so soon i.e. the barriers to them using Bookbug were temporary. As one survey participant said, “[I] need to wait for [the] crisis period to be over – then [I] can do this type of work”.

2.45 People who had not yet used Bookbug activities were still able to identify situations where they thought it would be suitable:

- when working with families who are difficult to reach and reluctant to engage with services;
- where parents need support to develop routines;
- where parents need support to interact with children;
- where parents are not aware of the benefits of talking and singing to young babies; and
- where there are more than two children in the household.

2.46 For those who did not expect to deliver Bookbug activities in the future, the continued lack of direct contact with families was the main underlying reason.
3. **Impact on children and families**

3.1 In this chapter we look at the impact of Bookbug activities on children and parents separately, as well as on changes in their interaction with each other. We also identify the effects on other family members. The section concludes with the views of early years professionals who have delivered Bookbug activities on the reasons why the impacts described are achieved through this programme.

3.2 Nearly all interviewees who have used Bookbug activities in the home observed positive impacts and changes to behaviour within families as a result of introducing Bookbug activities in the home (131, 93%), confirming findings from the Year 1 evaluation.

[Chart 2: Bookbug's impact on families (n=131)]

### Impact on children

**Engaging children**

3.3 Through the evaluation we sought to establish the response of children to Bookbug activities, and overwhelmingly interviewees described this reaction as being very positive. A large proportion of interviewees (112, 86%) reported that they had observed children being happy and engaged during Bookbug activities.
Many observed children keenly anticipating Bookbug sessions, including examples of children who stopped what they were doing to sit down and await the start of the session as soon as the worker arrived at the house, in some cases this was unusual behaviour within the family home. It is clear that the Bookbug sessions’ simple structure, often assisted by the resource of the Bookbug doll creates a unique moment for children.

“Even very young babies join in, look around, see all the actions, join in the actions.” (Family Resource Worker)

“Always excited, disappointed when it’s finished.” (Early Years Worker)

“Children love Bookbug and anything that’s rhyme and interactive children really respond to.” (Speech and Language Therapy Manager)

“They know when Bookbug [empathy doll] comes out it’s time to settle down for a story – it makes it easier for them to understand what’s going to happen next.” (Third Sector Family Support Coordinator)

“They enjoy it as it is more of a fun session – there are actions and silly songs and silly noises. They know when Bookbug comes out [that the session is going to start]. They’re sitting and clapping and ready to start. They know when we start tapping our knees – it’s a cue for them. There’s a start, fun in the middle and then a goodbye. The children know each of the songs that go with each character that comes out (referring to puppets in a bag).” (Toddler supervisor in nursery)

Improving behaviour and development

Just over a quarter (28%) of survey participants said that parents had reported improved behaviour as a result of Bookbug sessions. There was evidence of this from interviews, for example an Assistant Nurse Practitioner described three unruly children running round the house who came and sat on the floor when the worker entered the house with her Bookbug bag. There were additional examples of children who normally lack concentration uncharacteristically sitting still to listen to a Bookbug story, sometimes much to the parents’ surprise.

There are also some significant examples of children making developmental progress as a result of Bookbug. For instance, a Respite Early Years Worker described one boy “whose language has definitely come on” and others identified improvements in concentration and attention. In another example, a girl who was a selective mute began singing and talking after four months of weekly Bookbug sessions.

“We can see a progression in their concentration, even with the wee ones. There’s an improvement in concentration, in eye contact, building up relationships as they are sitting next
to someone. They are more expressive as they get used to telling stories themselves – this is for children some of whom are living with parents who have severe mental health problems.”

“They join in with action songs even if they have no language.”

“He loved the puppets and the storybooks [referring to a boy with very little language]. It was good to get the sounds from him. The fact that we are not asking him questions, just getting him to make sounds. Also there are new words for him from the books, like ‘badger’ – we’re talking about animals and how they feel and what they look like.”

“Some wee babies cooried into their mums and stare at me – gradually you see them developing and enjoying it and they end up dancing in week six.”

3.7 Some of the impacts described were particularly notable as in the case of a child who was mute outside of the home:

“Professionals didn’t know what direction to go in. They [family] had never had anyone coming into the home. Within weeks she [child] became familiar with songs and started interacting and singing, talking and making choices. Something clicked for her and it’s been a big impact. Really positive.” (Early Years Worker)

3.8 Further evidence of positive changes to children’s behaviour and development which can result from Bookbug activities are shown in the case studies (Appendix 4). These give clear examples of the ways in which Bookbug for the Home has supported children’s language development, general communication skills and understanding of the English language. They also provide examples of supporting children’s use of their imagination, motor skills, ability to focus on particular activities and their appreciation of books, as well as the way in which they engage with other people in the family.

Impact on parents

3.9 The evaluation sought to establish the impact which Bookbug activities had on parents and found that they played a role in increasing both their knowledge of appropriate activities and their confidence in playing and interacting with their children. Witnessing the positive effects which activities had on their children made it more likely that parents would continue to use them in their day–to–day lives.

3.10 Nearly all of the early years professionals (139, 97%) who have used Bookbug activities in the home reported that they feel able to convince parents of the benefits of these activities, and the same high proportion feel that Bookbug for the Home sessions provide parents with the tools needed for talking, book sharing and singing with their children. This is a significant result showing the appropriateness of Bookbug activities in producing results which parents can see, and in equipping them to get involved themselves.
3.11 In some cases, where parents appeared to be unsure about how to interact with their child, Bookbug sessions have demonstrated how this can be done through a form of role modelling. As one interviewee said, Bookbug “shows parents ways they can interact with their kids using things they have anyway”. Interviewees also commented that observing workers demonstrating ways of playing and “being silly” with children was particularly helpful for parents who were previously uncertain of how to play with their children.

3.12 Some interviewees commented on parents who realised that reading to their child was easier than they thought as a result of Bookbug. This was especially true for parents with literacy issues, who learned that they can share books with their children by talking about pictures and interpreting the story in their own unique way.

“One staff member used it with a mother with learning difficulties and poor literacy. The Mum could learn Bookbug rhymes and the worker introduced books without words. Mum was able to tell a story to her child from the Bookbug Pack – she memorised the story and read it to her girl regularly.”

3.13 A few interviewees said that parents lacked confidence in reading or singing with their children, but Bookbug activities had helped to put them at ease. An interviewee gave an example of a mum who “felt more comfortable doing story time with her child after three sessions”.

3.14 In other cases, parents were described as not being aware of the benefits of reading, singing and interacting with their child. In these instances, highlighting the links between Bookbug activities and what is known from research about children’s development, and evidencing this by demonstrating how children react to and enjoy the activities, had helped to inform parents and encourage them to be more actively involved with their children. For example, an interviewee described a parent who thought their baby was too young to be read to, but Bookbug changed their perception of this by letting them see the baby’s reaction when the worker read to him.

“Some are unsure, especially early on – you need to explain benefits of reading to young babies and children. Some parents might think ‘what’s the point of that, the child can’t read’, but when you get the books out and demonstrate the interaction, they start to see the benefits.”

“One young mum was unfamiliar with the importance of reading to babies. The worker started reading to the baby whose face lit up – Mum could see that baby was responding. Mum started to read to the baby too and she was still doing this at subsequent visits.”

3.15 In other cases delivering Bookbug activities had provided an opportunity for early years professionals to demonstrate to parents how to work with more challenging behaviours in children.
“They [the children] love it” – they don’t usually get this stimulation so it’s a bit overwhelming for them at first, and this can make them over-excited. This gives workers a good chance to demonstrate to parents how to contain an over-excited child and how to settle a crying child.”

3.16 Interviewees provided a range of examples which showed that families were increasing their use of Bookbug activities in between the home sessions provided. These included parents or children talking about the activities they had done, children being familiar with books or rhymes from their ongoing use, and families making or using their own props between sessions e.g. doing ‘Lycra-type’ activities with a blanket.

“There is evidence of Bookbug packs lying around in living rooms and they can find them if asked. This is different to before.”

“They are reading books and doing nursery rhymes when I wasn’t there, because the children are beginning to know them all or they’ll say “Mum Mum look at that. That’s the book we were reading.””

“You can tell as the child is more able to recite the rhymes or continue on with the story – it’s clear that parents have been discussing things with the child.”

“The mum made finger puppets between sessions.”

3.17 Further evidence of the positive changes for parents resulting from Bookbug activities is provided in the case studies (Appendix 4). These give clear examples of the ways in which Bookbug activities encourage parents to try new ways of interacting with their children, developing their confidence to do so through example and practice, leading to sustained changes in parenting behaviour.

Impact on parent-child interaction

3.18 A large proportion of evaluation participants reported that they had observed parents interacting positively with their children during Bookbug activities (111, 85%), and interviewees described increased play, reading, singing and rhyming, as a result of Bookbug.

“One child in particular loves the baby books (he is six years old). He loves the touch and tickle and it’s helping him to build attachments. He has had six different foster placements and lacks trust, so these times have been important, safe and fun”.

“Bookbug has had a positive impact on mum’s confidence in interacting with her children. They are very much being encouraged to continue this when I’m not around”.

“Parents have reported feeling their relationship has improved with their child, increasing their own confidence”.

“Mum is being more proactive rather than just leaving them to watch the telly.” (Family Support Worker)
3.19 Another Family Support Worker cited an example of a child who now sits with her mum and does ‘round the garden’ on her hand, demonstrating increased physical contact.

3.20 Just under two thirds of interviewees (80, 62%) said that parents had reported using songs and rhymes outside of the times they had visited and 60% (78) said that parents had reported using books, although this figure cannot be assumed to be solely about parents who did so as a result of Bookbug for the Home.

3.21 Some interviewees observed improved relationships between parents and children as a result of Bookbug. As a Family Resource Worker said, “the delight is to see mums and children relaxing together and coming together and moving on with their relationship [after experiences of domestic abuse]”. Other interviewees gave examples of increased eye contact between parent and child, improved verbal and non-verbal communication, more fun and laughter, and an increase in the amount of “quality time” spent together.

“An opportunity for parents to take a child on their knee and sit and read to them.” (Third Sector Family Support Coordinator)

“Bookbug sessions promoted bonding and attachment between the carer and her grandson and that helped the wee fella to have an increased sense of belonging... [as a result] the child was much more able to regulate his behaviour.” (Family Support Project Manager)

“Bonding is a lot better – parents are better able to respond to children’s needs.” (Health Visitor)

3.22 A few interviewees also commented on the way in which wider family relationships were supported and enhanced through Bookbug activities. This is best illustrated in the case studies included in Appendix 4 (see Murray Family, Gilchrist Family, Shah Family and Volunteer Family Support Project). These varied examples show that Bookbug activities can provide new ways for siblings to play together, a common focus for parents with an opportunity for them to learn together about their child’s development, and solutions for families to resolve negative patterns of behaviour and spend positive time together.

The reasons behind Bookbug’s positive impact on families

3.23 We asked early years professionals to identify why they felt that Bookbug activities had positive effects on children and parents. The responses described Bookbug and the resources which came with it as:

- fun, informal and non-threatening, making families more likely to accept practitioners into their home;
- easy to implement through an appropriate level of structure;
- a good way to communicate important messages about the value of play and interaction between parents and children; and
• encouraging for parents as a way of seeing play demonstrated.

3.24 In addition, Bookbug activities are seen as being easy for parents to implement in their own time using things which the families already own. One Nursery Nurse commented that people did not need to be especially knowledgeable to begin to introduce Bookbug activities, while a Speech and Language Therapist commented that “it’s a way for parents to interact with their children using things they’ve already got”.

3.25 Bookbug sessions in the home are seen as offering accessibility and encouragement: “Makes parents more aware of the ways in which they can spend quality time with their children” (Speech and Language Therapist).
4. Impact on families’ use of services

4.1 One of the aims of the Bookbug for the Home approach is to encourage parents to engage more with local services which would further support the development of their child and encourage positive family interactions. The evaluation sought to establish whether Bookbug activities in the home had led to any change in use of local services including public Bookbug Sessions, libraries and other support services for families with young children.

4.2 Just under a third of interviewees (43, 30%) said they have taken families they work with to a public Bookbug Session. This showed an increase from a figure of 19% in Year 1.

4.3 The main reason for early years professionals saying that they had not taken families to a public Bookbug Session was a lack of time on the worker’s behalf. Other reasons include:

- the family is perceived as not being ready or lacking sufficient confidence to attend a group;
- the family is not willing and have stated that they do not want to take this option: “the parents that I am currently working with are not willing to visit a Bookbug session in a local library”;
- some families already attend public Bookbug Sessions.

4.4 We asked the interviewees who had taken families to a public Bookbug Session to indicate how many families they had done this with. Responses ranged from one to 12, with an average of 2.9 per worker.

4.5 Just over a third (52, 38%) said that families they work with had reported attending a public Bookbug Session on their own. Many of these had not previously attended public Bookbug Sessions. This figure was similar to but slightly lower than that found in the Year 1 evaluation (41%). We asked respondents to indicate how many families had reported attending a public Bookbug Session on their own. Responses ranged from one to 15, with an average of 3.2 per worker.

4.6 Local authority Support and Early Years Workers were most likely to take families they work with to a public Bookbug Session. Just over half of these staff (52%) had done so. The percentage of staff taking families to public Bookbug Sessions for each job role is shown below.

- Support Worker/Early Years (local authority) (52%, 11)
- Nursing staff (e.g. health visitor/assistant, nursery nurse, FNP) (41%, 16)
- Support Worker/Family (local authority) (36%, 8)
- Nursery staff (22%, 2)
• Social Worker/Social Work Assistant (20%, 2)
• Third Sector Worker (18%, 3)

4.7 Just over a fifth of interviewees (30, 22%) reported that families they work with had engaged with other services that they previously did not engage with as a result of Bookbug. These services include libraries, Triple P, PEEP and other parenting support initiatives, speech and language therapy, playgroups and parent and child groups. This suggests that the Bookbug for the Home model has been successful in signposting and encouraging families to use other services.

4.8 Further evidence of parents’ increased use of services – notably library and public Bookbug Sessions – as a result of Bookbug for the Home, is shown in the case studies (Appendix 4).
5. **Conclusions**

5.1 Year 2 of the Assertive Outreach – Bookbug for the Home – Programme has seen a consolidation of activities from Year 1 as the original group of trainees continue to use the resources and activities with families while a new group have been trained and have begun to put that into practice.

5.2 The Year 1 evaluation of the Assertive Outreach Programme concluded that it had successfully pioneered the way for the next stages of the four year programme. We found that the programme had succeeded in:

- developing effective training and resources
- mobilising early years professionals; and
- impacting positively on families.

5.3 The Year 2 evaluation shows strong parallels with each of these areas and in doing so provides further and fuller evidence from a larger cohort of trainees that Bookbug for the Home impacts on their own practice and on the families who they work with. We found that an increasing proportion of those being trained are putting new knowledge and skills into practice by introducing Bookbug activities to families – nearly two thirds have done so, compared with just under a half in Year 1. In addition, as the programme progresses, the average number of families who have experienced Bookbug activities delivered by each Bookbug for the Home trainee has substantially increased.

5.4 The Bookbug for the Home training remains not only popular and practical but also inspires and motivates early years professionals to introduce singing, rhyming and book sharing activities with the families they are working with. The evaluation found clear evidence that many early years professionals have gained confidence to implement activities with families which they have not used before. Others who have some experience in this area already, gain reassurance and encouragement that their approach of using songs, rhymes and books to engage parents with children is worthwhile. The vast majority of those who have introduced Bookbug activities say that this approach has impacted on their professional practice.

5.5 Bookbug for the Home has proved to be a useful and complementary tool for early years professionals, enabling them to work in an informal way with families where they may have to undertake more formal work. It gives them the opportunity to demonstrate play which inspires parents to get involved, and increases their confidence so that they interact with their children more often. The resources, the flexibility of the model, the simple structure of Bookbug sessions, and the interactive nature of the activities are key factors in the success of getting children and parents involved. The overwhelming majority of those who have introduced the Bookbug for the Home approach say that they are able to convince parents of the benefits of
this, through modelling and informing parents about behaviours which are beneficial for children’s development, showing what resources can be used in the home, and increasing parents’ confidence in interacting with their child.

5.6 We have found clear evidence of the relevance of Bookbug for the Home to the work of early years professionals, as it both complements their everyday practice and links to wider early years strategies and initiatives aimed at improving the life chances of children. On the ground the Bookbug brand is an important part of the success of delivery, as it not only helps to engage children and parents in activities but provides a recognisable link in other settings e.g. libraries and nurseries. The brand provides familiarity which enables parents and children to make a connection with something they know, to feel more at ease in new environments, and which then offers opportunities to participate in activities they already have experience of, and where they know what will be expected of them.

5.7 The Year 1 evaluation also highlighted challenges which the Assertive Outreach Programme faced. To some extent these are still present. There are still some staff being trained who do not always have regular face-to-face or home-based contact with vulnerable families, while the issue of prioritising Bookbug activities within complex family situations remains. The main reasons why some people are not using their training with families are practical caseload issues or family-based issues which are beyond the control of Scottish Book Trust, and the vast majority of those who have not, still intend to do so in the future.

5.8 Through the case studies, the evaluation has found strong examples of Bookbug activities making sustained positive changes to child development, parent confidence and family interaction. These build on the examples found in Year 1, and the case studies show the diversity of settings where Bookbug can achieve success – from pairing families together or forming a part of prison-based attachment sessions, to acting as a valuable tool for foster carers. The changes for children can include language development and confidence gained through participation, as well as an understanding of important components of informal learning environments such as sitting, listening, sharing and turn-taking; life skills which are crucial for a successful transition to playgroups, nursery and ultimately school. Parents have given clear evidence of positive changes in the way that they interact with their children – taking part in Bookbug activities which demonstrate how to play has given them opportunities to try new things, in a user-friendly setting, and has raised their confidence in their own abilities. The evaluation also found parents describing additional benefits such as improved wider family interaction and encouragement to use local facilities and services.

5.9 In terms of the second year of the Assertive Outreach Programme, it is encouraging to see the increase in the proportion of trainees who have gone on to deliver Bookbug activities growing in confidence as practitioners as they see positive results within the families they work with. This, coupled with the intention of many to use their training in the future, suggests that the programme has built a strong foundation across a diverse range of early years professionals working in different sectors. The evidence of changes in children and in family interaction
directly resulting from Bookbug for the Home presents a clear picture of an approach which is achieving positive outcomes in many family homes, and in children’s lives, in a range of settings as it continues its development across Scotland.

5.10 The evaluation provides evidence that the Assertive Outreach Programme is working; influencing the practice of a range of early years professionals, changing the way they work with families, and subsequently leading to change for children, parents and families.

5.11 The Bookbug for the Home approach links strongly with the work of early years professionals working in social care, health and third sectors, tying in with their priorities in working with families and with the purpose of their organisations’ work. It also complements national strategies and plans relating to children and families. The approach is one that appears to be increasingly understood by those supporting families, in terms of what its activities entail and how they can contribute to improved outcomes.

5.12 At the end of Year 2, the Assertive Outreach Programme is at the halfway point in delivering training to early years professionals in all Scottish local authorities. The programme is gathering momentum with a growing cohort of trainees who feel inspired and equipped to introduce Bookbug activities in their work, and who are further encouraged by its positive outcomes for the families they work with.
## APPENDIX 1 – YEAR 1 AND 2 TRAINEES AND SURVEY INTERVIEWEES BY SECTOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Number of trainees</th>
<th>% of trainees</th>
<th>Number of survey interviewees</th>
<th>% of survey interviewees</th>
<th>Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Third Sector</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>includes 30 identifying themselves as ‘third sector’, plus 1 nursery staff member and 1 nursing staff employed by third sector, along with 13 volunteers and 1 student</td>
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<tr>
<td>LA Social Work</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA Early Years</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>includes 24 support workers/early years (LA), 32 support workers/family (LA) and 1 Early Years Collaborative programme manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHS</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>includes 48 nursing staff employed by Health plus 2 nursery staff members employed by Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLT</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA Education</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>includes 4 teachers, 3 community learning staff, 6 nursery staff members employed by education, 2 nursing staff employed by education, 2 bilingual support workers, 1 Family Learning EAL teacher and 1 outreach worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA (other)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>includes 5 foster carers, 10 nursery staff members, 2 daycare/childminders employed by LA and 1 clerical officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libraries</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<td>Psychology</td>
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<td>1%</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>223</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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*Note: The figures in this column do not total 100 exactly due to rounding.*
# Appendix 2 - Year 1 & 2 Trainees & Survey Interviewees by Local Authority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Authority Area</th>
<th>Number of Year 1 &amp; 2 Trainees</th>
<th>% of trainees</th>
<th>Number of survey interviewees</th>
<th>% of survey interviewees</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dundee</td>
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<td>–</td>
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<tr>
<td>East Ayrshire</td>
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<td>–</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Ayrshire</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1474</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>222</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Note: The figures in this column do not total 100 exactly due to rounding.
### APPENDIX 3 – SURVEY INTERVIEWEES BY YEAR OF TRAINING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of survey interviewees</th>
<th>% of survey interviewees</th>
<th>Assumptions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1 (Aug 2012–Jul 13)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>Includes two who reported taking part in the training in May 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 2 (Aug 2013–Jul 14)</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>Includes 22 who reported taking part in the training after July 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>202</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td>Excludes 23 interviewees who could not be categorised because they gave only the calendar year or only the month in which they took part in the training</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Murray family

Carrie and Rob Murray live in a town in Angus. Carrie is a full-time mum who spends time at home with their son Kyle (18 months). Rob is currently serving a custodial sentence in Perth Prison. The case study was completed by interviewing Carrie and Rob independently and the Project Worker who had incorporated Bookbug activities and resources within ‘attachment sessions’ at the prison. These had taken place over a 4 month period in addition to her wider support role with the family e.g. providing transport to enable prison visits to take place and supporting the family while Rob is in prison.

How did the Murrays get involved in Bookbug?

The Murrays’ involvement in Bookbug was through the Barnardos Thrive project which is funded to work with families with a pre-school aged child where there is a family member in prison. The project works to promote the bond between children and their imprisoned parents, and ultimately to improve the outcomes and life chances for children.

Rob Murray was serving a custodial sentence at Perth Prison and made contact with the Thrive Project in order to access attachment sessions with his son Kyle. These offered him the chance for greater interaction with Kyle than would be allowed through a normal prison visit e.g. where he would have to remain on his seat and with restricted physical contact. The attachment session (one hour a week) enabled him to play with Kyle in a more intimate way. This session was part facilitated by a Barnardos Thrive Project Worker who introduced Bookbug activities such as singing, rhyming and book sharing as some simple structure within the attachment session.

Carrie Murray had previous experience of a Bookbug library session – she had found this positive for her son who was aged 12 months at the time, but the timing of this then clashed with her opportunity for prison visits. She was keen to continue with activities like this and to find ways for Rob to be involved. The concern for both parents was to minimise any negative impact on the father-son bond which might be caused by Rob’s custodial sentence. In Rob’s words, “That’s my worry. That I’m losing a bond with him.”

At the same time as the attachment sessions, Carrie was also accessing Bookbug sessions through an Early Years Practitioner who visited her house, and by attending Bookbug Sessions organised by Just Play, a local organisation supporting families affected by offending behaviour, criminality or police involvement where there is a child aged 0–3.
What did Bookbug set out to achieve with this family?

The Bookbug sessions aimed to:

- provide an opportunity for positive interaction and strengthen the bond between father and son; and
- provide a positive activity for the family members to do together in the limited time they were able to spend together;

These aims were identified by both parents and then supported by the project.

How was Bookbug delivered?

Bookbug activities within the one hour attachment session tended to be towards the end of the session as a more settled, focused activity which then ended in a wind-down. The Project Worker saw her role as facilitating some of the play which the family could do together and demonstrating activities which they could then do on their own. In addition Carrie had learned how to use Bookbug activities and resources through sessions she had attended with Kyle. She would also introduce or describe some of these to Rob so that he had the opportunity to play with Kyle in the same way during the attachment sessions, doing activities which they knew Kyle was familiar with and would enjoy.

One of the key things noted by the Project Worker about the particular circumstances of this situation was to get the pace and content of the session right. Given the particular time pressure of a single hour of father-son contact a week, there could be a temptation to pack a lot of content in, however the worker’s view was that this “could be overwhelming,” and so getting a balance of structure and free time within the attachment session was important.

What worked well about Bookbug sessions with the Murrays?

Rob described how the sessions had “opened his eyes” to ways of playing with his son. He noted that previously he would have considered Halloween and Christmas as times to play, but he is “starting to understand that it needs to be a constant thing” in the life of his son, and how much Kyle would benefit from that, even at this early stage in life; “Getting down to his level can only be positive”.

Kyle responded well to songs and rhymes and the sessions provided a way to establish some definite activities which Kyle enjoyed which his dad, even in the limited contact time they had. Rob clearly knew what his son liked; “He has his favourites – twinkle twinkle definitely,” and “Giddy up with the horses – he was in stitches”.

The familiarity of songs also proved helpful in situations outside the Bookbug sessions. Carrie described how Kyle had been screaming but even over the phone had settled “as soon as Rob starts singing”. Rob said, “He just stops and listens. Brilliant.”

Rob commented on the difference between the type of prison visits he had previously experienced and the ones he was now involved in, and could see the contrasting experience for fellow inmates. “You can see the difference – the guys who are coming back from a [normal] visit and the ones coming back from a Barnardos visit. It’s the bond. The peace. The chance to be a Dad for an hour.”

How did the family benefit?

There were various benefits experienced for the family members involved.
Parents’ understanding of their son’s development
Both parents noted that prior to the sessions they had underestimated what Kyle could understand. Carrie said, “I did have books but I thought he was too young,” while Rob noted “I tended to ‘babify’ him. Through Bookbug I’ve learned. He soaks it up.”

Carrie also commented on how she could see Kyle learning; “after a couple of weeks of doing clappy handies he was doing it. With the songs I can see him respond. It’s the repetition thing.”

Rob took the same view; “It’s made me see that he’s capable. Now he’s interacting back with me, the eye contact.”

Confidence and knowledge as a parent
Rob noted that the activities had also built his confidence. He had regarded himself as good at singing with his son before, but he said he now had more confidence in understanding about how he could interact more thoroughly with Kyle, and about how his input as a father “is going to affect him in years to come.”

Rob also sees more clearly the role he has in Kyle’s future development. “It’s up to me. It’s my responsibility to make books fun for him.”

Carrie also noted that her understanding as a parent had changed as she had found new ways of communicating with Kyle in a manner which he understood; “We were trying to talk to him… that was our only way of interacting with him.”

The Project Worker noted that because Carrie is seeing the benefits of play and rhyming that she is “not scared to try anything.”

Father and son bond
Carrie described how the sessions have created a common language despite the family being separated for the majority of the week. “As soon as we get to prison Rob is singing the same songs. Rob is part of his [Kyle’s] world.”

Rob can see the way in which this form of play builds a stronger connection with Kyle. “Before I’d have been jumping about and rolling about, but this is more activity. It builds a bond with him, and with his mum as well. We work as a team. It’s perfect.” He described the activities as “things I definitely wouldn’t have done – maybe I would have tried to read him a book. It brings me right on to his level.” The sessions end with a quiet time for Rob and Kyle; “I go a wee walk with him and sing him a song”.

Structure of the day
Carrie described how she did some Bookbug activities most days at home. “After I’ve done everything [chores] I’ll do some Bookbug stuff. We’ll sit and read a story at night. It’s become a big part of his life.”

Child development
In Carrie’s view, even at Kyle’s young age Bookbug activities are really important. “I believe it’s teaching him. He’s taken all of these things in. Without it he wouldn’t be so advanced. I believe he’ll be quite brainy when he goes to school”.

The Project Worker noted that Kyle was now using cues and making connections and that he was able to focus and pay attention during activities.

Family relationships
Rob felt that the sessions have had a very positive effect on the family as a whole. “It’s drawn us together as a wee family unit. We’ve concentrated on him. It makes me and his mum work well together.” He went on to say “It’s all good. I enjoy it, he enjoys it – as a family we enjoy it – perfect.”
Carrie described how she had now involved other family members in taking part in Bookbug activities in the home, encouraging them to play with Kyle in the same way rather than stand around in the kitchen and chat and leave him to play on his own.

**Changes in use of local services**

Rob is looking forward to getting involved in group Bookbug Sessions in his local town on his release. There are plans for him to attend a Bookbug Session with Kyle organised through Just Play. Rob sees this as being really important to continue the opportunity to play constructively with Kyle but feels the sessions also have a part to play in his rehabilitation on release from prison.

“My worry wasn’t about looking after him – it was about filling the time – giving me positive things to do and giving me positive things to do with him. Two good things.”

**What impact did Bookbug have on the staff member and their organisation?**

Prior to this job role, the Project Worker noted that her experience was in work with older children and young people. Being newly involved with early years children, she has found it helpful to learn to use activities and resources such as Bookbug to support parent-child interaction. This has provided her with an approach which she can use with other families.

**Case study reflections**

This case study is an excellent example of the strength of Bookbug activities in creating familiarity for a child in very different settings (from home to prison visiting). It also shows how Bookbug activities can provide the means by which a bond between father and son can be safeguarded and built on, even during a period where they can spend little time together.

The Bookbug practitioner incorporated Bookbug activities within wider support she provided for the family. She was able to facilitate some of the play which the family was involved in together and demonstrate activities they could do on their own. It was important for the practitioner to judge what the most appropriate activities were in the limited time available, showing the flexibility of the various Bookbug activity options to suit different situations.

The Bookbug activities provided a common language for this small family unit which enabled them to ‘work together’ in their moments together. The activities had also been informative for both parents who had learned more about the development of their son through their play with him, seeing him in a new light in terms of what he was able to do and the concepts he was able to understand.

This case study provides a clear example of Bookbug activities providing a family with a stronger foundation at a potentially difficult time. It has given the family positive ways of interacting in their current situation, as well as motivating them to think positively about community-based Bookbug (and other) activities when their circumstances change.
Case Study
The Carlyle and Nelson Families
“A nice thing to do… away from everyday chores” (Home Worker)

NB: Names have been changed to protect the families’ anonymity.

The Carlyle and Nelson families live close to each other in a town in Renfrewshire. Morag and Kenny Carlyle have a son, Graham (3), and Laura and Bobby Nelson have a daughter, Polly (3). Both children have complex additional support needs including visual impairments and physical disabilities, and both attend a nursery for children with complex needs. In both families, the mum works part time and the dad works full time. A Home Worker delivers Bookbug sessions at home for the two families together. The case study was completed by interviewing both sets of parents, the Home Worker who delivers the Bookbug sessions, and the Depute Head of the nursery that Graham and Polly attend. At the time of the interviews, the families had undertaken around 15 to 20 Bookbug sessions.

How did the Carlyles and Nelsons get involved in Bookbug?

The Worker delivers Bookbug sessions at the children’s nursery but recognised that it is “difficult for the families to get out to Bookbug because these children have complex needs”. As a result, she offered parents the opportunity to receive Bookbug sessions in their home.

Both Polly’s and Graham’s parents were eager to take part in Bookbug sessions at home because they had both had unsatisfactory experiences of attending Bookbug Sessions in libraries that were too busy and noisy for their children. The families knew each other already through the nursery and they live close to each other so were keen to do the sessions together. They approached the Worker together to request joint sessions and as a result this format was organised for the families.

What did Bookbug set out to achieve with these families?

The Bookbug sessions aimed to:
- help the parents to spend quality time with the children; and
- support the children’s development.

How is Bookbug delivered?

Normally both the mums, both the children and Kenny attend the session. Bobby attends when he can but this is not always possible because of his working commitments. The Carlyle family has not taken part in all the sessions because Graham has to attend frequent hospital appointments. The sessions are continuing on an on-going basis.
The children enjoy stories, singing, and playing with the finger puppets. Sometimes the Worker uses the Lycra but the children’s visual and physical disabilities limit how much this resource can be used.

The Worker brings a bag with her which contains various resources and toys. The Worker finds this a good way of introducing activities and the children enjoy taking it in turns to choose a toy from the bag.

The sessions are normally themed with the toys linking to the stories and rhymes. For example, if there is a book about fish, there is also a toy fish.

Both children have communication difficulties and Graham cannot speak at all, which limits the extent to which the children can actively take part in the sessions. However, the parents said that the children enjoy the sessions, expressed by smiling, and the Worker noted that Polly has begun to take part in the sessions more verbally.

What works well about Bookbug sessions with the Carlyles and Nelsons?

Both families like the personalised and small group nature of the Bookbug in the home sessions. Both had previously attended library sessions but did not find them to be suitable for their children. Polly’s Mum said that “although she enjoyed it she wasn’t fully participating like all the other children”. Graham and Polly found it difficult to interact with the activities because the library sessions were “too noisy”, and the families prefer the home sessions because they are more suited to their children’s needs. Graham’s Mum said that Graham cannot easily see the books at group sessions because he is partially sighted, but he is able to at the home-based sessions because the books are closer to him; “The libraries are really really busy… [but at home, the Worker is] usually sitting right in front of the kids, so he can get to see properly”.

One of the elements that works well is the way the sessions draw on the children’s sense of touch and hearing as well as visual elements. Tactile activities and resources such as ‘touchy feely’ books, finger puppets and the Bookbug doll work well with these children and are suited to their visual impairments. The Worker commented that it is important to tailor Bookbug sessions “to the developmental needs of the child”. Kenny agreed that the “multi-sensory” nature of the sessions works well.

The Worker reported that the families have been “very engaged” with the sessions from the outset and the families said that they really enjoy the sessions.

How have the families benefitted?

There have been various benefits of the sessions for the two families.

Confidence of the parents

Bookbug sessions have helped to improve the parents’ confidence in reading with their children. Kenny said that although they have always read quite a lot as a family, Bookbug has given them ideas for ways in which they could read with Graham in a more engaging manner by using activities that involve actions. The Nursery’s Depute Head noted that the sessions have given the parents “the confidence to read to their children and to interact with them”.

Increased quality time

The Worker observed that the families already read to the children before the Bookbug sessions began. However, she said that the parents spend a significant amount of time undertaking chores and physical activities related to their children’s...
care, such as attending hospital appointments, feeding, and physiotherapy. In contrast Bookbug “seems to be a nice thing to do... away from the everyday chores” and allows the parents to do something “normal” with their children. Bobby agreed, pointing out that they cannot take their daughter to soft play or the library but Bookbug provides an enjoyable activity that they can do together.

Child development
The children’s parents described some developmental changes in their children as a result of Bookbug. For example, Polly's dad reflected that she “has come on with her language” and the Worker said that she “has started to participate in the session”. Her dad has noticed her becoming familiar with the nursery rhymes and finishing the lines – this shows that Bookbug helps “to develop her language and her memory, trying to recall things”. Graham’s mum explained that although they are still waiting for his first word, he is getting better at expressing enjoyment by smiling and he seems to be able to listen more attentively.

Polly’s dad also noted that she has improved movement in her left arm. Initially, she found the motion of reaching into the Worker’s bag to pick a toy difficult but now finds it easier.

The parents noted that the sessions give the children practice of taking turns in bringing the toys out of the bag. The Worker noted that the children “like the turn taking”. This is a benefit for the children of doing the sessions together, particularly as neither have siblings to practice this with.

Kenny felt that the sessions are “really educational” for the children in terms of developing communication and skills in sharing.

Social benefits
The families have had social benefits from doing the sessions together. The Depute Head of the children’s nursery noted that the sessions “mean they don’t feel isolated. They can interact with each other and discuss their own children’s positive outcomes… they aren’t feeling alone… and build up a bond with other parents” in a similar situation. The Worker agreed that the sessions represent “a good social thing for the two families to be doing together”.

The parents also talked about the social benefits of the sessions. Kenny commented that the sessions provide a “good social setting for the children” and Bobby observed that the sessions give them a “sense of community and friendship”.

What impact has Bookbug had on the Worker and the nursery?
Bookbug sessions provide a link between the nursery and the home. The Worker feeds back to nursery staff about approaches that have been successful in engaging the children at home. Staff then integrate these into their practice in the nursery. As the Depute Head said, staff are “able to introduce different things to the children and use different strategies in the room based on the Worker’s findings at home”. Conversely, nursery staff give the Worker information about books being used at the nursery so she can use them in her home sessions – “a good link to have between the home and the nursery” (Depute Head).

In the nursery, the Worker is not always aware of how much interaction each child is capable of. It is beneficial for the Worker to see the child in a smaller group and in their home environment to
learn more about the children and to tailor sessions to the child’s needs.

The Worker noted the importance of “gearing [sessions] to the developmental needs of the child” by incorporating activities and resources that are suitable for the children. In particular, she said that tactile activities are important because of the children’s visual impairments. She also said that “repetition is really important” because of the children’s complex needs.

**Case study reflections**

This case study is a good example of the flexibility of Bookbug for the Home – it is seen working in a small setting with two families together, while also showing the value of activities being tailored to meet the needs of children, in this case children with complex additional support needs. It is also an example of how valuable links can be created between home-based Bookbug sessions and other services, in this case a nursery.

This case study shows that Bookbug for the Home offers a means of ensuring that families who have found public Bookbug Sessions unsuitable, can still have access to Bookbug activities. It also shows that working within a small, personalised setting means that families are better able to concentrate on activities which work best for their children e.g. tactile activities.

Whilst the parents in this situation were already reading with their children, Bookbug for the Home has encouraged and equipped them to do so in a more engaging way i.e. Bookbug activities can build on people’s existing skills and experience.

This case study is also a good example of how Bookbug activities have had a direct impact on developmental changes for the children involved - these included changes in language and understanding.

The fact that the practitioner was involved in the home-based sessions and at the children’s nursery is a further significant element of this case study. This enabled feedback on successful approaches from home-based Bookbug activities to be shared and integrated into nursery practice, while books used in nursery were also used at home. In this case, Bookbug activities were a point of continuity and communication across different care and support settings for children.
Case Study

The Gilchrist Family

“It gives me a reason to go out” (Angela Gilchrist, parent)

NB: Names have been changed to protect the families’ anonymity.

The Gilchrist family

Angela and Stevie Gilchrist live in a town in Angus. Stevie works full time and Angela is a full-time mum at home with her son Ryan (2). They have a daughter Katie (4) who goes to nursery and an older son Robert (16). The case study is based on interviews with Angela and the Play Practitioner who had led the Bookbug sessions in the home after they had undertaken around 16 sessions together.

How did the Gilchrists get involved in Bookbug?

The Gilchrist family’s involvement in Bookbug came about through a Play Practitioner from a local organisation – a joint initiative (BIG Lottery funded) between Angus Council and Police Scotland, working with families affected by offending behaviour, criminality or police involvement and which have a child aged 0–3 years. Its work focuses on encouraging the importance of play with parents, with regards to the brain development and the general development of their children.

The Play Practitioner referred the family because Angela was finding it difficult to get out and mix with other people, although she did recognise that her son would benefit from this. This, combined with Katie taking up a lot of the mum’s attention, meant that Ryan was less of a focus leading to the possibility of him having delayed development e.g. his ability to walk and stand.

In the words of the Play Practitioner, “Mum wanted to bring him on.” Angela herself noted that Ryan had already enjoyed books but that she was keen to build on that. She said that she didn’t have much idea of what the sessions would involve but was happy to get involved in something that was for the benefit of her son.

What did Bookbug set out to achieve with this family?

The Bookbug sessions aimed to:

• improve the interaction and strengthen the bond between mother and son;
• provide a home based opportunity for parent–child interaction which might lead to more activities in the community; and
• support the language and general development of the child.

These aims were identified by the Play Practitioner and broadly discussed with the
mother. The sessions were also a way for the worker to practise using resources and activities she had recently learned about in training which the mother was also aware of.

**How was Bookbug delivered?**

The Play Practitioner tried to hold the sessions with Angela and Ryan when Katie was at playgroup but sometimes this was not possible so on some occasions she was involved too. However the worker did not find a problem with this as “the resources lend themselves to any age group.” Her experience with the older child was that they can “sing the songs themselves,” while “the Lycra helps to include people and kids can do so many things with it.” In fact the worker noted that if the older child was there the wider family were easily involved; “I liked if Katie was there it was natural.”

Ryan already liked books so the Play Practitioner said that it was “a natural next step” to build more activities on to books. The use of a bag of resources was a good way to introduce new activities while matching up puppets to a page in the book kept a link with books. After a few weeks Ryan “would go into the bag and try out the puppets and he would try to sing Twinkle Twinkle,” and the Play Practitioner noted that over time the sessions were “sometimes led by children going into the bag.”

The Bookbug doll also had a very positive impact; “the children were taken with him,” while the Lycra allowed new activities and songs to be introduced, for example the children lying underneath the Lycra sheet and ‘Twinkle Twinkle’ being sung.

As someone new to Bookbug for the Home, the Play Practitioner described how she experimented with different approaches saying that she would “give it a go and see how Ryan liked it.”

**What worked well about Bookbug sessions with the Gilchrists?**

One of the elements which worked well was that the puppets made the sessions “so visual” and encouraged participation; “he can have a shot himself.” The Play Practitioner added to the existing Bookbug resources with a nursery rhyme glove which “brings stories to life in a different way.” The puppets were also effective in encouraging speech because of Ryan’s recognition of them.

The fact that the sessions could build on books which Ryan was already interested in was also seen as positive.

**How did the family benefit?**

There were various benefits experienced for the family members involved and for the wider family.

**Confidence of the mum**

The Play Practitioner described how Angela “joined in as time went on,” for example initially she couldn’t remember words to nursery rhymes but then got used to them. Whilst the Play Practitioner believes that Angela was always good at interacting with her son, she is now singing to him more and there is now a rack with books in the living room which was not there before Bookbug sessions. Books have become more important within play and parent/child time together in the home.

She also observed that Angela had previously found her daughter’s behaviour difficult but has
found that Katie can also participate in some of the Bookbug activities they do such as singing and rhyming.

Angela herself said that Bookbug activities had made her more confident “in all aspects”, providing her with “different things to do” and “giving her a reason to go out,” as she has begun to use the library.

**Child development**
The Play Practitioner noted changes in Ryan as a result of Bookbug in one particular area; “the confidence side of things without a doubt.” Angela confirmed this saying that Ryan was more outgoing, “using his voice a lot more” and described a contrast with how he was before the sessions began; “He was very much in his shell – it’s nice to see him more outgoing.” She also described what this was like in practice; “Instead of me telling the story, he’s started now to try to explain what he thinks the story is.”

**Child readiness / maturing**
Some of the Bookbug activities helped Ryan learn to like books more; “It’s made him really confident. He’s more happy to come over with a book. You’ll find him sitting in the corner with a book – he’s book daft.”

Angela reflected that her older son (16) didn’t do activities like this when he was younger; “I think that may be why he doesn’t read books.”

**Family relationships**
Angela said that the Bookbug sessions have “been great for the whole family.” She said that Ryan’s father Stevie thought the initiative was positive, and commented that Ryan’s big brother would say “Here he comes again – he’s got another book”. Furthermore, Ryan and Katie play together based on Bookbug activities; “They’ll do nursery rhymes together and sometimes they’ll get books. She teaches him – she’ll pick up books and read to him.”

**Changes in use of local services**
Angela notes that the family now try to go to the library once a week, “sometimes just to look at books”. She said that Ryan “loves it, absolutely loves it.” And that “it’s an environment he’s comfortable in where he knows what to do when he goes in.”

The Play Practitioner noted that the family had recently chanced upon a Story Time session there. The fact that this had gone well with the children fitting in, may have given Angela confidence to join future activities. She is also hoping that Angela may join in with a Bookbug group run by her project. The Play Practitioner’s hope is that a future outcome of this work will be Ryan joining a playgroup.

**What impact did Bookbug have on the staff member and their organisation?**

The Play Practitioner is very positive about Bookbug and through working with the Gilchrist family has gained confidence in using the activities and resources. “I’ve tried it out with one family and it’s been good for everyone. I see changes every week and it’s build my confidence.”

As a result, the Play Practitioner is using Bookbug activities with other families. Seeing the resulting changes in children leads to her highlighting this to parents. “I sometimes tell parents it makes a difference to learning. I can say, ‘Look at the difference from saying rhymes’. It makes it real.”

She also notes that the Bookbug activities provide a new way of working with families; “It makes you
more human – approachable. I’m not the best singer but the kids don’t care!”

The Play Practitioner also notes that the Bookbug activities fit firmly with one of her organisation’s outcomes of encouraging families to spend more time interacting together as well as supporting children to develop; “The tools and things encourage you and they fit perfectly. They help children reach their potential of learning.”

In her opinion the Bookbug resources and the training package had been “fantastic” for her individually and for their staff team, whilst also being practical in highlighting that book sharing was still a positive activity even for those parents with literacy issues.

Case study reflections

This case study is an example of Bookbug for the Home successfully reaching into a home environment where the family would not otherwise have accessed such activities. The resulting impact of these is significant – an increase in confidence of the child (e.g. using his voice), new activities introduced that other family members can also enjoy, and the family starting to use the local library where previously they had not. It is a clear example of the wide reaching effects of training early years practitioners to facilitate home–based Bookbug activities.

The case study is a good example of the journey of a Bookbug practitioner and the need for this to sometimes take place over an extended period of time; trying out different activities as they get used to a new way of working, gaining confidence from working with one family, and being inspired and motivated to then introduce Bookbug activities more widely in their work.

Whilst the focus of the Bookbug activities in this case study was on one pre-school child and his mother, the fact that the older child had joined in at times led to family members having knowledge of new activities which they could be involved in together. This included the children playing differently together by using rhymes and books, showing clearly how Bookbug activities can positively impact on family dynamics.

The Bookbug activities in this case built on the child’s existing interest in books. This led to the family using the local library, something which was also able to happen because of an increase in confidence of the mother to get out of the house and the connection offered between Bookbug activities in the home and library services.
Case Study
The Granger Family

“They were interacting straight away” (Social Worker)

NB: Names have been changed to protect the families’ anonymity.

The Granger family

Elaine and Kevin Granger live in the Scottish Borders and are respite foster carers for children from East Lothian with severe and complex needs such as severe autism. The couple provides respite care for several children at any one time and all of the children they care for stay at their house for at least one night every week, with others staying for two or three nights a week, or for longer times during school holidays.

Elaine has completed Bookbug training and uses Bookbug activities every day. The case study was completed by interviewing Elaine and a Social Worker from East Lothian Council.

How did the Grangers get involved in Bookbug?

The Grangers got involved with Bookbug when Elaine heard about the training through East Lothian Council. She was keen to take part because she already used books in her work with children. She took part in Bookbug training in April 2014.

What did this family hope to achieve with Bookbug?

Elaine uses Bookbug to help build relationships with the children she cares for and to help with the children’s language, communication and behaviour.

How was Bookbug delivered?

Elaine has integrated Bookbug activities into her work with children every day. She has a bag of Bookbug resources and she emphasises to the children that the bag belongs to her and they are not allowed to go into it without her, therefore creating some boundaries and structure to the use of the resources. She encourages the children to come and ask her when they want to play with something from the bag. Elaine has made laminated sheets with photos of each of the toys so that non-verbal children can point to the toy they want to play with.

Elaine also uses Bookbug resources including books, finger puppets, the Bookbug doll and Lycra regularly. For example, she uses Bookbug activities to help calm the children as part of ‘quiet time’ before they go to sleep and also in the morning to make sure that the children do not get anxious or bored while waiting for their transport to school.

In addition, Elaine normally meets children for the first time at the child’s home before the child starts going to Elaine’s house. She uses Bookbug activities at these meetings as an ice breaker to build rapport with the child.
What worked well about Bookbug sessions with the Grangers?

Elaine said that tactile Bookbug resources such as Lycra, finger puppets and books have been particularly successful at engaging children with communication difficulties because they engage the child’s sense of touch and do not rely wholly on verbal or listening skills. Elaine finds Lycra particularly effective and she has used it in various activities, such as bouncing puppets on the Lycra while singing a nursery rhyme.

Another positive element of Bookbug activities that help to engage children is their use of songs, stories and characters that children are familiar with.

How did the family benefit?

Bookbug has had several benefits for the Grangers in their role as foster carers.

Voluntary engagement

Elaine emphasises to the children that the bag containing the Bookbug resources belongs to her and that they cannot open it without asking her first, but she encourages them to come to her if they want to play with something from the bag. This offers a way for children to show that they want to play or read with Elaine, particularly for those who are non-verbal and cannot explain verbally what they want: “they know they can’t access it on their own, so they don’t just pick out the toy – they have to ask and this shows they want engagement”. She described this “voluntary engagement” as “amazing” for children with autism.

Help with routines

Elaine said that switching the television off and reading books with children helps to calm them down before going to bed.

Improved behaviour

Bookbug activities have helped to improve children’s behaviour. For instance, Elaine cares for two brothers aged eight and ten, both of whom have autism. The two boys used to behave badly in the morning while waiting for the taxi to take them to school. Elaine said this time of the day used to be “traumatic” but Bookbug and Lycra have been “a lifesaver”. She uses Bookbug activities to keep the boys occupied while waiting for the taxi.

A Social Worker who works with Elaine noted that because the children understand that the Bookbug bag is Elaine’s, there are no tantrums when it is taken away. The Social Worker also commented that Bookbug is “good for turn taking” by giving children turns to choose toys from Elaine’s Bookbug bag.

Building relationships

Bookbug activities have helped Elaine to build rapport with children when she first meets them at the beginning of a placement. For example, Elaine used Bookbug activities the first time she met a six year old boy with “high functioning autism”. Elaine had been warned by the boy’s teacher and Social Worker that he can be difficult and aggressive and does not normally react well to meeting new people. Elaine used puppets and her Bookbug bag to engage the boy and the boy’s mum and Social Worker were pleasantly surprised to see his positive reaction to Elaine and the activities. The Social Worker said the activities “helped to build the relationship really quickly – they were interacting straight away on the first visit and now he looks forward to Elaine coming”. The boy’s mum told Elaine that she had never seen her son react so positively to any new person.
What impact did Bookbug have on the foster carers?

Elaine has always used stories and books with children she cares for but the Bookbug training gave her resources and ideas to use. Elaine said that previously she might have read a book suggested by the parent but now she has a stock of Bookbug resources that she can draw on. Elaine liked the Bookbug training because it “gives you a format to follow but if you deviate off, it’s not a crisis”.

A Social Worker who works with the family said that “Elaine is really really good at Bookbug” and as a result has asked Elaine for ideas for running her own Bookbug sessions. The Social Worker said that it “has been great” for her to see Elaine use Bookbug activities.

Case study reflections

A key element of the success of the Bookbug model in this case study is the Bookbug resource bag and how it is used. The resources are not made openly available to the children – instead the children are encouraged to ask if they want to play with them. This creates a structure and gives the children experience of boundaries and of asking to play, which is shown in this case study as being valuable, particularly for children with autism.

It is important for foster carers to build a positive relationship with the children they will be caring for. The case study provides an example of how Bookbug resources and activities can be used as ice breakers at an initial session, and how Bookbug can then provide continuity in other settings e.g. when the child subsequently stays with the foster carer.

The case study is also an example of how people who have experience of, and would already use stories and books in their work with children, can still be inspired and better equipped as a result of Bookbug for the Home training, leading to new ideas and more varied activities.
Case Study
The Shah Family
“Since Bookbug started, at night time they usually come to me and ask me to read a book” (Mandeep Shah, parent)

NB: Names have been changed to protect the families’ anonymity.

The Shah family
Mandeep and Raj Shah live in Renfrewshire with their daughter Narinder (7) who goes to school and twin sons Harbir and Gurpreet (3) who attend nursery. The family is of Pakistani origin and normally speaks Punjabi at home. Raj works full time and Mandeep works one day a week. Mandeep experiences some health difficulties including depression. The twins were born premature and are now experiencing some developmental and behavioural problems. The case study was completed by interviewing the mother and the Home Worker who leads the Bookbug sessions with the family after they had undertaken five sessions.

How did the Shahs get involved in Bookbug?
The Shahs involvement with Bookbug came after the twins’ nursery referred the family to a local authority family support service for support with the twins’ behavioural and developmental difficulties, which include biting, problems with turn-taking and language difficulties.

The Home Worker from the service, who also delivers Bookbug sessions at the twins’ nursery, felt that it would be beneficial to incorporate Bookbug activities into her work with the family, both to address the twins’ problems and to help the parents to learn stories and rhymes in English, which is their second language.

Mandeep said that she was keen to introduce the children to activities that are more educational than watching television or playing computer games and this was another reason for taking part in Bookbug.

What did Bookbug set out to achieve with this family?
The Bookbug sessions aimed to:
- help the parents to learn rhymes and stories in English;
- develop a stronger bond between the parents and the children;
- improve the behaviour of the twins; and
- improve the parents’ confidence in telling stories.

How is Bookbug delivered?
The Home Worker normally delivers the sessions with Mandeep and the three children. Raj has also been involved in a couple of sessions despite working long hours.

The Worker said the sessions have been rather “sporadic” due to other pressures on the family’s time, such as a recent house move, but the sessions are continuing.
The Worker always incorporates a book, singing and finger puppets into the session and activities with the Lycra are often included as well. The Worker takes a bag to each session with various resources which the children take it in turns to select toys from. This helps to engage the children in the session and allows them to influence the content of the session.

**What works well about Bookbug sessions with the Shahs?**

The fun and informal nature of Bookbug activities has allowed the Worker to support the family in a fun and relaxed atmosphere; she noted that Bookbug is a “good way of getting families to bond together without being preachy”.

The Lycra has worked well with this family because it is something they can all get involved with and use together at the same time.

The Worker also noted that it was helpful that she already knew the twins from delivering Bookbug sessions at their nursery.

**How has the family benefitted?**

Bookbug has had several benefits for this family.

**Interest in reading**

Mandeep said that the children really enjoy the Bookbug sessions and that they have helped them to learn to like books more. She said that “since Bookbug started, at night time they usually come to me and ask me to read a book”, which is something they did not do before. The Worker said that the Mum “reads them stories at bedtime which I don’t think she did before”.

Mandeep said that the sessions had also made her more interested in reading. She said that she was not very interested in reading before but the sessions have “encouraged me to read a book”.

**Family relationships**

The Worker reflected that, while the family go on days out together, they did not spend much time together as a family at home before Bookbug and often Mandeep was too busy with household tasks to play with the children. However, Bookbug sessions have provided an enjoyable activity for all members of the family to take part in. The sessions, and increased time spent reading together in between sessions, have led to the family spending more quality time together.

**Parents’ knowledge of and confidence in stories and rhymes**

Bookbug sessions have increased the parents’ knowledge of, and confidence in stories and rhymes. The Worker explained that, because English is not the family’s first language, the parents were unfamiliar with songs and rhymes in English. However, the Worker observed that Bookbug sessions have provided “a good way to introduce them [the parents] to the songs and rhymes the children learn at nursery and school” and have “definitely helped [Mandeep’s] confidence in telling them stories”. Mandeep confirmed that she now reads more to the children as a result of Bookbug sessions.

**Twins’ behaviour**

The Worker and Mandeep felt that the twins’ behaviour has improved. Mandeep described the children as “more calm” when reading books and they have improved their ability to sit nicely and attentively as a result of Bookbug sessions. The Worker also observed that the twins had got better at taking turns at choosing toys from her bag as the sessions progressed.
Changes in use of local services
The family did not tend to visit the local library before Bookbug sessions but now visit once or twice a week to borrow books, prompted by the family’s increased interest in reading.

What impact has Bookbug had on the Worker?

The Worker is very positive about Bookbug and noted that it has had a positive impact on the relationship between her and the families she works with. She says Bookbug “makes things jollier and brings you closer together” with families through shared participation in Bookbug activities.

The Worker noted a lesson learned from her experience of delivering Bookbug with this family: it is important to consider the timing of a Bookbug session. She said that delivering sessions when the children have just got home from nursery is not so effective because they are tired, so she tends to deliver sessions earlier in the day where possible.

The Worker also noted that it helps to have established a relationship with the children before delivering a Bookbug session. This helps the Worker to predict the children’s response to certain activities and to anticipate any potential behavioural challenges.

Case study reflections

This case study is an example of Bookbug for the Home supporting parents to develop knowledge and confidence of stories and rhymes in a setting where English is not the family’s first language. This is significant as the parents were then able to learn songs and rhymes which their children will learn at nursery. It means that they can then engage with their children on this level, which they would otherwise be detached from.

The case study also shows how Bookbug for the Home offers families new ways of spending time together, and provides examples of children developing an interest in reading which then leads to the library being used, and of children’s behaviour being more positive as a result of calming and sharing activities. This is a significant set of new and positive opportunities which are a direct result of the Bookbug intervention.

The practitioner’s experience in this case was that Bookbug for the Home has offered a way of creating a fun and relaxed atmosphere which resulted in a closer working relationship with the family. In this situation, knowing the children from another setting also helped the practitioner to pitch the Bookbug sessions appropriately.

It is clear that the informality of the Bookbug approach was key to the success of this case, and enabled a different and positive way of communicating. Bookbug also provided a means of breaking down some of the barriers resulting from English not being the parents’ first language.
Case Study
The Cairns Families

“I’ve seen me reading books for two hours – one story after another”
(Jo Cairns, parent)

NB: Names have been changed to protect the families’ anonymity.

The Cairns families

The Cairns families live in Angus. The two sisters Jo and Kirsty live next door to each other. Both are full time mothers and have daughters (Ruby and Anna) who are aged two. The case study was conducted with both mothers and with the Play Practitioner who has delivered Bookbug sessions over 12 weeks with them.

How did the Cairns sisters get involved in Bookbug?

The Cairns sisters became involved in Bookbug through a Play Practitioner from a local project which works between Angus Council and Police Scotland, and works with families affected by offending behaviour, criminality or police involvement and have a child aged 0–3. Its work focuses on encouraging the importance of play with parents in regards to the brain development and the general development of their children.

The families were already involved in some play sessions with the Play Practitioner in a group setting and in the home. The worker was also aware that they had tried public Bookbug Sessions but had not sustained any involvement. The worker involved reflected that her personal experience had been of going to a local Bookbug Session with her own child and how good this had been for them both socially and as a way of learning new things. “When I came into this post I was more and more aware of how difficult it was for families to make that step – some families just aren’t there yet.”

The Play Practitioner’s hope was that the Bookbug Sessions would consolidate the work she was already doing with the families, by providing further opportunities for the mothers to interact with their children to increase the confidence of the mothers, and to assist in the development of the children – one of the girls was receiving speech therapy and was not speaking much at the time the Bookbug sessions began. The Play Practitioner felt that Bookbug activities gave her “something else to try and put in there.”

Because of the Play Practitioner’s existing involvement with the mothers, the idea of Bookbug was an easy one to introduce. The staff member also used the idea that it was something they could all try together saying to the mothers, “I’m newly trained – how about we try this”. In addition there was a strong appeal for the mothers relating to the home-based nature of the activities.

The mothers talked of their experience of attending public Bookbug Sessions (twice). “After the second time we agreed we couldn’t go back.” They had both found that there was “too much structure for the young ones” and as a result they had felt
anxious about their children’s behavior within a group; “If the kids don’t want to sit you feel bad”. This contrasted with the opportunity to do Bookbug at home; “You can make it more their thing. You don’t feel pressured for your kid to sit.”

What did Bookbug set out to achieve with these families?

The Bookbug sessions aimed to:
- improve the interaction between mothers and daughters;
- equip the mothers better to play with their daughters; and
- support the language and general development of the children.

How was Bookbug delivered?

The sessions were proposed to take place in the family home over a block of 6–8 weeks and while initially it was just one of the families, the other family became “very keen to be part of what we offered”. The sessions then involved the two mothers and two daughters.

Before the block of sessions, the Play Practitioner had recently completed the Bookbug training, however even before this she was using books and musical instruments in the course of her support with families, including with the Cairns families.

The Play Practitioner was therefore assisted in planning the session content because she knew the mothers and children already and knew what they liked; “I was quite in touch with their age and stage – it was quite simple. I knew that stories and puppets were going to work and musical instruments were going to work.”

In terms of the session content, the Play Practitioner noted that she would keep some things consistent while changing other things around. “I would always keep a box of nursery rhyme puppets and Bookbug [doll], but I’d change around different kinds of books and put in some musical instruments. If they were getting used to one book then we’d try something else.”

An important element was to have structure but not to make it too pressured, in contrast with their experience of public sessions. The Worker’s view was that “The children were more able to join in at their own pace rather than feel pressure,” while the parents said “It was comfortable in your own home – they [the children] were more relaxed. It’s more free-flowing.” Simple structures such as starting the session with the ‘Hello Song’ were used, as were common elements like Bookbug taking part in the session. Over time particular books (‘Monkey and Me’ and ‘Little Mouse’) and various songs (‘1,2,3,4,5’, ‘Twinkle Twinkle’, ‘Incey Wincey’, ‘Little Green Frog’) became popular, many of which could be used with the puppets.

What worked well about Bookbug sessions with the Cairns?

One of the elements which worked well was that the mums were both willing to get involved and began contributing ideas to what the sessions could include. The Play Practitioner explained; “We did quite a few sessions, about four, and the mums were still enjoying it and asking for different things – both were keen to have an input on what was happening. They came up with suggestions on what was happening in the sessions.”

One thing that encouraged the children to talk was the use of the Bookbug doll. One mother described the way that the Play Practitioner had done this; “She’d say ‘Bookbug is sleeping’ and get her [daughter] to say ‘hello’.”
Book sharing had also been a prompt to encourage the children in conversation as one parent said, “The fact that she’s hearing other people reading books – it’s getting her to try and say the story, trying to say what’s going on.”

How did the families benefit?

There were various benefits experienced for the family members involved.

Confidence of the mums

Both the Play Practitioner and the mums described an increase in confidence around play with children. The Play Practitioner observed that, “The mums’ confidence has grown in storytelling and being silly! They’ve got the confidence to do stories and to do singing but I think they’ve been able to be a bit silly and learn that that’s ok.” She also described how the parents had developed to starting the session with the ‘hello’ song and having Bookbug sitting on their knee; “They were right down there – they didn’t really need me there after a while.”

The parents said, “She’s taught us ones [songs] we’d never heard of and also got us up moving about.”

The sessions also role modelled how the mums could do activities with the children; “She’s taught us how to get them [children] to sit and listen.”

The activities had led to practical changes in the way that the mums supported their children, “We read at night now more than we did before”, “I tell them it’s wind down time – a story before bedtime.”

Child development

The Play Practitioner and the parents both described changes in one girl’s speech. “My daughter is trying to speak more and trying to make conversation. She points things out in books or sees books she’s read before.” The Play Practitioner said, “I don’t know if it’s directly because of the sessions – there was no speech when I met her.”

Other issues referred to included the fact that one of the girls “didn’t like teddies before but Bookbug [referring to the doll] – it was all she played with. She went everywhere with it.”

Child readiness / maturing

The structure of the Bookbug session had also helped the children learn to sit and concentrate for a period of time. This was seen as helpful for other group settings they would be going into.

The Play Practitioner believed that the children were better prepared as a result of Bookbug for the Home for community based preschool activities “[they] can go confidently into these settings and sit and listen.” One mother said, “She never used to sit” although of her recent experience with her daughter said, “The nursery were impressed that she could sit and listen to a book.”

Changes in use of local services

The Play Practitioner noted that whilst the girls would have been accessing playgroup and preschool opportunities anyway, there had been a lot of anxiety for the parents about this transition. This had been helped by the changes effected during the Bookbug activities; “The confidence has grown for both mums in accessing services” and “I’ve heard them saying “I was speaking to the nursery teacher about that.””

The Play Practitioner also confirmed that the families now used the library, a fact confirmed by the parents; “I didn’t realise kids could get a library card, I thought you had to share it with an adult.”

Mother and daughter bond

The Bookbug activities and the opportunity to continue these outside of the planned sessions had
led to the mothers spending more time with their daughters, “She’s starting to try and tell me how she feels. She wants to have cuddles more – she’s settling down,” and “We are definitely spending more time together. I’ve seen me reading books for two hours – one story after another.”

Case study reflections

This case study is an excellent example of Bookbug for the Home’s flexibility being applied to a complex environment. It is clear that in this setting, the Bookbug resources (particularly the doll in this case), played an important role in breaking down barriers with the children, and that Bookbug sessions provided a (proportionate) level of structure to a setting where this had been lacking.

The Bookbug practitioner used Bookbug activities to consolidate other work going on, and the flexible nature of the Bookbug intervention enabled the practitioner to tailor it to meet the needs of the families involved by building on her pre-existing knowledge of them.

The home-based nature of the intervention was crucial in this case and was successful where services outside the home had not worked for these families. The practitioner was able to act as a role model and watching her in close proximity and in the security of a home environment clearly influenced the behaviour of the parents. Building the self-confidence of the parent in the home-setting resulted in parents developing the confidence that had previously been lacking to access services externally, fulfilling a key aim of the Bookbug for the Home approach.

It is clear that the Bookbug doll in particular had a significant impact on the children involved, as a means of breaking down barriers, and in this case being used by the practitioner to encourage the children to talk and engage (with the doll initially and then with her) where they had not done so previously. Whilst attributing the significant improvements in one of the children’s speech development entirely to Bookbug activities is difficult, it is clear that they did make a significant contribution to this development.
Case Study

Volunteer Family Support Project

“Stress levels have come down. It’s amazing” (Jill Collins, parent)

NB: Names have been changed to protect the families’ anonymity.

The project

The Volunteer Family Support Project – Inverclyde, run through Action for Children in Greenock, is aiming to improve family engagement and parenting skills within vulnerable families. This is being achieved by providing peer support for vulnerable parents by matching them with trained parent volunteers. The aim is to increase the knowledge and confidence of vulnerable parents in engaging with their children, to increase their knowledge on attachment and child brain development and to signpost and encourage them to participate in local activities.

Volunteers receive training on boundaries, child protection and child development, but all volunteers also receive Bookbug training. Bookbug activities are seen as an important resource for volunteers to introduce to the families they are matched with. The project works with families for varied lengths of time depending on their needs e.g. it may be a short term piece of work for two months or time-limited by the point at which children go to nursery. For other families it may be longer term if there remains a need in the family and continued value from volunteer input.

At the point of referral the Project Manager talks to families about various matters relating to interaction with books and other activities e.g. whether they have used their library, if they do bedtime stories and how confident they feel in these areas. This case study was completed by interviewing the Project Manager, three parent volunteers and one parent who is matched with a volunteer.

Volunteers’ experience of using Bookbug

Volunteers Stacey, Lauren and Clare are all matched in very different family situations; one is matched with a family where there are seven children, one where there is a three year old with additional support needs and delayed communication and language, and one with a family with two pre-school aged children who have delayed development.

All are using Bookbug, but in different ways. The volunteers talked about initially taking time to find out what was going to work best for the families they were each matched with. Their comments show the merits of the flexibility which Bookbug activities and resources offer and how they can be integrated into other family activities, as well as the variation in the timing and length of any Bookbug session or individual activities delivered.

“The first time I hadn’t done a plan it was bedlam. The next time I did a plan and explained to them what we were going to do.
Now every time I go there are seven kids aged 0–12 and all get involved.”

“It’s a bit different for different ages – the wee one loves the nursery rhymes, the bigger ones the Grand Old Duke of York.”

“It was a real struggle with communication and language – mum said that ‘he [child] didn’t like books’ so it was a really slow start – one book and using the pictures at first. It was a couple of minutes at first sharing it [book] with mum. Now they will sit and read through “My Big Shouting Day” – I see a big difference.”

“I really felt I needed the kids to be comfortable with me first so it was on the third visit that I started. In between I took other books, all about animals – I took pictures from the books and did a nature trail – What’s this? What’s that?”

“We do arts and crafts and then Bookbug at the end as a wind down.”

“We have a snack and a drink with a book at the beginning.”

Changes seen by volunteers

The volunteers were all at different stages of working with the families they were matched with, but all had positive examples of changes they had seen, many of which were sustained changes to family activities and interaction outside of their involvement.

“Parents get confidence if they see you [doing activities]. It encourages them.”

“It surprises them [parents] that they enjoy it.”

“The mum is doing it [Bookbug] with kids – songs in the bath.”

“I encouraged Mum to go to a Bookbug Session [with the volunteer]. She was really anxious but he [child] sat well – she can see the difference.”

“Her wee boy’s got a library card now.”

“There were sleep problems so we tried to get a routine [including bedtime stories].”

“One mum [I’m working with] has not got the confidence to go to a Bookbug Session in the library – eventually hopefully – but she’s getting so much out of it at home.”

“I met her on the bus and she had just bought the wee one loads of books.”

Benefits for the volunteers and their own children

The volunteers described benefits which they had experienced personally from being involved in the project. These were particularly in terms of increasing their own confidence as they undertook their role of supporting other parents, increasing their knowledge about child development and taking this understanding back to their own families and children.

“I’ve promoted it to my nieces and nephews – my nephew has just signed up for the library”

Their children had been exposed through their parents to so much Bookbug activity which they had enjoyed, that the children subsequently led a Bookbug session at a Family Play session run by the project.

Benefits for the project

A major impact of the volunteers’ involvement in the project has been the development, at their own initiative, of creating a training programme and facilitating it with parents. The volunteers were so struck by the information they had received on the links between play and brain development and from what they had seen in their roles as peer volunteers, that they felt that more parents should know how play and
interaction can affect their children’s development.

With the support of the project, the parents have pulled together resources to form the ‘Fun Active Better Parents’ programme (FAB Parents) and plan to deliver this in local schools and nurseries as courses of three informal, fun sessions. The aim is to help parents understand more about child development and give families lots of ideas about how to have fun and support their children at home. The hope is that with the parent volunteers acting as trainers, the course will be user-friendly for other parents to take part in. It is also hoped that this development will also encourage more families and community services to access the original Volunteer Family Support Project for support and assistance.

One family’s experience of Bookbug at the Volunteer Family Support Project

Jill Collins has been matched with a volunteer from the Volunteer Family Support Project for five months. Aged 24, Jill has three school age children (aged eight, six and five) and a daughter of eighteen months. Getting involved in the project was a way of gaining support in her parenting, but the introduction of Bookbug activities as part of that has had a huge impact not just on how Jill interacts with her youngest child, but on family dynamics.

Jill described how her volunteer has “brought a different way” of looking at books, and how it is “like a big party” with singing and actions.

She notes that she looks at books differently now, describing her previous approach to looking at books as being more “straightforward”. Now it is “more bringing it to life.”

“I liked the idea of reading a story – a wee figure for every story – there’s the unknown – you don’t know what’s coming out of the bag next.”

Jill says that the impact on the children’s interest in reading is evidenced by the fact that “there are a lot more books in the house” and “we just got the wee one [daughter] a big massive pack”.

Of her other children she said, “They’re asking for books for Christmas.”

How did the family benefit?

Family interaction and children’s behaviour

One key area where Bookbug activities have made a significant change is in providing an activity which the family can all do together. Jill said that her older two children “could fight over anything” although “9 times out of 10” it was about a choice of film to watch. In this situation she now puts the TV off, gets a book, sings and replicates ‘the big party’ approach introduced by her volunteer. “Stress levels have come down. It’s amazing.”

Jill said that the family now sing more (“constantly”) in other situations, for example when they are cleaning the children’s room. “It’s given more of a bond – something to do together.”

Family bonds

The Bookbug activities and the opportunity to continue these outside of the planned sessions had led to Jill spending more time with the children and the children spending more time with each other.

“We are spending extra time with each other. They are not on the XBox or tablet but sitting in
one room under a blanket doing things together.”

**Mother’s confidence**
Jill referred to the new ways in which she feels able to handle challenges of family life as an example of her increased confidence. “It’s benefited me personally and my family an awful awful lot.”

Improved confidence as a parent also meant that Jill felt positive about accessing public Bookbug Sessions because she was familiar with the content and was more confident in the way that her daughter would engage with it.

**Changes in use of local services**
Jill noted that she would not have felt confident previously about accessing public Bookbug Sessions. She said that this would have been “scary” and she would have been concerned about her daughter’s behaviour, worried that “she’s going to kick off” in a public setting and aware that she “didn’t want to be that mum.” Jill has now attended a public Bookbug Session with her daughter and both enjoyed the busy experience. “It was like an even bigger party!”

**Case study reflections**
This case study is a strong example of an organisation making Bookbug available to many families through the involvement of a team of volunteers. It also shows that Bookbug activities can have a significant role in positive interaction in very varied family settings with contrasting numbers and abilities of children.

In addition, this case study family provided an excellent example of how interaction between family members was improved by Bookbug activities, with the parent’s confidence improved, and with increased knowledge of appropriate activities to undertake with their children. Bookbug gave the parents tools to deal with challenging situations in a positive way resulting in a more fun and less stressful environment in the home.

This case study also shows that Bookbug’s impact on parent confidence in this case led to the parent feeling able to attend and take part in a public Bookbug Session, because of the familiarity with what was going to happen there, and knowing how the child would react to it.

This is a strong example of what happens when people are convinced and inspired by the value of Bookbug activities, shown by the volunteers playing with their own children in different ways, and their development of training and information sessions which they intend to deliver as peers to other parents.