



Case Study 2

The Ellis Family

“I feel like a mum for the first time”

Background

Kirsty Ellis, her partner Davy and their son Max (3) live in a town in Ayrshire. Kirsty is a full time mum and Davy who is currently out of work is involved in voluntary work at the local nursery school. The case study is based on an interview with Kirsty and Davy and with the Early Years Practitioner, Ros, from the nursery, who had delivered Bookbug for the Home for Kirsty and Max every week for around five months when Max was aged two.

How did the Ellis family get involved in Bookbug

The Ellis family got involved in Bookbug for the Home after Max started nursery. Early Years Practitioner, Ros, felt that Bookbug for the Home was the ideal approach for Kirsty and Max. She was aware that Kirsty appeared to have a low level of interaction with Max, was finding it difficult to leave home and wasn't engaging with other parents at nursery. Overall she was *“down on herself”*.

Kirsty referred to issues she had experienced during her schooling which were the root of her having a low level of confidence going into adulthood. Latterly the difficult delivery of her baby Max led to Kirsty having ongoing disability caused by permanent nerve damage and this severely affected her early experience of motherhood. There were many things she was physically unable to do at that stage and she subsequently experienced post-natal depression. She became isolated and described how she did not develop much of a relationship with her son.

Kirsty said that she decided to accept the offer of Bookbug for the Home because *“I knew I wanted to do something about how I was feeling.”*

The fact that Bookbug was offered in her home, *“a safe environment”* as she called it, was key to her getting involved – *“I would not have considered coming in [to the nursery]”*. The



other thing was that being able to trust the staff member involved was “*crucial*”. Kirsty had experienced involvement from other organisations coming into her home but found she felt like she was being judged and being told how to look after her son. This had not happened with the way that Bookbug for the Home had been offered or delivered.

Behaviour change

Parent and child

Ros took the approach of not aiming for a particular end point but rather being aware that Bookbug was “*valuable in itself*”. To begin with she felt that just doing some of the activities in the house was a positive start without having high expectations of interaction; “*This is what I’m here for, just about him hearing me.*” Ultimately her hope over time was that Max’s interest would encourage involvement from Kirsty and that this would give them new activities to do together.

Ros built on this low key approach which she described as “*drip feeding little bits*”. Max’s positive reaction to Bookbug activities became an important factor in Kirsty getting involved, who said, “*The very first time you think ‘the wean’s enjoying it - why can’t I do that?’*”

How was Bookbug delivered?

Ros said that her Bookbug Sessions in the home were “*never planned*” other than always doing the hello and goodbye songs, and including singing and a book. She reflected on the need for patience as it can take time for the child to engage in more settled activities, “*It was a few months before he was sitting down.*”

She used the bag and introduced some new things each time as “*surprise elements*” which gave “*something to build on.*” However she also noted that “*if something was missing he would know and I wouldn’t make that mistake again*” and “*you couldn’t have a Bookbug Session without doing ‘5 Monkeys on the Bed’*”.

Ros said her attitude was to “*persevere, persevere*”, gradually involving Kirsty, sometimes through Max. “*I’d say ‘Will we ask mummy?’ and depending on the reaction I would know whether to ask again.*” She also noted the importance of “*picking your moments*” – “*if I noticed her taking the lycra, then the following week I could do that again.*” Ros noted the importance of praising the parent. When Max got a sticker at the end, she would



encourage him to give one to his Mum as well, *“reiterating to the child that the parent is involved.”*

At times they had taken the opportunity to link Bookbug to *“things they can do together as a family”*, like mask-making, colouring in or taking photos of sessions. They did this when Max received his Bookbug Pirate Pack at nursery.

With home sessions working well, Kirsty took the big step with Max of attending a Bookbug Session in the nursery - *“It wasn’t as bad as I thought.”* This has since led to her socialising with other parents at nursery. She also attended a public Bookbug Session *“I would never ever have seen myself doing that.”*

How did the family benefit?

The impact has been huge for Kirsty as she now interacts with Max completely differently. *“I used to see my mum sing and talk to him – I didn’t feel like a mum”*. Kirsty reflects that after Max’s birth she feels that she did not bond with him but Bookbug has helped her to resolve this. *“I never got the bond but having the confidence to sing and read makes you feel like a mother.”* Her overriding feeling of the impact of Bookbug is that *“It makes you feel like a Mum.”*

“Now I just sing, read stories and emphasise words. It’s brought my confidence right up. I’ve never felt like a mother before because of my disability - now I’ve got a bond.”

Ros confirms this. *“Max is a much happier wee boy. Before mum’s anxiety was to the fore. She wasn’t coming in with a natural loving bond. It shines now.”* She went on to say that Max is *“a confident little boy”* and that *“it’s not been too late which the mum had thought.”*

Kirsty had had some concerns about Max’s language development however through Bookbug and his involvement at nursery she saw him change a lot and saw his speech develop. *“Now he sings songs to me. I need to go into the nursery and ask what the song is so we can sing it at home. He’s a lot more confident.”*

The other big impact on Kirsty is on her isolation. She reflected that without the intervention she has experienced life would be very different, *“I’d still be in the house”*. In contrast she has got involved at the nursery and now has social connections there. *“Now I’ll come along during the week and stay in the parent room. It’s helped me talk to other parents. Before she said that she would have quickly dropped her son off but wouldn’t have come in and would have returned home.”*



How did Bookbug impact on the staff member and the organisation?

The nursery were already looking for ways of integrating Bookbug into as many activities as possible. Bookbug for the Home has been a good extension to this.

Ros has found encouragement from this first use of Bookbug within a home setting; *"It's humbling to see it – it's so simple but so huge. It doesn't seem a lot but it did mean a lot."*

As a result she is now starting to use Bookbug for the Home with other families and described this approach as her passion. *"Bookbug is great but Bookbug for the Home is so fulfilling - to see them in their home environment building up trust and relationship."*

Summary

This case study illustrates the beneficial impact of Bookbug for the Home on a parent who has experienced difficulties including disabilities and post-natal depression, and who was socially isolated and having problems interacting and bonding with their child.

The Bookbug for the Home sessions led to improvements in Kirsty's confidence as a mother, and this helped to improve the bond and interaction between mother and son.

Kirsty's isolation also improved. She has attended nursery and public Bookbug sessions and engages with other parents in the nursery socially which she would not have done previously.

There have also been improvements in Max's happiness, confidence and language development - Kirsty said *"now he sings songs to me... he's a lot more confident"*.

Delivering the Bookbug sessions in Kirsty's home was critical to the success of the programme for Kirsty – her home was a *"safe environment"* and she would not had the confidence to consider coming in to the nursery to take part in a Bookbug session. The Bookbug practitioner also noted the importance of taking a patient and sensitive approach to the sessions, involving Kirsty when it seemed appropriate and introducing activities which the family could do together on their own, such as mask-making and colouring-in.