



Case Study 4

The Burnett Family

"...start with this little bag of magic."

Background

Anne Burnett lives in Fife with her two adopted children Freya (13) and Harry (6). Anne is a former foster carer with experience of fostering dozens of children over many years. Anne's son Harry lives with the effects of foetal alcohol syndrome which result in him being impulsive and having a short attention span. Anne has a 25 year career background in social work and as part of her current role had completed Bookbug for the Home training. This offered her a perspective on the value of Bookbug activities within her own family setting, for use within her own professional practice and in terms of the potential value of it for foster carers.

How did the Burnett family get involved in Bookbug?

As a social work practitioner, Anne attended Bookbug for the Home training as part of a secondment role which had a focus on nurturing. She immediately saw the potential in a number of ways; for use on a personal basis at home with her adopted son Harry, for use within situations working with children at work, and for use in supporting foster carers in their care of children, based on her own extensive experience of fostering before becoming an adoptive parent.

What did Bookbug set out to achieve?

Bookbug was initially received by Anne as professional development but she then introduced it to the family home in an effort to help to establish stronger bonding time between herself and her younger child, to support bedtime routines and other practical situations such as leaving the house. This was done in an effort to bring some clearer structure to some of the practicalities of daily family life which had been proving difficult.



How was Bookbug delivered?

In this case Bookbug was not delivered by a professional bringing the activities into the family home over a set of sessions. Anne had received the training as a professional and then introduced Bookbug activities and resources into the family home in her role as an adoptive parent, using a Bookbug Bag as a permanent resource bag for the family and with the Bookbug doll becoming a toy which Harry could have (rather than being brought into the house by someone else).

Anne tried using the activities to bring a positive influence to different aspects of daily family life – getting ready to go out, routines such as tooth-brushing and going to bed, new ways of introducing a set time to sit together and new ways for Harry and his sister to engage with each other.

How did the family benefit?

Harry responded very dramatically to Bookbug immediately with the result that his behaviour has become significantly easier to manage over the four week period since the activities were introduced.

“Oh my God, the difference within the house with a lot of things.”

Anne has felt equipped with new resources and activities which Harry has connected with and this has led to daily situations becoming more straightforward; from Harry getting his shoes on, to going to bed. They have more defined times where they sit together and bond over Bookbug activities. Anne also described how it had *“taken the pressure off”* her daughter as Harry was now focused on the bag and the Bookbug doll. Her daughter had been able to read with Harry as well because this was an activity which he wanted and liked, and was one which was easy for her to deliver, rather than being faced with more non-specific demands for attention.

Behaviour change

Children

Anne describes that, in some regards, Harry functions at the age of three (he is six) in the way that he engages in activities or how he remembers and responds to instructions. This has the result that getting him to go *“from A to B”* can be *“incredibly difficult”*.



The Bookbug doll has been instrumental in positively changing his behaviour in these situations by *“giving him a visual cue.”* Anne said that she can ask Harry to *“show Bookbug how you brush your teeth”*. She notes that it’s like Harry has taken on a level of responsibility as he *“wants to teach Bookbug”*. Bedtime routines have become easier as well as Bookbug is a part of this, and Harry wants Bookbug to be involved as he talks to Bookbug and tells Bookbug about things.

Anne noted that Harry has *“hundreds of soft toys”* but because he received this one boxed for him, it has taken on special significance. Anne said it’s as though he thinks, *“It’s my box, my bear...this is mine”*. In addition the tactile qualities of the doll have been particularly important, and in a similar vein another significant resource has been the lycra. When he was given it, *“He lay on the floor with it for about half a day, he ran around with it as a cloak, he wrapped Bookbug up in it, he took it to bed.”*

A further helpful resource has been the puppets which have *“encouraged him to sing and learn.”*

Before the introduction of Bookbug activities in the home, getting Harry *“to sit down was incredibly difficult”*. However with Bookbug he *“associates it with sitting down”* and it has created a new opportunity for Anne and Harry to share time and has *“brought them closer together”*.

Summary

The Bookbug input for this family has been over a short time period, but has been experienced every day in the immediate aftermath of training being received, so has been relatively intensive.

There has been a quick, clear and very positive impact on the child and the family, and the case study provides an example of how a parent can be equipped with strategies to bond more strongly with a child and how new ways can be found to make essential daily activities achievable rather than being a trial. This has been achieved by the parent having an ‘in house’ Bookbug Bag and the family having its own Bookbug doll.

In addition, from a professional point of view, this case study shows how a member of social work staff with many years’ experience has found herself better equipped with ways in which to create a calm environment for children in difficult situations, and approaches to engage with and even assess the capabilities of those who have additional support needs.



She noted that she has a Bookbug Bag at her desk at work and can see many situations where she would now use it.

One of the strong additional messages from this case study is about Bookbug's potential application in equipping foster carers who receive children into their care with whom they have no prior relationship and for whom they need techniques to engage with to form relationships. Bookbug is seen as strongly supporting this work, offering options for foster carers to interact more easily with children they are meeting for the first time, or in bringing children from different backgrounds together in a shared activity. In addition the Bookbug activities are also seen as giving foster carers activities which help them to work out children's capabilities, and what might be the most effective ways for them to feel integrated into a temporary family setting, given the developmental difficulties they might have experienced and the new and testing situation they find themselves in.