



Case Study 6

Family Nurture Approach (Dunfermline, Fife)

“Go for it! It’s changed our lives for the better.”

Background Information

The Family Nurture Team is a group of professionals from across health, education, social work and the voluntary sector. Linking with nurseries and Family Centres across Fife, best practice in areas such as attachment, relationships and early language was identified in order to develop services to support parents and help children get the best start in life. Rather than a single type of service being developed the aim was to design services which were easy to access, flexible and responsive to the varying community needs across Fife. Within the role there was a task of *“looking at where vulnerable families are based and why they are not attending services”* and trying to make services more universal, more accessible and more local. This case study was compiled following interviews with a Community Education Worker who had been heavily involved in the team, and one parent who had benefited from Bookbug activities.

The links between Bookbug and the Family Nurture Approach

After visiting Bookbug Sessions, Community Education Worker, Claire, could see the potential contribution of Bookbug to bonding and attachment, brain development and early literacy and language development. Although Bookbug had a presence at the start of the project it was not common and *“it was only really a library thing.”* Claire trained as a Bookbug Session leader initially and then undertook Bookbug for the Home training too, and was then able to start supporting local sessions within communities and families, describing Bookbug as a tool to get into parent and toddler groups. From there it became clear that there were families who weren’t attending these groups or that there were locations which were not served by groups. As a result Family Nurture staff developed small scale work, for example, working with two families at a time and taking referrals from health and social work. There were *“a lot of different criteria”* used before referring people.



“Some were known to social work or were on the child protection register, some were very isolated in communities and some were young families without parenting capacity.”

Experience of delivering Bookbug

Claire described working with younger families as *“a little bit scary”* having only recently been Bookbug trained, and that at first it wasn't easy to *“sit in the middle of the floor looking a bit silly with a finger puppet on.”*

“It takes perseverance if a family is initially not engaged and thinks that the Bookbug approach is a bit silly - you have to be prepared to be flexible and make changes to suit the needs of a family.”

However at the same time Claire *“realised that Bookbug was so key for families”*. Her experience was that families became more engaged once they saw their children enjoying the sessions and developing as a result - *“they respond when they see their child respond.”* Claire started to introduce a play element which she said was *“less threatening”* where she could pick a play topic such as ‘water’ and then theme everything (play activities, songs, books) with that.

There was then sufficient interest from parents for some of them to become Bookbug trained themselves, which then enabled new parent-led sessions to be started within toddler groups.

Immediate and longer term impacts

The sessions showed parents a different side to their children as they would make comments such as *“We didn't know he liked music or singing before”* or *“He never used to settle at night but now he sings.”* There was then sufficient interest from parents for some of them to become Bookbug trained themselves, which then enabled new parent-led Bookbug Sessions to be started within toddler groups.

Some of the other results included *“families being registered with libraries who weren't registered before”*. Claire said that previously they would have felt that their child was *“too noisy and might ruin a book”* but now they knew differently and saw libraries as a place they could use; *“they won't get shouted at, won't get fined, and they are now going to borrow books.”*



Behaviour change

Parents and children

The Community Education worker described a culture shift that needed to happen for some parents. Some of those coming to sessions thought that this was *“their free time and the kids were getting a story read to them”*. Staff had to get across that parents couldn't leave their children unattended or be answering their phone while the Bookbug Session was on. In this way *“Bookbug was used to change adult behaviour”*. At first they were sitting on chairs and looking *“a bit blank”* but then they began to get involved.

Some groups went on to be inspired to lead Bookbug themselves. *“I was supporting a dads' group at the time and they went on to be a constituted community group and looked at their training needs and they identified that they would like to be Bookbug trained. They looked at where Bookbug was and wasn't [being offered] and how to make it more accessible. They set up sessions in museums.”*

Overall impact on practice

This case study provides an example of Bookbug becoming fully integrated into the work of a local community-focused team of social care and early years professionals. *“It's key to everything that we do with families – we build on parenting by using Bookbug.”*

Bookbug has been used as a method of engagement to invite people to get involved in user-friendly local activities – *“Fancy coming to the centre to do a couple of stories and a Bookbug Session?”*. Their attendance and involvement then means that *“once engaged with the story session they can sign up for parenting or health advice or ways of getting some financial support. It's developing relationships and accessing services.”* It has also been used within events such as Family Fun Days and consultation days.

However Claire noted that its principal purpose is as a way of introducing parents to greater interaction with their children and to the positive impact of singing, rhyming and reading. It has been possible to incorporate it into many settings – *“We are all talking about it and using elements of it – we've developed and edited it ourselves.”*

“Using it appropriately in different sessions has in turn made it more accessible – they are using it in their homes.”

Although the project does not have secure funding, Bookbug's impact on practice continues and Claire noted that for herself; *“For me Bookbug will still be an element of what I do.”*



Case Study - Lizzie

For some individual parents the impact of their involvement in Bookbug through the Nurture Team has been not only on their relationship with their child but also on their own level of confidence leading to some major life decisions.

Lizzie, a young mum of three children under six, had started off going to a group for young parents as she was new to the area. She wanted something to do and people for her and her children to meet. From this she was encouraged to attend a Stay and Play session. Bookbug was part of this and was a new approach for her to experience. *"I hadn't done much with my kids before like reading books – I was a bit nervous and not very comfortable singing in front of people."* However with everyone joining in and her two year old being *"straight into it from the start"* she began to enjoy the sessions. Lizzie was involved in another group and they needed some parent helpers to lead, and it was suggested to her that she could train and lead Bookbug Sessions. *"I wasn't sure if she [Claire] had picked the right person,"* but Lizzie went on to find the training a very positive experience.

Her next big step was her first time leading a session. This had been *"nerve-wracking – thinking I was going to mess up the words or read the story wrong. I apologized that I might get it wrong,"* but now Lizzie has moved on to co-lead a session at her son's nursery once a week.

Lizzie now sees Bookbug as being *"brilliant"* in helping children to learn language (*"my daughter can sing 'wheels on the bus' and she's just turned two"*) and be more confident – *"my daughter is shy but she'll clap and sing the songs."* For her the impact has been at home as well – *"before I started doing Bookbug I wouldn't sit on the floor and sing with them and read stories. It's made the relationship better between me and my kids."* Beyond this Lizzie also feels that the confidence she has gained through leading Bookbug Sessions means that she is now looking at other opportunities. She plans to apply to go to college to do administration with a view to working in a school.

"I've been wanting to go to college for ages but because of doing the training and getting confident doing the wee group it's just built it up."

For others who would look at Bookbug as she initially did with some nervousness she says, *"Go for it. It's changed our lives for the better. I was quite a shy person before but even just reading a book in front of people has made a difference."*



Summary

This case study demonstrates the way in which Bookbug is helping a range of professionals reach more vulnerable families and opening up access. In this case professionals across health, education, social work and the voluntary sector, were able to refer vulnerable families who they thought would benefit from using Bookbug in smaller groups. The impact this direct, focused involvement had was clearly beneficial both for the children involved and their parents. But these benefits could take time to embed, as parents sometimes first had to learn to engage fully in the Bookbug Sessions.

The ripple effect that Bookbug Sessions can have is clearly shown in this case study, with a dads' group getting trained and taking Bookbug to a new location (museum), while the local Family Nurture Team has extended it to other events and settings. For individual parents it can raise confidence to a level that allows them to take other positive steps forward in their lives.