



Book gifting impact study

An exploration of 12 years of universal book gifting in Scotland.

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Executive summary

One family's journey with Bookbug and Read, Write Count

'My two children absolutely love getting the book bags! I remember a couple of years ago my son had got new fish and a fish tank for his birthday then shortly after when he received his Bookbug bag there was a story about a goldfish. He was chuffed to bits and we read that story every night for about three months.

We always try to make time to read but recently as a single parent of two kids we have been missing it quite often. After my son received his Read, Write, Count bag from school it has got us back into the habit of setting aside five or ten minutes before bed to read, it's a great bonding time and brings us closer together as a family.

I have never been a reader, it wasn't shown to me at a young age, we never had anything like Bookbug so I never read much unless it was necessary for school work. So honestly without being gifted the bags and seeing how much the children benefit from reading (and how much they enjoy it) I probably wouldn't have as much books in the house and wouldn't do as much reading with both my children as I do now.

Don't think I would change anything about the bags they are perfect! My son said he would change that they are only for up to P3 (he is in P3 now so this will be his last year) and to have more books in them! It has helped us to realise how much my son enjoys reading and he now has a full bookshelf of books in his bedroom. If it wasn't for Bookbug I probably wouldn't have seen how much he enjoys reading. Thank you.'

Background

Scottish Book Trust delivers two universal book gifting programmes, funded by Scottish Government: Bookbug and Read, Write, Count. The aim of both programmes is to support families to play, read and learn together, fostering the bonding opportunities and the love of reading that are so vital to children's life chances.

Currently, through the two programmes all children in Scotland receive six free bags of high-quality books and other resources between birth and age eight, totalling 16 books across the six bags, with an additional two books gifted to expectant parents in the Baby Box. It is believed that through Bookbug and Read, Write, Count, Scotland has the largest universal book gifting offer in the world.

Bookbug has been gifting books for 12 years, and Read, Write, Count for six years. Through a mixed methods approach, including the voices of children who have been recipients of the book bags, this study aimed to holistically assess the potentially unique cumulative impact of the two programmes for children and families in Scotland.

Findings

The Bookbug and Read, Write, Count bags have a number of important impacts for families and children in Scotland across: book access; language, communication and literacy development; and children's development as readers, as well as vital socio-emotional impacts around: bonding and attachment; relaxation; and comfort in difficult times.

In a national survey of parents/carers of 8–12 year olds:

- **88%** reported that they **remembered their children receiving** Bookbug and/or Read, Write, Count book bags
- **87%** agreed that the book bags helped them to **bond with their children**
- **84%** agreed that the book bags encouraged them **to read books together at an earlier age than they would have otherwise**
- **82%** agreed that the book bags had helped make them **more confident sharing stories, rhymes or songs with their family**
- **84%** agreed that the book bags had encouraged their family to **spend more time sharing stories**
- **85%** agreed that the book bags had **inspired new conversations, games, or vocabulary**
- **84%** agreed that the book bags helped their **child become a more confident reader**
- **83%** agreed that the book bags helped **start their child on the journey to becoming a lifelong reader**
- **79%** agreed that the book bags encouraged them to **visit the library more often**

Three key enabling factors emerged from the data:

- Universal gifting, which creates excitement and a shared culture of reading for pleasure across Scotland
- The inclusion of high-quality, fun books in the book bags
- Professionals providing families with information about the book bags at the point of gifting

The data suggests that families in the lower SIMD deciles are slightly less likely to recall receiving the book bags, and also less likely to use them as frequently, demonstrating the continued need for additional targeted activities tailored to families' circumstances to maximise impact.

Other than continued work to ensure all families receive and use their book bags, the only substantive improvement suggested by parents/carers and professionals was that book gifting be extended for older children.

Background

Book gifting

Global context

There are many book gifting programmes operating around the world, including in Europe, North America, Australia, Asia and South Africa¹. Whilst they vary in design, scale and scope, these programmes share an aim to promote family reading through the gifting of new, high-quality books to families, particularly in the early years.

Scottish Book Trust programmes

Scottish Book Trust delivers two universal book gifting programmes, funded by Scottish Government: Bookbug and Read, Write, Count. The aim of both programmes is to support families to play, read and learn together, fostering the bonding opportunities and the love of reading that are so vital to children's life chances, as shown in the research below.

Bookbug has been operating since 2010 and currently gifts books to all children in Scotland at four stages – at birth, at age 1–2, at age 3–4 and in Primary 1 at school (age 5). Each bag contains three books and a range of other fun resources to support families to sing, rhyme and read together, as well as crayons, pencils and paper for mark making, supporting early writing development. The bags are distributed via a network of partners including health visitors, nurseries, other Early Years settings, libraries and third sector organisations. The P1 bag is distributed via schools.

Read, Write, Count has been operating since 2016 and currently gifts books to all children in Scotland at two stages – in Primary 2 at school (age 6–7) and Primary 3 (age 7–8). Each bag contains two books and a range of activities to support families to do fun reading, writing and numeracy activities with their children. The bags are distributed via schools.

The books in all six bags change annually. Both programmes work with panels of independent experts to select 'high-quality' books, 'high-quality' meaning that they are age and stage appropriate, as well as being contemporary, fun, particularly suited to family reading and home learning, and representative of a diverse range of experiences and characteristics.

Both gifting programmes are supported by a wide range of training and resources for professionals and families, as well as targeted programmes for families who need additional support.

Currently, through the two programmes all children in Scotland receive six free bags of high-quality books and other resources between birth and age eight, totalling 16 books across the six bags, with an additional two books gifted to expectant parents in the Baby Box. It is believed that through Bookbug and Read, Write, Count, Scotland has the largest universal book gifting offer in the world.

The research

Language, communication and literacy development

There are a wide range of studies showing that shared reading can support and accelerate children's early language development, with many showing this positive effect regardless of parents'/carers' own levels of education². In addition to language acquisition, there is a body of research showing that shared reading increases children's vocabulary³, addressing the gap in language between those from the most and least affluent backgrounds⁴. Growing Up in Scotland, for example, found that frequent reading at home is one of only three factors proven to have an impact on the gap in expressive language between the most and least well-off children – an impact which occurs regardless of parents' level of education⁵. Further, research finds that the language of picture books is denser and more diverse than everyday speech, providing the opportunity for more advanced language development⁶.

Other skills and behaviours acquired from shared reading include learning to read from left to right, reading text from top to bottom and being aware of punctuation⁷, suggesting that young children are 'becoming readers and writers far before they actually begin to read and write'⁸. Moreover, sharing songs, rhymes and books with children helps them to develop the motor and cognitive skills vital to communication⁹. The *Family and Community Engagement Research Compendium* notes that, 'three-plus decades of research have detailed the benefits of reading aloud to children. Educators, paediatricians, and policymakers alike recognize the immense advantages for those children who enter school thoroughly immersed in the rich, inventive language of picture books'¹⁰.

Attainment, positive destinations and life chances

There is a large body of evidence that those who read for pleasure do better at school, often regardless of other circumstances in their lives. Analysis of PISA data found that increasing reading engagement could mitigate 30% of the attainment gap¹¹ and that whether or not a child enjoys reading is more important to their educational success than their family background¹². Young people who enjoy reading are three times more likely to read above the level expected for their age¹³ and have better reading comprehension¹⁴.

Pupils who read for pleasure also do better in other areas including maths¹⁵, financial skills¹⁶ and critical literacy^{17,18}.

There is also substantial evidence that those who read for pleasure do well beyond school, with improved life chances and resilience. Those with poor vocabulary skills at age five are twice as likely to be unemployed by the time they are 34¹⁹, and those who read for pleasure at age 16 are more likely to be in a professional or managerial job by age 33²⁰. One study calculated that reading for pleasure every day could boost a child's lifetime earnings by an average of £57,000²¹.

Additionally, readers, 'report a greater ability to cope with difficult situations [and] find it easier to make decisions, plan and prioritise'²²; reading also gives people the confidence to make changes in their lives²³.

Socio-emotional benefits

The research also shows a broad range of socio-emotional benefits for those who read for pleasure, both in childhood and throughout life. Shared reading between parents/carers and their babies is an important way to develop the secure attachment which is so important in giving children the best start in life²⁴. There is also evidence that shared reading can prompt parents/carers to have 'enhanced sensitivity and reciprocity'²⁵ to their children, leading to sustained improvements in children's development and the parent-child relationship, as well as reductions in parental stress²⁶.

People who read for pleasure are better able to regulate their emotions. Reading with babies and children has a long-lasting impact on their behaviour, reducing the chance of difficulties with aggression, hyperactivity and attention as they reach school age²⁷; daily

reading for pleasure at age seven is associated with lower levels of hyperactivity and inattention, and better pro-social behaviour at age 11, as well as lower levels of emotional problems²⁸. Research has also found this to be true of adults²⁹.

Reading also supports mental health and wellbeing. Reading for pleasure increases self-esteem at age 11, regardless of demographic, socio-economic, and familial confounders³⁰ and children who read for pleasure are likelier to have high levels of mental wellbeing than those who don't³¹. Those with poor vocabulary at age five are three times more likely to have mental health problems at age 34³², with adult readers less likely to report feelings of depression and loneliness and more likely to report good self-esteem³³.

There is also good evidence that reading develops empathy and reduces prejudice, through encouraging readers to learn about other countries and cultures³⁴, reflect on themselves³⁵ and step into others' shoes^{36,37}.

Book ownership and the home learning environment

There is also a broad body of evidence around the impact of children owning their own books and the presence of books in their homes, suggesting book ownership is an important factor in accessing many of the benefits discussed above.

The National Literacy Trust reports that 19% of 5–8 year olds in the UK do not own any books³⁸. Those who do own books are more likely to enjoy reading, rate themselves as good readers and have higher levels of mental wellbeing³⁹; they are also six times more likely to read above the level expected for their age⁴⁰.

The *Family and Community Engagement Research Compendium* found a range of benefits for children around having books in the home, including positive behavioural, educational and psychological outcomes and the fostering of a 'reading and scholarly culture', as well as increased bonding opportunities for parents and children⁴¹.

Finally, research examining the effects of access to books across 31 societies found that those who leave school at 15, but were surrounded by books as children, become as literate, numerate and technologically skilled in adulthood as university graduates who grew up with only a few books⁴².

Similarly, there is a wealth of evidence on the importance of a rich home learning environment for children. The quality of the home learning environment has a strong influence on children's development and success, with much of the research finding that a high-quality home learning environment can mitigate many disadvantages that children might face. Growing Up in Scotland, for example, found that 'while other family factors such as parents' education and socio-economic status are also important, the extent of home learning activities exerts a greater and independent influence on children's cognitive development at three years of age⁴³. SureStart research notes that 'what parents do with their children is more important than who parents are'⁴⁴.

The aims of this study

As detailed above, there are numerous book gifting programmes in operation across the world. Many of them have been evaluated with a range of impacts having been found, particularly around the home learning environment and language development^{45,46,47}.

However, the varying designs, contexts and scales of the different book gifting programmes makes it difficult to apply the findings of one evaluation directly to another. In addition, the majority of evaluations of book gifting programmes focus on language development, reading skill and attainment at school. Whilst these are vital outcomes that Scottish Book Trust also aims to impact, Bookbug and Read, Write, Count also seek to support children and families more broadly – in terms of bonding, socio-emotional development, communication, mental health and wellbeing – as well as to start children on the journey to becoming lifelong readers who will reap all the benefits discussed in the research above.

It has been noted in previous research that long-term gifting is most effective in positively influencing home learning environments⁴⁸. As detailed above, the Scottish programmes are unique in their scale, reach and longevity, providing the opportunity for positive messaging around shared reading and books to be repeatedly emphasised to children and families over the first eight years of a child's life. Whilst annual evaluations are conducted for both programmes, this research aimed to assess the potentially unique cumulative impact of the two programmes for children and families in Scotland, and to assess to what extent the programmes are supporting children and families to access the broad range of benefits suggested by the research.

Methodology

As detailed above, this study aimed to investigate the cumulative, holistic impact of the Bookbug and Read, Write, Count programmes on children and families in Scotland. In order to capture both the breadth and depth required to explore this fully, a mixed methods approach was used with three main sources of data.

Research with parents/carers and professionals

National omnibus survey

A national omnibus survey of 1000 parents/carers of 8–12 year olds in Scotland was carried out by a market research company. Parents/carers of 8–12 year olds were targeted as their children should have received all six book bags from birth to P3. This omnibus survey gathered the views of parents/carers who would not likely be reached by direct communications from Scottish Book Trust, and surveyed parents/carers from a breadth of geographic locations and demographic groups. It largely gathered quantitative data around perceptions and impacts of the book bags.

Memories survey

An online survey gathering memories of, and feedback on, the book bags from both parents/carers and professionals (health visitors, Early Years professionals, learning professionals and others involved in working with children) was circulated through Scottish Book Trust channels, including via newsletter, social media and professional networks. In order to capture the views of those who do not have the digital access and/or skills to complete an online survey, a 'snapshot' version of this survey was also created as a print, freepost postcard and distributed to all libraries in Scotland. This postcard also included a QR code link to the full survey for those who could complete an online survey but who may not have been reached via the above channels. This survey gathered a wealth of qualitative data, with 200 detailed responses received. This data added depth to the quantitative data collected through the omnibus survey and allowed for exploration of enabling factors and areas for development.

Research with children

Children's voices are traditionally under-represented in research. It was important that this research include the views of children who had received the bags, especially in the context of the incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scots law.

Including their voices enabled a true picture of impact to be triangulated and emphasises the centrality of their experiences to the development (or otherwise) of this impact.

Advisory panel

In order to design a method to undertake this research with children in the most effective and appropriate way, an advisory panel was formed. This panel included:

- A nursery practitioner from West Lothian
- A health visitor from Orkney
- A primary school head teacher from Glasgow
- A librarian and Bookbug co-ordinator from Dumbarton
- A researcher from University of Edinburgh with expertise in participatory methods
- A member of the Scottish Government Early Years policy team

Participatory arts methodology

Following consultation with the advisory panel, a participatory arts methodology was designed to gather the views of children through comic workshops, facilitated by a researcher from Scottish Book Trust and Paul Bristow, a comic book artist with a wealth of experience in working in schools. The workshops took place in early 2022 in four primary schools, as detailed below. The workshops involved pupils across P4–7 (the cohort who would have received all six book bags between birth and P3). In the context of ongoing Covid restrictions, two schools opted to undertake the sessions online, whilst the other two took place in person.

Participating schools

The four schools were selected to ensure a good spread of geographical location and a range of contexts; in order to focus on the views of those children who may stand to benefit the most from the book bags, particular emphasis was given to schools with above-

average numbers of pupils in SIMD Q1, with English as an additional language, and with additional support needs.

School	Local Authority	School roll	Pupils with ASN	Pupils with EAL	Pupils with a minority ethnic background	Pupils in SIMD Q1
Aberlemno Primary School	Angus	24	0%	0%	0%	0%
Craigour Park Primary School	City of Edinburgh	452	65%	27%	27%	42%
Hillington Primary School	Glasgow City	253	33%	9%	19%	51%
Rosebank Primary School	Dundee City	276	55%	32%	34%	62%
All Scottish primary schools	-	-	28%	8%	10%	23%



Ethics

Whilst formal ethics approval is not required for research outside of an academic setting, Scottish Book Trust felt it was important that the ethics of the project be given due consideration. Prior to the commencement of the project, the Research & Evaluation team, alongside representatives from the Early Years and School Communities teams, as well as the organisation's Designated Child Protection Officer, applied the [Third Sector Research Forum's 2021 Guide to Applying Ethical Research Principles](#) framework and designed the research accordingly; this guide includes consideration of: the need for the research, integrity, accountability of the researchers, confidentiality and safety.

Meaningful consent from children

Given the ethos of this research as regards children's voices and agency, it was important that pupils were given the opportunity to meaningfully consent to participating. In addition to consent from parents/carers and schools, advance and continuing consent was collected from the children involved in the workshops, giving them final say on whether and how they took part. The advance consent form was designed to be accessible with happy/unhappy faces for the children to circle to indicate consent to each aspect of the research. For continuing consent, in addition to the facilitators regularly checking in with the children and assessing behaviour, children were also given 'stop' and 'go' signs which they could use to indicate if they did not want to continue participating or answer a specific question.

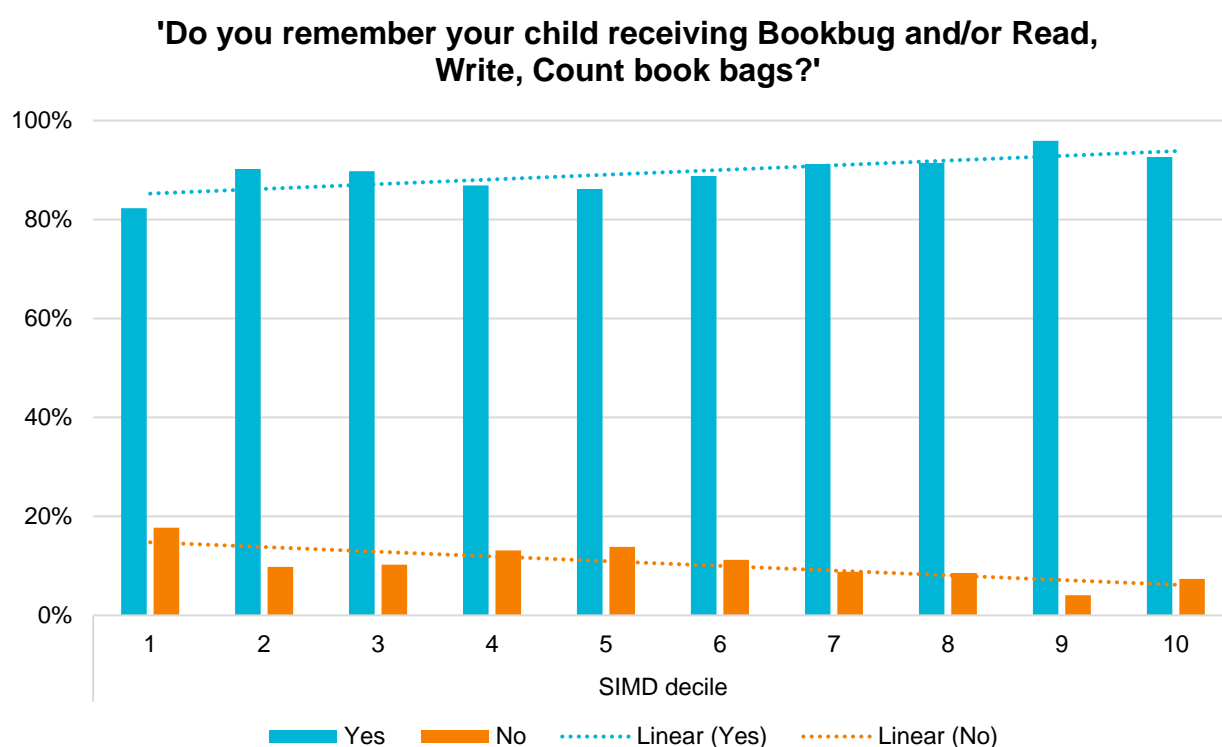


Findings

Access

Awareness

There is clear evidence that the Bookbug and Read, Write, Count programmes provide enhanced access to books for children and families. 88% of parents/carers of 8–12 year olds reported that they remembered their children receiving Bookbug and/or Read, Write, Count book bags. When looking at the data split by SIMD there is a slight downwards trend, with fewer parents/carers living in SIMD decile 1 remembering receiving the book bags; however, at 82% awareness is still high for those in SIMD decile 1, and awareness for decile 2 is 90%, higher than the 88% average.



Overall, 66% of parents/carers noted that without the book bags they would have had fewer books in their homes, and 63% that they would have had fewer resources to play with as a family.

In addition, 95% of the children in the art workshops (P4–7s) remembered the book bags, many with enthusiasm and excitement.

Low-income families

A number of parents/carers, professionals and children commented on how the book bags were particularly important to those families who might not otherwise be able to afford books:

'[I remember] my kids being really happy to receive them. I don't have much money so it is good for them to have an unexpected treat.' – *Parent/carer, omnibus survey*

'I would've bought some Gaelic books as I feel it's important for her to see the language written down but it really helped as starting a family is not a purse friendly time.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'It allows families who have limited finances access to lovely new books – something they might not be able to buy themselves.' – *Health visitor, memories survey*

'One young mum used the bag for nursery, she was so happy and said she'd wished she'd had the books as a child.' – *Learning professional, memories survey*

'One refugee family were so delighted, they had nothing, but this has meant their boys had books.' – *Learning professional, memories survey*

'[I remember] the smiles and excitement on the children's faces. Some of the children don't have books at home or don't get books read to them, so to be able to do this for them is magical.' – *Early Years professional, memories survey*

'Giving children who had very little these bags was such a treat. Some of my pupils don't own books so to be giving them the bag for free was amazing. The children were delighted, as were parents.' – *Learning professional, memories survey*

'One child in my class informed me that she doesn't have any books at home and she was delighted that she was getting to take the three books home with her to keep forever. It was a heart-warming moment!' – *Learning professional, memories survey*

'It was especially welcome during Covid where libraries were closed. Our children affected by living in poverty were delighted to read the books with us but then over the moon that they could keep their very own bag of books!' – *Learning professional, memories survey*

'We got three books, and we got them free, so mum didn't shout at me.' – *P7 pupil, art workshop*

Libraries

79% of parents/carers reported that the book bags encouraged them to visit the library more often, further bolstering their family's access to quality books and, potentially, community groups, events and support, such as Bookbug sessions.

'Children are more eager to visit the library after receiving the Bookbug kits.' – *Parent/carer, omnibus survey*

'This encouraged us to visit more library and become a good reader.' – *Parent/carer, omnibus survey*

'We visited the library and invited parents to come for the gifting. Lots of parents hadn't been in the library before and they enjoyed it.' – *Learning professional, memories survey*

'My daughter received her first bag of books at four months old from the health visitor. A lovely introduction to Bookbug! We also then attended a Bookbug session in the local library.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

Longevity

The longevity of the book bags is high, with 73% of parents and carers reporting that they returned to the book bags at least a few times a month (and 37% saying they returned 'all the time').

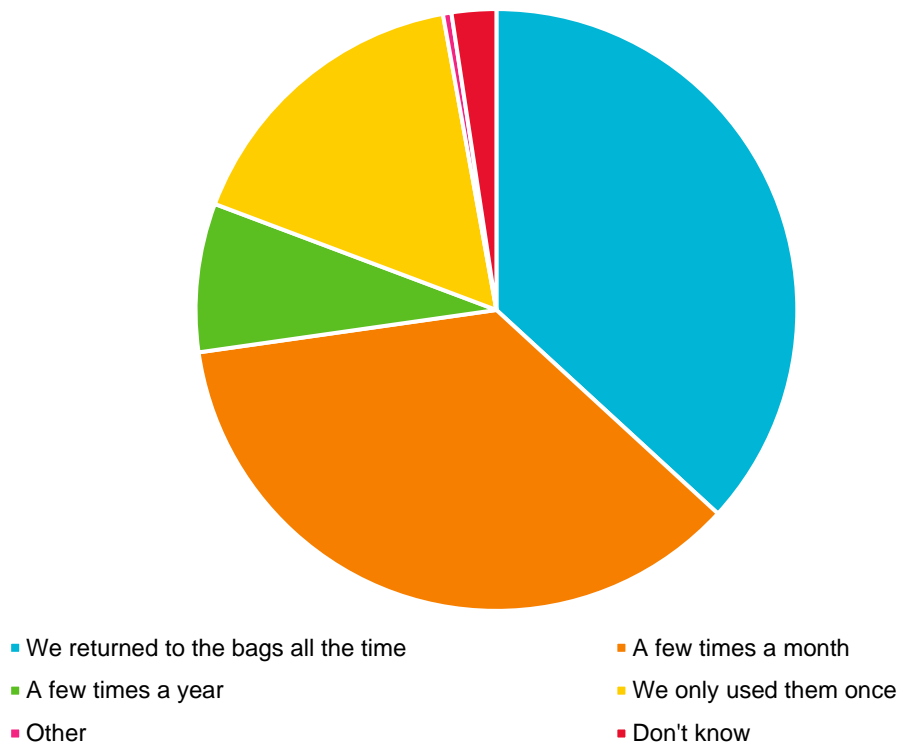
This is confirmed by numerous comments from parents/carers around re-reading books:

'My daughter's toddler Bookbug bag was probably my favourite as she was so inquisitive with the new books. We sat on our sofa, delved into the bag and pulled out and read each book. It felt exciting and filled me with warmth. She loved the books and asked for them to be read again and again.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'He loved one story so much he has been listening to it every night for the last three weeks. Equally excited every time, he now repeats the lines to Arlo after I have read it.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'*The Something* has been one of our favourite book bag books. It has been one we have read over and over and talked about when out and about, "I wonder what lives in there?"' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'After receiving the book bags how many times did you and your child generally return to use the bags?'



During the art workshops 81% of the children said they had returned to the book bags more than once, with 35% saying that still enjoyed returning to the books from the book bags they had received throughout the years.

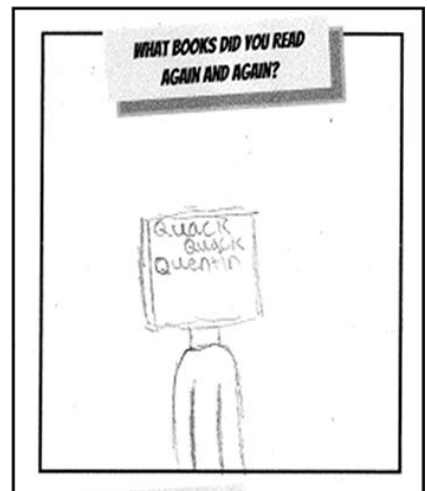
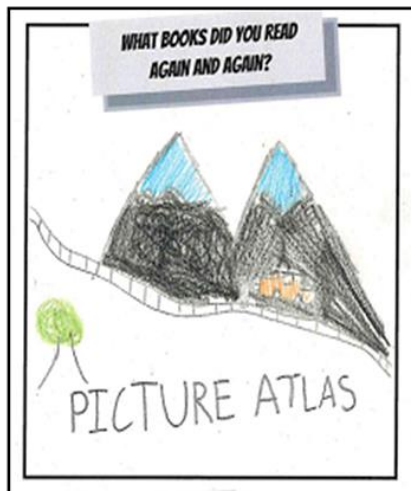
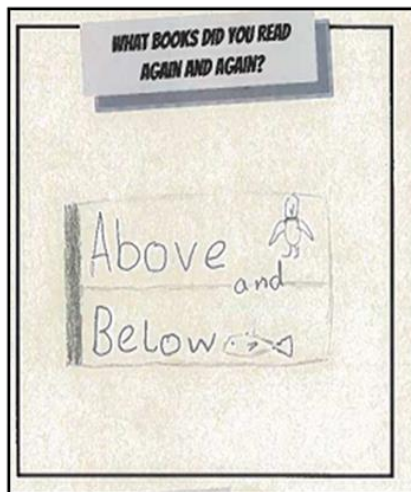
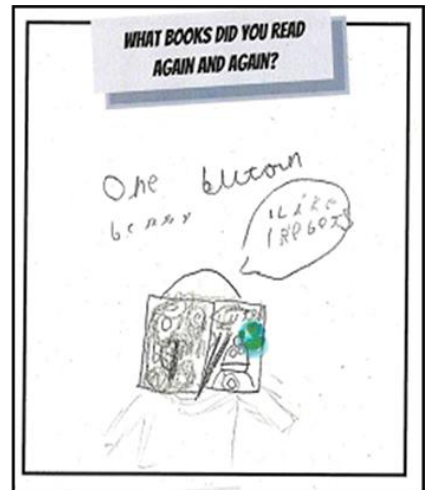
Pupils in the art workshops also reacted with great enthusiasm when talking about their favourite books from the book bags:

'I read *Above and Below* too many times it was unhealthy.' – *P7 pupil, art workshop*

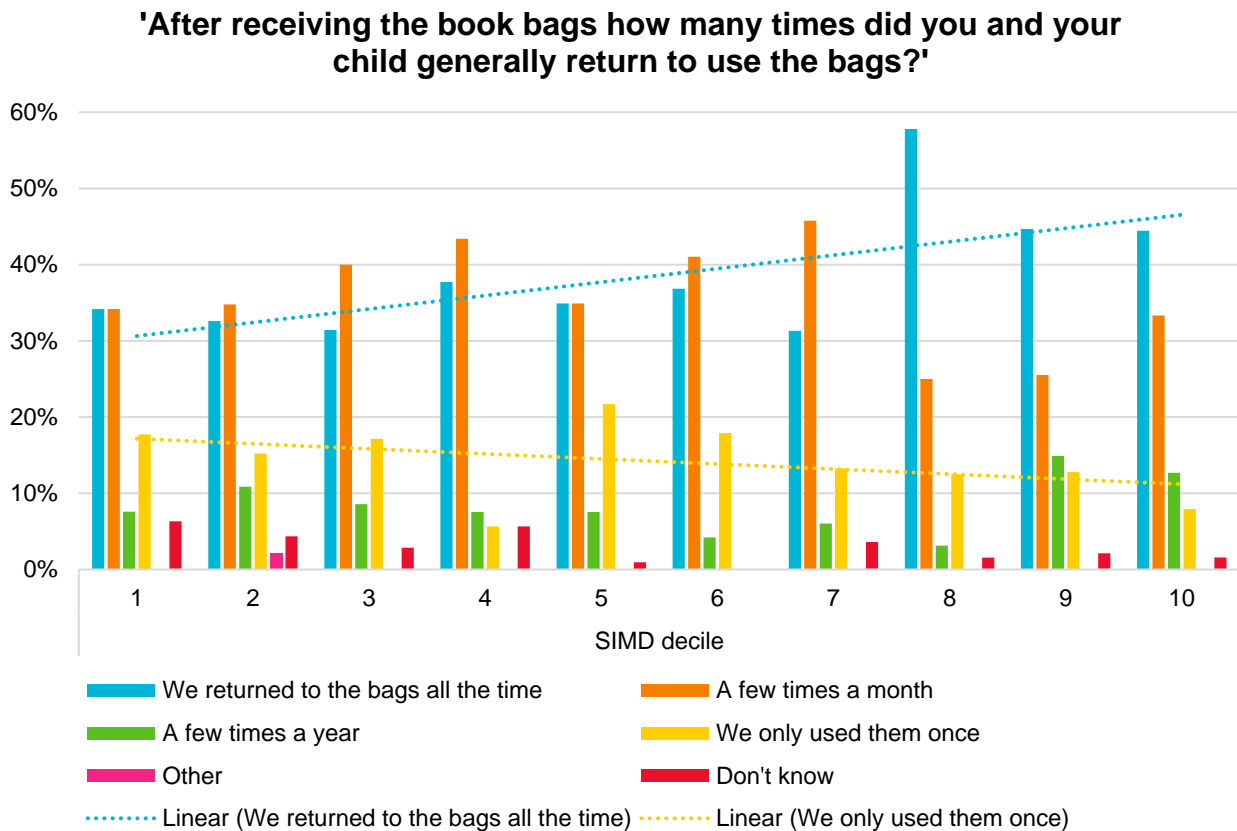
'After tablet time we would read a book and I would usually read this book [*Open Very Carefully*]. I would choose, my Dad would always give me two options but I would always choose this one.' – *P5 pupil, art workshop*

'Quentin, Quentin Quentin, YEESSS QUENTIN, I've missed you Quentin, I love Quentin.' – P6 pupil, art workshop

81% of the children also confirmed that they had favourites they remembered well and returned to again and again. Several of the children drew their favourite book, many with great detail:



However, in line with the finding above that parents/carers from lower SIMD deciles are slightly less likely to remember the book bags, there was a trend in parents/carers from lower SIMD deciles being less likely to have returned to the book bags as frequently as those from the higher deciles.



There may be a number of reasons for this, including time available with their children and their own attitudes and skills with regard to reading. It would be useful to research this issue further in order to maximise impact for those families most in need of support. As detailed in the 'enabling factors' section below, one method of boosting this is through the provision of information about the book bags at the point of gifting – those parents/carers who received information were 19% more likely to report 'we returned to the bags all the time'.

Early reading

Reading together sooner

There is clear evidence that the book bags prompt parents/carers to read with their children, with 84% agreeing that the book bags encouraged them to read books together

at an earlier age than they would have otherwise. This was high across SIMD deciles, with those in deciles 1 and 2 being slightly more likely than average to agree, at 86% and 87% respectively.

'Just a thank you for teaching me reading should be a big part of my baby's life as I thought she was far too young to start reading books to her.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'I have never been a reader, it wasn't shown to me at a young age, we never had anything like Bookbug so I never read much unless it was necessary for school work. So honestly without being gifted the bags and seeing how much the children benefit from reading (and how much they enjoy it) I probably wouldn't have as much books in the house and wouldn't do as much reading with both my children as I do now.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'Receiving the early books helped me and my husband introduce reading early and also made us aware of the Bookbug sessions.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'Some of the books inside are not ones I would have bought especially in her first bag I never knew how important it could be from that young.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'Without the bags I would not know where to start with being a first-time mother. The books have helped on what authors to purchase based on what my son enjoys the most.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'Mostly our young mums were excited by these free books for their children, it helped make them think about books and getting more.' – *Learning professional, memories survey*

Parents/carers modelling reading

There were comments from parents/carers that suggest the book bags helped them to model reading behaviours with the children, in particular around exploring the books and storylines with actions, questions and discussion. 82% of parents/carers agreed that the book bags had helped make them more confident sharing stories, rhymes or songs with their family.

'I loved how my little girl would ask questions about what she saw in the books and make predictions about what happens next in the story etc. I firmly believe these books have helped her develop her love for reading – a passion that runs deep to this day!' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'Just snuggling up together and chatting about the characters and what they are thinking and doing.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

The home learning environment

There is clear evidence that Bookbug and Read, Write, Count supports parents/carers to develop their home learning environments.

- 84% agreed that the book bags had encouraged their family to spend more time sharing stories.
- 82% agreed that the book bags had encouraged them to access more books or literacy resources for their home.
- 82% agreed that the book bags encouraged them to do more numeracy games and activities together.

These figures remained high across deciles, with no trends apparent in the data.

Parent/carers described the various ways the book bags had supported and enhanced their learning at home with their children:

'I was really proud when he jumped out of bed after the story to get a pencil and the activity book as he wanted to do the activities which related to the book, and then told me to keep the pencil and activity book with the stories for tomorrow night! It was wonderful to see him so keen and engaging with the stories.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'I have a particular memory of my youngest loving the *Car, Car, Truck, Jeep* book. He loves to sing so it was perfect for him. He learned all the words very easily and the clear bright pictures helped him remember as he can't read. He got a real kick over lockdown when this book came up in the live Bookbug sessions that were held every Friday. He got the book and turned the pages and sang along with Paul!' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'The Bookbug books helped my baby be more excited about books because of the different shapes and types of books we received. It also gave us some ideas for games to play together.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

Professionals also offered examples of how the book bags had supported and enhanced the home learning environment, their work in school and their efforts to engage families:

'It is great to hear about children enjoying the bags at home. Pupils have enjoyed the story cubes, story cards and games. Some of my P3 children still talk about the card games they got in P2.' – *Learning professional, memories survey*

'Giving the gift bags is a privilege as we get to see the joy of books when a child receives one. It gives us an opportunity to interact with the children during assessments and use the books to assess their development. Children love the pictures and regardless of what stage of development they are at or their abilities and communication skills – they all interact with the pictures and colours in their own way. With a smile!! We also get the opportunity to watch a parent interact with their child and it's a beautiful thing to see. A child who had limited English was able to communicate with me by pointing to their favourite thing – a tractor! And eagerly turn the pages to find more and more!!!!' – *Health visitor, memories survey*

'I remember one child saying their mum never comes to anything and she would be on her own. Her mum surprised her and appeared at the gifting event and the girl was delighted that her mum was there to read the stories with her. Her mum said she was going to make more of an effort to read with her at home after seeing how much she enjoyed reading in school.' – *Learning professional, memories survey*

Language, communication and literacy development

The evidence suggests that the book bags play a key role in language, communication and literacy development; 85% of parents/carers agreed that the book bags had inspired new conversations, games, or vocabulary.

'I love when my baby started copying me for the first time when we were reading the story together before napping. It was about when he was eight months and I felt we could communicate!' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'My child is three and so far has received three book bags. The books are always her favourite! They are so perfectly selected and age appropriate that they are always a daily read in our house. The *Look and Say* National Trust book has been a favourite for well over a year now and has certainly helped my child develop her vocabulary.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'We thought these book bags were fantastic – so good for encouraging children to read and expand their vocabulary. Love them! (and Bookbug!!)' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'This is a great resource for families from all walks of life. Our child has excelled with his reading and vocabulary.' – *Parent/carer, omnibus survey*

'Love the book bags. I also love, for example, how my now three year old mimics his older brother and reads the books for himself – he's not reading the words, of course, but reading the pictures, turning the pages, shouting out bits from books he can remember, he already thinks of reading as something as natural as eating or sleeping.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'Books are so essential to a child's development and allow so much growth in a child's communication skills.' – *Health visitor, memories survey*

Developing as a reader

Frequency

The findings indicate that the book bags encourage children to read more frequently, with 84% of parents/carers agreeing that the book bags helped their child read for pleasure more often.

'My son loves all the books in the bag. *Inch and Grub* is the funniest and he laughs so much at it. Since starting school, he has become even more interested in reading and it makes reading to him even more enjoyable.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'My children still go back to the Bookbug books and say remember I got this in my bag, or can we read the book from my bag again today.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'[I remember] my sons sat on each side of me and listened to me reading the book carefully and closely. They loved the illustrations and my older son read it again when I had finished.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

Confidence

The data suggests that the book bags support children to increase their confidence in reading, with 84% parents/carers agreeing that the book bags helped their child become a more confident reader.

'I wouldn't have encouraged a factual book – always resorting to fiction. Getting these books really helped one of my kids identify with books he did like and then have the confidence to find this category of book in the library.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'These were books we didn't know about ... My daughter was more keen to try reading the words herself cause I hadn't read it yet so that was a big plus.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'My favourite memory is *Good Night, Sleep Tight*. I remember sitting reading the book with my wee boy before bed and he was insistent he could turn the pages himself – a mix of independence and determination to find out what happened next in the story.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'This year's has been my son's favourite bag. He was so excited as he can finally read books without any help, as soon as he came home he went to read it right away to my dad ... I loved bringing the bags home and reading them to him and now it's swapped as he reads them to me.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'[I remember] when my son turned his first page. He is so relaxed and confident around books.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

A love of reading

Following on from this increase in frequency and confidence, there is clear evidence that Bookbug and Read, Write, Count support children to develop a love of reading.

- 84% of parents/carers agreed that the book bags sparked a love of reading, drawing, writing, or stories.
- 83% of parents/carers agree that the book bags helped start their child on the journey to becoming a lifelong reader.

'It helped us increase the range of books she was exposed to. I really believe that her passion for reading, writing and storytelling is rooted in the amount of books she experienced from a very young age. The song and rhyme book was also a particular favourite!' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'Certainly made him more enthusiastic about reading. He will often look at the bookshelves in the supermarket and ask to purchase new books with his birthday and Xmas money.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'The children I work with loved having new books to share with their families. Even if they could not read themselves, listening to and discussing the stories deepened their understanding and enjoyment of the books.' – *Learning professional, memories survey*

'Yes it made my child more enthusiastic about reading.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'They made my daughter more enthusiastic about reading. She really loves to read and be read to. The gifted books meant we had more of a range of books at home outside of what I'd usually buy, or borrow from the library.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'Much more enthusiastic about reading and now reads them to his little sister.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

Socio-emotional impacts

Bonding and attachment

The data suggests that one of the most significant impacts of the book bags is the promotion of bonding and attachment between parents/carers and their children. 87% of parents/carers agreed that the book bags helped them to bond with their children. Parents/carers described a wealth of ways the book bags helped them to bond with their children, and the special moments they have created. Several parents and carers

mentioned that the book bags had supported bonding when they particularly needed extra help, such as for first-time or single parents.

'I think they are absolutely wonderful. They are not only brilliant for children, but the earlier ones are great because they offer a way for new parents to bond with their children, I really appreciated this when I was a new, first-time mum who didn't really know how to interact with young children.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'We always try to make time to read but recently as a single parent of two kids we have been missing it quite often. After my son received his Read, Write, Count bag from school it has got us back into the habit of setting aside five or ten minutes before bed to read, it's a great bonding time and brings us closer together as a family.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'Having the bonding time together. We still do this every night. Her favourite book so far is *It's a Wonderful World*. The smiles she gives me and giggles just make me feel special.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'We snuggled up on the couch one of the many places we love to share a story and went through the whole bag. I love that my daughter is so excited about reading and the bags have been a big part of that. She couldn't wait for me to see the bits she found the funniest.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'It's a very special moment to share, either sitting on my lap and seeing them point at the things they recognise, or recite bits they know. The best moment was when my four year old 'read' one of the stories to her one-year-old brother when I was out of the room, because she'd read it so many times.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'My favourite memory is when he was first able to pick up a book, take it to me and then turn around and sit with his back against me (or on my knee), assuming the position for us to read a book of his choosing together! Now he does this CONSTANTLY!!' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

In the art workshops, many of the children drew themselves reading with family members including parents, siblings and grandparents:



However, the majority of children in the art workshop said they liked to read by themselves, with 54% saying they didn't like reading with parents/carers. This was also reflected in their artwork:



This may reflect the age of the children in the art workshops (P4–7) and their desire for independent reading time. The children in the workshops were no longer receiving gifted

books annually, having received their final Read, Write, Count bag in P3, which may suggest to children and/or parents/carers that as children become independent readers shared reading is no longer a priority. This would be a useful area for future research and development, as research shows that shared reading continues to have both literacy and emotional benefits for children beyond the lower primary years.

Relaxation

Parents/carers also commented that reading books from the book bags helped them and their children to relax, especially in relation to sleep routines and emotional regulation:

'I love reading to my child before bed and she loves it too helps to relax her.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'It was always exciting to open the new bag of books and read them together at bedtime. Reading had always been part of our daily routine, it's calming and relaxing.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'[I remember being] in my eldest daughter's bedroom, sitting on a chair with both girls beside me before I had to head back off to work away from home. Both girls wanted another story, but it certainly felt like memories were being made and a sense of calm in what is a busy and scary world outside.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'I always remember settling down to read before bedtime as a new parent. After a hectic day it was lovely to have a peaceful and calm end to help them drift off, helped me wind down too.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'Having 1p36 deletion syndrome [a genetic condition] and autism, my wee boy often gets worked up, and it can be difficult to catch his attention. Reading with me helps calm him.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'Books always make a difference, they calm him down when he gets frustrated and he likes to think he can read, holding the book so I could see the story too.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

In the art workshops many of the children drew themselves reading in relaxing or comfortable environments, suggesting they find reading a calming and enjoyable activity:



Comfort in difficult times

A number of parents/carers also shared stories of how the book bags had supported them in times of stress or difficulty, demonstrating the wide-ranging benefits of the book bags, and the significant impacts they have on individual families:

'I had postpartum depression symptoms when my daughter was born in the first lockdown of 2020. The book *What a Wonderful World* came as a saviour to us in our darkest of times. My husband and I started to read the book every night to our baby girl. Then we began to sing the song to calm our fussy baby. Gradually, we started to see the bright blessed day and the dark sacred night. The words of the book made us realise the importance of the wonders of the world which we took for granted.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'Our son was very young when he received it and wasn't well at the time, but he enjoyed holding the books. We used to read them together on the sofa. Our son used to sleep a lot due to his medical condition and didn't have the energy for play, so the books were the perfect way to bond with each other. He used to love looking at himself in the mirror at the back of the book, he loved touching the pictures, he laughed when we read the peek a boo jungle book. It was a moment that made us forget his condition as it felt like he was a normal baby. We used to take the books to his cardiologist appointments, surgeon's appointments, dieticians etc. and they helped to keep him calm, which made the visits a little less stressful and was one less thing to worry about, so they made a big difference to us. They were a lovely introduction to reading and helped us to bond, introduce him to words, letters, colours, pictures etc. Nothing needs to be improved.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'My daughter had lots of allergy problems when she was very little and she spent most of the time crying in pain. When we received her first Bookbug bag we tried reading to her to help comfort her and she really took to the *Hey Diddle Diddle* book. Now whenever she sees the cover she gets a big smile on her face and likes to try and turn the pages ... This is a wonderful initiative and has certainly brought a smile to our daughter's face when we were struggling. We now make a real effort to read to her each day (even if it's the same books because she loves them!). Thank you.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

Enabling factors

Universal approach

Bookbug and Read, Write, Count are universal programmes, meaning every child in Scotland receives all six book bags. The data suggests that this approach has a number of benefits, both for families who live in areas of multiple deprivation and those who do not, and is an important factor in creating the impact described above.

Excitement

As seen throughout this report, a sense of excitement at receiving the book bags was hugely evident throughout the data, suggesting that this is one of the key drivers of the impact demonstrated above. From the 200 responses to the memories survey, the words 'excitement' / 'excited' appeared 57 times; the word 'love' appeared 136 times.

'My two children absolutely love getting the book bags! I remember a couple of years ago my son had got new fish and a fish tank for his birthday then shortly after when he received his Bookbug bag there was a story about a goldfish. He was chuffed to bits and we read that story every night for about three months.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'These bags are a highlight in my kids' lives and I know that they will have fond memories themselves of receiving these when they are older.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'My son's favourite was the toddler bag, he got it a bit older as we were going through the adoption process at the time but one of the books he got is still his favourite yet. I'll never forget the look on his face as he was given something that was all his, priceless.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

Responses from both parents/carers and professionals suggest that this excitement, in part, stems from all pupils receiving the book bags together.

'My son was in P1 at the time and he was so excited that myself and his gran were invited into the school for a special gifting session. The activities were focused on the book *Gorilla Loves Vanilla* ... He still has the book and he is now P5.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'My daughter recently received a Read, Write, Count bag as a Primary 2 child. She was delighted and full of excitement at being given this in school.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'This time the bag was used in school before bringing it home and my daughter told me the entire story of *Inch and Grub* the minute she got home, so much so I was excited about it coming home on the Friday!' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

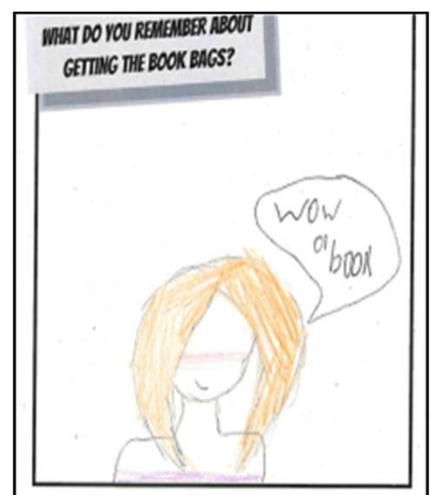
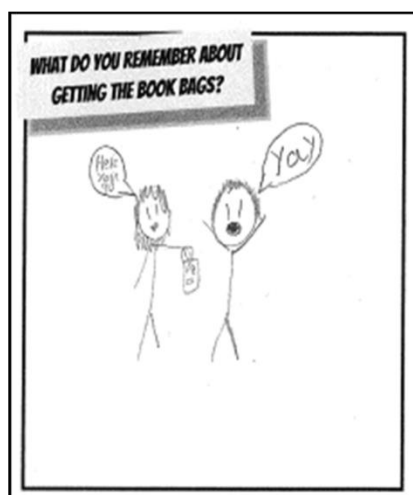
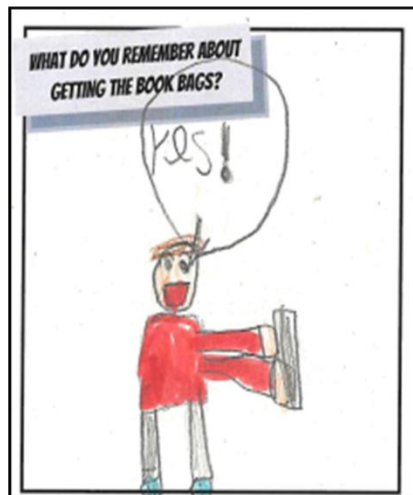
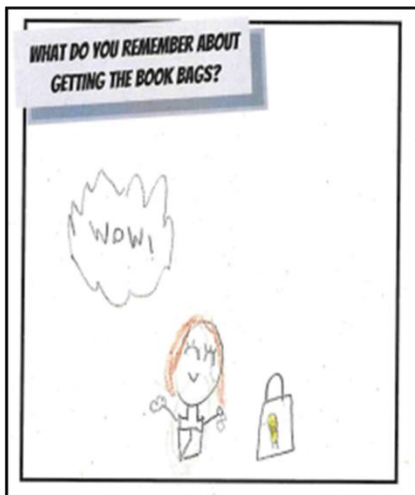
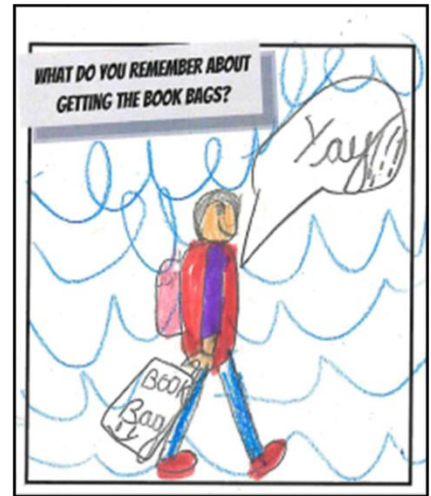
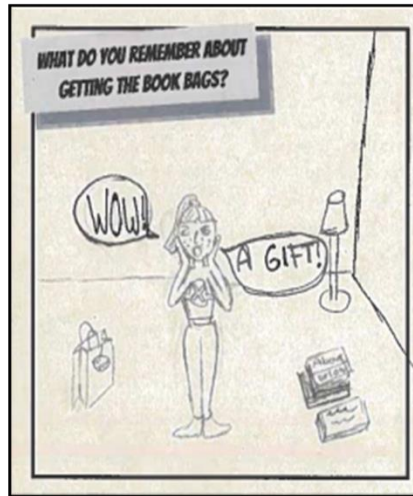
'I had one child in my group who didn't have much. When I gave them the Bookbug bag it was like Christmas morning they were so excited to tell their family. The Monday after when they came in mum said thank you so much as it made their weekend. They told all their peers and that made my day to see that little one's face.' – *Early Years professional, memories survey*

'The children absolutely loved planning the [gifting] event and taking ownership of all the organisation. They were super surprised to receive a copy of each of the books – this had been kept a big surprise from them. The parents really enjoyed the event and their feedback was wonderful. They loved reading with their children in school, seeing all their work and being there to witness their child receiving their new Bookbug bag. It was a very successful event and parents said they were going to try and read more with their children at home.' – *Learning professional, memories survey*

'As a newly qualified teacher, I clearly remember my first class being incredibly excited to receive their Read, Write, Count bags. It enhanced our in-class story time and gave great links with the families too.' – *Learning professional, memories survey*

'After a few years of handing out Bookbug / Read, Write, Count bags to my P1/2 and 3 classes, tonight I got to cuddle up with my nephew who started school this year and read the P1 books to him at bedtime. The joy on his face made those parent evening presentations seem so worth it!' – *Learning professional, memories survey*

In the art workshops, many children reacted with great excitement when discussing the book bags, and included words such as 'wow', 'yay' and 'happy' in their comics:



Introducing families to new titles and genres

Across SIMD deciles, parents/carers and professionals commented that in many cases the books were not titles they would have chosen themselves, expanding access to enjoyable reading experiences for all children. 80% of parents/carers agreed that the book bags introduced them to a favourite book, song or author.

'One of my children doesn't like the traditional story fiction books as much as fact books so the inclusion of these books lately e.g. the bird, woodland animals books have been great. He re-read the bird book over and over and he now heads to the facts section of the library.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'Yes! It's helped my son to value books and given him space to use his imagination and be creative. I wouldn't have thought to choose some of the books and they're now firm favourites!' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'In one of the very early bags we got what turned into my daughter's favourite books which we read, read and read. I still can't bear to part with the book.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'It's amazing the difference. We luckily already have lots of books but the Bookbug books have greater significance and meaning for him. And the weeks / months that follow definitely you can see books are more loved.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

Some parents/carers noted that the book bags helped them to develop their understanding of which books might best support their children's development.

'We would have had some books (gifts from family) but Bookbug gives me confidence in the types of books and their age-appropriateness. We still use the earlier books from the baby box and three-month visit too but we chat more about what we can see on the pages, not just the words. I'm not being biased but the Bookbug books are definitely amongst his favourites (and mine). We point at Bookbug at the back of the book. He recognises Bookbug from the songs and rhymes app (we use that most days too).' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'We had gifted a number of 'classic' children's books (think *The Large Family* and *Peepo* etc.) but the books provided in the Bookbug bag seemed much more geared

towards what is good for early development in babies, bright contrasting colours, mirrors, pictures of faces.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'The books are not ones we would have known about without Bookbug. There is a counting book, in particular, that I wouldn't have tried. But as it was in the bag we read it and a year in it is still one of my child's favourites.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

A shared reading culture across Scotland

It was also noted that the programmes' universal approach means that there is a shared, supportive culture of reading amongst pupils, families and professionals.

'Oh yes definitely made a difference. As other kids were given same books they were able to talk about the stories and fav parts.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'There is something special about the class sharing the books and all children taking these same books home. They are always well chosen, well written and beautifully illustrated books and I make sure my child understands that not all children have as many books as he does and might only have these books.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'What I have liked especially is that the whole generation of children have shared them, when they play the stories from them they all know them.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'We loved it and it was a milestone in my children's lives that they shared with all their friends as well as their parents.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'I think every year when the children come back and talk about the books with each other is precious. It's lovely to see them engaging with each other to talk about books.' – *Learning professional, memories survey*

'The good thing about the universal approach to gifting books is when we read one in nursery the children can relate to it because they have their own copy at home.' – *Early Years professional, memories survey*

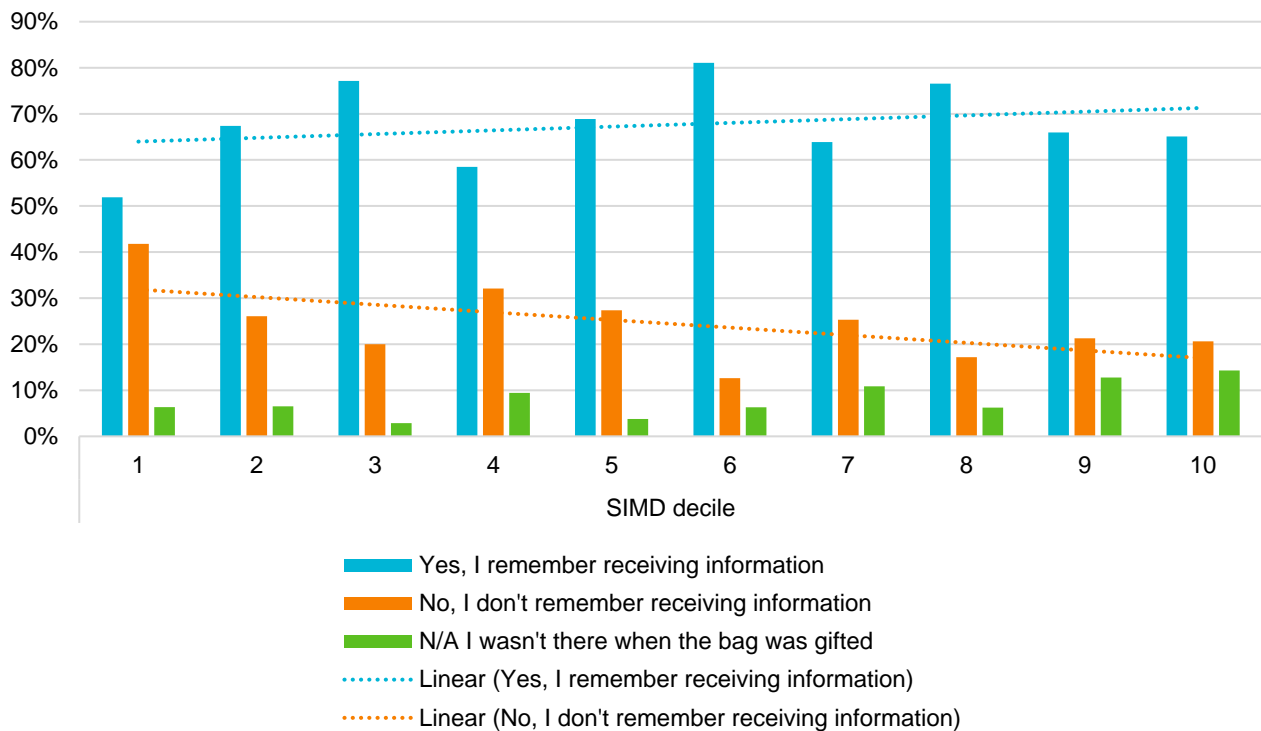
In annual evaluations of the programmes, learning professionals also frequently note the benefit of knowing every child in their class has a shared set of resources at home; this was particularly important during the school closures in 2020 and 2021.

What I love about Bookbug bags is that it provides equal opportunities for all children. Every child in my class now has access to books at home. Parents have access to drawing materials and stories in order to better interact with their children. Magic! – *Learning professional, memories survey*

Information at the point of gifting

Scottish Book Trust offers training and resources to professionals gifting the book bags to ensure families are aware of the resource and how it can best be used, as well as to create the excitement so important to realising impact as illustrated above. 60% of parents/carers recalled receiving information at the point of gifting, with those from the higher SIMD deciles being slightly more likely to recall this.

'Were you given any information about the Bookbug and/or Read, Write, Count bags at the point of gifting?'



Parents/carers noted the types of information they recalled receiving:

'They told us the importance about how to connect with the books and how the kids will connect to the good things by the inspiring stories in the books.' – *Parent/carer, omnibus survey*

'I was informed about all the different leaflets that came within the bag and how the books would help the baby.' – *Parent/carer, omnibus survey*

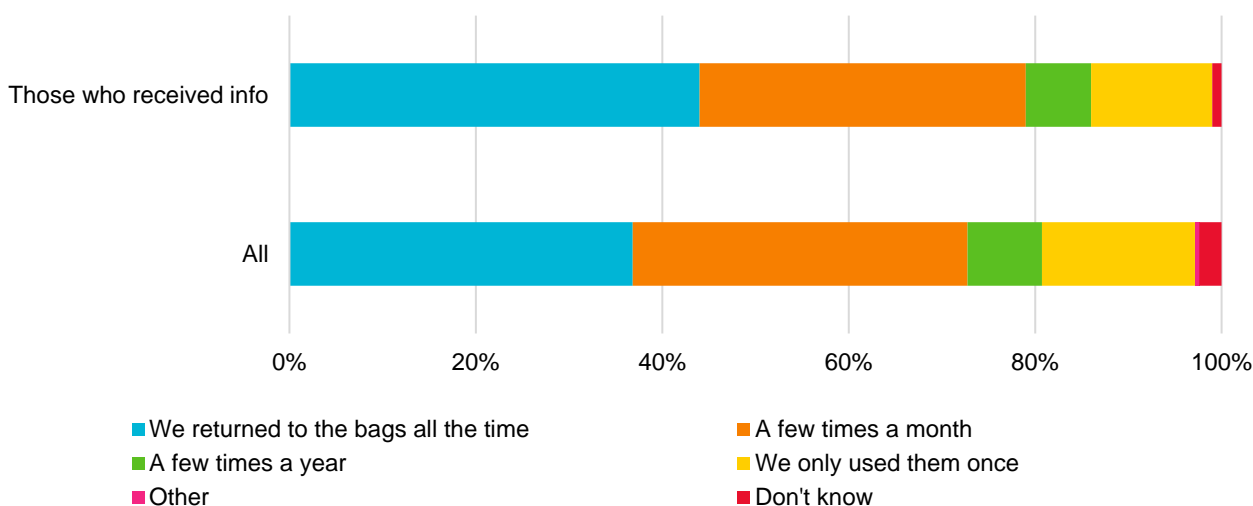
'Yes. I never realised how much this helps with baby's development until I received my Bookbug bag for my baby and read through the leaflets. It really has helped my daughter reading books to her.' – *Parent/carer, omnibus survey*

'How to use the bags and resources to help my children read more, count more and we also enjoyed the colouring pencils and colouring books too!' – *Parent/carer, omnibus survey*

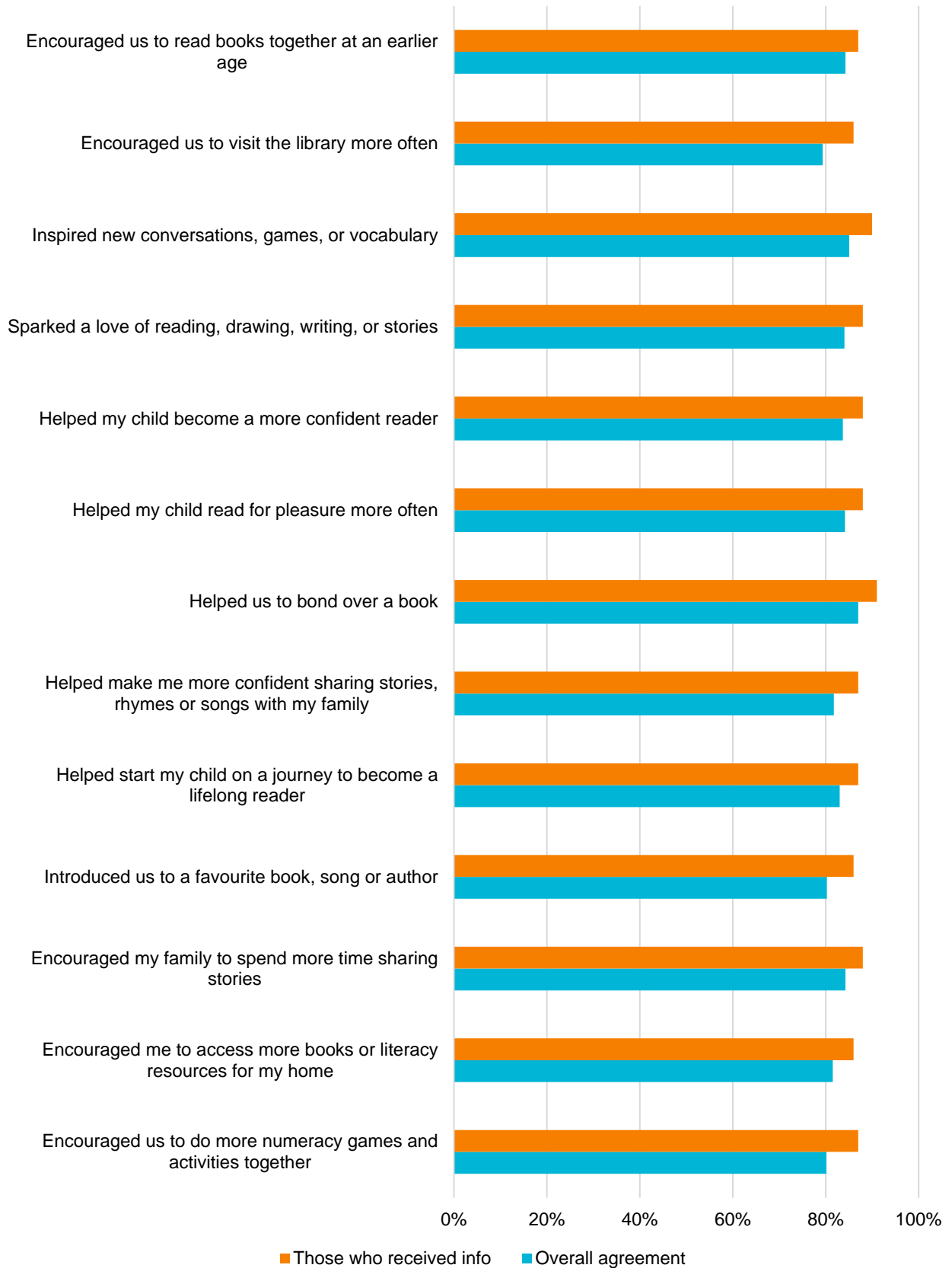
The data from this research confirms that the book bags have a greater impact when information is received at the point of gifting, with all the perceived benefits of the book bags being reported more frequently by those who recall receiving such information. This demonstrates the continued need for targeted work in those communities where need is greatest to ensure the impact of the book bags is maximised.

Further, as described in the 'awareness' section above, those who receive information at the point of gifting are more likely to return to the book bags.

'After receiving the book bags how many times did you and your child generally return to use the bags?'



'The bag of books and other resources gifted to my family...'



Areas for development

The data overwhelmingly suggests that the majority of parents/carers have positive experiences with Bookbug and Read, Write, Count, with hundreds submitting detailed stories of special moments that receiving the book bags created for their families. When asked what improvements could be made, the majority of parents/carers and learning professionals submitted ideas for specific books or resources, along with a number of messages of thanks:

'I think the bags are fantastic, very generous and don't require any addition. We have a lot of the Bookbug books we've managed to get second hand as well as those we've been gifted in the bags (from our baby bag the books are in tatters!!) all the books are so well chosen there's never been one we haven't liked. Thank you so much for all you do.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'Overall our experience with the bags has been extremely positive and overall the programme is one that is hugely important for early literacy. I also like that diversity of characters is apparent in the books chosen and this is something that should be continued going forward so all children can see themselves represented in literature.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'I just feel so lucky to be receiving these bags. I think them (and baby boxes) are a great investment. My boy absolutely loves books now and I hope this continues for the rest of his life.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'I just love this time of year, I look forward to it every year. I now train the other infant teachers on how to explore and gift the P1, P2 and P3 bags and how to get the best out of them.' – *Learning professional, memories survey*

'They are so valuable and well received by the families and professionals that use them.' – *Early Years professional, memories survey*

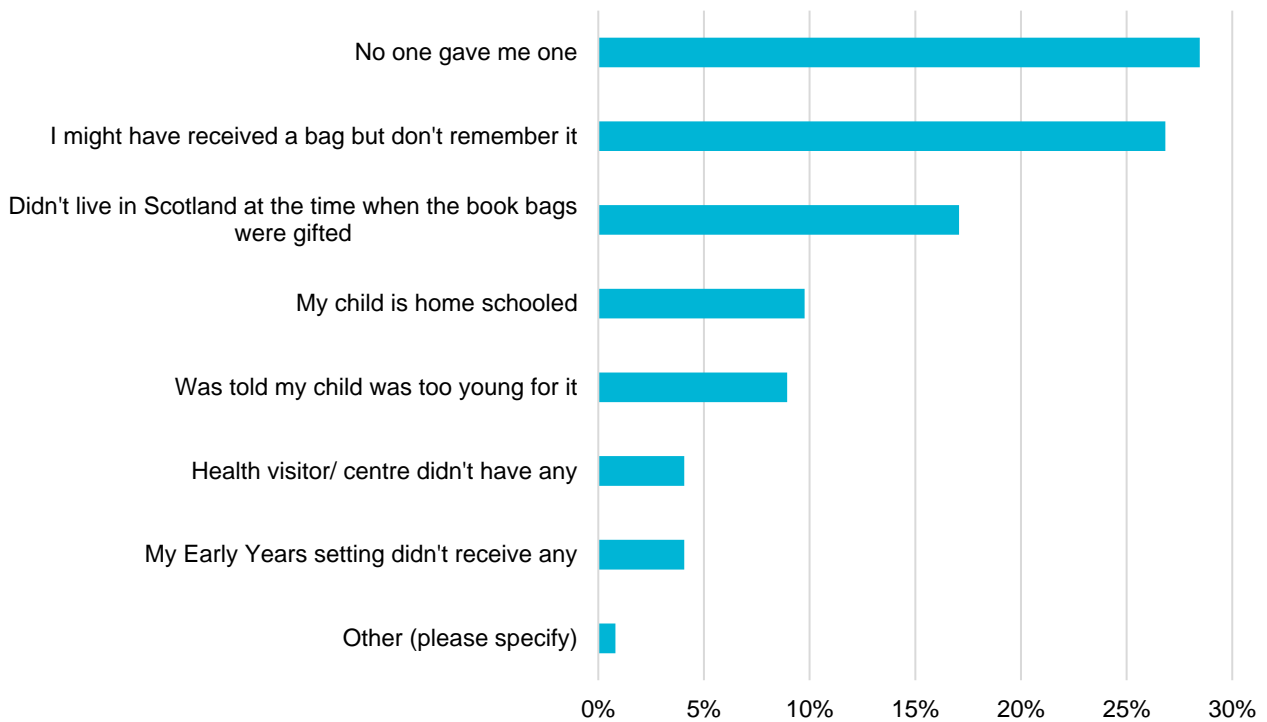
Awareness

The 12% of parents/carers who did not recall having received Bookbug and/or Read, Write, Count book bags were asked why they thought this might be. There was no one common reason; in 46% of cases, it seems that book bags did not reach individuals either

because 'no one gave me one', 'I was told my child was too young for it', 'the health visitor / centre didn't have any' or 'my Early Years setting didn't receive any'.

This survey was carried out in 2021, and it is likely Covid-19 had a significant impact on these figures.

'Do you remember why your child/grandchild didn't receive the Bookbug and/or Read, Write, Count bags?' (n = 123/1000)



This issue was also noted by a small minority of respondents in their qualitative feedback:

'We received our first bag at about 14 weeks because our HV forgot (likely due to the number of health issues with our daughter we were dealing with at the time). It was only through speaking to other mums I was made aware of it. Perhaps if there was flyers etc. at antenatal centres where you go for your appointments, I would have been more aware of the service prior.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'The Explorer bag was not given at nursery due to covid and now they have none. Fortunately our local Bookbug coordinator has sourced one for us.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'My only gripe was before school, the distribution of them was always by chance – if we happened to be at health visitor. But school has been a perfect way to ensure everyone gets one.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

Whilst recollection of the book bags is high, distribution is continually monitored by Scottish Book Trust in order to maximise receipt and address any issues timeously. Strategies for continuous improvement of distribution for Bookbug bags include:

- Regular contact with partners who carry out the onward distribution to health centres and Early Years settings
- Requesting onward distribution statistics from each local authority, comparing them to birth rates and monitoring accordingly
- Contacting stakeholders (including Bookbug co-ordinators, nurseries and NHS health boards) from any areas where drops in distribution have been recorded, to identify the issue
- Working with local authorities and other stakeholders to alleviate any issues identified, for example addressing supply issues, ensuring libraries have a stock of book bags in case families have missed out, providing book bags to third sector organisations who work with families needing more support

Read, Write, Count bags are distributed directly to every school in Scotland to be gifted to P2 and P3 children using data provided by each local authority. Additional bags are gifted to each local authority to address any fluctuations in the school roll and ensure that any children new to the area also receive their bag.

Both programmes also respond directly to requests from families who have not received a particular book bag.

A small minority of families do not know about the book bags and will therefore not know if their child misses a bag through the regular gifting routes, for example, through a missed health visiting appointment; reaching these families can be a challenge. One parent/carer in the comments above suggested that there should be more information given out about Bookbug in, for example, antenatal centres so that families know what they can expect to receive, in advance of their babies being born. Recent improvements to raise awareness of the programme at an earlier stage include antenatal information provided to young parents who participate in the Family Nurse Partnership programme.

Beyond P3

When asked what improvements could be made, a number of parents/carers suggested that the gifting be extended to older pupils:

'I love it. Please never stop. It brings me such joy to see kids bouncing out of school with a book in their hands. Is there a way to do with for teens too?' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'It would be nice for older children to receive books too. My daughter is in P4 now and they didn't get any books.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'The only thing that could be improved is if the book gifting scheme could be extended throughout primary and into secondary school. I'd love to see more books available for secondary school libraries to gift.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'It's a brilliant scheme – could it be extended to older age groups?' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'This service is very worth for all children who age is eight years old or above.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'Would be nice if they carried on for older children too.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

'I wish that it would go on longer than just to P3.' – *Parent/carer, memories survey*

Targeted gifting at P4–7 was trialled in the early years of the Read, Write, Count programme. Given the positive response and evidence of impact for universal gifting from birth to P3 found by this research, coupled with the well-documented drop-off in reading enjoyment and frequency as children age⁴⁹ as well as the decline in shared reading in upper primary suggested by this research, it may be of interest to further explore the possibility of gifting opportunities beyond P3.

Conclusions

The evidence clearly shows that Bookbug and Read, Write, Count book bags are hugely valued by the families and professionals of Scotland. Parents and carers from across the broad SIMD spectrum reported important benefits for both their children and themselves across: book access; language, communication and literacy development; and children's development as readers, as well as vital socio-emotional impacts around: bonding and attachment; relaxation; and comfort in difficult times. Children participating in the art workshops had clear memories of the books they received and discussed them with enthusiasm, as well as describing their excitement at receiving their gift, their enjoyment of the books and the relaxing reading experiences they had with them.

This report identifies a number of enabling factors that are key to creating the impact described:

- Universal gifting, which creates excitement and a shared culture of reading for pleasure across Scotland. The book bags undoubtedly support lower-income families to access books, however, there are a range of benefits reported across all deciles of the SIMD.
- The inclusion of high-quality, fun books. Many parents/carers commented that the book bags introduced them to new titles or genres that have since become favourites of their children. The selection of contemporary books by an independent panel of experts ensures that the books cover a range of themes and interests, represent diverse families and experiences, and are age and stage appropriate, supporting children's development and promoting a love of reading.
- Professionals providing families with information at the point of gifting. This is key to creating the excitement shown to be so important to the book bags' impact and supports parents/carers to use the book bags at home with their children, deepening that impact. Those parents/carers who received information at the point of gifting were 19% more likely than those that didn't to return to the book bags 'all the time'.

The data suggests that families in the lower SIMD deciles are slightly less likely to recall receiving the book bags, and also less likely to use them as frequently. Families in these lower deciles still overwhelmingly recall the book bags and report high levels of impact, suggesting the universal approach is successful in reaching families most in need.

However, the gap demonstrates the continued need for additional targeted activities tailored to families' circumstances in order to maximise impact; current initiatives include [Bookbug for the Home](#), [Bookbug Before Birth](#), and the outreach activities carried out in support of Read, Write, Count. The universal availability of regular and consistent [Bookbug Sessions](#) is also a key means of modelling positive behaviours for families and increasing parents'/carers' confidence.

Other than this continued work to ensure all families receive and use their book bags, the only improvement suggested by parents/carers and professionals was that the book gifting be extended for older children.

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