

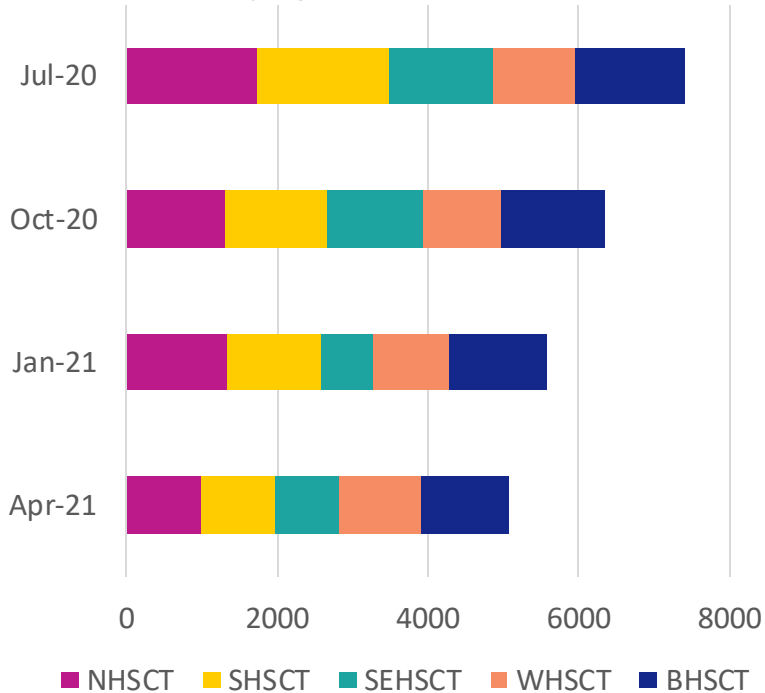
Bookstart Baby Packs 2020/21

A universal programme providing a reading intervention during babies first year, for babies born during 2020. Many new parents did not have access to the same support networks during this very difficult year. Sharing books, stories and rhymes with children from an early age can help create a lifelong reader. Bookstart Baby packs aim to encourage a love of reading in children from as young an age as possible. Reading for pleasure has enormous benefits from helping to build confidence, and develop empathy, creativity and social skills, and is also a huge pleasure in itself.

How much did we do?

Around 24,000 babies born in 2020 were gifted a Bookstart Baby pack by their Health Visitor.

Delivery figures for NI Health Trusts



"Mums have had more time to focus on children within homes with less social venues/resources to support them...We completed a play zoom with our young mums and used the books as a resource." (NHSCT)

How well did we do it?

Reading can be an important escape for many children, and shared reading supports language development, confidence, communication skills and resilience. However, with schools and libraries closed for many weeks, many children were at risk of missing out. During the Covid-19 pandemic, parents were limited in accessing normal support services.

"They are a really useful resource to use during lockdown when families can't get out and about, so need plenty of stimulation and entertainment for their children, who are possibly bored of the toys they already have." (BHSCT)

100% of Health Visitors feel that gifting the Bookstart Baby pack supports their own work with families.

"When handing out the pack it gives me the opportunity to discuss the importance of books in relation to the child's development and the opportunity reading together can have." (NHSCT)

92% of Health Visitors understand the purpose of the Bookstart Baby pack very well.

"This pack is even better than the previous one a few years ago, which didn't seem as captivating, or the shape of the bag made it look more like homework than fun! This one is perfect!" (BHSCT)

Is anyone better off?

100% of Health Visitors rate the Bookstart Baby programme as very important for babies, children and families in their community.

"Very important as many of our clients do not understand the importance of reading to their child. Given the levels of deprivation in the area we work, money for books is often not a priority. The Bookstart packs are often the only access to books these families have." (WHSCT)

96% of Health Visitors say parents express an intention to use the Bookstart Baby pack.

"The Bookstart baby pack is simple, colourful and fun. The pack is compact and the bag keeps the pack functional and easy to distribute. The parents and children appear to enjoy the books and we receive very positive feedback about the packs." (SEHSCT)

80% of Health Visitors say all parents show interest in the messages and information the Health Visitor gives them about the Bookstart Baby pack and its contents, whilst **20%** say most do.

"I feel all parents should be reminded of the importance of speech and language skills. By offering this pack, we as health professionals can promote the significance early to ensure each child can be afforded an opportunity to reach their full potential." (SHSCT)

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Some additional comments from Health Visitors:

"I use the pack to promote the important interaction between parents and their baby, promoting key skills to develop loving interactions and attention which promote emotional development helping their baby to safe and secure." (SHSCT)

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To what extent do you feel that gifting the Bookstart Baby packs supports your own work with families?

"As health visitors, we are well placed to distribute the Bookstart baby packs as such follows on from and backs up our key health promotion messages of the importance of interaction, floor play, stimulation and secure parent and child attachment." (SHSCT)

To what extent do you think the Bookstart Baby pack and its resources are suitable or not suitable for the families you work with

"They are very suitable for the client base we are working with. A lot of our mums even struggle to read to their babies as they feel embarrassed or self conscious – therefore we encourage small steps approach and in increasing confidence with this and as part of the daily routine whether that is part of bed time or earlier." (NHSCT)

"This is an essential and very valued programme for babies, children and families in my community. Many families in my area would not place importance on reading or using books with such young children, and some could not afford to buy books or are not aware of the ease of using the library service. Therefore this free colourful and attractive gift is not only well received by families but also shows that they are cared for and valued. It reminds parents of the importance of looking at books and reading together as a family." (BHSCT)



Case Study : Naomi's story

Mum Naomi explains how BookTrust's Bookstart Baby bag inspired a love of reading with her baby.

When the Health visitor came by during lockdown after Naomi had her first child, Dáithí, two months prior, she had never heard of BookTrust. The first thing that caught her eye was the bright yellow canvas bag as she notes: "I'd seen **the bag first of all because it was nice and bright** and you can never have too many canvas bags.... We keep all his books in the bag and we would bring it along with us so we definitely do use it!". It was not just the bag that appealed but the contents, especially the puppets which were met fondly by her son – so much so "he kept trying to reach out and put stuff into his mouth so they're no more!"

Bath, book, bottle, bed is a regular routine for Naomi's son but during the day, sharing stories after mealtimes is also a regular occurrence. These include singing songs, rhymes, texture books. As a result, Dáithí's book collection has only grown, at present he has over 20 books - and counting – books with really bright backgrounds are his favourite.

As restrictions continue to ease, Naomi is keen to engage with some reading/storytime sessions once her local library opens up so Dáithí, has a chance to interact with other babies and hear other stories, as she jokingly puts it, as Dáithí, is "Probably fed up of hearing my voice(!)"

Naomi mentions that before receiving the baby bag, she had not considered reading for her son early on, but she thought it "was good to know that there is a company out there getting parents into reading." This is similar to comments made by Health visitors who reflected that when gifting the BookStart baby bag to families, "**some families seem to be surprised how early one can start reading to a child and [the BookStart baby bag] is a good introduction and prompt to reading habits.**" Naomi appreciated the accompanying information in the bag as it highlighted the importance of reading early on in a child's life. Research has consistently shown that shared reading in the early years positively influences children's language and social communication skills and emergent literacy skills for years to come (Brown et al. 2018, Sénéchal, 2011; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002).

"We love it and still use the wee books and use the bag everyday. It's good for parents... Reading wouldn't be the first thing you think of [when you first have a baby]" – Naomi

