

The magic of sharing stories – strengthening bonds and creating moment of joy

Adoption Focus and BookTrust



**CVAA Annual Conference
19 November, 2024, Liverpool**

BookTrust mission and reach

We support, empower and inspire children and families – especially those from low-income or vulnerable backgrounds – to experience the magic of books and stories through reading regularly and by choice.

We are the **UK's largest** children's reading charity

We have carried out **extensive research** into the early years and behaviour change, **working directly** with our delivery partners and families. We co-create with kinship, fostering and adoption families

We deliver **2.7 million books**, reaching over **1.4 million families** in every community across England, Wales and Northern Ireland

We have an **extensive delivery network** including 6,000 early years routes and 90% of public libraries

We work with authors and illustrators, like Patrice Lawrence and Frank Cottrell-Boyce to help deliver our mission



Children from vulnerable family backgrounds stand to benefit the most from these benefits.



The transformative power of shared reading



1

Bonding and building trust between adult and child through the closeness of reading together

2

Supporting emotional wellbeing through escapism, emotional regulation and empathy

3

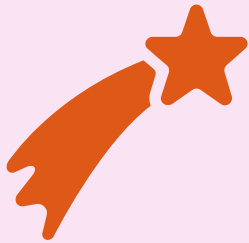
Supporting a sense of familiarity and security through development of a routine

4

Strengthening belonging and identity through stories that reflect their own and others' lives

How we approach our work with families and partner organisations

1



Inspiring, empowering, **strengths-based** – build on what families already know, have or do

2



Be **sensitive** to the diverse range of circumstances, needs, and preferences among the families

3



Hear from and bring together **experts and practitioners, families and children in partner organisations**



In 2023, BookTrust partnered with Adoption Focus, working with a total of 27 families (7 took part in more in-depth learning).

We ran workshops and joined sessions where we gifted books and playful activities and worked with the families to understand their needs and wants along with their pains and barriers.

There was substantial variety in confidence and experience of parents/carers



- Some adopters were confident interacting and sharing books; families have **established reading routines** which they are keen to enhance and embed.
- For the children to engage with the book and pack contents, they often relied on adult intervention.
- Use of props and playful activities, was used by parents as a tool to boost engagement.

“I’m clearly more impressed than you” –
Adopter to 5-year-old

Child lifting flaps of book [How do animals talk] and getting parent’s attention, “Mummy look!” – **Adoption Focus**

“[I wish for] more restful bedtime with stories specifically for winding down” –
Adopter

Asking child lots of questions, “Do you like colouring in?” “What are you going to name [the rhino]?” – **Adopter**

“Look at the veg [in Veg Patch Party]...it’s like what we’ve been looking at [the veg toys they had been playing with]” –
Adopter

“[I wish] that he learns to sit and listen” –
Adopter

“Can we put on a puppet show?” –
child to adopter

Reading together supports and embeds routines and rituals into the home



- For adoptive families, reading together is used to support healthy habits, routines and rituals, effectively embedding them into family life.
- Reading is seen as an important tool in a bedtime routine

“[I wish for] more restful bedtime with stories specifically for winding down” – **Adopter**

“The book is brilliant, we will really enjoy reading it at bedtime. The colouring pencils and packs are also brilliant...will absolutely love using it all!” – **Adopter**

“This will go down a treat at bedtime” – **Adopter of a 5-year-old**

“Books are always at bedtime.” – **Adopter**
... “Same in our house.” - **Adopter**

When first looking at Veg Patch Party, “I think you’re going to love reading this at bedtime” - **Adopter**

Reading together facilitates moments of joy and connection between child and parent/carer



- The books and resources helped spark moments of joy and connection between the child and their parent/carer
- This was both when opening the pack and exploring the contents together and, when reading the books together and using the activities for play linked to the story
- Parents wanted book recommendations to support conversations around particular emotions and points of challenge.

“It [the pack] made me happy because I got the same as my sister...I want to show daddy my new book” – **Five-year-old**

“The book is brilliant, we will really enjoy reading it at bedtime. The colouring pencils and packs are also brilliant...will absolutely love using it all!” – **Adopter**

“We’ve been reading a chapter of the book together a day or when she hasn’t got activities...we both read, she reads a bit and I read a bit as long as we’re both reading and it’s not just her, she’s happy” – **Foster carer**

“It’s about encouraging carers to have special time and not putting them in front of the TV or X-Box. It’s about finding five to ten minutes for that special time together.” – **Social worker**

Matching the child to the right pack and books for them



- We could match children to books and resources they found accessible and enjoyable
- We did this by empowering parents/carers and practitioners to match children to packs based on factors other than just their chronological age; focusing less on chronological age and more on the individual child

“I like the look of pack three...I am a tiger looks good” – Adopter

“Can we not focus too much on age?...I like the language you’ve used... [about emerging confidence with sharing stories] because we don’t want to focus too much about age. It’s about understanding the child and their needs.”
– **Social worker**

“I think he should have the earlier pack for where he is...he’s missed lots of school...he missed all of reception.” – **Adopter**

Where it all began...

- Annie and Anna met
- Why it appealed to us
- Interaction with children and families
- What happened next...



The research



- **Quality time**
- **Healthy habits**
- **Routine**

Message for Training

- **Brain development**
- **Identity and belonging**
- **Emotions**

Story Explorers

- Why we wanted to be involved
- What we are doing



- **How do you support your families with bonding and attunement?**
- **What does this look like day-to-day for your families?**
- **How do you see sharing stories playing a role?**

Support for sharing stories

- **Book recommendation lists** – supporting conversations around emotions, identity, points of challenge and transition
- **Story Explorers** – early years programme to embed story sharing rituals – built on the work with Adoption Focus
- **Policy work** – work with us to help inform the direction of our future programmes and to influence Frank Cottrell-Boyce's campaign as Children's Laureate

<https://www.booktrust.org.uk/support-for-families>

If you would like to hear more on our support for adoption families, please get in touch
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