

Creative Scotland, Youth Music Initiative Case Study – Bookbug in Orkney



**“Encouraging
parents and
children to share
books together
from birth”**



About this case study

This case study was developed as part of Creative Scotland’s evaluation of the Youth Music Initiative in 2014/15. The Youth Music Initiative is a national programme which is in its 12th year of operation. These case studies demonstrate the approaches used by organisations funded by the Youth Music Initiative, and highlight the impacts of this work.

This case study focuses on Bookbug in Orkney. Bookbug is part of the Scottish Book Trust’s Early Years programme. It aims to encourage parents and children to share books together from birth. The Bookbug programme provides four free packs of books for every child in Scotland. There are packs for babies, toddlers, 3 year olds and Primary 1 age children. It also promotes free, fun activities such as Bookbug sessions in almost all libraries across Scotland.

Creative Scotland has provided funding to the Scottish Book Trust through the Youth Music Initiative since 2008. The purpose of this funding is to provide high quality training and materials to local authority staff to enable them to deliver Bookbug sessions, and to extend the reach of Bookbug.

The approach in Orkney

Bookbug (formerly known as Bookstart) has been running in Orkney since 1999. The first ‘Bookbug babies’ are now approaching high school age.

The Bookbug Early Years Local Area Co-ordinator is responsible for delivering book packs to health visitors, local nurseries and primary schools. She also leads the monthly Bookbug sessions for babies and toddlers in Kirkwall Library. Her post is funded by Orkney Council, through the library budget.

Bookbug sessions are also run in local community centres in outlying communities on the mainland, for example, Deerness and Dounby, and also in some of the smaller islands. These sessions are led by three session leaders, who are currently funded through the local Childcare Partnership.

Activities

Bookbug packs for babies and toddlers are normally gifted to parents by health visitors, who then encourage parents to attend the free Bookbug sessions in local libraries or community centres.

The packs for three year old children (the “pirate packs”) are gifted in all nursery settings, where many of the nurseries run pirate parties.

The Primary 1 packs are gifted to children in local primary schools during or as close to Bookweek Scotland (in November) as possible – usually by visits to schools, or class visits to the library.



The Bookbug Library Challenge is also promoted in the local libraries in Kirkwall and Stromness. This is a free challenge, where children aged from birth to four years, receive stickers and certificates when they visit the library – an incentive to encourage children to use their local library.

Support and training

Support and training is provided through the Scottish Book Trust. The Bookbug Local Area Co-ordinator has attended:

- Bookbug Session Leaders workshops;
- Train the Trainer workshops; and
- networking meetings including Bookbug Annual Conference.

In addition, one of Scottish Book Trust’s national Bookbug trainers came up to Orkney to run a training session on ‘Bookbug for the Home’. This was tailored mainly, but not exclusively for the Homestart project.

The training provided by the Scottish Book Trust was seen as very helpful. In particular, the networking meetings were a valuable opportunity to share experiences and to find out what other Bookbug colleagues were doing. However, it was noted that attending meetings and training on mainland Scotland was expensive, both in terms of money and staff time.

Since receiving training, the Local Area Co-ordinator has also been involved in delivering ‘Train the Trainer’ workshops to encourage more people to deliver Bookbug sessions on the outer islands.

**“We are quite isolated up in Orkney –
it a great opportunity to network.”**

Working with others

The Bookbug Early Years Local Area Co-ordinator works with a number of local partners including NHS Orkney (Midwives and Health Visitors) and Homestart. The relationship with health visitors is very strong. For example, the health visitor might recommend that a family attend Bookbug sessions for particular reasons, for example, to help with speech or language development. In addition, the 24 month health checks for children are carried out in Kirkwall library.

“Health visitors work closely with us and like to keep an eye on who is attending the Bookbug sessions.”

The Local Area Co-ordinator has also developed very good links with colleagues in NHS Orkney. She works closely with midwives at the local Maternity Unit, and attends a ‘Social Baby Class’ for expectant parents. This has helped to raise awareness of Bookbug.

Bookbug also benefits from support from a range of volunteers, who help out at the sessions – taking part in the songs and rhymes, running craft activities or providing refreshments.

Impact on parents and children

In 2013/14, almost 4,000 people took part in Bookbug sessions across Orkney. This included over 2,200 children and almost 1,800 adults.

In February 2015, the Bookbug project in Orkney completed a survey of its service users. It received 59 survey returns and responses were overwhelmingly positive – with many respondents asking for more frequent Bookbug sessions.

As part of this case study, we spoke to four parents who had attended the Bookbug baby session in Kirkwall Library. All of these parents were very positive about the benefits of attending the Bookbug sessions:

- it was very enjoyable for their babies;
- it was a great way to learn rhymes and songs;
- it was a good place to meet other parents;
- it provided an opportunity to get out and relax in a friendly place; and
- it provided an opportunity for children to meet friends that they will go to school with.

Some parents also said that Bookbug helped to get the extended family involved (dads and grandparents), as the rhyme sheets that they got at the Bookbug sessions were also used at home.

“It’s the highlight of our week, and great opportunity to meet other babies and mums.”

Bookbug has also helped to promote bonding between children and their parents and carers. Those delivering the sessions find that babies and toddlers were very quick to catch on to the rhymes and songs, almost anticipating the actions. It also helps to foster an interest in books and the library.

“It is good to do something together with my son, and to learn the actions to the rhymes and songs. I probably wouldn’t do it at home.”

“It is all about encouraging parents to bond with their children and give them a love of books. They start to come to the library at an early age and remember it as a fun place.”

One of the session leaders also commented that the Bookbug session had been set up in one local community, as a result of concerns that had been expressed by the local health visitor that some of the local children had speech and language difficulties. Since establishing the Bookbug sessions, the health visitor has remarked that this has led to noticeable improvements in speech development among these children.

“It helps children to socialise, it gets mums out to meet people, and it doesn’t cost anything.”

Successes

Key successes of Bookbug in Orkney included:

- improved bonding between parents/ carers and children;
- stimulating an early interest in rhymes and books;
- positive impact on language skills and development;
- opportunity for parents to learn or re-learn songs and rhymes that they can use at home;
- opportunity for babies and children to develop their socialising skills; and
- opportunity for parents/ carers to meet other parents/ carers in a friendly environment.

For Bookbug deliverers, the greatest thing about Bookbug has been the sheer number and mix of people attending the Bookbug sessions, and also seeing the enjoyment that parents and children get from the sessions.

“The wee ones cotton on to the rhymes very quickly.”

Lessons learned

Originally, the early years Bookbug sessions in Kirkwall were joint sessions covering both babies and toddlers. They have now split these sessions. It is felt that this works better, particularly for babies and new mums, as the baby sessions are a lot quieter.

Based on experience of delivering Bookbug in Orkney, the Local Area Co-ordinator's advice to others who might be considering getting involved in Bookbug was to "just do it".

What's next

The Local Area Co-ordinator would like to be able to deliver the sessions on a weekly basis, but doesn't have the time due to working part time. She added that because funding for session leaders through the Childcare Partnership was under pressure, they might have to review some of their planned sessions for 2015/16.

