

**Seven Years On: An Evaluation of the Broxtowe  
Bookworms/Bookstart Project.**

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## **Abstract.**

Literacy has a profound impact on an individual's ability to function and participate in society, on their self-esteem, and on their life opportunities and choices. Literacy also has an impact on a national level, in terms of the economy and having a workforce capable of competing in global markets. It is no wonder then that the issue of literacy is of great interest, particularly as it is clear that there is a literacy problem in this country where 7 million adults experience basic skills difficulties. It is being increasingly argued that literacy is a shared responsibility, and there is a move towards cross-sectoral working and 'learning partnerships'. This study focuses on a community-led literacy project in a deprived area of Nottingham involving several agencies and community members. The project has two elements: one an after-school literacy club for children between the ages of 5 and 13, and the other a Bookstart scheme promoting the use of books with babies. Running for seven years, the project needed to be evaluated, and this study, using a variety of data collection methods, examines what the projects are trying to achieve, what is being done to achieve these aims, and whether or not these aims are being achieved. After discussions with various stakeholders it concludes that whilst it is difficult to separate the impact of the project from other influences, and despite a bias in the research, the project does appear to be having an impact. It also concludes that there are areas of concern, however, particularly in terms of library use.

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## **Chapter One.**

### **Introduction.**

#### **1.1 Background to the Project.**

The initial idea for this dissertation was to research some aspect of pre-school literacy intervention, an issue which presented itself during work carried out for the 'Access to Information Resources' module, completed in Semester One as part of the MA in Librarianship. A resource search for Professor Peter Hannon, of the University of Sheffield Educational Studies Department, highlighted the importance of pre-school literacy initiatives in raising literacy levels among children. Research suggests that children who participate in such initiatives are often ahead of children who do not participate, in both literacy and numeracy, when they start school (Hannon 1995).

The initial plan was to research the role of public libraries in raising literacy through pre-school initiatives, and one major initiative that presented itself was the Bookstart scheme. Bookstart was initiated in 1992 by Booktrust, beginning with a pilot project in Birmingham. Recognising "the central role that parents and carers play in their children's intellectual and moral development" (Wade and Moore 1998:6), Bookstart set out to provide: free resources to encourage parents to share books with their children; support and encouragement to make sharing books a habit, thus enabling parents and children to share the pleasures and satisfaction that books can bring and; empowerment for parents in helping them build the foundations for their children's literacy development (ibid.). Research into the Bookstart scheme found that, consistent with research into other pre-school literacy initiatives, children who had been through the Bookstart programme were largely ahead of children who had not when they entered school. The Bookstart scheme went national in 1999, most schemes being funded by Sainsburys (Raven 1999).

The opportunity arose to carry out research into a Bookstart scheme through the suggestion of Martin Shaw, Area Librarian with responsibility for Strelley Road library, in Broxtowe, Nottingham. A Bookstart project had been running in Broxtowe, a severely deprived area of Nottingham, for a number of years, and the suggestion was that this could be evaluated, along with a linked literacy club project, 'Bookworms'. This suggestion fitted in very well with the initial interest area.



## **1.2 A Definition of Literacy.**

There would appear to be some debate over the exact definition of 'literacy'. Hannon (1995) suggests that literacy is not just about the exercising of specific motor/perceptual skills in decoding letter-sound correspondences. It is, he argues "the ability to use written language to derive and convey meaning" (ibid.: 2). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in their report on literacy skills for the knowledge society, defines literacy more fully as:

"the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities at home, at work, and in the community - to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential" (1997: 14).

It is also increasingly argued that current definitions are too narrow, and in fact need widening to take account of new forms of literacy which are emerging in this 'digital age', for example, on-screen literacy and moving media literacy (McClelland 1997).

### **1.2.1 Defining Poor Literacy.**

Defining poor literacy is even more problematic. It has been argued that whilst policy emphasis has usually been concentrated on the negative effects of 'illiteracy' (the inability to read or write), this is largely unhelpful, since it does not highlight the fact that all people are literate to some degree. People demonstrate differing degrees of literacy difficulty or competence. This means that no one single standard of literacy can be set (OCED 1997). The Basic Skills Agency, in its study on the impact of poor basic skills, employed several different literacy tasks, highlighting that not only are there differing degrees of difficulty, but that whilst some people may be able to read fairly competently, they may have problems in writing (Bynner and Parsons 1997).

## **1.3 Why Literacy Matters.**

The Moser Report (1999) identified that literacy has an impact at four levels, those of the individual, the family, the community and society, and the economy.

### **1.3.1 For the Individual.**

The Moser Report states that "both literacy and numeracy have a profound effect on earnings" (1992: 23), in that those with poor literacy and numeracy skills are most likely to be in a low paid job. The report also suggests, however, that some people feel that the need for good basic skills has lessened with the technological advancements, however it points out that technology is in fact making having the ability to read competently more essential, arguing that "in so many aspects of our life we still need to read, a need technology cannot

replace” (1999: 22). It goes on to suggest that as more everyday activities become automated, for example drawing money from the bank via a cash machine, the need to read is becoming more important. This is the functional aspect of literacy, being able to read and write just to be able to function in society. Hannon, (1995) argues that literacy is also highly valued on a personal level, and people with difficulties are often afraid of being stigmatised as illiterate, and go to extraordinary lengths to cover up their inability to read or write. This situation can cause a great deal of personal unhappiness, stress, and loss of self-esteem.

Kassam, somewhat emotively defines the importance of literacy for the individual:

“To be literate is to become liberated from the constraints of dependency. To be literate is to gain a voice and to participate meaningfully and assertively in decisions that affect one’s life. To be literate is to gain self-confidence. To be literate is to become self-assertive. To be literate is to become politically conscious and critically aware, and to demystify social reality. Literacy enables people to read their own world and to write their own history. Literacy makes people aware of their basic human rights and enables them to fight for and protect their rights. Literacy enables people to have a greater degree of control over their own lives. Literacy helps people to become self-reliant and resist exploitation and oppression. Literacy provides access to written knowledge - and knowledge is power. In a nutshell, literacy empowers” (cited in Vincent 1999a)

### **1.3.2 For the Family.**

There are numerous studies which illustrate that the family is an important factor in the literacy attainment of children (for example, Hannon 1995, Segel 1994, Wells 1985, 1986). This therefore raises particular concerns about the ‘intergenerational’ effect of poor basic skills, that is, the fact that “when parents have trouble with reading, writing or numeracy, it is more likely that their children will start with a similar disadvantage at school” (Moser 1999: 23). Parents with low basic skills are less able to give their children the help and support they need. It has also been found that people with low literacy skills are likely to marry at a younger age, have children at a younger age, to experience both partners being out of work, and to be living in rented accommodation (Bynner and Parsons 1997).

### **1.3.3 For the Community and Society.**

Literacy has significant consequences for local communities to regenerate, for democratic participation, for the criminal justice system, for the health service, and for social welfare (Moser 1999, OECD 1997). It has to be said that there are many factors which impact on all of the above. Poor literacy is not the only reason people enter into crime for example, however good basic skills can help people to overcome, or deal with, their personal and social problems. Literacy is related to health in that literate people have more access to health information through their ability to access and process it, and make decisions and choices based on that information (OECD 1997). Poor literacy skills can also lead to social exclusion and impact on community participation, through the inability to access community information, and to be able to deal with the forms and documents which “are the meat and drink of welfare services” (Moser 1999: 24). The OECD study (1997) found that people were more likely to actively engage in community participation through volunteer work, if they had good basic skills.

### **1.3.4 For the Economy.**

The OECD study states:

“the ability not only to read and write, but to do so with increased competence, is a modern requirement with origins in economic and social changes that are by now familiar: the reach of global money markets; the shift to knowledge-dependent, information-based economies and societies; the stunning increase in the use of computers and other information technologies; the growth of the Internet; and the liberalisation of world trade” (1997: 11)

The study goes on to argue that the number of low-skill jobs is likely to decrease, and that this means that higher levels of literacy are needed now more than ever. The Moser Report (1999) similarly suggests that in order for the country to have a world-class economy, it needs a world-class workforce. People therefore need good basic skills, not only for current jobs, but to meet the changing demands of employment.

It has been argued that people with poor basic skills are more likely to end up in unskilled jobs, are more likely to get either sacked or made redundant, and are more likely to experience long-term unemployment. In addition, they also experience less chance of training or promotion. These factors obviously have a personal effect on a person’s life opportunities, however they also have an impact on employers and the economy. It is

estimated that the poor basic skills of employees cost the British economy in excess of £4.8 billion a year, through poor quality control, lost orders, bad communication, and the need to recruit externally when poor skills among existing staff limit internal promotion (ibid.).

#### **1.4 The Literacy Problem.**

It is clear then, that literacy has profound impacts both on an individual's personal life in terms of opportunities, choices, self-esteem and confidence, and participation in society, and in terms of the country's economy and ability to compete in global markets. Unfortunately, "there *is* a literacy problem in this country" (Hannon 1997: 33). The Moser Report (1999) indicates that 6% of the adult population had 'very low literacy skills', that is at below 'entry level', the equivalent of the standard a 7 year old should be at in school. In addition a further 13% had 'low literacy skills', that is the equivalent of the standard an 11 year old should be at. Thus just below 20% of the adult population, approximately one in five, or 7 million people, have more or less severe problems with literacy. The situation is believed to be worse in terms of numeracy.

The Moser Report further indicates that for many years a significant number of people have been leaving school without reaching a good standard of literacy. Barber (1997) develops this argument further, suggesting that even when people do leave school able to read and write, the standards of this reading and writing are no better than they were 30 years ago. Whilst the evidence for this has served to scotch the view held by some that there has been a drastic decline over the last generation it is still of great concern. Barber argues that people would be appalled if they were asked now to accept 1960s standards in, for example, broadcasting or medicine, and he states:

"Moreover standards must rise continuously if we are to keep up with the international competition and give children the skills they will need to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Remaining the same is not an option. We have to do better"  
(1997: 3-4)

In addition, the OECD study (1997) indicates that in a survey of twelve developed countries, Great Britain compared very poorly to its international competitors, with only Ireland and Poland having a higher proportion of adults with literacy skills at the lowest level.

### **1.5 Literacy and Poverty.**

Various studies have indicated that there is a correlation between literacy attainment and poverty. Nicholson argues that “children from low-income homes are less likely than children from middle-class homes to do well in school” (1997: 388). This, he suggests (1997), is due to a number of factors including the need to help out more with chores at home, the lack of a quiet place to study due to overcrowding, attendance at schools that are predominantly composed of children from other low-income homes<sup>1</sup>, poor adult literacy skills, and the fact that low-income parents may experience feelings of stress and inadequacy when dealing with school. Also, children from low-income families have less books in the home than middle and higher income families.

Dombey points out in many studies comparing the literacy skills of comparable countries, the scores of higher and mid-achievers has held up over the years. The ‘long-tail of under-achievement’ however has continued to grow alarmingly, and has served to bring down the average score for the country. This, she argues is associated with poverty, and states that:

“Britain now leads Europe in the gap created between the better off and those living in poverty: in the key five years between 1985 and 1990, the number of children officially designated as living in poverty quadrupled from 40,000 to 160,000” (1997: 23).

It is poverty, she argues (*ibid.*), and not poor teaching in schools, which seems to be responsible for ‘the tail of under-achievement’.

### **1.6 Whose Responsibility?**

Literacy attainment has traditionally been seen as the responsibility of the education system. It is increasingly being argued, however, that “literacy goals are a collective societal responsibility (Wolfendale 1997: 74). The Moser Report (1999) echoes this view, advocating a national strategy of ‘learning partnerships’ comprised of for example, public and private

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<sup>1</sup> Studies have indicated that children of any ability will perform better in a school with a relatively high concentration of pupils with good ability. This is known as the ability composition effect (Nicholson 1997).

sector companies, the library service, agencies working in health, crime prevention, housing and social, economic and community regeneration, community groups and the employment service. Her Majesty's Inspector John Hertich has similarly said "literacy is, or ought to be, a shared responsibility - it is too important to leave to English teachers" (cited in Rought-Brooks 2000: 16).

### **1.7 Specific Project to be Studied.**

The Broxtowe Bookstart/Bookworms project is a community led project which aims to raise literacy levels amongst people living in the Broxtowe Estate. In order to achieve this the project has taken a dual edged approach, providing free books for babies on the one hand, and through the provision of after-school clubs on the other. The Bookstart element is administered in a similar manner to the original Birmingham pilot (see Wade and Moore 1998), and the national scheme, in that books are given to babies, and parents are given support and encouraged to share books with their children. The after-school clubs are for children between the ages of 5 and 13 years, and are designed to promote reading as an enjoyable activity. Literacy levels are recognised as being of a low level throughout Nottingham, but are of particular concern in Broxtowe, one of the city's most deprived areas. In recognition of this the project is funded by Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) grants.

The Bookworms element of the project has been running for seven years now, and the Bookstart element for five years, and it's Steering Group decided that they would like the project to be evaluated. This was in part due to a need to evaluate the progress made in relation to the aims and objectives of the project, and in part because it has become increasingly necessary to produce some evidence of the impact of the project when making bids to the SRB. Such a study is also timely as there would appear to be little available literature on similar community (rather than school or university) led literacy initiatives.

### **1.8 Aims and Objectives.**

The aim of this study is to evaluate the Broxtowe Bookstart/Bookworms project. This will be done through the following four areas:

- An evaluation of the project on both parents, in terms of family literacy, and on the children's literacy levels themselves.

- A determination of the level of library use of the members of the project to: determine whether library membership has increased as a result of the project; whether parents are borrowing books for babies as a result of the Bookstart element of the project and; whether participants of the Bookworms after-school groups use the library more to borrow books, or for other reasons, for example homework support.
- Identifying, through the above two elements, the achievements, and the failings, of the project - that is to find out where the project has come from since its initiation, and identify where it stands today;
- Making recommendations to the Steering Group on how the project can be monitored continuously, in light of the need to provide information for the SRB bids.

The overall intention of the study is to draw conclusions about the extent to which the Bookstart/Bookworms project is achieving its aims and objectives, in particular its impact on the literacy levels of children participating in the study. It will hopefully be possible to highlight those areas where the project is successful, and any in which it is experiencing difficulties, and to make recommendations for future evaluation.

## **Chapter Two.**

### **Methodology.**

#### **2.0 Introduction.**

This project aims to evaluate a particular literacy project, considering in doing so several different facets. It does not set out to verify a pre-determined theory, and consequently no hypotheses were formulated prior to the research. Instead an inductive approach has been taken to the research such that the research examines a particular aspect of social life, in this case the management and outcomes of a literacy project, and derives theories from the data collected (May 1997). This formulation of theory and drawing of conclusions from the data is based in ‘grounded theory’ which “has as its explicit purpose the generation of theory from data” (Punch 1998: 166). Punch (ibid.) goes on to argue, however, that whilst grounded theory is largely inductive, it also makes use of theory verification (deduction) to a certain degree. He suggests that whilst the research may begin without a theory, it is not long before theories begin to emerge which the researcher wishes then to verify. This can be seen to be the case in the present research in which the first set of data collection put forward theories which were subsequently tested in further data collection. Once the basic research approach had been decided upon, it was then necessary to determine the nature of the data needed to carry out the research, and how this data could be obtained.

#### **2.1 Qualitative and Quantitative Data.**

It was felt that the data collected for this research would need to be predominantly qualitative. Qualitative data is descriptive, and seeks to “understand individuals’ perceptions of the world” (Bell 1996: 6). Such data was needed in order to ascertain what the project’s Steering Group members believed the Projects were aiming to achieve, what they were doing to achieve these aims, and whether they believed these aims were actually being achieved. Similarly it was also necessary to ascertain what views and perceptions the participants held on both the Projects themselves, and on the impact of the Projects. Quantitative data, which provides “information about the world, in the form of numbers” (Punch 1998: 58) was also needed, however, to provide objective, factual information on the impact of the project on library membership and participant use.



The need for both qualitative and quantitative data required the use of several different methods of data collection. Such a multi-method approach is known as triangulation, an approach described as:

“cross-checking the existence of certain phenomena and the veracity of individual accounts by gathering data from a number of informants and a number of sources and subsequently comparing and contrasting one account with another in order to produce as full and balanced a study as possible.”

(OU course E811 Study Guide, cited in Bell 1996:64)

The ability of the researcher to be able to compare and contrast data collected in varying ways is one of the main advantages of using a triangulation approach. It allows the researcher to gain as full a picture as possible, thus strengthening the validity of the research.

## **2.2 Methods of Investigation.**

A number of different methods of investigation were used to collect data for this study. These are as follows;

### **2.2.1 Literature Review.**

Before embarking on the course of study, a literature search was carried out in order to gain some background information and to ascertain current thinking on the subject in question. The initial search concentrated on research into Bookstart schemes and the ethos behind these. It also looked at pre-school literacy, influences on literacy development, and public library services to children. Consistent with a grounded theory approach, in which theories emerge out of the collected data, the literature review was updated throughout the course of the project as theories and issues began to present themselves. Further areas looked at included community groups and initiatives, group dynamics, literacy project evaluation and volunteers.

Literature was reviewed in several different fields, for example, education, the library and information sector, sociology, and psychology. A variety of sources were used in order to identify relevant literature, including bibliographies of major studies (for example Wade and Moore 1998, Hannon 1995), electronic databases and journals, and the Internet. For the purposes of this study however, the literature review has not been treated as, and presented as, a separate entity. Again, consistent with a grounded theory approach, the

literature has been treated as “further data for analysis” (Punch 1998: 43) and will therefore largely be considered throughout the report, but particularly in the analysis stages.

### **2.2.2 Preliminary Discussions.**

Preliminary discussions were held with Martin Shaw, Area Librarian with responsibility for the library involved with the Project, and Patsy Stannard, Community Librarian. These were informal, unstructured discussions to find out some of the background to the Projects, and to discuss the issues for investigation. Further informal discussions were held with Ada Gee, co-founder and Steering Group Chair, and Carole Asbury, Project Co-ordinator, again to gain some background knowledge of the Projects.

### **2.2.3 Interviews.**

When this research began, the Group did not have a formal constitution, and consequently did not have a formal set of aims and objectives to evaluate against. Some aims and objectives did exist, but in a fairly informal manner, and it was difficult to isolate these. Whilst the Group were in the process of forming an official constitution, the time limits of the study meant that there was not enough time to wait for it to be adopted (which it was on the 24<sup>th</sup> July 2000). It was therefore decided that all of the people involved in the management and running of the project should be interviewed in order to ascertain in the first instance what they believed the projects were trying to achieve. The interview was also designed to examine what the Group was doing to achieve its aims, and whether the members felt these aims were in fact actually being achieved. In addition some factual questions on the management of the projects were included in a bid to obtain management data.

The interview has been described as “a conversation between interviewer and respondent with the purpose of eliciting certain information from the respondent” (Moser and Kalton, cited in Bell 1996: 91). They are “a very good way of accessing people’s perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations, and constructions of reality” (Punch 1998: 175). As such they are an ideal tool for this element of the research. They may be time-consuming and costly to carry out, but they do have advantages over other methods, such as the questionnaire where responses have to be taken at face value, as they are a flexible and adaptable medium which allow the researcher to follow up comments or ideas which arise in

the course of the interview, to probe responses, and to clarify questions if necessary (Bell 1996).

A semi-structured interview technique was adopted for the purposes of this survey. The questions were predetermined, and were asked to each respondent in exactly the same way and order, however the semi-structured technique allowed the flexibility to probe and clarify responses. It also allows the respondent to answer more on their own terms than in the structured interview, in which responses need to fit into pre-determined response categories, whilst still providing some form of structure for comparability (May 1997). As the majority of the data required were dependent on the respondent being able to fully express their perceptions and beliefs, a technique using pre-set response categories was not suitable. An unstructured interview technique, in which the interviewer has no set of questions or schedule, was also deemed unsuitable, as there were specific questions that did need to be asked, and asked to all of the interviewees. An unstructured interview, it was felt, may result in relevant questions remaining unanswered and important data being missed.

#### **2.2.3.1. The Interview Sample.**

Initially it was hoped that all the members of the Steering Group could be interviewed, however this was not, in the end, possible. This was due in part to the fact that the Group is experiencing a substantial amount of change at present, and the make-up of the Steering Group changed over the course of the research following the Group's AGM. The following people were interviewed:

- Ada Gee - co-founder and Chair
- Paul Blythe - Treasurer and long-term volunteer
- Eunice Blythe - Committee member and long-term volunteer
- Carole Asbury - Project Co-ordinator
- Patsy Stannard - Community Librarian
- Don Bulmer - Community Development Worker
- Elaine Berrisford - Health Visitor

It was decided to interview Eunice Blythe due to the fact that she had been involved as a volunteer helper for the Bookworms sessions for about two years, and it was felt that she could provide valuable information. She was voted onto the committee on 24.7.2000, and remains the only official committee member at present. The Secretary was not interviewed, as this position had been vacant (with the Project Co-ordinator fulfilling the

administrative side of this role) until 24.7.2000. The person voted as Secretary was a new volunteer with the group, and his knowledge of the management of the projects and their impact was limited. It was decided therefore not to interview the Secretary. Similarly, whilst there were other volunteers, and two paid sessional workers, these were not interviewed as they joined the Project during the course of this research.

### **2.2.3.2 Design of the Interview Schedule.**

Berg (1995) suggests that the first stage of the development of any interview schedule lies in the nature of the investigation itself, and the objectives of the research. The determination of these two elements provides the researcher with a starting point from which to develop a schedule of questions. These elements were determined in this instance through the preliminary discussions and reading, and having determined them it was then necessary to decide upon the type of questions to be asked, and the content and ordering of the schedule (see Appendix One).

### **2.2.3.3 Type of Question.**

As this element of the research depended on ascertaining the beliefs and perceptions of the people involved in the management and running of the project, open-ended questions were, in the main, used. This was designed to allow the respondents to express themselves fully. Some closed questions were used in a few instances where factual information was required such as, for example, a date or example of an age group. Following Berg (1995), the interview schedule contained four types or styles of question:

- *Essential Questions* which “exclusively concern the central focus of the study” and which are “geared toward eliciting specific geared information” (ibid.:37) are used throughout to gain information on, for example, what the interviewees believe the projects are aiming to achieve, and whether these aims are being achieved;
- *Extra Questions*, those which are “roughly equivalent to certain essential questions but worded slightly differently” (ibid.: 38) are designed to examine either reliability in response, or the effect a change of wording may have. Limited use has been made of this type of question, however question 6.5 can be seen to be an extra question to question 4.5, as the latter seeks information on what the Bookworms project is doing to achieve it’s aims, whilst the former seeks similar information, but from the angle of what the Bookworms project uses to promote literacy;

- *Throw-Away Questions* are often found at the beginning of an interview and “may be essential demographic questions or general questions used to develop rapport between interviewers and subjects” (ibid.). Such questions have been used at the beginning of the schedule, in order to ease the interviewee into the interview;
- *Probing Questions* “provide interviewers with a way to draw out more complete stories from subjects” (ibid.). Probing questions have been asked in this research, where, for example, it has been necessary to ask respondents to elaborate on something they have said. Question 6.6 for example seeks information on whether or not the interviewee thinks that the materials used for the Bookworms sessions have been effective in promoting literacy. A probe has been used to ask the interviewee to elaborate on why they think this might be, if they have not volunteered the information themselves.

#### **2.2.3.4 Content and Question-wording.**

Bell (1996) suggests that whilst the wording of the interview questions needs almost the same amount of attention as do questionnaire questions, the interview does allow the interviewer to clarify for the interviewee any terms or questions which may prove a problem. Careful attention was paid, however, to the question-wording, the aim being to make the questions as clear as possible to the interviewees, and to avoid any bias or ambiguity. The questions were organised into five main areas:

- Section One: General Information - two ‘throw-away’ questions were asked about the nature and length of the respondent’s involvement with the projects, followed by two factual questions about when the projects were set up. These questions were designed to ease the respondent into the interview, whilst providing useful information at the same time.
- Section Two: Aims and Objectives - As there was no formal constitution available when the research began, this section was designed to gain an insight into what the different people involved with the project believed they were aiming to do, and to examine whether there were any discrepancies or disagreements.
- Section Three: Organisational Issues - This section was concerned largely with managerial issues involved in the running of the projects. The majority of the questions seek factual information, and cover: the scope of the projects; the materials used; funding and; the relationship between the community development, library and health services and the Projects.

- Section Four: Outcomes - This section sought to explore the respondents perceptions of the outcomes of the projects, through examining what, for them, meant success and failure.
- Section Five: The Future - this question sought information on how the respondents would like to see the projects moving forward in the future.

Finally, the interviewees were given the opportunity to make any other comments, or raise any other issues not covered in the interview.

#### **2.2.3.5 Implementation.**

The interviews were held over a two week period, in a variety of locations. Notes were taken, and the all the interviews were also taped, with the interviewees' permission. The interviews were taped so that points could be clarified at a later stage, and also so that correct quotations could be included in the research report. The tapes have not, however, been fully transcribed due to the limited amount of time available to carry out this research.

#### **2.2.4 Focus Group Interviews.**

The interviews held with those responsible for the management and running of the projects provided necessary data on what the projects were aiming to achieve, how these aims were being achieved, and whether or not the Group thought they were being realised. It has been argued (Bell 1996, May 1997) however, that interviews can only reveal how people *perceive* what happens, not what actually happens. After establishing how the Group perceived the success of the project it was decided to examine the views of the parents and carer's of participating children, in order to try to arrive at a true picture of the impact of the projects.

It was decided that focus group interviews should be used to gather data from the parents and carers' of participating children. The focus group can be defined very simply as "an interview style designed for small groups" (Berg 1995: 68), and it was decided that they would be the most useful data collection technique for this element of the research for several reasons. Firstly, they rely on the strengths of qualitative research methods, including "exploration and discovery, understanding things in depth and in context, and interpreting why things are the way they are and how they got that way" (Morgan 1998: 31). Secondly, they hold several advantages over the face-to-face interview in certain situations. The first of these advantages is one of time-saving. In the focus group interview several people are all

seen at once, saving time, and subsequently large amounts of concentrated data is collected in a short period of time. Bearing in mind the short amount of time in which to complete the current research, this was an important factor. However the dynamics of the group interview were also an significant consideration.

Focus groups are distinguished from other forms of interviews by the use of group discussions to generate data (Morgan 1998). They do not provide detailed personal accounts about the unique experiences of particular people, as generated by the face-to-face interview (ibid.), however in this instance the research did not require such data. Instead focus groups make use of group interaction to stimulate discussion between participants, with the interviewer acting as a moderator. It has been argued (Punch 1998, Morgan 1998) that this group interaction can produce data which would not arise, or at least be less accessible, without the interaction found in groups, exposing opinions and experiences which may not have otherwise been made available. Berg sums up this advantage, arguing that:

“A far larger number of ideas, issues, topics, and even solutions to a problem can be generated through group discussion than through individual conversations. Indeed, it is this group energy that distinguishes focus group interviews from more conventional styles of one-on-one, face-to-face interviewing approaches” (1998: 69).

A questionnaire survey was advised against by the members of the Steering Group, as it was felt that the response rate would be very low, due to the low levels of adult literacy in the area. Gillham (2000) argues that many people who can read perfectly well often have difficulty with spelling or expressing themselves in writing, and that therefore a questionnaire can seem daunting. To those who cannot read well, then an alternative data collection technique is needed. Gillham also argues that it is “an almost universal truth” (ibid.: 13) that people talk more easily than they write. Using a focus group approach would allow parents and carers to express their views verbally, without having to read anything, or write their answers. As the full expression of the ideas, opinions and experiences was needed, the focus group was therefore deemed the most appropriate method of data collection.

#### **2.2.4.1 Focus Group Sample.**

Having decided that the focus group was the most appropriate method of data collection for this element of the research, it was then necessary to determine who should be

invited to participate. The Steering Group members advised that they felt it would be difficult to get anyone at all who would be willing to participate and bearing this in mind it was decided to hold three focus groups in total, one for each of the elements of the Group's work (i.e. one focused on Bookstart, one on the 5-7 age group Bookworms club, and one for the 8-13 age group Bookworms club). As the number of children participating in the Bookworms clubs is relatively small, and bearing in mind the suspicion that it may be difficult to find people willing to participate, an invitation was sent out to all of the parents and carers the week before the sessions were due to take place.

There are substantially more children registered with the project under Bookstart (282) and the decision was made to invite parents through a systematic random probability sample of the database. In a probability sample everyone in a relevant 'population' has a chance of being selected, thus helping to ensure representativeness (Punch 1998), and the probability of this selection is known. It is important in such a sample that a complete (or as complete as possible) list of the population exists (May 1997), which there is in this case, as details of all the children receiving a Bookstart pack are kept on a database. Systematic sampling is a convenient way to draw a sample when there is a list or database available and involves the systematic selection of every  $n$ th person from that list. This method of sampling was the most useful in this instance, as the Bookstart database is not set up, and there was not time to set it up, in such a way to support a random sample in which each entry would be given a unique number, starting from one, and a mathematically random selection made with the aid of a computer or specifically produced random number tables. Nor was a stratified sample suitable, as the sample did not need to take in to account characteristics such as age group, gender, type of housing and so on (Punch 1998). A strategic random sample was therefore made of every third entry on the database, providing a sample of 94. A letter was sent out to the parent or carer of each child in the sample one week before the session was to take place.

The Group felt that people may not be willing to participate as adult literacy levels are very low in the area, and therefore people may not feel able or confident enough to participate, and secondly that people in the area may be suspicious of the idea of 'research'. The sessions were therefore billed as a 'coffee and chat', inviting parents to 'come and tell



us what you think about...'. In addition incentives were offered in the form of a guaranteed prize in a tombola of high-quality goods<sup>2</sup>.

#### **2.2.4.2 Design of the Focus Group Interview Schedule.**

The design of the focus group interview schedule was difficult in that the questions needed to be fairly easily understood, to take account of low literacy levels in the area, but at the same time not patronisingly so. Following Krueger (1994) the schedule contained five kinds of questions:

- Opening Question - a quick factual question, answered by everyone, to begin the interview process. In this case this question asked participants to give their names, and to say how many children they had participating in the schemes. This was designed mainly as an ice-breaker, but also served to give some idea of the extent of each person's involvement with the Projects.
- Introductory Question - designed to introduce the general topic of discussion, and to foster conversation and interaction between the participants. In the case of the Bookstart interview this question centred on the participants views of the Bookstart packs, and whether or not they had received an explanation of what the pack was for when they were given them at the 7-9 month hearing check. In the case of the Bookworms session, this question asked participants to reflect on the length of time their children had been involved with Bookworms. The aim of this question was to provide participants with the opportunity to reflect on their connection with Bookworms.
- Transition Question - transition questions move the topic towards the key questions driving the study, and help participants to understand the topic in a broader context. In order to do this, in the case of the Bookstart session, participants were asked to consider whether or not they had thought of sharing books with their babies before being involved with Bookstart, thus moving the topic towards the central concerns of the impact of the Project. In the Bookworms sessions participants were asked to consider what it was their children enjoyed about attending Bookworms, thus getting participants to reflect on the various activities their children experienced.
- Key Questions - These are the questions central to the study. These questions were concerned with obtaining an insight into the parents and carers perceptions of the impact of the projects. For the Bookworms sessions participants were also asked their opinions

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<sup>2</sup> All of the goods for the Tombola were provided by Bookworms/Bookstart. The Group paid for the hiring of rooms, refreshments, and postage. They also offered to pay travelling expenses, however

on the role of the library in the project. This was included as the Community Librarian had expressed some concern about the role of the library in the Projects, particularly with regards to the Project's future developments.

- Ending Question - brings the discussion to a close, allowing the participants to reflect back on what has been said. In all the sessions a summary of the main points was given, in order to check that the points raised during discussion had been thoroughly understood. Each group was then asked to reflect on what the Projects did, and whether or not they had any suggestions to put forward with regards to how the projects were run, activities and so on. Each group was finally given the opportunity to make further comments or raise points not previously discussed during the session (see Appendix Two).

#### **2.2.4.3 Implementation.**

The holding of the sessions depended largely on the availability of suitable rooms to hold them in. The Bookstart session was held in the morning in the local Family Centre. The Bookworms sessions were held in the same venue as the Bookworms clubs, and were held at the same time as the clubs, but in alternative rooms. Several parents brought their children down to the sessions, and it was felt that they may be more prepared to participate in sessions if they were already on the premises.

In the end there were problems in holding the sessions, because, as expected turnout was very low. These problems will be discussed in detail below, however it was clear that an alternative method would have to be applied to collect sufficient data on Bookstart, and after contact was made several people did agree to talk about the projects over the telephone.

#### **2.2.5 Telephone Interviews.**

Contact was made by the Project Co-ordinator whilst the focus group interview was taking place, and it was therefore necessary to phone back those people who agreed to talk later in the day. Two were unfortunately repeatedly out when they were rung back, and so only four people extra to the three that attended the focus group session were eventually spoken to. They were asked the same questions, in the same order, as the people who attended the focus group session.

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these were declined.

May (1997) suggests that there are several advantages to the telephone interview in that they can be quicker than face-to-face interviews, thus saving time, and that being relatively anonymous people may be less concerned about talking to someone on the phone rather than face-to-face. There are disadvantages too, however. The telephone interviewer cannot see the non-verbal signals and gestures of the respondent which could prompt the interviewer to probe or explore further what a respondent is saying. In addition, and of significant importance in this instance, is the fact that obviously group dynamics cannot come into play.

### **2.2.6 Questionnaire.**

Schools are obviously interested in the literacy of the children attending them, and so the decision was taken to contact the schools serving the area to ascertain their views on the Bookworms project. As time was short, and the schools were coming to the end of the summer term, and so very busy, a questionnaire was sent out to the schools, rather than attempting to arrange to speak to someone directly. An interview, either face-to-face or over the telephone, would have been the preferred method, as it would have provided more in depth information than the short questionnaire eventually decided upon, and would have given the school's representative the opportunity to express their views fully. Under the circumstances there was not enough time to arrange and carry out such interviews.

Questionnaires are a useful data collection tool as they are relatively cheap, and are less time-consuming than face-to-face and focus group interviews. They can provide an anonymous medium for people to express their views, and people can take their own time in filling them in, and therefore consider their responses more. There are equally several disadvantages to their use. The researcher loses control once they are posted, and the questions need to be kept as clear and simple as possible as the researcher has no control over how respondents are interpreting and considering questions. In addition answers have to be taken at face value and the opportunity to probe responses beyond the answer given is absent, and the response rate to postal questionnaire surveys is often very low (May 1997).

#### **2.2.6.1 Questionnaire Sample.**

The questionnaire sample comprised all five of the infant and junior schools serving the area. Due to this small number it was possible to include all of them in the study. The schools in question were:

- Brocklewood Infant and Nursery School
- Brocklewood Junior School
- Highwood Player Infant and Nursery School
- Highwood Player Junior School
- Seagrave Primary School

#### **2.2.6.2 Questionnaire Design.**

Self-response questionnaires need to be completed without assistance, and therefore questions need to be self-explanatory, clear, and not ambiguous. Misunderstandings cannot be corrected. The questionnaire can contain several different types of question, the most usual being the closed question, requiring a simple yes/no answer, or for the respondent to select an answer from a predetermined range. Less usually, open questions may be used in which the respondent indicates their opinions, beliefs or judgements (Gillham 2000). Such questions can be difficult to analyse, as a large survey can result in a vast assortment of different answers, or respondents are forced to choose predetermined categories which do not reflect their real opinions (ibid.). In addition, questions can be used which ask the respondent to choose and answer depending on a scale, for example Likert Scales, where respondents are asked to indicate the strength of agreement or disagreement with a given statement (Bell 1996).

For the purpose of this questionnaire, closed questions requiring a simple yes/no answer were used to gain information on whether or not the schools knew about the Bookworms project, whether they had, or would, refer children to the club, and whether or not they thought that the club had an impact on children's literacy. In addition, open questions were used, inviting the respondent to briefly explain their answers, and at the end of the questionnaire there was the opportunity to make additional comments. Due to the short nature of the questionnaire, and the smallness of the sample, problems with its analysis were not envisaged, and the open-ended questions were included in order to obtain qualitative data on the schools' opinions and beliefs.

The questionnaire was kept as deliberately short as possible, and comprised only five full questions, with two sub-questions. This would usually be considered too short. Gillham (2000) suggests, for example that a 'slight' questionnaire may not be taken seriously, however, due to time considerations the questionnaire was kept deliberately short

to encourage schools to fill it in at a traditionally very busy time. The respondents were also assured that their responses would be treated in strict confidence, and were also anonymous once the accompanying letter was removed (see Appendix Three).

### **2.2.6.3. Implementation.**

The questionnaire was sent out to all of the five schools mentioned above, and was addressed to the head-teacher of each school. Postal questionnaires can have a low response rate, and Gillham (2000) suggests that one of the reasons for this may lie in the fact that respondents are often uncertain as to what happens to data. Besides issues of anonymity and confidentiality, respondents are often not aware of why the information is being collected, or to what use the data will be put to. Gillham further suggests that making this clear is not only a ‘courtesy formality’, but that “it could have a major effect on whether or not someone completes the questionnaire” (ibid.: 13). Bearing this in mind, a covering letter was sent out with the questionnaire clearly explaining that the data was not only needed for a dissertation project, but would eventually form part of an evaluation which the Group hoped to use to improve their activities in the future. A brief explanation was also given on the questionnaire itself, in case the questionnaire and letter became separated, and a stamped addressed envelope was provided as this can again form “a big factor in getting a response” (ibid.: 46).

### **2.2.7 Library Circulation Management Data.**

The final collection of data for this research centred on the need to establish the impact of the project on library membership, and on participant’s use of the library. In order to do this all participants on both Bookstart and Bookworms databases were checked against library records. The aim of this was firstly to check:

- Membership - Details were checked to ascertain how many of the children held library membership. In the case of Bookstart, all children on the list should have had membership, as the registration forms are filled out by the Health Workers when giving out the packs. Checking the list in this manner would help to determine whether this registration was working properly. In the case of Bookworms membership was both voluntary, and at the discretion of a parent or carer, and checking membership figures would help to determine the extent of membership in the clubs;
- Borrowing - The ‘history’ of each child holding library membership was checked in order to collect data on borrowing patterns. Borrowing was checked over a year long

period, from July 1999 to July 2000, to give an indication of how many children involved with both elements had borrowed from either the library on the estate (Strelley Road Library), or other libraries in the city. This also provided data on how many items children were borrowing over the year long period.

- Type of borrowing - Through checking the 'history' of each Bookworms child with membership it was possible to determine what kind of materials children were borrowing.

At no time were notes made as to which children were or were not borrowing, or what it was that individual children had borrowed over the period in question. In order to protect confidentiality, and due to data protection considerations, only figures were recorded, and notes taken on the type of books borrowed. Such data were all that were needed for this element of the research, however.

### **2.3 The Data Collection 'In Context'.**

Biklen argues that "qualitative research has the natural setting as the direct source of data" (1992: 29) and that "qualitative researchers go to the particular setting under study because they are concerned with context" (ibid.:30). The idea behind this is that the research issue has to be understood in the context of the institutions or environments of which it is a part. Bearing this in mind, as much of the current research as possible was done 'in context'. Interviews were held in the interviewees homes or work places, all situated on the Broxtowe estate, and focus group sessions were held in the local Family and Community Centres. Several Project Steering Group meetings were attended, as were Bookworms sessions and Bookstart events, in order to experience the running of the projects, and their actual activities.

This was not official 'observation' research in which the researcher, in varying degrees of participation, spends a great deal of time with the community or population being researched, aiming to understand from people's actions what they do, and the meanings of those actions and events to the people being studied (Bell 1996, Punch 1998). It was however useful in helping to gain some sort of basic understanding of the community the Projects were set in, and of the running of the Project. In a bid to set the research further in context, a community profile has also been formed. Following Beal (1985) several sources were used in the compilation of this profile, including quantitative 'hard' data, which

involves the use of statistical social indicators (for example Census data, and official documents), and qualitative ‘soft’ data, which is more evaluative and descriptive (for example Community Development reports, newspaper reports, and the comments made by residents of the area).

## **2.4 Observations on the Data Collection Techniques.**

### **2.4.1 Interviews.**

Overall the interviews went quite well, with everyone making themselves freely available for interview, and were happy to answer all the questions. In hindsight, there were some problems with the design of the interview schedule. The same schedule, covering all of the group’s activities, was used for all interviewees, however not all of the interviewees were involved with all of the activities, and so some questions were irrelevant to some of the respondents. For example, the Health Visitor is only involved with the Bookstart element, and was not in a position to answer questions on the Bookworms element, similarly Committee Member and volunteer, Eunice Blythe, was only involved with the Bookworms session and had no dealings with the Bookstart element. Fortunately this possibility was recognised before the interviews were held with the relevant people, and this was therefore explained to them before hand. During the interview they then merely indicated which questions they could not answer. A similar situation arose with the questions asking for management information, for example question 7.2), which asks about funding, or questions 5.4) and 5.7) which asks for the number of children which had been involved with the projects over time. One or two respondents did not know the answers to these questions, and one or two made a vague estimation. The exact information could only come from those people either directly involved with the particular issue in question, for example the treasurer in the case of funding, or the Project Co-ordinator who holds, for example, attendance records.

### **2.4.2. Focus Groups.**

There were problems with the focus groups in the fact that, as expected, attendance was very low. No-one turned up for the Bookstart session, and it was necessary to telephone a few people on the sample list to ask if they would mind popping down to the Family Centre for a few minutes. Two families did eventually arrive, a total of just three people. Krueger suggests that “the ideal size of a focus group typically falls between 6 and 9 participants” (1994: 78), however he goes on to suggest that ‘mini-focus groups’ are

becoming increasingly popular due to the fact that they are easier to recruit and are more comfortable for participants. The disadvantage of such groups is that as the group is smaller the range of experiences is consequently smaller (Krueger 1994). Merton et al. (cited in Lewis 1995) suggests that group size should neither be too large that it precludes adequate participation by most members nor that it should be so small that it fails to provide substantially greater coverage than that of an interview with one individual. In this instance the small size of the group did not prevent it producing a significant amount of data, which was indeed substantially more than an individual interview.

Turnout was again very low for the Bookworms focus groups, with only one parent actually turning up expressly to participate. Holding the Bookworms focus group sessions whilst the club was running turned out to be a good idea, as it was possible to catch parents when they dropped their children off, and persuade them to participate. Several parents were quite willing to participate once asked directly. One parent could not participate in the focus group, but came back towards the end of the session, and went through the same questions. With regards to the questions asked, it is apparent in hindsight that one or two may be leading. The transition question for the Bookworms sessions asks what children enjoy about coming to the sessions. In asking the question in this manner an assumption has been made that the children *do* enjoy attending, and no account has been made for those who don't, nor is the opportunity provided at this stage for discussion of any elements that the children *don't* enjoy.

Despite the problems getting people to participate, the focus group sessions eventually did run quite well. It is widely recognised (Morgan 1998, Greenbaum 1998, Krueger 1994) that one of the most difficult tasks in implementing a focus group interview lies in moderating it effectively. The moderator has to control dominating respondents, without embarrassing or alienating them, whilst at the same time encouraging the more passive members of the group. Fortunately these problems did not arise in any of the sessions, with all participants speaking quite freely, with no-one person dominating the discussion. This may have been because most of the people participating knew each other quite well, or at least knew of each other.

One problem that did arise was that of extraneous noise. Greenbaum (1998) states that the management of noise levels during focus group interviews is very important, and it



was certainly a problem during the Bookstart session. In anticipation that participants may need to bring young children with them, the session was held in the Family Centre, in a room with plenty of toys and books for the children to play with. In order to supervise the children it was necessary to hold the interview in the same room (a suitably qualified person was not available to supervise the children in a separate room), and this resulted in a lot of background noise, making the tape recording of the interview very hard to listen too, and leading to quite a few interruptions from the children.

There are several possible reasons for the fact that attendance was low at the sessions. As noted earlier, adult literacy levels on the estate are low, and despite attempts to bill the sessions in as 'friendly' a manner as possible, it may be that some people still did not feel confident enough to participate. The invitations were also printed, and though they were worded as simply as possible, they still required reading. Recruitment may have been more successful if people had been contacted by telephone, and invited in this manner. This method was avoided however as it would have introduced a bias to the research, in that not all families have a telephone. A further, and more concerning, reason for low participation was suggested by those who did take part, and this was that many parents on the estate simply aren't interested enough in their children's literacy to be bothered to discuss it (see 7.7).

Despite the problems experienced in running the focus group sessions, and the fact that it was necessary to use other methods, i.e. telephone interviews, to gain additional data, the sessions did provide a lot of highly pertinent data. The last question of the interview gave participants the opportunity to give their opinions on what they thought the group could do in the future, or if they thought anything needed to be done differently. A wealth of suggestions were offered, a full list of which were given to the Group to consider, shortly after the sessions were held (see Appendix Six).

### **2.4.3. Telephone Interviews.**

Although the same interview schedule was used for the telephone interviews as for the Bookstart focus group session, the interviews never-the-less went quite well. The question regarding the contents of the Bookstart pack was a potential problem, as in the session both packs were shown to the participants. Obviously this was not possible in the telephone interviews, however most respondents appeared to readily remember what they

contained, and the sub-questions served well to jog the memory. The group dynamics characteristic of focus group interviews were also absent, however the interviews did prove to be valuable, and a fair amount of data was recorded.

#### **2.4.4 Questionnaire.**

The shortness of the questionnaire meant that it was not ideal, none-the-less it did provide relevant data. Three out of the five questionnaires sent out were returned, one having only the tick boxes filled in, the other two having additional comments.

#### **2.4.5. General Limitations.**

In addition to the above mentioned difficulties experienced in the research, there were a number of general limitations which had an effect on the research.

- It was not possible for the course of this study to conclusively test the influence of the Project on the participating children's literacy attainment. This was due to the fact that, in the case of Bookworms, there was also no way of knowing the level of the child's literacy when it entered the Project against which to test the current level of literacy. It is also impossible to isolate the influence of the Project from other influences, for example, home and school, both of which can be important influences in literacy attainment. This can only be done through the use of a control group, which was not possible in these circumstances, and may have been unethical.
- It may have been useful to examine the baseline assessment results of children going into school, who have received the Bookstart pack, and examining these against children who had not received the pack. This was done in the Birmingham Bookstart pilot study (Wade and Moore 1998), however it was not possible in these circumstances due to data protection limitations. Whilst it may have been possible to obtain both the schools and the parents permission, this would have been a very long and complicated procedure, and the limited amount of time available to carry out this research made this impossible.
- *Time limitations* effected the research in several ways. It was not possible, for example to arrange interviews with representatives of the schools serving the area, and it was not possible to try to arrange further focus group sessions, using alternative methods of recruitment, after attendance was so low.
- *Pilot studies* could not be carried out, partly due again to time limitations, but also because the samples for the interviews and the questionnaire were so small, and

remained constant. It is generally argued (for example Kane 1987, May 1997, Punch 1998) that a pilot study is an essential element of the data collection method, enabling the researcher to identify any weaknesses in the research design. In this case however, conducting pilot studies for the interviews and questionnaire would have meant asking the same people two sets of questions. The interview schedule was, however, discussed at length with the dissertation supervisor.

- *Bias* unfortunately became unavoidable in the focus group sessions. As no-one turned up at first for the Bookstart session the Project Co-ordinator rang the first few people on the sample list for whom there was a contact number available. This introduced bias in that the eventual participants were those who, firstly could be contacted by telephone, and secondly were the first on the list. The telephone interviews were also biased for the same reasons. Bias also plays a strong part in the nature of the people who participated, as those who eventually agreed to attend the Bookstart, or talk over the telephone, and who participated in the Bookworms sessions, were all adults with relatively good literacy skills themselves, and who took a keen and active interest in their children's literacy. They were identified as such by the Project Co-ordinator who played a big part in persuading people to participate, as she was well known to them (no member of the Group took any part whatsoever in the focus group sessions themselves however, to avoid the risk of participants not feeling they could express their true feelings).

## **2.5 Data Analysis.**

The data has been analysed in line with the use of a grounded theory approach, in that theory and conclusions have derived from the data (May 1997). As such, several themes emerged from the data, and these have been considered under four chapters, namely:

The Project I: Background and Aims and Objectives

The Project II: What the Project Does

Management Issues

Project Outcomes

## **2.6 Validity.**

All of the research methods used in this study have been made explicit, so that the research can be both evaluated and replicated. The research has in the main involved

qualitative data the quotations have been used throughout have been chosen to faithfully reflect the situations found<sup>3</sup>.

## **2.7 Generalising From the Findings.**

Generalising from qualitative research is a difficult. Punch argues however that “generalisation should not necessarily be the objective of all research papers” (1998:154). It has not been the intention of this study to generalise, but rather “to understand this case in its complexity and its entirety, as well as its context” (ibid.). Broxtowe Bookworms/Bookstart is a particular project, involving particular people and agencies, in a particular setting. As such, generalisations cannot be made. Punch also suggests (ibid.), however, that whilst generalisation may not be possible, there is still much to learn from qualitative studies, particularly if the case in question is unusual, unique or little understood. There is little literature available on projects like the Broxtowe Bookworms/Bookstart Project, and it is hoped therefore that this study will provide some useful information.

## **2.8 Summary.**

- The research has been inductive in its approach, and has made use of mainly qualitative methods of data collection in order to understand the perceptions on the running of the Projects, and their effectiveness, of a variety of stakeholders. A variety of methods of data collection have been used, consistent with a triangulation approach, in order to gain as full and balanced a study as possible.
- The data collection essentially began with a literature review. This was followed by the interviewing of the people involved in the management and running the Projects, in an attempt to ascertain what they believed the Projects were trying to achieve, how they were achieving their aims, and whether or not these aims were in fact being achieved.
- In order to cross-check the perceived effectiveness of the Projects, focus group and telephone interviews were held with the parents or carers of participating children, and a questionnaire was sent out to primary schools serving the area.
- Library circulation statistics were examined to check the Project’s impact on library membership and borrowing for both the Bookstart children, and the members of the Bookworms clubs.

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<sup>3</sup> These quotation are presented verbatim, with punctuation added to illustrate the delivery of the dialogue. All quotations from parents, carers and schools are presented anonymously in order to ensure confidentiality. Group members were happy to waive confidentiality, but in the most part it has not been necessary to identify the respondent.

- Overall the data collection went reasonably well, and sufficient data were collected. Some difficulties were experienced however, particularly with regards to recruiting focus group participants.
- The research experienced several limitations, namely time restraints, the lack of a pilot study, and a strong bias in favour of parents with a strong interest in their children's literacy, thus effecting the representatives of this element of the study.

## Chapter Three.

### **Community Profile.**

#### **3.1 Introduction.**

Broxtowe Bookworms and Bookstart projects serve the estate of Broxtowe, in the City of Nottingham. It is an area which experiences severe problems, and it was felt that in order to understand the projects thoroughly the research had to be set ‘in context’, and a community profile has therefore been developed with this in mind.

#### **3.2 The Estate.**

Broxtowe estate is a large housing estate on the north west boundary of the City, containing in the region of 2,000 houses. It was built mainly in the 1930’s, on the site of the old Broxtowe Hall, an historic mansion which was pulled down in 1937 to make way for the estate (Strauss 1989). Built in one depression, the estate suffered in that its problems were not recognised until another. 1983 saw the publication of The Broxtowe Estate Development Plan (1983), which described the estate thus:

“Broxtowe is without doubt one of the least attractive of Nottingham’s low density council estates” (ibid.: 4).

The Plan identified many of its problems as having arisen due to the layout of the estate. The basic design of the estate is a geometric street pattern of radial roads, extending from a central circle, and contained within an overall oval shape (see Appendix Four). This sort of design was common in the pre-war period, and in most the central circle would have been made the centre of the community. In the case of Broxtowe estate, however, the central circle, Denton Green, was originally left as a rough open space, and instead of being surrounded by amenities, for example shops, a clinic, etc. was surrounded by semi-detached houses. The report further suggests that the estate has been neglected due to the fact that it is an outlying estate, cut off by its location, and therefore no-one had cause to pass through it. The worst areas on the estate were identified as those lying furthest away from the roads skirting the estate to the south and east, and beyond the estate lay a vast tip.

The report further identified that “there is a severe lack of public open space and that space is fast being eroded” (ibid.: 5). There was an argument for keeping the space at Denton Green, however there was no where else to situate the much needed Community Centre, and a large Co-op supermarket was built on former school playing fields. The

Community Centre continues to be a vital resource for the estate, containing a nursery, meeting rooms, youth centre, and café. Several of the large semi-detached houses immediately circling the Centre have been converted and now house a Family Centre, “nearly new” centre, Broxtowe Partnership Trust, which co-ordinates regeneration projects on the estate, and the Broxtowe Bookstart/Bookworms offices.

The Broxtowe Estate Development Plan incensed many of the residents of the estate on its publication. Many objected to the depiction of the estate as a “depressing wasteland” (Evening Post 1985), however following the report, and a programme of modernisation developments have been made on the estate. By 1997 “the Government had pumped more than £6m into regenerating the area and providing the facilities which many determined residents had fought for” (Evening Post 1997).

### 3.3 The Population.

There are no exact figures for the population of Broxtowe estate itself. A 1997 ‘provisional estimate’ taken from the Deprivation Profile of Strelley Ward (2000)<sup>4</sup>, in which the Broxtowe estate is situated, gives a figure of 9, 990. The 1997 estimate breaks this figure down as:

Under 15	3, 230	32%
15 to 29	2, 010	20%
30 to 44	2, 100	21%
45 to 64	1, 460	15%
65 and over	1, 190	12%

The Broxtowe Estate Development Plan (1983) suggested that the structure of the population of the estate was to a large extent defined by the nature of the housing, (mainly medium to large family houses) and to housing allocation policies which placed large families in the larger houses. Also playing a part were “the less formal workings of choice, or lack of it, in the housing market” (ibid.: 5). The 1991 Census figures indicate that the ethnic composition of the Strelley Ward is predominantly white (96%) (1991 Census Atlas of Nottinghamshire 1997).

10.9% of households in the Strelley Ward are lone parent households, against an England Average of 4.1%, and a Nottinghamshire average of 4.2% (ibid.), with 39.6% of

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<sup>4</sup> This profile was supplied by the Broxtowe Partnership, who in turn received it from the City Council. It is a simple one page breakdown of deprivation indicators produced by the City Council for projects like the Trust.

households having dependent children (against an England average of 29.9%, and a Nottinghamshire average of 30.2%) (ibid.). The number of households containing dependants<sup>5</sup> is also high. The 1991 Census indicates that 59.7% of households in the Strelley Ward have dependants (against average figures of 45.0% for England, and 47.6% for Nottinghamshire) (ibid.).

The Broxtowe Estate Development Plan (1983) suggested that Broxtowe had the highest overcrowding in the County, with 14.2% of households having more than one person per room, and in one census enumeration district, this figure rose to 35%. Following the report steps were taken to tackle this issue, and the larger houses were deliberately under-let in a bid to reduce child numbers on the estate. The 1991 Census however suggested that despite these attempts overcrowding remained an issue with overcrowding in the Strelley Ward at 4.5% (against average figures of 2.1% for England, and 1.6% for Nottinghamshire) (1991 Census Atlas of Nottinghamshire 1997). The Social Need in Nottinghamshire Study (1994) gives a standard deviation from the mean figure of 4.1 for the estate itself.

The Broxtowe Estate Development Plan (1983) suggests that “despite its deprivation Broxtowe is not, unlike some inner city areas, a neighbourhood where the sense of community has broken down” (1983: 6). The population of the estate remains relatively stable, and there are several second, even third generation households, and therefore some extensive kinship networks. It has been further suggested that there is a positive attitude towards the estate by its residents, and that although “Broxtowe may be a deprived area, it is not a depressed area; it contains more people who want to see the estate improved than those who just want to leave it” (ibid.). This attitude was still in place eleven years later, when despite serious problems on the estate one resident stated “even though I am scared to walk down the street, I don’t want to move. This is my home....” (Evening Post 1994). It is further reflected in the number of multi-agency initiatives set up to try to tackle some of the estate’s problems.

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<sup>5</sup> Either a child or person with a limiting long term illness and therefore permanently sick or retired.



### **3.4 Housing.**

The Estate was built under three different Housing Acts (1923, 1930, and 1935), but mostly under the 1935 Act, which aimed to provide large houses at reduced subsidies to tackle the problem of overcrowding in the centre of cities. The houses on the Broxtowe Estate were built to low densities, many having large gardens. Many were built with outside toilets and downstairs bathrooms. The modernisation programme which began in the early 1980's sought to rectify some of the problems. A 'Special Management Area' was set up in 1980 in the most deprived area of the estate, where modernisation work began first. This included the opening of an estate housing office, and a move towards a more informal kind of contact between tenants and the Housing Department.

1991 Census figures indicate that 35.5% of dwellings in the Strelley ward are owner-occupied, way below the figures of 67.6% for England and 68.2% for Nottinghamshire (1991 Census Atlas of Nottinghamshire 1997). 60.2% of properties are local authority rented, significantly higher figure than the England average of 19.8%, and the Nottinghamshire average of 21% (ibid.).

### **3.5 Employment.**

The Broxtowe Estate Development Plan stated that "unemployment on the estate is a major problem with rates well over double that for the Nottingham area, at 23% at the time of the (1981) Census" (1983:6). Current figures, taken in January 1999 (Deprivation Profile for Strelley Ward), indicate that there has been some improvement, with unemployment standing at 14.1%. This remains significantly higher than the 9.6% average for the City however. Youth employment, identified as a problem in the Broxtowe Estate Development Plan, also remains low. The Social Need In Nottinghamshire (1994) indicates a 1.85 standard deviation from the mean for the Broxtowe Estate.

Of those residents who do have jobs, the 1991 Census figures illustrate that only 9.8% were in 'professional, managerial and technical occupation, against figures of 31.2% for England, and 27.7% for the County (1991 Census Atlas of Nottinghamshire 1997), and 42% were in partly skilled and unskilled occupations, against figures of 20.9% for England and 23.9% for the County (ibid.).

In view of the employment situation facing the Strelley ward, and the Broxtowe estate, it is not surprising that the estate scores very highly on a number of indices of poverty. The Social Deprivation Profile for the Strelley Ward indicates that 40% of households receive income support (as of August 1998), and 49% receive housing and council tax benefit (as of March 1999). Ofsted reports<sup>6</sup> for the schools serving the Broxtowe estate indicate that the numbers of children eligible to receive free school meals are also well above average, being:

Brocklewood Infant and Nursery School	64%
Brocklewood Junior School	68%
Highwood Player Infant and Nursery School	60%
Highwood Player Junior School	67%
Seagrave Primary School	58%

In addition to these figures, another important indicator is the number of households without a car. Figures show that 58.5% of households did not have use of a car (1991 Census Atlas of Nottinghamshire 1997). This is a significant point, bearing in mind the estate's distance from most sources of employment and other amenities (Broxtowe Estate Development Plan 1983), however the estate is well served by public transport.

### **3.6 Health.**

The Broxtowe Estate Development Plan states that:

“Low income levels are commonly associated with health problems and an example of this is the proportion of low birthweight babies born to Broxtowe mothers, which is one third higher than the County average.” (1983: 6)

Low birth weights are still a problem. The Deprivation Profile for Strelley Ward records that 8.2% of birth weights were low in the period 1993-1997, the City average being 6.8%. The area also experiences health problems in other areas. The Deprivation Profile for Strelley ward places the ward as third highest in the city for instances of ‘Injury and Poisoning under 14’, and fifth highest for instances of both heart disease (all ages) and mortality under 65.

Health problems in the area are to be tackled through the Health Action Zone initiative, which aims “to tackle inequalities in health in the most deprived areas of England

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<sup>6</sup> The latest inspection report for each school was accessed through the OFSTED website <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>, except for that of the William Crane Comprehensive which has been placed in special measures.

through health and social care service modernisation programmes, whilst addressing the wider determinants of health, including housing, education and employment” (What Are Health Action Zones (HAZs) 2000: 1). This initiative has been operational since 1<sup>st</sup> April 1999, and its high priority work includes taking action to reduce accidents amongst children and young people, promoting better teenage sexual health, and reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies, particularly amongst those under 16 (Nottingham HAZ ).

### **3.7 Crime.**

It was difficult to find figures on crime in the area, although the estate clearly has experienced severe problems in the past. Problems in the estate culminated in riots in 1993, and for a while the estate had a reputation as “the City’s wild west - a lawless area terrorised by young car thieves and vandals” (Nottingham Arrow 1994). The Nottingham Evening Post, however, suggested that the majority of residents on the estate were “beginning to reclaim their estate from the minority of hardcore criminals who have “ruled” it through fear and intimidation for almost two years” (21<sup>st</sup> January 1994). Moves by the City Council to remove problems families also served to ease the situation and to spark “a measure of hope on the strife-torn estate” (ibid.)

The estate does still experience its share of problems, however the Deprivation Profile for Strelley ward indicates crime in the area is either on a par with crime figures for the City as a whole, or indeed below average. For example, burglary of dwellings is just above the city average (81 per 1,000 dwellings, with a City average of 80 burglaries per 1,000 dwellings). Autocrime is below the City average of 58 per 1,000 population, at 25 per 1,000 population. Incidences of violence are also below the City average of 36 per 1,000 population, at 10 per 1,000 population.

### **3.8 Education.**

Nottingham City schools have shown to be struggling as a whole. In 1998 Nottingham’s 11-year-olds “recorded the worst marks in England” (Evening Post 1999) in English, maths and science, and secondary schools “recorded the fourth worst results at GCSE, with only 26% of students gaining A\*-C grades” (ibid.). Children from the Broxtowe estate are served by five primary schools and three secondary schools

### 3.8.1 Primary Education.

Between the ages of 5 and 11 years old, children on the estate are served by five schools. All of these schools, as illustrated by the City of Nottingham Primary School Performance Tables 1998, Key Stage 2, are achieving low results, as follows:

#### **% achieving level 4 or above at Key Stage 2.**

Schools	English	English	Maths	Maths	Science	Science
	Test	Teacher Assessment	Test	Teacher Assessment	Test	Teacher Assessment
Brocklewood Junior	18%	22%	42%	31%	44%	40%
Highwood Player Jnr	30%	42%	25%	45%	38%	58%
Seagrave Primary	24%	20%	26%	19%	43%	19%
<b>Average for schools in LEA area</b>	<b>46.9%</b>	<b>48.2%</b>	<b>40.6%</b>	<b>49.3%</b>	<b>50.9%</b>	<b>54.7%</b>
<b>England Average</b>	<b>64.1%</b>	<b>64.2%</b>	<b>57.9%</b>	<b>64.2%</b>	<b>68.6%</b>	<b>70.4%</b>

OFSTED inspection reports for all five schools similarly indicate that attainment in English, Maths and Science is below the national average. They also suggest that attainment of pupils on entry to the nursery schools is very low, with social, mathematical and language skills identified as well below average. Due to good teaching, by the time the children reach five years old, there has been significant improvement, but standards in the main still remain below average. Four of the five schools have higher than average numbers of children on the register of Special Educational Need (SEN)<sup>7</sup>, as follows:

School Name	Number of pupils on roll (full-time)	Number of pupils on register of SEN	Number of pupils with a statement of SEN
Brocklewood Infant and Nursery	183	59 (32.2%)	No figure given
Brocklewood Junior	269	174 (64.7%)	2
Highwood Player Infant and Nursery	203	65 (32%)	No figure given
Highwood Player Junior	244	45 (18.4%)	1
Seagrave Primary	????	(33%)	2

<sup>7</sup> The national average is 20.8% (including pupils with statements). This figure was provided over the telephone by the DfEE's SEN Division (21.8.00).

Whilst all of the five schools have attainment well below average in English, Maths and Science at Key Stage 2, OFSTED reports state that all have made significant progress, and that standards are improving. After an inspection in 1998 Seagrave Primary School was placed in ‘special measures’ under the School Inspections Act 1996 because it was deemed to be failing to provide its pupils with an acceptable standard of education. Following several further inspections throughout 1998 and 1999, significant improvements were made, and the school has now been taken out of special measures.

OFSTED reports for all five schools serving the area identify attendance problems as having a negative impact on attainment and progress. For example at the Brocklewood Infant and Nursery school, attendance at the nursery is deemed ‘irregular’, and whilst levels of attendance are relatively satisfactory at Brocklewood Junior, the report identifies that there is a group of persistent absentees, who are also among a group of persistent late arrivals. Punctuality is also identified as a problem, being seen as a further hindrance to attainment due to disruption, and hindering the schools in making an efficient and prompt start to the day.

### **3.8.2 Secondary Education.**

Children between the ages of 11 and 16 years old are served by three comprehensive schools, all of which are situated some way from the estate. All of these schools are recording very poor results in GCSE passes, as illustrated by the Secondary School Performance Tables: City Of Nottingham (DfEE 1999):

#### **GCSE Pass Rates.**

<b>School Name</b>	<b>% in age group obtaining the equivalent of:</b>		<b>% in age group with no passes</b>
	<b>5 or more Grades A*-C</b>	<b>5 of more Grades A*-G</b>	
Glaisdale Comprehensive	11%	68%	15%
William Crane Comprehensive	2%	45%	25%
William Sharp Comprehensive	13%	69%	13%
<b>Average for schools in LEA area</b> (excluding independent schools)	<b>28.7%</b>	<b>79.8%</b>	<b>10.4%</b>
<b>England average</b> (including all schools)	<b>47.9%</b>	<b>88.5%</b>	<b>6.0%</b>

The William Crane and Glaisdale Comprehensive Schools are currently in special measures, and the William Sharp Comprehensive has just been taken out of special measures following improvements in its teaching standards. Whilst the OFSTED report for the William Crane Comprehensive School was unavailable, reports for both the remaining schools found standards of attainment to be very low on entry to the schools (perhaps not surprising given the low attainment levels at the primary schools), in both numeracy and literacy. The OFSTED report for William Sharp School found that almost half of the pupils in the current Year 7 had reading ages of between 7.5 and 9.3 years, and a further 26% of the group had reading ages over three and a half years below their actual age. Only 12% of pupils had reading ages equal to their actual age. Attainment is similarly low in maths and science. Again, both William Sharp and Glaisdale Comprehensives have above average numbers of children on the register of SEN<sup>8</sup> (figures were not available for William Crane Comprehensive), as follows:

<b>School Name</b>	<b>Number of pupils on roll (full-time)</b>	<b>Number of pupils on register of SEN</b>	<b>Number of pupils with a statement of SEN</b>
Glaisdale Comprehensive	715	200 (28%)	5
William Sharp Comprehensive	615	184 (30%)	16

Glaisdale Comprehensive has experienced very severe problems recently. Placed in special measures following a May 2000 OFSTED inspection, the school was found to have experienced considerable instability. The LEA had issued a warning to the governing body in regard to the health and safety of pupils in some classes, two members of staff were suspended following allegations of gross professional misconduct, severe problems with bullying had led to much adverse publicity in both national and local press, and the headteacher had resigned to take up another post. The school has also received, on average, about 20 pupils per age group who have been excluded from other schools.

The OFSTED reports suggest that whilst attainment still remains low, improvements are being made, in the William Sharp Comprehensive at least. The two other comprehensive schools serving the Broxtowe estate are in special measures. Whilst no inspection report was available for the William Crane Comprehensive, it is clear from its GCSE results that it has severe problems. Education Secretary, David Blunkett, has stated that both William Crane

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<sup>8</sup> The national average at secondary school level is 18.7% (including pupils with statements). This figure was provided over the telephone by the DfEE's SEN Division (21.8.00).

and Glaisdale Comprehensives should become candidates for the Government's 'Fresh Start' scheme, in which schools are closed, and re-open with both a new name and new staff (Fresh Start 2000).

### **3.9 Summary.**

- The Broxtowe Estate Development Plan argued that the estate “experiences multiple social deprivation and manifests many of those problems more commonly associated with the inner city” (1983: 1). Despite a modernisation programme, and several regeneration initiatives running in the area, it is clear that the area still experiences multiple deprivation. Indeed the estate is identified as the second most deprived area in both the City and the County in the Social Need in Nottinghamshire Study (1994), named as an area of ‘extreme social need’.
  - Built mainly in the 1930’s radiating from a central circle, the estate has gone through a comprehensive programme of modernisation since the 1980’s, gaining in the process a much needed Community Centre.
  - The structure of the estate’s population has been largely governed by housing allocation policies, and comprises many large families, lone parent households, and households with dependants. It also has the highest instances of overcrowding in the City.
  - Housing on the estate is low density, and contains many large 4 bedroom properties, built in a bid to reduce overcrowding in the centre of the city, however the estate also experienced problems of overcrowding. The majority of houses are local authority rented.
  - Unemployment on the estate is high, with those in work in mainly partly skilled or unskilled positions. There are therefore high levels of households in receipt of benefits, and children eligible for free school meals.
  - The estate suffers from health problems associated with low incomes, for example, low birth weights. The area has been part of the Nottingham Health Action Zone since 1999.
  - Figures indicate that crime in the area is no worse than elsewhere in the City, although the area has faced severe problems in the past.
  - The City as a whole has experienced severe educational problems, recording the worst marks in England at Key Stage 2, and the fourth worst at GCSE in 1998. Schools serving the Broxtowe area recorded very low attainment at Key Stage 2 in 1998. OFSTED reports suggest that all of the five primary schools are improving, but two of
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the three comprehensive schools serving the area are experiencing problems, and are in 'special measures'.

- Despite suffering multiple deprivation, there remains a relatively strong community spirit on the estate, and the population remains stable, with many second and third generation families and extensive kinship networks.



## **Chapter Four.**

### **The Project I: Background and Aims and Objectives.**

#### **4.1 Introduction.**

The Bookworms/Bookstart Project has, as its name suggests, two elements. The first of these is an after-school literacy club for children, and the second is a Bookstart scheme providing free books for babies. Both of these elements will be examined in turn, looking at when and why they were set up, and examining the aims and objectives of the Project.

Armstrong and Dawson (1989) argue that an organisation is usually created because one person does not have all the resources, time, skill and energy to do what it is that he or she wants to do, and therefore need to ask other people to help. This is certainly true of the Bookworms/Bookstart Project, where it was necessary to recruit a number of people and agencies in order to work towards what the founders of the Project wished to do. It has been argued that there is as yet no widely accepted definition of an organisation (Cole 1996). Schein, however, defines an organisation as:

“the rational coordination of the activities of a number of people for the achievement of some common explicit purpose or goal, through the division of labour and function, and through a hierarchy of authority and responsibility”  
(1972, cited in Armstrong and Dawson 1989: 4)

Bookworms/Bookstart Project is first and foremost an organisation, however it is also a *non-profit* organisation, which Drucker suggests “exists to bring about a change in individuals and in society”. For the non-profit organisation to be successful it needs firstly to decide what it is that it wants to change, and then on how it will go about trying to achieve this change. It is necessary for the organisation to decide upon its goals, or aims and objectives.

There was no formal set of aims and objectives available for the Bookworms/Bookstart Project when the research began, and therefore members of the Steering Group were each asked what they believe each element is trying to achieve. Their responses were then considered in light of the formal aims and objectives laid out in the Constitution, adopted on the 24<sup>th</sup> July 2000.

## **4.2 Bookworms: Background to the Project.**

The idea for the Bookworms Project first presented itself in the summer of 1993, and took three months to get off the ground. It began with a small group of children meeting to read in the front room of the house of the Project's co-founder and Chair, Ada Gee. Ada, a school governor for 15 years, had access to books from the school library, which she would bring home to read with the children. Links built up by Community Development Worker Don Bulmer, and meagre funds obtained from a community group, allowed the Project to really get off the ground, and in December 1993 a weekly after-school literacy club was started.

Since its beginnings the Project has expanded considerably. Now funded by the Single Regeneration Budget, the Project involves several partners, employs part-time staff, and has several volunteers assisting on a regular basis. Two clubs are now run on the Broxtowe estate, one for 5 to 7 year olds, and one for 8 to 13 year olds. In June 2000 the Project expanded further, and clubs were set up in the neighbouring estates of Moorgreen and Denewood for 8 to 11 year olds. Each club runs once a week during term time.

### **4.2.1 Why the Bookworms Project was set up.**

The original driving force behind the project was community member Ada Gee, the Project's co-founder and Chair. As a school governor she was in a prime position to witness the underachievement, particularly in terms of literacy, of children on the estate. She observed that children weren't reading, that they weren't sharing books, and that they weren't using the library. She felt that in many ways the school environment wasn't working for many children in that:

*“children at the moment, they're getting National Literacy and all sorts of things like that, and they really know the **chore** of books, but they don't know the **joy** of books”*

She and Don Bulmer, were also aware of the fact that, for a variety of reasons, many children were not getting the support and encouragement they needed from home. It was felt that:

*“Literacy for many of them just wasn't an issue within the family”*

and that:

*“on the estate a lot of children don’t get involved with books and reading so much because, you know, of the way the area is. Parents just prefer to say go and do so, or go out on the streets”*

It was felt that many parents did not see themselves as having a role to play in their children’s literacy development, and that they saw this as being the role of the paid teacher:

*“you see, in Broxtowe there’s this ethos that if (someone is) paid for a job, that it absolves you from doing it.....instead of being a partner in what is happening, even if it’s your own child, they don’t see that connection, that they’re only at school for 39 weeks a year, 5 hours a week, and that they’re at home most of the time, and they could have an input”*

Ada and Don recognised that there were serious lifelong implications to underachievement in literacy, in that there is:

*“.....just a big gap in terms of future opportunities, self esteem and self confidence building, you know, being able to make choices for oneself. The inability to be able to read is a big thing, in terms of looking for a job”*

The Project was set up then in response to these issues. It was set up, in Ada’s words, *“because there is a lack of literate experience”*, and as Don states, to *“raise levels of literacy”*, and thus improve future opportunities for the children of Broxtowe estate. However, it was set up in such a way that it was in no way an extension of school. Ada, an avid reader herself, wanted to help children to have fun with books, to take the ‘chore’ out of reading, so that children were encouraged to read, to read more, and to read more widely.

#### **4.2.2 What Bookworms is hoping to achieve.**

In speaking to the Group members it is clear that whilst almost all of them suggest that one of the aims of the Project is to raise literacy levels, what the project does *not* aim to do is to formally ‘teach’ children how to read. Although at least three of the Group members have some form of teaching qualification, it was stated that:

*“the one thing we don’t do is put ourselves up as experts. I happen to be a sort of teacher in terms of my qualifications, but there’s no way we work with the children in the way that they get special help at school, so we don’t have those kinds of answers, we don’t work in that way”*

It was further stated that the club:

*“is not supposed to be another school session. It’s supposed to be something that they enjoy coming to”*

All of the Group members were absolutely agreed that the main aim of the Project was to foster a love of books and reading among the children of Broxtowe estate. Ada stated that the aim of the Project was, very simply:

*“kids to love books. Basically that is what it’s all about, kids to enjoy books”*

Whilst other group members agreed, stating the project is

*“hoping to achieve a love and enjoyment of books”*

*“mainly to get children into books and enjoying reading”*

*“to help children to have fun with books”*

*“just to show them the importance of, and a love of, reading”*

Other aims were also mentioned by Group members. The library service is seen as a pivotal partner in the Project, and various members of the group suggested that one aim was to encourage the children to:

*“become more involved with the library”*

whilst at the same time developing:

*“a familiarity and affection for the library service”*

A further additional aim mentioned several times was that of the promotion of social skills in the children. Recognising that fostering a love of reading and books was perhaps the main aim, one volunteer went on to say:

*“but from that I think then continued the aim of sort of getting them to socialise, because a lot of them don’t know how to work in teams, they don’t understand about sharing. They’re just not taught it by their parents”*

Another member suggested:

*“a lot of it is getting them interacting with each other as well”*

It is clear from the responses received by the Steering Group members that they perceive there to be several aims and objectives to the Project, the primary aim being to foster a love of reading, and enjoyment of books. Additional aims are to encourage a familiarity with the library service, and to impact upon the children’s social skills. It was

suggested that the aim of the project is, in the long run, to have a positive impact on the literacy levels of children,

*“a hope that the children that go through reach a higher educational standard than if it [Bookworm] didn't exist”*

This impact on children's reading and literacy went beyond the functional aspects of literacy however. Whilst it was recognised that literacy was very important in enabling the children to have future opportunities, to make choices, and to succeed in the job market, there was another aspect, one of more personal fulfilment, and broadening personal horizons. Ada, summed this up by saying:

*“speaking personally, the farthest I've been abroad is Bologna, but I've been all over the world. Books will take me where my feet will never walk, and I mean, perhaps a lot of these kids are going to be poor all their lives, but books will do that [for them]”*

#### **4.3 Bookstart: Background to the Project.**

The Bookstart element was set up in 1995, after Ada Gee was given an article on the work being done in Birmingham, where a scheme of giving books to babies was being piloted and monitored. Interested in the idea, Ada, Don, and the Librarian at based at Strelley Road Library at that time, attended a conference on the Birmingham Bookstart initiative, and were impressed by both the initiative and the results, which indicated that children who had been through the Bookstart scheme were ahead of children who had not, in both literacy and numeracy, by the time they reached school (Wade and Moore 1998). The Group obtained a grant of £1500 to set up their own pilot project, giving out around 100 packs (which were donated by the library) in the first instance. This meant the Group developed further links with the Health Visitor Service, who would give out the packs at health checks.

This element of the Project was fairly unique when it was set up, as it is community led, and funded by SRB. Bookstart schemes were usually set up and organised by the public library service, and whilst the library service is an important factor in the Broxtowe Bookstart, the initiative and funding came from a community group. 1999 saw the launch of a

national Bookstart scheme, funded by Sainsburys. In Nottinghamshire the scheme is known as Books for Babies, and is sponsored by the Nottingham based company Boots. Broxtowe's Bookstart, however, remains as it has always been, led by the community, and funded by SRB.

#### **4.3.1 Why the Bookstart Project was set up.**

The results from the Birmingham pilot indicated that literacy levels could be significantly improved by starting children with books from a very early age (ibid.). This therefore presented the Project with another means of having a positive impact on literacy levels on the estate. Again, there was perceived to be a need on the estate for such an initiative in terms of literacy development. There was also the recognition, however:

*“that people didn't have books in the home, that they perhaps didn't have as much access to books as they would like”*

and also that, just like Bookworms participants:

*“they might not use the library service for all sorts of reasons, all sorts of factors”*

Evidence from the Birmingham scheme demonstrated that both these issues could be addressed through Bookstart.

#### **4.3.2 What Bookstart is hoping to achieve.**

In speaking to Group members it was again clear that raising literacy levels was an important aspect of the Bookstart initiative. It was felt that the one aim of the scheme was to:

*“get across to parents the idea that (sharing books at a young age) will be beneficial for their children when they start school, which some parents may not appreciate”*

However, the main aim of the project was, again, to promote the joy and knowledge of books. The Project Co-ordinator summed this up thus:

*“the ultimate thing that we're hoping to achieve is raising awareness with parents that babies can enjoy books from a very early age, that they can be a fun thing, something that they can enjoy as well as toys”*

In order to promote this joy and knowledge, however, people must have access to books, and so one of the primary aims, it was suggested, was simply:

*“to get books into families where reading and books might not otherwise be valued”*

The Project recognised that books may not be valued in some households, but also that in many it is not a case of not valuing books, but more a case of simply not being able to afford to buy them<sup>9</sup>. Don Bulmer summed this up, saying:

*“there’s an issue around poverty as well, ‘cos I think it’s been said that a lot of the children who we work with wouldn’t actually get books simply because, when you need basic food stuffs, books come low in terms of priority”*

The Birmingham pilot demonstrated that Bookstart had additional benefits, and these too were suggested as being aims for the project. For example, Group members suggested that, as in the Bookworms project, one aim was to promote the use of the public library:

*“we’re hoping that more people will be aware of library services and use library services”*

The Librarian involved with the Project similarly stated that the aim was:

*“to encourage parents to bring their babies to the library from a very early age, both for themselves and for the babies”*

In addition the Birmingham pilot illustrated that there were positive psychological issues to the Bookstart initiative, in that it encouraged parents to spend quality time with their children, and so encouraged parent-child bonding. The Health Visitor involved with the project summed up the view expressed by several Group members, saying:

*“it encourages parents to spend one-to-one valuable time with children because book sharing at a young age is something you have to do with a child, it’s not something you hand to them and say get on with it, so it fosters bonding, a relationship building aspect”*

#### **4.4 The Relationship between the two Projects.**

It would perhaps be reasonable to assume that there would be a natural relationship between the two projects. They are both, according to the Group members, aiming to achieve similar outcomes in the desire to foster a love and knowledge of books, and the raising of literacy standards. It would seem reasonable to assume that there would be a natural

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<sup>9</sup> This issue was raised in the focus group and telephone interviews for Bookstart participants, who

progression from the Bookstart initiative, to the Bookworms clubs. If the Group aims to foster a love of books, and to raise literacy from an early age through Bookstart, then it could be seen that this is the beginning of a process which is carried on through the Bookworms club when the children reach 5 years old, and then are taken all the way through to 13 years old. Some members did not appear to see a clear link between the two elements however:

*“it hasn’t really got a relationship, it (Bookstart) sits side by side with what we want to do.....it’s not really connected in anyway, its divorced from anything Bookworms do”*

*“in a way there isn’t a direct link between them except that they have similar aims”*

Or, that there wasn’t a real link at the moment because:

*“with the Bookstart having not run for very long, it doesn’t sort of overlap”*

Other group Members did recognise that the two Projects did in fact work *“hand in hand”* with each other, and that as relationships were built up with families through Bookstart, as the children got older, they could be led towards the Bookworms clubs:

*“it’s all about families and reading, I suppose the Bookworms would be seen.....as encouraging..... a seed that’s been sown in the babies, to develop the kids who really like books and who want to read more and be encouraged in that way”*

This question did appear to cause some difficulty in the interview, or if not difficulty, then it was an issue which required some thinking from the respondents. It seemed, on this evidence, not to appear to have been an issue that has really been thought about or discussed by the Group, which may account for the fact that some members were not clear about the link. On probing, all respondents did see it as desirable that children moved on from Bookstart to Bookworms, and therefore appeared to recognise some form of link, if not consciously. It may be that the link has not been clear as the first children to receive the Bookstart packs are only just now reaching school, and therefore Bookworms, age, and so will only now be eligible to join the club. As children do, hopefully, move from Bookstart to Bookworms, then the direct link should be clearer.

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suggested that the Group could provide a discount book club or scheme (see Appendix 6).



#### 4.5 Formal Aims and Objectives.

The Group's formal constitution states that its 'objects' are as follows:

"The Bookworms/Bookstart project exists to raise the literacy levels of children and their families in Broxtowe, Denewood and Moorgreen Estates and the surrounding areas, in particular by:

1. Promoting and encouraging book sharing between parents and children, thereby developing a love of books;
2. The provision of after-school clubs with a focus on literacy;
3. Providing books and other materials;
4. Working to raise self-esteem and confidence levels;
5. Encouraging the uptake and use of library services;
6. Encouraging skills for lifelong learning;
7. Providing a forum and highlighting the issue of 'literacy'".

In general, the responses given in the interview as to what the two elements of the Project are aiming to achieve do tie in very closely with the formal set of aims and objectives accepted on July 24<sup>th</sup> 2000. McCurley and Lynch (1998) suggest that an organisation needs to clearly define its aims and objectives as if they are assumed, rather than explicit, conflicts can arise between individuals or groups within the organisation. An explicit definition of aims and objectives means that all members understand what it is they are working towards. The Group did lay out some form of aims and objectives in, for example, their annual report. Whilst the main aim remains the same, the constituted aims and objectives include issues such as encouraging take up of library services, encouraging self-esteem and confidence levels, encouraging skills for lifelong learning, and providing a forum for the issue of literacy, which were not included in the informal aims.

Despite this, all of the Group members seem to share the same understanding and view of what the Project is trying to achieve, no-one expressed anything that was in conflict with the majority of members views. The main conflict between the aims put forward during the interviews, and the constituted aims lies in the *emphasis* put on raising literacy levels, and fostering a love of books. In the interviews it came out very strongly that the main aim of the Projects was perceived to be to engender a love, knowledge and enjoyment of books, and that whilst raising literacy was very important, it was essentially incidental, something that would happen as a result of children learning to enjoy books. The constitution, however,

states that the main objective of the Project is “to raise the literacy levels of children and their families”, and fostering a love of books is essentially ‘relegated’ to being one of the means in which this will be achieved.

Considering the Group members interview responses it is clear that they easily translate into the formal aims and objectives. For example, it can clearly be seen that ‘providing books and other materials’ is ‘getting books into families’, ‘raising self-esteem and confidence’ is in part getting the children to ‘socialise’ and ‘interacting together’. Encouraging skills for lifelong learning can be seen to be both the encouragement of reading, and the use of library services, and highlighting the issue of literacy is echoed in ‘raising awareness with parents’

#### **4.6 Summary.**

- The Bookworms Project was set up in 1993 after a community member and school governor noticed that children were attaining only low literacy levels, that they did not read and that they did not use the library service.
- Groups members suggested that the Bookworms Project was set up in a bid to raise literacy levels on the Broxtowe estate, but by showing children that books could be fun, rather than formally teaching them how to read. The Project also aimed to raise self esteem and confidence levels, and impart lifelong learning skills.
- The Bookstart element was set up in 1995 following a pilot project in Birmingham which indicated that starting children with books as soon as possible had positive effects on early educational attainment.
- Group members suggested that the Bookstart scheme aimed to get books in to homes where they may not have been previously valued, to promote book sharing and the idea that starting children with books very young would benefit them when they reached school. The Bookstart element also aimed to promote parent-child bonding through book sharing, and to increase awareness and use of library services.
- The Group as a whole did not seem clear on the relationship between the two elements, although there would seem to be a natural relationship. Both elements share similar aims, and it would seem natural to hope that Bookstart children would progress to the Bookworms clubs.
- The Group members are all clear about what it is that the Project is trying to achieve, and their interview responses tied in very closely with the formal set of aims and

objectives, which was adopted during the course of this research. There were no major discrepancies between Group members.

## **Chapter Five.**

### **The Project II: What the Project does.**

#### **5.0 Introduction.**

After ascertaining the aims and objectives of the Project, it was then necessary to determine what the Group was actually doing in pursuit of those aims. This was done through asking ‘management’ questions to gain information on how families and children were selected to participate, ages of participation, the materials used in both elements, and the activities and services the Group provided.

#### **5.1 The Bookworms Project.**

As mentioned in the previous chapter the Project aims to provide after-school clubs with a focus on literacy. This is the Bookworms Project. On the Broxtowe estate the Group run two after-school clubs, one for 5 to 7 years olds which is run between 4.30 and 5.30pm, and one for 8 to 13 year olds, which is run between 4.30 and 6pm. The clubs run on consecutive nights, once a week during term time and are run by volunteers, Group members and paid sessional workers. During the course of this research two new clubs were set up on neighbouring estates. A nominal charge of 10p per session is charged, merely to help cover the costs of refreshments, however if children forget, or are not able to pay, allowances are readily made.

##### **5.1.1 Selection of Participants.**

There is no selection procedure in place for either of the Bookworms clubs. The clubs are open to any children on the estate, and children come to the club because they and their families want them to. As the profile of the Project has risen through the Group’s activities, and through the links created by the Community Development, Health and Library services, several children have been referred to the club from the NCH Family Centre, and from at least three of the primary schools serving the area. Such referrals usually involve children and families who are experiencing particular educational or family problems.

The Group’s End of Year Report for April 2000 indicates that the 5 -7’s club had (as of April 1999) 24 children on its roll, had achieved minimum/maximum attendance numbers of 10/19 and an average attendance of 15. Three children had progressed from this club to the 8 - 13’s club. The 8 - 13’s club had (as of March 2000) 29 children on its roll, had

achieved minimum/maximum attendance figures of 9/23, and had an average weekly attendance of 16 children. A precise figure of the total number of children who had been through Bookworms since its initiation was not available, since accurate records were not kept prior to the employment of the Project's co-ordinator. The Group estimated, however, that it would be in the 200 - 300 range. The Group co-ordinator thought that 120 children had attended the club at some time or other in the 2 years she had been employed there. Some children only attend for a short period, some are irregular attendees but keep returning to the clubs, whilst others are very regular attendees, and stay with the club for several years.

### **5.1.2 Club Activities.**

Each participating child is provided with a programme of events for the term's sessions, and these are also displayed in places like the Family Centre, Community Centre and library. The children help to design these programmes (see Appendix Five), as they are consulted at the end of term session, and asked what they would like to do. The activities are deliberately wide ranging, and involve some events held outside of the normal session times.

#### **5.1.2.1 The 5 to 7's Club.**

Held in the local Family Centre's spacious and well stocked nursery room, each of the sessions begins with book sharing and reading. Children chose books from the Project's own stock, and that supplied by the library, and read them in small groups for a short while. This element of the session is designed to get them looking at, using and reading books. It also helps with building self-confidence and esteem, as the children are encouraged to read in small groups in an informal friendly atmosphere. They then move on to the main activity for the session. These are very varied, and usually involved some form of craft activity, such as making sweets, bookmarks, placemats and puppets. They also have sessions where they have songs and games, or do puzzles and board games. Many of the games and puzzles that the children do have an influence on their social skills, as the children are encouraged to work together, to share, and to help each other. The session then ends with the children being given refreshments, and sitting down to listen to a story. Craft activities and stories sometimes follow a theme, for example, in one session attended in the course of this research, the children made a background for some plasticine animals they had made at a previous session. The session finished with a story about animals.

The children in this club do not visit the library. This is due to the logistics of getting so many small children down to the library, which whilst not too far, is some distance away for small children. The library therefore provides a selection of suitable fiction and non-fiction books, and each child can borrow a book from this stock on a regular basis. This scheme has proved popular, however there have been some problems in recovering some items. Again because of logistics, and safety issues, the younger children are not taken on trips like the older ones, but do have guest 'speakers' and storytellers from time to time.

#### **5.1.2.2 The 8 to 13's Club.**

This session is held in the BEE Centre, and again activities are very varied, with sessions often involving craft activities and games. The Group try to invite a 'speaker' to at least one session per term, and this can be a storyteller, an official figure such as the community policeman, or a poet. One session observed during the course of this research involved a performance poet, and was one which the children enjoyed very much. 'Latching the children onto poetry' is seen as an important element in the Bookworms club. It is an aspect the children enjoy very much, and it is an aspect that has long been recognised as having a positive effect on literacy acquisition, through its status as a form of 'linguistic play' (Combes 1997). The Group has also run a successful community poetry competition.

Drama is also seen as an important element of the club's activities, and again is enjoyed very much by the children. Research has shown that drama can help children to develop reading and writing skills by appealing to a range of different 'learning styles'. A practical approach helps children to understand narrative and use language. This is because of the provision of a physical and visual context can help them make sense of language (Kempe 1999). Such a visual and physical context is particularly helpful for those children who struggle with reading. In the context of Bookworms, plays are often put together by the children following a session to the theatre to see a play or pantomime. Children perhaps enjoy these sessions because they appeal to all of the senses - reading, writing, speaking, listening, watching and doing (ibid.). They also impact on the children's communication and social skills, as they discuss and plan the play.

The 8 to 13's club meets once a month in the library. Children in the club are encouraged to hold a library card<sup>10</sup>, and to use the beginning of the session to return old, and choose new, library books. At the beginning of the session the children also choose books to use in the next week's 'Noses In Books Session', where the children read and discuss the books they've chosen in small informal groups. This session helps to promote the library as a friendly place, getting the children used to using it and its range of stock.

There are some concerns with regards to the activities carried out in the 8 to 13's club, however. Some of the sessions appear to have very little to do with literacy per se. In one session observed the children made Easter cards and hats. No literacy activity was involved in this session other than perhaps writing 'Happy Easter', but very few children appeared to do even this. Another concern is the practice of taking children swimming. The Group do this as a treat for the children, and see it as an exercise in confidence building. Whilst building self esteem and confidence is an aim of the Project, it may be difficult to explain to a funding body why the literacy club they were funding were spending funds on swimming. These are perhaps only minor concerns, other sessions and activities have a much more obvious and clear focus on literacy, but it may be an area in which the Group may need to think about and be clear about how their activities link to their main objective of raising literacy.

### **5.1.2.3 The Literate Experience.**

The older Bookworms members are taken out on trips to the theatre, to the cinema, to museums, and to other arts events. They also take part in local events such as the Broxtowe Carnival and a photographic exhibition. There are also occasional additional trips to the swimming baths. Whilst some of these events do not appear at first to be closely linked to literacy, they are designed to widen the children's 'literate experience'. Many of the children would not get to such events if it were not for the Project, as most parents simply could not afford to take their children. Ada explained that the headteacher of the school where she is a governor has said:

*"we can teach children to read, but its like teaching robots, and if they've never been off the estate, never had any sort of experience, they've got nothing to draw upon."*

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<sup>10</sup> As are the children in the younger age group.

The various events and trips organised by the Group are therefore designed to provide the children with a wide range of experiences:

*“so what we do really in a way, we broaden their horizons and make the world just that little bit bigger”*

#### **5.1.2.4 Incentives and Birthday Books.**

In addition to the activities of the club, each child is given a book as a gift on their birthday, which they chose themselves from a small selection. This provides a means of ensuring that children have books in the house, and it is known that in some cases books received in this manner are the only books that the children own.

Incentives in the form of reading schemes with awards are not used, although the possibility of using some form of reading incentive scheme is currently being considered. An incentive to attend is offered in that if a child attends 25 times they receive a Bookworms tee-shirt.

#### **5.2 The Bookstart Project.**

The Group based their Bookstart Project on the initial pilot project run in Birmingham<sup>11</sup> in 1993. In this pilot free packs were given out to 300 inner-city families with babies of 9 months old, and the packs contained a free book, information about book sharing, bookmark, poster, poem card, and an invitation to join the library. The scheme was initiated after a member of Book Trust, Wendy Cooling, observed a child on its first day at school who had obviously never seen a book before, and didn't know what it was for, or what to do with it. She felt the child “was starting school at a disadvantage, lacking the confidence and skills of his peers” (Cooling, 1998: 4).

The Bookstart initiative was “based on the belief that it is never too soon to share books with babies, and that children who know how to handle books and have enjoyed being read to, will start school with the confidence that will quickly lead them into reading” (ibid.). This philosophy corresponds with a wealth of evidence that early experiences with books can have a positive effect on children's progress at school, and that children who

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<sup>11</sup> This project was a collaboration between Birmingham Libraries, South Birmingham Health Authority, Young Book Trust, and the University of Birmingham. It was funded by Unwin Charitable Trust, and a number of publishers supplied books.



arrive at school with the foundations for literacy in place tend to stay ahead, at least in the first two years (for example Wells, 1985, Wells 1986, Hannon 1995).

Early monitoring of these families by the University of Birmingham, indicated that as a result of receiving the pack they were more aware of books, engaged in more book sharing, bought more books, and had enrolled their babies at the library. Further monitoring as the children began school indicated that Bookstart children were generally ahead of children who had not received Bookstart packs, in both literacy and numeracy<sup>12</sup>.

### **5.2.1 Bookstart in Broxtowe.**

The Broxtowe Bookstart project has been run along similar lines to the initial pilot in that a free book pack is given out to babies at their 7 to 9 month hearing and developmental check. This pack is distributed by health visitors, and contains a two books (one is a bath book), nursery rhyme cards, and information on sharing books with babies. The packs also contain a library registration card, and this is filled in by the health visitor at the time the packs are given out. The library card is then sent to the families through the post. This means that, technically, all babies who receive the pack are automatically enrolled in the library.

The Broxtowe Project, however, goes much further than the initial pilot, and indeed most other schemes in the country. Whilst most schemes give out just one pack at the 7 to 9 month developmental check, the Broxtowe Project gives out another pack at the 18 month developmental check. This again contains two books, more nursery rhyme cards, and information on books and babies. This pack, as an encouragement to families to visit the library, contains a voucher which can be exchanged at the library for an additional book. Regular ‘parties’<sup>13</sup> are also held in the library, designed again to encourage people to visit the library, and to provide Group members with the opportunity to keep contact with families. This enables them to talk to the parents about book sharing in an informal atmosphere, and a display of good quality books is produced.

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<sup>12</sup> The fact that Bookstart children were ahead in numeracy as well was not anticipated, however Cooling suggests that “early experience with books does give confidence and, as many picture and board books involve counting, shape and predication, perhaps the maths results shouldn’t have been so surprising” (1998: 4),

<sup>13</sup> Refreshments are provided for both adults and children, along with games, competitions, and storytelling, and gifts are often provided in the form of, for example, books, posters and gifts for parents.

In addition to regular parties and the extra packs, the Project Co-ordinator also does some pastoral work, visiting families on the estate. Babies have received a birthday card on their first, second and third birthdays for some time, but are also currently receiving a book on their birthday too. This not only continues to get books into families, it also provides an ideal opportunity for the co-ordinator to make a visit to the family to deliver the book, thus keeping in contact with the family, and continuing to raise awareness of using books with babies and young children. This element of the scheme has been very warmly welcomed by the families<sup>14</sup>.

### **5.2.2 Selection of Participants.**

Participants are selected for the Bookstart element in that families with the appropriate age children are eligible. The scheme also covers only those families covered by the SRB funding for the estate. Whilst this is the majority of the families on the estate, it does mean that on some streets only certain families are eligible. Those families not covered by the Project receive a free book pack under the Boots 'Books For Babies' scheme, however they are not eligible for the extra packs, books and parties<sup>15</sup> as are the Project's participants. 282 families have received Broxtowe Bookstart packs under the scheme since it was initiated.

### **5.3 Lifelong Learning Skills.**

The Project's constitution states that one of its aims and objectives is to encourage skills for lifelong learning. The group does this through encouraging the sharing of books with babies, and the use and reading of books by the older children. The Group believe that dealing with a book is a skill which the children need to learn:

*"They're learning a skill, because dealing with books is a skill. Because they're learning that skill, that gives them confidence [as well]"*

This skill begins with Bookstart, as when books are shared with babies they learn what a book is for, how to hold it, that the pages turn, that there is a beginning and an end, that print means something (even if they themselves can't actually read it), and, hopefully, that books are fun.

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<sup>14</sup> There have been a few problems in getting the birthday books to some families due to the high level of movement on the estate. Whilst the population remains relatively stable, there tends to be quite a lot of movement within the estate itself.

<sup>15</sup> The Project has held occasional parties in conjunction with Boots 'Books for Babies', however, when participants from both schemes were invited together.

Through the Bookworms clubs children are shown that books and reading are fun, and it is hoped that this in turn will encourage children either to read at all, or to read more. As they read, then their literacy skills will develop as a result. As indicated in the Introduction, literacy is an increasingly important skill, necessary for personal life opportunities and well-being, as well as for the health of the economy. The Group also see their use of the library as fostering important lifelong learning skills. Sessions held in the library introduce the library as a friendly place to visit, and in doing so hopefully encourage children to take books out and to consequently read more. There are other aspects however. Quizzes and games in the library are designed to introduce children to the library system:

*“we have sessions at the library where we have activities, based around the library system, numbering and things like that, so children get to know where the different books are, they learn the library system and how to find books of interest”*

This is an important skill in terms of the children’s education now (for example in using the library for information for homework), and for later on in life so that they can find information on personal issues, or for re-skilling to meet the demands of an unstable and changing employment market.

#### **5.4 Summary.**

- Two after-school clubs with a focus on literacy are provided on the Broxtowe estate, one for 5 to 7 year olds, and one for 8 to 13 year olds. These meet each week during term-time.
- A variety of activities are carried out, some of which are obviously literacy based such as reading in small groups and ‘Noses in Books’ sessions, quizzes and letter-writing. Additional activities include crafts, drama, and trips, and guest storytellers, poets and ‘speakers’ are also provided.
- The older Bookworms club are taken on several outings to a wide variety of, in the main, arts events. This is designed to widen their ‘literate experience’.
- Children in both Bookworms and Bookstart (up to the age of three) are gifted a book on their birthdays. This ensures that children do have books in the house.
- Broxtowe Bookstart is run along similar lines to the initial pilot project carried out in Birmingham, which indicated that children who had received book packs were more prepared for school, and were ahead of their peers in both literacy and numeracy.

- In addition to providing a free book pack on children's 7 to 9 month hearing check, the Project also provides a pack at the 18 month developmental check, holds regular 'parties', and carries out pastoral work.
- Participants are not selected for the Bookworms Clubs, which are open to everyone. They are, however selected for Bookstart in the sense that the scheme is limited to those families eligible under SRB funding regulations.

Both elements of the Project are designed to foster lifelong learning skills, through both the use of books and the use of the library.

## **Chapter Six.**

### **Management Issues.**

#### **6.0 Introduction.**

As part of the evaluation of the Bookworms/Bookstart Project, it has been necessary to examine the managerial procedures and issues of the Project to some extent. It has, however, been an unsettled time for the Group, in the fact that whilst the research was being carried out, the Group was experiencing a great deal of change. This was due in part to the adoption of the constitution, the addition of new people to the management committee, to the setting up of new clubs on neighbouring estates, and the employment of sessional workers. In addition, Nottingham City Council restructuring changed the role and involvement of one key member considerably during the course of the research, a factor that will have a significant impact on the Project. This will be discussed during the course of this chapter.

#### **6.1 Roles and Relationships.**

Cole defines a group as “a collection of individuals, contributing to some common aim under the direction of a leader, and who share a sense of common identity” (1996: 59). Armstrong and Dawson suggest that an individual belongs to a formal<sup>16</sup> group “by virtue of the role played or the job performed in the organisation” (1989: 97). The Project is an organisation, but it is also a group of individuals who have come together with a common aim, and who do identify with belonging to the Project. Individuals involved with the Project are involved in various different roles, from volunteering to help out at the Bookworms sessions, to offering professional advice and support, to co-ordinating the Project, and participating in the management committee or Steering Group<sup>17</sup>. All of the individuals involved appear to work very well together, and this was a factor which was mentioned in almost all of the interviews as being one the successes of the Project:

*“I just think it’s good the way everyone works well together, everyone knows their roles and what they’re supposed to be doing, especially now its getting bigger, its got to be like that”*

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<sup>16</sup> Formal groups are those that are officially designated as such by management, and which have a specific organisational function to perform (Armstrong and Dawson 1989)

<sup>17</sup> The Steering group is in itself a separate ‘group’, however it is difficult to separate it out from the organisation as a whole, as almost all the individuals involved with the Project attend management meetings, and participate in the discussions and decision making.

*“I think one of the successes of the Project has been the ability of different professionals to work well together, that’s been very impressive”*

One reason for the fact that everyone knows their roles is the fact that paid staff have a contract of employment stipulating their roles, and service level agreements have been drawn up between the Project and the three professional services involved with the Project. A service level agreement also exists for volunteers and the Group are also looking at forming a ‘contract’ for volunteers involved.

### **6.1.1 Professional Roles.**

There are three professional services involved with the Project.

#### **6.1.1.1 The Community Development Service.**

The Community Development Service was the first professional service to be involved with the Project, and indeed has been involved from the start in that Community Development Worker Don Bulmer co-founded the Project. The main roles of the Community Development Service are: to assist in the promotion of the project; the building of links with other community organisations and agencies; the provision of assistance at supporting and promotional activities and events; to provide encouragement, assistance and training to volunteers; to encourage participation in the project from local community members; and to provide a representative to the Steering Group. In addition, an important element of the work of the Community Development Service is to advise on funding issues.

The Community Development Service has been a very important factor in the setting up and growth of the Project for the above reasons. As the Community Development Worker involved with the Project was a co-founder, his enthusiasm and commitment to the Project has been very significant. Unfortunately during the course of this research Nottingham City Council announced that as a result of restructuring, it was effectively disbanding its Community Development Service, and replacing it with a Youth Service. This has meant that Don’s job has changed, but more significantly he has been moved to another area of the City. Whereas the area had the equivalent of four full-time post Community Development Workers, it now has the equivalent of two full-time post Youth Workers. It is expected that whilst the Project will still receive support from the Youth Service, it is not clear to what extent this will be. The Youth Workers obviously have a larger area to cover now, and so the amount of time they can dedicate to each initiative in the area will be

severely limited. There is also the concern that their commitment to the Project will not be at the same level as the Group has experienced in the past.

#### **6.1.1.2 The Health Visitor Service.**

The Health Visitor Service became involved when the Bookstart element was set up. Their main role is to distribute the packs and promote their use. They are an important vehicle for the distribution as they see the children at the appropriate times, and if developmental check appointments are not kept, the health visitor pays a visit to the families home, so technically everyone should receive a pack.

There is an issue of how well the Health Visitors can promote the packs. Of the parents spoken to both in the focus group meetings and telephone interviews, one family out of the five spoken to had not received an explanation of what the pack was for, but said they were merely given the pack and filled out the library registration form. This may have been an exception to the rule however as on the whole every family should receive some form of explanation. However the Health Visitors are limited as to the amount of time they can give to promoting the Project, when there are so many elements of their own work to carry out as well. The Health Visitor involved with the Project co-ordinates the distribution of packs with other Health Visitors, and liaises with them and states that:

*“all of the health visitors are really keen and enthusiastic about the project anyway”*

Using books with young children has been shown to raise language skills, and to encourage the parent to spend time with their children, thus promoting parent-child bonding (Wade and Moore 1998, Butler 1995). These are issues that the Health Visitors are keen to promote. It was also hoped that Bookstart would increase the take-up levels for the developmental checks which are low in Broxtowe, however it is not clear whether or not this is happening. The Co-ordinator for the Project suggests that informing parents that they will receive a free pack at the health check is helping to increase take-up, however the Health Visitor states:

*“we were hoping at one time that it may increase the uptake of hearing tests.....but I'm not sure it's doing that really”*

### 6.1.1.3 The Library Service.

The Librarian involved with the project suggests that the library service was the pivotal service to the Bookworms element:

*“because it was set up for children to use the library and to increase their literacy levels”*

Elkin argues:

“if books and literacy are important for early development and lifelong learning, even in today’s technological age, then *access* to the materials that bring wealth of learning are critical.” (1997: 3) (my emphasis)

The role of the public library in providing this access has long been recognised by the sector<sup>18</sup>. The 1995 report ‘Investing in Children’ states:

“it is our clear view that, at a time when unfulfilled reading potential affects the economic, cultural and social life of the country, the potential of a library, and in particular the public library which is freely available to all, as a force in support of reading and information literacy cannot be too strongly emphasised. By making books available to all who want them, together with specialist staff to make them accessible through advice and assistance in the choice and use of them, libraries are uniquely placed to make a significant contribution to the encouragement of reading amongst children and young people” (cited in Elkin 1997: 6).

The Library Association’s Guidelines for services to children and young people suggest that the public library can exercise its key role in the fostering of literacy in three ways: through the provision and promotion of material which assists reading development in young children; by organising activities to promote literacy, (sometimes with other agencies) and; by the provision and promotion of services which assist those with literacy difficulties (Blanshard 1997). Outside of the everyday service provision of the public library, these three activities can be seen to reflect the role of the librarian in the Bookworms/Bookstart initiative.

The key roles of the librarian involved in the initiative are: to assist with the selection of books for inclusion in the Bookstart pack, and the promotion of the initiative through library parties (reading development in young children); assisting with the organisation and support for both elements of the Project, (organising literacy promotion

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<sup>18</sup> If not always exploited effectively (Vincent 1999a, Tilke 1997).



activities), and these are indeed done with outside agencies and; promoting the Project to those families or children who may need extra help (assisting those with literacy difficulties).

#### **6.1.1.4 Volunteers.**

There are a number of volunteers involved, whose input is vital to the running of the Project. The base of regular volunteers is small, and it has been the case that the Group have been 'top heavy' with professionals in the past. The number of volunteers has increased recently however, especially with the setting up of the two new clubs on neighbouring estates. Volunteers serve on the Committee, and assist in the main with the Bookworms sessions.

The recruitment of volunteers was highlighted as a problem for the Group. This is partly due to the fact that the area has a number of initiatives running, all of which require volunteer participation, and there are only a limited number of people willing, or able, to volunteer. This would appear to be a problem throughout the national voluntary sector where the demand for volunteers is outstripping supply, leaving a shortfall (Smith, 1997). The problem of asking for a regular commitment is recognised by the Group:

*it's a big thing to ask, this regular commitment, and certainly then when you get to the management of the project, and ask them to get involved with that, it's a big commitment.....it's a lot to ask from other people"*

The issue of staffing levels has been eased to some extent by the employment of sessional workers for the Bookworms sessions, however as a community project there is still the need for a strong community volunteer base, to ensure commitment and local ownership of the Project, and also for funding considerations.

## **6.2 Funding.**

When the Project was first set up it relied on small grants and funds from local groups and the local Community Fund. Since 1998 the Project has been funded by the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), initially by SRB 2, which ceases in 2000<sup>19</sup>. Due to this, and the fact that the Group wished to expand their activities, they applied for, and are now receiving SRB 5. The two sets of funding are running along side one another at the moment, and it is hoped that eventually SRB 5 will take over from SRB 2. The total funding amounts

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<sup>19</sup> SRB funding runs in 3 year stages.

to £35,300 per year and is paid in three-monthly instalments, enabling the Group to plan ahead.

The funding allows the Group to provide the after school clubs and Bookstart scheme, buy materials, books and refreshments, take the children on outings, hire rooms, and pay general administration and promotional costs. Obtaining SRB 2 funding allowed the Group to employ a part-time co-ordinator, who's role is now seen as crucial:

*“the thing I see as vital now is to have an employed co-ordinator. There are too many parts to it to continue to have the Project set up with volunteers and professionals who have other roles, we're all involved in other things as well, so to have somebody who draws us all together is just vital for success”*

The employment of the co-ordinator has allowed the Project to become more efficient, as it has freed up the time of other members of the Group, who can concentrate more on developing the Project and developing links with other organisations.

SRB 5 funding has allowed the Group to employ a part-time administration assistant, which has again increased the efficiency of the Group, and allowed the co-ordinator to do more outreach work. In addition, the Group has also been able to employ sessional workers to assist with the running of the Bookworms clubs, which has eased staffing issues, particularly in the new clubs where sufficient volunteers have not yet been recruited. The involvement of volunteers is a significant factor in terms of SRB 5 allocation as “the government increasingly recognises that community involvement is vital for regeneration to succeed, and now says that regeneration funding will only be paid over if regeneration programmes show that they have involved communities” (Hanna 1999: 48).

### **6.2.1 The Adoption of the Constitution.**

Although the Project has been running now for seven years, the Group only adopted a formal constitution during the course of this research. This was almost exclusively a funding matter<sup>20</sup>. Future funding from SRB is not certain, and in recognition that they may have to look elsewhere, it was decided that the Group needed to put themselves on a more official footing, and adopt a constitution. Many providers of funding require applicants to

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<sup>20</sup> There is another element to the adoption of the constitution and this lies in the fact that the constitution shows that the Project belongs to the community.

have a formal constitution. The Group is also tentatively considering becoming a registered charity, and the adoption of a formal constitution is the first step down this road.

### **6.3 Management Difficulties.**

In examining what difficulties the Group had faced, three issues were raised: funding issues, communication, and personalities.

#### **6.3.1 Funding.**

Obtaining the initial SRB 2 funding proved very difficult for the Group. Whilst the Group was part of the application for funding, when the funding was obtained, they were denied their share. It took eight months of fighting for the money before the Group finally got their share. The Group are now much 'wiser', and the application for SRB 5 funding proved much easier to obtain. The fund filters down, in three-monthly instalments, to the Group from the City Council, and is administered by the Broxtowe Partnership Trust. Problems have arisen, however, when the money has not been released from the City Council on time.

Funding is currently an issue for the Group, as the budgets for the Broxtowe estate have been cut, and the funds which the Group have been allocated for the new clubs on the neighbouring estates have effectively been frozen. This is due to the fact that neither estate has an established Trust from which the funds can be administered. The Group are currently working to resolve these issues. The limited nature of the funding is also a difficulty the Group have to face. It is uncertain for how much longer SRB will run, and therefore the Group may need to seek funding elsewhere. The Group has recognised this however, and is taking steps to look into alternative funding, and has adopted a formal constitution in readiness. The fact that the Group has to rely on short-term funding is a difficulty that has always had to be faced. The Project has never been intended to be a short-term Project which would finish when the funding ran out. It has always been seen as long-term, as the Group recognises that the literacy is an on going problem which needs a long-term initiative to tackle it.

#### **6.3.2 Communication.**

Communication can be defined as "the transfer of a message from one party to another so that it can be understood and acted upon" (Armstrong and Dawson 1989: 84), and

Cole argues that “the issue of communication is a vital one for any organisation” (1996: 207). Communication problems were suggested as a possible difficulty the Group experiences. The Health Visitor suggested communication between the Group and the Health Visitor service had been a problem. It had taken a long time to set up the Bookstart Project, and get it running properly. There were quite a few teething problems, when forms were filled out incorrectly, forms were sent to the wrong place, and packs were given out to the wrong children. She further suggested that:

*“its difficult for me I think perhaps sometimes to explain that to everybody else because when you talk about it, it just seems so simple, do the check, give out the pack, fill in the form, but there’s actually lots of paper work, lots of things going on at that check, so it’s difficult for health visitors to take it on sometimes”*

These particular problems have largely been solved, although the library does still sometimes receive forms which are filled in incorrectly, and there is also a problems with families not being registered (see 7.6.2). It is difficult to suggest why there may be communication problems within the Group, but it may be that it is simply because there are two strands to the Project, and an awful lot going on. There are also a lot of people involved, and some are only involved with certain elements of the Project and so on. The employment of a Project co-ordinator has helped the situation, however she also suggests that communication is difficult, for the reasons mentioned. An examination of the Group’s communication channels may be useful to increase the efficiency of the Project. At meetings, for example, a lot of time seems to be spent going through the correspondence received by the Group. This cuts down the amount of time available to discuss organisational issues, and an alternative way of communicating this information may be useful.

### **6.3.3 Personalities.**

There are, perhaps inevitably, some instances of disagreement and personality clashes between members of the Group. The Group Chair is, for example, by her own admission ‘very tough’ and stubborn about her beliefs about what the Project is aiming to achieve, and what it should be doing. This is perhaps not surprising given the fact that the Project is essentially her vision, and she has worked very hard since its inception to both get the Project up and running, and to develop it to what it is now. Other members also have

equally strong views, and this can lead to some differences of opinion and debate in meetings.

This difficulty is overcome to some extent:

*“by having enough quarrels, well, not exactly quarrels, but enough differences to accommodate one another”*

The Group would appear to be largely democratic in its management practice, and all members contribute to debates. Armstrong and Dawson define such practice as one in which “tasks, techniques and time scales are all a matter for group discussion and group decision with guidance and encouragement from the leader” (1989: 106). This would appear to be the case with this Group, and where the Group can’t reach an agreement the usual practice seems to be that ideas are given a trial for a certain period and reviewed at a later stage, or that the decision is taken to put an issue on hold for a designated time, whilst more thought is given to it, or it is researched more thoroughly. Another factor which may help the Group to overcome differences of opinion is the fact that as a whole all members share the same vision, and are fully committed to the Projects aims, and so will work together to pursue those aims:

*“the people who’ve got involved haven’t just got involved because it’s their job or whatever, they really [are] interested in the Project and the success of the Project”*

#### **6.4 The Future.**

In order to gain some impression of how the Group would like to see the Project develop, each person was asked about how they saw future development. Several issues arose.

##### **6.4.1. Funding.**

As mentioned above, the future development, indeed existence, of the Project will be dependent on the Group continuing to find funding. Whilst the Broxtowe elements should be all right for the next three years, problems with obtaining the allocated funding for the new clubs may put these in jeopardy. In addition, it is vital that the Group identify an alternative source due to the uncertainty of the future of SRB funding. Whilst the Group has received money from the fund since 1998, it needs to have alternative arrangements should future bids be unsuccessful, or if the SRB ceases. Whilst there are alternative sources which may be available to the Group, the Group as it stands at the moment needs a substantial

amount of money annually to keep its current practices going, and this may not be so easy to find.

#### **6.4.2 The Involvement of the Library.**

An issue has arisen about the future of the involvement of the library service in regards to the new clubs. Whilst the older Bookworms in the Broxtowe club have regular library visits, and library staff also visit the club elsewhere, the two new clubs do not visit the library. This is due to the fact that one of the estates is too far away from the library, and the other club is held on a night when the library is closed, and on which there are no library staff available to visit the Group elsewhere. The concern here is that the library is no longer being

seen as the pivotal service it once was, and also that if the Steering Group's time is increasingly taken with the new developments, which have no library involvement, then the library service may be reluctant to provide a representative for the Steering Group.

The current decision is to look into providing a box of books for the children to borrow, as is current practice for the younger Bookworms club in Broxtowe, and to concentrate on getting the new clubs established. The Group will consider how to increase the library involvement once the Groups are more established, and the suggestion is that Saturday activities are held in the library for the new clubs. There is however an issue of getting the children down to the library, particularly from the estate that is some distance away. The danger is perhaps that if the situation is not resolved fairly soon, it may never be, particularly if the Group continues to expand its activities.

#### **6.4.3 Expansion.**

There seems to be some division in opinion in terms of the expansion of the Group. This was mentioned by almost all the Group members in the interview, with a couple of Group members wishing to see the Project remain small:

*“my instinct is to keep it small, and I'd say small high quality”*

and to:

*“quietly [get] on with this”*

Other Group members would like to see the Project:

*“just getting bigger, reaching more children really, expanding into other estates”*

One group member suggested that expanding into other areas would be ‘the obvious thing’ to do, however if the Group does wish to continue to expand its activities there is an argument for them to expand their activities *within* the estate, rather than *out* of it.

All parents participating in the Bookworms focus group sessions suggested, jokingly, that they would like the clubs to go on for longer, and to occur more nights a week. On a more serious note, however, there is a waiting list for the younger Bookworms club and there may be an argument for an additional club on the Broxtowe estate to accommodate this<sup>21</sup>. As the first children to receive the Bookstart pack are now coming up to five years old, and therefore eligible for the club, the Group could conceivably find that there is greater demand. People may be discouraged if they have to wait a long time before their child can become a member. In addition all Group members agreed that they would like to see children progress from Bookstart to Bookworms, and this can only be effective if the places are available to take the children.

Another consideration is the fact that there may be an argument for targeting parents more. Evidence has shown that “parents play a crucial role in the development of children who have positive attitudes towards reading, and who become successful readers” (Spiegel 1994: 74). The climate in the home carries both explicit and implicit messages about the value of reading, which have a profound effect on the child’s attitudes towards reading, and their competence in, and enjoyment of, reading (ibid.). The Group’s Bookstart element is targeted at encouraging parents to share books with their children, however it was suggested by two families interviewed in the Bookstart focus group sessions that whilst receiving the pack was really good, they felt that they were largely given the pack and left to get on with it<sup>22</sup>:

*“so you’re given a pack and that’s it, you don’t hear from them until the next library party”*

These parents suggested that what they would really like is some form of help and guidance with their children’s literacy development. Several studies have shown the value of initiatives offering such guidance for parents (see for example Segel 1994). The Kirklees

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<sup>21</sup> Several members mentioned in the course of the focus group interviews that they had been waiting for what they perceived as a long time for a place to become available in the younger Bookworms club.

<sup>22</sup> It is perhaps worth remembering, however, that the Broxtowe Bookstart scheme already goes far beyond the provision of the majority of Bookstart and Books for Babies schemes throughout the country.

‘Babies into Books’ project, which gave out free book packs to parents, but which also ran Baby Book Groups, illustrated this. The evaluation indicated that the Book Groups, in which sessions focused on the value of shared reading, encouraging songs and rhymes, choosing appropriate books, and developmental issues, were more effective than the book packs. The Book Groups were successful in providing parents with an opportunity to meet and socialise, as well as providing advice on the value of literacy based activities (Hardman and Jones 1999).

Whilst many parents on the Broxtowe estate may simply not value reading, and take little interest in their children’s literacy (see 7.7), it would appear that some do, and they would welcome some further practical guidance from the Project. This suggests that the Group could, therefore, expand their activities within the estate to accommodate this. During the course of the focus group and telephone interviews parents were offered the chance to make suggestions for what they would like to see the Group doing. These, in their entirety are included in Appendix Six.

## **6.5 Evaluation.**

Evaluation is carried out on services “to prove their value, improve their performance, increase their effectiveness and plan for future developments (Usherwood 1996: 68), and one of the aims of this research was to suggest ways in which the Group could continue to evaluate the Project for those very reasons. It is monitored to some extent by the City Council, for funding purposes. A representative of the City Council periodically carries out snapshot surveys<sup>23</sup> at Bookstart parties. The Bookstart pack for the 18 month development check contains a questionnaire, however very few of these are returned, and the Group is looking at simplifying this in a bid to encourage more returns. The evaluation of this kind of project is difficult however. In business there is a financial bottom line, the organisation’s performance will be judged to a great extent on its profits and losses. In the non-profit organisation, such as the Bookworms/Bookstart Project, there is no financial bottom line. Drucker argues that:

“ the non-profits are human-change agents. And their results are therefore always a change in people - in their circumstances, in their vision, in their health, in their hopes, above all, in their competence and capacity. In the last analysis, the non-profit institution.....has to judge itself by its performance in creating

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<sup>23</sup> This is generally based on a questionnaire, which the representative fills out.



vision, creating standards, creating values and commitment, and in creating human competence” (1990: 85).

These elements are, by their very nature, very difficult to measure.

The Group can quantitatively measure whether or not the Projects are having an impact on library membership and borrowing, however just as “statistics are just a small part of the reality of the public library” (Usherwood 1996: 68), they are only a small part of the reality of the outcomes of the Project. They will indicate whether or not there has been an impact, but not why, or why not. Similarly, the Group can measure the numbers of participants past and present, the extent of the waiting list, referrals, the amount of interagency co-operation, and the amount of requests for the service<sup>24</sup> (Johnson 1986). Usherwood, however, suggests that “if public library services are to be evaluated in terms of their impact on individuals and society as a whole, then we are going to require sociological and psychological research skills”(1996:68). These same skills are applicable to any evaluation undertaken by the Project, in that it is precisely their impact on individuals that is the issue which needs to be evaluated.

Johnson (1986) suggests that there is a lack of understanding on how to effectively evaluate literacy programmes involving libraries, and argues for the need for an appropriate evaluation technique. Usherwood argues that the social audit “is a practical strategic management tool, allowing an assessment of social costs and benefits” (1996:72), a tool which “makes known individual and community experiences of using the.....service” (Usherwood and Linley 1998). The social audit is similar in technique, but goes much further than, the current research in that it seeks to analyse the goals (aims), inputs (resources), outputs (the service) and the outcomes (actual experience) of a service. In order to do this the social audit seeks to cross-check the views and perceptions of stakeholders in order to obtain as full a picture as possible of the social aspects of the service.

Bearing this in mind, the Group could continue to evaluate the Project through the means of a social audit, which would arguably provide them with the full picture. This method, however, is incredibly time consuming, and therefore has staff, time, and financial implications which the Group at present are ill placed to meet. The Group could concentrate on interviews or focus group sessions with participating families, rather than carry out a full

social audit, however this research has highlighted the problems involved in attracting participants. Alternatively the Group could continue to carry out snapshot surveys similar to the ones already undertaken by the City Council representative. These are by no means ideal however, and there is a suggestion that respondents may be telling the representative what they think she wants to hear. For example, in the last snapshot survey carried out during a Bookstart party, all of the parents interviewed said they visited the library regularly, suggesting that library use among Bookstart families is relatively high, and that the Project has had an impact. However library staff recognised only two parents as being users of the library service. Management circulation figures similarly indicate that library use among Bookstart families is low (See 7.6.2).

The Group is considering redesigning the questionnaire sent out with the Bookstart pack, and this could be a useful evaluation tool if parents could be encouraged to return them (there are of course issues here with regards to adult literacy). In addition the Group are also to begin using session evaluation sheets for the Bookworms clubs, on which are recorded what the aims of the session were, and an evaluation of how the session went. These will provide a useful on going evaluation of the Group's activities, but perhaps more in terms of the 'outputs' than 'outcomes'. These evaluation sheets will have the added advantage of making the Group think through the activities more, in terms of how a particular activity relates to their aims and objectives, and to state this clearly. Funding bodies will then be able to see exactly what the Group has done, and why.

In addition to the above evaluation measures, the Group could consider using an external body again to evaluate their work. The author believes that the Project would benefit from a longer term study, if this was at all possible, from a body with more educational expertise, who may be better placed to assess the Project's impact on literacy.

## **6.6 Summary.**

- There are a number of individuals involved with the Project, including professional agencies, paid staff, and volunteers. Roles are clearly laid out in service level agreements, and the Group see one of the strengths of the Project lying in the fact that all the agencies involved are equally committed and work well together.

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<sup>24</sup> Johnson (1986) also indicates that length of existence and continuation of funding can be used in measurement.

- The loss of the Community Development Service, and the consequent relocation of the Community Development Worker involved with the Project has been a big blow. The Group do not yet know the extent of the support they will receive from the new Youth service, and the situation will require service level agreements to be revised.
- The Project is funded by SRB, however it is experiencing some problems in obtaining the money on time, and from 'frozen' allocations. In recognition of the possibility of needing to seek alternative funding the Group have recently adopted a formal constitution. The future of the Project is dependent to some extent on the continuation of sufficient funding.
- In addition to funding issues, members of the Group also indicated that communication and personalities can sometimes be a problem. The communication problem stems largely from the fact that there are different strands to the Project, with various people involved in the different elements. Differences of opinion in the Group gives rise to some debate during meetings, however the Group solves such issues by trialing ideas, or putting them on hold until they have been looked at in more detail.
- The future involvement of the library, with regards to the new clubs, is an issue which needs addressing, however the Group are discussing ways to overcome this problem.
- There seems to be some split within the Group as to the Project's future expansion, with some members wishing to keep it small and high quality, and others wishing to expand into other areas. There may be an argument for expanding the Groups activities, but *within* Broxtowe estate, rather than *out* of it.
- The continuing evaluation of the Project is important for both their future planning and improvement, and as a funding requirement. It is an issue which is difficult to address, not least because there would appear to be little literature available on the evaluation of similar projects. Although there are several methods the Group could apply, including the social audit technique, there are implications in terms of staff, time and money, which the Group are ill placed to meet at present. The intention of using evaluation sheets for each Bookworms session could be useful in going some way towards evaluation however.

## Chapter Seven.

### **Project Outcomes.**

#### **7.0 Introduction.**

In assessing the outcomes of the Project, the Group members were first asked what meant the Project had been a success for them. Parents and carers of the participating children were asked about the impact of the Project on them, and local schools were also surveyed.

#### **7.1. Success for the Group.**

Group members are very aware that it is difficult to prove that the Project has been a success. In terms of their aims to provide after-school clubs, to get books and other materials into homes, and to promote book sharing, it is clear that these are being achieved. These are however outputs, and it is difficult to assess the outcomes of the Project, that is, what impact these activities are having in terms of the aims of raising literacy, and raising self-esteem and confidence levels. This is due in part to the fact that it is impossible to isolate the Project's impact from that of school, the family, and other community initiatives or services, a fact recognised by the Group:

*“it's hard to judge whether their reading has improved or not, because we don't do any reading tests, we don't liaise with the schools and say 'has this child improved because of us' .....because school's working on the same thing and it's hard to narrow it down to whether we've improved their reading or whether school has”*

One Group member suggested that because of this there was a large element of 'trust' involved, trusting of the Group's instincts, and in the fact that they work they do will have an impact in the long term.

Group members suggested that they would judge that the Project had been a success through seeing the children reading more and better, in seeing them use the library, and in seeing them become more confident. This was summed up thus:

*“just that the children enjoy coming really, enjoying the books, enjoying interacting with each other, becoming more sociable with each other”*

*“I think that you'd judge by the children using the library happily, regularly and often. You'd hope they'd be in the top band of their peers at school for reading and book appreciation, or at least they we're maximising, you know.....they were performing as well as they possibly could”*

Success for the Group also lies in the fact that the Project is still running after seven years, and is in fact growing:

*“I think just through its existence, just the fact that it’s still in existence seven years down the line, I think that’s successful”*

Moreover, the Group do not see that there has been a ‘greatest success’ element about the Project, except for the fact that the Project is still running. They suggest that the successes are more subtle, and small in scale at the moment<sup>25</sup>.

## **7.2 Failure for the Group.**

Whilst the Group members concede that it is difficult to judge the success of the Project in terms of its impact, neither do they believe it has been a failure. When asked what would mean that the Project had failed, the unanimous answer was that it most definitely wasn’t. Again the fact that the club is still in existence, and that the children still enjoy coming were seen as signs that the club wasn’t failing. Members suggested that the Project would only be a failure if the Bookworms clubs lost their focus on literacy and:

*“the group just degenerating into a youth club”*

or if the system the Group has set up over the years was to crumble, in terms of the people involved, the networks the Group have established, and the services they provide.

The Group believe that they have seen differences in the children which indicate that the Project is not failing:

*“it’s hard to actually prove it, but I’m sure some kids have moved on and they’re different because of it”*

This difference has been seen in terms of self-confidence:

*“if you see a change in children, which I have done, I mean one girl, she was so shy when she came and then the other week she just started chatting away to me, and you know, that for me is a breakthrough, to see the difference in a child”*

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<sup>25</sup> An interesting point is that when asked what they would judge as success, the focus was almost entirely concentrated on success in terms of the Bookworms element of the Project, rather than on Bookstart. This is perhaps because this element of the Project takes up the majority of the Group’s time, and members are involved in the sessions on a weekly basis. It is therefore perhaps at the forefront of members minds, whereas the majority of members involvement with Bookstart is more sporadic, as parties are only held occasionally, and once the packs are made up, they are largely out of the Group’s hands, as it is Health Visitors who distribute them, and library assistants who deal with library registration.

*“some children when they come at the start and they sit in a corner and they won’t join in, but to see them actually joining in and being involved, it’s good, it makes it all worthwhile when you see things like that”*

and in terms of reading and using books:

*“to see children actually enjoying the books - it’s only the last party I’ve seen toddlers turning the pages and coming out with all sorts of gobbledegook, but telling a story.....and there are a number of families where that wouldn’t have happened”*

*“some of the children will join in with the reading whereas they wouldn’t before”*

*“sometimes you get spontaneous actions, children bring books in, children will tell you about a book they’ve read, and it shows obviously that they’re keen”*

### **7.3 The Parent’s Views: Bookstart.**

Focus group interviews and telephone interviews were used to gain parent’s perceptions on the running and impact of the Bookstart Project. Overall all the participating parents were very positive about the scheme. They were all happy with the book packs, although there were some suggestions for books and information that could be included in them (see Appendix Six). The books were, perhaps unsurprisingly, appreciated by all the families, as were the nursery rhyme cards. When asked what had been the best thing about the scheme, almost all parents indicated that it was receiving the free books:

*“me and the kids love them”*

*“you see the children get so excited with it”*

Apart from the free books, all the parents said how much they appreciated receiving the birthday card, and lately the birthday present, and the Group’s regular activities, that is, the Bookstart parties:

*“because the kids really do enjoy them”*

Not only do the children enjoy them, both the parents involved in the focus group and a parent interviewed over the telephone suggested that the parties developed their children’s social skills and that:

*“it’s nice for them to interact with other children as well”*

When asked what they and their children had gained through the scheme, several points were raised. Almost all of the parents recognised the positive impact that the scheme could have on their child’s future:

*“it’s a headstart of going into school”*

*“I just think it gives them a better start”*

One parent described, with some pride, how well she thought her son was doing since she had been sharing books with him:

*“he recognises things he’s seen in books, then he sees them on telly and out and about and talks about them. I think it’s helped him a lot. Before he was two he could name all the parts of his body”*

Several also suggested that it made a difference to how people thought about sharing books with babies in that:

*“people don’t think about learning their children, but with this, it’s a start isn’t it”*

*“when I was young you didn’t bother with books until school”*

It was also suggested that through the scheme:

*“you feel more involved with your children as well”*

and that:

*“it’s nice to know, you know, that people do care about your children’s reading”*

*“yeah, it’s brilliant”*

#### **7.4 The Parent’s View: Bookworms.**

Again, focus group interviews were held to ascertain the views of parents and carers on the running and impact of the Bookworms clubs, and again they were, on the whole, very positive about the clubs. Parents and carers suggested that the children liked coming to the clubs for a variety of reasons, from mixing together with other children, to having:

*“something else to do as well, rather than just going home and playing in their bedrooms.....it gives them something to look forward to and to go to”*

The trips to both the library and elsewhere, particularly the theatre and swimming, were elements the children were said to particularly enjoy, but it was suggested that what they enjoyed about the clubs was the fact that:

*“they learn to read, they enjoy reading”*

It was suggested that one element that wasn’t enjoyed was the trip down to the library for the once monthly library meeting. This was however something that the parents and carers didn’t like, rather than the children. Whilst the Library was seen to be an

important element of the club's activities, the majority of parents taking part in the focus group sessions<sup>26</sup> argued that:

*“we don't like bringing the kids up from school at night and then going out right back to the library”*

This was because several of the schools are some distance away from the estate, and it is a long walk to school and back. The parents and carers felt that it was a rush to get home from school, and then to get the children down to the Library for 4.30pm, particularly when they may have several small children with them as well. One parent did not have time to go home and come back again, which meant waiting around for a while before the session started. Parents and carers felt the library sessions were important but suggested that the time the session began could be put back by half an hour.

This was the only negative comment received about the Project however, and besides the walk down to the library, parents and carers felt that the library sessions were good for a number of reasons. It was suggested that the library sessions were useful in providing the children with an opportunity to take books out, that the children did enjoy taking books out, and that they were sometimes more interested in the library books than their own:

*“he's got his own books, but he never seems to bother with them, but these he seems to bother about”*

It was also suggested by the parents and carers that the children learnt important skills in the Library, and that these sessions taught the children how to look for certain kinds of books, and how to choose books properly. One parent suggested that before joining the club her daughter would just grab the first few books, without actually looking at them to see if she really wanted them. This changed however when the her daughter joined Bookworms, and she suggested that:

*“it's broadening their outlook, and they know what kind of book to get, they're looking and they're concentrating”*

In terms of broadening outlooks, the parents and carers also felt that their children were reading a wider variety of books through participating in the Bookworms scheme. At school the children were largely limited to the reading scheme in use, but through Bookworms they had access to a wider choice.

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<sup>26</sup> Whilst the younger Bookworms do not go to the library it was still brought up in the focus group as one parent had children in both clubs.



When asked if they perceived the clubs to have had an impact on their children's literacy, the answer was a unanimous and definite 'yes' from both focus groups. Several examples of this impact were given:

*"they learn to read a lot, I mean my girl didn't learn to read a lot, but now, she's started to read"*

*"he couldn't read.....at the moment we're having special needs for him, but his reading's come on lovely, even them at school have said how well he's coming on with his reading"*

*"she's come on a lot with her reading I think since she's been here, she's improved a lot at school since she's been coming"*

*"it really helps them with their reading, her reading's picked up no end. My girl's 10, but she's got a reading age now of 12 plus"*

One parent whose child had only been attending for a few months stated:

*"I've just had a report back from school, and they've said that she's done really, really well this term with her reading and her writing and her literacy, and she got above average.....so she did really well to say that last term she was really lacking, she was really behind, so I think it has brought her on"*

Some of the impact of the club was put down by the parents and carers to the fact that the club was not like school, and did offer the children the opportunity to enjoy books in a stress free environment:

*"at school they have that many pressures, they have that much to contend with at school at the moment, but this, it's looking at books and doing things with books, but there's not that stress attached to it"*

*"there's no 'we've got to finish this today'"*

In addition to the effect the clubs were having on their children's literacy, parents also identified that the clubs were having an impact on their children's social skills, and confidence levels, stating:

*"I think it brings them out of their selves"*

*"it builds their confidence up doesn't it, their self-esteem"*

*"it sort of puts the idea to them about teamwork and doing stuff together"*

Parents and carer's felt that whilst these were also skills that the children were learning at school, the fact that there were more adults at Bookworms to help with the children, meant

that the Group were more effective. Parents and carers also appreciated the clubs for the fact that not only did the clubs offer the children something to do:

*“I’m dreading it when my Grandson leaves this... ..when he’s old enough to stop this, I mean, what’s he going to do. There’s nothing to occupy him, and he loves coming here”*

they know where their children are (and that they are having to behave themselves due to the behavioural standards of the club). In addition several parents said the club helped out with their children’s reading when they were sometimes pushed to do so themselves:

*“it helps me a lot you see. With me having four kids I haven’t always got time to sit down and read with them, so it does benefit me a lot as well as what it does the kids”*

### **7.5 Local Schools.**

Despite the less than ideal questionnaire sent out to the five main primary schools serving the estate, the returns did produce some interesting data. It would have been useful to have been able to talk to a representative from each school, but this was not possible due to time constraints. Three of the questionnaires were eventually returned, two having additional comments to the simple tick box answers. All three respondents indicated that they were aware of the Project and that they had referred or encouraged children to attend. Two respondents explained why:

*“every opportunity to access a literacy project is a valuable one. The more opportunities are accessed the more the children will increase their chances of success with literacy”*

*“encourage children in after school activities, to enjoy books, stories and a greater access to literature outside school”*

All three also indicated that they thought the Project did have an impact on children’s literacy. One respondent suggested that this was again because the more opportunities that were accessed, the more the children will increase their chances of success with literacy, and one similarly suggested that:

*“any extra reading or encouragement to do so, and more access to books will have a positive impact”*

Two of the three returned questionnaires suggested that the school’s did value the Project highly:

*“a super resource for the area”*

*“I hope that it can continue to run and be supported financially. It has become a vital part of the literacy input on the estate. I wish it every and continued success”*

## **7.6 Library Membership and Use.**

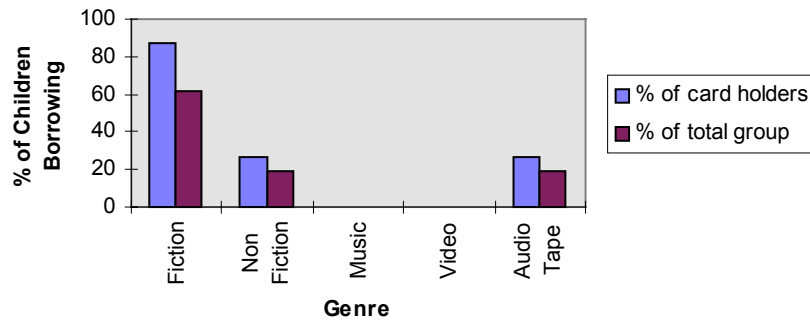
The library borrower record for each child participating in the Projects was examined to ascertain the extent of library membership and use. In the case of Bookworms, a note was made of the kinds of books children were borrowing, in a bid to see whether or not they were using the library to borrow books for school work.

### **7.6.1 Bookworms.**

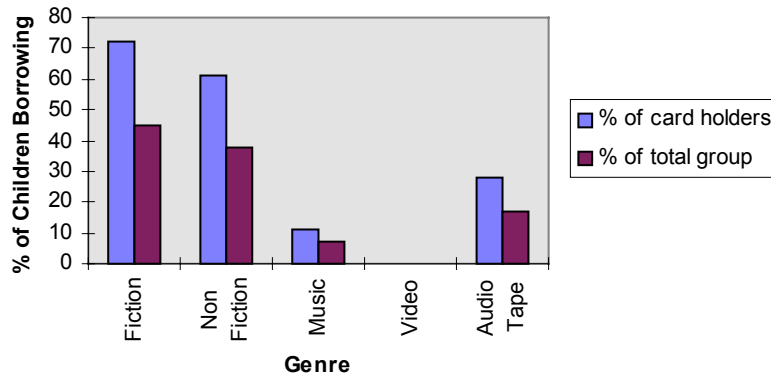
Of the 21 children on the database for the 5 to 7's Bookworms club four members did not hold library cards, and a for a further two a matching address could not be found. Although records did exist for children of the appropriate age and name, living in the same area, as the address on the library system did not match the address on the Bookworms database, it was decided not to examine the records for these. Whilst they probably were the children on the Bookworms database, it was not possible to be 100% certain. Of the remaining 15 children on the Bookworms database, two had not borrowed items in the last year (that is, July 1999 to July 2000), whilst the remaining 13 had. 87% of known card holders, or 62% of the total number of children on the database for the 5 to 7's club had, therefore, borrowed books in the last year. In the 8 to 13's club, there were 29 children on the database, 5 of which were not library members, and a further 6 for which there was not a matching address. Of the remaining 18 children on the database 2 had not borrowed in the last year, whilst 16 (89% of known card holders, or 55% of the total number of children on the database) had.

The breakdown of what children were borrowing is as follows (displayed as a percentage of the number of children with library cards, and as a percentage of the group as a whole):

### 5 to 7's Bookworms Club: Breakdown of Borrowing Patterns



### 8 to 13's Bookworms Club: Breakdown of Borrowing Patterns

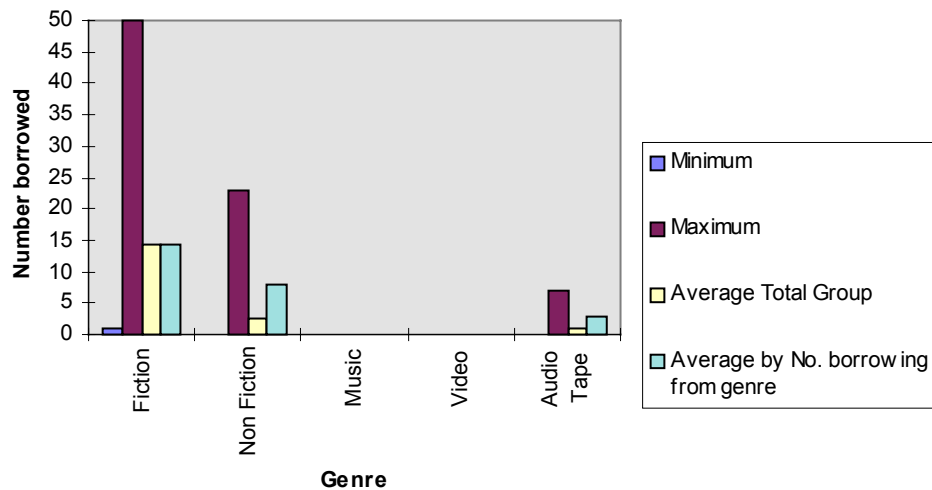


As can be seen by the graphs the majority of borrowing was of fiction material, however children in both groups also borrowed non-fiction materials, especially in the 8 to 13's group. The 5 to 7's borrowing non-fiction were borrowing both books that may have been associated with school work, such as books dealing with colour, telling the time, science, and water, and books for leisure interest, for example books dealing with dough craft and Christmas projects. Books were also taken out on subjects such as dinosaurs, trains, pirates, sharks and poetry. The older Bookworms children made particular use of the non fiction stock, taking out books on subjects traditionally associated with school work, such as drawing, the Victorians, the Tudors, castles, the Egyptians, Britain since 1930, and the Normans. Books were also taken out on subjects more traditionally associated with leisure

interests<sup>27</sup> such as soccer, magic, dogs, rabbits, and judo. This suggests that the children are making use of the library for homework purposes, as well as for leisure interest and fiction material.

The above figures illustrate that Bookworms children are using the library. When looked at as a percentage of the total group, the figures do not look too positive, in that they are suggesting that less than 50% of the older Bookworms group have borrowed fiction in the last year. It is important to note that the figures have been skewed due to the fact that some children have had to be left out of the ‘card holder’ category due to the lack of matching addresses between the Library and Bookworms databases<sup>28</sup>. They also do not illustrate the fact that while many of the children are borrowing, there are great differences in the *extent* to which they are borrowing. Some children, for example, have taken only one book out in the last year, whilst others have taken out considerably more. Appendix Seven illustrates the different borrowing rates for the children in the club, whilst the following graphs illustrate the minimum, maximum, and average borrowing rates for the period July 1999 to July 2000:

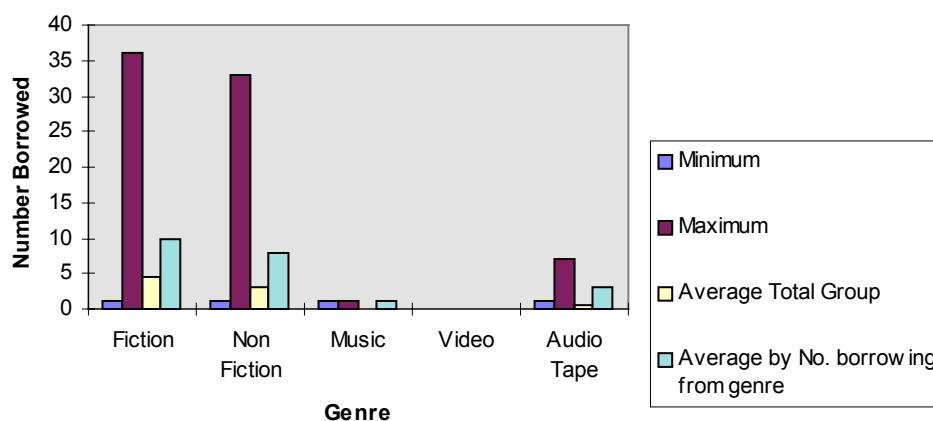
**5 to 7's Bookworms Club: Extent of Borrowing**



<sup>27</sup> It is quite possible that the ‘leisure’ interest books have been used for school projects, however, just as it is possible that stock traditionally associated with school work could have been borrowed as a leisure interest. Without a full survey, it is not possible to say for certain why stock is being borrowed.

<sup>28</sup> This may be due to the fact that, as mentioned earlier, there is a considerable degree of movement within the estate, and families may not have updated their new addresses with either the Library, or with Bookworms.

### 8 to 13's Bookworms Club: Extent of Borrowing



#### 7.6.2 Bookstart.

There are currently 282 children on the Bookstart database, all of whom should have been registered with the library, as registration forms are filled out by the Health Visitor when the pack is given out. The borrower records of all of these children were examined to ascertain the extent to which their parents or carers were borrowing books for them. The figures, however, are somewhat disappointing. Of the 282 children on the Bookstart database, 55 records could not be examined either because no record existed and they did not therefore possess a library card (42), or because there was no matching address (13). Of the remaining 227 children on the database, 157 (69.2%) had never borrowed, and only 44 (19.4%) had borrowed in the period of July 1999 to July 2000. Again, there was some variation in the amounts of books taken in this period (see Appendix Seven).

It is possible that some parents are using an older child's card to take books out for several children, or even their own cards. No attempt was made to check siblings or parents cards as this would have had data protection implications. Library staff have suspected however that library use among Bookstart parents was low, and the figures would appear to confirm this. In addition it is concerning that 44 children did not appear to have been registered with the library, although they had received the book pack. The Group may need to examine this, as the system would appear to be falling down somewhere.

There are several reasons why parents and carers may not be using the library service to borrow for their babies. There is some debate, for example, as to what extent disadvantaged people perceive the public library as relevant to their lives, and also the

extent to which public libraries are socially inclusive (Pateman 1999, Muddiman 1999). Muddiman suggests that “the numerical evidence suggests that it is the minority of the working class who are socially, educationally or intellectually aspirational who particularly value and use public library services” (1999: 5). He also states that the perceptions of the working class parents about the library service “focus upon a concern for literacy and life opportunities for their children” (ibid.: 2). From the focus group and telephone interviews it is clear that there are a minority of parents on the estate who are aspirational for their children, and it is likely that it is this minority who value and use the library service. It was suggested that many parents on the estate did not share this aspirational outlook however (see 7.7).

These points aside, however, one parent did make an interesting comment as to why she wasn't using the library. When asked what the best thing about Bookstart had been for her, she did not answer ‘the free books and parties’ as everyone else had done, but said unequivocally that it had been:

*“getting the library cards through the post”*

However she also stated:

*“but at the moment I wouldn't take them down there 'cos I'd end up paying damages”*

The Librarian involved with the Project is very flexible on the issue of damages, seeing it as inevitable that some books will get damaged by toddlers. However whilst it is not possible to generalise from one comment to all the Bookstart parents, it is feasible that in an area of high poverty, this is a concern to many parents. This issue did arise during the interview with the Librarian involved with the Project who stated:

*“I don't think that (the parents) see the library as a free service, I think they worry about fines, they worry about lost and damaged books”*

However:

*“The only way we can get over that is through publicity and I have no publicity budget”*

The literature included in the Bookstart packs<sup>29</sup> does indicate that children do not pay fines, but does not say anything about lost and damaged books. The Group is considering reviewing the this literature, and this is an issue which may be tackled to some extent at that point.

## 7.7 Parental Involvement.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the research has a strong element of bias in that the parents who were spoken to were actively interested in their children's education and literacy attainment. All of the parents and carers involved in the Bookstart interviews said that they had thought of reading with their children before becoming involved in Bookstart, even to the extent:

*"I had books even before my baby was born"*

It is impossible to isolate the impact of the Project from the influences of school and, indeed, the support these children are getting at home. The parents and carers were also keenly aware of the importance of parental involvement, stating that:

*"I think parents have to help their children otherwise they wouldn't get anywhere"*

*"it's more encouragement for the parent you need, rather than the child"*

and providing examples of their own efforts:

*"when I put [child] on my knee, he likes me to read to him, but also I, he doesn't understand the words yet, like say the sentence to him and he has to repeat it as well after me, so he's sort of getting used to reading"*

along with the results of those efforts:

*"since [child's] been tiny I've always read to him, even in the daytime, and that's why he likes books now. He always says "Mummy come and sit down and read to me"*

Parents and carers clearly believe, however, that the Project is having a positive impact on both their children's literacy skills and social skills.

Parents interviewed also provided a lot of information on the likely extent, or rather lack of it, of parental involvement on the estate. This involved both simply reading with their children:

*"a lot of parents don't read with their children round here"*

to involving themselves with school:

*"I know at school parental involvement is pathetic, it's pathetic beyond pathetic"*

*"I went to a play this morning in the juniors, and no word of a lie, there were four parents there"*

*"there's a lot of parents just don't bother"*

*"they couldn't care less"*

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<sup>29</sup> The main literature included is in the form of a glossy 'Babies Love Books' leaflet, produced by the



This perhaps again raises the argument that the Group could target parents more, it also, however indicates that this may be a very difficult task.

### **7.8 Summary.**

- Group members indicated that they would largely judge the success of the Project in terms of: the club still being in existence; the children still enjoying and continuing to attend Bookworms sessions; and that the children would be enjoying reading and using the library regularly.
- Group members were very aware of the difficulties in assessing the impact of the Project due to the difficulty of isolating the impact of the Project from other influences, particularly those of school and the home. None-the-less the Group members believe that the Project has had an impact on literacy levels and in terms of raising self-esteem and confidence.
- Parents and carers interviewed about both elements of the Project expressed very positive views. The book pack and Bookstart parties were particularly appreciated, and parents of Bookstart babies expressed their belief that the Project gave their children a headstart, and made them feel more involved with their children.
- Parents and carers of children participating in Bookworms indicated that their children enjoyed attending the clubs as a social event and to read, and that they particularly enjoyed the trips out. Parents and carers also expressed their belief that the Project had had a positive impact on their children's literacy levels, helped in their social skills, and broadened both their outlook and reading range. They also implied that the library sessions were teaching important lifelong learning skills.
- Local schools also made positive comments about the scheme. All schools responding said that they would refer or encourage children to attend, and that they thought the Project had an impact on literacy. It was described as a vital resource for the estate.
- Library membership and use statistics do cause some concern. Whilst children in Bookworms are using the library for both fiction and homework materials, the majority are not using it to any great extent. Issue figures for Bookstart children are particularly worrying in that there are no records for some children, suggesting a flaw in the system, that the majority have never borrowed, and that those borrowing in the last year amounts to only 19.4%.

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Project, but including details of the library service.

- It is difficult to say why parents aren't borrowing for their Bookstart children. It is feasible that this may be due to concerns about fines and lost or damaged books. It is also possibly due to the apparent apathy of many parents on the estate, a factor suggested by those parents and carers interviewed.

## **Chapter Eight.**

### **Conclusion and Recommendations For Further Research.**

#### **8.1 Conclusion.**

Literacy, it has been argued, is an incredibly important issue for a variety of reasons, and one which has an impact at several different levels. The Bookworms/Bookstart Project has been established to tackle the problem of low literacy attainment in children on an estate suffering multiple deprivation, and which is experiencing a struggling education system. This study has not, unfortunately, been able to give any definite answers on the issue of whether or not the Project is achieving its aim of raising literacy levels. It is not possible to isolate the influences of the home, school and community, and to therefore say for definite that children's literacy levels and levels of confidence and self-esteem have risen due to the Project. What is clear is that the Group sincerely believe that they are having an impact. Moreover, although only a limited number of parents and carers were consulted, it is clear that they too believe that their children's literacy levels have improved as a result of their involvement, and that the Project is indeed having an impact. This view was also expressed by three of the local schools. This evidence, flawed as it is, does then suggest that the Project is having an impact, and is achieving its aims, at least to some extent.

It is also clear, however, that there are areas where the Project may not be having the desired impact, where the message is not getting across, and this is in terms of library use. Library membership levels have increased as a result of the Bookstart element, however children are automatically registered with the library when the packs are given out and this does not indicate therefore which families would have made the effort to join themselves. In terms of library use there are real concerns, as the majority of Bookstart children's records show that they have never borrowed, and many of the Bookworms children have borrowed very little in the last year. It has not been possible in the remit of this study to explore why parents of Bookstart children are not using the library, however it is an area which the Group need to give some thought. Whilst the Broxtowe Bookstart scheme already goes much further than most schemes in the country, in terms of encouraging library use it would appear that the Group need to go further still.

Never-the-less the library is seen as an important resource by the parents spoken to in the course of this research. The majority of children attending the Bookworms clubs are

members, and are using the library for both fiction and homework related material, however the figures indicate that many of the children are not using it to a very great extent. It would appear that the Group's aim to promote skills for lifelong learning is being met, not only in terms of children reading, but also in terms of them learning how to use the library and search for books and information, an aspect which was mentioned by the parents and carers.

During the course of this research, the Group was in a state of considerable change, due to the setting on of new staff, the loss of a key professional, the setting up of new clubs, and the formalising of management procedures. This made it difficult at times to keep a track of developments and what was happening. Non-the-less despite some management issues in terms of communication procedures and some clash of personalities, the Project did appear to offer a good example of multi-agency working, with everyone clear about their roles and responsibilities. All of the members appeared to understand clearly what the Project is trying to achieve, and to be committed to these aims.

The future of the Project is of some concern, in terms of the continuation of funding, and whilst the Group are taking steps to identify alternative sources of funding, given current difficulties with area budget allocation cutbacks and 'frozen' allocations, this would appear to be a matter of urgent concern. The future direction of the Project did highlight some disagreement between members who wished to keep it small and high quality, and those who wished to continue expanding into nearby estates. Whilst the wish to reach as many children in the area as possible is commendable, the author is concerned that the Group may find itself spreading itself too thinly to make any real impact, and it may be missing out on further opportunities within the areas it is already working.

In an area experiencing the range and severity of problems that Broxtowe is, and where many children are living in poverty, and may have limited life choices and opportunities, it could be argued that any literacy initiative would be better than none at all. However, whilst it has not been possible to arrive at conclusive answers, the author sincerely believes that the Bookworms/Bookstart Project is having a positive impact. The author agrees with two local schools: that the Project "*has become a vital part of the literacy input on the estate*" and that it is "*a super resource for the area*".

## **8.2 Recommendations for future research.**

Several issues presented themselves during the course of this study, which would benefit from further research.

- An examination of why the use of library services in Broxtowe by Bookstart parents is so low. Is this due to the fact that the library is not seen as relevant in the lives of people living in a disadvantaged community, is it due to low adult literacy levels, or is it the fact that the Bookstart message is not getting across?
- Similarly a national survey of the impact of Bookstart on library take up, and importantly, use.
- The Project would benefit from further evaluation in the future. This would enable the Group to see how they had progressed, particularly as at the time of this study they were in a state of considerable change, and perhaps also to see if they were making a dent on the Broxtowe 'ethos'. Various Group members felt that it would take at least 10 years before a real change was seen. If further research was carried out in three years time, then the Project would have been running the Bookworms element for 10 years.
- In addition the Project may benefit from being evaluated by a body with educational expertise (for example, the education department of a university). A person with educational expertise may be better placed to examine the impact of the Project on literacy.
- Due to a lack of literature, research is needed to formulate an evaluation model for library associated literacy projects.
- A comparison study, looking at the levels of impact of traditional Bookstart schemes and of those schemes which target parents more proactively, through for example Baby Book Groups (see Hardman and Jones 1999), would be useful.





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## Appendix 1

### Evaluation of Broxtowe Bookstart/Bookworms Project.

#### Interview Schedule.

I am a student from the University of Sheffield, and am conducting an evaluation of the Bookworms/Bookstart project at Broxtowe, as part of my research for the Masters programme in Librarianship. For this I will be gathering information on what the projects are aiming to achieve, what is being done to achieve these aims, and whether these aims are being achieved. This interview, which should take about an hour, is a mix of factual questions about the management and running of the group, and questions seeking your opinions on what you believe the group is aiming to achieve, and how, or whether, these aims are being achieved. With your permission I would like to take notes throughout the interview, but I would also like to record the interview in order to get a full record of what has been said, should I need to clarify any points when writing the report.

#### Section One: General Information.

First of all I would like to ask you some background questions about your involvement with the Bookworms/Bookstart projects:

Name of interviewee:

1) What is the nature of your involvement in the project?

2) Could you tell me how long you've been involved?

#### 3.0) Timing of the Project:

I'd like to ask about the timing of the two projects:

3.1) When was the Bookworms project started?

**3.2) When was the Bookstart project started?**

**Section Two: Aims and Objectives.**

**4.0) Aims and Objectives:**

**I'd now like to discuss the aims and objectives of the projects, could you tell me:**

**4.1) Why the Bookworms project was set up?**

**4.2) What is the Bookworms project hoping to achieve?**

**4.3) What are you doing to achieve this?**

**4.4) Why was the Bookstart project set up?**

**4.5) What is the Bookstart project hoping to achieve?**

**4.6) What is being done to achieve this?**

**4.7) Could you explain the relationship between the two projects?**

**Section Three: Organisational Issues.**

**I'd now like to discuss the organisational issues involved in both projects, and**

**I'd like to start by asking about the scope of the projects:**

**5.0) Scope of the projects:**

**5.1) How are children/families selected to take part in the Bookworms scheme?**

**5.2) How old are the children taking part in the Bookworms scheme?**

**5.3) How many children are currently involved with Bookworms?**

**5.4) How many children have been involved with Bookworms since it was established?**

**5.5) How are children/families selected to take part in the Bookstart scheme?**

**5.6) How old are children when they get the Bookstart pack?**

**5.7) How many children have received the Bookstart pack since the scheme was established?**

**6.0) Materials: Next I'd like to ask about the materials used in both schemes, and the programmes of activities, starting with the Bookstart project:**

**6.1) What are the contents of the Bookstart pack?**

**6.2) How are the contents chosen?**

**6.3) How are the Bookstart packs given out? (Who and Where?)**

**6.4) Are any explanations given as the packs are given out?**

**6.4a) If so, what are they?**

**6.5) What materials and activities are used for the Bookworms to promote literacy?**

**6.6) Have these been effective? (if they have, could you explain why, and if they haven't, could you explain why not).**

**7.0) Funding: I'm now going to ask about funding for the projects:**

**7.1) How are the projects funded?**

**7.2) How much does the funding amount to?**

**7.3) What does the funding allow you to do exactly?**

**7.4) Do you think that the funding you get is enough?**

**7.5) What would you do if you had extra funding?**

**7.6) You've been running the projects for seven years now, what has led you to consider adopting a formal constitution at this point?**

**8.0) And finally on the subject of organisational issues, could you explain to me the relationship between the library service and the projects?**

**8.1) And the Community Development service?**

**8.2) And the Health Visitor Service?**

**Section Four: Outcomes.**

**9.0) Outcomes of the project: I'd now like to go on to discuss the outcomes of the projects:**

**9.1) How would you judge if the projects have been a success?**

**9.2) What do you see as the projects' greatest success?**

**9.3) What would mean, for you, that the projects have been a failure?**

**9.4) What has been the greatest difficulty in running the projects, and why?**

**9.5) How has this been overcome?**

**Section Five: The Future.**

**10.0) How would you like to see the projects moving forward in the future?**

**11.0) Finally, are there any other comments you would like to make about any aspect of the two projects?**



## Appendix 2

### Bookstart Focus Group Interview Schedule.

I am a student from the University of Sheffield, and am conducting an evaluation of the Bookworms/Bookstart project at Broxtowe, as part of my research for the Masters programme in Librarianship. The Bookstart Project has been running for five years now, and the time has come to look at the project to see what is working and what isn't. For this I need to talk to you, the parents and carers, to see what you think about the project. This session should take about 45 minutes, and I have a few questions to ask you. Anything you say will be treated in the strictest confidence. With your permission I would like to take notes throughout the interview, but I would also like to record the interview in order to get a full record of what has been said, should I need to clarify any points when writing the report.

#### **Opening Question.**

Could you each introduce yourselves, giving your name, and how many children you have who have received the Bookstart pack?

#### **Introductory Question.**

I have here the Bookstart packs given at the 7-9 month hearing check, and the 18 month check. Could you tell me what you think about them?

Sub-Question - What do you think about the information they contain?

Sub-Question - Were you told what the pack was for when you were given it?

#### **Transition Question.**

Had you thought about sharing books with your baby before you were given the pack?

#### **Key Questions.**

What do you think you and your children have gained through being involved with Bookstart?

Sub-Question - What has been the best thing about Bookstart?

**Ending Question.**

Summary of points discussed so far.

Is there anything you think that Bookstart should do differently?

Sub-Question - Is there anything Bookstart could do that they don't do now?

Is there anything else anyone would like add? Is there anything I've missed?

### Appendix 3

#### Bookworms Focus Group Interview Schedule.

I am a student from the University of Sheffield, and am conducting an evaluation of the Bookworms/Bookstart project at Broxtowe, as part of my research for the Masters programme in Librarianship. The Bookworms Project has been running for seven years now, and the time has come to look at the Project to see what is working and what isn't. For this I need to talk to you, the parents or carers of the children, to see what you think about the project. This session should take about 45 minutes, and I have a few questions to ask you as a group just to get things going. Anything you say will be treated in strictest confidence. With your permission I would like to take notes but I would also like to record the interview in order to get a full record of what has been said, should I need to clarify any points when writing the report.

#### **Opening Question.**

Could you each introduce yourselves, giving your name, and how many children you have who attend Bookworms sessions?

#### **Introductory Question.**

How long have your children been coming to Bookworms?

#### **Transition Question.**

What do you think your children enjoy about Bookworms?

#### **Key Questions.**

Do you think your children have benefited from coming to Bookworms?

(Probe: could you explain why or why not?)

How important do you think the library is to Bookworms?

Has Bookworms had any effect on your child's literacy?

**Ending Question.**

Summary of points discussed so far.

Is there anything you think Bookworms should do differently?

Sub-Question - Is there anything you would like to see Bookworms do, which they don't do at the moment.

Is there anything else anyone would like to add? Is there anything I've missed.

Appendix 4

Bookworms Project (Broxtowe)

**I am a student from the University of Sheffield and am conducting an evaluation of the Bookworms Project based in Broxtowe, as part of my research for the Masters programme in Librarianship. I would be grateful if you could spare a few minutes to complete the following short questionnaire, which will help me to gain some idea of the opinions of local schools with regards to the club. All replies will be treated in strict confidence.**

1. Are you aware of the Bookworms project?

- YES                        Please go to question 2  
NO                         Please go to question 3

2. Have you ever referred children to Bookworms, or encouraged them to attend Bookworms?

- YES              
NO

2a. Please could you briefly explain why you have, or have not, referred children to Bookworms, or encouraged them to attend.

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3. Would you ever consider referring children to attend Bookworms, or encourage children to attend?

- YES              
NO

4. Do you think the Bookworms club has an impact on children's literacy?

- YES              
NO

4a. Could you explain why you think the club does, or does not have an impact?

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5. Do you have any other comments about Bookworms that you would like to make

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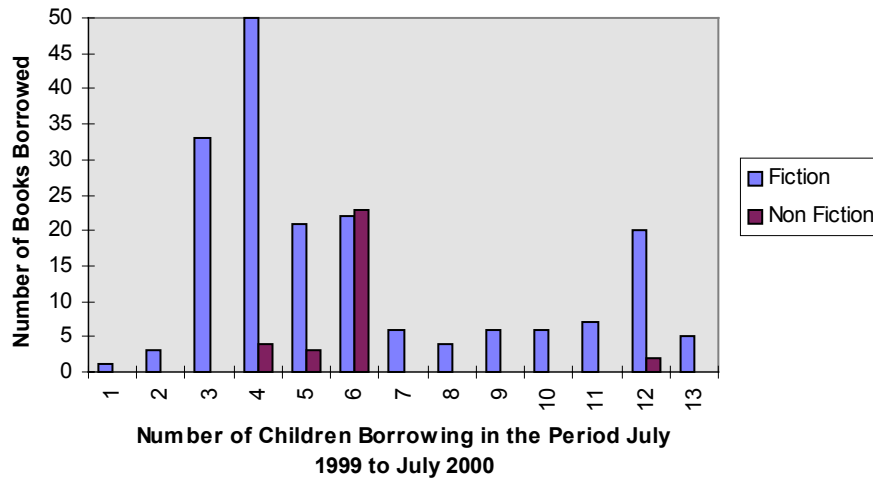
Thankyou for your time.

## Appendix 5

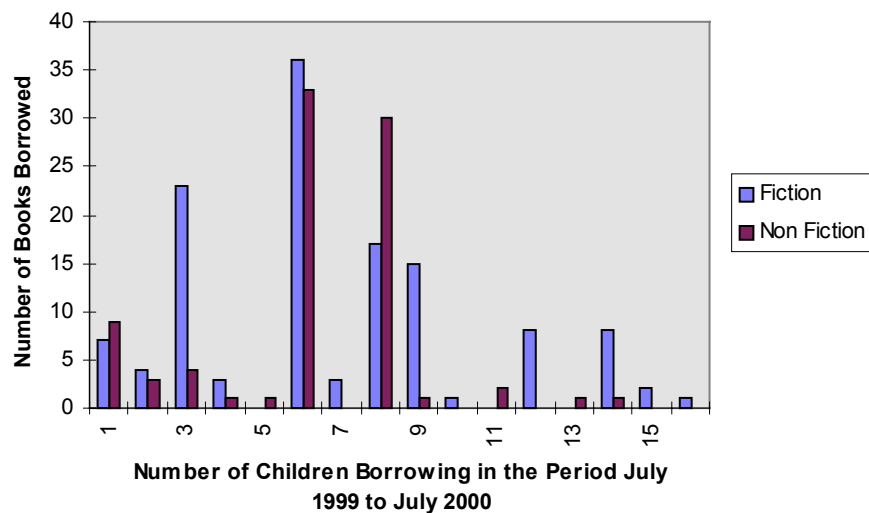
### Amount and Range of Fiction and Non Fiction Borrowing.

The following graphs illustrate the differing amounts of fiction and non fiction material borrowed by those borrowing in the period July 1999 to July 2000.

**5 to 7's Bookworms Club - Amount of Borrowing by Child**



**8 to 13's Bookworms Club: Amount of Borrowing By Child**



The graph below illustrates the number of books borrowed for each of the 44 Bookstart children who had borrowed in the period July 1999 to July 2000.

**Amount of Borrowing For Bookstart Children**

