To what extent does participation in the Bookstart scheme affect the reader development of parents and carers?

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ABSTRACT

This research begins by outlining the origins of the Bookstart scheme and highlighting the increasing importance of reader development. It notes that although Sorby (2002) has carried out research into the connection between family learning and Bookstart, there has been no investigation of the possible connection between Bookstart and parent/carer reader development. The aim of the research is therefore to investigate the relationship between Bookstart and adult reader development. Within this, the specific objectives are:

- To establish to what extent participation in Bookstart encourages parent/carer reader development.
- To understand the factors that determine to what extent parent/carer reader development is affected by Bookstart.

The research was divided into two phases, the first quantitative, the second qualitative. The first phase involved the distribution of questionnaires to parents and carers at a Bookstart 'Babytime' session in the library. Those that indicated they were willing to be interviewed were then invited to take part in a focus group discussion for the second, qualitative, phase.

The findings indicate that Bookstart does have an effect on parent/carer reader development, but to a greater extent in some areas than others. The scheme encourages parents to visit the library more regularly, and as a result their borrowing also increases. Bookstart also has a positive effect on parent/carer opinions of the library, and their attitude to reading. It is important to recognise that the scheme also creates potential readers; it raises parent/carer awareness of reading and library activities, and encourages them to use the library in the future. In some cases Bookstart also increases parent/carer willingness to ask for help choosing books, as they are more familiar with the library and the staff; this is however limited as many parents believe selecting books is a personal matter, and not something library staff could help with.

Several factors influence the extent to which Bookstart affects parent/carer reader development; the most notable of these being the attitude of staff and the library atmosphere, the physical library environment, whether parents perceive that Bookstart can benefit them, and their lack of time. Many of these factors are within library control, and recommendations are made based on the findings as to how the library could increase the effect that Bookstart has on parent/carer reader development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Bookstart

The Bookstart scheme is the first, national, books for babies programme in the world. It was conceived by Booktrust, and piloted in Birmingham in 1992, with the aim of giving every child a lifelong love of books. At the centre of the scheme is the 'Bookstart bag', which is given free to all babies, usually by a health visitor during a regular check. The contents have varied, depending on the funding situation at the time, but typically include two baby board books, an invitation to join the library, and a booklet explaining the importance of reading with babies to parents.

Initially, the scheme was funded by Sainsburys, but following the end of the sponsorship and a year of uncertainty, a new model of partnership funding was introduced in 2002, supported by the government and the children's book trade. Bookstart has continued to grow, and in July 2004, the Chancellor announced the extension of the scheme to include 'Bookstart +' and 'My Bookstart Treasure Box' resources for toddlers and pre-school children. Bookstart is therefore now firmly established at the centre of initiatives for early years children.

In the majority of local authorities, the scheme is administered by the library service, and has proved to be immensely successful. It has been shown to increase the amount of time parents spend reading with their children, and encourage more parents to bring their children to the library more frequently (Wade and Moore, 1993). Further evaluation of the first 'Bookstart' babies was conducted when they started school. This showed that Bookstart had also had a positive effect on their educational attainment (Wade and Moore, 2003). Maggie Hines (University of Sheffield) is currently undertaking an evaluation of the effect that Bookstart has had on the educational attainment of the second group of Bookstart babies in Sheffield as they start school this year.

1.2. Reader development

Alongside the educational aspect of the public library the promotion of reader development has been increasingly recognised as a vital part of the library's work. 'Opening the Book', an independent reading promotion agency, defines reader development as 'an active intervention to open up reading choices, to increase people's confidence and enjoyment of what they read, and to offer reader-to-reader activity' (Elkin, Train and Denham, 2003:34). Reader development involves 'work that intervenes to expand people's reading horizons, often by connecting people to each other to share reading experiences' (McKearney, Wilson-Fletcher and Readman, 2001). This work begins with Bookstart and other Books for Babies initiatives, introducing new babies to books early in their lives, and continues through the ages. Reading is important, not only because it reinforces literacy and creates independent learners, but also because it gives people a fresh perspective on the world and helps them to understand themselves and other people.

The promotion of reading has been increasingly emphasised since the early 1990's, when an awareness emerged that the public library was no longer engaging adult readers. Ken Warpole, writing in the Independent, sees the growth of reader development as a pivotal moment for the public library service.

> *'A few years ago Britain's public library service had the look of a tanker sailing slowly but inexorably into institutional oblivion. Crucially, it had lost its vital relationship with the culture of reading and an engagement with contemporary literature. Librarians had, in every sense, lost the plot. Remarkably, the tanker has been turned around!'* (Walpole in McKearney, Wilson-Fletcher and Readman, 2001).

Reader development was confirmed as an essential element of public library provision when the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)/Wolfson announced funding for reader development projects in 2000/1. It's aim was 'not just to fund a range of short term activities; rather it was to launch a long-term process of development that would embed reader development into public library practice' (Wallis, Moore and Marshall, 2002). Although not all of the resulting projects were in reality sustainable, reader development is now widely acknowledged as one of the library's key roles in society (Elkin, Train and Denham, 2003).

1.3. Subject for investigation

Despite the extensive information available about the effects of Bookstart on the babies involved, little research has been done to evaluate the effects on their parents and carers. This gap in the research is highlighted by Sorby in her recent work on Bookstart in the Sheffield area (Sorby, 2002). In her research, Sorby examines Bookstart in the context of the library's initiative to become a family learning centre. She looks at the influence Bookstart had on encouraging parents to take a basic IT skills course in the library, and concludes that Bookstart provides a good initial contact with adults who would benefit from library based education.

Sorby has demonstrated that Bookstart influences adult attitudes to the library as a place of learning. No research has however been carried out investigating whether Bookstart has any effect on parent/carer reader development, an equally important facet of public library work. This project is intended to address this gap in the research, and to establish to what extent Bookstart affects parent/carer attitudes to and enthusiasm for reading.

1.4. Aim

The aim of this project is to investigate the relationship between Bookstart and adult reader development.

1.5. Objectives

The objectives of this project are:

- To establish to what extent participation in Bookstart encourages parent/carer reader development.

- To understand the factors that determine to what extent parent/carer reader development is affected by Bookstart.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The current public library context

In the past few years the public's eagerness for books and reading has been rising rapidly. According to sales data from the general book trade, since 1997 the number of books sold has increased by 19 percent. (Coates, 2004:6). Consumer surveys also show that reading is an enduringly popular pastime, with 52 percent of adults saying that they read to relax or relieve stress. (Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), 2003:24). Reading is still overwhelmingly the main reason for visiting the public library (Coates, 2004:6). However, despite these encouraging signs, the future for public libraries is seen by some as bleak.

In his recent report for the Laser Foundation, Leadbeater (2003) highlights the declining use of the public library service. Audit Commission figures from May 2002 indicate that since 1992 visits to libraries have fallen by 17 percent and book loans by nearly a quarter. (Leadbeater, 2003:10). He argues that the British Public Library service is 'sleepwalking to disaster' (Leadbeater, 2003:35) and calls for recognition of the need for renewal, followed by the introduction of more focussed leadership and national objectives 'that are stretching and general goals that spread the love and habit of reading, questioning, enquiring and learning' (Leadbeater, 2003:18). He recognises that there are 'pockets of excellence' but calls for more consistent high quality services, and a clear vision of the library's role in promoting reading.

Interestingly, he highlights the importance of providing pre-school children with opportunities to play with books, and recommends that all babies and their mothers be automatically enrolled in the library and invited to a reading group. This, he suggests, could be provided by building on the Bookstart initiative. One of the keys to rejuvenating the library service is therefore regaining a focus on reading, and one of the practical ways of implementing this could be to build on Bookstart.

Coates (2004) in his report 'Who's in Charge?' also paints a dim picture of the current state of the library service. He compares the recent increase in interest in museums and archives (visits have doubled in the past 7 years) to the continuing decline in use of libraries, despite a funding increase from local councils of 25%. 'Today's reality is that if we do not address the fundamental structural problems of

the library service, there may be no libraries to provide these excellent services to readers in 10 or 15 years time' (Coates, 2004:1).

He identifies the provision of attractive, clean and safe buildings, a wide range of books and other resources, and longer opening hours as essential preliminaries, 'not only to an overall improvement in the library service, but also to providing resources for outreach and reader development for those sections of the community who might not currently use their library but for whom libraries could be a most useful resource.' (Coates, 2004:4). He places emphasis on the importance of regaining an excellent book stock, to reduce the probability of 'a frustrating and fruitless search' for users, who currently only have a 1 in 2 chance of finding the book they want when they visit (Coates, 2004:7). However at the same time he also recognises the huge potential that libraries have. 'One of the main things that libraries can do to make a real difference to people's quality of life is the promotion of reading' (Minister of State in the House of Lords, in Coates, 2004:3).

The phenomenal potential of the public library service to make a difference both on an individual level and to society as a whole is also the focus of the DCMS strategy document 'Framework for the Future' (2003). The promotion of reading is listed as one of the three areas of activity that should be at the heart of a library's modern mission- a mission that is at the centre of the Government's vision for the library service. Although criticised by both Coates and Leadbeater as providing insufficient information on the practical implementation of the strategy, the Framework acknowledges some of the challenges currently facing libraries. It highlights the innovations happening, especially in the area of reader development, but recognises that 'innovation is not evenly spread and is frequently short-lived due to a number of constraints' (DCMS, 2003:6). The fragmentation of leadership 'makes it difficult for national policy makers to communicate with the public library service as a whole' (DCMS, 2003:7) and as a result local programmes are often not translated into national schemes and the opportunity for funding is missed. Extending reader development activity consistently across the country by building on the success of existing national schemes such as Bookstart could however help to overcome this difficulty.

2.2. Reader development

'Reading is like going on a treasure hunt, following the path the writer creates until you come to the end and find yourself and a connection to the world' (Kendrick, 2001:81).

'Reading can educate, inform, help to develop language and vocabulary, and enrich the imagination. Reading can be life enhancing, health enhancing … reading can bring freedom, empowerment and personal development' (Elkin, Train and Denham, 2003:226).

These statements about the benefits of reading are representative of a view that pervades the literature; that reading is beneficial. Over the past fifteen years, libraries have become increasingly aware of the unique role that they have to play in enabling and encouraging people to read. At the 'Reading the Future' seminar, organised by the Arts Council in 1992, Coleman states that the key contributions libraries can make in terms of reading are 'to give people range, to give people space to browse and to experiment and to take risks' and 'to lead people to develop their reading interests … helping people develop their own tastes.' (Coleman, Blair-Underwood and McKee,1992:33). The conference included the announcement of a new Arts Council fund of £100 000 ' to promote new practice in the promotion of literature titles, practice that is lively and forward looking' (Thebridge and Train, 2002:131). According to Thebridge and Train (2002:132) 'this, coupled with the thrust of the whole conference, was a turning point in the reinstatement of the book at the core of the library service'.

In their research into the promotion of reading to adults in UK public libraries Kinnell and Shepherd (1998) found that this enthusiasm for reading had started to affect public library authorities. Ninety-three percent rated the promotion of reading as essential, very important or important when asked to express how high a priority it was for them. However, only thirty-seven percent had any form of written document that included the aim of promoting reading, and eighty-six percent said there were constraints on how they promoted reading, including staff time and lack of budget (Kinnell and Shepherd, 1998:22). 'Our general conclusion was that reading promotion for adult users has been largely neglected, with assumptions made by library services that adult readers know what they want, read in fairly specific areas and are competent to find books for themselves' (Kinnell and Shepherd, 1998:103).

Reader development was still largely disconnected from the core service provision of the library, and librarians tended to focus on giving information rather than advice on reading. The authors added however that changes to the situation were evident, and that good practice was emerging; the good practice just had to be spread.

The three key principles of reader development are outlined by Elkin, Train and Denham (2003) as:

- Raising the status of reading as a creative act,
- Increasing peoples' confidence in reading
- Finding ways of bringing isolated readers together.

The importance of these principles, the relevance of reader development to the political agenda, and the success of past projects, were highlighted at the Reading Nation Conference, which set out to 'show how libraries' work with readers develops social inclusion, citizenship, community cohesion, literacy, quality of life, the creative industries, new audiences and access, and lifelong learning' (McKearney, 2000:5). It succeeded in raising the profile of reader development projects nation-wide and inspiring libraries to work in partnership with other organisations to set up further reader development initiatives.

2.3. Partnership in reader development

The importance of partnership in developing successful reader development programmes was highlighted specifically by Thebridge, Train and Dalton (2002) in their work 'Partnership in Promotion'. Book Marketing Ltd statistics show that 'among individuals, those who borrow from the public library are more likely to buy the books that they read than those who don't borrow' (Thebridge, Train and Dalton, 2002:4). It is therefore to the advantage of both booksellers and publishers to work with public libraries in the promotion of reading. Partnerships are effective in that they enable projects to reach wider audiences, both socially and geographically, result in better promotional material from the use of shared expertise, create a high profile for the promotion in a variety of sectors and agencies and combine the strengths of all the organisations involved. Bookstart, along with initiatives such as World Book Day and the Launchpad Summer Reading Challenge, provides an excellent example of successful partnership working. Framework for the Future (DCMS, 2003) also recognises the importance of partnership working in building a modern library

service, and aims to help libraries forge partnerships with national agencies who share library service goals.

Government recognition that reader development work fits perfectly not only with the priorities of the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), but also with it's wider goals of social inclusion and lifelong learning, led to the creation of the National Year of Reading (September 1998- August 1999), and eventually the DCMS/Wolfson funding scheme for reader development projects in 2000-2001. The evaluation of the scheme found that it had been 'resoundingly successful in stimulating short term reader development initiatives' (Wallis, Moore and Marshall, 2002:1), although its success in encouraging long term reader development schemes was more limited.

2.4. Branching Out

One of the schemes that has been most successful in raising the profile of reader development in library authorities is 'Branching Out'. Funded by the Arts Council of England to run until September 2001, Branching Out was managed by Opening the Book and trained thirty-four participating librarians in the promotion of reader development. As part of the initiative several successful projects were developed, including 'A Touch of…' in association with the National Library for the Blind, and 'Forager', highlighting the role that ICT can play in promoting reader development. One of the major achievements of Branching Out was the sustainable attitude change towards reader development that it encouraged throughout library authorities, through raising awareness and improving staff skills. 'As a result of Branching Out, reader development significantly increased in status in many local authorities and it was often the case that as the work of the Branching Out librarians increased and the outcomes perhaps became more tangible, the size of the reader development 'team' working within those authorities also increased' (Train and Elkin, 2001:22). Recognition of reader development has therefore increased dramatically through Branching Out and the DCMS/Wolfson funded projects. However, 'it would be wrong to suggest that it is a core aspect of service provision in all public libraries' (Train and Elkin, 2001: 26). The effectiveness of Branching Out, and all similar reader development initiatives, is limited by the support of staff. This support can be substantially increased by properly disseminating the value and principles of reader development.

Reader development has therefore evolved to become an important part of library service provision. The Audit Commission Best Value inspection now requires libraries to focus on reader development, and its recent report, 'Building better library services' (2002), includes reader development as a key recent change in the library service. (Elkin, Train and Denham, 2003). Internationally, reader-centred activity has also grown in prominence. Almost all of the respondents to the International Reading survey had organised specific activities to promote reading for pleasure, and almost all thought that this was a worthwhile undertaking (Train, 2002).

2.5.   Reader development for adults

The survey also revealed a common misunderstanding of the concept of reader development however; that it is only relevant to children and young people. Several of the respondents to a question on whether they had a written policy on promoting reading for pleasure clearly interpreted the question as if it were only applicable to children's services (Train, 2002). Forrest (2001) in his article 'Who's afraid of declining adult issues'?' however clearly states the case for the value of adult reader development. He describes reader development as 'audience development for literature' and uses Opening the Book's definition of reader development as 'active intervention to open up reading choices, increase reader's enjoyment and offer opportunities for people to share their reading experiences' to clarify it's purpose. He uses the triangular model of reader, book and librarian to explain how 'reader development can reinvigorate adult-lending services, give staff a renewed sense of worth and purpose and engage readers in new ways' (Forrest, 2001:169).

The perception that reading is only important for children is widely held however, amongst parents as well as among staff. One headmaster involved in a DCMS/Wolfson funded scheme in Barking and Dagenham was prompted when reflecting on this to comment that 'the best way is through the children' (McNicol and Dalton, 2002). The success of Bookstart in encouraging children to read could therefore be successfully built upon if it can be established that it also has an effect on adult reader development.

2.6. Family reading and family literacy

The UK National Literacy Trust defines family literacy as 'working through parents to improve the reading and writing of their children, as well as the parents' literacy' Other authors have a wider definition, 'using the term to include any approach that explicitly addresses the family dimension in literacy' (McNicol and Dalton, 2002). Whilst family reading focuses on the enjoyment of books by both parents and children rather than the reader's ability, the two are clearly linked. Family reading groups have been happening since the mid 1990's, with authorities such as Norfolk running groups for children and their parents, grandparents or guardians. (McNicol and Dalton, 2001). Recently, the development of the 'Partnership with Parents' course in Barking and Dagenham, funded by DCMS/Wolfson, addressed both the issues of literacy and reading for pleasure. A taster course was designed for parents of five to seven year olds on how to support children's literacy development. The course was run by Barking and Dagenham Adult College, with the library providing both adult and children's books for borrowing. The project 'aimed to encourage adults to read and use libraries for their own benefit and enjoyment as well as to assist their children, while recognising that supporting their child's learning is a great motivator for parents who might not necessarily be interested in reading for their own development' (McNicol and Dalton, 2002). The project was successful in rekindling an interest in reading in at least some of the parents attending. Forty-one percent of parents borrowed adult material from the 'taster' collection provided by the library. 'Many enjoyed the taster collections and used them to return to the habit of reading' (McNicol and Dalton, 2002). Linking literacy and reader development, and parent and child projects has therefore proved to be an effective way of reaching adults who might otherwise never have used the library.

The role of the library as family learning centre and the part that Bookstart plays in encouraging parents to take basic skills courses was further investigated by Sorby (2002). She concluded as a result of her research that Bookstart did encourage parents to use the library as a learning centre, and that 'the learning experience had widened their view of libraries' provision' (Sorby, 2002:73). She recommends developing family learning further, as well as improving marketing and adopting a more integrated approach to library services. However, she fails to acknowledge the limitations of her findings- her small purposive sample means that wider research into the subject should be undertaken before generalisations can be made. The impact

that Bookstart might have on adult reader development was not considered within the scope of the research.

2.7.   *Parent and baby reading initiatives*

The context in which Bookstart and other parent and baby programmes are operating is described by Elkin and Kinnell (2000) in their research 'A Place for Children'. Statistics from the Library and Information Statistics Unit show a worrying trend: both staffing and stock provision for children's services are in decline. The importance of the public library's work with children has however been repeatedly emphasised, in documents such as the Library and Information Services Council report 'Investing in Children' and Elkin and Lonsdale's work 'Focus on the Child' (in Elkin and Kinnell, 2000). A Place for Children examines the continuing importance of the book in a child's development, and how books should be promoted alongside all the other skills needed by children today. A participant from Croydon libraries believes that 'public libraries are the driving force for children's reading development from the earliest ages.' He continues 'The Bookstart projects have demonstrated that. We forge partnerships with parents. No other institution is able to do that'. Bookstart's link with parents is seen as a vital element in its success. The research identified that 'much of the promotion of reading was now taking on a stronger family focus. Libraries had a strong role in supporting families, family reading and family visits to the library' (Elkin and Kinnell, 2000:79).

The majority of the research evaluating Bookstart's impact has been carried out by Wade and Moore, who produced the initial report on the project when it was piloted (1993). They concluded that Bookstart 'led to increased sharing of books with babies, more family reading generally, more babies enrolled in libraries, more book purchase and more membership of book clubs' (Wade and Moore, 1993:26). The authors also noted that 'its benefits have spilled over into family reading behaviour, since other siblings and adults have enjoyed the books' (Wade and Moore, 1993:26). They proceed to recommend starting similar projects targeted at older children on this basis. The *adult* enjoyment of reading, however, is not discussed further.

More research into the educational achievement of the 'Bookstart babies' in comparison to those who had not received Bookstart was undertaken, both when they started primary school in 1998, and then when they took their first Key Stage

One SATs. Wade and Moore (2003:8) found that 'the Bookstart children have been consistently superior in all observed elements at pre-school, in reception baseline assessments and in KS1 SATs'. It is therefore concluded that Bookstart has a positive effect on the educational attainment of children, as well as encouraging sharing books with young children and encouraging library use.

A follow up study was designed to establish if the same conclusions could be drawn using qualitative measures, allowing respondents to 'interpret their experience and give full and detailed personal information about the effects of Bookstart ' (Wade and Moore, 2003:8). This showed that Bookstart was successful 'in that it has generated positive attitudes to, and an interest in, books and book sharing in a wide range of families.' (Wade and Moore, 2003:12).

Interestingly, several of the professionals interviewed for the study commented on the ways that Bookstart benefited other members of the family. 'I think it will have an effect long term…grandparents say how developed they are now…it's educating everyone' (Nursery nurse, Wade and Moore, 2003:10). Health visitors 'have also seen an increase in the parents' enthusiasm for books, as well as a development in parents' abilities and skills in sharing books with their children' (Wade and Moore, 2003:11).

These findings are echoed in the findings of Millard (2002) in her evaluation of the Derbyshire Books for Babies scheme, developed as a key strategy within the literacy initiative Read On- Write Away! (ROWA). The scheme differed from Bookstart in that it focused not only on encouraging literacy in children, but also on helping parents to identify their own educational needs. As a result some data was collected relating to parents/carers, although the focus remained on education, and concentrated on involving parents/carers in other ROWA projects. It is surprising that the opportunity was not taken to extend the focus to adult reader development, as ROWA was involved in sponsoring the Derwent Project, a reader development initiative that included the setting up of the Derbyshire Millennium Literature Festival, and Book Chat readers groups (Thebridge, Train and Dalton, 2001). Whilst the project was nevertheless successful, more parents could perhaps have been involved if the potential link between Books for Babies and adult reader development had been explored.

Despite this, some illuminating comments appeared in Millard's research about changes in parent's reading habits as a result of the scheme. When interviewed a member of library staff commented that 'I have also noticed parents have also joined themselves, and started taking out their own materials, so that on return I'm not only discharging picture books but books for parents own use.' (Millard, 2002:9) This supports the hypothesis that Bookstart and similar Books for Babies schemes may effect adult reader development.

3. METHODOLOGY

All methods of approaching social research have their respective advantages, and also their limitations. 'Good social research is a matter of 'horses for courses', where approaches are selected because they are appropriate for specific aspects of investigation and specific kinds of problems.' (Denscombe, 2003:3)

The first phase of this study was deductive: the research attempts to establish the truth of the hypothesis that Bookstart contributes to adult reader development. This phase was therefore best investigated using a quantitative methodology that tests a specific variable; this provided objective statistics about the individual problem under investigation. In order to obtain valid data, a survey of a broad sample of the population was needed, and for practical reasons quantitative methods are more appropriate than qualitative methods for studying a large sample, as they are less time intensive. Due to the limitations of time and access, the researcher was unable to obtain a truly representative sample to run statistical tests and make valid generalisations from the data collected. However the findings are applicable to other situations with similar circumstances. The data is therefore presented as descriptive statistics and this information was used to inform the second half of the study.

'Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted' (Einstein in Patton, 2002:12). The second phase of the investigation aims to understand the attitudes, experience and motivation of parents and carers, in order to understand the factors that affect any relationship between Bookstart and reader development. It is impossible to empirically quantify attitudes and experiences and it was therefore most appropriate to use a qualitative approach for this stage. This means that detailed information was obtained which gave a more in depth understanding of the issues. Studying a small number of cases means that generalisations cannot be made, but the rich data collected provided understanding of all of the factors influencing parents/carers, giving context to their opinions and providing the researcher with a holistic view, which could not be achieved by measuring a single variable. Bartin and Lazarsfeld note that 'qualitative studies may pull up unexpected and striking things' (Burns, 2000:13). This stage of the research was inductive; there was no hypothesis about what factors could affect parental attitudes. It was therefore appropriate to use a methodology that encouraged discovery rather than testing predetermined ideas (Denscombe, 2003).

The combination of two methods meant that this study was methodologically triangulated. 'Using multiple methods allows inquiry into a research question with an arsenal of methods that have non overlapping weakness as well as complementary strengths' (Patton, 2002:248). The triangulation of the study meant that the understanding gained of the subject was greater than if just one method had been used. If the results from the second, qualitative, phase of the investigation reflect the results of the first phase, this increases the validity of the findings. If, however, the second phase produces data that is inconsistent with the data collected in the first phase, this can also provide opportunities for deeper insight. 'Different kinds of data may yield somewhat different results because different types of inquiry are sensitive to different real world nuances. This understanding inconsistencies in findings across different kinds of data can be illuminative' (Patton, 2002:248). Triangulation can provide an understanding of the relationship between the method of inquiry and the subject being studied.

3.1. Sampling

The research was carried out using a purposeful sample of Bookstart parents/carers who attend the weekly 'Babytime' session at a Sheffield public library. ' The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth' (Patton, 2002:230). Burns (2000) states that the sample may be chosen for a number of reasons, including recommendation from someone well acquainted with the situation, and convenience. This group were recommended as suitable for the project by the Bookstart Co-ordinator, as the majority came to the library as a result of Bookstart.

The first phase of the investigation used 'typical case' sampling. 'The purpose of a qualitative profile of one or more typical cases is to describe and illustrate what is typical to those unfamiliar with the setting' (Patton, 2002:236). The sample is selected because it is not extreme or deviant in any major way. Although no generalised statements can be made on this basis, it helps the reader to understand the context and to relate the data collected to their own situation. The library used was selected for the study as a good example of a library operating the Bookstart scheme in Sheffield.

3.2. The area profile

The library is situated in the centre of a town with a population of 13,663, approximately 10 miles from Sheffield city centre. It has a predominately white population, and the majority of its residents live in neighbourhoods classified by ACORN as 'established home owning areas with skilled workers' (National Statistics, 2003). There are however pockets of deprivation, and there has been a recent rise in unemployment following the decline of the steel industry, one of the area's main employers. There has also been a notable recent rise in teenage pregnancies. There is some nursery and playgroup provision, but the area is perceived as generally lacking children's activities.

4. METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

The first phase of the investigation involved distributing surveys to those attending the 'Babytime', and the Under 5's Story Time that many of the older toddlers also attend. Following consultation with the Project Worker, it was decided that some of the surveys would also be sent out to families who had received Bookstart, but who no longer attended the sessions as their children were now all of school age. This was done in order to access as wide a sample of parents/carers who had been involved with Bookstart as possible, so that the data obtained accurately reflected a range of parent/carer opinions on reader development.

The informal nature of the sessions means that not all of the parents/carers that use 'Babytime' come every week, so four sessions were attended, and the researcher distributed questionnaires at each. 'This method of data collection ensures a high response rate, accurate sampling and a minimum of interviewer bias, while…providing necessary explanations and giving the benefit of a degree of personal contact' (Oppenheim, 1992:102). The element of personal contact was especially important in this case, as the second phase relied on the parents/carers volunteering to speak to the researcher further.

As Sorby notes in her research on Bookstart in the Sheffield area, 'there was much to be gained by getting to know the participants in advance of the interviews, to enable them to feel comfortable and to talk freely and frankly about their experiences' (Sorby, 2002: 37). This contradicts the view put forward by Oppenheim (1992:90) that 'the interviewer must at all times remain detached and professional in her attitude…; she must offer identification about herself and her organisation, but she must not get personally involved'. Whilst it is desirable to remain entirely detached from the interviewee in order to reduce the risk of bias, it is also essential to establish a good rapport, so that the interviewee is comfortable answering questions. The distinction that Patton (2002:365) draws between rapport and neutrality is helpful in dealing with this dichotomy. 'Rapport is a stance vis a vis the person being interviewed. Neutrality is an attitude vis a vis the content of what that person says.' Rapport involves conveying to the person being interviewed that the interviewer cares about them and is interested in what they have to say, whilst neutrality means that the interviewer will not judge them for the content of their statements. Personal

contact with the interviewees can therefore help establish rapport, without compromising the interviewer's neutrality.

A total of fifty questionnaires were distributed; a fifth of these were sent by post to parents who no longer attend the sessions. The advantage of sending out postal questionnaires is their ability to reach respondents in dispersed locations, which was the motivation for using them in this case. However, it is widely acknowledged that they result in generally low response rates (Oppenheim, 1992). In order to increase response rates, the Project Worker provided a stamped return envelope, and included a letter of introduction with the survey (Appendix A).

In total 46 people completed the survey, giving a response rate of eighty-eight percent. Of the six non-responses, five were those sent by post giving a response rate of fifty percent to the postal questionnaire, and 97.5 percent to the self-administered questionnaire. This bears out Oppenheim's assertion that self-administered surveys result in a considerably higher response rate.

Of the respondents, only eleven percent were male. This reflects the small number of fathers and male guardians who regularly attend the Bookstart sessions. Fifty percent of respondents had more than one child, and twenty-seven percent had children over five and therefore no longer in the Bookstart target age group.

4.1. Questionnaire design

The questionnaire (Appendix B) was designed to gather quantitative data to establish whether or not Bookstart has had an impact on the reader development of parents and carers. Oppenheim (1992) suggests that closed questions are good for testing a specific hypothesis, which was the aim of the first phase of the investigation; closed questions also facilitate the analysis of the resulting data. A further consideration was that the parents filling out the surveys would be occupied with looking after their children; closed questions made the questionnaire much quicker and easier to complete, and encouraged parents/carers to agree to participate and to complete all the questions.

Although the questionnaire did not focus on discovering whether Bookstart has brought parents/carers to the library, as this has been extensively researched previously, it was still an important part of the scopeing survey. Initial questions on whether the parent/carer joined the library as a result of Bookstart, and whether they had increased the frequency of their library visits as a result of Bookstart were therefore included.

The remaining questions were intended to establish whether Bookstart had had an impact on the reader development of the parents/carers. The assessment of reader development is notoriously difficult. 'How do you measure the effect of someone reading a book? The impact may be far-reaching in emotional, social or intellectual terms. We have to take impact largely on trust' (Elkin and Kinnell, 2000:112). Although hard to quantify, many of the respondents to the International Reading Survey felt that they had evidence of the success of reader development activities from stock circulation statistics, increase in attendance and membership and informal anecdotal evidence. (Train 2002). The number of readers seeking guidance and intervention by library staff is another key aspect of reader development, as is a willingness to share the reading experience with others.

Questions were therefore asked about:

- The quantity of fiction/narrative non-fiction borrowed from the library before and after Bookstart
- The quantity of fiction/narrative non-fiction obtained from other sources before and after Bookstart
- The willingness of parents/carers to ask for help choosing books to read before and after Bookstart
- Parent/carer attitude to reading groups.

The questionnaire was piloted on the Bookstart Project Worker, who agreed that it was understandable and appropriate to the target group

4.2. Focus groups and Interviews

The second stage of the investigation involved conducting focus groups with a number of those respondents who said they were willing to be contacted, and interviewing the Bookstart Project Worker and Bookstart Coordinator, in order to compare their understandings of the effects of the Bookstart scheme with that of the parents/carers. Both the interviews and the focus groups were carried out face to face, so that respondents' non-verbal reactions could be observed. People communicate in many ways, including facial expressions, gestures and body language. Denscombe (2003) encourages the writing of field notes to capture non-verbal communication and visual signals not recorded on audiotape; this provides a context for what is said, giving a better understanding of the answers, and therefore more accurate data.

The main advantage of carrying out focus groups with the parents/carers rather than individual interviews was that it gave them the opportunity to hear each other's responses and make additional comments based on others opinions. Participants were given the chance to consider their opinions in the context of others. (Patton, 2002). 'Interactions among participants enhance quality data. Participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other, which weeds out false or extreme views' (Patton, 2002:386). The data collected is therefore more likely to be representative of the general view. The associated limitation of this however is that participants who realise that their viewpoint is controversial may not share it and risk a negative reaction from the rest of the group.

The focus group participants were selected using self-selection sampling. The questionnaire included an opportunity for parents/carers to give their name and phone number if they were willing to be contacted to talk about their reading habits. (This was accompanied by an assurance that their details would be treated with the strictest confidence.) The focus groups were then made up of those who gave their details as requested. This introduces an element of bias into the research, as those who didn't wish to discuss their reading habits, or believed that they had nothing to talk about, are automatically excluded. This is a limitation of all focus groups however, whatever method of sampling is used (FutureSkills Scotland, 2002).

The focus groups participants were all female, which reflects the high proportion of mothers and female carers that attend Bookstart events. More than half of the participants had more than one child, and a quarter of them had children over five.

Another advantage of using focus groups was that childcare only had to be found for two sessions rather than many. In her research into Bookstart, Sorby (2002) notes the importance of providing childcare during any sessions with parents, research orientated or otherwise. The sessions took place in the library, as it was an environment all the parents/carers were familiar with and therefore comfortable in, and meant that the discussion of Bookstart took place 'in context'.

A further potential limitation of focus groups is the reluctance of participants to discuss sensitive issues in front of others. This was not however a problem with the parents/carers in this research, as the subject under discussion was not overly sensitive. It was however decided to interview the Bookstart Project Worker and the Bookstart Co-ordinator individually, as the pre-existing formal work relationship between them may have inhibited them in expressing their opinions of the effects of the Bookstart project. Kaplowitz (2000 in Patton, 2002:389) also found 'that the use of both qualitative methods, focus groups and individual interviews, was complementary to each other, yielding somewhat different information'.

4.3. Focus group/Interview schedule design

The focus groups were conducted using a combination of standardised interview schedule and interview guide (Appendix C). A standard question was used to introduce each topic, and the topics were discussed in the same order each time. However, within each topic the conversation was allowed to flow naturally. This ensured that key topics were covered and that the results were comparable between groups. However, it also allowed 'flexibility in probing and in determining when it is appropriate to explore certain subjects in greater depth, or even to pose questions about new areas of inquiry' (Patton, 2002:347). It allowed the discussion to include topics that might not previously have been considered, but that were important to the participants. 'A guide is essential in conducting focus group interviews for it keeps the interactions focused while allowing individual perspectives and experiences to emerge' (Patton, 2002:344).

The individual interviews with Bookstart staff were also conducted using the same combination of standardised interview schedule and interview guide (Appendix D). The session was divided into two sections. The first discussed their perceptions of the scheme. The second followed the interview guide used with the parents/carers, excluding questions that the researcher judged the staff would be unable to answer. This was done in order to facilitate comparisons between the staff understanding of the impact of Bookstart, and the parent/carer understanding, and illuminate any differences of opinion.

The questions were designed to be open ended and neutral, in order to encourage participants to express themselves in their terms. 'Indeed, in qualitative inquiry one of the things the enquiry is trying to determine is what dimensions, themes and images/words people use among themselves to describe their feelings, thoughts and experiences' (Patton, 2002:354). A combination of dichotomous inquiry, to establish the relevance of the question, followed by further open ended questions, and presupposition questions were used. 'By presupposing that the person being interviewed does indeed have something to say, the quality of the descriptions received may be enhanced' (Patton, 2002:370).

The interview was divided thematically, in order to facilitate analysis of the data collected, into questions about parent/carer reading habits, questions about their library habits, and questions about reader development. It began by gathering factual information about actions, usually perceived as 'easier' for the participants, before continuing to ask for their opinions and ideas. It was hoped that this sequencing of questions would encourage participants to speak descriptively about current experiences, giving a context for them to relate later 'opinion' questions to, and therefore providing more detailed and in depth information.

5. BOOKSTART IN SHEFFIELD.

Whilst Bookstart is administered nationally by Booktrust, each regional scheme operates independently, and Bookstart is distributed in a variety of ways across the country. In Sheffield, the administration of Bookstart is different from the majority of other areas. Typically, the Bookstart bag is given out by health visitors during home visits. In Sheffield however, a 'voucher' system is used; the heath visitors give each family a voucher which they use to register for the scheme at the library.

> *'We enrol them in the library straight away and we can spend time with the family to just introduce them to books and libraries, and what the library's got to offer for the whole of the family.'* **Bookstart Coordinator**

This method of administration means that the library staff have an opportunity to explain and promote the library to the family, rather than books being just one part of a home visit. The disadvantage of this is that fewer families actually receive the Bookstart bag than in some other areas of the country. 5934 babies were born in Sheffield from 1st January to 31st December 2003 and 3000 Bookstart bags were distributed to children between April 2003 and January 2004 (Navratil, 2004). However, as the Coordinator stated:

> *'I should say about 90% of the Bookstart children that we have are or have been enrolled in the library, which loads of other projects, haven't managed to achieve.'* **Bookstart Coordinator**

The distribution of Bookstart bags in this way may also have an effect on the impact that Bookstart has on adult reader development. The parents are brought into the library, and shown what is available, which increases their awareness of library services.

> *'it might be something that they are not aware of, and they might join at the same time.'* **Bookstart Coordinator**

Parents sometimes join at the same time as their child as a result of their Bookstart motivated library visit. Whilst this in itself is not evidence of reader development, it encourages parents and carers to use the library, which exposes

them to a variety of books and reading materials, and could encourage them to read more. This should be considered if comparing the results of this project with any future data gathered in areas where the scheme is administered differently.

At this library, Bookstart is supported by a Project Worker, who attends clinics and other community events, encouraging families to fill in their vouchers and come to the library to register for their Bookstart bag. The Project Worker then arranges visits to the homes of parents and carers to give out the bag and explain about the Bookstart scheme, and the importance of reading with babies. She also promotes and runs the weekly 'Babytime' sessions for under 5's. The personal involvement of a project worker could also increase the probability of parents visiting the library, and this is also a factor that should be considered if these results are compared with any future research.

6. FINDINGS

6.1. Objective One: To establish to what extent Bookstart affects parent/carer reader development.

6.1.1. Attendance

The success of Bookstart at bringing parents and their children to the library is well documented (Wade and Moore, 1993) and the results of this research confirm those previous findings. Prior to Bookstart, only 43.9 percent of parents/carers surveyed visited the library once a month or more (Table 1). Now, following receipt of the Bookstart bag, 88.6 percent visit once a month or more (Table 2); more than double the original figure.

Table 1

Frequency of Library visits before Bookstart

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Once a month or more	18	40.9	43.9	43.9
	Less than once a month	23	52.3	56.1	100.0
	Total	41	93.2	100.0	
Missing	System	3	6.8		
Total		44	100.0		

Table 2

Frequency of library visits after Bookstart

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Once a month or more	39	88.6	88.6	88.6
	Less than once a month	5	11.4	11.4	100.0
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Many of those parents/carers who were already regular library users have also increased the frequency of their library visits. Overall, 68 percent of parents/carers have increased their library use since Bookstart, 29 percent have remained at the same level, and only 2 percent use the library less than they did before (Graph 1).

Percentage of people who visit the library more since Bookstart

Percentage of people who visit the library the same amount

Percentage of people who visit the library less since Bookstart.
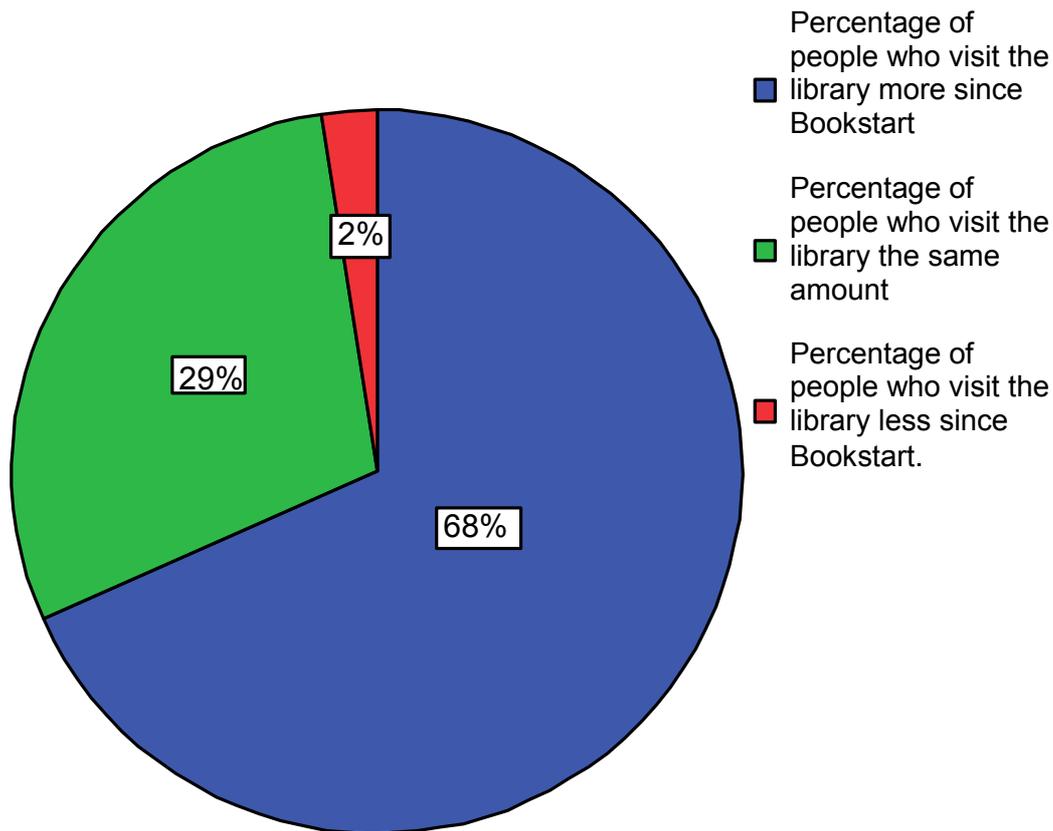
The qualitative data gathered in the second phase of the investigation supports the statistical data collected through the questionnaires. For some parents, the Bookstart scheme has reintroduced them to the library after a long period of absence.

'I've found the library that …. after leaving school I never went into a library until I had a child, it was only actually , you know, having the child that brought me back into the library again.' **Focus group participant**

'I've not been to the library since I was at school, so I mean, even though I live in Deepcar it would never have occurred to me to go to the library, erm, but its more than just a library isn't it it's like a resource centre really. So, I've gone from not coming at all to going once a week.' **Focus group participant**

For other parents and carers, the Bookstart scheme has increased the frequency of their visits, even if they were library users previously.

'Well I always come on a Thursday.' **Focus group participant**

'I think it's fair to say some of the parents that we get through probably would have come into the library anyway, but they probably wouldn't have come in as regularly, and keep that flow going.' **Bookstart project worker**

Whilst increased attendance is not on its own an indication of increased parent/carer reader development, it is an important precondition. Although reader development could take place outside of the library service, with parents/carers encouraged to obtain a wider range of books from alternative sources, the library has a specific role to encourage reader development in all age groups. The more often parents and carers visit the library, the more likely they are to come into contact with factors that may affect their reader development.

'Whether they actually borrow every time, I'd say probably that they don't, but more visits is bound to make more borrowing in the future'. **Bookstart Co-ordinator**

Establishing whether parent/carer library attendance had increased was therefore still an important part of the scopeing survey. That the majority of parents and carers are now visiting the library more regularly than before Bookstart is an encouraging finding at the start of the research process.

6.1.2. Opinions of the library

Whilst parent and carer opinions of the library are also not in themselves an indication of reader development, they are another important contributory factor. The ability of Bookstart to change previous habits and mindsets is a vital first step in the process of parent/carer reader development. The qualitative data collected shows that Bookstart is extremely successful at altering parents' opinions about libraries.

'That is a big difference actually from when I was a child, going to the library I was all "whispering" (whispered), um, whereas the first time I walked into this library, with or without a child, you know there's no emphasis, there doesn't seem to be any emphasis to actually "be quiet" (whispered), you know what I mean, you can just talk normally.' **Focus group participant**

'[We] show them that libraries aren't shushy places, and erm, and that they are good places to be.' **Bookstart Coordinator**

'I think the one thing I've found with Bookstart is that it gave me the confidence not to keep telling Em to shut up, you know because you have a designated time when the library's kind of handed over to kids and the noise level is just, and it's just kids everywhere, and you just think yeah they have a right to come and enjoy the library the way that they enjoy things which is, you know you can't keep telling them to shut up and be careful and like you say be precious with things and I think that's really nice is that, that it just , rather than this more kind of older image of being very quiet and the library being boring and staid, the fact that it kind of changes that'. **Focus group participant**

One of Bookstart 's key achievements is communicating to parents and carers that libraries aren't 'shushy' places, but that children are welcome to come and enjoy the library in their own way. This is an important element in encouraging parents and carers in their own reader development; they must feel confident that they can bring their children with them to the library, as their opportunities to visit without them could be extremely limited, and for many the primary motivation for visiting the library is to use the children's services.

6.1.3. Reading habits

The impact of Bookstart on parent and carer reading habits is harder to discern. The results of the questionnaire show that 28.6 percent of parents/carers have increased the amount they borrow since receiving the Bookstart bag (Table 3). Whilst the increase in borrowing is not therefore as large as the increase in library attendance, it is nevertheless important.

Table 3

Increases in borrowing by parents/carers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No increase in borrowing	30	68.2	71.4	71.4
	Increase in borrowing	12	27.3	28.6	100.0
	Total	42	95.5	100.0	
Missing	System	2	4.5		
Total		44	100.0		

The qualitative evidence also indicates that the effect of Bookstart on parent/carer reading habits may be broader than this figure suggests. Several focus group participants said that they borrow more both for themselves and for their children since receiving the Bookstart bag; the data suggests that it has rekindled parent/carer interest in reading, and for some reestablished it as a habit.

> *'And I do actually find that I take books out for myself now, rather than just books for the children.'* **Focus group participant**

> *'I didn't step foot in a library till I had my first daughter, so now I try to come every week and we take out at least ten + books every week and I try to get one or two for myself.'* **Focus group participant**

> 'A lot of the parents will make time to borrow for themselves, and borrow for their children at the same time, erm, so while they're there for the activity they've gone and made choosing a part of their routine.*'* **Bookstart Coordinator**

That parents make time to borrow for themselves as well as for their children is also reflected in the issue data from libraries that have run Bookstart activities.

> *'I know sometimes when we've had events and things,* [my manager*] will check issues, and videos, and whether issues were up in general that day, and they do always seem to be.'* **Bookstart Project Worker**

Bookstart does therefore have an effect on the quantity of books borrowed from the library by many parents and carers. It also appears that it can even affect those parents/carers who don't attend Bookstart activity sessions and rarely, if ever, come to the library. This confirms the findings made by Wade and Moore (2003) that Bookstart has an effect on the wider family circle. Several focus group participants shared that they have found Bookstart has encouraged their husbands to read more.

> *'My husband definitely reads more …..'*
> *'Yeah its the passing information on in't it, I'd say its made my husband read, he's got to read more, got to be seen with a book in his hand, coz he's realised its important that John don't pick up his habit of not reading.'* **Focus group participants**

The Bookstart Coordinator has also included teenage literature in the Bookstart outreach sessions run with teenage mothers, many of whom do not feel comfortable attending the normal Bookstart activities.

> *'I've been out to work with teenage mums, and we've taken teenage novels for them, you know to have a look at. And I think that has opened their eyes really about books for them, and what they would like to read. Err, lost a few along the way but never mind, what's important is that they've took them and they've enjoyed them!'* **Bookstart Coordinator**

Including books that appeal to parents in Bookstart sessions and raising parents' awareness of the range of books available does therefore seem to succeed in encouraging parents to read more, at least in the context of the teenage mothers. It would be interesting to see if a broader range of parents/carers would also appreciate the promotion of adult books alongside children's books at Bookstart sessions.

Another aspect of parents and carers reading habits that Bookstart could potentially have affected is the range and type of books that they choose to read. Some parents felt that they had been introduced to new books through their children.

> *'My eldest daughter's 6 now, she's wanting to read all the like, Narnia, witch and the wardrobe and those sort of things and have them read to her, but they're all books that I never came across as a child, books was a no no in*

my house, so we just didn't read in our house at all, and so all these classics my husband keeps going on about 'haven't you ever heard of that' and I'm like nooo, I'm now starting to read them to her, so I'm enjoying them for the first time now, so that's great.' **Focus group participant**

It could be argued that this was a result of becoming a parent rather than the impact of Bookstart. However, without the Bookstart scheme some parents would not have come into contact with children's literature, and several chose to read children's books for themselves as well as with their children.

'I'm enjoying it you know, it is just, a kids book, but you know I'm so shattered by the time they go to bed anyway, that's about the level I can manage.' **Focus group participant**

Reader development is about encouraging reading for pleasure; if parents are discovering children's literature for the first time this is an extension of their reading interests, and can legitimately be classed as reader development.

Some parents however have found that Bookstart, and by extension the library, has not encouraged them to read new things.

'you come in and its just like books everywhere, and erm, it's a bit overwhelming really for somebody like me that doesn't really know what they're looking for.' **Focus group participant**

'I look at all the books, and Tom, and I think, I just can't face looking at all those books and trying to decide what I want to choose, with Tom there as well. So people lend me things, that encourages me to read different things, but the library, I'll only go for what I know.' **Focus group participant**

The large selection of books available in the library, which it is often assumed will encourage readers to choose something new that they wouldn't otherwise have been aware of, can actually be off putting for some parents. This obviously limits the effect that Bookstart has on the reader development of some parents and carers.

6.1.4. Intervention

One of the aspects of reader development intended to counteract the problem readers have choosing books is intervention. Library staff are available not only to provide information and answer practical questions, but also to recommend books to readers who are unsure of what to choose. The data gathered through the questionnaire was extremely encouraging, as only one respondent indicated that they would not be happy to ask staff for help choosing a book. When asked whether since receiving Bookstart, the amount of times they had asked staff for help had changed, 15 percent of respondents indicated that they had asked staff for help more frequently since receiving Bookstart. The overwhelming majority indicated that they had asked staff the same amount, whilst only 2 percent said that they had asked staff for less help since the scheme (Graph 2).

Graph 2

Since you received Bookstart, do you ask for help more, less or the same amount?
- ■ Less frequently
- ■ Same amount
- ■ More frequently

2.56%
15.38%
82.05%
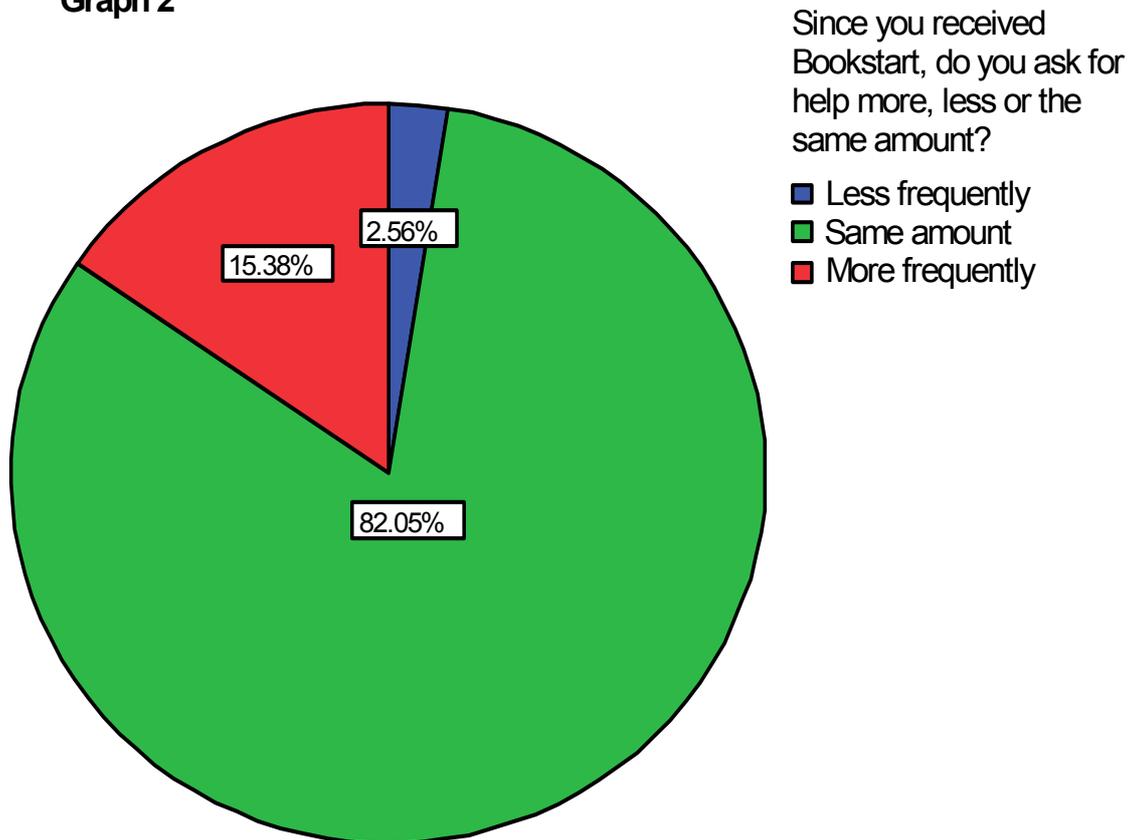
The qualitative evidence illuminates the reasons behind some parents increased confidence in asking staff for help. When asked whether they had asked library staff for help choosing a book, several participants replied that they had. When they were then asked whether Bookstart had made them more happy asking staff for help choosing books, the same participants also responded positively, as they were more

familiar with the staff. This is echoed in the anecdotal evidence given by the Bookstart Project Worker:

> *'Rebecca, and her mum Tracey, she's been so, if you like grateful, that we're a resource to her, and it doesn't cost her anything and she can come in and she's quite happy now to ask questions about all sorts, whereas she would have been quite reluctant to have stepped foot inside.'*

The comment suggests that Bookstart has encouraged the parent to use the library, and that her increasing familiarity with the staff and the service has resulted in her feeling confident in asking questions about books as well as practical issues.

One pertinent point to note that may effect whether Bookstart encourages parents and carers to ask library staff for help choosing books is that in the library used for research, the Bookstart Project Worker is not a member of the main library staff team, and although Bookstart sessions are held in the library, they take place in the community room downstairs which is separate to the main library area. It is therefore possible for the parents and carers to have minimal contact with library staff and the main library itself, even if they regularly attend sessions and build a relationship with the Project Worker. This is likely to have an effect on how familiar they become with the other library staff, and therefore how happy they are to ask for help choosing books. The background of the Project Worker could also have an effect on this aspect of how Bookstart affects adult reader development.

> *'Because I've always worked with children, I do tend to see it more from that side, whereas if it was a member of library staff who was implementing it, they'd probably be able to put the emphasis more on adult reading, which I don't do very much of, because I'm not familiar with it. I'm at a loss like they are when they go upstairs* [to the main library]*….. so, that's my, sort of narrowness if you like.'* **Bookstart Project Worker**

Bookstart could therefore have a greater effect on how happy parents and carers are to ask for help in libraries where Bookstart sessions are more integrated with the main service.

The qualitative data also highlights some issues that are not picked up in the quantative data. Although all of the focus group participants stated in the questionnaire that they would be happy to ask staff for help choosing a book, during one focus group it emerged that several of them would not ask staff for help as they did not believe that someone else could successfully choose a book they would like. The parents were comfortable with the staff, but their attitude to the concept of reading in general meant that they would not ask for help in book selection.

> *'I think sometimes book choice is personal' (yeahs of agreement).* **Focus group participant**

> *'When I did work in the library, if people asked me, I would only sort of suggest to people if I saw they were reading the same books that I was reading, erm, coz otherwise like you say it's a very personal thing'.* **Focus group participant**

> *'People kind of look at certain books and make an assumption about why you're reading it and then recommend things that you would never interest you'.* **Focus group participant**

> *'Everyone reads books in different ways and I think, so people would recommend stuff that wouldn't interest me.'* **Focus group participant**

> *'You need to know somebody before you can trust them to choose a book for you.'* **Focus group participant**

They saw reading as a personal and creative experience, and believed that even someone that knew them very well could still struggle to find books they would enjoy. Library staff would not therefore be able to successfully recommend books for them. This sentiment was relatively widespread amongst the participants, and is a limiting factor on how effective Bookstart could be at encouraging this aspect of parent/carer reader development.

Another factor that the Bookstart Project worker felt might affect parent's willingness to ask for help was a fear of appearing stupid.

'I know as a user, I would feel awkward asking people because you'd think they must think I'm thick coz I don't know, so you don't ask.' **Bookstart Project Worker**

This factor wasn't mentioned by any of the focus group participants, and the vast majority of questionnaire respondents indicated that they were happy to ask staff for help choosing books. It is possible that Bookstart has increased the confidence of the parents and carers spoken to sufficiently that none of them feel insecure about speaking to staff. However, it is also possible that those parents and carers who would feel awkward asking staff for help would not admit this to the researcher, being similarly afraid of looking stupid.

6.1.5. Sharing the reading experience

None of the parents/carers who responded to the questionnaire were currently members of a reading group. 14 percent, however, expressed an interest in joining one (Table 4).

Table 4
Would you like to be a member of a reading group?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	37	84.1	86.0	86.0
	Yes	6	13.6	14.0	100.0
	Total	43	97.7	100.0	
Missing	9	1	2.3		
Total		44	100.0		

Whilst this is a relatively small percentage of parents and carers, it is still a considerable increase, bearing in mind that none of the parents and carers are currently involved in sharing reading. It is interesting to note that those parents that were enthusiastic about reading groups were interested in different ways.

'I've always fancied joining like a reading group, you know when they all read the same book, I've always fancied doing that. Coz I like to discuss, and my husbands not always usually in the mood for the book that I've just read and I really want to talk to somebody about it.' **Focus group participant**

'Yeah, [reading groups are a good idea] *to get other people's opinions but you don't want to read the same books, and I think a reading group, if you were reading the same book, and then commenting on it, it wouldn't work for me, erm. I would want to read the books that I would want to read, and then tell everybody why I wanted to read it, and what I got out of it, and that would be quite good.'* **Focus group participant**

These two participants clearly have quite different concepts of the idea of sharing reading. Both would like to share the reading experience with others, but in different ways. Whichever aspect of sharing reading parents are interested in however, it is still an encouraging example of adult reader development.

That the interest in reading groups is limited could perhaps be partly explained by the opinion of some parents and carers previously discussed, that reading is personal. This translates into a caution about how reading groups are formed, and with whom parents and carers feel comfortable sharing their reading experiences.

'You'd choose wouldn't you. You choose who you're in a reading group with, not just jump in with a load of people you didn't know.' **Focus group participant**

This opinion is therefore again a limiting factor in the extent to which Bookstart can affect the reader development of parents and carers. Other parents expressed concern about the pressure of having to read a specific book within a certain time.

'I'm not confident that I'd be able to read the book quick enough, err or read it at all for that matter because erm, I just find it hard to read books'. **Focus group participant**

Bookstart has been shown to improve parent/carer reading ability and increase their confidence (Wade and Moore, 2003) so could be an important factor in addressing this problem and encouraging parents and carers to share their reading experiences.

It is not clear from the data collected however what effect Bookstart has had on parent and carer attitudes towards shared reading. No conclusion can be drawn about whether Bookstart was a determining factor in the decision of parents and

carers who expressed interest in joining a reading group, as this question was not included in the research. This is a limitation of the data, which should be addressed if this research is built upon in the future.

6.1.6. Opinions of reading

One of the sustainable effects of Bookstart is the way it alters parent/carer opinions of reading. Whilst patterns of library use and reading habits are likely to change with circumstances, alterations in parent/carer opinions of reading are enduring. Bookstart emphasises the importance of reading, and ensures that it is a priority for parents.

> *'I think its emphasised the importance of this, that they put a lot of effort into the Bookstart, and err, probably without that, I wouldn't have thought of it for Holly, yeah, erm, but its, its emphasised how important it is in children's education, and its hit home to me how much more effort I have to make.'* **Focus group participant**

> *'It puts reading back up on your list of priorities doesn't it.'* **Focus group participant**

The impact of Bookstart is particularly important for those parents whose opinion of reading is largely negative.

> *'I think that some parents in particular are more open to come in, and actually not think that library and reading's boring.'* **Bookstart Project Worker**

> *'When I were younger I always thought reading was something that you had to do, it weren't pleasurable, but … you know, you come in here, there's so much information here, and its, there's so much going on, they make it fun.'* **Focus group participant**

That Bookstart promotes reading as a 'fun' activity is incredibly important, not only for encouraging children to read, but also for the reader development of adults. Reader development is the promotion of reading for pleasure: that Bookstart leads parents to consider reading 'fun' for the first time is clearly vital in encouraging their reading habits further.

The influence of Bookstart is no less important for parents and carers who are already keen readers.

> *'Its getting her into a library, and starting to develop all those lovely feelings that go with reading a book and you just think this is a gift for life isn't it, and it just, I think it makes you aware of, of the benefits that are life long, coz I mean my love of books come from, being Em's age.'* **Focus group participant**

> *'I didn't appreciate how important it was because it's just always been there, but they draw your attention to the fact that you read because (emphasised because) you know, rather than just because the books are there you read them for a reason'.* **Focus group participant**

Bookstart reawakens a sense of the importance of reading, and also a sense of the joy of reading, that it is a 'gift for life', and something that should be cherished rather than taken for granted. The phrase 'gift for life', used by a focus group participant, captures perfectly how important changing parent and carers opinions of reading is, and how Bookstart can have long term effects on the reader development of both children and adults.

6.1.7. Increased awareness

One of the positive outcomes of the Bookstart scheme for parents and carers is the increased awareness of both events and services that comes as a result of their more frequent visits to the library. Staff make an effort to ensure that relevant material is placed on display during Bookstart sessions, increasing the chances of parents finding something for themselves when they visit as well as borrowing books for the children.

> *'I'd say its made me a lot more aware of things that are going off, things that happen in the library, like that Rollercoaster and things like that, coz obviously if you come down, the information's there for you to see, or you get told about it later.'* **Focus group participant**

'It [Bookstart] *makes you more aware of what's available in the library, rather than just children's books or novels or stuff, there's all sorts.'* **Focus group participant**

'Hopefully when they come in for the children they find things that interest them as well'. **Bookstart Project Worker**

'When we've had incentives or workshops, we've always had displays that would interest the parents as well. So that even if they don't borrow them on the day, they know about them, and just awareness, of you know is a good thing.' **Bookstart Coordinator**

As the Bookstart Coordinator's final comment suggests, awareness does not necessarily immediately translate into increased borrowing. This could be one factor that explains the considerable difference between the percentage of parents and carers who visit the library more regularly following Bookstart (68 percent), and the percentage of parents who borrow more books (28 percent). That the increased awareness does eventually lead to a greater interest in books and more borrowing is however a clear theme running through the data from the second phase of the research.

'I haven't been in the library for years, and I'm not that familiar with libraries, erm, but I think coming with the toddler groups I think I'll eventually … I didn't realise, it had got so much to offer so, I think the more I come with my daughter the more I'll see what's in it for me.' ***Focus group participant***

'It [Bookstart] *brought me into the library, which was a start, I not actually took a book out for myself yet, but I've took some for Holly, but I think I will start to use the library more, borrowing books, instead of going to bookshops.'* **Focus group participant**

'Sometimes parents come to Babytimes, or the other activities for under 5's, and it might take them a whole year before they'll borrow something for themselves, but I'm sure it does come in the end'. **Bookstart Coordinator**

The importance of increasing parent/carer awareness of what is available and happening in the library can often be underestimated as it's impact on reader development is hard to quantify. However, as the data illustrates, increasing awareness is a vital element in encouraging adult reader development.

> *'Although they may not use the service to its full extent now, at least they do feel comfortable with it, and know of it, and can return to it, anytime of their life, which is like reading really.'* **Bookstart Project Worker**

6.2. Objective Two: To understand the factors that determine to what extent parent/carer reader development is affected by Bookstart.

6.2.1. Previous circumstances

One of the key factors determining to what extent Bookstart affects parent/carer reader development is the previous habits and circumstances of the parents and carers.

Table 6
Have parents/carers joined the library as a result of the Bookstart bag?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	26	59.1	60.5	60.5
	Yes	17	38.6	39.5	100.0
	Total	43	97.7	100.0	
Missing	9.00	1	2.3		
Total		44	100.0		

As Table 6 shows, only 39 percent of parents/carers joined the library as a result of Bookstart. This does not however mean that Bookstart only affected that number of parents and carers. For many parents/carers, the effects of Bookstart are not apparent in library membership figures, as they were already library members. A more accurate reflection of the impact of Bookstart can be obtained from the changes in frequency of library visits, but even this does not accurately portray differences in attitudes, and gives no sense of the differing extents to which Bookstart has affected parents.

Those parents on whom Bookstart has had the greatest effect are often those who have had no contact with the library since childhood.

> *'The library to me, when I was at school,…the only time you were allowed out of school, during the school day, was at lunch time, if you were going to the library, so that was the only way you could get out of school, so that was the reason why I went to the library.'* **Focus group participant**

When asked what effect, if any, Bookstart had had on her, the same focus group participant replied:

> *'Positive, Mmm. Just really going back to everything I've said, reintroducing me back to books, the library, brought me out of myself after I had my third child, and you know, made me want to read again'.*

As part of the focus group the participant shared that Bookstart sessions were the only event she attended outside of her house during the post natal depression she suffered following the birth of her third child. Bookstart had therefore had a much greater effect on her reader development, and her life in general, due to her previous circumstances, than on some of the other focus group participants.

The Bookstart Project Worker acknowledged the importance of understanding a parent or carer's background when promoting Bookstart, and explained that this altered the way in which she presented the library and its services to parents.

> *'I take into account, I mean, some parents wouldn't be interested to hear you going on about different aspects of the library. You go, you present the books, you talk to the baby, and you just briefly touch on do you want to come in, because you know it's going to be such a big step. Some of the parents are far more interested and so then I go into them joining, mobile libraries, computers, email setting up, all sorts of things, what we offer, and I've always got leaflets and stuff with me, for people that want one…so that's really how I encourage them to come in, for different reasons other than just for the children.'* **Bookstart Project Worker**

The effect Bookstart has on parents and carers is therefore determined partly by their previous circumstances. This is something that the library clearly has very little control over, and it could not therefore build on or alter Bookstart to increase its effectiveness in this respect. It is important to bear in mind however that often parents who would gain most benefit from the Bookstart scheme are those who are hardest to reach. This has been recognised by Bookstart staff and the parents themselves, and new ventures have been tried in order to reach out to those people on whom Bookstart could potentially have the most effect.

'The four of us seem to me, to be quite literary people, and (to Parent) *it brought you back into libraries, erm, there's a lot of people out there who have never been in a library, and who'd never think about it, and the only contact they have is when* [the Bookstart Project Worker] *goes to their house when their baby's been born.'*

'Not all of the families will feel comfortable about coming to the library, so as time has gone on, we are finding ways of being flexible about the bags, and erm, not always having them just in the libraries, because there are, say like the refugees, or erm, mums that have had, err, battered wives, you know, difficult situations, or substance abuse centres or something like that, then we've gone out and just taken out bags to them.' **Bookstart Coordinator**

6.2.2. Alternative sources

Table 7

Do you get books from sources other than the library?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	8	18.2	18.2	18.2
	Yes	36	81.8	81.8	100.0
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

81.8 percent of parents and carers indicated that they get books from sources other than the library (Table 7). These sources included bookshops, friends and family, the internet, catalogues, and even, in one case, Father Christmas!

Graph 2

How, if it has, has the amount of books you obtain from other sources changed since Bookstart?

- ■ Decreased
- ■ Stayed the same
- ■ Increased

7.5%

10.0%

82.5%
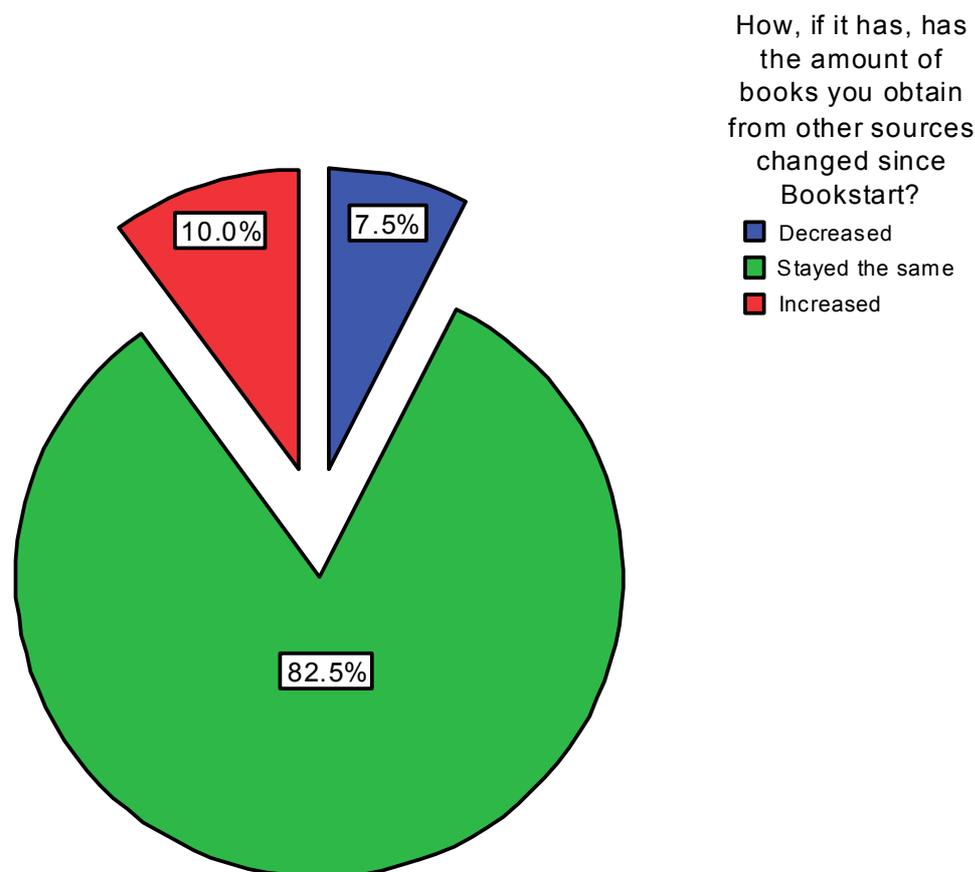
As graph two illustrates, just ten percent of parents and carers said that since Bookstart they had increased the amount of books they obtained from other sources. This figure is surprisingly low, as Wade and Moore concluded in their research into the Bookstart pilot project in Birmingham that 'Bookstart led to …more book purchase and more membership of book clubs' (Wade and Moore, 1993:26). Whilst some of the increase can be attributed to increasing book purchases as part of increased parent/carer interest in reading following Bookstart, some of the increase was also revealed in the qualitative data as being the result of parents' changing circumstances.

'I sometimes find that, because my little one's 3 months old, that by the time you've come down and looked at books for kids, I don't really have time to look for me as well (Mmms/ yeahs of agreement) *because they're starting to get bored, or just it's getting on to dinner time and you know that if you last another 10 mins there's going to be full scale war, and so on Monday I hadn't*

got a book to read so I went on the internet, onto Amazon, and you know you'll get the book the next day.' **Focus group participant**

Those parents who were already keen readers found that their opportunities to borrow from the library were restricted by their children, and appreciated the convenience of being able to purchase books from home on the internet. Other advantages of buying online included the speed of delivery and the low prices.

'Because it's there, you don't have to go out. I mean if you come to the library and you're looking for a specific book you don't always find it and when you put the order through the dialex system and then it eventually comes. But you pay 50p for that and you can get a book from Amazon for a penny, and then you pay the postage on top of that but you know the next day, so the next day it's going to be there, on your doorstep and you've got it to read' **Focus group participant**

Another factor highlighted in this comment that encourages parents to use alternative sources for books is the much higher chance of finding what they are looking for. As Coates (2004) states in his report on the state of the library service, visitors to libraries currently have only a 1 in 2 chance of finding a specific item. The fact that parents are using other sources to obtain their reading material is not detrimental to their reader development, indeed, it could be argued that it is encouraging that they are making the effort to obtain books. However, the fact that the library service is failing to meet the needs of its users could potentially affect the extent to which Bookstart effects reader development. The reader development of parents and carers could be restricted, if when they do decide to borrow a book for the first time, then cannot find what they are looking for.

A small percentage (7.5 percent) of parents and carers have decreased the amount of books they get from other sources. However, this is not necessarily an indication that they are reading less, and that Bookstart has therefore had a negative impact on reader development in some cases. The qualitative data reveals that for some parents and carers, Bookstart has encouraged them to replace buying books with borrowing them from the library. Even those parents who are very new to the library, and have not yet started to use all the available services, indicated that they would do so in the future.

'I'm beginning to think why do I keep spending all this money on books when I could borrow them? And I'm beginning to think, I'm beginning to think of books that I … could borrow instead of buying.' **Focus group participant**

The majority of parents however have continued to obtain books from other sources in the same way as they did before Bookstart. One focus group participant explained her motivation for using multiple sources to obtain reading material:

'I think all these different things have different benefits, like Amazon, it's the accessibility of it, for the library it's the fact that you can go away with 10 books, and you can try different authors and that you can pick up a book and if half way through it it hasn't worked it you don't feel like it's a waste'.

The library is clearly a key factor in encouraging reader development, as it gives parents and carers the ability to try new authors and genres without fear of wasting money. However, the fact that Bookstart has had no effect on the way in which the majority of parents and carers use other sources indicates that the there is no strong relationship between the use of alternative sources and the extent to which Bookstart affects parent/carer reader development. The quality of the library book stock however may be a factor in determining to what extent Bookstart affects parent/carer reader development.

6.2.3. Time

Another factor that plays a key part in limiting the effectiveness of Bookstart in encouraging adult reader development is the lack of time that parents have to choose books.

'I sometimes find that, because my little one's 3 months old, that by the time you've come down and looked at books for kids, I don't really have time to look for me as well' **Focus group participant**

'You have enough time to pick their books, and then no where near enough time to have a look on the shelves for yourself' **Focus group participant**

'It is hard, like you say, to actually find the time to actually choose books for yourself.' **Focus group participant**

'Whether they have the time when they're here to actually do that [borrow] *I don't know.'* **Bookstart Project Worker**

Even if the problem of finding time to choose books is overcome, finding time to read when looking after small children is also difficult.

'*Sometimes I bring them back without looking at them, just depends, I mean sometimes you're just so busy that you don't get a chance to pick them up.'* **Focus group participant**

'I mean my borrowings dropped, but that's purely because I don't have as much time, I don't, you know, I don't have as much time in the day and in the evening to read at the moment, so its not a reflection of this, its just purely that its taking me longer to get through books.' **Focus group participant**

For some parents and carers however, reading has become even more important now that they have children: it presents a form of escapism.

'I've got a book in my hand, and I don't know how I find time to do it, I've got a two year old and a one year old, but I think that's just my way of escaping it all'. **Focus group participant**

'I think you make, if you want, sometimes I think if you want to read you'll make time to read.' **Focus group participant**

The majority of parents and carers however find that lack of time limits the number of books they can choose and read. This is clearly a factor that affects the amount of influence Bookstart can have on parent/carer reader development.

6.2.4. Library environment

Another factor which determines how much effect Bookstart has on parent/carer reader development is the library environment. This is important in several ways. Firstly, it can affect parents' opinions of the library, and how comfortable they feel using the service. A practical issue that was identified by both parents and Bookstart

staff as vital in encouraging parents to use the library was waiving fines on damaged books for the under fives.

> *'The first thing that parents say to me, well, what if my baby eats the book or what if my baby tears it, or gets excited and you have accidents, or their drink spills, or whatever. And so a few years ago, we made a policy in libraries that any accidents by under 5's would be totally, erm, waived shall we say, of any problems, so, lost books chewed books eaten books, it doesn't matter. Because that's a BIG thing for parents, the first thing they worry about, what happens, erm, and they think that a black mark will be against them for ever, you know,… and I think we're getting over that hurdle, so that's one good thing.'* **Bookstart Coordinator**

The evidence from the parents and carers suggests that the Bookstart Coordinator is right in thinking that 'we're getting over that hurdle'.

> *'It really doesn't matter if, you know, they damage some books, ok they don't want you to, but its, you know, they're not going to ban you from the library because they happen to have chewed the corner of the page or something, or been sick on it.'* **Focus group participant**

> *'I've found, erm, with the actual Bookstart, because when I had my first daughter, Bookstart wasn't in, I just had a normal child's* [ticket]*, and I'd only let her take one or two books out at a time coz I was always paranoid of them getting lost in the house, getting spoilt anything like that coz you had to pay for it, whereas now, I just let them take 10 books out each and you know it's just a mad rush round when you come to find them all and have they ripped anything or whatever. And I know that sounds a bit, sort of blasé and you know you're not taking care of the books, but before with Natasha I was ' be careful with that book' you know 'turn the page carefully'.*

Another participant interjects- *'it puts you off'*

> *'Whereas now, even with Amelia who's only 1 and a half I'll let her just sit down with a book, you know, flick her way through.'* **Focus group participant**

The parents are clearly comfortable with the security the 'no fines' rule gives them, and are therefore happy to visit the library and borrow children's books, and have the opportunity to borrow for themselves at the same time.

Secondly, aspects of the library environment can influence how much effect Bookstart has on reader development as choosing books can be made easier or more difficult depending on the physical layout of the library. Practical ideas, such as keeping doors closed and providing baby gates on stairs, give parents peace of mind and allow them to concentrate on choosing books, encouraging reader development, rather than worrying about their children.

> *'I do find it awkward at this library, because they don't have the gate up on the stairs all the time.'* **Focus group participant**

> *'And also they quite often have that door open don't they too... and the number of times I've been checking out books and one of them's just gone charging out there and there's concrete steps.'* **Focus group participant**

> *'You can't just wheel them in in their push chairs; Harry would be quite happy if he was just sat in his push chair and I could pick a book then, but if I take him up from this session, and then he's running around all over the place.'* **Focus group participant**

Whilst some issues, such as the problem of the library being inaccessible for push chairs, may be out of the library's control, simple actions such as closing doors are easily achievable, and can make a difference to the impact that Bookstart has on parent/carer reader development.

The physical layout of the library can also encourage or discourage users from asking for help, which can be an important element of reader development.

> *Desk and counters are big barriers, and if you got out wandering around the shelves and being in the library, people will come and approach you and ask those sort of questions, but sometimes being behind the counter is a great big barrier.* **Bookstart Coordinator**

This is also a factor that the library has control over. Whilst counters and desks are sometimes necessary, if libraries are aware of the barrier they potentially present, then they can take steps to counteract this, and therefore help to increase the extent to which Bookstart affects parent/carer reader development.

6.2.5. Partnership

At national level partnership working has proved to be a key element in the success of adult reader development projects. Many of the DCMS/Wolfson funded initiatives involved partnership between different authorities and agencies, and Framework for the Future (2003) identifies partnership working as important in the building of a modern library service. Bookstart is an excellent example of successful partnership working at both national and local level. The importance of local partnerships in making it effective is recognised by the Bookstart Project Worker

> [Speaking about what makes Bookstart effective and how it could be made more effective] *'A project worker, … having the time to link more with other projects that are going on, that are trying to reach hard to reach families. Because the families that are hard to reach are hard to reach for everybody, health visitors, the nurseries, the community workers in general.'*

The strength of Bookstart's local partnerships are one factor that determines how successful the scheme is in reaching parents and carers, and therefore in encouraging their reader development. Building on existing partnerships could make the scheme as a whole more effective, and the partnerships already in place could be used to create and then promote further adult reader development activity.

6.2.6. Role for parents

Another factor that could determine to what extent Bookstart affects parent/carer reader development is whether parents and staff believe that it has a role to play with the parents and carers.

The data collected shows that the Bookstart Coordinator firmly believes that Bookstart does have a role to encourage parents to read.

> **Researcher:** *'Do you think Bookstart has a role to encourage parents to read more?'*

Bookstart Coordinator: *'Oh, big style, yes definitely'.*

'Coz a lot of young parents now have not had a history of using libraries, and maybe their parents have not had a history of using libraries, and we've got to get them back, and we've got to start again with a lot of parents.'
Bookstart Coordinator

She sees the further development of family learning schemes and family reading groups as vital in continuing the work of Bookstart in getting parents involved in reading, and getting the most out of books.

'I think doing more family learning activities, we've had some pilot projects and we're building upon those and I think that's the way forward we need to do some more family learning. Very informal, but erm, I think that opens a lot of parent and carer's eyes really to what libraries have to offer, and encourages them and gives them confidence to make things do things and use books a bit more, use them to their maximum really.' **Bookstart Coordinator**

The effect Bookstart has on the attitudes of parents towards adult reading is being investigated further in research currently being carried out at the University of Sheffield by Hines. The question is being asked as part of an in depth study of the first Bookstart babies from the area to start school. The subject is obviously therefore of interest to those involved in the management of Bookstart in Sheffield.

The Bookstart Project Worker was also positive when asked about the role that Bookstart could play with parents and carers, although less strongly than the Bookstart Coordinator.

'I would hope so [that Bookstart has a role to encourage reading in parents]*, yes, but then I've always, because I've always worked with children, I do tend to see it more from that side, whereas if it was a member of library staff, who was implementing it, they'd probably be able to put the emphasis more on adult reading, which I don't do very much of, because I'm not familiar with it.'* **Bookstart Project Worker**

It appears that the affects of Bookstart on parents are acknowledged as important, but the focus has remained solely on the promotion of reading for children. This is partly due to the individual experience of the Project Worker, and is understandable as Bookstart is aimed, in the first instance, at babies.

That the primary focus of Bookstart is the children is reflected in the parents responses when asked how they would feel if Bookstart finished. Whilst acknowledging the differences that it has made to them, parents and carers still saw the scheme in terms of the benefits it brings for children, rather than parents and carers.

> *'It's a travesty for our children.'*

> *'I've seen how much, you know, my children benefited from it and it would be a shame, you know, if other children couldn't benefit as well.'*

> *'I think its very unfair if the only kids who read are the kids whose parents read, and who see it as important.'*

A few parents did mention the importance of Bookstart in reaching parents who otherwise would not have come to the library.

> *'There's a lot of people out there who have never been in a library, and who'd never think about it, and the only contact they have is when Trudy goes to their house when their baby's been born.'*

> *'Coz I think it's encouraged a lot of children in, particularly, and adults, to bring the kids to the library, who quite possibly wouldn't have come, you know, not necessarily.'*

However, overall the Bookstart Coordinator's belief that Bookstart has a role to play encouraging parents to read does not appear to have been transmitted through the scheme to the parents themselves. An increased awareness of the part that Bookstart can play in parent's lives could potentially translate into Bookstart having a greater effect on parent/carer reader development; it could become an integral part of the initiative rather than a beneficial extra.

6.2.7. Staff attitudes and library welcome

Potentially the most important factor that affects the impact of Bookstart on parent/carer reader development is the attitude of staff and how welcoming parents find the library. The issue was commented upon frequently in the course of this research. The Bookstart Project Worker believes that building relationships with the parents and making them feel welcome, 'the personal touch', is one of the things that makes Bookstart so effective.

> *'The personal touch, and being around in clinics and in the community, and being local, in this area, makes a big difference'* **Bookstart Project Worker**

The importance of this personal touch to parents became clear in the focus group discussions.

> **Participant 1***: 'I mean the first few times I came down here with her I mean I just sort of sat in that room and I just wanted to burst out into tears but I forced myself to come again. And if it hadn't of been for the Bookstart, and Trudy as well being that focussed person and you know, as soon as you walk in the room, its oh, hello! You know.'*

> **Participant 2:** *'And she's always going around making sure she talks to everybody even if she's at the other end of the room, she comes back.'*

> **Participant 1***: 'Yeah, and I see her in the health centre as well, and she's hey, how are you, and that, and a friendly face it does bring you out of yourself'.*

The difference that friendly and committed staff can make to the effect that Bookstart has is probably best illustrated by anecdotal evidence from the Bookstart Coordinator.

> *'One of the Bookstart project officers went to visit a family in Park End* flats [a deprived area of the city]*, to deliver a Bookstart bag, and erm, she'd made prior arrangements to go, and knocked on the door.*

Dad staggered to the door, mum was out, the baby was out, and the Bookstart worker wasn't put off and said "Well I'll still leave the bag with you, erm, you might enjoy sharing these books."

"Oh we don't do books, oh no, haven't got books, we've got some toys but no we're not really bothered about books"'

So the worker said "Well, maybe if I call back another time, erm, I could bring something that we can chat again."

"Ok Ok". So he dismissed her and shut the door and away she went. But she thought well she wouldn't be put off, erm she'd make arrangements to go back when mum was there, dad was there and the baby was there and try again. And the second visit, she knocked on the door, opened the door, and in the hallway, she had to stride over the books!

"Come in, Come in, come and see," you know, "what Daniel's done this week, and look what we've got from the library, and I've got a video, and see what, he really likes them, and you did bring those books, and have you got any more?"

It was the biggest success story that we've had! And it was that personal touch, and I think the Bookstart workers that we have had have made such a big difference to how the Bookstart project has been received.'

The impact that the 'personal touch' of the Bookstart staff has had on the success of the project should clearly not be underestimated. However, it is equally important that this friendly attitude and welcoming atmosphere is shared by other library staff.

'And the staff are friendly. It makes a big difference if you come in and feel welcome (yeahs of agreement) *you don't want to, you're not put off.'* **Focus group participant**

Participant 1: *'I would say, that it's as important that the library is welcoming, as to have the Bookstart. My sister lives in xxxxx, and they have the Bookstart there, but she doesn't go to the library, because the children aren't allowed to talk… so she just never takes them, because its too much like hard work!* (Laughter)'

Participant 2: *'It's not fun, is it,'*

Participant 1*: 'No. It's not worth the hassle it's not worth showing the children that that's what libraries are about.'*

Participant 2: '*Yeah, that's because then their endearing memory of the library is being told to sit still and shut up.'*

'I do try and present it very modern, well, there's no try about it I do present it enthusiastically, welcoming, bright and breezy, drop in, casual, don't worry about the noise don't worry about the costs and the books, and just really do encourage parents to come in and be a part of the community here. I really do try hard to present that image, erm, sometimes it's a bit disappointing, when I think, after I've presented that image, it isn't continued.' **Bookstart Project Worker**

This is clearly a factor that the library has control over, and should be able to change, in order to maximise the effect that Bookstart has. An unwelcoming and inflexible library service can have an extremely negative effect, and undermines the work done by staff to encourage parents to use the library service. On the other hand, a friendly and welcoming library can dramatically affect the impact that Bookstart has encouraging parents and carers to use the library, and therefore potentially encouraging their reader development.

6.3. Other findings

6.3.1. Improvements in literacy

Although the focus of this research was the effect that Bookstart has had on parent and carer reader development, the data has also produced some other interesting findings. The evaluation of the Read On –Write Away! Project in Derbyshire (Millard, 2002) revealed that parent child initiatives can have a positive effect in improving parents literacy, and encourage parents with poor literacy skills to ask for help. The data collected for this research confirms Millard's findings.

'David's never been very academic, but, not very good at reading, writing,
just the basics, but since he's been reading to the girls, he's just improved
beyond belief….
My husbands exactly the same.' **Focus group participants**

'A lot of parents will be very brave and say they've got difficulty with reading,
and then we can flag that up, and we can guide them to get some help with
their literacy skills. And on the Bookstart voucher we've got a few helpful
telephone numbers, so that they can get some help, with their reading or
maths or whatever skills'. **Bookstart Coordinator**

6.3.2. Impact on fathers

The above comments also serve to illustrate another interesting issue raised
in the research: the impact that Bookstart has on fathers and other male carers. It is
noted by McNicol and Dalton (2002) that very few fathers get involved in parent child
literacy programmes, and much of the research into their effects is therefore female
dominated. This project reflects this trend, with only 11 percent of respondents being
male. However, although they are notable in their absence, this data suggests that
nevertheless some fathers and male carers are affected by Bookstart, both in terms
of literacy and reader development.

Table 5

Crosstabulation: A comparison of the increase in library use between men and women.

| | | | Are you male or female? | | |
			Male	Female	Total
People who increased library visits as result of Bookstart	No	Count	3	10	13
		% within Are you male or female?	75.0%	27.0%	31.7%
	Yes	Count	1	27	28
		% within Are you male or female?	25.0%	73.0%	68.3%
Total		Count	4	37	41
		% within Are you male or female?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Only 1 of the 4 men involved in this research had increased their library use as a result of Bookstart. This is only 25 percent compared to 73 percent of women who have started visiting the library more frequently (Table 5). However, the very small number of men surveyed means that this data is far from representative. The qualitative data collected suggests that Bookstart is having an impact on fathers and male carers despite their lack of direct contact with the library.

> *'My husband definitely reads more'* **Focus group participant**

> *'Its the passing information on in't it, I'd say its made my husband read, he's got to read more, got to be seen with a book in his hand, coz he's realised its important that Adam don't pick up his habit of not reading.'* **Focus group participant**

> *'Its encouraging Dads as well to read. We had erm, a father's day week of events, to try and get Dads more in tune with err, babies and toddlers and what they're enjoying to read, and try and encourage them into the library and do something special for them. And so that worked really really well.'* **Bookstart Coordinator**

As there is very little data available about the effect of parent and child reading initiatives on fathers and male carers to put these comments in context, this could be an interesting area for further research.

7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1. Objective One: To what extent does participation in the Bookstart scheme encourage parent/carer reader development?

The data collected for this research indicates that Bookstart has a considerable effect on both parent/carer attendance, and on their opinion of libraries. For the majority of parents, the frequency of their library visits increases as a result of Bookstart, and preconceived notions of the library as quiet and boring are replaced with the idea that the library is a useful resource centre, and a fun place to be. Whilst these two issues are not in themselves indications of parent/carer reader development, they are both important factors in encouraging reader development.

Bookstart also has an extremely positive effect on parent/carer opinions of reading, increasing their awareness of its importance and their appreciation of the enjoyment it can bring. This is vital in encouraging parent/carer reader development, and is a valuable finding of this research

It is also apparent that participation in the Bookstart scheme encourages borrowing. Many parents and carers who bring their children to the library as a result of Bookstart begin to borrow for themselves. Bookstart also encourages reading in other family members, even if they themselves don't visit the library regularly, and creates many 'potential' borrowers, who although they do not immediately begin to use the library services for themselves, are made aware of what's available and will use them in the future. The increased awareness that parents/carers have of the different types of reading material available and the many reading related activities that occur in the library was also mentioned several times in the focus group discussions, and is another important aspect of reader development that Bookstart has had a considerable effect on.

Whilst Bookstart encourages reader development by increasing parent/carer awareness of what's available in the library however, this does not always translate into an increased enthusiasm in parents to try new genres and authors in fiction and narrative non fiction. Although some parents were attracted by displays and

appreciated the freedom the library gives to experiment with new books free of charge, others were discouraged by the large quantity of books available, and continued to only select books they knew they liked. Bookstart does therefore encourage parents/carers to try new types of books and broaden their reading habits, but only to a certain extent.

The qualitative evidence in particular reveals that Bookstart increases parent/carer confidence in using the library, and makes them more familiar with both the staff and the available services. This increased familiarity encourages parents and carers to ask for help in choosing what to read, an important element in adult reader development. However, the extent to which Bookstart can encourage reader development in this area is limited, as there are many factors that influence how parents and carers choose what they like to read; some see reading as a personal experience, and therefore don't believe that library staff could help them with their book selection. This issue was mentioned by several parents, but does not appear to have been recognised by staff, who believed that a formal, intimidating library environment and the fear of appearing stupid were the main factors that dissuaded users from asking for help. The way in which Bookstart is integrated into the main library can also influence to what extent Bookstart increases parents' familiarity with staff and services; this then affects to what extent Bookstart encourages parent/carer reader development in this area. Overall, therefore, Bookstart influences this aspect of reader development to some extent, but not to the degree that might have been expected by staff.

One aspect of reader development that Bookstart does not appear to have had a notable effect on is the enthusiasm of parents/carers to share the reading experience with others. Although all the parents and carers enjoyed sharing books with their children, only a minority were interested in joining a reading group, and many saw reading as a personal experience that they were only willing to share with close friends and family. The limitations of the data mean that it is not possible to establish whether those parents who were interested in sharing reading had developed their interest as a result of Bookstart.

7.2. Objective Two: What are the factors that determine to what extent parent/carer reader development is affected by Bookstart?

The most important factors determining the extent to which Bookstart affects parent/carer reader development are staff attitudes and the library atmosphere. A committed and friendly staff, providing the 'personal touch' and building relationships with parents/carers are vital in encouraging parents and carers to return to the library and in giving parents the confidence to ask for help with reading. Creating a welcoming library environment is also essential in ensuring that Bookstart has the maximum effect on parents and carers; if the library is not welcoming, then parents and carers will not use its services.

As well as providing an atmosphere that parents and carers feel comfortable in, the library must also ensure that the physical layout of the library is as helpful as possible for parents in order to encourage them to browse, borrow, and make the most of the opportunities provided for reader development. Things that were mentioned in the course of the research were putting baby gates across stairs, closing doors, making the library accessible for push chairs, and perhaps cordoning off the children's area so that parents could safely leave their children there whilst they browse for themselves. Counters and desks can also be intimidating for users; the way staff are positioned in the library can have an effect on how willing users are to ask for help choosing books. All of these factors can have a considerable impact on how much effect Bookstart has on parent/carer reader development.

Both of the above factors are things that the library, to a large extent, has control over. It should therefore be able to make changes to maximise the impact of Bookstart on parent/carer reader development. Two other factors largely within the library's control that have the potential to affect the impact Bookstart has are the building of partnerships with other agencies and the perception of Bookstart's role in encouraging parents to read.

Partnerships at both national and local level have helped to contribute to the success of the Bookstart scheme throughout the country. By continuing to work closely with health professionals and other community workers, Bookstart can

hopefully begin to reach some of those 'hard to reach' parents and carers who stand to benefit most from it.

Perceptions of the role Bookstart has to play with parents and carers is the issue on which parent and staff opinions were the most diverse. Whilst staff, especially at management level, clearly envisaged the role that Bookstart had in encouraging parents to read, parents themselves seemed largely unaware of this. One way of potentially increasing the amount that Bookstart affects parent/carer reader development could be to make parents and carers aware of the benefits of Bookstart for them as well as for their children. The setting up of family learning activities and family reading groups, as suggested by the Bookstart Coordinator, could also increase the impact Bookstart has on parent/carer reader development.

As well as these factors however, there are also factors determining the extent of the affect Bookstart has on parent/carer reader development that are outside of the library service's control.

One of these is the previous circumstances and experience of the parent or carer. Whilst Bookstart has proved to have an effect on the reader development of keen readers, its greatest impact is on those who had had no contact with libraries and reading since school, if ever. Bookstart could therefore have the greatest effect on the reader development of those parents and carers who are the hardest for the scheme to reach.

The most obvious limit on the reader development of parents and carers highlighted in the research is that caring for young children leaves parents with very little time to either choose books or read them. In some ways, parents are the most unsuitable group to run a reader development project for, as they are almost permanently occupied looking after their children. However, although the research shows that time is a factor limiting the extent to which Bookstart affects parent/carer reader development, it does not prevent the initiative from being extremely effective at encouraging reading in parents and carers.

7.3. Further conclusions

In addition to discovering that Bookstart does have an effect on the reader development of parents and carers, this research also confirms the findings of both Millard (2002) and Sorby (2002) that Bookstart can help improve the literacy of some parents and carers, and can encourage parents and carers to seek assistance with their basic skills.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1. The library environment

- Ensuring that doors are closed and putting baby gates over stairs gives parents the opportunity to choose books without worrying for the safety of their children.

- Keeping children entertained whilst their parents choose books is also a problem. Cordoning off the children's area so parents can leave their children safely whilst they select books, or providing child sized trolleys/cars, as they do in supermarkets, for the children to push/drive around the library with their parents could both provide a solution to this problem.

- Making the library accessible for push chairs would also give parents a greater opportunity to select books, as they could leave their children safely in the push chair. This is obviously something that is dictated by the library structure however, and so might not be physically possible.

8.2. Staff attitudes and library welcome

> *'It's as important that the library is welcoming, as to have the Bookstart'.*
> **Focus group participant.**

- The library should be child friendly; understanding about noise and forgiving of accidents by the under fives.

- Having a specific Bookstart Project worker to provide the 'personal touch' is also extremely important, although obviously their provision is limited by funding.

- Staff should spend time when parents first join the library showing them all the available services, as well as ensuring that they are aware of any special damages policy for children's books.

8.3. Intervention

- As far as possible, staff should not be positioned behind desks and counters; having staff in the main body of the library encourages users to ask for help.

- Bookstart should be integrated into the main library service, with sessions held in the children's section of the library if possible, rather than a separate room. This may not always be possible however depending on the size and layout of the library.

8.4. Bookstart's role for parents

- 'Taster' collections, containing a selection of books that might interest parents, have proved to be successful both in the course of this research, with teenage mothers, and also in other reader development initiatives, such as the Barking and Dagenham Partnership with Parents project (McNicol and Dalton, 2002). The possibility of bringing a selection of adult books to the sessions was also suggested by one of the focus group participants. It is therefore recommended that a selection of adult books are made available for borrowing alongside children's books in the Bookstart sessions.

- Family learning activities and family reading groups were also both suggested by the Bookstart Coordinator as an excellent way of increasing parental involvement in the Bookstart scheme.

- It is also recommended that Bookstart staff try to raise the awareness of parents and carers of the benefits that the Bookstart scheme can have for them, as well as for their children.

8.5. Increasing awareness

- The Bookstart staff interviewed believed that better publicity was key in raising the profile of Bookstart and altering the public's opinion of the library. It is therefore recommended that Bookstart continues to produce high quality publicity materials to promote the scheme and encourage parents into the library.

8.6. Previous circumstances

- A 'travelling Bookstart', perhaps based in a mobile library, could be used to take the scheme to those parents whose previous circumstances make them very unlikely to visit the library.

- Partnerships with other community workers could also be used to reach those parents who are otherwise hard to reach. Bookstart sessions could be held in community centres and other venues perceived by parents as less intimidating than the library.

8.7. Alternative sources

- One of the factors encouraging parents to use alternative sources for books was the increased chance of finding what they were looking for, and the speed with which orders were delivered. Improving the library book stock and speeding up the ordering and reservation process could therefore encourage parents to use the library more. Changes in this area are obviously however limited by funding, and the current library circulation system.

8.8. Other recommendations

- The effectiveness of displays in encouraging users to try new genres of books was commented on several times in the focus groups, with the 'Richard and Judy Summer Read' and the 'BBC Big Read' mentioned specifically. It is therefore recommended that special attention be paid to creating prominent and attractive book displays, reflecting what is happening in the popular media.

- Linking what happens in all of the sessions and displays by following a theme or topic was mentioned by staff as a way of encouraging parents and carers to borrow for themselves. This is also therefore recommended.

- Providing a specific display of new books was seen as useful by focus group members who were keen readers, as it alerted them to new additions to library stock.

- Providing reviews of books, either by staff or from newspapers and magazines, was suggested by focus group participants as a way of encouraging users to try new types of fiction/narrative non-fiction.

- One aspect of buying books online which appealed to parents/carers was the 'if you enjoy this author, you might also like' feature, which recommends similar authors. It is therefore recommended that library's promote reader development tools, both printed and online, such as Forager, and 'Who else writes like? : reader's guide to adult fiction.' (Thebridge, Train and Dalton, 2001).

- Regular sessions for children are currently only available for the under fives. It was suggested by focus group participants with older children that the library run sessions for six to eleven year olds, as this would help to encourage them to continue reading.

8.9. Suggestions for further research

This project highlighted the effect that Bookstart can have on fathers and other male carers. However, very little research has been done on the effects of parent/child reading initiatives on fathers, as the vast majority of parents who are involved in projects, and are therefore surveyed, are female. This would be an interesting area for further research.

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APPENDIX A: ACCOMPANYING LETTER

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE

Reading for Pleasure Survey

Please circle the answers that apply to you

1. Have you joined the library as a result of receiving the Bookstart bag?

     Yes   No

2. How often do you visit the library?

Less than once a month	Once a month	Every three weeks
Every fortnight	Once a week	More than once a week

3. How often did you visit the library before you received the Bookstart bag?

Less than once a month	Once a month	Every three weeks
Every fortnight	Once a week	More than once a week

4. On average, how many adult fiction/narrative non-fiction (eg biographies) books do you borrow from the library per visit?

_____

5. On average, how many adult fiction/narrative non-fiction books did you borrow from the library per visit before you received the Bookstart bag?

_____

6. Do you get adult fiction/narrative non-fiction from any sources other than the library eg friends, bookshops, book clubs?

     Yes   No

7. **Since you received the Bookstart bag, has the amount of adult fiction/narrative non-fiction you obtain from other sources changed?**

    Increased   Decreased   Stayed the same

8. **Are you happy to ask library staff for help choosing fiction/narrative non-fiction books for yourself?**

    Yes   No

9. **Since you received the Bookstart bag, have you asked library staff for help in choosing books more frequently, less frequently or the same amount?**

    More Frequently   Less frequently   Same amount

10. **Are you a member of a reading group?**

    Yes   No

11. **If not, would you like to be?**

    Yes   No

I'm interested to know more about your reading habits.
Would you be prepared to give 10 minutes of your time to talk to me more about them?
Please note that any information you give will be treated with the strictest confidence.

My name is Mr/Mrs/Ms _____

My phone number _____

<div align="center">Thank you very much</div>

Emily Morris
The University of Sheffield
Phone no: 0114 232 6903
Email: lip03emm@shef.ac.uk

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

'Reading for Pleasure' Interview Schedule

Intro:

Thank you very much for giving up your time. This should only take about 20 mins. I'm going to record the interview, to make sure that I don't misquote you or miss anything you say, but no one else will hear the tape; if I include anything you say in my report I'll make it anonymous. Please say whatever you want to during the interview, even if you don't think it's relevant, because I'm interested in anything you want to tell me. I'm particularly interested in your reading habits, as well as those of your children.

Topics to talk about:

Their reading habits:

1. What kind of things do you normally read?

2. Where do you get books etc from?
   - What encourages you to use these sources rather than/as well as the library?
   - What effect, if any, has Bookstart had on how much you use other sources?

3. What was your opinion of reading before the Bookstart scheme?

4. How, if it has, do you think your opinion of reading has changed since the Bookstart scheme?

5. What influence, if any, do you think Bookstart has had on your attitude towards adult reading?

Their library habits:

6. Roughly how often do you visit the library?

7. How, if it has, has receiving the Bookstart bag affected your library use?

8. Which library services do you use when you visit?

9. Which services, if there are any, do you use now that you hadn't used before Bookstart?
   - What influenced you to use these?

10. How do you think Bookstart's changed your borrowing habits, if it has?
    - Do you borrow more for you, or more for your children, or both?
    - Why do you think that is?

11. What do you think the library could do to encourage you to read more?
    - Is there anything you think Bookstart specifically could do?

Reader development:

12. How do you choose what you like to read?

13. Would you say the library encourages you to read new things?
    - If not- what could it do to encourage you to read new things? What could Bookstart do to encourage you?
    - If so, how does it do that?

14. Would you be happy to ask library staff for help choosing a book to read?
    - Have you?
    - If so/If not why?

15. Do you think Bookstart has affected how happy you are to ask staff for help in choosing what to read?
    - If so, how has it done that?

16. Do you think of reading as a personal experience, or do you like to share books with others?
    - What makes you think that?

17. Do you think reading groups are a good idea?
    - What makes you think that?
    - Would you join one?
    - Why/Why not?

Other opinions:

18. How do you feel about the possibility that the Bookstart scheme could end?

19. What effect do you think Bookstart has had on both you and your children?