

The Next Chapter

Our Strategy



About BookTrust

We want to get every child reading, regularly and by choice.



We distribute

3.3 million books to families every year



We want all families to establish a routine of reading together with their babies as early as possible and to continue this throughout childhood as children learn to read independently.

Reading matters because it can have a lifelong positive impact on a child, affecting their health and wellbeing, creativity and educational outcomes.



We reach every baby

in their first year of life

About BookTrust

libro, livre,
książka, llyfr, bestil,
buch, bok, 本

We review a new
children's book



**every
day**

We provide books in

**35 different
languages**



**We reach
disadvantaged
children in their
early years**

in over 95% of English local authorities

We partner with:



About BookTrust

We're the UK's largest children's reading charity.

Each year we reach millions of children and families, inspiring them with our books, resources and support to get them started on their reading journeys.

We work in partnership

Alongside our passionate and experienced staff, we bring together:

- A network of skilled delivery partners including local authorities, health visitors, schools, libraries, social workers and early years practitioners
- A diverse community of children's authors, illustrators and publishers
- National agencies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and book gifting organisations around the world
- Committed and supportive funders, donors and friends



We have been delivering Bookstart to children and their families for nearly

30 years.

For millions of children

–from those born last week to those who are now young adults – the first book they owned was a gift from BookTrust.



Introduction

This strategy sets out how we will support children and families to reap the lifechanging benefits of reading.

Over the past decade, the lives of children and families have changed. Family structures, routines and priorities are evolving, and their time is increasingly facing competition with technology. Millions of children face disadvantage and inequalities in their lives. Local services are transforming. The pandemic has seen the disadvantage gap grow, threatening the wellbeing and prospects of a new generation.

As the world changes, we must change with it to ensure we remain relevant and are equipped to meet the needs of children now and in the future.

There's never been a more urgent time for us to focus our efforts, redefine our approach, and set out how we will inspire and encourage a new generation of children on their reading journeys.

"The harsh reality of child and family poverty has always had a devastating impact on the wellbeing and life chances of many children in this country. The recent pandemic has turned what was already a crisis into a tsunami of need."

Charlotte Ramsden, Vice President,
Association of Directors of Children's
Services, 2021



A new focus for BookTrust

Reaching children from economically disadvantaged and vulnerable family backgrounds...

Through this strategy, we will prioritise our actions and efforts to meet the needs of children who face the greatest barriers and for whom the benefits of reading can be even more transformative.

By adapting our existing resources and developing new and exciting ways to engage children and families on their reading journeys, more of our reading tools, resources and support will be targeted to meet the needs of families facing economic disadvantage and those from vulnerable family backgrounds.

...whilst retaining our commitment to all children.

“Not only do children from disadvantaged backgrounds have considerably lower school attainment and lower adult earnings than their peers from more affluent backgrounds, we also find large differences in the outcomes of children from disadvantaged backgrounds across the country.”

Laura van der Erve,
Senior Research Economist,
Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2020

Our ambition is to bring the benefits of reading to children in the greatest need and to achieve long-lasting impact by establishing reading habits and behaviours.

We take our responsibility to get every child reading seriously. Many of our activities will remain universal, reaching children in every community across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and inspiring families to cultivate a reading habit from birth up to the age of 13.

Thanks to our network of partners, we have the unparalleled opportunity to reach all children – including those living in deprivation – whether that’s in rural areas or urban developments.

We will design our universal activities so they respond to the needs of children and families in economic disadvantage who face greater barriers on their reading journeys. This way we can ensure our activities are truly universal with all children getting the support they need.



Why reading matters

The powerful and transformative benefits of reading

From babies to those in their early years and all the way through to early teens, reading brings children profound and wide-ranging benefits that can have a lifelong positive impact on their lives, affecting their health, wellbeing, sleep and their academic and social development.



Supporting high educational achievement

- Doing better at school at age five and at GCSEs
- Higher attainment in literacy, numeracy and reading performance throughout school
- Better progress in vocabulary, spelling and maths than if they have a parent with a university degree



Improving a child's mental health, wellbeing and self-esteem, and helping families bond

- Longer sleep at night for children in their early years
- Warmth, sensitivity and less stress for parents of babies
- Better mental wellbeing, ability to overcome stress and a boost to self-esteem
- Enhanced sense of security, improved emotional regulation and opportunities to exchange ideas by sharing interactions over a book

Why reading matters

The powerful and transformative benefits of reading



What do we mean by reading?

Reading is finding meaning in text or images, independently or with others, and making sense of an idea through focus and concentration. Whether it's through graphic novels, picture books, stories, poems or rhymes, paper based or digital. More than functional literacy, it's a creative act that takes you somewhere and opens up new possibilities.

Creating new opportunities and developing aspiration and possibilities for children

- Helps overcome educational barriers and drive social mobility
- More likely to be in professional or managerial roles in their thirties
- Less likely still to be in poverty as an adult

Many people don't know about these benefits. With millions of children facing disadvantage and inequalities in their lives, there is an urgent need for us, our partners and professionals who support children and families to advocate for the role of reading in a child's life so a new generation of children can enjoy these life-changing benefits.



Sparking imagination and creativity

- Develops curiosity and broadens horizons
- Builds imagination, reflection, problem-solving and critical thinking
- Cultivates an awareness of the perspectives of other people and increases empathy

How will we deliver change for children and families?

Achieving our aim of getting every child reading regularly and by choice means supporting families to adopt or change behaviours that enable them to create and cultivate a reading habit.

This is a new and ambitious direction for us.

We have a new theory of change that will transform our approach, providing children and families with the opportunities, confidence and motivation to initiate and maintain a reading habit that lasts.

The key ingredients to forming lifelong reading habits:

Start early and provide ongoing support to



We will draw on our research, evidence and our long and successful history of delivering engaging and impactful reading support to millions of children and their families.



of books to increase their motivation



How will we deliver change for children and families?

The key ingredients to forming lifelong reading habits:



so children can see themselves in the books they read



to engage their children in reading



Inspiring a new generation of children on their reading journeys

We're excited to build on our knowledge, insight and experience; to develop innovative new approaches; to deepen our relationship with partners; and to transform our support for children and families, helping them form long-lasting habits and behaviours.

We'll do this by delivering on five areas where we know we can make a difference.



Starting together so all families are supported to initiate shared reading at the earliest opportunity:

- We'll continue to gift every new baby a Bookstart Baby pack through our network of health visitors, registrars and libraries
- We'll extend the support we offer to reach families, with both digital and physical reading support throughout the first year
- We'll learn more about what drives families to engage with reading in the first year of their baby's life and remodel our support to reflect this



Supporting disadvantaged children and families in their early years who need more help to get started on their reading journeys and make reading a regular part of their lives:

- We'll continue to recommend and gift books through partners and places that we know reach disadvantaged families, including libraries, nurseries, children's centres and housing associations
- We'll co-design an innovative and new way to engage disadvantaged families with their local public library
- We'll learn more about the touchpoints and moments where we can engage with disadvantaged families and use this insight to develop our current early years offer so we can provide more effective and better targeted support

Inspiring a new generation of children on their reading journeys



Encouraging children and families to continue on their reading journeys even when change or new experiences can make this a challenge:

- We'll continue to support children on their reading journeys at key moments in their lives such as starting primary school and moving to secondary school
- We'll create new opportunities for more children to see themselves in books through a programme of training and school visits for diverse authors and illustrators
- We'll champion the Waterstones Children's Laureate as a leading voice for children's reading
- We'll learn more about the most important moments for maintaining a reading habit and explore how we can best support schools and other partners to engage children and families at these times

Overcoming barriers so children from vulnerable family backgrounds can enjoy the benefits of reading despite the challenges they face:

- We'll continue to reach thousands of children in the care system through our Letterbox Club so children can build their own library
- We'll work together with local authorities to develop a new model of support for children from vulnerable family backgrounds who are moving home or to a new care placement
- We'll invest in more research to understand what works best to support children from vulnerable family backgrounds to enjoy the benefits of reading and ensure their voices are embedded in the way we choose books

Inspiring a new generation of children on their reading journeys



Building a community of champions who understand, advocate for and promote the benefits of reading:

- We'll continue to provide tools, advice and resources to help promote and raise awareness of the benefits of reading amongst partners, practitioners and professionals
- We'll provide tailored support to help practitioners and partners take action to promote reading with the children and families they support
- We'll strengthen the understanding of the benefits of reading among professionals who support children and families, so they advocate for the role of reading in children's lives

A commitment to monitoring, evaluation and ongoing learning

We will continue to learn, evolve and adapt throughout this strategy period, responding to research and insight, shifting our approach and adding new actions where needed so we can be confident we're achieving our ambitions.



Foundations that underpin our approach

Families' lives will continue to evolve. We must ensure we are equipped to evolve with them and ready to respond to the new challenges and opportunities we face. As we work in a more responsive and agile way, we will not lose sight of the foundations that underpin our approach by:

- Keeping children and families at the heart of our innovation, design and development
- Working in partnership
- Being accountable for decisions based on evidence and robust evaluation
- Underpinning our activity with safeguarding best practice
- Embracing digital tools, platforms and technology
- Becoming more environmentally responsible and sustainable
- Being committed to diversity and inclusion across our organisation and embedding that commitment throughout our work



Diversity and inclusion

We are committed to ensuring fair access to the benefits of reading and strive to meet the needs of children and families with protected characteristics, those facing economic disadvantage and from vulnerable family backgrounds. We know children from some minorities face greater disadvantage, so we take deliberate steps to ensure their inclusion. All children need to see themselves in the books they read, and we will reflect this in all our actions and activities.

Environmental sustainability

We will be environmentally responsible and mindful of the impact and sustainability of our decisions and actions across our office, supply chain, procurement and logistics. We will actively curate and procure books that support children to understand environmental impact and climate change.



How will we know if we're successful?

By 2026, we want to see:

- ✓ Every family in England, Northern Ireland and Wales supported to initiate a reading habit
- ✓ A generation of children starting school who can confidently choose a book for an adult to read to them
- ✓ Teenagers who identify as readers and who read to create space to reflect and relax
- ✓ A more diverse network of partners who together give disadvantaged children and families and children from vulnerable family backgrounds the best possible access and support to enjoy the benefits of reading
- ✓ More professionals advocating for reading habits in children's lives



Join us on our journey



From parents to professionals, partners to funders, if you believe in the transformative power of books and reading, we can work together to make a difference.

Find out how you can get involved at booktrust.org.uk

booktrust.org.uk

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Supported using public funding by

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