

Evaluation of Derbyshire's Books for Babies Project

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DERBYSHIRE BOOKS FOR BABIES AND BOOKS FOR BABIES 2
EVALUATION REPORT
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The Derbyshire Context

The Derbyshire *Books for Babies* project was inspired by various projects in the UK including the Bookstart pilot study created in Birmingham in 1992. The Birmingham project which was evaluated in 1997, showed clear advantages for "Bookstart Babies" over their peers in both literacy and numeracy development at the time of school entry (Moore and Wade, 1997, 1998). In Derbyshire and Derby City, *Books for Babies* was first proposed by Derbyshire's Libraries and Heritage service in 1995 and was eventually launched in 1997, as part of the Read On-Write Away! Literacy Initiative, with funding from the Single Regeneration Budget Fund. From the outset, it had the full commitment of the library services and was promoted positively by Martin Molloy, the Director of Libraries and Heritage Department who described it when interviewed in 1997 as a natural extension of his service's work.

Books for Babies was developed as a key strategy within Read On-Write Away! (ROWA!) not only for encouraging the first steps to literacy in very young children, but also for raising the importance of literacy for all the members of families with young children.

In order to evaluate the success of the project it was agreed to concentrate research on one specific area and to monitor the effects of the implementation of the project over its first five years. The Staveley community was chosen for this purpose as it represents an impoverished, community of North East Derbyshire which has been hit by contraction of major local industries eg. coal mining. Moreover, the area is quite self-contained and situated in a distinct locale, at a expensive bus-ride from its nearest town, Chesterfield. It forms one of those isolated, hard to reach communities, whose families continue to experience high levels of long-term unemployment and social deprivation. The high street has little to offer in the way of intellectual stimulation. Many of its small shops are boarded up, there is no cinema or bookshop only one video centre and no other source of entertainment for young families. A single supermarket, Morrisons, dominates the town. It is also convenient to study as a *Books for Babies* community because it is served by three medical practices, which share four health visitors between them. This means that in this area, all children are assessed at eight months and eighteen months and the health visitors are able to follow-up all those who fail to attend first appointments. This ensures that there is almost 100% coverage of the children born in the area with the *Books for Babies* materials.

Delivering the project

The long-term intention of the project was to build on an initial contact with families made through the health visitor's eight-month health check, by the gift of the *Books for Babies* materials (See Appendix 1). In the first instance, it provided a means of working with parents to support their child's development, but it also focused on helping parents to identify their own educational needs, where this was appropriate. In this it differs from Bookstart projects in some parts of the UK, which are concerned exclusively with the process of presenting book bag materials to parents and of securing the enrolment of the baby into the library.

The role of the librarians and the role of health visitors work to complement each other, with a focus on creating well-balanced partnership and a shared concern for the development of both child and parent/carer. In order to achieve this, the Project Librarians provide a wide range of publicity materials and information about local or mobile libraries and library events, such as storytime sessions and whenever possible, supervise the initial gift of the book bag and its support materials spending time showing parents/carers how to share books and rhymes with their children. Where it is seen as appropriate it is possible to extend relationships with the families by providing access to other literacy projects created by the ROWA! Initiative, and by involving post-16 agencies who support the parents' learning requirements. Project Librarians and healthcare professionals are therefore able to link parent/carers to both family literacy and basic skills provision. All library staff have been involved in supplementary training, which has made them aware of how to support both parents and children. An earlier review of the development of the project in 1999 had traced several such families and reported their involvement in other aspects of ROWA! (See Millard, Taylor and Watson, 2000)

The Research Process

Details of the babies who received the book gift were recorded on a dedicated data base, located in Staveley Branch Library which enables the *Books for Babies* librarians and the researcher to monitor the rate of membership and the subsequent borrowing records of the members of the families involved. It also facilitates the sending of follow up information to families and has proved particularly helpful in monitoring the response to a second initiative *Books for Babies 2* (Hargreaves, 2002).

The Staveley area was chosen for a five-year longitudinal study. The continuing involvement of health visitors ensured that all the subjects were also followed up at eighteen months. This was

initially by means of a short questionnaire, whose simplicity of administration meant that health visitors were very happy to co-operate despite a very heavy workload involved in their monitoring of many aspects of health and social welfare. From this initial data, further information about the families' responses was collected through follow up contacts at the two local play groups and by visits to the staff at two nursery classes serving the area who had begun to monitor children on entry to the nursery. At the start of the project, a questionnaire was completed with the parent/carers by the health visitors at the eighteen months check-up for a control group of 45 babies who were born a year earlier than the initial group. Their responses to questions about the appropriate age for introducing books to their children and whether books had been specifically purchased for them were used to test parents' changing attitudes to the use of books with young children.

It had been the initial intention of the researcher to involve the nursery schools which serve the area in a more deliberate monitoring of the children as they entered the first stage of their schooling at age three or four, in order to identify any differences in book related behaviours that might be noticed when the first wave of *Books for Babies* children were enrolled. However, the many changes made to the foundation stage of education during this period, with resulting differences in the timing and age focus of baseline assessments and home visits, made the collection of reliable data problematic. Moreover, the widespread publicity given to the widening of the *Books for Babies* project, through Sainsbury's sponsorship of Bookstart in the period 1999 - 2001, meant that it was not really possible to identify many families who had had no contact at all with the aims and outcomes of the project. Even where the control group was followed through to nursery, it was generally the case that younger siblings or the babies of close relatives had become part of the project and parents' behaviours had changed in response in response to knowledge gained through this. It was therefore decided to monitor the effect on the parents and professionals serving the community by semi-structured interviews with representatives of all interested groups, including teaching staff from two nursery schools. In addition, during the period of research, one of the two nurseries involved created much closer links with the library, actively participating in promoting the *Books for Babies 2* initiative. This provided a useful set of comparisons for evaluating the processes necessary for embedding positive attitudes to books and book borrowing in areas of greatest social need. The research focus was not confined however, to identifying the educational benefits for babies, but was also attentive to any patterns of change in the use of books and libraries by the families taking part. In the course of the project, changes in families' attitudes, perceptions and access to literacy projects were recorded and evidence of their use of the library was taken from the database. Eight parents of infants over eight months of age, were contacted through

one of the walk-in baby clinics held at the health centre, and two further groups of parents of children of eighteen months and over were interviewed during their attendance at two local parent and toddlers playgroups, one held in a school, the second in a church hall. There were twenty-two parents in all.

Further data were collected by interviews with the other professionals involved in the scheme - this included all four health visitors, six staff working in the branch library at Staveley, two librarians working in Chesterfield district, a driver of the mobile library serving the Staveley district and two teachers of nursery classes in the Staveley district.

These different sources of data were used to identify and crosscheck significant patterns of response to the project and to determine any areas for further development that might contribute to the continuation of work throughout the county.

Research Findings

1. The gift of the book bag is a memorable literacy event in itself and provides both a means of introducing education matters for health visitors and something that parents will talk about and pass on to one another in social settings, the clinic or playgroup.

Eight mothers who were attending baby clinics with their children, but not in relation to an eight months check, up were interviewed. All but one of them clearly remembered the gift of the book bag with pleasure. The exception was a mother who had recently moved into the area after her child's eight month check-up period and had not yet heard of the project. Of twenty two parents/carers interviewed during playgroups with their older infants, all but two remembered receiving the gift, and again they spoke of using the bag itself to transport children's books and toys, of using the rhyme card as a place mat and reciting the rhymes at mealtimes. Many of them could also recall a favourite title from the books they had been given. Helen Oxenbury's books were cited as being particularly 'good' for babies as were the Rod Campbell books provided in the bags. The two people who had no recollection of the project, lived outside of the Staveley area, one being a grand-father who was attending with his grandson for the first time that day. Only one of the eight parents interviewed at the time of the clinic and six of those attending the playgroups had in fact followed up the gift by joining the library. However, the parents reported that the gift bag and books had been well used and suggested that the first year of a baby's life was usually too busy for many parents to make regular visits to a library. The health visitors corroborated this fact, explaining that most of their families had limited means and travel to the library with young children was often inconvenient. However families

passed on information about the book gifts to each other and many now came to the clinics expecting to be presented with their bag.

2.The early book gift encouraged parents to share books with their children from an earlier age than heretofore

This important finding came out of a comparison of the responses of the first cohort of parents in Staveley with the parents of the comparison group surveyed at the eighteen-month check up. It was clear that the book gift had influenced the Books for Babies' parents to bring forward the age at which they thought it would be appropriate to share books with their very young children. When the first 196 Books for Babies parents were questioned at their eight months check up, 102 parents, that is more than half, had suggested that they thought it more appropriate to share books with their children in their second year of life. Further, three of this group had stated that they thought school was the best place to introduce their children to books. At the time of the eighteen month check up, 152 members of the group now thought that books were important to children in their first year of life, with over half of this sub-group, that is 79 parents, choosing six months as the most suitable age for introducing babies to books. In comparison, 28 parents, that is over half of the control group who were interviewed when their children were eighteen months still believed that books were more appropriately kept for babies in their second year of life.

The questionnaire finding was also confirmed by responses of the four health visitors when interviewed together. They reported that during the first questionnaire surveys many parents or carers responded to the question: 'When is it appropriate to introduce books to a child?' with responses such as: 'When they can talk proper', or 'When they start school.' They also discussed together how it had frequently been their experience on home visits to find that mothers had bought books which were not as suitable for very young children, Ladybird books with the familiar fairy stories, for instance, or series of illustrated books from book clubs. The former were often torn by the babies, who were too young to listen to their carers read full stories, further convincing the parent that they were 'too young for books'; the latter were kept on shelves, behind glass doors to await the time when their children were old enough to read. One parent interviewed at the playgroup provided such a history. She said before her child's birth, she had saved up to buy children's books monthly from a book club advertised in her daily paper, and had spent sixty pounds in total on completing her set. This consisted of hardback books, Disney versions of key children's stories such as *Winnie the Pooh*, *The Little Mermaid* and *Peter Pan*. However, she considered the books to be too expensive to be handled by a baby and had therefore kept them on a high shelf in the living room. When she

received the book gift, however she realised that these were the sort of books that could be shared with a young infant.

In the first set of questionnaires, the parents had also been asked whether they had bought books especially for their baby. At the eight months check-up, just over half of the Books for Babies parents had bought books specifically for their babies. This had increased to 192 of the 196 by the eighteen-month check -up, comparing favourably with the 36 out of 45 of parents in the control group, who had bought books for their babies by the age of eighteen months. It seems therefore reasonable to claim that the project had increased both awareness of the importance of books and a willingness to introduce books to young children. If a willingness to buy books also signals a willingness to share them with children, then this figure compares well with the national finding that the number of people reading to their babies rose from 78 per cent to 91 per cent during the programme. Further evidence of an increased community interest in books for early years might also be detected in the inclusion of a number of books for young children in the stock of the local supermarket.

3 The book gift is only a start to building confidence and interest

By 2002, 445 families in the Staveley area had received the book gift, and of these 120 babies had been enrolled in the library (27%).

Although library membership is only one indicator of a parent's willingness to share books with young children, it does remain an important source of new books and related materials for young children in this area. The national up-take from Bookstart projects was reported as having risen from 5 per cent before Bookstart to 31 per cent afterwards. These figures are taken from a wide cross-section of the population, and include data from projects where parents are only given the book gift only if they enrol in the library. The rate of library enrolment for the *Books for Babies* children in the Staveley is 27 per cent of those initially contacted through the project. However the Staveley figures represent a whole cohort of a socially disadvantaged population who are choosing to follow up the gift with a library visit.

A close scrutiny of the borrowing details of one in five (no= 89) of the children who had received the book gift showed that:

- 25 out of the 89 selected sequentially were enrolled in the library, just over a quarter.
- 20 of these had borrowed children's books at sometime in the past eighteen months.
- 12 were established and regular borrowers and had borrowed on average 31 books each in the last year.

The only available comparison for gauging the rate of change during the life of the project was made by consulting figures provided at this time by local schools. Families in these schools had not had the book gift, as they were too old to have been involved in the project. In one reception class of 24 children, only 2 were enrolled as library members at the time of asking. In a Year 5 junior class of another local school who were planning library visits, it was found that only 2 out of 20 children were already library members.

All of the parents interviewed for this study, explained their original surprise when they were informed that libraries were very willing to invite young children to browse their shelves. Many of the young mothers still considered the library to be a forbidding place, which would automatically require a respectful silence from borrowers. As one young mother said:

‘I still look at the library as I pass by and think it’s a scary place. You get worried that if you take your kids in that they will make too much noise.’

Another added:

“We’ve been taught that libraries are quiet places where you are not allowed to make noise.”

A third:

“You expect they will want your kids to sit still and there’s no way he’s capable of that!”

They were equally worried that young children would damage the books and create problems for them with the ‘authorities’. Additionally, some parents were not aware that the library no longer fined children for late returns or damage.

However, those who had overcome their inhibitions had been impressed both by the positive atmosphere of the interior of the library and the welcome they had received from staff.

One grandmother acting as carer explained:

“It’s very welcoming down at Staveley library. The staff are not at all worried even when she was pulling books of all the shelves. All the librarians spoke to her. You are made to feel welcome.”

It was clear that further invitations to events designed specifically for babies in the library had helped some of them to overcome this initial hesitancy and proved the value of maintaining postal contact with families following on from the book gift.

Further evidence for this was provided by responses to questionnaires completed during a *Books for Babies* month of events organised in the summer of 2001. 22 Staveley parents and carers responded after attending events, comparing very favourably with 25 responses from the Matlock library and 11 responses from Chesterfield. The comments of those attending Staveley book events were overwhelmingly positive. 19 out of the 22 made positive comments, two responses were neutral and one complained about the lack of suitable books for older toddlers. Responses to 'What do you like about the library?' included:

- *Helpfulness of staff*
- *The brightness of the children's corner*
- *The ambience*
- *'Friendly staff attitude - it's small and friendly'.*

As well as positive comments on the storytime sessions, comments were made about the proximity to home and the variety of the books provided.

4. *Books for Babies2* is able to build on the earlier gift and increase participation

Three years into the project, as the first group of babies began to attend playgroups, it became apparent that parents and carers would respond positively to renewed invitations to visit the library. The initial evidence came from small projects, such as Mary Swanwick Primary School *Cygnets* group and Longford Primary School's *Bookworms*, organised by playgroups and nurseries and funded by ROWA! These projects supported groups of children visiting their local libraries accompanied by their parents as an element of the early years provision. Evidence collected by these projects had shown that parents tended to drop off their own library visits when the nursery or school provided them.

Following from this, the *Book for Babies2* scheme was launched in Staveley in June 2000. Its aim was to extend library contact with parents and carers of toddlers and enable a further discussion of children's literacy needs, prior to nursery or school enrolment. Parents and carers of children age 2-4 were sent a further invitation to attend the library with their child. Each child attending, who was accompanied by a parent/carer, received a new book bag, an information pack and a library 'collector card'. This card was stamped each time a book was taken out of the library. When all fifteen stamps had been collected the child received a book and a toy representing a popular storybook character, such as *Daisy the Duck*, *Maisie Mouse* and *Parsnip the Lamb*. To date, 71 families in Staveley have been recruited to the *Books for Babies2* scheme and over 20 of them have completed the collector card and received their book and toy. Of these 71 families, 26 had already received *Books for Babies* packs and 45 were new contacts. Of the original 26 *Books for Babies* children, 17 were already library

members and a further 6 joined immediately after receiving the *Books for Babies2* information and only 2 have not joined the library.

Of the 45 additional children contacted through *Books for Babies2* scheme, 18 were already members and 24 joined on receiving the pack. This represents a marked increase from the 27% of babies who joined as a response to receiving their Books for Babies pack at the age of 8 months, to 92.9% of those who were contacted through *Books for Babies 2*. Although some of this membership may only be short term, the report from Nursery and Infant School B provides further evidence that, where a sustained and collaborative effort is made to encourage book use, there are large gains to be made in community awareness of the role and importance of parents' reading with their children as well as them visiting libraries.

The driver of one of the mobile libraries which is part of the *Books for Babies 2* scheme commented that the scheme had 'brought on' some of the children involved:

'You can see a difference in the children taking part. They seem to be a lot more confident and involved. They bring their card to the counter to be stamped and now will talk to you, where as before they were too shy.'

5. Other family members are drawn into the library through the range of invitations made and activities on offer.

There was good evidence that the renewed invitation to join the library and the provision of additional author and book making events drew in additional members of the family.

The counter staff of the branch library reported that some small children were brought in by grandparents and that more grandparents enquired about ways they could join children in to the *Books for Babies2* scheme when they saw others having their 'collector card' stamped or receiving the gift of books and a small soft toy. One young man in his early twenties brought his very young brother into the library almost every day, leaving him to sort through the picture book boxes while he selected books for himself. This little boy had borrowed 239 books in the seven months following receipt of the pack. It was evident also from the data base that often when a young member of the family was enrolled in the library older brothers and sisters became included in the book borrowing activities and family borrowing increased. This is hard to quantify because at the beginning of the project these systems were not in place to track family borrowing records. One of the library staff commented:

'Parents are more aware that it is not too soon to introduce your babies to books. I have also noticed that parents have also joined themselves and started taking out their own materials, so that on return I am not just discharging picture books but books for the parents' own use.'

Another talked of how the atmosphere in the library reflected the young borrowers' interests:

'We now have more borrowers in Staveley; there is a rise in book loans, CD and video hire, use of the Internet. It allows staff to get to know the children their families or their carers from a young age. We now have lots of colourful book stock and cuddly animals round the building! It's bright, cheerful and welcoming. Young mums are making friends with the staff. They are gaining confidence and social skills as well. Most involved recommend us to their friends and relatives who then come along to see what we can offer.'

6. It is important to keep up the flow of invitations to be part of a book sharing community

All four health visitors were of the opinion that there was a growing awareness in the community of the importance of early learning experiences connected with sharing books.

Parents interviewed who had had two children enrolled in the project explained how they had looked out for the book gift for their second child. Health visitors added that parents would now regularly enquire about the gift bag and what books were available. The health visitors also thought that changing attitudes took time and repeated efforts. One described some of the young mothers she visited as 'thwarted intellectuals'. By this she meant they had the interest and ability to continue their education but were weighed down by family responsibilities and very often relationship difficulties. She cited specific cases where she had been able to focus on the mothers' own educational needs by building on relationships built up through contact with Read On-Write Away!

The project was supported through regular contact with the parents by means of twice-yearly newsletters, birthday cards and invitations to additional events. Newsletters kept parents informed of new additions to library stock, times of special events such as author visits and related projects. Recommendations of books for toddlers and those on the brink of learning to read were added as the first cohort moved towards schooling. Health visitors in addition publicised other Read On-Write Away! initiatives with a family focus.

One of the parents interviewed commented on her pleasure on receiving her first newsletter. She said *'It was dead weird - you have an eight month old baby and he gets his own post!'* Others remarked that they looked for the books recommended when they visited the library or bought them in town. 'Touch and feel' books were particularly liked for the youngest borrowers and those with special needs. Despite a growing interest in sharing books with their children at

home, the use of the library still seemed to have been restricted by the weight of parental responsibilities in the first year of their babies' lives. For this reason, a further invitation to join the library was issued to groups of parents at playgroups and nursery classes. This had developed into the *Books for Babies 2* project recorded above.

7. Professional expertise and understanding has been developed through the shared experience of the project

One of the key subsidiary outcomes of the project is an increased awareness amongst the professionals involved of the needs of young families. This was linked to a growing openness on the part of both health and library workers to sharing ideas and adapting their practices to accommodate one another.

During the project in Staveley all four of the health visitors have remained very committed to delivering the book gift to families and to spending time explaining the benefits of an early introduction of book reading to them. This was in spite of a very heavy workload. They all however, preferred to have a librarian available when possible to develop this further as their time was limited because of the large number of follow-ups they were required to do. Moreover they also passed on all information about other ROWA! initiatives and where this was appropriate, contacted specific individuals whom they judged would be able to benefit most from specific programmes.

From the outset, the project has received excellent support in both staffing and resourcing from the Libraries and Heritage Services. It has become embedded in the provision for the County and City, and all library staff have received in-service training. In Staveley, the staff in the branch library who have been involved tangentially through working on the library counter service, universally welcomed the project and reported that they had seen a steady increase in the number of young families visiting it. They commented on the growth of their expertise in catering to the needs of the very young, by adapting storytimes to include more rhyming and play activities for example. This practice had permeated the library service and had enabled the Surestart projects to build on firmly laid foundations when making library provision for families.

8. Library staff have made significant changes to book buying policies to accommodate the difference in community tastes and experiences

Chesterfield District children's librarians explained how their professional knowledge of books appropriate for very young children had increased and this was true throughout the service. The interest in early board books was also being reflected in the numbers being produced by publishers so that librarians could now make their selections from a very wide range of new publications. 50% of spending for children is dedicated to board and picture books. Each branch library is provided with a spread of books to cover the range and this is the case down to the smallest mobile library.

Staveley has noticed a big change in its stock with the greater emphasis on books for young children. As the Books for Babies children grow-up into the system it gives a new impetus to look for fresh and appropriate materials; current areas needing attention includes extension books for the first independent readers. There is now more inclusion of popular culture in the library provision, including comics and early magazines, so that families' existing interests may be built upon. In response to the increasing numbers of young families joining the library, a parenting collection is being set up in Staveley, Newbold and Brimington in addition to the one already established in Chesterfield Library. The Staveley library is sympathetic to the needs of young families allowing use of its limited toilet facilities when necessary and accommodating pushchairs. Library staff and most borrowers are happy to see young children in the library.

Staff in other branches have been able to apply the knowledge acquired through working with *Books for Babies* to providing for the family groups working with Surestart. They have found this particularly satisfying and have been delighted by the numbers using the library and sharing computers with their older children as well as the younger ones.

Accommodating children's needs now forms part of in-service training for library staff and an aspect of understanding of working with families is looked for in new recruits to the service at interview.

9. There are many gains for schools in working closely with library professionals to promote book sharing and library use in families

Two nursery teachers were interviewed as part of the final evaluation of the project. Their schools had evolved very different policies in relation to book sharing and library visits. The first nursery and infant school (A) is located at the furthest edge of Staveley, so that a trip to the library would involve teachers, parents and children walking along a very busy road down which large lorries and delivery vehicles thunder constantly. The resulting clouds of dust and buffeting volumes of air are sufficient to hamper the progress of young children. The school had

therefore not themselves participated in the libraries *Book for Babies 2* scheme nor had it instituted regular library visits for any of the children in the main school.

The teacher said that in her early assessments of her current children who are entering the nursery at age 3, and most of whom would have been part of the *Books for Babies* cohorts, she found that hardly anyone reported visiting the library with their children. She considered that the recently admitted children had had very poor book handling skills on school entry. The parents of some of the children were very young and there were many consequences of isolation in the community. Where parents did mention their children having favourite books these were often traditional fairy stories seen on Disney videos or ones first encountered on television such as *Postman Pat* and *Bob the Builder*.

The health visitors confirmed that the area in which this school was located was also badly served by its general community facilities. On reflection, the health visitors thought that perhaps insufficient time had been spent at this centre to 'hook' parents properly into the scheme and this initial difficulty was compounded by the school's lack of involvement.

A very different picture emerged however from the second nursery class in Nursery and Infant School B, which, although serving a similar population, is located much closer to the Staveley branch library. Here the nursery teacher has made very specific arrangements to take parents and children to the library together, emphasising that library use was part of the expectation for developing reading in school. The teacher thought most parents willingly followed this through and the children often inquired about going to the library. Classes of the older children continue to make these visits and so there is a general acceptance of the routine of library visits amongst the school's parents. The nursery promotes the library's Storytime sessions. Many children were reported as coming to school with a good prior knowledge of books.

The teacher said they often commented they had had a particular book from the library or they had a book like that at home when she introduced a new story in shared reading time. The small group of six children interviewed for the project were eager to talk about the books and rhymes they enjoyed. As well as the television spin-offs that had dominated the previous nursery children's choice of 'favourites', they also mentioned some books which are part of a school reading curriculum, with authors like Rod Campbell, Eric Carle and Pat Hutchinson.

The last words of the nursery teacher emphasise the importance of collaboration between the different agencies. She explained that she maintained good contacts with the library because *'with our parents its something you need to encourage. You can't just give the children books because the parents then stop visiting the library'*.

10. The contents of the book bag are of key importance in promoting family interest

Towards the end of the period under review, Sainsbury's sponsorship of the Bookstart materials had ended and no other sponsor had been found. The supply of books had become partially dependent on goodwill gifts from publishers and therefore not as rigorously selected for appropriate content or format. The parents interviewed in the toddler groups had strong opinions about the books they had been given. They rejected one in particular as too flimsy because it had a thin board cover and was easily 'scrunched up'. It was clear from their discussions that they were forming firm opinions of the books that worked best for their children. Many of them mentioned books with a tactile element, particularly the mother of a child with special needs who thought the project librarians had been very good at recommending books appropriate for his particular needs. Those who had visited the library were pleased that very familiar materials were available such as *Thomas the Tank Engine*, the *Mr Men* Series and *Bob the Builder*. Where parents and carers were regular visitors to the library it was evident that they chose from a wide range of materials including both aspects of popular culture and more 'classic' children's picture books such as *Peek-a-Boo*, *Dear Zoo*, *Oh Dear!* and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* in their selections alongside *Mr Men* and *Rosie and Jim*. This compared well with the recorded preferences of the first control group whose parent carers had, at eighteen months, recorded only books relating to television and video narratives as part of their favourite choices for their babies.

Conclusion

Both *Books for Babies* projects are now well embedded in the Staveley community. One unexpected outcome reported by the Health Visitors was the provision of a wider selection of early reading materials in the supermarket, Morrisons. All the young families interviewed during the final evaluation were found to have been touched in some way by the provision. In cases where professional collaboration was most successful, such as in the practice of School B, the project had moved beyond the initial gift of a book to drawing in a range of family members to participate in library events and book borrowing. Professional expertise and community know-how have developed alongside each other, so that the project has had an influence on other work in the area, such as the Surestart activities, classes in parenting and in some recorded cases, the take-up of other courses or ROWA! sponsored activities. It would have been gratifying to be able to show a difference in school baseline assessments for those first babies given a bag in 1997. However, it was evident to the researcher coming from outside the area that the project had embedded itself in the community's way of thinking about early literacy and that the sustained efforts of the professionals involved to draw others in had produced clear

results. The final survey confirmed the findings of the earlier study completed in April 2000 when it was reported:

'The introduction of the Books for Babies materials has been shown to influence parents' views on when it is appropriate to introduce babies to libraries and increases their willingness to provide earlier book experiences both for existing and future children.

Secondly, work on the project extends the professional knowledge of workers in related disciplines, such as librarians, health visitors and community education staff, allowing them to work together to create a greater awareness of the importance of literacy in the community.

Thirdly, the focus on babies' literacy provides the opportunity for parent/carers to discuss their own educational needs, whilst the interwoven strands of the project enable these to be met through community networks.'

Millard, Taylor and Watson, 2000

The Staveley community has clearly benefited from Derbyshire's emphasis on providing scope for inter-disciplinary liaison and the sharing of different professional knowledge. This is evidenced by the way in which evaluations of other ROWA! projects have been instrumental in creating the ethos of *Books for Babies*². It is this inter-connectedness that allows the influence of the project to spread beyond the need of the babies themselves to provide for the interests and needs of other family members. I have found strong evidence of a cultural shift in the community which enables parents and carers from all backgrounds to understand the value of early literacy and to benefit themselves from the new provisions. Its continuation does however need a sustained effort and constant willingness on the part of the professionals involved to adapt and create new opportunities for sustaining contact and supporting change. It also needs continued funding to enable this project to benefit **all** babies, children and families.

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The book gift consists of a cloth bag supplied by Bookstart and distributed by Children's Librarians to the Health Centres. From here it is presented to parents and carers at their baby's eight-month health check either by the health visitors supported by the project librarians or by the health visitors alone. The bag contains two good quality board books, a nursery rhyme place mat, a booklet advising parents on how to share books with their children, a leaflet welcoming them to their local library, and a questionnaire which is completed with the health visitor. It is the role of the librarian and/or health visitor to explain the importance of books in the early years of life and reassure the families that the library welcomes young children and does not fine for late return or damage done by the baby.