

Booktrust – improving the educational outlook for children in care

Books and maths parcels for 11 to 13-year-olds in care reap rich results
www.letterboxclub.org.uk

Results published today (Wednesday 7 September 2011) – the eve of International Literacy Day – by Booktrust reveal a significant improvement in the reading scores of looked-after children who participated in a pilot for Letterbox Green.

Letterbox Green is an extension of the Letterbox Club, a programme established in 2007 by Booktrust, which delivers parcels of reading materials, maths resources and stationery every month for 6 months to children aged between 7 and 13. The pilot has demonstrated the positive impacts of the programme for an older age group, highlighting the link between the children's progress and the pleasure that the children experienced in receiving the parcels. Letterbox Green, like all of the Letterbox Club groups, was established by Booktrust in partnership with the University of Leicester to help close the gap between mainstream attainment levels, and those of children in care. This gap is known to widen as children get older: many children in care fall further behind.

Dame Jacqueline Wilson, author and patron of the Letterbox Club:

'I'm incredibly proud to be a Patron of the Letterbox Club. It's wonderful that looked-after children can receive crucial support through their special book and maths parcels, delivered once a month. I'm particularly pleased that there are now parcels containing a delightful book selection for older children aged 11-13 and know it will be much appreciated.'

There are over 86,000 children currently in care in the UK. The Department's official statistics '*Outcome Indicators for Children Looked After (OC2)*' showed that in 2009 only 15 per cent of looked-after children who have been looked-after for at least a year achieved five good GCSEs compared to 70 per cent for all children.

As well as the educational benefits of the parcels, feedback from the Letterbox Club pilots have shown how they can help support socio-emotional issues around belonging and instability that many children in care face.

A carer with two foster children, quoted in the evaluation report:

'They love getting the parcels and that was important to them, especially when they hadn't been here very long, it was like "somebody from the outside knows I'm here"'

Summary of results:

- Each child was tested before the first parcels were sent out and after the last package was received.
- At the beginning of Letterbox Green, the children demonstrated much lower reading scores than would be expected for children of their age nationally. 53% of the children had scores of under 90; nationally for all children this figure would be between 20-25%.
- The Neale Analysis of Reading Ability showed that after Letterbox Green the children made a mean gain score of 3.0 compared to the expected gain score of zero (meaning average progress) of children nationally.
- 65% of the children assessed improved their number skills.

Looked-After Children member of staff reporting on progress of a child from the evaluation report:

'Alongside all the provision in school, we feel that Letterbox reading and number activities made an impact on improving her attainment over the 26-week period, particularly as this period includes ten weeks of school holidays...she moved up one [National Curriculum] sub-level in reading, and two sub-levels in maths.'

****A full evaluation of the Letterbox Green pilot is available from Booktrust – please contact Alice Ingall at alice.ingall@booktrust.org.uk**



The Letterbox Green pilot was supported financially by a grant from the Siobhan Dowd Trust, which was founded by the late Carnegie-winning author to fund projects that bring the joy of reading to disadvantaged children who have little or no access to books.

From 2011 Letterbox Green has been open to every local authority in the UK, on a subscription basis for each child enrolled. After the initial pilot with 60 children, local authorities have already signed up over 900 children for 2011.

The programme officially launches this evening, 7 September, at an event in Westminster. Amongst the speakers at the event will be: **Edward Timpson, MP** and Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children; author and Letterbox Club patron, **Dame Jacqueline Wilson**: author and chair of the Siobhan Dowd Trust committee, **Tony Bradman**.

Rose Griffiths, lead researcher, University of Leicester:

'As a foster carer and teacher, I know first-hand how important the first few years in secondary school are for looked-after children. Letterbox Club Green is a simple and effective way of supporting children and their foster families at this often tumultuous time.'

Viv Bird, CEO of Booktrust:

'Booktrust wants all children to experience the joys of having books of their own to keep, and develop their reading and writing through exciting learning resources to use at home. Over the last few years, our evaluations have shown that children in public care, who as a group significantly underachieve, benefit hugely from the Letterbox Club both in their English and maths, but also in increased self-esteem. We are delighted that with the support of the Siobhan Dowd Trust we have been able to extend this extremely effective programme to 11-13 year-olds in foster care.'



****Interviews are available with: Rose Griffiths**, lead researcher at the University of Leicester; author and Letterbox Club patron **Jacqueline Wilson**; **Tony Bradman**, author and chair of the Siobhan Dowd Trust.

*****A case study of one of the children involved in the pilot is also available.**

******For the full research document, which includes quotes from pilot participants, and interview opportunities please contact Alice Ingall on alice.ingall@booktrust.org.uk / 020 8875 4827 OR Will White on will.white@booktrust.org.uk / 020 8875 4583**

Notes to Editors

1. 60 children aged 11 to 13 were enrolled in the Letterbox Green pilot across eleven geographical areas
2. Of those 60, 38 children completed the evaluation: 17 boys and 21 girls
3. A sample of 6 children and 6 foster carers from two local authorities were interviewed to give a more detailed picture of their view of Letterbox Green
4. The pilot ran from July to December. Letterbox Club usually operates from May to October
5. There are already three Letterbox Club parcels; Letterbox Blue for children aged 7 to 9; Letterbox Red for children aged 9 to 11; and Letterbox Yellow for children aged 7 to 11 who are working below National Curriculum Level 1.
6. Thus far, more than 13,000 looked-after children have participated in the Letterbox Club and 87,636 parcels have been delivered.
7. **Booktrust** is an independent charity dedicated to encouraging people of all ages and cultures to engage with books. The written word underpins all our activity and enables us to fulfil our vision of inspiring a lifelong love of books for all. Booktrust is responsible for a number of successful national reading promotions, sponsored book prizes and creative reading projects aimed at encouraging readers to discover and enjoy books. These include the Orange

Prize for Fiction, the Children's Laureate and Bookstart, the national programme that works through locally based organisations to give a free pack of books to

young children, with guidance materials for parents and carers. See www.booktrust.org.uk

- 8. The Siobhan Dowd Trust** was set up in 2007 to support disadvantaged young readers. The Trust exists to fund any persons or organisations that:
- take stories to our children and young people without stories;
 - bring the joy of reading and books to children and young people deprived of access to books and of the opportunity to read;
 - fund and support disadvantaged young readers where there is no funding or support.

Siobhan Dowd founded the Trust shortly before her death, bequeathing the royalties from her four books in support of its aims. The Trustees – Tony Bradman, Rachel Billington, Polly Nolan, Barry Kernon, Denise Dowd, Hilary Delamere, Sara Whyatt and David Fickling (who was Siobhan Dowd's editor and remains her publisher) – support the fundamental, important and urgent work of the Trust: to ensure that disadvantaged children and young people have access to books, experience the joy of reading and develop their literacy to safeguard their future. See www.siobhandowdtrust.com