

Booktrust newsletter

for Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland children and families to take The Rhyme Challenge

Booktrust has been awarded funding from the Arts Council Northern Ireland to launch The Rhyme Challenge for early years settings.

Early years settings throughout Northern Ireland will be invited to apply to Booktrust for a pack, plus a series of artistic performances and celebratory events for families will take place in early years settings in Ardoyne, Ligoniel and Cliftonville. An event is planned in June to celebrate the completion of the project, and will be held at the Ulster Museum, Belfast where certificates will be presented and Polly Poppet will entertain families with puppets, stories, rhymes and songs.

Caroline Milligan, Glenbrook Sure Start Coordinator, said that they were delighted to be involved with Booktrust and the Arts Council in The Rhyme Challenge, 'Rhymes are an integral part of the work that we do from one to one sessions with parents through to our song, rhyme and storytimes in Ardoyne Library. We believe rhymes are key in supporting children's language development, social interactions and future learning and best of all it is a fun activity that the whole family can participate in and enjoy'.

Damian Smyth, Head of Literature and Drama at the Arts Council of Northern Ireland said, 'We are delighted to be able to partner Booktrust NI in this wonderful initiative. Rhyme is one of the building blocks of creativity and the record shows The Rhyme Challenge is a great way for children to share the joy of words among themselves – and with their parents too!'



Left to right: Liz Canning, Booktrust; Caroline Milligan, Glenbrook Sure Start; Damian Smyth, Arts Council Northern Ireland.

What is The Rhyme Challenge?

The aim of The Rhyme Challenge is to encourage a love of rhymes and early poetry in an informal way. Children learn rhymes with their friends at nursery or playgroup and then share them with all the family at home. Parents may remember some of the rhymes from their own childhood or they may have forgotten them so the rhyme sheets, brought home by the children, will be a welcome reminder.

If your early years setting is interested in taking part, please contact **Kathryn Anderson** at kathryn.anderson@booktrust.org.uk or call **028 9070 8782** for a resource pack and CD.

To find out more about the Rhyme Challenge, visit www.bookstart.org.uk/professionals/get-involved/the-rhyme-challenge



Welcome

Welcome to the 2013 edition of the Booktrust NI newsletter. As always, the first thing is to thank all of our partner organisations in Northern Ireland. All Booktrust programmes and activities are undertaken in partnership with others to ensure that everyone has access to books from the earliest age.

We have had a busy and exciting year, as you will see from this bumper edition. Bookstart in Northern Ireland is now ten years old thanks to continued funding from the Department of Education and support from our gifting partners in health, education and libraries. We continue our successful partnership with the Fostering Network to deliver the Letterbox Club to children in care, and with Dog Ears Limited for our children's author events. We are also very excited about working with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland on The Rhyme Challenge, which will bring rhymes and early poetry to families across the region.



Booktrust NI has a new Belfast office adjacent to the Fostering Network and we are delighted to welcome Kathryn Anderson to the post of Northern Ireland Coordinator. Kathryn will be the first point of

contact in the office, but will also be out and about meeting our partners at key events throughout the year. A skilled photographer, Kathryn's work is evident throughout this newsletter, plus it features on our updated Booktrust NI website. Our social media presence has also increased thanks to Kathryn's regular Tweeting, so if you don't already follow us @booktrust, why not?

Liz Canning.

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Letterbox Club 10th anniversary celebration



At a prestigious event at Parliament Buildings on Wednesday, 17 April 2013, Lemn Sissay addressed an audience of professionals, policy makers and

elected members, to tell them about the success the Letterbox Club programme has achieved so far with inspiring children in care to learn, and the continuing need for funding and support to do this.

Liz Canning from Booktrust Northern Ireland said, 'Booktrust is delighted that the programme has reached its tenth year anniversary, and we are proud to be holding this event alongside the Northern Ireland Government, to celebrate.'

'As patron of the Letterbox Club, Lemn works tirelessly as an ambassador for the rights of children experiencing care, and we are delighted that he is speaking at this event to recognise the achievements of children across Northern Ireland.'

Margaret Kelly, director of the Fostering Network Northern Ireland said, 'We are delighted that Lemn is taking the time to come to Northern Ireland and celebrate the fantastic achievements of not only the Letterbox Club but, more importantly, the young people that the programme helps every single day.'

'The independent evaluation shows that there is little doubting the successes of the programme in increasing academic and creative achievements.'

Speaking after the event Lemn Sissay was inspired to make the following comment, 'Books change lives. Books broaden horizons. The world unfolds in books as it unfolds in the child. Books are friends with stories to share and games to play. The Letterbox Club, in connection with Fostering Network, can see that each child needs to know and feel that the world is their oyster. The oyster bed is a collection of books; the world and all its horizons are there. How else would a child aspire? What is great and unique about the Northern Ireland Letterbox Club is its close association with The Fostering Network who can track the impact as part of their growth, and vice versa.'



Left to right: Liz Canning, Booktrust NI; Margaret Kelly, Fostering Network Northern Ireland; Michelle McIlveen MLA, and chair of CAL committee, Lemn Sissay.

Letterbox Club in Northern Ireland

Recent evaluation, carried out by the Centre for Effective Education at Queen's University Belfast, has found that just over a third of children who receive packs increased a key stage maths level after improving their mental arithmetic and ability to solve numeracy problems. It also showed that the 348 fostered children in the study made an average gain of 2.9 points on their reading accuracy scores and 3.9 points for reading comprehension.

Children in care tend to underachieve and often fall behind in literacy and numeracy at an early age, so the Letterbox Club encourages them to get more involved in their learning with the help and support of their foster carer.

Margaret Dunn is a foster carer and primary school headteacher from Newtownards. A young boy she fosters was part of the Letterbox Club this year, as were some of the children in care at her school. Margaret said, 'Our foster son was very excited when the big red envelope arrived each month and he found the materials really motivating. He was already a good reader so the books maintained his enjoyment and interest, while the maths games helped him to realise the importance of numeracy in real life.'

'The Letterbox Club is a great innovation. It creates an important link between the classroom and home, inspiring children to get more involved in their learning. I can see the clear benefit it has had for the children in care in my school.'

Margaret Kelly, director of the Fostering Network Northern Ireland adds, 'While children in care typically struggle to do as well as their peers in terms of academic achievement, the evidence from the Letterbox Club clearly shows that with the right help they can improve.'

By providing fun and inspiring educational materials, and with the support of their foster carers, these children can really enjoy the process of learning and are able to achieve their potential at an early stage in their development.'

Education Minister, John O'Dowd, has lent his support to the initiative and said, 'Literacy and numeracy are the most important building blocks of a child's education and are vital for their prospects later in life. The Letterbox Club initiative is an excellent way of increasing the access that children in foster care have to books and written material, and this evaluation by Queen's shows beyond doubt that the programme works.'

'The Government has committed funding of £95,000 to the Letterbox Club, spread over the past two years and

this year, and it is clear that this is money well spent. I commend the Fostering Network and Booktrust for their highly effective partnership approach in delivering the Letterbox Club, and wish everyone involved in delivering this innovative project continued success as they help some of the most deserving children in our society.'



Left to right: Margaret Kelly, Fostering Network; Margaret Dunne, foster carer; Karen Winter, QUB; Rose Griffith, founder of the Letterbox Club; Liz Ganning, Booktrust NI and Mervyn Storey MLA, Chair of Education Committee.

The Letterbox Club



The Letterbox Club is launching a new pilot to work with children aged 5-7 years. Children in Northern Ireland will be among the first to try out Letterbox Orange, designed to improve interest and understanding of reading and writing from an early age.

As with the Letterbox Club for children aged 7-13 years, each child will receive specially selected books and age-appropriate numeracy games, plus stationery each month delivered to their current home address.

The pilot is being fully evaluated and will hopefully be made available to more children from next year.

If you would like more information about Letterbox Orange, or if you have any ideas or suggestions for future development work, please contact Lizzie Poulton on 020 8516 2985 or email lizzie.poulton@booktrust.org.uk



The Letterbox Club is funded in Northern Ireland by the Fostering Network as part of Fostering Achievement, in partnership with the Northern Ireland Government.

A good news story - from Gorey!

Booktrust welcomes Books4Babies as a new international affiliate member.

Liz Canning, Booktrust Northern Ireland Manager, was delighted to be asked to work alongside Laurence MacLaughlan, Director of Books4Babies, in the early stages of this exciting new project.

A Bookstart scheme similar to that in Northern Ireland has been launched in Gorey, County Wexford. The programme went live on Monday, 15 October 2012 as a two-year pilot, gifting books to about 600 children a year for two years. The scheme is organised through a voluntary charitable organisation, Books4Babies Ireland Limited, whose aim is to gift books to children so that parents and carers are encouraged to read to their babies on a regular basis and to use the local library.

Packs of carefully selected books and parental guidance information distributed by public health nurses to the babies during the child's 7-9 month

developmental check, so that parents learn about the importance of early learning and books as part of a professional consultation.

Like Bookstart, the Books4Babies story is about the pleasure of reading and positive parenting; it is not simply a programme about learning how to read. The message to parents is that sharing books is one of the nicest ways that they can spend quality time with their child. Hopefully every child in Ireland someday will have the opportunity to enjoy book sharing from as early an age as possible. Books4Babies Ireland is working towards that future.



Books4Babies



Derry pupils vote for whizzpopping winners of the Roald Dahl Funny Prize 2012

This 2012 Roald Dahl Funny Prize saw two local schools, Glendermott Primary and Londonderry Model, involved in the judging process.

Over 500 pupils from across the UK were selected to read the shortlisted titles, discuss these amongst their fellow classmates, and then to discuss their favourite funny book in the relevant category for their age group. Their votes were then combined with the votes of the adult judging panel to determine the two winners for the 2012 prize.

Christina Doherty, Principal of Glendermott Primary School said, **'There was great excitement when copies of the shortlisted books arrived and the primary two children have enjoyed sharing the picture books together. They were delighted to hear that My Big Shouting Day was the winner, although there were several other favourites within the class.'**

Speaking of the judging process for the older children, Sara Polley from Derry Model said, **'Taking part in this award was a unique experience. The children enjoyed reading and reviewing the books and there were very lively discussions on which was the funniest book.'**



The Roald Dahl
**FUNNY
PRIZE**

About this year's award, Michael Rosen commented, 'I'm very proud of the fact that this is the fifth year of the Roald Dahl Funny Prize, an award I cooked-up when I was Children's Laureate in order to celebrate books that make children laugh. That's five years-worth of books which are written with fun and enjoyment in mind. We know that reading for pleasure is an engine for attainment and achievement in all walks of life. Children, parents, teachers, librarians and all concerned with reading can find a rich vein of books for all ages in the back lists of this prize, and this year's shortlists and winners are engaging, fascinating and above all, very funny.'

Hazelwood College students get the buzz for books!

Hazelwood College, Belfast was one of 1,400 schools which took part in Bookbuzz last year.

Bookbuzz is a reading programme from Booktrust that supports schools to encourage reading for pleasure, independent choice, and develop a whole school reading culture. Participating schools give students the opportunity to choose their own book to keep from a list of 17 titles suitable for 11 year olds and carefully selected by a panel of experts.

Students receive their chosen book plus a bookmark to keep, and schools keep two sets of Bookbuzz books for their school library. Guidance is also included, to advise on developing a whole school reading culture, and ideas for writing projects based on the Bookbuzz titles. Staff and students also have access to the website which features a film of the Bookbuzz authors, downloadable resources and competitions.

Commenting on the programme, Jackie Braun, School Librarian said, 'Bookbuzz is a brilliant initiative which has helped our college promote reading for enjoyment. I think this has been a great opportunity for our first year students to start off



Students from Hazelwood College

their year with a new book to keep. Our students have been encouraged to read their new book during reading groups, and to recommend their book to their classmates. I have also tried to encourage them to swap their books when they have finished.'

Bookbuzz was also a hit with the Year 8 students, as can be seen from their comments:

'I think Shadow Forest was an excellent book and I really enjoyed reading it. The characters were brilliant. As soon as I read the first chapter, I couldn't let go.'

Jennie Aughey, Class 8AL

'I loved talking to all my friends about what book we were going to pick. I picked the book called Twelve Minutes to Midnight. I chose this book because it seemed a little scary and I like scary books.'

Charlotte McCurdie, Class 8HT

'I showed my book to my mum and she read it too.'

Holly Livingston, Class 8HT

'The book I chose was Don't wipe your bum with a hedgehog. I found this book very funny and would recommend this to anyone with a good sense of humour.'

Mya Smith, Class 8HT

'I liked my book. It was very interesting and mysterious. I am so glad I got Twelve Minutes to Midnight. It was the best book I've ever read. I hope we could do this again to get us these wonderful books.'

Robyn Cardwell, Class 8HT

Bookbuzz can be purchased at the greatly subsidised cost of £2.50 per participating student. To find out more, or to register, visit the website www.bookbuzz.org.uk



Valentina loves books

In celebration of ten years of Bookstart Baby Packs in Northern Ireland, we've asked Cathy Martin, Managing Director of CMPR, proud new mum and enthusiastic reader, to be an ambassador for Booktrust in Northern Ireland. She invited us to her home to meet her daughter Valentina and tell us about why she believes reading to children from a young age is so important.

When did you begin sharing stories with Valentina?

I started sharing stories with Valentina from when she was born – she spent her first five weeks in an incubator and during that time we told her stories. We still tell her stories during feeding time and cuddling.

As Valentina got a little older, sharing a storybook became part of the bedtime routine. We began with very simple stories, such as *Peepo Baby* and *That's Not My Monster*.

What are Valentina's favourite books?

Valentina has already amassed quite a big collection of books, ranging from board books to ones we're keeping until she's a bit older. They're beginning to take over our house! Her favourite book is *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, which was also my favourite book as a young child. She also loves tactile books, like *Calm Down Boris* by Sam Lloyd and *Jazzy In the Jungle* by Lucy Cousins, which are very colourful and the different shaped pages are great for developing motor skills.

Who else reads stories to Valentina?

Her Daddy and her three older siblings: Johnny, Elisa and Sasha. Everyone in the family loves to share books with Valentina. We enjoy the stories as much as she does, and it also provides us with special bonding time together.

Why do you think reading is important?

Communication and language is an important part of my day-to-day work, so I know how crucial it is to foster it from a young age. I love books and reading, although I don't have as much time as I would like for it myself these days!

Do you have any special memories of reading when you were younger?

As a child, I visited my local library every Saturday to borrow books, and attended story sessions at the Lisburn Road library. I really looked forward to these and enjoyed going every week. As the sixth of seven children, a lot of the books I read were handed down, which meant the books were well-loved and the stories were already very familiar to me.

I can even remember the first book I bought with my own pocket money, *The Midnight Kittens* by Dodie Smith, from the Bookworm Club at school. I've kept a lot of my favourite books from when I was a child, such as *George's Marvellous Medicine*, *Noddy*, *Winnie the Pooh* and *The Wombles*. Being able to look through them again as an adult brings back lots of happy memories, and I look forward to being able to share them with Valentina when she's a little older – I don't want her to chew them!



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Ten years of Bookstart Baby Packs in Northern Ireland

Almost 23,000 Northern Ireland families received Bookstart Baby Packs last year. These are gifted by health visitors to babies within their first year. We believe that it is never too early to start sharing stories and rhymes with young children and the Bookstart Baby Packs contain everything a parent needs to get started:

two board books, Babies Love Books guide for grown-ups and Bookstart rhyme poster, all contained in our new Bookstart Baby bag. We are very grateful to our partners in Health and the Department of Education, for enabling Bookstart Baby to be so successful in Northern Ireland.



Early years professionals agree Babies Love Books

There was a great buzz in Lisburn City library, as almost 100 professionals, including early years, librarians and health visitors, came together for the Babies Love Books seminar organised by Libraries NI in partnership with Booktrust.

The event was planned to mark Bookstart's twentieth birthday, so it was fitting that the day began with an entertaining and informative talk from Wendy Cooling, founder of the Bookstart programme. Wendy told us about Kevin, who had



Left to right: Marleen Collins, ETI; Sir Robert Salisbury; Wendy Cooling; Viv Bird, Booktrust and Irene Knox, Libraries NI.

clearly never seen or handled a book until he came into Wendy's primary one classroom, and she told us how she was determined to get books into the hands of children at the earliest possible age.

Presentations followed from Dr Marleen Collins

(ETI); speech and language therapist, Mary-Elizabeth Hagenson; health visitor Anne Welsh and children's author/illustrator Chris Wormell, who won the Early Years Book Award for *One Smart Fish*. The seminar ended with a question and answer plenary session involving all the speakers, and chaired by Sir Robert Salisbury, the former Chairperson of the Literacy and Numeracy taskforce in Northern Ireland.

Viv Bird, the CEO of Booktrust, said that the message of the conference was vitally important, as there is strong evidence that families who receive Bookstart read more with their babies and young children, and are more likely to join their local library and are more confident when reading to children (Collins et al, 2005).

Valerie Christie, Children's Services Manager with Libraries NI, spoke of library services available to early years and agreed, 'These statistics highlight the value of the work undertaken by both Libraries NI and Booktrust in encouraging parents to be the first educators of their children, by introducing them to a love of books and by reading to them from birth.'

Liz Canning, Booktrust Manager for Northern Ireland, thanked all the partners involved in the Northern Ireland Bookstart programme and stressed the impact that the programme has made, 'Bookstart is a home-based intervention which encourages parents and carers to share books with children from a very early age, and fully supports and reflects the Department of Education's *Valuing Education* campaign.'

Improving children's lives seminar

Booktrust Northern Ireland was invited to present at an outcomes seminar at Queen's University Belfast on Wednesday, 30 January 2013.

This was the fifth of six events supporting integrated planning based on the outcomes in a ten-year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland (2006 – 2016).

Booktrust has been recognised as an outcomes focused organisation and presented at the event on the improved health and education outcomes, evidenced as a result of the Bookstart and Letterbox programmes.



Panel and presenters at the Seminar

Sure Start training

Funding for the training was provided by Western Area Childcare Partnership, and enabled Bookstart packs to be provided to Sure Start centres across the region.

Booktrust Reader Development training took place in March 2013 at Arc Healthy Living Centre, Dry Arch Sure Start and Rainbow Sure Start in order to support, and enhance the impact that Bookstart packs have on early years development. The training, facilitated by Christine Robinson, highlighted the importance of sharing books, engaging with parents, plus dialogic reading tips.



Christine Robinson delivering Bookstart training to staff at Dry Arch Sure Start

Bookstart Treasure Packs for all children in the pre-school



Kathy Dunseith, Education Library Service, with pre-school children receiving their Treasure Packs in Bangor

In 2012, the Department of Education agreed funding for Bookstart Treasure Packs for all children in the pre-school year. Early Years settings could either collect the packs from one of four library collection points, or receive them through their Education and Library Board. More than 21,000 packs have since been distributed.

Kathy Doherty, from St. Colmcille's pre-school playgroup commented, 'On behalf of the children, parents and staff of the playgroup I just wanted to thank you for the lovely Treasure Packs our children received. We have very good links with our local librarian, Maureen King, at Ballyhackamore, and promote the importance of books, looking at books and caring for books with our children.'

The Bookstart Treasure packs contain everything you need to begin sharing rhymes and stories with pre-school children: two picture books, a guidance booklet on sharing stories, *My First Marks* drawing pad and colouring pencils, all of which are contained in a bright and colourful messenger bag.



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Julia Donaldson Northern Ireland library tour - March 2013

Julia Donaldson came over to Northern Ireland at the beginning of March as part of the Humdinger! Children's Book Festival, before beginning her week-long Northern Ireland library tour.

Parents and children flocked to the Millenium Stadium to see Julia, along with her husband Malcolm, act out some of her favourite books and songs, such as *What the Ladybird Heard*, *A Squash and a Squeeze* and of course, *The Gruffalo*.

On the Monday morning, Julia went on a private visit to Magilligan prison, during which she met with prisoners and their families. This was part of the Big Book Share, where prisoners are able to record stories for their children to listen to at home. Julia and Malcolm then performed some songs and got the prisoners and children to re-enact the different animals in the stories.

Over the course of the following four days of their tour, Julia and her husband Malcolm visited six libraries in all: Coleraine, Dungiven, Chichester, Lurgan, Irvinestown and Lisnaskea, as well as completing two book signings at Easons Stores.



Julia Donaldson with her husband, Malcolm, a representative from Libraries NI and pupils at Chichester Library

At each of the libraries Julia met local primary school children, who had been asked to prepare a performance for her. Some of the classes wrote their own story: the children at Coleraine Library performed a rainforest rap, incorporating facts they'd learnt about all the animals in the lyrics. Others performed stories from well known picture books: at Chichester Library, the children acted out Jill Murphy's *Peace at Last*. After the children's performance, Julia and Malcolm began theirs, encouraging the children and teachers to get involved at every opportunity.

This was the final leg in what has been an extensive library tour of the UK for Julia Donaldson. It was a very busy week and everyone involved had a fantastic time. Well done to Julia and Malcolm for this amazing accomplishment!

Families had a **Humdinger!** of a time at the Children's Book Festival!



In partnership with Dog Ears Limited and with support from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Derry Londonderry City of Culture 2013 and Tesco, Booktrust were part of the team behind organising the first Humdinger! Children's Book Festival in Derry, which ran from 7 until 9 March 2013.

Booktrust organised three Storytime events at local Sure Start centres, during which young children in their pyjamas, cosied-up with their parents and listened to local storytellers read some of their favourite books. The Bookstart Bear also made an appearance, giving each child their own Bookstart Bear and rhyme book to bring home.

Anna McQuinn, author of the *Lulu* books, hosted a Booktrust Storytime event at Derry Central Library, during which she sang songs whilst strumming her guitar and read stories to the children. Anna also held an inclusive storytelling workshop for Early Years adult practitioners, which focussed on ways of making children with other languages welcome through visual clues in stories and rhymes.

Other features of the festival included Quercus Ensemble, Rastamouse, Malachy Doyle, talks by authors Roddy Doyle, Alex T. Smith and Meg Rosoff, plus Julia Donaldson's stage show at The Millenium Forum. Well done to Dog Ears Limited for organising such a fantastic festival. We can't wait 'til next year!



Northern Ireland pupils judge national book award

Primary 6 pupils from Victoria primary school in Newtownards took part in the Blue Peter Book Awards which were announced, live on Blue Peter World Book Day on Thursday, 8 March 2013.



Over 300 Blue Peter viewers from a selection of schools voted for their favourite titles from a shortlist of six books, to determine the overall winners: *Genius Ideas Tom Gates*; *Mostly* by Liz Pichon, which was chosen as the winner of the Blue Peter Book Award for Best Story and *Horrible Science: House of Horrors* by Nick Arnold and Tony De Saullés, which was the winner of the Best Book with Facts award.

Jenny Hull, Literacy Coordinator at Victoria Primary School said, 'I was very pleased when our primary 6 classes were invited to be part of the Blue Peter Book Awards this year. Some children chose to



read the books in either the fiction or non fiction categories, but the majority chose to read all six books. The children's enthusiasm continued and they eagerly looked forward to getting the next book. Some pupils discovered new authors they enjoyed and have gone on to read more of their books.'

Liz Canning, Booktrust Northern Ireland Manager, commented on the importance of Northern Ireland schools taking part, 'Including local schools in the national prizes and awards that Booktrust administer is always exciting. The children are introduced to a range of new books which they read and enjoy for a specific purpose. The books are then added to the school library so they can be enjoyed by other pupils.'

STOP PRESS.....

National Bookstart Week

National Bookstart Week begins on Monday, 24 June 2013, and this year the theme is fairy tales. Libraries NI will once again be hosting lots of fun activities in libraries throughout Northern Ireland.

CAPS Networking Group Exhibition

We'll be at the Curriculum and Professional Support Conference talking to Early Years professionals about The Rhyme Challenge and other Booktrust initiatives in Northern Ireland. The conference takes place at the Rosspark Hotel in Kells on Friday, 17 May 2013.



We're on Twitter

Kathryn will be regularly tweeting about what Booktrust Northern Ireland is up to - follow us @booktrust and tweet #BooktrustNI

Website

For up to date information on recent events and to find out more about the Bookstart packs, log on to www.bookstart.org.uk/ni