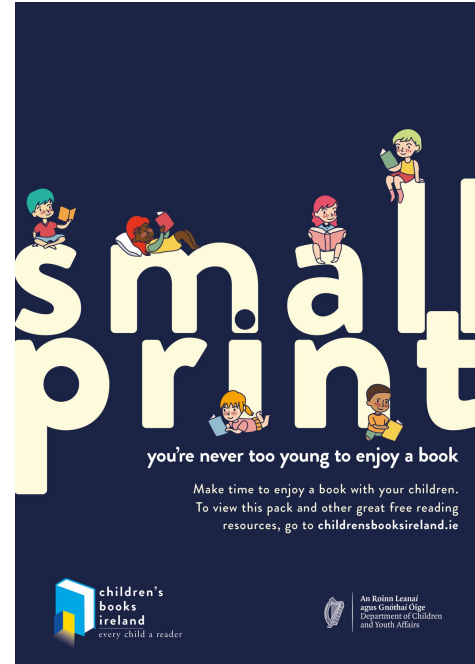


ON DEVELOPING
PILOT PROJECTS
AND WORKING
WITH
GOVERNMENT

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O'KANE BOAL AND
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BOOKSEED AND SMALL PRINT

Children's Books Ireland undertook two pilot projects, underpinned by national and international research, focused on integrating books into children's lives at key stages of infancy and childhood.

Bookseed was a pilot book-gifting scheme for babies , funded by the JP McManus Benevolent Fund and the Social Innovation Fund (now Rethink Ireland).

The Small Print pilot project was funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and it was designed to enhance and develop early learning and care professionals' existing skills in using picture books with preschool children. This project recognized that early learning and care settings are vital settings for fostering a love of books.



How Bookseed worked

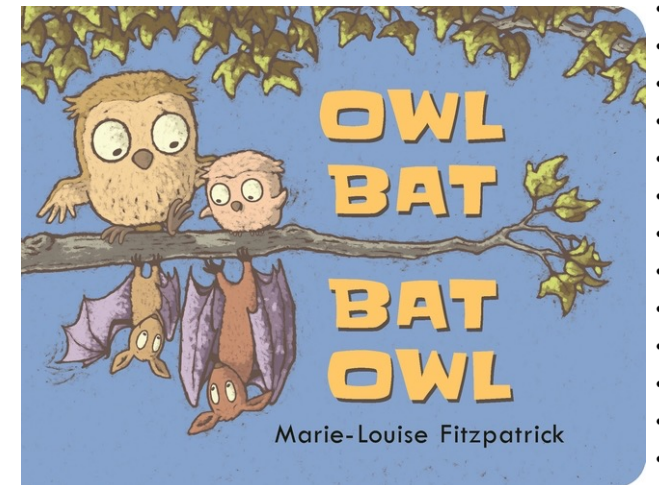
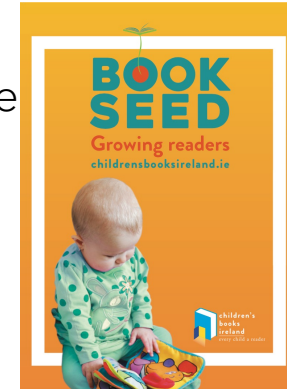
Bookseed ran from Feb 2019 until Oct 2021 and 1440 books were delivered to BookSeed at beginning of 2022 to finish out that project. When first wave of babies turned one in Feb 2020 events were held in Limerick Libraries with Mary Murphy

- At 3-month health check with public health nurse (PHN), parent/guardian/caregiver received a bag with a book, a booklet on reading to your baby and other book suggestions and a leaflet about joining the library

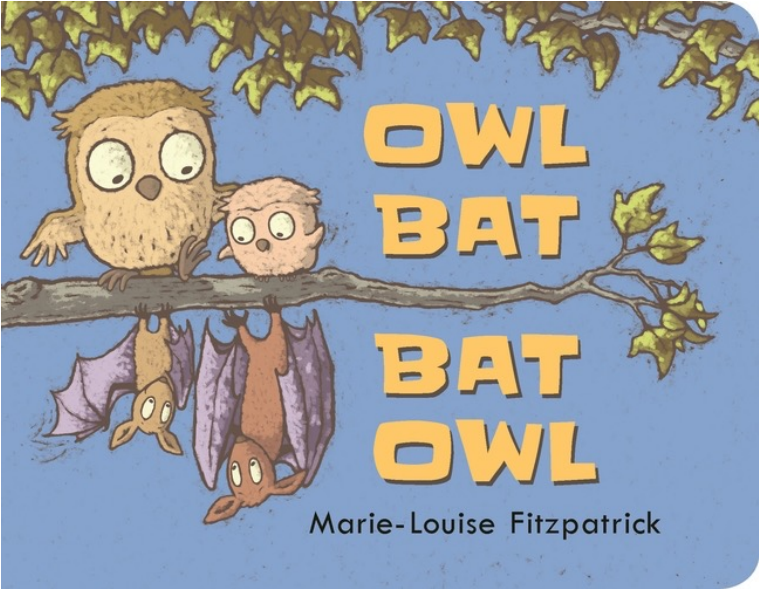
- PHNs asked to take the book out of the bag and model reading
- PHNs complete a short 3-item survey with the parent/caregiver
- PHNs also complete 3-item survey themselves

PHNs comments

- 'It was very good, it was lovely to be able to give parents something.'
- 'It is a lovely gift to be able to get from the public health nurse, you know initially when they don't even know us, a lot of the parents, it's their first time (attending the clinic).'
- 'It was nice to focus on something that is creative.'
- 'It brings the whole experience back down to time with your baby to just be with your baby doing something that might be good for their mental development.'



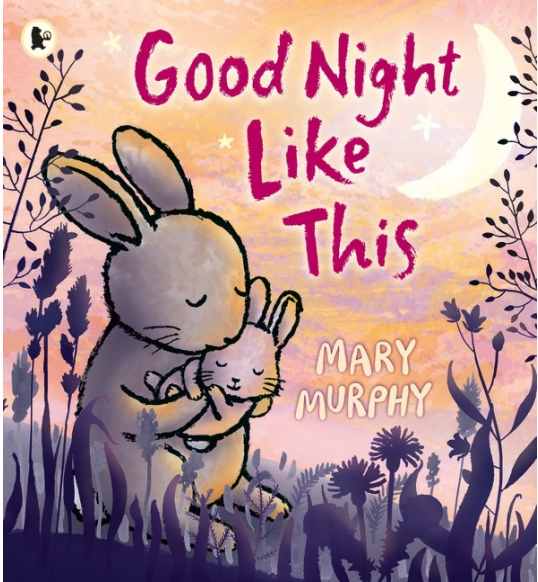
BOOKS



3 months



7-9 months



1 year



KEY FINDINGS

- More parents were reading to their child at 7-9 months than at 3 months and 48% said they were reading the Bookseed book once or twice a week
- Book ownership increased significantly. All parents of 7-9 month olds had books in the home at this point, whereas 19% had said they had no books at the home at the outset of the project
- Bookseed encouraged parents to join the library
- Bookseed ensured that babies in Limerick had increased access to high quality books from Irish authors and illustrators



HIGHLIGHTS

- The more parents/guardians read to their children, and the more books there are in the child's home, the better a child will perform later academically and socially
- Maternal attitudes to reading at birth predicted reading behaviour when infants were 6 months old
- Beyond literacy, reading to infants promotes socio-emotional development (self-expression, self-regulation, empathy and enhanced self-esteem)
- Involvement in new-born literacy programmes has a positive effect on parenting behaviours and attitudes, including enhanced enjoyment of reading
- Ready access to books in the home encourages parents/guardians to read with their child
- Although parents/guardians might know the importance of reading, involvement in book-gifting programmes helps prompt regular reading from an early age.



SOME COMMENTS

- A **mother** whose first language was not English explained during an interview how the wordless picture book worked *Owl Bat Bat Owl* – *‘So, I started reading to him, not reading but creating a story, there is no letters on it, he was listening, he was playing with it, he started turning the pages himself.’*
- **Librarian:** *‘I think book-gifting schemes are very important for parents because it kind of introduces them to giving books to their babies from such a young age and it encourages a love of reading and an interest in books from the get go’*
- **Author:** *‘One of the things I do love about programmes like this is that books are placed in the home. So it’s lovely to think of that, to know that they are getting into homes that maybe would not have books or many books otherwise’*
- **Parents** of 7-9 month olds commented - *‘I probably started a bit earlier because of the book scheme’*
- *‘I hadn’t thought about (reading) with her till the book scheme’*
- *‘I wouldn’t have started with her at all at this stage’*



LIMITATIONS & OBSERVATIONS

- Big fall off in numbers of respondents from 3-month survey (n=323) to 7-9- month survey (n=31) to parent interviews (n=7) - *(Drop off could be linked with return to work)*
- Respondents at 7-9-month survey, and parent interviews are possibly the more engaged parents, interested in early reading already, rather than from hard-to- reach groups
- Of the 323 parent respondents, 41% never or hardly ever look at/read books with their 3-month old infant, with only 22% looking at or reading to their infant daily ***(at point of delivery of books)***
- **19% of homes had no children's books**, and **39% of homes had less than 10 books** ***(so the impact of these books was crucial)***



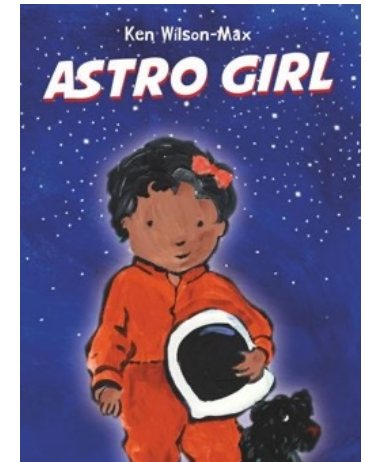
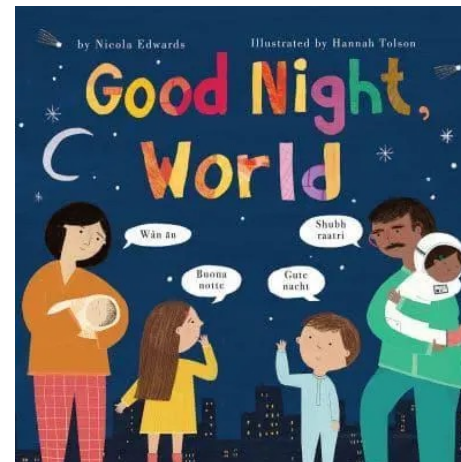
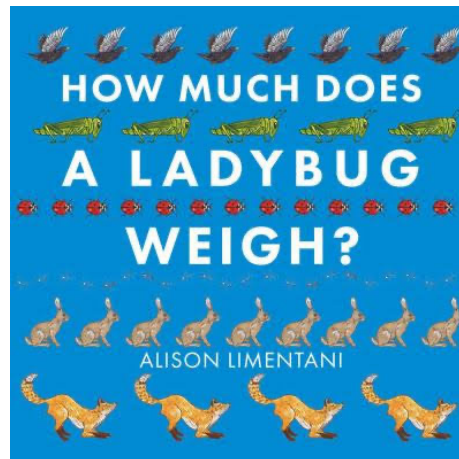
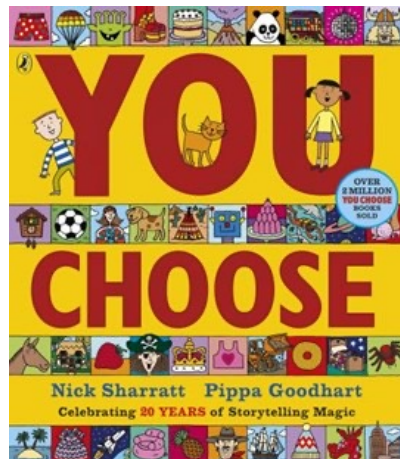
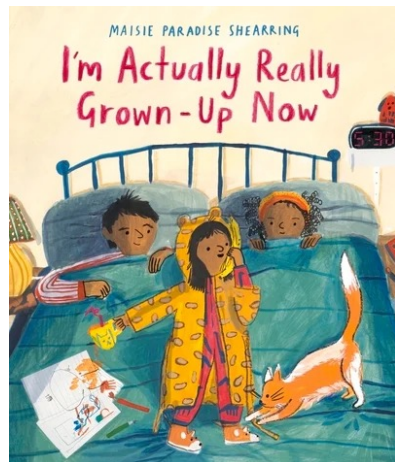
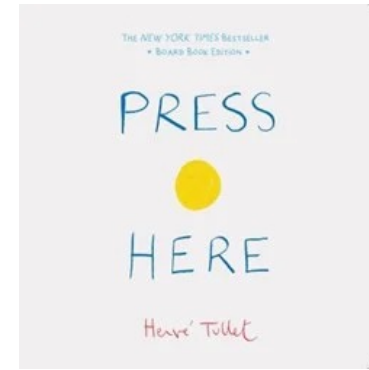
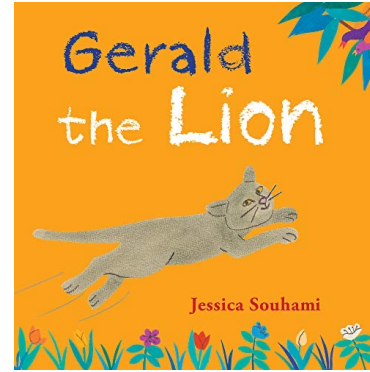
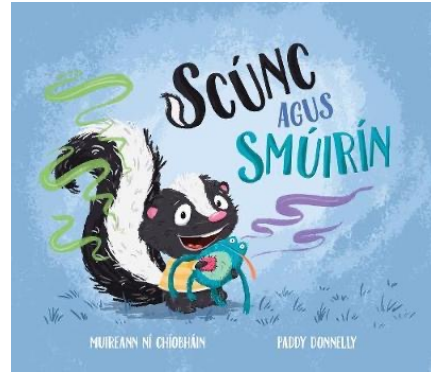
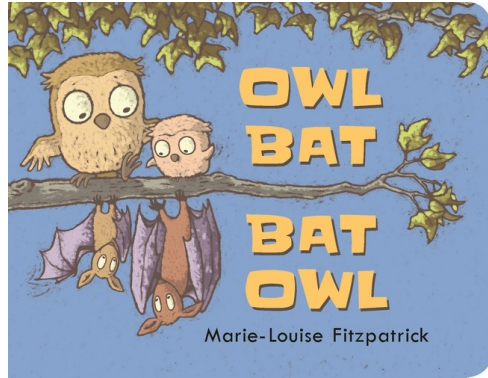
How Small Print worked

- Small Print took place in 2020.
- Children's Books Ireland curated a selection of ten excellent picturebooks for young children (aged two-and-a-half to six), drawing on the principles of early learning and development and the themes of Aistear*, the early learning curriculum framework.
- 50 early learning and care settings were selected to receive a set of books, a large poster to encourage parents and their guardians to read with their children and a resource booklet to guide staff members on engaging with the books.
- The resource booklet helped bring the 10 books to life and extended beyond the books to adaptable activities and additional thematic book suggestions.

**Aistear is the early childhood curriculum framework for children from birth up to the age of six years. Ireland's early childhood curriculum framework is called 'Aistear' (Irish word for journey).*



BOOKS



OUTCOMES

Pandemic closures and restrictions had implications for the extent to which settings could implement the picturebooks and guide but there were successes in spite of these limitations. The respondents were the staff members and providers at ELCs

- Increased confidence 65% of respondents reported increased confidence in their skills for reading with children after using the picturebooks
- 100% of users would recommend the small print resource booklet to other professionals working with young children
- Small Print has helped to nurture a reading-focused culture within settings
- 92% report that the picturebooks stimulated the children's imaginations
- Existing book stock has been enriched with diverse, quality titles.
- The picturebooks complement and assist in the delivery of Aistear



COLLABORATION & SUPPORT

- These schemes were based on collaboration and support with stakeholders such as parents, public health nurses and ELC professionals.
- Bookseed had public health nurses as the point of contact for distributing the books at two developmental health check ups. And the final book was collected from the library.
- Small Print was designed to empower ELC professionals to use their existing skills to engage children in their care with picturebooks.
- Bookseed saw better engagement with parents through book distribution, interviews and surveys whereas this dimension of Small Print could not be delivered due to the Covid-19 pandemic.



LINKS TO GOVERNMENT

- Bookseed was a universal book-gifting scheme for babies piloted in Limerick City and county. It was a 2-year scheme but it was confined geographically.
- Small Print built specifically on Aistear curriculum and supported ELC's professionals existing skills.
- First 5 Strategy has been developed by government that references pilots such as ours, but they have not been delivered specifically in tandem
- My Little Library- Little Book at Bedtime (2023) - Free bedtime story books and library card wallets are available at the library for all children of 4 years and under, to pick up and keep.
- My Little Library Book Bags (2021 - 2023) for all children starting school - To help children to navigate starting school, libraries have put together a bag of books just for them that can be collected at any library. This initiative is a collaboration between libraries, the Department of Rural and Community Development, and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth as part of the First 5 Strategy.
- The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth have introduced The Little Baby Bundle pilot scheme in which 500 selected parents from The Rotunda and University Hospital Waterford have received a welcome gift from the State containing key items required to care for your new baby. Includes two board books (one in Irish and one in English).



Government Initiatives



Bags of stories and fun for every child starting school in 2023!



Pick up their **FREE** Little Library Book Bag at your local library



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



OPPORTUNITIES

- Pilot projects such as these provide the opportunity to work with key stakeholders and to test the strengths and limits of these relationships.
- There is the opportunity to work with government and field test book-gifting schemes on a manageable scale for extended future roll out.
- There is an appetite in Children's Books Ireland to work with government on universal book-gifting schemes and in-house expertise to support this.



CHALLENGES

- When working with stakeholders such as parents, public health nurses, ELC professionals, there are limitations in terms of time available to collaborate, ongoing good will.
- Covid in 2020 meant that these projects could not run as smoothly as hoped & brought with it many complications
- While there is the opportunity to maintain an ongoing relationship with government, what happens if the government create their own projects that do not directly build on the pilot projects and partnerships?
- Like all organisations, it is helpful to have one key contact to build a relationship with. What happens when this is missing in government organisations?
- How do we build in the potential to be called upon as experts in the field by government?



OTHER EXPERIENCES

- Can other researchers and organisations share their experiences of working with government
- What challenges and opportunities did the relationship present?
- What learnings can you share on this?
- Have you found ways to continue an ongoing relationship with government following pilot projects?
- Is it helpful to work with government? What other ways are there to work in partnership?
- How to successfully have a national roll out that will have all stakeholders engaged, namely parents, healthcare professionals & early year practitioners
- First 5 Strategies are aimed at forming the connection between parent/child & the library system. Is the connection with the library enough to instill a love of reading for pleasure in children?

