



# RESPONSE TO COVID-19: SUMMER 2020

Impact evaluation  
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Children's  
**BooK**  
Project

# IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN

## Challenging circumstances

The relatively abrupt closure of primary schools on 24th March to all but targeted groups of children had multiple impacts on young people. **Loss of access to friends and wider community** and enforced restrictions on movement were, for many, compounded by challenging circumstances: whether **financial uncertainty, health fears or cramped accommodation**.

It was in this context that primary school staff sought to support and reassure parents, for many of whom the pressures of homeschooling a child were considerable. **Online learning was restricted by a lack of IT or internet access**, whilst **parents' own lack of academic confidence, understanding or time inhibited their ability** to support their children. Many households had **limited access to basic resources such as pens and paper**, and often very few or no age-relevant books.



"This is a thread that we have been able to evidence through our 'keeping in touch' phone calls to every family. The anxiety & lack of confidence has spanned across all socioeconomic groups."

Deputy Head Teacher, Oxon

## Survey amongst 123 recipient school leaders

- 84%** agree that access to online learning resources is an issue for their families
- 83%** agree that families have limited resources of their own e.g. pens, colouring materials and paper
- 97%** agree that low ability and / or low confidence can impact their parents' ability to support their child at home
- 94%** agree that parents have expressed concerns or anxiety about their ability to home educate their children



# IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN

## Emotional impact

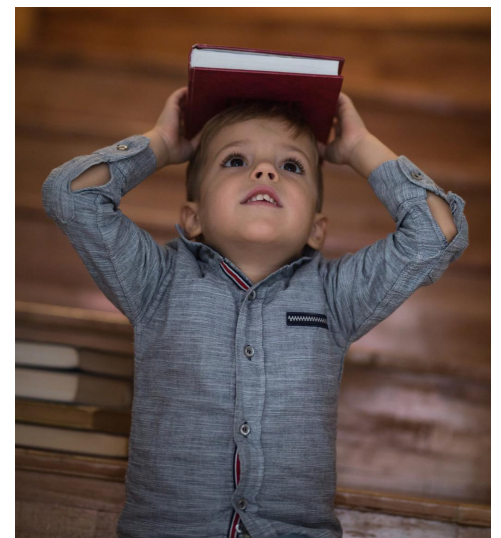
Practitioners were mindful of the emotional impact of lockdown on children and young people and began to put in place measures to address this. This included telephone calls to parents, online links to well-being related resources and the use of social media to reinforce and remind children of their wider relationships, friends and routines. Through these and other measures schools sought to reinforce in children a sense of belonging and of the wider world.

- 96%** offered telephone support to families where needed
- 94%** conducted a (safe) home visit
- 98%** signposted further support e.g. food bank or CAMHS



## Impact on learning

Schools report varied successes with home learning. This was impacted by the number and ages of children at home, parents' own work responsibilities, their child's needs and their aptitude for supporting him/her. Learning remained a priority but staff took care not to put pressure on families and children's emotional well-being was prioritised.



**"We have contacted each family every week throughout COVID and found that many parents were incredibly anxious about supporting their children at home. As a school, we created youtube videos to 'teach' the parents specific skills and also posted paper home learning packs to all pupils, every fortnight."**

Deputy Head Teacher, West London



# OUR RESPONSE

## A new approach

Conversations with school leaders early in lockdown revealed huge appetite for gifting books to vulnerable children at home. Though there were safety and logistical barriers to overcome, staff were keen to address children's lack of access to reading material and to provide their pupils with the pleasure and escapism of a book.

We developed the concept of Book Bundles - parcels of three books for targeted children:

- Relevant, good quality books
- Choice for every child
- Safe (no concerns re. contamination)
- Can be home delivered or distributed via school Food Bank



Between March and July 148 schools distributed 63,208 books to over 21k children across London and Oxfordshire.

Books were home delivered by staff or gifted via a school's Food Bank. A partnership with mental health arts charity AT The Bus ([www.atthebus.org.uk](http://www.atthebus.org.uk)) permitted us to gift paper, pens and worksheets alongside 10,000 packs.

The majority of books were collected by schools from our west London premises: an indication of their perceived value and role.

**"Delivering books to our pupils was without doubt the most enjoyable couple of days of lockdown. I was able to check on a lot of families I had been worrying about and make contact with lots at risk of falling out of contact with school. While I was at it I was able to signpost many of them to help and support. "**

Literacy Lead, Oxon



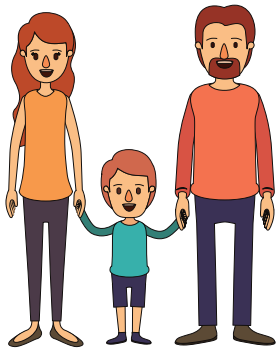
# IMPACTS

## During lockdown we:



Designed a new gifting mechanic:  
**banded bundles of 3 curated books**

Worked with practitioners to gift  
**63,208 books to children unable to attend schools**



Helped facilitate supportive interactions with vulnerable families  
**to allow 148 schools and settings to signpost other help**



Brought the joy and distraction of a book  
**via schools, groups & Food Banks across London & Oxfordshire**



# TEACHER FEEDBACK

## Our practitioner survey highlighted key motivations for gifting:

### (1) The joy of a book

95% of teaching staff surveyed note reading for pleasure as a key driver of their book gifting activities\*. There was a real desire to give children the means to become immersed in a story and to escape to new worlds.

**"Books provide escapism at an incredibly difficult time for many children and their families."**

### (2) Remind children of their wider community

65% of teaching staff cited the value of face to face gifting to their pupils as a key motivator. Many families that had previously been 'getting by' but whose circumstances had changed could be sensitively offered support via a home visit, whilst children welcome sight of a member of their school community.

**"One of our parents told us that her daughter put on her school uniform to read her books."**

### (3) Support literacy skills

Lack of access to school and public libraries and schools' inability to safely loan books left many families without access to reading material. Teachers welcomed the opportunity to gift books that had inherent appeal and that might engage both children and parents.



**"It was great to have book chat with the kids as I dropped books off: we talked about what they liked and I was able to ensure they got something they'd enjoy."**

Literacy lead, East London

\*staff were asked to indicate their top three priorities for gifting to children at home



# OUR VOLUNTEERS



## A volunteer-led organisation

The Children's Book Project won the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in June 2020 - testament to the value it places on the many and varied individual and corporate volunteers who help it to gift over 100k books annually. Lockdown forced a new approach to working with volunteers, but made their role (and impact) even more pivotal.

During the period March to July, Kensington & Chelsea Volunteer Centre provided invaluable advice on safe practice and supported the recruitment of over 70 local residents keen to volunteer their time. **Collectively, our lockdown team delivered over 1,200 hours' volunteering: sorting and packing over 60,000 books on our behalf.**



With thanks to the:



volunteer centre  
kensington & chelsea

est. 1969

"It was wonderful to be surrounded by books and part of a mindful process."

Lucy, RBKC Volunteer





# ABOUT THE CHILDREN'S BOOK PROJECT

## Charitable aims

The Children's Book Project gifts 100k+ books annually to families that have few books of their own.

Celebratory book gifting events coordinated by schools and other settings build reading communities, further children's aspirations, develop their literacy skills and help support young people's mental well-being.

## Our thanks

To every practitioner in schools across London and Oxfordshire that took the time to gift to their pupils. To RBKC for their ongoing support - it is so appreciated. To AT The Bus and illustrator Jane Ray for their partnership and the opportunity to gift beautiful Story & Draw packs to 10,000 young people. To Oxford Hub and Barlby Primary School, W10 for supporting the local distribution of books to schools. To Neighbourly, Penguin Books, Hachette Publishing and First News for their support and generous donations of books and resources. And to every Volunteer that so generously gave their time to sort, pack and distribute over 62,000 books.

Particular thanks to Sophie Almquist, Emma Fane, Solveig Nepstad, Margaret Wilesmith and Tatiana Wait.

## Safe practice

All books are gifted via targeted organisations that support needful communities. Input from practitioners in each setting informs all gifting practice and the quality of children's interactions with books.

During lockdown (and ongoing), we adopted safe practices with regards to social distancing of volunteers within our premises and handling and packing of books.

