

Coming to America

Bookstart goes transatlantic on National Bookstart Day!

**Visit to Boston Reach Out and Read
National Bookstart Day - 10 October 2008**

How it came about

The Reach out and Read (RoR) programme in the US shares a similar philosophy as the Bookstart scheme in the UK – for children to develop a love of books and reading through the gifting of free books between the ages of 0 and 4. I knew that RoR had originated in Boston, so when National Bookstart Day coincided with my trip there, I thought it would be a great idea to offer to do a story time session. It was also a chance to meet the RoR team, to see what they do, and to see what opportunities there might be for us to share best practice and resources. I organised the visit through Gretchen Hunsberger, the Massachusetts Programs Director.

The visit



Reading 'We're Going in a Bear Hunt' to children at Boston Children's Hospital

I met some of the Reach out and Read team at Boston Children's Hospital, including Nora Murphy who is the Massachusetts Programs Assistant and my host for the day. Chris Alexander who is the RoR Co-ordinator at the Children's Hospital took us to the children's clinic where there were children aged 0 – 4 coming in to have their well-child checks with doctors. I talked to the children and their parents, gave out some National Bookstart Day stickers, and then did 'Incy Wincy Spider' and read 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt' with the children. There were 5 children there, and they all got to take a copy of the book home with them. Chris then showed me round and explained how the scheme works.

What I learned about the RoR scheme ([*please see additional comments below](#)):

- RoR creates a catalogue of books which co-ordinators can choose from. Co-ordinators then order direct from the publisher using a fund of money provided by RoR.
- In each health centre, hospital or surgery they aim to have a waiting area which is conducive to reading, with a stock of books which children can read while they are waiting and take home with them if they wish. The co-ordinators replenish this stock of books from private donations and fund-raising.
- Doctors who conduct well-child checks then choose a book for the child from the centre's stock – they choose based on the age or needs of the individual child. At

Boston Medical Centre (BMC), Nora also gives out information about local libraries such as opening times, library activities and how to join.

- Co-ordinators also arrange for volunteers to read to children in the waiting rooms. Nora has a link with a local university and students help out at the BMC with reading whilst earning credits for their course.

Nora then took me to the Boston Medical Centre where I met some of the staff. I told a pirate story to one of the children in the waiting room, and her little brother came to join us too! They were a little timid at first but were really interested in the book and the pictures.

Then I went to meet Barry Zuckerman, founder of RoR and the CEO. He was really interested in Bookstart and how it works, and we talked about how the schemes worked towards the same aims. He also talked to me about a RoR pilot being run in Peterborough.

After the BMC, we went to the RoR offices just outside Boston where I had the chance to meet a lot of the RoR national team. Over a very lovely lunch (including pumpkin cheesecake!) we talked a lot about the two schemes and how they work, things which are similar and different, cultural differences between the US and the UK, and the challenges of making the scheme work. They were really interested in Bookstart and we felt there were lots of opportunities to share information and literature for our mutual benefit (see actions).



With the Reach out and Read team at their offices in Boston

*** Supplementary information about RoR**

I know there is much to learn about the ROR model, so I'd like to supplement what you've written, and offer one small correction: ROR is for children between the ages of 6 months and 5 years of age (not 4). Also, the waiting room books are used books, and the ROR books that the doctors hand out are new. Not all clinics have used books available in their waiting rooms, but many do. Yet, all ROR programs have funding for the new book they give to the children as part of the exam.

And, in addition to giving out the books at each prescribed well child checkup before Kindergarten, the health care provider offers anticipatory guidance to the parents about the importance of reading aloud. The ROR model suggests beginning the exam WITH the book so that it doesn't just become like a lollipop at the end of the visit; in fact, many providers use the book as a tool for development surveillance. Our new training DVD will actually show doctors "doing" ROR in the exam room.

Because of budgetary issues this year, we are experimenting with a scheme that does not involve programs getting cash funding from ROR. Instead, sustainability awards will arrive in the form of books. The 25 titles were pre-selected, ordered in very large quantities, and printed in China. (While this has resulted in a lower cost per book, it has also reduced the selection of titles; thus, we'll be studying the success of this model this year.) With any additional funds raised by individual programs, though, ROR Coordinators may still order from the ROR catalog.

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Actions

Request	Who	Action
Forward links to the Bookstart TV ads	Laura	http://www.bookstart.co.uk/Schemes-news-article&newsid=0000118
Talk to Bookstart about book selections and work with publishers (for Jackie Miller)	Laura	Jackie might want to check out this section of the Bookstart website for more information: http://www.bookstart.co.uk/Publishers/Publishers-packs I will try and find out a contact at Bookstart for more information.
Work with dads	Laura	Here's the link to a website of resources put together by Bookstart: http://www.bookstartdads.org.uk/ I will also send some examples of what we have been doing in Leeds with our 'Saturdads Club'.
Send some examples of Booktouch and Bookshine literature (for Chris Alexander)	Laura	We are just waiting for a delivery of booklets from Bookstart, so I will forward examples as soon as possible.
Forward Bookstart gifting figures for the UK (for Barry Zuckerman)	Laura	The research section of the Bookstart website might have some information that would be of interest: http://www.bookstart.co.uk/Press-and-Research/research I will also ask Bookstart to forward audit figures for the number of children who have been gifted Bookstart packs.
Forward a copy of the RoR training DVD	Nora	I would love to have a copy of your DVD when it is ready. Thanks!

Many thanks everyone for a great visit!

Laura Sanderson
 Bookstart Process Manager (Leeds Library and Information Service)