Evaluation of DOLLY PARTON'S IMAGINATION LIBRARY for Looked After Children in Scotland

KSO Research

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Dolly Parton's Imagination Library
CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

The Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Scottish Book Trust
inspiring readers and writers

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION 1
   Background 1
   Research Aims & Objectives 1
   Methodology 2
   Research Caveats 2
2. IMPLEMENTATION AND OPERATION 4
   Looked After Children in Scotland Statistics 4
   Number of Children Enrolled 5
   Number of Books Issued 6
   Challenges of Enrolment 7
   Use of the Book Order System 8
   Local Staffing & Staff Awareness 8
   Communication with Parents and Carers 10
   Integration of DPIL with other Early Years Initiatives 10
   Perceived Impacts 11
   Local Evaluation Mechanisms 11
   Expansion of DPIL 13
   Non-Participating Authorities 14
   Other Observations 14
3. FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS AND PERCEIVED VALUE FOR MONEY 16
   Funding Arrangements 16
   Perceived Value for Money 16
   Future Joint Funding 16
4. DISCUSSION 18
   Key Findings 18
   Next Steps 19
   Action Planning 20
   Conclusions 21
Appendix A – Participating Authorities 22
Appendix B – Glossary of Terms 23

1. INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

1.1 Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (DPIL) was launched in Scotland in 2011 and aims to provide all Looked After Children (LAC), aged 0-5 in Scotland with the gift of a specially selected book each month, mailed directly to their homes. The aim of the project is to foster a love of reading among this particular group of pre-school children and to improve their accessibility to age-appropriate books.

1.2 The initiative is funded in Scotland by the Scottish Government and is administered centrally by Scottish Book Trust (SBT), the national agency for the promotion of reading and writing across Scotland, as part of their Bookbug early years programme.

1.3 In 2013/14, a mid-term self-evaluation was carried out by DPIL and SBT in Scotland to explore how the project was running, and to explore early impacts of the scheme in a small sample of participating authorities. The final evaluation was designed to complement this earlier research specifically for understanding the processes involved in implementing and delivering the initiative in Scotland.

RESEARCH AIMS & OBJECTIVES

1.4 The main purpose of the evaluation was to establish the effectiveness of the *processes* being used by DPIL and SBT as well as Local Authorities in implementing and delivering the initiative.

1.5 Specifically, the evaluation explored:

- the process of enrolment of children and distribution of books;
- staffing models being used locally to deliver the initiative;
- integration of the scheme alongside other early years initiatives, including Bookbug;
- local arrangements for evaluation of the scheme;
- communication and engagement with key stakeholders;
- perceptions of value for money, local funding arrangements and possibilities for joint-funding of the scheme in future years; and
- potential for broadening out the scheme to other groups of children.

1.6 The extent to which the project has supported the target group through the gifting of age-appropriate books and the impact that it has had on early literacy levels, fine motor skills, attachment and family connectedness were explored in the mid-term self-evaluation and were not, therefore, included in the final evaluation. Where additional insights were offered on impacts these were, however, included in the analysis.

1.7 Overall, the evaluation sought to assist future discussions on whether there are good foundations for the Scottish Government to consider further financial and practical support for the programme, and to better understand the potential buy-in from Local Authorities involved in the medium to long term.

METHODOLOGY

1.8 The evaluation was based largely on data from two sources, these being:

- A **telephone survey** of all participating Local Authorities, carried out by Dollywood Foundation staff in late 2014/early 2015 – this involved speaking with administrative staff to explore local processes for enrolment of children to the scheme and administration of the books using the Book Order System (BOS), as well as engagement with other local stakeholders and perceived early impacts of the initiative; and
- A **self-completion online survey** of all participating Local Authorities across Scotland designed and administered jointly by DPIL and SBT - initial invitations were sent to service managers overseeing the project in each area, with an initial two-week deadline for responses. This again focused on local practices for enrolment and administration, but also explored issues around funding and future widening out of the scheme. Initial response rates were low and so the survey deadline was extended for a further period of two weeks. Telephone calls were also made by Dollywood Foundation staff to encourage those who had not yet taken part to do so.

1.9 At the time of writing, 30[1] out of 32 Local Authorities were participating in the initiative and all of these were invited to take part in both the telephone and online survey. While interviews were achieved with all 30 participating authorities as part of the telephone survey, 19 responses were received to the online survey (i.e. a 63% response rate). Feedback from both surveys was combined for analysis purposes and is presented below.

1.10 In order to capture the views of the two, non-participating authorities, separate brief telephone interviews were carried out and their feedback is included below.

1.11 The evaluation report also draws on supplementary information that was submitted by Local Authorities as part of their survey response (all were invited to submit additional insights or reports, where available), and reference is also made to the findings from the earlier mid-term evaluation, where appropriate.

1.12 A brief review of literature and research from other countries where DPIL is also used was undertaken to provide context for the data generated here.

RESEARCH CAVEATS

1.13 Although the online survey was issued to managers in each local area, it is not clear if they were always sufficiently well positioned to provide detailed feedback on processes. In some cases, the task may have been delegated to other staff with a greater awareness of practical delivery and in other cases, there may have been gaps in the data due to lack of awareness of local practices. Indeed, some of the survey returns provided quite brief responses, even where open-ended fields had been provided.

[1] The two authorities that do not yet participate in the scheme are Aberdeen City and East Ayrshire.

1.14 It is recognised that a more detailed understanding of local processes may have been possible to achieve via in-depth, one-to-one interviews with local managers, in addition to the administrative staff who were spoken to, but the time available and other resource constraints meant that this was not possible. A great deal of time was spent by DPIL and SBT staff in ensuring that the responses presented here were achieved, and this in itself is a sound achievement given staffing constraints. The exercise was undertaken almost single-handedly by just one member of Dollywood Foundation staff.

1.15 Finally, despite efforts to achieve a 100% response rate from participating authorities for the online survey, the 11 missing cases means that the findings presented here are not fully representative of all those currently taking part in the initiative. Some degree of generalisation is therefore inherent in the analysis and it is recognised that there will be some inevitable bias, as a result.

2. IMPLEMENTATION AND OPERATION

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN IN SCOTLAND STATISTICS

2.1 Data from the most recently published Children's Social Work Statistics in Scotland[2] show that, as of 31 July 2014, there were 3,255 children aged under 5 being looked after in Scotland. Table 1 below shows the number of children in this category by authority area.

Table 1: Number of Looked After Children by Authority Area

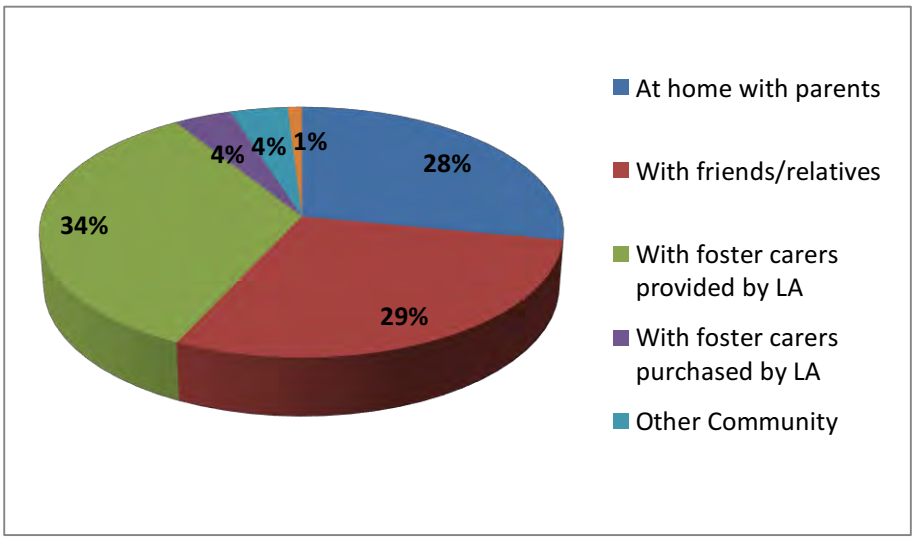
Local Authority Area	Number		Local Authority Area	Number
Aberdeen City	151		Highland	106
Aberdeenshire	81		Inverclyde	47
Angus	57		Midlothian	69
Argyll & Bute	36		Moray	47
Clackmannanshire	45		North Ayrshire	169
Dumfries & Galloway	100		North Lanarkshire	130
Dundee City	166		Orkney Isles	7
East Ayrshire	108		Perth & Kinross	53
East Dunbartonshire	23		Renfrewshire	144
East Lothian	36		Scottish Borders	32
East Renfrewshire	27		Shetland	6
Edinburgh, City of	325		South Ayrshire	86
Eilean Siar	9		South Lanarkshire	117
Falkirk	87		Stirling	35
Fife	238		West Dunbartonshire	89
Glasgow City	535		West Lothian	94

2.2 Figure 1 below shows that the majority of children aged under 5 currently being looked after at the national level are living with foster carers provided by the Local Authority (34%), followed by those living with friends/relatives (29%). Just over one quarter of all looked after children aged under 5 live at home with parents (28%) and the remainder are in other types of accommodation.

2.3 It is important to note that the social work statistics presented here do not include children aged 5, since they are classified in the older age band of 5-11 for Scottish Government analysis purposes. The Imagination Library is open to children aged 0-5 inclusive.

[2] Scottish Government (2015) Children's Social Work Statistics Scotland, 2013-14, Scottish Government: Edinburgh, available at http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00474429.pdf

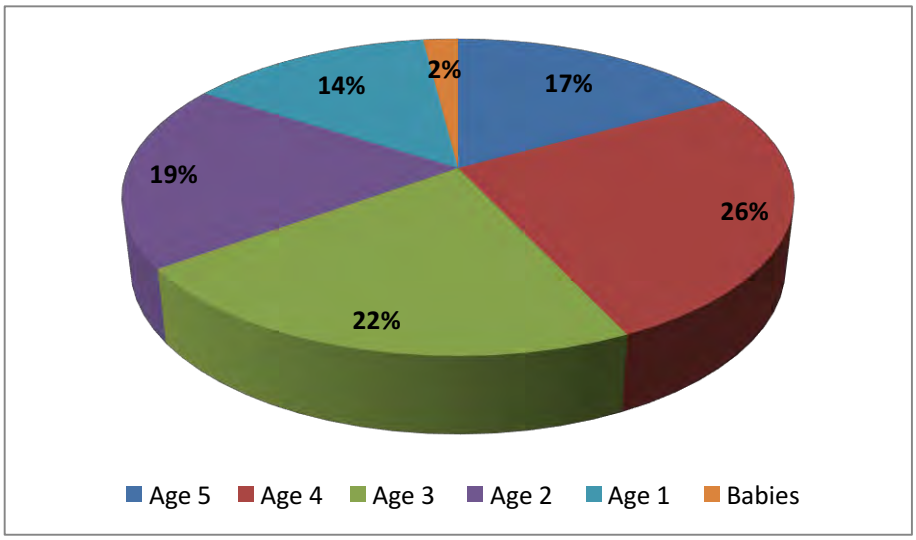
Figure 1: Proportion of Looked After Children by Accommodation Type



NUMBER OF CHILDREN ENROLLED

2.4 At the time of writing, a total of 2,549 children aged 5 and under were enrolled in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in Scotland, as taken from the Book Order System administered by DPIL. Of these, 2,105 were aged 0-4. This represents around 65% of all looked after children in this age band as reported in the social work statistics, although it should be noted that the differences in data capture periods means that this figure is likely to be slightly skewed (i.e. the BOS data relates to June 2015 while the social work statistics relate to July 2014). As the social work statistics also categorise children 0-4 and aged 5-11 respectively, it is not possible to say what proportion of all eligible 5-year olds are currently enrolled in DPIL nationally. Figure 2 below, however, shows the proportion of all those enrolled by age based on data from the BOS in July 2015.

Figure 2: Proportion of Children Enrolled by Age, July 2015



NUMBER OF BOOKS ISSUED

2.5 As part of the telephone survey, authorities were also asked to indicate the total number of books mailed up to the end of September 2014. Table 2 below shows the total number of books mailed by authority area, alongside the start date of the initiative in each area. No data was returned for Clackmannanshire or North Lanarkshire and, at the time of the survey, neither Aberdeen City nor East Ayrshire were participating in the scheme.

2.6 The data show that a total of 60,602 books were mailed to looked after children between August 2011 and September 2014. This ranged from 41 in Orkney to 8,417 in Edinburgh.

Table 2: Number of Books Issued by Authority Area

Authority	**Books Mailed**	**Participating Since**
Aberdeenshire	462	Nov-12
Angus	2049	Nov-11
Argyll and Bute	984	Sep-12
Dumfries and Galloway	371	Jul-13
Dundee	5409	Oct-11
East Dunbartonshire	270	Aug-11
East Lothian	783	Jun-12
East Renfrewshire	1306	Nov-11
Edinburgh	8417	Jun-12
Falkirk	1339	Jun-13
Fife	6983	Nov-11
Glasgow	1986	May-14
Highland	2525	Jul-2012
Inverclyde	913	May-12
Midlothian	2024	May-12
Moray	840	Nov-11
North Ayrshire	3908	Nov-11
Orkney	41	Mar-13
Perth and Kinross	3555	Aug-11
Renfrewshire	6221	Jun-12
Scottish Borders	1110	Jan-12
Shetland	139	Oct-12
South Ayrshire	2618	Jan-12
South Lanarkshire	1559	Dec-12
Stirling	62	Aug-14
West Dunbartonshire	301	Feb-14
West Lothian	4377	Nov-11
Western Isles	50	Sep-12
Total Responses	**60,602**	**-**

2.7 It is worth noting that the numbers of books issued is not necessarily directly correlated with the numbers of looked after children (e.g. although Glasgow has the highest number of looked after children, it does not have the highest number of books distributed). This may be explained by the relative proportions of parents/carers who opt in to the initiative in each area, as well as some of the variations in local practice discussed below. The numbers of children who qualify to take part will also fluctuate over time.

CHALLENGES OF ENROLMENT

2.8 The majority of authorities reported no problems with enrolling looked after children to the Imagination Library (IL). Some early misunderstanding did exist regarding who could be enrolled, for example, some authorities did not realise that all looked after children could be enrolled, and assumed it was only for those in foster care/kinship care, but this was quickly clarified. This accounted for some of the discrepancy reported in the numbers enrolled and the total number of looked after children in each area.

2.9 The main challenge of enrolment described by authorities was the regular movement of children between different placement addresses. This transition and some slight delays in systems updating quickly enough to reflect the changes meant that, in some cases, books were being sent to the wrong addresses (where children had already moved on). This was especially true if the move occurred close to the monthly book issue date.

2.10 Some authorities reported that they had to run monthly checks of addresses for their looked after children and cross-reference these with the Book Order System (BOS) to ensure that the two were always comparable. This regular monitoring and cross-checking is necessary to ensure that books reach their intended recipients, it was felt.

2.11 One authority reported that they had asked staff to hand out books, rather than using the postal system, as they felt this was more appropriate for some families. Another authority arranged for books to be collected at the local library or again asked social workers to hand out the books, as they felt this more actively engaged parents/carers with the scheme and encouraged use of the books as intended. This mirrors some of the practice that was also reported in the mid-term evaluation report.

2.12 A further challenge was reported insofar as parents, who are reunited with their children after a period in care, may be confused about whether they are eligible to receive the books or not. The policy stipulates that only children who are deemed Looked After by a Scottish Local Authority can receive the Imagination Library books i.e., defined legally as a 'looked after child' by section 17(6) of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, as amended by the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 and Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011. If the child is returned home and is no longer 'looked after' or is no longer considered 'looked after at home' then they should be removed from the local Imagination Library database. Social Workers should then be referring these children and families on to universal services such as Bookbug sessions in the library or other universal provision. Some responses suggest that this may not be clear to parents or local partners in delivery and this is

important to note given that one in four children in care are living with parents in their own home. Similarly, some parents may not inform social work staff of changes to address and this can, again, result in some books being returned. The local affiliate's contact details are included as the return address and the return of books is sometimes the first indication staff have that the address is out of date or needs to be changed. This is a useful check or reminder for Local Authorities to keep the data up-to-date and engaged with the programme. Overall, the main challenges seem to be associated mostly with children who are looked after at home, rather than in any other type of care.

2.13 Some authorities reported that the mandates/consent forms used to gather permission from parents/carers in order for children to take part were not always signed and returned for processing, and required some chasing on behalf of authority staff. Limited parental reading ability was also cited by just one authority as possibly preventing some children from being enrolled into the scheme but parental/carer engagement was not, on the whole, seen as a problem.

USE OF THE BOOK ORDER SYSTEM

2.14 The majority of Book Order System (BOS) updating and management is undertaken by dedicated administrative staff at the Local Authority level and occurs on a monthly (or more frequent) basis. Despite some early work being required, in terms of updating systems and establishing data sharing protocols, most authorities reported that the system was easy to use and said that they had experienced no problems with the system.

2.15 Perhaps the main challenge with the system is where it fails to recognise an address which is known by the staff to be accurate. This was especially true where children are housed in multi-occupancy buildings and individual addresses are not recognised by the system. This can cause some frustrations and some manual editing needs to take place. Where staff have tried to enter addresses that are not recognised by the system, comments were made that these queries/problems had been quickly addressed by Dollywood Foundation staff, as appropriate.

2.16 The only other problems reported in relation to the BOS was the slow running of the website on occasions and changes in Local Authority staffing, which meant that there were sometimes delays in updating the system as new staff had to settle into/learn their new role.

LOCAL STAFFING & STAFF AWARENESS

2.17 Most authorities reported that the scheme was being administered by social work staff and that the project had been implemented by small dedicated teams in the first instance who had taken a role in setting up the systems and local mechanisms to allow it to run.

2.18 Several authorities had undertaken specific awareness raising activities/meetings for the scheme among social work staff when it started, and ongoing communication between staff takes place at local team meetings and via internal email correspondence in

participating authorities, it seems. Some authorities also include information/updates on DPIL as part of local newsletters.

2.19 Some authorities did recognise that more could perhaps be done to ensure that social workers continue to promote the Imagination Library when engaging with families, since some staff were better at promoting it than others. One authority suggested that the booklists could be used to remind social workers about books and to ensure that they continued to make it a part of their discussions during family visits. It was also recognised by some that the high turnover in social work staff perhaps meant that not all were aware of the IL initiative, and so more regular and ongoing familiarisation/awareness raising activities might be needed to ensure that it retains a high profile.

2.20 Dedicated staff involved differs between authorities, and can include staff working in children and families social work teams, family placement teams, kinship and fostering, early years teams in health and education, family based care, family workers, schools, nurseries, educational psychologists, libraries, speech and language staff and adult literacy teams. One authority (Midlothian) reported that they also involved their 'Vulnerable 2s' worker. Another authority (Falkirk) indicated that they used school library staff to contact families and help to administer the scheme and that this worked well (despite some initial challenges contacting families). They commented that:

> *"School library service librarians and public library assistants have been gifting the books in the homes of the LAC at home children and where appropriate have been sharing the books with the children in story sessions. The children have really enjoyed the storytelling and get excited when we arrive. The parents or grandparents are observing the interaction between the children and the stories and have said that they will share the books with the children, one family are now visiting their local library."*

2.21 In some authorities (e.g. Argyll and Bute), all Bookbug Session Leaders have been made aware of the programme via their training. Library staff and early years' staff are also aware of the programme and book lists are also sent out to Early Learning and Childcare (ELCC) settings.

2.22 The variability in who is involved in each Local Authority demonstrates that authorities are operating their own discretion to ensure that the initiative is appropriately tailored and suits local structures. There might be some lessons to be learned, however, from sharing practices between authorities so that everyone is aware of the potential reach of the scheme and the value of increasing awareness among wider Local Authority staff and other partners in service delivery.

2.23 One potential barrier to the scheme's success is the high turnover of staff and also some perceptions that the initiative is more within the remit of education services than social work services. Comments in this regard were few and far between but do suggest that more could be done to ensure that all relevant staff working with the target population share awareness and buy-in to the scheme.

COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS AND CARERS

2.24 The standard model is that initial letters are issued to birth parents and carers inviting their child to take part in the Imagination Library. Some authorities specifically ask parents to 'opt in' while in other areas an 'opt out' system seems to be in place whereby children are enrolled unless their parents or carers explicitly ask that they not be included. For those who do take part, consent forms require to be signed by the parents/carers.

2.25 Most authorities reported that parents and adoptive parents are notified of the scheme when children are returned home or placed for adoption. One authority (North Lanarkshire) reported that they hold an awareness day for foster carers as well as information about the scheme being sent to all foster carers and in all localities. Another authority (Scottish Borders) routinely remind carers of the Imagination Library both in supervision sessions and through their quarterly newsletter. Both of these activities might be considered examples of innovative practice which could be replicated elsewhere.

2.26 Ongoing contact between families and the local IL co-ordinators is facilitated by the lead social work staff assigned to individual families. The scheme is dependent on carers alerting authorities to changes in address or changes in the residence status of the children enrolled to allow them to update systems. As noted above, this can sometimes mean books are wrongly addressed if there is a delay in this information being shared with the authority and the regular book issue dates.

INTEGRATION OF DPIL WITH OTHER EARLY YEARS INITIATIVES

2.27 Eight survey respondents said that they did not currently link the Imagination Library with any other initiatives in their authority.

2.28 Where authorities did link the Imagination Library with other local initiatives, this was most often the Bookbug Early Years programme. One authority also commented that, although they did not formally link Bookbug and the Imagination Library, the Bookbug initiative had resulted in the training of carers and this had a knock on benefit for the IL.

2.29 Just over half of survey respondents said that they had staff from within the Local Authority who had participated in Bookbug training. This included social work staff (and Families First social workers), support staff, health visitors, nursery staff and others working with Early Years groups. Others reported that many of their third sector partners were trained in Bookbug and that childcare providers were well-trained regarding the benefits of reading more generally. Most authorities were unable to specify the exact numbers of staff who were Bookbug trained.

2.30 Scottish Borders reported that three foster carers had been trained in their area and Perth and Kinross reported that they were looking into delivering training to foster carers/kinship carers in the future. East Dunbartonshire also expressed that they were looking into Bookbug training for staff.

2.31 City of Edinburgh Council links the IL with literacy work in Early Years settings, including 'Peep', the UK book gifting and numeracy initiative 'Letter Box' and their own book gifting initiative within Edinburgh Libraries. North Lanarkshire also said that they linked the IL with play@home.

2.32 One authority (Dundee) also said that they link the Imagination Library with Adult Learning – encouraging adults to read to their children, wherever possible.

PERCEIVED IMPACTS

2.33 As part of the telephone survey, all authorities were asked to rate the perceived impact of DPIL on a scale of 1 to 10. Responses were very positive with most authorities offering ratings of 7 or more.

2.34 Comments were made that the scheme was particularly good because it is not perceived to be a Local Authority 'handout' by carers, because books are clearly labelled as DPIL gifted. The quality of books was also seen to be of a very high standard and children looked forward to receiving the books, especially because they are personally addressed.

2.35 It was perceived that the initiative was particularly valuable at ensuring that children had access to books as it was unlikely that many parents/carers would typically buy or borrow books to use with their children. City of Edinburgh Council reported that they had received a letter from a kinship carer at the beginning of the project expressing how fantastic the books were and that they would not have been able to afford to purchase them otherwise.

2.36 Anecdotal feedback from social workers was that books were being well used and were much appreciated, and that they were helping families to sit together and spend time talking/sharing special time/bonding. One authority commented that:

> *"Has helped us look at basics with families - we're good at child protection, but sometimes forget to prioritise good child development - the good stuff about communication and special time together."*

2.37 Overall, most authorities recognised that they needed more time to measure true impacts and that more engagement with parents/carers was needed, since most feedback to date was anecdotal and from staff.

LOCAL EVALUATION MECHANISMS

2.38 Few formal mechanisms exist for the evaluation of DPIL at the local level and most authorities seem to rely on ad hoc feedback from staff to understand how the initiative is working. This includes positive and negative feedback and it was highlighted that any 'problems' (typically around administration, as above) are usually reported quickly and resolved promptly. Some authorities had taken part in the DPIL mid-term evaluation and had used this as a way of understanding how effectively their local schemes were operating.

2.39 Where feedback had been gathered, this was always positive. West Lothian said that feedback forms were used by staff to provide comments and these suggested that they perceived DPIL to be a good initiative. One illustrative quote was provided by Aberdeenshire to reflect the types of comments typically reported by social work staff:

> *"All the carers I oversee whose children are in receipt of the Imagination Library books think they are wonderful and they are so appreciative of receiving them. The carers have often commented that they have been used not only by the kinship children, but they also hand them down to other family members/grandchildren once the kinship kids have outgrown them. It's an excellent service."*

2.40 Dumfries and Galloway also reported that, although feedback is not routinely collected, they receive ad hoc feedback from social workers. From this, they concluded that:

> *"There is no doubt that having books in family homes has a positive impact on their learning."*

2.41 Perth and Kinross reported that they build discussion of the IL into supervision with foster carers to gain some feedback as to how they find the service and Dundee also issue letters to parents/carers for feedback. In Falkirk, the Foster Carers Consultative Committee is used to verbally evaluate impact and positive comments had been received regarding how IL had changed evening routines, settled the children and improved their vocabulary.

2.42 City of Edinburgh consider IL evaluation as part of their wider literacy strategy evaluation and Falkirk gain feedback from the library service for looked after at home children and families. Most other authorities rely on anecdotal feedback from both carers and workers and one mentioned that a lack of resource meant that more formal evaluation was not possible.

2.43 Only one authority (North Ayrshire) reported that they had undertaken a formal survey of people in receipt of books. Among the six survey respondents, feedback was generally positive – all had read the books and, for the most part, found them age appropriate and enjoyable for their children. Other comments generated from the survey included that the books were used by older children on placement to read with assistance to younger siblings, an activity which they both enjoyed. Comments were also made that it was good to receive books as part of a series e.g. Spot the Dog.

2.44 Six authorities said that the Imagination Library had been included in their Local Authority's Early Years Collaborative Test of Change initiatives or that they were in the planning stages to enable this.

2.45 Argyll and Bute explained that, although DPIL is not directly included in their EYC Tests of Change, the Assertive Outreach Bookbug for the Home is one of their EYC projects and they are currently measuring the impact of this intervention with a growing number of families.

2.46 East Renfrewshire reported that DPIL had been included as part of their corporate parenting inspection, on which they had performed excellently. DPIL links directly with SHANARRI[3] themes on well-being and so it was considered that it was "too important not to participate" in the IL scheme.

2.47 One authority suggested that, although they had not pursued feedback or evaluation as yet, they would welcome information about how this was approached in other authorities so that they could begin their own local tests. This sharing of evaluation practice is perhaps something that would be valuable to other authorities too and might be something for DPIL to pursue in the future.

EXPANSION OF DPIL

2.48 Only a small number of authorities reported positively that they could see opportunities for expanding the Imagination Library into other community, health and education settings. Some reported that partners in their Early Years Collaborative were keen to get involved in taking the initiative forward, especially Health Visitors. Others reported that they would like to expand the initiative to vulnerable but not looked after children (for example, using returned books or books donated back to the authority with other children). This would only be possible if the labels that were previously attached with the name of the LAC had been removed.

2.49 There may be some barriers in widening the reach of the Imagination Library insofar as awareness raising needs to be undertaken with managers of other Early Years teams/staff outwith social work, to ensure that they are aware of the potential benefits/outcomes alongside the potential resource or other staff inputs that might be required if they came on board. Funding may also be a barrier to widening out of the initiative, more generally.

2.50 Some specific suggestions were made in terms of widening out the IL book gifting to other under-five children. These included:

- 2-year olds who become eligible for free Early Learning and Childcare provision under the Children and Young People Act;
- local family centres (who may benefit from a library within their units);
- children in kinship placements;
- formerly looked after children;
- children 'in need' (who are not looked after but who are in contact with social work staff on a voluntary basis); and
- those living in areas of deprivation (as measured using SIMD).

[3] The eight SHANARRI well-being indicators are part of the Getting It Right for Every Child agenda. They are: Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible and Included. For further information see: http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/background/wellbeing

2.51 Again, however, while there was some enthusiasm for widening the reach of the initiative, many commented that they would be hindered by lack of staffing and funding to enable them to implement it.

2.52 It is also worth noting that there is some interest from third sector agencies in DPIL and some authorities reported that they had received queries from third sector agencies at the start to ask if they could get involved (Renfrewshire also reported that a local church had asked to get involved). When external agencies became aware that it was just for looked after children, the queries reduced, but this does, nonetheless show that others outside of the Local Authority structures might be willing to play a role in facilitating the widening out of the scheme to other children.

NON-PARTICIPATING AUTHORITIES

2.53 At the time of writing, one authority (East Ayrshire) was just about to start participating in the DPIL and another (Aberdeen City) was still putting in place plans to join the initiative.

2.54 Although East Ayrshire was one of the first authorities to engage in discussions with Dollywood Foundation staff around implementing the scheme, it took between 2011/12 and 2015/16 to put in place the necessary data protection and information governance arrangements to facilitate its operation. Feedback from staff there suggests that it would have been helpful if a standard national protocol for data sharing had been established which could have been replicated in different areas early on. This may have avoided some of the problems experienced locally with those responsible for setting up data sharing of children's details. A centrally led core model that could have been tailored to meet local needs is something that would have been welcomed. Enthusiasm and support for the scheme was not a barrier.

2.55 Similarly, in Aberdeen City, staff reported being very keen to get involved in the initiative but had been unable to find suitable solutions to the data protection and confidentiality issues involved in sharing children's details. The staff in this area also suggested that it would be helpful if some of the authorities who had successfully implemented the scheme were able to share and explain the data protection mechanisms that had been put in place to allow a similar model to be adopted. Sharing protocols would alleviate some of the pressure faced in trying to work through the challenges alone, and it seems that valuable practical lessons that have been learned elsewhere could be shared to good effect. The authority remains keen to be involved and simply needs more time, staff availability and advice from other areas to allow them to get started.

OTHER OBSERVATIONS

2.56 For the most part, local practices seem to be working well. Some comments were made that Local Authorities were missing out on DPIL webinars and asked for more advanced notice of these. Some authorities asked for more webinars and said that they liked the DPIL e-bulletins but felt they were not produced often enough. Some requests

were also made for more personal contact with Dollywood Foundation staff by phone or email to help authorities deal with problems, but these were scarce.

2.57 On a practical note, requests were made for the name labels attached to books to be removed and instead placed on the plastic packaging of books. This would help in cases where books are used with multiple children or if family names change as children move between homes/addresses. This was considered especially important in the case of children in emergency placements or those living at non-disclosure addresses and, for confidentiality reasons, social workers would prefer to see the books themselves anonymised or hand-delivered. [The Dollywood Foundation has introduced easy-peel labels for use on the books so that carers can remove them easily].

2.58 Thinking more strategically, some concerns were raised about whether all authorities were approaching the equalities and inclusion aspects of the scheme with similar rigour. One authority, for example, explained how they intended to purchase educational gifts of equivalent value to the books being issued for those children for whom English was not their first language, or who faced other communication challenges. This would ensure that all looked after children in the target age band were being treated equally, with no exclusions based on special communication needs. [The Dollywood Foundation is currently working with RNIB in order to get some of the books converted to audio and braille versions].

2.59 Finally, while most authorities explained that they now had robust data sharing practices in place, it is worth stressing that this evaluation did not specifically audit any of the data sharing protocols that had been set up. Some questions were asked about the comparability of practices and whether there was any independent review of mechanisms to ensure that they were fit for purpose. With Local Authorities being ultimately accountable for their data sharing practices it seems that there is no central onus to ensure that they are compliant, however, an audit of practices would perhaps provide DPIL with quality assurances around how the scheme is running from a data protection point of view.

3. FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS AND PERCEIVED VALUE FOR MONEY

FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

3.1 The cost of the Imagination Library is £25 per child, each year. The costs to the Scottish Government of participating in the programme is dependent on the number of looked after children registered but the maximum costs that were originally agreed on implementation was approximately £76,000 per year[4]. This meant a maximum potential cost of £380,000 over the 5 year period from April 2011 to March 2016, the period for which funding was secured.

PERCEIVED VALUE FOR MONEY

3.2 Among the authorities who took part in the online survey, several explicitly said that they perceived the initiative provided good value for money with some perceiving it be "excellent" value for money. One respondent indicated that:

> *"I think it's great value for money and really important for children to be able to access books. I am hoping our LA and the Scottish Government will continue to fund it."*

3.3 When asked what the perceived cost of DPIL was for each child, as part of the telephone survey, estimates ranged from £3 to £10 per child, per month, and most respondents were surprised that it was more in the region of £2. Some guessed that the cost was in the region of £100-£150 per child, per year and were astonished that the actual cost was just £25. Several again mentioned the high quality of books and perceived that it definitely, therefore, represented good value for money.

FUTURE JOINT FUNDING

3.4 Of the 19 authorities who responded to the survey, four said that they would be unable to commit to funding or joint funding the project for under 5s for it to continue post March 2016.

Response	Number and % of Authorities
No/unable to commit/unlikely	4
Unsure/to be decided/dependent on other priorities	6
Yes/tentative agreement/part funding	8
No response	1
Total	**19**

3.5 Many respondents said that they were either unable to commit to future funding, or were unsure because of budget cuts locally, general austerity and the need for more internal discussions to be held before they could make a future commitment. Funding for

[4] For financial year 2013/14, the maximum grant offer was reduced to £60,000, based on a review of previous year's expenditure. This limit also applied to the grant offer for 2015-16.

DPIL needs to be considered alongside other competing priorities at the Local Authority level, it seems, before people can commit to its longevity. Statutory services will take priority in any local funding decisions.

3.6 One authority also commented that any funding decisions would need to be made jointly between social work and education services and two indicated that funding was a multi-agency group decision within their authority and so not something they could commit to alone. This perhaps suggests that any future joint-funding discussions need to be opened up to a wider group within authorities, rather than Children and Families social work teams alone.

3.7 Several comments were provided to suggest that, despite not being able to commit to future joint funding, this was not a reflection of the perceived value of the initiative, but was directly as a result of austerity:

> *"Although it's a valuable resource to LAC children, it is unlikely that funding can be secured. We would hope that this would not be the case in these austere times."*

3.8 Several also commented as part of the telephone interviews that they would be prepared to argue for the continuation of the Imagination Library locally and defend their requests for internal future resourcing because of its perceived benefits.

3.9 Among those who were 'unsure' about future funding as part of the online survey, two said that they had no direct personal involvement or responsibility for funding decisions.

3.10 Although several respondents provided a positive response to the question around funding, it was not clear if this was in response to whether they perceived it to be good value for money, or if they could commit to longer term funding (since the questions were merged). This could be followed up with individual respondents to clarify their position.

4. DISCUSSION

KEY FINDINGS

4.1 As with the mid-term evaluation, the data presented here suggests that DPIL is perceived as an excellent service and is a resource that is greatly appreciated by children and their parents/carers alike. Staff report positively on the process and its perceived impacts.

4.2 From a process perspective, the key findings appear to be that:

- local administration and implementation runs smoothly, for the most part, with the main challenges being around the matching of addresses in the Book Order System and keeping abreast of movement of children between homes;
- awareness raising among social work staff was effective at the start of the initiative and some good examples of how the profile of the project can be maintained exist. These should be copied elsewhere in areas where awareness and promotion of the scheme among social workers suffers as a result of staff movement;
- several authorities attempt to link DPIL with other suitable initiatives, especially Bookbug. There are, perhaps, more opportunities to link with other initiatives that could be pursued, given time and budget;
- several partners are getting involved in the delivery of the Imagination Library and there is scope for others to come on board in the future;
- while communications with foster carers seems to be good, there may be more scope for engaging with other parents/carers to promote the benefits of the scheme and to encourage more efficient return of participation mandates. This will ensure that the initiative reaches the most children possible; and
- budget and staff movement are the biggest barriers to the successful implementation and operation of the scheme and to its widening out but the initiative and the way that it runs in itself requires little change.

4.3 While the focus of much of the previous Imagination Library research has been on impacts, the current research has provided a valuable opportunity to understand the processes that sit behind the sharing of books. Some key lessons have been learned regarding how best to facilitate access to books among looked after children to ensure that impacts such as increased enthusiasm for reading, improved literacy and increased joint reading can be achieved. Refining and making book distribution practices as efficient as possible will help these benefits to be realised.

4.4 Although the evaluation did not specifically seek to explore impacts of the scheme, some of the data generated here suggests that key findings in relation to impacts are that:

- most authorities rate the perceive impacts highly, although many recognise that they need to more actively engage with parents/carers to measure true impacts in the medium and long term;

- children look forward to receiving books, and they are being used appropriately by parents/carers to engage children in reading;
- staff anecdotally report that books are assisting with wider bonding activities;
- books are being used more widely than for the target child alone; and
- access to books is being improved via the initiative since it is unlikely that parents/carers would otherwise be able to afford the resources.

4.5 Overall, as with the mid-term evaluation, the evidence suggests that books are being used appropriately and as a way of encouraging bonding between children and their parents/carers. Independent feedback was again given that suggests that books are being used not only by the intended direct recipient, but by their siblings and other children residing in the household. This suggests that the impact and reach of DPIL may be even wider than originally anticipated and this demonstrates the added value of the scheme.

4.6 Although most authorities perceive the Imagination Library to provide good value for money, and would be keen to see the initiative continue, limited budgets and competing priorities mean that few would be able to sustain the project from within their own existing budgets. There may be scope with buy in from other partners and departments to fund the project, but it seems likely that some central support is necessary to ensure that the project continues to run at the same level.

NEXT STEPS

4.7 Although staff generally reported that the BOS is easy to use and most local schemes are operating well, it is worth noting that some minor problems with updating the system still remain and the disparity in numbers of recorded looked after children and those enrolled may also indicate that there remain some challenges either with the enrolment process or BOS updating. Additional training for local database maintenance staff, or guidance from The Dollywood Foundation in the form of free online training or a webinar might provide a cost-effective means of ensuring that all authorities remain up-to-date with BOS developments and what is required.

4.8 One of the main limitations remains the personal addressing of books via stickers placed onto the books themselves. The mid-term evaluation showed that only 44% of carers reported that the children liked having their names printed on the books and some social workers also commented that this created a barrier to children taking books with them when they moved addresses (for anonymity purposes). Comments were again made here that this personal labelling was perhaps inappropriate and not liked by parents/carers. It is important to note that, since views were collected as part of the research, the Dollywood Foundation has already dealt with this by changing the labels so that they are 'easy peel' and this seems to be something that would be supported going forward.

4.9 To date, limited local evaluation has been undertaken, especially with parent/carers and there is scope for sharing evaluation approaches or formalising them to ensure that impacts can be better assessed.

4.10 Similarly, there has been little sharing of experience regarding data protection practices between authorities and there has been no official audit of protocols set up (this was also outwith the scope of this evaluation). Whilst East Renfrewshire Council initiated a risk assessment to review the privacy and security standards being used by the hosted provider for DPIL at the start of the initiative in Scotland, this has not been reviewed since then. A quality check of this kind would allow more lessons to be learned around data sharing that might benefit those still to come on board, or those who are experiencing local challenges, and would also act a means of independently assessing that safety of children is being upheld.

4.11 Overall, perhaps more needs to be done to raise the profile of DPIL locally. This might be challenging given staff changes/turnover and departmental restructures, but some examples of good practice exist which could be copied elsewhere (e.g. including regular information about DPIL in team meetings, newsletters and briefings).

ACTION PLANNING

4.12 In an initial response to the evaluation findings, the Dollywood Foundation has also undertaken to:

- provide a list of selected Imagination Library books and relevant fun and educational literacy activities for Scottish Book Trust (SBT) trainers, Bookbug co-ordinators, social workers, practitioners, parents/carers and children to implement in co-ordination with the books;
- encourage stronger communication between Dollywood Foundation staff, SBT Trainers, Bookbug Co-ordinators, Local Authority staff (not just in looked after children departments), parents/carers, Social Workers and Practitioners, to promote the benefits of the Imagination Library and to reach more children;
- request an investment in nationwide research with the Local Authorities participating in DPIL in Scotland. Such research will measure impacts in the short, medium and long-term;
- review the Book Order System (BOS) Operations Manual for the Scotland LAC programme and provide separate guidelines and a manual tailored for this programme specifically;
- facilitate a regular focus on awareness-raising among social work staff about the Book Order System (BOS) and the Imagination Library, in order to help alleviate the gaps related to Local Authority staff turnover. This may be accomplished with regular visits to Local Authorities and a newsletter specially designed to support the DPIL work or via specific BOS webinars;
- explore the feasibility of establishing a centrally led, standard national protocol for data sharing which could be tailored to meet local needs;
- revisit the security review carried out on the DPIL Book Order System at the beginning stages of the project as well as to audit local data sharing protocols to ensure that they remain fit-for-purpose;
- consider organising a one day conference for LAC Local Authority staff in Scotland to discuss opportunities and share practice/experience to date;

- strengthen the partnership between SBT (Bookbug) and Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in order to align messaging, modelling, training, access and resources for parents/carers and their children; and
- encourage more involvement of Dollywood Foundation staff in local and national literacy initiatives and collaboratives including the Early Years Collaborative: #bestplacetogrowup, Play Talk Read, Read Write Count and Save the Children's *Read On, Get On* campaign.

4.13 Fulfilling each of these actions will help to support the longevity and success of DPIL in Scotland.

CONCLUSIONS

4.14 Together, the mid-term and final evaluations suggest that the Imagination Library is a much welcomed initiative that receives positive feedback from all those involved, both in terms of process delivery and perceived impacts. Future funding for the initiative would allow the processes that have been put in place to become even better established to maximise the reach and potential impacts of the scheme. Going forward, it will be essential to measure impacts more precisely. This will help with understanding the value for money that DPIL provides, although it is recognised that many of the benefits cannot be measured in economic or monetary terms.

APPENDIX A – PARTICIPATING AUTHORITIES

Local Authority	Telephone Survey	Online Survey
Aberdeen City	Not participating in scheme	Not participating in scheme
Aberdeenshire	Yes	✓
Angus	Yes	
Argyll and Bute	Yes	✓
Clackmannanshire	Yes	
Dumfries and Galloway	Yes	✓
Dundee	Yes	✓
East Ayrshire	Joined scheme June 2015	Joined scheme June 2015
East Dunbartonshire	Yes	✓
East Lothian	Yes	
East Renfrewshire	Yes	
Edinburgh	Yes	✓
Falkirk	Yes	✓
Fife	Yes	
Glasgow	Yes	✓
Highland	Yes	
Inverclyde	Yes	✓
Midlothian	Yes	✓
Moray	Yes	✓
North Ayrshire	Yes	✓
North Lanarkshire	Yes	✓
Orkney	Yes	
Perth and Kinross	Yes	✓
Renfrewshire	Yes	✓
Scottish Borders	Yes	✓
Shetland	Yes	✓
South Ayrshire	Yes	
South Lanarkshire	Yes	
Stirling	Yes	
West Dunbartonshire	Yes	✓
West Lothian	Yes	✓
Western Isles	Yes	
Total Responses	**30**	**19**

APPENDIX B – GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Looked After Children: Under the provisions of section 17(6) of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 'the 95 Act', as amended by the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 '2007 Act' and Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 a 'Looked After Child' is defined as those in the care of their Local Authority. A child is looked after when he or she is: (a) provided with accommodation by a Local Authority, or (b) subject to a supervision order made under the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011, or (c) subject to a permanence order under section 80 of the 2007 Act, or living in Scotland and under the responsibility of the Scottish Local Authority as a result of a transfer of an order under section 33 of the 95 Act.

Looked After at Home: Where the child is subject to a *Compulsory Supervision Order* or an *Interim Compulsory Supervision Order* ***with no*** *condition of residence* through the Children's Hearing System, section 83 of the Children's Hearing (Scotland) Act 2011. The child continues to live in their normal place of residence (i.e. often the family home) with contact with social services.

Looked After away from home (i.e. away from their **normal** place of residence): Where the child is subject to a *Supervision Order* ***with a*** *condition of residence* through the Children's Hearing system, or is provided with accommodation under section 25 (voluntary agreement) of the 1995 Act or is subject of a *Permanence Order* under section 80 of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007. The child or young person is cared for away from their normal place of residence, e.g. in a foster care placement, residential/children's unit, a residential school or with a kinship carer.

Parents/Carers: A "parent" is defined as someone who is the genetic or adoptive mother or father of the child. A "carer" is someone other than a parent who has rights/responsibilities for looking after a child.

Kinship Care: If a looked after child cannot remain with their birth parents they can be placed by a Local Authority in the care of family or friends, for either a short or long period of time. Under the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009, these 'kinship carers' are defined as "a person who is related to the child (through blood, marriage or civil partnership) or a person with whom the child has a pre-existing relationship".

Foster Care: Unlike adoption, fostering is generally a temporary arrangement - on either a short or long term basis - and many children in foster care will return to their birth family. Some fostered children are eventually adopted, either by their foster carer or by another family. Local Authorities can only place children with foster carers who have been approved by an agency registered with the Care Inspectorate. Such agencies include Local Authorities, voluntary organisations and independent sector providers.

Early Years Collaborative: a coalition of Community Planning Partners, including social services, health, education, police and third sector professionals committed to ensuring that every baby, child, mother, father and family in Scotland has access to the best supports available.

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