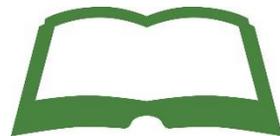# Launching Bookstart in Finland

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1. Why Bookstart?

While Finland still ranks number one in the world of literacy, the motivation and enthusiasm expressed by children and adolescents towards reading is extremely low.

Also parents' attitude towards reading to children has recently become more negative (PIRLS 2011-2017).

The aim of this campaign is to encourage the parents of small children to read aloud to them. The campaign informs parents how reading aloud helps children to develop.

Good practices from other European countries.

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Basic arguments

Home, early childhood education, school and library together create the framework and resources for children and youth to develop a desire to read.

The campaign informs parents how reading aloud helps children to develop. Listening to regular read-aloud stories boosts children's vocabulary, supports their emotional development and has a major influence on their future literacy and school performance.

Reading aloud is one of the key factors in boosting the **equality** between children and families, regardless of their social or economic background.

If you read aloud your child will...
- grow up to be more confident and social in a group setting
- gain a considerably wider vocabulary
- be more successful at school
- get a better start at life
- be more talkative at home
- grow up to be a more active and curious as adult
- read more as adult as well

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2. Steps towards Bookstart

1. Providing to parents, educators and other adults hands-on information, hints and reading suggestions for children of all age groups. FRC also opened a web-page for easier access to the information.

2. Active communication had to be integrated at the very start of the process.

3. Active contacts with decision-makers: politicians and Ministry.

4. Arranging happenings and events around the subject.

5. Piloting in child health clinics, which provided enough credibility to present the campaign to Parliament.

6. With government support of 100 000 euros we were able to expand the pilot nationally (reached 50 000 families/one generation)

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Why maternity and child health clinic services

The goal was clear: To provide *Read to children-* information to all families regardless their social or economic background. Families could be reached through health care centers.

Maternity and health care centers are
Free of charge within **easy reach** of clients in every municipality in health centres
Universal for all social groups:
Widely used and accepted regardless of social class
Maternity clinics: Around 55 000 births per year
– **99,3 % of families** use these services
Child health clinics: Around 420 000 children under school age (0-6 years)
– **99,5 % of families** use these services

At least 8-9 visits during the normal course of a pregnancy and at least 9 health visits during the first year of an infant's life and once a year after that (1-6 years)

Sources: Medical Birth Register (2016)

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3. Kick off of Bookstart

The pilot in 2017 turned out to be so successful that the biggest private grant-providing foundation in Finland decided to finance the book gifts for all generations in the years 2019-2021.

The Finnish Cultural Foundation granted 1,2 million euros to national book gift program.

The Finnish Reading Center publishes two new children books and administrates the program.

Minister of Social Affairs sent the letter to all health care centers and encouraged them to order book-gift and materials and inform families about importance of reading.

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- Further steps
- To get early reading implemented to legislation, so all municipalities and health care centers have to order reading-materials/book gifts at their own expence
- To create functioning connections with health care centers and libraries
- To get literacy and early reading to government program after next elections

Keys of success
- Clear goals
- Convincing arguments
- Close connections to decision-makers and potential funders
- Visibility in media and society
- Inspiring materials – reading chart, folders, books