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FREE EARLY LITERACY PROGRAM LAUNCHED BY SOUTH EASTERN SYDNEY LOCAL HEALTH DISTRICT FOR FAMILIES IN BAYSIDE

A free early literacy program is being offered to families who live in the boundaries of Bayside Council to encourage parents and carers to share books, stories, songs and nursery rhymes with their children.

To help lay the foundations for local children to thrive, SESLHD's Health Promotion Service is introducing the *Let's Read* Community Program to residents of Bayside Council. This program encourages families to share the art of story-telling and singing with children from birth to 5 years.

A wide range of services including government, non-government organisations and community volunteers, will be delivering early literacy information and support to parents, caregivers and their young children.

Almost half (44%) of Australians over the age of 15 lack the literacy skills they need to meet the demands of everyday life and work¹.

SESLHD is providing local services with free, *Let's Read* resources for families. These include tips for parents and carers on how to build their child's skills and have fun with books. Every child engaged in the *Lets Read* program will receive an age-appropriate storybook to take home, read together as a family and keep. The program aims to reach over 6,000 preschool aged children and their families over the next 12 months.

"The *Let's Read* Community Program is a unique opportunity for the Bayside Community to make a real investment in the future of our children," said Julie Dixon, SESLHD's Director, Planning Population Health & Equity.

"It has taken a lot of planning and hard work to get to this stage and we're thrilled to see it all come to fruition. Our children will have the chance to be part of a new generation who are better placed to learn to read when they reach school".

Let's Read is a national, evidence-based early literacy initiative. Research indicates children learn the skills they need for reading long before they begin to read². It is crucial

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2006). Adult literacy and life skills survey. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics [http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4228.0Main+Features12006%20\(Reissue\)](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4228.0Main+Features12006%20(Reissue))

² Kalb, G., & van Ours, J. C. (2012). Reading to young children: a head start in life. Discussion Paper No. 7416, 1-43.
Hart, B. & Risley, R (2003) Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children

for families to start reading, telling stories and singing with children from birth. The Australian Early Development Census data shows children living in parts of Bayside Council are more vulnerable in social, communication and language development when compared to the rest of NSW³.

Let's Read was developed by the Centre for Community Child Health at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) and The Royal Children's Hospital. The Murdoch Children's Research Institute and The Smith Family have partnered to implement *Let's Read* with communities across Australia.

The *Let's Read* Community Program is being coordinated by SESLHD's Health Promotion Service and delivered by a network of partner services in Bayside. These services have completed the *Let's Read* training (NSW Education Standard Authority accredited).

³ Australian Early Development Census (2015. Data Explorer. Melbourne: AEDC
<http://www.aedc.gov.au/data/data-explorer?id=62085>