



Annual Evaluation Summary **2011**





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This report provides evidence of Let's Read's engagement in community activities that can assist communities to make progress toward Let's Read outcomes and objectives. The report is also designed to show how activities are tailored to communities' needs and can provide 'food for thought' for partnerships that are thinking about ways to engage families and enhance literacy experiences in their communities.

In 2011, Let's Read was delivered across nearly all Australian states and territories.

The delivery was in settings that included:

- localities that identified a need for literacy programs and raised funds locally for Let's Read delivery
- State government-funded locations throughout Queensland, including three remote Aboriginal communities
- Children's Centres in South Australia in a state government-funded project that will see Let's Read implemented in 38 Children's Centres
- The Smith Family Learning for Life sites, several of which receive support from corporate sponsors.

These sites represent hundreds of agencies and thousands of families, all involved in Let's Read activities.

All Let's Read sites undertake action research and many also undertake evaluation activities. A range of tools and frameworks is available to support communities' evaluation activities. Many Let's Read community programs report on process and outcomes at the local level or as part of a broader evaluation strategy, such as their local Communities for Children project.

Let's Read is an early years literacy program developed by the Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health. Together, the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) and The Smith Family (TSF) have worked with communities across Australia to introduce Let's Read and support children's early literacy.

Acknowledgements

This evaluation summary represents a small portion of the qualitative data provided to Let's Read in annual reports for 2011 activities. This report would not have been possible without the dedication of community-based professionals across Australia. We would like to thank all those community-based professionals and organisations who have committed to delivering Let's Read, developing creative ways to engage families in emergent literacy activities and taking the time to collect data and compile these annual reports.

ERC 120917





Background

On the basis of research evidence, we believe the best way to deliver better language and literacy outcomes for Australian children is for:

- **all Australian children to share books, songs and nursery rhymes every day as part of their relationships with the important people in their lives.**

Research on early literacy development has shown that shared reading has a significant and positive impact on vocabulary development (receptive and expressive), listening comprehension and understanding the conventions of print. Evidence presented in the 2004 Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) Let's Read Literature Review suggests that using reading styles that can help children to acquire knowledge of letters and the sounds they make can increase the positive impact of shared reading on early literacy development. Let's Read has been developed based on this evidence and includes the following key components:

- shared reading between child and caregiver
- easy access to free, age-appropriate books
- professional involvement to convey guidance messages and model shared reading practices to parents
- building upon an emergent literacy framework that promotes emergent literacy knowledge, skills and environments, including language abilities, letter sound/name knowledge, phonological awareness and conventions of print
- community involvement to assist sustainability of a community-based early literacy program.

The key components of Let's Read are delivered in community programs through:

- providing messages and resources to support community approaches to early literacy development
- encouraging and supporting partnerships and initiatives for literacy activities and promotion
- providing professional training about the development and importance of early literacy and the activities that support it
- training for professionals to engage with parents/carers regarding early literacy
- supporting the Let's Read universal multi-point intervention, which is provided by a trusted community professional at or around child ages of 4 months, 12 months, 18 months; and 3½ years
- providing messages, information and resources that support provision of literacy-rich home environments
- making high quality children's books available at low cost for use in the home and community
- encouraging the provision of child-focused literacy-rich experiences in the community.





Evaluation Activity 2011

In 2011, the potential to build on evaluation activity at a number of sites across Australia was discussed. As a result, TSF representatives from QLD, SA, NSW and nationally came together to refine the Let's Read outcomes framework and program logic model so it could be used more effectively to support data collection and evaluation.

The result of this is an outcomes framework and program logic for Let's Read that reflects experiences from Let's Read community programs. Although the models were finalised in 2012, community projects provide an annual report on their activity each year. This means that examples from community projects across Australia in 2011 have been compiled according to the outcomes framework.

The activities are presented according to the 'outcome' and 'objective' they best reflect, although many are likely to have an impact on more than one level (children, families, services and communities) and achieve more than one objective.

The actions detailed in this summary report reflect a great community capacity to provide literacy-based activities that are creative and relevant to the community's particular needs, while meeting the broader Let's Read outcomes and objectives. As one report said:

“This small example shows how a well-delivered program can have multiple outcomes.”

Collectively, these short case studies demonstrate how the program responds to local needs, operates at a range of levels and is changing some families' lives.

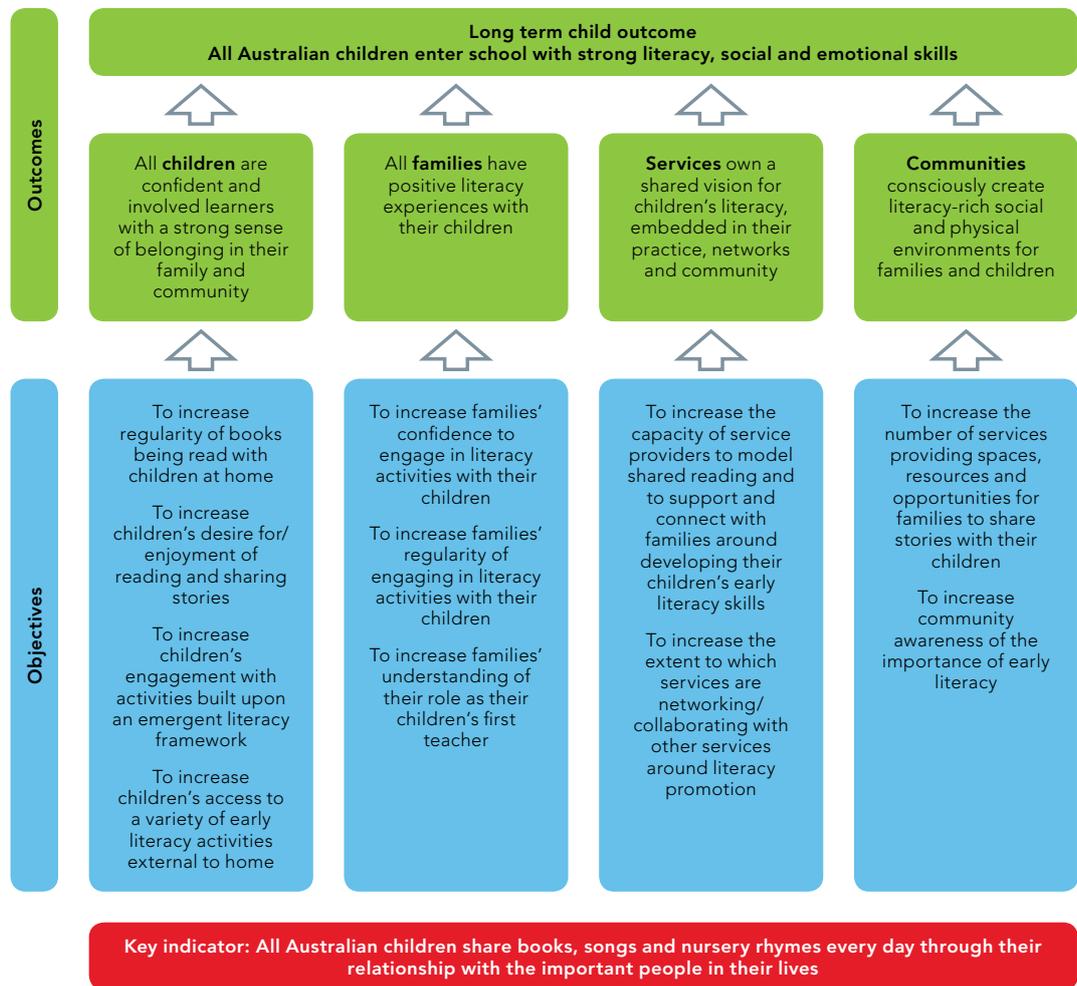




Outcomes Framework

The evaluation summary is reported against the outcomes and objectives outlined in the following framework, drafted in early 2012 by The Smith Family and The Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health.

Figure 1. Let's Read outcomes framework



Child outcome: All children are confident and involved learners with a strong sense of belonging in their family and community



OBJECTIVE 1: To increase the regularity of books being read with children at home

Doveton, Vic

Maternal and Child Health drop-in sessions at the Doveton Family Resource Centre are used to distribute Let's Read packs to families in an informal environment. When one child was first given a Let's Read book she was not sure what to do with it. Through modelling, the child was encouraged to open the book and look at the pages and she explored the book upside-down and starting from the back. The parent turned the book up the right way and the staff member reinforced the child's engagement and interest in the book and encouraged the parent to do the same. Although the parent reported that the child wasn't interested in books and did not usually sit still long enough to read, the child turned the pages, studied them and became engrossed in the book for five or ten minutes. The parent was very happy to watch her daughter being so interested in the book and said she would encourage her to explore more books when they returned home.

Bacchus Marsh, Moorabool Shire, Vic

In 2011, 100 parents were asked to complete a postcard with their thoughts on the program. Below are a few of the responses:

'I am extremely impressed with the Let's Read program which commenced when my daughter was born and is a nice addition to her Maternal Health Nurse visits. We have received postcards, bags, books, info sheets, and the most valuable gift was the DVD. This DVD taught me how to read books to my daughter, how to engage her and how valuable a book is to her learning and our special time together. I am proud to report that at 5, my daughter is reading books to her sister in role play even though she cannot read words yet. Well done.'

'Thank you for introducing our family to the Let's Read program. Each night since receiving our book *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* at the 4 month health check, we have been reading to our son. We have found it has helped develop his speech, helps us with routine and settling and there are some really great tips in the program to help get the most out of books and reading time.'

'The Let's Read program is wonderful and the books are really treasured. Please continue the program. My 3-year-old is able to recite the alphabet and count to 20 and is able to recognise some words. Although several factors have led to this, the Let's Read program definitely has helped. Her father had learning difficulties and remedial reading as a 6-7 year old and her grandmother is still barely literate, so this is a wonderful head-start for her schooling.'

OBJECTIVE 2: To increase children's desire for/enjoyment of reading and sharing stories

Mundubbera Community Development Association, Qld

The book *Hairy Maclary from Donaldson's Dairy* by Lynley Dodd, has been well received by the children in the 18 months-3.5 years age group with the Kindergarten Director reporting that the children who had access to the book all knew the content and were able to discuss the rhymes and talk to each other about the book. The older children were able to 'read the book' themselves.

Port Stephens Council/Family Action Centre, NSW

A family with two children joined the library and purchased more books after having Let's Read delivered to them. The boys in the family enjoy reading together and the worker reports the mother's relationship with her children has improved.



Logan, Qld

The 'Power Program' enables young parents to have their children cared for by early years trained staff during school time. A young mother attending the Power Program at Mabel Park State High School while she completes her secondary education reported that her child loves *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* and insists on having it read to him daily. When he is spending the weekend away with his father, he insists on having the book packed into his weekend bag and his dad is now reading to him regularly as well.

OBJECTIVE 3: To increase children's engagement with activities built upon an emergent literacy framework

Kwinana, WA

The Koorliny Art Centre is presenting Let's Read in conjunction with KEYS to Literacy at the Koorliny Bookworm Club. Participation increased significantly at this weekly preschool-age program following the introduction of the Bookworm Club in October 2011. The children are enjoying the storytelling sessions and participating through interactive prompts. The program encourages children to interact with the story through the use of craft, puppets and actions.

Onkaparinga, SA

A father from the O'Sullivan Beach Children's Centre and Learning Together program was really impressed with the quality of the resources received and wanted to share this with more men in his community. The father has since attended a Let's Read training session, and is now incorporating the program into his new Dads and Kids Saturday morning playgroup sessions. This parent is also seeking out funding to provide packs for all the fathers he is now working with.

Brimbank City Council, Vic

After 10 weeks of Let's Read and literacy activities, a Harmony Playgroup participant with limited English commented:

'My one-year-old son now goes and gets his Let's Read book and wants to share reading it as soon as he gets up. My son goes and gets his Let's Read book and reads it talking in Chinese. On TV they have a story time and now my daughter goes and gets her Let's Read book when she sees this on TV. My daughter has been watching a lot of TV but now asks for story time. When I brought the Let's Read book home from playgroup my seven-year-old said we now have some real books which are like books at school. She now reads the book to her younger brother who attends the playgroup. This has helped me encourage reading in our family.'

OBJECTIVE 4: To increase children's access to a variety of early literacy activities external to the home

Collie, WA

In partnership with The Smith Family and Collie Library, the Collie 'Read with Me' group held a community book reading session for children and parents from Koolbardi Kindergarten at the Collie Aboriginal Baarnimarr Park in November. The event was well received with 12 students and 11 parents attending. A Koolbardi teacher read *The Caterpillar and Butterfly* using larvae and caterpillar puppets, which captivated the children. After the book reading, families had a tour of the park followed by morning tea at the library.



City of Yarra, Vic

The Victoria Street Children's Literacy Walk was funded through Boeing, as a partnership with The Smith Family. A total of 60 prep children and 20 parents listened to well-known Victorian children's book author Jeanette Rowe reading from several of her books. The children participated in a series of literacy activities with Jeanette which culminated in the arrival of Jeanette's Smarty Cat character. Led by Constable Glint, the children and their parents then walked in small groups of four along Victoria St, a very busy shopping precinct. The children entered designated shops where shop keepers had prepared a space for them to sit, and listened to a story told by a volunteer story teller. After two stops, they walked to a local café and had lunch together. Back at school, each family was provided with a 'Launchpad to Learning' book bag with Let's Read information, and information on other community agencies. School principals and classroom teachers reported that the activities stimulated the children's imagination and interests. Many children took a greater interest in books and drew pictures about the walk as well as writing letters of thanks.

Family outcome: All families have positive literacy experiences with their children

OBJECTIVE 5: To increase families' confidence to engage in literacy activities with their children

Mirabooka, WA

The question of whether parents should read to their children in the home language was raised during a Let's Read session. Parents had received the message, especially from teachers, that they should speak to their children only in English. It was explained to them that research has actually demonstrated that children transfer knowledge and skills across languages. At the end of the session an African father of five approached the facilitator with tears in his eyes as he told of how not speaking with his children in his home language had made him feel he was discarding loyalty to his home and culture and grinned as he announced that he would tell his children his favourite story about African animals that night.

City of Yarra, Vic

Following Let's Read activities, parents told us they felt more able to tell stories to their children. One mother felt that she could now tell her children stories in her own language, as before the event she thought that this would confuse them. One father said he had not realised that he could read to his baby but that he was now looking forward to doing this. Another parent told us that she would find a special place for the children's books. Another parent said that she was going to spend half an hour before tea with all of her children sharing in a reading activity. Two parents wanted to know how they could become library members.

Uniting Care Burnside, Wyong, NSW

A parent from a non-English speaking background embraced the opportunity to increase her ability to read English when introduced to Let's Read. Along with reading to her children, she also attends English classes and helps out with listening to children read at her child's local school.

Hackham, SA

A family with a two-year-old boy attend the Hackham Learning Club each week for the older children to complete their homework. We showed the mum how to read a story just by making up something to go along with the pictures. She now tells people she is his tutor and tries to tell him a story each week.

Beachside Family Centre and Umina Public School, NSW

A young mother, who had been quite negative when she was given the Let's Read bag because of her own poor experiences with reading, requested more books the next week because both the baby and the baby's father had really enjoyed the Let's Read books.



OBJECTIVE 6: To increase families' regularity of engaging in literacy activities with their children

Port Stephens Council, NSW

Dad's twilight story-times were held in 2011, with 15 dads, 51 children and 25 mums attending. It continues to be a challenge to get dads to come alone to these story-time sessions as many appear to be more comfortable if their wife or partner attends with them. As a result, there will be a shift in focus to 'family story-time sessions' in 2012. A child who had previously attended a dads' story-time said that she and her father are spending more time together and replicating the craft activities since attending the dads' night.

Ngala/Mirrabooka, WA

On a visit to the Girrawheen Food Bank, the Let's Read worker was approached by a Somali mother who remembered her from a previous visit delivering Let's Read packages. She revealed that the books she had received on this visit were the first books her children and the entire family had ever owned. The same was true for her neighbour who had also received the Let's Read packs for her two children. Since then both women save \$3 out of their fortnightly Centrelink payments and use the money to buy children's books once every month, which they swap and share. In this way they have started their own library.

Nowra Family Support, NSW

A family of three, who had books at home but weren't reading them, started reading books in the mornings rather than watching television after receiving Let's Read packs. Six months on the three children are borrowing books from the library and enthusiastically seeking out and reading the same books many times. Another family with two children have now joined the library and purchased more books. The boys enjoy reading together and their relationship with their mother has improved.

Uniting Care Burnside, Wyong, NSW

Several families who attend an Aboriginal Supported Playgroup began visiting the local library regularly after having Let's Read delivered to them. A family from a CALD background began visiting the local library, attending story-time there and began attending two local playgroups.

Townsville, Qld

A Let's Read volunteer reader runs sessions at Rasmussen State School in Townsville. With the assistance of the Teacher Librarian, the sessions involve reading, singing songs and other early literacy activities. The Let's Read sessions are held at 8.30am every second Wednesday during school terms, allowing parents to drop off older school-aged children before heading to the library for a session with Robyn. The following are some comments from participants:

'I love Let's Read. It's not just for the kids but for us adults too. My kids have learnt a lot as I have. This has been a wonderful learning and fun experience. I am glad to be a part of it. Thanks Robyn for making reading fun.'

'Since we've been coming to Let's Read, Liam really enjoys reading books. He sits and listens. He looks forward to singing songs and listening to stories. He memorises stories and tries to retell them. We have such a wonderful time with Robyn.'

'Let's Read is an amazing program. My daughter has come so far since we have been coming. Robyn is fantastic and reads so well. The kids love it.'

'Natalie really enjoys coming. We read a lot at home and she often refers back to what she has done with Robyn. Robyn is very good at getting all the children involved regardless of their age.'
'The sessions give us easy take-home ideas and activities. We all love Let's Read.'



OBJECTIVE 7: To increase families' understanding of their role as their children's first teacher

Uniting Care Burnside, Wyong, NSW

After attending 'Walking the Talk', one father, who was keen to learn how to interact and read with his children, came away with new knowledge, greater understanding of his children's development and a bag full of activities and books to share with his children. He now makes it a priority to set aside 'special time' with his children.

South Gippsland, Vic

Let's Read is delivered in rural and remote locations in South Gippsland/Bass Coast and Wellington. It continues to increase the capacity of parents to stimulate early literacy skills in their children and importantly it encourages parents to connect with their children through books. A young mum with a three-month-old baby had never read to her child, not understanding its importance. The mum agreed to participate in the program and started reading to her child on a regular basis. Now the baby is 10 months old, he self-selects the books to read and happily looks at books by himself. Mum has developed a drive and passion in reading to her son, rejoices in the connection it has given them and uses books to calm her son down when he is upset. This small example shows how a well-delivered program can have multiple outcomes.

Cardinia Shire, Vic

One of the very first Let's Read recipients was a single mum with three children. She knew she should read to her children, but she only did so occasionally. She received the 18mth and 3½ yr old information pack, including books. She now has a better understanding of why reading is so important and found the tips really helpful.

Service outcome: Services own a shared vision for children's literacy, embedded in their practice, networks and community

OBJECTIVE 8: To increase the capacity of service providers to model shared reading and to support and connect with families around developing their children's early literacy skills

Ngala/Mirrabooka, WA

Over 2011, this Let's Read Community Program facilitated 33 partnered activities with local government libraries, childcare centres, church groups, playgroups, government and non-government services, primary schools and Communities for Children partners. Feedback received from 12 partners indicated 100% were satisfied with the program. One Let's Read Facilitator workshop was held with 11 community members and professionals trained as champions. Five of the attendees provided feedback and 100% expressed satisfaction with the delivery and content of the training.

South Australian Children's Centres, SA

New Children's Centres are coming on board with training and engaging successfully by identifying unique ways to implement Let's Read in their Centres. Furthermore, they are seeking to partner with local community services to increase their reach. The continuity of funding means that Children's Centres do not have to source their own funding and can focus on investing resources in the successful delivery of Let's Read. As a result, we have seen a quick uptake of the program with only one or two months between training, ordering and receiving resources, launching the program and delivering the program and resources.



South Gippsland, Vic

Over many years running Let's Read, we have found we achieve greater outcomes by implementing Let's Read across our programs rather than running specific community activities. Programs that incorporate Let's Read include the integrated family services and Child First programs, early year's programs, playgroups—including My Time, Young Mums and Aboriginal playgroups—Home-based Care and Bushlink. We have many staff trained in facilitating Let's Read, and are able to work individually with clients and families to improve literacy levels and family functioning. As part of our outreach program, Let's Read has enabled staff to engage with remote families and, over time, encouraged families to access other support services. We will continue to offer training to new staff and carers, thereby ensuring the program remains sustainable and relevant.

Eaglehawk/Kangaroo Flat, Vic

St Liborius Primary School, Eaglehawk has Let's Read as an integral part of their playgroup. Each week 20–30 children and their carers attend and a Let's Read display attracts young children. A family-friendly borrowing system encourages families to take books home to share. The playgroup was judged 'Playgroup of the year' by Playgroups Victoria.

South Gippsland and Bass Coast, Vic

We have found particular benefit in using Let's Read resources to work with children and families through the speech pathology department of the Health Service. We have been lending individual books to children with delayed speech and language development. The families have been absolutely delighted with the child's keen interest in the Let's Read books at home.

OBJECTIVE 9: To increase the extent to which services are networking/collaborating with other services around literacy promotion

Port Stephens Council, NSW

During National Literacy and Numeracy Week in September 2011, Port Stephens Council Library Services in partnership with The Smith Family's Communities for Children Program, local Raymond Terrace businesses and community agencies, held an event encouraging parents and carers to read and count with their children. The 'Stories in the Town' Children's Literacy Event saw Raymond Terrace Library and Children's Literacy staff dress as characters from children's books and entertain the audience with stories, songs and rhymes. Each family received a free Let's Read book, and all children received a free literacy and numeracy activity bag. The event was a huge success with 175 children aged 0–5 and 132 parents in attendance. Staff received much feedback over the following weeks congratulating the library team on a wonderful community initiative.

Eaglehawk/Kangaroo Flat, Vic

Building on local partnerships, Let's Read has added another dimension to the HIPPY program. In June 2011, HIPPY Tutors from Eaglehawk/California Gully enthusiastically took part in a Let's Read training program. Following the training, the Communities for Children initiative arranged for delivery of Let's Read packs to children involved with the HIPPY program. Feedback from the tutors was that the packs were enthusiastically received. Significantly, this offered a unique opportunity for cooperation between HIPPY, St Lukes, The Smith Family and Communities for Children.



Wodonga, Vic

A workshop for family day carers and providers of emergency housing for children provided information about how literacy activities could benefit the incoming child. We spoke at length about Let's Read and ways that parents can be encouraged by agencies to use this as a positive tool in relationship building with their children.

Onkaparinga, SA

From August to December 2011, the Onkaparinga Libraries hosted morning teas to deliver Let's Read to the local community. Six libraries take turns hosting a morning tea. The host library performs a letterbox drop to the local area in the lead up to the event, and morning teas usually take place immediately after a regular library session such as Toddler Time or Story Time. The Smith Family Learning for Life workers and volunteers deliver Let's Read to the families alongside trained library staff.

Community outcome: Communities consciously create literacy-rich, social and physical environments for families and children

OBJECTIVE 10: To increase the number of services providing spaces, resources and opportunities for families to share stories with their children

Karratha, WA

Let's Read has been embraced by the Pilbara community. As a result of promotion regarding the importance of early literacy, the Best Start Aboriginal Play Group has partnered with the Learning for Life team and set up a book corner. The cool and comfortable corner provides books and information and a new opportunity for children and parents to go to the corner and select a book to read.

Uniting Care Burnside, Wyong, NSW

The introduction of a literacy and language session at the Aboriginal Supported Playgroup provided an opportunity for the local families to develop further interest in language and sounds. Traditional Aboriginal stories and the opportunity to watch local artists sing and play musical instruments were used.

Port Stephens, NSW

In Port Stephens Let's Read includes 'Stories in the Street'; weekly visits to homes within the Raymond Terrace and Medowie community to read to children aged 0–5. In 2011, 41 families and 68 children participated.

Collie, WA

Local Noongar woman Kristina Ugle read her book that she wrote in Noongar language *Naatj Noonook Djinanj* (What did you see?). The Collie Library also spoke to parents about the Better Beginnings program which reiterates the messages from Let's Read.

Coolangatta, Qld

Let's Read is achieving positive results in the Coolangatta area, and was invited by St Joseph's Catholic Church and Community Care to attend the street library that is held each Tuesday in a local park. Donated books and clothes are given away, lunch is delivered by Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Church and local homeless people meet and share their stories. Being invited to present Let's Read to the people who attend is a wonderful opportunity to talk about the importance of reading to young children with those who are most in need. One young mum who was presented with the Let's Read pack, said that she reads to her child every day and she was



excited to receive *Spot Goes on Holidays* and the Let's Read information. She was also happy to hear that she could borrow books for herself and her child from the street library, without the need for a library card. The hope is that more families will learn about our program and the street library as the word gets out. Being part of this was truly rewarding.

Coomera, Qld

As part of Coomera Let's Read, parents, carers and children can visit the weekly mobile library and join in story reading, singing and craft activities. The mobile library sets up at the site where a library/community hub is currently under construction. Let's Read pitches a reading tent outside the library and hopes to connect families to the library service, so they can make the transition to the new facility once it is open. Many parents walk past the site pushing strollers, and it is hoped to engage with these families. It is also hoped that the many retirees who borrow from the library may become volunteers with the Let's Read community reading program. After two visits to the site, two retirees have already volunteered to be involved in the story sessions, so this is proving to be an effective engagement tool.

OBJECTIVE 11: To increase community awareness of the importance of early literacy

Claymore, NSW

Let's Read has been an essential agenda item in Claymore Literacy planning, for which The Smith Family, the Campbelltown City Council, Claymore Literacy group and Housing New South Wales were key stakeholders. Work has been in progress since 2008. Let's Read brought about a cohesive and holistic approach to early/emergent literacy; including capacity building. Let's Read has been identified as an instrumental central need in the Claymore community, supported by all major stakeholders including schools. Let's Read is part of Claymore Literacy Action Plan and the plan will be owned by the Claymore community who will oversee its implementation for the next three years.

Bribie Island State School, Qld

At the playtime group where we distributed Let's Read books in National Numeracy and Literacy Week the parents shared favourite titles and some started a book swap club. One parent offered discounts at his second hand bookshop. The school Literacy Coach met with the local library, museum and Arts Centre who worked with children to make a bridge to reflect Book Week and Bridge to the Future. The structure was covered in 'bricks' depicting favourite book titles. This was moved to the library and then to the school. Following the event, the library reported a surge in membership.

Northern Peninsula area, Qld

The Northern Peninsula Area consists of five communities at the top of Cape York. Let's Read project officers support the communities to deliver Let's Read packs, especially the Indigenous Knowledge Centre coordinators. During their most recent visit they adapted the book *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* to incorporate different animals that the children are familiar with. Once the children got the rhythm and rhyme of the book, they not only substituted animals in *Brown Bear, Brown Bear*, but were also able to use the animal's names in their language. One of the highlights of the visit to New Mapoon was to meet Arone Meeks, author of the children's book *Enora and Black Crane* (Magabala Books) as well as a National Year of Reading Ambassador. Arone, an award-winning artist, was conducting workshops on painting styles and techniques with local artists for the exhibition, 'Ngalpa Mura Tjar'a Tjera Apudthama' (Our Journey Together) to be held in Cairns.

