



DRAFT NATIONAL MEDIA RELEASE [23 October 2007 - for immediate release]

National literacy program celebrates milestone during Children's Week

Let's Read, a national early literacy program developed by the Centre for Community Child Health and the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute in partnership with The Smith Family, will use National Children's Week 2007 (22 to 28 October) to celebrate reaching more than 65,000 children in 40 communities across Australia since launching two years ago.

Celebrations will centre in Corio, Victoria, the first community to introduce Let's Read with funding from the program's inaugural corporate supporter, Shell. Popular personality and high profile mum, Nicky Buckley will be joined by AFL great Billy Brownless and more than 70 local children and their families to mark the occasion with literacy games and activities at the Corio library.

Shell Chairman, Russell Caplan, will also attend the event to announce that Shell has committed a further \$750,000 to Let's Read over the next three years to ensure the program continues to expand to reach more children, particularly those in remote communities. This funding will also contribute to a significant research program.

"Let's Read is a unique opportunity for Shell to invest in the future of Australian children," Mr Caplan said. "Shell has been involved since the first phase of implementation of Let's Read and has supported it from an idea to a highly successful program that has been embraced by communities across the country."

Let's Read gives families the information and tools they need to introduce their pre-school aged children to books from as young as four months. It aims to improve the nation's literacy levels.

Let's Read includes tips on how to read with babies, toddlers and preschoolers, a list of suggested books for different age groups, a DVD demonstrating ways to read aloud and have fun with books and a free children's book from the recommended reading list.

With Australian Bureau of Statistics figures indicating that almost half of all Australians aged between 15 and 74 years (6.2 million people) have either 'very poor' or 'poor' basic literacy skills, The Smith Family and the Centre for Community Child Health believe improving literacy levels should be a national priority.

According to Professor Frank Oberklaid, director of the Centre for Community Child Health, starting early is the key to developing literacy skills.

"Research tells us that children who have not developed emergent literacy skills, such as the ability to identify and manipulate sounds, by school age are unlikely to catch up with their peers and stay caught up," said Professor Oberklaid. "Reading with young children is the single most important activity parents can do to develop their child's future literacy skills."

The Smith Family's chief executive officer, Elaine Henry, explains that the Let's Read resources have been designed to address the fact that many parents are not reading with their young children because their own literacy skills are poor.

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“By giving parents easy to follow tips and modelling how to read with their child, Let’s Read not only helps to develop the building blocks of literacy for the child, we’re also opening up the world of reading to parents whose contact with books has been relatively limited,” said Ms Henry. “All parents want the best for their children. When you explain to parents that sharing books is important for their child’s development, it is all the incentive they need to get involved and improve their own literacy skills.”

To access information on the Let’s Read program and resources, visit www.letsread.com.au.

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Let’s Read is an early childhood literacy initiative of the Centre for Community Child Health (a key research centre of the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute) in partnership with The Smith Family. Let’s Read aims to improve and measure literacy outcomes in Australia by encouraging parents to read to pre-school-aged children (0-5 years). Let’s Read is designed to be delivered to families by community-based professionals using research-based, emergent literacy techniques and resources.

Research has shown that exposing children to books and reading in their pre-school years assists in the development of emergent literacy skills (the ability to identify and manipulate sounds), the building blocks that are needed to help children learn to read later in life. Let’s Read seeks to address research that has found that children who have not developed emergent literacy skills by school age are unlikely to catch up with their peers.

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For further media information please contact Kathryn Elliott:

Tel: 03 9445 0203

Mob: 0418 577 583

Email: kathryn@12parasols.com.au

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