



19 August 2008

Babies and toddlers in Gosnells area targeted for early literacy program

A program aimed at boosting early childhood literacy will be launched this Tuesday 19 August by the Gosnells Early Years Action Group (GEYAG), encouraging parents to read aloud to children as young as four months old.

Let's Read will be coordinated in the Gosnells area by GEYAG as part of their *Bonding with Books* initiative. It will make available a series of resources including tips and information on how to read to babies and toddlers, DVD demonstrations and books. Shell, which supports Let's Read nationally, is also supporting this local implementation of Let's Read.

An initiative of the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute's Centre for Community Child Health, *Let's Read* is also being developed and implemented across other parts of Australia in partnership with The Smith Family.

The program's launch follows research revealing that early exposure to reading and books is recognised as crucial to a child's development, affecting self esteem, school performance and opportunities for success. It is also thought that children who have not developed emergent literacy skills by school age are unlikely to catch up with their peers and reach their full potential.*

With initial funding from the City of Gosnells, Let's Read began delivery through playgroups in Maddington and East Kenwick Primary Schools. Community-based services including Roberta Jull Family Day Care Scheme and Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service will expand the scheme through the provision of *Let's Read* resources to local families, ultimately aiming to boost literacy levels among Australian children.

Shell has agreed to support the program to ensure up to 500 local families will receive books and resources at the crucial milestones in their child's development.

Shell Development's Chief Operating Officer Chris Gunner, says, "Shell is committed to investing in our local community and one of the best ways we can do this is by supporting the development of local children."

"Shell has worked closely with The Centre for Community Child Health and The Smith Family throughout the development of *Let's Read*. We believe it has the potential to make an enormous difference to literacy levels across Australia and are pleased that it is now available to parents in the Gosnells area," Mr Gunner added.

Child health nurse and GEYAG member, Beverley Costello, said, "*Let's Read* is a unique opportunity for Gosnells to make a real investment in the future of our children. 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. Without support from organisations such as Shell, this would not be possible," Ms Costello added.



Event Details:

WHAT: Launch of *Bonding with Books Let's Read* Initiative
WHERE: Lyal Richardson Hall, The Agonis, 2232 Albany Hwy Gosnells
WHEN: Tuesday 19 August, 10am – 11.30am

-ends-

*Notes to editor:

ABS figures show that literacy is a national issue with almost half of Australians aged between 15 and 74 years (7 million) identified as either 'very poor' or 'poor' basic literacy skills, experiencing considerable difficulties in using and locating many of the printed materials encountered during daily life.

According to international research, children who have not developed emergent literacy skills (like the ability to identify and manipulate sounds) by school age are unlikely to catch up with their peers and face the prospect of limited educational achievement and poor opportunities later in life

The *Bonding with Books* is an Initiative of the Gosnells Early Years Action Group through which they plan to establish a range of activities to support early literacy. This initiative is in response to the results of the Australian Early Developmental Index for Gosnells in 2004 which showed that 26.3% of children are developmentally vulnerable on one or more developmental domains; the highest proportion of children developmentally vulnerable are in Maddington (46.9%). Let's Read is the first activity under this initiative. Source: <http://www.rch.org.au/australianedi>

About *Let's Read*

Let's Read is an initiative of the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute's Centre for Community Child Health. It is being developed and implemented across Australia in partnership with The Smith Family. *Let's Read* aims to improve literacy outcomes in Australia by encouraging parents to read to pre-school aged children. *Let's Read* is designed to be a sustainable, community-based program that is delivered by early childhood professionals using research-based literacy techniques and resources. More details about *Let's Read* can be found on www.letsread.com.au.

Let's Read gratefully acknowledges the support of Shell Companies in Australia, the inaugural corporate supporter.

About The Smith Family

The Smith Family is a national, independent non-profit organisation supporting disadvantaged children to reach their potential through education and learning opportunities. Visit www.thesmithfamily.com.au

About the Centre for Community Child Health

The Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) has been at the forefront of Australian research into early childhood development and behaviour for over two decades. A particular focus of CCCH's work is supporting and strengthening community-based professionals and organisations in their work with families to bring about the best outcomes for children. Visit: www.rch.org.au/CCCH

For further media information please contact

Deanna Brown, The Smith Family.
Ph: 02 9085 7276 or email deanna.brown@thesmithfamily.com.au

Maria-Jose Sanchez, The Centre for Community Child Health
Ph: 03 9345 5137 or email: maria-jose.sanchez@mcri.edu.au