



everyone's family

Wednesday, March 6, 2008

Official community celebration to kick off the implementation of QLD Government's Reading to Children *Let's Read* Project

On March 19, the Minister for Communities and Youth, The Hon Lindy Nelson-Carr, the Head of Community Programs from The Smith Family, David Ballhausen, and the *Let's Read* National Program Manager, Sonja Pase, will join guests at the Maroochydhore Neighbourhood Centre to celebrate the commencement of the **Reading to Children *Let's Read* project.**

Children from local community playgroups will attend the celebration and participate in a vast array of fun activities including face painting and balloon sculpting. Popular children's character, Agro, will encourage a read-along to Lynley Dodd's childrens' book, *Hairy Maclary from Donaldson's Dairy*.

Demonstrating its commitment to improving the State's literacy levels, the Queensland Government has provided \$2.1 million in support of this four-year pilot program designed to develop and enhance literacy skills in young children and encourage parents, carers, grandparents and seniors to actively read aloud to children on a daily basis. The initiative is aimed at providing opportunities for volunteers, in particular older people and grandparents, to contribute to the nurturing and well-being of young children and families in their local community and reduce social isolation of older people. The initiative is being rolled out in 11 Queensland regions including Caboolture, Ipswich, Brisbane South and Brisbane North, and aims to provide families with the skills to improve current reading capabilities for young children.

Let's Read, an early childhood literacy program developed by the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH), a key research centre of the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, in partnership with The Smith Family, is part of the Reading to Children literacy initiative. Community based professionals with a close working relationship with families are trained to talk about the importance of reading with young children and provide a range of *Let's Read* resources to support volunteers to do so. The program also aims to facilitate young children's transition to primary school.

Recently released results show that the percentage of Queensland children meeting the national benchmarks for reading in Years 5 and 7 are below the national averages. For example, 81.2% met the reading benchmark in Year 5 (significantly below the national average of 88.4%) and 85.6% met the reading benchmarks in Year 7 (also below the national average of 89.2%)*.

David Ballhausen, Head of Community Programs from The Smith Family commented, "The Smith Family strongly believes the cycle of disadvantage can be broken through education. By encouraging children to read from an early age, we are giving young Australians the best possible start. We applaud the Queensland Government for recognising the importance of early childhood literacy."

Professor Frank Oberklaid from CCCH says, "Research has demonstrated that early childhood shared reading practices have a significant impact on improving a child's vocabulary development, speech and reading ability. Reading aloud regularly to young children sets the foundation for future learning."

Event details:

Official launch of Reading to Children *Let's Read* Project!
Wednesday 19 March from 10.00am to 11.30am
The Maroochydhore Neighbourhood Centre, 5th Avenue, Cotton Tree

To register your attendance at the launch please RSVP to Elizabeth Sayers on 07 3308 9326 or email elizabeth.sayers@thesmithfamily.com.au by Friday March 14.

* Source: MCEETYA, *National Report on Schooling in Australia 2006*.

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To arrange an interview with the National Program Manager *Let's Read*, Sonja Pase, or for general media enquiries please contact:

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