



# Let's Read!

## Background.

Developed by the Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) at the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute (MCRI), Let's Read is an initiative that promotes reading with young children from birth to five years. It provides families with assistance and resources that support a community understanding of early language and emergent literacy development. In July 2012 MCRI was funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to implement a 12 month Let's Read National Early Years Literacy Campaign. Building on existing evidence-based programs, the Let's Read campaign engages families, professionals and communities to promote high quality early literacy environments for children aged 0-5 years.

As part of this campaign, MCRI contracted Colmar Brunton Social Research (CBSR) to explore parents' and carers' current views and understanding of the importance of reading (and other emergent literacy development activities) in the early years (0-5 years) and how to encourage all parents (and caregivers) in Australia to read with their young children (from birth) for at least 10 minutes every day. CBSR were also engaged to focus test the draft creative concepts and taglines developed by a Creative Agency independently sourced by MCRI after Phase 1 of the market research.

## Methodology.

The fieldwork stage of the market research involved 2 phases:

Phase 1: In-depth interviews to understand dynamics of behaviour change. Drawing on the findings from Phase 1, MCRI engaged an independently sourced Creative Agency to develop a series draft creative concepts and taglines for testing in Phase 2.

Phase 2: Focus group testing of the draft creative concepts and taglines.

The methodology used for the project is summarised in Figure 1.

Stage 1: Scoping	A scoping co-design meeting
Stage 2: Development of Discussion Guide	Colmar Brunton and the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute (MCRI) developed a qualitative discussion guide addressing the objectives of the research.
Stage 3: Qualitative Exploration - Depth Interviews	Pilot stage in Brisbane on 28 August. Followed by Phase 1 depth interviews in regional and metro locations in Queensland (Brisbane, Gold Cost, Cairns, Mossman Gorge and Canungra) and Victoria (Melbourne and Bairnsdale) between 4-15 September n=35 including 18 General public, 9 CALD and 8 Indigenous.
Stage 4: Analysis and Reporting	Strategic workshop.
Stage 5: Focus group testing of concepts and taglines developed from Phase 1	9 focus groups in metro and regional locations in Victoria (7) and Queensland (2). n= 68 including 33 General public, 18 CALD and 17 Indigenous. The focus groups took approximately 1.5 hours to complete.
Stage 6: Final Reporting	Presentataion and draft and final reports.

## Key findings.

### Benefits

This research suggested the key benefits to communicate to encourage parents to read more with their young children are:

- Love and learning – promote that reading will provide more opportunities for 'special time' bonding and building a closer relationship with children, and improve future literacy skills and social and emotional development.
- Feeling proud and being respected for being a good parent – promote or show parents feeling proud of themselves and being respected by other parents.

### Costs and barriers

This research suggested there is also a need to reduce the perceived costs and barriers to reading with children from birth. Key costs and barriers included issues such as being time-poor, lack of awareness of the importance of reading from birth, and low literacy/confidence.

## Making it easier

The research suggested these perceived costs and barriers can be reduced by promoting strategies that will make reading with children from birth seem achievable, even for very time-poor parents or those who lack confidence or don't like reading books. Identified strategies included providing advice on age appropriate reading resources, positively promoting the benefits of reading with children from birth and giving parents options to make it easier for them to encourage their children to develop a love of learning.

## Influential others

The research suggested that the key influential others that could encourage parents to read with their children every day from birth include: maternal nurses, child care workers, doctors, mid wives and teachers, other family members and experienced parents talking to other parents about the importance of reading with children from birth.

## Exchange statement

An exchange statement is based on the idea that all marketing involves an exchange to encourage voluntary behaviour change. Based on the findings from Phase 1, an exchange statement was formulated to help inform the campaign's creative concept and tagline development. The formulated exchange statement was as follows:

"If I read with my children from birth every day for at least 10 minutes (action) instead of watching TV, going on the internet, doing housework or getting on with 'my evening' (competitive behaviour), I will feel caring, loving, responsible, informed, and relaxed because I am bonding with my children and helping them to learn. I will also feel like I am being a good parent because I am doing something to ensure they won't get left behind and that they will get the best possible start in life. I will also feel closer to my children and my children will love me more (benefit).

I know this will happen because other caring, loving, responsible, informed and relaxed parents read with their children for 10 minutes every day and their children were not left behind when they started school and they felt closer to their children. Their children loved them more, and they had a stronger closer family as a result." (support).

## Attitudes towards promoting early literacy

During the interviews it became clear that although some parents were reading with their children most days and enjoyed the activity, there were also parents who were cynical of the supposed benefits of reading from such an early age, and parents that wanted to read more with their children but faced barriers preventing them from doing so. It seemed that some parents also did not see reading with their children as relevant, desirable or appropriate to their circumstances.

Based on the above clusters of attitudes, parent responses were characteristically themed together to describe the following 4 segments of parent attitudes to reading with their children:

- 'Motivated and confident' – parents who were already reading with their young children and just needed rewards and reminders to encourage them to continue reading with their children.
- 'Cynics' – parents who could read with their children if they wanted to, but felt that reading was not a priority for them. These parents needed to be persuaded of the developmental benefits to young children of reading with them to encourage them to adopt this behaviour. This needs to be done very carefully as some of this segment is cynical about the use of statistics.
- 'Disengaged' – parents who lack awareness of the benefits and felt that reading with their children was irrelevant to their circumstances. These parents needed education, role models and then help with strategies to make it easier for them to read with their young children.
- 'Battlers' – parents who to some extent wanted to read more with their children but faced barriers such as lack of time or low literacy, that made this activity difficult. These parents also needed simple, achievable and practical strategies to make it easier for them to read with their young children.

The nature of this segmentation is summarised in the Figure 2.

## Recommendations.

The following recommendations flowed from the research:

- Promote through future communications the immediate personal benfits to parents around love and learning to encourage this target audience to read with their children every day from birth
- Focus efforts on 'Battlers' and those in the Contemplation stage of behaviour change by making reading with young children easier ('How to') i.e. give parents options, promoting free or low cost accessible audio visual resources and by promoting the literacy benefits of alternatives like singing, nursery rhymes and making up stories.
- Develop materials for parents and resource kits for service providers at key touch points in young children's lives e.g. first time mothers in hospital, maternal nurses, at the 4 month checkup, health centres, preschools, childcare centres, 'Mums and Bubs' groups, parents groups and parent Facebook pages and develop strategies to engage other family members and significant others.

