



Let's Read to improve Australian children's literacy skills, one story at a time

Australian children learning to embrace reading and writing anywhere, anytime

Almost half (46%) of Australians over the age of 15 lack the literacy skills they need to meet the demands of everyday life and work.¹

This staggering statistic prompted the Federal Government to contribute \$1 million to the **Let's Read National Early Literacy Campaign** in July 2012 to enable early childhood professionals, families and carers to access reading tips and tools to promote quality early literacy environments for children from birth to five years.

The Murdoch Childrens Research Institute (MCRI) is implementing the **Let's Read National Early Literacy Campaign** as a call to action for families and carers to share rhymes, songs, and stories every day with their children from birth. **Let's Read** provides families and carers with reading tips, tools and resources that support children to gain the foundational skills for language, literacy and learning success in the years before school.

Let's Read was developed by The Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health. The Murdoch Childrens Research Institute and The Smith Family partnered to implement **Let's Read** with communities across Australia.

The partnership has seen the Let's Read program rolled out in 104 communities across seven Australian states and territories, engaging over 200,000 Australian children and their families. In 2013 alone, it is expected that 28,000 children in 66 communities will participate in the **Let's Read** community program.

Australian Year 4 children are ranked 27th out of 45 countries in reading², making Australia one of the lowest ranked English-speaking countries in the world. Taking a multi-tiered approach, the **Let's Read Campaign** aims to educate families, carers and early childhood professionals about early literacy development **and empower them to read with children from birth**.

The years before school are often regarded as laying the foundations for literacy success later in life. It is these foundations (emergent literacy) that support children to transition from being pre-literate to being able to read and write.

Research shows that children who are vulnerable and fall behind in the first few years of schooling find it very difficult to catch up to their peers, even with appropriate intervention.³ The building blocks for literacy start very early in life and a child's early literacy skills are a predictor of later literacy and academic achievement.⁴ Literacy levels will affect children's opportunities in life for education, employment, income and wellbeing later in life.⁵

In preparing for a sustainable approach to the promotion of early literacy across Australia, the **Let's Read Campaign** has established a joint venture with the *Love2Read* initiative from the 2012 National Year of Reading, and the *ReadLearnSucceed* program from United Way Australia. This joint venture seeks to work towards a national and common approach to early literacy promotion and to increase the reach and scope of families engaged and empowered in the campaign. Supported by the Federal Government's Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, the **Let's Read National Early Literacy Campaign** is an initiative of the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute and The Smith Family.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006

² Australia was ranked 27th in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study of year 4 students in 2012

³ Smart, Prior & Oberklaid, 2001

⁴ Neuman & Dickinson 2002, 2010

⁵ Goldfeld et al. 2011; Goldfeld et al. 2012

According to Prof. Frank Oberklaid, Director of The Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health:

"The ability to read is a crucial skill every Australian needs in order to be successful in life – we need to make reading a high priority in Australian children's lives from the earliest age possible. Reading and writing is a necessity for all Australian children and we must make it our challenge to raise the bar."

Let's Read is designed to be accessible to support all members of the community to read with their children from birth. Reading tips and information sheets in nine languages, resources for Indigenous families and age-appropriate book suggestions for all age groups between birth and five years are all available for free download from www.letsread.com.au

The public launch of the **Let's Read** campaign will take place in April 2013 with the Honourable Minister Peter Garrett and Let's Read ambassadors, Jay Laga'aia and Liz Ellis.

Let's Read has been embraced by many families, carers and early childhood professionals across Australia, many of whom are willing to talk about their experiences with the program.

For further information about Let's Read visit www.letsread.com.au

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To speak with Prof. Frank Oberklaid or members of the community using the Let's Read resources or any media enquiries, please contact:

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The Australian Government is working in partnership with the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute and The Smith Family to deliver Let's Read.

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The logo for The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne features a stylized graphic of a person's head and shoulders in yellow and orange, followed by the text "The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne".

