



Evaluation Summary Bendigo and Wyndham Communities April 2010

Prepared by the Centre for Community Child Health

Acknowledgements

This evaluation report was written by Paula Wood and Erica Gardner at the Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute. Support was provided by Rachel Robinson.

This evaluation report would not have been possible without the commitment of community based professionals who have given their time freely to provide information and support to the evaluators. The Author would particularly like to acknowledge the contribution and support of Maureen Tessier John Jones and the participating Maternal and Child Health Nurses from the City of Greater Bendigo, and Sue Christo, Elizabeth Bernard and the participating Maternal and Child Health Nurses from the City of Wyndham.

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1 Executive Summary

Let's Read is a community based, multi-point early literacy program that aims to encourage families to read with their children from four months old. The *Let's Read* resources consist of a bag with a book, a DVD, a parent information leaflet and a suggested books leaflet for four different age groups; 'from four months', 'from 12 months', 'from 18 months' and 'from 3 ½ year old' packs. The information leaflet and DVD offer suggestions for reading with children in the particular age group. It is usually delivered by community professionals and volunteers who provide services and/or activities to families with young children in the local community.

In 2006, funding was committed by the (then) Minister for Children, The Hon Sherryl Garbutt, to pilot the *Let's Read* program in two communities in Victoria for two years. The commitment was influenced by the recognition that early literacy for families and children in disadvantaged communities offers long lasting benefits for the children and communities. The funding was based on the engagement of 800 families per site per year and the two communities were selected by the Department in consultation with the Centre for Community Child Health, the pilot began in 2008.

The funding letter notes that in addition to the pilot projects, an evaluation will also be conducted to determine the effectiveness of the targeted interventions within disadvantaged communities.

At almost the same time as *Let's Read* was initiated in the two communities, the Young Readers Program was also rolled out. The Young Readers program includes distribution of a Rhyme Time Book and DVD, given to all families with babies of around 4 months. This is supplemented by Rhyme Time sessions (singing songs, enjoying rhymes) at local libraries; parent and caregivers can bring their babies along to these free sessions. Another book is distributed when the child is approximately two years old. Distribution is via the Maternal and Child Health Service. This influenced how the *Let's Read* program was implemented in the two communities. The communities involved were local areas experiencing disadvantaged in the City of Greater Bendigo and the City of Wyndham.

This report outlines the evaluation of this pilot.

Information from the data collected from professionals delivering and parents receiving *Let's Read* in the Wyndham and Bendigo communities to date is presented in three parts:

1. *Let's Read* training;
2. *Let's Read* delivery; and
3. *Let's Read* Participation.

The key findings of the data collected from participants in ***Let's Read* training** indicate that:

- Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Nurses are the main participants in *Let's Read* training delivered in Bendigo and Wyndham. Other professionals that have received training are library staff, playgroup facilitators, volunteers and MCH Coordinators.
- MCH Nurses understand that they can have a role in early and pre-literacy development and are enthusiastic about delivering *Let's Read* in the community and having skills and materials to engage and encourage families and children. In particular, MCH Nurses raise the need to engage particular families such as those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and parents and carers with low literacy levels.

- MCH Nurses who have received *Let's Read* training report that they are already highly skilled in respect of their knowledge of early literacy, the activities that promote its development and their understanding of engaging parents in discussions, they feel that this aspect of the training could be given less focus for groups of MCH Nurses in future.
- Suggestions for improvement to the training include the trainer having more knowledge of MCH Nurse practice and tailoring the training to the needs of the MCH workforce.

The key findings of the experiences of community based professionals in **delivery of *Let's Read*** collected to date suggest that:

- *Let's Read* is being delivered as a targeted program in Bendigo and Wyndham from MCH Centres in low SES¹ areas in each of the communities, as intended.
- While the *Let's Read* program and materials are being delivered on a one-to-one basis as suggested in the key components of the program, it is also being tailored to individual/community needs when required. Changes made include that the program was not delivered to all ages that are suggested, and materials were not all distributed in each age pack as suggested.
- Community professionals report that they also distribute a range of 'other' literacy related information with the *Let's Read* materials. These include items such as information about local libraries and parent support services.
- Community professionals feel that *Let's Read* is suitable for families who speak languages other than English and for families who have low levels of literacy.
- There are some reported barriers to the delivery and availability of *Let's Read* resources, the key barriers reported relate to ongoing funding, time restraints, flow of resources, the ability to deliver to parents who are difficult to engage and the ability to see families on more than one occasion.
- All MCH Nurses that responded reported that they believe *Let's Read* to be an effective way to promote reading with young children from birth to 5 years of age and also reported that *Let's Read* is an effective way to begin ongoing conversations with parents regarding early literacy. Most also report that there have been 'other' positive outcomes for families as a result of the *Let's Read* discussions including: that it encourages parents to think about the impact that providing stimulation for a child (through reading and other activities) from a young age can have on outcomes later in life; and parents reporting their child's ongoing enjoyment of books at later visits.

The key findings of the parent/carer **baseline data** collected indicate that:

- While most families in Victoria for whom data has been collected report that they are keen readers and are involved in activities that are likely to impact positively on early literacy - i.e. they are members of their local library; understand the importance of reading to children at an early age; have many children's books in the home - there is a sizeable proportion of families who report that they are not keen readers and this group are less likely to be members of the library; understand the importance of reading with children or have many children's books in

¹ Socio-Economic Status

their homes. This means that for some families there are multiple barriers to supporting their child/ren's emergent literacy skills.

The key findings of the parent/carer **post-intervention data** collected are that:

- The majority of respondents reported that they were satisfied with the program and materials.
- The majority of respondents reported changes to both their own and others' reading behaviour with their children in response to the *Let's Read* program - approximately 60% report that this behaviour has changed either 'quite a bit' or 'a great deal'.
- Behaviour change in relation to buying or borrowing suggested books was reported by about half of respondents, and take up of suggestions regarding how to read with children were reported by approximately 80% of respondents.
- The reading suggestions most reported to have been tried by respondents were: 'All suggestions'; 'Turning off the TV or radio'; and 'Reading the same story often'.

While there are few matched records (n= 64), the key findings of the **baseline information** and **post-intervention data** collected to date suggest:

- Most respondents reported some existing early literacy behaviours in the home.
- When comparing respondents that were more enthusiastic about reading with those who were not:
 - Respondents who were local library members were more likely than those who were not to report satisfaction with the *Let's Read* program and report having made behavioural changes as a result of the program.
 - Respondents (who may be considered at risk, i.e who were not library members or not keen readers or who had less than ten children's books in their home) were more likely than the keen readers to report that the discussion when receiving *Let's Read* and the parent information sheet were useful.

Importantly the above findings suggest that the resources that are most effective in delivering the *Let's Read* messages to vulnerable families are the discussion with a trusted professional and parent information sheets which are both easy to deliver and low cost.

The key findings of the **Parent Survey 2** (which is a small sample) collected to date suggest:

- Respondents reported some behaviour change in early literacy behaviours across all categories where this hadn't already been occurring before having *Let's Read* delivered. It would be necessary to continue with the evaluation and follow up with more families to make any firm conclusions about behaviour change related to the delivery of the *Let's Read* program.

The evaluation activities for the Bendigo and Wyndham pilot projects have been conducted on a minimal budget. While it is not possible to attribute any long term outcomes for children from this evaluation, the short term impact of the program has been promising. Further investigation and evaluation would be required to ascertain the longer term outcomes for the *Let's Read* projects in the City of Greater Bendigo and Wyndham City.

2 Introduction

2.1 *Let's Read* Program Overview

Evidence presented in the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH), 2004 *Let's Read* Literature Review has shown that shared reading has a significant and positive impact on vocabulary development (receptive and expressive), listening comprehension and understanding the conventions of print. Evidence found in the *Let's Read* Literature Review also suggests that using reading styles that help children to acquire knowledge of letters and the sounds they make increases the positive impact of shared reading on early literacy development. The *Let's Read* program has been developed based on this evidence and includes the following key components:

- Shared reading between child and care giver;
- Easy accessibility to age appropriate free books;
- Professional involvement to convey guidance messages and model shared reading practices to parents;
- Built upon an emergent literacy framework, which promotes emergent literacy knowledge skills and environments, including language abilities, letter sound/name knowledge, phonological awareness and conventions of print; and
- Community involvement to assist in the sustainability of a community-based early literacy program.

These components of the *Let's Read* program are delivered through the following strategies:

- Provide messages and resources to support community approaches to early literacy development;
- Encourage/support partnerships and initiatives for literacy activities and promotion in communities;
- Provide professional training about the development and importance of early literacy and the activities that support it;
- Professional skill training to engage with parents/carers re early literacy;
- Support the *Let's Read* universal multi-point intervention provided by a trusted community professional at or around child age 4 months, 12 months, 18 months; and 3 ½ years;
- Provide messages, information and resources that support provision of literacy rich home environments;
- Make high quality children's books available at low cost for use in the home and community; and
- Encourage the provision of child-focused activities rich in literacy experiences in the community.

2.2 Delivery of *Let's Read* in Bendigo and Wyndham

While the above provides guidelines as to how the *Let's Read* program can be delivered, each *Let's Read* community is able to tailor the program according to the needs of their target population and within the funding that is available. The following provides an overview of how the Bendigo and Wyndham communities have delivered *Let's Read*.

2.2.1 Rural City of Bendigo

Let's Read is delivered to parents and caregivers of 4 month and 12 month old babies who attend four Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Services within the City of Greater Bendigo. The MCH Centres involved were chosen to deliver the program because they are in low SES districts. The delivery group receive *Let's Read* from MCH Nurses at the developmental health check up for the corresponding age. At these points the MCH Nurses share the *Let's Read* messages and distribute the parent information sheet, suggested book list, and an age appropriate book in a *Let's Read* bag. There is no *Let's Read* delivery in Bendigo at the 18 month age point. For the 3 ½ year *Let's Read* pack the families of children attending eight supported playgroups (mostly located in schools) around Bendigo are delivered *Let's Read* by volunteers or the playgroup staff. Parents and caregivers are given the parent information sheet, suggested book list and access to a mini library of *Let's Read* books to borrow, take home and return. The Central Bendigo and Kangaroo Flat libraries are informally involved in the program by incorporating *Let's Read* messages and reading strategies into their story time groups. An annual community literacy festival (held in 2008 and 2009) in Bendigo attended by 450 – 500 children is used to promote *Let's Read* and messages about the importance of literacy more broadly. Along with this, *Let's Read* messages have been included in five community events over the 2008-2009 period. The funding for *Let's Read* in Bendigo has been from the Victorian State Government and this has generated additional community investment. Training in the delivery of *Let's Read* and purchase of resources is coordinated by John Jones (*Let's Read* project coordinator for Bendigo), while delivery of the resources to each of the MCH Nurses is coordinated by Maureen Tessier (Family and Wellbeing Coordinator, City of Greater Bendigo).

2.2.2 Wyndham City Council

In Wyndham *Let's Read* is delivered to families attending four Maternal and Child Health Centres in the City of Wyndham. The MCH Centres involved were chosen to deliver the program because they are in low SES districts. Initially the focus was on parents and caregivers of 4month old and 18 month old babies attending at the four MCH Centres receiving *Let's Read* at the corresponding age developmental health check ups. This later developed into the program being delivered to all age groups (including the 12 month and 3 ½ year age packs). At these four points the MCH Nurses share the *Let's Read* messages and give families the parent information sheet, suggested book list, and an age appropriate book in a *Let's Read* bag. Alongside this, the Wyndham Library Service carries books from the *Let's Read* suggested books lists, the *Let's Read* DVD and Parent Information sheets. The Wyndham Library's Children and Youth Librarians have taken part in the *Let's Read* training, and while they do not directly deliver the program, they incorporate the messages in their facilitation of group activities at the library. All funding for *Let's Read* in Wyndham has been from the Victorian State Government. Training in the delivery of *Let's Read* and purchase of resources is coordinated by Elizabeth Bernard from the Wyndham Library, while delivery of the resources to each of the MCH Nurses is coordinated by Sue Christo (Unit Leader, Wyndham MCH Service).

2.3 Let's Read Evaluation Framework Overview

The following describes the evaluation framework for the *Let's Read* program; this has been used to develop the evaluation activities for the Bendigo and Wyndham projects.

2.3.1 Outcomes, Objectives and Key Indicators

The ultimate or long term outcome sought is **literacy success for all** and the shorter term outcomes sought in order to achieve this are that **children 0-5 develop a love of books and have the ability to name letters and play with sounds.**

The objectives set to achieve these outcomes are divided into four levels: Community; Community based professionals; Parents/Carers and; Children.

1. To increase **community wide** understanding of the importance and elements of early literacy development
2. To increase the knowledge and skills of **community based professionals** to engage with parents/carers and children to promote literacy
3. To increase the motivation, resources, confidence and skills of **parents/carers** to provide a daily literacy experience to children 0-5 years
4. To increase access to books and experiences in literacy activities in the home and in the community for **children 0-5 years**.

The Key Indicator for these objectives is for all children aged 0-5 to be read with every day by important people in their lives. The more specific indicators and the evaluation tools developed to gather information on these indicators are described below:

Performance Indicators	Related Tools for data collection
1.1 Increase understanding amongst services and the community of the importance of daily reading and the activities and approaches that promote it. 1.2 Increase the number of <i>Let's Read</i> community partnerships 1.3 Increase <i>Let's Read</i> community activities and messages that promote and support early literacy	Baseline Parent Information Sheet Community Based Activities Event Log (no data currently collected from this tool) Community Case Study Survey
2.1 Training delivered 2.2 Professionals report increased: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding about the development and importance of early literacy • Skills to engage with parents/carers on early literacy • Engagement with parents on a literacy rich home environment • Knowledge of the services and supports in the community 	Training Evaluation Form Baseline Parent Information Sheet Community Based Professionals Survey <i>Let's Read</i> Focus Group Kit – Experiences of Delivering <i>Let's Read</i> .
3.1 <i>Let's Read</i> multi-point intervention delivered 3.2 Parents/carers report increased: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding, confidence and skill in providing home literacy activities • Number and quality of literacy interactions with children • Use of quality information and resources to support the home environment 	Baseline Parent Information Sheet <i>Let's Read</i> Post-Intervention Survey for Parents <i>Let's Read</i> Parent Survey 2 <i>Let's Read</i> Focus Group Kit – Families' Experiences of <i>Let's Read</i>
4.1 An increase in quality books available to children in the home and community 4.2 An increase in exposure to activities rich in literacy experiences in the community 4.3 An increase in the number of children having regular daily home and care experiences that promote literacy success (reading, singing, rhymes)	<i>Let's Read</i> Post-Intervention Survey for Parents <i>Let's Read</i> Parent Survey 2 <i>Let's Read</i> Focus Group Kit – Families' Experiences of <i>Let's Read</i>

Each of the tools used in this evaluation is described in more detail in the methodology section.

2.4 Evaluation Activities in Bendigo and Wyndham

Let's Read Evaluation activities in Bendigo and Wyndham were undertaken by the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH). All evaluation activities have been undertaken in consultation with those delivering *Let's Read* to ensure that the activities are relevant and acceptable to the community professionals, volunteers and the participants of the *Let's Read* program.

Training evaluation has been undertaken in recognition that the training must meet the needs of community professionals that deliver *Let's Read* and the importance of delivering training that provides the necessary skills to deliver the program to parents.

Evaluation of the program from the parent/carer perspective has been undertaken. The Bendigo and Wyndham sites have gathered data about the acceptability of the program and any change of behaviour in relation to reading aloud with the young child. Parents are invited to complete an initial survey and are followed up with subsequent surveys when they receive the next age specific *Let's Read* pack.

This report outlines learning to date from the training evaluation material, experiences of community professionals delivering the program, and the baseline and post-intervention data collected from the Bendigo and Wyndham projects.

3 Evaluation Tools and Methodology

The Bendigo and Wyndham *Let's Read* Evaluation project currently involves the use of the following tools to gather data:

3.1 *Let's Read* Training

This is a post-training survey that is used to gather information on:

- The understandings regarding the development of early literacy gained/reinforced in the training session;
- The understandings of the *Let's Read* program and how to deliver it gained in the training session;
- The usefulness of specific aspects of the training; and
- Feedback on the quality of the presentation of the training.

When do we use it?

This survey is given to participants immediately after the completion of the training session.

The information gathered from this survey provides **immediate feedback on the perceived value of different aspects of the training and on participants' experiences of the delivery of the training.**

Reflections on the value of *Let's Read* training is also collected from community professionals in the evaluation tools for *Let's Read* delivery. The information gathered aims to determine **how well the *Let's Read* training prepared the participant for delivering the *Let's Read* program.**

3.2 *Let's Read* Delivery: Survey for Community Based Professionals

This tool is used to gather information on:

- Where and how long the participant has been delivering the *Let's Read* program;
- How well the *Let's Read* training prepared the participant for delivering the *Let's Read* program;
- How the *Let's Read* program is being delivered in the participant's community;
- The participant's perception of the usefulness of the individual components of the *Let's Read* program;
- Whether there are any barriers to delivering the *Let's Read* program being experienced by the participant;
- Availability of *Let's Read* program materials; and
- Participant's suggestions for improvements/changes to the *Let's Read* program.

This tool gathers information from the perspective of Community Based Professionals delivering the *Let's Read* program to families.

When do we use it?

This survey is sent to all community based professionals approximately 4-6 months after they have begun delivering the *Let's Read* program.

The information gathered from this survey provides some measurement of **whether the program is being delivered as originally planned and what barriers there may be to this occurring.**

3.3 *Let's Read* Delivery: Focus Group for Community Based Professionals

This tool is used to gather information on:

- Where and how long the participants have been delivering the *Let's Read* program;
- How well the *Let's Read* training prepared the participants for delivering the *Let's Read* program;
- How the *Let's Read* program is being delivered in the participants' community;
- The participants' perceptions of the usefulness of the individual components of the *Let's Read* program;
- Whether there are any barriers to delivering the *Let's Read* program being experienced by the participants;
- Availability of *Let's Read* program materials; and
- Participants suggestions for improvements/changes to the *Let's Read* program

This tool gathers rich contextual data about the experiences of Community Based Professionals delivering the *Let's Read* program to families to enhance the survey data.

When do we use it?

This tool is available for use on the *Let's Read* website and has recently been trialled in the Bendigo and Wyndham communities to gather more nuanced data from community based professionals to inform this report.

The information gathered from this survey provides some in depth, contextual data regarding **whether the program is being delivered as originally planned and what barriers there may be to this occurring.**

3.4 *Let's Read* Participation: Baseline Parent Data

This information sheet plays a part in both the process and impact aspects of the evaluation process and establishes important baseline information about the people participating in the *Let's Read* program such as:

- ID number so participants can be tracked on future evaluation feedback;
- Details about the age and gender of the participants' children;
- Postcode of the family as a proxy measure of the participant group;
- Information about the participants' current reading behaviours such as library membership, ownership of books and interest in reading;
- Information about participants' understanding of when it is appropriate to begin reading to children and;
- Whether or not participants are willing to take part in the next step of the evaluation process.

When do we use it?

This information is gathered by the community based professionals delivering the *Let's Read* program at the point of delivery. The information gathered on participant attributes is an attempt to ensure that **the program is reaching those who it was intended to reach** and it also **enables future comparison or measurement of any variation in participant uptake or response to the program based on these attributes.**

3.5 *Let's Read* Participation: Post-Intervention Parent Data 1

This survey plays a part in both the process and impact aspects of the evaluation process. The survey is provided to participants that indicate a willingness to contribute to the evaluation at the time of the *Let's Read* program delivery and gathers data on:

- The information pack the family received;
- Who delivered the *Let's Read* pack to them and where they were located;
- The usefulness of the individual components of the *Let's Read* program;
- How the *Let's Read* program has changed the family's reading behaviours with their young children;
 - Whether the participant has used the library to borrow books suggested by the program;
 - Whether the participant has followed any of the *Let's Read* Parent Information Sheet suggestions;
- Whether the program was useful, the components of good quality and the messages easy to understand;
- Whether the participant would recommend the program to friends;
- Any suggestions for improvements to the program and;
- Email details if the participant is interested in participating in a follow-up evaluation survey in 6 months time.

When do we use it?

This survey and accompanying explanatory letter is given to participants by community based professionals at the point of delivery of the *Let's Read* program if the participant agrees to take part in the evaluation stage of the program. The individual ID code used on the Baseline Family Information sheet is written on the top of the survey by the Community Based Professional before handing it to the participant, in order for the information from the two tools to be matched in the future without collection of identifiable information.

The information gathered from this survey provides some measurement of **how satisfied participants were with the content of the *Let's Read* program, how appropriate and useful they found the content, if the participants' behaviour was affected by the program, and whether they can suggest any changes for future modifications to the program.**

3.6 *Let's Read* Participation: Post-Intervention Parent Data 2

This survey plays a part in both the process and impact aspects of the evaluation and gathers data on:

- How many and which age information packs the family received;
- Where and by whom the *Let's Read* pack was delivered;
- The usefulness of the individual components of the *Let's Read* program;
- How the *Let's Read* program has changed the family's reading behaviours with their young children;
 - Whether the participant has used the library to borrow books suggested by the program
 - Whether the participant has followed any of the *Let's Read* Parent Information Sheet suggestions;
 - Whether any 'other' positive outcomes have been noted by the parents as a result of changing reading/literacy behaviours; and
- Any suggestions for improvements to the program.

When do we use it?

This survey is sent as a link in an email to parents who provide their email contact details in the Parent Post Intervention Survey approximately six months after receiving the first survey and email details.

The information gathered from this survey provides some measurement of **how satisfied participants were with the content of the *Let's Read* program, how appropriate and useful they found the content, if the participants' behaviour was affected by the program, and whether they can suggest any changes for future modifications to the program.**

3.7 *Let's Read* Participation: Focus Groups for Parents

This tool is used to gather information on:

- How participants experienced the way the *Let's Read* program was presented to them;
- Whether or not participants feel that the *Let's Read* program changed how they and their families' read with their child or children, and if it *has* made a difference, what those changes have been; and
- Whether or not participants believe that the *Let's Read* program is a useful way to encourage parents and carers to read with their young children.

When do we use it?

The focus group is intended to gather rich contextual and qualitative data from participants in the *Let's Read* program to provide more nuanced information on how and where *Let's Read* is being delivered and how parents are experiencing the program.

The information gathered from this survey provides some measurement of **how satisfied participants were with the content of the *Let's Read* program, how appropriate and useful they found the content, if the participants' behaviour was affected by the program, and whether they can suggest any changes for future modifications to the program.**

The take up of the parent focus groups for this evaluation was poor. Resources to locate, recruit and engage parents in focus group were not available and the approach taken was not effective in engaging with parents at the time of the groups.

Findings for the training; community based professionals' experiences; baseline data; and parent post-intervention collection are detailed in the following section.

4 Findings: *Let's Read* Training

This section reports on data collected from: eight MCH Nurses who completed the '*Let's Read* Training Evaluation Form' (Completed and collected at the end of each training session in hard copy); four MCH Nurses as a part of the '*Delivery of Let's Read: Survey for Community Based Professionals*' (Collected via Survey Monkey) and ten MCH Nurses as a part of the *Let's Read* Focus Group for Community Based Professionals '*Experiences of Delivering Let's Read*'.

4.1 *Let's Read* Training Evaluation

Related Objectives: To increase **community wide** understanding of the importance and elements of early literacy development, and to increase the knowledge and skills of **community based professionals** to engage with parents/carers and children to promote literacy.

The *Let's Read* Training evaluation form provides immediate feedback on participants' experience of and feedback on the content and presentation of the training session. There is no data available for the Bendigo and Wyndham communities for training undertaken in 2007 and 2008 however there is data from eight participants who attended training in Wyndham in July 2009.

The data collected from the July 2009 training in Wyndham was as follows:

- Of eight responses, seven participants stated that the *Let's Read* training had been 'Extremely' and one stated that the *Let's Read* training had been 'Very' successful in giving them an understanding of, or reinforcing their knowledge of the importance of early literacy and activities that promote its development.
- Of eight responses, four participants stated that the *Let's Read* training had been 'Extremely', and four stated 'Very' successful in giving them an understanding of, or reinforcing their knowledge of how to engage a parent in a discussion about the *Let's Read* program and resources. Of the eight respondents, four made comments on the above:

'Reinforced what we do in practice. A few new ideas'

'Found programme very informative and helpful'

'Wonderful programme'

'It reinforced my knowledge rather than teaching anything new.'

- All eight respondents stated that they were satisfied with the delivery of the *Let's Read* training and two respondents made comments

'Excellent presentation'

'Jeanette's enthusiasm and knowledge of early literacy and the delivery of the Let's Read programme is fantastic'

- Six respondents gave feedback on what they found most useful about the *Let's Read* training:

'Speed at which the human brain grows'

'Examples and role play – discussion'

'Time to think about and discuss Let's Read'

'Making reading fun for the parent or reader and the child'

'(Board) books can be used as toys for fun. One to one approach'

'Gaining an overall sense of how Let's Read worked – good to hear nurses actual experience'

- None of the eight respondents gave feedback on what they found least useful about the *Let's Read* training
- One respondent gave recommendations for ways to improve the *Let's Read* training:

'Work through the DVD in real time (So the MCH Nurses do this in training time) because they don't have a huge amount of time.'

4.2 *Let's Read* Delivery: Survey for Community Based Professionals

Related Objectives: To increase **community wide** understanding of the importance and elements of early literacy development and to increase the knowledge and skills of **community based professionals** to engage with parents/carers and children to promote literacy

The 'Delivery of *Let's Read*: Survey for Community Based Professionals' (CBP survey) provides feedback from community based professionals from Bendigo and Wyndham, on their experiences of delivering the *Let's Read* program. This survey was sent out via online provider 'Survey Monkey'. The second section deals with questions regarding reflections on the usefulness of the training program after some time of delivering *Let's Read*. (The data from the remainder of the CBP survey are detailed in the next section of the report).

Training

The CBP survey asks for feedback on the degree to which participants feel the *Let's Read* training prepared them to deliver the program.

The feedback is very positive, as can be seen in Tables 1, 2 and 3 below. It has also provided some constructive suggestions for future trainings. This is valuable information as all respondents have had experience in the actual delivery of the program at time of responding, so can give informed feedback regarding the usefulness of different aspects of the training.

Table 1: *Let's Read* Training Learning Outcomes

Now that you have been delivering the <i>Let's Read</i> program for some time, could you please reflect on how well the <i>Let's Read</i> training helped you to:					
Answer Options	Extremely	Very	Somewhat	Not at all	Response Count
Understand the importance of early literacy and activities that promote its development?	2	2	0	0	4
Feel competent in engaging parents in a discussion about the <i>Let's Read</i> program and resources?	2	2	0	0	4
Comments BRILLIANT PROGRAM - it is very important that the program starts at 4 MONTHS Great program that I loved delivering (before I became ill and was not at the centre for some months) I have a few take home messages that really motivate parents to read with their baby or child					3
answered question					4
skipped question					0

Table 2: Let's Read Training Competency Outcomes

In regards to your delivery of the <i>Let's Read</i> program as a whole, how much did completing the <i>Let's Read</i> training effect:					
Answer Options	Extremely	Very	Somewhat	Not at all	Response Count
How well you understood the program?	1	3	0	0	4
How competent you felt to deliver the program?	1	3	0	0	4
Comment					
Very competent and enthusiastic trainer					2
Fantastic training - wonderful info					
answered question					4
skipped question					0

Table 3: Need for Changes to Let's Read Training Format

Would you like to see any changes made to the <i>Let's Read</i> training format?			
Answer Options		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		50%	2
No		50%	2
If Yes, please tell us what sort of changes			2
Comment			
'The 4 mth pack has been removed, the book 'Brown Bear' was very popular, we need it back. Some of my mothers can't be bothered redeeming their [Young Readers] library voucher, these children need this early book. Poorly educated parents are often surprised how interested their babe is in a book, if it is shown to their babe and they are interacting with you.'			
'It would be good if the trainers could have some idea of MCH practice, to tailor the training to our situation'			
answered question			4
skipped question			0

Summary of Comments:

Overall, there was a high level of satisfaction with the training and enthusiasm for the *Let's Read* program. Some participants felt that they had an existing understanding of the development of early literacy and activities that promote its growth prior to training. They would have liked less time spent on this and more time spent in the training sessions on how to run the program and deliver it to the particular cohorts of parents they work with. There was a focus on the 4 month delivery point, its importance and the messages from the training that can be used in context with the parents.

Summary Let's Read Training Evaluation

While the feedback regarding content, delivery and outcome of the *Let's Read* training has been exclusively positive, there have also been suggestions made both in Bendigo and Wyndham and more widely. The *Let's Read* training program is currently being reviewed; a train-the-trainer model and online training package are being developed. The online training will allow participants to do a substantial amount of pre-reading before attending face-to-face training. With this background information covered there is the potential to focus the face-to-face training more on how to run the program and deliver it to particular parent groups.

4.3 Let's Read Delivery: Focus Group for Community Based Professionals

Particular feedback on training was sought from the Focus Group for Community Based Professionals with the Bendigo and Wyndham MCH Nurses.

Presentation and Content of Training

In discussions regarding satisfaction with the presentation and content of the training, there was consensus that the length of the training was suitable and the presenter engaging and interesting, but there were suggestions regarding a need to tailor the content more for the particular needs of the group. One suggestion was that Maternal and Child Health Nurses are well versed in early brain development and that this element could be minimised. Another suggestion was that in earlier training there was too much emphasis on engaging parents:

'about not knowing your target audience when you're delivering information ... that's not an issue for nurses, because you're doing that, that's your job so this was just another tool ... you're using in part of your daily role.'

While there was some agreement among the groups on these points, one participant found the information regarding brain development 'a bit stimulating for me' and was inspired to seek out further knowledge in this area 'I bought a book after it ... 'The Brain that Changes Itself' I think'.

There was general agreement that the MCH Nurses felt it was important that training included 'actual hands on stuff' about how to deliver the program and strategies to use. In particular this should include how to explain to parents with low literacy levels and from a CALD background how they can share a book with their child without necessarily needing to read the words in the book. Similarly MCH Nurses in Bendigo stated that they felt enthusiastic and confident that they could deliver the *Let's Read* program after training, but one remembered she had felt concerned that some of her 'high needs clients' may not be receptive of the program but had subsequently been 'quite surprised' with 'only a couple of mums ... not negative, but not interested about it'.

Some MCH Nurses found the interesting and compelling facts that they had picked up from the training were useful to share with parents for example that children have a much larger vocabulary at school age when they have been read to, and development of the networks of the brain:

'...the research about the development of the brain, it was quite useful to have it presented in a way that you could tell to parents, because it was in here ... a few snippets, how the networks develop in the brain ... how stimulation helps that, yeah I just pretty much picked that up and presented it in my consultations.'

The library staff at Wyndham also took part in the *Let's Read* training, and while they don't deliver the program directly, they use some pieces of information from the training in their facilitation of parent groups at the library.

Other Training Issues

There were some concerns raised about staff turnover leading to some staff being trained and others not.

There was some initial confusion after the very first training and implementation of the program in Wyndham as to whether *Let's Read* was suitable for delivery to families from CALD backgrounds without bilingual/translated resources.

Summary of Focus Group Points

Generally MCH Nurses reported coming away from training feeling enthusiastic and capable to deliver the *Let's Read* program – this was particularly true for the Bendigo MCH Nurses. While training was considered to be of an appropriate length, the content may need to be modified to suit the needs of the MCH group. This would include:

- presenting early literacy and brain development information 'in a nutshell';
- providing some of the facts on a sheet as a reference for MCH Nurses to share with parents;
- acknowledging MCH Nurses' existing skills in engaging parents while offering suggestions for strategies to explain the benefits of the program to parents with low literacy and parents from CALD backgrounds; and
- ensuring availability of ongoing training for new staff.

4.4 Summary: *Let's Read* Training

While the feedback regarding content, delivery and outcomes of the *Let's Read* training has been almost exclusively positive, there have also been some important suggestions made from these respondents and other training evaluation. Partially in response to these suggestions, the *Let's Read* training program is being reviewed with a train-the-trainer and online training course is currently in development. This approach will provide all of the background and basic information for the *Let's Read* program in on-line format. Those that have a need for tailored face to face training in engaging with parents and carers to deliver emergent literacy messages could then seek that out.

5 Findings: *Let's Read* Delivery

This section reports on data collected from four MCH Nurses in an online survey and from ten MCH Nurses, one librarian and one MCH co-ordinator in two focus groups.

5.1 *Let's Read* Delivery: Survey for Community Based Professionals.

This section covers: Respondents; Delivery of the *Let's Read* Program; Outcomes of the *Let's Read* Program; and the *Let's Read* Program Materials.

Related Objectives: To increase **community wide** understanding of the importance and elements of early literacy development and to increase the knowledge and skills of **community based professionals** to engage with parents/carers and children to promote literacy.

Respondents

Four MCH Nurses from the Bendigo and Wyndham communities responded to the Community Based Professionals (CBP) survey. The respondents had been delivering the *Let's Read* program for an average of 15 months when they completed the survey, with a range of 12 -24 months of delivery across the sample of respondents.

5.1.1 *Delivery of the Let's Read Program*

Where is *Let's Read* being delivered?

In Bendigo and Wyndham *Let's Read* is being delivered through the MCH Service, through some playgroups in Bendigo and through a strong presence in the Wyndham library.

When are the *Let's Read* Program and Resources being delivered?

All respondents reported delivering *Let's Read* and the associated materials at the ages specified by the program. All four respondents delivered at the 4 and 12 months age points. Two then went on to deliver at 18 months and 3 ½ years; two did not. One respondent who was not delivering *Let's Read* at 18 months stated she and her colleagues were instead delivering an additional book from the *Young Readers Program* at 2 years of age.

How are the *Let's Read* Resources being distributed?

All respondents reported distributing *Let's Read* resources to parents at the time of delivery of the Program. In Bendigo, the parents who have *Let's Read* delivered via a playgroup also have access to the resources in the form of a shared library attached to the playgroup.

What other information is being distributed with the *Let's Read* Resources?

Handing out the *Let's Read* bag and resources offers the opportunity for communities to provide parents with other related and/or local information such as local library services or local community events. All 4 participants responded to this question and stated that they did give out extra materials to each family to promote local services and activities. The different types of information given out to families with the *Let's Read* materials are listed below. Participants reported that parents are given information on:

- Library and Mother Goose programs
- Young Readers Program

- Library information including Rhyme Time session information
- Maternal and Child Health Promotion information packs that include ideas about communication and play as well as other topics.

Is the *Let's Read* program suitable for delivery to people who speak languages other than English?

Of the four respondents, two stated that they have delivered the *Let's Read* program to parents who speak languages other than English (LOTE) and two had not (Table 4). Those respondents who had delivered to LOTE parents agreed that *Let's Read* is suitable for parents from a wide range of language groups, with a comments that '...picture books with a small amount of words, parents can read these in any language or read from the pictures if they are unable to read English' '...can also use reading/interaction to encourage parents to read from their own language/cultural books'. Those who had not delivered *Let's Read* to LOTE parents gave no response as to whether they believed the program was suitable for parents from a wide range of language groups.

Table 4: Delivery of *Let's Read* to parents who speak Languages Other Than English (LOTE)

Have you delivered the <i>Let's Read</i> program to parents for whom English is not a first language?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	50%	2
No	50%	2
If Yes, do you think <i>Let's Read</i> is suitable for parents from a wide range of language groups?		2
answered question		2
skipped question		2

Are there barriers to the delivery of *Let's Read*?

Three of the four respondents to this question felt that there are some barriers to their successful delivery of the *Let's Read* Program to families (See Table 5 below). There were quite specific reasons for this. The following list outlines the particular barriers the three respondents identified:

- Non interested parent
- Insufficient time BUT I think it's so important in some areas that I prefer to deliver the program than focus on 'issues' that I personally consider are not quite so important to these families
- Supply of books dwindled at times

Table 5: Barriers to the Delivery of *Let's Read*

Are there any barriers to you being able to successfully deliver the <i>Let's Read</i> program to families?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	75%	3
No	25%	1
If Yes please describe		3
answered question		4
skipped question		0

Outcomes of the *Let's Read* Program

Three questions were asked regarding respondents' perceptions of the outcomes of the *Let's Read* program. The response was overwhelmingly positive to all three questions and constructive comments were offered.

All four respondents stated that they think that the *Let's Read* program is an effective way to promote reading with young children from birth to five years of age. The following is a list of the comments made by respondents regarding this outcome:

- It's a good way to encourage reading to babies; a lot [of parents/carers] are surprised at how interested the baby is in the book. At least the child gets a book, as some [parents/carers] don't have any. Discussion can lead to use of library and story times, discussion about obtaining cheap books.
- At 4 mth we have most time a captive audience.
- It's excellent.

All respondents also stated that they found *Let's Read* a useful way to start ongoing conversations with parents about their child's developing literacy (see Table 6 below). Following are the comments made by respondents regarding this outcome:

- Can refer back to book, i.e. interaction with babe, spending special time or quiet time with the baby. Suggested book lists for birthday presents etc.
- I read the story to the child 4 mths while he/she is sitting on parent's knee. Then I discuss with the parent the baby's reaction to the reader i.e.:
 1. the voice tones one can use
 2. how to use a book - turning the page etc.
 3. duration of time spent reading to your baby
 4. how important that both parents participate in reading to their child
- Great to chat about the value of talking and singing to children as well as reading with them

Table 6: Ongoing conversations with parents about child's developing literacy

Have you found that promoting <i>Let's Read</i> is a useful way to start ONGOING conversations with parents about their child's developing literacy?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	100%	4
No	0	0
Please elaborate		3
answered question		4
skipped question		0

Three of the respondents also stated that they had experienced or observed 'other' positive outcomes from the *Let's Read* program (see Table 7 below). The following is an outline of the 'other' positive outcomes identified by participants:

- Many parents actively started to read to their babies after the 4 month check, although this is not as obvious now that they are not given a book at this time. One mother commented that her youngest child was more alert and interested in his environment

than were siblings. Siblings all attend a special school. Started reading and singing to him from the 4 month assessment.

- When parents return for further visits to MCH centre most have made comment on how their baby, now toddler, still enjoys Brown Bear.
- Encouraged parents to think about their child's development and the impact stimulation now – whether by reading or play – can have on their outcomes later on in life.

One respondent was not clear about experiencing or observing other positive outcomes from the *Let's Read* Program but still stated:

- This is very tricky because we don't see families often enough to really know about the outcomes HOWEVER families are always happy to receive books and info about talking, reading etc and if they're are reading to their children then this has to be a great thing

Table 7: Other positive outcomes from the *Let's Read* Program

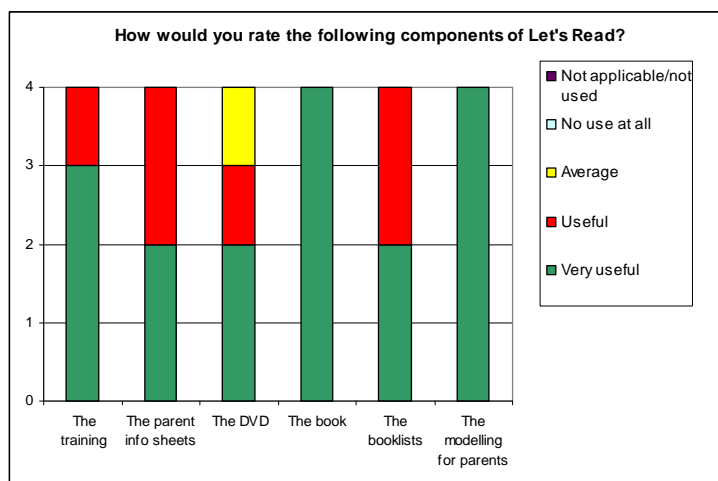
Have you experienced or observed any other positive outcomes from the <i>Let's Read</i> Program?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	75%	3
No	0	0
Please elaborate		4
answered question		3
skipped question		1

The *Let's Read* Program Materials

Three questions were asked regarding the usefulness and availability of the *Let's Read* program materials and one final question was asked regarding any changes respondents would like to see made to the overall *Let's Read* program.

The majority of respondents felt that all the materials were useful to very useful (see Figure 1 below) only one out of 24 responses stating 'average' to describe one of the materials.

Figure 1: Rate the components of *Let's Read*



Three of the four respondents stated that the *Let's Read* resources have not always been available to them when they needed them (See Table 8 below). There were three comments given regarding the availability of the resources and these are listed below:

- Often run out of books.
- I had the 4 months *Let's Read* program with Brown Bear book. I only had about 20 (12mth) Lets Read bags to hand out.
- Supplies of books ran out. As they were packaged with the other resources we did not have the parent info sheets to give out either.

Table 8: Availability of *Let's Read* resources

Have the <i>Let's Read</i> resources always been available to you when you need them?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	25%	1
No	75%	3
If No, which ones?		3
answered question		4
skipped question		0

There were four responses to the third question in this section 'What do you think is the best thing about the *Let's Read* Program?' These are outlined below:

- Starting to read early to the child, making the parent become aware of the interest that the child shows. Actively encouraging literacy, brain growth, development.
- Starting the program when the baby is 4 months.
- Fun and education - great to be able to present something to parents that is fun rather than just informative. They LOVE a gift and hopefully they value it. I talk briefly with their children about caring for books etc when I give the book and bag so this is a benefit too.
- Promotion of positive interaction between parents and their child.

Finally, the following is a compilation of the ways that respondents would like to change the *Let's Read* Program if they could:

- Bring back Brown Bear, Brown Bear book at 4 mths. Many mothers do not get the book from the library but will comment to you that the child loves "Brown Bear". Lovely clear pictures and colours. Bring it back!!!!
- Keep the packaging - the yellow bag & I would retain the DVD & the information re - creating the setting to read e.g. turn off the TV.
- Nothing – I just hope it continues. I love it and I'm sure the parents do too, especially if it's presented to them in a positive manner
- Give it to everyone!

Bendigo and Wyndham community professionals shared a concern around the availability of *Let's Read* resources, in particular specific book titles. While Bendigo uses a playgroup based shared library system to supplement the delivery of *Let's Read* resources, consistency in the supply of resources continues to be a barrier to ease of delivery for some of those delivering the program.

5.2 *Let's Read* Delivery: Focus Group for Community Based Professionals

This section covers discussions about resources for and delivery of the *Let's Read* program with the MCH Nurses from Bendigo and Wyndham and the librarian and MCH coordinator in Wyndham. The discussions regarding training have been summarised previously in the 'Training' section of this report above.

Related Objectives: To increase **community wide** understanding of the importance and elements of early literacy development and to increase the knowledge and skills of **community based professionals** to engage with parents/carers and children to promote literacy.

Participants

Ten MCH Nurses currently delivering *Let's Read* (five from Wyndham and five from Bendigo), one MCH coordinator and one child and youth librarian/*Let's Read* coordinator from Wyndham participated in two focus groups.

Delivery of *Let's Read*

Of the ten participating MCH Nurses, nine had been trained to deliver the *Let's Read* program prior to commencing delivery. The length of time the MCH Nurses had been delivering *Let's Read* varied from one to four years.

Let's Read has been delivered as a targeted program in both Wyndham and Bendigo, aiming at MCH clients in areas of lower SES. In Wyndham initially only the four month and 18 month old packs were distributed with the intention that the same families would have both packs delivered to them and that this would be tracked. This did not happen as there was no system in place for tracking who had received the four month pack and making sure this was followed up at the 18 month point, although one MCH Nurse stated that she used the 'notes' section on the client's page on the IT system to track who she gave the packs to. Ultimately all age packs were delivered to clients according to the age of the child being seen at the Wyndham MCH Centres involved in the program. In Bendigo the four month, 12 month, and 18 month packs were delivered by MCH Nurses in the chosen Centres in Bendigo, while the three and a half year old packs were delivered through playgroups.

There was consensus that – although there were initial concerns around the ability to deliver *Let's Read* within the MCH consultation time - these concerns were 'unfounded' and 'it wasn't a chore'. MCH Nurses reported that it is easier to finish up a consultation with 'a gift' [the *Let's Read* pack with book]. The Bendigo MCH Nurses noted in particular that the four month visit is very full but have found that they can easily incorporate *Let's Read* into this visit.

The MCH Nurses were also very positive about the *Let's Read* program's multiple point delivery. A comment was made that the promise of more *Let's Read* packs was a good way to encourage return visits from parents for whom 'attendance wasn't a positive thing'. It was suggested (by both Bendigo and Wyndham MCH Nurses) that a disadvantage of the way the program was delivered on the community level was the fact 'that we didn't roll it out to all of the centres in the municipality so word got around' and parents attending centres that *Let's Read* wasn't being delivered from began to ask for it. The point was made that universal delivery made more sense because people with low literacy can be found in any area:

Participant: 'Yes of course. Because in all areas and I've worked in a couple of, well three of the centres that have this, you have half of the population is the target group and then you have some pretty usual people as well, which might be the ones who are applying to your evaluation, so you're not even targeting the people that we're targeting, because they don't respond and in

all centres you have that, I mean it's really ignorant to think you don't have that same demographic in every area, because you do.'

It was also suggested in both communities that the four month stage is the most important to have *Let's Read* delivered:

Participant 1: 'I think of all the Let's Read programs, that four month was most important. They grab the two year book, that's great, the one year book is nice but that four month one... a lot of them haven't even thought of reading at that stage.'

Participant 2: 'Even to encourage them to talk to their baby. Some people, I think, haven't even twigged that you need to be doing that. It just makes them realise how much this child can take in.'

There was some discussion at Wyndham around the issue of limited funding and the need to work out which is the most important point to have *Let's Read* delivered and there was consensus that if it is to be delivered only once, then it should be at the four month age:

Participant 1: 'And we tried to divvy out the resources to the more frequent attenders, so we got more for the four month, less for the older ones.'

Participant 2: 'Yes, yes that's right we did, we balanced it out against those particular centres and an average of how many people attended in say a three month period and that's how many bags those centres got for that age group. There were more for the four months because we see more of the four month kids and even if they never ever came back again, at least they had the first one.'

Participant 3: 'Yeah, because that's when you give all that information out.'

Participant 1: 'That's right, so yeah, so we got more of the four months and fewer of the older ages...'

MCH Nurses reported that they tailor their delivery of *Let's Read* according to how their clients present and/or their prior knowledge of the client: 'you don't necessarily do one spiel and everybody gets that'. The Bendigo MCH Nurses agreed that this tailoring included which clients they gave parent surveys to because they felt it was inappropriate to give the surveys to low literacy clients or clients they knew wouldn't return them.

MCH Nurses from Bendigo and Wyndham reported that they also tailor the resources they include in the *Let's Read* bag to clients' needs, by inserting other resources in the *Let's Read* bag '... as the need comes up ... we put in extra information ...' one Bendigo MCH Nurse also used the opportunity to encourage library patronage reporting that she 'reinforced the fact that it would be a really good bag to take to the library.'

While delivery was tailored to the client most MCH Nurses perceived the modelling of reading to parents being the most important aspect of the delivery 'when you open the book at four months and put it in front of the baby, and ... show the parents how fascinated the baby is ... It's like a light goes off inside mum, or dad, or both, 'wow'!'. MCH Nurses reported using the book to engage the child and through the child's reaction also engage the parent:

'I thought too that it would be very hard to get the mothers interested in it, but when you've got that mother there and the baby sitting there and you've got this little book and the baby looks at it ... or tries to flick the pages, you see the mothers are sometimes a little bit surprised or you can point out 'See how the baby is looking at that'.

When asked what tips the MCH Nurses would give to others about to deliver the *Let's Read* program, suggestions were:

- Take each of the resources out of the bag and show the parent what they are: 'making sure that you do actually take everything physically out and make sure that they know

what's in there. I think you have to actually show people what's in something that you're giving them.'

- If you enjoy reading you will be able to deliver the program easily: 'if you you're passionate about it ... you'll be able to do it.'
- 'Do the training.'
- Modelling reading to the baby 'and showing the mum the reaction the child's showing'. The book 'Brown Bear, Brown Bear' was mentioned several times as a good book to model: 'And read Brown Bear to them and watch the child waiting for you to turn the page in anticipation of what's coming up, what's going to be next.'
- Be aware that *Let's Read* is suitable for families with low literacy and CALD families '...don't assume that you can't ... sell it to someone who doesn't speak English or who doesn't read'

Bendigo MCH Nurses gave examples of the suitability of *Let's Read* for families that speak languages other than English or that might be struggling with literacy:

'I had a couple of dads who were illiterate ... and I read the book and they said 'I'm not a good reader.' I said to look at what I'd just done, they could read this and ... he was quite taken aback that he could do this. It wasn't something that he was afraid to have a go at.'

'I had that conversation with a lot of the mothers too, they don't read.'

Other literacy programs

The MCH coordinator reported that 'there was some confusion' with the crossover between the Young Readers Program and the *Let's Read* program and that both were being delivered at the same time. The confusion related to explaining the two programs to parents, delivering resources and the administrative point of view. The universal approach for the Young Readers Program was perceived as positive with all parents in the municipality targeted. Some concern was raised regarding the lack of training for the Young Readers Program resources.

***Let's Read* Resources: Parent Information Sheet, Book Suggestions List, DVD, children's book and carry bag**

MCH Nurses in both Wyndham and Bendigo reported finding the Parent Information sheets useful and particularly the suggestion that parents turn off the television:

MCH 1: '...the resources, as in those sheets, are great for me, that's what we're using all the time to give them simple clear ideas about how to read what the baby likes, how to do it, etc, I think that's the most useful part.'

MCH 2: 'And particularly about turning off the television ... because so many of the home visits that you do, you have to ask for the television to be turned off so that you can hear what they're saying to you because they're just used to having it on all the time.'

There was some discussion regarding the information sheets not being useful for low literacy and visually impaired parents. It was generally agreed by MCH Nurses that the information sheets were most useful when used as a reference point to discuss with parents, because they may never be read again by parents either due to low literacy/English ability or just because they get forgotten:

MCH 1: 'I liked the sheet where it says "Turn off the television" and all that sort of stuff. Even if the mothers don't actually read it again, you can say 'See, it's got these few ideas on it, turn the TV off so you can read and all that.' It gives them a little bit of an idea.'

MCH 2: *'Whether they do... some of them miss the train. You've got to read and pick your client. Some clients are going to do it, they will do all of those things but some of them just need to be prodded.'*

One MCH Nurse felt the information sheet was not useful to families but that the DVD was:

MCH Nurse: 'Parent information sheet wasn't terribly important at all; it was hardly looked at ... from what I could see from the families. I think it was pretty much glossed over by the families; they were really appreciative of the DVD and loved the Brown Bear book.'

Other MCH Nurses were also generally very positive about the *Let's Read* DVD and felt that it is something that families will 'look at'. One MCH Nurse noted that it was a way for dad's (who don't attend visits with children very often) to be included in the *Let's Read* program:

'What I liked about it too, was that it was not every day we got dads in so it gave an opportunity for the dads to be equally as [involved]-'.

MCH Nurses believe that the parents like the *Let's Read* resources, the book being mentioned as the stand out favourite and parents reporting the child wanting them to be read over and over.

'...recently I had somebody say to me 'oh they love that book' and we've been reading it and they bring it out all the time'.

In Wyndham the library stocks multiple copies of books on the *Let's Read* book suggestion lists and the librarian stated that these books are regularly borrowed:

'Yes we have a few of them we've got 25 copies of them, and they're all out, so they're very popular books, the selection of books on there has been, is really good'.

One MCH Nurse stated that the book suggestions list was well used by her clients because of how popular the books are:

'And they seriously love the list of books that they can get, 'cause they just want everything, they like being able to tick off, my child's read that, and that, and that, and they loved that. They always ask me when they come, can I have the list?'

While the discussions around the value of the resources was generally very positive, an argument was put forward that for 'young mums' the resources are not necessarily as useful, because if they don't have a DVD player² they can't watch the DVD and if they can't read the information sheets are not useful. One MCH Nurse argued that even giving messages regarding the importance of early literacy development can be 'a threat ... because they left school at year nine, this is really threatening to them, so threatening'. For these clients it was argued that rather than relying on the resources, there is even more of a need to model reading to children so the parent sees that children will sit and listen quietly to a book. The need to get the messages across to these parents before the child is 12 months old was also stated or the parent may disengage from the MCH service and stop coming and that it can be helpful to use the suggestion that by reading to the child from a young age you are 'giving your child an edge'.

A final suggestion regarding the resources was that the bag could be made smaller with shorter handles as the children like to carry it and this would make it a better size for children to carry.

² It is noted that a DVD was selected as a useful resource for the *Let's Read* program because data had indicated that the vast majority of households – regardless of socio-economic status – have access to a DVD player

Availability of resources

Both the Wyndham and Bendigo MCH Nurses felt that the distribution of resources could have occurred more smoothly as they experienced delays and gaps in availability of particular packs or resources that should be in the packs and stated that for example that the DVD had not always been available. The issue of the resources not always reaching MCH Nurses, and therefore parents, in a pristine condition was also raised and this was linked in one case to the need to have storage space for the *Let's Read* packs in MCH Centres that were already short on room.

It was noted that it has been very useful for the library to stock the books from the *Let's Read* lists as MCH Nurses can tell parents that they don't need to be able to buy the books, that they can borrow them. This also means that parents are being encouraged to attend and join the library.

5.3 Summary *Let's Read* Delivery in Bendigo and Wyndham

Let's Read has been delivered as a targeted program in both Bendigo and Wyndham delivered from particular MCH Centres in areas of lower SES in each of the communities and has focussed on the four month age pack. The MCH Nurses stated their preference to have *Let's Read* delivered as a universal program across their municipalities to ensure all families have the opportunity to take part as they felt that the issue of low literacy is not entirely related to the SES of particular areas. It was noted that there is overlap between *Let's Read* and the Young Readers Program however they were seen as two quite different programs. MCH Nurses did not undertake training for delivery of the Young Readers Program. The MCH Nurses were very enthusiastic about the program and reported that they could generally deliver it without a burden on their existing workload. *Let's Read* is delivered in a tailored way according to the clients needs. The most important aspects of the program were seen to be the 'gift' of the book and the modelling for parents of how to read with young babies and children and how enthusiastically very young children respond to age-appropriate early literacy experiences. The booklists and suggestions for creating a reading environment were also raised in a positive light. The main suggestions for improvement were a more continuous flow of resources, for the program to be made universal, and (in Bendigo) for the library to carry the *Let's Read* books and resources for borrowing.

6 Findings: *Let's Read* Participation

Information from *Let's Read* participants was gathered at four points:

1. '**Baseline Family Information**' was collected by the Community Based Professionals while delivering *Let's Read* to the participant.
2. '**Parent Post-Intervention Survey**' was provided at the point of delivery of the program to participants who agree to give feedback. This is completed by the participant after they have used the resources, and sent back to CCCH in a reply paid envelope.
3. '**Let's Read Parent Survey 2**' was distributed to parents who indicate they would like to participate in further evaluation by including their email address on the 'Parent Post-Intervention Survey'. This survey is sent via a link in an email and completed online via 'SurveyMonkey.com'.
4. **Focus Group 'Families Experiences of Let's Read'** was offered to parents who gave their email address on the 'Parent Post Intervention Survey' in the Bendigo and Wyndham areas. MCH Nurses delivering *Let's Read* also advertised these groups to parents.

In Bendigo approximately 621 packs have been delivered since the *Let's Read* program began; 450 four month packs and 171 twelve month packs. As of 31 January 2010, baseline data has been received from 197 participants in Bendigo, representing 32% of the people who had packs delivered to them in this area. In Wyndham approximately 1,685 packs have been delivered since the *Let's Read* program began. As of 31 January 2010, baseline data has been received from 446 participants in Wyndham, representing 26% of the people who had packs delivered to them in this community. All together there is baseline data for 643 participants in the Victorian sites of Wyndham (n=446) and Bendigo (n=197).

Parent Post-Intervention Survey data has been received from 94 participants in the Victorian sites of Wyndham and Bendigo. These completed surveys were received more regularly since the parent information sheet accompanying them was simplified and deliverers felt more comfortable about handing them out to parents. The '*Let's Read* Parent Survey 2' was sent out to the 25 participants who included their email addresses on the initial survey and to date six completed surveys have been received.

There was only one parent response to the families' focus group so an informal interview with this parent and some of her friends was held and feedback from this is included below. This parent was in the Wyndham area, there was no interest in a focus group in the Bendigo site.

6.1 Baseline Parent Data

Related Objectives: To increase **community wide** understanding of the importance and elements of early literacy development; to increase the knowledge and skills of **community based professionals** to engage with parents/carers and children to promote literacy; to increase the motivation, resources, confidence and skills of **parents/carers** to provide a daily literacy experience to children 0-5 years and; to increase access to books and experiences in literacy activities in the home and in the community for **children 0-5 years**.

The baseline parent survey records the following:

- ID number so participants can be tracked on future evaluation feedback;

- Date of consultation and pack provided³ (4 months, 12 months, 18 months or 3 ½ years);
- Age and gender of the child;
- Family Postcode;
- Information about the participants' current reading behaviours and understanding:
 - library membership
 - children's books in the household
 - parent/carer interest in reading
 - parent/carer understanding of appropriate age to begin reading to children
- Whether or not participants are willing to take part in the next step of the evaluation process.

6.1.1 Demographic and Contextual Information for participants in Victorian Sites

The following is a data summary for Baseline Information collected from the Victorian sites to date of the total 643 responses, 70% (n= 446) were received from Wyndham and 30% (n=197) were received from Bendigo.

Table 9: Child's Gender and Postcode

Site	Postcode	Child's Gender			Total
		F	M	NS	
Wyndham	3021		1		1
Wyndham	3024	52	43	9	104
Wyndham	3028		1		1
Wyndham	3029	33	51	4	88
Wyndham	3030	120	121	10	251
Wyndham	3211	1			1
Wyndham Totals (from 6 Postcodes)		206	217	23	446
Bendigo	3350		1		1
Bendigo	3530	2	1		3
Bendigo	3550	62	62	5	129
Bendigo	3551	3	4		7
Bendigo	3555	6	7	2	15
Bendigo	3556	17	22	2	41
Bendigo	3557		1		1
Bendigo Totals (from 7 Postcodes)		90	98	9	197
Grand Total for Wyndham & Bendigo		296	315	32	643

As of 31st January, 2010, a total of 643 baseline records had been collected, representing 13 postcodes across the two local government areas of Bendigo (seven postcodes) and Wyndham (six postcodes) in Victoria. Gender of child was stated for 611 records over Bendigo and Wyndham, and this showed that the program was delivered quite evenly to both genders with 296 (48%) being female and 315 (52%) being male. This even spread of genders engaged in the program was reflected in both sites.

The 'Age Pack Delivered' is a category that has not always been collected in the Baseline Information form, however of the 446 baseline records received for Wyndham, 273 recorded which *Let's Read*

³ Note that the date of consultation and Let's Read pack provided has not been consistently collected through the data collection.

pack was given to the parent. As can be seen, the most commonly delivered pack (accounting for 45% of packs delivered) was the 4 month old pack with the 12 month pack accounting for 27%, the 18 month pack accounting for 18% and the 3 ½ year old pack accounting for 10% of deliveries of *Let's Read* packs. This corresponds with the actual distribution pattern in Wyndham of initially delivering the four month and 12 month packs and expanding this to include delivery of the 18 month and 3½ year old packs.

Table 10: Age Packs Delivered to Parents (Wyndham only)

Packs Delivered Jan 2009 – Jan 2010	Number of <i>Let's Read</i> Age Packs Delivered				Total
	From 4 Months	From 12 Months	From 18 Months	From 3 ½ Years	
Total	124	72	49	28	273

6.1.2 Reading behaviour and understanding summary

Participants are asked:

- whether they are keen readers (yes/no);
- whether they are a member of their local library (yes/no);
- how many children's books they have in their home (state approximate number); and
- what age they think that reading with children should start.

Participants are also asked whether they are willing to participate in a follow up data collection (yes/no). The results are summarised below.

Keen Reader

Of the records collected, 'are you a keen reader' was stated for 635 records. Of those records, 70% (n=445) indicated that they were keen readers and 30% (n=190) indicated that they were not keen readers. Eight respondents did not answer the question with a yes or no or may have provided a comment such as "average" or "changes". In Wyndham, respondents were more likely to be keen readers at 74% (n=326), in Bendigo 61% (n=119) indicated that they were keen readers.

Member of the Library

Of the 643 records collected, 'Are you a member of the local library' was stated for 635 records. A total of 52% (n=328) indicated that they were members and a total of 48% indicated that they were not members (n=308). In Wyndham, respondents were more likely to be library members at 55% (n=243), in Bendigo 43% (n=85) indicated that they were library members.

Children's Books in the Home

The number of children's books in the home was stated for 634 records. A total of 23% (n=143) stated that they had less than ten children's books in the home, with 77% (n=491) having ten or more. The individual results for Bendigo and Wyndham reflected the overall totals.

Age to Start Reading

Overall, 78% (n=501) of 643 participants thought that reading should start by 12 months. Results varied between the sites with a majority of 64% (n=127) of participants from Bendigo stating that reading should start before birth or by 4 months of age and a minority of 47% of participants from Wyndham stating that reading should start before birth or by 4 months of age.

Follow up survey

All participants are asked if they would be willing to participate in a follow up survey, 70% of those that had received *Let's Read* indicated that they would be willing. The results for the two sites were very different with 80% of Wyndham and 48% of Bendigo participants indicating they would be willing to participate.

6.1.3 Analysis of reading behaviour and understanding

An analysis of reading understanding and behaviour responses was undertaken to consider any relationship between understanding and behaviour.

It was found that participants that identified as keen readers were more likely than those who did not identify as keen readers to:

- be members of their local library;
- have ten or more children's books in the home; and
- believe that reading to children should begin before 12 months of age.

These results are analysed further below.

Table 11: Keen Readers and Local Library Membership

Wyndham and Bendigo combined				
Keen Reader	Member of Local Library			
	No	Yes	Not Stated	Total
No	135	55	0	190
Yes	172	272	1	445
Not Stated	1	1	6	8
Grand Total	308	328	7	643
Wyndham				
Keen Reader	Member of Local Library			
	No	Yes	Not Stated	Total
No	70	44	0	114
Yes	126	199	1	326
Not Stated	0	0	6	6
Grand Total	196	243	7	446
Bendigo				
Keen Reader	Member of Local Library			
	No	Yes	Not Stated	Total
No	65	11	0	76
Yes	46	73	0	119
Not Stated	1	1	0	2
Grand Total	112	85	0	197

It is noted that those who stated they were not keen readers were much less likely to be members of the local library at 44% (n= 135 of 307) than those indicating that they were keen readers at 83% (n=272 of 327). This is to be expected but is further indication of the multiple barriers for some families in engaging in early literacy activities. Again, this trend is more marked for Bendigo respondents with only 15% (n=11) of non-keen readers compared to 61% (n=73) of keen readers reporting being library members while the difference in Wyndham was 39% (n=44) of non-keen readers compared to 61% (n=199) of keen readers reporting being library members.

Table 12: Keen Reader and Ownership of Children’s Books

Bendigo and Wyndham Combined				
Number of Children’s Books owned	Keen Reader			
	No	Yes	Not Stated	Grand Total
*0-9	71	71	-	142
10-19	29	43	1	73
^20-99	65	243	-	308
100+	24	88	1	113
NS	1	0	6	7
Grand Total	190	445	8	643
Wyndham				
Number of Children’s Books owned	Keen Reader			
	No	Yes	Not Stated	Grand Total
*0-9	40	60	-	100
10-19	16	25	-	41
^20-99	44	180	-	224
100+	12	61	-	73
NS	1	0	6	7
Grand Total	113	326	6	445
Bendigo				
Number of Children’s Books owned	Keen Reader			
	No	Yes	Not Stated	Grand Total
*0-9	32	11		43
10-19	13	16	1	30
^20-99	19	63		82
100+	12	28	1	41
NS				
Grand Total	76	118	2	196

*Includes ‘some’ ^Includes ‘lots’

Bendigo and Wyndham parents who stated that they were keen readers were more likely to report that they have a significant number of children’s books in the home. Of the keen readers, 74% (n=331) owned more than 20 children’s books while of those who were not keen readers, 47% (n=89) owned less than 10 children’s books.

This trend is reflected in both of the communities with Bendigo respondents reporting 77% (n=91) of keen readers owning more than 20 children’s books and 42% (n=32) of non-keen readers reporting owning less than 10 children’s books while in Wyndham 74% (n=241) of keen readers reported owning 20 plus, and non-keen readers at 36% (n=40) owning less than 10 children’s books.

Table 13: Keen Reader and Best Age to Begin Reading to Child

Bendigo and Wyndham combined				
Age to Begin Reading	Keen Reader			
	No	Yes	Not Stated	Grand Total
Prior to Birth	3	21		24
Birth to 4 months	71	242	1	314
4mths to 12mths	56	107		163
12 mths to 2years	17	37		54
2 years to 4 years	17	20		37
4 years or older	8	4		12
‘Other’ / ‘Don’t Know’	11	8	2	21
Not Stated	7	6	5	18
Grand Total	190	445	8	643
Wyndham				

	Keen Reader			
Age to Begin Reading	No	Yes	Not Stated	Grand Total
Prior to Birth	3	12		15
Birth to 4 months	34	162		196
4mths to 12mths	32	84		116
12 mths to 2years	11	35		46
2 years to 4 years	14	19		33
4 years or older	8	4		12
'Other' / 'Don't Know'	5	4	1	10
Not Stated	7	6	5	18
Grand Total	114	326	6	446
Bendigo				
	Keen Reader			
Age to Begin Reading	No	Yes	Not Stated	Grand Total
Prior to Birth		9		9
Birth to 4 months	37	80	1	118
4mths to 12mths	24	23		47
12 mths to 2years	6	2		8
2 years to 4 years	3	1		4
4 years or older	0	0	0	0
'Other' / 'Don't Know'	6	4	1	11
Not Stated				
Grand Total	76	119	2	197

Parents from Bendigo and Wyndham who stated they were keen readers were more likely to state 'the best age to begin reading with children' was before birth to 12 months old, at 83% (n=370), compared to 68% (n=130) of parents who stated they were not keen readers. This trend was true for both communities individually with 81% of keen readers compared to 65% of non-keen readers in Wyndham and 94% of keen readers and 80% of non-keen readers in Bendigo believing that the best age to begin reading was before birth to 12 months old.

Willing to participate in a follow up survey

It was particularly noted that those respondents that were keen readers were much more likely – 73% (n=325 of 445 keen readers) to be happy to participate in the follow up survey than those that did not identify as keen readers – 50% (95 of 190 non-keen readers). Overall, Bendigo participants were less willing to provide further feedback (61% of keen readers and 28% of non-keen readers) than Wyndham participants (83% of keen readers and 70% of non-keen readers).

These results have a clear impact on which participants are more likely to take part in the follow up parent survey and this is reflected in the data from the Parent Post Intervention Survey detailed in the next section of this report.

6.2 Post-Intervention Parent Data 1

Related Objectives: To increase **community wide** understanding of the importance and elements of early literacy development; to increase the motivation, resources, confidence and skills of **parents/carers** to provide a daily literacy experience to children 0-5 years and; to increase access to books and experiences in literacy activities in the home and in the community for **children 0-5 years**.

As at 31 January 2010, 94 Parent Post-Intervention Surveys (PPIS) have been received from the Bendigo and Wyndham communities. The vast majority of parents responding have received the program for the first time when their child was around 4 months old: of the 89 respondents who stated which *Let's Read* Pack they received, **72** were labelled for 4 month olds; **10** for 12 month olds; **4** for 18 month olds; and **4** for 3 ½ year olds. This reflects the baseline data which showed that the majority of age packs being delivered were the 4 month old packs.

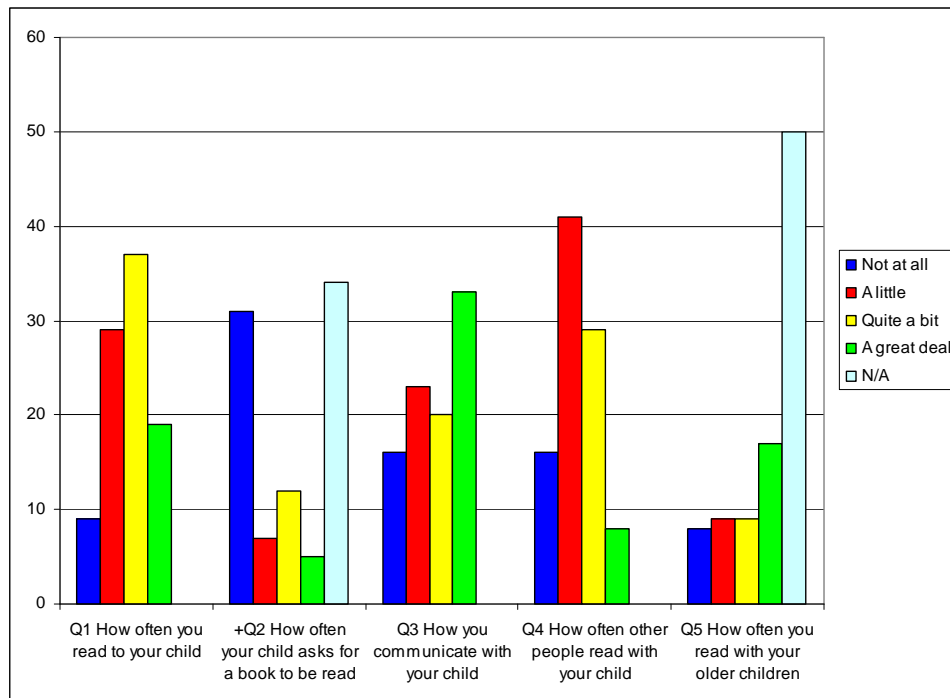
The first part of the PPIS asks about changes in parent/carer behaviour as a result of taking part in the *Let's Read* program.

Many of the Victorian respondents thus far have felt that the *Let's Read* program has had from 'quite a bit' to 'a great deal' of an impact on their reading behaviour with the child they are seeing the MCH Nurse with at the time of receiving the *Let's Read* program and with older children in the family:

- 60 % (n=56) of 94 respondents stated that it had changed how often they read with their child either 'quite a bit' or 'a great deal'.
- 30% (n=17) of 56 of respondents for whom this question was applicable, stated that it changed how often their child asks for a book either 'quite a bit' or 'a great deal'
 - NB: In the first version of the PPIS the option of N/A was not offered for this question. Therefore 'Not at all' was the default response for participants whose child was too young to ask for a book, this has an impact on the data reported.
- 57% (n=53) of 93 respondents stated that it had changed how they communicate with their child either 'quite a bit' or 'a great deal'
- 39% (n=37) of 94 respondents stated that it had changed how other people read with their child either 'quite a bit' or 'a great deal'
- 60% (n=26) of 44 respondents for whom this question was applicable stated that it had changed how often they read with older children either 'quite a bit' or 'a great deal'

When numbers for participants reporting that behaviours have changed 'a little' are included in this, the majority of respondents reported some level of behaviour change.

Figure 2: Reported behaviour change (%) as a result of the *Let's Read* program



Comments made regarding the impacts on the respondent were:

- I used to work as a qualified child care worker so I did it already

- Child too young to ask for book
- Being a teacher I found I have knowledge on the importance of reading to a child from an early age. I have read to [child] since birth. The only difference I found was getting others to read which is why the program hasn't changed much my opinion or frequency of when I read. I do it daily, sometimes more than once.

The next section of the PPIS asks questions about the usefulness of the content of the *Let's Read* program.

Table 14: Perceived usefulness of *Let's Read* program content

How useful was:	Not at all	A little	Quite a bit	A great deal	N/A	Not stated	Total
Q6 The discussion when receiving <i>Let's Read</i>	4	23	34	25	4	4	94
Q7 The parent information leaflet	3	15	39	32	4	1	94
Q8 The 'book suggestions' leaflet	2	12	39	41	0	0	94
Q9 Watching the <i>Let's Read</i> DVD	1	11	21	27	32	2	94

Most of the Victorian respondents found the content of the *Let's Read* program 'quite a bit' or 'a great deal' useful. The content that received the most positive feedback (quite a bit or a great deal useful) were the 'book suggestions' leaflet (85%), the '*Let's Read* DVD' (80%), and the 'parent information leaflet' (80%). The majority (63%) of respondents found the discussion when receiving the *Let's Read* pack 'quite a bit' or 'a great deal' useful. The high number of people rating the DVD as Not Applicable (n=32) may be due to the DVD not being included in the pack they were given, or because the participant filled out the form before watching the DVD.

Q9a How many times have you watched the DVD?

Of the 62 respondents who answered this question, 76% (n=47) reported that they had watched the DVD once or twice before completing the survey, with two people stating they hadn't watched it at all and 13 others reporting watching it more than twice (ranging from three to 20 viewings).

Comments regarding the above were:

'Did not receive DVD in pack'

'DVD was not available when four month pack given'

'But will continue to watch it'

'Enjoy the DVD with 16 months baby girl'

'I only received it yesterday'

'The book itself 'Brown Bear, Brown Bear' was best thing in pack and thing that encouraged me to read to baby the most'

The third section of the PPIS asks two questions regarding changes in behaviour in response to the *Let's Read* Materials.

Q10: Since receiving the *Let's Read* 'Book Suggestions' list, have you purchased or borrowed any of the books? If 'Yes', about how many times?

Of the 92 who responded to this question 49% (n=45), reported having purchased or borrowed a book or book/s from the list, while 51% (n=47) reported they had not. Of the 48 people who noted how many times they had purchased or borrowed books from the list, 29% (n=14) had done so once or twice and 38% (n=9) had done so three to five times and six people reported having done so between seven and 20 times. Comments from those who had not purchased or borrowed books were:

'But I intend to'

'But I intend to buy at least 3'

'Will be soon'

'Will be soon, we just started going to the library last week'

'Bought them (some of them)'

'Not yet, but will do'

Q11: Since receiving the Let's Read parent information leaflet have you followed any of the suggestions? If 'Yes', which suggestion did you try?

Of the 91 respondents to this question, 73% (n=66) stated that they had and 27% (n=24) stated that they had not followed any of the suggestions on the leaflet.

The most common comments regarding trying the suggestions were: all suggestions (n=12), the same story often (n=12) and turn off the TV or radio (n=10). The following is a list of comments regarding the suggestions tried by respondents:

Suggestion	Frequency
All suggestions	12
The same story often	12
Turn off the TV or radio	10
Moving child to the rhythm	2
Make a routine and try to share at least one book every day	3
Look for rhyme, rhythm and repetition in books	1
Cuddling up sitting on chair/hold baby on lap	2
Describing what is on the page as well as reading words	1
Different voices for each animal/character in a book	2
Engage the 3 yr old more & point and talk about pictures to 18 month old	1
Find the letters	1
Funny noises and sounds	1
Have older kids - just overall reminder of what to do.	1
Hold baby on knee while reading	1
Making reading more interesting	1
Play find 'letters'/'words' game. Ask questions about names & sounds of letters.	2
Pointing out pictures of babies in the supermarket	1
Talk about the pictures etc.	1
She reads with her older brother and sister	1
Showing pictures of babies	2
Sitting with me, pointing out things she recognised, making the noises	1
Talked about colours etc	1
The books	1
Changing the words to encourage more vocabulary	1
Pointing to words as you read	1

This data suggests that for approximately half of the respondents there has been a behavior response to the book suggestions list and the majority have responded to the parent information leaflet materials and that where there has not yet been action taken, there is an intention to act on the suggestions - in some cases. Where there has not been action taken, it is unknown how many of the respondents filled in the survey before they had time to take action on the suggestions offered.

It is noted that it would be helpful if the survey asks for parents to wait for a week or two before responding to the survey. This will help to ensure the data is a better reflection of any changes (or not) the respondents made to behavior in reaction to the program, because participants will have had enough time to make such changes.

The final section of the PPIS asks where the pack was delivered and by who and asks for comments on the *Let's Read* program.

Q12 and 13: The Bendigo and Wyndham communities deliver *Let's Read* through their MCH Services and this is reflected in the data, with only one of the 94 responses stating 'midwife' rather than some form of 'Maternal and Child Health Nurse' as the deliverer, and all responses stating some form of 'Maternal and Child Health Centre' as the place where the program was delivered to them.

Q 14: 91 of 94 respondents stated that they would recommend the program so far to their friends. The three comments relating to the respondents who stated they would not recommend the program were:

'I have read to my daughter from a young age, my friends with children have done the same'

'I just got a book and a letter about the questionnaire. We already read lots so not so helpful'

'It's just a pack of information I wouldn't call it a 'program' I was already reading to my child and she is only 4 months old'

Another comment from a participant who stated they would recommend the program was:

'I have already spoken to my friends about it and they are asking their MCH Nurse for the pack!! Also my 4 month old son is deaf and I feel this is important to him for speech and word recognition. The DVD is great because it is also written at the bottom of the screen.'

Q15-18: The table below summarises respondents' responses to the *Let's Read* Program.

NB: There are currently two versions of this section of the survey in use – one that asks for a 'yes/no' response and one that asks for a rating.

Table 15: Satisfaction with the *Let's Read* program

	Not at all	A little	Quite a bit	A great deal	Yes	No	Total
Q15 Are you satisfied with the program?		8	31	21	34		94
Q16 Are the materials/components good quality?		2	19	38	35		94
Q17 Was the program of use/help?	1	8	32	18	33		92
Q18 Were the messages easy to understand?			19	41	34		94

The majority of responses from participants were very positive, with 90-100% of responses being either 'yes' / 'quite a bit' / 'a great deal' for each of the questions. Thus far it would seem that respondents are satisfied with the program and find it useful, of good quality, and easy to understand.

Q19: Comments/ could you suggest any ways to improve the program? Below is a list of the responses to this question.

'A lot of these we see as common or things that we already do; maybe different not so simple suggestions' [would have been more helpful]⁴

'DVD should just roll on, not have to push for each different story. The program was very much so of use/help. My 3 ½ year old also enjoys the DVD'

'Encourage parents that reading is important. That their role in guiding the child would help enhance communication. Allot reading time and introduce going to the library. Good thing Wyndham Council Heaths Rd Library has pre-school story time and rhyme time'

'Fantastic as it is thank you'

'Have no suggestion at the moment but I have only received 1st one which just has two pamphlets and 1 book plus this survey'

⁴ This comment is from the respondent who stated that the program was 'not at all' of use/help.

'I have older children that I read to all the time. My baby sits and listens to us reading. Most of the strategies I implement already as I have an educational background. Suggestions I would make include: More access to books – discount vouchers to buy books. Borrowing books – having a service linked to the Children's Hospital (Possibly delivered to the home). Encouraging parents by providing incentives or a reward system. Link with local libraries – supply books on list (similar to raps or premiers reading challenge.)'

'I'm a new mum so this is all new to me'

'No, it's great'

'None at the moment'

'Provide list of literacy websites by age for further reference/more ideas. Keep going with this program to help improve literacy across early years - very important.'

'Providing a variety of books to those involved in the study as it is difficult at times to get out and borrow books'

'Have information on the benefits of reading to babies and children; scientifically and research wise'

'No my child was very interested in books already and got read to every night'

'Ensure that all mums/parents receive this pack at birth – maybe put in bounty bags. Great start to parenting'

'No, everything is covered'

'The quality of the materials is not too bad but the book is broken very easy if reading it and opening it a lot. So to suggest to improve the quality of the materials of the book'

'Not at all, I think you are doing a great job. I used to read to my daughter when she was in my tummy every night, I used different voices for different characters and I found that to be very useful and believe she has a lot of interest in books and learning early'

'Wish we'd gotten even more books!'

'The free books are great, my 2 ½ year old reads 'Brown Bear, Brown Bear What Do You See?' to my 4 month old, they both love it'

'Yeah just give out the book without all the info. If I wanted to know about more books I'd ask the library but it's cool to get a free book but the rest of the info is a waste of paper I think you can use the resources towards other things'

'Make sure it is available to all parents/babies'

'I think it's a great program especially starting so young. I was unaware how much my little boy loved me reading to him. I didn't think he would be interested but gets so excited when we pick up a book!'

'I'd like to get more information about bi-language reading. We speak Mandarin at home. When I read an English book for my child, should I interpret it into Chinese?'

'My child is 9 months. I had to ask Nurse for it. Could be handed out to babies at hospital not health centre as I had to ask was it going to be given out'

'I think it's a great start'

'It's a great program and the suggestion leaflets help to encourage further reading'

6.3 Baseline and Post-Intervention Matched Data

Related Objectives: To increase **community wide** understanding of the importance and elements of early literacy development; to increase the knowledge and skills of **community based professionals** to engage with parents/carers and children to promote literacy; to increase the motivation, resources, confidence and skills of **parents/carers** to provide a daily literacy experience to children

0-5 years and; to increase access to books and experiences in literacy activities in the home and in the community for **children 0-5 years**.

As at 31 March 2010, the evaluator was able to identify 64 Baseline records with matched PPIS data. Of the matching records, 17 were from Bendigo and 47 were from Wyndham. As noted in the baseline information data previously, participants in the program who were already keen readers were more likely to state that they were willing to take part in evaluation and this is reflected in the matched data from Baseline and PPIS. The respondents with matching baseline and PPIS data were more likely to already be library members, keen readers and own 10 or more children's books:

- Library member = 41 (64%) Non-library member = 23 (36%)
- Keen Readers = 49 (77%) Non-keen Readers = 15 (23%)
- 10+ children's books = 57 (89%) 0-9 children's books = 7(11%)

Only two participants reported that they were not library members, not keen readers and owned less than 10 children's books. This means that it is difficult to ascertain from the data particular behaviour change relating to early literacy environments.

The following describes the interactions between reported (in Baseline Information) existing/non-existing early literacy behaviours, and reported (in PPIS) effects of the *Let's Read* program and perceived usefulness of *Let's Read* materials. It is evident from the data that parents/carers that are more engaged with reading behaviours are also more likely to report engagement with the *Let's Read* messages.

Table 16: Baseline Literacy Behaviours matched with PPIS Sections 1 and 3 - Behaviour Changes

Respondents who report 'quite a bit' or 'a great deal' of change in:	Non-Library Members	Library Members	Non-Keen Readers	Keen Readers	Own <10 children's books	Own 10+ children's books
how often they read to child	39%	66%	60%	55%	57%	56%
how often child asks for a book	54%	20%	37%	30%	0%	30%
how they communicate with their child	39%	67%	53%	67%	71%	53%
how often others read with child	30%	46%	33%	43%	43%	40%
how often they read to older children	29%	68%	75%	55%	43%	40%
Respondents who stated they had...						
Purchased or borrowed books from the Book Suggestions List	30%	65%	13%	65%	43%	54%
Followed suggestions from the Parent Information Leaflet	68%	96%	67%	83%	71%	80%

It is encouraging to note that although they did not report behaviour change as often, when asked about usefulness of the content of *Let's Read*, those that were more vulnerable in respect of reading behaviours generally found the discussion and information when receiving *Let's Read* quite a bit or a great deal helpful.

It is also interesting to note that the a greater proportion of the participants that might be vulnerable in respect of the home literacy environment engaged with the Parent Information Leaflet than the Book Suggestion List. This suggests the potential to effect behaviour change through a low cost suggestion sheet and brief intervention. This is particularly compelling when you consider that, in all cases, the majority of the vulnerable group found the discussion and materials 'quite a bit' or 'a great deal' helpful as illustrated below. In particular, the evaluator would draw attention to the finding that in all cases the vulnerable clients were more likely to find the 'discussion when receiving the Let's Read pack' quite a bit' or 'a great deal' helpful than those that might be considered non-vulnerable.

Table 17: Baseline literacy behaviours matched with PPIS sections 2 and 4 – Satisfaction with Content

Respondents who report the <i>Let's Read</i> materials to be 'quite a bit' or 'a great deal' helpful	Non-Library Members	Library Members	Non-Keen Readers	Keen Readers	Own <10 children's books	Own 10+ children's books
Discussion when receiving LR Pack	57%	38%	73%	57%	86%	58%
Parent Information Leaflet	62%	81%	86%	71%	83%	73%
Book Suggestions Leaflet	65%	88%	73%	81%	71%	80%
Let's Read DVD	67%	85%	86%	78%	50%	79%

All respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the program, found all of the components of the program good quality and found the messages easy to understand.

6.4 Summary of Baseline/PPIS matched data:

Behaviour Changes:

- **Library membership:** A higher percentage of participants who are members of the local library reported that *Let's Read* changed how often they and others read with their child, how often they read with their older children, how they communicate with their child, reported borrowing/purchasing books from the 'suggested books' list and following suggestions from the Parent Information leaflet. While a higher percentage of non-library members, reported a change in how often their child asks for a book.
- **Keen Reader status:** A higher percentage of participants who reported that they were keen readers, reported that *Let's Read* changed how they communicate with their child, and how often others read to their child and reported borrowing/purchasing books from the 'suggested books' list and following suggestions from the Parent Information leaflet. While a higher percentage of participants who reported that they were not keen readers, reported that *Let's Read* changed how often they read to their child and older children, and how often their child asks for a book.
- **Ownership of children's books:** A higher percentage of participants who reported owning 10 or more children's books reported a change in how often their child asks for a book and reported borrowing/ purchasing books from the 'suggested books' list and following suggestions from the Parent Information leaflet. While a higher percentage of participants who reported owning less than 10 children's books reported a change in how they communicate with their child, how often others read with their child and how often they read to older children. About half of both these categories reported a change in how often they read to their child.
- **All three categories together:** Library members, keen readers and owners of 10 or more children books were all more likely than non-library members, non-keen readers and owners of less than 10 children's books to report having borrowed books from the book list and followed suggestions from the parent information leaflet.

Satisfaction with Content:

- **Library membership:** A higher percentage of library members reported that the parent information leaflet, book suggestions leaflet and DVD were helpful, while a higher percentage of non-library members reported finding the discussion when receiving the *Let's Read* pack helpful.
- **Keen Reader Status:** A higher percentage of keen readers reported finding the book suggestions leaflet helpful while a higher percentage of non-keen readers reported finding the discussion when receiving the *Let's Read* pack, the information leaflet and the DVD helpful.

- Ownership of children's books: A higher percentage of participants who reported owning 10 or more children's books reported finding the book suggestions leaflet and DVD helpful while a higher percentage of participants who reported owning less than 10 children's books reported finding the discussion when receiving the *Let's Read* pack and the information leaflet helpful.
- All three categories together: Library members, keen readers and owners of 10 or more children books were all more likely than non-library members, non-keen readers and owners of less than 10 children's books to report the book suggestion leaflet as helpful. Non-library members, non-keen readers and owners of less than 10 children's books were all more likely than Library members, keen readers and owners of 10 or more children books to report that they found the discussion when receiving the *Let's Read* pack to be helpful. There was 100% satisfaction from all groups regarding the materials and components of the program, the ease of understanding messages and the program as a whole.

This data suggests that while there has been behaviour change and satisfaction with the program reported to some degree across all categories, participants who were already library members were more likely to report behaviour change and satisfaction with the program than non-library members except in relation to how often the child asks for a book and finding the discussion when receiving the *Let's Read* pack useful.

Non-library members, non-keen readers, and participants who owned less than ten children's books were more likely to report finding the discussion when receiving the *Let's Read* pack helpful. This possibly reflects the fact that for people who already engage in early literacy behaviours with their children the discussion with the MCH Nurse is less important as the information is not new to them. It could also possibly be a reflection of the feedback from the MCH Nurses that they 'tailor' the program to suit the client; MCH Nurses would not necessarily go into as much detail regarding the importance of early literacy development with parents already engaged in early literacy activities.

6.5 Post-Intervention Parent Data 2

Related Objectives: To increase **community wide** understanding of the importance and elements of early literacy development; to increase the motivation, resources, confidence and skills of **parents/carers** to provide a daily literacy experience to children 0-5 years and; to increase access to books and experiences in literacy activities in the home and in the community for **children 0-5 years**.

As at January 31 2010, six 'Parent Survey 2' surveys have been received from the Bendigo and Wyndham communities. Four of these respondents had *Let's Read* delivered to them on one occasion and two had *Let's Read* delivered to them on two occasions – one delivery of the four month package and one delivery of the 12 month package. Although this is a small sample, the data collected from these six surveys is summarised below.

Content

The two respondents who were reporting on their second delivery of *Let's Read* stated that the discussion when receiving the *Let's Read* pack, the Parent Information leaflet and the Book Suggestions leaflet had been from 'a little bit' to 'a great deal' helpful. Neither of these respondents received the DVD in the second pack (this would have been included in the first pack they received).

Behavioural Changes

- Two respondents reported that they have begun reading to their child more regularly since having *Let's Read* delivered to them and the remaining four stated 'I was already doing this'.

- Four respondents stated that they had not become a member or made their child a member of a library since having *Let's Read* delivered to them and two respondents stated 'I was already doing this'.
- One respondent stated that they had begun visiting a library with their child, four respondents stated that they had not begun visiting a library with their child, and one stated that 'I was already doing this' since having *Let's Read* delivered to them.
- Four of the six respondents stated that they had changed how they read with their child, and had followed suggestions on the *Let's Read* Parent Information leaflet.
- Three of the six respondents stated that they had changed how often they read with their child, purchased or borrowed books from the *Let's Read* Book Suggestions list, and 'noticed other positive outcomes as a result of changes' in their family's literacy behaviours. These changes were noted as:

'I find that my husband and other children have picked up on some of the techniques suggested. Which is great.'

'[child] brings books to me to read now.'

'When my youngest, who is 11 months, is quiet I often find her with a book in her hands!'

- Two of the respondents reported that they had 'been watching and using reading tips from the *Let's Read* DVD'.
- There was one suggestion for how to improve the *Let's Read* program: 'More books!!!!'

In summary, in this very small sample, it would seem there has been some behaviour change in each of the categories where respondents were not already engaging in the behaviour and the changes most commonly reported were how the child is read to and how regularly they are read to.

6.6 Focus Group – Families' Experiences of *Let's Read*

Related Objectives: : To increase **community wide** understanding of the importance and elements of early literacy development; to increase the motivation, resources, confidence and skills of **parents/carers** to provide a daily literacy experience to children 0-5 years and; to increase access to books and experiences in literacy activities in the home and in the community for **children 0-5 years**.

The following is a summary of the discussion held with a parent from the Wyndham area who had *Let's Read* delivered to her at her Maternal and Child Health Centre, and a group of women from her First Time Mothers Groups who had not had *Let's Read* delivered to them. The focus is on comments and thoughts from the parent who had received *Let's Read*. It is acknowledged that the sample is too small to be representative but the comments are included as they provide additional insight.

The parent spoken to had *Let's Read* delivered in the Wyndham area and reported being very happy with the program, including how it was delivered and the resources. The participant did not receive the DVD in her (12 month) pack and was disappointed by this and aware that this was due to lack of funding for the resources. The participant felt that it is a suitable program to encourage parents to read with their children although she and her partner were already very keen readers and had a 'small library' of children's books at home for their child before receiving the program. Due to having a collection of books she had not yet felt the need to take her child to the library to borrow books but had been to one session of 'Rhyme Time' which she felt was: 'not actually reading as such. It's singing songs and doing actions'.

The participant invited a small group of friends to join the discussion and there was a strong feeling that all would have liked to have *Let's Read* delivered to them. While there was knowledge and discussion of the 'Young Readers' program being universal all felt that they would like to have taken part in *Let's Read* as well.

It is interesting to note that the MCH Nurses and this group of parents all felt that *Let's Read* should be universal. The parents' argument was that it would not hurt to reinforce messages for those who already read to their children, and that it is an opportunity to pass on the information to partners who may not be as 'sold' on the idea that it is important to read to babies and children from a very young age.

While several attempts to recruit parents for a focus group in Bendigo were made, the evaluator was unable to recruit and therefore hold a focus group for parents that had participated in *Let's Read*.

6.7 Summary: *Let's Read* Participation in Bendigo and Wyndham

The data collected from MCH Nurses in Bendigo and Wyndham shows that *Let's Read* has been delivered almost equally to male and female children and for the records that reported on age packs given, almost half of the packs delivered were the 'from four months' packs. The baseline data shows that participants who were keen readers were more likely to be willing to participate in follow-up evaluation activities and that these participants were also more likely to be engaged in early literacy behaviours before having *Let's Read* delivered to them (Join the local library, start reading to child at an early age, have children's books available in the home). The 'keen reader' parents are also more likely to state that they will be happy to take part in giving feedback on the program.

The data from the PPIS reflected the baseline data in that most (81%) of respondents had received the 'from four months' *Let's Read* pack. The majority of respondents to the PPIS reported finding the program useful, of good quality and easy to understand. On average across the behaviours measured, about 60 % reported that the way they and others read and communicate with their children has changed 'quite a bit' to 'a great deal' in response to the program. It may be that at least some of the other respondents were already undertaking early-literacy activities, explaining the lack in changes to their behaviour. In relation to the *Let's Read* materials, close to half of respondents reported having purchased or borrowed suggested books and the majority of respondents stated that they had followed a suggestion from the *Let's Read* lists. Most commonly participants reported having tried 'all the suggestions', 'reading the same story often' to their child, and 'turning of the TV or radio'. Comments from participants included many references to the satisfaction with receiving a free book and the recommendation that *Let's Read* be made available universally.

The majority of participants for whom there were matching Baseline and PPIS data, fell into at least one of the categories of being keen readers, members of their local library and owning more than ten children's books in the home. Only two of the respondents with matching data fell into none of these categories, that is, they were not keen readers, or members of their local library and they had less than ten children's books in their homes. Participants who were local library members were more likely to report satisfaction with the *Let's Read* program and report having made behavioural changes as a result of the program. However, participants who were not library members or not keen readers or who had less than ten children's books in their home were more likely to report that the discussion when receiving *Let's Read* and the parent information sheet were useful. This may reflect the fact that for participants already engaged in early literacy behaviours the information is not new and/or the fact that MCH Nurses report tailoring the delivery of the program to the individual client's needs and therefore do not include a detailed discussion for these clients.

The data from the very small sample of respondents to the Parent Survey 2 showed that there had been some behaviour change in early literacy behaviours across all categories where this hadn't already been occurring before having *Let's Read* delivered. More data from this survey would be helpful as it provides information on whether or not participants were not reporting behaviour change because they were already engaging in the early literacy behaviours suggested, rather than because they were not responding to the suggestions made in the program.

7 Summary Key Findings

The *Let's Read* program has been delivered since 2008 in the communities of Wyndham and Bendigo through the Maternal and Child Health Service and in through some playgroups in Bendigo. Baseline and post-intervention quantitative evaluation activities have been undertaken via the Maternal and Child Health Centres since the inception of the program in both communities. More recently, focus groups were conducted to gather additional qualitative data. All of the data gathered provided some insight into how the *Let's Read* program has been delivered and received in the two communities, along with suggested enhancements to the program that are being considered in the program.

The following is a summary of the key findings from this data.

In both communities the level of funding limited delivery of the program to select areas. Regions of particularly low SES in both communities were selected as targets for the *Let's Read* program. In Wyndham initially only the 4 month and 18 month packs were delivered, in the hope that families could be tracked and given the next appropriate age pack at future visits. When this did not eventuate, it was decided to deliver all age packs to parents attending participating MCH Centres as appropriate to the age of the child being seen. In Bendigo, the 4 month to 18 month age packs were delivered from participating MCH Centres and the 3 ½ year age packs were delivered at playgroups. Other modifications included using the *Let's Read* pack to include 'other' relevant information for parents.

Most (81%) of the participants in the baseline evaluation data had received the 'from four months old' pack. While in both communities the level of funding limited delivery of the program to targeted areas, MCH Nurses and parents reported that they would prefer the program to be universally available. For the MCH Nurses this was important because they didn't believe that low literacy is an issue found only in low SES areas.

MCH Nurses reported satisfaction that the *Let's Read* training provided a good basis for understanding early literacy development, a good understanding of the *Let's Read* resources and clear guidance for how to deliver the program. Along with this positive feedback, it was suggested that there is a need for ongoing, low-cost training to be available in communities and that training would be most useful if it was modified to suit the specific needs and expertise of MCH Nurses.

MCH Nurses were enthusiastic about delivering the program and found it achievable to incorporate it into their current practices. They reported that they believe *Let's Read* is an effective way to promote reading with children and to begin conversations with parents about early literacy behaviours. It was noted by MCH Nurses in both Bendigo and Wyndham that there was some overlap in the delivery of the Young Readers and *Let's Read* programs. In general this was seen to be a positive, and the delivery of *Let's Read* in both communities was designed around the fact that the Young Readers program was being implemented at the same time. MCH Nurses stated that it was difficult to implement the multi-point delivery aspect of the program, and to deliver to parents who were difficult to engage and/or did not attend the MCH Centre on a regular basis. Suggestions for future delivery of *Let's Read* in Bendigo were for the library to play a role in the program by carrying the *Let's Read* books and resources for borrowing and to deliver to all families in the municipality.

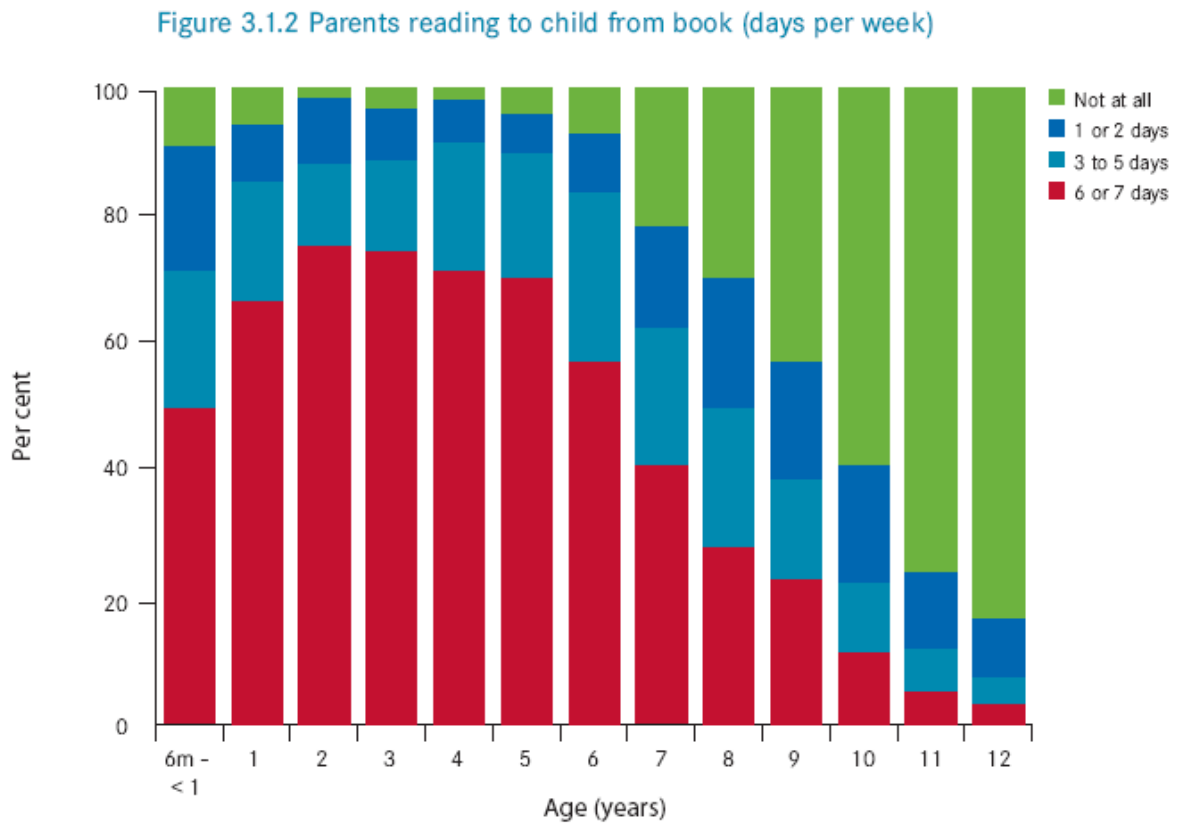
In respect to *Let's Read* resources the MCH Nurses regarded the 'gift' of the book and role modeling reading with the child for the parent as the most important aspects of the program. It was reported that there is a need for consistency of supply of resources in order for delivery of the program in the targeted areas to remain consistent. From the participants perspective, the book suggestions leaflet, DVD and parent information leaflet were reported to be the most useful resources. The data also

suggested that the discussion and the information sheet were more likely to be reported as being helpful for parents who had not previously engaged in early literacy behaviours, than by those who had already been members of a library and doing things like regularly reading to their child. In particular, MCH Nurses indicated that some clients are surprised at how engaged a very young child can be in an age-appropriate book and that this provides a very positive platform for delivery of the *Let's Read* messages. These findings suggest the low cost and easily delivered aspects of the program – the discussion and information leaflet – are those that are the most effective in delivering *Let's Read* messages to vulnerable families.

The participant data indicated that the majority of people that took part in the evaluation were already engaged in early literacy activities. This is consistent with data that has been collected in the Victorian Child Health and Wellbeing Survey, 2006, see Figure 3 below. For those families that were not engaged with early literacy activities there may be multiple barriers to engagement. This is reflected in data that suggests that participants who were local library members were more likely than those who were not to report satisfaction with the program and having made early literacy related behavioural changes. With this in mind, however, there was reported change in about 60% of participants' reading behaviours and how they communicate with their child and, as stated above, parents who had not previously been engaged in early literacy behaviours were more likely to report that they found the discussion and the information sheet as being useful to them.

The data suggests that the MCH Nurses in Bendigo and Wyndham find delivering the *Let's Read* program both manageable and worthwhile to deliver and would like to see it delivered to all clients. It also suggests that there have been some changes to participants' early literacy behaviours as a result of receiving the program. Future evaluation could build on these findings, in particular some qualitative data from focus groups with parents and more data from post intervention surveys would be of interest, including some data from the playgroups in Bendigo.

Figure 3: Victorian Child Health and Wellbeing Survey– Parents reading to child from book data



Source: Victorian Child Health and Wellbeing Survey 2006