

Embargoed to 29/8/05

Fact Sheet

- Let's Read is an early childhood literacy initiative of the Centre for Community Child Health (a key research centre of the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute) in partnership with The Smith Family.
- Let's Read is aimed at pre-school-aged children (0-5 years) and will form the basis of a long-term study into the effects of reading aloud on the development of literacy skills.
- Let's Read has been designed to be delivered in, and owned by, communities, building on existing local networks and systems to ensure its sustainability.
- Community-based professionals who have regular contact with families, such as community health nurses, child care staff and general practitioners, will receive training in emergent literacy techniques and will have access to Let's Read's research-based resources for parents.
- These professionals will work with parents to promote the importance of reading with young children and will demonstrate ways to engage children and help them develop emergent literacy skills.
- Let's Read is designed to be delivered at four points during a child's development – from 4 months, 12 months, 18 months, and 3 ½ years.
- Let's Read resources include:
 - Information leaflets to guide parents in sharing books with children in an age appropriate, effective and enjoyable way;
 - Suggested book lists to help parents select and read books with their children;
 - DVD demonstrating reading techniques, featuring Playhouse Disney presenter, Monica Trapaga and TV presenter and children's author, Andrew Daddo

An initiative of:



- Let's Read aims to reach a minimum of 50,000 children by 2007 and will initially be offered in Corio, Victoria and the Parramatta area, New South Wales. Literacy research
- Research studies have found that:
 - almost half of all Australians aged between 15-74 (6.2 million people) have either *very poor* or *poor* basic prose literacy skills, according to the most recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (1997);
 - literacy levels have not improved despite the advent of new technology, decades of reading research and teacher training;
 - 30% of year 3 and year 5 students failed to meet the appropriate minimum grade reading standard, according to a 1997 national survey of literacy standards of Australian children conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research;
 - strong links exist between literacy, school performance, self-esteem and life chances. Poor literacy skills are associated with generally lower education, earnings, health and social outcomes as well as being linked to high rates of unemployment, welfare dependence and teenage parenting;
 - reading failure disproportionately affects children from socially disadvantaged homes, which in turn contributes to a continuation of the cycle of disadvantage;
 - disadvantaged families report significantly lower numbers of books in the family home, significantly less time given to "reading aloud" activities and language exposure between child and caregiver, and lower numbers of library membership and library visits;
 - children who experience difficulties in learning to read are unlikely to catch up with their peers.
- Let's Read builds on research evidence that has shown that:
 - reading with young children is likely to be the single most important activity to develop a child's future literacy skills;
 - a child's ability to identify and manipulate sounds (emergent literacy skills) in their early years is an important predictor of later success in reading when a child begins their formal education;
 - activities that encourage positive attitudes to books and reading in early childhood lay the foundation for sound literacy at school.

Partners

The Centre for Community Child Health supports and empowers communities to continually improve the health and wellbeing of children and their families. The Centre is at the forefront of Australian research into early childhood development and behaviour and its findings are used to inform public policy, service delivery and professional practice. Located within The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne, the Centre is a key research centre of the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute.

Founded in 1922, The Smith Family is a national, independent, social enterprise that supports disadvantaged children and their families to create a better future through education. The Smith Family engages those who have the money, time or talent to give in order to create opportunities for financially disadvantaged children and young people to participate more fully in society.

Funders

Shell in Australia has committed \$750,000 over a three-year period to fund the first phase of implementation of Let's Read. Let's Read also gratefully acknowledges the support of The Telstra Foundation, Disney Hand and John T Reid Charitable Trusts. The Australian Research Council has committed a five-year linkage grant for a total research spend of \$1.3 million to measure the literacy and language outcomes in pre-school children.

Ends

Notes to editor:

Let's Read is an early childhood literacy initiative of the Centre for Community Child Health (a key research centre of the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute) in partnership with The Smith Family. Let's Read aims to improve and measure literacy outcomes in Australia by encouraging parents to read to pre-school-aged children (0-5 years). Let's Read will be delivered to families through community-based professionals using research-based, emergent literacy techniques and resources.

Let's Read gratefully acknowledges the support of Shell in Australia, The Telstra Foundation, Disney Hand, John T. Reid Charitable Trusts, and the Australian Research Council.

More details about Let's Read can be found on www.letsread.com.au

Media information

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