



The Let’s Read Community Program

Let’s Read is a national, evidence-based early literacy initiative that promotes reading with children from birth to 5 years. Let’s Read was developed by the Centre for Community Child Health at the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute and The Royal Children’s Hospital. The Murdoch Childrens Research Institute (MCRI) and The Smith Family (TSF) have partnered to implement Let’s Read with communities across Australia.

Let’s Read works with communities to promote the importance of emergent literacy development. Since 2005, the Let’s Read Community Program has been delivered in more than 100 disadvantaged communities across seven Australian states and territories, with over 200,000 children participating in the program.

In 2014, MCRI and TSF undertook a review of the Let’s Read Community Program. The review findings and the 2013 Let’s Read Literature Review informed the revision of the Let’s Read Community Program model to ensure alignment with both current research and practice-based evidence from community professionals and coordinators working in Let’s Read communities. The Let’s Read Community Program model is outlined below.¹

Vision

The Let’s Read Community Program vision is that all Australian children enter school with strong emergent literacy foundations.²

Outcomes and evaluation

Drawing from Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological framework for human development (1979), Let’s Read recognises that **families**, **services** and the **community** all have a significant influence on children – as well as on each other. As a result, these are the three settings that the Let’s Read Community Program aims to influence. The Let’s Read Community Program is measured against progress towards outcomes in each of these settings.

The long-term outcomes for the Let’s Read Community Program are:

- Let’s Read **communities** provide environments that successfully support strong emergent literacy development in children from birth to 5 years.
- Partner **Services** in Let’s Read communities include literacy-promoting activities as a core element of their practice.
- **Families** in Let’s Read communities engage in emergent-literacy-promoting activities with their children every day from birth.

Evaluation is built into the implementation of the Let’s Read Community Program. The Evaluation Framework³ provides a guide for evaluating the Let’s Read Community Program at two different levels: measuring the integrity of the implementation of the Community Program model (process evaluation); and measuring whether we are making progress towards or reaching the outcomes for the Let’s Read Community Program (impact evaluation).

¹ To learn more about the current early literacy research that has informed the development of the Let’s Read community program model read [Tool 3 – Early Literacy Research and the Let’s Read Community Program](#)

² Early (or ‘emergent’) literacy refers to the skills, knowledge & attitudes that are precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing, and the environments that support these developments (**Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998**)

³ Communities that set up the Let’s Read Community Program in their community will be given access to the Evaluation Framework.

Approach

The Let's Read Community Program draws on the knowledge, skills, resources and connections of local families, services and community groups to provide coordinated, locally relevant approaches to emergent literacy development. Using a place-based approach, the Let's Read Community Program focuses on the whole social and physical environment in a community, rather than just on the individual needs of those who live there.

Each child and family has a unique set of strengths and challenges. The Let's Read Community Program looks for opportunities to support existing strengths and capacities and compliment the way communities already work with vulnerable families. Using a strengths-based approach to working with families, the Let's Read Community Program seeks to build a positive partnership with families to foster children's emergent literacy development.

Who delivers the Let's Read Community Program?

The Let's Read Community Program is delivered by a network of **Partner Services** in a Let's Read community. Partner Services are services that have the capacity to deliver Let's Read to families from vulnerable groups, or communities with children aged from birth to five years. Figure 1. is an illustration of an example of a **network of Partner Services** in a Let's Read community:

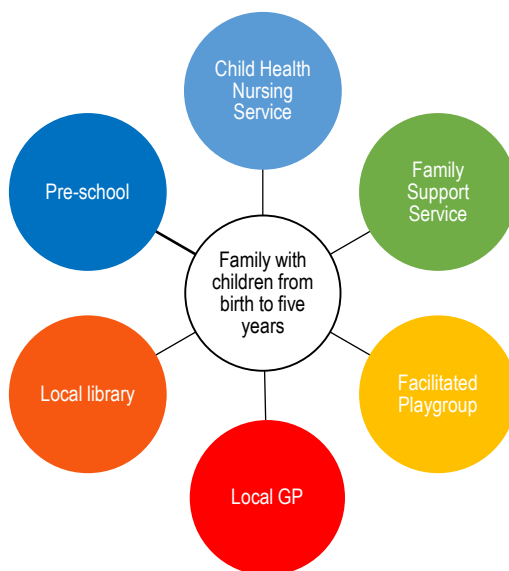


Figure 1: Illustration of an example of a **network of Partner Services** in a Let's Read community

Let's Read-trained **Community Professionals** from the network of Partner Services deliver the Let's Read Community Program during their interactions with families. These trained Community Professionals deliver the Let's Read Community Program to families using one-to-one interactions, group interactions or a combination of both.

Community Professionals who undertake the Let's Read training include community health nurses, teachers, early childhood educators, playgroup coordinators, librarians, social workers and GPs. In certain circumstances, community members (such as Elders or parents) with a connection to a Partner Service may also deliver the Let's Read Community Program after completing the Let's Read training.

What is a Partner Service required to do?

In each community Let's Read is delivered by a network of Partner Services that have the capacity to deliver Let's Read to families from vulnerable groups or communities who have children from birth to 5 years. This network of Partner Services includes both 'universal' and 'targeted' services. 'Universal' services refers to services accessed by all families within a community and 'targeted' services refers to services typically accessed by more vulnerable families. Partner Services are also required to:

- use a strengths-based approach to service delivery
- aim to deliver the Let's Read Community Program in line with the Community Program model
- aim to have a minimum of two Community Professionals who have completed the Let's Read training
- maintain a commitment to embedding emergent literacy promotion into their practice
- participate in and undertake evaluation activities as defined in the Let's Read evaluation framework
- participate on Steering Committee or existing committee (where possible)

How often is the Let's Read Community Program delivered to families?

Let's Read communities aim to deliver the Let's Read Community Program to vulnerable families 10 times during their child's first five years. This will be achieved by ensuring the network of Partner Services in a Let's Read community collectively enable access to the Let's Read Community Program for:

- **all families** four times at or around the following ages: 4 months, 12 months, 18 months and 3.5 yrs
- **vulnerable families** an additional six times, spread across the ages from birth to 5 years with a greater emphasis on interventions between the ages of 1–3 years.

Families will not be tracked regarding the number of times they have received the Let's Read Community Program. However, the network of Partner Services in a Let's Read community will collaborate to provide a range of services and opportunities that together ensure vulnerable families have the opportunity to be reached the optimal number of times.

How is the Let's Read Community Program delivered?





Let's Read trained Community Professionals deliver the **5 Elements** of the Let's Read Community Program model during their interactions with families. These **5 Elements** are delivered in a way that is appropriate for the child's age or developmental stage and for the individual family's needs. They do not need to be delivered in a linear style and can occur in one session or over a series of interactions with the same service. The **5 Elements** of the Let's Read Community Program model are explained in Figure 2 below:

Check in	Discuss emergent literacy	Model	Show, share and deliver resources	Emergent literacy connections
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using a strengths-based conversation, check-in with the family about: what they already know about emergent literacy, what they are doing regarding their child/children's emergent literacy development; whether anyone has previously spoken to them about emergent literacy and Let's Read, and the nature of any such conversations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a conversation with the family about emergent literacy development that builds on their current knowledge and behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model reading and emergent literacy-promoting activities with the family that build on their current knowledge and behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enquire whether the family has previously seen or used Let's Read resources. Building on this information, show and explain relevant Let's Read resources. Where appropriate, deliver a Let's Read book, refer the family to the local library to borrow recommended books, provide (or re-provide) existing Let's Read reading tip sheets, book suggestion lists, reading information sheets or the DVD. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information about and encourage families to engage with services and activities that promote emergent literacy in their community

Figure 2: The **5 Elements** of the Let's Read Community Program model

What resources are used to deliver the Let's Read Community Program model?

Community Professionals can use the [Let's Read Reading Tips and Tools](#) to show, share and deliver Let's Read during their interactions with families. These evidence-based resources, developed in partnership with early literacy and early childhood experts, provide practical information to support families to share books, stories, songs and nursery rhymes with their children from birth. The table below outlines the Let's Read resources that are available for communities to purchase so that Community Professionals can share with families while delivering the Let's Read Community Program:

Age of child	Suggested Let's Read resources to show and share with families	Available in:	
		English	Community languages
From birth/4 months 	Reading tip sheet – from 4 months	✓	✓
	Book Suggestion Lists – from 4 months	✓	x
	Reading with Young Children information sheet for families	✓	✓
	Let's Read DVD	✓	x
	Books from Book Suggestion List	✓	x
From 12 months 	Reading tip sheet – from 12 months	✓	✓
	Book Suggestion Lists – from 12 months	✓	x
	Reading with Young Children information sheet for families	✓	✓
	Let's Read DVD	✓	x
	Books from Book Suggestion List	✓	x
From 18 months 	Reading tip sheet – from 18 months	✓	✓
	Book Suggestion Lists – from 18 months	✓	x
	Reading with Young Children information sheet for families	✓	✓
	Let's Read DVD	✓	x
	Books from Book Suggestion List	✓	x
From 3.5 years 	Reading tip sheet – from 3.5 years	✓	✓
	Book Suggestion Lists – from 3.5 years	✓	x
	Reading with Young Children information sheet for families	✓	✓
	Let's Read DVD	✓	x
	Books from Book Suggestion List	✓	x

How are the Let's Read resources and recommended books shared with families?

The resources Community Professionals use to deliver the Let's Read Community Program will vary depending on what is appropriate for the child's age, developmental stage, the individual family's needs, the family's previous use of Let's Read resources, and the funding available to the community to purchase Let's Read resources. For example, a Let's Read recommended book may not necessarily be included in every interaction – some families may be directed to where Let's Read recommended books are available in their community (ie: the local library). For families from more vulnerable groups, or communities who may be less likely to have books in their homes, a Let's Read book may be included each time the Let's Read Community Program is delivered.

A Let's Read resource can also be shared more than once with a family. For example, a Community Professional could share one tip from the 12 month reading tip sheet with the family when their child is 13 months old and another tip from the same 12 month reading tip sheet when the child is 16 months old.

Community-wide early literacy promotion activities

Raising community awareness about the importance of early literacy development is vital to building and sustaining this evidence-based program in your community. Partner Services within Let's Read communities work collaboratively to provide literacy-rich environments for families and children by implementing community-wide early literacy-promotion activities that are documented in their Let's Read community plan. These include:

- disseminating emergent literacy messages
- providing opportunities for families to engage in emergent-literacy-promoting activities with their children
- holding literacy-promoting community events.

Let's Read key messages

Based on the 2012 Let's Read Market Research results, eight Let's Read key messages were developed. These key messages have informed the development of Let's Read resources and promotional materials that support community-wide promotion activities. These key messages are listed below:

1. Share, rhymes, songs and stories every day
2. Words are everywhere
3. Read, Play and Learn with books
4. Story time is a special time
5. Bond with books
6. Build a love of books
7. Sharing books from birth helps children become better readers for life
8. Sharing stories from birth gives children a great start to life

Implementing the Let's Read Community Program in your community

There are four phases of establishing a Let's Read Community Program, these are:

1. Plan
2. Set-up
3. Deliver
4. Review

There is a number of tasks involved in each of these Phases that include:

- identifying the need
- engaging relevant Partner Services
- developing and implementing the Community Plan ⁴
- managing budget (where relevant), seeking funding (where relevant) and program sustainability
- supporting Partner Services to deliver the Let's Read Community Program as per the model
- supporting Partner Services to embed emergent literacy promotion in their practice
- supporting networking between Partner Services
- overseeing, participating in and undertaking evaluation activities defined in the Evaluation Framework.⁵

To complete the tasks listed above, either a Let's Read Steering Committee can be formed or an existing committee can be joined to support and facilitate the successful delivery of the Let's Read Community Program. The existing committee may be one that is already working on issues related to early childhood.

In order to gain a clear understanding of the tasks involved in each of these phases (and the corresponding Let's Read toolkit resources that need to be completed) visit <http://www.letsread.com.au/Communities/Get-your-community-involved>.

⁴ Communities that set up the Let's Read Community Program in their community will be given access to a Community Plan to complete.

⁵ Communities that set up the Let's Read Community Program in their community will be given access to the Evaluation Framework.