

# Let's Read Social Marketing Campaign to Encourage Parents and Carers to Read with their Children from Birth.

- Executive summary –

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# 1. Executive summary

## 1.1. Background

Developed by the Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) at the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute (MCRI), Let's Read is an initiative that promotes reading with young children from birth to five years. It provides families with assistance and resources that support a community understanding of early language and emergent literacy development.

In partnership with The Smith Family, Let's Read has since been delivered to over 120,000 families in more than 100 Australian communities. In July 2012 MCRI was funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to implement a 12 month Let's Read National Early Years Literacy Campaign. Building on existing evidence-based programs, the Let's Read campaign engages families, professionals and communities to promote high quality early literacy environments for children aged 0-5 years.

As part of this campaign, MCRI contracted Colmar Brunton Social Research (CBSR) to explore **parents' and carers' current views and understanding of the importance of reading (and other emergent literacy development activities) in the early years (0-5 years) and how to encourage all parents (and caregivers)<sup>1</sup> in Australia to read with their young children (from birth)<sup>2</sup> for at least 10 minutes every day<sup>3</sup>**. CBSR were also engaged to focus test the draft creative concepts and taglines developed by a Creative Agency independently sourced by MCRI after Phase 1 of the market research.

## 1.2. Methodology

The fieldwork stage of the market research involved 2 phases:

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

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'parents' is used in the rest of the report to mean parents and caregivers.

<sup>2</sup> The research started out by targeting 'reading to children under 5 years'. This evolved to 'reading from 4 months', but based on the testing of Phase 2 – 'reading from birth' is the most effective way to engage parents.

<sup>3</sup> The initial brief focused on encouraging parents to read with their children for 10 minutes a day, this specification was dropped as parents in Phase 1 felt it was too directive and could make reading seem like a bore.

## 1.3. Key findings

### 1.3.1 Phase 1

Based on the four elements of behaviour change theory (see Appendix C), the findings from Phase 1 are summarised below in reference to encouraging parents to read with their children.

#### Benefits

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

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

#### Costs and barriers

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

#### Making it easier

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

#### Influential others

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

#### Exchange statement

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

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

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

### **Attitudes towards promoting early literacy**

The research suggested that to make reading every day with children from birth more appealing, this action needs to be seen as fun, relaxing, realistic, carefree, modern, easy going, something special between the parent and the child and not based on others’ expectations of what a good parent is. As such, all communications should suggest and offer help, and advise parents of alternatives without directing, preaching or making parents feel guilty. Further, it was noted that pamphlets, flyers and posters without a champion would be ineffective and the concept would need to be catchy, fun, novel and stand out.

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

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

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

Based on the findings from Phase 1 and the identification of the segments above, it was recommended that the Let’s Read campaign focus its efforts on the ‘Battlers’ who can be identified as those parents falling into the Contemplation stage of behaviour change (please refer to the behaviour change model in Appendix C i.e. Rejection, Pre-Contemplation, Contemplation, Action and Maintenance). This stage of behaviour change is indicative of parents who to some degree understand the basic importance of reading with their young children, but require motivation, encouragement or practical and safe strategies to help support them towards this behaviour.

Following this recommendation, the draft creative concepts and taglines were subsequently designed to target parents characteristic of being a ‘Battler’, with inclusion and consideration of the immediate benefits of reading with children (i.e. bonding and giving children the best start in life). The draft creative concepts and taglines developed aimed to motivate parents to read with their child in a

practical, simple and achievable manner, whilst acknowledging the immediate benefits of reading, such as love, bonding and fun.

It was acknowledged through the results of Phase 1, that a safe and achievable campaign would best engage these parents in considering and subsequently reading with their children, without the risk of threatening or using guilt to encourage parents to read with their children. A significant consideration was to introduce practical reading strategies with parents in an achievable manner that was almost a safe 'stepping stone' to the ultimate behaviour of reading an age appropriate book with their child every day.

A strategic decision was also made to not explicitly state that reading would strengthen a parent's love, bond and relationship with their child, due to the risk that it might be inconsistent with the soft and non-threatening approach required to ensure parental engagement and trust with the campaign. The immediate benefits of reading were to be incorporated implicitly through the final execution and delivery of the draft creative concepts, such as, through children's voices, laughter and parental enjoyment.

Finally, given the significant and prominent characteristics of the remaining segments of parents, the design and development of the creative concepts and taglines were also drafted in consideration of all the other parent segments. Specifically, these draft creative concepts and taglines were also mutually designed for engaging the 'Cynic' or 'Disengaged' parents, but also acknowledged that to effectively engage these difficult to reach groups, various other communication strategies would need to be implemented to complement and further reinforce the draft creative concepts. These could include web based and resource dissemination of facts and figures of importance and implications of emergent literacy, engagement of early childhood professionals in promoting the importance of early literacy, dissemination of key messages and resources through community program implementation with vulnerable communities.

### 1.3.2 Phase 2

Phase 2 of the fieldwork involved testing 4 draft creative radio concepts and 13 draft taglines.

#### Radio concepts

The 4 draft creative concepts tested were as follows<sup>4</sup>:

Concepts 1 and 2	Concepts 3 and 4
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Concept 1: Read anywhere</b> (every day out of home environments such as in the car, at the MCG, in the supermarket etc.)</li> <li>2. <b>Concept 2: Supermarket</b> (using every day experiences such as a trip to the supermarket as an opportunity for reading while acknowledging the importance of the parent's role to read with their child)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. <b>Concept 3: Cereal packet</b> (showing how everyday items in a family's life are an opportunity to read to and engage children with words)</li> <li>4. <b>Concept 4: Twinkle Twinkle</b> (musically-based concept involving an adapted version of Twinkle Twinkle little star to demonstrate how everyday life items and events can be used to engage kids in letters, sounds and rhymes)</li> </ol>

<sup>4</sup> Please note these draft creative concepts were presented to participants as recordings spoken by one voice.

The focus group findings indicated that Concepts 1 and 3 best encouraged the majority parents to read more often, in every day places, using strategies that they had not thought about before.

Overall, there was positive reaction to giving parents options (rather than sitting down and reading a book at home) which makes reading with young children seem easier. This promotion of reading with children was positively received by around 50% of parents. Parents felt that the draft creative concepts were **novel, fun** and that they reminded them that there were **easy** things they could do every day that fitted into their busy lives, and that this would also help their children develop a love of reading and learning.

**In terms of influencing actual behaviour change, the overall effect of the draft creative concepts was mixed. Over half of the parents felt that concept 1 and concept 3 would encourage them to read more to their children, but less than 50% of the parents felt that the remaining draft creative concepts would influence a change in behaviour.**

The results of Phase 2 also indicated that some parents felt that the draft creative concepts didn't provide an effective rationale for why they should read with their children from such a young age. Whilst parents generally understood that it was good to read with children, there was a lack of awareness about the benefits of reading with children from birth. Some parents also felt that the concepts needed to specify why helping children learn about words, sounds and letters from birth was beneficial.

In respect to the production of the draft creative concepts, there was also feedback received regarding the final execution of the radio concepts. For instance, there was feedback that fathers could be included in the draft concepts as well as a number of different voices, such as a child's voice, to make them more inclusive. Aboriginal parents also felt that the concepts and taglines could incorporate references to verbal stories, pictures, colours, animals and country as ways to help their children learn. Some parents also felt the draft creative concepts could be made more effective by emphasising the love and bonding special time aspects of reading with children.

**Taglines**

The taglines tested were as follows:

The 5 taglines designed for concept 1-3	The 3 taglines designed for concept 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Make reading to your kids child's play;</li> <li>B. Reading to your kids can be child's play;</li> <li>C. Words are everywhere;</li> <li>D. Don't just read by the book; and</li> <li>E. Words don't have to be work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>F. 3 ways to bring words into your kid's world;</li> <li>G. 3 Ways With Words; and</li> <li>H. Share words, rhyme and stories anytime, anywhere.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Additional taglines designed to capture the love and bonding immediate personal benefits of reading with children</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. Story time is special time;</li> <li>J. Bond with books;</li> <li>K. Reading with your kids brings you closer together;</li> <li>L. Reading with your kids is fun; and</li> <li>M. Build a love that lasts.</li> </ul>	

The tagline of 'Share words, rhyme and stories anytime, anywhere' was perceived to be the most effective of all the draft taglines. Participant feedback suggested that this tagline clearly explained

what parents needed to do and provided them with additional options. There was also feedback that the use of the word 'rhyme' suggested that the tagline included very young children and that the use of the word 'stories' reminded parents to include books. The use of the word 'stories' was particularly appealing to Aboriginal parents. Finally, the 'anywhere, anytime' message encouraged parents to read in many environments and to use strategies that they had not thought about before.

## 1.4. Recommendations

### 1.4.1 Phase 1:

Promote through future communications the **immediate personal benefits to parents around love and learning to encourage this target audience to read with their children every day from birth**

Focus efforts on 'Battlers' and those in the Contemplation stage of behaviour change by making reading with young children easier ('How to') i.e. give parents options, promoting free or low cost accessible audio visual resources and by promoting the literacy benefits of alternatives like singing, nursery rhymes and making up stories.

Develop materials for parents and resource kits for service providers at key touch points in young children's lives e.g. first time mothers in hospital, maternal nurses, at the 4 month checkup, health centres, preschools, childcare centres, 'Mums and Bubs' groups, parents groups and parent Facebook pages and develop strategies to engage other family members and significant others.

### 1.4.2 Phase 2:

Focus resources on developing the most promising draft creative concepts i.e. Concept 3: 'Cereal Packet' and Concept 1: 'Read anywhere'.

Incorporate the 'Share words, rhyme and stories anytime, anywhere' tagline into various campaign materials.