



MEDIA RELEASE

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United push to boost literacy levels in Perth's northern suburbs

Up to 3,500 pre-school aged children in the Perth suburbs of Balga, Girrawheen, Koondoola, Mirrabooka and Westminster will benefit from a new early literacy project called **Literacy Links**, which aims to improve the prospect of children being ready to learn to read when they start school.

The project is in response to research showing that one in seven children in the broader Mirrabooka area are at risk of falling well behind in their ability to read, write, count and recognise shapes and numbers.

The Ethnic Child Care Resource Unit (ECCRU) will coordinate the Literacy Links project as part of the Mirrabooka Area Communities for Children Initiative. Literacy Links will work collaboratively with the State Library of WA Better Beginnings Program, local libraries including the Girrawheen and Mirrabooka libraries, child care centres, preschool/kindergartens and playgroups to ensure parents and carers are given the best possible support to start sharing books and reading with their infants and toddlers.

The building blocks for literacy are laid well before a child begins school. Early intervention is recognised as crucial to a child's development and future success, with international research showing that children who have not developed emergent literacy skills (the ability to identify and manipulate sounds) by school age are unlikely to catch up with their peers. This affects their educational achievements and future employment prospects.

Literacy Links consists of three main components:

Distribution of free children's books and literacy resources - the Better Beginnings Program will provide every newborn child in the Mirrabooka area with a resource pack through the Child Health Nurse network. The pack includes a free book, growth chart, tips on how to read with babies and a *Let's Read* DVD that features well known identities Monica Trapaga and Andrew Daddo showing parents how to have fun reading with their child.

This will be followed up by Literacy Links distributing *Let's Read* resources at the 12-month child health nurse visit. These resources include a free book, information on how to read with toddlers, a recommended book list and a *Let's Read* DVD. *Let's Read* is an early literacy program developed by The Smith Family and the Centre for Community Child Health. Shell in Australia is the inaugural corporate supporter of *Let's Read* and has funded the *Let's Read* resources that will be distributed to families in the Mirrabooka area. A pre-loved book drive will increase the number of books available to parents with pre-school aged children.

Professional development opportunities - for child care workers, playgroup leaders and health providers to support them with resources and information needed to promote early literacy with local families.

Community outreach services – to broaden its reach, Literacy Links will also include literacy activities at child care centres, playgroups, libraries and other public places where families gather, ensuring all families in the area are included. These activities will be supported by volunteers who will be recruited from the community.

According to Craig Stewart, The Smith Family's project manager for the Mirrabooka Area Communities for Children Initiative, ECCRU was chosen to manage the Literacy Links project because of its reputation as a deliverer of quality child centred programs and a valued service for culturally and linguistically diverse families.



“Mirrabooka has a rich diversity of cultures from around the world and a strong Indigenous population and it is vital that these communities see the project as relevant and inclusive of their culture,” Mr Stewart said.

ECCRU’s Executive Officer, Christine l’Anson believes the level of collaboration between local organisations and the diversity of family focused activities will be instrumental in the success of the Literacy Links project

“By tapping into the networks that parents already access such as child health nurses and bringing families together at special community events, we stand a much greater chance of having an impact on the future literacy skills of local children. The coordinated approach is also important as it means families will get the maximum benefit from what each organisation has to offer and a consistent message about the importance of reading aloud with their children,” Ms l’Anson said.

With up to 3,500 pre-school aged children in the Mirrabooka area, the project requires significant financial backing to ensure all families will receive books and materials at crucial milestones. Chris Gunner, Chief Operating Officer of Shell Development Australia, explains why Shell was keen to be involved.

“Shell is committed to investing in the communities where we operate and one of the best ways we can do this is by supporting the development of local children,” Mr Gunner said. “Shell has worked closely with The Smith Family and the Centre for Community Child Health throughout the development of *Let’s Read*. We’re passionate about the program and making sure it is available to all parents in the Mirrabooka area when their child turns one.”

Better Beginnings packs are currently being distributed to parents of newborns and the *Let’s Read* resources will be available later next month. The community activities are already underway with five local playgroups already visited. The Literacy Links Project Coordinator has demonstrated story telling, use of rhymes and literacy craft activities with the parents and children. Already the benefits are evident with one parent commenting that “Since having the visit from Literacy Links I read to my children more often”. Another parent commented that “I didn’t know there was so much literacy value in every day things such as road signs, food packaging and junk mail.”

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For further information, interviews or photography please contact: Louise Partridge on 0418 201 533 or louise.partridge@smithfamily.com.au

About ECCRU

ECCRU is a not-for-profit organisation that supports families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to access child care and other children’s services that support their children’s development. Families are supported through various community projects, bicultural workers in child care and through access to multilingual resources and information.

About Communities for Children

Communities for Children is funded by the Australian Government under the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy to support up to 45 local communities with funding of up to \$4 million per community for local early childhood development initiatives. The Smith Family is the Facilitating Partner for Communities for Children in Mirrabooka, coordinating the investment of \$3.8 million in the local community.

About *Let’s Read*

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