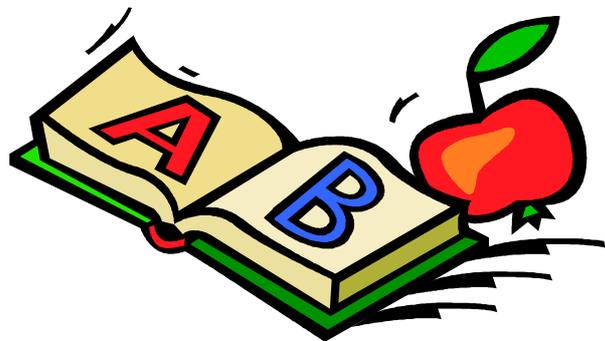


Australian *Bookstart*: a national issue, a compelling case



*A report to the nation by
Friends of Libraries Australia (FOLA)*

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Melbourne
Friends of Libraries Australia
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Bookstart, Born to read, Books for babies, Read with me or Let's read programs generally endeavour to ensure that all babies, through their parents or caregivers, receive a free kit from their local public library containing at least one quality board book, information on the critical importance of developing the literacy of children by reading to them as babies, and information on library membership and storytimes. A 2004 survey of Australian public libraries showed that a number of libraries were involved in forms of *Bookstart* programs, and that many others wished to provide *Bookstart*. Lack of funding and staff time, were the major constraints on them doing so. From research and British, US and other international experience, a nationally inclusive, systematic and evaluated Australian *Bookstart* program provided through public libraries in association with early childhood health agencies, would provide an outstanding national literacy development return for a low overall investment of \$2 million pa. Such a program will require leadership from the Australian government and cooperation between it, state/territory, and local governments.

This first Friends of Libraries Australia (FOLA) report to the nation was launched by FOLA President Peter McInnes at the 10th anniversary celebration of the establishment of Friends of Libraries Australia, a celebration held in the National Library of Australia 3 December 2004. It is made freely available in print or electronically to FOLA members, and other interested parties.

Recipients are encouraged to copy all, or parts of the report, for further dissemination and discussion.

Feedback to FOLA about the report through its author, Dr Alan Bundy, is also encouraged info@auslib.com.au or PO Box 622 Blackwood SA 5051 fax 08 82784000.

Read in order to live Gustave Flaubert

In 1920 H G Wells observed that ‘Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe’. In that race

- fundamental to education, lifelong learning and the sustenance of democratic institutions in the knowledge age is information literacy—recognition of the need for information and the capacity to identify, access, evaluate, synthesise and apply the needed information
- fundamental to the development of an information literate and questioning citizenry remains the capacity to read well
- fundamental to the development of the capacity to read well is for its development to commence as early as possible, and well before formal schooling commences.

Yet member countries of the OECD still have up to half of their adult populations not reading at the level of literacy required for everyday life in an increasingly information-intensive world. In Australia 44 per cent of adults are deficient in their literacy and numeracy. Even more lack information literacy, a natural extension of literacy as the ‘umbrella’ or ‘functional’ literacy of the 21st century.¹

As the Australian Library and Information Association’s *Statement on libraries and literacy* states (alia.org.au/policies/library.literacy.html)

Rapid social change, the emphasis on lifelong education, the increasing rate of technological development and the movement towards an information-based society are factors which suggest, as never before, that literacy is an essential instrument for effective participation in society.

The illiterate person can be substantially disadvantaged. It is essential to democratic processes of government that citizens have the skills and opportunities to inform themselves on matters of community and national interest and participate in the decision-making process.

The scope for access to information resources is growing and will be increased enormously as communications technology becomes more sophisticated. Nevertheless, the communications media of the foreseeable future will continue to assume the user’s capacity to read and understand the written word.

Illiteracy thus comes at great cost to the life and potential of the individual. It also comes at great cost to the community in terms, for example, of occupational health and safety, societal dysfunctionality and crime at all levels, particularly that committed by young males. A forceful reminder of this and of the high cost of illiteracy, is that typically 60 per cent of prisoners are illiterate or have marginal literacy. Addressing it as an adult issue in a coordinated and well resourced way must be a priority for Australia. It must also continue to be a priority in school education.

However, as Geraldine Casterton, president of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy observed in 2001

2001 marks the 10th anniversary of the release of Australia’s language and literacy policy ... at the time of the release Australia was thought to be at the vanguard of adult literacy policy and provision internationally. Now, ten years down the track, we are falling behind ... with a dying commitment from federal and state governments resulting in poorly coordinated action, fragmented, under resourced provision and lack of appropriate accountability measures.²

Beginning with *Bookstart**

It has been fairly stated that literacy development is the most important social justice issue in education. However, the continuing need to address illiteracy as an *adult* issue indicates earlier failure by parents, formal education, public libraries and other community educational agencies.

It is now recognised that children need to be introduced to books and reading at the earliest age possible, well before their school years. Dorothy Butler, the New Zealand educator, emphasised this 25 years ago in her seminal text *Babies need books*.³

This is because children learn more in their first five years than at any other time in their lives, with the first two years being an extremely important time for language development. Numerous studies have shown that children who are read to from an early age learn more sounds, develop listening skills, extend their vocabularies, imaginations and understandings of concepts, and learn to read by themselves more easily. Their parents or caregivers, however, may need sensitive and nonstigmatising awareness raising, encouragement and support in providing this critical early learning experience for their babies and children.

Numerous researchers and writers after Butler have reinforced her message. For example, in *Read me a story: parents, teachers and children as partners in literacy learning* Julie Spreadbury reviews the post 1952 research, including her own Brisbane study, on the importance of the family to children's literacy learning. She notes that a 1980s longitudinal study found that

Reading ability at age seven was found to be strongly predicted by knowledge of literacy on entry to school and this in turn was predicted by parents' interest in literacy and the quality of the parent verbal interaction with the child in the years before school. By the time the child began school she or he was knowledgeable about books and reading and this became predictive of later success in reading. Parents and the home environment were thus directly responsible for the child's concept of literacy.

The parent effect found to be the most crucial was active encouragement of literacy activities (such as bedtime story reading) and the provision of reading and writing activities in the home.⁴

Gloria Rolton in *Read to me*, published by the Australian Council for Educational Research in 2001, observes that

Children who live in homes where reading is valued, where they have been surrounded by books, handled books visited libraries and enjoyed listening to stories have a great advantage when they begin school. They have already gained many of the skills for learning to read. And they have learnt these skills while having fun. These children see reading as something that is a normal activity to be enjoyed, not a difficult 'school-only' activity. They assume that they will learn to read because every one at home does.⁵

Rolton focuses on the importance of the selection of high quality books for reading to children, to which further reference is made in this report because some well-meaning *Bookstart* programs have relied on cheap or donated books of very poor quality.

* *Bookstart* is the usage by the UK program to deliver free book kits or packs to babies to encourage parents and caregivers to read to them. Broadly synonymous are *Books for babies*, *Babies love books*; *Read with me*; *Babies who read, succeed*; *Sow the seeds to read*; and *Born to read*

South Australian writer, educator and literacy consultant, Mem Fox, is the leading current Australian advocate of reading to babies as the vital starting point of family literacy programs. She has asserted

Reading aloud is the most important tool in literacy education ... if every parent—and every adult caring for a child—read aloud a minimum of three stories a day to the children in their lives, we could probably wipe out illiteracy within one generation.⁶

The world of education and literacy development has witnessed many passing fads and claimed panaceas over the years. Fox's assertion, and those of other advocates, may be judged thus by the sceptic. However, from the US, UK and Western Australia, there is unequivocal evidence of its essential truth.

The US evidence is in the report of the Early Literacy Project⁷ which evaluated the results of early literacy programs involving 30,000 children and 14 libraries. This study answered two questions, the support of public libraries for parent and caregiver education for early literacy and 'when parent and caregivers of low income children take part in early literacy programs designed by the ... Early Literacy initiative, do they understand and use the best practices they learn?'

It was found that the project 'resulted in substantial changes in knowledge, skills and behaviour for parents, caregivers, libraries and the communities they serve ... parents of every age, educational background, income level and ethnicity ... significantly increased their literacy behaviour.

Reinforcing the point, *American libraries* 11 February 2002 carried the following item

A Chicago Public Library program to expand the number of books and other materials available to readers younger than age 9 was announced February 7 by Mayor Richard Daley. 'The object is to get children excited about reading *before* they are old enough to read', Daley said at a news conference held at the library's new Austin-Irving branch.

The *Get wild about reading* program, designed to get children 'behind a book instead of in front of the television' as they mayor put it, arose from an April 2001 reading roundtable of university professors and school administrators Daley assembled to find ways to improve reading scores in Chicago public schools, according to the February 8 *Chicago tribune*. 'We heard loudly and clearly that *starting at birth* was the only way we were going to get children reading and excited about reading', Library Commissioner Mary Dempsey said.

The US *Born to read* project sponsored by the Association for Library Service to Children of the American Library Association has, since the mid 1990s, prompted numerous local projects based on the success at five demonstration sites involving public libraries and health care providers.⁸

The evidence from the UK is the outstanding success, and real return on modest investment by the British government, charities and a major commercial sponsor (Sainsbury, the supermarket chain), of its world leading and comprehensive *Bookstart* scheme. This commenced in 1992 in Birmingham when 300 inner city lower socioeconomic families received free books for 7-8 month old babies, and advice on book sharing from health visitors.

The UK *Bookstart* scheme

The following information is from the *Bookstart* partnership report June 2003⁹

What is *Bookstart*? *Bookstart* is a national program that works through locally based organisations to give a free pack with books to babies and guidance materials for parents and carers. It aims to promote a lifelong love of books and is based on the principle that every child in the UK should enjoy and benefit from books from as early an age as possible.

How does it work? The program is based on partnership. It is coordinated nationally by the independent, educational charity *Booktrust*. Schemes throughout the UK order materials through *Booktrust* and distribute packs locally. Schemes are usually coordinated by the library service, but sometimes through education or health services, who place local library information and an invitation to join the library in the pack. Packs are usually delivered to families at babies' 7-9 month health check with their health visitor.

Partnership is the vital ingredient and it is a unique triumph of the program that it has facilitated numerous new links between organisations within the early years sector. 90% of library authorities said that *Bookstart* has enabled them to develop new partnerships (*The Library Association, Early Years Survey 2001*)

How is it funded? National level funding for English schemes currently comes via an annual grant of £500,000 from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The devolved nations (Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) have central funding via their respective governments. A number of other charities and organisations have also contributed to *Bookstart* over the last few years.

In addition to this, *Booktrust* has negotiated partnerships with a number of children's book publishers who provide books at a greatly reduced rate, at cost or for free. All of this reduces the cost of the *Bookstart* pack from what would be a retail price of £14 to only £2.50.

Schemes in England pay for these reduced cost packs through local funding. Schemes have received funding primarily from the library service, Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs), Sure Start and health authorities.

Who else is involved? In addition to over 4,000 libraries, 12,000 health visitors, government sponsors and over 14 publishers involved in *Bookstart*, *Booktrust* consults with numerous organisations such as the DCMS, Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the Basic Skills Agency, the Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association (CPHVA) and the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP). There is also a Library Working Group, Health Professionals Working Group and multi-agency steering committee providing guidance to the national program.

Who gets *Bookstart*? *Booktrust* aims that every baby in the UK will get a *Bookstart* pack. It is estimated that the program reaches 90% of babies in the UK, as a few areas do not have a functioning scheme at present. *Booktrust's* Schemes Liaison Officer offers support to these areas to help facilitate *Bookstart* there. Any baby that has not received a pack at their 7-9 month health check is eligible for a free mini pack from *Booktrust*.

Bookstart is for every baby – that is its appeal. But many schemes find that it is an especially useful tool to reach out to socially excluded groups. And because it is for everyone, it is non-stigmatising.

Bookstart began in 1992 with 300 babies. In 2000, there were 650,000. Since 2001 there have been 1,170,061 *Bookstart* babies.

Does it make a difference? YES it does! *Bookstart* children do better in school. Research by Wade and Moore (1998) showed that children who had *Bookstart* were clearly ahead in both literacy and numeracy upon entering school. Further research (2000) showed that this

head start was maintained through Key Stage 1 as *Bookstart* children did significantly better than their counterparts in both teacher assessment and test results.

Research by the University of Surrey Roehampton has also shown that *Bookstart* families have better book sharing skills and ways of extending reading as an activity. They read more with babies and young children, are more likely to join the library, are more confident with regard to reading to children and are more aware of the role reading can play in speech/language development.

The *Bookstart* report includes details of the seven critical elements of a *Bookstart* scheme, and notes that international interest in *Bookstart* is growing. It has been adopted in Japan where, with 98% of the population literate, its main benefit is seen as promoting family bonding and parenting skills. The report also notes that two Australian schemes have affiliated with *Bookstart*, and another has expressed interest. A significant extension of UK *Bookstart* is *Booktouch*, a program which aims to get blind and partially sighted babies and toddlers 'bookstarted'.¹⁰ Funding has also been received recently to distribute two more kits, one for 2-3 year olds and another for 4 year olds.

***Bookstart* research**

An important aspect of UK *Bookstart* as an early intervention strategy to develop the foundation of literacy has been the investment in quantitative *and* qualitative evaluation, against a background of largely only quantitative research in the area. This approach by the researchers, Maggie Moore and Barrie Wade, involved obtaining qualitative data in interviews with librarians, health visitors, nursery nurses and the project coordinator—the lay professionals working with families in the local authority.

They concluded that

Interviews with these *Bookstart* professionals are all overwhelmingly positive about the value of giving books to babies and their role in the process. None of the participants interviewed had negative opinions.

Interviews with library staff demonstrate their firm commitment to the role that book sharing has to play in children's early development. The librarians who run the Cradle Club are committed to supporting parents in book sharing and providing the necessary environment in which this can occur. Other benefits are the social interactions and learning opportunities that parents and children are able to enjoy.

It is evident that the role of health visitors is crucial in introducing and explaining the pack. They have seen an increase in the enthusiasm of parents for books as well as a development in parents' abilities and skills in sharing books with their children. In fact, the *Bookstart* project is seen as a facilitating factor in the work that health visitors are engaged in.

Nursery nurses comment on how *Bookstart* benefits not only children, but also other members of the family. They are able to use their professional skills to develop the literacy beginnings made by *Bookstart* and to use the project as a model to help and engage those children from families who had not benefited from the project.

The project coordinator emphasises that *Bookstart* is essentially a simple and effective idea, but one that works in all situations. Nonetheless, efforts have still to be made to involve and engage hard to reach families. All professionals recognise that, despite all the benefits it

offers, Bookstart cannot be a panacea for all aspects of poor parenting; nonetheless, it is seen as an important beginning.

These qualitative evaluations have shown that Bookstart is successful in that it has generated positive attitudes to, and an interest in, books and book sharing in a wide range of families. The results suggest that some 'fringe' parents may need special injections of support included with their book gifts. This has implications for already very busy health visitors. However, these professionals express their willingness to make contact with hard to reach families and see Bookstart as a mainstream aspect of their most important work. The evaluations also point to the necessity of greater awareness of the needs of parents whose first language is not English.¹¹

The only Australian independently researched evaluation of something like a *Bookstart* program is an outcome of the *Better beginnings* program, part of the WA government's early years strategy which aims to improve literacy outcome for young children in lower socioeconomic circumstances.

Undertaken by researchers at Edith Cowan University, preliminary findings were reported at the CECDE conference in Eire in July 2004.¹²

Bookstart in Australia and New Zealand

It appears that at least several New Zealand public libraries, such as Wellington, already provide a form of *Bookstart*. In July 2004 New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark officiated at the launch of the Dymock's Literacy Foundation in New Zealand, at which the first of the foundation's projects—*Books for NZ babies*—was announced. Patrons of the foundation include NZ children's writer Margaret Mahy, and bestselling Australian author Bryce Courtenay. Australia has no commitment yet to a national approach.

The first sustained large Australian *Bookstart* initiative appears to have been by the City of Moreland Libraries in metropolitan Melbourne. However, from the survey responses, the earliest continuing program has been provided since 1990 by the Cummins School Community Library on the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia. This joint use public-school library serves a total population of about 5,000 people in a rural area which has a reputation for self starting innovation and achievement. Another joint use public school library in rural South Australia, Quorn, appears to supply one of the best *Bookstart* kits in Australia, which includes a copy of Mem Fox's *Reading magic*.

The Moreland *Bookstart* was launched in August 2000. In a journal article published in 2002, Genimaree Panozzo, the Community Relations Librarian for Moreland, notes that its scheme

... is modelled on the UK scheme of the same name which is coordinated by the Book Trust and aimed at encouraging parents and carers to read to babies. The *Bookstart* kit is distributed to every newborn Moreland baby through the maternal and child health nurses. The kit, complete with calico library bag, features a board book and advice on developing children's reading skills from an early age as well as information on parenting resources. Where possible, a bilingual board book is provided for LOTE speakers. The library's booklet contained in the kit—*Reading is forever: how to develop your child's reading skills and have fun together*—is also available free to all Moreland residents, schools and centres.

The *Bookstart* kit has been overwhelmingly successful and has been the source for the most accolades regarding the Moreland reading project. *Results from a survey with 300 respondents found that 35 per cent of parents began to read to their babies for the first time as a result of the kit while 60 per cent began reading to their babies more often.*

A number of other library services have implemented, or are planning to implement, similar *Bookstart* schemes and I hope that one day Australia may follow the UK lead and with sponsorship, establish a national rollout of this worthwhile project. The original 1992 recipients of the *Bookstart* kit in Birmingham are being tracked against a control group. Given that this research has revealed that *Bookstart* children are consistently performing better at school than the control group, including at mathematics, there seems no better project to give children a good start to education and life skills.

The Moreland Library Service intends to become affiliated with the Book Trust's *Bookstart* program, thereby drawing on the Trust's considerable expertise and research. Our library service will also introduce 10-15 minute rhyme time sessions for babies based on UK models which will reinforce the messages in the *Bookstart* kits.¹³

The 2003 edition of the *Directory of Australian public libraries*,¹⁴ using information supplied by libraries in October 2002, recorded that only eight Australian local authorities were providing, or commencing, *Bookstart* programs through their public libraries. These were

	Population served
Australian Capital Territory (affiliated with <i>Bookstart</i> UK)	320,000
Bega Valley NSW	30,000
Darwin NT	71,000
Gannawarra Vic	12,500
Geelong Regional Vic	234,000
Lithgow NSW	44,000
Merriden WA	3,650
Moreland Vic (affiliated with <i>Bookstart</i> UK)	138,000
Total population served	853,150

It is likely that a few other local authorities were providing a form of *Bookstart*, but did not identify that they were doing so. It is also likely that variations on the *Bookstart* concept have been, and are being, attempted by various child support and state government agencies and community organisations such as Rotary and Lions but with no direct connection with the local public library system.

One such current initiative is the Royal Children's Hospital (Melbourne) *Let's read* program which involves the distribution of a limited number of age-appropriate books to parents of young children in four local authorities on the eastern fringe of Melbourne.¹⁵

Extrapolating, however, from the populations served by those public libraries that did so identify, only about 4 per cent of Australian babies may have been receiving a form of *Bookstart* at the end of 2002. This compares with over 90 per cent of UK babies actually receiving *Bookstart*.

At a 2004 national committee meeting in Melbourne, Friends of Libraries Australia (FOLA) discussed the *Bookstart* need in Australia. It endorsed a proposal that FOLA undertake a mailed survey of public libraries sponsored by Auslib Press to identify *Bookstart* provision and barriers to its national adoption, with its outcomes to be made widely available as a stimulus for national consultation and action.

The survey

The one page survey was mailed in May 2004 to all Australian public library services, a total of 534 individual services with 1560 branches.

Responses were requested by 14 June 2004. No follow up was attempted of those libraries failing to respond, although a number of late responses from NSW and Queensland, in particular, were received following the wide dissemination of a draft report in September 2004.

The total responses were 149, or about 27 per cent of the public library services in Australia. This response rate was not unexpected, as a number of the 534 individual services are small rural single branch services with limited, or no, professional staff, particularly in Queensland and Western Australia.

Of the 149 libraries responding, 117 were not involved in a *Bookstart* program, and 32 were, or were commencing such involvement.

Twelve questions were asked of the survey recipients

- 1 Does your service provide a *Bookstart/Books for Babies* program?
(usually a kit to parents of new or young babies containing board books, information on the importance of reading to babies, a library card and information on library storytimes)
- 2 If you do not, what are the reasons/barriers?
- 3 If you do, for how long?
- 4 What does it cost each year?
- 5 Who pays?
- 6 What is in the kits?
- 7 How do you identify recipients?
- 8 How do they receive the kit?
- 9 At what age do they receive the kit?
- 10 What percentage of new babies receive it?
- 11 Since you have provided kits has it made any difference to library membership/attendance at storytimes?
- 12 Comments/suggestions/issues?

Libraries involved in a *Bookstart* program

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Name of library service	ACT Public Library. Population served 320,000
Provided for	1 year and continuing
Cost pa	\$25,000 pa
Paid for	The library, via budget line (not subsidised from elsewhere)
Kit contains	Board book, storytime information, parent link guides, songs and activity book, library membership information and form
Recipients	All new babies. Once joined library they have special <i>Bookstart</i> membership status
Supplied	Via nurses or GP at 4 month immunisations/or if no immunisations then they can pick up from public library
Age	4 months
Percentage	100%
Comments	<i>Bookstart</i> library members are sent newsletters three times a year to coincide with 'Rhyme time' sessions for parents and their babies/toddlers. Newsletters include recommended books for parents and toddlers. Website has introductory information about <i>Bookstart</i> and links to the UK program to which we are affiliated www.library.act.gov.au/locandhrs/bookstart.htm/

NEW SOUTH WALES

Name of library service	Camden. Population served 43,945
Provided for	Launched in August 2004
Cost pa	\$11,000 approx
Paid for	State Library of NSW grant \$10,000 and Quota Club Camden \$1,000
Kit contains	1 cloth bag, 1 board book, 1 bib, pamphlets and reading list, membership forms etc
Recipients	Consult with baby clinic
Supplied	Given out at the 6 week visit at the baby clinic
Age	Approx 6 weeks
Percentage	We hope 80%
Comments	This is a new service. We have consulted with our local area health service and have come to an arrangement where the kits will be given out at the main area baby clinic at the 6 week visit

Name of library service	Central West. Population served 75,719
Provided for	Established in late 2002. <i>Take time take ten</i> (T4) is a community based organisation whose membership includes librarians, educators and health professionals. While it is not a specifically library project the public library is a key player and contact point
Cost pa	Approx \$1,900
Paid for	T4 is funded by a number of community organisations including Rotary, Zonta and the Children's Book Council of Australia. Central West Branch; by grant funding from the Orange Cabonne Community Development Support Expenditure Scheme (CDSE); and by inkind support from Orange City Council and the NSW Department of Education and Training
Kit contains	A book for the child, information about T4, guidelines on reading and a copy of <i>Ten minutes a day</i> produced by Newcastle Region Public library
Recipients	Every child born at Orange Base Hospital. As the major hospital in the region many children born there are from surrounding towns and villages.
Supplied	Delivered by hospital volunteers while still in the hospital
Age	Birth
Percentage	95%
Comments	T4 also conducts outreach programs. In May 2004 we played host to children's writer and literacy expert Mem Fox. Two seminars were held during the day – one directed at parents and carers and the other at educators, librarians and children's services workers. There was also a 'meet the author' dinner and a book signing for the young and young at heart. The day was funded by the CDSE. Funding has also been received from the CDSE to run workshops with parents and carers to develop their storytelling skills. T4's patron is Murray Cook – the 'red' Wiggle, a former resident of Orange

Name of library service	Cowra. Population served c8,000
Provided for	2.5 years
Cost pa	Approx \$500
Paid for	Friends of Cowra Library
Kit contains	A book, information on the importance of literacy development
Recipients	Through the maternity staff at Cowra District Hospital
Supplied	At various stages of pregnancy and after birth
Age	Newborn
Percentage	100% (we hope)
Comments	Thank you, you have spurred Friends of Cowra Library to reassess their kit. We will now include more Cowra Library information

Name of library service	Grenfell. Population served 3,550
Provided for	2 months
Cost pa	Anticipate c\$100
Paid for	Friends of Grenfell Library

Kit contains 1 book for baby, 3 leaflets on fostering literacy/numeracy, 2 library information flyers, invitation to twice-a-year new mothers library morning tea

Recipients Supplied Cannot be identified to the library for privacy reasons
Kits are given to early childhood nurses and they give one to each baby in the Shire on the first home visit

Percentage Comments 100% target
The Friends of the Library were planning the initiative anyway but are also supporting the WECARE (WEddin Community Are Readers Everyday) program, a shire wide initiative to promote literacy and the love of reading at all ages, which was launched in March 2004. The kits are funded from the Friends general funds, accumulated through raffles, pre loved book sales, catering efforts. Only the books actually cost money. The packs are done up in fancy paper with ribbon streamers and look very attractive

Name of library service Provided for Hurstville. Population served 132,000
Began the Joey Tales program since May 2004

Cost pa Joey Tales is held within the library in the children's section, which we can close off. There is no cost to the parent

Paid for Hurstville Library

Kit contains The program lasts for 20-30 minutes depending on the audience. We always begin and end with the same Joey Tales song and break up the time with active fingerplays, songs, simple stories, puppets, music, nursery rhymes etc. We encourage parent participation with their child. Each week has a theme and the content reflects that. At the end each parent is given a handout to take home with some of the songs/nursery rhymes/fingerplays, a list of good books for parents and recommended reading for the babies and my name and number should there be any questions. On the back is a simple craft, a recipe for playdough, how to choose an age related book etc. Books, toys audio visual and parenting books are then displayed and able to be borrowed. The audiovisual and parenting books are then displayed and able to be borrowed. The babies usually then play on the big toy equipment in the library whilst the parents chat

Recipients Anyone is welcome who has a baby/child 0-3 years of age. Grandparents, carers, dads and expecting mums are most welcome. We advertise through the local playgroups and word of mouth

Supplied Joey Tales is presented in the Children's Library. The baby sits in the parents lap and listen to stories and parents do fingerplays with them

Age 0-3 years

Comments The only problem raised by parents was other children eating or playing with toys that their child wants. We solved this by a simple set of rules and no eating or bringing in non essential toys was covered and respected by all parents. Also not having enough music (cassettes. CDs) for parents to teach their child, traditional songs, nursery rhymes etc. But after acquiring a grant of \$2000 we purchased more audio and board books specific for this age. We also brought new puppets and story props to keep the babies attention. All parents are very keen for this program to continue, and come along weekly (they wish the program was longer)

Name of library service Provided for Kempsey. Population served 27,000
Approx 3 years

Paid for Done in conjunction with a Kempsey project called *Sow the seeds to read* and it administers it. We provide books, booklists, enrolment forms etc. They get the bags and put in the labour. Received a development grant in 2003 which included about \$500 worth of little books to go into the bags

Kit contains A baby's book, a pamphlet extolling the virtues of reading, talking and singing to your child, a booklist on parenting, library enrolment form, a pamphlet about the *Sow the seeds to read* project, a list of other relevant resources in the Shire

Recipients Supplied Given to the hospital and the baby health care sister to hand out
As above

Age Birth

Percentage All babies born in Kempsey

Comments We have other programs, for older children, to encourage reading, so we hope that we will catch them one way or another

Name of library service	Kiama. Population served c8,000
Provided for	Approx 6 years
Cost pa	a) in its present form (as listed below) the total cost of kits is between \$3,000-\$4,000 per annum – costing depends upon number of kits produced which in turn depends on number of babies born b) cost without bibs would be between \$2,000-\$3,000 per annum
Paid for	Initial program was funded by a grant from State Library of NSW. Some sponsorship funds were also received from local service clubs eg Rotary/Lions clubs
Kit contains	1 board book, 1 bib screen printed with our <i>Born to read</i> logo, 1 congratulations card, 1 library leaflet, a storytime leaflet, 1 toy library leaflet, 1 parenting bibliography, 1 early reading book list, 1 ‘reading and your child’ leaflet, 1 evaluation sheet
Recipients	Kits are distributed to all new babies who present to the early childhood clinic at Kiama Hospital. Kits are handed out on the baby’s first visit
Supplied	As above
Age	As above
Percentage	As above
Comments	<p>Our <i>Born to read</i> program is made up of two parts. The first part of the program is the baby kit which is distributed as above. The second part is several parent information sessions that are run in conjunction with Kiama Community College. These parenting sessions are generally run once a week for four weeks. The last sessions we conducted were entitled</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of play • Talking with your child – speech development (session was conducted by a speech therapist) • Reading together • Ready for school? <p>All sessions were supervised by a qualified early childhood teacher.</p> <p>During Children’s Week, October 2004, Kiama Library will launch a baby story time program.</p> <p>The program is aimed at non walking babies (usually under 12 months of age) and their parent/carer. Each storytime session will run for about 20 minutes with the series being conducted for four weeks. The group will be limited to 10 babies with their adult carers.</p> <p>It will be a time for finger plays, rhymes and parent-child book sharing. This will be a parent-child interaction – not a librarian-child event. Baby storytime will also provide a great opportunity to meet other parents of young children, while introducing baby to the library and literacy. We will follow our first session with a morning tea for parents.</p> <p>At their first story time session each parent/carer will be provided with handouts of rhymes and songs used, a list of suitable books they might like to borrow from the library a ‘tips on reading to your baby’ sheet and information on available parenting material eg books, videos.</p> <p>This will also be an opportunity to provide carers with information about other services available in the community</p>

Name of library service	Lithgow Regional. Population served 44,000
Provided for	3+ years
Cost pa	\$1,500
Paid for	Library budget, some sponsorship
Kit contains	Library bag, book, hints on reading, library membership forms
Recipients	Every newborn
Supplied	Local hospital maternity staff deliver
Age	Birth
Percentage	95%
Comments	Concept is slowly starting to filter through. Highly recommend involving hospital to ensure reading from birth and contact at all social levels. Also include hints on how to read for fun. Originally made kits available through immunisation clinics but reading from birth is best because some parents do not have infants immunised

Name of library service	Mudgee. Population served 17,682
Provided for	Since mid 2004
Cost pa	\$70 each to put together
Paid for	Fully funded out of the library/council budget –they are free to borrow (\$1 to reserve a pack)
Kit contains	5 books and some pamphlet information on literacy and reading to children which parents borrow as a pack
Recipients	The different packs are targeted at different age groups (0-12 months; 12-24 months) are the books have been selected to appeal to these age groups. It is based on the program run out of the State Library of Tasmania. We have 15 packs (3 of each age group) and when they are returned they are restocked with the literacy information
Comments	They are all on loan at present and there is very rarely one on the stand

Name of library service	Wollongong City. Population served 185,000
Provided for	Since May 2004, as a 10 week trial in the central library to determine demand. There was an overwhelming response to it so we have now extended the program to the three district libraries (Dapto, Corrimal and Warrawong) in addition to the central library. The programs are held weekly in the libraries and limited to 10 months/carers and babies. No older siblings are permitted due to possible distraction of the babies. Due to the demand, bookings are essential
Cost pa	The initial cost was for the development of the staff kits. There are 5 kits costing approx \$400, therefore total cost was \$2,000. Ongoing costs for promotion (flyers in the participating library) and staffing costs, provision of tea for the mothers after the session – have not been determined at this stage. Council, via our children’s promotion budget, funds this program.
Paid for	The start up costs were funded from grant monies
Kit contains	The kits which the staff use comprise toys (suitable for 0 to 24 month old babies), books – board books, vinyl, pop-ups, textured, a rug for the babies and finger rhymes. Separate kits are given to the mothers. They contain the session outline and leaflets outlining how to nurture a baby’s love of reading, finger rhymes and a library bookmark with details of library opening hours, location etc
Age	0-24 months
Comments	We have not yet measured the success of this program on membership figures etc. However anecdotal evidence suggests that the program has stimulated a lot of interest from young mothers, with the demand exceeding our current capability to provide the program

QUEENSLAND

Name of library service	Broadsound Shire Council. Population served 9,600
Provided for	2 years
Cost pa	An initial cost of \$3,030.00. No ongoing funding
Paid for	Regional Arts Development Fund Grant
Kit contains	Board book, membership card, information sheet, congratulations card, in library bag
Recipients	Through local medical centre, baby clinic, word of mouth and visitors to the library
Supplied	At the library
Age	Newborns – 2 year olds
Percentage	100%
Comments	Will be holding regular ‘Babes in arms’ sessions in the library commencing in the near future to cater for babies and to promote the library as an excellent venue for babies

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Name of library service	Adelaide Hills. Population served 38,778
Provided for	Ongoing (8 months since inception)
Cost pa	Still assessing/using marketing budget
Paid for	By library
Kit contains	Book, leaflet <i>10 minutes a day</i> , reading lists, library information, giveaways from businesses when available, library bag
Recipients	Identify selves

Supplied Over library counter
Age Up to 3 months
Percentage NA (120 plus in 8 months)
Comments Very positive reaction. Now recording information so can send one year postcard and updated reading lists.

- Difficult to reach community—have used local newspaper, desk information, signage, word of mouth
- Staff proactive in promoting
- Working with Angus & Robertson/local bookshop re bulk purchases of books
- Friends of Library donate library bags

Name of library service Clare and Gilbert Valleys. Population served 8,100
Comments We commenced the *Babies love books* program in August 2004 in partnership with the Lower North Community Health Service. It has received funding to purchase the books and we will supply the bags and some information. Also perhaps a voucher to receive another book once they have joined the baby at the library. It is proposed that the midwives at the hospital will give out the bags. This will mean each baby born at the Clare Hospital will receive a library bag, book, literacy, pamphlets, bookmarks, vouchers etc. We plan to commence a lapsit storytime and parent information program in August as well. Sessions will include 20 minute storytime and 10 minute parent education about books

Name of library service Cummins School Community. Population served c5,000
Provided for 13½ years (started 9/9/90)
Cost pa \$120 approx (volunteers are very astute buyers taking advantage of specials)
Paid for Friends of the Library
Kit contains Brochure on 'Importance of' and a book
Recipients Keep in contact with hospital re new arrivals (or those sent to Adelaide)
Supplied While in hospital volunteers visit new mothers
Age First week
Percentage 100%
Comments When *Reading magic* by Mem Fox was published, discussed distributing a copy to each family with newborn child. Have not activated this yet (costs are a problem) but will keep on agenda

Name of library service Keith School Community. Population served 2,335
Provided for 1 year
Cost pa \$250 approx
Paid for By library
Kit contains A book, leaflet *10 minutes a day*, pencil, borrower registration card for children to fill out, leaflet on 'Story time', bookmark with library information
Recipients Local CATHS nurse gives to all parents of newborn babies
Supplied At time of 6 weeks checkup or at the new parents group meeting
Age Under 6 months if possible
Percentage 100%
Comments It would be great for government funding to keep this type of program going

Name of library service Quorn School Community. Population served 1,400
Provided for Since 2003
Cost pa \$30 per baby, 15-20 babies per year
Paid for School Community Library Board – Public Libraries funding plus discount of 20% from Meg's Bookshop in Pt Pirie
Kit contains Letter explaining idea and congratulating the parents; a *10 minutes a day* brochure from Newcastle Regional Library re early reading/literacy; a library brochure; a copy of Mem Fox's *Reading magic* for parents with bookplate; a copy of *Time for bed* or *Koala Lou* (Mem Fox books too) with bookplate; wrapped and ribboned
Recipients Local knowledge. Contact hospital staff

Supplied	We give a pack to all Quorn families who have a baby and all regional families who have a child at the Quorn Hospital (we are proud to have birthing facilities in such a relatively small community). We planned to give the packs at the hospital but changed to inviting them to the library as a family to receive it. This means some come in who never have before, or not for a long time. We send packs to outlying towns/station families if we miss them while they are here. We ask if we can take and display a photo on our 'welcome' board. Most are happy to oblige with brothers and sisters and a few parents in there too
Age	During first 3-4 months
Percentage	100%
Comments	Has meant we see more of some families than we usually would once 'the ice has broken' on the first visit. Most parents are absolutely delighted and surprised. Our regular library volunteer (also secretary of Library Board) is thrilled to be part of the production/giving procedures. Library Board unanimously voted to continue it this year after a trial last year for 2003@your library campaign

TASMANIA

Name of library service	State Library of Tasmania. Population served 459,659
Comments	The State Library of Tasmania's program is a lending service commenced in 2003. There are currently about 100 Baby Book Packs available for each of three age groups and they can be reserved and sent free of charge for collection at any of the State Library's 48 service points. The loan period is 3 weeks. The program has been publicised through all child health and childcare centres in Tasmania and is proving very popular. More packs are being developed so that every library will have some in the permanent collection. The Baby Book Packs are part of the State Library's <i>Babies who read, succeed</i> program. More information is at www.statelibrary.tas.gov.au/services/babybookpacks.htm

VICTORIA

Name of library service	Eastern Regional. Population served 388,263
Provided for	Commenced in September 2004 as the <i>Read with me</i> project www.erl.vic.gov.au/whatson/read.htm
Cost pa	Not sure yet
Paid for	We have a local government grant to initiate program
Kit contains	Board book and information for parents on reading and library services
Recipients	Newborns via maternal and child health centres
Supplied	Via MCH nurses, our lapsit programs and talks to new mothers
Age	About 4 months
Comments	Some years ago I was involved in a committee of Victorian public library children's librarians which endeavoured to get a similar program funded statewide. It failed; now we are all reinventing the work involved, in our individual library services. A far more effective and high profile method would be to have a state or Australia wide program properly funded and supported by government/s. The UK and US experience has shown these programs to be an effective way of alerting parents to the importance of reading and libraries

Name of library service	Goulburn Valley Regional. Population served 92,170
Provided for	Late 2004
Cost pa	Unsure at this stage, depends what is included
Paid for	Best Start government grant
Kit contains	Place mat; books and baby brochure; parenting magazine; board book; council and library information; community services directory
Recipients	All children born in City of Greater Shepparton
Supplied	3-4 month visit to MCH; intend to hand deliver or post to those families who do not attend MCH
Age	3-4 months
Percentage	Aiming for 100%

Comments The City of Greater Shepparton (1 of 3 library municipalities) is a project site for Best Start (www.beststart.vic.gov.au) which has provided a great opportunity for collaboration between the library and Best Start to deliver a baby book bag, and other activities.
We have sponsorship from a publisher who is supplying our first year's supply of 800 board books

Name of library service Provided for Moreland. Population served 138,000
The Moreland *Bookstart* kit program, launched in August 2000, has had outstanding success in encouraging parents to read to babies with more than 6,000 kits already distributed. The program is modelled on a UK scheme

Kit contains A board book, booklets giving advice on developing children's reading skills from an early age and recommended board books for babies, as well as information on parenting resources all packaged in a calico library bag. The 16 page booklet contained in the kit, *Reading is forever: how to develop your child's reading skills and have fun together* published by the library and using photographs depicting Moreland's multicultural mix of families, is also available free to all Moreland residents, schools and centres. Where possible, a bilingual board book is provided for LOTE speakers. A leaflet on reading to children produced and translated into ten different languages by the Free Kindergarten Association (FKA) Multicultural Resource Centre, is also included where appropriate in the Kit

Recipients The kit is distributed to every newborn Moreland baby in cooperation with the maternal and child health nurses. The distribution is followed up by talks by library staff to new parent groups at the maternal and child health centres on reading to babies and children

Comments In order to reinforce the reading message in the *Bookstart* kits, Moreland's library service provides rhyme time sessions for babies under 18 months every week at the Coburg Library and every month at Moreland's other four service points. The 30 minute sessions consist of stories, nursery rhymes, finger rhymes and songs. They have proved to be very popular with parents and babies, particularly as many first time parents have forgotten the nursery rhymes from their childhood. After the sessions, library staff are available to provide advice on reading to babies.
The rhyme times sessions have been very successful not only for their content but in also providing the opportunity for parents to engage socially with other parents. Informal support networks have emerged among parents and groups of them are frequently seen having coffee together at nearby cafes after rhyme times. Given the social isolation often encountered by first time parents, the rhyme time sessions play a valuable social role in connecting people and fostering wellbeing.
An evaluation survey was undertaken of parents who had received a *Bookstart* kit up to March 2001. Results from the 300 respondents found that 35 per cent of parents began to read to their babies for the first time as a result of the kit while 60 per cent began reading to their babies more often. General feedback from parents was very positive with many praising the concept and providing useful advice for the future development of the program. Given the UK research and Moreland's own experiences with the *Bookstart* program, there seems no better project to give children a good start to education and life skills

Name of library service Provided for Wimmera Regional. Population served 52,081
3½ years

Cost pa \$6,000

Paid for First two years received sponsorship which covered bag and book. Library covered rest of costs

Kit contains Cloth bag, board book, membership form, nursery rhyme booklet, reading advice booklets, library promotional material, sponsor promotional material, growth chart

Recipients Supplied All new babies born in region identified via maternal health nurses
Maternal health nurses distribute the kits

Age Birth – 1 year

Percentage 100% to start – currently only first babies

Comments General feedback indicates that everyone who received the bag thinks they are a great idea and appreciate them. The maternal health nurses are very supportive, but it has not yet translated into more babies attending the library.

Sponsorship covered bag and book cost for first two years and we had sufficient bags to last into third year. In 2004 we have produced a minimal number of bags with no board book and using our general plastic promotional bags to try and continue the program and contain cost. We are investigating how to continue the program, and ways to get the new parents and babies into the library as early as possible

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Name of library service Bridgetown-Greenbushes. Population served 3,935
Provided for 1 year
Cost pa \$100
Paid for By library
Kit contains Calico library bag; board book and pamphlets; membership form
Recipients From child health centre
Supplied At an afternoon tea in the library and talk by librarian, child nurse and speech pathologist
Age 7 months
Percentage 10%

Name of library service Broome. Population served 13,500
Provided for Commenced 2004
Cost pa \$8721.50 – includes staff time
Paid for Grant from Office of Multicultural interests
Kit contains Library bag, brochures for library services, board book, brochures for other common services
Recipients All babies born at Broome Hospital
Supplied Personal presentation
Age Newborn
Percentage 100%
Comments This will be an initiative we will be looking at continuing longterm. It comes with tagged information on the library database and community interconnectivity shown through greater participation in other library programs

Name of library service Capel. Population served 8,500
Provided for 2½ years
Cost pa Nil directly. Covered by staff time and local health service
Paid for Indirectly Shire of Capel, local health service and sponsors
Kit contains Board book, information about literacy services, speech and language development, local toy library, services provided by local health service to parents and carers
Recipients Child health nurses forward names/addresses of people who attend 7-9 month checks (with their permission)
Supplied At information session held in library
Age 7-9 months
Comments Funding is always a problem although local businesses do sponsor book purchases or donate suitable calico bags. It is stressful as we never know whether the scheme can continue

Name of library service Collie. Population served 8,500
Provided for 5 years
Cost pa \$200
Paid for Shire/grants
Kit contains Board book, library brochure, toy library flyer, storytime flyer, reading/literacy brochures, speech development information
Recipients Local infant health clinic
Supplied Information session at the library by invitation
Age 9 months
Percentage 50%+

Comments Strong bonds seem to form at mothers groups/playgroups, and storytime competes with these groups for attendance.
I would like to form a network with other interested parties (I currently only work with the speech pathologist and the infant health nurse) to include playgroup representatives, pre primary representatives, others in the primary health field for follow up sessions after *Bookstart*

Name of library service Derby/West Kimberley. Population served 8,500
Barriers Funding. We have done a few sessions paid out of our budget in preparation for setting up the program and have been getting a committee together. We are now ready to apply for a grant to maintain the program
Cost pa Estimated cost will be \$3,000
Kit contains Board book, Better beginning pamphlet, library pamphlet
Supplied Through local child health nurses and morning tea at health centre or night time sessions at library or session with young mothers group
Age Varies – usually in the first year

Name of library service Geraldton Regional. Population served 30,770
Provided for 1½ years
Cost pa \$2,000 approx
Paid for Friends of Library, donations from Mayor, library budget, DLD grant
Kit contains Book for baby, brochures about literacy and the library
Recipients Antenatal classes
Supplied Visit the library by personal invitation
Age 3 months approx
Percentage 20%
Comments I would like to present the program more widely than just these mothers. Currently attending antenatal classes at the private hospital. The government hospital is not willing to participate in the program. We need to find another way to make contact with the parents we currently do not reach

Name of library service Katanning. Population served 4,950
Cost \$10 per child per year
Paid for Shire and community funding
Kit contains Book, resource manual
Supplied At birth from child health nurse
Age Birth
Percentage 100%
Comments Run by *Smart start*

Name of library service Mandurah. Population served 51,300
Provided for Since March 2004, ongoing
Cost pa Under review. \$3,500 for board books, staff time to prepare bags and do workshops
Paid for Local government and grant funding
Kit contains Baby book, library leaflet, growth chart, library membership form, other related leaflets
Recipients Through pool health campus nurses
Supplied Via health nurse
Age 6-8 weeks
Percentage Approx 97%
Comments Sue North, State Library of WA, is conducting/overseeing the WA *Better beginnings* program. Currently in 6 pilot areas in WA. Edith Cowan University is doing a 5 year evaluation of the impact this project has on childhood literacy

Name of library service	Manjimup. Population served 5,000
Provided for	6 months
Cost pa	\$1000
Paid for	Shire of Manjimup from promotions budget
Kit contains	Board book, library bag and information pamphlets
Recipients	Through the child health nurse
Supplied	At an afternoon tea in the library
Age	Under 12 months
Percentage	80% aiming for 100%
Comments	We are planning for more <i>Bookstart</i> events and the library is involved in a plan to extend the program so that parents and children under four years are provided with more resources and information. The aim is to provide informal gatherings to introduce families to all the services available to them and to have a mentoring system to keep in touch. There is a program called <i>Smart start</i> already operating in WA which we would like to emulate. Funding is to be finalised; we have had contributions from Rotary and the Early Years Strategy Office of WA state government

Name of library service	Nyabing. Population served 600
Provided for	2 years
Cost pa	\$116.51
Paid for	By Shire of Kent
Kit contains	Books, puppets, games, toys
Recipients	If they are a library or <i>Smart start</i> member
Supplied	President of the group distributes one item
Age	6, 12 months then every year to 3 years of age
Percentage	80%

Name of library service	Stirling. Population served 176,000
Provided for	3½ years
Cost pa	\$2,500
Paid for	By Council
Kit contains	Book for the baby, book for parents, bookmark, information about reading to babies, brochure about library services
Recipients	Parents who come in with babies are encouraged to join. We also run a parents session for people to come to and babies join from there
Supplied	When they join the baby at the library
Age	0-12 months
Percentage	Do not know total number born in area
Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let's take advantage of the political climate and make it national using WA's <i>Better beginnings</i> program as a template • New parents are very receptive to the information. It has been a good PR exercise • In addition we run 'Hug a book parents sessions' with a speech pathologist talking about language development and the librarian talking about reading to babies. We join 50-60 babies each year this way

Libraries not involved in a *Bookstart* program

Of the 117 negative responses, the overwhelming majority indicated that they would like to be involved in a *Bookstart* program but that lack of local authority support, and financial and staffing resources, precluded it.

Six responses indicated plans to establish a program subject to local authority or grant approval. Another 14, mostly small country libraries, indicated that they had not heard of *Bookstart* but wished to know more about the concept.

However, many of these libraries, although not involved in a *Bookstart* program, provided considerable information on other ways they were attempting to support family literacy

development despite limited resources, and lack of children's and young adult (YA) librarians to foster them.

Comments included

- We have a fantastic storytime for preschoolers—regular attendance of 35-40. However lack of staff is the main reason we do not offer *Books for babies*.
Country library WA
- I have not been approached and I personally assumed that hospitals provide that service.
Country library SA
- I would love to be able to provide this service but my library has no budget for it.
Country library, Qld
- We do encourage baby membership through 'If you are born you can borrow' displays, pamphlets sent to day care centres, child health centres and playgroups etc.
Metropolitan library WA
- We could probably do something in the short term but being able to maintain a program cost wise would be difficult.
Large regional library Qld
- The hospital is also used by mothers from other council areas—we cannot service them all, although we would like to. Children learn preliteracy and literacy skills before school with their parents. All library employees would be happy to support a request to the federal government and other areas to encourage this funding.
Large regional library Qld
- We are investigating opportunities to provide this with our Friends of the Library group.
Large regional library Vic
- We are waiting for the State *Better beginnings* program next year.
Country library WA
- There should be no barriers—some things only need suggesting.
Country library WA
- In my former life as a NZ librarian we did have a similar program and it was a very positive marketing tool.
Country library WA
- We would like to be part of this program as we have a large under 8 population and being in a mining town, no extended family situation.
Country library WA
- The WA State Library has started a *Books for babies* program which we are keeping a close eye on.
Metropolitan library WA
- We have been unable to fund an ongoing project.
Country library Qld
- I talk at infant/welfare centres to new mums and highlight benefits of reading.
Country library Vic
- It is a wonderful idea that deserves support...but if it cannot be sustained it can become a burden, defeats the purpose and quality drops.
Regional library Qld
- We conduct a Head Start program (early literacy K-grade3) and also Project G.O.A.L. (grade ones at the library). We would love to give *Books for babies* as well but financial considerations do not permit. With the support of Friends of Libraries Australia etc, maybe we can make it happen.
Regional library Qld

- Community Services in our council gives out a kit under the *Birth to kindergarten* program, but we cannot afford to include library information in it—the scheme is very new.

Country library NSW

- I moved to Australia from New Zealand in February 2004 and have been struck by the financial constraints on libraries such as ours, particularly compared to my previous well funded library where we had a heavy emphasis on services to students. I was surprised that was not the case here as we have low literacy levels.

Country library NSW

- We do not provide a program as such but I am a member of the Bega community group ‘Birth to kindergarten’. We rely on sponsorship to fund the costs of books to give the new mums in the Bega hospital but we can’t afford to give to new mums in the other hospital in the Shire. Along with the books we include the library brochure, a list of suggested reading for toddlers, storytime leaflet and library membership form.

Country library NSW

- We costed something like this a couple of years ago (one book in a welcome pack with membership forms and library info etc) – total cost estimated at about 15 per cent of our bookvote). When the idea was raised with the library committee (3 councils) it was considered too expensive, a small target group with the benefits not able to be measured. The most compelling argument against it was that ours is a district hospital with about 200 births per year. The mothers come from about 7 local government areas and our library is funded by only 3 of these councils. Because our town is also a ‘service town’ for a large rural district and out service already supported/s the surrounding councils who have smaller libraries with less hours/services, through a reciprocal borrowing agreement this would never be an option here unless it was supported by funding from a sponsor or the state or federal government.

Country library NSW

- The major problem is the funding of the program. It would be possible to get one off funding but a program like this needs recurrent funding. However we decided that the issue of parents reading to their children was too important so we have set up a program which we fund ourselves, a practical lapsit session called *Babytime* and a parental training program.

Metropolitan library NSW

- Upper Murray Regional Library is developing a program for mums and babies. We are working with one of our eight councils to develop the model. It has not yet been completely developed but will target mums who do not read to their children due to their own low literacy levels. Basically we will not provide books but will work with the mums in their environment and encourage them to develop the skills they need to feel comfortable in reading to their children. The long term aim is to have the mums use the library for their books and to provide them with a support network within their peers.

Large regional library NSW/VIC

- ... it all has to start somewhere and *Bookstart* would be a very positive step. Having spoken with local speech therapists, preschools and school principals I know they share our concerns and are horrified at the low level of home reading.

Regional library NSW

Building a literate nation: the key role of public libraries

Australian public libraries are unique public agencies. They have nearly 1600 access points freely accessible to 99 per cent of the population, and are used regularly by 60 per cent of Australians. They are also distinctive in endeavouring to meet the educational, informational, cultural and recreational needs of all people from ‘cradle to grave’. No other public agency or educational provider has such a wide remit. They are the most trafficked public buildings in

Australia and the most heavily used and valued community provision by local and state government.

They are very high achievers on funding which currently represents only 7c per Australian per day, or a national total of \$550 million, about half the annual expenditure of just one large university.

Nonetheless, their current and potential contribution, in partnership with other agencies, to improving people's lives and developing social and educational capital is not always well understood by those agencies or by local, state or national governments. This point is made by Neil McClelland, the former Director of the UK National Literacy Trust in a paper *Building a literate nation: the key role of public libraries* given at the Western Australian public libraries conference in March 2003. He stated that, over nine years as the Trust's Director, he had become convinced of the need for public libraries to have fully integrated involvement in national policies and that

... libraries have a unique and potentially highly influential contribution to make to a number of other important social policy areas such as

- early years
- lifelong learning
- social inclusion and economic and community regeneration

... we need libraries to play a central and influential role ...¹⁶

At the same conference Sue North, the consultant for WA public library services, in a paper *Catching them in the cradle: family literacy programs* stated

The prosperity of today's society is drawn from its human capital. There is no doubt that as we progress through the twenty first century there are increasingly compelling reasons for governments to invest in resources that will instil in citizens an ability to acquire the knowledge and skills for lifelong learning. Good literacy skills are not only an essential foundation for performance in formal education but also a prerequisite for successful participation in all areas of adult life. In particular, children must receive the information literacy development they need to recognise their need for, and to handle, the variety and abundance of written information that they will encounter throughout their lives. The opportunities that children receive in their early years will impact substantially on their opportunities in later life. Providing these falls primarily to parents.

Families today are raising children under very different social circumstances to previous generations. Because of this they often require more flexible combinations of formal and informal social support. Public libraries are ideally placed to extend the social investment that communities make in their young people.¹⁷

This is emphasised in the Newcastle Region Library's excellent leaflet *Ten minutes a day* which is included in several of the *Bookstart* kits provided by Australian public libraries.

Survey conclusions

In the assessment of how well the individual local governments, states and territories of Australia are responding to these issues, the survey indicates that a form of *Bookstart* is available, or will be soon, to 1.76 million Australians, 7 per cent of the population. About 7 per cent of Australian babies *may* thus now receive kits, compared with 4 per cent at the end of 2002. This is some, but inadequate, progress. Progress at the same rate means that it will take over 25 years before *Bookstart* is provided to all Australian parents and babies.

In addition, there appear to be some *Bookstart* type programs which are provided by infant health agencies, or as initiatives by community organisations, but without public library involvement or connection. This lack of connection is unfortunate, as the public library is the community's major resource for quality reading resources for children and storytelling, particularly for lower socioeconomic, culturally and linguistically diverse and isolated communities.

The survey responses also indicate the extent to which Australian public libraries are attempting to promote family literacy and reading in school age children, young adults and beyond. A national consultation on Australian *Bookstart* would inevitably raise the need for better support for those efforts but nothing should distract from a focus—as the first priority—on Australian *Bookstart* provided to all babies regardless of the financial socioeconomic and educational circumstances into which they have been born

- The Australian Capital Territory has the most inclusive large Australian *Bookstart* program, similar to the UK program. Babies and their parents and caregivers in the nation's capital are advantaged relative to those in most parts of Australia. The City of Moreland in Melbourne also provides an excellent program and national exemplar.
- Tasmania's recently introduced statewide lending scheme *Babies who read, succeed* is a variant of the *Bookstart* program, which has been well accepted. Its limitation—like that provided by Mudgee and Wollongong libraries in NSW and Adelaide Hills in SA—is that it is primarily of benefit to babies whose parents who already access a public library, who are more likely to be aware of the importance of reading to babies, and to be confident readers themselves. It is unlikely to be getting to those parents and babies who have most need, the 'at risk' parents and babies which have been the primary rationale for overseas *Bookstart* programs.
- Western Australia has more individual libraries—some quite small—providing *Bookstart* than any other state, with over 1000 parent toolkits given away in pilot programs. A reading gateway has also been established (<http://web.liswa.wa.gov.au/read.html>). Its *Better beginnings* family literacy program has potential to underpin a statewide *Bookstart* program, and as a template for a national approach. Importantly, it has a quantitative *and* qualitative evaluation component involving researchers from Edith Cowan University, using funding from that university's commendable industry collaboration scheme grants.
- The State Library of Queensland's innovation grants have permitted local pilots of *Bookstart* programs, but apparently no ongoing funding.
- NSW, NT, South Australia and Victoria as yet have no inclusive and coordinated approach to *Bookstart*. However South Australia has recently established a working group of public librarians to develop a proposal for a statewide program, which has been provided with \$50,000 by the Libraries Board of SA to underpin the proposal. NSW has grant funded a few projects, as has Victoria under its *Best start* program (www.beststart.vic.gov.au) which aims to improve the health, development, wellbeing and learning of all Victorian children 0-8 years.

A matter of quality

One of the issues raised by several respondents to the survey and the draft report is the absolute importance of ensuring that *Bookstart* kits contain high quality books. Only one of the respondents, Quorn in South Australia, identified which books were being supplied for reading to babies (Mem Fox's *Time for bed* or *Koala Lou*)

One respondent commented that there are

... some gorgeous looking \$6.99 board books for babies. They are ghastly—impossible to read aloud and appallingly written, without any sense of rhythm or beauty. Cheap books will not solve the literacy problem, they'll only exacerbate it.

Bookstart programs which rely on such books for cost reasons, or which rely on publisher donations when publishers have such small profit margins, are almost self defeating, particularly when Australia itself now publishes outstanding children's books. However, from anecdotal feedback, it is the case that some well-intentioned local *Bookstart* programs—particularly those not collaborating with their local public library or state public library system—are providing very poor quality board books in their kits. Rolton's *Read to me* remains a useful resource for selection, as does Fox's following list of 20 suggested titles for children 0-4.

- Ahlbert, Allan *Each peach pear plum*
- Allen, Pamela *Who sank the boat?*
- Bemelmans, Ludwig *Madeline*
- Campbell, Rod *Dear zoo*
- Carle, Eric *The very hungry caterpillar*
- Dodd, Lynley *Hairy Maclary from Donaldson's Dairy*
- Eastman, PD *Are you my mother?*
- Hill, Eric *Where's spot?*
- Hutchins, Pat *Rosie's walk*
- Jennings, Paul *Rascal the dragon*
- Machin, Sue *I went walking*
- Martin Jr, Bill *Brown bear, brown bear*
- Perkins, Al *Hand hand finger thumb*
- Sendak, Maurice *Where the wild things are*
- Dr Seuss *Dr Seuss's ABC*
- Dr Seuss *The foot book*
- Dr Seuss *Green eggs and ham*
- Vaughan, Marcia K *Wombat stew*
- Waddell, Martin *Owl babies*
- Wagner, Jenny *The bunyip of Berkeley's Creek*

Potential partnerships

The achievement of a nationally comprehensive, inclusive, ongoing and evaluated Australian *Bookstart* faces the challenge of finding a way forward which involves all three tiers of Australian government, national, state/territory, and local, and possibly a national commercial sponsor. It is salutary that the UK *Bookstart* has surmounted not dissimilar difficulties during its 12 year development

- *National*, because the education and literacy of the nation is identified internationally as Australian, not by its political parts
- *National*, because if an Australian citizen or resident is denied the most effective literacy development by a state or local jurisdiction as a child, it is ultimately the responsibility of the Australian government
- *National*, because illiteracy will ultimately be a significant cost to the individual and the whole of the Australian community given the mobility of the Australian population across state borders

- *State or territory*, because it is the states and territories of Australia which have immediate responsibility for welfare and the formal education of all children, Indigenous and non indigenous
- *State or territory*, because it is the states and territories of Australia which fund and support, in partnership with local government, those public libraries and health services without which a national implementation of *Bookstart* would be impossible
- *Local government*, because it is close to the community and able to deliver targeted services
- *Local government*, because generally it is the major funder and provider of local public libraries, as its most heavily used and valued community service.

Finding the way forward for a nationally equitable and inclusive *Bookstart* program is not a challenge to be underestimated, given that public library development and recognition in Australia itself is one victim of Australia's complex system of national, state and local government.

The realities are that Australian *Bookstart* requires the political interest and leadership of the national government, the policy framework of the state/territory governments, and the infrastructure and connections of local government.

How much would a national *Bookstart* program cost?

Based on the \$25,000pa provided by the ACT Library Service, translated to the total Australian population of 20 million, the annual cost would be about \$1.5 million. With allowance for administration, marketing *and* researched evaluation it is reasonable to conclude that a total cost of about \$2 pa million would initially be needed. This is an extremely small national investment in view of the outstanding—from the 12 years of experience with UK *Bookstart*—return on investment.

This level of funding would need to be guaranteed for at least five years initially, to avoid the stop and start and partial coverage implementation, quality limitations and nonevaluation which has characterised local *Bookstart* initiatives in Australia.

Although the indicated funding is so small in national terms that it could be found by the federal government without difficulty, nonetheless there are opportunities for partnership between government and business. At least one of the large national supermarket chains is understood to have expressed interest in sponsoring a national program, but not individual state programs. A precedent for such a partnership exists in the form of the *Nestlé Write around Australia* program. As North notes, this

... widely acknowledged as a model partnership between government and business, is fast approaching its tenth anniversary. Nestlé Australia contributes around \$1m each year to support visits by Australian authors to public libraries, prizes, travel and a media campaign associated with the program.

Additionally this money pays for three librarians at the State Library of New South Wales to coordinate the program. At Nestlé Australia—as well as in schools, government and in the community—there is wide recognition of the powerful role that the program plays in ensuring that children are provided with opportunities to develop their literacy skills during the critical years of primary school education, regardless of their economic circumstances or physical isolation.¹⁸

The *Nestlé Write around Australia* program also provides a possible organisational precedent for Australian *Bookstart*, in its location within the infrastructure of a large state library, that of NSW. Location in a large library or a centralised state public library agency such as PLAIN in

South Australia—for which tenders could be called—would arguably be preferable to its location within a government bureaucracy.

It may be contended that, given the various state/territory and local initiatives to promote the importance of books, and of parents and caregivers reading to children at an early age, that Australian *Bookstart* is not really needed.

The counter to this is that it is clear that already those state/territory and local initiatives—commendable though they are—are generally noninclusive, patchy and subject to funding vagaries which will continue. From the survey responses, there is considerable reinvention of thought and effort occurring around Australia, about which several of the respondents commented. Except in WA, there are also no mechanisms for formally evaluating them.

If the programs are not inclusive and nonstigmatising ie *every* baby in Australia receives a *Bookstart* kit by the age of seven months, they will not help address the cycle of parental low literacy and unawareness of the importance of reading to children. It is this which characterises the background of socially and educationally deprived children who may more readily develop as dysfunctional adults—at great cost to their own lives and to the Australian society which has neglected their potential.

The case is compelling—from published research over many years, from the UK *Bookstart* program and the US *Born to read* programs, the adoption of the former in Japan, and most recently its adoption in New Zealand and varying approaches in Australia—that reading to babies and young children would unequivocally provide the best educational return on investment that Australia could make, and provide the essential base for a longterm national literacy plan.

As leading British policy expert Dr Geoff Mulgan told a conference at the National Library of Australia 27 October 2004, education spending should be targeted at the home and governments must allocate more to ‘early years, out of school activities and lifelong learning’.

The social and economic payoffs on investment before the age of five are probably higher than anywhere else in the education system. However ‘So many governments over so many years have ... carried on giving the vast bulk of the money to 19th century institutions—schools, universities and so on’.¹⁹

To avoid reinvention, poor quality kits, stop and start, noninclusive and nonevaluated approaches a national consultation towards a framework, action and investment in Australian *Bookstart* is required—and soon. The longer that it takes, the greater will be the ultimate cost to individuals, and for the nation in social dysfunctionality and remediation of adult illiteracy.

What form could a national *Bookstart* consultation take?

It is suggested that Public Libraries Australia (PLA) in association with the Council of Australian State Libraries (CASL) convene a one-two day national consultation in Canberra by mid 2005, with an action plan as its outcome. Invitees should include at least representatives of the

- Commonwealth Minister for Education, Science and Training
- Commonwealth Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
- Commonwealth Minister for Health and Ageing
- Parliamentary Secretary, Children and Youth Affairs

- Relevant state/territory Ministers
- National reading and literacy associations
- National child health associations
- Australian Local Government Association
- Australian Library and Information Association
- Australian Booksellers' Association
- Friends of Libraries Australia
- Potential charitable/commercial sponsors

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