

Welcome to the Spring 2007 Vital Link eletter. This is designed to keep you up to date with developments in the Vital Link programme.

In this issue, read about:

- **latest news on Quick Reads and support materials**
- **early plans for a Vital Link reading challenge for emergent readers**
- **blogs for the Vital Link stock projects**

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1. WHAT IS THE VITAL LINK?

For readers of this newsletter who are new to The Vital Link, it is a national programme designed to build and promote libraries' capacity to support the adult literacy agenda. Run by The Reading Agency in partnership with the National Literacy Trust and the National Reading Campaign, it encourages libraries and adult literacy providers to work together and has a special focus on using reading for pleasure to motivate and inspire existing students and to engage potential learners. The Vital Link forms part of the Government's Framework for the Future strategy for public libraries being taken forward by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and has support from the Department for Education and Skills for its Reading for Pleasure Campaign.

2. QUICK READS 2007

As most of you will know, eight new Quick Reads were launched on 1 March, World Book Day, by names as varied as Ricky Tomlinson, Kerry Katona and John Simpson. Libraries

have again invested heavily by buying at least 4000 sets and are continuing to purchase copies to meet demand from local literacy providers.

Hot off the press is news that Quick Reads is set to continue. Publishers and retailers backed the initiative at a high-level meeting on 2 April and had a lengthy discussion about authors who might be asked to participate over the next couple of years. Institutional sales to libraries, adult education, BBC RaW, employers and the TUC are particularly strong but sales through bookshops and supermarkets are an essential part of the mix – so please encourage your readers to buy some of their own copies too!

Here's a flavour of some fantastic feedback from readers, tutors and library staff.

'Before Quick Reads came out I had only read one book. I have now read lots of the Quick Reads and it has got me interested in reading.' Learner

'When I told my students that a new set of Quick Reads was about to arrive, they cheered!' Tutor from Staffordshire

'Quick Reads are wonderful! They have attracted a lot of interest from both the target audience and mainstream readers and we have had to buy more copies.' Havering Libraries

'One of our lads took an audio pack and then reported back to me that he didn't need to listen to the CD but managed to read the book in two days. He was really pleased with his achievement but taking the pack gave him the confidence to join the book group in the first place.' Librarian at HMP Blantyre

There are also some excellent podcasts including reaction to Quick Reads from learners at <http://www.niace.org.uk/quickreads/user/podcasts.asp>

The priority now is to keep promoting the Quick Reads prominently in libraries and in local learning and community settings to keep awareness high (*'Display them or they die!'* Portsmouth Libraries).

PLR figures for the 12 titles published in March 2006 indicate that there were 133,686 loans between March and June last year. We'll be collecting figures from the same period this year and hope that they will show a significant increase.

Don't forget that Adult Learners' Week from 19 – 25 May provides another great opportunity to promote the Quick Reads and reading for pleasure through open days in libraries or book displays and events in colleges and learning centres.

3. NATIONAL 6-BOOK CHALLENGE!

The Reading Agency is to launch a national version of the 6-Book Challenge, targeted at adults trying to improve their literacy skills, as part of the Vital Link programme. Piloted by Hull Libraries last spring, the challenge has been run really successfully by all 15 library authorities across Yorkshire & the Humber with support from BBC RaW and MLA Yorkshire – see <http://www.mlay-skillsforlife.org.uk/latestnews.php>

Early evaluation indicates that targeted use of a reading challenge provides an ideal mechanism for developing partnerships between libraries and adult literacy providers in a whole range of settings such as colleges, community centres, day centres, workplaces and prisons. Participants felt a real sense of achievement: *'Well done for starting this up as it got me to read more. Also it helps my English that I am doing with Adult Education.'*

We know that other library authorities have also either run or are creating their own challenges. In developing our own version, we'd be delighted to hear your views on useful support materials and promotional devices. We've learnt from the Summer Reading Challenge that we can all make the most impact with a promotion like this if it runs over a concentrated period, and it helps enormously with monitoring and evaluation too. So we're keen to identify a set period of time over which the 6-Book Challenge might run every year – possibly January to May when it can be mediated by library staff and tutors working in partnership.

Please contact Ruth Harrison at ruth.harrison@readingagency.org.uk with your ideas and feedback on your own ambitions or experiences of running a reading challenge with an emergent reader audience. We hope to offer this to libraries to purchase in the autumn.

4. QUICK READS LEARNING MATERIALS

In order to support your work with the Quick Reads, The Vital Link has produced more learning resources for the new titles. Created for The Vital Link by Kay Jackaman, Nancy Gidley, Roger Allen and Jim Gardner, these are already proving very popular.

- **Starting with Quick Reads**, a 24-page guide designed to offer all practitioners a range of ways to start 'conversations' about the new titles wherever they work with learners – in colleges, workplace learning centres, libraries or prisons. It includes

suggestions for other resources and curriculum references for the main learning points. Available free from the DfES – call 0845 6022260 and quote SFLQR – or downloadable from www.vitallink.org.uk

- An innovative set of web-based ideas for learners at www.quickreadsideas.org.uk – a web quest around the theme of each of the March 2007 Quick Reads and an interactive quiz to help new readers find other titles to suit their tastes.

Resources to support the titles published in 2006 are still available at www.vitallink.org.uk (there have been over 65,000 downloads). We're also producing a CD containing the resources from 2006 and 2007 for those such as practitioners in prison settings who don't have easy internet access. This will be distributed to education and library staff in prisons but will also be available from the DfES – call 0845 6022260 and quote SFLQRCD.

Some new case studies showing how the Quick Reads are being used by tutors can be found at <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/Adultlitcasestudies.html>

We've produced an A5 leaflet to publicise all these resources to tutors so please let us know if you would like copies – email genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk with your address and the quantity you require.

5. READING FOR PLEASURE CAMPAIGN

Production of these resources forms part of the campaign which has been funded by the DfES Skills for Life Strategy Unit. We've had a particularly busy six months getting the message about reading for pleasure and the role of libraries out to a range of practitioners. This began with Vital Link workshops at all three Skills for Life conferences. These supported the popular plenary session on Quick Reads in which John Bird was interviewed by Skills for Life tutor and TES columnist Gill Moore who has since been doing some consultancy work for the campaign.

We've held two more regional events to promote partnership working in support of reading for pleasure following the success of similar events last year. Delegates in Leicester enjoyed the insights provided by Quick Reads author Adèle Geras and those in Durham were challenged by writer and performer Nick Toczek. They also appreciated the chance to hear an update on BBC RaW and to share good practice and ideas for engaging new readers – *'I am enthused and confident in how I will promote Quick Reads'* Ruth Blake, Skills for Life lecturer, South Nottingham College

6. LINKS WITH UNIONS

Are you working with unions? There is enormous potential for promoting reading for pleasure and links to libraries in the workplace, especially as unionlearn have taken an active role in supporting the Quick Reads. The Vital Link held an exciting event in Leeds with unionlearn designed to bring together library staff and union learning representatives from the Yorkshire & Humber region. There was an exchange of really practical ideas such as mobile library visits to workplaces and use of library space for learning sessions as well as first thoughts about how unions and libraries could work together to mark Learning at Work Day on 24 May during Adult Learners' Week. There was a very positive response to the event from library staff and union learning reps:

'Opened up a new source for us to explore.'
Gary Ward, REMPLOY

'Meeting new people with fresh ideas. Brainstorming with enthusiastic people.'
Anna Turner, Calderdale Libraries

The Vital Link is talking to unionlearn about ways of building on this pilot event and would like to hear from library staff who are already working with unions or would like to do so.

7. PARTNERSHIP WORKING IN PRISONS

In addition to producing a CD of the Quick Reads resources suitable for use in prisons (see 4 above), we've been able to hold two campaign events for library and education staff in prisons thanks to extra support from the national Learning & Skills Council Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit. Delegates in London were inspired by John Bird and those in Birmingham were encouraged to set up author events by Courttia Newland. Again, people appreciated the chance to share ideas for promoting the Quick Reads by working together across libraries and education.

'Encouraging. Motivated to use Quick Read material more extensively in Education. Excellent to have core curriculum references.'
Ann Lockwood, Education Manager, HMP Lewes

8. VITAL LINK WITH PARENTS

The Vital Link is producing a DVD of libraries' work in support of family learning as part of the Vital Link with Parents project supported by the DfES-funded campaign. Nearly 40 authorities applied to take part in this project and it was a hard choice to select one in each region and two for London. These are Bradford, Derby, Dudley, East Sussex, Essex, Hammersmith &

Fulham, Northumberland, Sutton, Swindon and Warrington.

All ten participating authorities are using one of the Vital Link's book collections for families – Got kids? Get reading! or Five Minutes for Dads – as a catalyst to build a three-way partnership between libraries, children's centres and family learning providers. Project manager Rommi Smith arranged two sharing days with contributions from family learning specialists Juliette Collier from the Campaign for Learning and Lorna Batten from York City Council, writer Nick Toczec and library staff from Newcastle and Stockport who took part in a pilot project in 2005. Participating authorities have organised a wide range of creative reading-related activities with parents and carers during February and March in order to engage them in reading for pleasure and in their own learning. These will be captured in the DVD and a report to be made available later in the spring.

This project will also feed into further development of the Vital Link booklists for family reading over the next few months. We know that several other authorities have also developed successful models for working with parents with literacy needs and we'd welcome feedback on books that you have found to be particularly successful. Please contact ruth.harrison@readingagency.org.uk

More about booklists and promotional materials for Got kids? Get reading! and Five Minutes can be found at www.vitalink.org.uk

9. FAMILY PHASE OF BBC RAW

The Vital Link with Parents fits well with the current phase of the RaW campaign which is focused on families and also with the National Literacy Trust's Family Reading Campaign. All library authorities have copies of the Max and Lara family activity pack produced by BBC RaW which is proving a popular resource for family reading sessions in libraries and other RaW centres. More stories about the Max and Lara characters have now been written for publication in a smaller format to be made available in May.

The BBC RaW website at bbc.co.uk/raw now offers some great interactive storytelling activities for families introduced by Tony Robinson – Every Pictures Tells a Story, Storywriter and Tony's Telling Tales – as well as the RaW Reader featuring all the Quick Reads and some children's books. A new campaign partners section includes a range of useful downloads, examples of activities run by libraries and other RaW centres and the return of the RaW Star of the Month feature. Visit <http://www.bbc.co.uk/raw/campaignpartners/ideas>

[bank/](#) to fill in the online form and make sure your own work gets some publicity.

10. ANOTHER YEAR OF READING!

Families also look set to be a major focus of a National Year of Reading launching in 2008, ten years on from the previous celebration of reading in 1998-99. This was announced by Secretary of State Alan Johnson as he launched Every Parent Matters (see <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=11184>) but further details about the arrangements for the Year are still to come.

11. VITAL LINK LAUNCHES BLOGS

The Vital Link has now launched two blogs to support exciting new stock development work being led by Ruth Harrison. Despite the launch of the Quick Reads and other new titles from New Island, Sandstone and Barrington Stoke, there is a need to identify titles from mainstream stock appropriate for emergent readers on a more regular basis.

Supported by funding from the Vital Link Reading for Pleasure Campaign, a new project with six library authorities from the ReadEast network – Cambridge, Essex, Hertfordshire, Luton, Norfolk and Peterborough – is addressing some key issues for this area of stock development. These include staff training, refining the online database at www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk and testing out a new model for identifying stock that takes into account library capacity while maintaining the integrity of the Vital Link stock selection criteria. The aim is to deliver a workable model that has the potential to deliver more titles on an annual basis and is replicable across other library services.

Please see the project blog at www.vitallink.wordpress.com to join in the conversation about how you select titles for emergent titles or contact Ruth on ruth.harrison@readingagency.org.uk

A second blog at www.vitallinkspice.wordpress.com is being set up to support work undertaken by the SPICE group of library staff in the West Midlands to look at reading for pleasure work in the context of ESOL (English as a Second Language). Our definition of the target audience is adults who are literate in their mother tongue but at Entry Level 3/Level 2 in English. The aims of the project are to see if changes need to be made to the stock selection criteria when assessing potential titles for ESOL learners, scoping what's available from publishers and

developing a booklist, guidance and case studies for the Vital Link site. We're aware that materials to support ESOL are a priority for library staff and we'd be very interested to hear from libraries and tutors who are working with ESOL learners. Please visit the blog or contact Ruth.

12. THE VITAL LINK IN YORKSHIRE

Library services in Yorkshire & the Humber are currently working on a project designed to share good practice in implementing the Vital Link improvement framework. Supported by MLA Yorkshire, this links to work undertaken through the Open Doors project led by Abigail Hackett – see <http://www.mlay-skillsforlife.org.uk/index.php> Library staff have shared case studies and action planning at two events and there are two more to come in York in May and in Leeds in July. The overall aim of the project is to move towards a more consistent service to emergent readers and adults with low literacy across the region.

A similar project is being considered for the South East and The Reading Agency is keen to hear from other regions that might like to work with The Vital Link in this way. Please contact Genevieve on genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk

13. ROLE OF READING FOR PLEASURE

Recent research published by the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) reveals some useful opportunities for those promoting reading for pleasure. The summary report for the reading study, *Effective Teaching and Learning: Reading*, indicates that learners who spend time in self-study between classes make better progress and recommends that tutors should be supported in developing strategies for pair and group work in class. See www.nrdc.org.uk for the summary and full report.

There's also a chance to flag up the role of reading for pleasure in responding to the current review of the curricula being undertaken by LLU+ for the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA). See http://www.lsbu.ac.uk/lluplus/consultancy/currentprojects_3.shtml to have your say!

14. AND FINALLY

If you have found this eletter useful, please pass it on to colleagues and ask them to sign up by sending their **full** contact details to: sheila.karim@readingagency.org.uk The next issue will go out in summer 2007.

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