

Welcome to the Winter Vital Link eletter. This is designed to keep you up to date with developments in the Vital Link libraries and basic skills programme.

Some headlines from this newsletter:

- Advocacy leaflet *Libraries support Skills for Life through reading for pleasure* launched at Vital link conference
- Latest additions to online toolkit available at www.vitalink.org.uk
- First Choice stock database now live at www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk
- Launch of Vital Link's reading for pleasure campaign to adult literacy practitioners
- Impact research finds that libraries' work with emergent readers gives learners a huge confidence boost

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1. WHAT IS THE VITAL LINK?

For those of you new to The Vital Link, it is a national library-led partnership programme that is promoting reading for pleasure as a way of motivating existing students and engaging new learners. Run by The Reading Agency in partnership with the National Literacy Trust and the National Reading Campaign, it 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 been endorsed by the Society of Chief Librarians. The Vital Link now has additional DfES funding to promote reading for pleasure and partnership with libraries to adult literacy practitioners.

2. ADVOCACY LEAFLET

A new advocacy leaflet has been produced to help library staff who are setting up partnerships with Skills for Life practitioners. *Libraries support Skills for Life through reading for pleasure* sets out the benefits to Skills for Life practitioners of working with libraries to deliver the adult literacy curriculum. 20 copies have now been sent to each library authority in England and further copies have gone out to stakeholders and opinion formers in library and adult literacy organisations. If you would like to receive further copies of the leaflet, please contact resources@readingagency.org.uk

3. ONLINE TOOLKIT: WHAT'S NEW?

The online toolkit for library staff at www.vitalink.org.uk is being well-used, with most pages being accessed around 200 times a month. If you haven't had chance to have a look at it yet, be sure to go online and check out the practical guidance on accessibility, stock provision, learner support and reader development for work with adult learners. Guidance is backed up with good practice case studies from library authorities currently working with emergent readers. Recent additions to the toolkit are a new section on Progression, in the Learner Support section, and additional case studies such as using the national tests online (*Durham Skills4Life*). If you are looking for ways to use ICT with basic skills learners, check out how some libraries have used Webquests and blogs at <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitalink/LearnersupportusingICT.html>. Following a request at a recent consultation group meeting, an online discussion board is currently being set up, where library staff will be able to share good practice and discuss issues relevant to the target group.

4. 7 OCTOBER VITAL LINK CONFERENCE

The second national Vital Link conference, held on 7 October at Kensington Town Hall, attracted more than 160 delegates from libraries and literacy organisations. Speakers included the author Joanna Trollope, Jane Quinn, Learning Executive, BBC, Gail Rebeck, Chair & Chief Executive The Random House Group, Sue Henderson, Head of the Skills for Life Strategy Unit and Miranda McKearney, Director of the Reading Agency. A key message of the conference was that reading for pleasure is a powerful strategy for attracting and retaining adult learners. Delegates identified some of the barriers to integrating library partnerships into adult literacy

practice and suggested a wide range of solutions to tackle these. A full report of the conference and details of the barriers and solutions identified are available on the Vital Link website at <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/update.html#report2005>

5. READING FOR PLEASURE CAMPAIGN

The reading for pleasure campaign was launched at the Vital Link conference and workshops were subsequently held at the three national Skills for Life conferences in co-operation with BBC RaW. Most people attending signed up there and then to become organisational champions.

A questionnaire and the Vital Link advocacy leaflet has been mailed to practitioners to gather information to help develop learning materials for the Quick Reads launch on World Book Day. Materials will contain imaginative, creative and fun activities to enthuse emergent readers and assist practitioners in developing a reading habit, with the support of library partners. The questionnaire is available on the Vital Link and DfES Readwriteplus websites (www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/The_Vital_Link/) for downloading and return.

Questionnaire respondents are being offered a personal contact in their library service, drawn from our Vital Link database. Library staff receiving this eletter should be aware that Skills for Life practitioners may get in contact as a result of this exercise and will need to be put in touch with the most appropriate library in their authority area. We hope that many new partnerships around reading for pleasure will result.

Three regional events to celebrate reading for pleasure are being planned for March 2006; the campaign manager, Kay Jackaman, welcomes your ideas about the content of these events. Kay is also available to attend advocacy events in support of your own activities, so contact her at kay.jackaman@readingagency.org.uk.

6. IMPACT RESEARCH

Confidence all round, the report by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre on their research into the impact of libraries' work with emergent readers, is now available at www.vitallink.org.uk The research found persuasive qualitative evidence of the success of this work in contributing to national targets for both Skills for Life and libraries. One of the

key findings was the enormous confidence boost that work of this kind gives to learners, helping to increase their employability and motivate them to continue learning. We are currently working with MLA to produce an evaluation toolkit to be used by library authorities to demonstrate the impact of their own work with emergent readers.

7. TRAINING

The Reading Agency is now offering training courses aimed at staff working with emergent adult readers and their families. One day courses entitled *First Choice: getting learners into reading* and *Get going with Got kids? Get reading!* have already been delivered successfully in November, but places are still available for February courses. The next session of *Get going with Got kids? Get reading!* will be held on Tuesday 7 February 2006 in York, while *First Choice: getting learners into reading* will be in Birmingham on Thursday 9 February. Further details and a downloadable booking form are available at www.readingagency.org.uk

8. FIRST CHOICE BOOKS DATABASE

The First Choice online stock database is now live at <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/fcb.html> with a front page for emergent readers at www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk. Skills for Life practitioners, emergent readers and library staff can search the database, which includes all the First Choice and Got kids? Get reading! titles, by type of book – fiction, non-fiction, genre, title and author. Practitioners and staff can also search by readability level and see details of the stock selection criteria. If you would like to help us to keep the database growing, please go online now and send in your comments, reviews and further suggestions for recommended book titles.

9. WORLD BOOK DAY QUICK READS

All library authorities should now have received details of the 12 Quick Reads titles being published for World Book Day on 2 March 2006 and be liaising with their regular library supplier for orders. A second tranche of Quick Reads will be published in May 2006 to coincide with Adult Learners' Week. £1 book tokens, which can be used by adult learners to purchase Quick Reads at a discount, are being offered, along with promotional materials, to all learning providers through NIACE– see www.quickreads.org.uk .

Libraries: please note that The Reading Agency is handling your requirements for promotional materials and book tokens. Please contact

resources@readingagency.org.uk if you have any queries about your order.

10. BBC RAW CAMPAIGN

Two months on from the launch of the RaW campaign, libraries are busy raising awareness of the BBC's biggest push to improve the nation's literacy. We hope that library staff across the UK will find the Vital Link online toolkit a useful support for their work on RaW.

Library staff have been briefed using the welcome pack distributed to all participating libraries and callers to the RaW phone line are being directed to their nearest RaW library.

Phase 1 of RaW, which runs until the end of February 2006, is giving libraries the opportunity to engage potential new learners through themed events, quizzes, online tasters and library outreach. Regional structures linking BBC Learning Project Managers to a representative from the Society of Chief Librarians and the regional agency for museums, libraries and archives are proving important for strategic planning. Phase 2, RaW Passions, will start on 2 March 2006, World Book Day, coinciding with the launch of the new Quick Reads titles. Ideas and guidance are available at <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitalink/RaW.html> and a regular eletter is going to the main RaW contact in each authority.

11. FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUTURE

In England, library sign-up to RaW includes a commitment to develop services to adult literacy learners through use of the Vital Link Improvement Framework, endorsed by the Society of Chief Librarians. Almost 100% of authorities have now signed up to BBC RaW, using a three-tier sign-up chart developed through consultation at a series of workshops earlier in 2005. All library authorities have signed up at minimum level with nearly half planning to include some elements of medium level (over 600 libraries) and 17% some elements of enhanced level (around 100 libraries). 84% of libraries also said that Basic Skills will feature explicitly in the library authority's 2006-07 Plan. As current funding for The Vital Link comes to an end in March 2006, work is now focussing on mapping what has been achieved over the three years of the programme and identifying ways to sustain it.

12. GOT KIDS? GET READING!

Around 60% of UK library authorities have now purchased "Got kids?" promotional materials and most of these have also purchased the Got kids? book collections. Building on the success of the pilot project in early 2005, training is now focusing on developing further partnerships with children's centres and family learning and on ways to target more families with skills gaps. The programme has been endorsed by DfES, which is exploring with The Vital Link ways to build capacity in organisations in order to sustain and extend the work in the future.

13. MLA AND ADULT LEARNING

Following publication of the report from Liverpool John Moore University [Provision for adult learners in public libraries in England](#) MLA asked Customer Interpreter to develop proposals on ways to enhance and build on current provision for this group, focusing on libraries' key strengths and offering ideas for improvements that could increase the role libraries play in this field. Their new report, *Increasing the attractiveness of libraries for adult learners*, describes how library managers and staff might understand better the barriers that prevent potential learners from using libraries for learning, and suggests ways in which libraries could be made more attractive and accessible to adult learners, especially those with basic skills needs. It offers guidance on the language and messages most likely to influence adult learners.

The report is now available on the MLA website at: www.mla.gov.uk/documents/id2100rep.pdf and there is a link to it from the Vital Link online toolkit.

14. LONDON LIBRARIES SKILLS FOR LIFE COMPACT

ALM London is working with all the London library authorities to support adult learners through the Skills for Life Compact. LSC has made available 30 facilitation days between now and the end of March 2006 to take the work forward and a Compact co-coordinator has been identified in each authority. The five strands of the Compact are:

- Plans and partnerships
- Staff and training
- Stock and budgets
- Promoting reader and learner development
- Regional and national networking.

Working parties are meeting between November and March to look at each strand. The Vital Link is contributing to Compact working groups: Ruth Harrison to the stock and budgets group,

Genevieve Clarke to the regional and national group and Pearl Valentine to the staff and training group. A collective meeting has been planned for 8 March to share experience and a celebration day will be held on 24 March. A proposal is being put together for project funding to embed the Compact in day to day library working. Contact francesca.elu@alm london.org.uk for more information.

15. BIG BOOK SHARE CONFERENCE

The first Big Book Share conference was held on November 3rd at HMP Nottingham. Over 80 people attended from partnerships which had taken part in Phase 2 or from others hoping to start up similar projects.

A welcome from Nottingham prison, Nottingham Libraries and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation was followed by presentations from the National Offender Management Service, the DfES Offenders Learning and Skills Unit and Clive Hopwood of the Writers in Prison network. The conference then enjoyed short inspiring presentations from each of the prison service/public library partnerships involved in Phase 2 of the project:

- HMP Blundeston/Suffolk Libraries
- HMYOI Feltham/Hounslow Libraries
- HMP Foston Hall/Derbyshire Libraries
- HMP Hull/Kingston upon Hull Libraries
- HMP Magilligan/WELB NI
- HMP Nottingham/Nottingham Libraries

These were followed by workshops to discuss some of the issues and challenges around developing and sustaining this valuable work.

Thanks to further funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, the Big Book Share will continue into Phase 3, working closely with HMP Nottingham/ Nottingham Libraries and HMP Blundeston/ Suffolk libraries on strategies to help the inside/outside links for prisoners and their families, to support prisoners on their release and help them to access libraries more easily.

An 'associate' programme for Phase 3 will provide updates and newsletters to a range of associate projects in prisons throughout the country. If you would like to join this network, please email Tricia.kings@readingagency.org.uk.

16. INFORMATION FROM HELPISATHAND

The helpisathand website for UK Online centres: <http://www.helpisathand.gov.uk/news/learning/> has lots of relevant information on its learning pages. Recent headline articles include the Quick Reads campaign, the LSC change programme, *The Wright Stuff* national TV campaign to encourage viewers who have little or no experience of ICT and the internet to take the first steps into learning, and information about the RARPA guide – a guidance document providing information and action points for recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning. Register now at <http://www.helpisathand.gov.uk/> to access a wide range of tools, information on offers, resources, support and the latest news.

17. AND FINALLY

Please pass this eletter to colleagues in libraries and the basic skills sector and ask them to sign up by sending their **full** contact details to: resources@readingagency.org.uk
The next issue will go out in March 2006.

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