

Welcome to the Spring Vital Link eletter. This is designed to keep you up to date with developments in the Vital Link libraries and basic skills programme. It now goes to 1800 recipients across the library and adult literacy sectors in the UK

Some headlines from this newsletter:

- New online learning resources to support World Book Day Quick Reads
- Evaluation toolkit for libraries now being piloted
- New Quick Reads titles and RaW developments
- Extending the Got kids? Get reading!TM approach

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1. WHAT IS THE VITAL LINK?

The Vital Link 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. ONLINE TOOLKIT: WHAT'S NEW?

If you haven't yet had a look at the online toolkit for library staff, take a few minutes now to check out new additions.

A report from Cumbria library service about using the Got kids? Get reading!TM collections as part of wider family learning is now at www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitalink/gotkids.html

For libraries just starting or extending their outreach and reader development programmes to FE Colleges and Skills for Life classes, "Quick Reads" from Essex libraries has lots of useful tips for staff at www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitalink/RDstart.html

In the accessibility section, new items include library postcards in community languages from Croydon and a leaflet from Essex libraries for users whose first language is not English. See these at

www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitalink/Outreach.html . New links have also been added in this section to the designinglibraries website where examples of modern and accessible library signage can be found.

If you are developing a policy for your services to Skills for Life learners, have a look at examples of policies already in use at Hull and Kirklees at www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitalink/basicskillspolicies.html

Coming soon will be a list of Basic Skills materials used in Wandsworth for students with very basic levels of literacy.

If your library is doing innovative work with Skills for Life learners, or if you have materials aimed at this group which you would be willing to share with other libraries through the toolkit, please email them to pearl.valentine@readingagency.org.uk

3. READING FOR PLEASURE CAMPAIGN

The Reading for Pleasure Campaign has had a very busy time since Christmas. Learning materials to accompany World Book Day's Quick Reads are now online at www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitalink/Learningresources.html - libraries should make sure their Skills for Life partners are aware of them. We're already getting feedback that tutors love these resources, which will help them put reading for pleasure right back in the centre of their work with adult learners. The resources provide practical exercises to do in class, to stimulate interest and discussion about the Quick Reads and other titles.

Two recent regional events in Birmingham and Taunton showcased Quick Reads and their accompanying learning materials.

A toolkit is also now in development, with case studies and hints and tips for practitioners on developing reading for pleasure through the Skills for life curriculum. More details from kay.jackaman@readingagency.org.uk

A stakeholder meeting at the end of January focused on feedback from the recent questionnaire survey to Skills for Life practitioners on how they develop reading for pleasure in the classroom. 14% of those responding said they did not do it at all – blaming targets based closely on functional literacy, lack of suitable reading materials or lack of confidence in how to do it.

Another outcome from the survey was the database of library contacts sent to Skills for Life practitioners. We hope that many new links between adult literacy workers and libraries have resulted.

The campaign will be focussing next on training and development for library staff and literacy practitioners, and will keep a close eye on the current review of specialist teaching qualifications for literacy practitioners.

4. EVALUATING IMPACT

Confidence all round - the impact research undertaken by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre for the Vital Link - collected evidence of the difference libraries are making to adult learners' enjoyment of reading, leading to improved skills and motivation to continue reading and learning. Emergent readers from within the Vital Link programme reported that they were now either reading for pleasure for the first time or reading more frequently, while those who hadn't used libraries before reported a much more positive view of their role and value. Strong personal development outcomes, with significant increases in confidence and self-worth had resulted for learners, who had enjoyed thinking analytically and creatively about books and reading and taking part in discussions.

Based upon the outcomes of this research, an evaluation toolkit has now been produced, for libraries to demonstrate the value and impact of their work with Skills for Life learners. The toolkit contains model questionnaires for use with learners, a spreadsheet for analysis of the results and a template for reporting on the outcomes, together with extensive guidance notes on how to do it.

The toolkit is being piloted with a few libraries before being made available for general use. If you think you would like to try it out and feed back your views, please contact pearl.valentine@readingagency.org.uk.

5. TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Successful training courses on working with the First Choice books and getting started with Got kids? Get reading! have recently been held at a range of venues in England and Wales.

More than 100 people have been trained so far and we know that many more library staff are interested in learning more about the materials and programmes and how they relate to each other. We are happy to set up regional training events or to train for a cluster of libraries where there is local interest, so please get in touch if you would like to discuss a course in your area.

The Reading Agency is currently reviewing its training programme and is planning more training events for 2006–07, so register an interest now and receive early notice of new courses and their locations! Email liz.dubber@readingagency.org.uk

6. GOT ANY GOOD BOOKS FOR EMERGENT READERS?

We're getting lots of requests for more books that work for emergent readers, so if you have done any work on sourcing appropriate books it would be great if you could let us know so we can increase the range of titles available.

We're interested in any titles (fiction, non-fiction, graphic novels, poetry) that you think are appropriate for emergent readers and fit the Vital Link stock selection criteria. We're particularly interested in books that work for parents, dads or children (i.e. children's books). You can submit a title to the First Choice Books database (www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk) by completing the online stock selection form or alternatively print it out (downloadable from www.vitallink.org.uk), complete and send to: Ruth Harrison, The Reading Agency, 57 Effingham Road, Lee Green, London SE12 8NT. If you're not sure how to do the stock selection criteria you'll find guidance on www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk

We look forward to receiving your book suggestions. If you have any queries please contact: ruth.harrison@readingagency.org.uk

7. WORLD BOOK DAY QUICK READS

Twelve new titles for emergent readers by big-name authors were launched by the Prime Minister on World Book Day 2006, March 2nd as

part of a national celebration of reading. Many libraries held events to celebrate and the BBC screened a documentary about the importance of reading, which featured Coventry Library and the Idea Store at Bow.

10 more Quick Reads titles are planned to be published on 18 May to coincide with Adult Learners' Week. See www.quickreads.org.uk.

Adult learners can purchase these titles using the World Book Day £1-off tokens available from the Quick Reads, RaW and Vital Link websites, or can borrow them from libraries.

We're keen to get feedback on the books direct from emergent readers. Please encourage them to submit comments about any of the books to the First Choice database at www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk

8. OTHER NEW TITLES

More new titles are available from New Island and Sandstone Press and audio versions of the Quick Reads from W.F. Howes. All these, with some Welsh language titles and two books by Welsh authors are listed at www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/1stchoice.html

9. BBC RAW CAMPAIGN

Libraries all over the country are actively promoting the BBC's campaign to improve the nation's literacy; see examples of RaW library events in the RaW ideas Bank at www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/RaWideasbank.html

Evaluation data from 78% of library authorities showed that at least 3600 RaW activities were held during Phase 1, ranging from RaW quizzes to learning sessions in libraries. Phase 2 is now under way, switching the emphasis to personal and family interests as a spur to reading and writing better. This includes a focus on sport, to capitalise on interest in the World Cup, before moving into more general family reading towards the end of the summer. Stickers and posters for this new phase have recently been sent out to RaW contacts in all libraries, together with guidance on setting up RaW reading groups, RaW swaps and RaW stories. Libraries are being encouraged to link with RaW centres in their local area. For more information on all aspects of RaW, please contact Genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk

10. FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUTURE

The Vital Link has recently been assessing its impact on library policies and services for adult basic skills learners. Library managers responsible for Skills for Life services in a representative sample of libraries have been asked about their use of the Vital Link Improvement framework and programme, about their partnerships, and about funding and staffing for their services to adult basic skills learners. Many examples of good practice have been identified and most libraries felt that their work with the target group had developed and expanded as a result of their involvement. The survey identified some common barriers to progress and asked libraries about their requirements for future support. The results of this survey will be used to inform a report to MLA on the Vital Link's contribution to Framework for the Future and will underpin future developments. Grateful thanks are due to the library services taking part.

11. GOT KIDS? GET READING!™

We have recently been discussing how best to develop and extend the Got kids? Get reading™ programme to more libraries, children's centres and extended schools, with a target of involving at least one children's centre or extended school in each local authority in England. Potential developments under discussion are targeted collections and promotions for dads and grandparents.

We have been talking to the DfES and the Big Lottery Fund about how such developments might be financed, and have been in recent discussions with the London Libraries Development Agency about using the programme in libraries across London and with CYMAL about the potential to extend the programme to Wales.

If your library is part of a region or cluster that would like to develop active project work around the Got kids? Get reading!™ collections, with a view to partnership with children's centres, please get in touch with us at pearl.valentine@readingagency.org.uk or liz.dubber@readingagency.org.uk

12. LONDON LIBRARIES SKILLS FOR LIFE COMPACT

ALM London has been working with all the London library authorities to support adult learners through the Skills for Life Compact. The five strands of the Compact: Plans and partnerships, Staff and training, Stock and budgets, Promoting reader and learner development and Regional and national networking have all been discussed and analysed

intensively at a series of working groups facilitated through the Skills for Life Quality Initiative.

The Compact relates closely to the Vital Link Libraries improvement framework, and London libraries are assessing themselves against the Compact to badge their services for learners. Compact groups have been discussing quality assurance through such techniques as peer review and accompanied visits to each others' libraries.

13. UNESCO LITERACY PORTAL

UNESCO has just launched a literacy portal on the web which aims to provide a platform for information-sharing on literacy projects and activities around the world. The portal will be developed through contributions from a wide range of literacy stakeholders and workers in Member States and Institutions and will be a working tool to provide them with more visibility and networking opportunities.

Keep an eye on the portal to keep in touch with literacy developments world-wide and to see what strategies other countries use to reach disadvantaged groups of learners. The portal will be a guide to events and developments throughout Unesco's Literacy decade (2003-2012). See it at portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=40338&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

14. KNOWLEDGE FOR LIFE

A new publication from MLA – *Knowledge for Life* – describes how museums, libraries and archives contribute to the national skills strategy and help people of all ages learn and gain new skills. It outlines how our sector provides choice to learners about what and when they learn and how this contributes to meeting Learning and Skills Council targets. Download the report from www.mla.gov.uk/website/information/publications

15. KEEPING A FINGER ON THE PULSE

The Vital Link works closely with the library and Skills for Life sector to make sure that planned developments and services meet the real needs of the sector. Whilst we do this formally through Advisory and Consultation Groups, we also try to keep in touch through a network of contacts at all levels.

The **Vital Link Advisory Group** consists of stakeholders from organisations such as MLA, CILIP, DfES, and the Arts Council. It meets three times a year to discuss the direction and development of the Vital Link programme and is currently considering how best the programme can be embedded into mainstream library working.

The **Vital Link Consultation Group** is a much looser federation of interested staff from libraries across the UK. Although members meet in person about every six months to exchange experience and swap stories of good practice, the principal role of the group is to act as a sounding board for new developments in services for adult skills learners. Members have recently contributed to decisions about free publicity materials for the BBC RaW campaign

Other networks are more closely focused upon supporting specific developments, for instance the identification of titles for the stock database.

If you think you would like to take part in the Consultation Group or any of the good practice networks, please contact Genevieve Clarke or Pearl Valentine at The Reading Agency.

16. 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 June 2006.
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