

Welcome to the Autumn 2006 Vital Link eletter. This is designed to keep you up to date with developments in the Vital Link libraries and Skills for Life programme.

In this issue, read about:

- **NEW!** Five Minutes book promotion for Dads
- further funding from the DfES for the Vital Link reading for pleasure campaign
- plans for Quick Reads 2007
- new online Vital Link evaluation toolkit

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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 library-led programme aiming to inspire adults with literacy needs to enjoy reading for pleasure. Run by The Reading Agency in partnership with the National Literacy Trust and the National Reading Campaign, it has a special focus on helping library services and Skills for Life practitioners work together, and forms part of the Government's Framework for the Future strategy for public libraries being taken forward by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.

2. FIVE MINUTES PROMOTION FOR DADS

The Vital Link has recently launched a unique new reading promotion for Dads with low level literacy with children up to ten years of age to link with BBC RaW and promotions such as Family Learning Week. **Five Minutes** features books that Dads will enjoy sharing with their children as well as reading for themselves. There are two booklists available at www.vitalink.org.uk – one including fiction, non-fiction, graphic novels and audio for Dads, the other divided into titles for 0-5

years and those for 6-10. Titles have been selected in partnership with libraries, basic skills tutors and Dads themselves, using the Vital Link Stock Selection Criteria.

Produced in eye-catching black and white and branded with the BBC RaW logo, the Five Minutes display materials feature a man shaving with the strapline **'It takes five minutes...so does a story'**. The promotion includes banners, headers, posters and postcards. Available for immediate dispatch, these can be ordered from www.readingagency.org.uk

Don't forget that **First Choice** and **Got kids? Get reading!** promotional material (banners, headers, posters, postcards, reading diaries, stickers) are also still available to order for immediate dispatch. More details on www.vitalink.org.uk or the resources page of www.readingagency.org.uk

For further information and to let us know about your own work with Dads, please contact ruth.harrison@readingagency.org.uk

3. TRAINING REMINDER

There are still places available on two Vital Link courses for library staff:

- **Got kids? Get reading!** on 3 November in London
- **Vital Link** on 9 November in York

Booking forms and more information on each course is available on the Training page at www.readingagency.org.uk

We will be setting up further training days in early 2007 but please contact liz.dubber@readingagency.org.uk if you would like to discuss customised training for your library authority or a group of authorities.

4. VITAL LINK READING FOR PLEASURE CAMPAIGN

We're delighted to report that further funding from the DfES enables this campaign to continue. The overall aim of this work is to encourage and enable Skills for Life practitioners to integrate reading for pleasure and links with libraries into their curriculum delivery to learners.

Over the last year, The Vital Link has promoted this message to the Skills for Life sector, run successful partnership development events and consulted with adult literacy practitioners about their current practice and support needs. Campaign manager Kay Jackaman, together with experienced practitioners Nancy Gidley and Mo

Mowforth, produced learning resources to support the Quick Reads titles published in March and May. By the end of August, there had been well over 35,000 downloads of these materials from the Vital Link and Quick Reads sites – an indication of tutors' enthusiasm to identify ways of using the books with their learners.

Feedback from events held in the summer back this up: "I feel I have gained a valuable insight in to how the reading materials can help me as a tutor," said one delegate. "You addressed a very pertinent issue - how to get learners to read for pleasure and read regularly," said another.

The campaign will be running workshops at the national Skills for Life conferences in London, Birmingham and York in November focused on the learning resources and its plans to support further Quick Reads titles to be published in March 2007 (see below). It will also be holding regional events in the North East and the East Midlands in early 2007 plus sessions with prison education and library staff and with union learning representatives. Another strand of its work will focus on engaging families, building on a previous Vital Link project called Get On with Got kids? Get reading! which linked libraries and children's centres.

To download the Quick Reads learning resources, see www.vitallink.org.uk and follow the link to Quick Reads. We are very keen to receive feedback on your use of the materials, so please fill in the online form or contact kay.jackaman@readingagency.org.uk

5. QUICK READS

Following the success of the Quick Reads initiative this year, publishers will launch further titles for World Book Day 2007 on Thursday 1 March. These will include fiction by Ricky Tomlinson, Adele Geras and Maureen Lee and non-fiction by Kerry Katona, John Simpson and Allen Carr. The books will retail at £1.99 and readers will be invited to enter a draw with prizes ranging from a holiday for two in Barbados to sets of Quick Reads books.

Keep an eye on www.quickreads.org.uk from 25 October when a new site will be launched. As last year, The Reading Agency will be coordinating distribution of free promotional resources to libraries and will shortly be in touch to take orders for this.

Libraries' investment in this year's campaign reflects their commitment to the emergent reader audience. They purchased well over 100,000 titles and have promoted them strongly through book displays, special events and reading groups.

Quick Reads have been used for Book Crossing, radio book club debates, review boards and reading challenges. Feedback from prison libraries at the recent Prison Libraries Group conference indicated that the books have gone well with prisoners too: "Quick Reads are very popular with our emergent readers. We promote to a very high percentage of low-level reading ability users, raising standards and awareness." *Cathy Davis, HMP Blakenhurst*

We will soon have PLR figures to tell us how well the Quick Reads have issued in libraries.

Meanwhile please also keep an eye on the websites of those publishers who regularly produce titles for emergent readers and for learners at lower levels of literacy:

www.newisland.ie; www.sandstonepress.com; www.wfhowes.co.uk; www.barringtonstoke.co.uk; www.avantibooks.com and www.gatehousebooks.com

The Vital Link will also add new titles specifically written for emergent readers to its First Choice Books database at <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/fcb.html>

6. VITAL LINK ACTION PLAN

A summary of the Vital Link action plan for 2006-08 is now available at www.vitallink.org.uk In brief, our objectives for the period until April 2008 are:

- To improve access to and take-up of library services in England for emergent readers and adults with low literacy by supporting libraries to achieve a consistent level of service
- To promote The Vital Link as the national programme for engaging emergent readers through libraries
- To connect emergent readers with an improved range of library stock for reading for pleasure
- To improve the motivation and skills of adults with low literacy by embedding reading for pleasure through library support for curriculum delivery
- To extend these opportunities to adults with low literacy in the workplace
- To raise funding to sustain support or libraries and practitioners delivering the Vital Link approach

We will be taking a regional approach with much of this work in order to identify sustainable models. Library authorities in Yorkshire are signing up to involvement in more in-depth implementation of the Vital Link improvement framework to be facilitated by MLA Yorkshire and

The Reading Agency over the coming months. A similar approach is being suggested in the South-East. In both cases, links with Skills for Life providers will be encouraged as a starting-point for good practice.

Identifying further book titles for emergent readers and extending the First Choice Books database are also priorities. The Vital Link will be working with ReadEast and with the SPICE group in the West Midlands to model strategies and procedures for selecting suitable library stock, in the latter case focused on titles for ESOL learners. We'd also like to hear from other library authorities or Skills for Life practitioners who have book recommendations – either as submissions to the database at

<http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/fcb.html>

or to ruth.harrison@readingagency.org.uk

7. VITAL LINK EVALUATION TOOLKIT

Another key element of Vital Link activity is building up an evidence base for the impact of libraries' work with Skills for Life providers and learners. The Vital Link has now published its own online evaluation toolkit at <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/evaluation.html> for use by library staff and Skills for Life practitioners who are working with adults who are just getting into reading for pleasure. Based on the methodology developed by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre for *Confidence All Round* (also available from the Vital Link site), this uses the Generic Learning Outcomes developed by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) as part of their Inspiring Learning For All framework.

The toolkit provides:

- the context for evaluating this activity
- definitions of quantitative and qualitative approaches
- guidance on carrying out, analyzing and reporting on the research
- the tools required to carry out the evaluation

It has been tested successfully by a small number of library authorities who have found it a useful process. "Working on the evaluation has really helped us. It was only when we put all the information together that we were able to see properly what we'd done so far, where the gaps are and how to move on from here for the next academic year." *Freda Ackroyd, Buckinghamshire*

We are keen for library authorities and their Skills for Life partners to use the toolkit in order to test it further and add to the evidence base. We would also like to collate findings from different library authorities and keep use of the toolkit under

review. So please contact genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk if you are planning to use the toolkit in any way or if you have any comments or queries about its use.

8. LIBRARIES' CONTRIBUTION TO THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

The case for building an evidence base for libraries' work in this area is made in a recent report commissioned by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council from the Local Futures Group. Using survey findings and case studies, *Public Libraries in the Knowledge Economy* demonstrates that 'public libraries have evolved to become critical "bridge builders" in providing access to learning and skills development for hard to reach groups, in a high trust, less formal learning environment' but that their role in economic development is "not on the Government's 'radar screen". The full report can be downloaded from <http://www.localfutures.com/article.asp?aid=303>

9. VITAL LINK ONLINE TOOLKIT – WHAT'S NEW?

Check out the toolkit at www.vitallink.org.uk for new items. Recent additions include:

- A case study of Hertfordshire's learners' access survey of Welwyn Garden City Library <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/access/casestudies.html>
- Croydon Libraries' Skills for Life strategy <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/basicskillspolicies.html>
- Reading projects with Dads at HMYOI Glen Parva, HMP Leicester and HMP Lincoln <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/RDCasestudies.html>

Please send further items and comments on the toolkit to genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk so that we make it as useful as possible.

10. BBC RAW CAMPAIGN – PUSH FOR PARENTS

Library staff across the country have benefited from training provided by BBC Learning designed to support their delivery of RaW Stories activity. Part of this has focused on engaging families in creative reading and writing activity – a major element of the campaign over the coming months. Resources to support these activities are downloadable from www.bbc.co.uk/raw/campaign including RaW Reads discussion packs, a RaW Stories manual, a guide to RaW Football Stories and two family quizzes. See also the RaW ideas bank at

http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/RaWideasb_ank.html for short reports of library activity over the last few months, complete with contact details.

The major push to engage families in RaW will begin with TV trails in the last week of December and first week of January. These will encourage parents and carers to phone up for a free pack of ideas to help them read, write and tell stories with children. To complement this, the RaW website at www.bbc.co.uk/raw will have new content to support the focus on parents and storytelling.

This is a great opportunity for libraries to weave RaW activities into contact they already have with families through everything from regular Baby Bounce and Rhyme sessions to Chatterbooks reading groups for children. It's also a chance for adult and children's library staff to link to external partners such as Family Learning, Sure Start and Bookstart.

11. FAMILY READING CAMPAIGN

January 2007 will also see the launch of the **Family Reading Campaign**, a partnership campaign working to ensure that the benefits of reading in the home, and strategies to support parents, are incorporated into the messages of all the key organisations concerned with education, libraries, health and parenting. The campaign will be running a Family Reading Fortnight from 8 to 20 January 2007 which will include an official launch on 15 January in Lambeth.

BBC TV in the regions and local radio will be keen to cover family reading activity in January and the Family Reading Campaign is drawing up a table of contacts for BBC regional programming planners. These contacts should be people who are involved in coordinating family reading activities and who would be happy for the work they are doing to be featured on regional television and radio – not just special one-off events but the broad range of activity that takes place regularly in libraries, family centres and community groups.

Please get in touch with katy.mahood@literacytrust.org.uk if you would like to put your name or organisation forward. For more information visit www.familyreading.org.uk

12. BIG LOTTERY FUND FAMILY LEARNING PROGRAMME

As many of you will know, the BIG Lottery Fund launched its **Family Learning Programme** on 19 September offering grants worth £40 million over the next three years to increase family learning opportunities across England. The Reading Agency would be interested to hear from library authorities and Skills for Life providers who are

keen to focus their applications on reading for pleasure as a way of engaging families. Please contact liz.dubber@readingagency.org.uk

13. GOOD NEWS FROM LIBRARIES

Meanwhile this year's **Family Learning Week** has seen a wealth of activities in libraries linked to BBC RaW including Dr Who Days, football story events and creative writing workshops. Surrey Libraries ran some successful online sessions called 'Homework: helping your child...and yourself'. "We started by introducing the participants to the RaW campaign," explains Partnership Support Manager Glynis Craig, "giving them time to play a couple of the games on the site to get a flavour of what was on offer, and giving a plug to the Quick Reads. From there we showed them what was available on Skillswise, and some of the very many adult learning opportunities offered by the BBC, before going on to the various areas specifically aimed at children, and those which would be of interest to them as parents, in particular the schools - parents' guide. The people who took part were amazed at what was on offer. They were also delighted to receive the family DVD to take home with them."

14. AND FINALLY

If you have found this eletter useful, please pass it on to colleagues in the library and the adult literacy sectors and ask them to sign up by sending their **full** contact details to: resources@readingagency.org.uk

The next issue will go out in January 2007.

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