From little things big things grow

State Library of Western Australia
Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program
Working together to improve literacy in Western Australia

Supported by Western Australian Local Governments
“Learning to read is the most important life skill we can pass on to our children. Not only is it essential for success in school and later in life but it will provide countless hours of enjoyment and taking our kids on more adventures than an Xbox console ever could.”

Greg Lilleyman, President, Pilbara Operations, Rio Tinto

33% of five-year-old children starting school in Western Australia are developmentally vulnerable or at risk in their language and cognitive skills. (Australian Early Development Index, 2010).

44% of Australians aged 14 to 74 years do not have the literacy skills they need to meet the changing demands of everyday life and work. (Australian Bureau of Statistics).

75% of Australian employers reported that their business was affected by low levels of literacy and numeracy. (Australian Industry Group).

Australia showed a significant decline in the reading literacy of 15 year olds between 2000 and 2009. (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development).
The State Library started the Better Beginnings program because we believe literacy transforms lives. Introducing children to books and stories at an early age helps them develop a love of reading that will assist them throughout their lives.

75% of brain development happens in a child’s first three years of life.

Through Better Beginnings, the State Library of Western Australia and public libraries are working together with child and community health services and schools to support parents in reading to their children from birth. This ensures that children build the early literacy skills they need to become good readers and to succeed at school.

Better Beginnings:
- provides free books and literacy materials to families of babies through community health nurses and to children starting kindergarten and pre-school;
- has resources and services specifically designed for Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse families;
- hosts free rhyme and story sessions for families of young children at the State Library and in public libraries throughout Western Australia;
- lends children’s books and other literacy materials to community groups; and
- supports practitioners with resources and training around family literacy.

Margaret Allen, Chief Executive Officer and State Librarian, State Library of Western Australia
“Literacy starts in infancy, long before formal education begins … when human ability and motivation are shaped by families. Early learning begets later learning and early success breeds later success [which] lays the foundation for success or failure in school, which in turn leads to success or failure in post-school learning.”

James J. Heckman, PhD, Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences

Findings from the evaluation of Better Beginnings by Edith Cowan University show:

85% The percentage of parents reading to their child increased from 14% to 85% after their involvement in the program.

88% of parents reported that their confidence in sharing books with their child had increased after being involved in Better Beginnings.

The average number of books in the home suitable for reading with the child increased from 15 to 125.

65% Children with library membership increased from 4% to 65%, and most parents indicated that this had been influenced by Better Beginnings.

Parents reported that their children were pointing to pictures and talking about them, turning pages, joining in reading and pretending to read – all behaviours that will help them read and write.
“The kids love it when we get [the packs]… they cheer and cheer. One mother reads with her 4 year old every afternoon after school now… She said without these books, they would not have any to read. I didn’t realise the program was having this kind of impact on families!”

Cate Gould, Teacher, Tjuntjuntjara Remote Community School, 2009

The State Government, through the State Library of Western Australia, local governments and Rio Tinto come together to provide Better Beginnings – Australia’s most extensive family literacy initiative.

By working together, we:

■ have provided books and literacy activities to more than a quarter of a million Western Australian families since 2005;
■ deliver almost $2 million worth of literacy materials each year to families;
■ connect families with agencies in the community that offer support at many levels; and
■ provide a proven successful program with an independent evaluation that shows how Better Beginnings is helping families and the community.
Beginning with a Head Start

“Giving children a head start in their literacy is important to the future of the City, building successful individuals and a prosperous community. Through our libraries, we provide services that support reading and literacy and with Better Beginnings we are building better futures for our City’s children.”

Ray Tame, Chief Executive Officer, City of Armadale

Developing a library habit early in life gives children a head start in literacy and learning to read. Through Better Beginnings, public libraries are the driving force behind efforts to improve early literacy in Western Australia.

- Libraries support and encourage parents to play greater roles in their children’s literacy and ongoing education.
- They expose children to a wider range of books, stories and literacy activities.
- They provide year-round free access to books, parenting information, story and rhyme sessions and knowledgeable staff.

These are all proven factors in promoting reading and literacy achievement.

Partners in Literacy

The State Library works in partnership with public libraries to deliver Better Beginnings and improve literacy throughout Western Australia.

For families, Better Beginnings provides:

- better literacy skills;
- greater parental engagement in learning;
- enhanced self-confidence of parents in supporting their children’s literacy and language development;
- improved school achievement and self-esteem for children;
- increased awareness of local services; and
- confident, informed citizens.

For communities, Better Beginnings provides:

- increased level of skills and employability;
- better educational outcomes;
- more cost effective services;
- better use of resources through collaboration;
- improved partnerships across locally based agencies; and
- increased community participation and civic engagement.
For more information about Better Beginnings:

Phone (08) 9427 3130

Email betterbeginnings@slwa.wa.gov.au

Browse the program’s website at www.better-beginnings.com.au

Better Beginnings is provided by the combined support of:

- the State Government of Western Australia through the State Library of Western Australia
- the Department of Regional Development and Lands (through Royalties for Regions)
- Western Australian local governments
- Rio Tinto