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# Reading for pleasure

## Ideas to inspire dads and male carers of young children

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**'The National Year of Reading gives us a great opportunity to work together to promote reading for pleasure to adults who are improving their skills.'**

*David Lammy MP, Minister for Skills,  
Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills*

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**'If you read, the world has never been more accessible and more exciting. If you don't, the door on opportunity has never been more firmly shut. By starting with what people love – be it sport, music, film, family history, magazines or adventure gaming – the National Year of Reading is a perfect opportunity to weave a rich variety of reading into all your work with learners.'**

*Honor Wilson-Fletcher, Project Director, National Year of Reading*

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**'I can underestimate learners' understanding until they tell me about a book they have read.'** *Adult literacy tutor*

Start with what you love. This is the message of the National Year of Reading. And this is the message for adult learners as much as for any other audience.

The Vital Link libraries and adult literacy programme, together with the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), have created this series of ideas packs for practitioners working with adults in a range of different settings. **This pack contains ideas to inspire dads and male carers to share books with children and to enjoy reading themselves. There is a full list of all the packs available on page 9.**

The aim is to support you in introducing learners to reading in all its forms – books, magazines, websites, lyrics – not just this year, but every year. We need to widen people's concept of reading so that they can think of themselves as 'readers' whatever kind of reading they enjoy. We know that learners can get the reading bug if they are encouraged to choose what they read and can share their experience of reading with others. Reading needs to fit into their busy lives, be relevant to their interests and concerns but also to surprise them with new ideas and ways of looking at the world.

Research tells us that reading for pleasure 'helps to increase enjoyment, self-confidence, motivation and the acquisition of functional literacy skills'. Libraries are ideally placed to support learners as they discover an enjoyment of reading of all kinds. But other organisations also have expertise and resources to offer, which can help to engage people in a love of reading. Local authorities, colleges, prisons, trade unions, businesses and voluntary organisations have all made a commitment to use the National Year of Reading to create new readers.

Please make good use of these ideas while the profile for reading is high and help us to make 2008 an exciting point in their reading journey for adult learners across the country.

**Genevieve Clarke**, The Vital Link and **Jenny Cobley**, NIACE

See [www.yearofreading.org.uk](http://www.yearofreading.org.uk) for more information about the National Year of Reading.

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## Introduction

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The earlier you can engage fathers in the fun of reading, the better. Parenthood can be a catalyst for adults to come back into learning, often through family learning programmes. New dads' courses can help fathers to support their children's development. But you will need to link with antenatal and postnatal service providers, children's centres and other agencies working with families to reach them.

There are lots of factors to take into account if you are trying to attract dads or other male family members such as uncles, stepdads, older brothers or granddads. For a start, is your setting father-friendly? Men can feel uncomfortable in an environment that seems as if it has been designed for females. Consider whether you need a male leader for your activity or at least try to provide some male role models or posters showing men reading. Try to plan sessions at a time that will help working dads to attend, unless, like the case study below, you particularly want to reach dads who are unemployed.

Do you market your activities in a direct way, with a strong masculine appeal? If you address your invitations to 'Dear parent/carer' will it get dad's attention – or even reach dad at all? Do you use emails and text messages as part of your recruitment?

Do you cater for fathers or other male family members from ethnic groups who might view their role differently from British parenting traditions? How can you reach and accommodate them? Networking with groups like the YMCA and Barnardo's might be useful. Tap into the expertise of libraries that have been active in dads and lads reading campaigns.

When it comes to men and reading, think broadly. Men who would not willingly read novels might read books linked to films, science fiction, or current affairs. They may enjoy fanzines or magazines linked to their leisure interests. *Which?* consumer magazine, for example, has dozens of accessible articles with immediate relevance to men's interests.

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## Top ten ideas

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- 1.** Can you have a Saturday club where the children are engaged, at least for part of the time, playing games outside, while the dads get together inside to discuss topics and read? Quick Reads books include a good range of titles that will appeal to anyone who is short of time for reading. Could they borrow books to read at home?
- 2.** Football is always a strong topic to focus on, but there are plenty of other things that may attract fathers, for example, opportunities to improve IT skills or financial awareness.
- 3.** Can you arrange a lads and dads session at the library? Remind dads that they can borrow videos and CDs as well as books. Libraries have special book displays to promote reading with dads. Your library may already be running special 'lads and dads' sessions.
- 4.** Courses to promote fathers reading with their children can be geared towards some kind of outing that the participants can research and organise for themselves.
- 5.** Where it is difficult to get fathers along to sessions, a club that provides activities to be completed at home can help get fathers involved. For example, send home games to play, the instructions for making a model or setting up a kitchen experiment.
- 6.** Themed courses that encourage fathers and children to work together, where reading can be embedded, might be built around subjects such as family history (me, my dad, my granddad) or healthy living (how often do dads and kids cook together?) or orienteering.
- 7.** Get fathers to write stories for their children (and vice versa). Where fathers or sons are reluctant to engage with the written word, visual puzzle books like *Where's Wally?* may be more engaging.
- 8.** Fathers and their children could be encouraged to create comic strips together and to swap their finished comics. They don't need to be artistic. Pin men or cut and paste figures are fine.
- 9.** Get dads involved in creating some lads and dads storybooks.
- 10.** Use IT equipment and digital cameras to create a fanzine about a sports team or music group. Upload it onto the school or college website.

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## Case study 1: 'Real Men Read'

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'Real Men Read' attracted dads in Warrington to experience the pleasure that can come from sharing stories and rhymes with their children. Building on its partnerships with local colleges, schools, children's centres and with Warrington Wolves Rugby League Football Club, Warrington Library ran a pilot with The Beaches Children's Centre in Warrington to appeal to dads and other male family members.

Every month, a celebrity guest was invited. Visitors included players from the Wolves rugby club, a fireman, a policeman and Mr Universe. They usually chose a book they liked and were familiar with, and a song or rhyme was added. The library staff and the guest planned the session in advance, which helped those who were less confident about appearing, and they all spoke with enthusiasm about reading at home to their own children. Family tutors attended the sessions to help model ways of using books and rhymes.

The sessions ran for half an hour on a weekday morning, followed by lunch for the participants. The dads who attended were unemployed, and the provision of lunch was very popular, as it provided a relaxed time to chat to the visiting celebrity and to establish a social network among the participants.

Staff found that it was important to move at the pace of the group and not put the participants under pressure. Building a relaxed and accepting atmosphere allowed the men to lose any awkwardness they had about engaging with the activities. The pilot proved so successful that the group has continued. One of the dads wanted to run a session himself and was supported in doing this. It is hoped that the involvement of family tutors will enable the development of family learning courses that will attract more participants.

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## Case study 2: Fantasy Football

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'Fantasy Football', 'Lads and Dads' and 'Playing for Success' are three schemes built around football that have been used successfully in Staffordshire. Fantasy Football ran in Lichfield and was successful in involving learners who are hard to reach. Although boys and dads were strongly represented, the course was open to both sexes.

The sessions were held at a school venue on Saturday mornings and involved parents and children. They were delivered in partnership with a basic skills tutor from Tamworth & Lichfield College, an art worker from the North Lichfield Initiative (a community partnership) and sports coaches from Lichfield District Council. Funding for the programme came through the Adult and Community Learning Service Family Learning budget.

If you've never played fantasy football, this is how it works. You register online at a site such as <http://fantasy.premierleague.com> and you are allocated a theoretical budget, with which you 'buy' yourself a team made up of 11 players from the football league. Your fantasy team is allocated points, based on the actual performance of those players in their most recent real-life games, and your points are entered into a league table with other teams.

During the sessions, children and parents practised football skills out on the field, led by the sports coaches. This took place alongside creative activities in which children and parents designed football kits, posters, team logos and so on, for which they used the school's ICT suite and art rooms. They registered for the fantasy league, worked out how to spend their money, researched players, wrote about them and downloaded pictures. Basic skills work was supported by Mark Robathan and the art sessions were led by Tracy Potts.

All participants improved their physical fitness, learned how to use the computer to research and take part in the league. They used literacy skills to write up their research, designed team logos, and plenty of maths to work out their budgets and keep track of their points. According to Mark Robathan: 'The boys really enjoyed the physical skills training, but they also enjoyed the creative side of it too.' Tracy Potts commented: 'It was wonderful to see the parents and their children having so much fun learning new literacy skills through the art work they did creating team for the football league.'

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## Resources

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Publications produced by the **Fatherhood Institute** are designed to help agencies to engage more effectively with fathers. *Toolkit for Father-Inclusive Practice* is a key resource that takes you through eight key steps to father-inclusive practice. The website has areas about fathers in Muslim and African Caribbean families, fathers in prison, young fathers, etc. You can read research, case studies and find resources on [www.fatherhoodinstitute.org](http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org)

**Bookstart Dads** is a website devoted to engaging fathers in young children's reading. It provides practical ideas and case studies. [www.bookstartdads.org.uk](http://www.bookstartdads.org.uk)

**Reading Champion Dads** works as part of the National Literacy Trust's Reading Champions scheme to help schools utilise a great reservoir of untapped manpower and raise the involvement of men in their children's education. You can find out more about the initiative and resources and ideas to encourage dads' involvement at [www.literacytrust.org.uk/Campaign/Champions/index.html](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/Campaign/Champions/index.html)

The Vital Link's **Five Minutes** promotion with libraries is aimed at dads with low literacy. [www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/fiveminutes.html](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/fiveminutes.html). The dads' list features titles written specifically for emergent readers as well as mainstream titles selected for their accessibility and includes fiction, non-fiction, audio and graphic novel titles. The children's list is a combination of fiction and non-fiction titles in various formats.

A DVD of the **Vital Link with Parents** project which features 'Real Men Read' (see Case study 1) and a dads' group in Swindon can be seen at [www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/gotkidspilot.html](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/gotkidspilot.html) or ordered free from DIUS Publications – ring 0845 6022260 or email [dius@prolog.uk.com](mailto:dius@prolog.uk.com) (quote ref VLPDVD).

The **BBC's 606** site is an online community that will appeal to dads interested in sport. Areas include football, rugby, cricket, golf, boxing, tennis, snooker, horseracing, motor sports and disability sports. By signing up as members, participants can debate issues with fellow fans, create their own member's page, publish their own articles and reports and rate others' contributions. The site is linked to Radio 5 Live. [www.bbc.co.uk/dna/606](http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/606)

[www.literacytrust.org.uk/Database/boys/men.html](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/Database/boys/men.html) brings together lots of information and links about involving fathers in reading activities.

**Online games** that might appeal particularly to dads and are designed to encourage literacy skills can be found on [www.bbc.co.uk/raw/gamesandquizzes/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/raw/gamesandquizzes/)

The **YMCA** has a lads and dads scheme. Their website describes various local projects supported by YMCA staff. There is a DVD designed to show in short section to fathers and their children to help them discuss their relationship. [www.ymca.org.uk](http://www.ymca.org.uk)

**Quick Reads** titles are listed on [www.quickreads.org.uk](http://www.quickreads.org.uk). All are suitable for readers at Entry Level 3 or Level 1 and many have a strong masculine appeal. You can also hear podcasts with several Quick Reads authors: TV news correspondent John Simpson, rugby star Scott Quinnell, and author Gilda O'Neill who talks about growing up in the East End of London. Listening to them may be a way into reading for some dads.

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## Resources cont...

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**Getting the Blokes on Board** is a magazine of ideas for staff who work with or want to work with dads. Free download from [www.literacytrust.org.uk/familyreading/Blokes.html](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/familyreading/Blokes.html)

**Reading the Game – The Movie!** The National Literacy Trust has created a football-based DVD designed to promote reading. The 16-minute film features high-profile footballers talking about what, when, where and why they like to read. The message is that reading is cool, and that it is something which our sporting heroes are engaged in. This DVD is primarily aimed at 10 to 12-year-olds. [www.literacytrust.org.uk/football/DVD.html](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/football/DVD.html)

**Please also see the resources listed in the pack for parents and carers of young children.**

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## Full list of *Ideas to inspire packs*

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**New readers 1 (up to Adult Literacy Entry Level 2)**

**New readers 2 (Adult Literacy Entry Level 3 – Level 2)**

**Parents and carers of young children**

**Dads and male carers of young children**

**ESOL learners**

**People in prisons and young offender institutions**

**People in the workplace**

**FE college students**

**HE students**

**Readers with additional needs**

These packs are available to download as individual PDF files from [www.vitallink.org.uk](http://www.vitallink.org.uk)  
or [www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk)

### ***Ideas to inspire dads and male carers of young children***

Writer: Gill Moore

Case study 1 contributed by Fiona Barry with thanks to Christine Everett

Photographs of braille reading and flower-seller reading novel by Sim Canetty-Clarke

We welcome all feedback on these ideas and on how you are promoting reading to your learners. Please contact [genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk](mailto:genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk)



The Vital Link libraries and adult literacy programme is run by The Reading Agency in partnership with the National Literacy Trust. See [www.vitallink.org.uk](http://www.vitallink.org.uk)



NIACE is a non-governmental organisation working for more and different learners. See [www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk)