

newsletter

The Vital Link

Welcome to the Vital Link eletter number 15 for March 2009. With spring just around the corner there is much to look forward to and celebrate, including:

- **An update on the Six Book Challenge 2009**
- **The launch of ten new Quick Reads**
- **NEW! Two sets of free resources to support the Quick Reads**
- **Announcement of the proposed Chatabout network**

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What is The Vital Link

For readers of this newsletter who are new to The Vital Link, it is a national programme designed to build and promote libraries' capacity to support the adult literacy agenda. Run by The Reading Agency in partnership with the National Literacy Trust, it encourages libraries and adult literacy providers to work together and has a special focus on using reading for pleasure to motivate and inspire existing students and to engage potential learners. The Vital Link forms part of the Government's Framework for the Future strategy for public libraries being taken forward by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and has support from the

Department for Universities, Innovation and Skills (DIUS) to promote reading for pleasure and links with libraries to adult literacy practitioners.

Six Book Challenge 2009

'For me, the sense of achievement was like having my first child.' Mary Jarvis, Six Book Challenge completer, West Sussex

This year's Six Book Challenge, our annual incentive scheme for emergent readers, is now well under way. The main activity runs until 30 June 2009, the deadline for the prize draw for completers sponsored by Costa Coffee, but organisations are welcome to run the Challenge at any time. Materials for 2009 are still available from The Reading Agency. See www.readingagency.org.uk/shop

So far well over 250 organisations have signed up for 2009 representing nearly 27,000 potential participants - a great mix of library services, colleges, prisons and trade unions. With more than 150 library services involved - including the Channel Islands, Isle of Man, and Kilkenny in the Republic of Ireland - we've just exceeded the total for 2008 which is excellent news.

TUC unionlearn in Yorkshire and the North West are funding workplaces to run the Challenge in partnership with local library services. These include Fox's Biscuits, Royal Mail, Tesco and Fletchers Bakeries in Yorkshire and Mersey Travel, the Fire Brigade and Warburton's in the

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North West. David Kendall is our project manager for Six Book Challenge workplace activity so please contact him if you would like to get involved - mail@davidkendall.co.uk

We're already getting great feedback from this year's Challenge, some of which is featured at www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk Do get in touch if you'd like to share your experiences or if you have any queries about the scheme – please contact genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk

A full impact report of Six Book Challenge 2008 can now be found at www.vitallink.org.uk

Quick Reads 2009

Eager anticipation is almost over as ten new Quick Reads are published on World Book Day 5 March 2009. Top name authors this year include Ian Rankin, Catrin Collier, Kate Mosse, Gervaise Phinn and Lola Jaye. Quick Reads have made a huge impact on the lives of adults who are starting out on their reading journey. To date there have been over one million sales of Quick Reads and more than one million library loans. Visit www.quickreads.org.uk for more information and order your books and promotional materials NOW if you haven't already!

NEW! Free Quick Reads resource packs

Two new resource packs are now available to download from www.vitallink.org.uk to support the new Quick Reads titles. Please use the attached flyer to pass on this information.

For 2009 we have again produced a series of ideas for using the Quick Reads titles in both formal and informal settings. Commissioned by The Vital Link and written by two experienced practitioners, the first pack *Quick Reads: The Vital Link Guide 2009* explores each of the new titles and makes suggestions as to how they can be used to engage and motivate learners through a series of inspirational activities. In addition to this we have produced a collection of 'tried and tested ideas' kindly submitted by practitioners who are happy to share their knowledge and experience with others. This second pack is entitled *Quick Reads: How do you use yours?*

We would like to extend this collection over the coming months and invite tutors to submit their own 'tried and tested' ideas to us. To do this, please complete the downloadable template at www.vitallink.org.uk We would also welcome your feedback on the two new Quick Reads resource packs. Please contact lynn.ludditt@readingagency.org.uk

This year these guides form part of a wider programme of activity in support of reading for pleasure being run by NIACE and The Vital Link with funding from DIUS. New resources from NIACE will include CPD modules on using reading for pleasure for Skills for Life practitioners, for those working with offenders and for union learning reps in workplaces. There will also be resources for using storytelling, numeracy and ICT to promote reading for pleasure. From April 2009, please see www.readingforpleasure.org.uk

Reading for pleasure and the revised curriculum

We're pleased to report that the revised Adult Literacy Core Curriculum in England will include more explicit mention of reading for pleasure and its benefits, together with examples of how it can be used with Skills for Life learners. The revised curriculum, presented as an e-version, will be available on the Excellence Gateway at <http://excellence.gia.org.uk/> from late March.

Announcing Chatabout

The Reading Agency is to develop a national network called Chatabout to support the growing number of reading groups for new adult readers. Chatabout's potential audience will be adults aged 16+ ranging from those with very low literacy to lapsed readers. Many will be in classes to improve their skills; some will not be involved in formal learning. Some may get involved as volunteers to run reading groups themselves.

We've chosen the name Chatabout because we're keen that these groups bring people together to share their thoughts about books, but also about other things they read or watch or experience, just like any other reading group. Groups may take place in a library but they could meet in a college, workplace, community

centre, hospital, prison, church or elsewhere, with their local public library in a support role. They may use audio, TV, digital media or gaming as a way into reading, and they may cater for specialist interests such as health literacy, family reading or ESOL.

The proposed network has already attracted high-level government support.

“I welcome The Reading Agency’s initiative,” says John Denham MP, secretary of state for innovation, universities and skills. “It’s great news that more and more adults are getting involved in reading groups. Networks like Chatabout provide new opportunities for people to read and discuss books in a friendly and supportive environment.”

Andy Burnham MP, secretary of state for culture, media and sport commented “Recent years have seen an explosion of reading groups in England with thousands of people sharing their passion for literature with friends, colleagues, neighbours and other book lovers. Our public libraries have of course been at the heart of this revolution, supporting and underpinning this phenomenon by providing books, expertise and physical spaces. The Reading Agency’s initiative aims to give these opportunities to more people, and to new audiences. It has real promise and it has my support.”

We’ll be spending the next few months scoping and fundraising for the initiative so please get in touch if you’d like to be involved – contact genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk

West Midlands emergent reader groups

The new network will build on work we are doing in the West Midlands to support library staff starting new reading groups with learners. A wide variety of target audiences have emerged including ESOL, Young Offenders, Skills for Life learners, teenage mums, travellers, and employees. We offered training last autumn and are now following up with consultation visits to individual authorities. This work is funded by DIUS but forms part of The Reading Agency’s National Library Readers Group Development Programme, which won an Adult Learners’ Week

Opening Doors Award in 2008 for the work of the East Midlands Regional Reading Group project. Contact lynn.ludditt@readingagency.org.uk

Help us add more titles to First Choice Books

As many of you will already know, www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk is a unique online database containing books appropriate for emergent readers (Entry Level 3 – Level 2). The database holds a combination of mainstream titles and titles specifically written for emergent readers such as Quick Reads, New Island, Sandstone and Barrington Stoke as well as audio titles from WF Howes. There’s everything from love and relationships to science fiction and from sport to fun and humour. You’ll find fiction, non-fiction, poetry, short stories and graphic novels as well as children’s titles (ideal if you are working with families).

Through our partnerships with publishers, practitioners and library staff, new titles are being added to the site on a regular basis. But we’d like your help in recommending books that you have used successfully with learners to make the database an even better resource. We’d particularly welcome the chance to work closely with organisations running the Six Book Challenge to learn more about the books that are proving popular with participants. Please contact lynn.ludditt@readingagency.org.uk

Extending The Vital Link

Much of our work to date has focused on emergent readers, ie people who can read but have yet to discover that reading can be a pleasure. Together with libraries and learning providers, we are now exploring ways of applying what we’ve learnt in order to engage and support adults with the lowest literacy levels. In particular we’d like to address the dearth of appealing reading materials for this audience. We’d be pleased to hear from anyone keen to

share their experiences and knowledge in this area.

We have similar ambitions to promote reading for pleasure to ESOL learners so would also welcome any interest in this. Please contact genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk

National Family Week

National Family Week is a new national occasion to celebrate family life in the UK. Taking place from 25 to 31 May 2009, the week will include hundreds of events and activities run by local authorities, charities, companies, the media and schools, encouraging millions of people to celebrate being part of a family.

Wednesday 27 May is Story Time when National Family Week will be encouraging storytelling in a variety of formats. Storytelling sessions will happen in libraries, schools, homes, shops and online. For more information check out www.nationalfamilyweek.co.uk

This is a great opportunity to link with your local library to take part in National Family week activities. Books selected for less confident adult readers to share with their children are listed at www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk

The Vital Link with Parents DVD featuring children's centres in Warrington, Swindon and Basildon is still available from the DIUS Publications Orderline on 0845 602 8032 quoting reference 107-08-Sk/hc. To find out more about this project see www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallinkg/gotkidspilot.html

raw – skills for everyday life

The BBC RaW campaign has now launched a new interactive website. *Raw – skills for everyday life* is currently focusing on using computers, handling money and skills for employment. The website will be developed over the coming months with libraries supporting

this new phase of the campaign. Let cricketer and TV personality Phil Tufnell guide you through at www.bbc.co.uk/raw

Other resources

A passion for reading: where does it fit into Skills for Life? - a publication from the Reading Agency's New Thinking series. See www.readingagency.org.uk/shop

Ideas to Inspire – ten downloadable ideas packs from The Vital Link and NIACE to support practitioners promoting reading for pleasure to learners in a range of settings available at www.vitallink.org.uk

Vital Link advocacy leaflet to promote libraries' support for the Skills for Life strategy through reading for pleasure available to order free from www.readingagency.org.uk/shop

And finally ...

We are delighted that Lynn Ludditt is currently working as project manager with The Vital Link on secondment from Read On – Write Away! in Derbyshire where she coordinates the Quality in Libraries Award. Welcome Lynn.

But we're sad to be saying goodbye to Julia Strong who will be leaving her role as Deputy Director of the National Literacy Trust at the end of March after 13 successful years. Julia has supported The Vital Link since it launched as a pilot programme in 2001 and we'll miss her massive expertise and enthusiasm. Thank you Julia!

If you have found this eletter useful, please pass it on to colleagues and ask them to sign up by sending their full contact details to resources@readingagency.org.uk

Best wishes - Genevieve Clarke and Lynn Ludditt