

Welcome to a Vital Link eletter for the autumn. This is to bring you news of a busy year so far and plans for the months ahead. In particular:

- **new materials for the Six Book Challenge 2009 in association with Costa plus results of the first year of the national scheme**
- **a New Thinking publication from The Reading Agency featuring The Vital Link**
- **two sets of resources produced by The Vital Link to support the use of reading for pleasure**
- **news about Quick Reads and BBC RaW**

If you are reading this eletter on screen, you can go straight to any section by clicking on its entry below

1.	What is The Vital Link?.....	1
2.	Six Book Challenge 2008 and 2009.....	1
3.	New Thinking publication . A passion for reading: where does it fit into Skills for Life? 2	
4.	National Year of Reading Ideas to Inspire Packs . FREE! .....	2
5.	Ideas for using the Quick Reads . FREE! ...	2
6.	Quick Reads for 2009 .....	2
7.	Vital Link with Parents DVD . FREE!.....	2
8.	Vital Link Advocacy Leaflet . FREE!.....	3
9.	Promoting reading for pleasure.....	3
10.	Skills for Life conferences.....	3
11.	BBC RaW Update.....	3
12.	ō . And finally .....	3

**1. 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.

**2. SIX BOOK CHALLENGE 2008 AND 2009**

The Reading Agency is now offering new materials for the Six Book Challenge 2009. **Order now through the Shop at [www.readingagency.org.uk/shop](http://www.readingagency.org.uk/shop) and start your planning!** Orders made by **Friday 3 October** are guaranteed delivery by the end of October but orders can also be made after this date.

The Reading Agency launched the national Six Book Challenge in 2008 as an annual incentive scheme for less confident adult readers as part of the Vital Link programme. Pioneered and piloted by library authorities in Yorkshire, The Six Book Challenge invites adults to read six books and record their reading in a diary in order to receive a certificate. Those who completed the Challenge by the end of June 2008 also had the chance to enter a prize draw offered by our sponsors Costa.

The first year of the scheme has been a great success with an estimated 7000 participants and a completion rate of 43% based on data received from public libraries. 145 library services UK-wide (69%) signed up to offer the Six Book Challenge (122 or 82% in England) to work in partnership with local colleges, community education, prisons and other learning providers. Another 50 learning organizations signed up separately including several colleges, and at least 50 prisons ran the Challenge. More than 250 employees took part in the Challenge in the Yorkshire region from workplaces including Foxes Biscuits, Fletcher's Bakery, Royal Mail, BT and the Prison Officers Association through a Vital Link unionlearn project.

A full impact report will be available later in September at [www.vitalink.org.uk](http://www.vitalink.org.uk) but headline results tell us that 88% of those surveyed after the Six Book Challenge 2008 said they had gained something from the scheme including a new or renewed interest in reading, use of the library, introduction to different reading material and progress with their reading and writing

60% felt that their literacy skills had improved . a benefit endorsed by tutors. 89% expected to use the library more to borrow books, 85% to read more magazines and newspapers, 77% to write more (eg diary, stories, letters, emails) and 76% to read more fiction than they had before

The main activity for the Six Book Challenge 2009 will run from January to June but organisations are welcome to use the scheme at any time in 2009.

We're delighted that Costa have confirmed sponsorship for the Six Book Challenge 2009 and will again offer a national prize draw for those who complete the Challenge by the end of June and a separate prize draw for prisons and young offender institutions. Bestselling author Mike Gayle has also committed to continuing in his valuable role as Six Book Challenge patron. This summer he presented certificates to Challenge completers at three events hosted by Costa in Glasgow, Leeds and Liverpool.

The Reading Agency is now offering training to support organisations running the Six Book Challenge . see <http://www.readingagency.org.uk/new-thinking/training/> or get in touch if you would like to request a customised training event.

If you have any queries about any aspect of the Six Book Challenge, please see [www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk](http://www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk) or contact [genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk](mailto:genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk)

### 3. NEW THINKING PUBLICATION – A PASSION FOR READING: WHERE DOES IT FIT INTO SKILLS FOR LIFE?

Hot off the press is a new publication in the Reading Agency's New Thinking series which demonstrates the role of reading for pleasure in adult literacy provision. ***A passion for reading: where does it fit into Skills for Life?*** develops the views expressed at the national Vital Link conference in March and supports them with case studies and new research.

Contributors include Miranda McKearney and Debbie Hicks from The Reading Agency, Helen Sunderland from LLU+ at London South Bank University, Liz Lawson from DIUS and Skills and consultant and researcher Jane Mace. Please see <http://shop.readingagency.org.uk/productlist.aspx> to make your order.

### 4. NATIONAL YEAR OF READING IDEAS TO INSPIRE PACKS – FREE!

To mark the National Year of Reading, The Vital Link has worked with NIACE to produce ten downloadable ideas packs for practitioners working to promote reading for pleasure to adults in a range of settings. These free packs cover New Readers (one for Entry Level and one for Entry Level 3 upwards), 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 and readers with additional needs.

Available to download now from [www.vitalink.org.uk](http://www.vitalink.org.uk) , each pack contains top tips, case studies and a resources list.

### 5. IDEAS FOR USING THE QUICK READS – FREE!

Ideas packs to support the ten Quick Reads published in March 2008 are also downloadable from [www.vitalink.org.uk](http://www.vitalink.org.uk) Written by practitioners Gill Moore and Roger Adams these provide a way into using the books in a range of settings through ideas for discussion and extension activities. There are suggestions for other reading materials, printed and online, and curriculum references for the main learning points.

### 6. QUICK READS FOR 2009

The Vital Link will produce further ideas packs to support ten new Quick Reads to be published on World Book Day 5 March 2009.

Another strong list contains titles from Ian Rankin, Kate Mosse, Catrin Collier, John Boyne, Gervase Phinn and the author of six Doctor Who novels Jacqueline Rayner. It also includes the debut novel from *Coronation Street* actress/*Loose Women* presenter Sherrie Hewson, following her win of the BBC's crime writing reality programme *Murder Most Famous*.

The non-fiction range includes tips on how to engage your child with reading introduced by Jacqueline Wilson, counsellor Lola Jaye showing you how to achieve your goals and insider secrets of success from the BBC's *Dragons' Den*.

### 7. VITAL LINK WITH PARENTS DVD – FREE!

Funding from DIUS has enabled us to make further copies of the Vital Link with Parents DVD based on a partnership project run in 2007. This features children's centres in Warrington, Swindon and Basildon in Essex - three of the locations in which library services linked with their local children's centres and family learning providers to engage parents and carers in reading to their children and for themselves. All library authorities involved used either the Got kids? Get reading! or the Five Minutes for Dads collection as a trigger for creative family reading activities and a starting-point for conversations about learning opportunities.

Please order free copies from the DIUS Publications Orderline on 0845-602 8032 (fax 01375 484556; Minicom 0845 015 0030) quoting reference 107-08-Sk/hc. See <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitalink/gotkidspilot.html> for more about the project.

## 8. VITAL LINK ADVOCACY LEAFLET – FREE!

We have also produced an advocacy leaflet to mark the National Year of Reading designed to promote libraries support for the Skills for Life strategy through reading for pleasure. Order multiple copies free from [www.readingagency.org.uk/shop](http://www.readingagency.org.uk/shop)

## 9. PROMOTING READING FOR PLEASURE

The Vital Link will be working with NIACE over the next few months on a DIUS-funded programme to encourage and support adult literacy practitioners in promoting reading for pleasure. This follows research run by The Vital Link earlier this year which found that the use of reading for pleasure by Skills for Life practitioners with their learners is on the increase. Reasons cited included the Quick Reads (87%), support materials such as the Quick Reads learning resources created by the Vital Link (60%), the BBC RaW campaign (49%), the Vital Link Six Book Challenge in association with the Costa Book Awards (30%) and research and guidance from the NRDC (25%).

There is an evident gap, however, between tutors' enthusiasm for reading for pleasure and their confidence in actually introducing it as a teaching method, with fewer than one in ten using it as a main focus in their regular practice. See <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/readingforpleasure.html> for the full report.

The Vital Link's new work will include support for the development of reading groups for emergent readers in the West Midlands through partnership working between libraries, learning providers and voluntary groups. We will also continue to work with libraries and unionlearn in Yorkshire where there are plans to involve up to 30 workplaces in the Six Book Challenge 2009.

## 10. SKILLS FOR LIFE CONFERENCES

The dates for this year's Skills for Life conferences have been announced. 31 October (London), 12 November (Birmingham) and 25 November (York). and booking will open soon. Keep an eye on [www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus) for further details.

## 11. BBC RAW UPDATE

BBC RaW has had a successful summer with more than 22,000 people attending its Storytelling Festival in eight locations around the UK. National Year of Reading, Learndirect, Bookstart, Libraries and local colleges contributed to the events by hosting storytelling

activities to help parents get more out of sharing stories with children and sign-posting them to local family learning opportunities.

From January 2009, the BBC RaW website will be expanding to include a wide range of adult basic skills including money skills, ICT, numeracy and workplace skills as well as literacy. This video-rich, highly interactive website will aim to encourage adults to take the next steps towards tackling their skills needs and will offer practical advice and inspiring activities to help build self-confidence.

The website will be suitable for users to experience alone or can be used by tutors in the formal and informal education sectors. It will be supported by a BBC Learning campaign and will re-launch in the New Year with a focus on money skills. ICT activities will also be available, perfect for people not familiar with basic computer skills.

To find out more, contact your local BBC RaW Learning Project Manager (see [http://www.bbc.co.uk/raw/campaignpartners/event\\_s\\_feedback.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/raw/campaignpartners/event_s_feedback.shtml))

## 12. ... AND FINALLY

Some feedback from people who have been involved in the Six Book Challenge:

*'It's twenty years since I read a book; it's not bothered me. I wasn't any good at school so never missed it. It was the Gordon Ramsay [Quick Read] that got me interested. I saw that, and thought I know him, so I read it. Now I've got two books in my bag for my holiday.'* Andy Barnsley, Fletcher's Bakery, Sheffield

*'The best thing about the Challenge is the challenge.'* Challenge completer, HMP Leeds

*'Two of our learners have now joined the local library as well as the college one. One of these learners is now planning to speak to the librarian to ask for some recommendations as he has read all of the Quick Reads. This sort of individual involvement outside the classroom is great - an influence on every day life.'* Suzanne Snowden, Royal Forest of Dean College

*'Tutors, learners and I have all loved it and found it inspiring and confidence boosting. It's made a real difference to people's lives.'* Janet Puzlyo, Warrington Libraries

**If you have found this letter useful, please pass it on to colleagues and ask them to sign up by sending their full contact details to: [resources@readingagency.org.uk](mailto:resources@readingagency.org.uk)**

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