Family Reading Matters
A strategy to support family literacy in the home

An advocacy pack for local authorities

“Literacy is not just a matter for the director of children’s services, it’s a matter for the whole council. It’s critical to social mobility, regeneration, social cohesion and democracy. Family Reading Matters can help make this vision reality.”

Terry Piggott, Executive Director of Children and Young People’s Services, Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council
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Literacy has the power to change lives. Family Reading Matters is an initiative funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families, supported by a range of other key Government departments, and delivered by the National Literacy Trust. It is piloting the difference that a dedicated local authority strategic coordinator could make to supporting literacy in the home to benefit both children and their parents, with a particular focus on the early years.

Why focus on families?

Research has produced compelling evidence that:

- parents are a child’s first educator - the family and home environment have a strong impact on children’s literacy learning
- children’s literacy development begins long before they start school. A focus on the early years is therefore crucial.

The rationale for Family Reading Matters is presented later in this document.

Why a coordinated approach?

We believe that the more coordinated local services are, the greater their effect. Family Reading Matters has developed over many years of working with government, local authorities, and other interested organisations on how best to raise standards of literacy. The role of parents as a child’s first educator is acknowledged in both the Children’s Plan and Every Parent Matters, and the need for a more coordinated approach to supporting children underpins the Every Child Matters agenda. However, evidence suggests that despite much excellent practice on the ground, this does not involve productive partnership work as often as it should.

Why now?

During the 2008 National Year of Reading, every local authority in England committed to focusing on literacy and the importance of a coordinated, multi-agency approach. Family Reading Matters builds on this momentum, supporting each of the targeted pilot authorities in:

- mapping current provision
- strengthening partnership work across the authority
- linking with a wide range of voluntary organisations, community groups and businesses at local level in order to:
  - develop existing services to strengthen delivery of both universal and targeted provision
  - support a wider range of parents and their children
  - contribute to local and national targets.

www.familyreading.org.uk
Timetable
In year one, the strategy will be developed in four pilot authorities. In year two, the strategy will be refined, extending the pilots to cover all nine regions. Our target is that, by spring 2011, we will have proved the validity of the approach and Family Reading Matters will be ready for national delivery.

How Family Reading Matters can help local authorities reach their national targets

Research* has proved the impact of literacy on outcomes such as:

- educational attainment
- skills and employment
- aspirations and social mobility
- health and wellbeing
- civic and cultural participation.

Family Reading Matters will help local authorities to improve literacy outcomes for the most disadvantaged. It is in a powerful position to support the delivery of both local and national government targets. The diagram on the next page shows how Family Reading Matters can contribute to these targets.

* See Literacy Changes Lives: an advocacy resource at www.literacytrust.org.uk/research
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Outcomes achievable through Family Reading Matters

- Increased literacy of parents and children
- Greater emphasis on the enjoyment of learning

Public Service Agreement target sets

Sustainable growth and prosperity (PSA 1-7)

Relevant Public Service Agreements

- PSA 1: Raise the productivity of the UK economy
- PSA 2: Improve skills of the population
- PSA 7: Improve the economic performance of all the regions, and close the gap between regions

Negotiated National Indicators achievable via Family Reading Matters

- PSA 2: NI 161 Learners achieving a level 1 qualification in literacy
- NI 163 Proportion of population aged 19-64 for males and 19-59 for females qualified to at least level 2
- PSA 7: NI 151 Overall employment rate

The diagram demonstrates:

- the key outcomes achievable through the Family Reading Matters approach
- how they link to key national Public Service Agreement targets (middle section)
- how these outcomes contribute to a range of local targets from the National Indicator Set (final section).

The diagram maps Family Reading Matters outcomes against Local Area Agreement targets. It can therefore be used by partners (including the Local Strategic Partnership) to map the impact of supporting literacy in the home against local priorities. Indicators shown include the 16 statutory targets that form part of every agreement (shown in bold). As indicated, the Family Reading Matters approach can help to deliver at least seven of these.
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**Increased family cohesion and communication**
- Improved family relationships
- Enhanced communication skills

**Stronger communities and better quality of life** (PSA 18-26)
- **PSA 21** Build more cohesive, empowered and active communities
- **PSA 15** NI 4 % of people who believe they can influence decisions in their local area

**Fairness and opportunity for all** (PSA 8 – 17)
- **PSA 8** Maximise employment opportunity for all
- **PSA 9** Halve child poverty, on the way to eradicating it completely
- **PSA 10** Raise the educational attainment of all children and young people
- **PSA 11** Narrow the gap in educational achievement of all children
- **PSA 12** Improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people
- **PSA 14** Increase the number of children on the path to success
- **PSA 15** Address disadvantage and discrimination that individuals experience based on gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief

**Higher frequency of home literacy practices**
- Increased literacy of parents and children
- Sustainable growth and prosperity

**Better links between the school and home literacy practices**
- **PSA 21** Build more cohesive, empowered and active communities
- **PSA 15** NI 4 % of people who believe they can influence decisions in their local area

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In the last three decades, research has produced compelling evidence justifying a focus on the family in order to raise literacy standards, stressing the need for an emphasis on the early years.

These key findings underpin Family Reading Matters:

- **Families and parents are critical.** Parental involvement in their child’s literacy practices is a more powerful force for educational attainment than other family background variables, such as social class, family size and level of parental education.

- **The home is crucial.** Parents have the greatest influence on the achievement of young people through supporting their learning in the home rather than supporting activities in school. It is their support for learning within the home environment that makes the maximum difference to achievement.

- **Early intervention is vital.** The earlier parents become involved in their children’s literacy practices, the more profound the results and the longer-lasting the effects. Early intervention is crucial because learning begins within the family long before children start school.

- **Parents’ involvement in home learning activities is essential.** Many background variables affect the impact of the family and home environment but parental attitudes and behaviour, especially parents’ involvement in home learning activities, can be crucial in overcoming the influences of other factors.

No national strategy can succeed in improving literacy standards by focusing just on formal educational settings, where children spend only a small proportion of their time. On the contrary, we need to embrace the family as a whole and include parents as partners in their children’s education from the very beginning of their children’s lives. Family Reading Matters will help to raise parents’ awareness of the difference they can make and help set up systems that offer constant encouragement and support.

For a fuller version of this rationale, with references, see [www.familyreading.org.uk](http://www.familyreading.org.uk).

"I used to nag nag nag but now I know how to help my child."

Parent from Rochdale

www.familyreading.org.uk
Case study

Literacy changes lives in Rochdale

Terry Piggott, Executive Director of Children and Young People’s Services at Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council, explains how Rochdale’s coordinated approach to literacy is raising standards.

We’re a little bit unusual among local authorities because we’ve got a whole-borough literacy strategy. It’s working because the results here have started to improve rapidly. Although Rochdale is the twenty-fifth most deprived borough in the country, since 2003 Rochdale’s results at key stage 2 have consistently been among the most improved in the country. Our most improved primary schools are engaged in family learning.

The historic link between poverty, low aspirations and poor basic skills may not have been completely broken, but it has certainly been loosened. Obviously, family literacy is not the only thing that is helping children achieve these results but it is a vital part.

The special elements that have helped make our approach successful are, first, that I’m interested in it so there’s a drive from director level. The fact that I give this some priority means we funded a coordinator.

Another central element is our literacy entitlement group (bringing together people from a range of sectors to drive the initiative forward), which I chair. People want to attend because the meetings are interactive and fun, with a chance to network.

Apart from the usual literacy suspects, we’ve got Job Centre Plus, the primary care trust and voluntary sector groups. Despite their different interests, they can all see the importance of developing an active literacy strategy.

For me, literacy is a taproot of so much else. Obviously, the council wants its citizens to be prosperous, have jobs and fully participate in democratic debate. So literacy is not just a matter for the director of children’s services: it’s a matter for the whole council. It’s critical to regeneration and social mobility. It’s all very well to build new buildings and create new industrial estates, but the skills needed for the future really do rely on people having higher skills. You cannot progress to higher skills until you’ve got that basic bedrock of literacy. Every borough, whether it’s prosperous or otherwise, should recognise that.

To not have a literacy policy, to not have a coordinated approach to the fundamental building block of all those things, means you really are missing a trick. Literacy changes lives.

“\nTo not have a literacy policy, to not have a coordinated approach means you really are missing a trick.\n”

www.familyreading.org.uk
Reading to our children is an essential part of their growing up and should be as much a part of a child’s bedtime routine as brushing their teeth and having a bath. Parents can make a real difference and bring reading alive for children as they grow up by reading to them when they are young and there are plenty of easy ways to do this – sharing a book with your child for ten minutes a day before bed, playing word games in the car or reading magazines and newspapers.

Through Family Reading Matters, we want to support those parents who are most in need and who may be unconfident reading with their children so they can all enjoy reading as a family activity.

Ed Balls, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families

Reading and talking about books within the family are essential to the development of children’s skills - and their enjoyment. I am delighted that Wiltshire has been selected to pilot Family Reading Matters.

Keith Robinson, Chief Executive, Wiltshire County Council

Making children ready for learning is where our greatest gains can be made. Family Reading Matters will enable us to help more parents experience the pleasure and benefits of supporting their children’s reading, so they start school confident and enthusiastic.

Dr Sonia Sharp, Executive Director, Children and Young People’s Directorate, Sheffield City Council

Derbyshire has a really good track record of adopting a partnership approach to improving literacy. Family Reading Matters is a brilliant idea which will shape the achievement of literacy goals within the Derbyshire Partnership Forum.

Nick Hodgson, Chief Executive, Derbyshire County Council

Knowsley MBC is committed to supporting literacy in every Knowsley home. Family Reading Matters will further develop work that is currently being done in this key area, to the benefit of the whole community.

Damian Allen, Executive Director, Children and Family Services, Knowsley MBC

For more information about Family Reading Matters visit www.familyreading.org.uk or email FRM@literacytrust.org.uk.