

## **ABC 30+3 – CREATING AN INTEREST IN READING IN HOMES WHERE THERE IS NO READING CULTURE.**

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In 2003, Salisbury Library Service developed an extensive program aimed at encouraging all age groups in the community to read. Under the banner of 'Salisbury Reads' the program aims to develop a culture where the importance of reading is valued and acknowledged and to develop the foundation skills of language, literacy and numeracy. Components are changed as different needs are identified, and the component of the program called ABC 30+3 commenced in early 2009.

ABC 30&3 is a family literacy program that targets families where reading is not occurring in the home, or very little. Run in parent centres or environments where the target groups are already meeting, ABC 30&3 slots neatly into their regular program over a five week period. During this time, the facilitator (a library staff member) works with both the parents and children, demonstrating effective ways of sharing books with children regardless of the reading abilities of the adults. A clear message about the importance of reading to children and providing books in the home is reinforced over the program. Additionally, a range of books and other resources are given to the families to keep and take home each week. The program has been developed to improve school readiness in young children, through supporting and up-skilling parents who have poor literacy skills and would otherwise appear unable to support their child's emerging literacy skills. To round out the program, a visit to their closest library branch is organised to build sustainability around the supply of reading material and introduce families to the value of the public library service.

The program was developed to help the many families in Salisbury, South Australia, that are disadvantaged by illiteracy, low literacy or low education levels. According to the 2006 census, only 32.7% of residents in Salisbury finished secondary school. Additionally, 58.6% of residents have not obtained tertiary qualifications, a rate that has increased since the previous census. The number of residents who do not finish school or obtain tertiary qualifications is significantly higher than the Adelaide average, and literacy can obviously play a role in the reasons behind these statistics. Furthermore, the SEIFA index which measures education, employment, income and skills, places Salisbury quite low on the index. In 2006, Salisbury received an index value of 943.7. When compared with the lowest and highest values, Playford with 885.6 and Burnside with 1089, it can be seen that

there is a comparatively high rate of low income families, low attainment of educational qualifications, low levels of employment and a high rate of unskilled workers.

The title ABC 30&3 has been designed to reinforce the principles on which the program has been developed. In 2008, The Smith Family produced a report titled *Home-to-school transitions for financially disadvantaged children*<sup>1</sup> in which numerous factors were tested to predict school readiness. One of the risks identified was that if a child was read to on fewer than three days per week and there were less than 30 children's books in the home, there was a higher risk of low language skills and school readiness in all groups, whether there were levels of financial disadvantage or not. The program encourages the families to read together at least three times a week and to have a supply of books in the house. Costing approximately \$100 per participant, the Library Service has received funding from a number of sources and support from Council to enable the program to be run with a number of community groups each term.

It is expected that families who participate in the program will develop a knowledge and understanding of the importance of literacy development and reading in early childhood and be able to use and integrate supporting resources into their family life, regardless of their own literacy skills. By giving the families books, puppets etc, it introduces them to the concept of having books in their own homes. We believe this is fundamental to the success of the program so that children change the behaviour by requesting parents and adults read to them. The program has been designed to develop an awareness of the six pre-reading skills that children must learn in order to read, as articulated in the American Library Association's Every Child Ready to Read program<sup>2</sup>. These are:

**Print Motivation:** being interested in and enjoying books.

**Phonological Awareness:** being able to hear and play with the smaller sounds in words.

**Vocabulary:** knowing the names of things.

**Narrative Skills:** being able to describe things and events and tell stories.

**Print Awareness:** noticing print, knowing how to handle a book and knowing how to follow the words on a page.

**Letter Knowledge:** knowing letters are different from each other, knowing their names and sounds and recognising letters everywhere.

As previously stated, over a period of five weeks, parents and their babies/young children attend a group session where they receive books and other resources, learn about the importance of sharing books with babies and young children, as well as learning practical ways to integrate books and language development exercises into their family life. The sessions are structured as follows:

Week 1: Parents receive a library bag and their first book that promotes letter recognition. The group facilitator talks about the importance of reading to children, about building on existing skills, and school

readiness. They share some counting and alphabet books with the group and discuss ways that parents can engage their children with books at home, regardless of their own reading skills.

Week 2: Parents receive their second book containing nursery songs and rhymes and the focus is on vocabulary building, print awareness and phonological awareness. The group facilitator shares some songs and rhymes that include actions with the group and talks about providing a stimulating environment to help children develop healthy minds. The group facilitator discusses ways that parents can engage their children with word games and language building exercises in their daily life.

Week 3: Parents receive their third book containing a simple story for young children. The group facilitator talks about the importance of narrative skills and about ways in which parents can help their child develop these skills. The group facilitator shares simple story books with the group.

Week 4: Parents receive a small hand puppet to support the previous week's story book. The group facilitator talks about promoting a love of reading and demonstrates ways to enhance the reading experience with their babies and/or young children. The group facilitator talks about the importance of creative play and incorporating books, and promotes the use of libraries or other resource centres in their local area.

Week 5: The group meets at their local library. The facilitator takes the group on a tour of the library, particularly the children's area. Assistance is given to new members to join the library. The facilitator provides a story time and craft session to demonstrate the regular weekly story time program, and encourages families to attend independently. The facilitator closes the program.

At the beginning of each session, parents are encouraged to share their experiences after the facilitator provides a recap on the previous session.

Initially, the three sites that received the program were the African Mum's Group (Ingle Farm Family Zone), the Vietnamese Mum's Group (Kids 'n You Family Services), and the Good Beginnings Friday Parent Group run at the Salisbury North West Primary School.

ABC 30&3 was successful with both the ethnic groups and the Good Beginnings group, which was made up primarily of families who spoke English as a first language. The delivery was easily matched to the needs of the different groups, with the achievable outcome of parents/caregivers developing the skills needed to better prepare their children for school by reading to them and sharing activities at home to assist emergent literacy skills.

Feedback and evaluation highlighted the program's success in a range of ways. Improved family literacy, particularly in instances where family relationships are poor or strained, is dependent to a degree on relationships also improving. The parent/child relationship and the closeness and safeness experienced by the child is critical, and ABC 30&3 has helped to reconnect the parent/child relationship. Some parents expressed gratitude for the quality time it gave them with their child, which for some families is not easily achieved at home.

Feedback and evaluation also showed that the modelling that occurs when families with infrequent or poor reading habits observe the ABC 30&3 facilitator's demonstrations resulted in families wanting to try harder to include reading at home, and a desire to practice reading skills more with their children. Parents also realised that there is extensive follow up support available to them at their centre, the library and through other support workers with whom they have regular contact.

For families from ethnic backgrounds, feedback showed that parents were surprised at how easy it really was to share books successfully with their children, even when they couldn't speak or read English words in books, and when in some cases they were illiterate in their first language. The carefully chosen resources are intended to be easily shared, in instances where adult literacy is also a problem.

The program has now been in place for 18 months and evaluation is an ongoing process. To date we know that:

86% of families spend more time singing and saying rhymes with their child

43% of parents engage in more activities and games as a result of the program

43% of children initiate reading at home as a result of the program

57% of children initiate singing at home as a result of the program

29% of children show less interest in TV in preference of books, reading and singing as a result of the program

71% of parents are likely to increase their use of the library as a result of the program

Salisbury understands the enormous benefits of literacy and reading skills being developed early and good reading practices being established. The program has been included in the Library's Learning Framework, within the reading and the economic development components, and early childhood literacy programs are included in the City of Salisbury's City Plan 2020. There is an understanding that early intervention has a much better rate of return for expenditure of funds. There are many studies including the long term High/Scope Perry Pre-School study ([www.highscope.org](http://www.highscope.org)) that conclude the return on investment of spending on childhood education and literacy programs in the early years (ages 2 to 4) is \$7 for every \$1 spent.<sup>3</sup>

We believe this program helps to develop a community of readers that understand reading matters and therefore underpins their ability to participate in a democratic society, be self-sufficient, resilient and contribute in a positive way to a civil society. It also means that children go to school ready to learn and therefore have a greater chance of completing their formal education and gaining meaningful employment.

## REFERENCES

[1] Smart D., Sanson A., Baxter J., Edwards B., Hayes A., Home-to-school transitions for financially disadvantaged children: Final report; The Smith Family, Sydney, 2008.

[2] American Library Association, Every Child Ready to Read @your library brochure available at [www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org)

[3] RDI Trials in Public Policy. Training in pragmatic social interventions: problems, promises and protocols available at [www.york.ac.uk](http://www.york.ac.uk)