

Helping users get ahead

More than 500 people have taken part in the Reader's Digest (Australia) *Get ahead* family literacy program in four New South Wales libraries over the past three years.

The program, funded by the Reader's Digest publishing company and monitored by the State Library of New South Wales, was started in 1997 to help young Australians with specific learning difficulties. It operates in the public libraries of Liverpool, Campbelltown, Gosford and Broken Hill.

Experienced literacy teachers/tutors hold classes in the libraries for children and their parents, who are introduced to the staff and resources of the libraries. The classes last for up to two hours and run weekly for six to eight weeks.

SPELD, the organisation which helps parents with children who have learning difficulties, estimates that between ten and twenty per cent of children have reading problems, highlighting the importance of the participation of libraries in literacy programs.

'The program has been very successful,' State Library officer responsible for

children and young adult services, Cameron Morley, says. 'Reader's Digest provide the funding and prizes at the end of the course, but otherwise stay at arm's length. The libraries concerned were chosen because they wanted to provide literacy services. They administer the program and use appropriately trained tutors.'

Victoria Anderson, the State Library literacy and marketing projects officer, told *inCite* that public libraries are an ideal venue for this program.

'They hold extensive collections of appropriate resources and provide an opportunity to introduce the participants to the services of the local public library. We are grateful for the involvement and support from Reader's Digest,' she added.

Manly, Kiama, Lithgow and Hornsby are other NSW public libraries involved in literacy programs. The public libraries branch of the State Library provides advice and resources to any library interested in developing a literacy service for its community. The State Library has a reading development collection available for inter-library loan (contact the Disability Access Service phone 02 9273 1622)



and can also make available the software from the *Hands-on reading* program, a previous Reader's Digest funded literacy program.

Reader's Digest has a long commitment to promoting literacy in co-operation with the State Library. Its program, *Hands-on reading*, targeted adult readers with a package designed for independent, self-paced learning and was started at the State Library and Bankstown public library in 1993. Additional *Hands-on reading* collections were set up in public libraries at Hornsby, Fairfield, the Central Western Co-operative Library (based in Orange), Kempsey, Western Riverina Library service (based in Griffith) and the Upper Murray Regional Library Service (based in Albury). Each collection includes a computer with a CD-ROM drive and key software. ■



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