

# READY TO READ 2015 IMPACT SUMMARY

Helping more Australian children start school ready to learn.



## VULNERABILITY IN AUSTRALIA

According to the 2012 Australian Early Childhood Development Census (AEDC), 22% of children enter their first year of schooling “developmentally vulnerable” in one or more areas. These comprise:

- Physical health and wellbeing
- Social competence
- Emotional maturity
- Language and cognitive skills (school-based)
- Communication skills and general knowledge

Children starting school developmentally vulnerable from low socio-economic communities are more likely to struggle to learn and keep up with their peers, often facing vastly reduced opportunities in life as a result.

With 90% of all brain development occurring by the age of five, early interventions have proved the most successful and cost-effective means of helping children build the skills needed to start school prepared.

## READY TO READ

United Way Australia’s Ready to Read program aims to halve the percentage of children in target communities who are not ready to learn to read at school, by 2018.

It provides children and carers in communities facing high rates of vulnerability with the skills and resources to build vital early literacy skills via:

- ★ **Book distribution** – providing 0-5-year-old children with free monthly home-delivered books as part of Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library.
- ★ **Supporting parent behaviour change** – supporting parents and carers with tips, resources and opportunities to increase shared reading skills.
- ★ **Community mobilisation** – building coalitions with local groups, businesses, government and service providers to raise awareness of the importance of shared reading for children’s resilience, brain development and school readiness.

## OUR IMPACT

To date, Ready to Read and Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library have reached a total of 5570 children across 33 communities. Engagement with participants in our six Ready to Read pilot communities revealed that the program is generating positive outcomes across multiple literacies and life skills. These include:

### 1. Personal wellbeing and identity:

For both child and parent, increased confidence and emotional resilience for starting school, and development of literary identity (“I am a reader”).

### 2. Connectedness, bonding and inclusion:

Primarily between parent and child, but also with other children and other parents and siblings.

### 3. Skills, knowledge and norms:

Including language, vocabulary, life lessons, literacy, cultural norms, emotional regulation, life options, and home literacy practice.

### 4. Affinity for reading: Simple enjoyment of books.



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## KEY LEARNINGS

Parents participating in the program for more than four months were more likely to agree with the following statements, selected as key indicators of how Ready to Read is performing:

- “Having books delivered to our house supports me to read to my children.”
- “I have confidence to read to my children.”
- “Reading together is an important thing to do as a parent.”

However, our evaluation also revealed that many parents demonstrated a predisposition to engage with books and literacy activities, with many having signed up to the program at book-reading events.

This is an opportunity to review our current method of engaging parents in the program to ensure it targets those most vulnerable and expand our activities to support the broader range of vulnerabilities impacting a child’s ability to start school prepared.

*“My daughter can’t wait to receive her book. She loves the surprise and re-reads it constantly”*

– Parent



*“We can’t put them to bed until we have read at least one or two books.”*

– Parent

*“We know this is having an impact on early literacy. We see it in the children’s progress at school.”*

– School principal

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Clarify and confirm the impact we seek to create

Our evaluation presents an opportunity to review our Impact goal, including how we might reach the most vulnerable children beyond our target communities, and families that lack the skill and intent to help their children become “school-ready.”

### 2. Continue to evolve and measure our impact

We need to continue to ensure clear and measurable links between the stated impact, ‘reducing developmental vulnerability’, and our efforts.

### 3. Review how we engage families in the program

We need to consider new approaches to prioritise those families that are most deeply disadvantaged.

### 4. Adopt a broader definition of vulnerability

Expand the developmental areas we incorporate into our work to support children to ‘start school ready’, as opposed to focusing solely on literacy.

### 5. Less focus on books, more on parental support

While providing books and literacy resources has had positive impacts, parents that are especially vulnerable need additional support to ensure improved early development outcomes.

### 6. Build strong relationships with experts

We need to continue developing strong relationships with academics and early childhood educators, and engage them in the evolution of our program.

## ABOUT UNITED WAY AUSTRALIA

Established in the USA in 1887, United Way is now a global network of 1,800 secular non-profit organisations working to end community disadvantage.

In Australia, United Way focuses on collaborative approaches to improve early literacy and increase youth employment in more than 35 disadvantaged communities, operating flagship initiatives that mobilise some of Australia’s largest companies, social service providers and funders.

## GET INVOLVED

Are you interested in being part of a national collaboration ensuring every child starts school prepared? Please contact us today:

Visit: [www.unitedway.com.au](http://www.unitedway.com.au)

Or call: 1300 780 345