

What does the program cost?

Reading for Life is free to schools.

Businesses can contribute by providing volunteer time and/or funding for Learning Links' professional training and support to volunteers. It is ideal for businesses wanting to give something back to the local community, while providing a rewarding and inspiring experience for its employees.

The program may also be funded by trusts, foundations, registered clubs and other community members. Schools and parents can also raise funds to cover the cost of the program.

How can you get involved?

Schools and businesses are invited to express interest in Reading for Life by contacting Learning Links on (02) 9534 1710 or e-mail mail@learninglinks.org.au.

www.readingforlife.net.au

"The program was one of the most rewarding experiences I have had the pleasure of being involved with in the last five years."

Volunteer participating in Reading for Life

Learning Links

Learning Links is a charity working in partnership with families to help children from birth to 18 who have difficulty learning.

One in every five children has some sort of disability or learning difficulty. Without help, children with learning problems approach adolescence and adulthood with few skills for employment and social interaction. The consequences can include future drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment, homelessness and suicide.

Since its formation in 1972, Learning Links has grown rapidly and now helps 1,500 children and families every week at six Sydney branches. Programs are also available in country NSW, ACT, Victoria and New Zealand, with plans to expand Reading for Life across Australia and New Zealand.

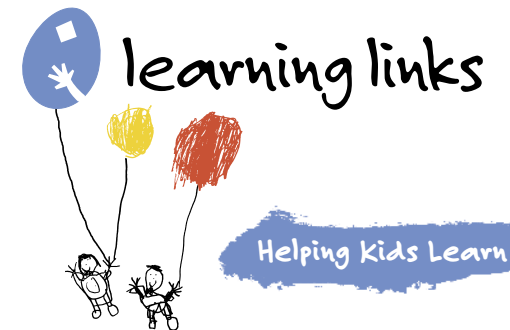
Learning Links' services include early childhood intervention; a full range of assessments; specialist educational services; occupational therapy; speech therapy; physiotherapy; family counselling; case management; group programs and professional development.

www.learninglinks.org.au

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Unilever Australasia is the founding partner for Reading for Life and is proud to support both the program and Learning Links.



"The teachers just thought it was one of the best things we've done over the last three years for literacy."

Principal of a school participating in Reading for Life

A volunteer program to help children having difficulty reading at school

Reading for Life is a volunteer community reading program to help children having difficulty reading at primary school.

Volunteers from businesses or the community become reading buddies to selected children and visit the school to help enhance the children's reading skills, self-esteem and motivation. Each volunteer works with a child one-to-one for 45 minutes every week for up to 15 weeks.

The program is more than simply reading with children.

Its semi-structured content is modelled on best practice and developed by a team comprising a psychologist, teacher and speech pathologist. Volunteers are trained and supported by professionals.

Reading for Life contains activities to engage and interest children. It also offers them encouragement to do their best and have a go in a supportive environment.

"You go home and tell your family or your friends about what you are doing and people get quite amazed that you're doing this and your company supports it. A lot of people say 'wow' and then you feel better about the company that you work for."

Volunteer participating in Reading for Life

Children in the program range in age from 7 to 10 years and are having difficulty learning. Their teachers and parents would like them to have the chance to benefit from the extra one-on-one help this program provides.

Each Reading for Life program includes children and volunteers who meet certain selection criteria. The program also actively involves families and classroom teachers.

"I want to do it the rest of my life. Even if I'm in Year 6 I'd still do it."

Child participating in Reading for Life

How does the program work?

The program invites a school to nominate suitable children who receive an individual literacy assessment by Learning Links. A written report is provided for each child.

Volunteers are identified from an interested business or organisation or the general community and then participate in a training session with Learning Links. They are then matched with children and become reading buddies. They meet each other as well as teachers and parents at an orientation session at school.

"The volunteer miraculously opened our son up to enjoying to read. My happy son was back. Words cannot express our family's gratitude and appreciation for the volunteers."

Parent of child participating in Reading for Life

Each week for up to 15 weeks the reading buddies work together for 45 minutes following a program of activities. During the program volunteers also attend two support sessions with Learning Links.

At the end of the program we encourage volunteers to hold a party for the children, parents and teachers to celebrate the children's hard work. Learning Links then conducts individual literacy assessments to measure gains made by the children.

Has the program made a difference?

The results achieved by children to date have been positive and the feedback from teachers, parents and volunteers, impressive.

The initial evaluation demonstrated that children improved an average of eight months in reading accuracy, nine months in reading comprehension and six months in reading fluency during the program.