

BETTER BEGINNINGS FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAM — WORLD STORYTELLING DAY

Statement by Minister for Culture and the Arts

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for Culture and the Arts) [12.03 pm]: I would like to inform the house of an event I had the pleasure of attending yesterday as part of World Storytelling Day at Manning Library, where I launched reading materials designed to develop the literacy skills of infants with vision impairments. The new resource packs, which include braille-embossed editions of the publication and an audio CD with the story sung and narrated, were added to the resources of the State Library of Western Australia's award-winning Better Beginnings family literacy program. Also available for free loan from local public libraries will be a touch-and-feel version of the resources pack that provides parents and carers with highly tactile 3D objects that relate to the *Baby Ways* book.

The State Library of Western Australia's Better Beginnings program has been a treasured literacy program for Western Australian families for well over a decade, supporting families to read, sing, talk and play with their child every day from birth, and recognising that parents are their child's first teacher. Partnerships are key to the delivery of the program. Without public libraries, the program would not exist, and the funding support of Rio Tinto has given opportunities to extend and grow the program with a strong evidence base. Through its 14-year partnership with Rio Tinto, state government funding and the support of public libraries, the State Library produces and distributes reading materials and literacy messages to 96 per cent of newborn babies and 99.8 per cent of kindergarten pupils across the state.

The benefits of reading to babies is now well understood and has been researched extensively. According to Edith Cowan University, developing early literacy behaviours of zero to three-year-olds will assist them in learning to read and write as they reach kindergarten and preschool. The benefits provided by this program are then built upon and extended through complementary programs delivered by schools and libraries, and by organisations such as the Literature Centre, which celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary this month, continuing the important journey of literacy from an early age, through the school years and towards a lifelong passion for reading.

Strong literacy is fundamentally important to the Western Australian community. The ability to provide access in those early years for all children—babies and toddlers—so that they are continually exposed to good, positive early literacy experiences, is critical. These additional resources to the Better Beginnings program ensure that all children and their parents have access to the resources and activities available in local libraries that are based on positive early literacy modelling. I congratulate the State Library and its partners on the launch of the new resource packs for infants with vision impairments and I commend the Better Beginnings program to all members of this house.