

Free resources for refugee families to encourage reading and play

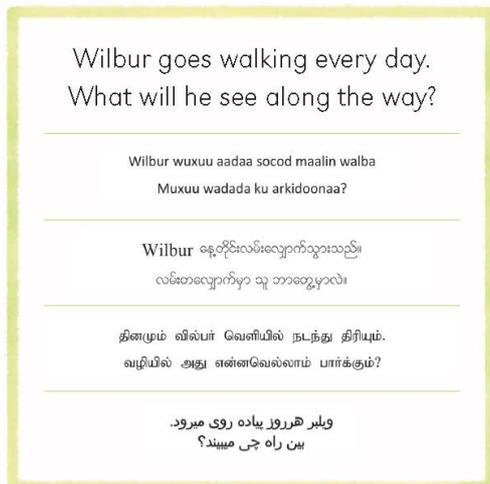
The Big Book Club Inc. in partnership with Kraft Foods Australia/New Zealand Foods is pleased to announce the launch of its **New Arrivals** program – a new addition to the successful Vegemite Little Aussie Reader initiative operated by The Little Big Book Club.

The **New Arrivals** program aims to provide a free reading and activity pack for every family with young children that enter Australia as part of the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship Humanitarian Program.

Research indicates that children develop emergent literacy skills that are transferable across languages so whether parents read aloud in their familial language or in English, the benefits remain the same.¹

However, the concern is that if parents cannot read English and they are not engaged or encouraged to read to their children, these children are placed at a disadvantage and risk having lower emergent literacy levels.

One of the major roadblocks in providing age appropriate reading materials for young families in a multilingual format is the prohibitive cost associated with translation. However with the generous support of Kraft Foods Australia/New Zealand, The Little Big Book Club has been able to develop a picture book called **Wilbur** and have it translated into twelve languages, with English as the common language throughout. Three versions of the book will be available and include:



Version 1: Somali/Tamil/Burmese/Farsi/English
Version 2: Dinka/Hindi/Khmer/Nuer/English
Version 3: Amharic/Chinese/Arabic/French/English

Written by renowned children’s author Phil Cummings, *Wilbur* tells the story of a friendly pet dog that goes on an adventure in his neighbourhood. The book is a great introduction to Australian culture and recreation and uses simple language that encourages the use and practice of English.

Working in conjunction with migrant groups and the early childhood sector, a range of other resources were also developed for migrant families including a Play Dough Activity Set and Drawing Activity Pad both of which encourage the concept of play between parent and child.

A copy of the *It’s Rhyme Time* booklet and DVD will also be included in the **New Arrivals** pack featuring traditional rhymes, counting and action songs as well as modelling reading techniques for parents and or/carers.

Selected public libraries in SA, WA, VIC, NT, NSW and Qld, *Early Words* in NSW and Migrant Resource centres nationally will distribute the **New Arrivals** resources to refugee families within their communities from September 2010.

The **New Arrivals** program is a unique initiative that will provide invaluable resources for migrant families. It cannot be underestimated how important exposure to books, reading and language is in terms of a child’s success at school and their ability to assimilate in a new country.

Sitting under The Little Big Book Club umbrella ensures the program already has the necessary links and partnerships with a wide range of services, agencies and individuals to make a real difference to migrant families, support organisations and the wider community.

¹ BILINGUALISM: BUILDING BLOCKS FOR BILITERACY, Language Acquisition Research Centre, University of Western Sydney Macarthur, Faculty of Education and Languages. Edited by Criss Jones Diaz 2004

The Big Book Club Inc.

In 2003, The Big Book Club Inc. was established as a not for profit organisation committed to the promotion of reading, literature and Australian authors and illustrators. The Big Book Club Inc. has two major national projects: *The Big Book Club* (TBBC) for adults and *The Little Big Book Club* (LBBC) for parents and caregivers of children aged between birth and five years.

The Vegemite Little Aussie Reader (VLAR) program

The generous support of Kraft Foods Australia/New Zealand Foods has enabled the development of The VLAR program in partnership with The Little Big Book Club. The VLAR program has been established to provide quality and accessible resources that help develop the literacy skills children need before starting school.

The New Arrivals program

Each year thousands of families are forced to flee their homes overseas due to conflict and human rights abuses. Australia has become a safe haven for many of these families and with the support of migrant organisations is helping refugees to rebuild their lives and assimilate in a new country.

In May 2008 the Australian Government announced an increase in the Humanitarian Program to 13,750 places for 2009–10. This year, the Refugee category will be set at 6000 places and the remaining 7750 places will be made available under the Special Humanitarian Program category and for onshore protection needs.¹

The key aims of the **New Arrivals** program are to:

- Understand the support required by migrant and refugee families to encourage and enable them to read aloud to their children in English and their familial language.
- Develop a more cost effective approach to supplying reading pack books in various languages and stimulate the book industry to produce quality multilingual resources for children aged 0-5 years and their families.
- Establish a national advisory group for the exchange of research and ideas.
- Encourage community organisations such as libraries to offer multilingual rhyme and story time sessions for migrant families.
- Provide training and development workshops for professionals working with migrant families.

Working with the early childhood sector, The Little Big Book Club identified that refugee families and their young children are not fully supported with age appropriate reading materials in multilingual formats. And while it is important for refugee families to practice using English as part of their transition to Australia, it is equally as important for them to maintain their cultural heritage by reading and engaging with their children in their familial language as well as English.

Refugee families attending CaFE (Children and Families Everywhere) Enfield in South Australia were used as case studies in the development and testing of the **New Arrivals** resources to ensure that the needs of refugee families and support organisations were being met adequately. The Enfield area has been identified as one of the most disadvantaged areas in South Australia with high numbers of single parent, low-income families, Indigenous and culturally diverse communities.

A support and information document has also been developed and will be made available to any staff member directly involved with the distribution of resources to ensure consistent program delivery and understanding of its key benefits.

For further information or an interview on the *New Arrivals* program contact: Sue Hill General Manager, on T: 08 8362 6066 | M: 0402 000 472 | E: sue.hill@tbbcinc.com.au | www.thelittlebigbookclub.com.au