

## **READ LIKE A DEMON : FOOTBALL HEROES PROMOTING READING TO PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Read Like a Demon is a literacy program that offers primary students an opportunity to participate in reading and writing workshops with Melbourne Football Club players, and a variety of best-selling children's authors. This is a joint partnership between the Melbourne Football Club and Casey-Cardinia Library Corporation, supported by Hardie Grant Egmont Publishers, and it involves 160 students from 10 primary schools in the City of Casey.

Introduced as a pilot program in 2009, Read Like a Demon aims to celebrate children's connections with literacy, and to encourage them to read more. In 2010, the successful program has been extended to offer creative writing workshops. Sport and reading create a great mix – supporting such positive literacy values with sporting role models will provide children with confidence and inspire them to develop a love of reading.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

The City of Casey is situated 35km from the Melbourne CBD, in Melbourne's south east. The City of Casey covers 396 sq. km and is exhibiting the largest growth numbers in Victoria.<sup>1</sup> (<http://www.cclc.vic.gov.au/about>) Its population is approximately 240 000 or 79 000 households. (2006 Census Australian Bureau Statistics data)<sup>2</sup>

The City of Casey's suburbs include: Beaconsfield, Berwick, Blind Bight, Botanic Ridge, Cannons Creek, Clyde, Clyde North, Cranbourne and surrounds, Devon Meadows, Doveton, Endeavour Hills, Eumemmerring, Five Ways, Fountain Gate, Hallam, Hampton Park, Harkaway, Junction Village, Lynbrook, Lyndhurst, Lysterfield South, Merinda Park, Narre Warren and surrounds, Pearcedale, Tooradin, Tooradin North, and Warneet.

### **3. THE PARTNERS**

The Melbourne Football Club and Casey -Cardinia Library Corporation are principal partners in Read and Write Like a Demon, and are supported by publishers Hardie Grant Egmont and 10 schools in the City of Casey.

#### **3.1. Casey-Cardinia Library Corporation**

The Casey-Cardinia Library Corporation is a public library providing services throughout the City of Casey and the Shire of Cardinia. Our seven Branch Libraries are located in Cranbourne, Doveton, Emerald, Endeavour Hills, Hampton Park, Narre Warren and Pakenham, with a mobile library providing weekly service to Beaconsfield, Bunyip, Cockatoo, Garfield, Gembrook, Koo Wee Rup, Lang Lang, Maryknoll, Tyng and Upper Beaconsfield.

The Casey-Cardinia Library Corporation runs a number of successful programs for children and young adults to foster literacy, including Tinies Times, Preschool Storytimes and afterschool book clubs for children age 5-7 and 8-12 years. We also host author events during Education Week and Children's Book Week, and have a good relationship with schools in the City of Casey and Shire of Cardinia.

#### **3.2. Melbourne Football Club**

The Melbourne Football Club is an Australian Rules Football Club playing in the Australian Football League (AFL). Also known as the Demons, the Melbourne Football Club was one of the pioneer clubs of Australian Rules Football, dating back to 1858.

In 2009, the Melbourne Football Club and the City of Casey executed an agreement that saw a commitment by the Melbourne Football Club to deliver a comprehensive community partnership program in the City of Casey over the next 30 years. This agreement included the Melbourne Football Club setting up a training base at Casey Fields in Cranbourne.

Melbourne Football Club President Jim Stynes confirmed the strength of the affiliation, saying, 'This is a great day for the Club. Casey Fields provides the world class training venue that we have been looking for – but it's not just the training ground. What we have achieved to date is just the beginning. We look forward to a long and rewarding relationship with the City of Casey, and we plan to make a real and meaningful contribution to this great community.'<sup>3</sup>

Then City of Casey Mayor, Cr Geoff Ablett, reiterated Stynes' sentiments, saying, 'The sealing of this agreement is absolutely fantastic news for the entire Casey community and is a historic moment in the history of our city as it's an extremely rare occurrence for a council to partner with an AFL team. It will see Melbourne Football Club undertake a number of activities at local schools, businesses and junior and senior football clubs at an estimated value of more than \$630,000 per year,' said Cr Ablett.<sup>4</sup>

The Melbourne Football Club is committed to becoming the leader in community programs, and aims to connect with the community through the establishment of a number of partnerships and meaningful programs. A significant part of the Club's community strategy is the commitment to schools in the Casey region. In 2009, a number of programs and initiatives were implemented to provide students with an exciting learning experience, including the Read Like a Demon (RLAD) program.

### **4. THE PROGRAM**

As part of their commitment to community programs in the City of Casey, the Melbourne Football Club's Community Manager Debbie Lee approached the Casey-Cardinia Library Cardinia Library Corporation's Community Engagement Librarian, Ceniza Fulco, to write a literacy program that would utilise the experience of the public library and the popularity of the Melbourne Football Club and football players. The key elements of the program include:

- Footballers as reading role models. This includes opportunities for interaction with players in a number of settings during the program.
- Read and Write Like a Demon Workbook that includes recommended reading Lists.
- Free Books, provided by MS Readathon in 2009, and Hardie Grant Egmont in 2009 and 2010. The State Library of Victoria program - Boys, Blokes, Books and Bytes - also includes a free book element and states, 'Book ownership is an important part of enjoying reading. It is also the best way to get books into the home, as it often gets the ball rolling with parents buying more books for their children.'<sup>5</sup>
- Freedom to choose what to read and review. Students are able to combine reviews of Premiers Reading Challenge books, but are not restricted to reading only what is recommended.
- The Read and Write Like a Demon blog.
- The involvement of the school to actively promote the program, giving class time to children posting book reviews, and encouraging children's reading and writing.
- Workshops with authors to encourage students to read and write their own stories.
- Involvement of parents at all sessions. Parents are encouraged to attend all sessions with students, and are invited to a special parent evening involving an author and the Football Club.
- Promotion of membership to their local public library. Library membership is promoted in the program booklet. The Library blog includes a link to Libraries Victoria and its Public Libraries search page.

#### 4.1. Background

In writing Read Like a Demon – the Literacy Program, Cenza Fulco was inspired by the **Premier League Reading Stars** program, which has been successful in the UK for the past nine years.

Since 2003, different Premier League players have acted as Premier League Reading Stars. These players have chosen their favourite books and encouraged children and adults to read these books and others.

Portsmouth player David James says:

'I truly believe in the power of the Premier League Reading Stars initiative and I am honoured to be the only player to have been involved in every year of the scheme. A love of reading is so important at all ages and if footballers can help to inspire young people to read more, then projects like PLRS really can make a difference.'<sup>6</sup>

The scheme has been running since 2003, with 111 different Premier League players having acted as Reading Stars. Over 15,000 parents and children have participated in the project, and over 25,000 books have been read.<sup>7</sup>

Read Like a Demon takes elements of the PLRS and adapts it to suit a single football club and one Library Service in one local government area - the City of Casey.

#### 4.2. Fitting in with the Curriculum

In 2008, Australia's State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education, meeting as the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) released the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians. The Melbourne Declaration sets the direction for Australian schooling for the next 10 years. The goals were developed by the Education Ministers, in collaboration with both the Catholic and independent school sectors.

The MCEETYA Four Year Plan ('Four Year Plan') supports the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians. It outlines the key strategies and initiatives that Australian governments will undertake in the following eight inter-related areas in order to support the achievement of the educational goals for young Australians:

- Developing stronger partnerships
- Supporting quality teaching and school leadership
- Strengthening early childhood education
- Enhancing middle years development
- Supporting senior years of schooling and youth transitions
- Promoting world-class curriculum and assessment
- Improving educational outcomes for Indigenous youth and disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds
- Strengthening accountability and transparency<sup>8</sup>

The Read Like a Demon program meets a number of the educational goals in the Melbourne Declaration – including developing stronger partnerships, enhancing middle years and senior years of schooling, and improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged young Australians.

### **4.3. Read and Write Like a Demon**

In 2009, 61 students from seven schools participated in the Read Like a Demon (RLAD) pilot program – a meaningful and successful program which has assisted many students in the Casey region with reading. In 2010, we have expanded the program by including a Write Like a Demon (WLAD) component; the two-year program will combine both reading and writing skills.

In 2010, 10 schools are registered in the Read and Write Like a Demon program. Those schools are:

- Cranbourne Park Primary School
- Cranbourne Primary School
- Hallam Primary School
- Hallam Valley Primary School
- Hampton Park Primary School
- Maramba Primary School – Narre Warren
- Mary MacKillop Primary School – Narre Warren North
- St Agatha's Primary School – Cranbourne
- St Michael's Primary School – Berwick
- Thomas Mitchell Primary School – Endeavour Hills

A total of 160 students in 10 schools will participate in the program in 2010.

Since the program commenced in 2009, participants have had the opportunity to meet some well known authors. Students in Read and Write Like a Demon have met Felice Arena, author of *Specky Magee*, and Chris Morphew, author of *Phoenix Files* and numerous *Zac Power* Books. In 2010, students in the Write Like a Demon program attended creative writing workshops with Chrissie Perry, author of many *Go Girl!* titles, Andrew McDonald, the author of *The Greatest Blogger in the World*, and Phil Kettle, the author of the *Too Cool* series, *The Xtreme World of Billy Kool*, and *BoyzRule*.

Sessions have been held in Casey-Cardinia Library Corporation Libraries branch libraries, in schools, and at Casey Fields – the Demons' training ground in Casey. Players have attended all sessions in schools and in libraries. Students have been able to watch players train at Casey Fields, and in May 2010, were all given family tickets to watch the Demons play the West Coast Eagles at the MCG as part of the City of Casey Round.

#### 4.4. The Participants

The target group of students for Read Like a Demon is students in Grade 3, 4 or 5. Write Like a Demon students have moved on to Grades 4, 5 or 6. The partners consulted with teachers from schools in the City of Casey, and decided that the program would be suited to these age groups. It was also decided to make the program a two year literacy program, as we were then able to engage with the students over a longer period of time. The addition of a writing component was a natural progression to Read Like a Demon, and presented the students with a complete literacy program.

The following is taken from **The Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH)** Literacy Promotion – Practice Resource Document, which includes research into literacy in primary aged children:

‘Nearly 40% of Year 3 students and over half of Year 5 students from low socio-economic backgrounds failed to meet the performance standards as set by the National School English Literacy Survey. In a study of 3000 Australian students in 2002, 30% of nine year olds still had not mastered letter sounds, arguably the most basic phonics skill.’<sup>9</sup>

‘Promoting literacy has many benefits, both immediate and long term, for children, families, communities and society as a whole.

‘Literacy promotion has been linked to:

- Increased academic and occupational success
- Increased self esteem and motivation to learn, participate in and commit to education
- Socially accepted behaviours in school and later in life
- Positive regard for one’s abilities and prospects, leading to empowerment
- Reduced need for special education
- Potential reduction in the effects of low socio-economic background
- Decreased social and financial costs associated with illiteracy’<sup>10</sup>

#### 4.5. The Blog

The Read and Write Like a Demon blog offers a forum to promote books and reading to children aged 8-12 years, giving them the opportunity for online contributions. Moderated blogs are an effective means to communicate with children in an age where they are exposed to technology through social networking and the increased use of computers in schools. Blogs are an ideal interface for this. The RLAD Blog offers its participants and the broader community the opportunity to read and comment on:

- Recommended reading booklists
- Book reviews from students
- Stories and information on all Read and Write Like a Demon sessions –including photos
- Original stories written by WLAD students
- Book reviews and comments from players
- Book reviews from library staff
- Links to partners’ websites
- Links to the library catalogue
- Read Like A Demon blog: <http://readlikeademon.blogspot.com/>

#### 4.6. The Competition

One student from each RLAD and WLAD also has the opportunity to win a 'Demons' Day Out', scheduled for Round 22 (August). Those students who post their book reviews on the Read Like a Demon blog will go into the draw to win this fantastic prize. There will be a random draw of book reviews posted on the blog from the participants.

In 2009, Callum McAuliffe, who posted several book reviews on the blog, including *Zac Power Test Drive*, *Zac Power Lunar Strike*, *The Bad Book*, *The Time Machine* and Leon Stumble’s *Book of Stupid*

*Fairytales* won the Demons' Day Out competition. Callum attends St Michael's in Berwick and was then in Grade 4 – he and his family and up to 40 classmates were the guests of the Melbourne Football Club in Round 22, when the Demons played the Saints at the MCG. Callum attended a pre-match clinic with Melbourne players, received a show bag of MFC goodies – including a guernsey signed by the whole team – visited the player warm up room and was in the guard of honour for the Club's retiring players.

Write Like a Demon participants enter their stories in a creative writing competition. Library staff will read and judge these stories, and select five shortlisted stories to be judged by Stefan Martin, the player ambassador of Read and Write Like a Demon.

## 5. FOOTBALL PLAYERS AS READING ROLE MODELS

A 2009 survey conducted by the National Literacy Trust in the UK explored who children chose as reading role models, and why. The online survey questioned 2176 children aged from 7-15 years. Some 56% of children surveyed were boys and 44%, girls, with the majority of children aged 11, 12 and 13 years old.

'Seventy-eight per cent of young people had a role model. These came predominantly from within the immediate family. A fifth of pupils' chosen role model was either their mum or dad. Sports people – footballers in particular – were the most frequently mentioned role model after the immediate social environment.

More girls than boys had role models (82% vs. 75%). Girls were also more likely to choose role models from within the immediate family, while more boys chose a sportsperson. Those children surveyed were asked how their role model could inspire them to read and responded that their role model could promote reading by providing reading recommendations or explaining why reading is important.'<sup>11</sup>

The partnership with the Melbourne Football Club provides us with the opportunity to utilise their players to promote reading, to model reading, and to engage children with reading.

Stefan Martin is the program ambassador, a versatile player who is a defender in the making. Stefan completed his VCE in 2008, and was an astute student, obtaining a VCE enter score of 99.75. Due to his interest in reading and education, Stefan was nominated to be the ambassador for the Read Like a Demon program.

Read Like a Demon ambassador Stefan Martin and 19 Melbourne Football Club players met with students over four sessions in 2009. They shared their own childhood memories of books and libraries, read extracts of popular children's books to students, listened to student book reviews, and fostered a love of reading by encouraging students to read for fun as well as for everyday life!

It was particularly encouraging to hear players like Russell Roberson talk to students about the wide range of opportunities available to children in the workforce and in sport and that it is possible to do both. He used Stefan Martin as a positive example of a player who obtained a VCE score of 99.75 and is studying at university while also playing AFL football.

At St Michael's in Berwick, Brad Miller and Rohan Bail talked to the Read Like a Demon students about books and reading. They both shared stories of books they had read as children – especially the *Goosebumps* series by R. L. Stine. *Goosebumps* was also popular with Stefan Martin as a child. Lynden Dunn and Paul Johnson have been reading the *Harry Potter* series. Many other players have memories of reading Roald Dahl, with *The B.F.G.* a firm favourite.

The library's perspective on the program is best summarised by this statement from Peter Carter, CEO Casey-Cardinia Library Corporation.

'Casey-Cardinia Library Corporation is very pleased to be working with the Melbourne Football Club on this innovative and exciting project. AFL football has a strong place in the hearts and minds of Victorians: Libraries are also highly used and valued by Victorians and it is great to mix both sport and reading in a celebration of important aspects of our community values. The outcomes in terms of promoting children's engagement with healthy lifestyle and with literacy can only be positive.

'The program aims to celebrate children's connections with literacy, encourage relationships with books and to encourage children to develop a love of reading by using sporting heroes as reading role models. It is well established that good reading skills are important to success in both education and in later life.

'Modelling such positive literacy values with sporting role models allows the library to reach a range of children and young adults who may not otherwise have seen the opportunities they can access.'

## 6. RESULTS AND FEEDBACK

Overall, the program has been a great success, as it has encouraged students to read more, and develop their literacy skills. Students have been encouraged to post book reviews on the RLAD blog. In 2009, 62 reviews were written by Read Like a Demon students. In 2010, there have been over 100 reviews posted so far (June 2010). In 2009, the most popular books reviewed were *Specky Magee* by Felice Arena and Garry Lyon, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* by Roald Dahl, and *Zac Power* by H.I. Larry. In 2009, 62 Read Like a Demon participants read over 450 books.

The blog itself has had over 6000 views (Google Analytics June 2010) since it went live in June 2009. The blog has also provided a venue for students to post reviews, view photos and keep up to date with the program. It also extends beyond the program, as children continue to post their reviews all year round. The blog also reaches a broader audience than the City of Casey, as it is accessible to many children in Australia and beyond.

Callum is an example of the success of the program. Writing had never been his strong point, and he wasn't interested in reading. His teacher chose him for the program because she believed that he would benefit. He was a reluctant reader and needed more confidence in himself. Callum enjoyed talking to the players he met in the program. He was inspired at his first meeting with MFC player Colin Sylvia. Colin spent time talking to Callum about the book *The Time Machine*. Each session, players encouraged Callum further.

At the end of 2009, Callum sat for the Torch Test (Tests of Reading Comprehension). At the beginning of the year, he had scored 8/20 for the Reading Writing and Comprehension test. Callum completed the test again at the end of the year, and scored 19/20. This was an outstanding result. Callum's mum said, 'His family was thrilled to bits, and so was Callum when I told him. Callum's teacher and I both believe the Read Like a Demon program contributed greatly towards this result.'

Comments from teachers have included:

- 'Children looked forward to each session and school assembly was fantastic.'
- 'Made reading seem cool. I saw changes in attitudes towards reading in the classroom.'
- 'Great for the children to see the value the players place on reading.'
- 'Getting males, especially 'sport' types to model reading and demonstrate enjoyment for reading is fantastic. Having the library visit showed students how exciting the local library is and that it's not just for books.'
- 'Our students loved the football players reading to them and discussing books they enjoyed reading. They also loved kicking the footy (added bonus).'

Comments from parents:

- 'It was good for children to hear about the players' reading experiences.'
- 'My son is much more enthusiastic.'
- 'Happy to pick up a book on his own and try to read.'
- 'Has a number of books lined up at home to read.'
- 'My son has made me buy books for him – he would never have thought about walking into a book store or looking at books.'
- 'Rhys thinks it's cool that some of his favourite books are the same as some of the players.'
- 'He was always a good reader, only now it's a bit 'cooler.'

## 7. CONCLUSION

The Read and Write Like a Demon Literacy program has been an exciting and innovative partnership between Casey-Cardinia Library Corporation and the Melbourne Football Club. It has taken the strengths and skills of both partners to combine to provide students with a program that encourages reading and writing through positive role models from the Melbourne Football Club. The program gives students who have difficulty reading, or who don't like to read, the opportunity to meet elite footballers who send the messages:

- 'It's cool to read.'
- 'It's important to read for fun and for every day life.'
- 'I'm a footballer and I like to read.'

Players spreading the reading message by:

- Listening to students read.
- Talking about books they have read.
- Reading extracts of books to students.
- Spending time talking to students about books and reading.

This positive role modelling has shown that students respond to the players and the program in a very positive way, and are reading more at the end of the program, because they see reading as cool and important as demonstrated by the players from the Melbourne Football Club.

## REFERENCES

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## **BIOGRAPHIES**

Cenza Fulco is the Community Engagement Librarian for Casey-Cardinia Library Corporation. She is responsible for organising library programs for children, adults and teens, as well as collection development for children and young adults. Cenza trained as a primary school teacher, but was lured to public libraries by a love of books and reading and the role of the public library in enhancing the lives of people of all ages. Cenza has worked as a Youth Services Librarian at a number of Melbourne libraries. Cenza barracks for Melbourne Victory (soccer) and Geelong (AFL), but has been seen wearing a Melbourne Football Club scarf!

Debbie Lee - the Melbourne Football Club's Community Manager - has made a profound contribution to women's football and local sport since the late 1980s. She has served on the Victorian Women's Football League Executive in an honorary/voluntary capacity since 1993, and was made President in 2004. She has overseen substantial growth and development in women's football, and is currently a member of the Women's Football Advisory Board. Debbie Lee was named as the 2009 Football Woman of the Year. Debbie has worked in the community space for a number of years, establishing the Western Bulldogs' community programs in the western suburbs. She joined the Melbourne Football Club in 2009, and has established a range of different community initiatives.