



National Literacy Agency, Malta
*Home Libraries: providing a literacy
environment in the homes of
vulnerable families*

National Literacy Agency

The National Literacy Agency was established in 2014 to promote and ensure the delivery of the different aspects of the National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo, and serve as a main driver in the field of literacy. The National Literacy Agency (NLA) seeks to promote and enhance lifelong and lifewide, high quality literacy practices among children, youths, adults, and persons with learning difficulties. It also strives to improve literacy outcomes, resulting in inclusive practices, higher educational qualifications, so that citizens may participate fully in society.

Children born in vulnerable families have less exposure to early childhood literacy. This flies in the face of the overwhelming evidence that early life experiences have a significant impact that persists well into adulthood. It is therefore of paramount importance that young children have access to high quality children's books if they are to develop their vital pre-reading skills. Despite the importance of books in strengthening children's awareness of print and knowledge, a number of children in vulnerable families have little exposure to books, let alone own one. We want children to benefit from easy access to books at home.

As book ownership is associated with reading for pleasure, which is positively correlated with reading attainment, it is expected that the 'Home Libraries' project will help literacy acquisition a little bit easier for children coming from vulnerable families.

Home Libraries/Librerija f'Kull Dar project

The Home Libraries/Librerija f'Kull Dar project started in 2017. Vulnerable children aged 3 to 5 were identified by the school management team of each primary school of every college in Malta and Gozo. The Agency contacted the beneficiaries by phone and made appointments for parents/guardians to collect the packs. Although the Agency endeavoured to trace all families, some families were untraceable as they changed residence. In 2017, 143 families benefitted from the budgetary measure. Since the number of families benefitting from this scheme was low, the Agency took the initiative to collaborate with FSWS to gift books to families with children under the age of three, who benefit from free food distribution.

The 'Home Libraries' project

The 'Home Libraries' project is part of a state funded scheme. Since 2017 vulnerable children have received:

- Lunches
- Uniforms
- Stationary
- Funding for school outings
- Funding for summer school
- Funding for sports activities
- Home Libraries

Through this project, the Agency is creating home libraries for children aged 0 to 5 who have been identified as at-risk children and who may have little or no exposure to books.

Home Libraries

Home book packs are delivered at 5 milestones.

Age 0 to 1

Age 1 to 2

Age 2 to 3

Age 3 to 4

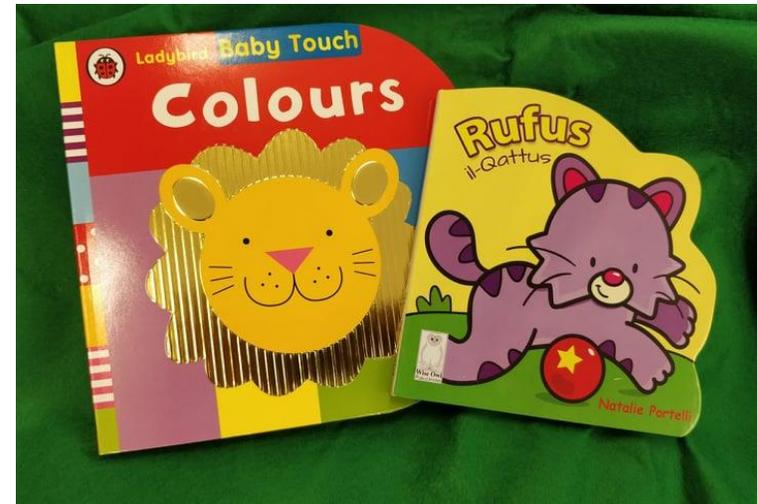
Age 4 to 5

Home Library for children aged 0 to 3

Children between 0 and 3 receive a pack of books for 3 years in a row.

Pack consists of:

- 1 Maltese books
- 1 English books
- 2 Information leaflets about reading aloud programmes and guidelines for parents.



Aqra Miegħi/Read with Me hu programm immirat għal tfa' ta' taht it-tliet snin u l-ġenituri tagħhom. Is-sessjonijiet BLA MLAS isru darba fil-gimgha u matulhom jinqaw stejjer u jikkantaw taqbiliet mat-tfal f'ambjent ferriċi. Bis-saħħa taqbiliet mat-tfal i-ħafna jidheru b'għajnejha ta' 'Aqra Miegħi, it-tfal isibuha chief jingħallmu l-ħiliet tat-taħdit, il-qari u l-ktiba.

Meta taqra lit-trabi u tfa' żgħir

- Aqra f' post kwiet.
- Ara li t-tarbija tkun qed tara wiċċek u l-kriieb li qed jinqara.
- Ighab u hu gost mat-tarbija.
- Heġġeg lit-tfal minn materjali differenti.
- Kanta taqbiliet li fihom it-tfal ikunu jistgħu jkapru, jżnu u jkkaqlqu mar-ritmu tagħhom.

Blex trawem l-imħabba għall-qari minn età bikrija

- Malli lit-tfal jagħzu l-koha huma, anke jekk taqra l-istess kriieb bosta drabi.
- Kantalhom it-taqbiliet.
- Kellem lit-tfal.
- Tkellem dwar dak li jinteressa.
- Irrepeti l-kliem tal-istampa li t-tfal juruk.
- Ara li fid-dar ikollok il-koha kullimkien.
- Il-qari tal-koha għandu jkun rutina.
- Ma lit-tfal il-librerija.
- Huw idhom ukoll sessjonijiet tal-qari addattati għall-età tagħhom.

Il-hin tal-qari flimkien jista' jkun hin speċjali fejn tikkber ir-raba bejn il-ġenituri qorrej u wlied. F'dan il-hin hu pjaci mat-tfal billi tanima l-istorja b'filma differenti, tirreċta, iddaħħak u tagħti gost.

Blex tirserva post tempel 2598 2990 jew ibgħat ltra elettronika lil aqra.storja@ilearn.edu.mt
Aktar informazzjoni fuq il-paġna ta' Facebook:
Aqra Miegħi/Read with Me.

AQRA MIEGħI READ WITH ME

BOV Bank of Valletta

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA Centre for Literacy

National Literacy Agency

The Aqra Miegħi/Read with Me programme is a family literacy programme for children of 0 to 3 years and their parents/caregivers. The one hour FREE sessions are held once a week. Each session features the sharing of story books. Each session of nursery rhymes and other fun activities for caregivers to develop the reading ability, and other literacy skills, of their child.

Reading with babies and toddlers

- Read together in a quiet place.
- Make sure the baby can see your face and the book you are reading.
- Play and have fun with the child.
- Encourage the child to manipulate the pages of the book, especially if they are made of different textures.
- Sing nursery rhymes where the child can clap, dance and move to the rhythm.

How to foster a love of reading from an early age

- Let your child choose books for you to read together even if this involves reading a favourite book over and over again.
- Sing nursery rhymes together.
- Hold meaningful conversations with your child.
- Talk about what is of interest to your child, shows you.
- Repeat vocabulary from pictures which the child ensures that there are books lying around at home.
- Establish a reading routine.
- Take the child to the library.
- Attend reading sessions which are age-appropriate.

The time spent reading together is a special time of bonding between the adult and fun with the child by animating the story with different voices, dramatising, and laughing.

To reserve a place call 2598 2990 or email: aqra.storja@ilearn.edu.mt
For further information visit the facebook page:
Aqra Miegħi/Read with Me.

AQRA MIEGħI READ WITH ME

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Start early

- Children do not confuse the two languages no matter how early you start. From developmental psycholinguistics we know that at first, some confusion between languages is inevitable, although by time children tend to grow out of this.
- If they are exposed to consistent use of language, children are able to acquire more than one language in a natural and effortless way.

Speak to your children

- You are your children's language model.
- Children will imitate what you say and how you say it.
- Engage in meaningful dialogue with your children.
- Identify the names of objects to your children, and repeat them.
- Describe and explain what you are doing.

Speak your first language

- Speak your first language to your children.
- Children who know their first language well, will find it easier to learn a second language.

Communicate positive attitudes

- When you show that you value both Maltese and English, your children acquire positive attitudes towards both languages.
- They will also learn how to value other languages.

Read in both languages

- You can create an environment that promotes language development by making sure that books in both languages are available.

Maximise exposure to both languages

- Supplement language exposure through activities that promote both languages.
- You can accompany your children to storytelling sessions.
- You can provide opportunities for your children to play with other children who speak Maltese and/or English.
- You can use technology to increase exposure to the languages, but keep in mind that human interaction is the best.

A guide for parents raising bilingual children in Malta

In Malta we have the privilege of two official languages: Maltese and English. They are also the languages of schooling. This entails several advantages. Bilingual children can think, speak, read and write in two languages. They can communicate with more people in the community. Bilingualism helps them to do well at school. They can learn other languages more easily and have more job opportunities in the future, both locally and internationally.

facebook.com/langpolicymalta

The National Literacy Agency
Ministry for Education and Employment
The National Curriculum Centre
Joseph Abela Sclero Street, Hamrun, HMR 1304
2595 2992

Ibda mill-ewwel

- It-tfal ma jgħallux iż-żewġ lingwi lanqas jekk tibdihomhom meta jkunu għadhom trabi. Il-psikolinguwisti jostnu li għalkemm għall-ewwel t-tfal jistgħu jgħaddu iż-żewġ lingwi, iż-żmien jagħtu fuq jagħallhom minn xalxin.
- Jekk it-tfal jigu esposti għal aktar minn lingwa waħda b'mod sistematiċi u konsistenti, huma jkunu kapaċi jgħallmu l-lingwi b'mod naturali u bla sforz żejjed.

Kellem lil uledek

- Inni tista' sservi ta' mudell għat-tfal tiegħek fi-żewġ tal-lingwi.
- It-tfal jimitaw x'għid u l-mod kif tgħidu.
- Ohloq ma' wliedek djalogi li jagħmlu sens.
- Uri lit-tfal xi nsejnhom l-oġġetti, u rrepetihom.
- Iddeskrivi u spjega xi tkun qed tagħmel.

Uża l-isien nattiv tiegħek

- Kellem lil uledek bi-isien nattiv tiegħek.
- It-tfal li jgħallmu l-isien nattiv tagħhom isibuha eħfef meta jigu biex jgħallmu t-tieni lingwa.

Uri attitudni pożittiva lejn il-lingwi

- Meta tuni lil uledek li tirrispetta kemm l-isien Malti kif ukoll l-lingwi, tkun qed trawem f'uledek attitudni pożittiva lejn iż-żewġ lingwi.
- U hekk jgħallmu wkoll jirrispettaw kull lingwa.

Aqra biż-żewġ lingwi

- Ipprova ohloq ambjent li jhegħegħ l-iżvilupp tal-lingwi fit-tfal billi tipprovdilhom kotba biż-żewġ lingwi.

Esponi kemm tiflha lit-tfal għaż-żewġ lingwi

- Esponi lit-tfal għaż-żewġ lingwi billi teħodhom attivitajiet li jipprovmovuhom t-tnejn.
- Tista' tieħu lit-tfal sessjonijiet ta' markontar ta' stejjer.
- Tista' ukoll taqqa' lil uledek ma' tfa' oħra li jkunu jgħallmu bi-Malti u/jew bi-lingwi, migħdu abna, billi jagħbu magħhom.
- Tista' tinquda wkoll bit-teknoloġija b'lekk esponi lit-tfal għaż-żewġ lingwi. F'aktar imma li m'hemmx xejn aqwa mill-komunikazzjoni umana.

Gwida għall-ġenituri biex inrawmu tfa' bilingwi f'Malta

F'Malta għandna x-wort li nużaw żewġ lingwi uffiċjali, jgħallmu l-istess il-lingwi. Dawn il-lingwi jinstawżaw ukoll għat-tagħlim u mirħaba f'hekk abna xortja. Dan għax it-tfal bilingwi jgħallmu, jgħallmu, jagraw u jgħaddu biż-żewġ lingwi u hekk ikunu jistgħu jikkomunikaw ma' frax usa' ta' nes. Il-bilingwiżmu jgħinjom jkibbu riżultati tajbin fi-skola. Jgħinjom jgħallmu lingwi oħra u jwessgħallhom l-oportunitajiet ta' xogħol fit-tgħid kemm f'Malta kif ukoll li hinn minha.

facebook.com/langpolicymalta

L-Agenzija Nazzjonali tal-Litterizmu
Il-Ministeru għall-Edukazzjoni u x-xogħol
iċ-Ċentru Nazzjonali tal-Kurrikulu
Triq Joseph Abela Sclero, Il-Hamrun, HMR 1304
2595 2992

The Agency in collaboration with the Foundation for Social Welfare Services distributes books to families who benefit from the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) and the State Funded Food Distribution Scheme (SFFD). These are 2 different grocery/food schemes and reach different people of low income.

Families with children under the age of three are identified and letters are sent out to them to pick up the books along with the grocery pack.

FEAD

Food packages are distributed to the most deprived households according to pre-established criteria as approved by the European Commission. These criteria take into account the financial situation of each household. It is noted that children, along with the elderly, are at greater risk of poverty and social exclusion and therefore have a higher risk of material deprivation. There is a notable difference between the at-risk-of-poverty rate of households with and without dependent child. Additionally, a household with two or more dependent children are deemed at a greater risk of poverty when compared to households with one dependent child.

The following are the established criteria:

- i. Households in receipt of non-contributory means tested benefits and having two or more children below the age of 16;
- ii. Households having two or more children below the age of 16 with an income not exceeding 80% of National Minimum Wage;
- iii. Households having two or more children below the age of 16 with an income not exceeding the National Minimum Wage;
- iv. Non-single households eligible for non-contributory means tested age pension.

Eligibility for the SFFD scheme

- i) Households in receipt of a non-contributory benefit (Unemployment Assistance, Special Unemployment Benefit, Social Assistance, Social Assistance Board, Single Unmarried Parent, Carer's Allowance, Increased Carer's Allowance and Age Pension), having 1 child below the age of 16

- ii) Households eligible for a non-contributory means tested Age Pension with single status

- iii) Households in receipt of the Energy Benefit:
 - o Having 1 child only below the age of 16 years
 - o Having 2+ children below the age of 16 years
 - o Having all children OVER the age of 16 years
 - o Having no children at all

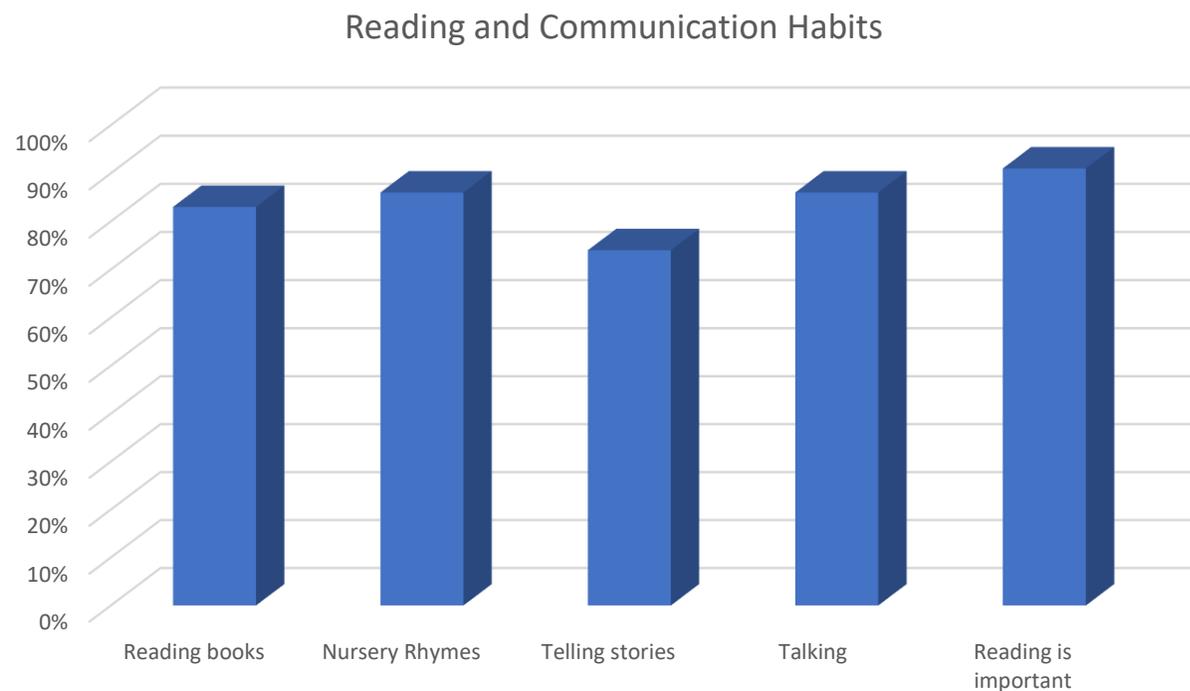
- iv) Households in receipt of a disability pension (Disability Assistance, Severe Disability Assistance, Increased Severe Disability Assistance and Visual Impairment Assistance) and who are not in employment.

Handing out of book packs to families of children aged between 0 and 3

- Trained reading animators hand out the book packs and promote reading aloud sessions which are held in every locality in Malta and Gozo.
- They also gather information about the family's reading habits.



Reading and communication habits of vulnerable families with children aged between 0 to 3 during the delivery of book packs in February 2020



- 83% of parents said they read to their children
- 86% said they sing nursery rhymes
- 74% said they tell stories
- 86% said that they talk to their infants
- 91% believe that reading is important

Home Library for children aged 3 to 5

Children aged between 3 and 5 attending kindergarten classes. They receive a pack of books for 2 years in a row.

Pack consists of:

- 12 Maltese books
- 12 English books
- Alphabet chart
- CD with Maltese nursery rhymes
- Parents/caregivers are also given 2 leaflets to guide them on how to use these books with their children and information about the reading for pleasure programmes organised by the National Literacy Agency.

Vulnerable children are identified by schools.

Parents/carers are given appointments in schools to pick up home library packs and are encouraged to attend the reading for pleasure programmes organised by the National Literacy Agency.





Why should I read with young children?

- Reading is vital for a child's development.
- Sharing books develops early literacy skills.
- Reading together develops a love of books and the motivation to want to read.
- Reading together from an early age helps your child understand how a book works.
- Sharing books together is a special time to bond with your child.
- Builds their vocabulary with words they understand.

Shared Reading

- Let the child choose a book.
- Discuss the cover page.
 - Read the title, author and illustrator.
- Look at the picture on the front cover:
 - Ask the child to predict what the book is about.
 - Ask questions about the story.
- Read the book and:
 - Ask the child to look closely at the pictures to help him/her understand the story.
 - Where appropriate relate events to the child's experiences.
 - Run your finger under the text.
 - Encourage your child to say repetitive or predictable phrases.
 - Repeat interesting words and rhymes.
- After the reading, talk about the story and ask 'why' questions that call for an explanation.
- Use non-fiction books to answer children's questions about the world.

To reserve a place call 2598 2990 or email: agra.storj@ilearn.edu.mt
For further information visit the Facebook page

Facebook Seher l-Istejjer/The Magic of Stories

Għaliex għandna naqraw lit-tfal?

- Il-qari huwa importanti għall-iżvilupp tat-tfal.
- Bi-qari flimkien it-tfal jgħidulhom il-hiliet bikrin tal-lit-tfal.
- Bi-qari it-tfal ikebbu l-imħabba għall-kotba u l-hegga għall-qari.
- Il-qari minn età bikrija jgħin lit-tfal jifhem kif inhu ma magħmula l-kotba.
- Il-hin meta jgħid il-qari flimkien hu hin speċjali għax fih tinbena rabta soda ta' fiduċja bejn il-ġenituri u wliedhom.
- Bi-qari it-tfal jibnu u jpidu l-vokabularju tagħhom.

B'leż triservu post, temp 2598 2990 jew ibgħat ltra elettronika li agra.storj@ilearn.edu.mt
Akkor informazzjoni fuq il-paġna ta' Facebook

Facebook Seher l-Istejjer/The Magic of Stories

Il-Qari Flimkien - x'tagħmel?

- Malli lit-tfal jagħzu ktieb huma.
- Iddiskuti l-qorra tal-ktieb:
 - Aqra l-nti, l-avtur u l-illustratur.
- Mares lejn l-istampa ta' fuq il-qorra ta' quddiem u:
 - Saqi lit-tfal ibassu dwar vixxi inhu l-ktieb.
 - Saqi mistoqsijiet fuq l-istorja.
- Aqra l-ktieb u:
 - Saqi lit-tfal jifhem mill-qrib l-istampa biex jgħidhom jifhem l-istorja.
 - Saqi lit-tfal mistoqsijiet biex ibassu xse jgħid.
 - Qabbel il-ġrajjet tal-ktieb mal-esperjenzi tat-tfal.
 - Waqt il-qed taqra mexxi sebgħek taht il-kiem li tkun qed taqra.
 - Inkoraggja lit-tfal jirrepetu frażijiet popolari jew prevedibbli.
 - Inrepi klem interessanti u li jgħid.
- Wara l-qari, tkellem dwar l-istorja u saqi mistoqsijiet bik-keima għaliex biex it-tfal jidraw jagħtu spjegazzjoni.
- Uta kotba fattwali biex twieġeb il-mistoqsijiet tat-tfal dwar id-dinja ta' madwarhom.

The power of spending time together

Media-free times together with parents should be designated. Do not underestimate the learning power of reading a book with your child or spending time exploring the outdoors. Parents need to be models for their children. Parents have to strike a balance, turn off the devices and spend real time with their children. The real world is a very important place for children to develop cognitive, social and language skills.

DIGITAL reading

Guidelines for Parents

Contact Information

The National Literacy Agency

<https://www.facebook.com/NationalLiteracyAgency/>

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National Literacy Agency

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA CENTRE FOR LITERACY

The number of children using smartphones and tablets is rising. Whether you opt for a smartphone, or a tablet, there will be plenty of child-friendly content to consider. Tablets have many advantages for children, with videos and apps to keep them entertained and educational games to help with learning. There are many Story apps on the market. It is important to know what makes a Story app good, how your child can make the most out of it and what safety issues you should consider.

How to choose a Story app:

- Choose only age-appropriate Story apps but also take into consideration the abilities and the interests of your child
- Choose high quality Story apps, rated highly by educators and parents, both in terms of their graphics and literary appeal
- The hotspots of the app should complement the narrative and aid in the comprehension of the story. This allows the children to focus on the story and not to get distracted by loud sounds and unrelated moving pictures

Digital Reading

- Share Story apps with your child, taking turns to read and to experience the story together
- Talk to your child about the story and ask relevant questions and point out different aspects of the content
- Help them to understand what they are seeing on the screen and apply it to the world around them
- Shared reading can help to increase your child's comprehension skills

Safety issues

- Overexposure to screens may cause the child to become less active and to miss out on physical and social activities, adequate sleep or other behaviours essential to health
- Keep media screens in family areas so that a child's media usage can be monitored
- Designate media-free locations in the house - TVs and computers should be kept out of bedrooms
- Supervise your child, show them how things work, and answer their questions about digital devices.

"Tablets are not toys. As a busy parent you may be tempted to leave your child alone with the tablet. This could cause some long-term problems. Children need to socialise, to run, to jump and to engage in active play."

Internet use

- Talk to your child about online safety - Cyberbullying, privacy and adult content are just a few of the issues they will face.
- If your child is using the Internet, you can check what he/she is doing online by checking the browser history

Limit screen time

The American Pediatric Association recommends that:

- Children younger than 18 months should avoid use of screen media other than video-chatting.
- Children under two years of age learn best from real-world experiences and interactions, and each minute spent in front of a screen-based device is a minute when your child is not exploring the world and using their senses, which is extremely important in their development process.
- Parents of children 18 to 24 months of age who want to introduce digital media should choose high-quality programming, and watch it with their children to help them understand what they are seeing.
- For children ages 2 to 5 years, screen use should be limited to 1 hour per day of high-quality programmes. Your child may be ready sooner or later, depending on his/her abilities and the level of supervision required.
- For school-age children, a smartphone or tablet can give them an additional learning layer, beyond the traditional classroom or book. Smartphones and tablets provide students with multiple opportunities to access content and engage with curriculum. They connect students to the world beyond the four walls of their classroom and give them access to real world experts and solving real world problems in real time. Technology makes their learning relevant.

Number of Families who benefitted from the Home Library Project

Year	Number of families
2017	143
2018	719
2019	655

'Read with Me'



Reading for Pleasure Programmes 'Read with Me'

The **Read with Me** programme is intended for children of 0 to 3 years and their parents/caregivers. The objectives of the bilingual programme are to promote a love of books through fun and playful activities and by involving their parents or caregivers. One hour free sessions are held once a week and each session features the sharing of story books, the singing of nursery rhymes and other fun activities for this age group. The young children discover that books feed their imagination and are exciting and fun thus developing the disposition to read stories for themselves. The informal learning opportunities encourage language development, listening skills, the development of concentration skills and attention spans.

The highly interactive sessions are conducted in local or school libraries and are hosted by local councils, schools and Malta Libraries, the entity in charge of public libraries. These sessions are delivered in all localities of Malta and Gozo and easily accessed by all participants.

23% of vulnerable families who have received the book pack attend these sessions.

'The Magic of Stories' in Schools



Reading for Pleasure Programmes

'The Magic of Stories'

The Magic of Stories programme is a bilingual reading aloud programme delivered by trained reading animators for children aged between 4 and 6 and their parents/carers. One hour sessions are held in a literacy rich environment. Stories from books are animated in a way which stimulates the children's imagination. This provides also learning opportunities for both children and their parents. The foundations are laid for the children to become enthusiastic readers.

These sessions are delivered in schools and kindergarten centres during school hours and in the community in the evenings.



‘Parents the First Teachers’

Parents the First Teachers

‘Parents the First Teachers’ is a short course in which parents/caregivers together with their children participate in interactive, language and literacy activities. Parents/caregivers are encouraged to practice literacy activities at home, so as to help their children develop language and literacy skills from an early age. This course is offered to vulnerable families who receive the book pack.

In 2018, the Agency organised 24 courses in 22 localities and 171 parents/caregivers attended.

In 2019, the Agency organised 10 courses in 9 localities and 79 parents/caregivers attended.

Information sessions for Parents/Caregivers about Early Literacy

The Agency liaised with Primary Health Care professionals and provides information sessions to parents/caregivers of new-born babies at the Well Baby Clinic. The aim of this initiative is to raise awareness of early literacy practices and the Aqra Miegħi/Read with Me programme, encouraging parents/caregivers to attend storytelling sessions, and to read aloud to their babies at home. 87% of parents of new born babies visit these clinics. As these are free of charge vulnerable families visit these centres.

The Agency also collaborated with Parentcraft Services, delivering talks at Mater Dei Hospital and the Central Hospital, Gozo about the importance of reading aloud to babies. These sessions are intended for groups of expectant parents and groups of parents/caregivers of new-born babies.

Thank You
Miriam Schembri

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Senior Manager

The National Literacy Agency



National Literacy Agency

<https://education.gov.mt/en/nationalliteracyagency/Pages/nationalliteracyagency.aspx>