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MEDIA RELEASE

Free reading sessions to tackle poor literacy and language levels in children

***CAPTION:** Ben and Tommy enjoy a bedtime story. Encouraging parents to read with their children is part of a new push by Bendigo Community Health Services to improve literacy and language levels.*

Bendigo Community Health Services will introduce free weekly reading sessions from November 14 to build literacy and language levels in Bendigo children.

The sessions support the organisation's strong focus on early years to break the cycles of disadvantage in Bendigo and links to other local initiatives such as the Communities for Children language and literacy priority and City of Greater Bendigo Municipal Early Years Plan.

The City of Greater Bendigo's State of Bendigo's Children Report (2013) found literacy and language levels for Bendigo children aged 0 to five years were lower than the Victorian average with children from suburbs with high levels of disadvantage significantly lower.

BCHS children, youth and family support services director Andie West said the free reading sessions in the kidzspace book nook would encourage children to 'love books'.

"The activities will encourage parents to get involved and help foster language and literacy development for babies to pre-school aged children in a fun and supportive environment," Andie said.

"Sometimes we will use singing and age-appropriate craft activities to add variety to the sessions.

"Parents will be supported to engage their children in all the activities which will be delivered according to the developmental needs of the children in the group."

Books donated by Communities for Children Bendigo and State Trustees Bendigo would be an important element of the reading sessions.

"We will encourage children to take a book with them after the reading session and bring it back next time. We want children reading as much as possible and falling in love with books," Andie said.

BCHS will provide fruit for children and tea or coffee for parents during the sessions.

The free reading sessions will be held from 10am to 11am every Tuesday in the BCHS kidzspace centre at 13 Helm Street in Kangaroo Flat during school terms.

Call our Kangaroo Flat site on 5430 0500 to book a place or visit www.bchs.com.au to learn more about BCHS services.

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