



# 2019-20 Summary Report

Reporting period: 1 July 2019 – 30 June 2020

First 5 Forever is an initiative of the Queensland Government, coordinated by State Library of Queensland and delivered in partnership with local government. In the years since its launch in 2015, First 5 Forever has been successful in highlighting the significance of public libraries and Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKCs) as important and trusted sources of early literacy support, and the value of enabling parents and caregivers to embrace their vital role in developing their child's literacy.

First 5 Forever is managed under a Service Level Agreement with local government. This agreement covers the period 1 January 2019 – 30 June 2021 and provides the 'business as usual' deliverables and obligations for First 5 Forever.

This reporting period has been impacted significantly by the COVID-19 pandemic dating from March 2020 through to the end of June. Restrictions on numbers of participants, ability to travel and space required have provided unforeseen challenges for libraries and IKCs delivering First 5 Forever face to face.



State Library support, creative solutions and dedicated public library and IKC staff have kept the First 5 Forever program active, however there has still been an understandable decline in participation and delivery statistics that will continue into the next reporting period.

This report provides a snapshot of the five 'business as usual' deliverables for First 5 Forever and highlights the trends and progress of the program across Queensland.

## At a glance 2019-2020

**100%** of eligible councils in Queensland participating in First 5 Forever (74).

**722,298** attendances at in-library First 5 Forever activities, down 25% from previous year.

First 5 Forever was represented at **2,802** outreach events, down 25%, with **100,197** estimated attendances at outreach events, down by 23% from previous year.

**49** councils reporting participating in outreach events, down 4%.

**1,253** partner organisations and agencies engaged with First 5 Forever, down 19%.

**334** participants from **51** councils attended professional development opportunities.

**8** workshops were delivered in **3** locations plus **7** Webinar/Zoom sessions.

**11,315** First 5 Forever Facebook page followers, up 18%.

**163,100** page views on the First 5 Forever webpages, up 122%.



## 1. Increasing access to early literacy experiences

In 2019-20 **24,662** in-library sessions took place across the library network with **722,298** attendances reported at in-library First 5 Forever activities (a decrease of 33% in the number of sessions and **25%** decrease in attendances from 2018-19).

From the end of March 2020, libraries and IKCs closed their buildings to the public and limited staff contact with members as directed by the state government COVID-19 Roadmap restrictions. These restrictions did not begin to ease until May 2019, when each council worked within their own risk assessments to develop programming that maintained social distancing, and cleaning practices for the safety of families and staff.

State Library stayed connected to public library staff through this time through phone calls and Zoom network meetings to support and advise; in addition to sharing creative solutions with the library network such as picnic blankets and frog themed lily pads to keep families distanced during limited programming.



Unfortunately, COVID-19 impacted libraries at a time when councils were observing that gains reported in the previous year were continuing, with increases in attendances at in-library sessions.

In particular, smaller RLQ Library services such as Barcaldine, Boulia, Cloncurry, Cook, Flinders, and Winton reported that up until March, numbers were increasing.

North Burnett reported that prior to COVID-19 their First 5 Forever programming (Storytime) participation had an 18% increase across the region compared to last financial year. This increase was due to changing the way that staff delivered storytime sessions from a presentation delivery mode to active and inclusive participation by children and caregivers. Plus the inclusion of play-based resources in each library branch provided through the First 5 Forever Community Literacy Project have also been a factor in this increase and are well received by the community and staff.

North Burnett reported that prior to COVID-19 their First 5 Forever

*"Barcaldine, Muttaborra, Alpha - most of these sessions were being held regularly with a successful attendance. This is a great opportunity for not only the children but their parents/carers to interact and network with each other, sharing snacks and a cuppa. It also holds a strong social aspect, making our libraries very much a community hub"*

Barcaldine 2019-20 Report

*"Slow but gradual increase in attendance at weekly sessions until COVID-19 restrictions were imposed. Even with the usual drain with families re-locating or children growing up the numbers have continued to increase with positive word of mouth and Facebook promotions."*

Flinders 2019-20 Report

This feedback aligns with individual library data, as of the 13 councils (17%) that reported an increase in attendances in this COVID-19 impacted reporting period, six are RLQs and three are IKCs. Smaller library services were also able to pivot more easily into outdoor areas, as smaller libraries with fewer participants require less spacing requirements.



Anecdotally there is an increased offer of “Messy Play” and play based sessions in library programming. These sessions are a result of the additional play based resources provided through the Community Literacy Project, and the strong emphasis on “play” as part of the Professional Development webinar series provided by State Library staff in 2019. Tactile and sensory resources, such as kinetic sand, and their role in developmental play were highlighted as part of “ages and stages” content in webinars and have now provided libraries with the opportunity to extend their offer for families.



**New To**  
**Hinchinbrook Shire Library!**  
 Spark the imagination of your child with hands on sensory play.

Each session is designed to develop fine and gross motor skills as well as building emergent literacy skills. Babies and toddlers will enjoy learning whilst playing. Come dressed for messy fun!

What: Messy Time @ TYTO Where: Hinchinbrook Shire Library  
 When: 10.30am Last Tuesday of every month, July to November 2019

first5forever.org.au

## Digital Delivery of First 5 Forever programs:

Public Libraries and IKCs pivoted to digital delivery due to COVID-19 restrictions so that families maintained their connection to the program and children did not miss out on early literacy foundational activities at a time where their brain development is highest. This also assisted in social isolation and mental health providing families with activities that could be done at home with common household materials.

The public library workforce rapidly developed delivery and technical skills to create this new service using whatever platforms and equipment were available to them. State Library promoted the availability of grant funding to support the purchasing of technology required for a quality product and provided examples of best practice to support staff in pivoting to this new delivery model for families.



The digital delivery model also created the opportunity for sessions to be accessible to a much wider audience in the community and be able to be easily shared through online promotional channels by council and in the wider networks.

Councils included their digital successes in their annual reporting.

Highlights include:

**Gold Coast:** In response to COVID-19 Gold Coast Libraries published virtual storytimes on Facebook three times per week with 12 storytimes from May 27 to end June 2020 receiving 10,720 views

**Whitsunday:** Whitsunday produced 19 virtual First 5 Forever sessions, and their combined views totalled 52,673.

**Burdekin:** "We have enjoyed the challenge of delivering our First 5 Forever program virtually. Although the cause of our going virtual is devastating, it has been a highlight for us to be able to spread the First 5 Forever messages and promote Burdekin Library more widely. Our virtual storytime reached 10,718 people and had 4,090 views between the end of March to 30 June"

**Lockyer Valley:** Gatton and Laidley Libraries Storytime program quickly moved to an online offering, being delivered live via Facebook twice a week so that families could interact and be acknowledged through the session. In just over two months the 17 sessions available were viewed over 8000 times from April – June 2020



*“COVID-19 has changed life as we know it, but our staff really wanted to find a way to still offer our services to the residents of the Lockyer Valley...Our Libraries are places that mean so much to residents – be it a place of refuge, a place of connection or a place of company and friendship and we set to work early to ensure we could still offer as many services as possible, albeit in a different way,”*

Nicole Kilah – Coordinator Libraries and Galleries, Lockyer Valley



## Storytime goes digital so kids don't miss out

Published: 25th of March 2020

Storytime at Noosaville and Cooroy Libraries has gone digital in an effort to ensure children don't miss out during the COVID-19 closures.

Library Assistant Kate Landsey and Young People's Librarian Maureen O'Shea are recording storytime videos and posting them to the Noosa Library Service Facebook page for kids to enjoy at home.

"We typically welcome between 30 and 50 children and families to our storytime sessions across the Cooroy and Noosaville libraries, so that's a lot of kids who would otherwise miss out," Ms O'Shea said.

"Storytime is a highly-rated part of our service to the Noosa community. We are very happy that technology enables us to continue to bring stories to the children and families in our area, and also to families further afield."

In coming days, storytime will feature *The Very Super Bear*, by Nick Bland, *Thelma the Unicorn*, by Aaron Blabey, and *Tricky's Bad Day*, by Alison Lester.

Library staff are currently recording *Where is the Green Sheep?*, by Mem Fox and Judy Horacek, plus *Cunning Crow*, by Gregg Dreise.

Ms O'Shea said Noosa Library Service offered a range of online services residents should explore while the libraries were closed due to the pandemic.

Library members have free access to download eBooks, eMagazines, eAudiobooks, plus stream movies, access online databases and follow online tutorials on a wide range of topics.

Parents can also access Story Box Library - videos featuring Australian actors and music artists reading stories.

Ms O'Shea said the Libraries' own storytime videos were made possible due to special publishing industry copyright agreements in response to the pandemic.

Visit [www.libraries.noosa.qld.gov.au](http://www.libraries.noosa.qld.gov.au) and check out the e-lending section. Follow Noosa Library Service on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/NoosaLibraryService](https://www.facebook.com/NoosaLibraryService). Phone the libraries on (07) 5329 6555.



Noosa Library Service staff member and keen storyteller Kate Landsey is taking Storytime to Facebook so kids don't miss out during the COVID-19 library closures.

## 2. Reaching all families with children aged 0-5

In 2019-20, libraries collectively ran or participated in **2,802** outreach sessions (**25%** decrease) and reported **100,197** attendances. Attendances at outreach events have predictably decreased from the previous year by **23%**.

Even with the impact of COVID-19, 66% (49) of councils continue to provide outreach for non library users, creating access opportunities to First 5 Forever. This is only a 4% decrease on the previous year.



Similarly, the significant increase in outreach for smaller councils reported last year has been maintained in 2019-20 with only a minor 2% decrease reported in RLQ/IKC services that deliver outreach sessions. It is positive to see these councils are still valuing outreach in 2019-20, and supporting early literacy in their communities through allocating resources outside standard library programming where staffing is limited.

Outreach sessions include both regularly scheduled sessions held in public areas hosted by library staff and participation in community-based family friendly events.

**Pop up libraries** are now a business as usual offer for the majority of Independent library services. This is notable for the amount of time, resources, and staffing that is invested in pop up programs especially in geographically large councils.

For example: Isaac Council staff travelled over 6000 kms to conduct 24 Pop Ups @ The Park (16 different locations) with over 550 attendees, until COVID-19 Lockdown in March 2020.

**Shopping centres** have increased as a preferred location in the reporting period due to access to families and no weather restrictions, while parks, pools and community events have remained valuable connectors for First 5 Forever and families.



**Story walks** that were a highlight of last year's reporting, have also expanded in 2019-20 in councils such as Western Downs, Livingstone, and in five locations in Toowoomba, including the Paediatric Unit at Toowoomba Base Hospital. Story walks are an effective way to promote library services, early literacy and picture books without requiring staff to be available to activate them. Story walks in parks can be family led or their locations used as a pop up venue. Libraries have been actively sharing templates, ideas and location ideas as this simple format provides access to First 5 Forever for families to share at any time.

Examples of Pop Ups throughout Queensland:



**Resources:** State Library has reviewed and significantly refreshed the templates and resources available via the Dropbox for local applications based on feedback from market research. The new designs include postcards, magnets, brochures, and posters.

Four 30-second animated videos featuring Errol the Frog and a range of Errol the Frog illustrations were also provided, supporting the increased emphasis on Errol as an ambassador for First 5 Forever with strong appeal for families.

Councils are also adapting and creating their own resources such as **Gold Coast's** translated flyers which are DL sized cards with early literacy tips created for each year of age from birth to five.

Each card provides age-specific tips on how parents can create daily opportunities to read with their children and is translated into seven of the most commonly spoken languages according to staff from Gold Coast Libraries and other local services that work with multicultural families. These are distributed via CALD services across the coast and at libraries and are accompanied by a resource information booklet to upskill staff on using the resource with families.

**Take home packs** for outreach continue to be popular and councils design their own to suit purpose and budget using First 5 Forever branding. These can now include items such as bibs, lunchboxes and water bottles (as shown in the example from Rockhampton (below right) in addition to the standard book and frog puppet model.



For example: **Gladstone** produced 1000 packs for their community. Their First 5 Forever bags (left) contain information about library services and the First 5 Forever program, a nursery rhyme frieze, a rhyme time booklet/DVD and a board book.





State Library of Queensland supported smaller library services in 2019-20 with the production of 2,500 take home packs for smaller library services. These packs ensured that that RLQ and IKC libraries were also able to provide packs to connect new families to First 5 Forever and libraries as these services have limited funding, based on their birth rates and populations, and cannot purchase in bulk for competitive pricing..

Due to COVID-19, the need for the production of First 5 Forever materials for take home packs has increased as councils have used this model to engage with families such as Gympie and Sunshine Coast “Stay at home” play packs and this has been much appreciated by communities.

Where libraries were unable to access families directly – local partners were able to assist in the distribution through their channels; for example Child Health staff were able to deliver First 5 Forever packs to new mothers in Sunshine Coast communities.



### 3. Collaborative partnerships and coordination

In 2019-20 public libraries and IKCs reported partnering with **1,253** community partners which is a **19%** decrease from the previous year. This decrease can be explained through local businesses and services reducing their capacity to partner based on COVID-19 restrictions and financial impacts.

However, First 5 Forever funding continues to provide libraries with the opportunity to connect with local steering groups, businesses and organisations and develop partnerships that extend the reach of libraries with families. Councils reported ongoing successes with local early childhood and/or community development groups as the First 5 Forever business as usual model builds strong local connections through consistent support.

*“Douglas Shire Libraries continued its association with the Douglas Early Childhood Community Network and are actively engaged in helping the community to develop strategies that will help support local children to be school ready. Through its on-going First 5 Forever program library staff have become recognised as a support resource for parents requiring early years literacy support.”*

Douglas Report 2019-20

*“First 5 forever staff have been involved in the formation of a Fraser Coast-wide Early Years’ Network. Prior to the formation of this network group, smaller geographical network groups were operating to various degrees in Hervey Bay and separately in Maryborough. The Fraser Coast Network) has been operating since late 2019. Early indicators show that this network will be very effective in its efforts to improve the wellbeing of children across the Fraser Coast.”*

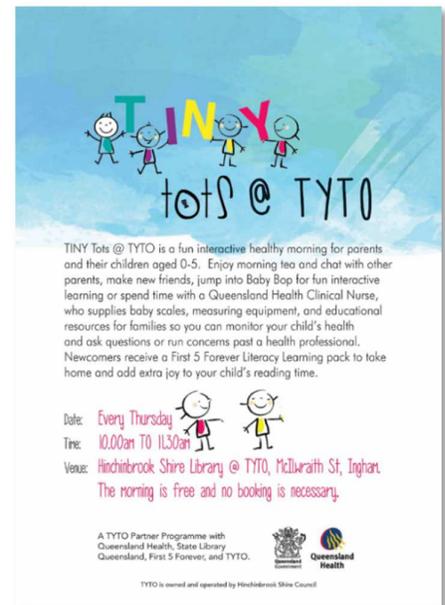
Fraser Coast Report 2019-20

**Partnerships with Queensland Health** continue to add value to the impact of First 5 Forever, such as the sessions at Hinchinbrook (flyer shown below) and work to increase access to early literacy support and public libraries. Examples include:

**Fraser Coast:** “During lockdown, due to our strongly established link, Child Health continued to promote the First 5 Forever messaging to parents and they also encouraged families to follow our on-line Rattle & Rhyme and Storytime sessions accessible via our Facebook page and Library website.”

**Gladstone:** “A child health nurse from QLD health regularly visits Calliope PlayTime sessions and is available for drop-in visits. We also attend the First Steps program at the Community Health Gladstone clinic, Gladstone Hospital, to speak to the new mother’s group about the importance of books and reading to babies.”

**Toowoomba:** “A new collaboration with Drayton Medical Centre, has been reaching out to local Indigenous families who will receive a First 5 Forever kit when getting their child’s immunisations. This received great feedback from the Doctors and Nurses at the Centre”



Businesses are also valued partners at the local level. Local businesses are also continuing to support First 5 Forever through simple but effective strategies such as:

**The Little Libraries Book Swap in Logan** where businesses across the city, including optometrist, barbers, hairdressers, employment agencies etc. display free library resources to promote First 5 Forever and provide access to information for parents to engage and interact with their children and to then take home. This has resulted in the recruitment of local champions and advocates for Logan City Council Libraries.



**Story sessions in Cunnamulla** – as part of the new digital delivery, local business people are sharing stories as part of the library program. This creates a new audience for the library through the reach of the businesses and promotes local business via the council webpage plus provides an avenue to share First 5 Forever strategies with community representatives so they can share their chosen stories in ways that add value for local families.

**Case Study: Bundaberg** As a mid size regional council with a population of 92,897 Bundaberg programs regular sessions at their 3 branches weekly. In addition to their in library program, Bundaberg staff represented First 5 Forever in more than 20 events and outreach opportunities in their communities working with 13 local partners.

These ranged from library led events such as Summer Reading Club celebrations, to community partnerships such as Walk for Autism Day and Rendezvous at the Zoo with Alexandra Park Zoo for the Milbi Festival and workshops for parents with HIPPIY Bundaberg. Through networks and partnerships, Bundaberg has created a sustainable program that values feedback and learning so that opportunities are capitalised on and lessons learned from trying new ideas and strategies.



## 4. Family and community awareness campaign

Centralised marketing activity for First 5 Forever in 2019-20 included radio, television and social media advertising, and results from June 2020 market research commissioned by State Library showed that statewide awareness of First 5 Forever has increased to 40%, an improvement from 33% in the previous year.

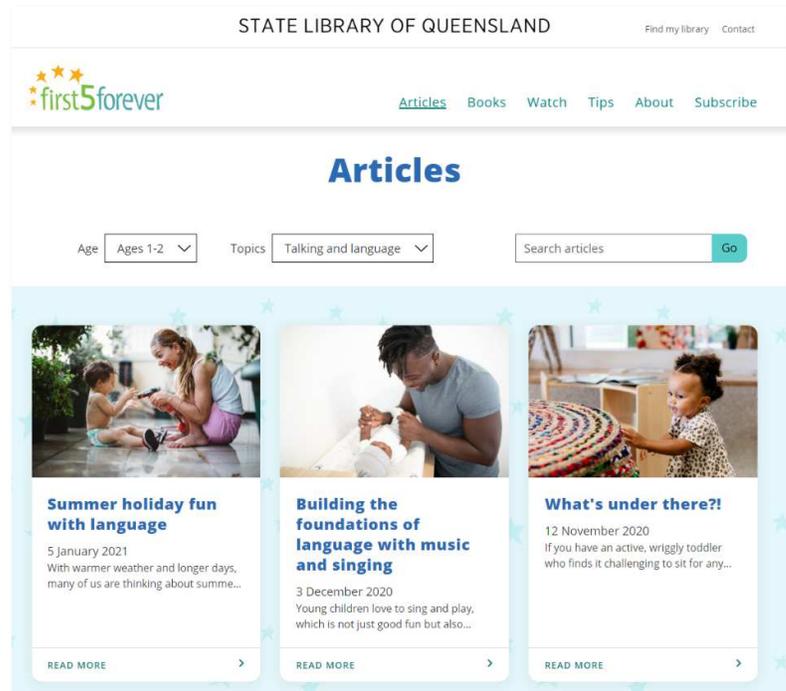
The research also showed that families who were aware of First 5 Forever were interacting with it more often: 91% of families either attended online sessions, used the website or visited the Facebook page. The research showed that families who interacted with First 5 Forever more often had a deeper understanding of the benefits of the program for their child's early literacy development.



The launch of a fresh new First 5 Forever website on 31 October 2019 delivered a vibrant new look that is easier for parents and caregivers to navigate and search and families can subscribe to free weekly tips, personalised to suit the ages of their child/ren.

User testing conducted on the new First 5 Forever website in June 2020 showed that families viewed the website favourably and appreciated its warmth, noting that it was family-friendly, bright and welcoming. Parents and caregivers found the content useful and appropriate for their requirements.

The refresh of the First 5 Forever webpages in conjunction with major marketing campaigns in 2019-20 led to a significant increase in visitation to the First 5 Forever website, generating **86,217** visits (**99%** increase on the previous year) and **163,100** page views (**122%** increase). The dedicated First 5 Forever Facebook page had **11,315** followers by 30 June 2020 (18% increase).



To support raising awareness and encouraging behaviour change through warm and engaging content delivered through online channels and responding to COVID-19 restrictions, the new "Watch" page was added in April 2020 as part of the webpages' redesign.

This page hosts regular First 5 Forever sessions from State Library and showcases public library content, plus additional material from "The Corner at Home" where State Library facilitators share language-rich activities that are directly transferable to home and emphasise the "play" aspect of First 5 Forever.

State Library staff continue to generate articles and content weekly for the webpages that specifically speak to the Queensland context, libraries and early literacy. This content is responsive to supporting families with early literacy strategies through issues such as natural disasters, or opportunities such as significant times of the year or even sporting events. The search function has been refined so that articles are resources that can be returned to when needed by families.

Online videos are also shared on First 5 Forever Facebook where they typically receive more than 1,000 views every week.

Subscribers to First 5 Forever emails increased by **35%** to almost **6,590** subscribers as at 30 June 2020. Market research showed that use of online resources (website content including videos and Facebook) increased in families familiar with the program from 34% to 47% (Campaign evaluation research study June 2020).

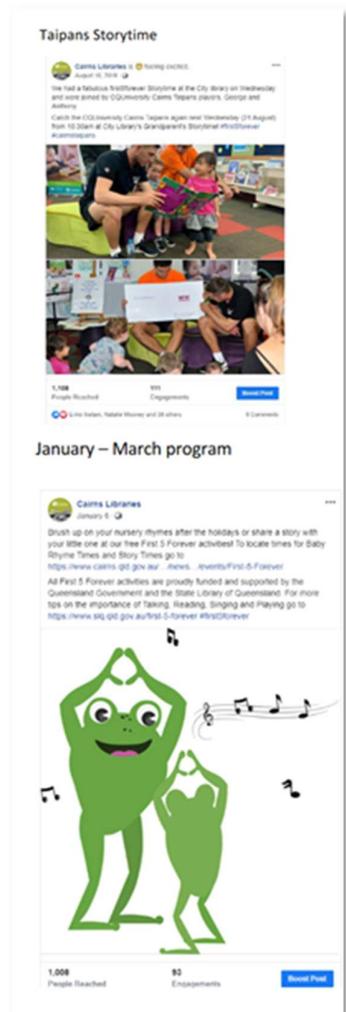
Queensland councils continue to be highly active using their own media releases / social media channels and local campaigns to promote First 5 Forever and target local families.

An improvement in quality and professional design of council produced promotional materials has been noted in First 5 Forever campaigns, as councils take advantage of the new digital assets provided by State Library, including the image library of professional quality photos that are copyright cleared for use. Plus smaller library services developing their skills with guidance available from State Library staff.



Some larger councils have also run media campaigns this year. Examples include:

**Cairns:** A targeted marketing campaign was undertaken with Council's Marketing and Communication unit to reach families not familiar with First 5 Forever. The campaign included radio advertisements, public buses including an external bus wrap and internal posters. Digital display boards were also used at Cairns Central and Stockland's Earlville shopping centres.



**Sunshine Coast:** A one year large scale marketing campaign was conducted at the Sunshine Plaza shopping centre. Monthly First 5 Forever promotions were aired on all digital boards in and around the shopping centre. Advertisements were aired 203,320 times throughout the 12 months to approximately 9.5 million shoppers.



## 5. Workforce capability and standards

In 2019-20 Professional Development (PD) focused on the new “business as usual” model and the opportunities provided by the Community Literacy Projects. In the reporting period **8 workshops** were delivered in 3 locations: Redlands, Toowoomba and Brisbane.



Online support was provided through **7** webinars and Zoom presentations. All webinars are co-delivered with public library staff where possible and topics are designed to be responsive and scalable to library services of any size.

Topics this year included: Advocacy, STEAM storytimes, and Libraries as play based spaces incorporating an introduction to how to design play activities based on age and development using the CLP resources provided to councils.

Additional planned workshops and travel were postponed due to COVID-19 and these will be rescheduled where possible and online options prepared as substitutes if issues are ongoing.

In total, **334** participants from **51** councils accessed opportunities for professional development provided by State Library. Feedback continues to be overwhelmingly positive both for face to face and online options, and State Library continues to respond to requests from public library staff for topics to maintain relevance.

In addition to PD sessions, practical Tip of the Week emails continue to support public library subscribers. These tips are designed to be simple and actionable across a variety of settings and are a direct response to feedback from libraries for new delivery ideas as they can be catering to the same families each week. Library staff are now also providing their own content for Tip of the Week emails for distribution, enabling strategies sourced from the network to be shared more widely.

Indigenous Services staff are also using the tips as talking points in their support of IKC coordinators delivering First 5 Forever and have promoted them on the IKC Facebook Page.

In 2020-21 State Library plans to continue with a combination of face to face and digital delivery with new online modules being made available, and limited regional travel planned in the second half of the year, pending COVID-19.

STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND

first5 forever

The wheels on the bus



**Tip of the week #69: sing in your own language**

Thank you to Rin Burns from Townsville City Libraries who shared her tip. Remember, the language you're most comfortable in is a great one to share.

"I think of myself 15 years ago, a person from a non-English speaking background, who had no family to help with my unsettled newborn baby. I didn't have a clue what nursery rhymes were, but I knew my own language and would sing the Thai alphabet. I now know it doesn't matter what language you use as long as you are talking and singing with your baby.

My now 15-year-old daughter can understand when I speak to her in Thai. I encourage all parents and caregivers to sing and talk with their children in their own language."

**About Tip of the week...**

In response to your feedback, State Library is publishing weekly, short, practical ideas public library staff can immediately action during their early literacy sessions. These tips form one part of the ongoing First 5 Forever Professional Development offer for public library and IKC staff.

**Share your tip**

We'd love to hear your tips and tricks for a successful session. Fill out the [PD Tips form](#), [email us](#) or share with the [First 5 Forever Library and Community Network Facebook group](#).

Thank you to all council staff, community partners and local champions who have contributed to the ongoing success of this program.

State Library looks forward to working in partnership with councils to continue delivering First 5 Forever for Queensland children in 2020-21.

