

WESTERN WATER
VICTORIA

Water Babies book enchants, informs young families

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WATER SERVICES
ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

Western Water's service area includes Melton, one of the fastest growing regions in Australia. 42 babies are born in the City of Melton each week. Across the remainder of Western Water's service area, around 2000 babies are born annually.

When Western Water commissioned Kildonan Uniting Care for a report in 2011, they discovered young families in new housing developments are increasingly likely to experience financial hardship – one of the results of this being they have difficulty paying their water bills.

Kildonan recommended Western Water look at ways to connect with young families to help them manage their water bills at a time when finances were tight.



THE WATER BABIES BOOK IS BORN

Western Water's brainchild was to develop a book, Water Babies, aimed at babies and toddlers, and their parents and carers. The book would have colourful, emotive images of children using water. It would also have rhyming words to read to baby alongside practical advice on saving water and managing water bills for parents.

Western Water Communications Advisor, Rebecca Colless, wrote and designed the Water Babies book. The project was led by Communications and Stakeholder Manager, Nicole Laurie, and her predecessor, Communications Manager, Brigid O'Sullivan. Members of Western Water's Customer Service team, led by General Manager, Customer and Community Relations, Peter Donlon, and Customer Service Manager, Greg Brown, provided valuable insights into the needs of customers experiencing financial hardship.

The first hard cover books were printed in early 2012 and a pilot was launched in the City of Melton, through Melton's Maternal and Child Health Nurse network.

ROLLING OUT THE BOOK TO YOUNG FAMILIES

The Melton pilot received positive customer feedback and was deemed a success. Further print runs of the book were commissioned and the book distribution program rolled out through 2012 and continuing into 2013.

All four councils in Western Water's service area agreed to provide the book to new parents through their Maternal and Child Health Nurse networks.

Three of the four maternal centres are providing the book to parents at baby's four-month checkup. This is when the reality of life with a baby starts to become routine and most centres report a continued high rate of visitation at this time.

The fourth council are providing it to parents during the home visit to families in the first few weeks of baby's life.

Copies of the book are also being provided to financial counselors in the region.



ASSESSING THE OUTCOMES

Western Water says that, while the Water Babies project is still in its infancy, anecdotal feedback from parents, carers and health professionals has been extremely positive.

A stakeholder launch of the book is to be held to celebrate the completion and initial success of the

program as an example of a positive partnership between Western Water and local councils.

Several other Victorian water authorities have expressed interest in using the Water Babies book as a template to launch similar projects in their service areas.

As part of a planned evaluation of the program in 2013, Western Water is asking parents and carers who receive the book to send in feedback forms. Feedback is also being sought from maternal and child health nurses, social services and Western Water customer relations staff.

In addition, Western Water will test awareness of the book via its annual customer survey.



BETTER INFORMED ALL ROUND

With the Water Babies book, Western Water has produced a delightful publication to educate and assist its customers.

More so, young families across the Western Water region can benefit from accessible advice about managing water bills, where to go for financial help if needed, and ways to save water around the home. Importantly, mothers who are using formula are learning that boiled tap water can be used over expensive bottled water.

Western Water also benefits by having better informed customers who are more aware of the quality of their water, payment plans and hardship program, and where to get help with managing their finances.

WESTERN WATER

Western Water provides water, sewerage and recycled water services to more than 57,000 properties representing 155,000 people, across an area of 3,000 square kilometres in Victoria including parts of the shires of Macedon Ranges, Moorabool and Melton, and the city of Hume.