

# Brain Time & Storytime: How the Lake County Public Library is Supporting Parents in Early Literacy

*"My biggest success was getting to know the little children and watching their parents change their habits."*

–Children's Librarian

The SPELL blueprint was created to assist library staff in their effort to support caregivers in practicing early literacy techniques with their children. In November 2014, eight libraries in Colorado were selected to implement the blueprint in their communities. Each library created a programming prototype that guided the library in collaborating with community partners, and providing outreach to low income and high need communities.

## Community

Lake County's population of 7,485 is comprised of 59% White, 38% Latino/a, and 4% two or more races. Seventy-one percent of K-12 students are a minority. With a median income of \$36,714, 13% of the county's residents live below the poverty line.

## Prototype

Lake County Public Library staff reinstated a former partnership with the Lake County School District. The Center Early Childhood Programs at Margaret Pitts Elementary School and West Park Elementary School brought their students to the library once a week for storytime and a related craft. They also encouraged elementary students to promote reading and literacy strategies with their younger siblings. There was no expectation from the school district that teachers would participate in the program. However, participation meant students had access to the public library once a week; access was previously limited due to a decrease in the funding of preschool activities. The school could no longer afford to bus children to the public library. This project enabled the library to fund the bus so students could once again visit the public library. A total of 22 bus trips to the library were funded.

Lake County Public Library offered Brain Time programming, an early literacy curriculum based on the work of Dr. Jill Stamm. This curriculum is designed for parents of babies aged 6-18 months and focuses on brain development and early literacy. This program was purchased for the library by a local mining company. Library staff offered the program as a series of three weekly 30-minute sessions (18 total sessions). Thirty-four children participated in the programming. Parents who attended all of the sessions were given a children's book to take home along with fliers containing information on early literacy.

Library staff conducted 28 parent consultations on early literacy. A total of 380 children (with 43 caregivers) participated in storytime at the library.

Library staff discovered the local high school had a parenting support group serving pregnant teens and teen mothers. The library gave a presentation to the group and will continue working with them to provide early literacy and library resources.

## Resources

Financial resources for this project came from two sources: \$5,029 from a National Leadership Grant distributed by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and \$3,215 in matching funds.

With these funds, 327 children's books were purchased to enhance the library's book collection for 0-5 year olds. The library printed and distributed 800 informational materials on early literacy and 400 promotional materials.

## Parent Survey Results

Parents were given a survey to assess the impact of the program and better understand the community:

- 64% agreed they have a better understanding of how children learn to read.
- 73% are more confident helping their child(ren) to be ready to learn how to read in kindergarten.
- 91% know what everyday activities to do with their child(ren) to help them to be ready to learn how to read in kindergarten.
- 91% agreed they plan to spend more time doing those activities.
- 82% agreed they plan to spend more time reading with their child(ren).
- 82% agreed they are more committed to maintaining a regular reading routine with their child(ren).
- 27% report having 51 or more books at home, 9% report having 26-50 books, 9% report having 11-25 books, 55% report having only 1-2 books at home.

Additional quotes from parents demonstrate what an impact this program had on families:

- "This class has given me lots of great ideas for play & learning w/ my child. I have a better understanding of how she is learning." – Parent
- "I learned to sing to them while changing them and their clothes...to be more specific about things that we are doing." – Parent
- "I learned just how important reading is for my child." – Parent

## What's next?

Lake County Public Library plans to work with their Friends of the Library group to find funding to ensure continued bus trips for the preschool, but will continue to hold storytime for elementary teachers who are able to walk their classes to the public library. They also plan to continue the Brain Time program and will continue working with the teen parent support group.

