

Storytime Kits for Childcare Centers & Play Groups: How Pikes Peak Library District is Supporting Parents in Early Literacy

"I feel so invested in the growth and development of the children, and I think that is an important bond that we share with the caregivers."

–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

Pikes Peak Library District (PPLD) is located in Colorado Springs with branches both in and around the city. Colorado Spring's population of 456,468 is comprised of 71% White, 16% Latino/a, 6% Black or African American, and 5% two or more races. Forty-eight percent of K-12 students are a minority. Thirty-four percent of households have children under the age of 18. With a median annual income of \$54,228, 14% of the city's residents live below the poverty line.

Prototype

PPLD partnered with Princeton Academy, a preschool and child care center in Colorado Springs. PPLD staff visited Princeton Academy twice a month to hold storytimes (14 visits total). Staff also developed 46 kits for teachers with early literacy materials that could be used in ways similar to those modeled during storytimes. The kits included books, manipulatives, and early literacy tips called "Brain Building Tips," which explained *why* particular activities help promote literacy in young children. Parent handouts were available that included information about books their child was reading and how parents can extend learning at home using early literacy tips. PPLD also held three events during pickup times to connect parents with early literacy strategies, crafts, books, library cards, and general library information. Parents responded well to these events and were excited to talk with library staff when they came to pick up their children (19 total one-on-one consultations). On the last visit, the library left the childcare center a small bookcase that fits under the check in/out computer and filled it with children's books for parents to borrow.

The childcare center's teachers attended three trainings presented by library staff. Trainings focused on Every Child Ready to Read®, modeling early literacy activities, and hands-on time to plan Talk, Sing, Read, Write, and Play activities. A Pikes Peak Children's Librarian described the trainings: "We offered a four-hour training to the Princeton Academy staff. The childcare teachers were able to earn four hours of required credit

from the training. We presented Every Child Ready to Read® information and also showed them age- and skill-appropriate books that they could use in their classrooms. The second portion of the training consisted of them making supportive literacy materials out of recycled and low-cost materials, such as a clothespin drop for fine motor skill development for toddlers, and high-contrast standup images to use with infants during tummy time.”

In addition to working with the childcare center, library staff connected with parents at play groups in the community. PPLD partnered with Parenting Matters through Alliance for Kids, its Early Childhood Council. The children in these groups range from six months to five years old. PPLD librarians found that the best way to model and discuss early literacy was to talk with parents during circle time (15 visits total) while demonstrating music and movement activities with scarf dances and shaker eggs with the children. Library staff facilitated library circle times twice a month. During visits, library staff brought books and included an activity or craft for the participants to create together. Library staff also provided specifically selected materials that built on early literacy lessons and training for children to keep for sharing at home with their parents. Materials included printed early literacy activities, flannel lap board, and storytelling flannel pieces.

The events reached 217 caregivers and 410 children during the funding period.

Resources

Financial resources for this project came from two sources: \$9,000 from a National Leadership Grant distributed by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and \$23,448 in matching funds.

With these funds, the library purchased 2,096 books for children aged 0-5 to enhance the library inventory and create storytime kits. The kits were stored in bins that included books, 192 manipulatives and printed informational materials on early literacy.

Parent Survey Results

A total of 12 parents took surveys before and 30 took surveys after the program to assess the impact and better understand the community. In addition, 10 parents took a one-time event survey. The survey results indicated that there was a significant increase in parents asking their childcare providers for tips to help their child learn to read. In addition,

- 72% agree that they know how children learn to read.
- 97% are more confident in helping their child to be ready to read in kindergarten
- 83% know what everyday activities to do with their child to help them to be ready to learn to read in kindergarten
- 77% have a regular routine for reading books
- 33% ask their childcare provider for tips to help their child learn to read
- 28% ask librarians for tips to help their child learn to read

- 67% are familiar with the activities the library offers for families with young children
- 69% plan to attend more library events for families with young children
- 43% read to their child several times a day, 25% once a day, and 14% most days of the week
- 89% talk to their baby several times a day, with 7% reporting once per day
- 86% sing with their child several times a day, with 7% reporting once a day
- 79% encourage their child to play with their hands several times a day
- 79% play with my child in a way that helps them explore their surroundings several times a day, with 14% reporting once a day
- 32% of families report having 51 or more books at home, 39% have 26-50 books, 7% have 11-25 books, 14% have 3-10 books, and 7% have only 1-2 books at home.

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

- "I'm pretty sure this is why my child loves books."
- "She loves to attend this weekly play group."
- "This program introduces us to new books and songs. Also, gives us more chances to interact with other children."
- "We now have more books to read at home!"
- "I have a new appreciation for the library knowing they have much more to offer than just books rentals"

Success Stories

Library staff reported data, including success stories, on a monthly basis. One of the tangible successes of the library's partnership with the childcare center can be seen through the welcoming attitude of the teachers at the center and the noticeable excitement of the children when they saw new kits. Throughout the year, the library noticed subtle changes in the childcare center to support early literacy such as flannel lap boards and more manipulative-type toys.

Quotes from Pikes Peak librarians highlight the impact this program had on the childcare center and the play groups:

- "The successes are always with the children! The classroom modeling we do serves two purposes: It gives the children undivided attention, that is focused on having fun and sharing books. Then the teachers see the power of stories and books and hopefully will mirror those examples with the kits we leave them. The children get so excited when we bring the kits, and sometimes they really don't want us to take the kit that they have been using!"
- "I thought we'd go ahead and read some of the books from the kit they had just had. To my surprise, the kids were very vocal about their favorites and about which books they wanted me to read. They also knew the words/story to those books, which really demonstrated to me that we are both choosing good books AND that the teachers are reading them to the kids!"
- "We had a Winter Party at Princeton Academy to give away a book to each child, as well as provide a literacy activity and a family dinner. All in all the

holiday parent party was controlled chaos! The kids had fun and families were relieved to learn that they didn't have to think about dinner. We were able to talk to many parents and answer any questions they had about the library and early literacy."

- "The partnership with Parenting Matters and the facilitation of the playgroups has put us into a community of caregivers and parents that we likely would not reach through regular library programming and/or our contacts with local childcare centers."

Parenting Matters will be hiring a part time early literacy expert to continue the library's work.

Lessons learned

The children's librarian describes the flexibility of the library's original prototype: "You start out with one idea of how the prototype is going to work and then you find that it is constantly evolving due to new needs and concerns!"

Locating and keeping partners was a struggle at first, but they focused on the two interested organizations and created strong partnerships that benefitted both participants.

One major, but unsurprising, lesson was how much time was consumed in creating so many unique literacy kits.

The librarians found that, despite their active attempts, it was incredibly difficult to gain access to parents who are working multiple jobs, as they do not typically come to the library and/or library children's programs.

Another challenge was hosting teacher trainings for the childcare center. Finding times that were convenient for all teachers was difficult. During these trainings, the librarians tried to provide the teachers with time to brainstorm and plan for their classrooms, but found it was difficult to stress the importance of intentional planning for lessons when the teachers don't have much planning time. The children's librarian further illustrates this point:

- "It seems like the childcare workers are as frazzled as the parents at times. What a difficult job it must be to work in such a loud environment, with children who have so many needs and deficiencies at home. I find that if I can be another interactive body and face for the children to get attention from, it helps divide the adult attention amongst the children and the quality improves."

Targeting children from low income families can be a great goal, but it is important to be aware of these families' needs and to be flexible. The children's librarian points out:

- "We are still learning that children from low income families are often much farther behind in terms of their early literacy and language development than we thought. For example, what would be perfectly appropriate for most 12-18 month old children, does not work with this group. It could also be that the

teacher/student ratio isn't ideal. 12-18 month olds seem to need much more one-on-one attention because they aren't very verbal and don't have very good fine motor control."

What's next?

PPLD staff already does outreach for older children and adults, but this grant allowed them to think about and focus some of these efforts on younger children (ages 0-3). Although they are currently suspending their SPELL work library staff said, "Seeing firsthand the challenges these families face, it fuels my fire to continue this work and keep improving." This experience was more time intensive than expected and the library needs time to pause, reflect on their work, and find sustainable ways to recreate the program.



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