

Kits to Childcare Centers: How Pueblo City-County Library District is Supporting Parents in Early Literacy

"Every visit is a success when a child is happy"

–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

Pueblo County's population of 160,757 is comprised of 53% White, 42% Latino/a, 2% Black or African American, and 3% two or more races. Sixty-three percent of K-12 students are minority. Twelve thousand households have children under the age of 18. With a median annual income of \$29,650, 18% of the county's residents live in poverty.

Prototype

Pueblo City-County Library District (PCCLD) staff partnered with:

- Thatcher Learning Center: a childcare center that serves children of Parkview Hospital employees
- Trinity Lutheran Early Learning Center: provides preschool, pre-K, and childcare programs
- Kinderkirk Preschool: preschool and childcare center
- Benjamin Franklin Elementary School: public school serving Pre-K through 5th grade

Library staff produced 12 themed storytime kits. The kits included books, manipulatives, songs with a CD, lapboards, toys, flannel board supplies, games, and a binder filled with early literacy tips and activities.

Library staff provided Every Child Ready to Read® and storytime training to representatives from all four of the partner organizations.

The children's librarian visited a school every Thursday, rotating through the four partners monthly. During her visits, she would model storytime with the children, introduce a storytime kit, and briefly talk with teachers. The librarian returned to the center during child pick-up time to read stories and provide early literacy activities for the children while they waited for their caregivers. The librarian also used this opportunity to talk with parents about services the library has to offer, the library's partnership with the childcare center, and distribute handouts with early literacy tips to use at home. Parents seldom stayed to do activities with their children.

The children's librarian conducted 30 storytimes at the locations and 25 parent nights throughout the year, reaching 218 caregivers and 1,387 children. The librarian also conducted 30 one-on-one early literacy consultations with parents.

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 \$9,313 in matching funds.

With these funds, the library purchased 78 manipulatives, 137 early literacy games, 409 books, and printed 715 early literacy activities and 1,678 promotional materials.

Parent Survey Results

Parents were given surveys before and after the SPELL program to assess the impact of the program and better understand the community. Results from the post-program survey include:

- 80% agree: I have a regular routine for reading books with my child
- 80% talk to their baby several times a day
- 70% sing with their child several times a day
- 83% explore and play with their child several times a day
- 27% of families report having 51 or more book in their home, 13% have 26-50 books, 20% have 11-25 books, 27% have 3-10 books, and 7% report no books at home
- 80% of parents have a better understanding of how children learn to read.
- 87% are more confident in helping their child be ready to read in kindergarten
- 93% know more about what everyday activities I can do to help my child
- 93% plan to spend more time doing activities that will help my child
- 93% plan to spend more time reading with my child
- 93% are more committed to maintaining a regular reading routine with my child
- 93% know more about the activities the library offers for families with young children
- 80% plan to attend more library events for families with young children
- 86% report having a library card

Success Stories

Quotes from the children's librarian demonstrate the impact of their SPELL program:

"My first visit was a lot of fun. I did a storytime in the morning at the preschool. The kids were very excited. Late in the afternoon I returned to do a parent night. The children were outside playing when I pulled into the parking lot. When I got out of my car they started jumping up and down and saying, 'The library lady is here!' It was neat that I had only been there once and already made a connection with them. The next day the director of the facility emailed me that it had been a lot of fun and the children can't wait till I come back next month."

"My storytime kits have individual themes that I use. Each month I take a new one to do the storytime and leave it there until the following month. I think the caregivers are more excited about the themes than the children. Every month as soon as I enter they want to know what the theme is and are super excited. It is great to see how much everyone loves this program."

"There is a boy about 3 years old at one of the facilities I visit. He is really shy. He has never spoken to me and when we do storytime he has never done any of the movement or fingerplays. Last week he danced and did the movements to a few of the songs. When we were doing the activities after storytime he was observing and watching the other kids. I was holding some pajama matching cards. The top card had Batman pajamas. He came up to me and told me what they were. Then we matched the rest of the pajamas. It was awesome to see the difference I am making."

Lessons Learned

While this prototype was successful, the PCCLD staff found it challenging to connect with parents. The children's librarian said, "I only wish I could have more parents attend the parent nights. It's hard to reach them when they pick up their children...they are in a huge hurry and only a few stay to do activities." Her advice is to connect with parents whenever possible, have fliers ready to help explain literacy tips and library resources as they walk out the door, but understand that many parents are in a rush during pickup times.

To find interested partners PCCLD staff found that contacting childcare centers works best by using other connections such as the Early Childhood Council for introductions. The librarians also discovered that it is vital to establish expectations for each participant in the partnership, and to create consequences for not following through on these expectations. Since library partners are taking time to attend training events, it is important to be specific during teacher trainings, make expectations clear, and be mindful of partners' schedules. Finally, do not expect childcare centers to come to library events; the library programs will need to be brought to them.

Staff found it time consuming and challenging to plan, purchase, and organize literacy kits. Staff wanted kits to stay at each childcare center for an entire month, therefore the kits had to include enough books, manipulatives, songs, CDs, activities, etc. to keep the children interested and the teachers prepared.

What's next?

The PCCLD project was such a success it is now expanding from four childcare centers to ten. Additional librarians from PCCLD will participate in the program, and children in Pueblo childcare centers will have the opportunity to receive visits from librarians from their local library branches.