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LSTA Grant Evaluation
Proposal # 11-1-EPL
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Story-Time-To-Go
Eugene Public Library

Summary of Evaluation

As stated in the goal, this grant resulted in a program that expands early literacy development programs to primarily preschool children who do not have access to early literacy development programs provided through story times at the three locations of the Eugene Public Library. After a careful analysis of the community, the Eugene Public Library developed The Story-Time-To-Go project to increase access to early literacy development by children who are enrolled in either center provided child care or home child care sites. Building on already established partnerships with Family Connections at Lane Community College and the City of Eugene Recreation Department, Youth and Family Services; the library was able to identify and enlist the participation of five sites, three with multiple classrooms. Under the guidance of Youth Services Manager and Project Manager, Cynthia Olsen a Story-Time-To-Go Coordinator was hired and volunteers were recruited using the volunteer program already in place at EPL. Youth services staff assisted in the selection of materials for the Story-Time-To-Go kits, the resource used by story time presenters. Technical services staff prepared kits for circulation not only to story time volunteers, but also for borrowing by any EPL cardholder and for branch staff to use when presenting story times. Coordinator Shauna Dyer developed training for volunteers using materials reflecting best practices for early literacy development. In addition to providing story times for participating child care providers, the project provided a Presenting Story Time program aimed at training additional child care providers and other members of the public with techniques for presenting successful story times that incorporate essential elements of early literacy development.

Project Objectives

The goal of the Story-Time-To-Go project is to increase early literacy, among primarily preschool children, who are unable to access story times offered at the three Eugene Public Library locations. Utilizing demographic information from the 2000 census; childcare provider information from the Child Care Resource and Referral Network at Lane Community College; and, information provided by the Raising a Reader Program the Eugene Public Library determined that providing story times at child care centers and

home child care sites would be an effective strategy for increasing access to early literacy services among underserved children, especially low income children, who are unable to attend story times at a library location. By partnering with Family Connections at Lane Community College and the City of Eugene Recreation Department, Youth and Family Services the library was able to market Story-Time-To-Go to child care providers who would benefit most from this service.

Project Method

Under the leadership of Cynthia Olsen, Youth Services Manager & Project Manager and Shauna Dyer, Story-Time-To-Go Coordinator, a program consisting of three parts was developed. First the volunteers: drawing on an experienced staff of five youth services librarians and Eugene Public Library's strong volunteer program, an applicant pool of volunteers were interviewed; background checked, and received training using *Reading for Healthy a Family* and *Every Child Ready to Read* materials with the result of being able to provide successful story times that include a welcoming song, age appropriate stories, finger plays, games and crafts and a closing song. Each of the volunteers is paired with a site and provides weekly story times.

Running concurrent with the recruitment and training of volunteers was the marketing of the program to potential home child care providers and child care facility sites through Family Connections at Lane Community College and through the City of Eugene Recreations Department, Youth and Family Services. Eugene Public Library received an enthusiastic response from both facility based child care sites and from home child care providers. The positive response from home child care providers enabled Eugene Public Library to meet a key objective of reaching low income children. Sites chosen for the Story-Time-To-Go project have a signed agreement with the library to provide space, a consistent designated time, and provider participation in story time with the goal of being able to provide story times at their site in the future.

The second component of the Story-Time-To-Go project was creation of the Story-Time-To-Go Kits. The 60 plus kits have been developed by the library's youth services staff with an expertise in early literacy development. The kits address a variety of subjects of interest to preschool children including topics such as seasons, shapes, colors, and alphabet. The materials also reflect the diverse populations this program serves. The kit materials are housed in plastic containers that are easily transported and offer users easy storage to care for and keep track of materials. The kits are not only used by participants in the project but also are available for EPL cardholders to checkout.

One of the most effective ways to expand early literacy development opportunities for children is to train early childhood services providers. This is the third component to the Story-Time-To-Go project. The Presenting Story Time class trained participants to present effective story times that incorporate early literacy development; select

developmentally appropriate stories; and, develop age appropriate activities that support early literacy development.

The above was accomplished by developing a timeline that allowed for a systematic approach to get the program up and running. Under the direction of Cynthia Olsen, Story-Time-To-Go Coordinator, Shauna Dyer was recruited. Shauna then developed a plan for volunteer recruitment and training while also working with Family Connections at LCC and the Eugene Recreation Department to identify sites who wished to participate in the program. Shauna and youth services staff developed the kits used in the program. Volunteers were paired with sites and evaluation tools were identified.

The Story-Time-To-Go project utilized multiple means of evaluation including surveys and feedback. Providers were able to evaluate the volunteers and make suggestions and adjustments to the program as needed. The volunteers were able to evaluate the effectiveness of the kits and make suggestions and communicate any concerns about the sites they were visiting.

Project Results

The Story-Time-To-Go project has resulted in Eugene Public Library being able to provide early literacy development to a significant number of preschool children, especially low income children, who often face multiple barriers when trying to access library services. The five volunteers and two substitutes recruited for the program are able to provide eight story times per week owing to the fact that there are multiple classes at three of the five selected sites. I observed a story time volunteer at a recreation center and visited a home child care site.

It was evident from my observation at the recreation center that both the provider and the children eagerly anticipated the story time presented by the Story-Time-To-Go volunteer. The well trained and well prepared volunteer led the children in an opening song; provided three interesting stories and an activity that thoroughly engaged and delighted the children while remaining focused on early literacy development. Looking around the room it was evident that early literacy was one of the focal points of activity at this center. The home child care site offered additional examples of the ways this project was meeting its stated goal. While no volunteer was present, I had the opportunity to visit with the provider to see how early literacy development was incorporated into the functioning of her home child care site. Activity sheets from the Story-Time-To-Go kits were evident in the room and the provider talked about how early literacy activities were incorporated into the daily activities of her site and how the volunteer often provided additional insights into the use of the kit materials. The site offered a literacy rich environment. There is every reason to believe that early literacy development will continue at sites participating in this project because of the extensive modeling and guidance offered to the providers by the volunteers. Providers should feel confident they

are able present story times rich in early literacy development. Since kits will be available for patron checkout, providers should continue to make use of the kits recognizing the added value the kits and early literacy development activities bring to their individual programs.

The Presenting Story Time class is an effective and efficient way for the library to present early literacy training to child care providers and others in the community who work with young children. With a curriculum culled from best practices, participants learned how to create an effective story time. A suggested structure for a story time was provided as well as lists of stories, songs and activities to use, as well as techniques for bringing stories to life.

Project Impact

The grant's goal of increasing access to early literacy development by creating a corps of volunteers and a resource of kits containing library materials supporting early literacy to child care providers has a great chance of continuing in the future. The library has clearly stated that early literacy services are a priority and has secured the financial support of the Eugene Public Library Foundation to continue providing a variety child care sites with early literacy development services as demonstrated in this project. The library has also continued to develop strong relationships with Family Connections at Lane Community College and the City of Eugene Recreation Department, Youth and Family Services; both are key resources for identifying child care centers and home child care sites wishing to participate in future Story-Time-To-Go programs.

Eugene Public Library identified that 45% of families in Lane county use paid child care and there are 303 child care providers in the City of Eugene. According to the 2000 census 17.1% of the population of the City of Eugene live below the poverty line. In 2010 the unemployment rate in Lane County was 10.6%. The Raising A Reader program estimates that 61% of low income families do not have age appropriate books in the home. There is a demonstrated need in the City of Eugene for a program like Story-Time-To-Go and the above figures indicate that the library has its work cut out. It is hoped that the Eugene Public Library will be able to continue providing early literacy services to preschool children unable to attend story times at the library.

The major barrier to providing early literacy services to children in child care settings is the lack of sufficient staff to reach the large number of child care sites in a given community. The Story-Time-To-Go project offers a cost effective and efficient model for libraries wishing to increase early literacy services by utilizing a cadre of trained volunteers to present story times in a variety of settings and by providing library materials to support early literacy activities and story times.

Suggestions for Improvement

This project has all the elements for continuing success. It was well organized and planned from the very beginning. There is a good structure in place to continue the program. Hopefully the library will be able to build upon its successes. The major challenges to continuing and perhaps increasing the number of sites involved include: the expected resignation of the Story-Time-To-Go Coordinator to pursue educational opportunities; the ongoing challenges of recruiting volunteers and finding sites willing to participate in the program; and, the need for funds to pay for the coordinator position and the replacement and expansion costs of the kits.

With the strong relationships the library has developed with child care agencies through partnerships with Lane Community College and the City of Eugene Recreation Department; a supportive youth services staff able to create and maintain kits; a strong volunteer recruitment and training program; and the ongoing financial support of the Eugene Public Library Foundation I look forward to the continued success of this program and its replication by other libraries in the state.