Let’s Read Family Literacy Program Outcomes Report

All Partners
FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAM OUTCOMES REPORT 2020-2021

WHY FAMILY LITERACY & OUR PARTNERSHIP MATTERS
The ability to read is a gateway skill to positive life outcomes, and development of that skill starts early. There is also overwhelming academic consensus that the preschool years (0-5 years) are a crucial period of pre-literacy development and that children of parents who foster literacy and language-rich home environments are more likely to start kindergarten with the skills they need to learn to read successfully. However, parents from underserved communities often lack access to opportunities that support their children’s learning, which can put their children at higher risk for poor education and life outcomes.

OUR SHARED PURPOSE
At Words Alive, we believe that empowering experiences turn parents into agents of change and advocates for their families. We also believe that reading is the foundation of community and economic development, and that when everyone can read, whole communities thrive! During the 2020-21 school year, Words Alive partnered with like-minded leadership and family engagement teams from six community providers to deliver a virtual version of the Let’s Read with Words Alive Family Literacy Program with families attending 27 Head Start, Title 1 elementary schools, public libraries and out of school time providers.

This program and partnership supported strategic goals of all partners:

- To engage the whole community in working together to ensure that children are ready for school (School Readiness).
- To develop programs, competencies and linkages that support and promote parent empowerment and self-sufficiency. (Parents – Empowerment/Self-Sufficiency)

Our partnership also supported commonly adopted school readiness goals for infants, toddlers and preschoolers:

- Social & Emotional Readiness: Children will demonstrate appropriate social skills to engage with adults and peers.
- Language & Literacy: Children will increase awareness of sounds, books, words and print.
- Approaches to Learning: Children will demonstrate attention, persistence, engagement, curiosity and initiative.

OUR PROGRAM METHOD & PROCESS CONDITIONS
Our research based, seven-week program provides 10.5 hours of parent education on topics of early literacy development for preschool age children. Each program session includes information and skill building exercises for parents, group story time and guided activities for parents and children.

Research shows that the most effective forms of family engagement are those that engage families in working directly with their children on learning activities at home.1 Our program is designed to meet the process conditions needed to build the strong family engagement that leads to positive learning routines and improved achievement. Each of our program sessions are:

- Linked to learning: Content and activities are directly connected to age-appropriate developmental milestones and what children are expected to do academically.
- Relational: Activities help families build relationships, get to know one another and build trust.
- Developmental: Families are learning new skills, and after participating, better understand how to support their child’s literacy development at home.
- Collaborative: Families are working together to learn a new skill as a group and with their children.
- Interactive: Families practice new skills they are expected to use at home and have opportunities for corrective feedback.
FAMILIES SERVED

During the 20-21 school year, 395 children and their families participated in the Let’s Read Family Literacy Program with Words Alive. Partners trained by Words Alive to implement the program within their own organization were empowered to serve an additional 150 families.

Of reporting families...

- 100% were represented by a female family member, such as mothers, grandmothers, and adult siblings.
- 65% speak a language other than English with their children at home. Represented languages include Spanish, Farsi, and Loa.
- the average age of the attending adult was 31.2 years old.
- the average number of children at home ages 0-8 years was 1.63

PARTNERS

Thank you to the following community partners who courageously collaborated to connect families with experiences to read, think, create, and play:

Diamond Educational Excellence Partnership Cohort
- Balboa Elementary
- Chollas-Mead Elementary
- Encanto Elementary
- Johnson Elementary
- Webster Elementary

Fullerton School District - Parent Engagement

Lindsay Community Day School

Neighborhood House Association – Head Start Cohort
- Balboa Lutheran Head Start
- Bethel Head Start
- Clairmont Head Start
- Euclid Ave. Head Start
- McGill School of Success
- Mercado Head Start
- Miller Head Start
- North Park Early Head Start
- STEM Head Start
- Urban Village 2 Head Start
- Walker Head Start
- Webster Head Start

San Diego Public Library Cohort
- Central Branch
- City Heights/Weingart Branch
- Linda Vista Branch
- Logan Heights Branch
- San Ysidro Branch
- Skyline Hills Branch

Oceanside Cohort
- Boys & Girls Club of Oceanside
- Laurel Elementary
- Oceanside Public Library
- Women’s Resource Center of Oceanside
RESPONDING TO COMMUNITY NEEDS

Protecting *opportunities* for children to learn and their *motivation* to learn is the highest call to action for community-based organizations with educational resources to lend during this reimagined school year and the long-term pandemic recovery. Reading can do both by accelerating, amplifying, prolonging and enriching learning experiences for children and their families. Doing this requires honoring children as whole people and empowering the adults in their lives with accessible tools and support.

To support families at home during the pandemic, Words Alive retooled our Let’s Read program for remote delivery in spring 2020 — distributing books and curated activities in English and Spanish along with school supplies in grab and go bags; sending targeted strategies, ideas, and support via text messaging platforms; and creating a web-based portal with recorded videos where families could access additional program content as digital connectivity improved.

In the time to learn and tinker since, we have elevated our content and teamed up with creative partners like the New Children’s Museum to diversify projects for families, leveraged new technology tools to communicate remotely with families in more languages, designed new methods to capture evidence of activity, and most importantly, added live program sessions via zoom where families engage with a trained teaching artist who models effective questioning and engaging read aloud experiences.

Our success during the prolonged pandemic has been informed by our courage to collaborate creatively, our commitment to evaluating what works, and invaluable community-informed recommendations from the San Diego Distance Learning Equity Taskforce white paper Beyond the Hotspot.
How Do We Connect Families to the Power of Reading?

**The Words Alive Way**

**Bring People Together**
A total of 395 families participated in the Let's Read program in the 20-21 school year, with trained partners empowered to reach an additional 150 families.

**Create Access**
Families took home 4,793 new children’s books, with 36% more families reporting ownership of at least 15 books by program’s end.

**Build Habits**
By program’s end, the number of families who reported looking at books everyday grew by 64%.

**Practice What Works**
Families focused on learning strategies that support the power of play and children’s innate sense of wonder.
Practicing What Works
OUTCOMES – WHAT CHANGED FOR FAMILIES

Research shows that providing books alone is not enough to jumpstart or strengthen reading habits at home. Instead, the most successful family literacy program models target (a) changing parent behavior and their understanding of their role in children’s pre-literacy development and (b) increasing parent understanding of the impact of a positive learning environment on a child’s education.

Using this research base as a guide, and evaluative tools identified or developed by our third-party evaluative partners at the University of San Diego’s Caster Center for Non-Profit and Philanthropic Research, our Family Literacy Program focuses on three key impact goals. That:

Parents develop an enduring commitment to reading. Meaning parents internalize the value of reading and develop durable family reading habits as they experience positive, shared reading interactions with their young children.

Parents and children become life-long learners. Meaning parents experience positive attitudinal shifts about learning and their role as their child’s first and foremost teacher. Parents expand knowledge of children’s brain and reading development, and practices that support their children’s learning.

Parents become advocates for their children and their futures. Meaning parents are empowered to invest in the future of their family by increasing self-confidence in their role as their child’s first and foremost teacher.

Our ultimate objective is that children and their parents believe in the power of reading and love what reading means in their lives. That is the tipping point between someone who can read and someone who calls themselves a reader. To get there, our program aims specifically to influence how parents feel, what they know, and what they do about their child’s reading development and enjoyment.

In our ninth year delivering the program, the workshop series increased child interest in reading and provided parents tools and confidence to change reading behaviors at home.
WHAT PARENTS SAID

Parents who participated in the program were asked to complete an electronic retroactive evaluation survey in the week following the program. This survey measure parent confidence in reading to their child and understanding of how small children develop as readers, with importance placed on literacy building activities and literacy behaviors before and after the program.

Survey responses from parents who participated in the remote version of the program were 100% positive. Parents stated they were reading more with their children, that they learned more about early literacy development in young children and were better prepared to support their children while learning at home during the pandemic.

SURVEY RESPONSES AT A GLANCE

100% of families said they looked at books from their learning kits together.

In addition, of reporting families:

- 85% reported using provided questions while they read stories with their child
- 83% reported using the provided conversation prompts to talk about the stories they read.
- 80% reported using provided prompts to engage in play and pretend with the stories they read.
- 65% of families reported using provided prompts to write and draw with the stories they read.
- 75% of families reported using prompts to connect elements of the story to their child’s life and world

As shown at right, key indicators of book ownership, the frequency, and duration of book exploration each showed gains on the parent retrospective evaluation:

- The number of families who reported looking at books together every day increased by 64%.
- Almost 3 times as many families spent 30 minutes or more when looking at books together by program’s end.
- The number of families with access to at least 15 children’s books at home increased by 36%.
RETROACTIVE PARENT EVALUATION

The figures below compare how many parents rated themselves at the highest end of the scale for key literacy building indicators before and after the program. The % increase on the far right reflects how many MORE parents rated themselves at the highest end of the scale for each indicator after completing the program. Note that n=60 or 15% of participating families.

* Parent/Child engagement is described within the evaluation as pointing at or talking about the pictures, asking, and answering questions, etc.
* Creative activities are described in the evaluation as singing, dancing, drawing, storytelling, etc.

Looking at the data from a different angle, below is a summary of the average response on a Likert Scale of 1-5 for each item on the retroactive parent evaluation, as self-reported by parents before and after the program. Note that n=60 or 15% of participating families.

**Parent Knowledge and Book-Sharing Behaviors (Scale of 1-5, where 1=low & 5=high)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My child enjoys looking at books.</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child is engaged when we look at books together*</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child knows what role the author and illustrator have in a book.</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am engaged when I look at books with my child*</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know the importance of play in my child’s learning.</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I model curiosity for my child by using phrases like “I wonder” or</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I noticed that”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spend time with my child working on creative activities*</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I link items in the story to aspects of my child’s life or experiences.</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know the importance of exploring the environment in my child’s learning.</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**PARENT COMMENTS**

Parents were also asked how reading at home had changed since participating in the program. After the program, parents reported positive changes in attitudes about reading at home and felt more empowered to help their children.

*Parent comments about changes included:*

“It has allowed us to relax and let go of stress.”

“It has given us a way to extend the fun of reading books together. We can get more creative than just reading and asking questions and come up with activities to do that relate to the books we read.”

“When we read, I would ask “what happened”. Now I go into more detail. I ask different questions and he can tell me more about what he understands. His favorite was the book about the penguin who goes to the moon. I asked, “who were his friends?” I liked listening to the questions you asked during the reading session. My questions got better, more detailed, and complex.”

“I liked the projects that came with the books; It gave me options and the projects are what the kids loved the most. They are happy to read books and do art, but they loved putting them together in play! When we did the one with the bugs, they would say “Mommy, let’s go outside at look for bugs like in the story.” They loved it most when I would do it with them.”

“It’s changed so much! The books in Spanish were really helpful. I would read to her in English because we only had English books but when we read together in Spanish, she really loved it. It made a big impact. Our primary language spoken at home is Spanish.”

“It’s influenced how I ask questions and expand the children’s’ responses. I use more open-ended questions for reading to get more information from them and make them think.”

“We used to go to the park to read and get some fresh air, but during the pandemic we were couped up for so long. He wasn’t usually the one to grab a book, but he has a box of books and a box of monster trucks – he used to go for the monster trucks, but now he’ll pick up a book 2-3 times a day.”

“We’re more spontaneous. Nothing is perfect, just get up and grab a book or try an activity from the kit. I liked to catch him off guard and say let’s do this one (activity from the kit) and see him light up. He’d say, “that was cool mom!””
Parents were also asked to identify their greatest discovery or the most valuable thing they learned through participating in the workshops. Their statements suggested a better understanding of the importance of reading with their children and their own roles in their children’s literacy development.

“I discovered that kids are curious, you need to facilitate their curiosity by asking certain questions and giving them time to answer.”

“I used to read to them, but I didn’t ask questions like you showed us. Like ‘What do you see? What’s happening?’ Or talking about what the book might be about. Asking questions helped a lot for their understanding. They’ve gotten really into it and now we take turns telling stories without books.”

“I learned that we enjoy art activities! That was new. I’m not artsy, and I assumed he wasn’t either, so it was fun for us to do the activities together and have them relate to the story. I wouldn’t have come up with those projects. I liked that they were connected to the book. It’s encouraged me to look for art activities online because he’ll ask to do art with every book! Now he expects it. He’ll say, ‘are we going to make something?’ after we read. It’s motivated him to make things when we read.”

“We learned how to get my 1-yr old involved: She is all over the place. She would crawl into my lap or over the books while we were trying to read or do the projects. Gio said ‘let’s do circle time like at school.’ So we’d set up a circle of their stuffed animals around her twice a day to help keep her in one place and occupied while we read.”

“The importance of being intentional with the choice of words we use to model curiosity.”

“She used a big Word. I can’t remember what it was, but it was a BIG word for her. She didn’t do that before, but I think now that we read the words in the books, she knows more words. Now when we’re reading, she’ll ask me what the words are and what they mean. She points to the words and asks me what they mean.”

“I discovered that children learn when playing.”

“I discovered walking through the book first and making predictions.”
Additionally, parents commented on the program’s support of **building habits**:

“I’m most proud of being able to do it every day: I used to read, but now we don’t miss a day. I don’t have to ask them, they just bring me a book. They expect it. When they tell me they are bored, instead of telling them to watch TV, now I tell them to go get a book.”

The Program reinforces and encourages me as the parent to continue the fun (and hard!) work of learning and reading.”

“I work a 8-hour shift, do my own schooling, have house chores, and have the kids at home - so it’s a lot. My time towards reading changed – I used to leave it until the end of the day, but I wanted to get him away from TV. I intervened his TV time to make sure we did it earlier. I’m proud of my time management to make it happen.”

“We used to read a bible bedtime story at bedtime every night. It stopped about four months ago – I don’t know why. The program got us started again and now we’re reading every night.”

“My daughter is engaging with books and loves books. If I’m stressed out, I bring a book out to read together because it brings her joy. At any time of day, I can bring out a book. If she’s mad, or sad or fussy or anything I bring out a book and she loves it. When I saw you reading during story time and how you made it fun it motivated me to read more with her.”

Parents were asked to how the program impacted their children’s **interest in learning and their time at home while schools were closed** due to the pandemic. Family responses suggested increased interest to engage with one another and their peers.

“I was concerned when COVID hit that my son’s preschool would have to be put on hold. This program allowed us to have the opportunity to have some normalcy in my son’s life.”

“We looked forward to every Wednesday. My daughter and I started a stronger bond with alone time which we both enjoyed.”

“We have relied on the “live” story time every Monday. I am so sad it is done. It helped my daughter connect with another adult(s) besides me and see other kids participating as well.”

“Going to the reading club helped my baby become less shy around other people. Before she didn’t talk or interact with the other kids at daycare and now, she does and with other kids outside of daycare too.”

“It’s kept him learning while the libraries are closed. He can keep reading with this program at home.”

“He loved it. He always sees his siblings in school and he wanted to go too until these classes. He said it was his school.”

“Brings excitement to learning. Its more hands on than normal distance learning.”

Finally, we asked parents to identify one word to describe their experience participating with their child and other families in the program. Their responses suggested an empowering experience for families.

“Moving...that might sound cheesy. Seeing him light up was the best. Watching him get into the story and excited about the art was moving.”

Other descriptions included: helpful, enjoyable, awesome, engaging, fun, perfect, fantastic, exciting, good, excellent tool, excellent, learning, beautiful, great.

WHAT PARTNERS SAID

The movement to make reading matter gathers the greatest momentum when children and families live in literacy rich communities. That means the spaces where families gather and the organizations they interact with are prepared and empowered to incorporate engaging reading experiences into their own program offerings.

During the 2020-21 program year, Words Alive shared what we have learned about what works with four community partners organizations in the Oceanside Community.

Partners who were trained to implement the Let’s Read Program completed evaluations after training and after receiving support throughout implementation, participated in a qualitative interview in the weeks following their final round of delivering the program.

Implementing partners were asked to reflect on if and how this collaboration deepened their own work or empowered their team to do something new. Partners’ responses reflected a broadened audience for their programming and increased capacity to support reading development in young learners.

About increased capacity and intentionality of content delivered, partners said:
“The program taught us how to ask good questions and deeper things to do when looking at books with the kids. We grew our skillsets to support students’ reading. It was all prepared; we could follow the content, and the agenda was clear, until we got more comfortable with what to do on our own. We’re also more intentional. We already read and do crafts, but we hadn’t thought about connecting them before, or doing it together on purpose. Before, kids could choose to make a craft or read on their own, but now we do it as a group in our other programs too.” – Boys & Girls Club of Oceanside

“We followed the materials and added our own songs to start and stop. Anchor songs helped communicate expectations. It helped to know (from the prepared materials) what the goal of the session and what the background was, so that we could highlight that part. Otherwise, it would be just a Storytime. A lot of story times go through the motions of songs and the story, but don’t focus on the “why” or the “try this” for families. There is more of that in this program. It’s not just giving your kids something to do for 20 minutes. Because of what we learned; we’ve changed the way we prepare our lesson plans for families in the adult learner program. For example, we’ve incorporated asynchronous materials and activities like Let’s Read.” – Oceanside Public Library

“I knew I had allies in the classroom, and this was a meaningful collaborative tool to support teachers and families. Families were so engaged – I heard lots of descriptive language and it was a great teaching opportunity for parents. Modeling the questioning and book handling - it gave them something to run with at home during a stressful time with virtual learning. Teachers kept a copy of the books in their classroom and said that the students reached for those books again, asking her to re-read them aloud.” – Speech Pathologist, Laurel Elementary School

About broader audiences, partners commented:

“We definitely had more interaction with parents and small children since starting Let’s Read. The program has been a way for children who are not old enough for our usual school-age programs to get involved in the Club atmosphere.” – Boys & Girls Club of Oceanside

“I’m going to use these materials to support families on my speech caseload. Having play-based activities and a copy of good books at home will help what we cover in therapy go farther. It will support community among those families too.” – Speech Pathologist, Laurel Elementary School
REFLECTIONS AND ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

In our ninth year delivering the Let’s Read Words Alive Family Literacy, we continue to observe a deep resiliency among families, and that supporting parent involvement in literacy development translates to stronger reading habits at home, and that given the tools, parents are ready to invest in their child’s learning.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Families who participated in the remote delivery of the program in Spring 2021 grew their access to books, and exploratory habits and skillsets around reading, but that growth was not as much as that of families who participated in in-person program delivery in recent years.

We believe the change families undergo by participating in the program is strongest when those families have the opportunity to learn alongside one another in shared experiences, such as positive and playful read alouds where teaching artists model ways to encourage child participation, and activities that provide parents opportunities to practice the reading engagement strategies suggested.

Adding live, virtual program sessions to the remote model of Let’s Read with Words Alive helped protect children’s sense of community and opportunities to learn while providing parents and caregivers opportunities to see strategies in action. However, in-person programming remains the more robust model for family learning. As community partners prepare to return to in-person instruction, Words Alive will continue to explore practices and processes that can safely bring families together to learn.

In the meantime, we look forward building strong reading habits together – discovering the growth and magic that comes along with sharing stories.

THANK YOU

Words Alive and participating families share deep gratitude to the philanthropic leaders who invest in our movement to make reading matter and who ensure that each child participates in the Let’s Read program at no cost to their family:

Transformational Leaders
Anonymous
Century Club of San Diego
Dr. Seuss Foundation
The Conrad Prebys Foundation
William Gumpert Foundation

Impact Investors
L3Harris Foundation
Oceanside Community Foundation
Qualcomm Incorporated
The Westreich Foundation
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Carleton Management Inc.
Christensen Family Foundation
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Houlihan Lokey
Jennifer & Thomas Janes
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1 Cotton, K., Wiklund, K., Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, School Improvement Research Series. In Parent Involvement in Education.