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Ten years and growing

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Early Childhood Resources is a unique combination of outreach programs and specialized library materials serving children pre-birth to kindergarten, their families and caregivers. By providing an environment rich in language, through talking, listening and reading to children, parents and caregivers build the experiential and linguistic foundations necessary for future reading and educational success. These experiences also encourage bonds between the child and adult that foster confidence and a strong sense of self for the child. For the adult, focusing attention on a child's language and literacy activities encourages a heightened sensitivity to the developmental and individual needs of the child. The goal of all the *Early Childhood Resources* outreach programs is to support parents and caregivers in this process. All programming and materials are developed around the principles of developmentally appropriate practices with sensitivity to diverse populations.

Ten Years and Growing

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Multnomah County Library youth librarians provide traditional services to children through storytimes in the library and in child care centers or Head Start programs. What separates *Early Childhood Resources* programs from these traditional library services, is the emphasis on adults. While some *Early Childhood Resources* programs are presented to children, they are done so as a modeling or training for adults. Caregivers and families have the greatest influence on a child's consistent literacy development, but adults must first see the need for early language and literacy activities. The recent brain development research has created a new sense of urgency and understanding of early literacy experiences.

An Oregon State Library 1988 *Library Services and Construction Act* (LSCA) grant called *Reaching For Reading* initiated the services to the early childhood community. This \$27,000 beginning grant provided a rotating book collection to 60 child care centers and Head Start programs. It also included two training sessions for early childhood staff to encourage use of books in the classroom. *Early Childhood Resources* has grown over the past ten years, in spite of lean financial times, because the programs are considered vital to the community. The Portland Multnomah Progress Board's *Children's Readiness to Learn: Strategies for Improvement* (1998) report emphasizes the need for early language and literacy development, while recognizing the Multnomah County Library as the only source for such programs in the county. The original half-time Early Childhood Specialist position has grown to three full-time Early Childhood Specialists who are educated in child growth and development, curriculum planning and

adult education. Two clerical/delivery staff take the Library out the front door and into the community.

PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Parent Education Program is an outreach program designed to provide parents with a positive model of sharing books with children, to encourage parents to read regularly to children and to help create a love of books in children. The program coordinator visits social service agencies on a regular basis. These agencies include county parent/child development centers, high school teen parent classes, substance abuse programs, and domestic violence shelters. Information about emergent liter-



Renea Arnold, Parent Education Program coordinator, reads with toddlers at a local agency.

acy is presented to the parents and a developmentally appropriate storytime provided to their children. Parents are encouraged to visit their neighborhood library, meet the youth librarian and explore the children's literature sections. Some of the agencies also receive books through the book delivery program described later in this article.

The Born to Read project, a national early literacy program for at-risk, expectant parents under the auspices of the American Library Association, is an integral part of the Parent Education Program. The program coordinator gives presentations at high school teen parent programs and other agencies in the County that assist at-risk parents. The goal is to motivate parents to read to their children before and after they are born. Parents who participate in the presentation can visit the library and receive free incentive books including the *Eensy Weensy Rhyme Book*, developed for the program. Newborns receive the ever popular Born To Read T-shirt. The project was started with an Oregon State Library LSTA grant, which included the production of two videos, *Born to Succeed* or *La Llave del Exito*. In the videos young parents relay their personal stories about why reading to their babies is important.

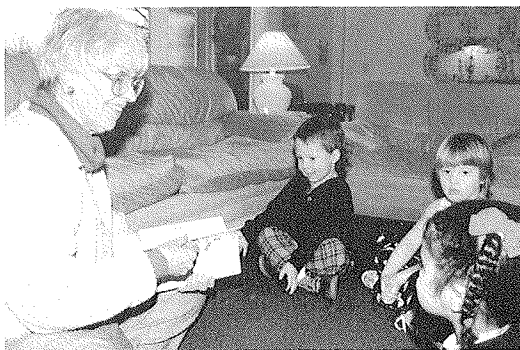
* For information on the videos or rhyme book see: <www.multnomah.lib.or.us/lib/entre/ecr.html>

CHILD CARE OUTREACH

The Early Childhood Book Delivery Program, the new face of the original grant, now serves 129 child care centers and Head Start programs along with 19 agencies and 60 family child care providers, with numbers growing each month. Every two months a site receives a box of 25 to 50 paperback picture books. Child care providers and agencies have limited preparation time. Having a changing supply of picture books has been a special "gift" to the sites. Interestingly, many staff at the sites report that the delivery services has motivated them to purchase more of their own books and to use the library more often, particularly for specific themes. Visits made by clerical staff to exchange the book collections also offer an opportunity to share information about other library resources.

Parents need reliable, affordable, quality child care. Recent studies have shown that the education and training level of child care providers measurably affects the quality of care for children. The Early Childhood Resources Trainings actively support the early childhood care and education community's effort to improve the quality of care. Trainings are presented at various library sites by area clinicians, Early Childhood Resources and other Youth Services staff. The trainings are specifically designed to meet requirements for state and child care self-certification standards. Training subjects have included health and safety, management and supervision, parent/provider relations, implementing developmentally appropriate practices, professionalism, and curriculum areas such as science, music, circle time activities, puppet making and storytelling. Trainings are hands-on, practical and interactive. Providers can immediately implement what they have gained.

Trainings are also done at the child care sites to support each site's use of the book delivery system. All new child care sites are required to have this training. Other sites receive the training as time allows. The training covers the latest brain development research, language and literacy experiences to support that development, curriculum ideas and promotion of other library resources.



Frances Kinkade, Family Child Care Program coordinator, enjoys working with children in a family child care home.

The Family Child Care Program sends staff and volunteer mentors into family child care homes weekly for four weeks to present a modeling storytime for the children. The mentor assists the provider in using theme-based curriculum tubs that include picture books and teacher aids. By the end of the four weeks the provider is doing the storytime as the mentor observes and offers support. At the completion of the mentorship, the provider is placed on the book delivery program. To participate in the program family child care providers are required to attend a library orientation training that covers basic child development with an emphasis on the latest brain development research, the importance of reading with children, and the details of the program. Additional trainings are provided upon the providers' needs and interests.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Trained volunteers are the backbone of the BOOKS WHILE YOU WAIT PROGRAM, designed to furnish children's books in waiting rooms and lobbies of city, county or state agencies where parents and children are waiting for medical or social services. Picture books and beginning readers are provided in English, Spanish, Russian and Vietnamese.

Agencies report great enthusiasm for the program. Often parents do not bring toys or books from home to deal with the wait, which can sometimes be as much as an hour. Children become bored and parents impatient. The books become a focal point for parents and children to enjoy this waiting time together. If this previously stressful time can have moments of pleasure, it is hoped that the families will repeat this experience at home by reading to their children. Each month volunteers visit approximately 30 agencies to replace and exchange the collections. Sites include county medical, dental and mental health facilities, corrections field offices and jails, Adult and Family Services, and Child and Family Services offices.

The Early Childhood Resource Centers, created for early childhood care and education professionals, offer curriculum, child development and professional development materials, including *It's In The Bag*, an extensive gathering of curriculum materials to be used in the classroom or child care home. Bags are available in English with a few in Spanish. The bags contain three to five picture books, a curriculum guide and a related activity such as a toy, puzzle or flannel board story. The curriculum guides assist teachers in creating a whole experience around the theme. The bags are divided into two age ranges, pre-school and toddler, with books and materials chosen appropriately for each age group. Although designed for early childhood professionals, parents also enjoy the resources. The Centers are located at Albina, Capital Hill, Holgate branch libraries, at Gresham Regional Library and at Central Library with a new site opening at the Midland Regional Library in January.

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- Every year incremental growth in public library staffing moves a number of libraries toward satisfying the staffing level criteria of one paid staff person per 4,000 persons in the service area. It is expected that this incremental growth will help a few of the libraries currently not meeting this criterion to satisfy it in the future. However, it is also expected that staff decreases resulting from Measure 47/50 in a few libraries will cause setbacks in meeting this criterion in next year's benchmark progress report.
- The residents of a handful of libraries serving populations over 10,000 persons also end up being categorized as underserved because their jurisdictions have not traditionally employed a professional librarian with a Master of Library Science degree, or have made a decision not to re-employ a professional. Retirements and future hiring decisions will most likely affect this criterion's satisfaction by these libraries.


NEW USES OF THE LIBRARY BENCHMARK

The acceptance of the library benchmark by the Oregon Progress Board, and its ongoing maintenance by the State Library has led to its being used in other ways. The federal Institute of Museum and Library Services that administers the new Library Services and Technology Act stressed the importance of evaluating the use of LSTA funds in each state. The LSCA/LSTA Advisory Council subcommittee developing the Oregon LSTA Five-Year State Plan accepted the State Librarian's proposal to establish LSTA Benchmarks to assist in evaluating the use of Oregon's LSTA funds. One of the LSTA Benchmarks is "the percentage of Oregonians served by a public library that meets minimum service criteria" - the same library benchmark described in this article. When the Council and State Library Board were

adopting the LSTA Five-Year State Plan and the LSTA Benchmarks, it was expected that LSTA competitive grants submitted under certain LSTA priorities would advance the number of libraries meeting the library benchmark.

State Library staff delivered a report about the current library benchmark progress report to the State Library Board at their December 4, 1998 meeting. Board interest in developing some strategies for increasing the number of libraries meeting the library benchmark surfaced. The State Librarian and Library Development staff engaged in some planning discussions with a Board representative. On January 22, 1999 they made a report to the LSTA Advisory Council, and sought the Council's interest in developing a special LSTA Benchmarks grant program. The Council encouraged the development of a draft application packet to review at their May 25, 1999 meeting.

THE LIBRARY BENCHMARK AS A PLANNING TOOL

Local library leaders can use the library benchmark as a tool for improving service in their communities. The specific criteria that are not met by a local library can be targeted in planning sessions, and strategies developed for how the library might satisfy them. Short-term strategies to move a library from underserving citizens to adequately serving them may include incremental budget increases, a volunteer program (including training) for providing children's programming, fund development efforts for enhancing the library's basic support, and, applying for grants, particularly if an LSTA Benchmarks grant program is offered. Ideally, the planning effort will also identify major governance and funding changes to accomplish as the means to move service to citizens into the excellent level. 

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Goal No. 1 of the National Education Goals states: *By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.* Too many children are coming to kindergarten lacking the language and cognitive foundation necessary for school success. Busy, stressed parents do not spend sufficient time talking, reading, singing or interacting with their children. Child care providers are often under-educated and under-trained for the vitally important work they do. Early childhood is the critical time for brain devel-

opment. Adults must recognize their role and responsibility in a child's development. Influencing the attitudes and behaviors of one adult can impact the children in that adult's circle and many more children to come. As we begin the twelve month countdown to the year 2000, the goal feels much too large but the goal keeps us moving forward. *Early Childhood Resources* has made great strides in the past ten years and will continue to support adults through training, resources and inspiration. 