

Memo

To: Montana State Library Network Advisory Council

From: Sara Groves, MSL Communications and Marketing Coordinator

Date: November 20, 2015

Re: Early Literacy update

Ready 2 Read Rendezvous

The bi-annual Ready 2 Read Rendezvous was held at the Bozeman Public Library on October 9 – 11, 2015. A total of 44 librarians from around the state participated at the Rendezvous, representing 31 different libraries. All librarians who attended represented public, school/community libraries, or tribal libraries.

On Friday, October 9, Jeri Robinson, Vice-President of Education and Family Learning at the Boston Children's Museum, was our featured speaker. Jeri presented to the group on Massachusetts' Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant and how museums and libraries worked together – along with various state agencies, preschools, and childcare centers – to support kindergarten readiness.

In December 2011, Massachusetts was one of nine states to win a federal Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge grant (RTTT-ELCG) to spur innovation in statewide systems of education. The Early Learning Challenge is designed to close the achievement gap for high needs children and to ensure that all children enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

Boston Children's Museum (BCM) was selected by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care to implement a statewide strategy to bolster the capacity of museums and libraries to collaborate in their local communities by offering more support for early literacy programming, resources for STEM activities, a focus on kindergarten readiness, and participation in the state's Brain Building in Progress campaign.

As our nation commits to early learning as a national priority essential to our economic and civic future, it is time to become more intentional about deploying these vital community resources to this challenge. BCM led the charge and helped museums and libraries realize their ability to play a stronger role in early learning for all children. 56 libraries and 49 museums from across the state are active in the project.

Jeri shared the effort from Massachusetts museums and libraries to sustain their new community relationships and innovative early childhood programming by creating a framework for four focus areas (STEM, Brain Building in Progress, kindergarten readiness, and literacy). BCM and other partners provided activities for a full year of programming that can be adapted by any museum or library. The

Passport to Kindergarten Kit contains an educators' guide and a sample "passport" for children and families to use to document their participation. In addition, there are many parent tips sheets in multiple languages that can be used thematically with your Passport to Kindergarten programming. This is all available online and Jeri emphasized how to scale the MA model to something that would work in Montana.

A grant from First Interstate BancSystem Foundation paid for Jeri's travel expenses and stipend.

On Saturday, our speakers were Marisa Conner, Youth Services Coordinator at Baltimore Public Library in Maryland, and Dorothy Stoltz, Community Outreach and Programming Coordinator at Carroll County Libraries in Maryland. Marisa and Dorothy are also co-authors of the book, "The Power of Play: Designing Early Learning Spaces". Dorothy and Marisa presented key methods and knowledge that librarians need to transform any library space into a dynamic space for young children to play and learn. They explored ways for librarians to make good decisions regarding practical design, materials and resources to create interactive play spaces for early learning. They shared success stories from their own communities and around the country of how play works in the library and demonstrated how libraries become community partners in preparing children for success in school.

On Sunday, we worked together to identify what types of services our communities need in regards to early learning and child development. Then we worked to identify what services and programs our libraries offer to support these needs and – if there's a need identified that is not being met by anyone – could the library fulfill that need or partner with an organization to solve it? We also committed to our year-long projects that will help our libraries more effectively meet the needs of our communities regarding early childhood. Finally, we worked together to develop a mentoring program based on what we're learning in Supercharged Storytimes. Newer librarians were paired with librarians who have been doing this for a long time and with librarians who were close in proximity to them so that they could work together to evaluate one another's storytimes and other programming in order to offer support, feedback, and ideas.

Ready 2 Read Montana Texting Program

Now preschoolers (or at least their parents and caregivers) have a whole new way to access the information needed to set them up for success in school and in life. The Montana State Library has launched a new statewide texting program, called Ready 2 Read, designed to reach parents and caregivers with messages related to early literacy skills development via text.

The texting program launched statewide on Monday, October 19. Participants will receive three messages per week designed to help parents and caregivers build early literacy skills in their four year-old through easy practices families can do every day at home, like reading, singing, talking, playing, and writing together.

The Ready 2 Read text program is based on research developed by Stanford University that found if parents of preschoolers received text messages focusing on early literacy skill development, those children scored significantly higher in kindergarten assessments.

The Ready 2 Read text program is free to Montana families. Participants do not need to be a patron of any library to participate. The program is designed for parents and caregivers of four year-olds, though families with other pre-school age children are welcome to join.



Get your four year-old

Ready 2 Read!

Send "SIGNUP" to 406.204.3583 to start receiving texts!

Participants will receive three messages per week for a total of eight months. The messages start at a basic level and build on skills developed through the program. While the program officially began on October 19, 2015, families can sign up at any time. Regardless of when they sign up to participate, families will begin with the program's first message and then continue to receive messages for eight months.

The messages are based on the latest research that has proven how children develop early literacy skills. Each message is designed to be fun and interactive between parent or caregiver and their child.

Signing up to participate is easy. Text the word "signup" to (406) 204-3583.

If, for any reason and at any time, participants want to stop receiving text messages, they just have to text the word "stop" to the same number.

The Ready 2 Read texting program is part of the Montana State Library's Ready 2 Read project, which is designed to help parents and caregivers understand the value of sharing language and literacy with their

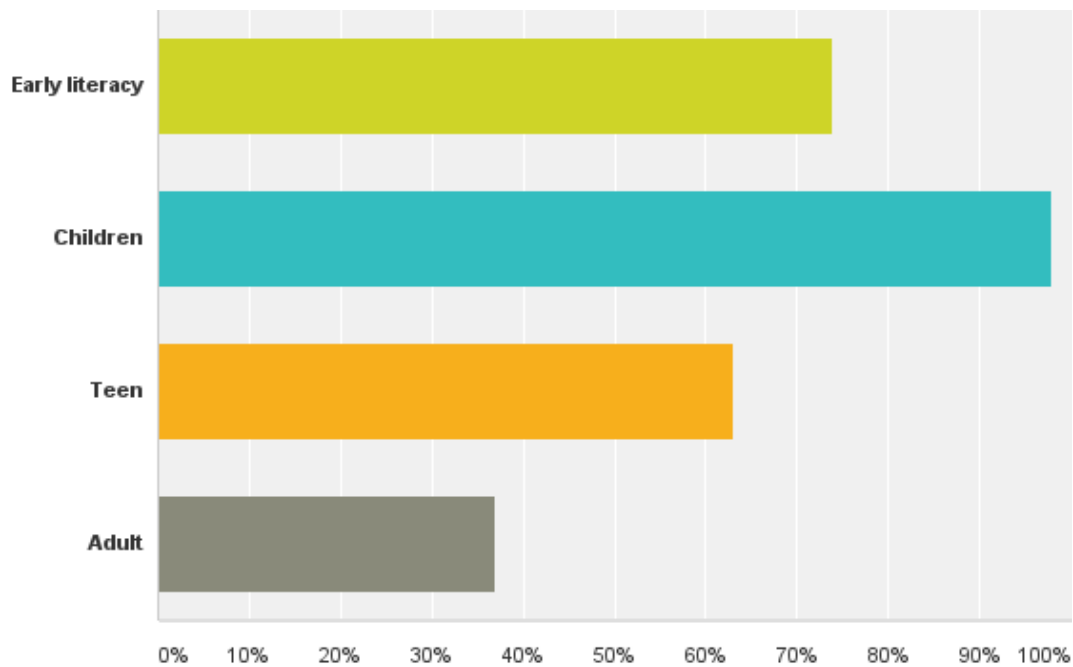
children beginning at birth. The Ready 2 Read text project was partially funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services in the form of Library Services Technology Act monies. LSTA dollars were used to pay for the development of marketing materials and for a consultant to develop the text messages. SHOUTBOMB, the company that is providing all of the technology, is currently offering their services for free as a pilot program.

Currently, there are over 200 people signed up to receive the text messages. My goal is to reach 1,000 registrants and I am working on how to effectively market the program.

Summer Reading Program

This year, the State Library conducted its' first-ever assessment of summer reading programs in the state. Findings indicate that summer reading is an important library service in communities statewide with 97% of survey respondents saying that they offer a summer reading program.

Survey respondents were asked what type of summer reading program they offered and encouraged to check all that apply since many libraries offer multiple versions of a summer reading program targeted at different audiences. Results indicate that 74% of respondents offer an early literacy program; 98% offer a children's summer reading program; 63% offer a teen summer reading program; and 37% offer a summer reading program specifically for adults.



Approximately 91% of survey respondents use the Collaborative Summer Library Program manual that is provided to them from the State Library (through LSTA funds). The number of participants in the respondents' summer reading programs ranged from 25 to thousands with the bulk of participants identified as children. Libraries identified staffing and funding as two of their biggest challenges for their summer reading programs and great participation from their communities as one of their big successes. Survey respondents also identified some ways for the State Library to assist them with their summer reading program, such as purchasing statewide advertising, and providing performers to travel from library to library.

Mind in the Making Training

In November, I had the privilege of traveling to San Diego to attend a Mind in the Making training that was specifically designed to help museums and libraries think about how they can offer programming and information on the seven essential life skills that every child needs. This was a train-the-trainer event and now I am in the process of thinking about how I can adapt this training to offer it to Montana libraries and museums.

The seven skills include:



Children need this skill in order to achieve their goals, especially in a world that is filled with distractions and information overload. It involves paying attention, remembering the rules, thinking flexibly and exercising self control.



Perspective goes far beyond empathy: it involves figuring out what others think and feel, and forms the basis of children understanding their parents', teachers' and friends' intentions. Children who can take others' perspectives are also much less likely to get involved in conflicts.



Communicating is much more than understanding language, speaking, reading and writing – it is the skill of determining what one wants to communicate and realizing how our communications will be understood by others. It is the skill that teachers and employers feel is most lacking today.



Making connections is at the heart of learning—figuring out what’s the same, what’s different and sorting these things into categories. Making unusual connections is at the core of creativity. In a world where people can google for information, it is the people who can see the connections who can go beyond knowing information to using this information well.



Critical thinking is the ongoing search for valid and reliable knowledge to guide beliefs, decisions and actions.



Life is full of stresses and challenges. Children who are willing to take on challenges (instead of avoiding them or simply coping with them) do better in school and in life.



It is through learning that we can realize our potential. As the world changes, so can we, for as long as we live — as long as we learn.

In the meantime, there were many aspects of the training that were not just relevant to parents and caregivers but also to adults in a business environment. In addition to providing the training to Montana public libraries, I will also offer the training to MSL staff as a “Lunch and Learn” series.