

Ready 2 Read Update

(Provided by Sara Groves, MSL Communications/Marketing Coordinator, for the November 9, 2010 meeting of the MSL Network Advisory Council)

Since launching last year, the **Ready 2 Read** program has helped 43 of Montana's public libraries increase their early childhood collections by providing trunks of materials to these libraries. Each trunk contains nearly 40 high quality board books, plus a book, *The Early Literacy Kit*, that outlines for librarians how to incorporate research-based messages about early literacy into their existing programming. In addition to the board books and literacy kit, each trunk also contains a binder full of information that librarians can give to parents on literacy skills, language, rhymes, and child development. The folder had over 100 handouts that could be copied and provided to parents as supplements during story times and books and babies programs.

In order to receive the trunks, librarians had to complete a survey about their current early childhood services and programming. From this survey, we learned that, at the time the survey was completed, the vast majority of Montana libraries did not have existing programming for children ages 0 – 3. Additionally, their collections that served this age group were deficient.

In order to receive the R2R bins, the recipient libraries had to complete two trainings on how to best serve this age group. In the past year, eight trainings have been offered via federation meetings and library conferences. Additionally, the libraries also had to begin a regular program that specifically served children ages 0 – 3. Today, we have 43 librarians with early childhood training under their belt and, best of all, 43 new early childhood programs. Additional libraries are working towards receiving bins this coming year, which means more trained librarians, and more libraries, working to serve this age group.

As part of the Ready 2 Read early literacy program, a partnership was developed with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services and **Ready 2 Read Goes Wild!** was launched with the goal of providing communities throughout Montana with a unique learning opportunity that unites the distinct missions of each agency together.

The **Ready 2 Read Goes Wild!** trunk provides childcare providers, preschools, early elementary educators, parents and caregivers an opportunity to share language, literacy, learning, and nature with some of Montana's youngest citizens – children from ages three – seven years old.

Part of MSL's statewide early literacy initiative, Ready 2 Read, **Ready 2 Read Goes Wild!** uses nature and Montana animals to get kids interested in language and literacy, math and science, and the natural world that surrounds them.

Each of the **Ready 2 Read Goes Wild!** trunks focuses on a theme. The themes for the current trunks include owls, ungulates (hooved animals), bears, and animal tracks. Each trunk includes puppets, a number of age-appropriate fiction and non-fiction books on the theme, rubber tracks, and animal parts, including items such as skulls, hides, antlers, feathers, and hooves. Additionally, all of the trunks are supplemented with a *Growing Up Wild: Exploring Nature with Young Children* activity guide.

In addition to the trunks, Sara Groves has been working with MT Fish, Wildlife, and Parks to coordinate trainings around the state for early childcare providers and librarians. Within the past six months, over ten trainings have been conducted and early child educators from around the state are trying to get their hands on the Ready 2 Read Goes Wild bins.

The Montana State Library believes the **Ready 2 Read** and the **Ready 2 Read Goes Wild** programs will:

- make a wide range of early literacy materials available across the state accessible to all Montanans;
- assist childcare and early education providers by supplying quality early literacy materials, lesson plans, and supplemental materials;
- help parents and caregivers understand the value of sharing language, literacy, and nature with their young children;
- supplement Montana libraries' existing early literacy collections with high-quality materials.

While we are proud of our accomplishments, there is much to do. Montana is significantly behind other states in our region in its support of early literacy development. As more and more research is completed in the field of infant neurological development and the huge impact that the development of early literacy skills has not just on a child's life but also the impact it has on our communities, states, and our entire nation, we believe that the Montana State Library and libraries throughout Montana have an obligation to do everything possible to support our youngest patrons and their families and caregivers in the development of these lifelong skills. In fact, in the 2011 legislative session, a large group of early childhood educators and providers will come together to present a bill that states that Montana has an obligation to serve its youngest citizens by providing quality early childcare education, programs and services throughout our communities. This is only the beginning. President Obama has also voiced his support of early childhood programs and has stated that there will be funding for the education of our nation's youngest citizens.

By continuing to support the **Ready 2 Read** program, the Montana State Library has the opportunity to be on the forefront of providing important services to families with young children during these critical early years. Libraries need to be part of this national effort; we are the only organization that welcomes all families with young children without a social service (like WIC) or cost (like a museum membership) attached. Additionally, we already have exactly what kids need in order to develop these skills: books. With continued training, additional resources, and more marketing materials on how to reach out to this group, our libraries will only get better and better at serving this population.