Children's Services
Partnerships for Success

Edited by Betsy Diamant-Cohen

Coauthor of the popular titles Booktalking Bonanza and The Early Literacy Kit, Betsy Diamant-Cohen brings together 18 examples of successful outreach partnerships that children's librarians and library administrators can adapt to their own situations. Readers will find:

- Descriptions of innovative, award-winning collaborations, such as The Read to Me Program (a family literacy project that evolved from a collaboration between an adult corrections facility and a public library)
- Programming ideas perfect for enhancing community outreach
- Inspiration to create and kick-start new initiatives

Filled with lively collaborative programming ideas, Children's Services will help you reach out to your communities and to your constituents in new and exciting ways.

You may also be interested in:

www.alastore.ala.org
Dr. Betsy Diamant-Cohen recalls a Rutgers library school professor lamenting the lack of professional articles written by practicing librarians and urging students to write and share experiences and practical knowledge. This encouraged Betsy to write books and articles for librarians based on her work in public and school libraries, museums, a web design firm, and a film archive. Her first article (on partnerships!) was published in 2003. A talented presenter, Betsy conducts workshops around the country, serves on Baltimore’s Reach Out and Read board and on a variety of Public Library Association committees, and is currently the early childhood specialist at Baltimore’s Port Discovery Museum. In addition, Betsy developed the popular Mother Goose on the Loose early literacy program, was selected as a 2004 Library Journal Mover and Shaker, and is a past president of the Maryland Library Association’s Children’s Services Division.

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From the start of my library career, I have been involved in partnerships. When a child’s abduction became a topic of concern in the community, my library was asked to address it in some way. I remembered seeing a puppet show on the danger of strangers at the Cambridge, Massachusetts, public library while I was still an undergraduate at college. After a phone call to the Cambridge library, a copy of the script was mailed to me. I revised the script to suit our community, and we partnered with local police to create a stranger safety program for children.

My next partnership was in Metuchen, New Jersey, where the library partnered with the public elementary schools to present a townwide poetry festival. The school media specialists and I wrote a grant that provided funding for the entire festival. The poets Eve Merriam and John Ciardi gave a public reading of their poetry in the local movie theater and at the public library. Special creative writing classes run by a local theater inspired children to write their own poetry. Teachers and school media specialists helped children choose a favorite poem and memorize it. Through schoolwide competitions, each class selected representatives to present their memorized or self-written poem. Original poems by schoolchildren were placed on display in the public library and space was reserved for the final event. As the children’s librarian, I organized the event, created the flyers, sent out the press releases, provided the refreshments, and acted as the MC. It was a wonderful experience.

Coming from a large library with multiple children’s librarians to a small-town library where I was the entire children’s department made partnership a necessity. A group of children’s librarians from central New Jersey partnered together to provide multiperson skits, puppet shows, and shadow-box theater in
our various small libraries. By sharing personnel, we were able to visit schools in all of our towns and offer a scintillating skit to encourage children to join the Summer Reading Club. It certainly was more fun than visiting schools alone, and it made a greater impact on the children.

My first job with the Enoch Pratt Free Library was as manager of the Exploration Center, a public library inside of Baltimore’s Port Discovery Children’s Museum. Although I was an employee of the public library, my physical site was inside the museum. Because of this unique setup, groups coming to the library for preschool storytime were able to hear funny stories about body parts, to visit a museum exhibit on the body and climb through a mouth or nose, and then to return to the library for a final body-themed story and finger play. The ability to take storytime attendees into museum exhibits for free as part of each library program enabled us to enrich the typical storytime experience. Moreover, museum visitors who lived anywhere in the state of Maryland were encouraged to browse through the collection of books on topics relating to each museum exhibit, to borrow them with their library cards, and to return them to their local libraries. This enabled them to extend their museum visit beyond the physical walls of the museum. As the State Library Resource Center, Pratt both distributed and collected library books from around the state, so the museum was added to its delivery route, which made this all possible.

Because our museum-library partnership was rich with so many benefits, I was inspired to spread the word about partnerships in the hope of encouraging other libraries to try them. At an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) presentation at an American Library Association (ALA) conference, I heard Dina Sherman, who was then library director of the Brooklyn Children’s Museum, speak about her partnership with the Brooklyn Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Public Library. I saw that she shared my enthusiasm for partnerships and asked whether she wanted to write an article with me. “Hand in Hand,” about museum-library partnerships, was published in Public Libraries in 2003. We then joined forces with Carol Sandler from the Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester, New York, and gave presentations on museum-library collaborations at both library and museum conferences.

Following the closure of the Exploration Center, I became the children’s programming specialist for the Enoch Pratt Free Library, and my enthusiasm for collaborative partnerships was undimmed. One phone call to the Maryland Institute College of Art led to an intern who loved creating flannelboard nursery rhyme characters for my Mother Goose on the Loose early literacy program. This expanded into a partnership with the Baltimore Museum of Art and led to another article, “Promoting Visual Literacy Using the Mother Goose on the Loose Program” (Diamant-Cohen and Valakos 2007). As the value of having an intern proved itself, an internship position within the Children’s Services Department was created and later expanded to include AmeriCorps volunteers.

The Walters Art Museum is just one block away from Pratt; a meeting with the head of the museum’s family education department led to many joint proj-
ects, including storytelling by librarians that complemented museum exhibits of picture-book illustration; art programs led by museum educators at Pratt; the ArtCart, a cart at Pratt displaying books relating to exhibits at the Walters; and joint design and staffing of an early childhood area that was used at events hosted by both institutions.

Pratt librarians, their family members, and some friends mainly staffed the first annual Fairy Tale Festival at Pratt. Yet the few institutions that we asked to participate responded enthusiastically, and as a result, we were able to offer multiple tables with more activities and to provide exposure to groups such as the Baltimore Science Fiction Society. Each subsequent festival added new partners, including the Maryland State Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Art with a Heart, the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture, the Jewish Museum of Maryland, 4-H, the Bach Society of Baltimore, the American Visionary Art Museum, the Baltimore Streetcar Museum, a local Girl Scout troop, and AmeriCorps. We also invited the Music Teachers Association of Greater Baltimore to hold its annual piano recital in our Central Hall. Children treated library visitors to live music performances, and the piano students were treated to a stunning venue with a large audience for their performance.

A phone call to a professor in the Music Education Division at the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University led to musical performances of *Zin! Zin! Zin! A Violin!* (based on the book by Lloyd Moss, Simon and Schuster, 1995) during Children’s Book Week and another article in *Public Libraries* that I coauthored with Cherie Stellacio (Diamant-Cohen and Stellacio 2008). A favorite collaboration of mine was with Anne Calderón at the Maryland Committee for Children, which resulted in the creation of Buena Casa, Buena Brasa, the Spanish-language early childhood program that was a precursor to Mother Goose on the Loose en Español. While Deborah Margolis was the youth services coordinator at the Maryland State Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, she and I adapted Mother Goose on the Loose yet again, creating an inclusive version for children with a variety of special needs. We then brought the program to the Port Discovery Children’s Museum and provided training for it at the Prince George’s County Memorial Library System, which broadened the effect of our collaboration. Mother Goose on the Loose collaborations have spread even further than my local area; a collaboration among the Vigo County Public Library, Success by 6, and the United Way of the Wabash Valley resulted in a mobile Mother Goose on the Loose program in Terre Haute, Indiana. An outreach librarian with a designated Mother Goose on the Loose mobile brings the program to a number of home day cares in both Vigo County and Clay County on a regular basis.

Through all these partnerships, I have learned that often it just takes one phone call and a lunch to meet someone at another cultural institution, followed by a brainstorming session about ways to partner. Some projects are long term and require funding, a memorandum of understanding, and strict
controls. Others are more flexible and incur no additional cost to either institution. I believe that partnerships are a wonderful tool for expanding resources in a time of a shrinking economy. For that reason, I was delighted to undertake this book project. By asking fellow librarians and museum staff to share their stories of successful partnerships, I hope to encourage readers to find new partnerships or extend the ones already in place.

The most logical way to find contributors for this book was to ask people with whom I had already directly collaborated and to ask others whose projects I held in high regard. The projects described by Ellen Riordan, Emily Blumenthal, Leah Wagner, Deborah Margolis, and Linda Schwartz are ones in which I have had some type of personal involvement. By traveling around the county to present Mother Goose on the Loose training workshops, I have met incredible people, such as Maureen Ambrosino, Cathy Lancaster, Shelley Quezada, Georgene DeFilippo, Margie Stern, and Elizabeth Gray, who all shared information about their exciting projects. Professional involvement with Maryland libraries, the ALA, and the Public Library Association provided opportunities to meet energetic librarians such as Dorothy Stoltz, Tess Prendergast, and Starr LaTronica. Involvement with the children’s museum world resulted in connections with Carol Sandler, Jeri Robinson, and Wendy Blackwell. Word of mouth directed me to the collaborative ventures of Catherine Hakala-Ausperk and Jan Johnson. And these are just a few of the myriad wonderful examples to be found! Although there are many collaborative partnerships worthy of emulation, I believe that the ones included in this book present a well-rounded base. Together, they create a broad picture of the types of partnerships, both large and small, funded and unfunded, that other public librarians may want to try.

 Librarians love to share information, and I recently discovered a helpful website on school or public library collaborative programs hosted by the Association for Library Service to Children. A number of elementary school, middle school, high school, and public librarians have shared their success stories (and cautionary tales) at the School/Public Library Cooperative Programs web page (www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/alsc/initiatives/partnerships/cooacts/schoolplcooprogs.cfm). The inclusion of information regarding funding resources and contact information for the collaboration point person makes this a very useful tool.

I would be remiss if I did not mention at this time the superb resource found at the IMLS’s website (www.imls.gov). The IMLS is the primary source of federal support for the nation’s 123,000 libraries and 17,500 museums. The institute’s mission is to create strong libraries and museums that connect people to information and ideas. The IMLS works at the national level and in coordination with state and local organizations to sustain heritage, culture, and knowledge; to enhance learning and innovation; and to support professional development. The website describes projects that have been funded by grants and provides a brief description of what grants are available for funding. One
of these grants is a national leadership grant for libraries on museum-library collaboration.

Available from IMLS are a number of publications regarding successful partnerships between institutions and organizations. In June 2009, IMLS and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting published a report titled “Partnership for a Nation of Learners: Joining Forces, Creating Value,” which describes successful multi-institutional collaborative ventures among public libraries, public broadcasting agencies, and other organizations. Some of these projects involved children; one targeted obesity in children, and another addressed childhood asthma. Descriptions of twenty projects include characteristics of successful partnerships, challenges, and lessons learned. Although the report targets the projects that received IMLS funds, it is valuable for generating ideas about collaborations to consider for your library. Keep in mind that there are still great opportunities to receive funding for partnerships through IMLS. I encourage all librarians to apply for an IMLS grant. But whether or not you apply, I hope you will get lots of wonderful ideas about partnering from this book!

References


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Community Organizations and Public Libraries
The Big Tree Library is a summer reading collaboration between the Princeton Public Library and the Princeton Recreation Department day camp in New Jersey. The object is twofold: to enrich the camp experiences for children and to take librarians and the library outside our walls to remind children spending most of their summertime in active adventures that we are the starting and destination points for adventures of the mind, in the summer and all year round, too.

Princeton Public Library serves thirty thousand residents of both Princeton Borough and Princeton Township. The library’s mission is to connect “people with ideas, information, technology, resources and each other in ways that enrich their lives and help them to realize their dreams” (www.princetonlibrary.org/about/index.html). The Princeton Recreation Department, a joint agency governed by an appointed recreation board, provides services to the Princeton community that promote fitness, wellness, and other life-quality activities. The Princeton Recreation day camp entertains more than 250 children between the ages of five and eleven for four or eight weeks using the Community Park Pool, as well as adjacent sports and nature facilities.

BACKGROUND

My daughter attended the Recreation Department’s day camp when she was six years old. She loved most of it but had a limited tolerance for chaos. I asked the counselor if there was any way she could quietly sit under a tree and read for a few minutes every day when she felt overstimulated and was told no—the
counselors had to have all the kids in their groups do the same things at the same times in order to keep track of them. My daughter quit camp. About that time, the board of trustees of the Princeton Public Library was looking for outreach programs in an attempt to build more community awareness of the library in preparation for a building program. Our original outreach idea was to take the Summer Reading Club to the summer day camp, complete with reading records, reporting, rewards, and actual circulation of materials. The logistics would have been too labor intensive and too costly, requiring up to eight volunteers and two librarians just to listen to 260 reading reports and to tabulate the results each week. Include the cost of duplicating supplies and the challenge of transporting all the paraphernalia from the library to the camp three times a week and it was too much. So we simplified it.

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

The Big Tree Library happens at the Community Park Pool, about half a mile from the library, after campers have a chance to swim and eat their lunch. We send one of our youth services librarians and (usually) two teen volunteers to read stories and to distribute paperback books at the summer day camp three times a week every week that camp is in session. The approximately 260 campers are divided into six groups: boys and girls entering first grade, boys and girls entering second grade, boys entering third and fourth grade (usually the largest group), girls entering third and fourth grade, boys entering fifth and sixth grade, and girls entering fifth and sixth grade. Each of these groups meets with a librarian once a week.

Librarian and teen volunteers arrive at approximately 1:30 p.m. to set up. They carry the plastic milk crates filled with age-appropriate paperbacks across the pool deck from the storage area to the Big Tree Library, which is a grassy area under a huge maple tree about fifty feet from the diving pool. A picnic table and benches are there to display books, and not too far away a lawn chair accommodates the reader. The children are arranged facing away from the water, and the librarian faces the pool.

At 1:45, two groups of campers, anywhere from thirty to eighty kids, arrive with as many as fifteen counselors in tow. They all stop by the picnic table to “return” the books they took home the week before. Then one group settles in on the grass surrounding the lawn chair and the other group eagerly surrounds the picnic table. The listeners hear and talk about stories for thirty minutes while the readers have thirty minutes to peruse the titles in the milk cartons to choose what they want to read on the spot and which book they want to take home. Circulation is on the honor system. At 2:15, the groups exchange places, and the former readers listen and the former listeners peruse the books. At 2:45, all campers put their books into their backpacks, gather up the towels
they were sitting on, and trudge off to the camp’s pickup spot for dismissal or after-camp care.

Librarians read materials from the library’s collection. For librarians who spend the school year reading stories to preschoolers, the chance to share favorite fables, folktales, “fractured” fairy tales and stories with more complicated plots or sophisticated humor with the six- to eight-year-olds is a treat. But trial and error has taught us that nonfiction goes over well with the older groups. With the fifth- and sixth-grade boys, we have had great success with such titles as *Bodies from the Ice: Melting Glaciers and the Rediscovery of the Past*, by James Deem (Houghton Mifflin, 2008). Books about pets and pet care are successful, as are such titles as *My Librarian Is a Camel: How Books Are Brought to Children around the World*, by Margriet Ruurs (Boyds Mills, 2005), and *The Bone Detectives: How Forensic Anthropologists Solve Crimes and Uncover Mysteries of the Dead*, by Donna M. Jackson (Little, Brown, 1996), with photographs by Charlie Fellenbaum. For older boys especially, we have found that the more gruesome the plot or photos are, the more engrossing is the read.

If the weather is rainy, the campers spend the day inside a steamy unair-conditioned school. No one carries cartons of books through a downpour to the school, but the librarian shows up and usually reads to the double group as a whole. Sometimes this is a real challenge, particularly if the campers have spent the morning watching DVDs. On those days, we try to be extra creative,
taking with us riddles, jokes, sing-alongs, and goofy poetry, things that beg for an active response.

What kind of books do we offer for borrowing? High-interest titles of all types, but those that tie in with summer movie releases are especially desirable, as are those with lots of recent television publicity. In 2008, paperbacks for younger audiences about the *High School Musical* movie were popular. Monsters, sports, and animals as pets are successful subjects as well. Chapter books in series such as Captain Underpants, My Weird School Daze, Judy Moody, the Time Warp Trio, and the Fairy Realm are popular—frankly, copies of Newbery Medal winners usually languish in the crates. Books are identified with a Princeton Public Library stamp and a Big Tree Library stamp. We do not bother with bar codes or any other processing.

**COSTS: STAFF TIME AND BOOKS**

The costs for this program include those for staff and the paperback books. We schedule an extra library staff member for Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoons for eight weeks from mid-June to mid-August to do the reading. A reliable and well-trained volunteer could do it, but we send a librarian because we are introducing ourselves to our new library users. We want them to find someone whom they feel they know when they come to the library.

We also have an assortment of eight hundred paperback books and donated plastic crates for storage. When we began the program in 1997, we spent approximately $1,000 on high-interest paperback books at Scholastic warehouse sales. Since then, we have replaced and updated materials at an annual cost of approximately $200 to $250, taken out of the youth services book budget. Books and crates are stored in a climate-controlled shed at the camp’s site throughout the year, but about six weeks before camp begins, they are all toted back to the library for inventory and replenishing. There is no need to invest in publicity, because we are collaborating at the organizational level and our audience is essentially captive.

**TRAINING AND LOGISTICS**

With respect to training and logistics, we send a librarian to meet with camp counselors briefly during their orientation. It is important that the counselors know that during the reading hour they are still in charge of discipline (they know the kids’ names and personalities better than the librarians do) and must remain alert and aware of the campers’ behavior while the kids are attending the Big Tree Library. It is important, too, that the counselors model appropriate behavior during the reading. Big Tree Library time is not an occasion for them to take a break and chat with their peers, which would distract the children
and the librarian. Usually the counselors are wonderful and as grateful for a few quiet moments as the campers are.

We contact the camp coordinator in January to get in on planning that year’s program and to find out which day of the week we will meet with which age group. We also want to know whether there are any big events, such as no camp on the Fourth of July or Cardboard Canoe Day, which might supersede the program that day. For those days, we schedule a different day that week so all groups of campers have a storytime every week. We also ask whether there are any theme weeks, so we can tie our reading materials into them.

The concept is so simple, and it works so well! Do we lose books to the honor system of circulation? Yes—but not so many that we worry about it. In fact, because they bear a Princeton Public Library stamp or two, Big Tree Library books are returned to the library year-round. And while the location, near a swimming pool, might seem both distracting to the children and hazardous to the books, neither of these fears has been much realized. First, the campers have already had almost two hours of swim time, so they are saturated with pool drama and are quite willing to engage in a good book. Second, the campers may be damp when they arrive at the Big Tree Library, but they dry off quickly and the books go into backpacks or bags for transport home.

Princeton Public Library and Princeton Recreation Department have been collaborating on the Big Tree Library for eleven years. It is a winning partnership for all. The campers have an enriched quiet moment once a week, and the librarians have a captive audience for stories, word games, and plugs for library programs. Librarians love responding to the “Hi, Library Lady!” greetings shouted across the complex as we arrive on-site, and when a child asks, “Do you remember me from camp?” we always respond with a “yes!” any time during the year.

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About the Author

Jan Johnson has been manager of youth services at the Princeton Public Library (NJ) since 1998, having been reference and children’s librarian there for the previous nineteen years. She served on the Association for Library Services for Children’s 2007 Notable Children’s Videos Committee and the 2009 Randolph Caldecott Committee and has been secretary and treasurer of the Children’s Services Section of the New Jersey Library Association. She strongly believes that going to where the children are is the first step toward creating library users. Jan can be reached at jjohnson@princetonlibrary.org.
All parents, regardless of income, education, or first language, can benefit from access to information, resources, and support about how to be their child’s first teacher. Individual organizations are not always successful in helping parents to fulfill this role. How can parents become knowledgeable about appropriate stages of development and the importance of school readiness? What strategies can a community develop to help every child become ready to learn? How can families who have limited English proficiency make successful community connections? How can a community help individuals bring out their best qualities for learning, becoming self-reliant, and raising healthy children?

**THE SPANISH MASS SOCIAL**

As four-year-old Doris and her mother sign up for the storytime club at St. John’s Spanish Mass Social, several families hover around Viviana. Viviana, fluent in Spanish, is a parent educator for the Parents as Teachers program (www.parentsasteachers.org). The families are patiently waiting to fill out an Ages and Stages child development screening (www.agesandstages.com). During Doris’s screening, Doris’s mother learns that her child demonstrates indicators for developmental delays. Viviana immediately refers the family for further assessments.

Most of the parents who come to the social—a monthly family event with community presentations, storytime, bookmobile service, music, and food—have very limited English proficiency and several are illiterate in Spanish. This
may make some of these families vulnerable to misinformation. For example, some young mothers wondered how storytimes could be appropriate for young children. One mother said, “My baby cannot participate in storytime because she cannot read.” It took Viviana fifteen minutes to explain to the mother why it is never too early to read to her daughter. Although a little hesitant, the mother was willing to participate in storytime. After the first few notes of the opening song, the mother and her baby daughter were smiling, clapping, and singing.

**DRAWING ON TALENT AND RESOURCES**

When Maryland’s Carroll County Public Library established a goal to better reach the rapidly growing number of Spanish-speaking families in this rural-suburban community forty-five minutes from Baltimore, one name came immediately to mind: Elena Hartley. Hartley, born in Peru and fluent in Spanish, directs United Hands of Carroll County, a resource and referral nonprofit organization. In 2002, St. John’s Catholic Church in Westminster, Maryland, began offering Spanish-language Mass. Churchgoers seeking advice on finding prenatal care, applying for a driver’s license, and registering their children for school inundated Hartley after mass. She made it her mission to empower
families by cofounding United Hands and creating the Spanish Mass Social, where community organizations have the opportunity to connect with families.

The Carroll County Public Library has a long history of establishing community partnerships to better serve families. It offers six full-service branches and three bookmobiles. The library invited Hartley, the Carroll County Public Schools, Carroll Community College, and others for a two-hour workshop featuring WebJunction’s Spanish-language outreach training (see the American Library Association’s collaboration with WebJunction at www.webjunction.org). Through that discussion, community representatives and library staff developed a first step for improving library services for Spanish-speaking families: offering a bookmobile stop outside the hall where the social was held.

Concurrently, several agencies in Carroll County, including the library, had adopted the internationally renowned, research-based home visitation program Parents as Teachers (PAT). Parents as Teachers targets families and child-care providers with children from birth to age five by providing one-hour visits or trainings complete with information, demonstration, hands-on activities, and follow-up support in early childhood development and school readiness. Although Carroll County (population 174,000) is predominantly a white, middle-class community with top-performing schools and a library with the state’s highest per capita circulation, several pockets of poverty exist throughout the area, and many children entering school score below the state average on the kindergarten assessment.

With local and state funding, twenty-seven staff members from seven agencies were trained as PAT parent educators. The educators help parents and child-care providers understand the stages of early childhood development by providing detailed information and conducting age-appropriate activities during home visits. Low scores on kindergarten school-readiness assessments and a countywide needs assessment drove this impressive community investment. The initiative was spearheaded by the Carroll County Public Schools’ Judy Center Partnership, a collaborative effort among professionals offering a broad continuum of early childhood education opportunities and services to foster school readiness, and the Carroll County Local Management Board, a consortium of agencies serving families and children. After its first year, PAT helped increase scores by six points for children entering school ready to learn.

The Carroll County Public Library and Resources in Reading, a Maryland-based literacy consulting firm (www.resourcesinreading.com), developed a scientifically based research study to determine the effectiveness of the library’s emergent literacy training of child-care providers. The study was inspired by the American Library Association’s Every Child Ready to Read initiative and Maryland public libraries’ It’s Never Too Early public awareness campaign. A Library Services Technology Act grant funded the study, and the support of the Judy Center Partnership was foundational to its success. The results showed a statistically significant increase in three- and four-year-olds’ listening comprehension, phonological awareness, and concepts about print (Czarnecki
2006). Several of the study’s components were adapted for the Spanish-language outreach project. The library also piloted an emergent literacy peer-coaching initiative for Maryland, which resulted in an online learning portal for storytime presenters, the Emergent Literacy Peer Coaching wiki (http://wiki.carr.org/traction/post?proj=EmergentLiteracy). This online resource was used in training Spanish-speaking nonlibrarians to present storytimes embedded with early literacy tips for parents.

Another key element to the partnership has been the consistent and persistent efforts of library staff over the years to have a presence at the community table. Their participation in meetings, projects, and collaborations of community partners has helped librarians build important relationships and ensure the importance of literacy development across all populations.

**BECOMING AN ARCHITECT FOR CHANGE**

Carroll County was lucky to have several agencies come together in a dynamic process of collaboration. A state conference on cultural and linguistic competence was a driving force in developing a blueprint for the Spanish-language outreach project. The project adapted several of the components that proved successful in the library’s study of child-care provider training. It also adapted best practices for early learning, storytimes, and community outreach to use with families at St. John’s Spanish Mass Social. A $13,000 grant provided books and school-readiness kits for the bookmobile, adult literacy instruction, and free early literacy materials for parents. The goal to sign up twenty-five families for storytime was quickly met in the first six months. The project components and best practices include the following:

- A parent survey and child assessment used as educational tools for parents; parents learn through the process of answering (in writing or verbally) the survey and assessment, which include questions such as “Which early literacy activities does your family conduct at home?” and “Is your child where she needs to be?”
- A take-home snapshot questionnaire for parents on their child’s early literacy development (see the box in this chapter “Taking a Snapshot of Your Child’s Literacy Development”).
- Free early literacy materials for home use, such as books, alphabet letters, foam shapes, and puppets, which encourage parents to attend storytime, share books at home, participate in pretend play, and conduct other early literacy activities.
- Bilingual storytimes with embedded early literacy tips for parents.
- Cross-training among agencies, including storytime training for nonlibrarians who speak fluent Spanish.
Consistent staff participation.
The treatment of parents as partners by establishing trust and building relationships.

**Taking a Snapshot of Your Child’s Literacy Development**

Can your child identify the front and back covers of a book?
Is your child able to point to the title of a favorite book?
Does your child understand that the print is what you are reading?
Is your child beginning to understand that print tracks from left to right and top to bottom?
Can your child guess what a book is about when you read the title and talk about the cover picture together?
Can your child guess when you stop and ask, “What do think will happen next?”
Is your child starting to connect to the story by telling you how a character or event relates to his or her own experiences?
Can your child clap syllables in two-syllable words?
Can your child recognize and identify some or all of the letters in his or her first name?
Is your child showing interest in learning how to write his or her name? (Adapted from Czarnecki 2007.)

Surveys, assessments, handouts, and other information are presented in Spanish and English. A separate component (not held during the church social) is adult literacy instruction, which offers one-on-one tutoring and group classes for basic Spanish-literacy skills for those who are unable to read or write and English-as-a-new-language instruction through the literacy council and the community college.

**WHAT ARE WE LEARNING?**

What are the library and its partners learning about how to effectively reach immigrant families?
Despite the time limitations of the two-hour church social, community agencies are bursting with excitement as they make strides in partnering with English-language learner (ELL) families and in connecting them to services. The community’s unique collaborative staff model (Parents as Teachers training used across agencies) is proving successful for ELL families. Despite there being an inadequate number of Spanish-speaking staff and volunteers, community partners are finding ways to consult with and coach a significant percentage of ELL families, such as by using interpreters and helping family members learn English. Storytime presenters are trained to conduct storytimes effectively in the boisterous atmosphere of the social. Parents and children cheerfully participate.

To create a stronger linkage to library services, the library will create a Sunday storytime club game board. It will use a reward point system for participation in activities. For example, points might be awarded during each bookmobile visit when a family checks out a school readiness bag with toys or for each month that no fines or overdue fees are charged or due.

Parents’ willingness to learn and grow can have a critical impact on their children. Through word-of-mouth marketing, parents often provide the best publicity for programs such as Parents as Teachers.

Agencies must collaborate to more effectively reach immigrant families and to create positive outcomes such as school readiness. High-performing collaborations can expand the community’s ability to reach into neighborhoods and homes, thereby establishing trust and building relationships. In our library and our community, we are beginning to reap the enormous benefits of stronger partnerships and empowered families.

References


About the Authors

Dorothy Stoltz is outreach services manager for Maryland’s Carroll County Public Library. She spearheaded a successful emergent literacy training study that showed statistically significant increases in early literacy skills of children (see “Every Child Was Ready to Learn,” in the May/June 2008 issue of Public Libraries). She oversees library programming, emergent literacy peer coaching, mobile services, and community outreach. Dorothy can be contacted at dstoltz@carr.org.

Susan Mitchell is coordinator for Maryland’s Carroll County Public Schools’ Judy Center Partnership. She serves as a program consultant, providing technical assistance to early childhood education programs throughout the county. She cochairs the School Readiness Team and coordinates the Parents as Teachers program.

Elena Hartley is the director and cofounder of United Hands of Carroll County, Maryland, a resource and referral agency serving immigrant families. She is a winner of Maryland’s Hispanic Heritage Award and serves on several community boards that reach children and families.

Jillian Dittrich is the children’s services supervisor for the Westminster Branch of Maryland’s Carroll County Public Library. When she is not working, she lives in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, with her husband, Charley; new baby daughter, Madison; and two cats, Ulysses and Shiloh.
Conceived through a collaboration between the Boston Children’s Museum, Head Start, Boston Public Schools, and the mayor’s office in 1999, Boston’s Countdown to Kindergarten engages families, educators, and community partners in a citywide effort to strengthen and expand early learning opportunities and to celebrate and support the transition into kindergarten, a significant educational and developmental milestone for children and their families. Through this collaborative effort, the mayor, the Boston School Committee, and the superintendent of schools are partnering with more than thirty public and private organizations, including the Boston Public Library.

Countdown to Kindergarten has a multipronged mission. Countdown hopes to ensure that Boston’s families with young children take advantage of the academic and social benefits kindergarten provides by raising public awareness about the value of kindergarten, the availability of full-school-day programs, and the steps family members can take to support their child’s kindergarten experience. In collaboration with its community partners, Countdown to Kindergarten aims to coordinate and expand social and learning activities that help children prepare for school and help them transition from home or preschool into kindergarten. It lays the groundwork for primary caregivers (e.g., parents, grandparents, guardians) to be active partners in their children’s education at home and at school, from birth through their education in elementary school and beyond. It supports the Boston Public Schools in their work to ensure that the process of choosing schools, registering, and entering kindergarten is clear and welcoming for all families.

The Kindergarten Celebration at the Children’s Museum has become a signature event for Countdown. Occurring in August each year, the celebration
Countdown to Kindergarten is the official send-off for Boston's newest kindergartners. The event is a special occasion for children and their families, providing them with an exclusive evening at the museum with free access to the Boston Children's Museum exhibits. Fun activities include climbing on school buses, playing literacy games to help learn about school readiness, and sending children home with some school supplies that will prepare them for kindergarten. Graphing games help children develop simple counting and graphing skills. For example, children added their personal information to a bar graph using squares of paper. They answered questions such as “What is your favorite color?” “In what month is your birthday?” and “What school will you be attending?” Parents are encouraged to talk with present Boston Public School staff regarding any last-minute questions about their child's new school system.

The Boston Public Library (BPL) started collaborating with Countdown to Kindergarten in its earliest days by participating in the Kindergarten Celebration. The Boston Public Library hosts a table for library card sign-ups. It often also supports the event by reading aloud to children. This has been an ongoing commitment and is a win-win situation for both partners. The collaboration costs the BPL only personnel time, after hours. Also, depending on budget, some years the library has been able to provide a free book to each child at the event.

In 2004, the library's partnership substantially grew to include their involvement in the Boston Children's Museum “I'm Going to Kindergarten” T-shirt distribution. Countdown provides each new kindergarten student with a free T-shirt, which is the child's free admission ticket to lots of fun and educational activities throughout the summer, such as trips to museums, storytimes at bookstores, swim times, and so on. The BPL's twenty-seven branches agreed to be the distribution points for the T-shirts starting in 2004. Kindergarten families were mailed a postcard inviting them into their local library to pick up their free T-shirt. The children's librarians served as contacts and were responsible for giving out the shirts, collecting postcards, and returning them to the museum for tabulation. In turn, the invitation, available in eight languages, brings new families into the libraries, where they can sign up for library cards and/or take advantage of programming.

Countdown worked with the BPL to make the T-shirt distribution more focused on school readiness. To do this, the librarians were asked to give out a readiness packet that consisted of not just the T-shirt but also the DVD I'm Ready! (which illustrates what kindergarten is like in Boston and how to get ready for it), as well as a summer guide, which lists all the fun, free stuff families can do together to keep young minds and bodies growing. Families must bring in a postcard that Countdown sends out to receive the packets or some other proof of assignment in a Boston Public School kindergarten, which librarians can then use as proof of address to help the family sign up for a library card. Proof of address can be the most difficult step for families signing up for cards, especially those who recently moved into Boston from other countries. For the
Past five years, Countdown has been able to offer incentives to libraries that work hard to promote the readiness packets, providing the three libraries with the best displays prizes for their creative efforts. These prizes are not big—usually $50 gift certificates to a local office-supply store—but they help motivate and rally a competition among the librarians.

In 2006, Countdown to Kindergarten partnered with the BPL in yet another way, working together to bring smaller, community-focused kindergarten celebrations to the many neighborhoods of Boston. Recognizing that not all five thousand kindergarten families could attend the one celebration at the Children’s Museum, the idea behind the smaller events, called Kindergarten Days, was to bring celebration opportunities into the neighborhoods where families could more easily access the special opportunities to mark their children’s milestone to kindergarten. The most successful Kindergarten Days bring neighborhood school principals and teachers in to meet their new students while providing parents and kindergarteners alike an opportunity to connect over their shared experience and feelings. The BPL cosponsors the special events, acting as the host site, providing storytime and/or other special activities, and identifying local resources and businesses to donate snacks and supplies. Countdown creates and mails the invitations; advertises the events in local newspapers; handles press releases; and provides a core set of activities, including face painting and arts and crafts. Countdown to Kindergarten also ensures there are volunteers to staff the event, although some library branches have done so with their friends-of-the-library organizations. Kindergarten Days have been beneficial to the librarians, too, by allowing the libraries to build a reputation as a resource for families in the neighborhood. Community members are introduced to the children’s librarian and learn about his or her storytimes and other free programming.

Over the years, the library has been a constant partner behind the scenes as well, attending Countdown’s bimonthly partner planning and collaboration meetings. The meetings update the partners about Countdown’s activities and include brainstorming about better implementation and outreach. They also include requests for in-kind support, including human resources. The library has been a tremendous partner on this front. In 2007, Countdown began planning its Parent as a Child’s First Teacher outreach campaign. The library signed on as a work-group member, providing invaluable input about content and distribution methods—again offering to display and/or distribute materials. In November 2008, when Talk, Read, Play was launched, all twenty-seven branches handed out palm cards to patrons as they walked in. The palm cards talked about the importance of talking with young children and included some simple developmental tips. This effort helped to disseminate more than seven thousand pieces of literature on the first day of the campaign!

One of the most promising aspects of Countdown to Kindergarten’s collaborative relationship with the Boston Public Library is its promise for duplication, even without a local Countdown to Kindergarten or similar organization.
Countdown to Kindergarten

A Kindergarten Celebration or smaller-scale Kindergarten Days can be planned with a few simple phone calls to the school district, or even to a local school, and a local vendor. To plan these events, Countdown to Kindergarten first obtains a list of all of the incoming kindergarten students from the Boston Public Schools to mail invitations. We place reminder ads in some of Boston’s neighborhoods papers, and then it is time to prepare for the children to come! There have been simpler Kindergarten Day celebrations when the children come in and enjoy face painting, temporary tattoos, coloring, and some craft activity, then enjoy a story read by the children’s librarian or a performance by some musician or magician with which the librarian has a relationship, and finally walk to a neighborhood grocery store in their “I’m Going to Kindergarten” T-shirts to pick up a free popsicle. If the librarians are hesitant about walking to a neighborhood vendor, they bring in pizza, cake, fruit, or vegetables.

Some of the best Kindergarten Day celebrations involved the local schools’ principals or teachers, nonprofit organizations that offer health-care screenings or important safety information to parents, and obstacle courses (set up by children’s librarians or local organizations). For last year’s craft, the children made foam pennants stuck onto rulers with stickers and the name of their new school. Don’t forget to have a special treat (such as pencil toppers or fun erasers) for the children who sign up for library cards at the celebration!

The Countdown team believes that project’s strong success is due to continued collaboration among public, private, and nonprofit organizations throughout the city. Countdown to Kindergarten continues to grow locally and has expanded nationally to children’s museums, libraries, and school systems.

About the Authors

Jeri Robinson is vice president of family learning and early childhood programs at Boston’s Children’s Museum and has taught and consulted in early childhood education for thirty-five years. She developed the PlaySpace exhibit (a prototype for museum early-learning family spaces), founded the Boston Cultural Collaborative for Early Learning, and cofounded Families First Parenting and Countdown to Kindergarten. Jeri received her BS, M.S.Ed., and an honorary doctorate in education from Wheelock College. In 2005, she was named to the American Association of Museums’ Centennial Honor Roll in recognition of her contributions to the museum field. Jeri can be reached at robinson@bostonchildrensmuseum.org.

Krystal Beaulieu is a program coordinator for Countdown to Kindergarten in Boston. She came to the program in 2006 after working on local policy reform with Governor Michael Dukakis. She earned her bachelor’s degree in political science and journalism from Northeastern University. Krystal lives in the Savin Hill neighborhood of Boston with her fiancé and shih tzu puppy, Teddy Roosevelt. Krystal can be contacted at kbeaulieu@boston.k12.ma.us.
In August 2008, staff from the National Children’s Museum (NCM) in Washington, D.C., traveled to Oklahoma to present a workshop, Family Literacy Projects on a Budget, to eight Ready to Learn trainers and several literacy staff from the Office of Literacy Resources in the Oklahoma Department of Libraries (ODL). The workshop was based on a simple and easy-to-use book for community educators offering resources, ideas, and helpful hints about ways to use low-cost and recycled items to develop and present effective literacy programs and related activities based on broad themes. Because of interest in the topic and the credentials of the presenters, ODL invited children’s librarians, teachers, and family literacy providers to participate. Although the workshop was initially limited to twenty-five participants, because of a high level of interest, the list of attendees expanded to fifty. The NCM staff showed how to create a multitude of crafts and story extensions using low-cost and free materials. Workshop participants were thrilled with the number of ideas that were shared and were interested and involved during the fast-paced, enjoyable workshop.

Thanks to the NCM, ODL’s expenses were minimal. Participants who traveled from across the state received travel reimbursement, and ODL provided hotel costs for the presenters. Participants brought free and low-cost everyday items from a list provided ahead of time. They shared their raw materials with one another so everyone was able to make bags full of samples to take home and use in their local programs.
For almost three decades, the Office of Literacy Resources in the ODL literacy office has worked with volunteer literacy councils that help adults improve their reading skills. In recent years, the office has expanded its services to support family and emergent literacy. Ready to Learn (RTL) is a collaborative project of ODL, the Oklahoma Educational Television Authority, and the Oklahoma Department of Human Resources (DHS); its focus is on providing books, resources, and teaching materials to aid children at risk for low literacy.

The ODL’s Ready to Learn (RTL) trainers present emergent literacy workshops throughout the state for staff of DHS-certified child-care centers. Each year, the RTL project offers a new early literacy topic with different materials, resources, and training. Along with receiving a wealth of ideas and information, child-care staff receive continuing education credits required for DHS certification. According to Leslie Gelders, ODL’s administrator, library staff is always on the lookout for resources and partnerships that can advance the office’s mission: “When our staff member told us about the National Children’s Museum program, we immediately saw that it could help with our Ready to Learn project.”

ABOUT THE BOOK

Family Literacy Projects on a Budget: A Trainer’s Toolkit, written by Wendy C. Blackwell, Jennifer Neale, Deborah Mason, Tisha Thorne, and Skye Hallman, organizes programs into themes, allowing program leaders to introduce families to many different books. Community agencies, professionals, artists, and other local groups are highlighted as invaluable resources that can provide useful information, support, and content to enrich literacy themes. The tool kit emphasizes that community involvement may start with just a simple invitation, and the workshop gives concrete examples of different programs.

Each chapter describes a different theme highlighting several books, activities that families can do together, and ways to link to the community via Internet, field trips, public television programming, and inviting in the community. Specific and unusual community connections are included in each chapter. For instance, the alphabet chapter suggests inviting a local cook or chef to help prepare alphabet soup for families to share at the literacy event that features either just one letter or the entire alphabet. Some other tips include the following:

Back to School. Inviting the cafeteria staff to teach parents about healthy bag lunches, after-school snacks, and the school’s policy on peanuts. Inviting the school nurse or other health-care practitioner to demonstrate the proper size and positioning for kids’ backpacks to avoid back injury.
Bedtime Stories. Studies indicate that young children and some older adults can sleep through the sound of smoke detectors. Invite the fire department to distribute smoke detectors and tell families about emergency escape plans and meeting places.

Growing Challenges. This chapter featuring books about losing a pet, losing a tooth, wearing glasses, school, and friendship provides a great reason to have an intergenerational community party at which community members share their stories and make books together.

Illustration Replication. Because most children’s books are beautifully illustrated using imaginative and creative techniques, this chapter encourages families to make books in the style of an illustrator using media like watercolors, torn paper, and etching. Community artists can be invited to share their creative ways to tell a story. A griot will use his voice; a dancer, her body; a musician will play an instrument; and a painter will use a brush.

Just the Facts and Who’s Who. These activities highlight nonfiction books and introduce families to unusual professions like the piñata maker or the pea-shooting timekeeper. When a community explores these books together, families will meet inventors, magicians, realtors, upholsterers, veterinarians, and others. These meetings introduce children to careers and professions that they may not yet have encountered.

Not Your Inside Voice. This chapter celebrates advocates for the loud and rambunctious joy of boys featuring books like I Stink, by Kate and Jim McMullan (HarperCollins, 2002); Dog Breath, by Dav Pilkey (Blue Sky Press, 1994); Walter the Farting Dog, by William Kotzwinkle and Glenn Murray (Frog, 2001); and Stanley Goes Ape, by Griff (Hyperion, 2001). Family events feature careers and professions related to working outside, physical work that intrigues growing children and their parents like mounted police, garbage-truck drivers, band leaders, animal tamers, and zoo workers.

ABOUT THE COLLABORATION

Following the NCM training, ODL Ready to Learn trainers customized the information for the 2008–2009 workshop Make It, Take It, Teach It, which was offered to Oklahoma child-care providers. Each of thirty-two local workshops presented during the year incorporated books and craft suggestions acquired from the NCM training. Because Ready to Learn training promotes the use of the learning triangle—read, view, and do—trainers incorporated programs readily available on public television to coordinate with the theme and books
selected. Each of the Ready to Learn trainers presented several local workshops across the state to share information with child-care providers and to demonstrate how storytimes could be enhanced through the use of free and low-cost craft activities. In addition, each child-care center received copies of the corresponding books and the NCM publication.

**FAMILY LITERACY PROJECTS ON A BUDGET**

Leslie Gelders said that feedback from the trainers and more than six hundred child-care providers was overwhelmingly positive: “Ready to Learn trainers are already planning how they will incorporate NCM information and resources in new training being developed for 2009–2010.” The new workshop’s theme is “Early Literacy through Science and Play.” “The resources offered by the National Children’s Museum are so good that every library, childcare center, and literacy program should have no problem adapting the examples to help their young children,” according to ODL’s Ready to Learn coordinator, Kerri McLinn. “These resources build literacy skills and help develop a lifetime love of reading,” McLinn said, “and that’s what our mission is all about.”

**OTHER COLLABORATIONS**

The Sanford Community Adult Education Program in Maine crafted a different relationship with NCM. Pam Cote is the family literacy coordinator of Sanford Community Adult Education, part of Sanford Public Schools. With NCM, she created Families READ (Reach, Explore, Achieve, Dream), a Maine Family Literacy Lighthouse Project, funded by the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. The Families READ program provides parents access to educational services to improve their skills as family members, workers, and community members. In its work with families, the program pursues four major goals:

1. To help parents improve their literacy skills needed to increase job opportunities
2. To help children reach their full potential as learners by the time they start school or as they continue through school
3. To help parents develop skills needed to teach, support, and advocate for their children
4. To help parents identify opportunities to learn and grow together.

Cote attended the National Children Museum’s workshop Family Literacy Activities on a Budget at the National Center for Family Literacy’s 2009 confer-
ence in Orlando, Florida. Impressed by Wendy Blackwell, her team, and their work, Pam contacted Wendy on her return to discuss a potential collaboration.

As chair of the conference Literacy Connections within Your Community in March 2009, Pam wanted to find a way to share the information she had received at the NCM workshop. She called Blackwell before the conference to discuss how they could work together to provide this information to Maine literacy providers. Wendy and her team put together chapter excerpts from their trainer's tool kit and created illustrative activities from their books for a display table. Because of this, Pam was able to discuss Family Projects on a Budget and provide an example of how collaborations can be made outside of one's immediate community. As a result of the information sharing, 235 conference participants were able to learn about the NCM and its resource book. In addition, each table's centerpiece was a hardcover book with an accompanying chapter excerpt. These were raffled off to participants at the end of the day. Clearly, Wendy Blackwell and the National Children's Museum staff believe in partnerships, and their willingness to collaborate helped to make Pam's conference successful.

In addition, the family literacy coordinator presented this topic at the June 2009 Maine Adult Education Association Conference, providing an opportunity for Pam to share the trainer's tool kit with adult educators, family literacy providers, early literacy providers, libraries, and other programs. This collaboration between Families READ and the National Children's Museum has become a true partnership. It is an example of programs working together to bring significant change to children and families.

By July 2009, the National Children's Museum had visited ten cities and developed collaborations with libraries in Minnesota and Maryland, where community educators use Family Projects on a Budget to implement family literacy programs. Other partners include the Prince George's County (Maryland) Early Childhood Interagency and CentroNia in Washington, D.C.

### About the Authors

**Wendy Camilla Blackwell,** director of education for the National Children's Museum, is overseeing the development of education initiatives and the NCM Center for Learning and Innovation. Wendy believes that the excitement created by a good book can linger on forever and has set out to create memorable experiences for children and families with books, arts, and crafts. A mother of two and a textile artist, Wendy is also a former teacher who enjoys the education intersection where museum, library, school, community, children, and families meet. She can be reached at wblackwell@ncm.museum.

**Pam Cote** is family literacy coordinator for Sanford Community Adult Education. Families READ recently won the Maine Family Literacy Lighthouse Project Grant from the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy for the second
year. Pam currently teaches English classes and taught for several years at the elementary level. She previously was manager for Manpower Temporary Services, where she championed staff development and managed business relations with many of the firm’s largest clients. Pam is active on several committees dedicated to the promotion of family literacy and school readiness in the Sanford and Springvale area. Pam can be contacted at pamcote@sanford.org.

Leslie Gelders brings more than twenty-one years of adult literacy experience to the Oklahoma Department of Libraries’ Literacy Resource Office. Her expertise as a tutor, trainer, grant writer, program developer, public speaker, and administrator has benefited libraries and literacy programs throughout Oklahoma. Although Leslie has shared her expertise on numerous state and national task forces and committees, her passion is helping local literacy programs provide quality services to their communities. She can be contacted at lgenders@oltn.odl.state.ok.us.

Kerri McLinn serves as the Ready to Learn coordinator for the Oklahoma Literacy Resource Office. Under her direction, new books are provided each month to more than 1,500 preschool children at risk for low literacy. Kerri coordinates emergent literacy workshops presented free of charge to child-care staff, teachers, and parents throughout the state. In addition, Kerri works with partner organizations to plan and present Read across Oklahoma, an annual literacy celebration attended by more than 1,500 children and 150 volunteers each April. She can be contacted at kmclinn@oltn.odl.state.ok.us.
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