

# SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION IN A LIBRARY LITERACY PROGRAM

Small groups enable libraries to reach more learners while maintaining high levels of learner achievement and satisfaction. They can also help programs realize benefits of intergenerational literacy intervention, which improve marketability and increase funding prospects.



## ESSENTIAL STEPS

### ● THINK ABOUT HOW TO BETTER MEET YOUR COMMUNITY LITERACY NEEDS.

Redwood City Project READ needed to serve more learners. Even though we train approximately 200 tutors annually, hundreds of people remain on our waiting lists. We also needed to bring the literacy program into the proximity of the neighborhoods in order to make it accessible to learners with limited transportation options. As we were drawing learners from all existing program areas, care for the children of the parents needed to be provided.

### ● DEVELOP A SMALL GROUP MODEL.

We developed a model that matched one tutor with several learners (ideally four to six people). Groups were formed based on reading level, common goals, needs, geography and personality. Collaborative efforts with local elementary schools provided neighborhood tutoring sites for year-round evening meetings. Childcare is provided for all children of learners and tutors during the small group sessions. In keeping with our student-centered philosophy, groups are autonomous in choosing their learning materials, including use of the computer lab.

### ● REEVALUATE PROGRAM MODEL ON A CONTINUAL BASIS.

The project expanded assessment tools to address the language abilities of small group participants, the

majority of whom speak English as a Second Language. Childcare was enhanced to provide meaningful intervention for the children through using the computer, playing learning games, and physical recreation. Our materials bibliography (both books and software) was expanded to reflect the needs of the groups' dynamics. Because of the over-crowding in our library computer lab, laptop computers were purchased for the benefit of the learners at the school sites.

### ● MARKETABILITY AND FUNDING.

Our intergenerational approach to literacy intervention in our community has resulted in an easy-to-market and appealing-to-fund program. Because we are offering programs for adults, families, and youth using both one-on-one and small group instruction, news articles can be written using many different themes. Funders are interested because they feel a maximum amount of literacy intervention is accomplished with their funds. Small groups make better use of community resources by increasing the ratio of learners to tutors. Experiencing the dynamics of a small group is tangible and appealing to visitors—whether they are visiting reporters, potential tutors or funding agencies.

## BENEFITS

The small group program has demonstrated excellent results and yielded real benefits to students, tutors, and the library.

● Reading gains of up to three levels in six months are surpassing our initial expectations.

● The small groups have an excellent retention rate—over 85 percent of learners remain in the program for at least one year.

● The groups developed a strong sense of community support among the learners.

● Anecdotal evidence of self-esteem gains is being expressed by improved speaking and self-advocacy skills.

● Peer learning/teaching supports learning goals and enhances self-esteem.

● Community outreach has improved due to the neighborhood school setting.

● The computer lab functions effectively within the small group model, as it allows one tutor to support the learning activities of up to eight learners in the computer lab at a time. In this way, the computer lab functions as a spontaneous small group.

● The small group model provides a choice for learners with interpersonal learning style preferences.

● Small groups have contributed to our total intergenerational approach. We are reaching preschoolers to seniors within one model.

(continued)

ALA American Library Association

Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) is an initiative of the American Library Association (ALA) and the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund.

For more information, contact ALA Office of Literacy and Outreach Services (OLOS), 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611.

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## SUMMARY

Listen to the community and learners and build flexibility into your program to grow and mature with your community's needs. Determine the indicators of the program's efficacy. These might include such things as customer satisfaction, reading level increases, or learner retention rate. The above indicators will also help define your program to funders and enhance your marketing campaigns.

For more information, contact:

### PROJECT READ

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