

The Routes to Reading grant project has had a whirlwind first year. The program has exceeded expectations and most of the objectives outlined in the grant application have been met. A 30+ page evaluation report has been conducted on the first year of the Books to Go project by independent evaluator Dr. Roger Stewart. It is located at <http://libraries.idaho.gov/files/Wave1-Routes-Eval-rpt.pdf>. We have summarized Year 1 accomplishments in this interim report comparing them to goals established in the grant application. Significant findings and unexpected benefits are also included.

2. Compare actual accomplishments with goals established for the report period. Our desired outcomes for the grant project are outlined below followed by the actual accomplishments.

Routes to Reading Goal: All Idaho children have equitable access to quality, age-appropriate books, in order to develop early literacy skills critical to school readiness.

Desired Outcomes & Indicators of Success: The project has three desired outcomes:

Desired Outcome 1: Early literacy skills improve among low-income children as a result of participating in the Books in a Bag program. [Note the Books in a Bag program is now referred to as “Books to Go”]

Indicator: Children participating in the experimental groups who receive the Books in a Bag will show statistically significant gains in their early literacy skills compared to children in the control groups.

A pretest-posttest quasi-experimental evaluation study was conducted during Wave 1 of the *Books to Go* project. The design utilized the following groups: Books to Go only, Books to Go plus My First Books, My First Books only, and Control. Children were pretested and posttested with the revised version of the *Get Ready to Read!—Revised Screening Tool* (Pearson, 2009) in late January or early February of 2013 and then again in late April or early May of 2013. This instrument is widely used in early childhood educational settings and research has shown the instrument to be reliable and valid for ages three to five. All of the children in this study fell within this age range. 200 children were post-tested in eight sites and 178 children were post-tested due to attrition and absences. Although the groups scored differently on the pre-test, all made similar gains. It can be concluded that none of the treatment conditions, that is Books to Go, Books to Go & My First Books, or My First Books, had an impact on raw score gains when compared to each other and to the Control condition. It is important to note, however, that the treatment period was relatively short during Wave I and participation by the children at the various Books to Go sites varied considerably. During Wave II of the Books to Go program most of an entire academic year will pass between pre-testing and post-testing and additional efforts will be made to assure high percentages of children at the sites participate in the Books to Go program.

Desired Outcome 2: Parents participating in Routes to Reading will indicate their behavior has changed by incorporating more reading and early literacy activities into daily life.

Indicators:

- By the end of the three-year grant period, 90 percent of evaluations completed by participating parents will show an increase in the amount of reading and early literacy activities done in homes.

During the first year of the grant period, 86 percent of 1,311 parents who completed the Books to Go quick surveys indicated they increased the amount of time spent reading as a result of the program. 87 percent of those parents reported reading all four books in the bags and 8 percent reported reading three of the books. Fewer parents completed the year-end survey (153). Of those who returned the surveys, 73 percent said they increased the amount of time spent reading with their child/children. The other 26 percent said they already did this regularly before participating in the program. Only one respondent indicated they did not increase the amount of time spent reading. When asked if they spent more time talking with their child/children about the books, 83 percent said they increased the amount of time spent talking. 43 percent said they spent more time singing and 66 said they spent more time rhyming with their child.

- By the end of the three-year grant period, 75 percent of participating parents will indicate they visited their public library to check out books with their children or accessed electronic picture books through their library's website.

At the end of Wave 1 of the Books to Go program, 72 percent of parents answering the end-of-year survey (152) indicated they had visited their public library within the past week, month, or past six months. Sixty-two percent indicated they had checked out books. Twelve percent said they accessed TumbleBooks through their public library's website.

Although we are early into the program, information from parents gathered through our surveys show more work needs to be done in this area. Anecdotal stories from the Idaho library community show that when parents use the bags on a regular basis, it also stimulates library use as described in the case below:

"I had a mother in here this morning just gushing over being able to check out themed book bags at her son's preschool. She said her family tries to come in to the library regularly, but can't make it as often as she would like. She greatly appreciates the convenience of having themed book bags with extension activity ideas available right there at the preschool for families to borrow. Her four-year-old son really liked *Rhyming Dust Bunnies* from the "Rhyming" bag, so they were in here looking for a copy to check out to keep at home for four weeks!" - *Cathy Hardy, Eagle Public Library*

Desired Outcome 3: The project builds the capacity of libraries to better serve low-income preschool children and their parents and caregivers.

Indicators:

- Summary reports from 100 percent of participating libraries will show community partnerships were formed or enhanced as a result of the program. A minimum of 75 primarily rural libraries will participate in the program by the end of the three-year grant period.

Summary reports from 24 participating libraries in Wave 1 of the program were submitted. Those libraries indicated they partnered with 44 partner sites; 20 of those had been previous partners and 24 were new partners. Having the Books to Go program generate so many new

partners is a good outcome. Library staff was asked what new activities they did with their partner as a result of the program; 22 libraries responded with items such as regular storytimes, deposit collections, participating in the My First Book program with their partners, and family workshops. Ninety-one percent of libraries rated their working relationship with their partners as excellent or good. Nine percent rated their partnership as neutral and no one said they had a poor relationship.

There are 58 Idaho libraries participating in Wave 1 or 2 of Books to Go, which is ahead of our target at this point. Those 58 libraries are partnering with 154 different partners statewide.

- 90 percent of participating libraries will have action plans in place to sustain the Books in a Bag programs on their own.

All of the 27 Wave 1 libraries are participating in the second year of the program. All libraries will be working on action plans by the end of the three-year program.

- 80 percent of partner reports will show a positive experience with the project, related training, and in their relationships with their local library staff.

Partner surveys were returned by 26 of 44 partner sites. Of those who answered questions on the partner survey about their relationship with their library, 73 percent rated their relationship as excellent. No one rated their partnership as poor. When asked to rate their overall experience with the Books to Go program, 19 (73 percent) said excellent, six said good, and one was neutral. None said poor.

A series of open-ended questions was asked. The first being, “What successes did you experience from participating in the Books to Go program? Why do you think these successes occurred? Please explain.” Fourteen sites responded to this question and the comments were quite extensive. Twelve said that the children became excited about books and reading as a consequence of the program. Several said that checking out the bags made the children feel important and grown up since they were like older children taking books home from school. Another common comment was that the program provided easy access to high-quality books for families. Nine respondents mentioned this and used words like “convenience” and “easy to use.” Another common comment was that parents read more to their children, talked more to their children, and spent more quality time with their children. Seven comments like this were made. Three respondents reported that they used the books and *Bookworms* in their curriculum and instruction. Two said that they thought their partnership with their local library was successful and useful.

When all of the successes discussed and listed above are taken together, a very positive profile emerges of the Books to Go program. Parents liked the program because of its convenience and the wide variety of books. Center staff liked the program because the children became excited about books and reading, and parents/caregivers became involved and read and talked more with their children as a consequence. The following quotation encapsulates the positive regard that the program engendered:

“Some of my students have no books in their home. These book bags were a BIG DEAL to them. The children were so proud to take them home and the parents were thankful for them. Everyone loved them! Children and parents felt valued and it gave them a sense of ownership. It leveled the playing field for families in poverty, in addition to spending time together reading quality literature. The wonderful books and activities helped increase and expand vocabulary. The children loved talking to each other about their favorite books and using new words, phrases from their stories. It was really fun to listen to their conversations. Families had the opportunity to talk about and practice using concepts of print. I believe all parents want the best for their children and want them to succeed. Often they just don’t know what to do or how to help them. The Books to Go program really provides a wealth of information to use both when you have short or long snippets of time. It really packs it in! Parents seem to be very busy + on the go all the time. This program is a nice recipe for success for everyone!”

- A minimum of four regional third-grade reading coalitions will be in place by the end of the grant period.

In April 2013 Ron Fairchild from the Smarter Learning Group representing the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading traveled to three communities in Idaho to share information and garner support for grade-level reading proficiency. He visited Pocatello, Twin Falls, and Boise. Stakeholders from public education, libraries, government agencies and non-profit groups, as well as some Idaho legislators, attended these workshops. One more coalition meeting will be held during Year 2 and it is anticipated that four coalitions will be in place by the end of Year 3.

- 85 percent of Idaho librarians attending training related to the grant project will indicate the training helped them build capacity to better serve low-income children and their families.

The 2013 Annual Read to Me Meeting focused on capacity-building to better serve low-income children and their families. ICfL brought in Lynda Coates from the Communication Across Barriers Poverty Institute in Portland, OR to present to 72 library staff members from around the state. Evaluations show 100 percent of these participants indicated the training increased their knowledge of general poverty issues and communication barriers. Thirty-two participants said the poverty training was the most useful part of the two-day meeting. A sampling of comments from the evaluation included:

- “I feel that I didn't understand true poverty and the illiteracy that goes with it. I was given a lot of info and skills to help in this area.”
- “The session on poverty was one of the most rewarding and one of best I have been to. It will stick with me for long time.”
- “Poverty presentation was excellent. Great info and strategies to use.”

ICfL AmeriCorps VISTA Julie Armstrong attended four days of training at the Poverty Institute in November 2012. She is now a certified poverty trainer and conducted 12 presentations during Year 1 of the grant period for 170 library staff members and community partners on generational poverty, and how to better serve low-income children and their families. All of these workshops have been well received and we are working with state partners to include more training on poverty issues in the coming year.

- A minimum of 100 public libraries will promote the electronic picture books and web-based early literacy modules through their websites and through outreach efforts. 90 percent of library evaluations of this component will be positive.

Two new online resources were launched in Year 1 of the grant project: a statewide subscription for all Idaho public libraries to TumbleBooks electronic picture books and DayByDayID.org, an online storytime resource with fresh content updated daily. Both resources were designed to increase access to print and online storytimes for those who are not able to get to a public library. Of the 143 public libraries in the state, only 18 had a Tumblebooks subscription before the grant. 95 library jurisdictions (of 103) are promoting TumbleBooks and DayByDayID.org through their websites. Forty-five libraries have promoted these resources through a new customized postcard campaign ICfL created colorful postcards with a unique URL for each library, directing patrons to the site containing both resources. Each library was asked to place the TumbleBooks and DayByDayID.org links in a prominent location that would be easy for users to find. Forty-five libraries ordered the postcards, requesting a total of 47,600 postcards for distribution in their communities. Highlights from libraries who participated in the postcard campaign from their TumbleBooks statistics included:

- American Falls Public Library went from 0 to 5,269 views
- Cascade Public Library 0 to 719 views
- Idaho Falls Public Library 0 to 10,736 views
- Lewiston City Library from 5,773 to 12,577 views
- Nampa Public Library from 28,359 to 48,252 views

DayByDayID.org launched in November 2012. Between November 1, 2012 and September 17, 2013 the following statistics are noted for the site:

- 6,124 unique visitors
- 13,488 total visits
- 42,255 page views
- 3:22 was the average length of time that a visitor spent on the site
- 54.6% were returning visitors

In addition to the postcard campaign and in-house promotions, efforts were made to promote these new resources at early childhood conferences, family events, at workshops, through paid and unpaid social media marketing, public television spots, and radio advertising campaigns, and

through ICfL's statewide partnerships. Despite the promotional efforts completed in Year 1 of the grant, parents who completed the year-end Books to Go survey showed more work needs to be done to promote these resources to our target audience, as 85 percent of parents said they never accessed TumbleBooks and 91 percent said they had not accessed the DayByDayID.org resources. More efforts will be made to encourage local libraries to promote these resources.

ICfL will survey Idaho public library staff about these online resources during Year 2 of the grant period.

3. Describe any significant findings or accomplishments in this period.

Highlights and unexpected benefits included:

- The Routes to Reading project would not be as successful as it has been in Year 1 without the amazing amount of work and energy our AmeriCorps VISTA Julie Armstrong has put into the project. This is the first time ICfL has utilized the talents of this program, and it has definitely been the best return on investment we've made. Julie has a master's degree in Early Childhood Education and was a Head Start teacher for many years. She has a remarkable ability to connect with our partner organizations, conduct training on poverty, and get things done. This grant project has been labor-intensive. In addition to the work our full-time AmeriCorps has done, ICfL volunteers have put 411 hours into the program and ICfL's support staff have contributed at least that much time into preparing each of the 313 Books to Go bins that have been sent during the first year of the project.
- The Books to Go project is well ahead of targets set for the program and is reaching most of the goals that were established. The project coordinator underestimated the number of children served by some of the partners and demand for Spanish-language materials and it took a bit more time to get materials translated and out to libraries. Customized Books to Go bins were developed for Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program – another partnership that would likely not have happened without the grant funds. During Wave 1 of the project, 97 bins were sent to 25 libraries to distribute to their partners. Wave 2 had another 33 libraries apply for 144 bins. These 58 libraries are partnering with 154 different partners, in addition to the new Infant Toddler partnership (outlined below). The grant funds have made it possible to provide 312 bins containing over 32,000 age-appropriate, high-quality books to over 7,000 children in Idaho. This has exceeded our targets for Waves 1 and 2 of the project.
- The new VISTA partnership led to several other major unexpected benefits. ICfL was able to strengthen its partnership with the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare Infant Toddler Program and the Early Childhood Coordinating Council. The Council was able to utilize funding to purchase several hundred board books which ICfL utilized in special Books to Go bins for infants and toddlers. ICfL supplemented the books in some themes, added infant toddler bookworms and packaged everything similar to the preschool Books to Go bins. Health and Welfare's Infant Toddler Specialists received 71 bins for use with their families at home visits. Additional Spanish language bags were recently added to

better meet the needs of Spanish-speaking families. Since the model for this age group was already developed, ICfL made infant toddler bins available for libraries partnering with Early Head Start and teen parent programs in Wave 2. The Infant Toddler program also purchased 37 refurbished computers and laptops for rural libraries to increase public access to their online developmental screening tool along with increased use of computers for the general public. The AmeriCorps VISTA was also able to create a partnership with a Boise State University class to translate Bookworm handouts into several languages. This will be a new resource that has never been available before.

- Through the VISTA partnership, we were made aware of the AmeriCorps Summer Associate program and expressed an interest in using a position to increase capacity of libraries to reach more underserved children through summer reading programs. ICfL was able to secure a Summer Associate for 10 weeks and worked with area libraries to pilot a “Literacy in the Park” summer reading program in conjunction with the Idaho FoodBank’s Picnic in the Park program. ICfL also developed a Summer Reading Outreach Guidebook as part of this program that was recently used in workshops and is available on the ICfL website.
- Bringing Ron Fairchild to Idaho for three regional Third Grade Community Campaign meetings was also a highlight of the year. Ron’s enthusiasm and ability to get people excited about the goals of the campaign were a good momentum-builder. It will be exciting to see how Idaho communities develop plans to increase the number of children reading on grade level.

4. Include other comments or anecdotal information that shows project achievements or lessons learned in this period.

More information about the Routes to Reading project can be found at <http://libraries.idaho.gov/landing/routes-to-reading>. Dr. Roger Stewart’s research report on Wave 1 of the Books to Go program can be found in its entirety at <http://libraries.idaho.gov/files/Wave1-Routes-Eval-rpt.pdf>. His summary statement follows:

“Wave I of Books to Go was a success. All of the data, with the exception of the quasi-experimental study, showed strongly positive effects. Libraries liked the program and found it easy to implement, and partners felt the same way. Parents/caregivers appreciated the program and found it convenient and easy to use. Everyone said that the selection of books was superb. Both open-ended responses commenting on the wide variety and quality of the books and also the high percentage of parents/caregivers reporting reading three or four books from each bag support the assertion that the selection of books was excellent. Finally, although the quasi-experimental study did not find *Books to Go* superior to the other interventions or the control condition, it did not fair any worse than the other treatment conditions since no intervention was superior or inferior to any other.”

ICfL staff members are looking forward to Year 2 and 3 of the grant and using the feedback and information found in Year 1 to improve the project.