### Summer Literacy in the Park 2013 Results and Discussion

Submitted by Roger A. Stewart, Ph.D. November 4, 2013

Summer Literacy in the Park (SLiP) was a new ICfL initiative during summer 2013. The Idaho Food Bank provides a free lunch program, called "Picnic in the Park," for youth 18 years and younger. Food Bank trucks travel a circuit to Boise and Garden City parks and apartment complexes Monday through Friday during the summer to distribute lunches. The ICfL developed a traveling lending library that followed the Food Bank trucks for ten weeks. The lending libraries were staffed by an Americorps Summer Associate, who was a public school teacher during the academic year, and volunteers from local public libraries. Additional assistance was provided by volunteers who were either private individuals or employees of local businesses who allowed their employees to perform community service.

Resources allowed each park to be served by Summer Literacy in the Park once each week. SLiP visited parks on the same day each week so patrons knew from week-to-week when the program would be available. Along with a lending library, Summer Literacy in the Park also provided weekly activities and a weekly storytime. Topics included such things as Libraries Rock!, Delightful Dirt, Wonderful Worms, and Healthy Food. For additional details and a complete list of activities see the ICfL's Summer Reading Outreach Guidebook-http://libraries.idaho.gov/files/SR-Outreach-Guidebook-2013.pdf

A typical day looked like the following. The individual from the ICfL with a volunteer assistant arrived at the park during the time the lunch truck was there. Close by the lunch truck, one or two small tables were set up and blankets were spread on the ground to display books and for people to sit on for storytime. The materials for the weekly activity were placed on the tables. Children were given time to complete the activity. This was followed by a storytime, and the cycle concluded with the children and parents/caregivers perusing the books and choosing which ones to take home. No check outs were required. Attendees were asked to return the books if they could the next time they attended. The entire cycle took 30-45 minutes because as many as four parks were visited each day over the roughly two hours that the lunch truck traveled from one park to another. Some parks had many parents/caregivers and children in attendance whereas others had less. Attendance also varied considerably from one week to the next because of weather, summer school schedules, etc. Two SLiP teams traveled each day, so as many as eight parks could be served.

During the last two weeks of the program, ICfL staff, the lead evaluator who is the author of this report, and other volunteers followed the Summer Literacy in the Park teams to each park and surveyed youth and parents/caregivers who were in the parks that day. Youth and adults in the parks were approached by the surveyors, introductions were made, the purpose of the survey was provided, and then each person was asked if they gave permission for the survey to continue. Those who said no were immediately thanked for their time and the questioning ended at that point. Those who gave permission were asked the questions provided in Appendix A if they were youth and those in Appendix B if they were adults. The remainder of this report provides the results from the surveys along with discussion of the results. In most instances, results from both the parent/caregiver survey and the youth survey are reported together to facilitate comparisons.

Specific survey questions are in italics with an indicator of the survey from which they came followed by results and discussion. The report ends with a summary and recommendations section.

### **General Background Statistics:**

- A total of 65 parent/caregiver surveys were collected from 17 of 22 sites. A total of 64 youth surveys were collected from 17 sites.
- A high of 11 parent/caregiver surveys were collected from Ivywild Park. The next highest was eight surveys from Mountain View Park. At most other sites, two to five surveys were collected. A high of seven youth surveys each were collected from Shannon Glen and Liberty parks. The next highest was six surveys from Ivywild. At the other sites 1-5 surveys were collected.
- Six different surveyors conducted the interviews. For parent/caregiver surveys, one surveyor completed 32 of the 65 surveys while the other five surveyors ranged from 3-11 completed surveys. For youth surveys, one surveyor completed 18 of the 64 surveys while the other five surveyors ranged from two to 15 surveys.
- Fifty-two of 58 (89.2%) adult respondents were female. Of 59 youth who provided gender information, 32 (54%) were female and 27 (46%) were male.
- Sixty-one youth provided their age. Average age was 9.3 years (sd=2.8) with a range of 3-16 years. Frequency analysis revealed that the majority of the children (38 or 62%) were between the ages of 7-11, but there was an additional cohort of eight youth (13%) who were 13 years. This cohort was roughly evenly distributed across six different parks with each park serving one or two members.
- Fifty-seven youth provided the grade level into which they will enter in the fall. All grade levels except kindergarten and 11<sup>th</sup> grade were mentioned with the bulk of the children, which is 44 (77%), entering grades 1-6. There was an additional cohort of seven youth (12%) entering 8<sup>th</sup> grade in the fall.
- Youth reported attending 28 schools in the fall of 2013. Elementary schools, junior high schools, high schools, charter schools, parochial schools, alternative schools, preschools, and homeschooling were mentioned.

#### Results from Other Ouestions:

How many times per week do you come to the park for lunch?(Parent/Caregiver & Youth) Table 1 shows the results for both parents/caregivers and youth.

Table 1: Times per week attending "Picnic in the Park" by respondent

Respondent	1 time	2 times	3 times	4 times	5 times
Parents/Caregivers (n=59)	12(7)*	20(12)	30(18)	19(11)	19(11)
Youth (n=55)	18(10)	11(6)	16(9)	16(9)	38(21)

<sup>\*</sup> Value outside ( ) is percentage. Value inside ( ) is frequency.

The differences between parent/caregiver responses and youth are probably explained by different populations being sampled. Not all youth came to the sites with parents/caregivers. Many came by themselves. This was especially true at the apartment complexes where the

children were playing close to their homes so their parents were often in their apartments instead of outside with their children. When parents/caregivers in the parks were asked this question, they often said that they came to the park only on days when they didn't work or have other conflicts. So it is understandable that 38% of the youth said that they had lunch in the park five times per week while only 19% of adults said this. These were neighborhood parks so the youth could more readily come each day.

Has your child received free books this summer from attending lunch in the park? (Parent/Caregiver; n=62)

Fifty-one (82.3%) said yes, nine (14.5%) said no, and one each said don't know and "Bells for Books." The high percentage of yes responses is a positive finding but is probably due to the interviewers completing the surveys with parents/caregivers who had had experience with Summer Literacy in the Park. This is said because the lead evaluator and author of this report completed 32 of these surveys and if people said to him that they had not participated in Summer Literacy in the Park, they were thanked for their time and no further questions were asked. In the future, records should be kept as to how many adults are approached, how many participated in SLiP, and how many did not. This would provide a measure of how well the program is being promoted in each park. This particular issue is raised because in each park there were some adults who had children who had not participated in SLiP. This is probably because some parents sat some distance away from the lunch program and the SLiP tables and blankets so they didn't have enough information about SLiP to walk over and participate. How might this have occurred? Most of the parks are quite large and once people pick up their lunch sacks from the truck they disperse throughout the park. Given the tight schedule the SLiP teams operated under, it was not always possible for them to move about the parks to talk to people about SLiP and invite them over to participate. The ICfL team leaders and the volunteers did as much of this as they could under the circumstances, but more signage and maybe someone to stand by the lunch truck with flyers and a friendly sales pitch for SLiP might increase the numbers who participate. Once the "lunch rush" tapers off, this person could then move about the park handing out flyers and talking with people about the program. In other cases, there was an obvious reason for why adults and their children had not participated. For example, some adults said that they were in the park for only the first or second time during the summer, so they and their children had little opportunity to participate.

Has your child enjoyed the books?(Parent/Caregiver; n=51) & Have you enjoyed the books you received by participating in summer reading in the park?(Youth' n=58)

Fifty (98%) parents/caregivers said yes. Only one respondent said some. No one said no, didn't read them, or don't know. On the youth survey, 41 (71%) said yes. One each said no or didn't read them, and no one said some. Thirteen (22%) responded that they didn't receive books and two said they didn't know. Having the books so consistently liked by the children is a wonderful finding and having both parents/caregivers and youth report this makes the findings all the more robust. It is also important to note that 22% of youth said that they had not received books. Additional analyses of this group revealed that it was mostly comprised of older youth. Ages were reported for all 13 and seven of the 13 (54%) were 13 years or older. So it appears when youth report not receiving books this experience is biased towards the older youth who were surveyed. In future Summer Literacy in the Park programs special attention should be given to this group to assure that they take books as often as the younger youth.

What were your child's favorite books that you received? (Parent/Caregiver; n=49) & What were your favorite books you received? (Youth; n=40)

Some adults and youth reported more than one favorite. Adults mentioned 68 different things. Specific books were mentioned along with general themes and topics such as princesses, animals, etc. Most were mentioned only once but some were mentioned more often. For example, the *Magic Treehouse* series was mentioned seven times and dinosaurs were mentioned six times. No book, theme, or topic was mentioned more than seven times so it is evident that the 68 mentions were very diverse and eclectic. Youth surveys also exhibited a diversity of favorites. Table 2 shows the things mentioned and the number of times they were.

Table 2: Titles/topics/themes mentioned by youth and frequencies (n=40)

Title/Topic/Theme	Mentions	Title/Topic/Theme	Mentions	
Magic Treehouse	12	Stink Garbage	2	
Dinosaurs	7	Clifford	2	
Animals	6	Scooby Doo	2	
Harry Potter	6	Superman	2	
Princess	5	Spiderman	2	
Miss Mary Mack	5	Captain Underpants	2	
Junie B. Jones	5	Nancy Drew	2	
Unfortunate Events	4	Hungry Caterpillar	2	
Dr. Seuss	4	Holes	2	
Fancy Nancy	3	Silver Dream	2	
Hunger Games	2	39 Clues	2	
Flat Stanley	2			
All below mentioned once	:			
award winners	Diary of a Wimpy Kid	Catching Fire	Boxcar Children	
Mockingjay	Baby Animals	A to Z Mysteries	Pete the Cat	
Bones (NF)	I feel	Skippyjon Jones	City of Ember series	
Lego	Porcupine Named Fluffy	Cat Warriors	Butterflies	
Scream for Ice Cream	Bob the Builder	Spongebob	Rapping book	
Ferno the Dragon (Beast	Snowmen book	Francis	Powerless	
Quest)				
Dora	Little Bear Loves Mom	Amazing Animals	Reptiles	
Rabbit	Blue Shoes	Sisters Grimm	Dragons	
Stinky Cat	Lift the Flap	Matched	Clock book	
Trucks	Puppy book	Judy Moody	Captain America	
Berenstein Bears	Water Circus	Frogs	Horses	
Click Clack Moo	Fox one	Monsters	Ferdinand	
Spongebob	Cam Jansen	Disney	Goodnight Moon	
Mitten	Batman	Timed bedtime stories	Cups for Sale	
Maisy	F is for Freedom	Angry Birds	Susan Boynton	
Arthur	Geronimo Stilton	Superheroes	Golden Fish book	
Storm Runner	Star Wars	Make Way for	Colors	
		Ducklings		
All	Can't remember			

The extensive list in table 2 underscores that youth who participated in Summer Literacy in the Park have diverse interests, so having many different titles of books spanning a wide variety of genres is important to capture the interests of participants.

Has your child read more this summer than in previous summers? (Parent/Caregiver; n=59) & Have you read more this summer than in previous summers? (Youth; n=59)

For adults, 38 (64.4%) said yes, 16 (27.1%) said no, and 5 (8.5%) said don't know. Nearly two thirds said that their children read more this summer than in previous summers. This high rate of increase was corroborated by the youth survey where 45 (76.3%) said yes, nine (15.3%) said no, and five (8.5%) said don't know.

For those who responded yes, a follow-up question asked why the increased reading had occurred. Thirty-nine adults provided reasons. Twelve (31.0%) attributed the increase to SLiP. Twelve (31.0%) said their child was an older and better reader which allowed them to spend more time reading independently over the summer. Other reasons included more books available—unspecified source for the books (5 people), other library programs (4 people), likes to read (2 people), to become a better reader/practice (1 person), more variety (unspecified) (1 person), parent encouraged child to read more (1 person), and Boys and Girls Club (1 person). Having nearly a third of adults attribute their children's increased reading to SLiP is a very positive finding since a primary goal of the program is to increase reading. When youth were asked why their reading had increased, similar answers were given (see Table 3).

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Table 4	Reaconc	OIVAN	ht	vouth	tor	incresced	reading	(n-/13)
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Reason	Percentage	Frequency
1. Likes to read	25.6	11
2. Other	20.9	9
3. Summer Literacy in the Park	16.3	7
4. More books available (unspecified)	14.0	6
5. To be a better reader/practice	11.6	5
6. Older, better reader	7.0	3
7. Other library program	4.6	2

The most common response, likes to read, is heartening but not all that helpful since it doesn't provide details about why more reading occurred during summer 2013. In future evaluations of this program, surveyors might probe on this response by asking something like the following, "It's great you read more this summer, but what caused you to read more?" The second most common category (20.9%) was an eclectic group of responses that were coded into "other." Responses included more time to finish a book; like to read to make memories; reading content; read at home; discovered a new author - John Grisham; my mom told me to; read two books per week; made a chart and it was more than last year; and last summer I just played but I read now. An important finding is that 16.3% said that SLiP was the cause of their reading more. This percentage was not as high as when adults responded but it still represents a successful outcome for the program. Seven (14%) said there were more books available, but the youth did not specify where these books came from. Similar to above, in future evaluations a probe should follow a response like this to find the source. Youth reporting that they read more because they wanted to become better readers is extremely powerful. All youth who read during the summer should be praised for their efforts, but those who state that they want to become better readers through practice need to be especially reinforced for their efforts. A few said that they read more because they were older and better readers. This response needs some explanation since a sizable percentage of parents/caregivers provided this same response. What appears to be happening is that as youth become more independent readers they begin to read more since they are less

reliant on adults or older siblings to read to them. It is an interesting insight into how readers evolve and what programs like Summer Literacy in the Park can do to help them progress.

When adults said that their child was not reading more, a follow-up question asked why. Thirteen people provided this information. Ten (76.9%) said that their child was reading the same amount as last year which basically reiterated their response to the original question. One person attributed the lack of increase to being too busy or having other activities that take time. One person said their child was too young and one person provided a response that was placed in another category. When youth said that they were not reading more, they were also asked why and eight provided information. Three (37.5%) fell into another category. Two (25.0%) said they read the same amount as last year and two (25%) said they had no access to books. One (12.5%) said that they were too busy or had other activities. Since so few youth replied that they had not read more over the summer, the number that fell into each category was quite small. What can be concluded from this is that there are a variety of reasons youth do not read more but none are more common than the others.

Has your child participated in the summer reading activities in the park? (Parent/Caregiver; n=62) & Are the summer reading activities in the park fun? (Youth; n=55)

Fifty-three adults (86.0%) said yes. Nine said no. No one said they didn't know. Fifty-five adults answered a follow-up question asking if their children had enjoyed the activities. Fifty-two (94.5%) said yes. Only one person said no and two people said some. When youth were asked whether the activities were fun, similar responses were given. Of these, 47 (85.5%) said yes, four said no, and two each said some and don't know. The data strongly support the assertion that the summer reading activities were fun. What is of additional importance is that the age range of youth saying that the activities were fun was from four years to 16 years. This is quite remarkable since it is difficult to develop short, portable, high-quality activities that are enjoyable for such a wide age range. These are positive findings and corroborate observations made by the author of this report. Children of all ages enthusiastically congregated around the tables where the activities were located and spent time interacting with the materials. A lot of excited talk and interaction between children and between children and the library volunteers occurred during the activity time. Such positive regard for the activities from both adults and youth is important since considerable time and energy were expended in developing the activities and then delivering them to all the parks.

Has your child attended the public library summer reading program this summer? (Parent/Caregiver; n=61), Have you attended the public library summer reading program this summer? (Youth; n=60), & Have you visited the public library this summer? (Parent/Caregiver; n=62 & Youth; n=61)

These questions are addressed together because of their strong relationship to each other. When adults were asked if their child had attended summer reading at the library, 29 (48%) said yes and 32 (52%) said no. No one said don't know. Having nearly half the respondents say their children attended a public library summer reading program is very positive. These are probably people of limited means since they were in a public park to receive free meals for their children. Granted, we do not know if this was the case since meals were provided to children without any knowledge of family background, but it is probably safe to assume that a good portion of the participants were from families of lower economic means. Thus, transportation to and from library summer reading programs could be a challenge since cars are expensive to operate and

public transportation in and around Boise is not always easy to access and use. So this is a wonderful outcome and says much about the respondents to this survey and their commitment to the literacy development of their children. The results also speak to the local libraries and their efforts to advertise and promote their summer reading programs and make them accessible to all. When youth were asked this same question, 18 (30.0%) said yes, 40 (66.7%) said no, and two (3.3%) didn't know. Recall that a sizable number of youth attended the lunch program without parents. It may be that these youth do not have the means to go to the library as much as those youth who attend the lunch program with their parents. Thus there were a lower percentage of yes responses from youth.

Adults were also asked if they had visited the library during the summer. Forty-seven (76%) said yes and 15 (24%) said no. When youth were asked if they had visited the library during the summer, a similar profile of responses occurred with 38 (62.3%) said yes, 22 (36.1%) said no, and one (1.6%) didn't know. These are very positive results with significant proportions of adults and youth having visited the public library. There may have been some selection bias in these results since the sort of adult or youth who would participate in SLiP and thus respond to the surveys would probably value the library and thus make efforts to visit it, but it is still important to know that people who attend a summer meal program for children are also patrons of their local libraries and value what those libraries have to offer.

Additional exploration of youth responses to these questions is necessary since the first question revealed that two-thirds had not participated in public library summer reading programs but the second question revealed that nearly two-thirds had visited their public library during the summer. What this might mean is that Summer Literacy in the Park was for two thirds of respondents probably the only formal program that systematically and regularly exposed these youth to a variety of books, but, and this is equally important, two thirds of these youth did visit their library giving them access to a wide array of books, much greater than what was available from Summer Literacy in the Park. Future research might want to explore why so many of these youth visit the library during the summer but do not participate in the summer reading program. To better visualize the relationship between responses to these two questions a crosstabs table was constructed (see Table 4).

Table 4: Relationship between youth library summer reading program participation and visiting library during summer

Summer Reading → Visited Library ↓	Yes	No	Don't know
Yes	17	19	1
No	1	21	0
Don't know	0	0	1

For those youth who responded yes to visiting the library (n=36), about half participated in summer reading (n=17) and about half did not (n=19). This is important for local libraries to know. They probably have a substantial number of youth who are most likely from lower socioeconomic strata visiting their libraries over the summer but who are not participating in summer reading. Mechanisms need to be instituted or additional ones need to be put into place to enroll these patrons into the summer reading program. They are coming into the library but for some reason are not being recognized and recruited.

## **Summary and Recommendations**

The Summer Literacy in the Park 2013 program was quite successful. Adults and youth reported liking the activities and the books, and there was solid evidence that for a sizable number of youth the program caused them to read more during summer 2013 when compared to previous summers. All evidence points to the need to implement the program in subsequent years since it appears to work well. Additional recommendations follow.

- Since the parks are large and people disperse throughout them, more signage in the parks and maybe someone to stand by the lunch truck with flyers and a friendly sales pitch for SLiP might increase the numbers who participate. Once the "lunch rush" tapers off, this person could then move about the park handing out flyers and talking with people about the program. This is not as much of an issue in the apartment complexes where the spaces were much smaller and therefore more contained.
- 22% of youth respondents said they had not received books. It appears when youth report not receiving books this experience is biased towards the older youth who were surveyed. In the future, special attention should be given to this group to assure that they take books as often as the younger youth.
- The ICfL did a wonderful job building book collections that were diverse enough to stimulate a wide variety and a large number of "favorites" reported by adults and youth. This underscores the need for having many different titles of books spanning a wide variety of genres to capture the diverse interests of participants.
- Future research might want to explore why so many of these youth visit the library during the summer but do not participate in their library summer reading program. Once answers are found, mechanisms need to be instituted to enroll these patrons into the summer reading program.
- The adult and youth surveys functioned well but if they are to be used again some revisions should be made. As was discussed in the report, probes need to be added after a few of the questions so that additional details are elicited. One question on each of the surveys should also be rewritten for clarity. Question 6 on the Youth Survey asked whether the youth enjoyed the books they "received." Once during the summer, youth were given a free book to take home and they also had access to the lending library each week. The term "receive" might be confusing in that some might interpret the question to mean only the free book when the question was intended to mean all of the books that the children were exposed to during the program. A similar potential problem occurred on question 3 of the Parent/Caregiver survey. Respondents were asked if their children had received free books from attending SLiP. Again, this wording might have been interpreted differently than what was intended since respondents may have thought the question only focused on the free book their child received instead of this book and those available from the lending library.

# Appendix A: Summer 2013 Literacy in the Park: Youth Participant Survey

Park:	_ Date:	Surv	eyor's N	ame: _			
1. Gender of youth:	Male Fema	ale					
2. What is your age? _							
3. What grade will you this fall?	be going into	1 2 3	4 5 	6 7	8	9 10	11   12
4. What school will yo	u attend this fall?						
5. How many times per	r week do you con	ne to the park f	or lunch	2 1	2 3	<b>4 5</b>	5
6. Have you enjoyed the participating in summe	ne books you recei	ived by Yes ark?	No So	me R	Didn't ead Them	Didn'	t Don't
6a. If answer to #6 was							, –
a	b			_ c			
7. Have you read more	this summer than	in previous sur	mmers?	Yes	N	lo I	Oon't Know
7a. If answer to #7 was				•	·		•
7b. If answer to #7 was	s <b>No</b> : Why haven	't you read mor	e this sur	mmer? _			
8. Are the summer read	ling activities in t	he park fun?	Yes	No	Some	Don't K	<b>Enow</b>
o. Are the summer reac	ing activities in the	ne park run:					
9. Have you attended the <i>public library</i> summer reading program this summer?			Yes	N	10	Oon't Know	
program uns summer:							
10. Have you visited the <i>public library</i> this summer?				Yes	N	10	Oon't Know
					[		

Thank you!!

# Appendix B: Summer 2013 Literacy in the Park: Parent-Caregiver Survey

Park:	Date:	Surv	Surveyor:					
1. Gender of adult:	Male Female							
2. How many times per lunch?	week does your child	come to the	park for		2 3 4	5		
3. Has your child receivattending lunch in the p		nmer from		Yes	No	Don't Know		
4. If #3 was <u>Yes</u> ask: H books?	Has your child enjoyed	the Yes	No	Some	Didn't Rea	nd Don't Know		
5. If answer to #4 was Y received? a	<b>Yes</b> or <b>Some</b> ask: Whate	at were your	child's	favorite b	ooks that y	ou		
6. Has your child read r summers?	more this summer than	in previous		Yes	No 🗆	Don't Know		
7. If answer to #6 was \( \frac{1}{2} \)	Yes: Why has your ch	nild read mor	e this su	ummer?				
8. If answer to #6 was 1	<b>No</b> : Why hasn't your o	child read mo	ore this	summer?				
9. Has your child participated in the summer reading <b>activities</b>					No	Don't Know		
in the park?  10. If #9 was Yes: Has your child enjoyed the summer  Yes No Some Don't Know								
reading activities in the								
11. Has your child attended the <i>public library</i> summer reading program this summer?			ding	Yes	No	Don't Know		
12. Have you visited the	 	Yes	No No					
	, public words y this summer.							

Thank You!!!