

# ***Ready to Read at New York Libraries***

## **A Statewide Early Literacy Program for Public Libraries, Caregivers and Families**

### **Background**

In 2013 the New York State Library began conducting research into the need for and the development of a statewide Early Literacy Program for public libraries, caregivers and families. One of the early findings of this research is that comprehensive and coordinated early literacy training for public library staff is key to the success of a statewide Early Literacy Program.

Given the results of the research, the State Library is pursuing the development of a coordinated statewide early literacy training plan for library staff throughout New York State. This sustainable, comprehensive plan will be based on best practices and training needs of public libraries in New York. The implementation of the training plan will provide all public library staff in the state with access to the training and materials they need to make the library a vital community hub for early learning and a key community partner in every village, town, city, and in New York.

To begin the process of developing an early literacy training plan, research was conducted in best practices for early literacy training provided through state library agencies throughout the country, and current practices and perceived training needs of New York librarians were surveyed.

Three phases of work have been undertaken:

**Research Phase:** Research was conducted in order to learn what training in early literacy other state library agencies were providing and which early literacy models and programs were most commonly implemented throughout the country. After an initial online survey was completed State Library agencies in Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Indiana, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah, Vermont, and Washington provided extensive information (see State Library Initiatives from across the US <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/earlylit/initiatives.htm>). In addition, the three most commonly implemented national early literacy programs – Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library, Family Place, and Mother Goose on the Loose were analyzed for comparative approaches, costs, and benefits (see National Early Literacy Best Practices <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/earlylit/initiatives.htm>).

**Review and Survey of New York State Libraries:** The state of early childhood literacy practices and training needs of New York libraries was reviewed. In 2013, an online survey was used to gather information about current practices, perceived training needs, and preferred modes of training. A total of 643 responses were received from a distribution to 756 libraries. As a follow-up to the online survey, the State Library conducted three focus groups with children’s librarians and library staff were conducted at three locations in the state: Rochester, Long Island, and Manhattan. In 2014, an updated survey was used to gather further information, and a report comparing the two was prepared.

**Application submitted for a Laura Bush 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian Program Collaborative Planning Grant:** The New York State Library applied for a Laura Bush 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian Program Collaborative Planning Grant to develop a comprehensive statewide early literacy training plan, ***Ready to Read at New York Libraries***. This one-year grant project will begin April 1, 2014 and end March 31, 2015.

### **Significant Findings from Research Phase**

Surveys and interviews with key state library staff in other states yielded useful information including best practices in the area of Early Literacy skills and training. One overarching best practice that permeated both public library early literacy programs and the training provided by state library agencies was the importance of ongoing evaluation. Having practical evaluation strategies in place enabled state library staff and children’s librarians, library staff and volunteers to monitor their work and respond to changing needs.

#### **Best practices for early literacy development in public libraries**

- ***Every Child Ready to Read*** is the most prevalent and practical model for implementation in public libraries, no matter what their size, funding, or staffing level.
- Parent and caregiver involvement and/or education is essential.
- Redesign of public spaces to create a family-friendly environment facilitates parent and caregiver involvement.

#### **Best practices for statewide training for early literacy development**

- Recognize that capacity for change and implementing best practices varies widely within the state.
- Develop strategic partnerships at the state level and encourage libraries to do the same at the local level.
- Using a Train-the-Trainer model, develop cohorts of trainers from within the state’s ranks of youth services librarians, library staff and volunteers.

### **Significant Findings from Review and Survey of New York State Libraries**

#### **Most commonly expressed training needs:**

- How to conduct community analysis/needs assessments.
- How to conduct effective outreach.
- How to identify and cultivate effective and relevant partners.
- Sensitivity to cultural, racial, and economic differences among families and caregivers is needed in order to successfully implement all three of these training needs.

#### **Other training considerations:**

- ***Every Child Ready to Read*** has been adopted in some public libraries in the state; there is a need to keep those libraries up to date while providing full training to other public libraries.

## *Ready to Read at New York Libraries* – Background and Research

- There is some evidence that training in early childhood development and literacy should be offered to the entire staff where possible. Consider adapting the “Everybody Serves Youth” model, used in Oregon and Brooklyn, New York, to a “Everyone Serves Young Families” model that would focus on the needs of preschool children, the parent’s role as first teacher, and the opportunity for all library staff to promote early literacy.
- Half-day face-to-face training is the preferred mode for training.

In addition to training, librarians and other library staff would like additional support for:

- Marketing.
- Acquisition of materials to create more welcoming early childhood spaces.
- Kits to enhance and facilitate parent/caregiver education and early literacy-enhanced story times.

### ***Ready to Read at New York Libraries for 2014 and Beyond***

The New York State Library plans to develop *Ready to Read at New York Libraries* as a statewide initiative to transform the lives of young New Yorkers through quality library programs that provide parents/caregivers and young children with the skills and knowledge needed for success in the school years ahead. It is hoped that, with the help of the Laura Bush 21<sup>st</sup> century Library Program Planning Grant, in 2014 the New York State Library will be able to form an Advisory Group, research sources of funding, develop an evaluation tool, and create a plan to train librarians and library staff in early literacy skills that will result in a sustainable and comprehensive plan to provide public library staff in the state with access to the training and materials they need to make the library a vital community hub for early learning and a key community partner in every village, town, county and city in New York.