

Early Literacy Update:

We produced five new bookmarks, five new posters, and five new info cards. All of these have original art by a MT designer and focus on one of the five themes in the American Library Association's revised Every Child Ready to Read campaign. The five themes are meant to be extensions of the existing six literacy skills and are easier for parents, especially those with low literacy skills themselves, to understand. Additionally, it helps parents understand exactly what they need to do to develop their children's early literacy skills. The five themes are: Read, Write, Play, Talk, and Sing.

There were two programs at the Fall Workshop that related to Ready 2 Read – Play in Libraries and Block Play. These two workshops were well-attended and both spoke to our next steps in the Ready 2 Read program, introducing the concept of “play” in libraries. Both workshops were packed and the speakers provided ample ideas for introducing things that librarians could easily work into their libraries, regardless of size and budget – which is one of the important messages we are trying to share.

The Montana State Library hosted the Ready 2 Read Rendezvous at the Bozeman Public Library from Friday, October 7 – Sunday, October 9, 2011. A final agenda and speaker bio is attached for your information. A total of 43 librarians attended, representing 37 different libraries. Montana communities from different sizes and different parts of the state – from Libby to Fort Peck, from Billings to Darby – were all represented. We also had three tribal libraries represented and two of Montana's school/community libraries as well.

The training was unique for a number of reasons, including:

- 1) Participants had to apply to attend; i.e. they were greatly invested in being there.
- 2) Participants were all children's librarians and many had never attended a conference or training before. For many, this was their first professional development experience they had ever had.
- 3) Participants spent every minute of the entire Rendezvous together. There weren't competing speakers – everyone attended the same speakers. They ate all of their meals and snacks and took their breaks together. Additionally, they stayed in the same hotel. A great deal of bonding and networking took place because of this.
- 4) The content and speakers of the Rendezvous were designed to build on each other. We began the conference with an overview of information on early childhood development, for instance, that provided everyone with solid base knowledge to bring to the next trainings. We ended with a training on advocacy and how to garner support for their efforts in their local communities.

At the end of the conference, some attendees literally wept with gratitude about being able to attend. In the evaluation of the Ready 2 Read Rendezvous, one attendee said, “I always go to these trainings, come home, and then put everything away in a drawer. This conference has left me energized and excited to go home and put everything I learned into practice immediately!” Another comment, from an email I received after the Rendezvous, is below:

I just had my 1st Books and Babies since the rendezvous and what an incredible experience! I was seeing all these different “stages of development” amongst the different ages, and noticing the skills they had

to use for particular toys. I was looking at the toys we use with totally new eyes, and happily thinking we've got a great variety and bunch of toys for the kids to choose from. I used one of the new board books (the ten little fingers one) in the regular part of the program and the kids loved it. As soon as I can find something to play the tune on, I'll learn the song, and I'm sure it will become a regular on our list.

I put the blocks out and one Dad sat and built structures and the little ones would toddle over and knock them down, but none of the kids were drawn to the building part of the blocks. Then, when we were cleaning up, I accidentally spilled the "tip" cards from the bunch that came with our Ready to Read bin, and wouldn't you know that the one about blocks just fell out in front of me. I read the card to the Dad, and we both had a good laugh over it. It said, "Put some blocks out for children to play with at the end of storytime. Talk about the shapes and encourage children to explore what they can do with the blocks. Encourage the adults to do the same." He said, "Looks like we have to work on the kid part." I laughed, but said, "Oh no, for this age they did just what they were supposed to do. They'll start building with them if we just make them available." Before today, blocks had not been a choice for the kiddies. I made sure to tell them all that they came to us from the State Library and the grant from First Interstate Bank....hope that info was correct.

Anyway, I already had great enthusiasm for Books & Babies...it's one of my favorite days of the week...but I now have renewed enthusiasm and it all came from the Rendezvous! Thanks again and again and thanks SO MUCH!!!

A few things were requested by the attendees to keep the group moving forward:

- a) A place to put ideas, materials, etc. We will have a wiki available by MLA.
- b) An email list of people interested specifically in early childhood services.
- c) An interest group on early childhood services that meets regularly and provides direction to the State Library on next steps and direction for the Ready 2 Read program, similar to an early childhood Network Advisory Council. I have collected names of interested parties and we will talk more about this at MLA.

Librarians who attended the Ready 2 Read Rendezvous have moved forward with many exciting projects and opportunities. The North Lake County Library has received three grants to support the development of their own Play and Learn Center. Additionally, the Bitterroot Public Library and the Darby Public Library are partnering together to provide eight trainings for their community on early literacy in March 2012.

The new Ready 2 Read PlaySpace opened at the Bozeman Public Library in mid-September and it has been a tremendous hit. We will provide money to libraries across the state to develop PlaySpaces of their own and are currently working on a plan that includes an application process, and providing

materials to communities based on the size of their library, etc. Our plan is to roll the application process out in February. The goal of each PlaySpace will be to offer high-quality toys and hands-on interactive tools with the goal of expanding the traditional role of children's services and increasing the capacity of libraries to recognize and realize their full potential as community hubs for healthy child and family development, parent and community involvement and lifelong learning beginning at birth. The PlaySpace is branded as part of the Ready 2 Read program through design, which was completed by the original Ready 2 Read designer. Our plan is to use funding from the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation to expand the PlaySpace ideas into libraries across Montana. To further support the concept of play in libraries, we have offered a number of trainings on the value of play and will continue to do so.

Additionally, the Montana State Library was asked to serve on the state's Best Beginnings Advisory Council. This is a huge step forward in helping other organizations and agencies understand how libraries are part of the early education puzzle, and will hopefully lead to increased funding opportunities in the long run.

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