



Children & Families  
Commission of Orange County

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Agenda Item No. 7

September 3, 2008 Meeting

CLERK OF THE BOARD  
ORANGE COUNTY  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

**DATE:** August 25, 2008

**TO:** Children and Families Commission of Orange County

**FROM:** Michael M. Ruane, Executive Director

**SUBJECT:** **Transition Plans for United Way *Success By 6* Programs - Raising A Reader and Affordable Buildings for Children's Development (ABCD)**

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**SUMMARY:**

The Children and Families Commission of Orange County has supported the expansion of successful early literacy and early learning programs in underserved communities in Orange County. The United Way of Orange County is restructuring their organization and will no longer support the *Raising A Reader* early literacy program and *Affordable Buildings for Children's Development* (ABCD) program that supports the construction of child care facilities and preschools. Both programs were components of the United Way's *Success By 6* program. Transitioning these programs to the Commission's Early Literacy and Ready to Learn programs is recommended to consolidate and strengthen efforts to expand the programs to reach at risk children in target communities.

**Raising A Reader Early Literacy Program**

*Raising A Reader* (RAR) is a national evidence-based early literacy program outreaching to low-income parents to engage them in a routine of daily book reading with their children birth to five. Participating children borrow a weekly rotation of four books that are high-quality, developmentally-appropriate, and multicultural. Through training and support, RAR parents, including those with limited English proficiency or low literacy skills, learn and engage in interactive read-aloud strategies, and an introduction to the public library.

The RAR program fits within the mission of the Commission's Early Literacy Program to promote reading to children in Orange County every day in order to build language and learning skills, with a belief that providing access to books and educating parents about the importance of early literacy are some of the most effective strategies in helping children to start school prepared to succeed.

RAR is a scaleable method of fostering read-aloud routines to low-income families and is designed to be implemented across communities in any setting in which parents and children routinely gather, such as family child care homes and home visiting programs. *Success By 6* offered this program to a select group of child care centers that will continue using existing resources to ensure no supplanting of Commission funds. Expanding the program to 250 additional children and transitioning program management for both the current and expanded

programs to the Commission's Early Literacy Program is recommended for a total cost not to exceed \$25,000. An analysis and recommendation for the long-term implementation of the RAR program will be included in the Bridgespan implementation plan for early literacy investments.

### **Affordable Buildings for Children's Development (ABCD) Program**

Since 2004, the Commission participated in a local coordination of efforts to address child care facilities development including economic development issues, particularly facilities and business development, researching and analyzing gaps and needs, and building partnerships with the community economic development and financing sectors to address those needs.

In 2005, through a grant from the Affordable Buildings for Children's Development (ABCD), a program of the Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF), with major funding from First 5 California, a formal collaborative effort was established at the Orange County United Way and chaired by the Commission's representative. The collaborative serves as a clearinghouse for child care facilities development and aims to achieve favorable land use and building regulations, financial resources and a child care industry that understands business management

Commission grantees, including but not limited to Delhi Center, Anaheim City and Magnolia School Districts, Cambodian Family, and Orange County Therapeutic Arts Center, have received technical assistance, support and resources through the collaboration. The LIIF grant to support the collaborative and the ABCD program was renewed through August 2010. Transitioning the management of the ABCD program to the Commission's Ready to Learn program is recommended through the term of the grant.

### **STRATEGIC PLAN & FISCAL SUMMARY:**

The program has been specifically reviewed in relation to the Strategic Plan and is consistent with the Ready to Learn outcome goal. Funding for this item is included in the FY2008-2009 Budget within the Ready to Learn Program Set Aside budget category.

### **PRIOR COMMISSION ACTION:**

July 2, 2008 – Received Executive Officer's report on programs administered by Orange County's United Way *Success by Six* Program.

### **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:**

1. Approve an increase of \$25,000 in Agreement PS-56 with Public Health Foundation Enterprises, Inc. for the period July 1, 2008 through June 30, 2009 and a new total maximum obligation of \$1,975,000 to expand the Raising A Reader program and transition the program management to the Commission's Early Literacy Program.
2. In coordination with Orange County United Way, authorize transitioning the lead agency role for the Affordable Buildings for Children's Development (ABCD)/Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF) to the Children and Families Commission of Orange County's Ready to Learn program.

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Raising A Reader 2008 Program Overview

**Contact:** Kelly Pijl

# Raising A Reader®

**2008  
Program  
Overview**

## Mission

The Raising A Reader mission is to foster healthy brain development, parent-child bonding and early literacy skills critical for school success by engaging parents in a routine of daily "book cuddling" with their children from birth to age five.



## Raising A Reader National Headquarters

1700 S. El Camino Real  
Suite 300  
San Mateo, CA 94402  
Phone: 650.581.4300  
Email: [rarinquiry@raisingareader.org](mailto:rarinquiry@raisingareader.org)  
[www.raisingareader.org](http://www.raisingareader.org)



**Since 2001, Raising A Reader has filled an important niche in the spectrum of national early literacy programs, providing a low-cost, scalable method for communities to foster read-aloud routines among low-income families.**

## How it works

Headquartered at Silicon Valley Community Foundation, Raising A Reader is operated through a diverse national network of community affiliates (e.g. school systems, libraries, or local United Ways). These affiliates reach out to low-income families through preschools, home visiting programs, adult education centers, family child-care homes—any place where parents and children routinely gather.

Each week, Raising A Reader children (or parents) bring home a sturdy red bag filled with four high-quality, developmentally-appropriate, multi-cultural children's books. Over the course of the program year, they are exposed to a wide range of titles, providing them with both a mirror reflecting their own world and a window

to the world beyond. Through initial training and ongoing support, Raising A Reader parents—even those with limited English proficiency or low literacy skills—learn how to engage their children in storytelling with picture books. The program includes an introduction to the public library, setting up families for a lifetime of book enjoyment.

Raising A Reader is cost-effective because the bags and books remain the property of the agency delivering the program and can be used year after year. The program can be started for approximately \$100/child, and the average cost per child served over a five-year period is \$35.

## Theory of Change

The Raising A Reader theory of change consists of five anchor behaviors that lead to desired changes of family bonding, early brain development and school readiness.

### If...

- ★ **Children drive the process** and the red book bags and books become a favorite toy;
- ★ **Program professionals learn how to train parents** in interactive read-aloud strategies and early brain development;
- ★ **Parents learn and engage in read-aloud strategies** and develop a regular routine of book cuddling;
- ★ **The weekly book bag delivery system is turnkey**—a simple, sustainable routine that is easily managed in a number of diverse settings;
- ★ **Families start to use their local library** for an additional source of high-quality reading materials;

**Then** children in the program will benefit from healthy brain development, family bonding, and increased early literacy skills. They enter kindergarten with a love of books and ready to learn to read.

## Results

A dozen independent evaluations have validated Raising A Reader's theory of change. Notably:

**Read-aloud activity:** There was a 471% increase in the percentage of low-income parents sharing books with their children five or more times each week. (San Francisco, 2004)

**Kindergarten readiness:** Head Start children in Raising A Reader for 8 months tested at least twice as high as the national norms for Head Start children in readiness skills of book knowledge, print concepts and story comprehension. (Santa Clara County, 2001)

**Library usage:** There was a 337% growth in the percentage of Spanish-speaking parents taking their children to the library at least once a month. (Santa Clara County, 2001)

## Impact & Reach

- ★ 113 active affiliate partners
- ★ 120,000 children served annually
- ★ 175 communities in 33 states

**Since 2001, more than 427,000 families have participated in Raising A Reader.**

## Current Research Studies

Raising A Reader is being evaluated in the following contexts:

### ★ Technology, Learning & Caring Project:

Researchers from the Stanford Schools of Education and Medicine are examining the longitudinal impact of Raising A Reader on parent-child bonding and early literacy skill development among low-income families with children in the 9-24 month-old age range. Their research will be submitted to academic journals in 2008.

According to the researchers, their initial findings "suggest that the Raising A Reader program provides important developmental benefits during infancy and toddlerhood that may enhance developing literacy skills in the preschool years and beyond."

### ★ Texas Early Education Model Partnership:

Researchers at the University of Texas Health Science Center, led by Dr. Susan Landry are investigating the impact of Raising A Reader on parent read-aloud behaviors and kindergarten readiness when used as a complement to the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM) preschool programming.

### ★ Early Steps to School Success:

Raising A Reader is being evaluated as part of the Early Steps to School Success program piloted by Save the Children and Zero to Three in sites across the rural Southeast.



## Future plans

By 2010, Raising A Reader seeks to double its annual social impact, reaching more than 200,000 children each year.

Raising A Reader is also partnering with Rickshaw Bagworks in developing eco-friendly, Cradle-To-Cradle certified book bags.

## Awards

Raising A Reader was named one of America's top 45 non-profits for 2008!

For the third year in a row, Fast Company Magazine and the Monitor Group honored Raising A Reader with its Social Capitalist Award, given to nonprofits or "social entrepreneurs," that combine creativity and ingenuity with business solutions to address social issues.

|| "One of the top non-profits changing the world" ||



## Learn more

If you are interested in reviewing Raising A Reader evaluation results or learning more about the program, please visit us at [www.raisingareader.org](http://www.raisingareader.org) or contact a member of our Outreach team at 650.581.4300.