



BRIGHT SPOTS

STOCKTON, CALIFORNIA

When the future was uncertain for Reach Out and Read San Joaquin – a central California program site of a national effort by pediatricians to coach low-income parents on reading to their children – the community’s Grade-Level Reading coalition came to the rescue.

“We were able to make sure it continues because we believe it is so important,” says Jennifer Torres Siders, of University of the Pacific, the lead organization for the GLR coalition in Stockton, the seat of San Joaquin County.

“In our county, the program focuses on low-income families, who are especially in need of good literacy resources,” says Torres Siders. “It’s been very successful and we like that it’s research-tested. We also love that the program links health and school readiness and draws the medical and health community into our literacy coalition.”

Today, Reach Out and Read San Joaquin reaches around 6,000 children ages 6 months to 5 years who receive care in 12 public and private medical offices serving low-income families. The program also distributes 11,000 children’s books a year, including books written in Spanish and Asian languages from Khmer to Urdu that accommodate the area’s diverse population.

To preserve the program, Stockton’s GLR coalition secured new major funding sources – Health Plan of San Joaquin, a not-for-profit health care plan serving low-income residents, and First 5 San Joaquin, a tobacco-tax funded agency that aims to improve the lives of children ages 0 to 5. Meanwhile, another nonprofit organization, San Joaquin A+ stepped in to oversee the program’s operations.

The coalition also worked to make the program sustainable, hiring a consultant to run it, reinforcing relationships with medical providers and reigniting community support. Two successful book drives coordinated by University of the Pacific garnered 5,000 children’s books to be distributed to doctor’s offices.

“That process is ongoing,” says Torres Siders. “It will be stronger than ever. That’s a testament to the power of a strong coalition. Without a lot of people coming together to work on it, the program could have easily fallen by the wayside.”

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Bright Spots showcase the work that Grade-Level Reading communities are doing to make progress on school readiness, school attendance and summer learning by 2016. You can nominate a Bright Spot in your community by emailing Betsy Rubiner at brubiner@gradelevelreading.net.

Since 1998, Reach Out and Read San Joaquin has made it possible for pediatricians to distribute books to parents and caregivers during well-child visits. They also relay an important message about how to use books at home and the importance of reading to children daily.

“Doctors are respected authority figures whose advice parents trust. They also see young children on a regular basis way before they enter school,” says Torres Siders. “So it’s an excellent opportunity to reach out to parents and caregivers with the literacy message.”

For more information on Reach Out and Read, see www.reachoutandread.org. Jennifer Torres Siders can be reached at (209) 946-3134 or jtorressiders@pacific.edu.