



**COLORADO**  
**Department of Education**  
Colorado State Library

**Growing Readers Together Evaluation Findings**  
**August 2017**



## Background

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Growing Readers Together is an early literacy initiative designed and supported through the Colorado State Library (CSL), a unit within the Colorado Department of Education. The vision for the Growing Readers Together (GRT) program was conceived and expanded on in partnership with the Buell Foundation who funded the first implementation of the project in 2016-2017. The purpose of the program is to expand early literacy programming access to family, friend, and neighbor providers (FFN) across Colorado.

The CDE Library provided sub-grants to local library systems across the state, including the Alamosa Public Library, Canon City Public Library, Canon City Public Library, the Combined Community Library, Conejos Library District, John C. Fremont Library District, Lamar Public Library, Limon Memorial Library, Lincoln County Bookmobile, Pikes Peak Library District, Pines & Plains Libraries, Pueblo City-County Library District, Security Public Library, Walsenburg Public Library, and the West Custer County Library District.

CSL described the project goals and objectives: *“Growing Readers Together will build FFN partnerships/networks, increase FFN caregiver/librarian interactions to impart early literacy training and modeling for caregivers, and expand early literacy materials in libraries and FFN caregiver homes. Because local libraries and other agencies serve unique communities, each of the goals, objectives, and activities will result in customized programs that fit the unique communities and the FFN caregivers identified locally. The approach is not one size fits all, yet CSL staff will work closely within each community to ensure consistent use of evidence-based practices for early literacy activities, training, collections, services, and evaluation.”* (For more information see <https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdelib/growingreaderstogether>).

CSL contracted with the Clayton Early Learning Research and Evaluation Department to conduct an evaluation of the Growing Readers Together (GRT) initiative during its first year. This report provides documentation of the successes, challenges, and accomplishment of the statewide project goals. The evaluation addresses the following research questions. The GRT Evaluation Plan is provided in Appendix A. Clayton Research and Evaluation met regularly with CSL to develop and monitor evaluation strategies and held a webinar for sub-grantee library sites in May 2017 to explain the summer evaluation activities. A presentation of the evaluation findings was provided in August 2017.

## *Evaluation Questions*

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The following evaluation questions were developed in collaboration with the CSL team and are aligned with the project goals (please see the evaluation plan in Appendix A).

- How do GRT program activities affect FFN provider knowledge, skills, attitudes, and resources?
- What strategies with FFN providers were employed by public library staff and how did these change as a result of the GRT program?
- How has the Colorado State Library impacted state-level infrastructure related to FFN providers and early literacy?
- What were the library and FFN early literacy opportunities for children birth to 5 in SE Colorado?

## *Evaluation Methods*

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A variety of approaches were used to gather data to answer the evaluation questions. These are summarized in Appendix A. The methods included surveys, interviews, and review of sites' monthly reports.

**Surveys** were developed to assess aspects of the FFN experience and were made available in both Spanish and English. A short postcard survey was used to get immediate feedback on library services, and another survey designed by CSL staff was used in some cases by partner sites to get timely data on the FFN experience. A longer survey (see Appendix B) was delivered by sites to FFN program participants (i.e., mostly those receiving early literacy materials purchased and assembled in bags for the providers) to assess details about the care situations children experience in FFN care. This included questions regarding the number and ages of children in care, language spoken, and providers early childhood work experience. The survey also examined the provision of literacy materials, literacy activities, library interactions, and experiences with Growing Readers Together.

**Interviews** with FFN providers, local library GRT coordinators, and CSL stakeholders offered an opportunity to explore their experiences in striving to meet GRT project goals. Other community stakeholders involved with statewide FFN networks were invited to participate in an interview to share perspectives on this approach to reaching this population of providers and children.

**Monthly report reviews** were conducted to hear from sites about the numbers of activities they conducted and FFN providers they reached and stories about the impact the initiative was having on the FFN community.

## Evaluation Findings

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### **Family, Friend and Neighbor Survey Results**

#### ➤ **Description of Growing Readers Together Family, Friend, and Neighbor Provider Participants**

During the spring and summer of 2017, Family, Friend, and Neighbor providers (FFN) participating in their local library's Growing Readers Together were asked through their local libraries to answer a survey to learn more about how in-home childcare providers throughout Colorado are involved with their local libraries. A total of 61 FFN providers completed participation in the evaluation study either online ( $n=18$ ) or on paper copies sent to Clayton through the mail ( $n=43$ ). These families attended Growing Readers Together sessions in 13 libraries across Colorado (Alamosa Public Library ( $n=1$ ), Canon City Public Library ( $n=10$ ), Combined Community Library ( $n=0$ ), Conejos Library District ( $n=3$ ), John C. Fremont Library District ( $n=3$ ), Lamar Public Library ( $n=2$ ), Limon Memorial Library ( $n=8$ ), Pikes Peak Library District ( $n=18$ ), Pines & Plains Libraries ( $n=0$ ), Pueblo City-County Library District ( $n=3$ ), Security Public Library ( $n=10$ ), Walsenburg (Spanish Peaks Library District) ( $n=2$ ), and West Custer County Library District ( $n=0$ ).

Additionally, within the larger group of FFN providers responding to the FFN provider survey, 35 FFN providers responded they would like to speak in more detail about their experiences with their library and the Growing Readers Together through a phone interview conducted by staff at Clayton Early Learning. Analyses are also provided by library location aggregated by size of population in library service area.

Libraries in the large urban area include: Pikes Peak Library District, Pueblo City-County Library District, and Security Public Library. Libraries in a medium rural area include: Alamosa Public Library, Canon City Public Library, John C. Fremont Library District, and Lamar Public Library. The remaining libraries, Combined Community Library, Conejos Library District, Limon Memorial Library, Pines & Plains Libraries, Walsenburg (Spanish Peaks Library District), and West Custer County Library District comprise the libraries located in a small rural area. FFN provider survey responses by site classification are: large urban ( $n=31$ ), medium rural ( $n=16$ ), and small rural ( $n=13$ ).<sup>1</sup> Results from site classification should be considered preliminary and

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<sup>1</sup> Sum of FFN Provider Survey responses aggregated by site size does not include one survey in which the FFN Provider declined to include library site information.

additional efforts should be made in Year 2 to collect a stronger representative sample from FFN providers in all sites to support these analyses.

*Table 1. Sample Sizes by Data Collection Type*

<b>Data Collection Activity</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
<b>FFN Provider Survey</b>	61
<b>FFN Provider Phone Interview</b>	35

FFN providers responding to the survey reported taking care of children in their home, on average, for 6 years, 5 months. Some FFN providers reported providing care for children in their home for as long as 30 years and as few as 3 months. FFN providers in medium rural areas reported, on average, the longest experience working with children in their home (7 years, 2 months), with the providers in the small rural areas reporting the least average length of time caring for children (5 years, 7 months).

The average number of children in an FFN care arrangement was reported to be 2.3 children, with the greatest number in any one arrangement being 7 and the fewest reported as 1. This did not differ substantially by the size of population in the library service area. The most frequently reported age of the children in FFN care was 1 to 2 year olds (57.3%), followed by children ages 3 to 4, and then by children ages 5 to 6.

Primary spoken languages of children participating in GRT are summarized in Table 2. English was the primary language for nearly all of the FFN providers and children participating in the FFN survey. Languages other than English varied to include Spanish and German.

*Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of FFN Providers and Children in their Care (FFN Provider Survey, n=45)*

<b>Languages Spoken</b>	<b>FFN Providers</b>	<b>Children</b>
<b>English</b>	100%	100%
<b>Additional languages - Spanish, German</b>	7%	2%

FFN providers were asked about their previous experience working with children in other roles, 21% of FFN providers said they had previous experience as a teacher in a classroom setting and nearly 15% of said they had previously been a licensed childcare provider. FFN providers in a medium rural area were nearly twice as likely those providers in a small rural or large urban area to report they had previously worked as a teacher in a classroom setting. Other experience working with children included: babysitting, unlicensed childcare, care of children in a church

setting, Teacher's Aid in a local Head Start classroom, and volunteering with Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts groups.

### ➤ **FFN Provider Care and Experience with Growing Readers Together**

We examined factors related to children's experience with home-based care environments and providers' experience with the Growing Readers Together program. The quality of home-based care relationships, and enrichment activities all play an important role in children's overall wellbeing. According to Nievar, Moske, Johnson, and Chen (2014), "...a positive home environment leads to enhanced cognitive development and...provides a basis for the development of attachment and self-regulation. A positive, enriched environment aids in the development of children's self-regulation as well (p. 322)."<sup>2</sup> To understand the prevalence of these factors among home-based care, FFN providers were asked to complete a survey and asked to participate in a phone interview as part of their participation in the *Growing Readers Together* evaluation study.

**Access to Literacy Materials.** Effective instruction and access to literacy promoting materials in the early years can have a large impact on children's language and literacy development, and children at risk for school failure stand to benefit the most from high-quality experiences (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002).<sup>3</sup> The following literacy materials are considered important in promoting a literacy enriched environment. The list below reflects the proportion of caregivers who reported that as they care for children in their home, the children have access to:

- Books that teach the alphabet (89%).
- Books that include rhyming words or stories (91%).
- Books that range in difficulty level (83%).
- Books that include factual information (79%).
- Recorded books/stories (38%).
- Crayons, pencils, and paper for writing and drawing (97%).
- Toy letters such as cut-out or foam letters, fridge magnets, letter puzzles, blocks, etc. (89%).
- Word cards with names and familiar words (67%).

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<sup>2</sup> Nievar, M. A., Moske, A. K., Johnson, D. J., & Chen, Q. (2014). Parenting practices in preschool leading to later cognitive competence: A family stress model. *Early Education and Development, 25*(3), 318-337. doi:10.1080/10409289.2013.788426

<sup>3</sup> Campbell, F. A., Ramey, C. T., Pungello, E., Sparling, J., & Miller-Johnson, S. (2002). Early childhood education: Young adult outcomes from the Abecedarian project. *Applied Developmental Science, 6*, 42-57.

Responses for many of the above items did not vary substantially by size of population in library service area. However, FFN providers in medium rural areas were nearly twice as likely to report having recorded books and stories for use with children in their care. They were also slightly more likely to report having word cards with names of familiar words than providers in other areas.

**Book Access, Reading Frequency and Behaviors.** Early childhood educators, including FFN providers, promote cognitive development by intentionally planning activities and experiences that optimize conditions for children to acquire positive attitudes, skills, and knowledge about language and literacy. Neuman, Copple, Bredekamp (2000) highlighted a caregiver’s role as critical to a child’s learning and that caregivers can inspire children to read, write, and learn through thoughtful planning and developmentally appropriate literacy instruction.<sup>4</sup>



Nearly 80% of surveyed FFN providers reported reading aloud to children in a group setting frequently, while over 70% FFN providers reported reading aloud to children on an individual basis often or always. FFN providers (89%) reported setting aside a special time each day to read to the children in their care. FFN providers in small rural areas were the least likely to report, on average, reading to children in a group setting<sup>5</sup> though they did not differ in their frequency of reading to children on an individual basis.

Yeo, Ong, and Ng (2014) stated that “...caregiver-child engagement in reading is the strongest predictor of children’s emerging reading abilities and their reading motivation (p. 807).”<sup>6</sup> The proportion of FFN providers who reported frequently participating in literacy promoting reading behaviors are as follows:

- Read aloud a variety of different books (83.4%).
- Reread favorite books (86.3%).
- Talk with children about books read together (56.8%).

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<sup>4</sup> Neuman, S., Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (2000). *Learning to read and write: Developmentally appropriate practices for young children*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

<sup>5</sup> Percentage of FFN providers who responded reading aloud to children in a group setting often or always: Small Rural – 36.4%, Medium Rural – 81.3%, Large Urban – 61.9%

<sup>6</sup> Yeo, L. S., Ong, W. W., & Ng, C. M. (2014). The home literacy environment and preschool children's reading skills and interest. *Early Education and Development*, 25(6), 791-814. doi:10.1080/10409289.2014.862147

- Ask children questions about the books as we read or after we read (66.7%).
- Talk with children about new or unfamiliar words while reading books together (62%).

FFN providers in small rural sites were less likely to report participating in literacy promoting reading behaviors when compared to their colleagues in larger populations of library service area.<sup>7</sup> This suggests a particular area of focus when working with FFN providers in these areas.

Additionally, FFN providers were asked about their facilitation of print awareness, over 85% of surveyed FFN reported frequently providing children with the opportunity of look at books and other printed materials on their own. Less than one-third of FFN reported they frequently spent time teaching children about different features of a book (e.g., front and back cover, top and bottom, pointing out and describing the responsibility of the author and illustrator). Slightly over half of the FFN reported teaching children that printed letters and words run from left to right and across the page and from top to bottom. One-third of FFN providers reported rarely engaging in this activity with children in their care. Responses did not vary substantially by the size of population in the library service area.

FFN providers also reported their frequency of participating in letter knowledge and phonological awareness activities with the children. Over two-thirds (70%) reported practicing saying the alphabet with the children often. Nearly 75% of FFN reported singing songs that feature letter sounds, such as the alphabet song, every day. Additionally, 67% of FFN reported teaching children to recognize the letters of the alphabet. FFN providers in small rural areas reported reviewing the alphabet with children less frequently than providers in medium rural and large urban areas.<sup>8</sup> Findings such as these indicate many FFN providers are exploring several avenues to introduce children to the first steps of language.

### ➤ **FFN Providers' Library Interactions**

**FFN Provider Perceptions of Outcomes of Participating in Growing Readers Together.** FFN providers were asked if they agreed with the following statements about their perceptions of the outcomes resulting from their participation in the Growing Readers Together initiative at their library.

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<sup>7</sup> Talk about books: Small Rural – 36%, Medium Rural – 69%, Large Urban – 59%

Ask children questions about the books: Small Rural – 55%, Medium Rural – 75%, Large Urban – 67%

Talk with children about new or unfamiliar words: Small Rural – 46%, Medium Rural – 69%, Large Urban – 67%

<sup>8</sup> Practice saying the alphabet: Small Rural – 55%, Medium Rural – 81%, Large Urban – 71%

Sing songs that feature letter sounds: Small Rural – 64%, Medium Rural – 75%, Large Urban – 81%

Teach children to recognize letters: Small Rural – 55%, Medium Rural – 69%, Large Urban – 74%



FFN providers mentioned the following features as a benefit to participating in GRT:

- You learned something you can share with the children in your care (91.3%).
- You feel more confident to help the children in your care to learn (88.9%).
- You will spend more time interacting with the children in your care (e.g. read, talk, sing, write, play; 91.3%).
- You are more aware of available resources and services provided by the library (93.8%).
- You will visit the library more often with the children in your care (87.7%).

Nearly two-thirds of FFN providers (64%) from small rural areas reported becoming much more aware of resources and services provided by the library through their participation in GRT. A similar level of the same FFN providers (67%) from small rural areas also anticipated visiting the library more often with children in their care in the future.

FFN providers were asked about their experiences with the materials provided by their GRT participating libraries. When asked if they found the tips and ideas shared by the Growing Readers Together librarians to be helpful, over 98% of FFN providers strongly agreed the suggestions were helpful in building literacy experiences for their children. Again, over 94% of FFN providers thought the experiences with GRT were appropriate for the age of the children in their care. Over 50% reported the literacy building guidance and activities were generally new to them. A majority of FFN providers (98%) reported they would continue to use the ideas offered by through the GRT program when spending time with the children in their care. FFN providers did not vary substantially in their supportive responses regarding their experiences with the tips, ideas, and materials provided by their library through GRT by size of population in library service area.

### ***Family, Friend and Neighbor Interview Results***

Using an open-ended phone interview, FFN providers were asked what changes they might have made to their interactions, materials, and environments to support the language and literacy development of children in their care as part of their participation in GRT. They were also asked what they liked most and liked least about their participation with their local libraries and the Growing Readers Together program. FFN providers generated ideas about other services and activities they could see the program offering in the future.

*“The children like to listen to the stories and color. They think they are writing a big story.”*

FFN providers reported now placing more items on lower shelves to allow the children in their care easier access. Another provider said she had not been back to the library to borrow materials lately, but purchased some children’s books so she could have her own library at

home for the kids. Another provider said she reads to them more and now encourages painting and coloring. A grandparent provider reported wanting to go to the library to spend more time reading with her grandkids.

The summer reading programs made available in many libraries in particular were mentioned as a favorite among providers. One FFN provider indicated that they especially liked the variety of materials so the grandchildren she watches have something new to explore.

Most frequently, FFN providers mentioned the following features they liked most:

- Going to the library allows the children to socialize with other children.
- Spending quality time with their children.
- Library events are being held outside of the library (e.g., playgrounds, farmers' markets).
- Getting to know other people in the community with young kids.
- The librarians are really interested in the children.

While several FFN providers indicated there was nothing about the GRT program or the library they disliked, some shared their thoughts for improvement. The most common complaints were difficulty getting to the library events with multiple children. Of the aspects they liked least, FFN providers reported:

- The calendars of library activities sometimes come out too late to plan.
- Some children don't pay attention and parents don't care when they are disruptive.

Some providers had ideas for additional services or activities for the sessions. One suggested having a parent night (with childcare) to learn more about child development. Another thought it would be nice to have more languages represented at story time and toys that speak different languages. She bought tapes to teach the children in her care German and Spanish. She would like to find some more language materials at the library appropriate for the ages of the children in her care.

### ***Local Library Site Interview Results***

Phone interviews were scheduled with library site coordinators to learn about their experiences with implementing the GRT program in their communities. The interview questions assessed activities and outcomes related to Goal 2 of the grant and were intended to answer aspects of the four key evaluation questions. The interview ranged from 30-45 minutes each and 10 interviews were conducted and included the following public libraries: Alamosa, Canon City, Conejos, John C. Fremont (Florence), Limon (with reference to Lincoln bookmobile activities), Pikes Peak Library District, Pueblo City-County, Security, Walsenburg, and West Custer County. Findings are described below.

### ➤ Effective FFN Early Literacy Outreach Strategies

Local library sites reported on the outreach strategies they tried within their communities and talked about the relative efficacy of each approach. **The most common theme across sites was the need to go to places and events the FFN provider naturally already go.** One library staff person said it was critical to be ready to engage no matter where you are and recommended taking bags and materials with you wherever you go. Relying on FFN to go to the library and identify themselves specifically as FFN providers was not an effective strategy for finding this population. Home visits were also somewhat limited as an initial strategy because, as library staff reported, FFN may be more cautious or private, or concerned that they would “get in trouble” legally or through social services because of the care they were providing.



This means that **library staff most effectively located FFN through attending a variety of venues and events.** They conducted outreach by visiting community places and gatherings such as food giveaways, school lunch, grocery stores, community centers, playgroups, health clinics, doctor offices, parks, and farmer’s markets and attempted to identify FFN providers by starting conversations with any people with children. Several librarians said they had to become more prosocial than they otherwise were accustomed to. They talked about needing to move out of their comfort zones at times to approach people in the community outside of the library. Relatedly, one librarian said, *“I had to learn how to take rejection gracefully. Sometimes people just weren’t interested. I had to be able to take that rejection and stay positive and still make them feel welcome.”*

Other outreach involved setting up home visits via contact lists obtained through library events, local licensed child care/Head Start programs, or other community partners serving this population. Home visitation was a strategy that appeared more effective once families had already attended activities at the libraries or received early literacy bags at another event. Home visits were also more effective for FFN who already had established direct relationships with the librarians. One community’s librarian talked about using a bookmobile for outreach and that this was a good way to distribute the literacy bags and reach FFN in neighborhoods they had not visited before. In addition, getting the word out during other library activities, such as the summer reading programs was effective.

**Partnering with other organizations and their events was listed as a highly effective outreach strategy.**

Local library site coordinators described numerous other non-profits providing other types of services that welcomed supporting GRT program goals. This list of organizations included those providing, for example, services related to health, housing, food, and early childhood intervention, care, and education. In some cases the partner organization (e.g., Alliance for Kids, HIPPY) would deliver the literacy materials on behalf of the local library and in other instances the librarians themselves worked side by side at the partners' events. Several library staff in smaller communities said they were very surprised at seeing people with children who they had "never seen before", increasing their realization that outreach was important. Another librarian shared that partnering with other organizations "*injects a lot of new ideas into the conversation on how to contact people and impact their lives*". Another librarian found success in distributing materials and literacy bags at local school enrollment events.

*"What we're learning is that collaboration is vital for reaching different demographics. It's something we are all doing and seeking out anyway. And the grant helped us do this faster and be more creative about who we are collaborating with."*

One of the key advantages mentioned by librarians was the ability to reach many more people through partnership with other organizations than they could via library walk-ins. For instance, one library, partnering with a nationally organized event around crime reduction, reported having contact with over 600 people to give out literacy materials, activity ideas, and informational brochures. Partnerships also provided opportunities for repeat engagements with the same groups of children and more chances to meet providers.

A clear challenge for the public venue recruitment was the actual identification of a person with children as an "FFN provider". Since providers do not necessarily give themselves this designation, it was reportedly not effective to ask simply whether the person is an FFN provider. Rather, **library staffs were more successful when they were able to make a connection through asking about the relationships** between the adults and children or asking about the person regularly babysitting for a group of children. Emphasizing difficulty in identifying FFN, library staff in a few communities said that the FFN providers were not always the "usual suspects" such as grandma or aunt. More variety was observed in the relationship between the provider and the children. A few communities indicated their surprise at finding a large proportion of grandfathers who provided care for multiple children and the librarian believed there was a unique opportunity here for providing early literacy supports for a very underserved portion of the FFN population. One person said: "*The surprising thing was that there were more gentlemen and great grandmas with a big generational gap. Sometimes it was the children's older brother or half-brother watching the little ones. Family relationships [we have found] are not so typical.*" Another rural library staff person described a group of young

women enrolled in online college who provided care for a substantial number of children in her community.

Another important group of FFN providers that were mentioned were the older siblings of children in the targeted early literacy age group. One librarian mentioned how older siblings may often provide care during gaps between when other parents or providers leave for work and other activities start or other providers arrive. It was suggested that in future there can be more attention and recognition of the potential for positive “trickle down” of literacy knowledge and values from older to younger siblings, and that age-appropriate literacy support and activities could enhance school readiness all around.

Another tip from one librarian was to be sure to take a translator (“*if you don’t speak Spanish*”) to events to have effective conversations about what the program offers. FFN providers within migrant or transitory communities had needs that were especially well served with GRT, according to one librarian, in that they could take the literacy bags in their cars and would have more continuous access for the children as they moved from location to location. In terms of positive relationship building, a few librarians indicated that there were “residual effects” of the outreach related to seeing the providers and children at more events later after the first connection.

Another important outreach strategy was related to the **communication strategies** that libraries used to inform the community about GRT and other library services. The library staff shared that they used flyers, posters, handouts at events, radio announcements, TV station marketing, bookmarks, calendars, and the use of social media like Facebook and other networks. They placed written materials in the literacy bags as well as in many locations all over the community (e.g., coffee shops, grocery, swimming pools, dollar stores, etc.). Partners also supported communications by distributing materials via their contact and email lists.

### ➤ **Reported Completion of Local Library Plans**

The consensus from library sites was that they were able to generally meet the goals they set forth on their plan, but the approach to accomplishing the goals may have varied from what they originally envisioned. The bottom line was that they reached people who care for children who they had not had contact with before. Some outreach activities specifically were less effective or delayed for some communities, but they believe the foundations have been established for effective outreach as they move forward. Several librarians made comments about the delay of the program year and that they could have “*done even more*” had the initiative been a full year. Overall, the local library staff expressed the value in experimentation to learn how to most effectively reach FFN providers to improve early literacy among children in their care.

### ➤ Reported Plan Modifications and Budget Satisfaction

Librarians were asked whether they needed to make many modifications to their original plans to accomplish their goals. Many agreed with the idea that recruitment and outreach strategies needed to vary to reach different subsets of FFN providers, and that different avenues needed to be tried to learn how to best communicate GRT offerings. Plans changed as new partners emerged throughout the grant year, as

*“I was able to buy books for the collection at the library, I redid our areas in the preschool children areas, and created a family zone for toddlers and babies. I added manipulatives and got the children new things. I also purchased a table for outreach.”*

activities could be modified to reach populations receiving other key services in the community.

The libraries also reported on their satisfaction with how they had planned the budget and the overall experience of budgeting. All were pleased with the amount of funds and thought they had generally planned well. One librarian said, *“We never had this amount of money to spend. I thought carefully about how to spend it wisely and with longevity in mind.”* They did indicate being happy with the flexibility of the grant in terms of shifting line items to accommodate spending or purchases in a more needed area, since the activities changed over the course of the project. Another person connected the spending as one of the planning challenges: *“I had a hard time wrapping my head around how to get started and spend this money, it took me the whole year. It was so big!”*

Another person said, *“The budget gave me a lot of leeway...didn’t have to worry about shorting the provider aspect. We got some big ticket stuff for story time. The budget afforded let us get stuff on our wish list, like the felt board and the story kits. It was ample enough. Wide open so we could figure out what we wanted to put in our literacy kits. We had lots of options, computer stuff. We have a good marketing campaign so we didn’t have to spend too much there.”*

For one librarian, the program activities and demand for early literacy materials increased toward the end of the project as FFN experienced the materials and literacy tips. Thus, the need for more purchases and kits increased with longer GRT implementation.

### ➤ FFN Provider Engagement

In some cases library staff knew the exact numbers of FFN providers they had reached, and in other communities it was more difficult to tell exactly how many were reached because of having worked with partners who helped distribute materials. Library staffs were hopeful they would become better at tracking numbers and families over time with more experience. Related to improving initial provider engagement, one library staff shared that it was important to go in with the simple message that it is important to read to the children, rather than

showing or teaching FFNs at first, so they would not get turned off by a too-didactic approach. When asked about the numbers they reached, these comments illustrate their responses:

- *For sure, from the HIPPY bags there were 39. I saw other FFNs ...want to estimate maybe 100.*
- *I gave out 36 bags (75% at food giveaway).*
- *I think we got about 23 kits out and 42 more at an event.*
- *I reached them at pop-up story times at the farmers' market every Thursday and gave handouts and the kits. I've had four of those in addition to the ones at Head Start. My five regular people who come to story time were there too.*

In terms of FFN reactions to the materials, the library staff reported the following examples:

- *FFNs were pleased that we were a good resource and that there was an alternative.*
- *Providers were asking different questions about individual children's developmental growth and development.*
- *They have come back for more.*
- *We made up 50 bags with different providers. They are so grateful. One thing I see is that, because we are giving them new books not used, they were glad we were able to do that.*
- *FFN are overwhelmed and grateful and say things like, "really these are mine to keep? Why?" and I would answer, "because we want you to read to the kids whenever you can."*
- *At first they were stunned. Because you don't get anything free, they're thinking, it's too good to be true. They were surprised and, as I talked to them more, they perked up and they were excited and thought the library was not a scam and it was something that was legitimate. And they warmed up to us just by us identifying with the library.*
- *When they opened the bag they 'ooohed' and 'ahhhhed'. They were excited to see what was in there. The shakers, the music activity.*
- *Some families were upset they were not eligible to receive a bag. Finding people in crowd is tricky, so you have to have an alternative prize to pass out.*
- *People are really happy and excited and appreciate what we gave them. Ironic story, at the park, grandma asked me where she can buy a shaker egg then I said here it is!! Everybody loves what we gave them.*

Another library staff person said that FFN providers were really patient compared to parents she had observed. She said, *"They are more understanding of what to do with the kids. They were enthusiastic if I was. They would mirror my language and enthusiasm. Two adults, and the triangulation, the kid is referencing their provider. Their attitude really changes the kids' attitudes."*

### ➤ Evidence of Positive Outcomes for Children

Library staff gave examples of children's enthusiasm and early learning:

- *One grandmother who was involved told me that one of the children in her care loved the materials and library activities so much that when she drove by the library and couldn't stop that day, the child was really sad.*
- *I think hearing that kids loved it from the providers was great. I think that means they are taking the time to enjoy what's in the bag.*
- *I took a bag to the home visit to the provider. She met me outside and held the bag and I talked to her about ideas. The kids were so excited, they are inviting-looking bags and they couldn't wait to open them. They were excited that it was just for them.*
- *In my story time 3 days a week, I have watched these kids with the new toys. We have these exercise mats. They are called "let's get moving activity mats". The kids can jog, jump, do arm circles. Then we count. They are getting so much better, they sit longer, they listen more, they can count now, and they can do all the nursery rhymes. At first they couldn't do pat-a-cake, but can now do "I'm a little teapot". Almost, they can now do Hokey Pokey. They've learned a lot about colors and we do a bean bag game. Matching colors and sorts. The materials have given me new ideas and then the kids and providers start thinking differently about the activities.*
- *In some of the places for story time, they'd [the kids] open bags and sing songs and do the shaker egg. They would participate and be able to sing 'twinkle-twinkle' and the body parts song.*

### ➤ Local Library Perceptions of Partnering with CSL

Many positive words were used to describe the CSL staff and process. Librarians said the following about CSL staff: patient, flexible, kind, caring, concerned, gentle, attentive, supportive, great, quick responders, there when you need them, accommodating, wonderful, answered questions, provided surveys, helpful, recommended good resources, it's a pleasure, I love them, awesome, they know how to run a grant, they keep me on track, consistent check-ins and heads ups.

Other comments related to difficulties of the partnership related to the project getting a late start (about half of the sites mentioned the delay affected their GRT implementation). One person mentioned how helpful CSL was to set up webinars to support peer learning and information sharing since their communities were so far apart geographically.



## ➤ Positive Outcomes and Other Key Lessons Learned for Local Libraries

Library sites used the project funds to purchase the materials for bags for outreach, but they also reported a number of other positive outcomes in terms of enhancement to early childhood spaces at the library, expansion of ideas for ongoing programming, and skill enhancement around outreach, budgeting, and partnering/collaboration.

One key lesson learned was the acknowledgement that, while in some cases the connection was immediate; it may take a longer period of time to see the effects of some outreach and partnership. There was a general realization that it takes time to get the word out and to build trust. One librarian shared that she learned: *“Mostly that you can’t do this stuff by yourself. It’s definitely takes lot of people to make something worthwhile.”* A few other librarians indicated that the providers (and other community members) preferred their privacy and that getting the materials and message out can be challenging.

*“Outreach works. There are tons of people I do not know. I have been here 17 years in this job, and there are people we were able to connect with whom I have never seen before. They come to the library now! People come and play to get away from their small home spaces.”*

In terms of library space enhancements, most sites reported new or enhanced play areas. This included adding seating for both children and adults (to encourage participation and to foster dialogue and language use), books (and more board books), colorful rugs, shelving, toys (manipulatives, sensory materials, balls), art and craft supplies, dress up areas, mirrors, and intentionally differentiating areas for younger children from those for older children. One library staff shared that providers and parents are often reluctant to check out books for fear of the books becoming damaged by the children, so she was grateful for the opportunity to buy more sturdy board books for the collection.

Another librarian was very enthusiastic: *“I have learned to be more adept at Excel! I can make better decisions on budgeting. Now I have even better ideas on how to reach those kids and how to do story time and how to get their attention. I was getting a little stagnant and now I’ve learned new techniques. Speaking with peers was very helpful, giving me whole new ideas.”*

*“FFN play a vital role in the literacy development of young children.”*

In another community one person said, *“I have developed knowledge on how to find and approach FFN and have more skills on how to figure out who might be one.”* Several mentioned that they learned some new ways to conduct and enhance story times with the use of new tools. Another person indicated lessons learned about FFN providers’ potential contributions to early literacy: *“We need to convince the FFN*

*[providers] that they aren't just babysitting and that they can create better readers and be involved in early literacy education of this kid they might have just one day a week. That can make a big difference. I had one grandma say...their parents are so busy that they're the only one who reads to them."*

Another site shared that because of the GRT together funds dedicated to early literacy, they were able to strategically utilize other donations and funds to enhance collections for older children and young adults improving their overall offerings across age groups.

### ➤ **Libraries Fostering Early Literacy at the Community Level**

Library staff had many ideas about how to continue fostering literacy in their communities and identified what was still needed. They were passionate about the GRT program and the creative thinking about how to reach young children. One library staff said: "We are still trying to enlighten people about what libraries can do

*"I think we are still working against a myth that libraries are obsolete."*

*"We just need the time and the resources. New books=amazing reaction. This is the joy I get out of my job!"*

*for them. I believe that libraries, schools, and preschools, and child care providers should find ways to be more interconnected."*

Several people indicated that they simply need more time to see how the GRT activities come to fruition.

A librarian from a bigger community reported that "since the biggest challenge is reaching people, we need to find that best way to reach them, even the people who come in every day. Find ways to let the community know what the library is doing."

Librarian's ideas for improving community knowledge about the library's role in early literacy:

- Advertisements on TV and radio (morning shows)
- Advertisement in places families go (bus stops, schools)
- Use of social media (Facebook ads)
- Emphasize early brain development

### **CSL Stakeholder Interview Results**

Key Colorado State Library staff members involved in GRT were interviewed to understand their perspectives on the accomplishments of the grant project at both the community and the state level. A summary of their views is provided below.

### ➤ **Goal Accomplishment**

CSL staff agreed that over the course of year the community libraries have become increasingly aware of the FFN providers identities, characteristics, early literacy needs, and library

participation behavior. In addition, they reported that in a very short time community library staff have supported the grant's efforts in enhancing the early literacy environments available to FFN providers within and outside of the library. While acknowledging some of the challenges in impacting FFN home literacy environments, they suggested important in-roads were made with regard to establishing relationships and trust between library staff and community and that a positive trajectory was set for further connections in the future. CSL staff described this first project year as a "learning year" where each of the communities tried and adapted practices and strategies to best fit and reach the FFN in their areas. This matches what the local community librarians indicated as well. The key takeaway was that forming relationships between local library staff and with FFN providers takes time.

CSL staff reports of increased materials in the homes are also aligned with the librarian and FFN provider surveys and interviews descriptions of their efforts. In terms of library services and improvements on-site at the libraries, CSL staff talked about the purchase of additional materials and space enhancements that sites made to provide better early literacy supports for FFN and families in general. For example, one staff person said, *"In discussions and through looking at receipts, they are expanding their offerings and collections in their libraries and space."* Overall, there was a recognition that outreach (with and without other community partners) was a critically important strategy, because FFN have some barriers to visiting the library and its on-site events.

CSL's statewide capacity expanded greatly with the hire of the Growing Readers Together Coordinator (a state position dedicated to FFN) and Regional Early Literacy positions. Bilingual outreach support was strongly enhanced with the early literacy position and the on-the-ground work and coaching to impact FFN and the children in their care.

### ➤ **Establishing FFN and Community Connections**

CSL staff indicated a number of factors related to building strong FFN and community connection through a project such as this. One person said that despite high levels of support and resource provision, there can be a perception that, because of working on behalf of the state, that there is increased monitoring of the library sites. She suggested it was important to keep this in mind to understand ways to strengthen relationships. The interviews also highlighted the challenge in reaching a balance between supporting/assisting and requiring/holding accountable sites for their planned activities and use of funds. It was overall acknowledged that this first year of the GRT project was a learning year and that a more exploratory approach was warranted with regard to best practices within each community. CSL staff suggested a more flexible approach in the beginning and providing more support/tips on how to build relationships and to partner with other organizations. Another illustrative comment: *"One of our fundamental approaches is to tell stories of success from other libraries."*

*It's a way of inspiring people. Appreciate inquiry approach is what I insist on as we are influencing change."*

Also important was the recognition of the libraries' differences in terms of establishing connections and implementing programming. One staff shared that, *"I would try, for next year, to listen to their realities and what they want to do with the project. They have better ideas of what they need. I would start to make them feel this is possible and explore different ways to do it. When you approach them with too many preconceived ideas, they stick with that even if we want it to be flexible."*

Another interesting lesson was in attending to the way language can be best used to talk about the services, outreach and supports. It was shared that sites reflected more closely on how they were referring to the activities they were doing (e.g., playdates versus workshops) and paid more attention to *"meeting the average person where they're at"* and welcoming the relationship via the literacy giveaways. Again, several library sites echoed CSL comments about the "power of language" and mentioned it was better to take a less didactic approach with providers and to place more emphasis on enhancing their resources. One librarian, for example, said she was much more effective when she began telling providers that she was helping them "level the playing field" between preschools and their home child care by providing the early literacy materials.

### ➤ **Community Similarities and Differences**

Exploration across library sites/communities was of interest to determine whether different characteristics or needs existed or whether different or more uniform approaches were utilized to best address early literacy, particularly for children with FFN providers. CSL staff members observed many differences and similarities during their engagements with the sites.

#### Community Differences:

- Staffing capacity tends to be greater in larger communities. In some smaller communities, in fact, library open hours were limited to several days a week partly due to staffing challenges.
- Educational backgrounds of local library staff was higher in larger communities suggesting perhaps greater professional development needs in smaller communities.
- Expertise or preference differed across sites, e.g., Alamosa placed a heavier emphasis on music to enhance literacy than some other sites because that was the expertise of the librarian.
- Community context varied and affected the degree of independence of local libraries in decision making (e.g., some are managed by the city versus library district, etc.).

- Composition of the community also influences the programmatic needs; for example, the numbers of Spanish-speaking FFN providers or more migrant/transitory population made a difference in terms of the types of outreach or materials provided. It was suggested that in larger communities, some distinguishing of subpopulations of FFN providers was necessary to provide more targeted outreach and services. It was also mentioned that the composition of library patrons, community membership, and FFN providers can change rapidly within smaller communities, which could imply a need for flexible and responsive outreach and services.
- Smaller communities tended to have fewer library patrons and fewer resources generally, and in the most rural areas more difficulties were reported by libraries to CSL staff regarding transportation of children by FFN to the library sites.
- On the positive side, smaller communities indicated they had a greater advantages with well-established relationships both with patrons as well as other community partners and could bring these relationships to bear in recruiting FFN providers to participate. Describing this, one CSL staff said, *“In the smaller communities they know people and have a passion, they attract people around them. The cult of personality, people know and connect and, with their children, they are drawn to what is new and FFN specific.”*
- In larger communities, communication within the library system itself was reported as more complex with more staff and needed to be more formal compared to that of smaller library branches.

#### Community Similarities:

- Local libraries view themselves as champions for early literacy in their communities.
- A unifying theme...the biggest similarity was the challenge in identifying people as FFN and connecting with them and taking action the goals of this project.
- All sites tried a variety of techniques to help FFN have increased access.
- Librarians uniformly reported that home visits seemed intrusive in the beginning, unless a relationship was already built.
- Literacy outreach to this degree and for this population was not routinely practiced before GRT, so was experienced as a novel approach by most sites.
- In all communities, children needed repeated exposure to materials, resources, and literacy activities.

#### ➤ **Linking Outreach and Early Literacy Strategies to Outcomes**

Outreach was the most powerful aspect of the GRT program in reaching the FFN providers. Along with this, library sites were effectively able to connect with other existing community service providers, sometimes for the first time, to meet FFN and other families in the locations

and activities they frequent. Some libraries' approaches in outreach/information sharing encouraged FFN to attend subsequent library events, and they reported these efforts drew in more patrons to take advantage of the GRT improvements to the early literacy areas of the libraries.

Emphasizing the connection between outreach and outcomes, one CSL staff said: *"The biggest hope is that the children would have more early literacy experiences in the home or at the library, hopefully that would increase skills and abilities and support their growth and development. They have increased exposure to early literacy services and being read to in the context of these relationships. They are increasing early literacy awareness."* Much evidence of increased awareness of early literacy was provided in the stories of FFN attending events and receiving materials.

Another CSL staff reported that the most positive outreach strategies were the pop-up story times where the librarians go out to a place where kids already are and conduct an activity there and offer something they don't have. The providers don't have to make special trip, and the kids are already there ready to benefit from the activities.

Many anecdotes were provided that showed the connection between outreach and positive outcomes. Some described how outreach meetings lead FFN to the library for more activities or increased literacy experiences for children. For example, one staff told a story about one FFN provider shared how a child in her care was excited by the drawing and coloring materials in the literacy bag. This influenced the child's parent to provide home materials and now the child is drawing letters. Other stories such as this demonstrated that these efforts are leading to increasingly positive effects for children.

One point that was made in the interviews was that the power of outreach was felt by librarians when they could see the effects locally. Emphasizing the importance of practice change, one librarian said, *"We could say you need to do outreach, but it is the intense experience of the difference that outreach can make. That builds that behavior change and change in practice we are looking for."*

### ➤ **GRT Impact on State Infrastructure Related to Family, Friend and Neighbor Networks**

It was acknowledged that building statewide infrastructure for FFN networks is still in its infancy, but that there is growing momentum from this project as well as other statewide efforts. The GRT initiative has activated an effective niche for early literacy outreach via the library presence in each community, while building on the strengths of relationships among human service and educational partners across the state. Evidence of this: the GRT grant project was honored by being awarded the Colorado Association of Libraries Adult Literacy Award for the targeted strategies it employs across the state.

Other related comments:

- *We are moving from awareness to action.*
- *We are taking our baby steps at this point and putting some things in place and with time it is going to grow. It is the start. Even though we have changed two kids' lives in Colorado, and that is influencing their future generations!!! They are going to pass that knowledge along.*
- *In education you can't see all the results immediately...it takes time to change a person a community, it's not a switch you turn off and on.*

### ➤ **Communication and Partnership Lessons Learned**

CSL stakeholders indicated that, while communications were effective, the first year of the project was experienced as somewhat delayed with the compressed timeline and that an opportunity was lost in the beginning to explore more individually what was needed and possible within each of the communities. Staff reported that using language conveying a more exploratory learning approach would have been a better initial start given the newness of these activities within each community. Plans for future engagement with the sites included more exploratory conversations to set the forward direction in a more natural fashion. One staff suggested “...*really co-constructing the approach and respecting the realities that you are facing within each community.*” Communications were viewed as an essential part of the relationship building and trust process with the sites, and that it was important to be available and responsive when they needed support or had questions. Along with this, it was mentioned that it is important to use a variety of strategies and be flexible particularly with more remote communities whose connectivity to phone service and internet is not as reliable.

Staff shared other lessons learned. For example, one staff shared that “...*From a state perspective, you can recommend best practices, but be open to what the community feels are best for them. There is a state level guideline about pushing boundaries and get people to move outside their comfort level. That is also important to continue to do.*” Another lesson learned was around the difference context makes within each community and how that may affect any of the strategies recommended for the local sites.

It was reported as essential that library directors and boards continue to recognize the value of this work. The CSL staff also indicated the benefit of ongoing support: “*It is essential for the local point person as well as other partners to continue to engage...not a one-time grant, but a new way of doing things in that community. Then they can have regular community of practice conversations.*”

## ➤ Needs and Recommendations for Future

It is the case that in many of these communities there are very few licensed child care options, so a majority of children are in FFN care. Thus, it is critical to reach out with early literacy supports. CSL staff indicated we still need to know what children experience on an everyday basis in these settings. One staff detailing the needs: *“We want to create a growing movement to FFN providers. How do we know children have been inspired to curiosity and learning and that these experiences lead them to be kindergarten ready? We want to provide a pre-language and literacy experience so that school is easy to them. These are the markers that move us to work on early literacy.”*

Similarly, firmer confirmation that the GRT initiative and activities actually make a difference in early literacy outcomes is also needed. It was evident from CSL staff that a longer-term project is needed to continue to build relationships and customized strategies within each community to maximize effective practices with his population of providers and children. It was suggested that even further efforts can be made to identify and reach out to FFN with more communication, trainings, and resources – to keep working toward truly building a network. One caution was noted, however, regarding how partnerships can be problematic in the sense that ownership of the early literacy project activities may be lost. Libraries do want to be seen as the experts and the leader in providing this service.

### **Community Stakeholder Interview Results**

Looking outside of GRT, the perspective of another community leaders focused on home-based networks of parents and providers including FFN was sought. Interview questions centered on advice in identifying and reaching the FFN population and their impressions on how we are doing as a state on FFN network infrastructure.

*“Keep sending information out in every way that makes sense and libraries make a lot of sense.”*

Comments were well-aligned with many of the discoveries from the other components of this evaluation.

- Connecting through local partner organizations is really important and effective.
- *“Find the one person who is key and that community, and he/she will open the door.”*
- *“People don’t self-identify as FFN. How do you reach out...go through parents? People who are using FFN can tell you where their kids are.”*
- Reminders that children in some communities might not have a lot of options in terms of high quality preschool or child care. Programming like this is key, since services are limited and children may not be as ready for school without it.



- Early Childhood Councils in each community are good partners to seek out. Other placed like child care resource and referral organizations can also be very helpful.
- *“Think about where FFN providers might go for resources and track them down there.”*

➤ **Where are we as a state with reaching out to FFN providers?**

This stakeholder said: *“We are talking about it. We haven’t figure out the magic way to connect. Great we have the efforts. Areas across where we are talking and thinking about it, more than in other states. There is also a lot of work in how we can be successful.”*

**Project Activities and Implementation**

Participating library districts were asked to report their progress towards their proposal goals through a monthly online report submitted to CSL. A total of 55 monthly reports were completed by the library districts participating in the Growing Readers Together initiative. These monthly online reports gave the libraries an opportunity to share lessons learned, strategies used, and materials purchased and distributed to support the work of the library and efforts towards reaching FFN providers in their communities. Libraries distributed over 16,000 promotional items (e.g., flyers, event advertisements, and activities calendars) to their local communities to identify and recruit FFN providers to participate in the GRT events.

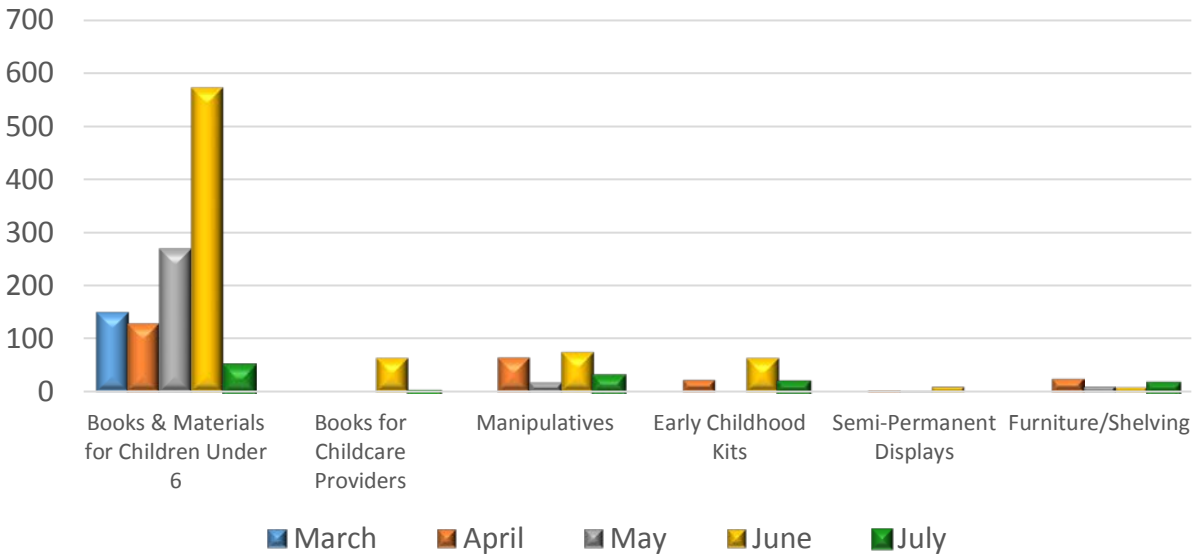
➤ **Library Partnerships**

Libraries were encouraged to promote the GRT program throughout their communities through partnerships with other local organizations. From March 2017 to July 2017, libraries reported establishing partnerships with 89 individual organizations and/or individuals to support the work of GRT. The partnership organizations varied from early childhood specific partners (e.g., early childhood councils, local Head Start schools, private preschools), to local governmental agencies/supports (e.g., public health agencies, emergency services, town councils), and to organizations supporting community-level resources (e.g., community centers, museums, and farmers’ markets). The level of partnerships remained fairly consistent over time with libraries reporting working with 2.5 partners each month, on average.

➤ **Purchases Made for Library Use**

Funds from the Growing Readers Together program could be used to support general in-library needs. Purchases for in-library or circulation use included: books and/or educational materials for children younger than age 6; books for childcare providers on early childhood development; manipulatives; early childhood kits; semi-permanent displays; and furniture, shelving, etc. Between March and July, libraries reported purchasing nearly 1,600 items to support general in-library needs.

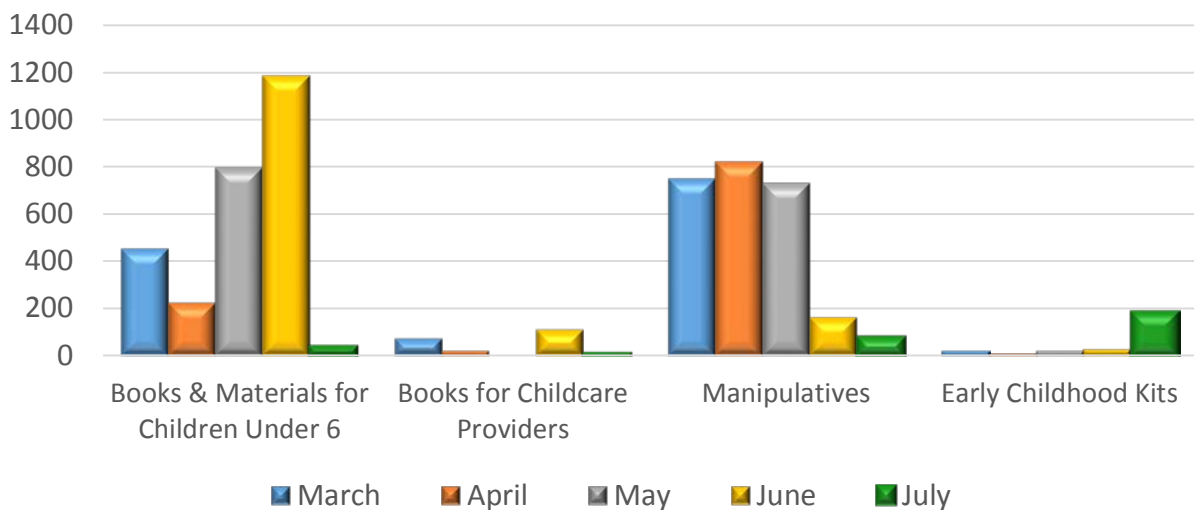
### Purchases for In-Library or Circulation Use



### ➤ Purchases made for Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) Childcare Providers

Similarly, libraries were asked to report on materials purchased specifically to support FFN providers’ care of children within their homes. Again, the purchases included: books and/or educational materials for children younger than age 6 (e.g., board books, easy readers); books for childcare providers on early childhood development (e.g., art instruction for young children, pre-kindergarten fundamentals); manipulatives (e.g., counting items, puppets, sensory shapes); and early childhood kits (e.g., Brain Boxes, mini science kits). Nearly 6,000 items were purchased by libraries to support FFN providers with materials for the children in their care.

### Purchases to Benefit FFN Providers



## ➤ **FFN Events and Consultations with FFN Providers**

Between March and July, libraries participating in GRT hosted 698 in-library events (e.g., story time programs, early literacy workshops, etc.) and had library representation at 195 events outside of the library (e.g., health fairs, preschool roundup, and farmers' markets). Libraries provided over 400 in-library consultations ( $n=202$ ) and outside of library consultations ( $n=205$ ) with FFN providers.

## *Summary of Findings*

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This evaluation report describes learnings from the 2016-2017 first year implementation of the Growing Readers Together program through the Colorado State Libraries funded by the Buell Foundation. The program successfully reached its goals and set the stage for future engagements with Family, Friend, and Neighbor Providers statewide focused on early literacy development among the children in their care. The following summary of findings is provided by each evaluation question and provides a preliminary look at variability across community libraries that may have implications for future program implementation.

### **How are GRT program activities affecting FFN provider knowledge, skills, attitudes, and resources?**

Observations from local library staff indicated that some FFN providers had good baseline early literacy knowledge, while others were less knowledgeable or skilled upon first meeting. The GRT program across all sites provided an opportunity for relationship-building as the avenue for sharing information about early literacy and for distributing fun early learning materials to support children's development. GRT outreach tended to attract FFN to other library events and activities on and off site.

FFN providers were asked in surveys about their experiences with the materials provided by their GRT participating libraries. When asked if they found the tips and ideas shared by the GRT librarians to be helpful, over 98% of FFN providers strongly agreed the suggestions were helpful in building literacy experiences for their children. Again, over 94% of FFN providers thought the experiences with GRT were appropriate for the age of the children in their care. Over 50% reported the literacy building guidance and activities were generally new to them. A majority of FFN providers (98%) reported they would continue to use the ideas offered by through the GRT program when spending time with the children in their care.

FFN providers mentioned the following features as a benefit to participating in GRT:

- You learned something you can share with the children in your care (91.3%).
- You feel more confident to help the children in your care to learn (88.9%).

- You will spend more time interacting with the children in your care (e.g. read, talk, sing, write, play; 91.3%).
- You are more aware of available resources and services provided by the library (93.8%).
- You will visit the library more often with the children in your care (87.7%).

### **What strategies with FFN providers are employed by public library staff and how do these change as a result of the GRT program?**

All of the library sites in the evaluation study reported not specifically targeting FFN providers for services prior to the implementation of GRT. While they may have served FFN in their general inclusive approach, this opportunity was the first time they attempted to reach them with such intentionality. For the grant, the library sites planned activities and resources for FFN and the children in their care, including substantive outreach and the use of varied communication methods. These included planned and serendipitous activities such as attending community events and locations like farmers' markets (reportedly highly successful), health fairs, school enrollments, food giveaways, parks, grocery stores, and community centers among others.

Maximizing outreach attempts by partnering with other community-based organizations was also highly successful and resulted in the distribution of many early literacy kits to participating FFN providers. GRT enabled libraries to change the scope of their reach and revision how they approached, identified, and communicated the importance of early literacy within their communities of FFN providers. The GRT program also helped libraries make much needed improvements to their early literacy spaces and story times for children, families, and providers at their libraries with the purchase of age-appropriate books and materials and the redesign of spaces to make them more inviting and child and adult friendly.

In addition, this project revealed *important differences across communities* that warrant careful attention in planning future programming (implying a need for differential implementation strategies). These differences include geographical considerations, that is, larger versus smaller communities; library management structure and annual budgets; and the community context and composition. Specifically, we found that:

- Staffing capacity tends to be greater in larger communities. In some smaller communities, in fact, library open hours were limited to several days a week partly due to staffing challenges.
- Educational backgrounds of local library staff was higher in larger communities suggesting perhaps greater professional development needs in smaller communities.
- Expertise or preference differed across sites, e.g., Alamosa placed a heavier emphasize on music to enhance literacy than some other sites because that was the expertise of the librarian.

- Community context varied and affected the degree of independence of local libraries in decision making (e.g., some are managed by the city versus library district, etc.).
- Composition of the community also influences the programmatic needs; for example, the numbers of Spanish-speaking FFN providers or more migrant/transitory population made a difference in terms of the types of outreach or materials provided. It was suggested that in larger communities, some distinguishing of subpopulations of FFN providers was necessary to provide more targeted outreach and services. It was also mentioned that the composition of library patrons, community membership, and FFN providers can change rapidly within smaller communities, which could imply a need for flexible and responsive outreach and services.
- Smaller communities tended to have fewer library patrons and fewer resources generally, and in the most rural areas more difficulties were reported by libraries to CSL staff regarding transportation of children by FFN to the library sites.
- On the positive side, smaller communities indicated they had a greater advantages with well-established relationships both with patrons as well as other community partners and could bring these relationships to bear in recruiting FFN providers to participate.
- In larger communities, communication within the library system itself was reported as more complex with more staff and needed to be more formal compared to that of smaller library branches.

### **How has the Colorado State Library impacted state-level infrastructure related to FFN providers and early literacy?**

All stakeholders agreed that the GRT project has positively supported what is known about statewide FFN providers and their needs. It was also acknowledged that there is still much work to be done to build effective communication structures and to provide early literacy resources where they can be most potent. What is emphasized through this project, is that community collaboration, outreach, and intentional relationship building are likely the most powerful mechanisms for connecting FFN with early literacy resources and supporting the school readiness needs of Colorado's youngest children. Furthermore, individualized and flexible approaches within each community are the most effective given geographic and compositional differences.

### **What are the library and FFN early literacy opportunities for children birth to 5 in Southeast Colorado?**

Many new opportunities exist for children birth to 5 in the grant's target area of Southeast Colorado thanks to the GRT program, the local libraries, and their community partners. Some communities focused on enhancing activities, events, story times, and in-library play areas, while others focused on the distribution of early literacy/learning kits with activity ideas. What is clear is that FFN providers play an enormous role in meeting the early literacy needs of

children in their care. Further opportunities exist for engaging FFN providers in educational opportunities and skill building using a capacity building, strengths-based approach. Honing strategies for outreach may take some time and resources, but this project revealed numerous existing community programs and partners who can be linked with to focus on children's early learning including Head Start, preschools, licensed child care and family home care providers, and many others. Through this project, the libraries have initiated a new way to connect in their communities to impact early literacy.

## Appendices

### Appendix A. Growing Readers Together Evaluation Plan

Evaluation Question	Aligned with Project Goal	Measures	Timeline	Evaluation Activity Detail
How are GRT program activities affecting FFN provider knowledge, skills, attitudes, and resources?	1	FFN Provider Survey FFN Provider Interviews	Data collection follows key points of service delivery (provision of resource or outreach) customized for each site.	Data Collection: Library Sites distribute surveys following key project activities. Surveys invite participation in follow-up interviews. Analysis: Clayton analyzes survey data to address eval question, plus examines for subgroup and community differences.
What strategies with FFN providers are employed by public library staff and how do these change as a result of the GRT program?	2	Library Staff Interviews Library Monthly Activity Reports	Ongoing data collection with final interviews at the end of the grant period.	Data Collection: Clayton staff will conduct 1-2 interviews per site during the project period. CDE provides Clayton with monthly activity reports on an ongoing basis. Analysis: Clayton provides qualitative analysis of interview findings identifying major themes and lessons learned. Tallies of monthly activities are computed from databased reports. May employ a case study evaluation report format.
How has the Colorado State Library impacted state-level	3	Key Stakeholder Interviews including state	Interviews conducted near the	Data Collection: Clayton staff will conduct 30-45 minute interviews with each stakeholder during the project period.

infrastructure related to FFN providers and early literacy?		staff, and community leaders working in the FFN arena	end of the grant period.	Analysis: Clayton provides qualitative analysis of interview findings identifying major themes and lessons learned.
What are the library and FFN early literacy opportunities for children birth to 5 in SE Colorado?	4	FFN Provider Survey FFN Provider Interviews Library Staff Interviews	Ongoing data collection through library sites during the grant period.	Data Collection: Library Sites distribute surveys following key project activities. Surveys invite participation in follow-up interviews. Clayton conducts library site interviews.  Analysis: Clayton will provide quantitative and qualitative evidence to support understanding of these opportunities.



**Appendix B. Family, Friend, and Neighbor Survey**

**Growing Readers Together – Child Care Provider Survey**

(Also available in Spanish)

*First, we'd like to know more about children you care for in your home.*

**A. Children You Care For in Your Home**

▪ How many children are in your care? \_\_\_\_\_

▪ How many children are in your care in each of the following age ranges? Please write the number of children on the line for each age range.

_____ Under 1 year of age	_____ 7 – 8 years old
_____ 1 – 2 years old	_____ 9 – 10 years old
_____ 3 – 4 years old	_____ 11 - 12 years old
_____ 5 - 6 years old	_____ 13+ years old

▪ What languages are spoken by you \_\_\_\_\_ and any other adults working with you? **Please check all that apply.**

- English
- Spanish
- Other – please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

▪ What languages are spoken by the children in your care? **Please check all that apply.**

- English
- Spanish
- Other – please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

▪ Have you had previous experience working with children in other roles? **Please check all that apply.**

- A teacher in a classroom setting
- A licensed childcare provider
- Other – please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

▪ How long have you provided childcare in your home? \_\_\_\_\_ years \_\_\_\_\_ months

For the next two sections, please think about the things you do with the children you care for to support their literacy development.

### B. Literacy Materials

Look around your home and think about the materials you have for children to use in their play. If the statement on the checklist is true, place a check in the “true” column. If the statement is false, place a check in the “false” column.

When I am caring for children in my home, they can play with...	Mark one answer for each statement	
	True	False
1. Books that teach the alphabet (e.g., Chicka Chicka Boom Boom, by Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault).		
2. Books that include rhyming words or stories (e.g., One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish, by Dr. Seuss).		
3. Books that range in difficulty level (e.g., books with no words, others with paragraphs on each page, books with simple language, others with more sophisticated language).		
4. Books that include factual information (e.g., science, math, or health-related books).		
5. Recorded books/stories.		
6. Crayons, pencils, and paper for writing and drawing.		
7. Toy letters such as cut-out or foam letters, fridge magnets, letter puzzles, blocks, etc.		
8. Word cards with names or familiar words.		

### C. Literacy Activities

Please think about the literacy activities you do with children in your care. Circle how often you do each of the following activities using the scale provided.

When I am caring for children in my home, I/we...	Circle an answer for each statement				
	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1. Read aloud to children in a group setting.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Read aloud to children on an individual (one-on-one) basis.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Set aside a special time each day to read to the children.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Read aloud a variety of different books (e.g., rhyming books, alphabet books, counting books, picture books).	1	2	3	4	5
5. Reread favorite books.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Talk about books that we've read together.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Ask children questions about the books as we read (or after we read).	1	2	3	4	5
8. Talk with children about new or unfamiliar words while reading books together.	1	2	3	4	5

9. Provide opportunities for children to look at books and other printed materials on their own.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>When I am caring for children in my home, I/we...</b>	<i>Circle an answer for each statement</i>				
	<b>Never</b>	<b>Seldom</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Always</b>
10. Teach children about different features of a book (e.g., front and back cover, top and bottom).	1	2	3	4	5
11. Teach children that printed letters and words run from left to right and across the page and from top to bottom.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Practice saying the alphabet with the children.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Sing songs that feature letter sounds, such as the alphabet.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Teach children to recognize letters of the alphabet.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Teach children to distinguish between uppercase and lowercase letters.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Help children learn the sounds that each letter can represent.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Teach children to write letters of the alphabet.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Help children learn to write their names.	1	2	3	4	5

### D. Library Interactions

Please think about your interactions with your library during your participation in the Growing Readers Together program. Circle how much you agree or disagree with the following statements using the scale provided.

As a result of participating in your library's Growing Readers Together program...	Circle an answer for each statement				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. You learned something you can share with the children in your care.	1	2	3	4	5
2. You feel more confident to help the children in your care to learn.	1	2	3	4	5
3. You will spend more time interacting with the children in your care (e.g., read, talk, sing, write, play).	1	2	3	4	5
4. You are more aware of available resources and services provided by the library.	1	2	3	4	5
5. You will visit the library more often with the children in your care.	1	2	3	4	5

### E. Your Experiences with Growing Readers Together

We would like to know more about your experiences with the Growing Readers Together program. The tips provided by your library as part of Growing Readers Together aim to help you engage children in your care with literacy activities (e.g., pre-reading, pre-writing). Circle how much you agree or disagree with the following statements using the scale provided.

The tips, ideas, and materials provided by your library through Growing Readers Together are:	Circle an answer for each statement				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. Helpful?	1	2	3	4	5
2. Age-appropriate for children in your care?	1	2	3	4	5
The tips, ideas, and materials provided by your library through Growing Readers Together are:	<i>Circle an answer for each statement</i>				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
3. Easy to use with children in your care?	1	2	3	4	5
4. Generally new-to-you?	1	2	3	4	5
5. Ideas you will continue to use with children in your care?	1	2	3	4	5

As part of the evaluation study, we would like to talk in more detail about your experiences with your library and the Growing Readers Together program. May we contact you in the near future to conduct a 15 minute phone interview? As a thank you for your participation, you will receive a \$15 gift card upon completing the phone interview.

- Yes, feel free to contact me for a phone interview (please be sure to provide phone number below).
- No, please do not contact me for a phone interview.

**Thank you for completing this survey! As a thank you, we would like to send you an electronic \$5 gift card. Please provide your contact information below to receive the gift card.**

- Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_
- Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

If you would like to receive a physical gift card instead, please also provide your mailing address below.

- Street: \_\_\_\_\_
- City / Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_