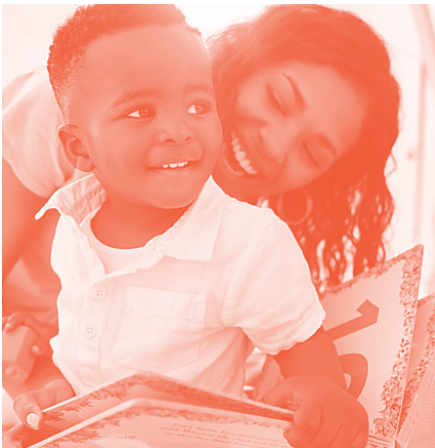


The Reads Initiative - Collective Partnership for Literacy Rich Communities: Five Years of Family-Focused Literacy Programming in South Jamaica and East New York

Executive Summary 2019-2020

By Julie Poncelet Consulting, LLC



SOUTH JAMAICA READS
PLAYING, READING, AND SUCCEEDING TOGETHER



EAST NEW YORK READS
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Executive Summary

The Reads Initiative - Evaluating Five Years of Family-Focused Literacy Programming in South Jamaica and East New York

The Reads Initiative, which began in 2014 with support from The Pinkerton Foundation, is a comprehensive neighborhood literacy effort created to serve the literacy needs of children and families in targeted low-income neighborhoods - currently South Jamaica, Queens, and East New York, Brooklyn. Based on what research indicates are best practices for community-focused literacy programs, the Reads Initiative fosters collaboration among ten partner organizations as well as schools, branch libraries and trusted community organizations to advocate for and train families in positive literacy behaviors and activities. The Reads Initiative partners work together to continuously improve service coordination and provide a year-round continuum of childhood literacy programming accessible at home, at school, and in the community.

Knowing that reading proficiency by the end of third grade is a critical marker for academic and long term social and economic achievement, the Reads Initiative identified two communities with low English Language Arts (ELA) scores and strong partnership potential. Before the Reads Initiative, on average, 14% of 3rd grade students were reading at grade level in participating South Jamaica Elementary Schools (P.S. 40, P.S. 48, P.S. 160) and 22% on average were reading at grade level in participating East New York Elementary Schools (P.S. 7, P.S. 108, P.S. 158, and P.S. 345). The ultimate goal of the Reads Initiative is to enhance the literacy culture in the target communities and to ensure that children learn and succeed with their family's direct support so that they may perform at grade level.

Over the past five years, the Reads Initiative has achieved numerous impacts with children and families in both South Jamaica, Queens and East New York, Brooklyn.

Reads Initiative Impacts

There are three significant findings that are directly attributed to the Reads Initiative by numerous stakeholders including principals, parents, and librarians. The Impacts below represent cumulative effects from the Initiative's first five years (2014-2019).

Impact #1: The Reads Initiative increased access to and use of literacy resources in the community. Importantly, these resources were high quality, age-appropriate and culturally relevant.

Key metrics include:¹

- › 25,533 children received 18,537 hours of curriculum-based supplemental literacy programs;
- › 199,433 children under 12 served across 5 library branches with school-visits, literacy programs, homework help, and bookmobiles;
- › 15,147 parents or families provided with training, workshops, or bi-weekly home visits to increase knowledge on supporting their child's literacy development;
- › 60,976 children in both communities received a free storybook and their parents were provided with reading tips during pediatric visits;
- › 132,414 free books were distributed to families in both communities;
- › The Queens and Brooklyn Public Libraries expanded staff, hours and visitors in Initiative partner branches.

Impact #2: The Reads Initiative helped children increase their literacy skills.

The Initiative's goal is to enhance the literacy culture in the two communities and ensure children are excited and proficient readers. Stakeholders agreed that the Initiative has impacted children's enjoyment of reading. As one Principal said:



"It's not just about assessments but changing attitudes. Children are seeing themselves as readers!"



Reads Initiative partners' standardized literacy assessments show that approximately:

- › 92% of students in South Jamaica Reads' curriculum-based programs increased their reading skills with 46% reading at grade level or beyond
- › 87% of students in East New York Reads' curriculum-based programs increased their literacy skills with 51% reading at grade level or beyond

Impact #3: The Reads Initiative deepened the relationships between literacy organizations, schools, and branch libraries.

The Reads Initiative is a unique opportunity for ten literacy service providers to collaborate and coordinate programs with schools and branch libraries; more than what one organization could offer alone to a community. The Reads Initiative intentionally brings partners together with frequency to share best practices. The depth and breadth of the collaboration helps partners to strengthen their programs and services in the two communities, such as outreach techniques to increase family participation or enrollment, identifying funding opportunities, and using shared data to make decisions.

¹The metrics represent five-year aggregates across the two communities and may include duplicates. For school-based programs, the aggregate target school population for Pre-K to 5th-Grade (for 2018-2019) in South Jamaica (P.S. 40, P.S. 48, P.S. 160) is 1,525 students and in East New York (P.S. 7, P.S. 108, P.S. 158, and P.S. 345) is 2,803 students. According to NYC Population FactFinder Neighborhood Tabulation Areas (NTA) there is a total population of 82,456 people in the South Jamaica-Baisley Park consolidated area and 5,118 children under the age of 5 and 4,652 children from the ages of 5-9 (source: <https://popfactfinder.planning.nyc.gov/profile/38339/demographic>). According to NYC Population FactFinder NTAs there is a total population of 145,818 people in East New York-Cypress Hills consolidated area and 11,898 children under the age of 5 and 10,919 children from the ages of 5-9 (source: <https://popfactfinder.planning.nyc.gov/#12.81/40.66876/-73.89554>)

Reads Initiative Outcomes

In addition to the three key impacts, the Reads Initiative is producing intended outcomes for children, parents, and families, and making steady progress towards realizing literacy-rich communities. This is exactly where the Initiative expects to be after five years as individual and group behavior changes take time to accomplish.

Outcome #1: Children read for fun at home and in the community.

This outcome is strongly linked to Impacts #1 and #2, described above. Children who have greater access to literacy materials and stronger reading skills enjoy reading more. And those who read more, further improve their skills. The Reads Initiative will continue to strengthen children's foundational literacy skills and provide greater access to culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate high-quality reading materials and to year-round literacy programs.

Outcome #2: Parents recognize the Reads Initiative's positive effects on their children and themselves. Their children are developing better social-emotional learning skills and they understand how to better support their children's literacy development.

Parents expressed happiness at seeing the positive relationships their children had developed with literacy volunteers and professionals and their children's excitement for regular engagement with them. The Initiative's workshops were identified by families, principals, and librarians as helping parents support their children to read better and more frequently. As one parent said:



“Every night, I can't close my eyes without, ‘We gotta read a book!’. She's on my tail for that! I can't close my eyes. As I get in from school, she's there with a book, waiting. Doesn't matter the time, 10:00 – she's up waiting for me to read.”

Outcome #3: Families trust the Reads Initiative partners.

Parents noted that Reads Initiative partners provided a welcoming environment and culturally appropriate resources that made families feel comfortable and trusting of the programs. Immigrant communities, in particular, noted this finding. In addition, while immigrant families are showing a decreased willingness to participate in some school and library events due to the current political climate, they continue to participate in many Reads events underscoring the trust that immigrant families have for the Reads Initiative.

Families are familiar with individual partners but are less aware that the ten partners are collaborating as part of the Reads Initiative. Future work will focus on improved communication with the communities about the Initiative and the role of the partners.

Outcome #4: The literacy cultures in schools and libraries were strengthened by the Reads Initiative.

Principals described positive changes in their school's community literacy culture due to the Reads Initiative's influence on children's attitudes towards reading and their improved literacy skills. In addition, librarians observed an increase in the number of families who visit local branches and utilize library services.

Conclusion

The Reads Initiative has had a positive effect in South Jamaica, Queens and East New York, Brooklyn. Over the five years since the Reads Initiative began, participating children and families showed literacy gains, and literacy culture was enhanced in participating schools and libraries. In the years to come, the Initiative hopes to realize broader, community-level results. The groundwork to realize these community-level changes has been set and the Reads Initiative partners are committed to ongoing collaboration to more deeply enhance the community's values and practices around literacy.

READS INITIATIVE PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS



The **Brooklyn Public Library** offers multiple programs in the local branches, schools and community to promote library usage and support literacy. This is achieved by providing STEM learning, homework assistance, and parent engagement programs. The Library acts as the hub for many of the East New York Reads partners, bringing them together for fun and engaging family events. The participating branches are Arlington, Cypress Hills, and New Lots.



City Year deploys teams of AmeriCorps members—idealistic, diverse, and energetic 17-24 year-olds—to add human capital resources to schools, and to work closely with youth to improve their attendance, behavior, and course performance in math and literacy.



Jumpstart helps preschool children enter school prepared to succeed by building literacy, language, social, and inquiry skills. Trained college students called Corps members are paired with preschool children in caring and supportive relationships to work on literacy activities.



Literacy Inc (LINC) uses early childhood programming, parent engagement, and organizes literacy events in collaboration with daycare centers, schools, libraries, and community and business partners to ensure that literacy is visible and valued as a community practice. LINC proves that to create sustainable change for children, we need to reach them early while also reaching their parents, grandparents, and caregivers.



ParentChild+ works with families that have children ages 2-3 for a two year or two programmatic cycle period and assists families to the next level into a pre-K, head-start or kindergarten program. Early Learning Specialists model with the parents how to use books and educational toys with the hopes of building stronger engagement between the child and parent over time.



Queens Public Library reaches out to families with children to provide developmentally appropriate resources that stimulate educational development. Three Queens Library branches, South Jamaica, Baisley Park, and Central Library serve as anchor sites for the Initiative. Both branches provide special public programs and services for children and their families including homework assistance, enrichment activities, educational collections, references and guided reading kits for parents and teachers.



Reach Out and Read of Greater New York partners with pediatricians and other medical providers to work with low-income parents to emphasize the importance of reading for their young children from birth to age 5. Doctors, nurse practitioners, and other medical professionals incorporate Reach Out and Read's evidence-based model into regular pediatric checkups, advising parents about the importance of reading aloud and giving developmentally appropriate books to children.



READ ALLIANCE

Read Alliance works to improve the educational trajectory of early elementary students through the power of teen leaders who provide one-to-one tutoring in foundational reading skills.



Reading Partners pairs kindergarten through fourth-grade students who are reading six months to 2.5 years below grade level with trained adult volunteers. Tutoring is held during and after the normal school day, which allows Reading Partners to be fully integrated into the school culture and develop stronger relationships with administrators and teachers.



Springboard Collaborative is an intensive 5-week summer program that combines daily reading instruction; weekly workshops training parents to teach reading at home; and a rigorous coaching cycle for teachers.



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