

Kalamazoo RESA

Three years ago, with an original \$100,000 ASAP-PIE grant, we initiated a universal access 0-5 year old parent education program that we named Ready, Set, Succeed!. We hired a Coordinator and 5 parent educators who were immediately certified in the Parents as Teachers program. We started monthly home visits starting in July of 2000 and multiple monthly play groups in public elementary schools in October 2000. We set up a hospital intake system with an existing at-risk parent education program which served only mental health and substance abusing parents. All new parents hear about, and can sign up for, our programs right in the hospital. In our first year we served 468 families and in our second year we served 965 families. We supplemented the original Dept. of Ed. grant with contributions from local school districts and, eventually, three additional grants. All schools now contribute an annual formula based amount, all of the original grants are in their second year of three or four year cycles, and K/RESA supports us to complete our budget of around \$350,000 each year. We have managed to stay universal access – not yet needing to sort out families by risk or income factors – and have not yet had to turn any families away from our services because of over-enrollment. We now have around 230-250 home visits conducted each month and host 20 play groups each month (a new addition is a play group at the homeless shelter).

READING TO CHILDREN – all of our play groups are focused on a child's book which every family gets a copy of to keep. All of our child development screenings include a reading environment scan for the child and family. We partner with the Ready to Read programs at the libraries, and have been a presenter for the public libraries leading sessions for parents of young children on the critical advantages created by talking to and reading to a child from the day they are born. In our community, however, it is the Ready to Read program operated through the Kalamazoo Public Library system and a very committed Rotary club, that coordinates volunteer readers who go into child care settings, waiting rooms and other places where children and parents are to demonstrate reading to children and turn parents on to the library system.

As a RESA program, we plan to continue to seek funds which allow us to grow to the point where every parent who wants a parent educator has one (and those that don't want one will have one anyway) and will grow in our commitment to early language and pre-literacy skills embedded in every home and child care facility. We will continue to be the community advocate and collaborator for like-minded programs, writing joint grants when possible and supporting other's attempts to assist parents in creating good students. We will also continue to partner with, and support, Ready to Read, and other groups who can bring reading volunteers together with parents and children.

Please call Kristi Carambula, Administrator for Ready, Set, Succeed!, at 269-488-7600 with questions.

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