

***Play and Grow Pennsylvania Libraries***  
***Pennsylvania Office of Commonwealth Libraries***  
**Report of Pilot Year**  
**2019-2020**

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## **Program Summary**

The Play & Grow Pennsylvania Libraries initiative was designed to support libraries and librarians in better serving the families in their communities. As with Family Place libraries, this program builds on the knowledge that good health, early learning, parental involvement, and supportive communities play a critical role in a young child's growth and development. Resources and professional development were provided to participating libraries to assist staff in strengthening their understanding of these areas.

This project was funded in part by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) as administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education through the Pennsylvania Office of Commonwealth Libraries.

## **Needs Assessment Findings**

Prior to launching this initiative, a needs assessment was administered to determine the strengths and needs of participants and their libraries. Eighteen libraries were chosen to participate in the pilot year. The results of this assessment survey were used to inform the materials and professional development provided.

The areas of professional development that participants reported wanting the most support with were as follows:

- Interactive early literacy activities for storytime

- Resources and ideas for passive programming (play and explore centers for children and parents)
- Promotional ideas for drawing new families to the library
- How to connect families with available resources in the community
- How to make storytimes and programs more inclusive for children with special needs
- Collection building resources for early childhood, including STEM topics and parenting books / materials

When asked to share the area of youth and family programming that they were most comfortable or confident with, participants reported storytime program delivery most frequently as a strength they wanted to build upon.

\*See Appendix A for the complete needs assessment results.

## **The Program**

Two in person training workshops were provided, one in the fall of 2019 to launch the initiative and one in the spring of 2020 as a culminating event featuring a guest speaker from the Fred Rogers Institute. In between these two events, online professional development modules and webinars were made available to participants. Materials for implementation were also provided to the participating libraries.

## **Program Evaluation**

Feedback was sought to assess the impact of the pilot program and to provide guidance for future development. A 67 percent response rate was achieved, with 12 out of 18 participants completing the survey. Below is a summary of key findings along with qualitative data in the form of direct quotes from participants.

\*See Appendix B for the full data summary from the evaluation survey.

## **Summary of Key Findings**

When asked to rate their confidence in providing effective programming for families in each of the needs assessment areas BEFORE and AFTER the Play and Grow initiative, all skill areas showed a significant increase on a five-point Likert-type scale.

## **Quotes on the Impact of Play & Grow:**

*The Play and Grow initiative had the strongest impact in creating a more welcoming atmosphere. Our children's area was quite sad looking to begin with and having this program full of amazing ideas and funding has made it so that we have a plethora of items to offer to children of all ages to use. One of our most*

*popular items is the magnetic board with letters on the end cap of one of the children's bookcases.*

*It gave us better knowledge to take on the younger age groups, when we are able to open again, we have some designed for babies.*

*Play & Grow helped us to create more interesting, welcoming atmosphere. I have had several parents remark that they looked through the window while returning books and then just had to visit to experience the "fun" was.*

*I personally feel that the entire Children's department is more welcoming! We do now however have sections, and an actual infant area. The overall space has made the children and families so happy!*

*Play and Grow had a very big impact on our Birth-24 months storytime. The materials provided gave us more options and ways to engage with our babies. This group's attendance continues to grow!*

*The songs, activities, and rhymes for the youngest children helped me the most, as well as learning how to use them with different items such as bells and wrist ribbons.*

*Enhanced book organization and more engaging and sensory toys; area is more fit for babies/toddlers; storytime has been enhanced by materials from P&G and people telling others to come.*

Another significant finding was that 100 percent of participants reported participation in the Play and Grow initiative was helpful in supporting their family and community engagement efforts, with 50 percent stating that it had been extremely helpful in meeting this goal.

### **Quotes on the Helpfulness of Play & Grow in Supporting Family Engagement:**

*The Play and Grow initiative has been very helpful in supporting family engagement at my library. It gives us a "jumping off" point for discussions with parents. It helped me by providing engaging and educational things for my children to use and explore. The Play and Grow initiative gave me more confidence to try new things and experiment with my space and programs I provide for families.*

*This workshop helped me get areas of the children's room organized and ready for families to come in and have a wonderful experience. We are ready now and*

*are going to continue to learn and make changes to meet the needs of our children.*

*Every staff member knows that when a family comes in, we do not always know what they are dealing with at the time. We want to make them feel welcome, valued and cared for while there. Whether it is to return a book or for a program, we all are now focused on meeting the simplest need of kindness first. We always have been, but this program and the recommendations at workshops helped to see where we could strengthen our commitment to service to all of our patrons.*

*It's been tough since we have been closed and prior we had begun to move our toys away to protect patrons. We really haven't had a chance to reach out much but in the limited one on one interactions the past few months the parents and children have been very happy with our new items/space.*

### **IMLS Evaluation Data Summary**

- 100 percent of participants agreed that they learned something by participating in the Play and Grow program, with 92 percent strongly agreeing with this statement.
- 100 percent of participants agreed that they felt more confident about what they just learned, with 67 percent strongly agreeing with this statement.
- 100 percent of participants agreed that they intended to apply what they just learned, with 67 percent strongly agreeing with this statement.
- 92 percent of participants agreed that applying what they just learned would improve library services to the public, with 84 percent strongly agreeing, 8 percent agreeing, and 8 percent neither agreeing nor disagreeing with this statement.

\*See Appendix C for the IMLS evaluation data.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The data provide strong support for the effectiveness of the Play and Grow program in building the knowledge and confidence needed by library staff to best serve the families in their communities. The combination of training and materials facilitated an increase in welcoming spaces and engaging programming for young children and their parents and caregivers.

The coronavirus pandemic occurring right at the end of this pilot was, of course, unfortunate for everyone. As libraries begin to re-open to their communities, the



materials and activities may be used more in virtual programming at first. Parents and caregivers may be motivated to try similar activities at home using materials that are readily available to them.

Families will surely benefit from the increased knowledge and skills of the librarians who participated in the pilot year of Play and Grow. This program may be even more important to the library community moving forward. A new cohort may benefit from virtual training in the fall if in-person trainings still are not advisable. It may work out that the culminating workshop in the spring could be offered in a face-to-face training, or perhaps two half-day sessions of smaller groups. The material and activities, coupled with the expertise of the two main trainers, Rose Gioia-Fine and Nina White, should be powerful in any combination of delivery options.

### Play and Grow Library Photos







### **Play & Grow Materials**

Link to Promotional Video developed by Heritage Public Library:

<https://www.heritagelibrarypa.org/whats-new/play-grow-comes-to-heritage>