

Chapter 3

El Dorado County Libraries in Collaboration with First 5 of El Dorado Children and Families Commission and Partnering Agencies

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ABSTRACT

The partnerships of the El Dorado County Library system (EDC Libraries) with the First 5 El Dorado Children and Families Commission (First 5 El Dorado) and other public and private organizations have created a unique web of collaborations to enhance the pre-literacy competency and confidence of young children, newborn to five years old, and their families and caregivers in their communities. In recent years, the EDC Libraries have exponentially increased the number of library-based educational services for these young people and their families. In 2010, 43,000 young children, their parents, and caregivers participated successfully in the pre-literacy-based programs with EDC Libraries and their collaborative partners.

INTRODUCTION

EDC Libraries serve a diverse population from those who live in rural areas that have one-room libraries to those who live in suburban areas with state-of-the-art libraries. Serving the unique needs of these young children and their families in their communities is a continuing challenge that has

been dramatically addressed over the past four years by the six county libraries. The EDC Library system in California faces the funding and staffing challenges that other libraries are experiencing around the country. Yet in a significant contrast to this downward spiral of lost funds and services, the EDC Library programs have expanded to meet the pre-literacy needs of young children, newborn

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61350-387-4.ch003

to five years old. This astounding phenomenon has occurred through collaborations and partnerships with external institutions and agencies. The term, *partnership*, in the context of this chapter, demonstrates how separate and autonomous organizations with different strengths can work together to achieve a common goal.

Together with First 5 El Dorado, the EDC Library system's goal is to improve early literacy education for children, newborn to five years old, with an emphasis on parent education. The coming together of this network of collaborations began with the serendipitous recognition of mutual goals by First 5 El Dorado and EDC Library staff. Initially, First 5 El Dorado provided seed funding for a pre-literacy children's program, and the EDC Library staff disseminated and expanded the program throughout their six library branches. The first year began with \$1200 and one children's program. In succeeding years, the EDC Library's network of collaborations with other First 5 El Dorado programs and additional other public and private institutions exploded into a myriad of interwoven partners to meet the mutual goals of pre-literacy intervention for young children and their caregivers.

The EDC libraries serve as the "go to" place for families with young children and additionally serve a diverse cross section reflection of the local communities. First 5 El Dorado supplies significant funding and support to the EDC Libraries for early literacy programs, and the branch libraries constitute the nexus of the expertise, audience, and physical sites. Although the library seemed a natural vehicle to both partners, to the surprise and delight of all those involved, this partnership of two uniquely different organizations took on a life of its own that has expanded into a network of collaborations with the other programs funded by First 5 El Dorado. Even more surprising to the uninitiated, the collaborations have not stopped there, but the partnerships continue to flow outward and inward to connections with additional county agencies and community organizations.

This chapter describes the role and activities of the EDC Library system in achieving the goal of pre-literacy readiness of young children, newborn to five years old, and EDC's multi-faceted collaboration with First 5 El Dorado and with other agencies and institutions. These organizations are listed in the next section and include other First 5 El Dorado Initiatives and programs, preschools, child care centers, non-profit organizations, federal, state, county agencies, and local educational institutions such as elementary schools and high schools and the El Dorado County Department of Education and the El Dorado County Department of Health. As a result of the interweaving of these collaborative partners into the fabric of the EDC Libraries' early literacy programs, each program is supported by many partners. Therefore, in this chapter, discussion focuses on individual programs and the collaborative partners that participate in each program.

BACKGROUND: EL DORADO COUNTY LIBRARIES AND PARTNERING AGENCIES

First 5 El Dorado Children and Families Commission

The statewide voter approval of California Proposition 10 funded the First 5 Children and Families Commission through a 50-cent tax on tobacco products. Throughout the state, local commissions, such as the First 5 El Dorado Children and Families Commission have been established to meet local needs and objectives. The primary mandate of First 5 El Dorado is that young children will enter kindergarten ready for school, academically, socially and physically. Since research shows that young children's need for literacy-based education crosses economic and social lines, all young children, newborn to five years old, are eligible and encouraged to participate regardless of income. Research has clearly delineated four

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