

Education-Read to Your Bunny

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”

How often have we read this quote and wondered how we can light a fire? Education opens doors to a new life of opportunities for our youth as well as those returning to school, whether it is in a degree program or a self-improvement course. Aren't we learning and expanding our knowledge our whole life? Each time we pick up a book to read, we are acquiring some insight into another step into the world of knowledge and learning. This is one huge way we may eventually make a difference in our lives, communities, and the world.

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YOUNG FAMILIES/EARLY HEAD START

Young Families/Early Head Start is a day care and early childhood learning center serving primarily teen and low income families with children birth to three years of age, pregnant women, and infants and toddlers with special needs.

Power Point presentation, “Read to Your Bunny” BJWC club members gave two “Read to Your Bunny” Power Point presentations to forty teen parents at the Young Families day care center. Forty children’s book, forty parent books, and literacy packets were given to participants. This presentation has been given every year for the past six years.

The following is research cited in the Power Point presentation: **Research shows that birth to age one and birth to age three are critical age markers in reading to children, but new research, according to Mem Fox, indicates that the first four months is an extremely critical time for establishing language patterns. *Children's brains are only 25% developed at birth; the other 75% is up to the parent(s) and caregivers. *Children who know eight nursery rhymes by heart by the time they are four years old are usually among the best readers by the time they are in third grade.*

Children need to hear at least 1000 stories read to them before they can learn to read for themselves* **6. “Reading Ladies” is an extension of the **Read to Your Bunny** program at Young Families. Two BJWC members and one guest read and sing to **five** different groups of children birth through three years old (40 children) every two weeks throughout the year (24 times) using big books, nursery rhymes, and finger plays. One guest plays the guitar while the other two BJWC members show the pictures and read/or sing the story or rhyme. Reading to these young children is encouraged and appreciated by the children, parents and caregivers of Young Families. Because the teen parents often participate with their children during the read/sing along, members are able to model good reading practices for them. It is a win, win situation for all involved! Children are often waiting for us at their half gates, chanting “Reading Ladies”. Their enthusiasm is obvious and welcoming!

Young Families Staff

After doing the Read to Your Bunny program at Young Families for over six years, 2016 was the first time we were asked to do the Read to Your Bunny Power Point presentation for the staff at Young Families. The Read to Your Bunny Power Point program was presented to 17 staff members at Young Families. 17 children's books were given to participants to be used at the Young Families day care center.

As a result of the Read to Your Bunny presentation, it is apparent that the day care teachers are reading and singing more to the children. The children know the words to many of the nursery rhymes and songs because someone at school or home is reading to them.

The classroom teacher, responsible for the early childhood curriculum for the teen parents, told us that because of the Read to Your Bunny presentations and the read alouds that we do with the children, she has made a significant change in the lessons plans for her students. She indicated that she is now putting a major emphasis on literacy for her students. In addition to her lessons on literacy, she is requiring each student to research children's literature and nursery rhymes in order that they will be knowledgeable about what is available for their children and therefore read to them.

For the first five years of Reading Ladies, the *teacher in charge of the infant room* did not want us to read to the babies from birth to four months. She thought they were too young for this activity. After hearing our Power Point presentation to the staff at Young Families last year, she asked us if we would read and sing to the babies. I asked her why she changed her mind. She said, "I heard what you said in your presentation." According to Mem Fox, "The first four months is an extremely critical time for establishing language patterns." We now read to the infants-birth through four months every two weeks. Caregivers either hold them on their laps or prop them up on pillows. The joy of hearing us read and sing to them is evident by their body movements and facial expressions. The impact for brain development is huge!

**Not only is it enjoyable to be involved with these children through our read alouds, it is also rewarding and encouraging to know that we are making a significant difference, in the lives of the children, their parents, and their caregivers, in identifying the key for children to become successful readers.*