

ASSET PRESENTATION
Story County
March 1, 2022
Raising Readers in Story County

Presenters: Cari McPartland, Executive Director, Jerri Heid, Pres. Board of Directors & Lynne Carey, VP Board of Directors

The mission of Raising Readers in Story County is to improve language and literacy development in children from birth to age eight and nurture healthy parent-child relationships.

Our focus for the past year has been on providing internal stability as well as both virtual and in-person programming. We will continue to use statistics to enhance and monitor program outcomes and to provide the best research-based programming possible. Additionally, we are continuing to make our parent education a vital component of programming as parents are crucial in their child's development.

Cari McPartland became the Executive Director of RRSC on January 24, 2022. Our previous director left in July of 2021. RRSC has one 25-30 and one 10 hour per week staff, both have been steadfast in making sure that the services to children did not drop. In addition, the Board of Directors picked up the pieces and has worked very hard to continue the important work of RRSC. It should be noted that we still have approximately 80 hours in open positions to fill.

At about the same time our previous director left, we were notified that Harrison Barnes was pulling all of his charitable donations across the board. This is a loss of \$80,000.00 per year that we will need to replace.

About our programs.....

Research continues to support that early exposure to literacy and language development activities are essential to brain development and long-term positive impacts. The first 2,000 days of a child's life are the most important in brain development, thus **Thrive by Five** programming is a priority for Raising Readers in Story County.

Our programs are as follows:

Sing, Talk and Read for Success (STARS)

The STARS program is a 10-week parent education class where participants learn skills to increase the quality and quantity of language interaction with children. The increase in the number of words spoken and conversational turns builds a healthy foundation of brain development to prepare children for Kindergarten and reading. STARS provides a community to participants through group story times and in-person graduation celebrations.

StoryPals

Our dedicated tutors nurture the joy of shared reading and provide good books and extra help for young readers year-round. Due to the unrelenting covid epidemic, we decided to go virtual. We took the lessons learned during our totally virtual year last year and began offering both virtual and in-person tutoring this school year. We work closely with ACPC and the School Districts in Story County for referrals.

Our goal moving forward is to be back in person at ACPC, Zearing, Nevada and Northwood all while still offering Virtual StoryPals to our partners who prefer on-line learning.

Reading Buddies (formerly known as the Harrison Barnes Reading Academy):

Summer Reading Buddies:

RRSC, in partnership with the Ames Public Library and Ames Community Schools, coordinates summer tutoring programs to promote literacy skills while combating the summer slide. Students grades K-3 are paired with a trained volunteer tutor and meet twice weekly via Zoom. Each session is 45 minutes in length and contains a “read-to”, “read-with” writing activity and comprehension, recall, and vocabulary activities.

Reading Buddies Afterschool Tutoring:

This tutoring program is for children in Kindergarten through 3rd grade. We work in partnership with Ames Community Schools and the Ames Public Library to pair each child one-on-one with a trained volunteer tutor to supplement their in-school reading activities with a focus on at-risk readers.

We consulted with the Ames Schools to identify critical issues facing students and, as a result, incorporated social-emotional development and non-fiction analysis into our tutoring sessions.

Additionally, we reached out to the homeschool community and we signed up 8 students for virtual Reading Buddies. We also extended the grades served to 4th grade as an attempt to bridge the covid-related gap for those children learning to read. We run this program alongside virtual StoryPals.

Advocacy:

Advocacy is a critical component to all our programming. We strive to highlight the importance of literacy, increasing access to high quality books, and fulfilling the mission of RRSC. Reading with children from a young age not only helps with literacy and language development, but also helps bond the child and caregiver together. This bond then promotes healthy social emotional development which is critical for success in school and life.

Our Little Free Libraries are continuing to expand in Story County this year. It was certainly serendipitous that we started the project before the pandemic. Our goal is to have at least one Little Free Library in every community in the county. We have added a map to our website with the locations of all the Little Free Libraries in Story County.

Volunteers:

Volunteers are a critical part of all that we do at RRSC. We work with Iowa State, Retired Senior Volunteer Program, and by word of mouth to find volunteers who help with every single thing we do from tutoring our young children to labeling books to holding book drives and so on.

Step into Storybooks & StoryWalks

With the success of our altered Step into Storybooks events last Spring, we are planning a similar approach this year. Likewise, StoryWalks continued to be popular with children and families, in particular, our LGBTQ focused StoryWalk last Summer.

Staff:

RRSC is planning to hire approximately 80 hours more per week than we currently have on staff now. We are working to identify who we need with regards to job duties and what will best propel RRSC into the future. In addition, we have made the decision that any interns, practicum, and work study students will be paid a competitive wage.

New opportunities:

1. Becoming fully staffed. As previously stated, we are in need of approximately 80 hours of staff.
2. We plan to focus on County-wide services in conjunction with libraries and school districts.
3. We are going to begin having regular open times starting in April. We will be open weekends from noon-4:00pm. In addition, we are working with local agencies to volunteer at our welcome desk. Their role will be twofold: being a representative of RRSC and also sharing information about their agency's programs and services.
4. We will be working diligently to build our partnership network.
5. We continue to search for new locations for our Little Free Libraries. Our next focus will be on mobile home parks throughout the County, low income apartment complexes that don't already have LFL's and childcare facilities.

We sincerely thank the Story County Board of Supervisors for your continued funding of literacy programming. You are providing a long-term solution to the academic, social, emotional, and thereby economic, future of the children in Story County.