

To: California State Library  
From: Dr. Virginia A. Walter, Consultant  
Subject: Evaluation of 2010 Family Place grants  
Date: June 30, 2010

## BACKGROUND

In 2009 the consultant conducted a study of the issues involved in evaluating the Family Place grants that would be awarded by the California State Library in 2009-2010. The Los Angeles County Public Library served as a case study because it had implemented Family Place at several of its locations. The consultant initially visited four of these Family Place libraries to interview librarians and observe programming. She then made site visits to three libraries in communities with varying demographics to interview a total of six parents who had participated in aspects of Family Place.

All librarians involved with the program agreed on certain outcomes or benefits that Family Place provides to parents:

- General parent education.
- Focus on the importance of creative play for very young children.
- Opportunities for parents to meet and network with other parents.
- Library seen as a destination place for parents.

Other outcomes expressed by individual librarians include:

- Educating parents about emergent literacy practices.
- Giving parents the opportunity for an intimate experience with their children.
- Connecting parents with community resources.
- Making parents more aware of library resources.

Parents reported similar benefits. They welcomed the opportunity to spend quality time with their young children in what many said is the only free parenting activity in communities. The low-key, nearly subliminal parent education was effective. They had no suggestions for improvement in the program; they only wanted more.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

These findings suggested directions for an outcome-based evaluation of the grants awarded by the State Library at the end of 2009. These grants would have an exceptionally short time frame; money must be spent and programming implemented by the end of June, 2010. Two sets of outcomes were identified: organizational outcomes and outcomes for the parents and caregivers who would participate in the Parent Child Workshops and use the enhanced early childhood areas in the libraries. The following

sections list the desired outcomes, methods used to document those outcomes, and the initial findings.

## ORGANIZATIONAL OUTCOMES

The desired organizational outcomes included:

- Libraries adopt family-friendly policies and practices.
- Libraries redesign space to accommodate families with young children.
- Libraries are seen as significant resource for families of young children by two or more community agencies.
- Libraries integrate services for families into their overall mission and service plans.

The organizational outcomes would be tested at four libraries designated as case study sites. These libraries -- Beverly Hills Public Library, Cesar Chavez Branch of Salinas Public Library, Logan Heights Branch of San Diego Public Library, and the Union City Branch of the Alameda County Library – were selected to represent various regions of the state and various populations. Beverly Hills is an affluent Southern California community with a large Persian immigrant community. The Cesar Chavez Branch serves a largely low-income Latino community in Monterey County. The Logan Heights Branch also serves a largely low-income Latino community in San Diego; it occupies a large new building on the grounds of the local K-8 public school. The Union City Library serves a community with both middle class and low-income families of mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds, including many people from India who are here with temporary visas to work in Silicon Valley. The wives, who do not have the legal status to work, are often left at home with small children and form a natural target population for Family Place.

The consultant visited each of the four case study libraries early in the grant cycle, while they were still getting organized and planning for their grant implementation. At all sites, she met with the librarians responsible for implementing the grants and where possible with a relevant administrator and a community partner. Appendix A lists the people interviewed. Appendix B gives the basic questions asked at each site.

Return visits were made to each library in May and early June to see first-hand what changes had been made to their public space and to learn more about their experience with the grants.

### Findings: Organizational Outcomes

#### Constraints

Libraries had an unusually short time in which to implement their grants. The biggest constraint involved ordering the various materials needed for the redesigned preschool spaces and for the workshops themselves. All of the case study libraries reported

problems with this. San Diego Public Library was able to authorize some purchases in advance of receiving the check from the State Library; none of the other libraries was able to do so. Some libraries reported additional slowdowns due to city-wide staff shortages and furloughs, leaving the budget and purchasing departments short-handed. Alameda County had to work with a policy prohibiting them from purchasing any materials outside the county. Nevertheless, all libraries managed to hold a series of five Parent Child Workshops within the grant period – even if they hadn’t received all of the materials they had ordered. Some libraries were still waiting for furniture and equipment for the public space as well.

The short time frame also made it difficult for library staff and the consultant to tease out significant organizational outcomes or to know whether the short term outcomes that were observed will have lasting impact. However, some initial conclusions can be drawn, as follows.

#### Libraries adopt family-friendly policies and practices.

It needs to be noted that all of the participating libraries were making efforts to provide family-friendly services before they received the grant. In fact, this was a primary consideration in their applying for the grant. All administrators confirmed that working with families of young children and/or promoting early literacy was consistent with their mission and strategic plans.

Nancy Hunt-Coffey (Beverly Hills Public Library): “We’d taken some first steps in this direction. Kay MacDonald went to the program on early literacy at the PLA Conference. She and I were convinced by the research, so we extended our storytimes from 18 months down to 3 months and added a small collection of manipulatives. Programming became as much for the parents as for the children.”

Ann Hammond (Alameda County Library): Our strategic plan emphasizes service to children and teens. Family Place will increase our capacity to serve families in the community.”

Elizabeth Martinez (Salinas Public Library): “We are a city of families. The average age in Salinas is 26 so this was a perfect program for us. Ages 0 to 3 is our growing population. People come to the library as a family; we see lots of strollers.”

The branch manager at Union City Library reports that the new focus on families has made her aware of the need for changing tables in the restrooms, and she has begun to develop plans for acquiring these.

While all case study libraries found the Family Place concept to be consistent with their existing strategic plans, administrators agreed that without the training, furniture, and equipment provided by the grant, they could not have embarked on this particular initiative.

Libraries redesign space to accommodate families with young children.

All of the site visit libraries made some changes and/or additions to their public space to make it more family-friendly. At Beverly Hills, Cesar Chavez, and the Union City libraries, this even included moving or removing shelving to create a more defined and open Family Place with comfortable adult seating and educational toys intended for creative play. At Logan Heights, more manipulatives and other toys were placed in their early childhood room. Staff are also considering putting more of these enhancements in their picture book area, a move that the consultant encouraged.

Having toys in the library appears to be an obvious signal that young children are welcome here. It has also raised some more troublesome issues. At the Cesar Chavez library, there is a concern that older children will take over the new Family Place area and use the toys in inappropriate ways. A few more traditional librarians at the Beverly Hills Library worry that the toys will entice children away from the books. And all libraries have found that keeping the toys clean and organized is a new workload. At Beverly Hills, discreet signs and verbal reminders to parents ask them to put toys back when they leave the room.

While it is still a little early to document trends, staff at all libraries reported that families seem to be staying at the library longer now that there is more to do. At Cesar Chavez, staff are still educating parents about their responsibility to stay in the Family Place and interact with their children rather than leaving them there while they use the computers. Staff is considering moving some of the toys to the computer area to accommodate this very strong patron demand.

The evaluator had the opportunity to talk directly with three mothers at the Union City Library. They were frequent visitors to the library who reported that it was an important destination even before the Family Place installation. However, they have welcomed the enhancements to the preschool area. They liked being able to sit in comfortable chairs and watch their children play. They joined in when their children tried on the dress-up clothes, pretending to drive a school bus and a fire engine.

Libraries are seen as significant resources for families of young children by two or more community organizations.

It was not possible to test this outcome rigorously. Only the Logan Heights Library arranged for me to meet with their major community partner both before and after Family Place was launched. However, I was able to meet once with a community partner in Salinas and Union City before the program was fully implemented. Both of these women, professionals active in parent and early childhood education, had high hopes for the libraries' involvement with Family Place. Both of these early childhood advocates noted that there were literally no services available for children under 3; this was a significant gap that the library would be filling. They welcome the library's increased emphasis on services to families with young children.

Marisol Benard (early childhood literacy and family education specialist, Union City): “When we first started working with the library ten years ago, it was very quiet and traditional. That’s no longer the case. It has changed progressively, and now I’m seeing a major culture shift.”

Jeannie (early childhood educator, Hartnell College, and First Five board member): “We push families to get a library card and visit so it’s not a ‘scary place.’ Family Place changes the library from a quiet place to a place where things are happening. It is especially important for marginalized families.”

#### Libraries integrate service to families into their overall mission and service plans.

No significant change was noted for this outcome, largely because all four libraries had already focused significantly on service to families. They had applied for the Family Place grant because it was a good fit with their existing emphasis on families. While no major changes occurred as a result of implementing the grant, there were some smaller trends that are worth noting here.

- At Union City, the director is seeking to install a baby changing table in the public restrooms.
- Beverly Hills has made significant progress in its fund-raising efforts to enlarge its children’s area.
- The director of the Salinas Public Library has expressed interest in expanding the Family Place concept to its main library.

Several librarians, both at the administrative and direct service-providing levels, noted the value of both the training and the requirement to try something new as factors in ensuring that the Family Place approach would continue.

Maria Roddy (Deputy Director, Salinas Public Library): “If I can get the staff trained, I know they will continue to implement.”

Nancy Hunt-Coffey (Director, Beverly Hills Public Library): “Some staff are more ‘old school.’ This pushes them to try new things.”

Kay Macdonald (Children’s Services Manager, Beverly Hills Public Library): “Some of our staff are very traditional. They are freaked out by the toys. I hope this will help them think outside the box and encourage a culture shift.”

Kim Noriega (Literacy Coordinator, San Diego Public Library): “I hope now we can educate the rest of the library in ideas about literacy and creative play.”

#### OUTCOMES FOR PARENT PARTICIPANTS

The desired outcomes for parents included:

- Parents see the public library as a destination place for them and their young children.

- Parents see the public library as a community resource and support for their family.
- Parents acquire knowledge about the importance of play in the lives of young children.
- Parents acquire knowledge about techniques and resources to encourage their young children's early literacy.

The parent outcomes were tested through a before-and-after count of parents and children using the public Family Place space and through a brief survey given to parents who had participated in the Parent Child Workshops and to parents using the Family Place public space.

### Findings: Parent Outcomes

Constraints: The data that was analyzed for the parent outcomes was supplied by the participating libraries. Only nine libraries returned both the before-and-after space counts, and only six returned the parent surveys. The findings, therefore, reflect only partial results. The participating libraries represent a good geographical spread, but unfortunately neither of the two libraries serving largely low-income, Latino families reported any data from the parent surveys. Therefore, the findings reflect largely middle-class parent and caregiver responses. Many of the written responses indicate a non-native English speaker, and this is consistent with the reports of some of the librarians. Many limited-English-speaking parents, new immigrants, seem to have discovered the public library as a significant community resource. In Union City, for example, both the librarians and the community partner have reported an influx of Indian families in which the fathers have received temporary visas to work in high-tech jobs in Silicon Valley. The terms of their visas do not allow their wives to work, and many of these women have found the public library to be a haven for themselves and their children. The children's librarian at the Chavez Library in Salinas also told about two Indian mothers who took a long bus ride across town in order to come to the Parent/Child Workshop at his library.

There were 74 usable surveys from workshop participants and 90 from parents and caregivers using the children's area. These 90 surveys were coded as "non-participant" even though some respondents had also attended the workshops earlier.

#### Parents see the public library as a destination place for them and their young children.

The primary method used to document this outcome was a before-and-after count of usage in the libraries' preschool area. All participants were asked to conduct a count of adults and children in this area at sample times during one week before the Family Place materials had been added and again after the materials had been installed and the Parent Child Workshops had begun. Nine libraries supplied this data, and the results are included in Appendix C.

At six of the nine libraries reporting data, usage increased dramatically. At Mission Viejo and Gillis Library, the usage remained relatively static, and the Concord Library

actually showed a decrease in usage. The librarian who submitted the data from the Gillis Library in Fresno County noted that she was surprised at the relatively low numbers. Staff there reported that families were staying in the library for longer periods of time. One can only speculate that the “before” week in Concord was an unusually busy one, perhaps with heavy programming that attracted families with young children.

One can infer from the increased usage at six libraries – doubling at Logan Heights and Pleasanton – that families were indeed seeing the public library as a destination place for them and their young children.

Findings from the parent survey also documented that parents see the library as a destination place. An overwhelming number of respondents indicated that they spend time in the children’s area, and many volunteered their reasons. A sample of these comments:

“It’s such a bright, colorful space with so much to do.” (Maidu)

“I like that it’s close to the walking path and park so we can do outdoor activities and then spend quiet time at the library before nap time.” (Maidu)

“It’s a fun place to socialize, learn and play.” (Beverly Hills)

“It is fun, safe, comfortable.” (Beverly Hills)

“It is a friendly environment with a lot of developmental stimulation.”

(Pleasanton)

“I can come for a couple of hours, and the kids are engaged and happy.”

(Pleasanton)

“The library offers a lot of activities for my kid. One of the best places to visit.”

(Union City)

“The children enjoy the trip to the library every week.” (Union City)

“Safe, friendly environment that encourages my children to read and to interact well with others.” (Mission Viejo)

“It is a quiet place where they can interact with other children, where good literacy skills are encouraged/developed/modeled, where parents can watch their children in a quiet and relaxing place.” (Mission Viejo)

“It’s fun with the kids rain or shine.” (Butte)

“Gives us a place outside our home to spend time together, which is also budget-friendly. It’s a cool, free place to come on difficult toddler days.” (Butte)

#### Parents see the library as a community resource and support for their family.

Many respondents cited the library’s parenting books and availability of books and DVDs as important resources for their families. Parent Child Workshop participants also sometimes mentioned that they had learned from the specialists who attended as resource people.

“I’ve enjoyed the specialists and the librarians – very informative and hands-on.”

(Maidu)

“The parenting section of books has helped me out quite a lot.” (Maidu)

“Great parenting books.” (Beverly Hills)

“Good children’s materials in a safe and clean environment. Helps me to experience good resources for better parenting, early child development.” (Pleasanton)

“I got lots of information and activities to keep my child busy.” (Union City)

“I get lots of information about the community.” (Union City)

“The amazing variety of books!” (Mission Viejo)

“Tons of information is made available for parents. I have learned songs/stories and have attended wonderful children’s events that have brought my children and I closer together. The child parent workshop has also taught me about different resources available for parents and has let me evaluate the progress my children have made developmentally in many areas.” (Mission Viejo)

“I get to talk to other parents and get ideas from them.” (Butte)

“Certain books give me tips and ideas – a way to meet other parents.” (Butte)

Many respondents such as the one above mentioned the value of meeting other parents and exposing their children to social situations. This element of community-building is rarely mentioned as a value of early childhood services in public libraries, but it is clearly an important consequence. One mother even noted that it got her out of the house and kept her sane!

Few respondents made the connection between the value the library had for them as individuals and its role as a community resource. An exception was a parent from Butte County who commented: “It is an important place for the community and its children.” Perhaps Family Place libraries could be encouraged to position themselves more obviously and openly as significant community resources for young children and their parents and caregivers.

#### Parents acquire knowledge about the importance of play in the lives of young children.

Relatively few respondents volunteered that they had learned about the importance of play although many mentioned the appeal of the toys and puzzles in the children’s area. Many actually referred to the “play area” or the “play room,” which suggests that they valued this aspect of the library experience for their children. An occasional comment revealed that the parent had absorbed this message:

“Got more ideas for playtime.” (Pleasanton workshop participant)

“Having educational toys that we normally don’t have at home.” (Pleasanton workshop participant)

“Re-emphasized playing and connecting with your child is important.” (Maidu workshop participant)

The fact that few respondents articulated the importance of play in the lives of young children may indicate that this message is a little too subliminal and may need to be highlighted more in the workshop implementation and perhaps in information disseminated about the enhanced children’s area.

Parents acquire knowledge about techniques and resources to encourage their young children's early literacy.

This outcome was overwhelmingly achieved. Literally every respondent mentioned books, reading, and/or early literacy development someplace in their survey comments. Ninety one percent of Parent Child Workshop participants and 89% of parents and caregivers surveyed in the children's area checked out books for their children. However, only 66% of Parent Child Workshop participants and 64% of other respondents checked out books for themselves. Either these adults have plenty of reading materials at home or they have not gotten the message about the importance of modeling reading behavior for their children.

The comments demonstrate that most adults who bring children to the library do so because they want to encourage a love of books and reading. Parent Child Workshop participants and storytime attendees also welcome the techniques they have learned for sharing books more effectively with children and for developing literacy skills. Some sample comments:

- “Educating my children with many different books.” (Maidu)
- “I want to get my kids to love books and reading.” (Beverly Hills)
- “Lots of good tips and advice on increasing literacy.” (Beverly Hills)
- “It has helped me share my love of books and reading with my grandchildren.” (Beverly Hills)
- “Helping my child enjoy reading and going to the library.” (Pleasanton)
- “Has helped me to encourage literacy.” (Pleasanton)
- “Help me read to my kid more which I believe can help her to be a good reader.” (Union City)
- “We check out 20 books a week. It has resulted in me reading more to my kids.” (Mission Viejo)
- “How to read to your kids (from storytime).” (Mission Viejo)
- “It's a great place for my kids to get excited about books and reading.” (Mission Viejo)
- “Storytime helped me to read in a better way for my children.” (Mission Viejo)
- “Exposes them to books.” (Butte)

## DISCUSSION

Findings from this evaluation study are consistent with previous studies, particularly in the confirmation of parent satisfaction with the Family Place approach in public libraries. Parents and caregivers welcome having a free, safe, inviting public space in which to spend time with their children and other parents, to develop their parenting skills, and in particular to introduce the youngest children to the pleasures of books and reading. Perhaps because this was the first session of the Parent Child Workshops in the participating libraries and also because there was little time to do outreach and publicity, it appears that workshop attendees were recruited from the numbers of library “regulars.”

My conversations at the four case study libraries indicated that the librarians themselves are aware of this. Mira Geroy at the Union City Library wants to reach out next year to teen mothers who are not regular library users. At Beverly Hills, they are talking about the possibility of reaching a different audience if they offered the workshops at different times of the day or week.

The survey results demonstrate that Family Place libraries do contribute to improved parenting skills and behavior. Ninety three percent of both Parent Child Workshop participants and parents and caregivers using the children's area responded that the library has helped them to be better parents. In their comments, they cited resources such as parenting materials, the Parent Child Workshop resource specialists, and the librarians themselves. They also wrote about how the environment itself contributed to their ability to be better parents. The pleasant, inviting library space got them out of the house and into a social situation with other adults, and it enabled them to provide different kinds of learning activities for their children. They also welcomed having a place for their children under three to be with other young children and to learn social skills before they start formal preschool. It is significant that parenting benefits were not limited to the Parent Child Workshop participants. Other services such as story times and enhanced play areas also pay off in positive parenting outcomes.

It was intriguing to see how many parents commented on the library as a "safe" place. It would be interesting to learn more about what they meant by this.

Dramatic changes in organizational practices and policies could not be expected from such a short time period. To varying degrees, the libraries that applied for the Family Place grants were already moving in the direction of increased services to families and young children. It seems likely, however, that the grant stimulated a more sophisticated awareness of the theory behind early childhood services and a broader understanding of early childhood practices throughout the library hierarchy. Concepts about the importance of play and very early literacy experiences that had been common knowledge among children's librarians were now being disseminated to administrators and clerical staff.

Appendix A

LIST OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

Beverly Hills Public Library

Administrators

Nancy Hunt-Coffey, City Librarian  
Marilyn Taniguchi, Deputy City Librarian

Children's Librarians

Kay MacDonald  
Debbie Henderson

Cesar Chavez Library (Salinas Public Library)

Administrators

Elizabeth Martinez, City Librarian  
Maria Roddy, Deputy City Librarian  
Mary Ellison, Literacy Coordinator

Branch staff

Dan Gardner, Children's Librarian  
Margarita MedinaRomero, Literacy specialist

Community partner

Jeannie

Logan Heights Library (San Diego Public Library)

Administrator

Eileen Labrador, Branch Manager

Literacy Coordinator

Kim Noriega

Children's Librarian

Adriana Huerta

Community partner

Antonio Villar, Principal

Union City Library (Alameda County Public Library)

Administrator

Ann Hammond, Deputy County Librarian

Mira Geroy, Branch Manager, Union City Library  
Children's Librarians  
Dennis Finnegan  
Pat

Community partner

Marisol Benard, early childhood literacy and parent education specialist with  
Even Start

## Appendix B

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### Administrators

- Why did you decide to apply for a Family Place grant? Did you push for this – or was it your children’s librarian?
- What outcomes do you hope to achieve? For your customers? For your staff? For the library?
- What challenges do you anticipate in implementing the grant? How do you plan to deal with them?
- What do you see as your role in implementing Family Place?
- How would you describe the attitude of your NON children’s library staff to the prospect of focusing more intensely on young children and families?
- Obviously, the grant enables – and obligates – you to make some significant changes in the public space for families and young children. I assume this will be in the Children’s Area. What other kinds of changes do you anticipate making in library policies or services as you implement the grant?
- What role do you see your library playing in the lives of families and young children? How do you hope that Family Place help you fulfill this role?
- Have you had any opportunities to talk to political figures or other significant community stakeholders about Family Place? What was their reaction?
- Is there anything else you can tell me that would help me understand the possible impact of Family Place on your library and the community?

#### Children’s Librarians

- Why did you decide to apply for a Family Place grant? Did you push for this – or was it your Administrator?
- What outcomes do you hope to achieve? For your customers? For other staff? For the library?
- What challenges do you anticipate I implementing the grant? How do you plan to deal with them?
- What impact will the implementation of Family Place have on your services to other customers: school age kids, teachers, etc?
- How would you describe the attitude of other staff to the prospect of your focusing more intensely on young children and families/
- Obviously, the grant enables – and obligates – you to make some significant changes in the public space for families and young children. What other kinds of changes do you anticipate making in library policies or services as you implement this grant?
- What role do you see your library playing in the lives of families and young children? How do you hope that Family Place will help you fulfill this role?

- What kinds of community partners have you worked with in the past? Have you had any opportunities to talk with them about Family Place? What was their reaction?
- Is there anything else you can tell me that would help me understand the possible impact of Family Place on your library and your community?

### Community partners

- Please tell me a little about the families and children that you serve.
- Please tell me a little about your agency and the work you do with families and young children.
- Have you worked with the library before? Tell me about that.
- How would you describe the library's past service to families and young children? If you could imagine a web of community supports for these families, where would the library fit in?
- What have you learned about the Family Place initiative? From what you have heard so far, how is it likely to change the library's role in the lives of families and young children?
- Do you plan to be involved with Family Place at all? If yes, how will this enhance your own agency's work? How do you expect to enhance and expand the work of the library?
- Is the library an unlikely partner for agencies like yours? Why or why not?
- Is there anything else you can tell me that would help me understand how you – or your agency – and the library can work together on behalf of families and young children.

Appendix C

PRESCHOOL PUBLIC SPACE USAGE  
BEFORE AND AFTER  
FAMILY PLACE IMPLEMENTATION

BEFORE

AFTER

	Adults	Children	Adults	Children
Beverly Hills	47	69	70	78
Biane (Rancho Cucamonga)	48	51	72	83
Butte	60	70	97	144
Concord	120	192	110	148
Gillis (Fresno)	17	31	19	24
Logan Heights	15	41	32	64
Maidu (Roseville)	55	69	88	120
Mission Viejo	50	65	48	63
Pleasanton	186	230	363	476

Appendix D

PARENT SURVEY SUMMARY DATA

Parent Child Workshop Participants – 74

Non Parent Child Workshop Participants – 90

Total: 164

Library services used

Services	Workshop	Non-workshop
Books for myself	49	58
Books for child	67	80
Use computers	10	17
Children's area	65	84
Storytime	60	56

How family friendly is the library?

	Workshop	Non-workshop
Very family friendly	66	85
Fairly family friendly	8	4
Not family friendly	0	0
No answer	0	1

Has the library helped you to be a better parent?

	Workshop	Non-workshop
Yes	69	84
No	3	5
No answer	2	1

Libraries responding: Beverly Hills, Butte, Maidu, Mission Viejo, Pleasanton, Union City