

# FAMILY PLACE LIBRARIES

## A PRE-EVALUATION STUDY

Submitted to the California State Library

By

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### Executive Summary

The consultant conducted a preliminary study of the issues involved in evaluating the upcoming Family Place grants that will be funded by the State Library. The Los Angeles County Public Library served as a case study because of its implementation of Family Place at several of its locations. The consultant initially visited four Family Place Libraries to interview librarians and observe programming. She then made site visits to three libraries to interview a total of six parents who had participated in aspects of Family Place.

All librarians involved with the program agree 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 benefits 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:

- Family Place libraries are welcoming destinations for parents with young children.
- Family Place libraries create opportunities for parents to spend quality time with their children.
- Family Place programming provides support to parents by giving them an opportunity to interact with other parents, by providing free quality activities for their young children, by modeling positive ways of interacting with children and sharing books with them, and less importantly, by introducing a variety of parenting informational resources.
- Family Place provides low-key, nearly subliminal parent education.

- Family Place is the only free quality organized activity for children from 0 to 3 in these communities.
- Parents have no criticism or suggestions for improving Family Place; they just want more.

The study suggests some implications for evaluating the Family Place grant operations. Feedback on individual parent-child workshops will yield little useful information. More useful would be evaluation that focused on the libraries themselves – how their service culture evolves to embrace the Family Place concept – and how parents and caregivers experience the totality of the library experience. More difficult to capture but worth knowing would be the degree to which other family service agencies in the community perceive the library as a result of the Family Place innovations.