

Family Place Long Island Evaluation

Final Report

A report for:

Rauch Foundation

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A report by:

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Introduction

In fall 2010, The Rauch Foundation, in conjunction with Middle Country Public Library, asked Nagle & Associates to undertake a multi-year evaluation of the Family Place Libraries© initiative. Overseen by Middle Country Public Library (MCPL), Family Place is a network of children's librarians nationwide who believe that literacy begins at birth, and that libraries can help build healthy communities by nourishing healthy families. At the start of the evaluation, the Family Place Libraries network included more than 300 sites in 22 states.

While there are many facets to the Family Place initiative, this evaluation focuses on measuring core components for librarians, community members, and families. The evaluation team worked with MCPL to identify the key questions to be explored in this evaluation, including:

Questions to Help us Understand Impact on Librarians and Libraries:

- In what ways has the knowledge acquired at the Family Place Training Institute (FPTI) and other Family Place events impacted library programs, services, space development, collaborative work with community professionals, and the librarian's role as advocate/messenger?
- What are the barriers to librarians participating in continuing education/network offerings?
- What are the barriers to librarians engaging in collaborative programming, networking, partnership building, and outreach?

Questions to Help us Understand Impact on Community Partners and Partnerships

- Do other family-serving organizations view the library as an early childhood, parent education support institution?
- How many outside agencies are libraries working with, and what is the level of collaboration? Have they gone beyond utilizing agencies as resource professionals in the Parent Child Workshop (PCW)? Are additional services, such as Child and Family Health Plus signup or developmental evaluations, being offered at the library?
- Do agency personnel refer clients with young children to the library?

Questions to Help us Understand Impact on Parents and Caregivers

- Have parents and caregivers increased their use of the library?
- Has their confidence in the ways they can contribute to their child's development grown?
- Do they feel more informed about child development, their role as a child's first teachers, and library and community agency supports and programs?
- Do they spend more time playing, talking, singing, and sharing books with their young children?
- Do they view the library as a welcoming and beneficial early childhood, parent education support institution in their community?
- Do they refer other parents and caregivers of young children to the library?

The evaluation sought to explore the degree to which exposure to early childhood development, parenting, and family support information and staff training impacted Family Place Long Island

libraries as key community institutions. The evaluation also sought to identify the critical factors of success to help strengthen the Family Place program model.

It is important to note that while this evaluation was conducted over a year-and-a-half period, it is largely a retrospective evaluation. That is, we asked key informants (librarians, community partners, and parents and caregivers) to provide their perspectives on Family Place programming looking back. We did not attempt to measure changes in programming over the period of this evaluation.

Overall Evaluation Methodology: During the year-and-a-half, the evaluation relied on multiple methods (surveys, interviews, and focus groups) and gathered the opinions and perspectives of several key audiences (librarians, library directors, community partners, and parent and caregiver program participants).

To best manage the evaluation, we developed an evaluation implementation schedule. This schedule originally proposed conducting surveys in fall 2010 and winter/spring 2011, interviews in fall 2011 and winter/spring 2012, and focus groups (with parents) in spring 2012.

- **Surveys:** In 2011, the evaluation team surveyed librarians, library directors, and community partners. We had a generally high response rate in all three categories (79% from librarians, 63% from library directors, and 68% from community partners). Findings for these survey results can be found in the Family Place Evaluation Interim Report (July 2011).
- **Interviews:** In fall 2011 and winter/spring 2012, the evaluation team interviewed librarians, library directors, community partners, and parents and caregivers. Over a period of months we spoke with a total of 45 library staff, community partners, and parents and caregivers. Specific results can be found in this Family Place Evaluation Final Report.
- **Focus Groups:** In the spring of 2012, the evaluation team conducted two focus groups with parents and caregivers. A total of 23 parents and caregivers participated in these discussions. Specific results can be found in this Family Place Evaluation Final Report.

The Family Place Evaluation Interim Report (July 2011) summarized findings from the surveys of librarians, library directors, and community partners. This Final Report provides information on the findings from the interviews with library directors and librarians, interviews with community partners, and interviews and focus groups with parents and caregivers.

Overview of the Final Report: This report attempts to provide insight on two fronts. First, we review results from data collection conducted since the completion of the Interim Report. As noted above, this encompasses interviews (with librarians, library directors, community partners, parents and caregivers), and focus groups (with parents and caregivers). Second, we try to assess the nearly two years worth of evaluation data. The final section of the report provides a summary of the evaluation findings, as well as potential next steps.

Findings from Library Director and Librarian Interviews

To help inform the evaluation, the evaluation team wanted to go beyond the responses to the librarian and library director survey (see Interim Evaluation Report, July 2011) and have deeper conversations with library staff about Family Place. This section of the report provides an overview of our methodology for interviewing library staff, as well as key findings.

Methodology and Approach

While it might have been desirable to interview all library staff connected to Family Place on Long Island, that was not feasible. Thus, the evaluation team needed to develop an approach to selecting with whom we would conduct follow-up interviews.

After many conversations, the evaluation team decided to pursue a strategy of interviewing library directors and librarians from the same library (paired interviews). We felt this would ensure the most consistent results across the interview sample. In addition, we decided to interview staff from only experienced or transitional libraries because they would be able to provide us with more detailed information about the program experience than newer libraries. We planned to interview a total of 20 library directors and librarians.

As we set out to invite library staff to participate in the interviews, we were surprised at the relatively large turnover in directors and library staff since completion of the evaluation survey (from which we were drawing our pool of interviewees). This turnover hindered our ability to make matches—that is, interviewing both a director and a librarian from each target library. After considerable outreach, we ended up completing a total of 20 interviews – eight directors and librarians from transitional sites and 12 directors and librarians from experienced sites.

Each telephone interview lasted between 30 minutes and one hour and covered topics including:

- Implementation of Family Place
- Community partnerships
- Impact on families
- Additional impacts
- Future of Family Place
- Ways to improve Family Place

We intentionally included both experienced and transitional libraries in our interview pool because we hypothesized that there might be differences in interview responses, particularly with regard to staffing, institutionalization of Family Place, and community partnerships. Interestingly, we found little difference in responses between experienced and transitional libraries. We have noted the differences we did hear in the summary below.

Implementation of Family Place

Interviews with librarians and directors began with asking interviewees to identify, from their perspective, the core components of Family Place as a way to help us understand their knowledge of the Family Place model.

- **Core Elements:** Both librarians and library directors were able to articulate the core components of Family Place. They reported believing there was a value for parent as well as library participation in Family Place. While library staff implementing the program certainly expressed a deeper level of knowledge, the library directors we interviewed also were able to speak knowledgeably about Family Place components, though only one of the directors interviewed had participated in formal Family Place training. The most common elements raised were:
 - The importance of play in development and learning
 - Importance of welcoming space in library
 - Educational materials for parents
 - Fostering trust between library staff and families
 - Library staff as a conduit of information about community resources

Of particular interest was the number of times librarians noted that, “Family Place is more than a program; it is a philosophy.” This was not, however, voiced by library directors. Most library directors describe Family Place as highly valuable *programming*, but had not crossed over to using words or sentiments like “philosophy” to describe it.

Also of note was the number of interviewees who mentioned Family Place as an opportunity to help the library undertake a more general transformation – from a place where patrons come in for books and ask reference-oriented questions to a place that engages patrons on multiple levels. As one interviewee said, “The library is and needs to be a place that fosters growth among children and youth and adults, too. Family Place is one real, concrete way we become that library we want to be.”

Interestingly, several library directors expressed interest in having additional information on the research underpinnings of Family Place and any research on effectiveness. They noted that this would be helpful as they “go to bat” for the program with the Library Board and in budget decisions.

- **Continuing Education/Network Offerings:** Half of the interviewees mentioned that they had participated in continuing education and network offerings provided by Family Place Long Island. The most commonly mentioned additional network offerings were Distinguished Speaker Series and Play Webinars. Librarians new to the program (particularly in transitional libraries) mentioned these opportunities as helpful in becoming part of the Family Place “family.”
- **Staffing:** Interviewees noted that well-trained staff is essential to a successful Family Place model. This belief permeated the director’s interviews as well as library staff interviews. As one director said, “Sending staff to training is a huge commitment, but it would not be possible to do Family Place well without it. You just can’t read this in a book.” Interestingly, one director noted that if their current children’s department staff

left, a priority in hiring would be familiarity with and/or comfort accepting the Family Place approach.

Librarians raised the importance of learning both child development and program implementation knowledge, as well as learning about new approaches to working with families. As one librarian said, “There is a lot to do with Family Place, a lot to understand. But, fundamentally, you have to really want to bring (very young) children into the library. And this rests on the enthusiasm of the staff. Without that, there is no Family Place.”

According to our interviewees, staff outside of the children’s department are mostly not involved in Family Place. Many libraries described their children’s services department (the home of Family Place) as being separate or isolated from other departments. Most interviewees noted that they enlisted the assistance of other departments for promotional purposes, but did not get other departments involved in programming. Interviewees noted that this was a result of increased specialization of library staff and limited time. Information about Family Place is largely communicated by children’s department staff to others though inter-departmental or newsletter and calendar meetings.

Librarians indicated that buy-in from higher administration was essential to get the program started and keep it running over time. They had been able to accomplish this by showing the success of the program and with help from the Family Place national office. Staff at transitional libraries particularly noted how important it was for new directors to be brought into the conversation about Family Place. These librarians indicated that when a director is hired with no Family Place experience, they have to argue for the program’s importance. For some, this transition was not a problem, but the librarians needed to take this on and sought tools or support to help them.

- **Space:** Several interviewees mentioned the importance of appropriate space to take on Family Place. This is both a core component of the model as well as a reality of effective implementation. Several interviewees mentioned that as they have redesigned or added library space over the years, Family Place heavily informed layout and service considerations.

Community Partnerships

An area that the evaluation team explored with library staff (though not with directors) is their relationship with community partners. We asked them to tell us about how they work with community partners and the results of those relationships.

All of the interviewees talked about the existence of and nature of community partners (early childhood providers, health care providers, social service providers, etc.). Their primary point of connection with community partners is the Parent-Child Workshop (PCW). For interviewees this was a natural connection point that both the library and community partner had benefited from. A secondary point of connection (often with the same community partners in the PCW) is providing parental referrals for community services.

While library staff could easily talk about their work with partners in the context of the PCW or referrals to other specific programs, they had greater difficulty describing the ways they work with community partners on issues of concern to those individuals (creating a two-way street of support) or in supporting parents with young children more generally. Staff also articulated that they believed that even their existing relationships with community partners could be deeper and stronger but were not always sure how to take this on.

Interestingly, while we did not explicitly talk to directors about community partners (as we thought it would not be an area of deep knowledge), several raised the issue in their interviews. These directors see the value in the library as a community hub. And their analysis is that Family Place helped the library achieve that goal by bringing in community resources and creating connections between the library and other community institutions. As one director said, “One of the great aspects is that Family Place connects families with providers in the community. And by making those connections the library is building a relationship with that provider. We are helping them; they are helping us. And, together, we are helping families. We start to see the value of each other.”

Impact on Families

Library staff were asked to identify any impacts of Family Place programs on families. All interviewees shared their sense that parents value Family Place and see the program as positive. All interviewees related stories to support these impressions. These generally can be divided into three themes, including:

- **Building Lifelong Learners:** Several librarians noted that they see children who started out in the PCW who have now grown up to patronize the teen department and maintain expectations that the library will be a place to go for knowledge and social activities.
- **Social Bonds/Friendships:** Librarians clearly see their programs as providing an avenue for parents to create bonds. As one librarian noted, “People don’t know each other before the start of the Parent Child Workshop, and you see them leave as friends. They go in alone and walk out together. They bond. Parents are surprised that there are other people like them out there. They can feel so alone. This program shows them they are not alone.”
- **Knowledge Acquisition:** Librarians shared many examples of the kinds of information they believe parents learn during the PCW and other family-centered programming. This knowledge comes through both librarians and the community partners that librarians brought in to support programs. Several library staff noted the program’s particular importance for families with children who have a special concern or need and may not have yet had an opportunity to identify the next steps. As one librarian noted, “Parents do make connections to community resources. Especially those with kids for whom there is a need identified. In the Parent Child Workshop you see the light bulbs going on. The parent has found the person who can help them understand what is happening.”

Additional Impacts

During the interviews, librarians and directors talked about the ways Family Place has had an impact on their library—change in physical space, staffing, etc. While most of these impacts are mentioned above, there were a few additional ones worth noting:

- **Transfer of Program Approach:** A few interviewees noted that the Family Place model approach impacts other program areas. For example, a few libraries reported taking some of the program elements of Family Place—special physical space, target audience for specific programming, training library staff on audience-specific needs, connections to community resources—and applying them to other populations. For example, one library reported taking the principles of Family Place and applying it to new youth-related work, including creating a special space and special collection, training librarians, and making connections to community partners.
- **New Kind of Relationship with Patrons:** While some library programs just focus on knowledge acquisition, librarians believe that Family Place helps to foster trust between library and patron. As one librarian said, “Trust is essential. They know that they can ask questions without being judged. It is confidential. It is comfortable. With that trust they’ll come back to you, to the library.” Librarians who noted this additional impact believed that Family Place had enabled the library to create a new kind of connection to patrons.
- **Entry Point for Library Services:** Many librarians reported that parents hear about Family Place and come to the library rather than hear about the program while already using the library. For some of these parents, Family Place is their first time in the public library and then they come back to use other services. In these instances, Family Place can be considered a gateway program for the library.

Future of Family Place

Given the challenging fiscal times faced by most local municipalities, we talked with library directors and librarians about the potential for cutting back or eliminating Family Place programs. Across all the interviews we heard resounding support of Family Place and a sense that there was neither interest nor a movement to reduce the programming. In fact many library directors said things like “this is a line in the budget that we’d fight for” or “this is now part of who the library is.”

Interviewees describe Family Place as a staff function with relatively small costs (post-initial implementation) that does not require a lot of new budgeting each year and, thus, makes maintaining it easier. As one director said, “I can’t imagine that the library would abandon Family Place. If we don’t get them in early, we’d never get them. We are committed to building them as library users. This won’t go away.”

Ways to Improve Family Place

During the course of the director and librarian interviews, we asked interviewees to identify ways that the model could be improved. Suggestions included:

- **Help with Community Contacts:** Library staff made particular note of how hard it can be to find quality community contacts. Some wondered if the national office of Family Place could assist in that challenge.
- **Refresher Courses:** A few librarians asked if developing a Family Place refresher course is possible. Most of these staff members had been trained several years ago, and appreciate an opportunity to have a shortened version of the training.
- **Train-the-Trainer Model:** Several directors and staff wondered if developing a “train-the-trainer” approach would be beneficial for Family Place. For directors they thought this might be an opportunity to help bring Family Place to new staff more quickly and less expensively than having staff participate in the full Family Place training. Both directors and library staff noted that while sending multiple staff to training is just not an option for their library, they would like to find ways to bring training to more librarians.
- **Additional Networking Opportunities Among Libraries:** Several librarians asked for more networking opportunities among staff trained in Family Place. As with any field, connections to your peers who attempt to implement the same model or achieve the same goals can be beneficial.
- **More Technological Mechanisms to Connect Staff to Field Developments:** While most library staff and directors felt that going to more seminars might be a challenge (primarily due to lack of time), they did ask for additional opportunities to learn. Some suggested developing “continuing education” opportunities that could be accessed on their own schedule, such as videos that could be watched or even interactive learning tools that could be accessed during lunch breaks or slow moments at work.

Findings from Community Partner Interviews

A core area of inquiry for the evaluation is about community partnerships. While we talked with librarians about their community partners, it was also critical to talk with community partners about their view of the relationship. This section of the report provides an overview of our methodology for interviewing community partners, as well as key findings.

Methodology and Approach

Community partners were surveyed as a part of our first-year evaluation efforts. A list of potential community partner interviewees was generated from these survey responses. After reviewing the results of the community partner survey and Family Place staff interviews, the evaluation staff decided to segment the potential interview pool into larger community partners (educational institutions, large nonprofits, etc.), medium-sized community partners (medium sized nonprofits), and smaller community partners (small nonprofits or individual practitioners). We believed that this stratification of the sample would reveal different kinds of connections with Family Place libraries. Interestingly, we found only a few differences among community partners based on size. Where there are differences, we highlight them.

We had good success convincing community partners to participate in telephone interviews. As with other elements of the evaluation, the major challenge we faced was the relatively large number of individuals who no longer worked for the agency connected to Family Place. Ultimately, we did hit our interview target (seven community partner interviews). Of the seven, two were from larger institutions, two were from medium institutions, and three were from smaller institutions or individual practitioners.

Each telephone interview lasted about one hour and covered topics, including:

- Nature and extent of partnership with library
- Impact
- Suggestions of ways to improve programs or connections

Nature and Extent of Partnership with Library

A primary focus on the telephone interviews with community partners was to learn more about their partnerships with local libraries. Every interviewee could identify a library (or libraries) that they partnered with, as well as individual staff members within each library who were their primary points of contact.

It is important to note that every community partner interviewed stressed the value of the relationship with the library. They appreciate library staff and what the library tries to do when it serves young children. They view this effort as a benefit to the community and parents.

- **Locus of Connection:** For most community partner interviewees, the locus of their connection is the PCW. This might be a function of who we ended up interviewing – those who simply have a connection to the library via the PCW. However, the community partner survey results support this finding. Thus, we think this is a valid finding. A few community partners mentioned working with the library on other

programs, but it was not widespread. These opportunities included offering classes at the library, utilizing library space, and volunteering for library fundraisers. However, this was not the primary locus connection between the community partner and the library.

- **Referrals:** All community partners reported receiving referrals from libraries and making referrals to libraries. This was made possible because the community partner has a better sense of what the library offers and has communicated to library staff what it can do for families. As one community partner said, “We have good communications with the library staff. We have educated them about screening kids on language issues and they have sent families to us. They have let us know about what the library is doing and we have sent families to them. It works both ways.”
- **Depth of Relationships:** When community partners were asked about what stands in the way of deeper connections to the library, they generally offered two perspectives. First, several noted that their agency did not have the capacity to work more deeply with the library. They had a lack of staff time or other financial means to add programming with the library. As one partner said, “Sure, I’d do more but I just don’t have the time to add anything. Our agency took big budget cuts this year, so we are really watching our bottom line. Fitting in anything extra is just out.” In addition, as will be discussed a bit later in the report, some community partners also believe that their library partner lacks vision to see or implement a deeper relationship with the community partner.

Impact

- **Improved Perception of Library:** Several interviewees noted that since connecting with the library via Family Place, their awareness of and opinion of the library has improved. As one community partner said, “I definitely have a better impression of the library now (since connecting through Family Place). I see libraries as connecting with families in a different way. I see them facilitating the building of networks and friendships. That is so important and just not what I used to think the library was for.”
- **Ability to Meet Needs of Clients:** All interviewees reported that working with the library helped them serve their clients. Interviewees noted that, by referring families to the library for resources and classes, they were able to better fulfill their purpose in serving families. As one community partner said, “The library is a great partner. I can’t find or get to all these families. My ability to do my job is directly proportionate to how much time I spend in the library.”
- **Resources for Families:** All interviewees reported thinking that the library has a positive impact on families. This primarily came in the form of informational resources—knowledge gained about how to work with their children and about additional community resources. As one community partner said, “The Parent Child Workshop is great. Parents love to get information. It’s great for families. The whole setup is wonderful. Parents get great ideas for play with their children.”

Suggestions of Ways to Improve Programs or Connections

While the relationship described by community partners is positive, they did have ideas for ways to improve the connections, including:

- **Growth and Depth of Relationship:** There is interest in making deeper connections with libraries to develop programming. While most interviewees were content with their connection to the library, several (particularly medium-sized or larger partners) wanted to push the library to do something deeper. For example, one interviewee suggested that the library should engage in planning programs with community partners, not simply ask a partner to come fill a “slot” in an already developed program. As one partner said, “There is so much potential, so much more we could do. But to really do this, it has to be more collaborative. We need to sit down together and work to identify what the needs of families are and be open to a variety of programming approaches. That is just not the way it works now.”
- **Better Definition of Roles and Expectations:** A few interviewees believed that their relationship with the library could strengthen with specific conversations about roles, responsibilities, and expectations. These interviewees said that misunderstandings about expectations led to underperforming programs or hurt feelings.
- **Engage More Diverse or Targeted Audiences:** The community partners interviewed for this evaluation were interested in seeing the library undertake special efforts to bring more diverse audiences into the library. While the community partners acknowledged that libraries may or may not do this, they felt that libraries could do a lot more. As one partner said, “I understand that they have an open door policy. Whoever signs up, that is who is in the program. But we know there are families out there who really, really need this and who just aren’t coming in. How do we reach them with this great resource? Sometimes I see the same families over and over, which is nice. But I can’t help thinking about all those other families who we never see.” Interviewees who raised this point noted that this might not be about better outreach, but a different program policy and/or approach.

Findings from Parent Interviews and Focus Groups

A critical component of the evaluation was to hear directly from parents and caregivers as to their experience with Family Place libraries. This section of the report provides an overview of our data collection methodologies and key findings from parents and caregivers.

Methodology and Approach

To best understand the perspectives of parents, we relied on interviews and focus groups and then supplemented this data with a selection of PCW evaluation surveys. Across all of these methods, we tried to get a better understanding of how:

- Parents and caregivers used the libraries;
- If they perceived benefits of services that libraries offer;
- If participation in library programming has changed activities they do at home;
- If library patronage helped participants better connect with their communities;
- If participation in library programming changed the way participants use the library; and,
- How the libraries could better help parents with small children.

Telephone Interviews and Focus Groups: We completed telephone interviews with 18 parents, grandparents, and caregivers representing Amityville, East Islip, Levittown, Mastic-Moriches-Shirley, Middle Country, and Port Washington Public Libraries. We held two focus groups in mid-April, one at Uniondale Public Library and one at Sachem Public Library. Across the two groups, we talked with 23 parents, grandparents, and caregivers.

Participants learned about the possibility of participating in the interviews and focus groups through a flier from their local library. In many cases, librarians directly asked parents if they would like to participate and provided them with RSVP information. Each participant was provided with a \$25 thank you gift (in the form of cash, check, or gift card) as a monetary incentive to participate.

Note about Respondents: As can be seen from the list of libraries above, respondents came from a variety of neighborhoods and kinds of libraries. They represented a diversity of family circumstances—some with one child, others with multiple children; some younger parents and some older caregivers. The parents, grandparents, and caregivers most likely to respond to this kind of request are those that use the service the most. Thus, the reflections below are largely drawn from those who have used multiple programs over a period of years.

Parent Child Workshop Surveys: A total of 206 parents and caregivers who attended PCW's at 11 different libraries completed surveys. Parents and caregivers were given a "pre-workshop" survey at the first session of the workshop and a "post-workshop" survey after completing the last session. Because not all parents and caregivers attended both the first and last sessions, 66 parents completed both pre- and post-session surveys, about 32% of parents surveyed.

Unfortunately the survey data is very limited and does not allow extensive quantitative comparison between pre- and post-evaluations. Rather, we use the survey data available, both qualitative and quantitative, to further explore points made in the interviews and focus groups.

Webinar: While we had planned to host a research webinar for parents, we did not have a single parent sign up to participate in this data collection event.

An exploration of lessons learned from reaching out to parents and caregivers as part of this evaluation can be found in Appendix A.

Summary of Findings

- **Use of the Libraries:** The parents, grandparents, and caregivers participating in this evaluation use the library a great deal. In fact, according to the available post-PCW surveys, 58% come to the library three or more times a month. As they have young children, they mostly come to the library for children's programs. And every participant was able to identify specific programs that they had participated in the last year (PCW, craft time, music and movement, story time, etc.), their use of the space to play and look at books, and if they took books home to read.

Many of the parents and caregivers described starting with one or two programs and then increasing their use and participation as their children became older. As one mother said, "I started bringing my son here as soon as he could walk. I wanted him to see the books and then I discovered the programs. Now I have three kids and the oldest is in summer reading while I still bring my little girl here for story time and music. The library has grown with us."

A number of parents also noted that they set "play dates" with other parents with young children at the library. According to these parents, the library provides a safe, inviting, indoor space for children to play. As one mother said, "They (the library) have the cutest little play area. We meet up with our friends here and the kids have a great time." Two parents noted that their library has an outdoor play space that also leads to meeting other families for playtime.

A few parents specifically mentioned using the library for socialization of their young children. These parents, often with an only child or not currently using other school-based programs, noted that the library provides a way for their children to meet others, learn how to interact with other children, and how to play and problem solve with other kids. As one mother said, "This is great because they (the children) can participate in a library program that fills the socialization gap and allows them to interact in both a formal classroom-type setting as well as just in play."

The professional caregivers (nannies or in-home child care providers) who participated in this evaluation noted that they bring their children to the library for a change of pace and exposure to other materials. As one child care provider noted, "The library has so much. Many more toys and books than I could ever have. So we come here. And it is good to

get the kids out of the house. Just to expand what they are seeing.” Some of these caregivers had also established a practice of having the librarian come to their in-home child care business. According to the child care providers, this is a tremendous service as it enables children to build a connection to another adult (the librarian) and expands their exposure to new educational materials. As a child care provider said, “The kids get so excited when they know Miss (librarian) is coming. I’m always telling them they’ve got to be on their best behavior or she won’t come. They really love her. And she brings such great stuff and the kids love the books she brings and the stories she reads. It is great.”

For the parents who have created the deepest relationships with their library, and more specifically their librarians, they turn to library staff for all kinds of child development questions. For example, one grandparent worried about his preschool-aged grandson’s behavior. After talking with the children’s librarian, he reported having a much better understanding of what kind of behavior is expected at different ages. For parents and caregivers like this grandparent, this information gave them greater confidence in their approach to children.

Role of Library Staff: It was very clear throughout the discussions that the quality and approach of the library staff was a critical component of success. Parents and caregivers spoke personally about staff as the representative of the library as a whole. When they perceived librarians as kind, informative, etc., they perceived the entire library positively.

- **Benefits of Services Offered by Library:** Library patrons had much to say about the benefits in participating in library programs. Specific mentions of impact on their family and connections to community services are noted below. In addition, parents, grandparents, and caregivers mentioned:
 - ***Informational Fun***—parents and caregivers really appreciate the combination of information and fun that library services offer. Some noted that other programs for families are often one or the other (just educational or just fun). But that the library brings together these essential elements in its programming. Specific areas of learning that parents and caregivers commented on were nutrition information, potty training, and behavior management.

And parents and caregivers do learn things by coming to library programs. According to pre- and post-PCW surveys, generally just over half of parents and caregivers are familiar with community-based organizations when they started the PCW. By comparison, generally about three-quarters of participants reported being familiar with community resources after the PCW.

- ***Informal Environment***—participants appreciate the informal nature of most library programs. They appreciate that most library settings and library staff understand when children are loud and hard to corral. They appreciate the informal presentations that accompany the PCW. And they appreciate that there are drop-in opportunities as well as classes that require registration.

- ***Socialization for Children***—many parents commented on the library providing a good place to enable young children to socialize. As one parent commented on in one post-PCW evaluation survey, “I like watching how (child) behaves in a group. I like watching her interact with other children.” Some families do not get opportunities to see their children in social settings and the library provides that opportunity.
- ***No or Minimal Cost***—many parents and caregivers made specific mention that it was important that the programs are free or very low cost. They noted that raising children is expensive and it can be a challenge to make ends meet. That the library programs are free or low cost is a plus in the minds of parents across the economic spectrum.

This finding is backed up by the post-PCW evaluation surveys, where 97% of respondents indicated they took home the free handouts. A lower percentage reported checking out books for themselves or their children.

- ***Variety***—many parents and caregivers commented on the fact that their library offers a variety of programs (not the same program repeatedly). This keeps them and their children coming back.

Bringing these observations together, one parent said, “The library is always where I tell new families to go because it is so easy. And, if you are on a budget, it’s free and they’re quality things—talk about children development and support for parents and appropriate activities. And they are fun. A lot of fun.” One hundred percent of survey respondents reported that they would recommend the PCW to another parent.

- **Changes in Participation in Library Programming:** Many families reported that participating in the Family Place programs at the library changed how they interact with their children at home. When families reported this change they indicated an increase in reading to their children and singing songs to and with their children. A few noted that they learned new activities to do with their children at home. As one parent said, “I am more aware of the things that I can do with my kids at home. All kinds of things I never thought of. I’ve been really inspired to do more and be more creative.”

Several parents shared stories of how coming to the library with their children helped them to overcome challenges they (as parents) face. For example, one mother relayed a story of her own struggles with reading as a child and even now as an adult. She feared that she would not be able to help her own children learn to read. This mother said, “I was really worried for my kids. I did not want them to end up being a poor reader like me. So we came here. And the librarians helped with reading and helped to pick out books and helped to make reading fun. Now my daughter is reading books that are two grade levels ahead. Two! This makes me so happy that they (her children) don’t have to face the same problems I did.”

A few in-home child care providers also noted that their caregiving has changed as a result of connecting to the library. For example, these care providers indicated that they read stories to their children differently after seeing a librarian do it. As one caregiver said, “I really liked the way she (the librarian) made voices for different characters and stopped at certain points and asked the children what was happening and what would happen next. It made it more exciting for everyone. So, now I do that.”

- **Connection with Their Community**

- **Meet other Parents**—a strong message we heard in the interviews and focus groups was the significant isolation parents with young children feel. A major continuation of the Family Place model is simply providing a place and mechanism for parents to meet each other, connect on issues of common interest, and form friendships. We heard many stories of new friendships formed in the library. One mother relayed a story of being new to town. As a recent arrival, she had neither friends nor family in the area. She described feeling isolated and lonely. Another young mom in her neighborhood, and long-time library patron, invited her to sign up together for a children’s singing and dance class. Through this they formed a deep friendship. As this mom said, “This saved my life. I was so alone. And with a new baby. I just stayed in the house all the time. I don’t know what I would have done if I hadn’t met (the other mom) and went to the library.”
- **Learn about Community Resources**—parents and caregivers talked about the important role that the library has played in helping them learn about resources. This has come in two forms. First, many parents and caregivers reported learning about other community resources directly from library programs and staff. Most of these connections came through the PCW. But a number of parents relayed stories of asking library staff for information on area services. In some libraries, they even provide parents with community resource guides.

Two parents relayed specific stories of how meeting a community resource in the library helped them identify their children’s development needs. For example, one parent noted that she had concerns over her son’s hearing and that meeting a child development professional who conducted a hearing and eye exam helped to identify that the child did have a hearing problem.

Another source of information on community resources was other parents that participants met at the library. Participants who mentioned this avenue for information on community resources noted that they rarely had the opportunity to talk with other parents and that the library programs and setting provided that venue. As one parent said, “Interacting with the other moms gave me a lot of good information about preschools in the area. There are a lot of choices. It was good to hear their perspectives so I could make the best choice for us.”

- **Changes in Perception and Use of Library:** Overwhelmingly, participants indicated that after they started to come to the library for children’s programs, it expanded their use

of other library services. While three respondents indicated that they already use adult services before they brought their children in, it is much more common for the dynamic to work in the opposite direction. Parents come to the library with their young children and participate in programs, get to know the library and library staff, and through these relationships and physically being in the library, they learn about new programs.

As one grandparent said, “We started bringing our grandson in, and we discovered all these programs for us that we never knew about. Fun things like books groups and health talks.”

- **Suggested Improvements:** As with any program, even those that are well-loved and deeply appreciated, participants had criticisms and suggestions of ways to make Family Place better, including:
 - ***Sibling-Friendly Programming***—several parents and grandparents noted that it can be very hard to bring a younger child to a program when there is no child care or other program option for an older child. While parents were quick to recognize that the library would have a hard time accommodating older children in a program specifically designed for younger children, this was a challenge raised on several occasions.
 - ***Community Resource Guides***—when we raised the availability of community resource guides during one focus group, several parents noted that their library did not have (to their knowledge) such a resource. Parents in libraries where guides are available described their great value, and other parents requested them in their libraries.
 - ***Increased Program Variety***—recognizing that most of the parents, grandparents, and caregivers participating in this part of the research are deep users of library programs, it is not surprising that they called for increased programming, variety, and specialization for different-age children. They know a good thing when they see it, and they want more of it.

In addition, several respondents to the post-PCW surveys commented that they wished there were more sessions in each workshop (though did not want the hour-long session to be longer). As one parent wrote, “It went too fast. It would be better if it was more weeks.”

- ***Transportation***—A few parents talked about lack of transportation as a barrier to attending library programs. While this was not prevalent, it is an important reminder that a lack of transportation is still a barrier for some families. Because the vast majority of library-connected programs happen in libraries, getting to the library can be a challenge.
- ***Librarian as Key Contact***—Librarians are clearly the gateway to these programs and to the library as an institution. The vast majority of parents and caregivers we

spoke to believed that their librarian is caring, helpful, etc. However, a few did mention experiences with library staff that was less than perfect. Parents are extremely sensitive to situations in which their children are not acting in appropriate ways or settings involving their children that are beyond their control. Several recounted stories where they felt that library staff—both inside and outside the children’s department—had not treated them respectfully. Unfortunately, these experiences stick with the parent or caregiver and can cast a negative light on the library.

Overall Evaluation Findings

After nearly two years of collecting and analyzing survey, interview and focus group data, the Family Place Long Island (FPLI) evaluation has come to an end. The Interim Evaluation Report (July 2011) and the first section of this Final Evaluation Report provide an overview of what we have been hearing from key actors – library directors and librarians, parents and caregivers, and community partners. To be sure, we heard a lot.

At this juncture we can stand back and take stock of what we have learned and identify potential next steps. To help us make sense of the evaluation findings, the evaluation team returned to the original key questions matrix developed in 2010. These were the questions that Middle Country Public Library and the evaluation team agreed that this assessment should try to address.

While the evaluation addresses many of these key questions, there are still some gaps in our knowledge about Family Place. These comprise the next steps in the final section of the report.

Key Questions For Librarians and Library Directors

- *In what ways has the knowledge acquired at FPTI and other FPLI events impacted library programs, services, and space development, collaborative work with community professionals, and the librarian role as advocate/messenger?*
 - **Library Transformation**—This evaluation reveals strong evidence for transformation within the library as a result of engaging in the FPTI and other FPLI events. The librarian survey indicates that 77% of libraries implemented core program elements. One hundred percent reported believing that there was an impact on their library. Librarians and library directors raised the physical and programmatic transformation as well as changes in how they think about and interact with families with young children. A few also mentioned the transfer of Family Place ideas to other areas of the library.
 - **Work with Community Professionals**—Again, survey and interview results indicate that librarians believe that they would not have interacted with community partners in quite this way or at this level if they had not engaged in Family Place. And there is an indication that, for some libraries, this approach to community partners has had impact outside of the children’s department.
 - **Role as Advocate/Messenger**—This is an area that the evaluation is less clear on. Librarians can articulate clearly their role as messengers of early childhood information to parents and other caregivers. However, most do not articulate an “advocate” or “messenger” role outside of parent interaction (with, say, library administration or community partners). This was not how they articulated their primary role. Even with parents, most see their role as information providers and modelers of good early childhood practice, but not as *advocates* of change in behavior or parenting strategies.

- ***What are the barriers to librarians participating in continuing education/network offerings?***
 - **Hard to get out of Library**—Most librarians knew of continuing education and network offerings. According to the survey and interviews, they were unable to take advantage of them because they lacked time and found it hard to get to (get approval to attend) programs outside of the library. According to the survey results, this was most true for new and transitional libraries. This was less of a concern for more established libraries.

There is, however, great interest in networking with other librarians to learn about their practice and models. Just like parents with young children, librarians feel some sense of isolation and desire additional opportunities to get to know and develop relationships with peers.

- ***What are the barriers to librarians engaging in collaborative programming, networking, partnership building, and outreach?***
 - **Time and Vision**—Based on survey and interview data, it is clear that librarians want to develop relationships with community partners. However, most are not doing a deeper level of collaborative programming and partnership building. The barriers are two-fold. First, library staff articulate a lack of time to build these partnerships and/or lack of support from upper library administration to prioritize this activity in the time they have.

In addition, some librarians had difficulty describing why or how they would work with community partners outside the PCW. For some, they still see the relationship as transactional—the library needs a community partner to fill a slot in a program—rather than really collaborative, such as working with a community partner to identify needs and develop joint approaches to programs. This finding reflected community partner surveys and interviews.

Key Questions for Community Partners

- ***Do other family-serving organizations view the library as an early childhood, parent education support institution?***
 - **Library is Key Partner**—Evidence from the community partner survey and follow-up interviews provide much evidence that the library is a valued partner in early childhood and parent education and support. According to the survey, 100% of community partners see the library as a vital link in supporting families. In the interviews, community partners told many stories about the value of the library.

As with any good thing, the community partners want more from the library, including more programming and deeper relationships.

- ***How many outside agencies are libraries working with and what is the level of collaboration?***

- **Level and Depth**—There is a large variation in the number of community partners libraries have. According to the community partner survey, 77% had interaction with the library outside the PCW and 50% had been to the library within the last month. Community partners value the relationships they do have, and as noted above, would like deeper connections. They do, however, also struggle with their own barriers to deeper connection. Like library staff, they sometimes lack time or resources to partner with the library.
- **Locus of Relationship**—According to community partners, the primary locus of the relationship continues to be the Parent Child Workshop. While some of the community partners reported doing limited programs outside PCW, this was still the primary point of contact and identity connection with the library. A handful offered additional programs that they had established with their library, but this was not pervasive and was certainly secondary to their primary connection via the PCW. Less than half of the community partners surveyed for the evaluation reported asking library staff to serve on external committees or workgroups.
- **Referrals**—There is substantial evidence that community agencies refer families to the library. We heard this directly from community agencies. According to the community partner survey, 73% refer families to libraries, though a lower percentage believes that libraries refer families to them. Librarians and parents also supported this finding. Both reported that community agencies suggest that families visit the library or tell them about specific library programs.

Key Questions for Parents and Caregivers

- ***Have parents and caregivers increased their use of the library?***
 - **Use has Increased**—There is clear evidence from the interviews and focus groups that parents believe their participation in library services has increased as a result of participating in library programs (though the evidence in the pre- and post-session surveys shows that already high participation became only a bit higher). Parents and caregivers could articulate clearly the programs they started with and how that grew over time. Many of them also indicated that coming to the library for children’s programs made them aware of and increased their use of other library services, such as adult programs.

It is important to note that parents and caregivers reported that it was because the library made them feel comfortable, not strictly the new awareness of the library as a resource, that encouraged them to come to the library for other programs.

- ***Have parent and caregiver confidence levels in the ways they can contribute to their child’s development increased?***
 - **Increase in Confidence**—Parents and caregivers in the interviews and focus groups told many, many stories of the information they learned in library programs for families with young children and how it translated into better handling a situation or approaching child development differently. While

participants did not use the words “increase in confidence,” what they describe is clearly a greater confidence in their ability to meet the needs of young children.

- ***Do parents and caregivers feel more informed about child development, their role as a child’s first teachers, and library and community agency support and programs?***
 - **Informed about Child Development**—Parents and caregivers indicated that they did learn important child development information and techniques as a result of participating in library programs. They also reported turning to libraries for child development questions.

 - **Informed about Community Resources**—Parents, in the PCW survey, the interviews, and focus groups, reported learning a great deal about community resources from library programs, library handouts, and other parents they met at the library. Based on limited survey data, we can see that knowledge of a variety of community resources rise from about 50% of participants at the beginning of the PCW to about 80% after it. It is important to note that all three of these mechanisms—programs, handouts, peers—were influential in dissemination of information about the community.

- ***Do parents and caregivers spend more time playing, talking, singing, and sharing books with their young children?***
 - **Time Working with Children**—The evaluation had a harder time answering this question. There is anecdotal evidence that some parents talked about working with their children differently, but few articulated doing *more* with their children. Without direct observation or time-diaries, documenting this change is hard.

- ***Do parents and caregivers view the library as a welcoming, beneficial early childhood, parent education/support institution in their community?***
 - **Value of Library**—There is substantial evidence that parents and caregivers feel that the library is a welcoming, beneficial, parent support institution. Parents spoke fondly of the library and what it offers them and their families. They spoke fondly of their local librarian. For parents, the primary value of the programs offered by the library include (in order of importance): connection to other parents, fun for them and their children, learning about parenting and child development, and learning about and gaining access to community resources.

- ***Do parents and caregivers refer other parents/caregivers of young children to the library?***
 - **Parents Referring other Parents**—There is substantial evidence that parents refer other parents to library programs and services. The evaluation team heard many first-person accounts of a parent referring or being referred by another parent to the library. In the interviews, parents identified the library as the number one community resource to tell a parent new to the area. When asked why, parents indicated that the library is welcoming, free, full of good information, and fun for children and parents.

Conclusions and Next Steps

With such a long and substantial evaluation, it can be a challenge to cull the most important findings. This report (as well as the Interim Report) is filled with important findings and lessons not repeated here. But there are a couple of larger takeaways that the evaluation team believes are important to highlight.

- **Value of Family Place:** This is a very valuable effort from multiple perspectives—librarians and library directors, parents and caregivers, and community partners. In our efforts to identify areas of improvement, it is important to start with a recognition that people perceive it as a strong and valuable effort. That is not to say that there is not room for improvement and desire for changes, but it is important to start with an understanding of the core belief in the value of Family Place.

The evaluation team believes it might be helpful to spend some time articulating to key partners what the value is. For example, it is clear that library staff and library directors did not uniformly believe that parents accessed additional services as a result of Family Place. Parents had a very different story to tell. It would be beneficial to the program to articulate the value (and evidence of value) for participating sites, as well as help them find ways to document it themselves. Similarly, librarians underestimated community partners' value of the library. Helping librarians and library directors better understand the opinion of community partners could help to inform and shore up program strategies.

- **Institutionalization:** From the data we collected, there is evidence of institutionalization of the Family Place model. Our evidence includes comments that this is a “philosophy,” not a “program”; that in some libraries the principles of Family Place have been utilized in other programs; that library directors would only hire children’s department staff who were or planned to be trained in Family Place; and that librarians and directors believe that this is a core of who they are as a library.

To be sure, additional work could be conducted to ensure institutionalization. For example, while most libraries keep other staff apprised of Family Place programming and integrate a few of them, most other library staff are not part of the model. Deepening understanding of the full program model (beyond just securing support for the PCW) is critical to full implementation. Deeper engagement of other library staff would be a higher level of institutionalization.

- **Impact on Parents and Caregivers:** From all perspectives—parents and caregivers, community partners, and library staff—Family Place has a positive impact on families and young children. While more objective documentation of this would be ideal, anecdotal evidence suggests that some parents and caregivers learn key child development and early literacy concepts, become less isolated from community resources and peers, and gain confidence.

- **Family Place as Gateway:** Interviews and focus groups with parents and caregivers strongly indicate that Family Place is a gateway program to other library arenas for them and their children. Library staff and directors recognized this less. Further identifying this gateway effect and sharing its results would be helpful for library administrators.
- **Library Staff are Key to Success:** Across all aspects of the evaluation, it was clear that well-trained, informative, helpful, and kind librarians were the key to success. Without this, it would seem to not be possible to sustain the program, make deep connections to families and community partners, or have the vision for program improvements.

Because well trained and supported staff is so critical, an element worth exploring is hosting “booster” sessions with already-trained staff or investigating a “level one-level two” approach to training. This would allow experienced staff to continue to build their skills and provide opportunities to take on more advanced elements of the model, such as building deep relationships with community partners.

- **More Could be Done with Community Partners:** A clear finding from this evaluation is that most libraries could develop deeper connections with community partners. Community partners would not only welcome this, some feel that it is essential. Working collaboratively with a community partner to identify needs and create programs is a different skill set than identifying community partners to help with programming. Most library staff could use support to undertake this deeper level of engagement – both in terms of training for themselves and work with their library administration to support the activity.
- **Help Librarians Manage Increased Demand:** As with anything good, consumers (parents or community partners) want more of it. Librarians and other library staff need help managing the demand for programs and services. Further, it seems beneficial to help them move from basic to higher levels of programming – that is, help them grow and evolve.

Next Steps

As with any evaluation, there are clearly additional programmatic or evaluative elements that could be explored in future work.

- **Use of Logic Model:** Family Place Long Island now has a revised and expanded logic model to help guide its training and work with local libraries. It would be good to train Family Place libraries in the logic model and help them understand how to use it as a programmatic and evaluative tool.
- **Evaluation Over Time:** As was noted at the beginning, this evaluation was retrospective. A better approach, when possible, is to evaluate as the sites implement the program. This enables evaluators to be a bit less reliant on participants’ memories (and all of our memories can be flawed!).

- **Understanding Value of Additional Programs:** This evaluation did not pay great attention to the additional program and training offerings of the Family Place Network. While there is evidence that some librarians use these opportunities, it is not clear the specific value added. More work could be conducted here.
- **Perspective:** As was noted several times throughout this and the previous report, this evaluation relied exclusively on the perspective and insights of participants and partners. While this is incredibly valuable, it is a different kind of evaluation than objective measures and observations. More objective evaluation measures – while more costly and time consuming—certainly would be a next step in the evaluation of Family Place.

APPENDIX A: Lessons Learned from Data Collection with Parents and Caregivers

Gathering input from the people using services is always a challenge. People, especially parents with young children, are busy and are rarely willing to give their time for this kind of research. Even given the challenges faced industry-wide, we believed we faced particular challenges in this evaluation. While we were ultimately able to overcome them, we believe it is helpful (from a continuous learning perspective) to reflect on our approach and what we might do differently.

- **Engagement Strategy** – our primary approach was to ask Family Place library directors and librarians to provide our outreach flier to parents. While some libraries did this after our initial request, we clearly needed to do a much more direct request. For example, we should have called each Family Place library (we did call a few, but not all). And we could have asked each library for a specific target number of parents to ask to participate rather than leave it wide open. Library staff are busy, and this was not a high priority for them. However, when staff of Middle Country Public Library directly asked Family Place libraries to help recruit parents, quite a number of parents contacted us. This is another important reminder that people respond to those who they are the most directly connected to. In this instance, even though we had been communicating with the library staff for more than a year, they were still not “beholden” to us.
- **Incentives** – we had originally planned to provide incentives only to parents participating in the focus groups. Once we opened up the ability to secure an incentive (\$25) to any participant, our parent and caregiver enrollment increased.
- **Webinar** – we did not have a single parent or caregiver sign up for the research webinar. In talking with parents about why they did not choose this as an input mechanism, they indicated that they were not sure what it was, if they had access to a computer that could handle it, or if they could commit to a webinar. This is a good lesson. If we plan to use a webinar as a data collection mechanism, we should focus this strategy on professionals (those with ready access to technology and familiarity with a webinar format) and/or reserve computer space at the library for parents. Even with reserving computer space, we would be hesitant about its use as a data collection strategy for parents.