

Nagle & Associates

FAMILY PLACE LIBRARIES™ MODEL FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In early 2012, Middle Country Public Library asked Nagle & Associates to develop and implement a multi-year evaluation of its Family Place Libraries™ initiative. This evaluation was distinct from previous evaluation efforts because of its size (originally including 28 libraries from across the United States), duration (2012-2015), and range of informants (collecting information from library staff and leadership, parents, and community partners). Further, this evaluation is unique because of the wide variety of indicators of change it explored. Finally, this evaluation also was unique because it followed a cohort of Family Place Libraries™ from their initial training through two years of implementation.

The goal of this project was to evaluate the Family Place Libraries™ model for early childhood and family services as a vehicle for institutional change. To address this, the evaluation assessed:

- **Staff Change:** changes in children's librarians' and library leadership's attitudes and practices,
- **Library Culture Change:** organizational dynamics, investment in children's services, and attitudes towards children's services among all staff, and
- **Change in External Position of Library:** among parents, resource professionals, and community agencies.

A logic model that calls forth four goals guides the work of the Family Place Libraries™ initiative. The goals include:

- Create a library culture and staff capacity that support the development of the Family Place Libraries™ model for early childhood and family support services.
- Implement the Family Place Libraries™ model for early childhood and family support services.

- Establish the library as a key institution and community partner that serves the information and education needs of families and young children.
- Develop parents' knowledge and use of the library as an early childhood and family resource center.

Within the logic model, each goal is further articulated with a series of program outcomes.

Methodological Approach: The evaluation team used a mixed informant and mixed method approach to the Family Place Libraries™ evaluation. Over the course of the evaluation, we collected information from a variety of informants, including librarians, library directors, staff, parents, and community partners. To collect data from these key informants, we used a variety of tools—surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

Participating Libraries: At the start of the evaluation, there were 28 participating libraries in the program (six were stand-alone libraries and 22 were branches within nine systems). At the conclusion of the evaluation, 25 participating libraries remained in the program. Of the remaining libraries, six were stand-alone libraries and the other 19 were branches within seven library systems. The participating library sites were from all across the nation—from Southwest to Midwest to Northeast to Central—and represented a variety of communities—urban, suburban, and small town.

Based on the training survey, the majority of key librarians were familiar with Family Place Libraries™ before starting the program and felt this would build on the work their library was already doing. And, 24% reported having received formal training in brain or infant and toddler development. In addition, it is important to note that the libraries chosen to participate in this Family Place Libraries™ training cohort and evaluation were selected because of assumptions by Middle Country Public Library staff that the libraries had the capacity and institutional support to successfully implement the program.

Based on these starting points, it is important to note that the libraries that participated in this initiative did not start with a blank slate. All of them had a children's program already in operation. All of them had some form of a children's space. Many of them had already been working to improve their early childhood and family program offerings, and all of them had interest in and willingness to transform their programs along the lines of Family Place Libraries™ as a requirement of acceptance into the initiative.

Summary of Findings

This evaluation looked at a broad range of goals and indicators and used a number of tools to help inform its work. While substantial detail appears later in the report, the evaluation team developed a quick overview of some of the key findings to make this work more digestible.

A logic model was used to guide the work of the Family Place Libraries™ initiative. Similarly, the evaluation team used the logic model to create data collection tools and structure the final report. The tables below provide a quick overview of findings based on the Family Place

Libraries™ logic model. Evaluation results are categorized as ‘Failed to Achieve’, ‘Moderate Progress’, ‘Good Progress’, and ‘Achieved’.

GOAL: Create a library culture and staff capacity that support the development of the Family Place Libraries™ model for early childhood and family support services.

Administrator and staff will participate in the Family Place Libraries™ Training Institute and related online training.	Achieved
Library leadership will increase their knowledge, awareness, and support of Family Place Libraries™ objectives and the library’s role as a family support institution.	Achieved
Family Place Libraries™ training participants will share knowledge of Family Place Libraries™ and the full range of services for young children and families with library staff.	Achieved
Staff will participate in additional online training and technical assistance activities.	Achieved
Library leadership will express support for and readily promote library-based early childhood and family support initiatives.	Achieved
Staff from multiple departments will help connect families with Family Place Libraries™ and related services.	Achieved
Staff from multiple departments will have increased ability to promote the role of the library in early childhood and parent support services within the library profession.	Achieved

To achieve this goal, the logic model notes that the initiative would expose lead staff and administration to the core components of the model. These program leaders would then share that knowledge with other non-Family Place Libraries™ staff and continue to develop their knowledge and skills in order to build and support the model.

Summary: Based on evaluation data, 100% of the libraries were trained in the model and (at the very start) more than 50% of trainees were strongly in favor of becoming a Family Place Libraries™ program. Library leadership demonstrated increased knowledge and ability to understand and implement the key components, even when faced with staff turnover. Also, library leadership expressed considerable support for Family Place Libraries™ because of its impact.

Evidence indicates that knowledge was shared with other staff in the library. For example, 90% of key librarians reported an increase in awareness of the Family Place Libraries™ model among other library staff and all but three staff could accurately describe the impact of Family Place Libraries™ programming on their library. While knowledge increased, staff could not always identify how that knowledge was gained. There is strong evidence that the understanding and promotion of Family Place Libraries™ transcended the children’s area. For example, 82% of staff from departments outside the children’s department could explain the core tenets of the Family Place Libraries™ program.

Enthusiasm for Family Place Libraries™ was high at the start and was sustained over the course of the initiative. In fact, all sites plan to continue the program even after completion of the initiative.

GOAL: Implement the Family Place Libraries™ model for early childhood and family support services.	
Staff will create an interactive early childhood/parenting space in the children’s room including toys and collections for very young children and resources for parents.	Achieved
Staff will plan and conduct the Parent Child Workshop.	Achieved
Staff will have increased familiarity with key research on child development and family support.	Achieved
Staff will be better able to identify community resources to assist parents and caregivers.	Achieved
Staff will be active members of the early childhood and family support systems in their communities.	Achieved
Staff will have increased competencies and skills to act as critical communicators of early childhood development, parenting, and community support information.	Achieved
Staff and administration will have increased ability to promote Family Place Libraries™ to parents/caregivers, community organizations, and the library community.	Achieved
Staff will assess current library services, programs, and policies offered for young children and parents/caregivers and modify to conform better to evidence-based best practice.	Achieved

To achieve this goal, the logic model notes that the program would need to create a unique space, conduct Parent Child Workshops, be familiar with child development best practice, and promote the library as a source of information for parents.

Summary: All (100%) of participating libraries substantially transformed their spaces into destinations for families with young children. In addition to being welcoming, the new spaces also use early childhood best practice. For example, the percent of libraries that had at least some parenting collection in the children’s area increased from 56% to 95%. Changes to the library’s space, addition of toys, and movement of collections were recognized and valued, though did present some challenges.

All (100%) of library sites conducted at least two Parent Child Workshops series that provided support to thousands of families. Evidence is strong that librarians increased familiarity with early childhood research and community support services and used evidence-based practices in their work. For example, 85% of librarians reported a positive change in their ability to modify programs based on child development best practices. For example, the placement of toys and books in areas where small children can reach them and the limiting of class sizes.

Staff had increased ability to share early childhood learnings and connect parents to community resources. By late 2015, 95% of librarians felt more secure in their ability to identify community resources to assist parents. More than 80% of parents report that the library has supported them in their role as parents and 65% report that staff at the library talked with them about child development. There is evidence that parents feel supported by their library regardless of whether they participated in the Parent- Child Workshop. There is strong evidence that these libraries were seen as vital and important links in their local early childhood support systems. For example, between 2013 and 2015, the percent of libraries that participated in family support coalitions increased from 59% to 79%, and community partners gave their libraries an average score of 95 out of 100 on the statement “my organization sees this library as a vital link in supporting families.”

GOAL: Establish the library as a key institution and community partner that serves the information and education needs of families and young children.

Staff will have gained the knowledge and skills necessary to be able to raise awareness for library programs, services, and spaces that serve the needs of families and young children.	Achieved
Staff and administration will create a communications plan that focuses on Family Place Libraries™ services.	Achieved
Staff will create and distribute promotional and public relations materials for the Parent Child Workshop and other family-serving programs.	Achieved
Staff will outreach to families through direct contact, media relations, and other family support agencies.	Achieved
Library will experience increased media attention on library services for families and young children.	Achieved
Key library staff and administration will share information with local, state, and national library organizations.	Achieved
Key family support agency partners will refer families to the library for early learning materials and activities, parenting information, and support.	Good Progress
Community family support agencies will partner with the library and acknowledge it as a community asset for families and young children.	Achieved

A core component of Family Place Libraries™ is to create connections to community agencies serving families with young children. To evaluate the success of this program goal, the first step is to identify whether knowledge and skills were acquired. Then, the evaluation can gauge whether activities were undertaken and determine the level of impact.

Summary: Evaluation data indicate that librarians increased their awareness of and experiences with outreach over the course of the initiative, though outreach has slowed some. All (100%) crafted communications plans as well as promotional materials. Less than half of librarians reported increasing outreach in the last year. While a plan and materials were in place, many struggled to find time to conduct more than basic outreach. Those with specific time allocated to outreach as part of their job description had ability to shift the outreach paradigm. But, the

outreach libraries were doing does seem to be reaching parents. For example, 72% of parents indicated they received information about library programs in the community.

There is evidence that the libraries expanded partnerships and many created deep reciprocal relationships with core partners. For example, 83% of Library Directors reported a moderate or significant increase in community partnerships as a result of participating in Family Place Libraries™. And, 89% of libraries reported providing referrals to families. Community partners report working with libraries, including 74% who report providing outreach materials to libraries. Community partners see libraries as critical partners. Community partners provided an average score of 95 out of 100 on the statement “my organization sees this library as a vital link in supporting families.” The specific objective of providing and receiving referrals remains unclear as there was less evidence of this practice.

There is evidence of increased media activity and coverage, but word of mouth remains a strong outreach mechanism. Libraries substantially increased sharing of their model and approaches with early childhood support and professional associations (from 68% of libraries in 2013 to 100% in 2015).

GOAL: Develop parents'/caregivers' knowledge and use of the library as an early childhood and family resource center.	
Parents, caregivers, and children will attend the Parent Child Workshop and interact with the children's librarian and family support professionals.	Achieved
Parents will have increased awareness that the library is a place to connect with other parents and family-serving professionals.	Achieved
Parents will have access to interactive developmentally appropriate learning spaces, collections, and resources and understand how to use them with their children.	Achieved
Parents will have increased knowledge of ways in which they can support children's development.	Achieved
Parents will meet family support professionals and have increased awareness of the library as a source of community information and early intervention resources.	Achieved
Families with young children will increase the use of library programs, collections, and spaces.	Good Progress
Parents will increase the time sharing books and engaging in developmentally appropriate play and communication with their children.	Achieved
Parents will meet other parents and have a decreased sense of isolation.	Achieved

Over the course of the evaluation, the evaluation team was able to collect a variety of data from parents—opinion surveys, interviews, Parent Child Workshop participation surveys, and focus groups. It is important to note that participants in all of these data sources skew toward higher use participants. While this is helpful because these informants are able to provide a deep source of information, it also limits our understanding of the experience of lighter users of the library.

Summary: Every library offered the Parent Child Workshop, serving more than 3,200 children and 2,900 adults. There is evidence that more families are viewing the library as a place to connect with other parents and information on community services. Parents are noticing and taking advantage of the new space and collections (60% noted a positive change in the library space over the last year). Because most parent informants were already substantial users of the library, gauging an increase in usage was difficult. Their usage coming into the study was high and remained high. The evaluation indicates that while some parents are able to articulate a change in how they are using books and toys with their children, this is not universal. In addition, the majority of parents (56%) indicate that they have connected to community resources at their library and can articulate why this is of value to them.

Some parents reported decreased isolation after participating in the Parent Child Workshop. For example, 15% indicated that they do not have a chance to get together with other parents in the pre-Workshop survey. This decreased to 9% in the post-Workshop survey. For parents who voiced some isolation, the library is a place to make connections to other parents and extend personal networks.

There is substantial evidence that parents, especially frequent library users, increased their belief that they have additional knowledge of child development practices. For example, 79% of parents in the pre-Workshop survey indicated feeling informed about child development. In the post-Workshop survey, that increased to 89%.

Finally, the rates of parents reporting that they read to their children daily increased from 77% to 84% between the pre-Parent Child Workshop and post-Parent Child Workshop surveys.

Conclusion

Over the past three years more than two dozen libraries from across the nation worked to implement the Family Place Libraries™ model. As is noted in this evaluation report, libraries made great strides in implementing the model, reshaping their programming, impacting their institutions, creating community partnerships, and touching the lives of families with young children.

Of particular note, libraries substantially transformed their spaces—creating welcoming places where families come to learn and play, ask for information, and meet other families. While the space changes were perhaps the most obvious, important changes also were noted for library staff. In implementing this model, staff had to re-imagine their role, change long-held programming practices, and open up new kinds of relationships with parents. Using the child development research provided by Family Place Libraries™ training and other support, librarians created new programs (Parent Child Workshop being the most notable), tweaked existing offerings (story time), and worked to create relationships with families.

Creating or expanding relationships with community service providers to better assist families and becoming a greater leader in the local early childhood community were critical to successful implementation of the Family Place Libraries™ model. All participating sites created new community partnerships and grew in their leadership, though outreach and really serving as a

conduit for relationships between parents and community service providers remained a challenge due to time constraints. While there is still room to grow in this arena, community partners reported important improvements of the positioning of the library and its willingness to be part of the safety net for families.

Finally, another real area of growth for participating libraries is in their relationship with families. Parents who made connections to their local libraries came to deeply appreciate and use the library as part of their support network. Librarians in the children's area are the critical connection point for families. Making connections to families who are deep users of the library is naturally easier than connecting with low-frequency users. Additional work needs to go into ways to expand the model to reach parents who (for a variety of reasons) are lighter users of the library.

Because most parents participating in this evaluation were already regular users of library programs, observing increases in usage was difficult. There is substantial evidence that families encountered community partners at the library and are looking to the library as a source of information on parenting and community services.

Overall, this cohort of libraries transformed their children's spaces into destinations for families with young children, built staff understanding of child development, shared their knowledge with families and partners through Parent Child Workshops and other programming, and developed new partners in the community. Each of these libraries is committed to expanding upon these changes and to reaching even more families.