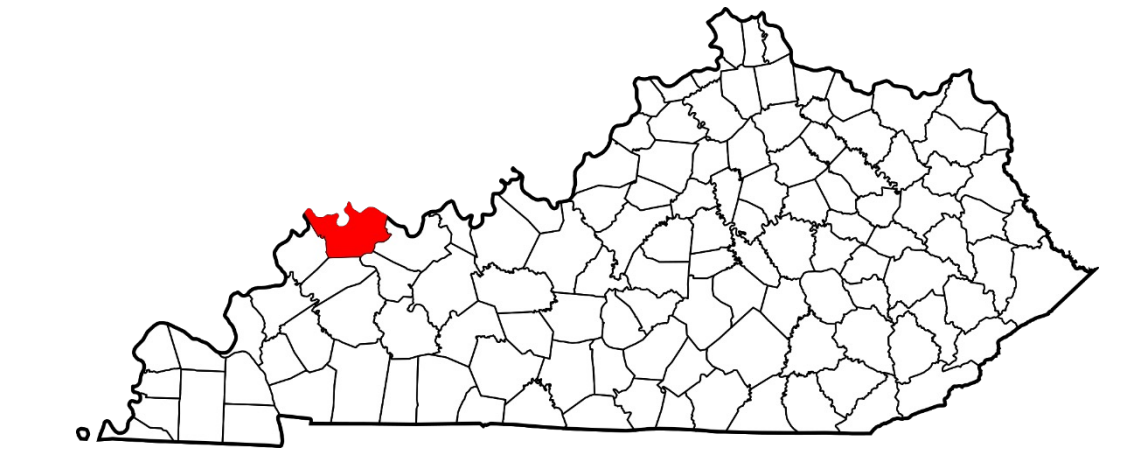


Community Connections Through Family Learning



Introduction

Family literacy refers to a continuum of programs that addresses the intergenerational nature of literacy. Under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Title II of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, family literacy programs integrate (1) interactive literacy activities between parent and child; (2) training in parenting activities; (3) Parent or family adult education and literacy activities that lead to readiness for postsecondary education or training, career advancement, and economic self-sufficiency (2014). (4) age appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences. A few of the metrics commonly used to evaluate family literacy include: attendance, persistence in educational goal attainment (for adults and children), improved partnerships with schools, and improved academic achievement in adults and children.

According to over three decades of NCFL's research (NCFL,2012) parenting adult literacy gains from being part of a literacy program, especially with their children, is well worth the time spent. With that in mind, our KYAE team at HCC approached the 'Foundation in Family Literacy' opportunity in a practical way. We wanted to use our platform to create lasting connections to the community by engaging parents and children in a learning activity, but we also sought to ensure that each family was making as few sacrifices of their time as possible. Therefore, we planned three efficient and enriching family friendly events.

Events

Our general theme for these activities was 'Community Ties'. Therefore, all our activities were designed to connect families to their national, local, and social community members. The first event in our family learning series was a celebration of **Dr. Seuss's birthday** for which children and parents from a local Head Start center were invited to HCC's KYAE classroom. We served drinks and birthday cupcakes, and provided copies of Dr. Seuss books for sharing. Staff, including our college president, read Dr. Seuss books to participants. Pam, our director, was the master of ceremonies and provided a media presentation. This activity connected the families to their national community, because Dr. Seuss books are beloved by those across the country.

Our second event was a **seed planting** event along Henderson's Riverfront Walking Trail in Henderson, KY. Parents and children were given planting implements and seeds. Each seed packet was read aloud by parents such that children would know general information and best conditions for planting. Pam provided materials needed, and Elaine (one of our instructors) helped her contact parents, give out materials, and manage pictures. This activity connected families to their local community, because other members can enjoy the beautiful results of the families' hard work.

The third event was a **recorded reading** event for parents and children. Each family was provided with a book to read and practice for dramatic interpretation. Then they presented their reading to the group. Each family was recorded, and copies of the video were sent to the parents such that they could post them on Facebook. Books were chosen from our KYAE library, and our director invited and filmed the participants. This activity connected families to their social community, by allowing them to share their experiences with their friends and family.

Figure 1: Pictures taken during the seed planting event. Parents are teaching their children how to plant seeds and reinforcing the information provided to them.



Figures 2 & 3: Dr. Warren, President and CEO of Henderson Community College reading Dr. Seuss books to children from the Head Start program on campus.



Student Engagement

Our first event, celebrating Dr. Seuss's birthday, did not require family surveys ahead of time, because we formed a partnership with the Head Start center on campus to provide this celebration. The children were asked if they had fun, and which story was their favorite. This activity was reported to us as fun and exciting, so we know that this is a good exercise for future activities.

Our second and third events were presented as ideas to the parents that accepted our invitation to participate in our family literacy pilot. These parents voiced their desire to do something fun and outdoorsy (our seed planting event), and something that was useful in fostering their children's growth while also creating an environment for familial bonding (our recorded reading event). For these activities, we asked the parents for feedback a few days later. This was done so that the parents had time to see what their children thought of the events. Our questions included: 1) Did the child want to engage in that activity again (unprompted)? 2) Did the parent enjoy that activity? Or would they have preferred something else? 3) Did the parent feel that the activity was beneficial for both the education of the child and the growth of their bond? All the parents enjoyed the activities, but some weren't sure if they would do the same activities again. As in, they would enjoy future activities that were different and offered something new. Overall, the number of participants ranged from six to twenty.

What we learned

We learned many things from our 'Community Ties' events. Firstly, we learned to always know our audience. This included such things as providing snacks and drinks during events, and to have a back-up plan in place during those events if the original plan falls through. This plan should resemble the original, in that it should not be too complicated. Finally, for these group events, providing products and materials to be taken home for the families is favored by the participants.

Knowing your audience also means that invitations need to be vocal (over the phone or in person), since it is easier to sway busy families into participating. Furthermore, as a courtesy for families making time sacrifices, it is also crucial to have an activity agenda and to attempt to keep on schedule so that everyone feels their time has been respected.

Lastly, knowing your audience also means taking and providing pictures of the families. As children grow, artifacts such as this make valuable family memories.

Reflections

Our participation in this pilot project has provided some insight into what would be most helpful in the work of implementing family literacy programming. Planning is essential and as a small program, it would be ideal to have a team member who is mainly responsible for the planning and delivery of family literacy events. As such, attention to our primary work with students made it challenging to devote additional time needed for the planning and logistics associated with the three events. Additionally, because pilot documentation in KAERS was not established, we were unsure how parent participation should be documented. However, we found that our events were successful in fostering parent-child learning and bonding. Therefore, these events were useful to us as educators.

We did not attract any participants in which the parents were studying for their GED. All parents that participated in the events are enrolled at HCC and have registered for the following semester. As discussed, the children that engaged in the activity planned around Dr. Seuss's birthday were already cared for on campus by the Head Start center. We believe that working with these populations led to some of the success of our events, because we they were already present on campus and capable of engaging in activities at times that fit their class schedule.

References & Acknowledgements

National Center for Families Learning (NCFL). (2018). Toyota Family Learning Program..