

Viewpoints

A simple idea that works

As the end of summer approaches, I find myself spending quite a bit of time on my front porch. I think one of the reasons I love porch sitting is that it brings back memories of sitting on my grandmother's front porch over 50 years ago.

I often sat on her lap while she sat on a cane-bottom rocking chair. She often held a book and let me turn the pages. Sometimes we had a children's book, but often we pursued something else because our tastes were fairly eclectic. We looked at the interesting photographs in *Life* and *Look* magazines. We examined the Sears catalog. She even read me stories from *Marvel* and *DC Comics* — reading material that many would have found unacceptable for a three year old.

My grandmother's philosophy about reading was pretty simple. As long as you had some kind of book in your hand and were turning pages, you were teaching a child a useful lesson.

A Weber State University project is founded on a similar philosophy. Two decades ago, Jay Glasmann established an endowment at WSU to promote reading and family literacy. Under the current direction of Paul Schvaneveldt, the Glasmann/Standard-Examiner Family Literacy Project assists parents with the critically important task of helping their children learn to read.

In partnership with the Ogden-Weber Community Action Partnership, Elizabeth Stewart Treehouse Museum, Deseret Industries and UBS Bank, the Family Literacy Project both trains and encourages the parents of Head Start children to be more engaged in literacy activities with their children. The fundamental goal of the program is promoting greater levels of literacy with preschool children. Over the past year, the Family Literacy Project served 121 families in greater Ogden. The profiles of the families served reveal the

changing demographic in central Ogden.

The majority of these families live below the poverty level. Slightly more than 66 percent of the families were Hispanic. Almost half the households were one-parent households. More than 84 percent of these families had household incomes of less than \$25,000; more than 60 percent had

household incomes of less than \$15,000.

Many of the families have a very limited number of books in their homes. To address this challenge, Deseret Industries collects 500 books each month and donates the them to the project. UBS Bank funds family memberships at the Elizabeth Stewart Treehouse Museum.

Over the course of a year, trained

facilitators visit families in their homes every three to four weeks. The purpose of these visits is to help parents establish regular reading routines, and engage their children in educational activities inside and outside the home. Research indicates that these activities can have a profound influence on educational attainment, income, and emotional health when the child becomes an adult.

The results of assessment research show that the program is working. Results show that parents increase their daily literacy activities with their children and that their children's literacy abilities increase. Participating parents are more likely to be engaged with their children in reading, storytelling, rhyming activities, and letter and word identification. Parents are also more likely to establish routines, establish limits, and create a regular time for reading each day.

The children who participate in the Glasmann/Standard-Examiner Family Literacy Project receive many benefits. One of these will be lifelong memories of reading with their parents.

The project is an example of a simple idea that works.

Top of Utah Voices



Michael Vaughan

■ Commentary

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