

Title: Helping Incarcerated Caregivers Read to Kids

Overview: San Diego County Library's *Raising a Reader* workshops help incarcerated caregivers provide a literacy-rich environment for their young children, reducing generational incarceration.

Challenge: During 2020 and 2021, an intensive, library-wide strategic analysis and planning process revealed a gap in services. Individuals who were incarcerated in jail and re-entry facilities run by San Diego County had little to no engagement with the public library. No mechanism existed to educate these individuals about the lifelong benefits of literacy and library services. Subsequent listening sessions with jail counseling staff identified a strong need for early literacy education geared towards caregivers. Early literacy instruction offered a uniquely powerful opportunity for SDCL to intervene in the cycle of generational incarceration. Children of incarcerated parents are six times more likely to become incarcerated themselves. Additionally, 85% of juveniles who interact with the court system are functionally illiterate.

Solution: SDCL developed an engaging instructional curriculum for its *Raising a Reader: Birth- Age 5* workshops. These were geared towards adults to teach them the basics of early literacy in an approachable manner. The workshop also includes a demonstration portion where picture books, rhymes, games, and songs are practiced. Information is presented in a trauma-informed manner designed to empower caregivers and encourage engagement. Real-life scenarios and achievable tips for teaching children are shared. Adult students are educated about library resources and encouraged to visit upon their release. Students also apply for a library card, receive a workbook containing all course content, and select two free children's books to practice reading while incarcerated, and to take home upon their release.

The county's incarceration and re-entry facility for women was selected as the location for the workshops. Preparation to launch the workshops included safety training for library staff and sourcing learning aides which complied with jail safety requirements. Since November 2022, trained librarians

have been visiting the facility in-person to present monthly class sessions. Sessions are offered at a variety of times, to accommodate the schedules of general population, work-crew, and pregnant inmates. Participants opt-in to the workshops voluntarily.

Innovation: SDCL believes we are the sole library in the state to offer caregiver-oriented literacy instruction in an incarcerated setting. Library staff are the key element to the success of these workshops, providing lighthearted and engaging teaching style to reduce the stigma of asking questions and encourage engagement. Staff recognize each student's desire to do their best for their children.

Results: Since launching in November 2022, 19 workshops have been presented, with 156 attendees. Workshops are scheduled on an ongoing monthly basis. Outcomes have been positive. Participants have overwhelmingly reported feeling more confident when reading to their child and state they had learned something new. One student stated, "Today I learned that reading will help a person graduate." Another student stated that she had "learned how to make reading fun and interactive, instead of a chore." Students have benefitted so strongly from this class that many requested similar sessions for their elementary- school aged children. To fill that need, SDCL has designed a second workshop, "Raising a Reader: Ages 6-11," which will launch in August 2024.

Replicability: The "Raising a Reader" workshop model is unique, and other libraries have been very interested in replicating it within their own service areas. SDCL has freely and widely shared information and materials with other library systems throughout the state to help expand services to justice-involved caregivers.

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Additional Materials: Raising a Reader [Power Point](#) and [Workbook](#)