



## Madera County Backpack Literacy Project Executive Summary

### Overview

Madera County Library's Backpack Literacy Project supports caregivers as their child's first teacher through themed storytime kits and corresponding interactive workshops in English and Spanish.

### Challenge

Located in the heart of California's Central Valley, Madera County finds more than half (56%) of its residents living in rural, unincorporated areas with limited access to affordable, quality preschool and childcare options.<sup>1</sup> Madera County also has a poverty rate of 17.6% with 48% of households considered low income and 7.3% of the population under 5 years old. Nearly half of residents (45.3%) speak a language other than English at home.<sup>2</sup> A lack of affordable and quality childcare ranks #10 on Madera County Department of Public Health's list of health problems facing children ages 0-18, and only 29.3% of children ages 3-4 are enrolled in preschool in Madera County.<sup>3</sup> Without accessible and affordable childcare and preschool options, parents and caregivers may lack the materials and support needed to effectively prepare their children to successfully start kindergarten. Additional challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic further limit accessible preschool and childcare options while also increasing isolation for residents in rural and unincorporated areas of the County.

### Solution

With funding through a grant from First 5 Madera County, Madera County Library (MCL) created a Backpack Literacy Project to increase support of parents and caregivers as their child's first and most important teacher. The project provided opportunities for quality parent-child interactions and activities through a series of six units of free workshops in English and Spanish with accompanying thematic backpack kits of books, craft supplies, flash cards, and

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/CA%20UNINCORPORATED\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/CA%20UNINCORPORATED_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/maderacountycalifornia>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.valleychildrens.org/media/file/Valley\\_Childrens\\_Healthcare\\_2019\\_CHNA\\_Final\\_Revised\\_2.pdf](https://www.valleychildrens.org/media/file/Valley_Childrens_Healthcare_2019_CHNA_Final_Revised_2.pdf)





activities. Staff at all five library locations were trained in early literacy techniques and facilitation to lead the workshops, increasing internal awareness and appreciation of the importance of early childhood resources and services within the organization. To adapt to the pandemic, the backpack kits were distributed through contactless 'grab-and-go' methods and workshops were held virtually via Google Classroom, allowing caregivers to connect live with library staff and form a community of support online with other caregivers and children while staying safe and healthy. Participants were also registered for library cards and introduced to staff at their nearest location to begin forming supportive relationships that translated into library visits when pandemic restrictions lessened.

### **Innovation**

MCL's Backpack Literacy Project is unique among California Counties in its adaptability and capacity to reach beyond library walls to include residents in more remote and rural areas of Madera County. When faced with closed buildings due to the pandemic, the Library team resisted temptation to postpone the project and instead quickly adapted the program to an online format. Backpack kits were distributed to registered participants via contactless curbside service, and workshops for caregivers were led live online through secure Google Classroom settings. The virtual format allowed MCL to expand its reach and include participants from unincorporated areas in the more rural parts of the County that might otherwise not have been able to participate due to obstacles of transportation and distance. The project was so successful in reaching this goal that First 5 has extended funding for an additional year, and MCL is getting ready to start a new iteration of the project with in-person programs in English and Spanish planned in unincorporated, rural areas via the Bookmobile and one online program accessible through Google Classroom. Additional funding from a partnership with Madera County Superintendent of Schools will support the creation of themed backpacks for public check out from all library locations with accompanying pre-recorded workshops via online videos to further expand the program to caregivers and children not able to participate in live sessions. The Library team continues to confront challenges directly to find more ways to expand its reach and reduce barriers to access and inclusion while giving caregivers and children the tools they need to successfully prepare for kindergarten.

### **Results**

MCL's Backpack Literacy Project reached a total of 136 repeat participants (65 adults and 71 children) through 144 online sessions over 6 months. The program positively impacted





the community by providing workshops and supporting materials in English and Spanish to best support parents and caregivers as their child's first teacher. The project filled a void during the pandemic's shutdown of most preschools and daycares by creating an online community of support for parents and caregivers without access to other options. Library staff modeled the importance of quality, language-rich interactions for adults through workshops in English and Spanish to help caregivers better communicate with and teach their children at home.

### **Replicability**

MCL's Backpack Literacy Project can easily be replicated by other California Counties. A list of materials and budget spreadsheets are available for guidance and duplication along with samples of the online workshops. The Backpack Literacy Project and its further iterations can be promoted as a best practice and the various models can be further adapted to meet individual needs and constraints of unique communities.

### **Project Contact**

Krista Riggs, Library Director  
Madera County Library  
121 N. G Street  
Madera, CA 93637  
(559) 675-7871  
krista.riggs@maderacountylibrary.org

### **Additional Materials**

(Attached below: Sample Video, Flyers in English and Spanish, and Testimonies from Leaders and Participants)

Sample Video of Backpack Literacy activities from the Madera Ranchos Library (for internal use only, please): <https://youtu.be/PhPfJTAVJLk>





Program Flyer in English:

**Madera County Library Presents:**  
**BACKPACK LITERACY**  
**Empowering Parents to be their Child's First Teacher!**

Backpack Literacy is a **FREE** program designed for parents of children ages 4 or 5 who are **NOT** enrolled in an established Pre-K program within Madera County. Parents will meet online to learn engagement techniques from our librarians.

**Requirements to participate:**

- \_\_\_ Parent of a child age 4 or 5
- \_\_\_ Child is **NOT** enrolled in a Pre-K program
- \_\_\_ Madera County Resident
- \_\_\_ Madera County Library Card - **FREE** - If you do not have a card, you may pre-register for one online at [card.maderalibrary.org](http://card.maderalibrary.org)

Then complete the process (ID Verification) at any Madera County Library

- \_\_\_ Access to a Computer or Smart Phone
- \_\_\_ Internet Connection
- \_\_\_ Google Account (*Gmail*) - **FREE** - If you do not have a Google Account (*Gmail*), you can create one by visiting [accounts.google.com](http://accounts.google.com)



**Online meetings will take place every  
Tuesday at 11:00 am**

**Session Subject and Dates:**

<b>Math:</b> Jan. 12, 2021 - Feb. 2, 2021	<b>Shapes:</b> Apr. 6, 2021 - Apr. 27, 2021
<b>Science:</b> Feb. 9, 2021 - Mar. 2, 2021	<b>Color:</b> May 4, 2021 - May 25, 2021

**Social Emotions:** Mar. 9, 2021 - Mar. 30, 2021    **Letters & Writing:** Jun. 1, 2021 - Jun. 22, 2021

Parents may apply for one, some, or all subject sessions.  
Space is limited, applications will be taken first come first serve.

Register online at [backpack.maderalibrary.org](http://backpack.maderalibrary.org)  
or in-person during public access hours at  
**Madera County Library, 121 N. G Street, Madera, CA 93637 | (559)675-7871**





Program Flyer in Spanish:

**La Biblioteca del Condado de Madera presenta:**  
**ALFABETIZACIÓN DE MOCHILAS**  
**¡Empoderando a los padres para ser el primer maestro de su hijo!**

Alfabetización de mochilas es un programa **GRATIS** diseñado para padres de niños de 4 o 5 años que **NO** están inscritos en un programa Pre-K establecido en el condado de Madera. Los padres se reunirán en línea para aprender técnicas de participación de nuestros bibliotecarios.

Requisitos para participar:

- \_\_\_ Padre de un niño de 4 o 5 años
- \_\_\_ El niño **NO** está inscrito en un programa de Pre-K
- \_\_\_ Residente del condado de Madera
- \_\_\_ Tarjeta de la biblioteca del condado de Madera
- \_\_\_ **GRATIS** - Si no tiene una tarjeta, puede preinscribirse para obtener una en línea en [card.maderalibrary.org](http://card.maderalibrary.org)
- \_\_\_ Luego complete el proceso (Verificación de ID) en cualquier Biblioteca del Condado de Madera
- \_\_\_ Acceso a una computadora o teléfono inteligente
- \_\_\_ Conexión a Internet
- \_\_\_ Cuenta de Google (Gmail) - GRATIS - Si no tiene una cuenta de Google (Gmail), puede crear una visitando [accounts.google.com](http://accounts.google.com)



**Las reuniones en línea tendrán lugar todos los martes a las 11:00 am**

**Asunto y fechas de la sesión:**

<b>Formas:</b> 12/01/2021 - 02/02/2021	<b>Matemáticas:</b> 06/04/2021 - 27/04/2021
<b>Color:</b> 09/02/2021 - 02/03/2021	<b>Letras y escritura:</b> 04/05/2021 - 25/05/2021
<b>Ciencias:</b> 09/03/2021 - 30/03/2021	<b>Emocionales sociales:</b> 01/06/2021 - 22/06/2021

Los padres pueden solicitar una, algunas o todas las sesiones temáticas. El espacio es limitado, las solicitudes se aceptarán por orden de llegada.

Regístrese en línea en [backpack.maderalibrary.org](http://backpack.maderalibrary.org) o en persona durante el horario de acceso público en la **Biblioteca sucursal de Chowchilla, 300 Kings Avenue, Chowchilla, CA 93610 | (559)665-2630**





## Testimonies of Project Leaders and Participants:

When our Interim Library Director Mary Jo Lawrence first asked me if I would like to be a teacher for the backpack literacy program, I was hesitant. Though I would always help our children's coordinator with our children's programs I had never done something of this magnitude before. It was extremely daunting but after speaking to Mary Jo about what was expected of me and the other teachers, I realized that this was going to be something that I would regret not doing for the rest of my life.

We had months to prepare lesson plans and to pick out our books for the then yearlong program, but then Covid19 hit and the whole world shut down. I thought that that would be the end of the program, that the funding would be pulled, our planning and preparing would have been for nothing. Luckily that wasn't the case. Instead of having the kid's come to the library we would move it to an online Google Classroom with the assistance of our Desktop Technician Ignacio Negrete and our Children's Coordinator Yvette Herrera, whom without their help I don't think this program would have been as near as successful.

I really could not have done this without my colleague's support. Her knowledge and experience with children have helped me immensely. She had all our teachers do a mock class and answered all of our question's that we had regarding what the parents and children should know before entering Kindergarten.

Since our branch is the largest, I knew I would have the most children and parents applying. Since we started in January, I've had over twenty children and through the coming months I've lost a few but still had about fifteen.

I was able to meet each child and their parent's when they came to pick up their backpack and supplies. I got to speak to them about what to expect and how the program was going to help them prepare their child for kindergarten and help cultivate a love of reading.

Many of the kids were shy and didn't want to participate, however as the weeks went by, they were slowly starting to come out of their shells and were very exuberant during class. I also had the privilege of teaching a few autistic children. One in particular, his family had just recently started coming to the library and his mother was very excited to sign him up for our program. Knowing that he would have a routine would help him very much.



Since he began, he has opened up so much in class and especially when his family comes to the library. He speaks to all the staff and is so inquisitive from when I first met him. Knowing that this program has helped him and so many other children, it's truly been the most rewarding experience of my working career.

Lacey Taylor – Backpack Literacy Program Teacher (Madera Main Library)  
Madera County Library  
(Office Assistant I)

June 3, 2021

To Whom it May Concern,

This spring, we were fortunate enough to be accepted to the backpack literacy program sponsored by First 5 and hosted by the Madera County Library. This program was spectacular! It was just what my 5-year-old needed to help him prepare for kindergarten in the fall. Ms. Lacey Taylor was a fantastic teacher. She was very kind, considerate, and patient with the students. With the crazy year we have had, and all the obstacles that COVID-19 has put on us all as a community, this program really exceeded all expectations and was very helpful in the educational development of my son. It was something he looked forward to every week. Being on a virtual platform also helped me feel safe as a parent, but also allowed us to give him that classroom setting experience that I hope will translate over to his upcoming kindergarten debut.

Thank you again for all who were involved in this program. I hope that future students will be able to experience this much needed program for many years to come.

Sincerely yours,

Clarissa Rigby – Backpack Literacy Program Parent (Madera Main Library)  
[clarissarigby@gmail.com](mailto:clarissarigby@gmail.com)





June 03, 2021

This backpack program has been amazing, and so helpful! From having items for us to be able to use, to the interaction with Ms. Lacey and other little learners. Alex has thrived much more with this program and loves to learn and do the crafts along with interacting with his teacher and peers.

I am so excited for him to be starting kinder in August, but also sad this program is coming to an end. I want to say thank you so so much for all you have done for my son and me! Especially during this pandemic. He has excelled greatly, and I really thank you.

Mindy Garcia - Backpack Literacy Program Parent (Madera Main Library)

[mindizzle1011@gmail.com](mailto:mindizzle1011@gmail.com)

June 2021

To whom it may concern,

I am writing this letter in regards to the Madera Library Literacy program. My daughter was able to participate in all four subjects of the program and I would really just like to say thank you! This was a great experience for her and the teacher Mrs. Lacey and lady behind the scenes Mrs. Yvette made this such a memorable experience.

It was easy to work with my child with all the materials and lessons provided. I especially love how the teacher would introduce the lesson, read a story, answer questions but still allow the parent to work with the child. My daughter always stayed focused and engaged in the lessons and together we would finish the work and enjoyed every minute of it. My daughter always looked forward to meeting with Mrs. Lacey and was always happy and eager to learn something new. She especially loved our bi-weekly trips to the library to pick up new materials.

I would recommend this program to anyone wanting to introduce their child to early academics or wanting to spend some extra quality time with their child. All lessons were engaging and age appropriate and I absolutely loved spending this time working with my daughter.

Thanks again for this opportunity and I hope many other families get to enjoy the program.



Much Appreciation,  
Annalicia Garcia - Backpack Literacy Program Parent (Madera Main Library)  
[annaliciagarcia23.ag@gmail.com](mailto:annaliciagarcia23.ag@gmail.com)

I am so happy yet sad that my daughter has completed this program. Happy because she enjoyed every minute of the backpack literacy program. Each section had books and small art projects that followed along with the theme of each section like math, science, feelings/emotions, colors and letters. At the end of each section we were given one of the books that we read as a gift for completing the section. She felt like such a big girl going to "school" every Tuesday. She shared her books and her completed projects with everyone in our household. She was given little posters that have the days of the week, the seasons and months of the year, shapes and colors and planet and weather. I saw her excitement each time she logged into the class and interacted with her classmates and teacher. The library offered this program free of charge and it is such a benefit to the community. I'm sad because she will not be able to continue the program because she is ready for Pre-K thanks to the Backpack Literacy Program. At first I was hesitant putting my daughter in the program because I thought it might be too much for her. I was very wrong. My daughter soaked everything up like a sponge. She learned how to interact in a classroom, even if it was online. She met new kids and definitely worked on her social skills and learning when to raise her hand in a classroom. I am extremely happy with my decision to put her in this program. I have recommended this program to other moms as well. This program is definitely a program that should be offered every year. And I thank the Madera County Library for offering it to us.

Cynthia Montes - Backpack Literacy Program Parent (Madera Main Library)

My name is Anahi Mendez and I was a lesson leader to the kids in the First 5 Backpack Literacy Program. First of all, I will say this program was fun to do and I believe the kids can say the same. When I first began, I was nervous to lead a class on my own but I gained confidence little by little. Every week was fun, the kids were entertained with every lesson and were ready for each class. What I took away from the program was that every child had the eager to learn. The parents were there on their side which was great because the kids knew they had support. I'm grateful to have had this opportunity to see their smiles and how much they achieved.

Anahi Mendez – Backpack Literacy Program English/Spanish Teacher (Chowchilla Branch Library)  
Madera County Library





(Office Assistant I)

As a parent participant of The Backpack Literacy Program my favorite aspect is that the program held myself accountable! As a busy parent with a small child, I will too often decide not to follow through with a set curriculum. This program provided ALL the materials and directions/videos to use and I LOVED IT!!

Another aspect of the BLP that I enjoyed was my son was able to see other young students in a virtual format which we are not use to yet!

All around this is a wonderful program I would do again and again with my little one!

Crystal Clark - Backpack Literacy Program Parent (North Fork Branch Library)

[Crystal.Pike@maderacountylibrary.org](mailto:Crystal.Pike@maderacountylibrary.org)

