

Wichita Public Library

Summer Reading Program Evaluation

October 28, 2005



Center for Community Support and Research
Wichita State University
Fairmount College of Liberal Arts and Sciences



WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY



Center for Community Support and Research

About the Self-Help Network

The Self-Help Network is Wichita State University's Center for Community Support and Research. For more than 20 years, the Self-Help Network (SHN) has helped strengthen individuals, communities, and organizations. Network staff help communities and nonprofits in three focus areas: Strengthening Organizations, Strengthening Communities; Research and Evaluation; and Self-Help Group Support. Through these focus areas, the SHN provides a number of services to individuals, organizations, and communities including: strategic planning, vision and mission development, grant writing, program evaluation, team building, collaboration, conflict resolution,

outcome-based planning and monitoring, evaluation, self-help group referrals, and resource materials for leadership development and self-help group development and maintenance.

Our vision is that all Kansans have a voice and share their talents and experiences to create thriving supportive communities.

Our mission is to facilitate and support grassroots and community partnership efforts in creating and sustaining positive change.

Contact Information

For more information about this report, contact the Self-Help Network at 1845 Fairmount, Box 201, Wichita, KS, 67260; (800) 445-0116 (toll-free in Kansas); (316) 978-3843; or by e-mail at selfhelpnetwork@wichita.edu.

For more information about the Self-Help Network and its community support, research, self-help, and education services, visit us on the web at selfhelpnetwork.wichita.edu.

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Executive Summary

During the summer of 2005, the Wichita Public Library held their Summer Reading Program. The theme of this summer's program was Dragons, Dreams, & Daring Deeds. Children set goals for the number of books to read (or have read to them) and then reported progress toward achieving that goal during return visits to the library throughout the summer.

The Wichita Public Library partnered with the Self-Help Network (SHN) who helped evaluate the Summer Reading Program. Library personnel worked with Self-Help Network staff to design and develop the questions for each survey instrument. The SHN was asked to analyze data from three sources:

- Registration Surveys
- Special Event Surveys
- End-of-Program Surveys

Based on an analysis of the questions asked on these evaluation surveys, a number of insights and considerations are provided below. When possible, analysis and comparisons between Westlink and Evergreen surveys were made to provide greater insight into the program.

Overall Very Favorable Response to the Summer Reading Program. A high percentage (95.8%) of parents/guardians surveyed at the end of the summer reported that their child enjoyed participating in the Summer Reading Program, and nearly everyone (98.2%) indicated they would recommend the Summer Reading Program to others. There is also satisfaction with the way the program is currently structured related to the length of the program and the defining and rewarding of goals.

Focus on Additional Promotion through Schools.

The largest percentage of Summer Reading Program participants heard about the program through the library (36.7%) or through a librarian visiting their child's school (19.1%). A much smaller percentage (3.7%) were made aware of the program through a newspaper or the library's webpage. Slightly more than a quarter (27.3%) of respondents at library Special events reported that they were unaware of the Summer Reading Program. When asked how to get more children involved in the program, marketing and advertising were mentioned most frequently, with emphasis on promoting the program through the schools.

New Families Participating in the Summer Reading Program. More than half (65.7%) of the overall participants in the Summer Reading Program had participated in previous summers, with the average repeat participant having been involved for three or four summers. Just over a third (34.3%) of participants indicated it was their first time to participate in the program. At the Evergreen branch, there was a higher percentage of first time participants, and among the Spanish speaking population that percentage was even higher. This indicates that the program established three years ago at the Evergreen branch is still attracting new "first-time" participants, meeting a need in that community, and providing the opportunity for the Hispanic population to be involved in summer reading. Thanks to the Summer Reading Program, the Wichita Hispanic community has the opportunity for year-round reading.

Summer Reading Program Helps Boost Summer Library Usage. The majority of those who completed registration surveys (87.2%) indicated they used the library year-round as did the majority of those completing special events surveys (92.8%). This is consistent across both branches and among Spanish speaking participants. Responses indicate that nearly 60% of participants (59.2%) visited the library weekly or more often during the summer, with almost everyone (96.7%) visiting the library at least once a month. Though the majority of those who participated in the Summer Reading Program indicated they used the library year-round, almost 80% (79.1%) said they used the library more during the summer because of the reading program.

Parents See Many Benefits to Summer Reading Program. Parents/guardians see the benefits of their children participating in the Summer Reading Program. A high percentage agree that participation in the program is beneficial as their child returns to school (94.5%) and that participation helps improve their child's reading level (64.3%). They believe the program helps reinforce both skill development and a "love for reading." Respondents offered that the program is beneficial in that it provides "exposure to the library and its resources" and "generates interest in other subjects" beyond what they might be exposed to in school. Spanish speaking participants valued the exposure to English language materials that could assist and support English language proficiency. Still others saw the reading program as an opportunity for parent/child bonding through reading activities.

Summary of Findings and Insights for the Future

Based on findings from this report, several considerations for the future are worth noting. These considerations can be a useful starting point for future discussion regarding the Wichita Public Library's Summer Reading Program.

- Overall participants are very pleased with the Summer Reading Program. While the Wichita Public Library should always be looking for ways to improve their current programs, they should also be very proud of their success in this area!
- The Summer Reading Program and the special events seem to cater largely to those who are already using the library on a year-round basis. If a goal is to increase the use of the library by those who do not typically use the library throughout the year, it will be important to examine ways to target that audience.
- The majority of special events participants are English speaking. Presenting some special events

at the Evergreen branch in Spanish would provide the opportunity for Spanish speakers to increase their participation in these activities.

- The majority of children attending special events are already participating in the Summer Reading Program, indicating that special events are not resulting in significantly more children signing up for the Summer Reading Program.
- Most participants indicate they found out about the Summer Reading Program through the library or through the school. Low cost efforts in these areas will likely yield the biggest pay-off.
- The most appealing aspect to the children participating in the Summer Reading Program is the prizes. Prizes are listed as a draw to becoming involved and a motivator for continued involvement.

Summary of Work and Methods

Wichita Public Library Summer Reading Program

Cynthia Berner-Harris of the Wichita Public Library approached the Self-Help Network Center for Community Support and Research at Wichita State University regarding an evaluative survey of two Wichita branch libraries offering a Summer Reading Program during the summer of 2005. The branches selected for the survey differ demographically. The Evergreen Library has a mixed demographic, with a percentage of Spanish speaking users, while the Westlink Library has a more homogenous user base, primarily white, English speaking users.

The Summer Reading Program is designed to attract children and their parents, guardians, and grandparents to local libraries. Library administration and staff are interested in gathering information from library users participating in the Summer Reading Program, as well as those not participating, to determine primary reasons for participation, perceived benefits of participation, possible barriers to participation, and ideas for improving and marketing the program to increase participation.

Regular and special events were also scheduled during the course of the Summer Reading Program. Regular events consisted primarily of scheduled story times and

other programs presented by library personnel. Special events included performers with a variety of talents that were presented to parents, guardians, grandparents, and children who attended the library. For example, performers included magicians, storytellers, balloon makers, pupeteers, and others. By attending events at the library, children are exposed to the books and resources offered by local libraries, which will hopefully result in reading more often throughout the summer and maintaining or improving their reading abilities from one school year to the next.

Evaluation Overview

Survey Construction: Preliminary work based on the design of the study included the construction of three separate survey instruments for data collection from the parents and/or guardians of the Summer Reading Program participants. Library personnel worked with Self-Help Network staff to design and develop the questions for each instrument. Data was collected utilizing multiple methods. The first data collection instrument was included as part of the initial registration, which was encouraged but not required for participation. A second instrument was developed for data collection with participants in the library's special events activities scheduled

throughout the summer. Library personnel encouraged participants in these special programs, regardless of their involvement in the Summer Reading Program, to complete the survey onsite. The final survey was designed to collect information from the parents or guardians of program participants at the end of the program via a telephone interview. All completed surveys and comment sheets were provided to the SHN. The SHN entered collected surveys into a computer program for statistical analysis.

Registration Surveys: During the first several weeks of the Summer Reading Program, library personnel at the Westlink and Evergreen branches obtained names, consent, and contact information from parents and guardians who initially registered their children for the Summer Reading Program at those branches. Parents/guardians were not obligated to participate in the evaluation; however, those who were willing to participate indicated their interest on the registration form and also provided contact information for later data collection. In addition, the initial registration form asked for information regarding how they had heard about the program, prior participation in the program, and information on their typical library usage.

Special Event Surveys: Additional participation and contact information was gathered by library personnel via onsite surveys from parents and guardians who brought their children to special events held at the Westlink and Evergreen libraries throughout the summer. The surveys asked participants attending special events if they were

familiar with the Summer Reading Program, if their child was currently participating in the program, perceived barriers to participation in the program, and information on their typical library usage. At this time, participating families that had not previously consented to being surveyed at the end of the program were given another opportunity to consent.

End-of-Program Surveys: Utilizing phone numbers provided by participants from the two prior data collection opportunities, surveyors attempted to contact parents and guardians after the Summer Reading Program to assess the extent of their child’s involvement, level of interest and enjoyment in reading, typical library usage, interest in the Summer Reading Program, questions about perceived benefits and challenges of participation, and questions about what parts of the program – incentives, activities, affordability, etc. – were key factors in wanting to participate. From the phone number list of 414 participants who agreed to take part in the survey, the contacts were divided into English and ESOL (Spanish) language preferences. Due to various circumstances (i.e., no answer, constant busy signal, disconnected line, wrong number, etc.), a total of 292 were possible survey participants. Of the phone call attempts made, 18 surveys were completed in Spanish and 196 were completed in English. Two surveys were started but not completed, due to respondents’ discontinuance. A total of 216 survey respondents make up the data pool, resulting in a 74% response rate (216 completed surveys out of 292 possible surveys).

Activity Report Table

What we said we would do (based on Logic Model and other considerations):	What we actually did (and why):
Strategy 1: Assist in the design of survey instruments and protocol for data gathering from Summer Reading Program participants and special events participants.	
Objective 1-1: Design survey instruments appropriate for gathering relevant data and identifying potential survey respondents for the end-of-program evaluation.	Throughout the evaluation, SHN worked with participating libraries to design and draft survey instruments and procedures. The SHN partnered with participating libraries to determine the most efficient method for obtaining parent/guardian names, consent, and contact information.

<p>Strategy 2: Gather data from Summer Reading Program participants and special events participants.</p>	
<p>Objective 2-1: Gather information from participants at registration to identify basic information regarding how they heard about the program, prior participation (previous summers), and information on typical library usage.</p>	<p>During the first several weeks of the Summer Reading Program, utilizing the survey instrument designed in collaboration with the SHN, library staff obtained names, consent, and contact information from parents/guardians who initially registered their children for the Summer Reading Program at the Westlink and Evergreen branch locations. The raw data was then forwarded to the SHN for evaluation. The initial registration sample produced 430 completed surveys.</p>
<p>Objective 2-2: Gather information from participants during special events activities at the public libraries to determine if their child was participating in the program, barriers to participation in the program, and information on typical library usage.</p>	<p>Utilizing a survey instrument designed in collaboration with the SHN, library staff distributed and collected on-site surveys from parents/guardians who brought their children to the special events. The events sample represents 167 survey respondents.</p>
<p>Objective 2-3: Utilizing registration data, identify families who agreed to be contacted for the end-of-program evaluation and contact by phone to conduct survey and gather data regarding the extent of their child’s involvement, level of interest and enjoyment in reading, typical library usage, interest in the Summer Reading Program, questions about perceived benefits and challenges of participation, and questions about what parts of the program – incentives, activities, affordability, etc. – are the key factors that caused families to want to participate.</p>	<p>Through the two previous samples, 414 participants agreed to be contacted for the end-of-program survey. Contact information was formatted, disaggregated, and phone contacts were attempted. A total of 216 survey respondents make up the end-of-program pool of completed surveys. Of those 216 surveys, 18 were conducted in Spanish and 196 were conducted in English. (Two surveys were only partially completed due to the respondents’ discontinuance.)</p>
<p>Strategy 3: Analyze all raw data from each of the three data collection points and generate evaluative propositions, suggestions, and recommendations for consideration in program marketing, increasing future participant levels, increasing overall library usage, and other suggestions for program improvement as applicable.</p>	
<p>Objective 3-1: Utilizing data from each of the three data collection events, analyze raw input to answer key questions relative to program usage, reasons for participation, level of satisfaction, and suggestions for improvement.</p>	<p>All data collected from the three survey instruments were coded and entered into a computer program for analysis. Responses were reviewed and analyzed in aggregate. Results from the data analysis allowed for the development of a final report, including emerging themes and suggestions for the future.</p>

Analysis of Surveys

Registration Surveys

A total of 430 parents/guardians completed the registration surveys. Approximately three-fourths (74.4%) of those who completed registration surveys enrolled for the program at Westlink. The table below shows the breakdown of Westlink and Evergreen participants and English and Spanish speaking participants.

	Westlink	Evergreen	Total
English	100%	73.6%	93.3% (401 participants)
Spanish	0%	26.4%	6.7% (29 participants)
Total	74.4% (320 participants)	25.6% (110 participants)	430 total participants surveyed

One of the first questions on the registration survey asked **where/how participants heard about the summer reading program. The most popular responses included seeing sign/brochures inside the library (36.7%) or having a librarian visit the school (19.1%). A school visit by a librarian was an even more common response from those registering at Evergreen (26.4%) and those who spoke Spanish (44.8%).** Of those who mentioned something other than the options listed, most mentioned having previously participated in the program, seeing a flyer, or finding out through the school.

Where/how did you hear about the Summer Reading Program?	Total %	Westlink	Evergreen	Spanish only
From signs/brochures inside the library	36.7	39.7	28.2	17.2
Librarian visited my child's school	19.1	16.6	26.4	44.8
From the newspaper	2.3	1.9	3.6	6.9
From the library's webpage	1.4	1.3	1.8	0.0
From another area library	1.2	1.6	0.0	0.0
Other	24.7	24.4	25.5	24.1

The overall majority of those completing registration surveys (65.3%) indicated their child(ren) had previously participated in the Summer Reading Program, participating an average of three to four summers prior to this summer. This held true when looking at the participants from Westlink; however, when examining the data from Evergreen and the Spanish speaking population, some significant differences were found. **A little over half (51.8%) of those surveyed at Evergreen indicated that this was their child(ren)'s first time participating in the Summer Reading Program. Nearly 80% (79.3%) of Spanish speaking participants said this was their child(ren)'s first time participating in the program.** This could partly be due to the fact that the Evergreen branch is newer and has only been open for three years while the Westlink location has been around for over 20 years.

Is this your child's first year in the Summer Reading Program?	Total %	Westlink	Evergreen	Spanish only
Yes	34.7	28.8	51.8	79.3
No	65.3	71.3	48.2	20.7
Average number of summers previously participated	3.53	3.60	3.27	2.17

The majority (87.2%) of those who completed registration surveys indicated that they use the library year-round – not just in the summer.

Does your family use the Wichita Public Library throughout the year or only during the summer?	Total %	Westlink	Evergreen	Spanish only
Year-round	87.2	89.1	81.8	72.4
Summer only	11.4	10.3	14.5	24.1

Special Event Surveys

A total of 167 participants completed surveys at special events. These 167 participants brought a total of 232 children to events. The age breakdown of the children in attendance can be found in the table below. The great majority of those in attendance (97.6%) were English speaking, both at special events held at Westlink (100%) and those held at Evergreen (91.3%), suggesting that **special events are not attracting Spanish speaking families.**

	Westlink	Evergreen	Total
English	100%	91.3%	97.6% (163 participants)
Spanish	0%	8.7%	2.4% (4 participants)
Total	72.5% (121 participants)	27.5% (46 participants)	167 total participants surveyed

Age Range	Total % of children attending special events
0 – 5	46.1%
6 – 10	44.4%
11 – 15	9.5%

The majority (86.8%) of those who completed special event surveys brought children who were already signed up for the Summer Reading Program, indicating that the special events do not result in additional children signing up for the Summer Reading Program. Of those who brought children who were not signed up for the program, there was no consistent reason as to why the children were not participating in the Summer Reading Program, though more than a quarter (27.3%) indicated they did not know about the program. An open-ended question on the end-of-program survey asked **what could be done to get more kids involved in the Summer Reading Program. The most common responses by far (41.7%) were related to marketing and advertising, especially in the schools.**

Are the children you brought today signed up for the library's Summer Reading Program?	Total %	Westlink	Evergreen	Spanish only
Yes	86.8	85.1	91.3	75.0
No	13.2	14.9	8.7	25.0

If not, why not?	Total %
My child/children are too young/too old.	31.8
I don't know about the program.	27.3
I am not the parent/legal guardian of the child/children.	9.1
We will be out of town for too much of the summer.	9.1
We are already participating in a program in another place.	8.7
Our children are in too many other summer activities.	4.5
We are visiting from out of town.	4.5
We don't have time to do the reading club paperwork during our library visits.	4.5
We don't have library cards and/or do not want to be responsible for borrowing books from the library.	0.0

Again, the great majority (92.8%) of those completing surveys at special events use the library year-round – not just in the summer.

Does your family use the Wichita Public Library throughout the year or only during the summer?	Total %	Westlink	Evergreen	Spanish only
Year-round	92.8	93.4	91.3	100.0
Summer only	5.4	5.8	4.3	0.0

End-of-Program Surveys

End-of-program surveys were completed with 216 participants, 18 (8.3%) of whom were Spanish speaking. **Nearly 70% (69.9%) indicated they had more than one child enrolled in the Summer Reading Program.** For purposes of the survey, parents/guardians were asked to answer questions based on only one of their children participating in the program. The average child's age was between 7 and 8 (mean = 7.87), with 83.4% falling between the ages of 5 and 10. Slightly more than half (51.9%) of the children were female.

Over 95% (95.8%) agreed or strongly agreed that their child enjoyed reading (or being read to). With a range of 0 to 180 minutes, **the average number of minutes spent reading (or being read to) each day was 36.27 minutes** (61.5% reported between 20 and 40 minutes a day).

Does your child enjoy reading (or being read to)?	
Level of Agreement	% of Participants
Strongly Disagree	0.0
Disagree	0.9
Neutral	2.3
Agree	39.8
Strongly Agree	56.0

Most participants (59.2%) visited the library at least once a week during the Summer Reading Program with nearly everyone (96.7%) visiting at least once a month. Over one-third of those surveyed (34.7%) indicated that their child attended special events at the library this summer. (Special events are programs presented by outside performers such as musicians, magicians, yo-yo masters, puppet troupes, etc.) Of that 34.7%, the average number of special events attended over the summer was approximately 3 (2.99). Almost 22% (21.8%) indicated that their child attended regular events at the library this summer. (Regular events are story times and other programs presented by library employees.) Of that 21.8%, the average number of regular events attended over the summer was between 3 and 4 (3.43).

Which response best describes how often your child visited the library this summer between June 1 and August 4?	% of Participants
More than once a week	13.4
Once a week	45.8
Every other week	24.1
Once a month	13.4
Less than once a month	3.2

Participation in the Summer Reading Program

Parents/guardians were asked to identify what attracted their child to the program. Three main responses were found: seeking educational activities for the summer, affordability (a free summer program), and the promise of prizes. **The top two responses are likely what prompted parents to encourage their child(ren) to participate in the program, while the promise of prizes is likely what attracted the children.**

What attracted your child to the program?	% of participants who indicated yes
Seeking educational activities for the summer	83.8
Affordability (a free summer program)	79.2
Promise of prizes	75.5
Decorations/signs during a visit to the library	50.5
Encouragement by staff/volunteers during a visit to the library	43.1
The theme	37.5
Related library programs	31.0
School visit by librarian	28.7
Child's friends were participating	28.2

More than 90% (90.7%) of those surveyed said their child reached his/her reading goal for the summer. When asked what helped keep their child involved in the program, the main reasons were related to encouragement from parents/caregivers and the love of reading (or being read to). The ability to set and achieve a goal, the promise of prizes, and acknowledgement in a display were also common contributors to continued involvement.

Of those who said yes, what kept your child involved in the program?	% of participants who indicated yes
Encouragement of parents/caregivers	86.6
Love of reading/being read to	85.6
Ability to set and achieve an individual goal	82.4
Promise of prizes at completion	77.3
Acknowledgement in library finishers' display	60.6
Programs and activities held at the library throughout the summer	35.2
Encouragement from staff/volunteers at the library	22.2

Of those who said their child did not complete the program, no consistent reason emerged as to why some children did not finish. An open-ended question asked participants to list **the biggest challenge to participating in the program.** The most common response (21.8%) was that there were no challenges to participation. The next most common response (14.4%) was related to **time and fitting reading and the Summer Reading Program into what can be already busy schedules.** **Other challenges listed included: reaching the goal, paperwork/recordkeeping, getting kids to read/making sure they read the books, transportation/getting to the library, book selection, and returning books on time.**

Of those who said no, why did your child not complete the program?	% of participants who indicated yes
Child lost interest	27.8
Child set goals too high	27.8
Too many other activities	27.8
Vacation/time out of town	22.2
Lack of transportation	16.7
Forgot the finishing date	11.1
Forgot we enrolled in the program	5.6
Lost the reading record	0.0

Survey participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with various statements about their involvement with the Summer Reading Program. **Nearly everyone agreed (98.2%) they would recommend this program to others, and 95.8% said their child enjoyed participating in the program.** Parents/guardians also saw the benefits of participation in the Summer Reading Program, with **94.5% agreeing that participation is beneficial for their child in returning to (or starting) school, 72.2% agreeing that their child read (or was read to) more often because of the program, and 64.3% agreeing that their child’s reading level improved as a result of participation in the program.** While just over half (52.7%) said their child enjoys reading (or being read to) more because of the Summer Reading Program, this slightly lower percent could be due to the fact that over 95% (95.8%) indicated that their child already enjoyed reading (or being read to), and 85.6% said a love of reading (or being read to) is part of what kept their child involved in the program.

Extent to which...	(1) Strongly Disagree	(2) Disagree	(3) Neutral	(4) Agree	(5) Strongly Agree	Mean
I would recommend the Summer Reading Program to others.	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	50.5%	47.7%	4.47
Participating in the Summer Reading Program is beneficial to my child as she/he returns to school (or starts school).	0.0%	1.4%	2.3%	55.1%	39.4%	4.36
My child enjoyed participating in the Summer Reading Program.	0.0%	0.9%	1.9%	58.3%	37.5%	4.35
We visited the library more because of the Summer Reading Program.	1.4%	12.5%	5.6%	56.0%	23.1%	3.89
My child read (or was read to) more this summer because of the Summer Reading Program.	1.4%	12.5%	11.1%	53.2%	19.0%	3.82
My child’s reading level improved because of the Summer Reading Program.	0.5%	8.3%	21.8%	53.2%	11.1%	3.79
My child enjoys reading (or being read to) more because of the Summer Reading Program.	1.4%	18.5%	24.1%	45.8%	6.9%	3.46

Summer Reading Program Goals

Survey participants were asked a few questions about how goals are set and defined through the Summer Reading Program. Most seem to be pleased with the way the program is currently structured, with the exception of considering **allowing goals to also be set based on number of minutes spent reading as well as number of books read.**

	Yes	No	Undecided
Do you think audio books should count toward the total number of books read?	37.0%	53.2%	8.3%
All children receive the same prize if they reach their goal number of books read, regardless of what that number is. Do you think children should receive different prizes based on the number of books read?	20.4%	76.4%	1.9%
Goals are set based on the number of books read. Should children have the option of setting goals based on minutes spent reading?	54.6%	37.5%	6.5%
	Too Long	Too Short	Just Right
The program runs from June 1 to August 4. The length of the program is:	1.4%	13.4%	82.9%