



# LITERACY INITIATIVES

## SUMMARY

According to the Children's Defense Fund, a direct correlation exists between literacy at a young age and general health. Furthermore, students not reading at grade level by Grade 3 are more likely to live, at best, in poverty and worst, to become incarcerated. It also leads to poor health literacy, affecting people's ability to search for and use health information, adopt healthy behaviors and act on important public health matters. With that in mind, St. Luke's has developed a multi-pronged approach to help meet the literacy needs of children, with a focus on children from birth through third grade.

Currently the literacy program is involved in the following:

- Maternal-child health programs
- Reading Rocks
- Dr. Seuss Day
- Reach Out and Read
- Little Free Libraries
- Book Drives
- Book carts and bins on all vans to reach middle and high school aged kids

## HIGHLIGHTS

### Maternal-child health programs

Early literacy is a continuous developmental process that begins in the first years of life. The maternal child health programs (NFP, PATH, and VNAC) offered through the Visiting Nurse Association of St. Luke's encourages mothers to talk and read to their infants beginning in pregnancy, and continuing throughout childhood. The goal of early literacy is to not have children learn to read at an early age, but rather to appreciate the enjoyment of books, the importance of positive interactions between young children and adults, and the critical role of literacy-rich experiences. To promote early literacy, new and gently used books are distributed to all families according to the age of the child(ren) and the nurses work individually with the parent/care provider to assure that books are incorporated into the family's routine as a way of promoting future school success.

### Reading Rocks

Reading Rocks is an innovative community collaboration to boost literacy among elementary age students who are reading below grade level by having students read and interact with volunteers. Reading Rocks programs were implemented at two elementary schools (Donegan in Bethlehem and Union Terrace in Allentown) in 2014-2015. Participating students in both schools demonstrated improvement in reading levels, as measured by the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Skills) standardized test.

### Little Free Libraries

The Little Free Library (LFL) program was initiated in 2014-2015, and is an opportunity for the St. Luke's Community Health Department to promote literacy in high risk communities surrounding our adopted schools as well as at the St. Luke's entities themselves. Funded in part by the Auxiliary of St. Luke's Hospital, five Little Free Libraries have been purchased and are in the following sites: McKinley Elementary School (Allentown), William Penn Elementary School (Bethlehem), DeFranco Elementary School (Bangor), and St. Luke's Anderson Campus. Three more are in the process of being built. Books are supplied by Cops n' Kids, the community book drives as well as individual donors.

## HIGHLIGHTS (cont.)

### Dr. Seuss Day

The National Education Association's Read Across America is an annual reading motivation and awareness program that calls for every child in every community to celebrate reading on March 2, the birthday of children's author Dr. Seuss. All St. Luke's Network hospitals were involved in Dr. Seuss Day this year. The St. Luke's event was held in late February and early March of this year, with all six of St. Luke's entities reaching out to schools in their areas. Almost 5,000 children participated in this event in 2015.



### Books on Vans and in Clinics

The goal is to have age-appropriate books on every van going out into the community. Children being seen on the vans for health and dental care are asked if they would like a book to take home. The St. Luke's pediatric clinics also have book carts so that families can choose books that appeal to them.

### Book Drives and Collections

Community partners help the Literacy Programs by collecting books throughout the year. This year 4,390 books were received from the following agencies: Penn State Lehigh Valley (3,100 books), Weissenberg Elementary (200 books), Cops 'n' Kids (200 books), AAUW (220 books) and several private individuals (670 books). These books are sorted and then used by the various literacy programs listed above.

## SUCCESSES

- Dr. Seuss Day was held in school districts associated with all six hospital entities:  
Bethlehem: 2 schools, 34 classrooms, a total of 672 students participated  
Quakertown: 10 schools, 60 classrooms, 1430 students  
Miners: 6 schools, 34 classrooms, 756 students  
Anderson: 1 school, 25 classrooms, 537 students  
Allentown: 2 schools, 27 classrooms, 622 students  
Warren: 5 schools, 41 classrooms, 878 students
- Donegan: 98% of the students improved their raw scores on the DIBELS early literacy acquisition and 62.5% of students improved by at least one whole benchmark level.
- Union Terrace: 20 of the 21 participating students increased their words read per minute or more and participants increased their oral reading fluency by an average of 54%.

## CHALLENGES & NEXT STEPS

- The challenges of the literacy program include the coordination of the various and wide-ranging programs that fall under this umbrella. We rely heavily on dedicated volunteers to work with students in the schools as well as to sort the books and label books as they come in. Reliable volunteers are difficult to find and keep.
- Dr. Seuss Day was very successful, with many St. Luke's employees and volunteers reading to the children. Some schools were impacted by the poor weather, resulting in school being cancelled or having a delayed start. This year we will try to plan for an alternate snow day.
- Another goal for the coming year is to have consistency in measurement of the outcomes of the Reading Rocks programs. School districts have many ways to measure student progress in reading, which makes it difficult to compare one school to another. Reading Rocks will work with the schools to develop a system of measurement.

