

# Literacy Buddies Make a Difference!

## The 30 million word gap...

This project is modeled after a program from the ELC of Southwest Florida and started at the Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County in 2012.

Here is what our early learning programs and volunteers are saying:

*"One important goal for children in our preschool program is that they develop a love for reading. Most of the children in our program are living in poverty, so we know the first thing a parent does with extra money is not to buy a book. The Literacy Buddies project helped get new books into our children's homes and did it in a way that was empowering to the children."*

— Early Learning Director

*"I absolutely love being part of this project. I have gotten great satisfaction knowing that I am helping expand the mind of a young child. I find it a lot of fun searching for the particular subject the child is interested in."* — Volunteer

*"It was fun receiving letters from my buddy Corey. I think it's a great opportunity for older kids to help younger kids start reading earlier in their lives. Trying to find a book that Corey would like was fun, and it was cool, to see his interests change over the year. It was also cool to see what similarities in interests I had when I was his age. I'm hoping to recruit some of my friends to join the Literacy Buddy Project"* — Middle School Volunteer

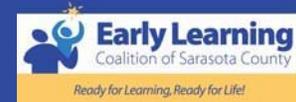
- The brain develops most during the first years of life. Children's early experiences have a big impact on their future ability to learn.
- The amount of different words children hear by age 3 is directly related to how well children can read at age 9.
- Research shows that by age 3 children in more talkative families will have heard 30 million more words than children in less talkative families – a 30 million word gap!
- By age 3, children from the most talkative and encouraging families scored approximately 25 points higher on IQ tests than children from the least talkative and encouraging families.
- Children's scores on vocabulary, language, and school tests at age 9 showed a strong connection with their word use at age 3.

***Giving books on topics of interest to a child through the Literacy Buddy Project helps promote reading and the use of language and words, thus impacting the 30 million word gap.***

**The Literacy Buddy program enhances existing efforts in our community to support early literacy such as *Bucket of Books* and *Children Who Read Succeed*.**

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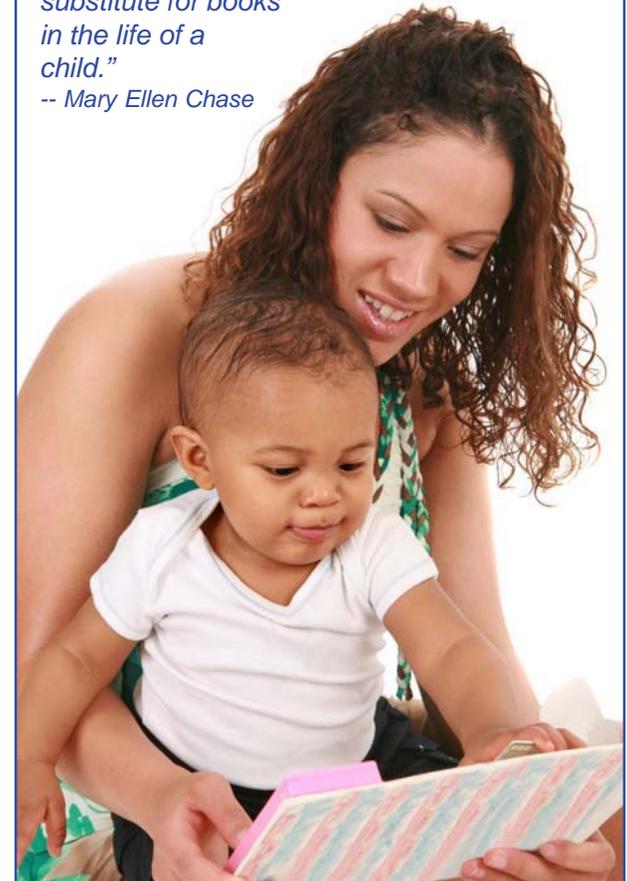


## Literacy Buddy Project

**The Early Learning Coalition believes all children should have interesting and engaging reading materials in their homes**

*"There is no substitute for books in the life of a child."*

-- Mary Ellen Chase



# Early Literacy



Early language and literacy development begins at birth, and is closely linked to a child's earliest experiences with books and stories.

The interactions that young children have with the adults in their lives, as well as with literacy materials such as books, paper, and crayons, are the building blocks of language and reading/writing development.

This understanding of early literacy development aligns with current research and identifies the critical role of early experiences. Many children in preschool classrooms do not have enough interaction with literacy materials and interactions with adults that increase literacy knowledge outside of the classroom.

Early experiences are significantly enhanced in quality childcare. When children additionally get a good start with literacy, they enter the school system more prepared to learn and are less likely to have problems that require intervention.



## Reading Aloud

Research indicates that an adult reading aloud to a child is "the single most important activity" in building a foundation for learning to read. Children need to be read to frequently using a variety of texts, including storybooks, informational books, and poetry. For low-income families, obtaining these books is financially difficult.

**Many parents and other primary caregivers underestimate the importance of their role in helping their children become ready to read and write.**

The Literacy Buddy Project helps teachers involve the parents as partners in the development of early reading and writing skills. After the children receive their books from their Literacy Buddies, teachers read them aloud to all children utilizing the themes in the classrooms. They also provide parents with information about how to talk with their children about books and how they as parents can promote early literacy skills. The Literacy Buddy Project provides parents an authentic way to become partners in their children's learning.

The purpose of this project is to teach children about correspondence, communication, and to provide them with quality books that they take home.

For many of our children, the Literacy Buddy Program provides the only opportunity for them to have books of their own at home.

Anyone, any age, anywhere can become a Literacy Buddy. It does not take much time to be a Literacy Buddy. All exchanges between buddies are done by mail, sent to the child care site and using first names only. Many Literacy Buddies are winter residents of Florida.

## How To Become A Literacy Buddy?

Applications are available to download from the Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County website at [www.earlylearningcoalitionsarasota.org](http://www.earlylearningcoalitionsarasota.org) or call 941.954.4830 ext 225 for more information.

## What is a Literacy Buddy?

Children in preschool programs in Sarasota County are paired with a volunteer who agrees to receive letters from a child. In turn, the volunteer sends a letter and a book to this child in response to the child's letter. In the letter from the child, he or she indicates a specific book or interest that he or she would like to receive a book about. These exchanges take place three times over the course of the school year.