

Reading Express; service for newcomers and refugees

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Abstract:

Due to the fact that the Netherlands is a multicultural country (as many around the world) we are facing the fact that reading aloud to young children is not very common in families with an oral background or poor reading skills or even illiterate. The Reading Express is an approach which is developed on a national level and executed on city and village level. The concept on its own is simple but effective.

Volunteers get a training on reading aloud and are connected to a family where they will read stories to the child or children for 20 weeks in their own home. Parents need to be present and are trained on the job as well. Halfway the program the family, parents and children, visit the public library to get acquainted and feel relaxed. At the end of the 20 weeks parents promise to continue the reading aloud sessions.

Keywords: Reading aloud, family reading, refugees.

Reading Express; activities for newcomers and refugees.

Illiteracy and low literacy are worldwide problems. In the combat to extend or at least diminish the numbers of low literate persons, the government of the Netherlands agreed in a national Action plan (Action Plan Low Literacy 2012-2015) upon the important role of libraries in this process. The Koninklijke Bibliotheek (Royal Library) and the PSO's (Provincial Support Organizations for libraries) took this task to enrol this program.

The combat of illiteracy is connected to Agenda 2030, goal 4 and 16.10

Timeline:

- May 23 2012: gathering at provincial government on the approach and combat of low literacy. Attendees: 100 businesses, Reading and Writing Foundation, Rijnbrink and public libraries of province Overijssel.
- The public libraries of Overijssel recognize the combat of low literacy as an important task and seek contact with National Platform Reading Express. In a joint strategic plan they focus on increasing the social and educational role of public libraries
- End of 2012; extra provincial subsidies are granted
- Spring 2013; at first start the larger cities and then the smaller ones.

The Reading Express connects to the Ongoing Reading line from 0-110 and its programs as BookStart, BookStart Daycare Centres, Library at School, Library at School secondary schools, public library and basic skills.

Target group: All families with children with a back draw in language skills, Dutch and immigrants and refugees.

Lay-out of the program:

- Libraries advertise for volunteers
- Screening of volunteers (VOG; declaration on behaviour; handed out by police)
- Training of volunteers and/or coordinators on the program
- Training on social skills
- Training on reading aloud to young children
- Schools and preschools ask families to participate in the program
- Schools send names and addresses to library
- Connecting a volunteer to a family

Goals:

- Reach low literate adults and their families
- Enrich the language environment of families at home
- Improvement of language skills
- Parental commitment
- Support parents to stimulate the language development of their own children on their own way
- Strengthen the social coherency within the community
- Connect with refugees organisations as well as with language poor families (Dutch and immigrants)
- Connect and cooperate with education, welfare and social networks

Intake, halfway evaluation, final evaluation:

- Coordinator visits together with reading volunteer a family, they fill in the form in order to get the starting level straight

- The form contains questions on languages issues in the family, hobbies of the children, age, sex, favourite toys and so on
- Volunteer gets book tips from the library and connects them to wishes and tastes from the children
- After 10 weeks the family visits the library, all family members get a library card. Parents are empowered to take over the reading sessions, if possible. Sometimes the reading skills of parents need a fresh up too. They can be connected to adult literacy programs
- At the final evaluation parents and children tell their experiences and progress.

Challenges:

- Starting level needs to be more clear
- Language issues when parents do not speak some Dutch, English or French
- What is the right moment for families to step in the program
- In the asylum centres children start immediately with the Dutch language
- Instead of volunteers the program can also work with students of Primary School Teachers Education

Conclusion

The Reading Express is a good program to include newcomers as soon as possible in a new country with new ways of life and values. We need to get a better picture of the results of the program on children level. With a good intake and real statistics of the teachers we should be able to get a clear view of the results after 20 weeks. The families and the volunteers develop most of the time a strong bond, which usually is easier when beside the few Dutch words volunteer and parents can communicate in another language as well.

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