

Dayton Metro Library (DML) proposes a \$25,000 Sparks Grant project with a true opportunity to put the learner at the center as we promote the library as a strong community anchor. We propose the extension of our successful “Love Them Out Loud” (LTOL) kits, with the design, development and creation of an early literacy kit for children age 24-48 month. Gifted at the Library, at WIC centers through in-home visits, or in local health care facilities to families with toddlers in the critical toddler/preschool development stage, these boxes will guide parents in appropriate steps to encourage literacy and instill a love of learning for the child.

Statement of Need Babies are born ready to learn, but many new parents don’t know how to take advantage of this critical period of development. Distributed by trusted medical and social service professionals, LTOL kits are full of suggestions for easy, fun activities parents can do at home to engage their young children in daily learning, and set them on the road to reading success. With the first and second iterations (0-12 mos. and 12-24 mos.) already successful with our community partners, and requested by library partners across the county, LTOL is a proven model. With IMLS support through the Sparks Grant, DML will take the next step in creating a box for the preschooler (24-28 mos.), to help parents with support for kindergarten preparedness.

Zero to Three emphasizes that “early language and literacy development begins in the first three years of life,” and that “children gain significant knowledge of language, reading and writing long before they enter school.” Early literacy skills are essential to put children on the right educational path. New research, by Catherine S. Tamis-LeMonda and team (*In Press, Aug. 2017*) demonstrates that early learning environments predict children’s 5th grade academic success, with a longitudinal association between pre-kindergarten skills and 5th grade learning. What happens at the home when children are toddlers/preschoolers has a lasting effect on educational success.

Neuman & Celano’s (2001) landmark study demonstrated the stark contrast between access to books in socio-economically stable families and those in poverty when they revealed that middle-income children interact with approximately 13 titles per child while low-income families have access to one title per 300 children. Impoverished neighborhoods are essentially “book deserts.” Beyond the lack of access to physical books, the problem runs deeper with a generational challenge where low-income parents either feel overwhelmed and underqualified to engage with early literacy experiences, or they are unaware of the impact simple early literacy interactions can have on their child’s development. Jessica Lahey cites the work of Next Generation in her article (*The Atlantic*, October 2014) to explain “there’s a lack of alignment among low-income parents regarding how much talking, singing, and reading to children really matters over a lifetime...one study found that low-income parents underestimate their power to influence their children’s cognitive development, sometimes by as much as 50 percent.”

As libraries, it is our duty to ensure access to opportunity, put the children at the center of the learning experience, and create a system where the library is a backbone institute in partnership to address this important national need, as we ensure that children are ready to learn when they enter kindergarten.

IMLS Project Category This proposal falls under the National Leadership Grants for Libraries as a Sparks Grant for Community Anchors. This project solidifies the role of the library as an active stakeholder in addressing the important community need of early literacy and kindergarten preparedness. We are working together in partnership with our regional educational leaders, community health experts and parent educators -- all partner organizations striving to meet the most basic needs of our families in poverty. The LTOL kits provide positive learning experiences for both the parent/caregiver, who may be overwhelmed with the pressure of home education, and the toddler beginning to explore their world in advance of structured learning school experiences. Most importantly, there will be a broad impact as this program is easily scalable to other

markets, once the kit is designed and proven effective. The first iteration of the kit (0-12 mos.) has already been requested by libraries from across the nation, and the second (12-24 mos.) kit is through design and nearing production. With the third kit designed with support of IMLS, DML will be able to support libraries across the nation with a full spectrum of early literacy support from birth through kindergarten.

Project Design DML begins the project with discussions with area health partners, literacy experts, librarians, educational partners and graphic designers. Early conversations determine what the goal of the kit should be and what types of tools are best for caregivers and children at that age. For the proposed LTOL kit (24-48 mos.), a flip book with rhymes and finger play, handheld objects, manipulative toys, tip sheets for caregivers and a beautiful book embedded with positive tips on literacy will be targeted to the appropriate level of development. As an expansion of an already successful model, the project design has been tested and proven; each LTOL kit/story includes the popular characters Felix (black male) and Fiona (white female) and their families and pets at the center of the storytelling experience.

Committed partners include Learn to Earn Dayton, Help Me Grow/Brighter Futures, Five Rivers Community Health Centers, Dayton Children's Hospital and 4C for Children, led by DML staff including Mandie Burns (Youth Services Director), Kathleen Moore (Early Literacy Librarian), and Diane Farrell (External Relations Director).

Once designed and fully produced, LTOL kits are distributed through trusted parenting educators and physicians to families living in poverty. They will also be added to our library collection for circulation. In support of bridging the educational gap in early learning and ensuring a broader impact, DML will also make these kits available to libraries across the nation.

National Impact The education gap between low-income and middle-class families in early literacy and kindergarten preparedness is staggering. Across the nation, libraries are hosting storytimes, gifting books, and creating opportunities for our youngest patrons to learn. However, the gap continues and our most vulnerable children are falling behind. This model, with IMLS support, is easily shared with libraries across the nation who would not have the resources to conduct their own research and create their own materials. Love Them Out Loud, while branded as a DML project, is interchangeable with other library systems. The developed box, board book, rhyming booklet, and parent tip sheet are easily adapted to represent the mission of any library. The DML library card application can easily be removed and replaced with an application for the local library. DML has already learned that this tool is popular and necessary on a national level, with the first two versions.

Performance Goals and Outcomes DML will produce 1,500 kits for distribution. Short-term outcomes to be tracked will include: feedback from partner organizations as they share qualitative results and case studies from caregivers, check-outs of the kits that are incorporated into the library collection, and the number of new library card applications which return on the special application form included in the LTOL kit. Longer term goals will include the feedback from community partners and interest from national library partners.

Budget DML requests \$25,000 in Spark Grant funds to cover the design, illustration and packaging of the LTOL v.3 kit (\$10,000) and the cost to produce 1,500 kits in a first run (\$15,000). DML and all community partners will contribute their time in the development of the kit. Once a first run is complete, and distributed, DML will make kits available to libraries and partner organizations across the nation at an (estimated) cost of \$7.50/kit. The cost of the staff to coordinate national distribution is absorbed by DML.