



Early Learning with Families (ELF) @ Your Library

Project Overview

The California State Library (CSL) launched the Early Learning with Families (ELF) initiative in the summer of 2006. Its purpose is to help further strengthen public libraries important role as community centers helping families, caregivers and childcare providers acquire the resources and skills necessary to support the healthy development of very young children. This LSTA (Library Science and Technology Act) supported initiative is intended to encourage public libraries in their efforts as they:

- Serve families with young children from birth through five years of age,
- Build on the most promising early learning research and practices,
- Offer services developmentally appropriate and that foster early learning,
- Support parents and caregivers in their parental role and as their children's first teacher,
- Partner with local agencies to address family interests and needs, and
- Strengthen the position of libraries as valuable community resources for families, caregivers, childcare providers and their young children.

Fifty-three library jurisdictions are funded to provide ELF programs in 2007/08. Thirty-four of these libraries are in their second year of continuation funding, while nineteen are beginning their first year of implementing ELF services. For a complete list of these libraries access the CSL website at http://www.library.ca.gov/grants/lsta/lsta_app_06_07.html .

Over the past year, ELF libraries have designed exciting and engaging family programs, as well as created interesting places for families to share time and learn together. ELF services reflect current early learning research, offering families opportunities to stimulate their infants and toddlers with rhyme, song and rich language, interspersed with movement and activity. The programs provide a chance for parents and caregivers to share focused, fun time with their little ones in Parent Child Workshops, play and learn activities and interactive storytimes.

Additionally, libraries have created physical spaces where caregivers and their children can play and pretend as they interact with the library's puppets, dolls, building blocks, toys and books. And there are quiet corners for cuddling and reading books together. ELF libraries are thoughtful of families' needs. There's a spot for strollers as well as the necessary diaper-changing tables in restrooms. Books and playthings are stored in tubs and on low shelves for easy access by toddlers and young children. It is not surprising to find a child manipulating a "hob nob" or studying his reflection in a mirror that's positioned at just his level at the library's service desk.

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The family area not only contains children's resources, but also has books and resources for parents and caregivers. These are often conveniently located for ease of access and immediate reference. Copies of songs, rhymes, games and finger plays that support child development and literacy, are distributed to parents and encouraged as activities at home. Community resource pamphlets and information are displayed, as is information about the ELF community partners with whom the library is collaborating.

In support of the California libraries, an ELF website is in the process of development with an anticipated launch in fall, 2007. It will feature ELF programs, as well as serve as a means of communication and a resource to the California library community.

Additionally, several promising statewide collaborations have developed that are further spearheading local partnerships and enriching local services. These include the California Department of Education's Child Development Division, the First 5 California Children and Families Commission, California Public Television, California Child Care Resources and Referral Network, California Association for the Education of Young Children as well as the western office of Zero to Three.

For additional information regarding the ELF initiative, please contact Judy Klikun, the Statewide ELF Coordinator at 916-446-6378 or jklikun@sbcglobal.net or Suzanne Flint, the State Library Programs Consultant for this project at 916-651-9796 or sflint@library.ca.gov.