

## **Raising Readers in Story County (RRSC)**

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**Liaison: Michale Hansen**

### **Need for Program**

“The mission of Raising Readers in Story County is to improve language and literacy development in children from birth to age 8 and to nurture healthy parent-child relationships ([www.raising-readers.org](http://www.raising-readers.org), 2014).

A grass-roots organization originally started in 2000, Raising Readers of Story County focuses its programs and services on reaching children and families as a means to addressing the importance of early reading skills so that children are able to be proficient readers in the early grades, continuing on to use these skills for success in college, work, and in their personal life.

Raising Readers of Story County targeted population for its programming focuses on working with families that have been identified as low-income. Through volunteer efforts, Raising Readers offers a multitude of programs including: Thrive by Five, reading buddies tutoring, story times, specific parenting programs for families, and an Out of School reading program. All of these programs work collaboratively with other community organizations as a means to provide books to children and families in need.

Raising Readers of Story County is a unique organization as it addresses a community need that is inclusive of all families with children. There is not another identified organization within Story County with the sole focus on literacy and the development of effective reading skills.

The programs provided through Raising Readers of Story County align well with established funding priorities such as safety, health and well-being of children, prevention and early intervention services, youth development, and access to the building blocks for academic success.

### **Program Strengths:**

- Through volunteer efforts, RRSC has continued to develop and implement programming relevant to its mission. During FY 2015-2016, 247 volunteers have given more than 5,987 hours of service.
- This year RRSC has developed new relationships with the Ames Public Library Friends Foundation to establish the Harrison Barnes Summer Reading Program, and new programming with People Place and also ChildServe. They are also partnering with Colo-Nesco schools and expanding programming in the Nevada schools. Furthermore, a new Coffee and Chat program has been developed which is an extension of the Thrive by Five program meeting three times/month. Primary Health in Huxley, WIC, MICA and a total of five McFarland Clinic sites are now

partners. RRSC is conducting surveys with parents of children at the Nevada McFarland Clinic site to gauge the RRSC reading program success as well.

- New this year is that RRSC has been receiving phone calls and email from other communities seeking information about their programming.
- Two thousand community members receive the RRSC e-newsletter which includes organizations, families, and contacts also from Fort Dodge, Mason City, Iowa Falls and Marshalltown.
- Two new little libraries were established at Brookside Park in Ames. Two more Little Free Libraries are being installed this fall/winter: one at Greenbriar Park west of Laverne Apartments on South 16<sup>th</sup> and one at Patio Park, a residential park northwest of Sawyer Elementary School in Ames.
- RRSC is a candidate for the All American City Award and is considered a pacesetter in school reading readiness.
- The strength of RRSC is best illustrated in the number of programs (there are 19 of them!) that have been developed and expanded in a remarkable manner through volunteer efforts. The board remains firmly committed to the mission of the organization with each board member holding responsibility for some facet of the educational or administrative functions of the agency.
- Kim Hanna has completed her first full year as the Executive Director. Her primary focus is on advocacy, building partnerships, administration, marketing, and outreach for the agency as their programs continue to grow and expand. Judy Dahlke continues to work 20 hours per week as the Family Literacy Coordinator specializing in parent education and outreach with Coffee and Chat and Raising a Reader programs, school readiness programs Super K-Transition to Kindergarten and ACPC Reading Buddies, and out of school learning with StoryTime at Eastwood – soon to come to Laverne Apartments. Lisa Reeves was hired part time (20 hours/week) to deliver summer literacy program K-3 Reading Buddies, preschool dialogic reading program StoryPals in three communities, the Harrison Barnes Reading Academy and reinstating the Head Start Book in the Home program.

### **Program Weaknesses**

- Last year RRSC struggled with determining a helpful and detailed method in which to determine the unduplicated number of children and families that they serve since many of their programs are open to anyone at any time (i.e. a family visiting the reading room at the clinic and then participating in one of the programs offered at the Learning Center). This year they have begun to track the number of children and families that participate in their programs through an organized system.
- The need for more volunteers or another part-time staff member to coordinate programming and support for programming is another weakness. It takes many individuals to assist in coordinating and providing direct service to children and their families especially with the multitude of programs that RRSC offers.

- The partnership with ISU Extension established last year has further helped expand programming out into Story County this year. This partnership was developed in response to not being able to expand into the county due to the lack of funding and personnel. The goal for this partnership continues to be for Extension staff to use a “tool kit” created by RRSC to offer literacy materials to those children who they connect with through other ISU Extension programming. This digital resource is being created pro bono for RRSC and is close to being available on a state and national level.
- The RRSC board is intentionally seeking to diversify its board of directors. Two new members have been elected to the board recently and a brand new slate of officers has been seated for this fiscal year.

### **Financial Outlook**

Raising Readers of Story County continues to utilize multiple sources of funding. ASSET funds are sought as a means to continue, maintain and expand program needs.

### **Internal Management Practices**

An independent accountant has been retained for the purposes of performing audits as needed for funders.

### **Agency Comments**

The RRSC staff and board continue to be most appreciative of the opportunity and assistance that they have received in applying for ASSET funding in support of the programs that they provide to Story County.

### **General Conclusions**

The staff, board of directors, and volunteers is what truly drive this organization and share in its success. This board is a prime example of a hard working board with each member accountable to some facet of RRSC’s programming and outreach. The dedication that is evident in the organization’s board members truly serves as a vital role in continually developing and meeting programming demands and is a testament to meeting a critical community need.