

# Agency: Raising Readers

Liaison: Meagan Richard

## **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 started in 2000, Raising Readers of Story County focuses its programs and services on reaching children and families as a to address the importance of early reading skills so that children are able to be proficient readers in the early grades, using these skills for success in college, work, and their personal lives.

The Raising Readers of Story County targeted population focuses on families that have been identified as low-income. Through volunteer efforts, Raising Readers offers a multitude of programs including: Super K, Thrive by Five, reading buddies tutoring, Story Pals, 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.
- RRSC has relationships with the Ames Public Library Friends Foundation to establish the Harrison Barnes Summer Reading Program.

- Approx. two thousand community members receive the RRSC e-newsletter which includes organizations, families, and contacts from Fort Dodge, Mason City, Iowa Falls and Marshalltown.
- New Little Free Libraries continue to pop up around the community, with the latest one being built and installed in Maxwell recently.
- There are 12 programs (6 for ages 0-5, 3 for ages K-3rd grade, and 3 for all ages) that have been developed and expanded in a remarkable manner through volunteer efforts.
- Began to successfully track unduplicated records of students using these services, and 340 students used the services last year
- Entire RRSC program is heavily research and evidence based and has pre/post assessments and continual evaluations to gauge success. This includes comparing with local school districts.
- The success of the entire mission of Raising Readers was demonstrated in the 16/17 year with 100% of kids in the program reaching grade level readiness.
- RR posts their techniques as “Toolkits” to help other educators help children learn to read. These Toolkits are downloaded from all over the US and all over the world, showing the national and international effect this unique organization has on children.
- They reach all school districts including homeschools and engage each child individually.

### **Program Weaknesses**

- The need for more volunteers or more part-time staff members 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.
- A specific paid position that Raising Readers is in need of is a volunteer manager. This individual is wanted to help with volunteer recruiting and organizing, as RR is heavily volunteer based and would not be able to operate without their extensive volunteers. The addition of a paid staff person to assist with this would increase the capabilities of other staff to work on programming and research and implementation of their initiatives.
- Raising Readers operates out of one room space and that limits their staff capacity and facilities for working with their own staff or students.

### **Financial Outlook**

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

### **Internal Management Practices**

The current staff members are dedicated to the mission and cause of Raising Readers and work to their full ability to run the organization. They are restructuring with a current Interim Director and could benefit from additional staff to continue to support their mission and increase their success.

### **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**

Raising Readers gains its strength from its dedicated staff and volunteers. They are using top notch research to successfully promote literacy and increase the benefit to children's lives through their extensive range of services. It is a unique organization in the importance of their mission, their research-based techniques, and their continual success in achieving their goals of promoting literacy in children.