

Free program brings books for children to apartment communities

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(Photo: Nick Oza / The Republic)

Sitting on our parents' laps reading books — those are magical memories. Dr. Seuss taught us to rhyme, the Berenstain Bears showed us how to share and our parents taught us how to love reading. Fostering a love of books in our own kids is crucial.

Four years ago, the Arizona Multihousing Association partnered with Southwest Human Development to bring the non-profit's Raising a Reader program into Arizona apartment communities.

Trained early-literacy specialists meet with families in the community rooms of apartment complexes over an eight-week period to teach parents the importance of building early-literacy skills and how to introduce children to books by reading together as a family. This shared time with their children gives parents the tools and confidence they need to make reading a part of their routines.

According to Raising a Reader, independent evaluations showed "that parents reported a 471 percent increase in time spent sharing stories with their children (five or more times a week) and Spanish-speaking families increased library visits with their children by 300 percent." A recent study of the program by the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust reported similar results: a dramatic increase in children requesting their parents read to them, increased visits to the library, and more time spent reading at home.

This free program, available in a number of apartment communities around the metro Phoenix area, not only provides training but helps participating families begin to build a library of their own. At the end of the eight-week program, each family will have received around six children's books.

This program is free to the families we serve, and we are always in need of books. To learn more, go to www.swhd.org/programs/education-and-literacy/raising-a-reader.

Tom Simplot is president and CEO of the Arizona Multihousing Association.

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