

## Reading program a success in Monterey County

By

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**SALINAS &&** Studies have shown that young children need to be read to by others to promote an appreciation of books and a love of reading.

Children who aren't exposed to books and reading, studies have found, often don't succeed as well in school as those who have been nurtured to love reading.

That's where Raising A Reader comes in. The nonprofit group, founded in San Mateo County 15 years ago and headquartered in Redwood City, has helped more than 1 million U.S. children and families on the path to literacy. The program is used in 34 states at 2,700 sites and as of 2013, 130,000 children were involved.

Raising A Reader is in its fourth year at the Salinas Public Library. The library has recently received a \$15,000 grant from the Community Foundation for Monterey County to fund the program, said Mary Ellison, literacy program manager.

"The program," Ellison said, "is very much evidence-based. It's a good program, it has good structure, and the families really like it."

The program is well entrenched in Monterey County. In addition to the Salinas Public Library, Raising A Reader programs are established at Head Start and the King City Unified School District. The programs are funded by grants and donations.

In the United States, said Gabrielle Miller, national executive director of Raising A Reader, about half the children entering kindergarten are not ready to learn.

"As children grow older" up until third grade, she said, "pretty much everything is about learning to read. The expectation is after third grade, children should be ready to learn.

"The point is," Miller said, "if children get to third grade and can't read and get information from text, the rate they fall behind their peers grows exponentially, and it begins harder and harder for them."

To combat the problem, she explained, families must help children see that reading is not just something they do at school.

Raising A Reader focuses on training the trainers, Miller said. "We are helping families develop (reading) habits."

Teachers and librarians work directly with families.

In the classroom and in the library, children in Raising A Reader programs are given colored bags, each containing three books, to take home each week. The bags are blue or red and they are rotated among the students.

In Monterey County, Miller said, the impact of Raising A Reader has been significant. Since the program began in Monterey County, about 6,000 children have been positively affected.

"The work in Monterey County has just been amazing, absolutely amazing," she said.

The program started with the help of two anonymous donors who helped fund it.

King City Unified School District began its Raising A Reader program last February after receiving a grant to purchase books. The program started the five kindergarten classes at Santa Lucia School.

The books that are used in the program include picture books, bilingual books, English-only books and theme books, thus encouraging parents to read to their children.

"For the kids and the families, the reaction is very positive," said Rosa Uribe-Ochoa, a Santa Lucia School kindergarten teacher.

The kindergarten students, she said, brought the book bags back from home when they should and were involved in keeping track of them.

At the end of the school year, the children were given a blue book bag they could keep and take to the library to hold books they check out.

All five classes visited the library during the program. Librarians were made aware of the colored book bags so they were able to help motivate the students.

The program is so popular there is a waiting list to get in it.

"We've seen a lot of dads get involved," Ellison said. "We just finished graduation. I hope it's a program we'll see broader adoption of."

Monterey County recently got two new funds sources for Raising A Reader: the Pebble Beach Corporation and the Chapman Foundation, Miller said.

"Raising A Reader makes sure it has strong local partners," Miller said. "When we get the right local partners the program works incredibly well, and there's no question we have outstanding partners in Monterey County."

For more information on Raising A Reader, see the group's website at [raisingareader.com](http://raisingareader.com).