

## **A success with stories: Volunteers encourage kids to become readers**

By **DIANE D'AMICO**, Staff Writer | Posted: Monday, November 4, 2013 12:01 am

At the Free to Be Child Care Center in Galloway Township, children eagerly opened the bag of books they get to take home each week, courtesy of the United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey's Raising a Reader Program.

At the United Way office a few miles away in Galloway Township, members of the American Association of University Women just as eagerly opened new books they will be reading to young children as part of the Ready, Set, Read program.

Both programs are part of the United Way's Success by 6 Initiative that coordinates with groups like the AAUW and the Boys and Girls Club to help prepare low-income children for school.

John Emge, executive director of the United Way in Atlantic and Cape May counties said the program began through AtlantiCare in the 1990s, and as they moved their focus toward health and immunizations, the United Way took over the educational component in 2003.

Getting an early start on education is increasingly shown to be crucial to a child's later success. A recent study by Stanford University psychologist Anne Fernald found that between the ages of 18 months and two years, children in affluent families learn 30 percent more words than children from low-income families.

Success by 6 programs also include a First Look program which provides one book a month to children in day care centers and schools to begin a home library. More than 2,000 children have received a book in the last eight years.

Getting Ready for Kindergarten calendars for parents with activities they can do at home to teach their children basic skills like shapes and colors.

The Healthy Smiles program funds trips to the dentist for uninsured children. More than 120 have seen a dentist since 2005.

The program is funded through the Women's Leadership Initiative of United Way. This year's fall fundraiser, "Sweet Laughs" will be held at 3 p.m. Nov. 13 at Stockton Seaview Hotel and Golf Club in Galloway Township, featuring humorist and author Gina Barreca and a sampling of desserts.

About a dozen AAUW members recently met at the United Way to prepare for this year's round of readings. Amanda McGowan, director of Community Initiatives for the United Way, and Dianne

Lennon, of Egg Harbor Township, a volunteer coordinator of the Women's Leadership Initiative, reviewed the calendar of participating schools and talked about how to be a good reader.

Some AAUW members had participated last year, others were joining for the first time said Diana Intenzo, of Linwood, who is coordinating. Member Helen Walsh, who helped bring Success by 6 to Atlantic County, suggested they volunteer to be readers.

"I volunteered last year, and this is right up my alley," said Gail Vreeland, of Egg Harbor Township, a retired teacher and president of the AAUW chapter. "I loved it. There is nothing I love to do more than read, and to pass on that appreciation to preschoolers."

Arlene Roller, of Galloway Township is a retired high school teacher who always wanted to teach younger children. Arlene Groch, of Northfield, an attorney, just enjoys interacting with the children.

"You are going to have so much fun," she told the group.

Other participating AAUW members include Pam Family, Audrey Owen, Carolyn Bassett and Lee Ellenberg, of Linwood, Anne-Marie Glenn, of Somers Point, Audrey Moloney and Rosa Ojserkis, of Egg Harbor Township, Lucy Jerue, of Galloway Township, and Lynn Walters and Beverly Schechtman, of Atlantic City.

Lennon said their goal is to reach 500 children this year in Atlantic County, so she is glad to have a good group of readers. They reviewed tips on how to engage the children and make the reading interactive.

Groch recalled finding it a challenge to read an alphabet book until she asked the children to act out a word that began with each letter.

"It turned out to be wonderful," she said.

Walters suggested stopping to ask the children what might happen next as a way to check comprehension and encourage creativity.

Each of the children gets a copy of the book that is read, and Lennon said she always asks each child who will read the book to them at home to encourage them to make that connection with their family. She also warned the readers to expect a lot of hugs from the three- and four-year olds.

Groch said she always talks to the children about having respect for books. She encourages the teachers to have the children write their names in their books to give them a sense of ownership.

The Raising a Reader program takes a different approach, loaning four different books a week to children to take home. Some are familiar stories like "Goodnight Moon" and other are less well known like "Tar Beach" and "Elizabeth's Doll." A few are in Spanish and English.

"It's the red bags with the books in them," said Graysen Jaeger, 4, as Free to Be Child Care Center director Elyse Smith brought the book bags to a group of children.

Ruby Tran, 4, lined hers up in a neat row, then picked up "Elizabeth's Doll."

Smith said the children get to keep each bag for a week. The parent cooperative at the schools coordinates the program to make sure all the books are returned, repacked and redistributed. She likes that the books cover a wide range of topics.

"It really promotes reading," Smith said. "And it introduces books that you might not pick up on your own. I know some are books that I, as a parent, might not have chosen, but fell in love with when I read them."

McGowan said the more money they raise, the more children they can reach.

Lennon said the volunteers can help reach parents as well.

"Strong reading skills are the building blocks of education," she said. "If we can get kids on the path of reading, to enjoy reading, we can get the parents on board, too."

Contact Diane D'Amico:

609-272-7241

DDamico@pressofac.com

If you go

The United Way Women's Leadership Initiative fall fundraiser will be held from

3 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. Nov. 13, at the Stockton Seaview Hotel and Golf Club on Route 9 in Galloway Township. Guest speaker is humorist Gina Barreca, author of "They Used to Call Me Snow White But I Drifted: Women's Strategic Use of Humor." Tickets are \$35 per person or \$300 per table.

Guests are also encouraged to bring new or gently used books for children ages 1 to 6 for the "Success by 6" program. Call Amanda McGowan at 609-404-4483 ext. 1182 or email

**amcgowan@uwgpsnj.org**. Tickets can also be purchased online at

**UnitedforImpact.org/Atlantic**.