

**WESTGATE RESEARCH, INC.**

**Ready Readers**

**Outcome Study**

**Fall 2010**

## **Outcome Study Committee**

**Richard T. Rennecamp, President, Westgate Research, Inc.**

**Susan Darcy, Volunteer Reader**

**Lisa Greening, Executive Director, Reader Readers**

**Susan W. Nall, Ph.D., Board Member**

**Diane Sinclair, Volunteer Program Coordinator, Ready Readers**

# Reader Readers

## OUTCOME STUDY

### I. Introduction

Ready Readers is a unique, nonprofit organization whose purpose is to inspire preschool age children from low-income communities to develop a love of books. The program began in 1997 with a few volunteers who read to preschool age children in six classrooms. In 1999, Ready Readers became an independent, Missouri nonprofit corporation with an established Board of Directors, and received tax-exempt 501(c)(3) status.

Each year, the Ready Readers program has grown. Presently, Ready Readers has 450 volunteers who read each week to more than 7,000 children. The children are enrolled in 116 early childhood programs in the Greater St. Louis Metropolitan Area. Ready Readers is financially supported by the generous grants and contributions from local corporations, family foundations, trusts, and individuals.

Reader Readers is unique in literacy programs in the St. Louis area, as volunteers read high-quality children's books every week for 30 minutes to a classroom of preschool age children. The same volunteer reads to the same children at the same time each week. In addition to weekly reading sessions, each child receives at least six high-quality, new books throughout the year. Our volunteer readers reflect the population of St. Louis and are recruited from businesses, corporations, colleges, universities, etc.

The goals of Ready Readers are:

- To motivate preschool children from low-income communities to want to learn to read by regularly reading high-quality books to them in a classroom setting and by giving each child at least six new, high-quality books each school year for further enjoyment at home.
- To enhance early literacy skills in preschool age children from low-income communities by modeling appropriate reading techniques and listening skills.
- To foster positive relationships between preschool age children from low-income communities and their volunteer readers.
- To provide children from low-income communities with access to additional quality books by distributing new and gently used books to their teachers for classroom use.

**On April 1, 2009, Pat Simons retired as Founder and Executive Director of Ready Readers. Lisa Greening was hired as the new Executive Director to continue to grow the mission and the services of Ready Readers. This was the first time in the history of Ready Readers that the Director served in a full time capacity, another indicator of the growth of the organization. During the 2010-2011 school year, the Board of Directors increased in size from 17 to 21 members. As the organization continued to grow and expand, so did the structure and systems. Among the accomplishments were revised bylaws; revised general policies and committee charters; and the creation of an employee handbook. A new website became active at the end of the fall of 2010.**

**In January 2010, Ready Readers moved to a new location at Highway 170 and Page Avenue. This move was essential in order to be more centrally located, and to provide office space for the six employees as well as a warehouse for books. Ready Readers opened accounts with major book publishers in the United States, and leveraged its buying power to acquire large discounts on purchase of books.**

## **II. The Need for the Study**

**The need for early literacy programs for young children in the St. Louis area is an ongoing one. The need is particularly pronounced in low-income areas. Children living in poverty usually are not exposed to regular read-aloud sessions, and they lack sufficient access to books. Ready Readers is premised on the fact that children who are not motivated to become readers rarely learn how to read well. Furthermore, research indicates that learning to read depends upon regular exposure to reading aloud and access to books at home.**

**The Board of Directors and the staff of Ready Readers recognized the need to measure the effectiveness of the program. After discussing the scope of the study extensively with individuals involved with the program, Westgate Research was hired. The purpose of the study was to determine the extent of the quality of the program, and its effect on the attitudes and emergent literacy skills of the preschool age children served.**

## **III. Overview of the Study**

**The research was conducted to provide an independent, high-quality study of the Ready Readers program. Under the supervision of Richard T. Rennecamp, President of Westgate Research Inc., all of the teachers and volunteers involved with Ready Readers were surveyed in the spring of 2010.**

**A questionnaire (see attached), written by Westgate Research with guidance from the Ready Readers Outcome Study Committee, was hand-delivered to all 357 teachers involved with the Ready Readers program. Teachers from three types of early childhood education programs were represented: the early childhood programs in the St. Louis Public Schools; the Head Start Programs managed by the YWCA, the Urban League, Grace Hill, and Youth In Need; and other early childhood programs which are for-profit, United Way, or faith-based.**

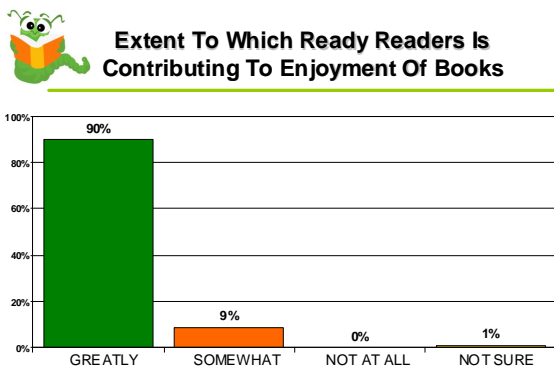
In addition to the questionnaire for teachers, a similar questionnaire (see attached) written by Westgate Research with the guidance from the Ready Readers Outcome Study Committee was delivered or mailed to 420 volunteers currently reading for Ready Readers. Volunteers represent the Greater St. Louis community and those who receive college credit for volunteering for Ready Readers.

All completed questionnaires were mailed directly to Westgate Research. The cover letter delivered with the questionnaire emphasized the confidentiality of the study and the need for their candid opinions of the Ready Readers program.

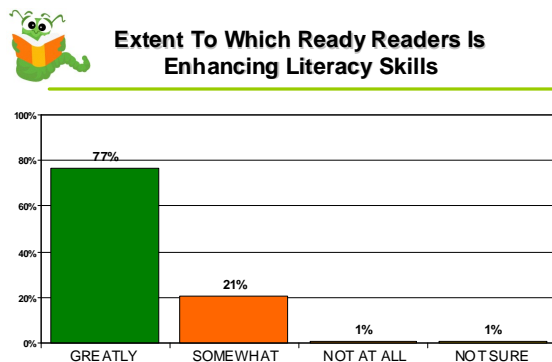
The return rate was remarkably high. The overall response rate from the teachers was very high at 63%. Two hundred and twenty-six of the 357 teachers returned the questionnaire. The overall response rate from the volunteers was also high at 41%. One hundred and twenty-six of the 250 community volunteers returned the questionnaire. Forty-six of the 170 college volunteers returned the questionnaire.

#### IV. Results of the Study

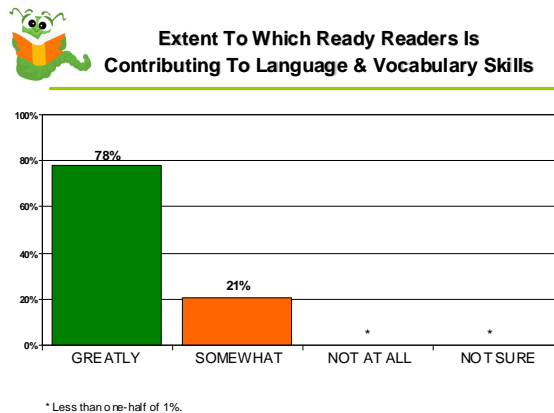
The mission of Ready Readers is to inspire an enjoyment of books for preschool age children from low-income communities. Results indicate that 90% of the teachers surveyed believe Ready Readers GREATLY contributes to their children’s enjoyment of books. These results show that the teachers believe Ready Readers is directly accomplishing its mission.



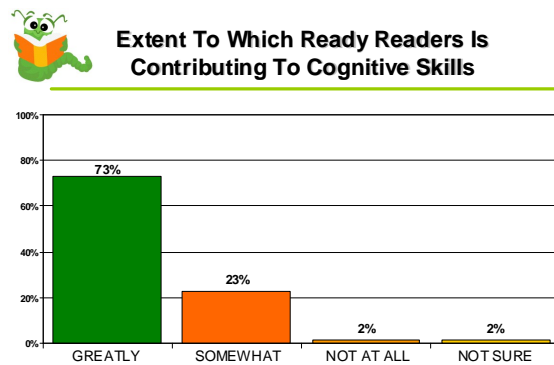
One of the goals of Ready Readers is to enhance early literacy skills. Emergent literacy skills including print awareness, phonological awareness, letter knowledge, and print motivation are essential skills a child needs before reading independently. Ninety-eight percent of the teachers surveyed believe that Ready Readers is enhancing the literacy skills of their students.



**Additional emergent literacy skills relate to oral language and vocabulary building which are crucial for children before the age of 4. Seventy-eight percent of the teachers surveyed responded by saying that Ready Readers “GREATLY” contributes to the language and vocabulary skills of their children. Almost 100% of teachers surveyed stated that Ready Readers is contributing to the children’s language and vocabulary skills.**



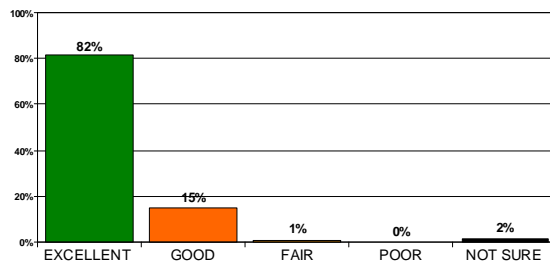
**Within the early childhood profession it is a recognized that 90% of a child’s cognitive development takes place before the age of 4. With Ready Readers read-aloud and book gift program, 96% of teachers surveyed believe that the Ready Readers program is directly contributing to a child’s cognitive skill development.**



Six times during each school year and once in summer, volunteer readers give the children high-quality, personalized, new books to take home for further enjoyment. The Ready Readers Book Committee that includes early childhood educators, teachers, readers, board members, and staff meet and choose the seven titles that will be purchased for the children in the program. Ready Readers chooses high-quality books that will not only model great writing and vocabulary, but will inspire the children to want to read them again. Ninety-seven percent of the teachers surveyed rated the quality of the book gifts as “EXCELLENT” or “GOOD.” During the 20092010 school year, Ready Readers distributed more than 49,000 new books to children in the program.



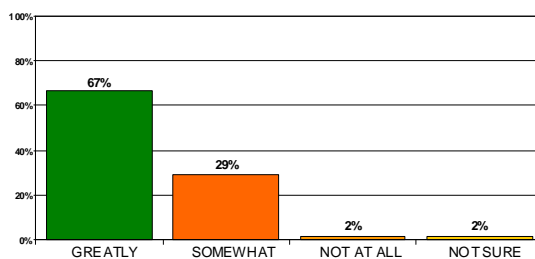
**Rating Of Quality  
Of The Give-Away Books**



In addition to giving the children books, Ready Readers gives the teacher a copy of each of the books for the classroom library. The teachers can reinforce the reading of the story during classroom time or the children can independently look at the book during classroom time. For classrooms with no books, Ready Readers also contributes new and gently used books that are donated to the program.



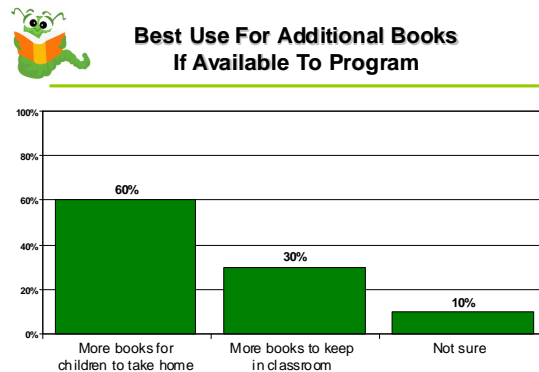
**Extent To Books Given By Ready Readers  
Have Enhanced Classroom Library**



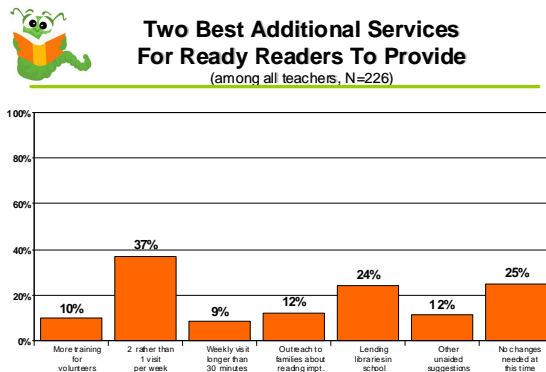
## V. Recommendations

In addition to data received relative to the effectiveness of the program, the Outcome Study provided recommendations for quality enhancement and growth. The following recommendations will be discussed by the Board of Directors of Ready Readers:

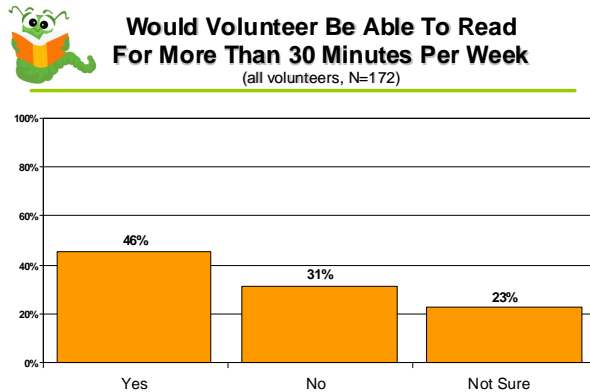
1. Consider giving more take-home books. Based on the results from the teachers surveyed, sixty percent of the teachers believe that the children need more books to take home and thirty percent of the teachers believe that they need more books in the classroom.



2. Twenty-four percent of the teachers surveyed asked for lending libraries in their school. From the study, it is recommended that Ready Readers provide more books for the children's classrooms. Additional services recommended by the surveyed teachers include having Ready Readers visit more than one time a week.

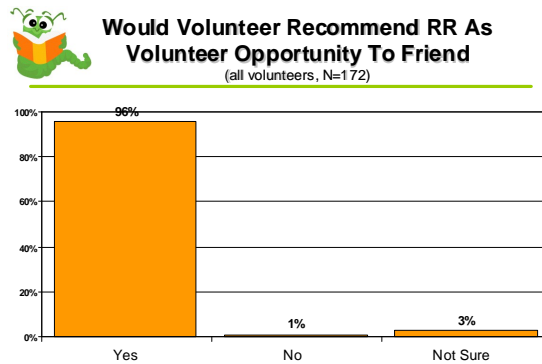


3. Consider increasing the weekly reading time. Forty-six percent of volunteers surveyed said that they would be able to read for more than 30 minutes per week.



4. Consider additional support for volunteer readers. Eighty-two percent of the volunteers surveyed believe that Ready Readers is “GREATLY” contributing to the children’s enjoyment of books. The volunteers, however, requested additional training and supervision from the Ready Readers staff. Suggestions for additional support:
- All volunteers to be trained as a group in the Ready Readers office or at a group’s school or business. In the past, individual volunteers were trained over the phone and mailed training materials.
  - Volunteer training materials should be rewritten to reflect best early literacy practices in a clear, concise format.
  - Formalize a Volunteer Corps of trained, experienced, highly-skilled volunteers who can mentor volunteers in the field at their early education site. Staff will mentor those volunteers who need the most guidance in the field.
  - Forty-seven percent of volunteers wrote that the level of on-going support from the Ready Readers staff is “EXCELLENT.” With the creation of a Volunteer Corps, the staff and corps will have the additional time for on-going support. Quarterly workshops for all volunteers need to continue.
5. Continue communication with the teachers at the early childhood sites. Sixty-eight of total teachers wrote that the communication with Ready Readers staff is EXCELLENT. The staff, with the assistance of a Volunteer Corps, could visit each classroom and talk with the teacher about how to further enhance the literacy needs of the children.

6. **Provide outreach to families.** Twelve percent of teachers requested that Ready Readers provide more outreach to families about the importance of reading. The staff and volunteers should continue to reach out to individual communities and early childhood centers to provide guidance and additional support in early emergent literacy.
7. **Continue to identify ways to recruit more volunteer readers.** Ninety-six percent of volunteers surveyed would recommend the Ready Readers program as a volunteer opportunity to a friend. The board and staff of Ready Readers need to continually refine the processes and policies of the program in order to accommodate more volunteers reading to more children.



## VI. Conclusion

Based on the collection and analysis of the data presented above, the results of this evaluation are extremely positive. Westgate Research concludes that the Ready Readers program is meeting its primary goal, providing a high-quality program that is directly enhancing the emergent literacy skills of the preschool children.

Just as important as the data regarding program effectiveness is the formative data for program enhancement and improvement that the outcome study provided. The recommendations will shape future conversations with the Ready Readers constituencies.

Dear Teacher:

Thank you so much for supporting the Ready Readers program in your classroom.

Ready Readers needs your help. Please take a few minutes to answer 13 questions about the Ready Readers program. Your opinions are extremely valuable because YOU are the single best person for judging the impact of the Ready Readers program on your children. We need your feedback to help us improve our program.

**THE SURVEY IS TOTALLY CONFIDENTIAL AND ANONYMOUS.** Please return the survey in the enclosed postage-paid envelope by **MAY 7, 2010**. It will go directly to an independent market research company. They will tabulate the combined results based upon all responses by teachers who have Ready Readers in their classroom. We welcome your candid opinions.

Thank you so much for your time and cooperation!

1. To what extent do you believe Ready Readers is contributing to the children's enjoyment of books? Would you say...

- Greatly
- Somewhat
- Not at all
- Not sure

2. To what extent do you believe Ready Readers is enhancing the literacy skills of the children? By literacy skills we mean concepts like "print is read from left to right" or "pictures help us follow the story." Would you say Ready Readers is enhancing literacy skills...

- Greatly
- Somewhat
- Not at all
- Not sure

3. To what extent do you believe Ready Readers is contributing to the language and vocabulary skills of the children? Would you say...

- Greatly
- Somewhat
- Not at all
- Not sure

**(PAGE 2 SURVEY QUESTIONS ON THE BACK.)**

4. To what extent do you believe Ready Readers is helping to develop the cognitive skills (thinking skills, questioning, predicting) of the children? Would you say...

- Greatly
- Somewhat
- Not at all
- Not sure

5. How often is the volunteer Ready Reader prepared?

- Always or almost always
- Much of the time
- Some of the time
- Seldom
- Not sure

6. How would you rate the quality and appropriateness of the books read weekly by the volunteer Ready Reader?

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Not sure

7. How would you rate the quality of the give-away books?

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Not sure

8. How would you rate your relationship with the volunteer Ready Reader?

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Not sure

9. How would you rate the communication between you and the Ready Readers staff?

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Not sure

10. Which TWO of the following additional services would you most like to see in the Ready Readers program?

- More training for volunteers
- 2 visits per week by a Ready Readers volunteer instead of 1 visit
- Weekly visits that are longer than 30 minutes
- Outreach to school
- Lending libraries in the schools
- No changes needed at this time
- Other (PLEASE DESCRIBE) \_\_\_\_\_

11. If Ready Readers had more books to use in their program, which of the following options do you feel would be better for your children? (PLEASE PICK JUST ONE OPTION).

- More books to keep in your classroom
- More books for the children to take home
- Not sure

12. To what extent have the books given to you by Ready Readers enhanced your classroom collection of books? Would you say...

- Greatly
- Somewhat
- Not at all
- Not sure

**(PAGE 4 SURVEY QUESTIONS ON THE BACK.)**

13. Please give us your suggestions for how we can improve Ready Readers. No program is perfect and we really value your opinions.

**THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR TAKING THE TIME TO SHARE  
YOUR THOUGHTS!!**

**PLEASE MAIL BY MAY 7, 2010  
USING THE ENCLOSED ENVELOPE  
WITH PRE-PAID POSTAGE.**

Dear Ready Readers Volunteer:

Thank you so much for the time and energy you provide to the Ready Readers program.

Ready Readers needs your help. Please take a few minutes to answer 15 questions about the Ready Readers program. Your opinions are extremely valuable because of the time you actually spend with the children. We need your feedback to help us improve our program.

**THE SURVEY IS TOTALLY CONFIDENTIAL AND ANONYMOUS.** Please return the survey in the enclosed postage-paid envelope by **MAY 7, 2010**. It will go directly to an independent market research company. They will tabulate the combined results based upon all responses by Ready Readers volunteers. We welcome your candid opinions.

Thank you so much for your time and cooperation!

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- Greatly
- Somewhat
- Not at all
- Not sure

2. To what extent do you believe Ready Readers is enhancing the literacy skills of the children? By literacy skills we mean concepts like "print is read from left to right" or "pictures help us follow the story." Would you say Ready Readers is enhancing literacy skills...

- Greatly
- Somewhat
- Not at all
- Not sure

3. To what extent do you believe Ready Readers is contributing to the language and vocabulary skills of the children? Would you say...

- Greatly
- Somewhat
- Not at all
- Not sure

**(PAGE 2 SURVEY QUESTIONS ON THE BACK.)**

4. To what extent do you believe Ready Readers is helping to develop the cognitive skills (thinking skills, questioning, predicting) of the children? Would you say...

- Greatly
- Somewhat
- Not at all
- Not sure

5. To what extent do you believe the read-aloud experience is fostering a relationship between you and the children? Would you say...

- Greatly
- Somewhat
- Not at all
- Not sure

6. How often is the classroom teacher welcoming and prepared for you during the read-aloud sessions?

- Always or almost always
- Much of the time
- Some of the time
- Seldom
- Not sure

7. How would you rate your relationship with the classroom teacher?

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Not sure

8. How would you rate the quality of the give-away books?

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Not sure

9. How would you rate the initial training you received from Ready Readers?

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Don't recall
- Not sure

10. How would you rate the level of on-going support that you receive from the Ready Readers staff?

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Not sure

11. When the school year ends, do you plan to continue to read for Ready Readers?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

12. Approximately, how many years have you volunteered as a reader for Ready Readers?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-3 years
- 4-6 years
- 7 or more years
- Not sure

13. Would you be able to read more than 30 minutes a week?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

**(PAGE 4 SURVEY QUESTIONS ON THE BACK.)**

14. Would you recommend Ready Readers as a volunteer opportunity to a friend or colleague?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

15. Please give us your suggestions for how we can improve Ready Readers. No program is perfect and we really value your opinions.

**THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR TAKING THE TIME TO SHARE  
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