

Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care

Public Libraries SA

How libraries develop early literacy in communities

The importance of brain development and literacy experiences in the early years

The Words Grow Minds Campaign (2023) in which Libraries SA has been an active 0-3 taskforce member, emphasizes that up to 85% of a child's brain development occurs during their first three years and quality interactions in the early years play a crucial role in shaping children's development, physically changing the way their brain grows.

Repeated positive early experiences of language, rhyme, and stories through talking, reading, playing, and singing, strengthen connections in a child's brain and support babies and young children to thrive.

A child's future success is influenced by a strong foundation in the early years, impacting lifelong learning, achievement at school and beyond, self-confidence, motivation, and both physical and mental health (Raising Literacy Australia, 2012).

How libraries develop early literacy in communities

SA Public Libraries offer early literacy resources and programs.

Public libraries support families by providing free literacy and learning resources, such as board and picture books, information books, toys, games and more. Public libraries offer early literacy programs, such as story time, toddler time, baby time and other state-wide programs developed in partnership with government departments/organisations to families of birth to five-year-olds. The programs link to the library collections, encouraging families to borrow and utilise library resources to consolidate and broaden learning. In 2021-2022, there were almost 7500 early childhood library program sessions throughout South Australia, with almost 165 000 participants attending these sessions.

Public library programs support the foundations for lifelong learning.

In the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care Interim Report (2023), the report states that "there are a number of other settings in which children experience early learning and care out of their home environment including family day care, early learning centres, children's centres and facilitated play groups" (p. 6). However, children also experience early learning through public libraries.

Many preschool-aged children attend library story time sessions and/or other library programs on the days that they do not attend preschool or long day care services. For children who do not attend preschool or long day care services, these library programs are a valuable opportunity to develop and consolidate a range of literacy and learning skills.

Early learning sessions in public libraries provide the perfect opportunities to build the foundation for optimal brain development in the first five years. Baby time, toddler time and story time aim to do the following:

- broaden children’s vocabulary and language development.
- foster an appreciation of books and reading.
- provide exposure to quality children’s literature.
- encourage social skills, routines, and other skills appropriate for school readiness.
- strengthen child-caregiver relationships.
- link in with other specific programs developed in partnership with government departments/organisations that explore STEM/STEAM concepts, numeracy concepts, family literacies etc. which complement the development of literacy skills.

Public library programs encourage parent engagement in early literacy and learning.

Through early literacy programs, public libraries support parents to be their child’s first teachers. Story time, toddler time and baby time provide important opportunities for direct parent engagement in their child’s learning. The sessions promote literacy and language strategies and behaviours to use in the home through the modelling of reading stories, sharing songs, rhymes, and chants, talking, and conversing, and engaging in literacy-based activities. They also provide information to parents about literacy and learning strategies, child development research, and other initiatives developed in partnership with government departments and organisations.

Public libraries are valued and trusted institutions that provide supportive and collaborative roles in the early learning space.

In the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care Interim Report (2023), the report states that “the Commission has heard about the value of integrated services, and notes that it has been urged to encourage investment in new integrated services to reshape the system towards a greater number of these sites being included (p. 88). Public libraries are a valuable support in a child’s first 1000 days and are ideal partners to deliver on State and local early learning agendas, their role being worthy for consideration in integrated services hubs.

The report also refers to layering support and that stakeholders have encouraged the Commission to look at Victoria’s School Readiness Funding, which is a program that provides all preschool providers with funding to purchase from a ‘menu’ of resources to support children (p. 68). Included in this ‘menu’ of resources is Story Box Library, lending libraries, parenting programs which are all programs and services that public libraries can offer for free, highlighting the value of including public libraries in support and resources in early learning settings.

References

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