



A child from a low-income family enters kindergarten with a listening vocabulary of 3,000 words, while a child from a high-income family enters with a listening vocabulary of 20,000 words. (Hard & Risley, 1995)

Early Literacy Initiative

Children prepare to read long before they enter school - early literacy is everything children know about reading and writing before they can actually read and write. Early literacy is a baby who chews on a book, a toddler who wants his favorite book read over and over, and a preschooler who "reads" the story from memory.

Early literacy skills begin to develop in the first 5 years of life. A child's likelihood for success in the first grade depends on how much she's learned about reading before entering school. A child's early experiences with books and language lay the foundation for success in learning to read. **Early literacy is not the "teaching of reading."**

Reading, talking or playing with a child, stimulates the growth of a child's brain and builds the connections that will become the building blocks for reading. Brain development research shows that reading aloud to a child every day increases his brain's capacity for language and literacy skills and is **the most important thing a parent can do to prepare him for learning to read.**

Experts now know that:

- The development of language and literacy skills begins at birth.
- Children develop much of their capacity for learning in the first three years of life, when their brains grow to 90 percent of their eventual adult weight.

One of the most effective approaches to helping young children develop literacy skills is to have a home environment that supports literacy. Research clearly shows that instructional environments "have a powerful impact on children's growth in reading." (Morrow & Weinstein, 1986) While much of the research on instructional environments focuses on classroom environments, researchers believe that the same effects may be found in supportive home environments.

How Kiwanis is Promoting Early Literacy

Kiwanis of Bellefontaine is changing the future by giving young children the gift of reading with books for ownership. Children have the opportunity to choose and keep three books per year at no cost through book distributions. Kiwanis volunteers are promoting fun literacy-related activities. Volunteers motivate children to read with a myriad of festive book activities that accompany each book distribution.

Kiwanis is working with Reading is Fundamental to end the cycle of poverty by putting books in the hands of children, and encouraging them to read for fun. According to the U.S. Department of Education's Commission on Reading, reading motivation activities, books in the home, leisure reading and parent involvement are among the best ways to help children become fluent, able readers.

Kiwanis Book Distributions

- HEAD START Distribution of 300 books to 100 children at three Literacy Events
- HELP ME GROW/EARLY HEAD START Distribution of 525 books to 175 children at three Literacy Events
- NEWBORN HOME VISIT program donation of 100 books given to 100 new moms

Over 900 books put in the homes of low-income children for only \$800 in Local Kiwanis Match Funds to the Reading Is Fundamental Grant (an estimated award of \$1,500)