

PAEDIATRIC RESIDENT ADVOCACY GRANT – FINAL REPORT

***Make room to read:
A clinic-based intervention to promote early literacy among
medically uninsured children in Toronto, Canada***

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Background:

Low literacy remains an important problem in Canada. The medically uninsured paediatric population may be especially vulnerable to the health effects of low literacy because of interrelated factors: poverty, food & housing insecurity, and education.

Objectives:

Through 'Make Room to Read' program, we aim to:

- 1) Promote literacy amongst a vulnerable paediatric population
- 2) Educate trainees about literacy and its health effects

Project implementation:

"Make Room to Read" is a project of the Paediatric Residents' Advocacy Committee at the University of Toronto. We are partnered with the Paediatric Outreach Program (POP), a monthly, resident-led, volunteer clinic for medically uninsured children within the Canadian Centre for Refugee & Immigrant Health Care.

The "Make Room to Read" project is based on three components:

Modelling: A volunteer reads with patients in the POP waiting room, in a literacy-rich environment

Counselling: Literacy promotion occurs during the medical encounter, per the Canadian Paediatric Society position statement "Read, speak, sing: Promoting literacy in the physician's office" (Shaw 2006)

Resources: At each clinic visit, families are provided with (1) information on local resources & obtaining a library card, (2) information on accessing books without cost (e.g., Telebooks, where books can be accessed over the phone through the local library or online), and (3) a developmentally-appropriate book.

"Make Room to Read" has been occurring in monthly POP clinics since October 2016 (with a pilot program operating since January 2015). More than 80 books have been distributed.

Funds from the Paediatric Resident Advocacy Grant have been used to purchase approximately 200 books for the clinic thus far. Furthermore, the funds have been used to purchase materials such as bookshelves so that books can be safely and securely stored in clinic, and are easily

accessible to patient families. We have also received donations from private donors and Scholastic. Finally, funds from the Pediatric Resident Advocacy Grant have also been utilized to provide nutritious snacks to the children while they participate in the literacy program.

One of our goals with “Make Room to Read” was to ensure sustainability of the program. To that end, we involved two University of Toronto medical students through the Community-Based Service Learning Placement in the Community, Population and Public Health course (2016/2017). These medical students (Maya Deeb and Susy Lam) assisted with (1) development of age-appropriate literacy activities to be implemented in the clinic waiting room, (2) storage and classification of books, and (3) recruitment and training of literacy volunteers. Moving forward, we have plans for ongoing recruitment of literacy volunteers via the University of Toronto Paediatric Interest Group.

Some of the challenges encountered with the implementation of " Make Room to Read" included recruiting literacy volunteers, keeping the children engaged during a lengthy clinic visit and providing consistent literacy counselling to the families in the clinic. These challenges were overcome through recruiting medical students to participate as literacy volunteers resulting in a highly motivated, engaged and committed team of volunteers to deliver the program at our monthly POP clinics, as well as creating standardized packages with counselling materials that are now presented to each family. Finally, children are more engaged for longer periods of time with the introduction of a nutritious snack while they are reading. This has also been used as an opportunity to provide nutrition education, and we are currently exploring other activities we can use to promote literacy and continue engaging our patients. Moreover, we have had interest from dieticians to participate in the nutrition education component and provide guidance on eating healthy on a budget. The literacy program has been immensely well received by the families. The feedback we consistently receive include a deep gratitude for the education around literacy education and how to deliver it, as well as excitement towards having new reading materials.

Future directions:

As part of the educational component of our literacy program, we have decided to implement a nutrition program where we can educate

families about healthy food and low cost meals. We are planning on developing a variety of meal plans and utilizing a portion of the grant funds for snacks in the waiting room, to provide healthy food options to children and families while they participate in the “Make Room to Read” program.

Moving forward, we also plan to continuously obtain feedback from families and undertake a quality improvement project to quantify the effect, if any, of “Make Room to Read.”

Acknowledgements:

We are extremely grateful for having been chosen as recipients of the Paediatric Resident Advocacy Grant, which has allowed us to implement our literacy program and ensure its sustainability over the years to come. We would also like to acknowledge the growing “Make Room to Read” team (Drs. Stephanie Erdle & Lucy Duan, paediatric residents) as well as the Canadian Centre for Refugee and Immigrant Health Care (Dr. Paul Caulford and Jennifer D’Andrade).