

# Early Childhood Learning & Kindergarten Readiness: Public Libraries Lead the Way



# Introduction

Statistics from the California State Library demonstrate the enormous reach that public libraries have throughout the state, **boasting 184 library systems and 1,181 service points**. Libraries are trusted community spaces where families of all backgrounds are welcomed with free and easy access to books, learning opportunities, technology and educational resources.

Numbers also show how libraries across the State have long been participating in early childhood learning and education, providing over **100,000 programs** targeted at children ages 0-5, serving over **three and a half million young children** in fiscal year 2016-17 with storytimes, playtimes, early learning opportunities and activities that help build the foundational skills of early literacy.

Across the State **participation in library programs for young children has increased by over a third** in the last five years. As funding, support, public awareness and partnerships with other early education organizations grow throughout the State, these attendance numbers will continue to increase.

But this isn't just a question of numbers. The **impact is what matters**. We see that programs for ages 0-5 across California are leading to **tremendous positive outcomes for young children and their families**.

We invite you to be **inspired** through these examples of ordinary and exceptional programs offered in communities across the state—whether large, small, rural, urban and all between—public libraries are helping young children get ready for school and build a foundation of learning that will last a lifetime.



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developingLeaders  
in California Libraries

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# Using Touchpoints

## Butte County Library

About a third of California's libraries have been participants in the State Library's "Early Learning with Families" (ELF) initiative, which offers training and resources for staff to help families feel welcome at the library and empowered to help their children learn.

Butte County Library is one of seven California library systems to pilot "**Touchpoints in Libraries,**" a professional development training that has now been offered in over 30 California libraries.

The concepts behind Touchpoints come from pediatrician Dr. T. Terry Brazelton's **evidence-based approach to child development**, from his studies of children and families at Boston's Children's Hospital and Harvard Medical Center. A main goal of Touchpoints in Libraries is that all library staff (from circulation clerks to children's librarians) are prepared for interacting with families **in a way that provides support and scaffolding for families** whose young children are experiencing different developmental stages.

Butte County Library staff have applied Touchpoints and other ELF philosophies to many children's programs, such as a quarterly "Playtime" program for families with children ages 18-24 months. The pro-

gram offers activity stations where parents/caregivers play with their young children, using toys, games and activities that encourage **spatial awareness, sensory development, creative storytelling, fine and gross motor skills, socialization, aural skills** and more.

Outreach staff from Public Health participate to share information about nutrition, dental hygiene, speech pathology and other important topics for toddlers' parents. The experts play on the floor alongside the families, affirming the value of play to healthy development, and offering an approachable presence where parents can casually ask questions. **Each play-time may serve as many as 60 or 70 families.**



# A Rural Difference

## Humboldt County Library

Humboldt County has one of the highest rates of ACEs (adverse childhood experiences) in the state, with over three-quarters of adults having experienced at least one ACE and almost a third of adults with four or more ACEs in their background. ACEs have significant health and social impacts over a person's lifetime, and may impact multiple generations. **Humboldt County Library has worked with a number of agencies to become trauma-informed** and best serve the needs of struggling families.



Early childhood programs support the development of **social-emotional skills and early literacy learning** combined with support for adult caregivers, counteracting the isolating effect of raising young children and helping adults form and strengthen community networks to support their family through hard times. Family workshops help adults begin conversations about difficult topics—such as scary world news, disabilities or racism—with their young children. The workshops begin with reading and discussing a picture book, and then engaging children in activities that extend the reading experience while adults dive deeper into discussion led by a social work intern from the local university.

To reach the most **remote areas** of the County, the library partners with First 5 Humboldt to provide additional support for early literacy development and caregivers' understanding of their children's needs. This includes delivering books to preschool sites to ensure regular access to high-quality children's books and presenting early literacy workshops to parents/caregivers to demonstrate simple, effective practices that adults can use to support early literacy development.

# An Early Learning City

## Pasadena Public Library

**The City of Pasadena’s Office of the Young Child, hosted by the Pasadena Public Library, is a foundational investment by the City of Pasadena to bring direction and a comprehensive approach to early childhood policies and services in Pasadena.**

The City of Pasadena endeavors to become an **Early Learning City** by the year 2025. The commitment to that vision arose following a collaboration between the City, the Pasadena Unified School District (PUSD), and the UCLA Center for the Study of Healthy Families and Communities, to utilize the Early Development Instrument (EDI) to assess children entering PUSD Kindergarten in the 2012-13 school year.

The results indicated a **readiness gap** existed among many children in the Pasadena area, and raised awareness regarding the importance of the first five years. In response, the City adopted an Early Childhood Policy, and established the **Office of the Young Child** and Early Childhood Coordinator position. The Office of the Young Child’s mission is to work towards the realization of Pasadena as an Early Learning City using the Early Childhood policy as its guide.

The Office of the Young Child is hosted by the Pasadena Public Library. It is both symbolic and significant that the Office is located in the Library—a **place that seeks to nurture every child and creates an environment where young children are healthy, safe, and find early success in school and life.**

In January 2018, the City of Pasadena received funding from First 5 LA to hold convenings to present and discuss the EDI results with a wide variety of stake-

holder groups including City and school district officials and staff, nonprofit service providers, and parents/caregivers of children aged 0-5 in the neighborhoods with the greatest EDI vulnerability.

Between April and June of 2018, the Office of the Young Child led 14 community conversations, with a total of 81 parents/caregivers, 63 school district staff, and 57 direct service providers participating.

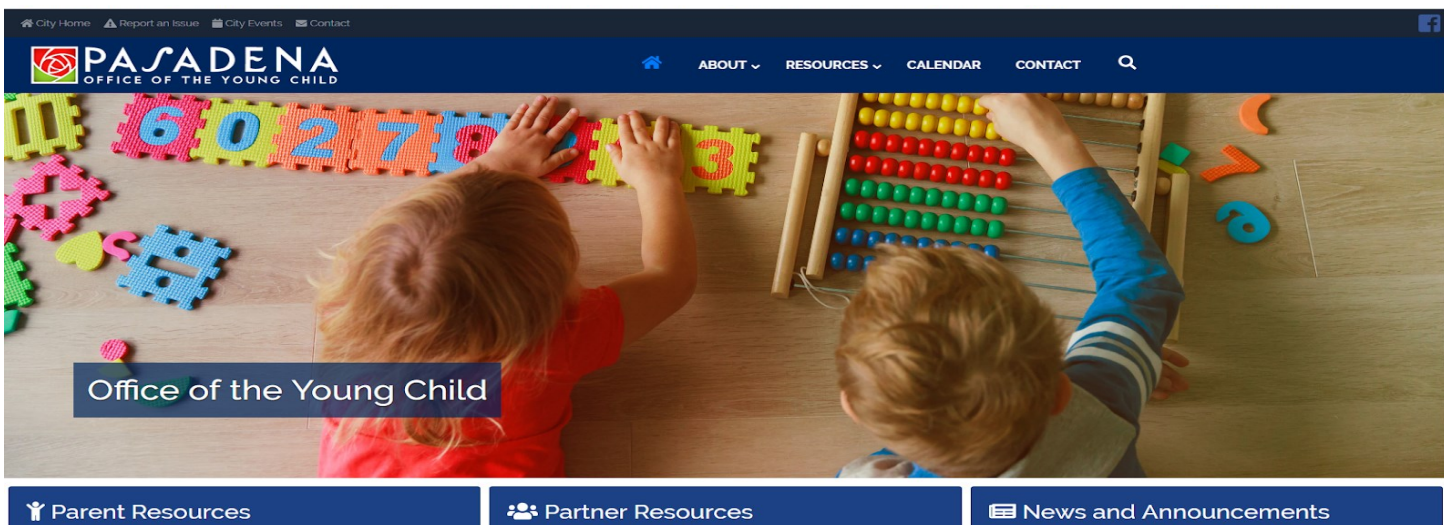
## Powerful Outcomes: Reading-2-Go

*Santa Monica Public Library*

Community partners help the Library connect with children ages 1-4 who are at risk for being unprepared to start kindergarten, and who don’t attend preschool or daycare, through a program offered in English, Spanish and Amharic:

- *Early Literacy Kits* provide families with books, music and toys to enjoy at home
- *Welcome Meetings* model simple, everyday early literacy activities parents can replicate
- *Texting Literacy Tips to Parents:* Based on a Stanford University study and San Francisco Unified School District pilot program, this technique has been shown to work and influence parent behavior to take action every day.
- *Home Libraries* of age-appropriate books are given to the family, creating a print-rich environment that sustains learning

Participating parents have shown gains in understanding the importance of reading aloud, and have more frequent contact with library staff and access to library resources.



## New Tools for Success

### Ontario Public Library

Ontario's City Library has long offered regular early learning experiences and programs for young children and their parents/caregivers, with storytimes developed for different groups from ages 0 through 5.

The library was a pilot location for the **Reimagining School Readiness Toolkit**, developed in partnership between California State Library and the Center for Childhood Creativity (CCC) at the Bay Area Discovery Museum, with funding from the US Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act.

The toolkit, designed for public libraries, provides **research-based strategies to support school readiness programming at libraries**, enhances library staff's work with young children and their families, and provides a variety of tools that allow staff to pick and choose the resources that are right for the local community.

Using the toolkit library staff have made small, but intentional, changes to traditional programming. For example, the new Preschool Prep storytime, for ages 3-5, has served as a bridge for young children preparing to begin their formal schooling, particularly for those whose families neither qualify for Headstart/State Pre-

school nor can afford private preschool. Through a partnership with the Ontario-Montclair School District, this storytime is structured to mirror many of the learning units and book titles used by the school's **transitional kindergarten curriculum**.

Children attending this storytime are exposed not only to the alphabet but to the phonetic sounds each letter makes; they aren't simply recognizing numbers, they are learning larger **mathematical concepts** and vocabulary such as "fewer" and "more."

Staff also incorporate a strong focus on the **social component** for learners at Preschool Prep. Children are

given time to interact, share and play with their peers. Staff use stories to discuss emotions and how to respond to them appropriately, and teach self-regulation. Most importantly, the children's caregivers and parents are engaged to take an active role in reinforcing these concepts during the activity, and at home, equipping them with new tools and resources to help their whole child's growth.



Ontario library staff also created Discovery Days, a quarterly thematic program that introduces young children to **S.T.E.A.M concepts**. A unique part of this program is the visible shift in parents'/caregivers' awareness that their little ones are not too young to begin to understand complex scientific, technological, engineering or mathematical concepts—while still having fun!

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## Traditional Services, Inspiring Results

### Torrance Public Library

Torrance Public Library recognizes that **immersing young children in books and reading** helps them build vocabularies, learn about reading, and get ready to go to school. The library presents fourteen weekly storytime programs for all ages, from "Babytime" and "Toddler time" targeting those specific age groups, to family storytimes during the day and even a "Pajama-Rama" storytime after dinner. During "Babytime," the little ones begin learning **shapes, songs, and the sounds of language** with their caregivers. Programs for toddlers and preschoolers include hands-on crafts, song and dance, and physical activities. **Developmentally-appropriate activities** enable all children to experience different forms of learning, building their brains with skills needed to read and write.

**The adults are learning too:** how to share a book with a child, how to sing with a child, and how to make building these skills part of their daily lives. The storytime also **builds community life**; the caregivers who bring their little ones to the library for stories in the morning regularly move outside to the park for a picnic lunch together. Many had few friendships with other area caregivers until they all met at the library.

Torrance also offers "**Read, Play, and Learn Together Storytime Kits**" which bring together themed books alongside other early literacy-enhancing elements such as toys, puppets, flannel board stories, music and other manipulatives. Families and childcare centers can borrow the kits to explore at home or daycare.

# Strengthening Families with Storytimes in English y Español и русский 和普通话

Yolo County Library



Yolo County Library offers bilingual **English/Spanish** storytimes at all eight of its locations, an **English/Russian** storytime at the Arthur F. Turner Community Library in West Sacramento and an **English/Mandarin** storytime at the Mary L. Stephens - Davis Branch Library. Most of these programs take place in the evening or on weekends to **accommodate working families**. Staff take a **holistic approach** to engaging families and building communities by incorporating the “**Every Child Ready to Read**” tenets of Sing/Talk/Read/Write/Play (see page 10, “Every Child Ready to Read”) and by utilizing the “**Strengthening Families**” framework.

“Strengthening Families” comes from research by the Center for the Study of Social Policy, with input from other key partners like the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Its focus is on enhancing five “Protective Factors” - **parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting/child development, concrete support in times of need and social/emotional competence of children**. These factors strengthen families, promote optimal child development, and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect.



*Yolo storytimes are yielding strong outcomes:*

- 100% of parents/caregivers would recommend storytime to a family member or friend.
- 90% of parents/caregivers report that they are more connected with other families after participating in storytime.
- 94% of parents/caregivers report feeling more confident in themselves as a parent/caregiver after attending storytime.
- 75% of parents and caregivers report that they are reading with their children more often after participating in storytime.
- 72% of parents/caregivers report singing songs with their child more often after participating.

## Play and Learn to Spark Curiosity

Riverside Public Library

The Riverside Public Library provides a library of toys for children and families to borrow. Research shows that playing with toys, games and puzzles helps children **enhance physical abilities, create new vocabulary and enrich cognitive, social and literacy skills**. With a goal of sparking curiosity and providing tools for discovery, the collection offers toys in several categories, for babies and beyond.



### Building

Engineers of the future will love this great selection of building toys. An assortment of building toys with various colors and textures are available.



### Special Needs

Braille blocks, American Sign Language blocks and special textures make this selection of special needs toys fun for everyone.

# Library as Convener

## El Dorado County Library

**Community Hubs (located at five El Dorado County Library sites) are a unique partnership between the El Dorado County Library, First 5 El Dorado, El Dorado County Early Care and Education Planning Council, EDC Child Abuse Prevention Council, EDC Health and Human Services Agency's Maternal Child and Adolescent Health Program and Mental Health Services Act.**

Community Hubs provide prevention and early intervention strategies to help strengthen and support communities by offering access to classes and workshops, local and regional partners and resources and services for expectant parents and families with children ages 0-18.

Analysis of data at the community level, including demographic, economic, educational and even health information and trends allows each Community Hub to prioritize its services based on needs of the individual community. And while the Hubs model allows each site's programming priorities and decisions to be driven by the needs of the community it serves, all five hubs provide access to a multidisciplinary team of **health, literacy, and family engagement specialists.**



Following the axiom **"Every moment is a learning moment for your child,"** at the library families find:

- **Community Health Advocates and Public Health Nurses** to promote healthy practices and preventive healthcare for families. Families find help with the challenges of finding insurance, doctors and dentists, and receive information about activities and habits that contribute to family wellness. Public Health Nurses help to provide assessments, discuss options and connect individuals with community resources.
- **Early Childhood Literacy Staff** to connect parents/caregivers with the tools and resources necessary to help children develop strong language and literacy skills. Using the "Reach Out and Read" milestones, Early Childhood Literacy Specialists teach parents how to understand their child's language development, so they can make sure their child is on track.
- **Family Engagement Specialists** help parents and caregivers better understand their child's behavior and development, and provide access to parenting resources such as the "Ages and Stages" questionnaires. These specialists understand that parenting is part natural and part learned. As children grow and reach new milestones and stages there are new ways and opportunities to connect. When parents and caregivers learn to recognize the feelings behind their children's behaviors, parenting is easier and children benefit from having caregivers who understand the social-emotional skills they need to learn and grow.



## "Early Learning Nation"

### Sacramento Public Library

As a result of a partnership with the Sacramento Public Library, the City of Sacramento received an **"Early Learning Nation"** technical assistance grant through the National League of Cities. This effort will result in a strategic assessment of early learning in the city and **a plan for expanding early learning support through both the library and city services.**

With a dedicated **Early Learning Specialist** position, Sacramento Public Library has been able to create many new tools and programming to expand access to early learning for families with young children.

For example, the library's Raising Readers program refocused bookmobile services to help families in affordable housing overcome barriers to accessing early learning services. The **bookmobile** makes weekly stops at 10 sites, serving a diverse range of residents, including newly arrived immigrants and families at a transitional women's shelter. Staff offer early literacy workshops and pop-up art programs, often in the parking lot or outside, to engage families.

# Lunch at the Library

## Fresno County Library

Without proper nutrition, young children are less likely to reach their learning potential. The Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission partners with the library to provide “**Lunch at the Library**”—free, healthy meals for during summer vacation. Combined with daily enrichment activities, the initiative promotes healthy development by instilling practices of early literacy and early childhood nutrition in an accessible environment. **Over 5000 meals** were served in summer 2018 across six branches.

The Library also offers free books for participants, combating the combined challenges of “food deserts” and “book deserts” in the region.



## Just for babies!

*A special library card just for babies ages 0-35 months highlights to Fresno families the important role of books and interactive programs in the development of their young children.*

# Closing the Word Gap

## San Mateo County Libraries

In 2015, San Mateo County Libraries began offering a free program for low-income families that emphasizes how parents can support their little ones’ brain development through talking, reading and singing. The program, offered in English and Spanish, focuses on developing parents’ talking habits around their young children aged 0-32 months. The program comprises weekly parent classes alongside take-home resources such as baby-friendly board books as well as “**talk pedometers**,” which provide the parents data about how many adult words the baby hears. These reports help **families understand their talking habits and see where there might be room for growth to help develop their child’s language skills.**

Among the 276 families reached by this program so far, 3/4 have shown gains in how much parents speak with their children. Above all, “Talk, Read, Sing” reinforces the power of parents and caregivers in helping their little ones learn and grow, and positions the **library as a resource to support life-long success.**



### Key project partners:

- LENA Research Foundation
- San Mateo Housing Authority
- Institute for Human and Social Development

“It’s well known that increasing conversations between parents and young children builds babies’ brains, improves their social and emotional well-being, and makes them more prepared for school and for life. This program perfectly fits our mission to provide opportunities for growth and enrichment in the communities we serve.”

—Anne-Marie Despain, Director, San Mateo County Libraries



# Revamping Storytime

## Oakland Public Library

Each week Oakland Public Library invites caregivers with toddlers aged 1-3 to come **play and learn** in a friendly setting. The *Play Café* offers a 90-minute program with a loose, but consistent, structure that helps participants feel welcome whether they can stay for only a few minutes or enjoy the entire activity. The library provides coffee and tea to **help adults feel at home as the children enjoy free play with trucks, dolls, blocks and new friends.**



Then the toys are put away, and a librarian leads everyone in songs and rhymes with hand motions, in both



English and Spanish. They might pass out scarves or musical instruments to shake, reinforcing the rhythms of speech and helping little ones hear all the sounds that make up words.

The librarian reads some short books chosen especially for this age range, modeling for caregivers how to engage their children with books. Adults receive reassurance that it's normal for children to wander a little as their attention spans develop, and encouragement to build on the storytime as they head out the door after a family snack and more free play:

*"Your children are benefiting by being in the room with you and the storytime.*

Babies learn SO much in their first years: just by being in earshot, your little one is being exposed to rhythm, melody, and enthusiasm about reading. They may surprise you at home by dancing to a song they first heard in storytime. You can read the same books at home, or try singing at bathtime or in the car."

This revamped storytime saw a **300 percent increase** in attendance by caregivers at two branches where attendance had historically been very low. Interview findings show that 59 percent of respondents had never attended a children's program before the *Play Café* and **71% of caregivers reported they read more to their children after attending *Play Café*.**

# Small Library, Big Impact

## Riverside County Library

In addition to weekly **Baby and Preschool Storytimes** at the tiny 2500 square foot Calimesa Branch of the Riverside County Library System, the library staff make sure to get out of the building and into the community. Staff present monthly storytimes at the local Head Start preschool in Yucaipa, reaching **over 120 children ages 1-3** each month. Staff share stories and songs, and send a simple early literacy activity home for children to do with their families.

The library also offers **"pop-up storytime"** at the park to engage children during the summer.



## Reach Out and Read!

At Camarena Memorial Public Library in Calexico, the library partners with *Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo* through the national program "Reach Out and Read." Through this program, pediatricians give a book to each child between six months and five years old during every well-child visit and "prescribe" reading and provide literacy information to parents. **Last year, the program reached 826 children.**



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# Kindergarten Prep

## San Diego County Library

Early childhood support at the library can take many forms. Sometimes it's as simple as creating an inviting space for family learning. Eight branches of San Diego County Library offer "**Discovery Zones**" where children ages 0-5 can hone their early literacy skills by talking, singing, playing, reading and writing with their caregivers. The Zones, developed and funded in **partnership with First 5 San Diego**, feature interactive furniture with

activities that help build these skills. Each branch's customized Discovery Zone includes items like an alphabet tracing table to encourage writing, a play structure to encourage play, a "Roll-a-Song" Activity to encourage singing, LEGO and magnet walls to encourage early learning and plenty of books for little ones to enjoy in comfortable reading areas.

San Diego County Library also offers a **structured program** to help children get ready for school. With 40% of children ages 3-5 not enrolled in preschool, the Library's "**Kindergarten Gear Up**" helps to bridge the gap in school preparation. Working with educators and students at **San Diego State University**, youth

*"Early literacy development is closely linked to a child's earliest experiences with books and interactive play with parents and caregivers," said Kim Medeiros, executive director of First 5 San Diego. "We're excited to give families a place for such positive experiences."*



services librarians at the library created a curriculum and experience that allows families to prepare their children for kindergarten. The curriculum, taught in 10 sessions, provides an introduction to school readiness skills. Parents are also engaged with enrichment, learning from guest presenters on topics related to parenting and literacy, as well as how to better support their children on their journey to kindergarten and lifelong learning.

As of 2018, **more than 1000** have attended the program. Families that completed the program gained confidence and understanding about how to apply new learning skills to **improve kindergarten readiness**. The program, which was initially funded with a federal grant through the State Library, also provided training for staff to bring understanding of child development and needs for school readiness to all existing programming for 0-5 children, expanding the impact of the program to all library offerings.

## Serving Storytime

### Tulare County Library

A special library program in Tulare County brings literacy support and family bonding to young children left behind by incarcerated parents. The library works with the mothers and fathers to promote reading to their children via video.

The program helps develop adult literacy as many of the parents struggle with reading and writing. **For some of the parents, this is their first experience of being able to share a story with their children.** The children also receive a copy of the book being read by their parents.

It builds an **intergenerational connection** to support learning and literacy in the children. When children see their parents reading, it builds an interest and awareness of the importance of literacy. And most importantly, it **strengthens the parent-child bond, leading to better outcomes for both family members.** **Grandparents are invited to participate, too.**

*Susanna Reyes, Tulare County Sheriff's Office Inmate Program Manager:*

*"The [incarcerated] father told me that the foster parents calmed his young children by playing the recording of him reading.*

*"It was an amazing opportunity for these children, who were dealing with so much change and separation, to be able to hear and see their father reading to them, and hold the book that their father was reading (in Spanish, their first language). When he was released and reunited with his children, it was a very powerful tool to help them reconnect. I am extremely proud of this program, and I see and experience the hope, inspiration, motivation and love that goes into every recording.*

*"This program is making the difference."*

# Every Child Ready to Read

## Los Angeles Public Library

At Los Angeles Public Library, “**Read, Baby, Read!**” helps to provide new (and expecting) parents with everything they need to develop early literacy skills in their little ones. It also helps parents understand the essential role early reading plays in their child’s development. The library **partners with hospitals, health care providers, daycare centers and early childhood education centers** to distribute kits for families, which include baby’s first library card, a book, t-shirt, socks, blanket, diaper bag and brochure with early literacy tips.



Another program, **We Read Together**, equips preschool children ages 0-5 with a head start on reading and writing by teaching their parents and caregivers how to read aloud and build critical pre-literacy skills. At the Central Library and all 72 neighborhood branches, children’s librarians teach parents/caregivers proactive ways of

reading to children by introducing techniques and fun books that increase vocabulary, print awareness, letter awareness, phonemic awareness and narrative skills. Children who master these concepts as **preschoolers are prepared to learn how to read** when they begin formal school instruction.



These programs promote habits for lifelong reading by fostering literacy in the Library and in the home. They are modeled on the nationally acclaimed “**Every Child Ready to Read**” program developed by the Public Library Association and the Association for Library Service to Children in collaboration with the **National Institute of Child Health and Human Development**, a division of the National Institutes of Health.

## CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Public libraries provide free, readily-available resources for people and families of all backgrounds and walks of life, including those with special needs. Many California public libraries practice inclusive storytimes for children affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder and developmental disabilities, allowing children with special needs opportunities to socialize, learn and have fun. Some of these library systems include **San Jose Public Library, San Francisco Public Library, Santa Monica Public Library, San Diego Public Library** and **Los Angeles Public Library**.



Sensory storytimes help autistic children and their families feel **welcome and engaged** by tailoring the storytime to their specific needs, whether it is having the storytime take place while the library is not open to the public, adjusting the lights, showing a visual schedule or including fidget toys and equipment to provide stimulation, regulate emotions and improve concentration.



Libraries also include resources and services for children with accessibility needs. Many provide books in alternative formats such as electronic, audio, large print and Braille, as well as assistive equipment and technology. In fall 2018, the San Diego Public Library @Joan A Irwin Jacobs Common opened the **Binford I CAN, Too! Center** within the children’s library on the first floor. The dedicated space is specially equipped with adjustable height tables, a large print keyboard, a desktop magnifier and software such as screen reading software JAWS and Read & Write to support those with learning difficulties or requiring dyslexia tools.



Photos: Participating Libraries & Terry Lorant Photography, California State Library LSTA Grant



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