

New York State's Court-Based Children's Center Literacy Project

Creating Literacy-Rich

Children's Centers

Promising Practices From

the Children's Centers

The Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children was established in 1988 to address the problems of children whose lives are shaped by New York State's courts. The Commission is chaired by Chief Judge Judith Kaye and its members include judges, lawyers, physicians, and state and local officials.

The Commission has spearheaded several reform initiatives that have improved the lives of New York's children, including the nation's first statewide system of Children's Centers in the courts. In 2001, more than 30 Centers in New York State's courts served over 50,000 children. The vast majority of these children live in low-income families. Less than ten percent are enrolled in any early childhood program.

The Children's Centers provide a two-pronged service. They provide a safe, supervised, supportive early childhood environment for children, enabling their caregivers to attend to court business. And they provide a site to connect children to essential services such as Head Start, WIC and Food Stamps.

The Children's Center Literacy Project creates a literacy-rich environment in the Centers. The program features the gift of a new, age-appropriate book for every child who visits the Center and a literacy-enhanced curriculum that promotes activities focused on reading readiness. Golden Books Family Entertainment donated 40,000 books to sustain the program during its first year of operation. Partners in this initiative include the America Reads Challenge and the agencies that operate the Children's Centers.

Immerse Children In Literacy

- ◆ Create a cheerful, colorful environment that promotes literacy
- ◆ Label items and areas in room
- ◆ Provide a variety of writing instruments
- ◆ Create comfortable reading areas with books at child's eye level

Make Reading Fun

- ◆ Encourage staff and volunteers to use language and reading in every activity
- ◆ Foster literacy through music, dramatic play, storytelling and computer activities
- ◆ Incorporate visual and written materials in cooking and science activities

Use Books As A Bridge To Home-Based Literacy

- ◆ Give every child a new book with a personalized bookplate
- ◆ Send child and parent home with a literacy activity that encourages the use of words
- ◆ Provide parents with information about their local library
- ◆ Provide parents with information about literacy projects for children and adults

➔ **Enlist** court staff including judges and court officers to read to children on their breaks

➔ **Recruit** college students who can earn work study credits for reading to children

➔ **Link** Centers to Even Start programs and other early childhood and literacy programs

➔ **Encourage** community service providers and groups to provide incentives to volunteers such as free memberships and services

➔ **Establish** strong relationships with local public libraries for special activities and book donations

➔ **Secure** book donations from publishers, corporations and others

➔ **Sponsor** book drives with local Bar Associations and other community groups

The Value of Literacy

Reading regularly to a child without question fosters that child's later literacy. Promoting reading readiness can enhance a child's prospects for school success and help break the cycle of poverty. Engaging parents in promoting their child's literacy can strengthen the bond with their child and improve their own reading skills.

Research on literacy and language development reveals that children in lower-income families are exposed to half as many spoken words as children in higher-income families. By age six, children from higher-income families have learned 20,000 words, while children from lower-income families have learned only 3,000 words. It would take 41 hours a week in addition to school in a literacy-rich environment to close this word gap.

A major obstacle to literacy for low-income children is the scarcity of books and appropriate reading material. Studies also show that parents in low-income families are eight times more likely to read and share books with their young children when provided with books and encouragement.

The Children's Center Literacy Project views the time children spend in the court-based Children's Centers as an opportunity to immerse children in a literacy-rich environment and to encourage parents to stimulate their child's language and literacy development.

Children's Center Locations

Albany County Family Court 602 Broadway, Albany, NY
Bronx Family Court 900 Sheridan Ave., Bronx, NY
Bronx Housing Court 111-8 Grand Concourse, Bronx, NY
Broome County Family Court Hawley St., Binghamton, NY
Buffalo City Court 50 Delaware Ave., Buffalo, NY
Dutchess County Family Court 50 Market St., Poughkeepsie, NY
Erie County Family Court 25 Delaware Ave., Buffalo, NY
Genesee County Family Court 1 Main St., Batavia, NY
Kings County Criminal Court 120 Schermerhorn St., Brooklyn, NY
Kings County Family Court 283 Adams St., Brooklyn, NY
Monroe County Hall of Justice 99 Exchange St., Rochester, NY
Nassau County District Court 99 Main St., Hempstead, NY
Nassau County Family Court 1200 Old Country Rd., Westbury, NY
New Rochelle Family Court 420 North Ave., New Rochelle, NY
New York Civil & Housing Court 111 Center St., New York, NY
New York Family Court 60 Lafayette St., New York, NY
Oneida County Courthouse 200 Elizabeth St., Utica, NY
Onondaga County Courthouse 401 Montgomery St., Syracuse, NY
Orange County Family Court 255 Main St., Goshen, NY
Otsego County Family Court County Center, Cooperstown, NY
Queens Civil & Housing Court 89-17 Sutpin Blvd., Jamaica, NY
Queens County Family Court 89-14 Parsons Blvd., Jamaica, NY
Red Hook Community Justice Ctr. 88 Visitation Pl., Brooklyn, NY
Rensselaer County Family Court 1504 Fifth Ave., Troy, NY
Richmond County Family Court 51 Stuyvesant Pl., Staten Island, NY
Suffolk County Family Court 400 Carleton Ave., Central Islip, NY
Sullivan County Family Court 100 North St., Monticello, NY
Ulster County Family Court 16 Lucas Ave., Kingston, NY
Westchester County Family Court 111 MLK Blvd., White Plains, NY
Yonkers Family Court 53 South Broadway, Yonkers, NY

For information about the New York State Children's Center Literacy Project, to volunteer at your local Children's Center or to donate books please contact the:

Children's Centers Program • (845) 486-6520



Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children

Promoting Literacy

Lessons from New York State's Court-Based Literacy Project



"Our court-based Children's Centers provide a perfect opportunity to start a child on that essential road to literacy."

*New York State Chief Judge
Judith S. Kaye*