

## From the Director, Donna DiFillippo

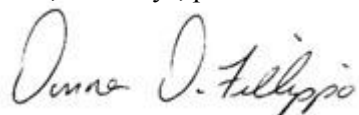
Oh what a year! Raising A Reader MA is going through an exciting period of growth. Over the last 18 months we've added three new communities – Brockton, Lowell and Plymouth. Over the next three months our program team is ramping up to serve as many as 3,000 new children in up to six new communities including Holyoke, Lynn, New Bedford and Springfield. This means we are thoughtfully adding staff, shoring up internal data systems, and building local program management capacities in those Raising A Reader MA communities where there is less concentrated need for our services. I expect by this time next year we will truly be a statewide organization serving more than 10,000 high need children and families every year!

Not only are we growing, but our core model is evolving to maximize our impact. Most notable is the addition of a five part, evidence-based workshop series that helps high need parents practice interactive, Dialogic Reading strategies the academic literature has shown is effective in helping children develop vocabulary, verbal fluency and auditory comprehension (Chrisler, Alison and Thomas Ling. 2011. *What Works for Early Language and Literacy Development*, Child Trends Fact Sheet, [www.childtrends.org](http://www.childtrends.org)).

None of this would be possible without our extraordinary supporters. We are so grateful for the more than 25 corporate and foundation sponsors (you can see the complete list in the “About Us” section of our website, [www.raisingareaderma.org](http://www.raisingareaderma.org)) that have contributed nearly \$500,000 to our mission. These institutional donors are complemented by nearly 500 individuals that have contributed nearly \$300,000 over the last year to help us grow – ranging from the donors who give \$25 to support a member of the Raising A Reader MA cycling team in the annual Rodman Ride for Kids; donors who are consistently giving \$12.50 a month, *every month*, to support one child on his/her path to early literacy; and our major donors who have given at least \$1,000 to support our important work over the last year. This spring please look for new opportunities to directly experience the impact our work has on high need families. And, as always, thank you!

As we prepare for our Spring Into Reading Annual Fund campaign, which kicks off in April, we wanted to give you, our donors and friends, details on how your support is helping families in high need communities break the cycle of low literacy through reading together at home. Browse this short report to learn how we are using your philanthropic dollars to make a difference for children, families and communities across the Commonwealth.

And, as always, please do not hesitate to call if you have any questions!



Donna Di Fillippo, Executive Director



Since Executive Director Donna DiFillippo launched Raising A Reader MA in Chelsea in 2006, we've grown to serve nearly 8,500 high need children and families in more than fifteen communities across the Commonwealth.

PS: Please remember! Raising A Reader MA is a 501-c-3 organization (EIN 80-0297898) and donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by the law.

## Raising A Reader MA Overview

Raising A Reader Massachusetts' mission is to give every young child (ages 0-5) an equal opportunity for achievement by engaging parents in a routine of daily book sharing with their children. Our goal is to help families develop and sustain early literacy routines that contribute to their child's lifelong success.

35% of children enter kindergarten unprepared to learn, according to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. **This achievement gap can be as high as 60% for the children served by Raising A Reader MA.** We are directly addressing this need by annually working with the parents and early educators of more than 8,000 children to deliver the following services:

1. Our signature red bag book rotation program, which puts more than 100 high quality, developmentally and culturally appropriate books in the hands of children and families to share at home each year,
2. Multilingual workshops, training tools, and other support services that train parents in Dialogic Reading strategies so they can read and share stories at home in a way that supports their children's pre-literacy development,
3. Training and support for early education and care providers in the development of children's pre-literacy skills through storytelling, book sharing, family empowerment, and related activities.

Raising A Reader MA offers these services primarily, but not exclusively, through partnerships with school- and community-based early education programs and family child care centers in high need communities.



Raising A Reader MA's 2011 Summer Story Time in the Parks activities, funded by Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Massachusetts, prevented summer learning loss for more than 400 children in each of the five regions we serve.

## Expanding the core program model to deepen parents' Dialogic Reading skills

In the 2009-2010 program year, Raising A Reader MA started to lay the ground work to both expand its reach and deepen its impact on high need children and families across the Commonwealth. The growth was inspired by the results of a study completed in 2010 by researchers at the University of Texas Health Sciences Center with funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. This four-year, randomly controlled evaluation of the effectiveness of the Raising A Reader MA program with the addition of an evidence-based, five-part Dialogic Reading workshop series showed that, when implemented with fidelity, the program model has **statistically significant effects on five key drivers of student lifetime achievement**: vocabulary, grammar, phonological awareness, letter knowledge, and memory for language skills. This research study complements other program evaluation research that shows the program model also has a documented impact on school readiness by increasing oral communication, and executive functioning (e.g. ability to sit still during a story).

**In the 2010-2011 program year, Raising A Reader MA introduced the five-part Dialogic Reading workshop series as a new component of the core program model through a small pilot test in the community of Chelsea.** The goal of the pilot was to develop systems for efficiently and effectively leveraging the intensive workshop series as a resource for engaging parents in strengthening their Dialogic Reading skills. **Based on the success of this pilot the five-part series was introduced to all of the Raising A Reader MA communities starting in September 2011.** Significant organizational effort is being given to monitoring and evaluating the implementation of this new program component to ensure it is implemented efficiently and with integrity.

Also in the 2010-2011 program year, Raising A Reader MA pilot tested in Chelsea the role of Parent Ambassador as a strategy for improving outreach to hard-to-reach communities, and expanding the range of available supports to families seeking to improve their home book sharing routines. Parent Ambassadors live in the communities we serve and have benefitted as parents from the Raising A Reader MA program. During the pilot year the role of Parent Ambassador was defined to include peer outreach, peer support and program support in their churches, schools and neighborhoods.

## Expanding the number of children benefitting from Raising A Reader MA

Raising A Reader MA is effective. The evidence shows that the introduction of the five-part Dialogic Reading workshop series deepens our impact on children's lifelong achievement.

Buoyed by the successful expansion of the core program model, Raising A Reader MA is also exploring three strategies for multiplying the number of children and families who benefit from our program.

**1. Serving children not enrolled in formal early learning programs:** With funding from BNY Mellon, in the 2010-2011 program year Raising A Reader MA teamed up with two community-based organizations in Chelsea that offer adult basic education (Centro Latino, Intergenerational Literacy Program) to implement the red bag book rotation program and parent training as part of their instructional programs for families. Through this pilot test we successfully served nearly 100 children and families who would not otherwise have access to our services, and developed a rubric for initiating and maintaining partnerships with community-based child and family service organizations. In the current program year we are taking the lessons learned from the Chelsea pilot and developing implementation partnerships with teen parenting programs, faith-based organizations and other centers for adult learning in many of the other communities we serve.

**2. Expanding into Gateway Communities:** Raising A Reader MA, working with support from organizations that include the Edith Glick Schoolman Children's Foundation, the Sheehan Family Foundation and the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley, was introduced in Brockton and Lowell in the 2010-2011 program year. In each community Raising A Reader MA successfully served 500 high need children in public preschool programs. Mid-way through the 2011-2012 program year, the number of children being served between these two communities is up to nearly 1,600, and implementation partnerships have expanded to include community-based centers of early education and care such as Head Start and Early Intervention.

**3. Expanding into new communities with less intense need:** In the current program year Raising A Reader MA is pilot testing a satellite community model intended to deliver our core program in communities with (a) greater internal implementation capacities, and (b) smaller pockets of high need children. This pilot is taking place in Plymouth, where the Department of Early Education and Care's Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) grantee is serving 100 children whose family income is low enough to qualify for subsidized child care vouchers. The CFCE partner staff has been trained by Raising A Reader MA staff and is expected to take full responsibility for (a) implementing the red bag book rotation program, and (b) organizing and delivering the Dialogic Reading workshops series. Raising A Reader MA staff do site visits and offer implementation support as needed.

Our work to expand (a) the way we reach high need children and (b) the number of communities we serve is informing Raising A Reader MA's nascent engagement in the Commonwealth's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grant. Through strategic discussions with the Commissioner of the Department of Early Education and Care and other stakeholders, Raising A Reader MA is preparing to collaborate with CFCE grantees in communities like Holyoke, Lynn, New Bedford, and Springfield to deliver Raising A Reader MA's unique program of early literacy development. With support from the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grant, Raising A Reader MA could be expanding to serve up to 3,000 new children and families within the next year.



Participating in community-wide literacy events, like Somerville's Family Literacy Day, is one of many ways Raising A Reader MA reinforces its mission of providing families with the tools and the support needed to maintain a habit of reading together at home.

## Process and impact objectives

Mid-way through the FYE 2012 program year, Raising A Reader MA is on track to meet its programmatic goals.

Our partnerships are stable (Table 1). We are currently working with 92 implementation partners across the five regions in which we work; this is a 7% increase over figures for the previous year. These include public preschools, Head Start programs, early learning centers, or other community-based family support programs. Our partners offer 423 implementation sites (e.g. classrooms, playgroups) where Raising A Reader MA is offered as part of the early literacy instructional program. In addition, we continue to work with 88 family child care providers; we have changed the structure of these partnerships in the last two years, but these high need programs remain important to our work. We are currently serving 8,164 children, an 8% increase over the previous year.

**Table 1: Raising A Reader MA FYE 2012 Service Numbers**

Community	# implementation partners	# classrooms/ playgroup implementing Raising A Reader MA	# family child care provider partners	# children currently being served in each program
Lawrence	19	101	28	1,778
Greater Boston 1	27	98	24	2,086
Greater Boston 2	30	127	22	2,639
Brockton	8	64	0	982
Lowell	8	33	14	661
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>8,146</b>

In addition, we are serving an additional 100 high need children in Plymouth through the pilot test of the satellite community model.

## Mid-year progress towards process objectives

The success of Raising A Reader MA's work lies in our ability to ensure partners are implementing the core program model with fidelity. This is assessed through the monitoring of the following measures:

- The percentage of staff at participating Raising A Reader MA implementation sites who participate in Raising A Reader MA training
- The percentage of implementation sites facilitating the red bag book rotation program and related instructional activities with integrity
- The percentage of families who receive multilingual orientation materials about Dialogic Reading and the red bag book rotation program
- The percentage of children enrolled at participating Raising A Reader MA public preschools and early learning centers with access to high quality, culturally and developmentally appropriate books at home and at school through the weekly red bag book rotation program
- The percentage of communities offering Dialogic Reading workshops that are accessible to eligible families
- Average parent participation in Dialogic Reading workshops and training

At this stage in the 2011-2012 program year, Raising A Reader MA and its implementation partners are on track to achieve its program objectives (Table 2).

**Table 2: Raising A Reader MA FYE 2012 mid-year progress in meeting implementation partner outputs**

Objective	Goal	FYE 2012 Baseline	FYE 2012 Mid-year Status
Are partners implementing the red bag book rotation program and related instructional activities with at least 90% fidelity? <sup>1</sup>	90%	85%	82%
Did 100% of staff at partner programs participate in the Raising A Reader MA orientation? <sup>2</sup>	100%	100%	100%

<sup>1</sup> Fidelity of implementation is assessed through site visits and other observations. Improvement plans, with extra support from Raising A Reader MA program staff, are being introduced to the 18% of sites that are not currently implementing with fidelity with the intention of bringing them to full fidelity by May 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Staff at implementation sites is trained in early literacy and brain development, and the logistics of Raising A Reader MA (e.g. the process of rotating the red book bags, etc.).

What makes Raising A Reader MA so effective is the combination of the (a) weekly red bag book rotation program, which puts more than 100 high quality, culturally appropriate books in the hands of children and families every year, and (b) the myriad workshops, training and family support services we offer to help families develop, practice and maintain a habit of home book sharing using Dialogic Reading techniques. Table 3 shows our mid-year success in reaching our objectives specifically related to our work with families and children.

**Table 3: Raising A Reader MA FYE 2012 mid-year progress in meeting child and family outputs**

Objective	Goal	FYE 2012 Baseline	FYE 2012 Mid-year Status
Do 100% of children in partner programs have access to high quality books through the red bag book rotation program?	100%	100%	100%
Did 100% of families receive the multilingual Dialogic Reading DVD? <sup>3</sup>	100%	100%	100%
Is the five-part Dialogic Reading workshop series being offered in all communities and to all eligible parents? <sup>4</sup>	100%	N/A	100%
Is an average of 25% of eligible parents attending the five-part Dialogic Reading orientation and workshop series? <sup>5</sup>	25%	N/A	25%

<sup>3</sup> 100% of families have access to our multi-lingual parent training video either on DVD or through YouTube. *Storytime: How to Share Books with your Child* (currently available in English, Spanish, and Portuguese) gives parents concrete strategies for sharing books with their children and finding time in their busy schedules to do so. By March we expect to have more than doubled the number of languages on our DVD to reflect our diverse communities; we are wrapping up translation in Haitian-Creole, Cape Verdean Creole, Arabic, and Khmer.

<sup>4</sup> The five-part Dialogic Workshop series has been launched in each of the individual communities served by Raising A Reader MA. To achieve economy of scale and maximize convenience for families, the workshop series is being offered in multiple settings in each community. For example, 59% of our center-based implementation partners, like the Early Learning Center in Chelsea, are offering the workshop series. Other examples of where the workshop series is being offered include:

- Head Start programs
- Public libraries

- Centers of adult education
- Brockton Public Schools' Parent Academy
- CFCE playgroups

All parents at all implementation sites in a community are invited to each of the training sessions in their community, regardless of whether their child is formally affiliated with the workshop site. For example, all families in Chelsea whose children are participating in the red bag book rotation program in any of our implementation sites are invited to attend the workshops at the Early Learning Center. By offering the Dialogic Reading workshops at a variety of times, locations and languages in each community we expect to maximize parent participation.

In the first three months of the program year, we held 66 trainings; this is more than half delivered throughout the entire 2010-2011 program year and therefore a strong indicator we will exceed our FYE 2012 training goals. We expect this number to grow exponentially in the last six months of the program year, as our parents and partners are fully engaged in the Raising A Reader MA routine.

At this time 852 duplicated parents have attended our trainings. Our experience shows that attendance grows with time. For example, at a training in December at the Greater Lawrence Community Action Council Child Care Center 15 parents attended; the next in the series in late-January attracted 22 parents; this included some who returned after the prior session, and some who had never attended before. This reflects a trend we noticed when we piloted the five-part series in Chelsea last year, and reinforces our assertion that we will meet our FYE 2012 expectations for the percentage of eligible families who participate.

<sup>5</sup> The Texas study that informed Raising A Reader MA's adoption of the five-part evidence-based Dialogic Reading workshop series showed that, if an average of 25% of eligible parents attend the trainings, then a tipping point is reached in terms of benefitting the entire child and family at the implementation partner site.

## Progress towards impact objectives

In addition to reaching a large number of children, families and early education providers, our combination of services, resources, and training has the desired result of increasing the percentage of families who report having a family routine of home book sharing.

Combined, these program outputs will result in improvements in the percentage of families who report reading with their children at home at least three times a week. Raising A Reader MA's specific impact objective is to increase to 75, the percentage of parents who participate in Raising A Reader MA programs who report reading to their children at home at least three times a week. This has historically been measured through parent pre-/post-test surveys conducted on a representative sample of families whose children are enrolled in Raising A Reader MA implementation sites (Table 4).

**Table 4 Raising A Reader MA progress towards impact objectives**

	Goal	After completing Raising A Reader MA
Parents who reported sharing books at home during the 2010-2011 program year	75%	67%
Parents who reported sharing books at home during the 2011-2012 program year	75%	To be reported in Spring 2012

## Wrapping up the program year

Over the next several months, our staff will be working with our parent ambassadors and implementation partners to schedule and conduct the rest of the Dialogic Reading workshops in our target communities. We will also plan, upon request, special blue bag ceremonies to signal the end of the academic year. During blue bag ceremonies children are given a Raising A Reader MA book bag, complete with books donated by Reading Tree and other partners, which they can keep as they move on to kindergarten or other learning environments.