

# South Carolina First Steps e-Spotlight

June 3, 2016



## Dorchester County First Steps & Dorchester County Library: Working Together to Ensure Every Child is Ready to Read

Every Child Ready to Read® is a free program housed in the Dorchester County Library for any parent or caregiver of children aged zero to five who live in Dorchester County. The objective of the program is to provide literacy training through activity toolkits that families can take home to effectively introduce books and related activities to young children. For the past two years, Dorchester County First Steps (DCFS) has partnered with the Dorchester County library to fund and distribute these Every Child Ready to Read® toolkits from the two library branch locations in Summerville and St. George.



A picture of an Every Child Ready to Read® toolkit currently available at the Dorchester County Library.

Over two years ago, DCFS Executive Director, Karen Hill, noticed that the educational kits that the library was using for children were old, worn, and dated. As a result, children and families were not “checking out” the kits and, therefore, not accessing the resources they contained. After speaking with library staff, Ms. Hill learned that the library could not afford to update the kits and offered to help sponsor and implement a new family literacy resource through DCFS. Together, DCFS and the Dorchester County Library decided on the Every Child Ready to Read® (ECRR) parent education initiative to replace the existing kits.

The ECRR toolkit empowers libraries to assume an essential role in supporting early literacy within a community. Through the literacy resources contained in these toolkits, parents, grandparents, childcare providers, and preschool teachers use five simple research-based practices—talking, singing, reading, writing, and playing—to develop language and pre-reading skills in children. Each toolkit has a literacy focus that the books and activities are based on such as print motivation, letter knowledge, phonological awareness, and vocabulary. Toolkits also have different themes, including animals, science, health & nutrition, and social-emotional development.

Since introducing the initiative in July of 2015, over 150 new ECRR toolkits have been made available to children and families and circulation of the kits has increased dramatically. According to library circulation records, as of May 31, 2016, 311 Dorchester County families have accessed the new toolkits and 30 families have participated in ECRR training workshops. In 2016-2017, DCFS, in partnership with the library, plans to expand on and improve this initiative. They will be adding

***“Having parents teach specific literacy skills to their children was two times more effective than having parents listen to their children read and six times more effective than encouraging parents to read to their children.”***

*- The Effect of Family Literacy Interventions on Children's Acquisition of Reading, 2006*

more toolkits with topic areas selected based on feedback from parents. DCFS and the library also plan to hold more group sessions where staff will teach parents and caregivers specific activities to help their children develop key language and literacy skills. There will be a “Kit of the Month” to spotlight its contents and generate excitement around the initiative. In addition, data has indicated that the toolkits targeted to newborns and babies have lower circulation rates than the ones for children ages 2-5. In response, they will direct more effort into promoting the kits to parents of this age group and instructing them how to use them.

According to a study conducted by the National Institute of Family Literacy, “Having parents teach specific literacy skills to their children was two times more effective than having parents listen to their children read and six times more effective than encouraging parents to read to their children.” DCFS and the Dorchester County Library’s partnership for Every Child Ready to Read® gives parents and caregivers the tools to teach their children critical literacy skills that will help prepare them to enter school.

**For more information on the partnership between Dorchester County First Steps and Dorchester County Library, please contact DCFS Executive Director Karen Hill at 843-873-3507. For more information on the Every Child Ready to Read Initiative, visit their website by [clicking here](#).**