

## ATTACHMENT A

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# Wee Connect!

and Stay & Play

### Background

Wee Connect! and Stay & Play is a pilot program funded by the Early Learning for Families Initiative (ELF 2.0) through the Informal Caregivers grant, a resource to assess and build connections with non-parent and non-paid caregivers for young children in our community.

Wee Connect! and Stay & Play combines the current San José Public Library Storytime model with an additional curriculum designed to provide informal caregivers (e.g. grandparents, aunts, uncles, neighbors) with tools to knowledgeably and confidently support their child's optimal development. Program participants also have the opportunity to connect with their fellow peers in attendance, with library staff and resources, and with the different guest community organizations who visit every week.

### Wee Connect! and Stay & Play Goals:

- Support informal caregivers and empower them to be actively engaged in the healthy development of the children in their care;
- Develop support systems to reduce caregiver isolation and increase exposure to opportunities to be part of a supportive community;
- Identify best practices through the pilot that can be replicated at the other 24 SJPL locations with a focus on intentionality and support specifically for the informal caregiver.

To best meet these goals and ensure that the program's approach meets the needs of informal caregivers, the following Learning Questions were considered:

- What types of resources or supports do informal caregivers need in our community?
- What are effective outreach strategies for reaching informal caregivers?
- What are the most promising learning strategies to engage informal caregivers?
- How do we reduce isolation/increase socialization for informal caregivers in our community?
- How do we keep informal caregivers engaged and continuing to participate in our learning community?

Wee Connect connects informal caregivers to library resources, to best practices on strengthening their connection to the child, to fellow community members in attendance, and to the different guest community organizations on a weekly basis. This wealth of information and access is a way to support our youngest community members by supporting the adults in their lives.

Through this program, SJPL supports informal caregivers so that they may be able to support the healthy development of the children in their care, create a sense of community through a dedicated space to learn, share and interact with other caregivers in a safe and welcoming environment.

## **Pilot Program Summary**

The 6-week Wee Connect! and Stay & Play pilot took place once a week from March 6, 2019 – April 10, 2019 at Educational Park Branch Library.

### *Format & Curriculum*

The program synthesizes the current San José Public Library Storytime model—already popular and accessible to informal caregivers—with an additional curriculum informed by the *Reimagining School Readiness Toolkit* from the Center for Childhood Creativity at the Bay Area Discovery Museum. The Toolkit is an evidence-based resource created for librarians to help families prepare children ages 0 to 8 for success in school and in life.

The topics covered are divided into three categories:

- Talk & Play
- Science & Math
- Body & Brain

Weeks 1 to 3 of the program were each devoted to covering one topic, with the cycle repeating (with some adjustments and modifications) for Weeks 4 to 6.

Librarians developed talking points and activities for each of the 3 topics above. Wee Connect! presenters weave the talking points and activities throughout the program: they introduce and preview the topic for the audience at the beginning the program; they use talking points during and after Storytime to engage and inform the audience; they model skills and concepts for the audience through intentionally curated songs and activities; and they extend learning into Stay & Play with intentionally designed activities connected to the week's topic.

### *Community Connections and Stay & Play*

Stay & Play is a vital part of the Wee Connect! program, providing multiple opportunities for connection, advocacy, and access for all participants.

In order to increase informal caregivers' access to relevant community resources, Wee Connect! brings in a different community organization each week for a meet and greet. Program participants have the opportunity to talk to representatives and learn about resources and materials during the Stay & Play portion. For this 6-week session, we hosted SOMOS Mayfair, Children's Discovery Museum, Department of Transportation, SJPL Early Education Services, Census Bureau, and Grail Family Services.

Stay & Play is also a vital opportunity to establish a trusted relationship between library staff and informal caregivers and children. Stay & Play is a time for library staff to intentionally strengthen connections with program participants by being present and available for questions, conversation, and interaction with families. During the pilot program's run, library staff used Stay & Play as an opportunity to directly solicit audience feedback about the program and refine their strategies and materials for the following week.

Finally, Stay & Play provides opportunities for peer-to-peer connection, helping to further establish a safe, welcoming, and supportive learning community.

## Early Findings

Feedback surveys filled out by program participants indicated:

- 88% of participants felt more supported as a parent or caregiver in their community
- 85% of participants began to spend more time reading, looking at books, and telling stories with the child in their care after the program
- 85% of participants became more aware of daily opportunities to be engaged in helping the child in their care to learn

### *Ages of children served:*

74% of child participants were between ages 1-3. Therefore, Wee Connect curriculum, talking points, and activities can best serve the specific needs of the toddler population and their caregivers by providing information focused on child developmental milestones and modeling developmentally-appropriate activities.

### *Knowledge & skills gained:*

Caregivers reported positive changes to their interactions with the child in their care after attending Wee Connect! and Stay & Play, including engaging with the child more; reading, singing, and playing more; and communicating more effectively with the child. Caregivers also reported on skills their child gained after attending the program, including increased participation, attention span, and self-control; increased positive social interactions with other children; increased interest in reading; and increased familiarity with concepts such as counting, animals, and shapes.

## Next Steps

- Identify best practices & sustainability elements
- Session 2 begins in **Fall 2019** at Educational Park Branch Library
- Pilot Project concludes February 2020