



## One Letter at a Time

*One Letter at a Time* is a project that gives parents the tools to educate parents on the importance of reading with children and complements that with a book to share at home. The Reading Tub, Inc. will sponsor a new section on its Web site to accommodate this initiative. The project will serve children from infancy to 8 years of age (i.e., pre-readers and emerging readers). This is a contract-driven project.

### Philosophy

Reading is the skill that will make or break your success in life. We are not born readers. We learn to read...and the process evolves one letter at a time. Reading is a skill that **MUST** be practiced at home, not just worked on at school.

While parents may know that reading with their child is important, they may find it difficult to do. It may be that they can't get their child interested in reading; it may be because they struggled with reading as a child; it may be that they just never liked reading; or it may be that they are not connected to reading resources most of us take for granted.

For help with those issues, parents want to know what the clues are and identify a strategy to help them help their child. They want information from a knowledgeable source, in a language **THEY** can understand, without the statistics, theories, and academic jargon.

### Program Objectives

One Letter at a Time (OLaT) is an initiative to help kids learn to read. This project pairs a free book with a Reading Guide written for parents who, because of their own literacy issues, do not currently read with their kids. The Reading Tub, Inc. will distribute the product in places these families frequent (e.g., doctors' offices, free clinics, family services centers, etc.) The material is written at the appropriate reading level for adults suffering with literacy issues, and will also be available in Spanish.

By helping parents and meeting them where they are, we will directly impact the success their children achieve in school and, ultimately, in life.

- 📖 Provide up-to-date information from literacy experts about the importance of reading with children in a format that is practical and meets parents where they are.
- 📖 Explain what "reading with a child" looks like at various age levels.
- 📖 Encourage family reading through improved access to books.

### Target Population

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We aren't born readers; it is a learned skill that requires practice every day to build and maintain proficiency. Children from low socioeconomic families enter first grade with only a 5,000 word vocabulary, while those from higher income homes have a 20,000 vocabulary. [In the United States, every 35 seconds a baby is born into poverty.] Study after study has shown the direct link between early reading with a child and that child's later success in school, and ultimately life. Every nine seconds a high school student drops out of school in America. The causes are varied, but literacy is a significant contributing factor.

Perhaps one of the most compelling studies on reading is the landmark 1983 report *Becoming A Nation of Readers*. Its writers state: "Parents should informally teach preschool children about reading and writing by reading aloud to them, discussing stories and events, encouraging them to learn letters and words and teaching them about the world around them. These practices help prepare children for success in reading. In addition, *Starting Out Right, A Guide for Promoting Children's Reading Success*, emphasizes that even "during the first months and years of life, children's experiences with language and literacy can begin to form a basis for their later reading success." Our target population is children (0 to 8) who, in large part due to socio-economic placement beyond their control, struggle to learn to read.

The Reading Tub, Inc. embraces literacy for a diverse student population. Not all students enrolled in public schools speak English as native language (i.e., English as a Second Language/ESL), and may have no English-speakers at home. Literacy is not about speaking English, and we need to reach ESL families. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 3.8 million (11% of all students) received English Language Learner services for the 2003-2004 school year. [source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2006). Public Elementary and Secondary Students, Staff, Schools, and School Districts: School Year 2003-04 (NCES 2006-307). Note Illinois, New York, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee did not report ELL services students.]

The One Letter at a Time (OLaT) project reaches people who do not actively nor regularly read with their children. There are parents who are intimidated by or do not have access to tools that can help their children learn to read. Finding information about literacy and the importance of reading with children would seem to be easy. There are public service announcements on television; articles regularly appear in magazines and newspapers; and you can search the Internet. On well-known sites like Reading is Fundamental (and others), the material and vocabulary are written for those who can read at a sixth-grade level. Test scores over the past decade have shown that huge numbers of adults only read at a third grade level. There are socio-economic ramifications for these adults – many of them parents – that impact their individual success, but more importantly, their child's growth and development.

"As the U.S. economy has changed, an increasing number of jobs have come to demand English literacy and communication skills. At the same time, millions of American adults cannot reap the rewards of literacy because their prior education was inadequate, they have learning problems, or they are in the process of learning English." [source: John Comings, et al. "As Long as It Takes; Responding to the Challenges of Adult Student Persistence in Library Literacy Programs," *Manpower Demonstration Research Project*, (a Wallace Foundation Report), 2003, p3.]

#### Program Requirements

The Reading Tub, Inc. will secure the required expertise and services through contract. We will contract with individuals to create materials that bring the literacy message to a population that does not routinely connect with traditional information resources. More specifically, The Reading Tub, Inc. will:

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- Hire a literacy expert to create the Reading Guide and PTO-type presentation of project;
- Contract with an individual who will translate the materials for a Spanish-language version; and
- Negotiate with authors and publishers to donate or purchase at significantly reduced prices books to be handed out with the Reading Guide.

While the research and writing work are underway, the President of the Reading Tub will begin promoting the project. Because the Reading Tub, Inc. has no paid employees or board members, there is no staffing cost associated with this work. Once in operation, there will be no additional staffing costs associated with printing, storing, or maintaining the materials for One Letter at a Time. Requests for copies will be handled by volunteers.

### Benefits

Information is power. When it comes to reading (or potential reading-related issues) parents want all the help they can get: they want to know what's good to read, and how to best help their kids learn to read independently. Major parenting magazines have a "Recommended Reading" section in each of their issues; some also recommend educational software that focuses on reading. Similarly, the success of Jim Trelease's *Read-Aloud Handbook*, first published in 1979 and still available today (Fifth Edition, 2001), attests that parents want a self-help guide.<sup>1</sup>

### Program Functions & Beneficiaries

One Letter at a Time reaches people who do not read with their children. The socio-economic ramifications for these adults impact their child's development. Parents know they must help their kids learn to read. If they didn't like reading or don't read well, they feel added the pressure of not wanting to fail their child. According to the University of Oregon's National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators "National longitudinal studies report that more than one in six young children (17.5%) will encounter a problem learning to read during their crucial first three years in school." To reach the kids, we must provide meaningful materials to their parents, who may be struggling with their own literacy.

Finding information about the importance of reading with children is easy (Public Service Announcements, news articles, Internet), but that material is written for people who read at a sixth-grade level. Test scores over the past decade have shown that huge numbers of adults only read at a third grade level. In addition, the literacy message is not always accessible or formatted for a population that is underserved by English-only, media-driven resources. The One Letter at a Time project closes that gap.

OLaT offers materials that meet parents/guardians of underserved children where they are. Our project will:

- Provide a tool with basic information about literacy and reading with children.
- Create bilingual materials to connect with children of Spanish-speaking families.
- Give children and families access to materials that are meaningful and relevant to their life, including a free book to take home.

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Trelease has also edited three anthologies of books to further encourage reading aloud with children: *Read Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young* (1983), *Hey! Listen to This* (1992), and *Read All About It!* (1993)

All of the products will be available free of charge. They will be given to non-profit agencies that serve the community, such as literacy programs, schools, pediatricians, family services organizations, free clinics.

### Performance Measures

All recipients complete a survey about the One Letter at a Time product 90 days after initial receipt and every six months after that (provided they continue to receive books/guides). Questions will focus on organization profile (e.g., health services, education), client demographics and feedback, distribution rate, and recommendations for product improvement. We will also include surveys and Postage-paid envelopes in the books to get feedback from recipient families.

The project will be successful when survey analysis shows that evaluators see changes in their client base, such as improved comprehension or reading scores for children, requests for additional material, and changes in reading behavior(s). Survey data will guide us in prioritizing future recipients and help us formulate application questions for new organizations interested in receiving One Letter at a Time materials.

### Project Budget

Contact the Reading Tub for this Information.