

2016

Adolescent Book Group Impact Report



Patrick Stewart, Executive Director
Chrissy Califf, Operations Director
Amanda Bonds, Senior Program Manager
Theresa Tolentino, Teen Services Program Manager

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to present the process Words Alive undertook and the findings discovered as we set out to measure the impact of our Adolescent Book Group (ABG) program.

Established in 1999, Words Alive was founded on the belief that if you value reading and understand its fundamental connection to all aspects of your life, you will thrive as a lifelong learner - *ready to transform your community*. In that vein, our mission is to open opportunities for life success through the power of reading, and with our three primary programs: Read Aloud, Teen Services and Family Literacy, Words Alive provides life-changing services to 5,500 at-risk students and families monthly.

As our flagship program, Adolescent Book Group (ABG) serves 450 at-risk teens, most of whom have been referred to specialized community schools by the Juvenile Court system and have experienced extraordinary circumstances such as violence, pregnancy and homelessness. Each month, Words Alive hosts integrative programming within alternative classrooms through book discussions, writing sessions and college/career readiness workshops. Through reading and sharing opinions about texts, ABG participants enhance self-esteem, reading levels, vocabulary, critical thinking and literary analysis.

As a means to continually provide meaningful and evaluation-driven programming, Word Alive commenced the seven-month Dialogues in Action (DIA) project to analyze our ABG program using both a qualitative and quantitative evaluation model. Through this process, we had an opportunity to view our program from a different perspective – through the lens of our students. Interviewing both ABG student participants and our teachers, Words Alive was able to examine the intended impact made in the classroom and determine resolutions in order to enhance our program delivery.

Our key program goals within ABG are as follows:

- Students develop an enduring commitment to reading.
- Youth become life-long learners.
- Youth become advocates for themselves.

Our key findings from both our qualitative interview process and quantitative survey include:

Sharpened skillsets: After participating in the ABG program, students are reading more efficiently and purposefully. Teachers reported that students – whom may have not read a book cover-to-cover prior to

Words Alive – are now reading for comprehension, citing evidence from text to support their claim or opinions.

Boosted confidence: Students who participated in three or more sessions noted a sense of confidence in not only their literacy skills but also their communication with their peers, teachers and Words Alive volunteers. The practice of sharing ideas and perspectives of books enhanced students' comfort-level with reading aloud and discussing in a classroom setting.

Enhanced commitment to reading: As an aim to encourage students to become readers, through this process we learned that students are recognizing the important of literacy in their everyday lives – not just within the context of school.

Humanized reading: Students started to see themselves as readers and as part of a reading community.

Shifted attitude towards reading: Students' viewpoints related to books has transformed from a negative perception of reading to a positive one; students understand that reading isn't just a novel but rather a key component in their day-to-day lives.

Improved communication: Students are developing their own voice in order to better express themselves – in the classroom, amongst their peers and within their community.

Increased book ownership and access: Students are building their home libraries and sharing their love of books with others.

Enriched group learning: Students now have agency in their own education, working as a team to read a book, discuss, learn and prosper.

The following review is an insight to the interconnectedness literacy plays in our everyday lives. In effort to showcase the need for intervention, this document will address the importance of literacy-centric programming in order to support at-risk students and families in developing strong reading skills and habits. Studies have proven that literacy is at the heart of our community. As a means to advocate for oneself, literacy is the key to success – whether it's in regards to your professional career, educational pathway or daily responsibilities, like going to a physician or signing a rental agreement. Reading is a part of everything we do; it's integrated into our lives. This is the impetus behind the Words Alive program – it's our mission to make reading matter and change the landscape in San Diego County.

*Literacy is the foundation of community and economic development.
When everyone can read, whole communities thrive.*

*We read to live full, independent lives.
We read to...*

- Apply for jobs that pay a living wage
- Advance and build on prior learning in school
- Advocate for our families
- Understand medical instructions
- Vote and write to our elected officials
- Interpret bills and use bank accounts
- Search for information on the internet
- Participate in or volunteer for a cause we believe in
- Travel and navigate our community safely



words alive
ADVOCATES FOR READING

Words Alive & Why Literacy Matters

We read to learn, to experience our world and to advocate for ourselves — quite simply, to live full lives. In this way, literacy is a fundamental skill needed for life success, yet 450,000 San Diego County residents lack basic reading proficiency. At Words Alive, our goal is to change the story of children, youth and families in our community by fostering a love of reading, ensuring they won't be counted among that number.

We also know that literacy development starts early, and youth who struggle with reading are at a significantly higher risk for illiteracy and low-literacy later in life. Research has shown a strong connection between low-literacy and poor life outcomes, such as poverty, reliance on public assistance programs, underemployment and high risks of incarceration.

That's why our programs focus on connecting under-served populations with access to quality reading experiences, materials and a growing community of *readers*. Founded in 1999, Words Alive began with a singular vision to introduce at-risk teenagers to experiences of meaningful reading. Since then we have blossomed into a cornerstone of San Diego County's literacy movement. Today we serve 5,500 children, youth and adults each month through our three flagship programs and numerous community collaboration projects.

Adolescent Book Group

This impact report focuses on our Adolescent Book Group (ABG) program - an integrated, comprehensive language arts program delivering monthly book discussion groups in combination with a writing program, college and career readiness workshops and an annual arts component. Serving approximately 450 students each month, highly trained volunteers share their love of reading through

interactive, directed discussion and writing groups. These sessions provide the students opportunity to develop their voice, express opinions about books, enhance their literacy skills and make connections between text and real life applications.

Our primary partners in this effort include 22-Momentum Learning classrooms (*formerly Juvenile Court and Community Schools*), a fully accredited educational program of the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE) for youth who are wards of the court or have been referred to alternative learning settings by social services, probation, or one of the 42 school districts in San Diego County. As an alternative learning setting, Momentum Learning classrooms specifically serve some of San Diego County's highest at-risk teens, many of whom are navigating considerable challenges, including transitioning in and out of the delinquency system, teen parenthood, living in foster-care, substance abuse and homelessness.

Intended Impact

In order to measure not just our outputs (what we did), but also our *outcomes* (what changed because of what we did), Words Alive participated in a Dialogues in Action (DIA) Project Impact cohort, measuring the impact of our programs along with crafting a meaningful narrative around both the quantitative as well as qualitative outcomes. Through this process, we've identified three-specific areas of intended impact:

Students develop an enduring commitment to reading.

By this we mean that students internalize the value of reading as a tool and remain engaged in reading habits during and following their participation in the program.

Youth become life-long learners.

By this we mean youth experience positive attitudinal shifts about learning and recognize their own ability to seek out information to solve problems, acquire critical thinking skills and transition successfully into post-secondary education or career environments.

Youth become advocates for themselves.

By this we mean youth find their voice and are empowered to invest in their futures. Youth will increase self-confidence as readers, writers and speakers; expressing themselves more clearly and strengthening their writing; make steps towards personal, educational and career goals; gain competency in navigating post-secondary education and career systems; and pursue success through commitment to activities which lead to specific desired outcomes.

Evaluation Method

The aim of our evaluation was to ascertain the type of effect our program has on the teen population we serve within Momentum Learning. Over the course of seven months, our team developed and refined ideas of intended impact and indicators, designed and implemented both qualitative and quantitative means to collect and analyze data, and identified findings and implications for program adjustments and renovations.

This evaluative project commenced with an insightful analysis of our program and its impact on our students and classrooms. Once we had a clear understanding of our programmatic goals, we designed a questionnaire to collect data geared towards quantitative measurements for our entire Words Alive ABG population as well as hosted a qualitative interview protocol with 26 students and eight Momentum Learning teachers. From our analysis, our team identified trends and translated them into findings. From these findings, we developed program responses and communiques.

Qualitative Data and Analysis

Our qualitative approach followed these steps:

Protocol Design

We designed an in-depth interview protocol using the Heart Triangle method of question construction. This produced a protocol consisting of nine sequences of questions (22 questions for our student population and 20 questions for our teacher population). The protocol was our guide to collect data about the subjects' awareness and reflection of structural shifts and developments of growth and progress. (See Appendix B for Interview Questions.)

Sample

We identified a sample of subjects using a purposeful stratified technique to select a representation of the population we serve. Our population size was 450 students and 22 teachers. From our population size, we decided to focus on schools with lower rates of student turnover in order to see the longer-term impact of students who participate in multiple sessions. From those school sites, we selected students who participated in three or more sessions, or 50% of the total program sessions offered during the school year. In addition to the number of sessions the students participated in, we drew our sample from the following strata of our population: 30% of students were female while 70% male (mimicking student demographics according to the 2014-15 School Accountability Report Card, the most recent report available).

Of the 450 students we served during the 2014-15 program year through the Adolescent Book Group, 111 or 25% of students attended three or more program sessions and, per our established protocol, were eligible for qualitative interviews. We interviewed 26 students, or 23% of students who had participated in three or more sessions at that time of the interviews. We also interviewed nine, or 41% of the 22 teachers participating in the program. The teachers interviewed represented all classrooms of interviewed students.

Data Collection

We conducted one-on-one interviews lasting between 45 minutes and one-hour in length. Data were collected via notes during the interview, and then recorded immediately following the interview to provide a substantive rendering of the conversation.

Data Analysis

We applied a four-step model of textual analysis to each of the interviews. This process allowed us to interpret the meaning and significance of the interview data.

Themes

We then examined the overarching themes that emerged from the full scope of our data analysis to illuminate the primary insights and discoveries. From our interviews, we discovered the following themes:

- Skills
- Confidence
- Commitment
- Humanizing effect
- Attitudinal shifts
- Communication
- Book Ownership and Access
- Group Learning

Quantitative Data and Analysis

We also designed a questionnaire to collect data on our quantitative indicators of impact. We sent this questionnaire to all 22 teachers to administer to our 450 students. Students were involved with standardize state testing at the same time we deployed the survey, which impacted the response return rate. We received 75 total survey responses, or 17% of the 450 sample. This sample size of 75 included students who participated in less than three sessions as well as students who participated in three or more sessions. By comparing both groups, we were able to see the differences between students that have received more Words Alive intervention as opposed to students who are newer to our programming.

The questionnaire is composed of 10 questions regarding students' behavioral changes and their relationship to reading. (See Appendix C for questionnaire.) The data was analyzed primarily using measures of central tendency.

Our evaluation produced findings which captured the primary discoveries from the data. The most salient of the findings are described in the following narratives.

Findings

Finding 1: *"Doing More with What We Read"* – Sharpening Skillsets

By the end of the program, 100% of teachers interviewed not only reported that their students were reading more, they stated specifically that their students were doing more with what they read – that students were, in effect, flexing skills sharpened through months spent habitually reading, writing about and discussing texts. This was the most fundamental change we saw among students participating in the program.

Students noticed this too. As one student shared, "at first I didn't like reading because I didn't understand what I was reading, even though it was my level book. I would just go on and on to finish, and wouldn't know what I was reading."

When asked what changed, she replied, “I started paying attention. I learned how to get myself into a book, how to question what I’m reading to get into it. [Now] I get why readers are reading.” In interviews, teachers on the other hand, repeatedly identified this change as getting better at reading for comprehension. Reading for comprehension, or the ability to process what we’ve read and understand, is a complex process for learners and improvement in this area speaks to positive changes in the skills needed to process, interpret and put a text in context within the world outside the story. In this vein, teachers reported observing increased student vocabulary, fluency, ability to annotate and analyze text and use evidence to support their claims and ideas. One student provided a very specific example of building fluency, stating “I’ve overcome pronunciation, like ‘acknowledgement’ in *Black and White*. I knew what the word meant, but I’d never seen it written down. Then I saw it in *Girl in Translation* and I knew how to pronounce it really fast.”

In general, students responding to the quantitative survey self-reported that participating in Adolescent Book Group improved their ability to express themselves as readers, writers and speakers. The chart below shows the percentage of students who identify a skill as strengthened via participation in the program. It is important to note that, as we anticipated and is shown below, students who attended at least half (3) of the offered program sessions during the school year positively identified sharpened skills more frequently than students attending the program fewer than three times.



Significance

When students do not or cannot read for comprehension, motivation to read and self-confidence as a reader stalls, which in turn, deters students from the reading practice needed to strengthen their ability.

It is a challenging cycle, but if we can interrupt that cycle with interventions like the Adolescent Book Group that engage students in increased time spent reading through methods that help them learn to pull meaning out of what they read, we open the opportunity for many of our other desired outcomes to develop and deepen.

It is well documented in research on literacy development in adolescents that skills, motivation or interest to read, and confidence as a reader work in concert to propel student ability forward. Imagine a snowball gaining momentum as it rolls down a hill. And this year, as students sharpened the tools in their belt, they saw what reading can offer them as a lens to their own world, providing a sense of relevancy of reading to their lives and relationships.

Our Response

Adjustment:

- Implement expository writing within monthly writing program sessions and/or book club discussions;
- Provide close readings of short/argumentative text;
- Enhance volunteer role and training to incorporate methods to read for comprehension, annotation, the importance of reading, interpretation and critical thinking.

Experiment:

- Employ small group pedagogy within monthly book discussion to highlight vocabulary, interpretation of text and use of evidence to support claims/ideas;
- Pilot 1:1 tutoring opportunities for students that are reading below grade level.

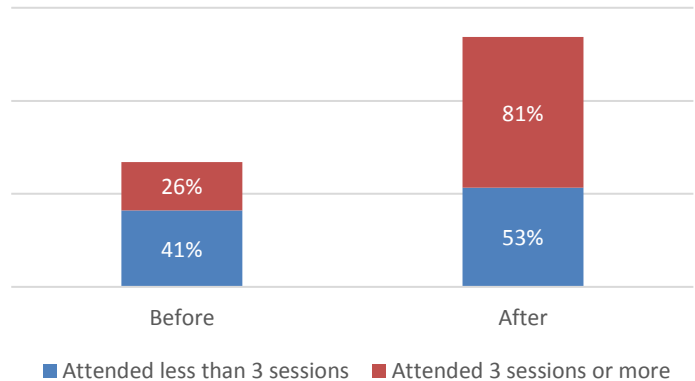
Finding 2: “*Students have come alive*” – Gaining Confidence

Hand-in-hand with sharpening skills, by the end of the program 100% of teachers interviewed reported growth in student confidence. Most immediately, students saw that they could, in fact, finish a book – for some, the first book they had ever finished in their lifetime—and student pride in getting through books reoccurred as a theme in student interviews.

Students were recognizing that they could do this, and each month as the pages turned, pens scribbled and discussions continued, teachers witnessed students taking risks in front of one another as well. This is where Words Alive staff, volunteers and partner teachers saw that growing skills and confidence was changing the learning dynamic in class and the caliber of the discussion. Students were, in effect, *showing up* differently for the program: we heard new student voices chiming in during discussions, witnessed others volunteer to read aloud or share a piece of their writing and, in a move of classroom leadership, step up to help facilitate book club discussions alongside volunteers or fellow classmates. As one teacher described it, “students have come alive.”

In addition to gains in student confidence observed by teachers, students viewed themselves as better readers after the program. The chart to the right depicts, on a scale of 1-5, the percent of students who rated themselves a good (4) or very good (5) reader before and after participating in the program. Again, the data showed that students who attended more program sessions were showing greater gains. For example, 56% of students who participated in 3 or more sessions rated their reading ability higher on the scale as opposed to just 28% of students who attended less than three program sessions. Returning to our image of the snow ball rolling down the hill: the more you go, the more you grow.

Before and after comparison of students rating themselves good or very good as a reader.



Significance

The lives of many students in the Adolescent Book Group program are scarred by crisis, failure, loss and missteps. These students are also bright, creative and remarkable survivors, but the circumstances of their lives often undercut their confidence as learners and their engagement in their learning environment. Thus, taking risks, especially in the role of learner and in front of their peers, is not a comfortable one. But with practice, engaging tasks and encouragement from consistent and caring adults, students develop the confidence to take a more active role in their own learning and support the learning environment of others.

Our Response

Adjustment:

- Enhance student facilitation process in the classroom by creating student-centric book discussions and ownership;
- Create more sharing opportunities, such as writing and/or project-based assignments.

Experiment:

- Establish protocol for student facilitation, such as grade adjustment, student/volunteer preparation and student role;
- Establish a speaker's bureau, designed to involve current and former Teen Services students in Momentum Learning and Words Alive outreach;
- Host college/career readiness workshops tailored to public speaking and expressing oneself.

Finding 3: "Sticking with it to make it yours" – Commitment

Our program aims to help high-risk teens become *readers*, and establishing those enduring reading habits starts with smaller commitments that develop a student's willingness or motivation to engage in reading. Our time in the classroom, paired with teacher and student interviews revealed three such commitments taking root:

1. Student commitment to themselves
2. Student commitment to their peers
3. Student commitment to volunteers

First, we noticed that students' dedication to reading varied depending on how long they participated in the program. Specifically, students who attended sessions more often were more likely to finish the *next* book. Dovetailing on growing skills and confidence that they could get through a book, students with books under their belt were more likely to demonstrate a commitment to future books read in the program.

Additionally, students showed a commitment to reading and their peers by motivating each other to finish the books used in the program. A theme in teacher interviews described students in an exchange such as:

Student A: *"Did you get to the part in chapter 10 where..."*

Student B: *"Don't say, I'm not there yet!"*

Student A: *"Well hurry up, or I'm going to spoil it."*

Finally, students were impacted by the commitment of volunteers who visited their classroom to facilitate the program. As students and volunteers built rapport, and students learned that volunteers were not paid, but came of their own volition and interest to discuss books with the class, students upped their commitment to be prepared for discussion. In the words of one teacher, "It's different with the volunteers – it's not a school assignment. Students know they'll be coming soon and they want to have something to contribute when volunteers arrive. They're accountable to them in a different way." Simultaneously, during program sessions, students were observing people outside of teachers and administrators sharing their own love of and commitment to reading. Students are observing that reading is a *real* thing that *real* people do regularly - *and of their own volition*.

In select cases, where students were also young parents, they extended their commitment to the next generation by developing reading habits with their own children. One student shared, "Words Alive has helped me become a reader," going on to say that she now loves to read to her son, thus passing the torch and showcasing her commitment to reading as a model to her little one.

Significance

Students and teachers alike shared that students viewed reading quite narrowly as something certain people do, in a certain place, for a certain reason – mostly that you read in school with teachers in order to graduate. Very often, this view was bolstered by home environments where students lacked the stability, materials and role-models that help reading routines take shape. Through the Adolescent Book Group however, students were developing confidence (*believing* they could do this), and fluency (*knowing* what they're reading) and building commitments to themselves, each other and adults who chose to be there as support along the way. Students were moving from reading as something they did, to a reader as someone they were.

Our Response

Adjustment:

- Work with Momentum Learning teachers and administrators to ensure the Words Alive programming is fully integrated into the classroom;
- Implement a mid-month check-in prior to the book discussion and writing program to encourage more participation amongst students.

Experiment:

- Align curriculum with Thematic Interdisciplinary Project Based Learning (TIP), Tutoria and/or ELA units to ensure program is integrated into the Momentum Learning curricula.

Finding 4: "Seeing ourselves in one another" – The humanizing effect of sharing stories

This sense of commitment, confidence and heightened skillset was delivering students to a point of deeper reflection. Hence, another important theme in teacher and student interviews was *connection* – specifically as a sense of deepening empathy and a broadening world view. In discussion and in their writing, students were demonstrating that they were relating to stories, characters, their peers and volunteers and placing it in the context of our community. As one student explained:

"With the characters too, sometimes you can relate to how they are or their situation. The most recent book we read, Girl in Translation, I thought I was a lot like her and I saw how we had the same thought or doubt, but we thought about it differently. Like how she didn't speak the language in school and dressed differently. I had a similar experience at school in Mexico, but I thought more about how the other kids saw me instead of focusing on my studies like she did. I wanted to know what happened to her. It changes the way you think about the world – there are certain things in the book where I was like wow, if the book hadn't told me about that I wouldn't have known."

Students were recognizing themselves in what they read - this certainly supported their interest in the books they were reading and, importantly, their motivation to get to the end. In interviews, students shared that when characters in the book that went through similar problems as they experienced, they felt more positive about their lives and as though they were not alone in their struggle. Similarly, reading about other cultures and communities around the world altered students' perception of their own circumstances, freedoms and opportunities. In a sense, students were practicing putting someone else's experience into context and exercising the power of perspective.

As has been discussed in previous findings, student abilities and confidence to express themselves as readers, writers and speakers was improving as the program year progressed – students, were cultivating their voice and becoming advocates for their ideas and passions by learning how to communicate their thoughts effectively.

During book discussions and writing sessions, students showed that they had something to say, that their voice had arrived. Something that surprised us in the realm of communication, however, was the emphasis students put on their growth as *listeners*. In fact, listening was the most frequently selected skill on our quantitative survey asking students to identify areas of literacy skill growth after participating in the program. Students and teachers both remarked on the safe space this helped create

to express opinions, digest powerful subjects within literature and share about oneself. This opened up students to make connections with each other and new groups. On this topic, students and teachers said:

"I feel like I got to know more people. I recently saw a [volunteer] at a fundraiser for our school and we started talking about [the book] and we shared our opinions. Usually I'm shy so it surprised me that we talked about the book."

– student

"When I say my opinion in class, sometimes people agree or they don't, but I try to connect our opinions."

– student

"Like when the volunteers came...I had already read the book, but when they came it made me see other people's opinions and consider the way other people think."

– student

"What [the program provides] besides exposing them to texts, is the opportunity to discuss their opinions with communities and people who they wouldn't normally have these kinds of conversations with – like women of different races and economic status. It challenges them to articulate their passions and ideas and back them up."

– teacher

Significance

Students now see themselves as part of a reading community, which has resulted in a shifted attitude towards the perspective of others and broadened world view. The ability to relate to themselves and others helps level the playing field – it's the realization that success is achievable and that they, too, can read a book, graduate high school, attend post-secondary school and start a career. Their dreams are more accessible and believable for students who have become accustomed to being marginalized. The book club has opened students' minds to their potential – showcasing that reading is a tool to not only enhance skills, but also an instrument to obtain perspective. Students have become advocates, empowered to invest in their futures and dedicated to securing their own success.

Our Response

Adjustment:

- Walk students through exercises in creating circular connections (text to self, text to someone you know, text to community, text to world).

Experiment:

- Train former Teen Services students to volunteer in the classroom as a means to mentor;
- Create mentor opportunities for high school students.

Finding 5: "The World's a Book" – Attitudinal shifts about the value of reading

A different but related shift in attitudes was around reading itself, and how it applies to one's life and the value students place on reading as an activity. In interviews, students shared the realization that reading can be anything from a magazine article, to a novel, to the Spanish captions that scroll across the television screen – recognized that reading is everywhere – intertwined in all aspects of life. One teacher noted the shift in attitude about reading from an assignment to a tool, stating:

“Since we’ve made inspiring the girls to relate and see themselves and their world in the text, making that the most important thing, we’ve gotten them to connect to reading. That psychological shift away from reading as something you have to do at school to reading as something that can help you overcome something, that reading can give you solutions to things in your life, gives a way to apply reading outside of school. Reading is a tool of liberation.”

One student shared her perspective on reading and how it’s changed:

“I feel like I’m getting better at reading. I’m not a pro. I hated reading, now I like books, especially if they’re interesting. Knowing different things, other peoples’ struggles, or like relating to other peoples’ stories.”

Another student shared the impact reading has had in his life:

“Reading gets you far, keeps you out of trouble, teaches you things you didn’t know about life. I just think open, I don’t think about myself, I think about my surroundings. I think about how to get further in life.”

Significance

It is evident from our discussions with students participating in Adolescent Book Group that they have a better understanding of what books and reading allows them to do. They are able to better understand the world around them and become more conscientious of their surroundings. The students better understand that reading matters and is an important aspect in life because it’s ubiquitous.

Our Response

Adjustment:

- Meet with classrooms one month prior to program kick-off to encourage student participation, including facilitation, book selection and project-based assignments.

Experiment:

- Implement problem-solving format, akin to Fieldstone Leadership;
- Recruit student ambassadors for the Words Alive/Teen Services programming.

Finding 6: “Creating Closet Readers” – Challenging a stigma through ownership & access

In line with a shift in attitudes about the value of reading, both students and teachers commented that books, book ownership and book borrowing have become more normalized among students thanks to the efforts of Adolescent Book Group. One way we do this is by encouraging students to keep any and all books they enjoyed reading in the program in order to build their home libraries (approximately seven high-quality, age-appropriate books a year). Additionally, we routinely make donations to teachers’ classroom libraries to bolster student selection.

We have discussed how students come alive during book discussions with dedicated volunteers, engaged teachers and peers sharing in the safe space cultivated through the program. However, making the leap to openly projecting a commitment to reading outside the classroom is a more delicate issue for the population we serve. Almost all the students we serve are reading below grade level, and because of the adversity our students experience on a daily basis, most don’t readily see themselves as good students. In fact, many students have developed a hard exterior to protect themselves and their

reputations, along with a mentality that being book smart and street smart is mutually exclusive. In a way, as they are learning to value reading, they're also working to shake the myth that acquiring this new appreciation for reading lessens their credibility as a survivor on the street.

We see the in-roads forming however, sometimes in quiet ways. As one teacher commented, "to my students, it's not cool to read because of [peer] pressure. I tell them they can take the books if they want, and when I go looking for a particular book, I notice that it's missing. So I know they're taking them and reading them." Other teachers reported that students aren't "losing" their books as often or shoving them deep in their pockets before getting on the trolley. Still, other teachers shared more blatant examples:

"Most of them come here hating reading, or say that they've never finished a book cover to cover. Seeing them want to take books home, or saying they want to get a certain book for someone they know, even though their barely able to put food on the table, seeing that they're passionate about a book is powerful."

And while challenging the myth of tough kids who don't read and establishing durable reading habits takes time, by the end of the program year, more students consider reading to be an enjoyable thing to do, and that's a good place to be.

The chart to the right depicts, on a scale of 1-5, the percent of students rating reading as a good (4) or great (5) way to spend their time.

Significance

Every day, these students combat homelessness, the stigmas of being a teen parent, incarceration, truancy or a combination of the aforementioned adversities. Although each story is different, what they have in common is that they aren't reading at grade level.

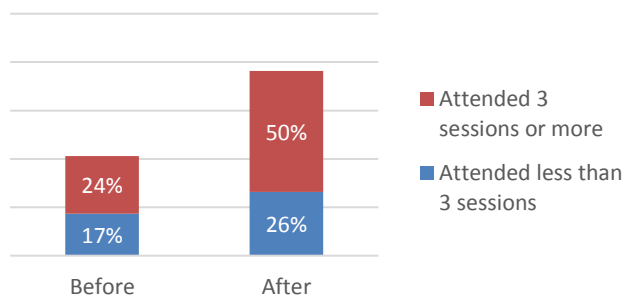
Bringing books to the classroom and providing resources to the students and teachers are ways to help raise student reading levels, sharpen their literacy skills and close the achievement gap. In 2010, The University of Nevada, Reno, published an article by Claudene Wharton about books in a home being as important as parents' education levels. In the article, Wharton includes Mariah Evans' 20-year study research findings, which indicated that students who have access to books at home increases the level of education the students attain. The monthly book club, while designed to develop critical thinking skills and promote a healthy book discussion, also allows Words Alive to fill the gap for students who don't have access to books at home.

Our Response

Adjustment:

- Provide students access to read books from mobile phones;

Before and after comparison of students rating reading as a good or great way to spend time.



- Connect students with the Obama eBook program that provides students at Title 1 schools access to massive eBook library.

Experiment:

- Give students access to eBooks and hard copy and determine if the students who used the eBooks are more likely to finish curriculum books.

Finding 7: “*Learning together, changing together*” – The power of Group Learning

As we analyzed teacher and student interviews, we saw that *group learning* was driving program impact. In other words, it was the mode through which students’ changing experiences with reading were coming together.

In a Momentum Learning classroom, “group learning” means students and volunteers re open to discussions and/or activities regarding the historical, social, economic, cultural or political issues within a selected text. An example of this in action looks like a classroom of students and a handful of volunteers, often separated in small groups, or in one large group. Trained volunteers break the ice with students by discussing whether they liked or disliked the book and then delve into the deeper, more meaningful questioning and activities. In a recent book discussion, for example, students read and discussed *Speak* (Laurie Halse Anderson) - a story about a teenage girl who went to a party, had a few drinks and was raped. The students, both male and female, had a great debate about who was to blame for the incident. Was it the girl’s fault for dressing provocatively? Was it the boy’s fault for taking advantage? Was is society’s fault for marketing underage drinking? These were some of the questions and points brought to the table. In the end, it resulted in a healthy debate which students voiced their opinions and evaluated the culture to which we are exposed to. Thus, students were able to learn how to agree to disagree while effectively communicating their opinions.

Across the board, teachers and students shared the behavior and attitude changes in the classroom through group learning. Although its benefits were not surprising to us, it validated our engrained program delivery: learning as a collective. What *was* fascinating to discover is the evolution of the book-facilitated sessions morphing from being solely volunteer-led to being student-led. And with students at the wheel, they are now encouraged to become leaders and advocates of their own education.

Significance

Group learning is all encompassing; it connects all of the findings in that the students’ communication skills towards their teachers, peers and volunteers are being developed, practiced and honed after each discussion. This is significant in allowing students who don’t normally have a voice in the classroom to develop the confidence to share their thoughts and ideas. It is through the book discussion experiences where students learn to make connections through text, personally and as a group, which ignites their commitment to reading. As one teacher shared, “making [the connection between the students and the literature] is the most important thing [and Words Alive] has inspired them to make that connection to reading.”

Momentum Learning is shifting their focus to deeper learning within the classroom. Most recently, this has allowed Words Alive to better develop our relationship with the San Diego County Office of

Education (SDCOE) and opened opportunities to work with teaching specialists and curriculum designers to select higher-level text in combination with our group learning model.

Our Response

Adjustment:

- Challenge students to focus on social justice issues, related to a book and present a solution.

Experiment:

- Implement the Tutoria concept as part of the student-led facilitation.

Conclusion

During this process we gained a deeper understanding of the value of our programs. It has allowed us to see our program in a new light while igniting a passion to create a more impactful experience for our participants. Below are the Words Alive implications for our programs:

Sharpening student skillsets and supplying resources

Through our in-depth interviews with program participants and teachers, we learned that students were not reading for comprehension. As the program continued throughout the year, teachers noted that students began to flex skills that were sharpened through months of habitually reading, writing and discussing. Students' skillsets vary within a classroom requiring many of our teachers to simultaneously teach multiple grade levels. Reading is not something that comes naturally and happens through continuous practice. It is learned and can look different from culture to culture. Students cannot practice these skillsets without the necessary resources. We need to be able to provide more access to books, help increase reading levels by sharing ways to read effectively and sharpen their basic reading skills.

Steps forward: We have a great number of volunteers who are retired teachers and principals because of the literacy focus of our organization and the work we do within schools. Some of the ways we can help our students enhance their basic reading skills include 1:1 tutoring for students reading below grade level, integrate a small-group pedagogy within the monthly book discussion to highlight vocabulary, interpretation of text and the use of evidence to support claims and ideas and walk students through exercises in creating circular connections (text to self, text to someone you know, text to community, text to world).

We know that students don't always have access to books. To combat this, we will provide our students opportunity to read books from their mobile phones as well as connect our students with the Obama eBook program within Title 1 classrooms, *schools of which a majority of the students are living at or below poverty level*, which provides entrance to a massive eBook library.

Creating student leaders

Several of our findings indicate that students learn the best when themes, book selection and discussion sessions are student-led. In the past, we worked with our teachers and lead volunteers to select the curriculum because they know our students best. Although we ask our students to suggest books they would like to read, not all students know what their favorite book is until after participating in Words

Alive. We purposely work with our teachers because they align their English Language Arts (ELA) lessons around the selected texts.

Additionally, we created a culture for our volunteers to take the lead within the book discussions. Having each volunteer facilitate one or two books per program year allowed for them to be creative during their time as facilitator in the classroom. Now we can focus on modifying our program to be led by our students, create a culture where students take responsibility of what they learn and provide opportunities to build their confidence for necessary life-skills, such as public speaking.

Steps Forward: If we plan to create student leaders, we need to build their skillsets and allow them to take the lead in their education. We plan to do this by hosting public speaking workshops and exercises to enhance and build the student facilitation process in the classroom. We can also promote student-centric book discussion sessions by allowing students to select the theme or text for future book discussions.

We are creating student leaders by aligning the Words Alive curriculum with Thematic Interdisciplinary Project Based Learning (TIP), Tutoria and ELA units to ensure the program is integrated into the Momentum Learning curricula. TIP is project-based learning where students create projects, like a documentary video, based upon a theme, like perseverance. Students become the experts of a specific topic based on the theme and showcase what they learned through their project. *Tutoria* is a form of project-based learning where Student A becomes an expert in a topic and teaches Student B what they know to the point where Student B also becomes an expert.

Another alternative is to use *Tutoria* to support our concept to implement the student-led facilitation. To do this, we would establish protocol for student facilitation, such as grade adjustment, student/volunteer preparation and define student and volunteer roles during the session.

The ELA units is a list of high-level texts created by an author hired by the San Diego County Office of Education. By using these texts in the classroom, we can ensure that we are using grade appropriate books or articles.

Strengthening the group learning environment

They say that it takes a village to raise a child. This is why our teachers, program staff, volunteers and students all have an important role in the success of our student populations. Before, almost all of our volunteers consisted of teachers and different types of school administrators. As our programs grow, we will need more volunteers, some who might not have the advantage of an education background. We need to provide more training (and more in-depth training opportunities) to ensure that our volunteers are making a consistent impact across all of our classrooms.

Steps Forward: Our volunteers are the Words Alive ‘word warriors’ who are in the classrooms. To enhance the group learning experience in the classroom, we will improve volunteer training to include methods and best practices to engage at-risk teen populations; provide training on how to facilitate the importance of reading, interpretation and critical thinking; as well as incorporate methods to read for comprehension and annotation.

To enhance our program for the benefit of our students, Words Alive will make some programmatic changes to share with our volunteers. We plan to meet with classrooms one month prior to program kick-off to encourage student participation, including facilitation, book selection and project-based assignments; as well as implement a mid-month check-in prior to the book discussion and writing program to encourage more participation amongst students.

From our findings, we found that group learning was driving our program impact in the classroom. Through our discussions with our teaching specialists at the San Diego County Office of Education, we learned that even though our students are not reading at grade-level, if the books are high-level and interesting, the group learning environment is the perfect setting to dissect a novel. Moving forward, we plan to challenge our students to work on social justice issues related to a book and present a solution; create more sharing opportunities of their writing and project-based assignments for our students to showcase their solutions; implement expository writing within the monthly writing program sessions and/or book club discussions.

Appendix A

Impact #1 – Students develop an enduring commitment to reading.	
What we mean: By this we mean that students internalize the value of reading as a tool and remain engaged in reading habits during and following their participation in the program.	
E3 (Quantitative Indicators of Impact) E3: Students understand the importance of reading (know) E3: Students read for pleasure (do) E3: Students are confident in their reading ability (feel)	E4 (Qualitative Indicators of Impact) E4: Students internalize the value of reading as a tool (believe) E4: Youth remain engaged in reading habits* (become) E4: (love)
Impact #2 – Youth become life-long learners.	
What we mean: By this we mean youth experience positive attitudinal shifts about learning and recognize their own ability to seek out information to solve problems; acquire critical thinking skills; and transition successfully into post-secondary education or career environment.	
E3 (Quantitative Indicators of Impact) E3: Youth experience attitudinal shifts* (feel) E3: Recognize ability to seek out information (know) E3: Acquire critical thinking skills (know) E3: Transition successfully into post-secondary education or career environment (do) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Students apply for the WAWS scholarship – Students attend series of development workshops – Students become a Words Alive Intern 	E4 (Qualitative Indicators of Impact) E4: Youth believe knowledge is critical to their future success (believe) E4: Youth actively seek out new expertise (become) E4: Youth are fulfilled by the learning process (for youth to love to learn) (love)
Impact #3 – Impact #3: Youth become advocates for themselves.	
What we mean: By this we mean youth find their voice and are empowered to invest in their futures. Youth will increase self-confidence as readers, writers and speakers; expressing themselves more clearly and strengthening their writing; make steps towards personal, educational and career goals; gain competency in navigating post-secondary education and career systems; and pursue success through commitment to activities which lead to specific desired outcomes.	
E3 (Quantitative Indicators of Impact) E3: Youth will increase self-confidence as readers, writers and speakers (feel) E3: Express themselves more clearly and strengthening their writing (know)	E4 (Qualitative Indicators of Impact) E4: Youth are empowered to invest in their futures* (believe) E4: Youth take action to commit to success (become)

<p>E3: Make steps towards personal, educational and career goals (do)</p> <p>E3: Gain competency in navigating post-secondary education and career systems (know)</p>	<p>E4: Youth persevere and dedicate themselves to a life of success (love)</p>
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Direct Impact

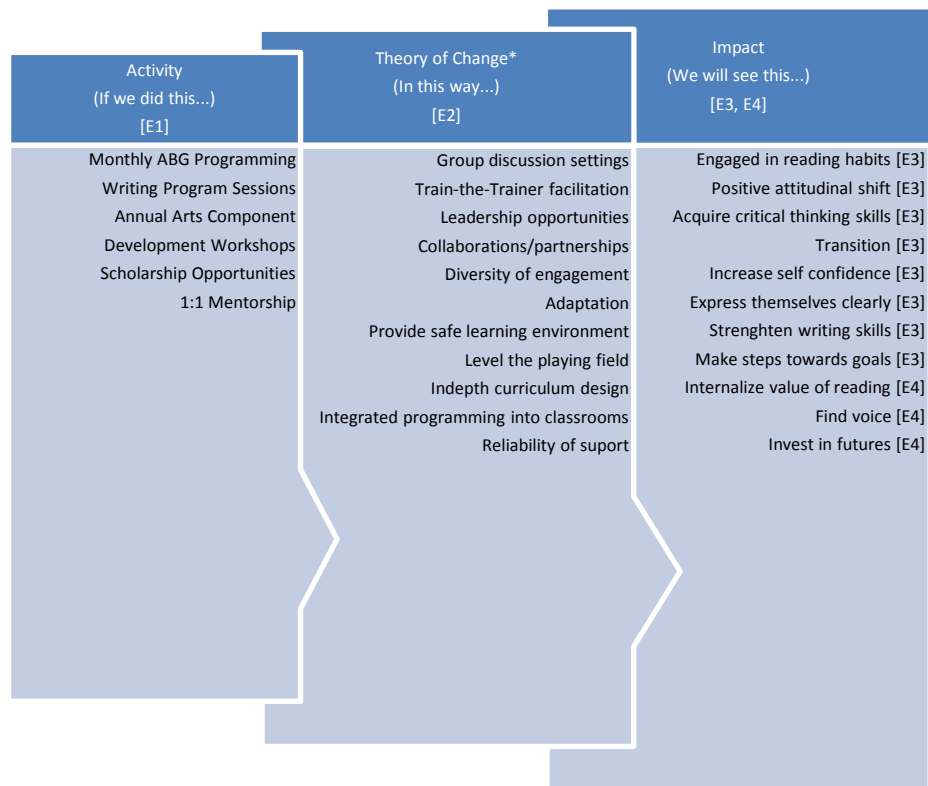
- Change reading behaviors (including participation) & attitudes

Secondary Impact

- Influence classroom learning climate

Tertiary Impact

- Break cycles of disengagement with education among students' communities



Theory of Change: Words Alive Teen Services

Critical Features of Teen Services	The theory or principle behind the feature
Group discussion settings	A sense of camaraderie amongst student, peer and volunteer, group discussion settings create an environment of open dialogue, trust, intergenerational contribution and comfort for students to share opinions, assessments and connections based on the book.
Train-the-trainer facilitation	Train-the-trainer allows volunteers and staff to expand leadership in order to create more impact.
Leadership opportunities	Words Alive provides ample opportunities for students to take on leadership roles (e.g., book group facilitation, internship, volunteer opportunities) in effort for students/participants to increase self-confidence, find their voice and invest in their futures.
Collaborations/partnerships	As part of our values, Words Alive seeks to collaborate/partner with high level organizations in the community in order to provide more resources for our participants.
Diversity of engagement	Teen Services provides a number of outlets for participants to allow students to experience new things to develop competency.
Adaptive Manner	Words Alive continually adjusts and responds to the needs of our students, families, teachers, administration, volunteers and community in order to create a dynamic and responsive environment for student engagement.
Provide safe learning environment	Words Alive program delivery is consistently meaningful, reliable and open in order for students to feel comfortable.
Level the playing field	As one of our values, Words Alive creates equal opportunities as a means to provide resources for students to make steps towards their goals.
In-depth curriculum design*	Words Alive incorporates common core standards and thematic interdisciplinary project-based methodologies in conjunction with teachers' syllabi in order to create an integrated curriculum.
Integrated programming into classrooms	Teen Services not only integrates curriculum into the classroom but aligns with themes, resources and delivery on a consistent basis.
Reliability of support	The support of the Words Alive volunteers strengthens students' self-advocacy, ensuring they take action and commit to their success.

Appendix B

Qualitative Interview Questions: Students

Know → Believe

1. What has being a part of Words Alive taught you about the importance of reading? → How has reading changed the way you think? Or perceive the world?
2. How has Words Alive helped you in seeing out information? How has this helped you be better able to make connections to text and real like applications? → What does knowledge mean to you now?
3. What are the most meaningful things you learned from the development workshops? → How have the development workshops -- like Share Your Story -- changed the way you see your future?

Do → Become

1. What barriers to reading regularly have you overcome based on what you've learned from the Words Alive book club? → How have you remained engaged in reading as a result?
2. What skills have you learned from Words Alive to become a better reader? → In what ways has reading become a part of your daily life? → How has reading improved your life?
3. In what ways are you able to better express yourself clearly through writing after Words Alive? → Has Words Alive helped you in defining your voice? If yes, how?

Feel → Love

1. In what ways has Words Alive changed the way you feel about reading? How has this inspired you? → After participating in the Words Alive Program, how are you more empowered to invest in your future?
2. How comfortable are you now in navigating post-secondary and career systems? → How has this changed your commitment to your future success?
3. What has been difficult for you to do in achieving your personal, educational or career goals? What do you consider to be your greatest accomplishment/achievement this school year? → How have these experiences made you more passionate about living your dreams?

Qualitative Interview Questions: Teachers

Know→Believe

1. What has being a part of Words Alive taught your students about the importance of reading? How have student discussion dynamics and their reactions to tests changed as ABG sessions progress? → How has reading changed the way your students think or perceive their world?
2. How has Words Alive helped your students seek out information? → How has this helped your students be better able to make connections to text and real life applications?

Do→Become

3. What barriers to reading regularly have you witnessed your students overcome based on what they've learned from the Words Alive book club? → How have they remained engaged in reading as a result?
4. What skills have you seen your students learn from Words Alive to become better readers? → In what ways has reading become a part of their daily lives? → How have you seen reading improve your students' lives?
5. In what ways are your students better able to express themselves clearly through writing after Words Alive? → Has Words Alive helped your students define their voices? If yes, how?
6. What student reading achievement are you most proud this school year? In what areas are your students struggling to apply the things they've learned? What been difficult to do? → What still needs to develop in your students to make progress the way you hope?

Feel→Love

7. How has Words Alive changed the way your students feel about reading? How has this inspired them? In what ways do they still feel discouraged about reading? → How has Words Alive changed the way you use books and reading in your classroom? How has Words Alive impacted your classroom/teaching goals regarding Language Arts?

Appendix C

Quantitative Student Survey

Words Alive Teen Services Questionnaire 2016

We want to hear from you!

Thank you for participating in the 2016 Teen Services Focus Group. Words Alive has a vested interest in continually improving our programs and services to better support you!

Please take a few moments to complete the following questionnaire. Your responses will help aid in restructuring our program in order to create an environment for you to thrive educationally, professionally and personally.

Thank you for your time and for participating in our Words Alive Teen Services program.

*** 1. Please provide your first and last name, JCCS site, age and student identification number**

Name (first and last):	<input type="text"/>
JCCS Site:	<input type="text"/>
Age:	<input type="text"/>
Student ID #:	<input type="text"/>

*** 2. Finish this sentence; "I think reading is _____."**

	1-a BORING way to spend time	2	3-an OKAY way to spend time	4	5-a GREAT way to spend time
BEFORE participating in Words Alive book club	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
NOW that you've been participating in Words Alive book club	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*** 3. Finish this sentence: "I think I am a _____."**

	1-a POOR reader	2	3-an OKAY reader	4	5-a VERY GOOD reader
BEFORE participating in Words Alive book club	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
NOW that I've been participating in Words Alive book club	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 4. I think participating in Words Alive book club has helped my ability to...
(Please select all that apply.)

- ☐ express myself in group discussions
- ☐ express myself through writing
- ☐ make connections between what I read, my life and my world
- ☐ listen to others
- ☐ use evidence to support my ideas and claims
- ☐ use new vocabulary
- ☐ seek out new information on my own
- ☐ challenge my own perspective and attitudes about others

Other (please specify)

5. About how many more hours of your free time per week do you spend reading because of Words Alive book club?

6. Because of Words Alive book club, I will spend _____ of my future free time reading.

- ☐ none
- ☐ very little
- ☐ some
- ☐ a lot
- ☐ most

* 7. What has challenged you as a student participating in the Word Alive book club or writing program?

* 8. How do you see the world/people/your own life differently because of the stories you have read?

* 9. What do you consider to be your greatest achievement within the Word Alive program?

10. What other comments do you have in regards to Words Alive and the ABG book club?

Done

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See how easy it is to [create a survey](#).