



Adolescent Book Group Program

Impact Report

ALL PARTNERS

2022 - 2023

Why Reading Matters

Reading is the foundation of academic achievement and a key to living a free and full life. Development of that skill begins early and continues throughout a learner's educational career. When learners gain confidence as readers and build reading habits, they have the power to become lifelong learners.

Our Shared Purpose

At Words Alive, we believe that empowering experiences turn learners into agents of change and advocates for their own education. We also believe that reading is the foundation of community and economic development and that when everyone can read, whole communities thrive!

Words Alive's Adolescent Book Group brings books alive for youth facing extraordinary circumstances such as unstable housing, food insecurity, violence, and impact by the justice system. Through engaging projects, writing workshops, and discussion sessions, Adolescent Book Group participants enhance their critical thinking skills, self-esteem, and ability to express themselves. Words Alive's commitment to reading diverse and relevant texts allows program participants to connect books to themselves and the world while changing their life story.

During the 2022-23 academic year, Words Alive partnered with like-minded leadership at seven community partners in 13 locations to facilitate our hallmark book group program, with 496 learners in 4-12th grade.

Youth read a series of books (generally 2-to-4 chapter books or graphic novels per program year), created book-inspired art projects, engaged in creative writing prompts, and received starter kits of basic school supplies. Each book group was facilitated by trained reading role models who are passionate about serving today's youth and cultivating a community of readers.

When possible, Words Alive seeks to train individuals and stakeholders who may already be living in and/or serving the community where the program is being delivered. This not only contributed to a more sustainable program model for the partner organization, but also enhances the role model-to-student relationship, leading to more significant programmatic impact and learner outcomes.

Program Partners

Thank you to the following community partners who collaborated to connect learners with experiences to read, think, and create:

- Monarch School and San Diego County Office of Education
- Boys & Girls Club of San Marcos
- Boys & Girls Club of Vista
- Guitars in the Classroom
- Millennial Tech Middle School
- ProKids Oceanside
- Groundwork San Diego
- United Way of San Diego County
- Jackie Robinson YMCA
- San Diego Public Library

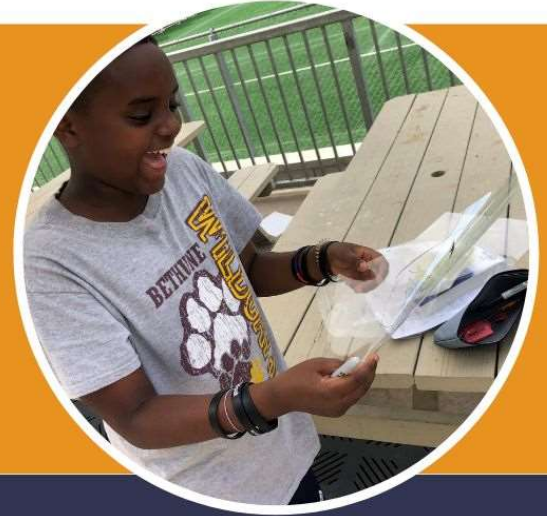
The Words Alive Way

ADOLESCENT BOOK GROUP PROGRAM

SCHOOL YEAR 2022 - 2023

Bring People Together

A total of 496 youth participated through the program through partnerships with 11 community partners in the 2022-2023 program year.



Create Access

Participants added at least 1,300 new books, in total, to their personal libraries, reporting an increase in the number of books they owned by 60%.

Build Habits

Survey respondents who rated reading as a good or great way to spend time increased by 75%, from before to after the program.



Practice What Works

“Yall are the reason I started to go to the library and check out books to read.”

Impact Framework

Reading is a non-negotiable skill set for personal agency and self-sufficiency. It is also through knowing the stories of others that we deepen our humanity and connection to one another. Words Alive's work connects people to the power of reading through the simple, essential, and effective act of reading together.

Using research-based program models and tools identified or developed by our third-party evaluative partners at University of San Diego and Dialogue in Action, our Read Aloud Program focuses on three key areas of impact. That students:

Develop an enduring commitment to reading.

Objective: Students internalize the value of reading as they analyze a close reading of characters, plot, theme, and experience life-changing ideas through discussion with their peers and adults.

Become life-long learners.

Objective: Students 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.

Become advocates for themselves and their future.

Objective: Students become empowered to invest in their futures by increasing self-esteem and clarity as readers, writers and speakers who use effective communication strategies to express themselves.

Across our programming, Words Alive supports student achievement, and inspires a motivation to read, through five learning anchors:

1. **Read:** We read fresh and relevant texts that reflect the communities we serve.
2. **Talk:** We talk about what we read to build vocabulary and sharpen self-expression skills.
3. **Write:** We write about the stories we read to think through and present our ideas. Our youngest learners draw until we are ready to write.
4. **Connect:** We place the stories we read within the context of our lives, our community, and our world.
5. **Do:** We do something with what we read to play with ideas and bring it all together.

Methods and Process Conditions

Adolescent Book Group is designed to meet the *process conditions* needed to build the strong engagement that leads to positive learning routines and improved achievement. Each of our program sessions are:

- **Linked to Learning:** Content and activities are directly connected to age-appropriate developmental milestones and what students are expected to do academically.
- **Relational:** Activities help participants build relationships, get to know one another, and build trust.
- **Developmental:** Participants are learning new skills, and after participating, better understand how those skills support reading achievement.
- **Collaborative:** Participants are working together to learn new skills as a group, with caring adults.
- **Interactive:** Participants practice new skills and have opportunities for corrective feedback.

The Impact of Books and Belonging

Research has found that children who regularly read for pleasure have better mental health outcomes in their teen years. Adolescents reporting high levels of school connectedness are more likely to experience better mental health and emotional stability as adults.



Reading young adult literature has been associated with a better understanding of human nature and the wider world, especially when relevant texts are used, and students deepen their engagement with the book with group discussion and writing activities. By going to the classrooms in which teens already spend their time, fostering genuine connections through group discussions and shared experience, Words Alive builds a sense of belonging for the overburdened youth we serve.

Positive youth development programs such as our Adolescent Book Group that strengthen young people's sense of identity and increase protective factors are recognized as having positive impacts on a range of health and academic outcomes, as well as increasing school connectedness.

Who We Served

Out of the total 496 learners enrolled in the program, 180 participated directly through our collaboration with Monarch School, in partnership with the San Diego County Office of Education and their Juvenile Court and Community Schools (JCCS). The remaining 316 learners engaged in the program through our Train-the-Trainer delivery model.

Our Train-the-Trainer approach empowers partners to independently facilitate the program at their respective sites, following their schedules, and equipped with all the necessary resources for a meaningful

book group experience.

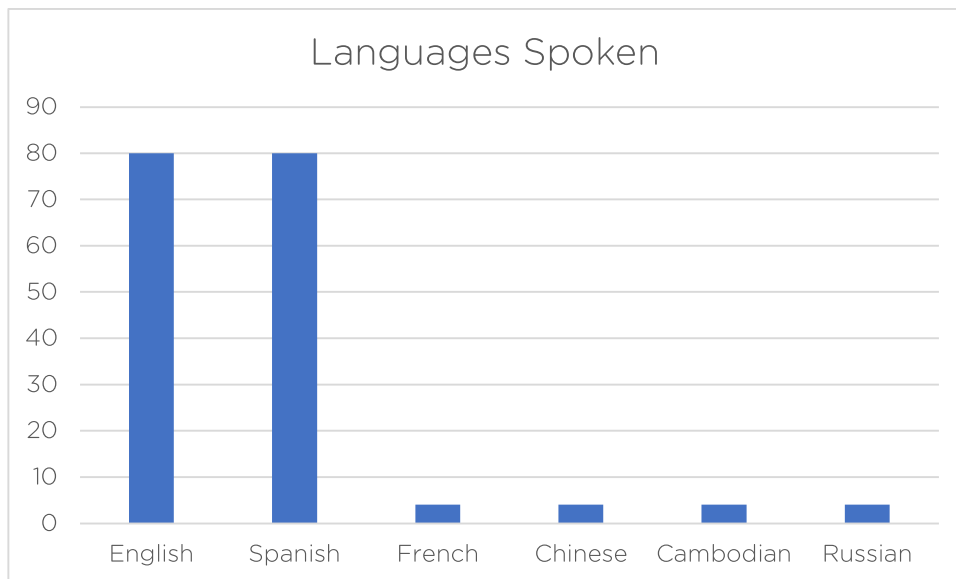
The Adolescent Book Group Train-the-Trainer initiative involved multiple partners, such as Community Schools in Oceanside in collaboration with ProKidz, Boys & Girls Clubs in Vista and San Marcos, and Groundwork San Diego.

Survey Responses

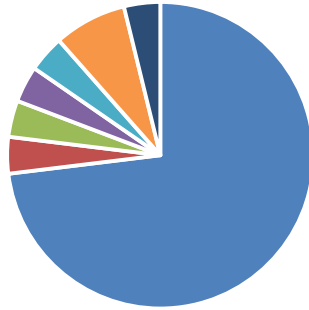
Of the organizations that took part in the retroactive survey, totaling three, there were 178 participants. Among these participants, 33 completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of 19%.

Regarding the respondents:

- 68% reported speaking a language different from English with their families. The survey showed an equal division between English and Spanish spoken at home among the respondents, indicating high levels of bilingual readers participating in book groups.



Race and Ethnicity of Survey Respondents



- Hispanic or Latino/a/x
- White or Caucasian
- Black or African American
- Asian or Asian American
- African or Middle Eastern
- Other, or not listed
- I choose not to disclose

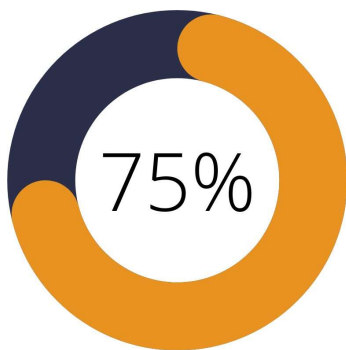
76% of survey respondents identified as Hispanic or Latino/a/x. Other was the second most popular response at 8%, All others listed received 4% of responses.

Learners demonstrated growth in key areas of interest, confidence, and time spent reading. After participating:

- The number of learners who rated reading as a good or great way to spend time increased by 75%.
- The number of learners who rated themselves as a good reader increased by 33%.
- The number of learners who reported not reading at all decreased by 50%.



Youth from Jackie Robinson YMCA poses with their self-portrait in Fall 2022



increased number of learners who rated reading as a good or great way to spend time



increased number of learners who rated themselves as a good reader

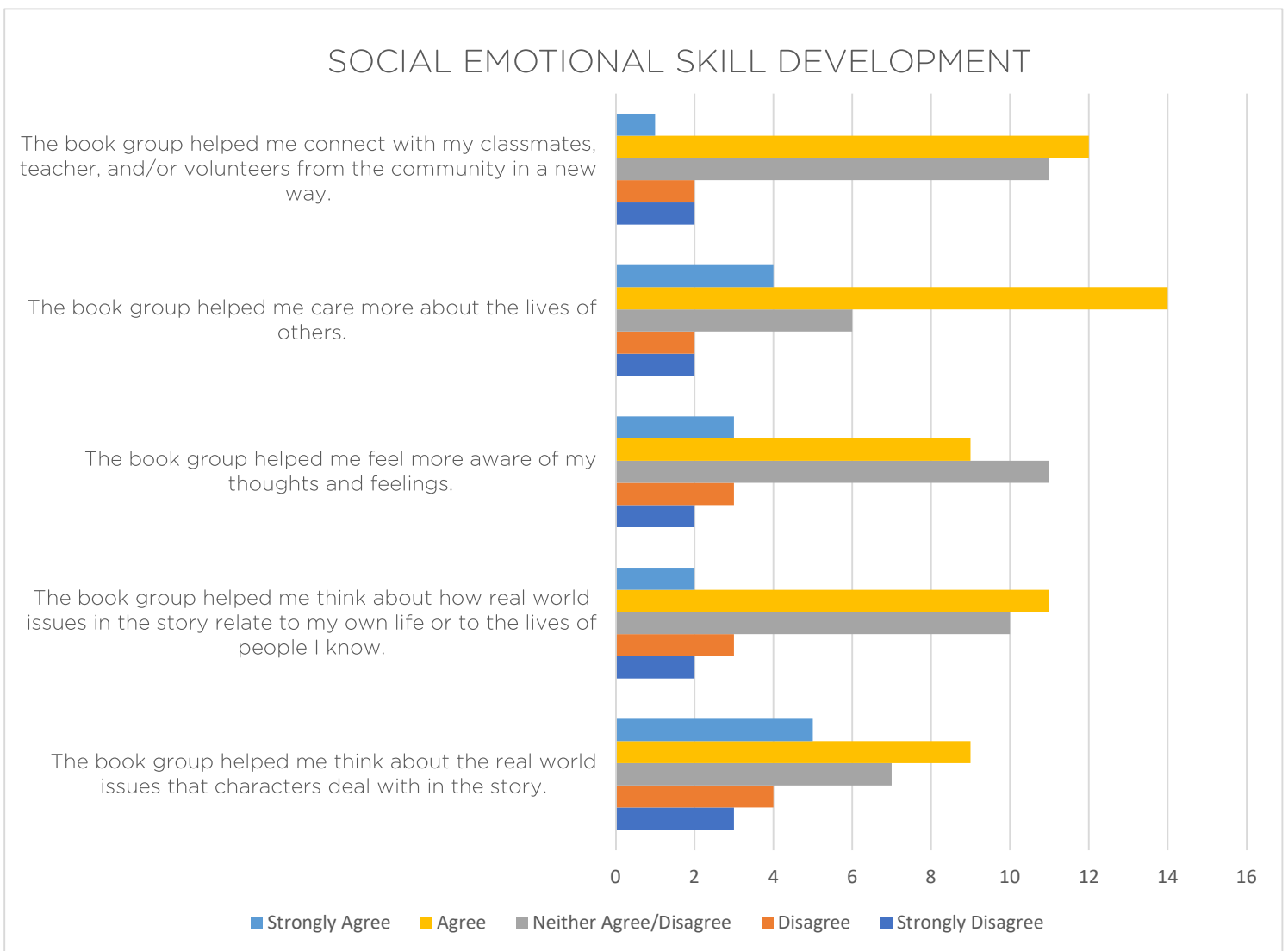


decrease in students reporting not reading at all

Reading together and discussing the themes, topics, and characters in the book encourages participants to think critically about real world issues while emotionally connecting to the story through and developing empathy and self-awareness.

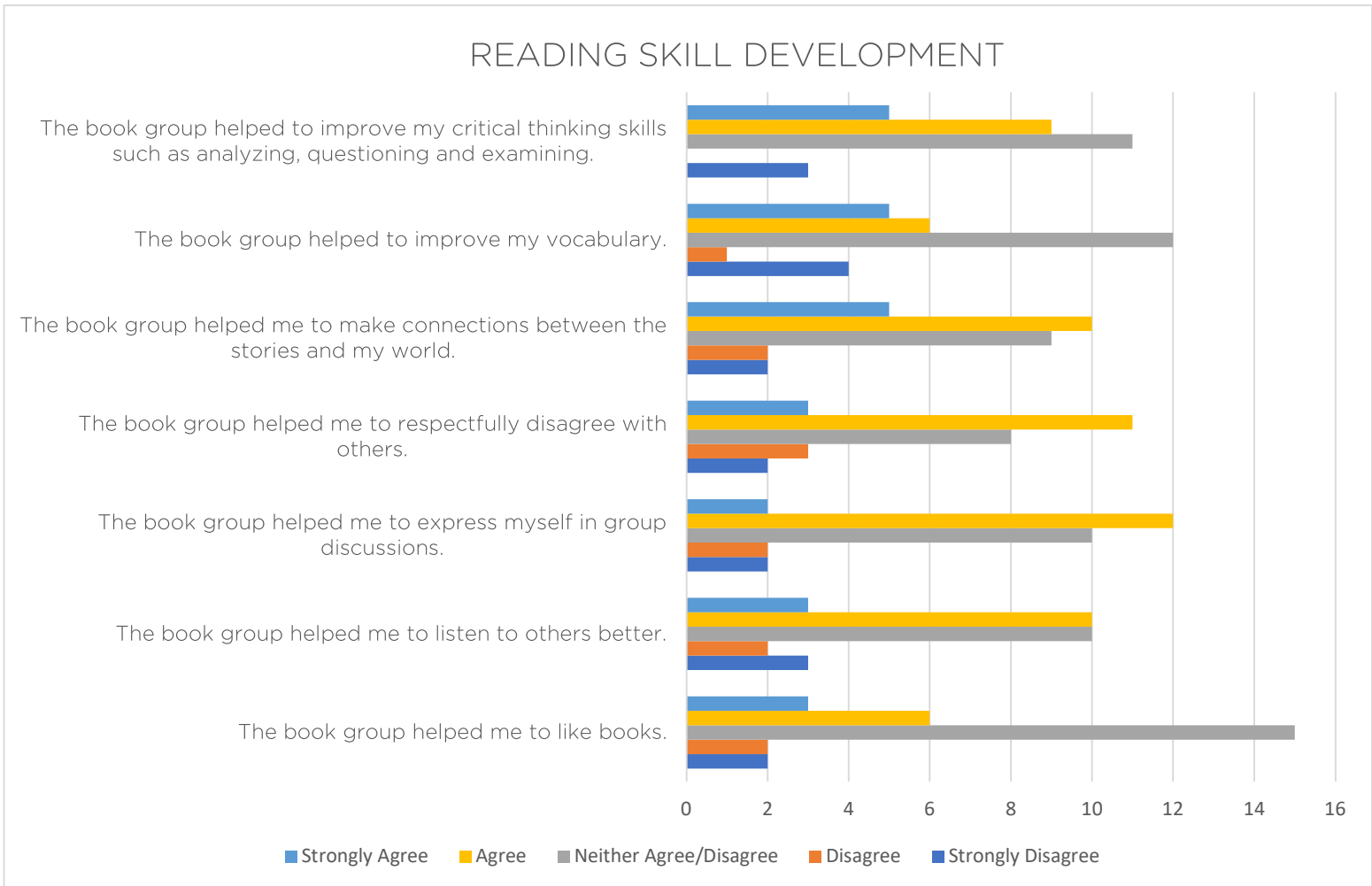
Adolescent Book Group facilitates social-emotional and reading skill development through:

- Writing and discussion prompts
- Research and resource exploration
- Active listening and group reflection
- Exploring connections between text and self through relevant art projects



56% of youth surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed that a specific social-emotional skill was strengthened via participation in the program, and 50% of respondents agreed that their critical thinking and group communication skills were improved, which indicates some growth but there is room for greater impact (see *Reflections* section).

Furthermore, self-evaluation for reading skill development showed the greatest improvement to critical thinking, connection-making, and communication skills.



■ Educator Comments

About the act of reading together:

Having students understand the importance of reading and reading together builds a new generation of readers.

It's interesting how the students were learning about different people's experiences, their life experiences, and then how they are told. I saw how they are able to connect their own experiences and then be able to get explain how that impacts them.

One English Language Learner was able to read the titles which helped them to make connections between his culture and others.

About building relationships with volunteers:

Y'all are the reason I started to go to the library and check out books to read... The way we are as a class could talk about the books we read was fun.

- 9th grader at Monarch School

About skill development for future success:

Exposing students to books and volunteers with different perspectives is invaluable.

The students have to see other adults outside of their own space. They have to know how to engage in intellectual conversations, so that when they do gradually that they're more likely to be able to be successful in those type of spaces.

Students learning annotation in books helps to prepare them for college level reading.

About the impact of relevant texts:

One usually shy student was super excited to share her letter she wrote based on one book the students chose called 'Patron Saints of Nothing.'

Access and Book Ownership

Our Adolescent Book Group aims to enhance youth literacy by providing access to diverse and engaging reading material. Through our efforts, we've distributed 1,321 books to young readers, promoting a culture of reading and exploration.

Survey responses from participants revealed a significant impact: an average increase of up to 60% in personal library sizes, translating to an average possession of 6-10 age-appropriate books per respondent.

Analyzing data from the National Center for Education Progress (NAEP) via the Nation's Report Card, Unite

for Literacy discovered correlations between 8th-grade student performance, reading habits, and home library sizes. Students with over 100 books at home and a daily reading habit excelled on the NAEP reading assessment, with 74% achieving proficiency or higher.

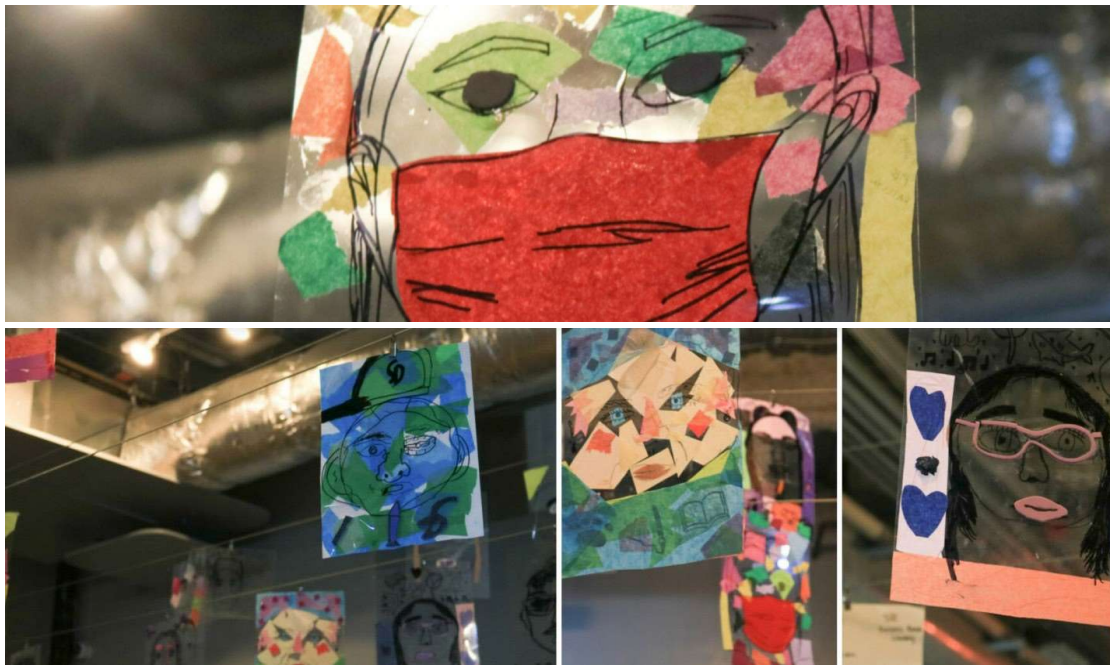
In contrast, students with fewer than 100 books at home and irregular reading habits demonstrated lower proficiency rates, with only 21% scoring proficient or above. This underscores the critical role of accessible books and consistent reading in academic success.

Worryingly, the data predicts that a mere 8% of households possess the conditions deemed vital for fostering strong literacy development: 100+ books at home and a daily reading habit. Our goal is to bridge this literacy gap and cultivate an environment where robust literacy practices are accessible to all young people.

Art & Lit: *Collectively You Portrait*

Through an art-making project designed with the New Children’s Museum, students reflected on the readings and created their own *Collectively You* portrait inspired by themes from the books we read of celebrating our authentic selves, resilience, courage, belonging and friendship.

Book group participants used collage techniques with acetate film, tissue paper, foam, and markers to create self-portraits that examine which parts of themselves they keep inside, and those they choose to share with the world.



**Photo credits New Children’s Museum 2023*

Young visitors at the New Children’s Museum, where portraits were displayed to the public from early December 2022 through January 2023, also had an opportunity to make their own *Collectively You* Portrait while in the exhibit space and read picture books on the same themes as the older readers explored in chapter books and graphic novels. During this time, the exhibition was featured on ABG10 News’ annual Project Literacy series highlighting the important work of making reading matter in our community.

The exhibit featured the artwork of 164 students in grades 4-12 at Title I schools at Words Alive San Diego partner sites, out-of-school time partners, and through summer experiences designed to support students' unfinished learning from the COVID pandemic.

Partners for the project included: San Diego Unified School District's Level Up spring programming at the Jackie Robinson YMCA and summer programming with Guitars in the Classroom, San Diego County Office of Education – Monarch School, San Diego Public Library, Oceanside Public Library, Boys and Girls Clubs of San Marcos, and Boys and Girls Club of Vista.

The projects can be viewed by visiting the Words Alive website (bit.ly/CollectivelyYou) or following this QR code:



Art & Lit: *Graphic Tales*

The next iteration of Art & Lit, called “Graphic Tales” and is being delivered in partnership with San Diego Public Library, Monarch School, and San Pasqual Academy throughout the 2023-2024 school year.



Author Marcie Colleen visits with Art & Lit participants over the summer in the 2023-2024 pilot *Graphic Tales* project at City Heights Library.

When a group of 14 adolescents ages 9 through 11, participating in the pilot *Graphic Tales* project at City Heights Library during Summer 2023, took a short survey designed to quickly gauge their thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors around reading, **100% of respondents agreed with the statement “When I read books, I learn new things.”**

This short survey included responses from two individuals indicating their disagreement with the statement “I think reading books is fun.” This indicates that even the youth who do not like reading very much acknowledge that they learn new things when they read, and it demonstrates the power of reading together. Young readers exposed to Words Alive’s annual Art & Lit project through book groups understand the value of reading.

Funding for Words Alive’s Art & Lit Program is provided by Bentivoglio Family Fund, The Century Club of San Diego, Jordan Ressler Charitable Fund of the Jewish Community Foundation, Qualcomm, and S. Mark Taper

Foundation.

REFLECTIONS

In the 2022-23 program year, our efforts to broaden the Adolescent Book Group model led to new partnerships and enriched community programming for youth as we shifted back to comprehensive in-person activities.

Throughout this period, learners reported progress in crucial areas: academic and social-emotional skills, expansion of their personal libraries, and a heightened appreciation for reading.

Moving forward, we aim to enhance the impact of the Adolescent Book Group in three key ways:

1. Strengthening our volunteer recruitment and onboarding processes to bolster program support and increase our capacity to administer and enhance surveys, in addition to returning to paper survey collection methods.
2. Creating consistent and frequent opportunities for learners to engage with authors of the stories featured in the program, fostering deeper connections and understanding.
3. Focusing on elevating our influence on participants' social-emotional development and reading skills by critically analyzing our program practices and refining our curriculum design.

In the interim, our commitment remains unwavering: to introduce more youth to the transformative power of reading by fostering the essential and effective practice of shared reading experiences.

SPECIAL THANKS

Words Alive and participating classrooms share deep gratitude for the philanthropic leaders who invest in our Adolescent Book Group program and the movement to make reading matter:

Literacy Legends (\$100,000+)

- Bentivoglio Family Fund
- William Gumpert Foundation

Transformational Leaders (\$50,000 - \$99,999)

- Century Club of San Diego
- Dr. Seuss Foundation
- The Conrad Prebys Foundation
- San Diego Foundation

Impact Investors (\$25,000 - \$49,999)

- Carleton Management Inc.
- The Conrad Prebys Foundation
- Walter J. & Betty C. Zable Foundation

Learning Advocates (\$10,000 - \$24,999)

- Christensen Family Foundation
- The Fischer Family Fund *
- The LJ Galinson Advised Fund*
- Hologic
- Nordson Corporation Foundation
- PNC Foundation
- Karen & Jeffrey Silberman Family Fund*
- Walter J. & Betty C. Zable Foundation

Reading Patrons (\$5,000 - \$9,999)

- Anonymous
- The Baratz Family
- S. Bernstein Fund*
- Boys and Girls Foundation
- Cushman Foundation
- Toby Eisenberg
- Roberta & Mark Emerson
- Marjory Winkelman Epstein
- Samuel H. French & Katherine Weaver French Fund
- Kimberly & Jeffrey Goldman
- Norm Hapke
- Hunter Industries
- Gail & Don Kohn
- Leslye & Scott Lyons and family
- PGA Tour Wives Association, Inc.
- Lorne Polger & Lori Weiner
- Rice Family Foundation
- The Schoenith Foundation
- David & Tina Thomas Family Charitable Fund **

* Fund of the Jewish Community Foundation of San Diego

** Fund of the San Diego Foundation