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**WORDS ALIVE FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAM  
EVALUATION OF YEAR 2**

**PRESENTED TO:  
WORDS ALIVE**

AUGUST 2014

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CASTER FAMILY CENTER  
FOR NONPROFIT AND PHILANTHROPIC RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO

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**SCHOOL OF LEADERSHIP  
AND EDUCATION SCIENCES**  
*Caster Family Center for  
Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research*

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## OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

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Words Alive is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) reading advocacy organization whose mission is to open opportunities for success by cultivating a commitment to reading among children, youth and families from low-income communities across San Diego. The Caster Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research (Caster Center) at the University of San Diego was contracted by Words Alive to analyze data for the Family Literacy Program Pilot Year (2013) and Year 2 (2014).

The research methods were determined and executed by Words Alive staff and the data were provided to the Caster Center for analysis. The final evaluation for the Pilot Year determined some changes were necessary to improve the accuracy of the evaluation. Among these suggestions were to: 1) eliminate the Control Track,<sup>1</sup> 2) increase the number of participants, and 3) provide snacks at last session as an incentive to increase the number of parents who completed the post survey. Words Alive implemented all of these recommendations and increased participation in the Workshop Track from 37 to 102 students, and in the Library Track from 55 to 109 students. They also added a seventh session in order to provide incentives for completing the surveys and focus groups as well as to give out kindergarten readiness tool kits. The percentage of Workshop parents who completed both the pre and post evaluation surveys increased from 81% in the pilot year to 98% in Year 2.

The purpose of Year 2 was to validate the Pilot Year's findings and evaluate the most effective strategy for increasing students' reading readiness and habitual reading at home. The following research questions were posed:

- Does book ownership improve literacy skills for preschool age students?
- Do parent education workshops, in addition to book ownership, improve literacy skills for preschool age students?

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<sup>1</sup> During Year 2 of the program, it was decided that the third track -- known as the Control Track in which neither books nor workshops were provided -- yielded little additional information. It was determined that comparing the Library Track with the Workshop Track was the most effective indicator of the success of the program.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Child Development Centers

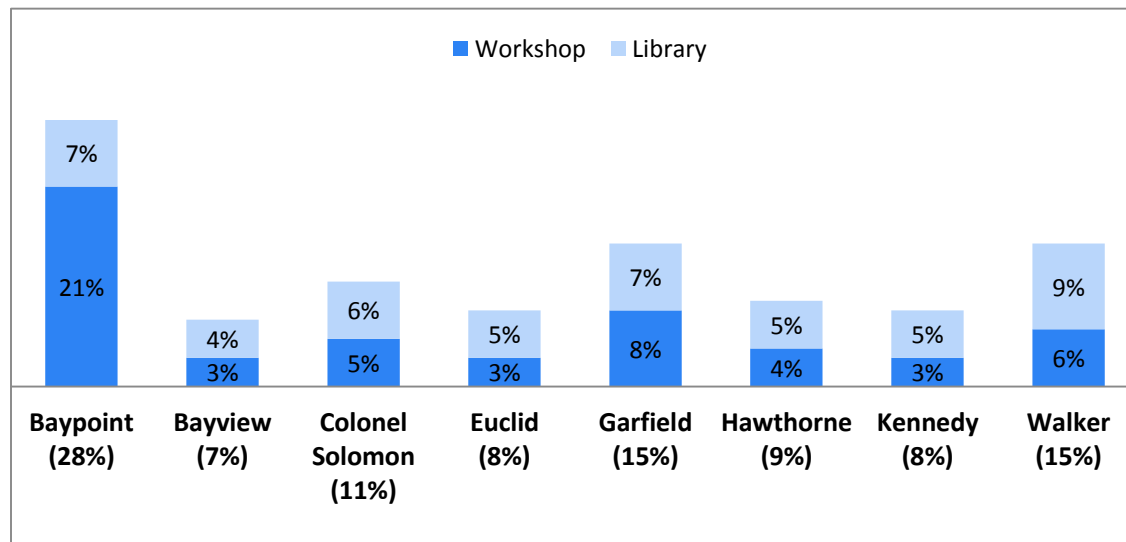
Year 2 of the program included eight different Child Development Centers (CDCs):

- Bay Point
- Bayview
- Colonel Solomon
- Euclid
- Garfield
- Hawthorne
- Kennedy
- Walker

The program was conducted at the eight sites for two different seven-week intervention periods. The first session ran February 3 to March 21, 2014 and the second from April 7 to May 23, 2014. Each of these sites included a Library Track and a Workshop Track. In the Workshop Track, books and workshops were provided to parents/caregivers and students to educate parents about: 1) early literacy development in children, 2) the importance of routinely reading aloud to their preschool age children, and 3) how to do so effectively with developmentally appropriate materials. Children attending the Library Track were given books to keep, but they received no Workshop interventions.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of children at each of the CDCs who participated in the Workshop and Library Tracks.

**Figure 1. Percentage of Children At Each CDC Site**



## Data Collection

The primary tool used for assessing reading readiness in children was The Get Ready to Ready (GRTR) screening tool. Developed by the National Center for Learning Disabilities with the help of nationally recognized experts on early literacy and child development, the GRTR screening tool was selected as the most applicable assessment by University of San Diego graduate student team during the planning phase of the program pilot. The GRTR was administered at each of the sites two times, once at the beginning of a seven-week intervention period and once at the end. Words Alive Staff recorded the GRTR raw scores in an Excel spreadsheet along with their appropriate level (below average, average, and above average) based on the GRTR Score Interpretation Form.

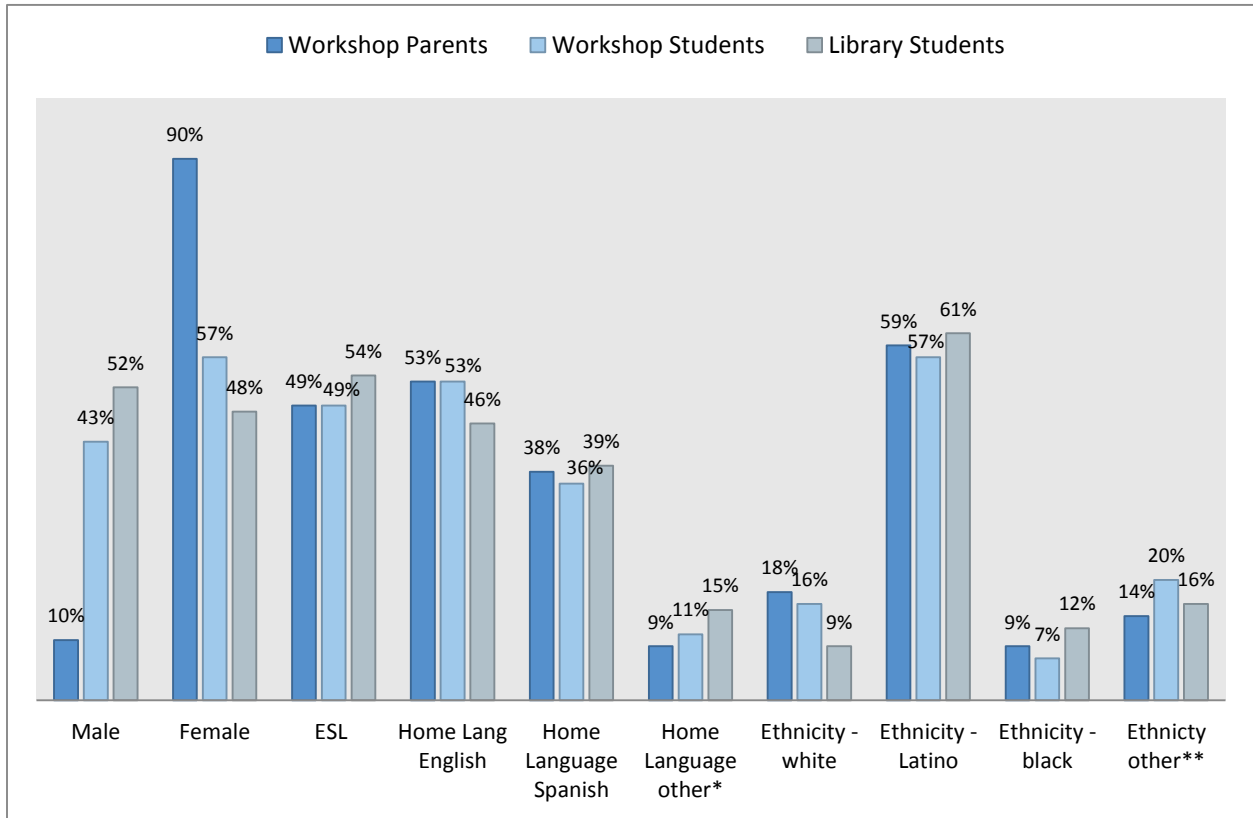
Two evaluation surveys were administered to parents both before and after the seven-week intervention period. The first survey, the Family Literacy Survey, was given to parents in both the Library and Workshop Tracks to measure children's interactions with books and literacy behaviors. The second survey, the Family Literacy Program Retrospective Evaluation, was given to Workshop parents both before and after the seven-week intervention, and consisted of a series of questions aimed at providing insight into four main areas: parent knowledge, literacy behaviors, child book exploration behaviors, and parent book exploration behaviors. These surveys were analyzed to measure parent confidence in reading to their child, the importance placed on reading, and literacy behaviors before and after the program. Words Alive Staff recorded the results of these surveys in an Excel spreadsheet.

The final data collection method was a focus group for each Workshop group at the end of the seven-week intervention. Parents met with Words Alive staff to discuss the changes in reading behaviors they had seen with their children and how they had changed their reading behaviors at home. Words Alive staff recorded and transcribed the focus group findings.

## Participants

A total of 211 students participated in Year 2 of the Literacy Program. The Workshop Track included 102 students, and the Library Track included 109 students. An overview of the student and parent demographics revealed diversity between and among the Workshop and Library Track students. The parent demographics were used to determine if there were any relationships between parent demographics and student performance on the post-GRTR scores in the Workshop Track. Figure 2 summarizes the demographic information that was collected for the students and the parents. Overall, the demographic makeup was similar for the Workshop and Library Tracks.

**Figure 2. Demographics of Participants**



\*\* The numbers for each of the other ethnicity categories were too small to analyze individually so they were included in “Ethnicity other” which includes: Japanese, African, Asian Indian, Filipino, Chinese, Multi-racial, Other Asian, and Other Pacific Islander.

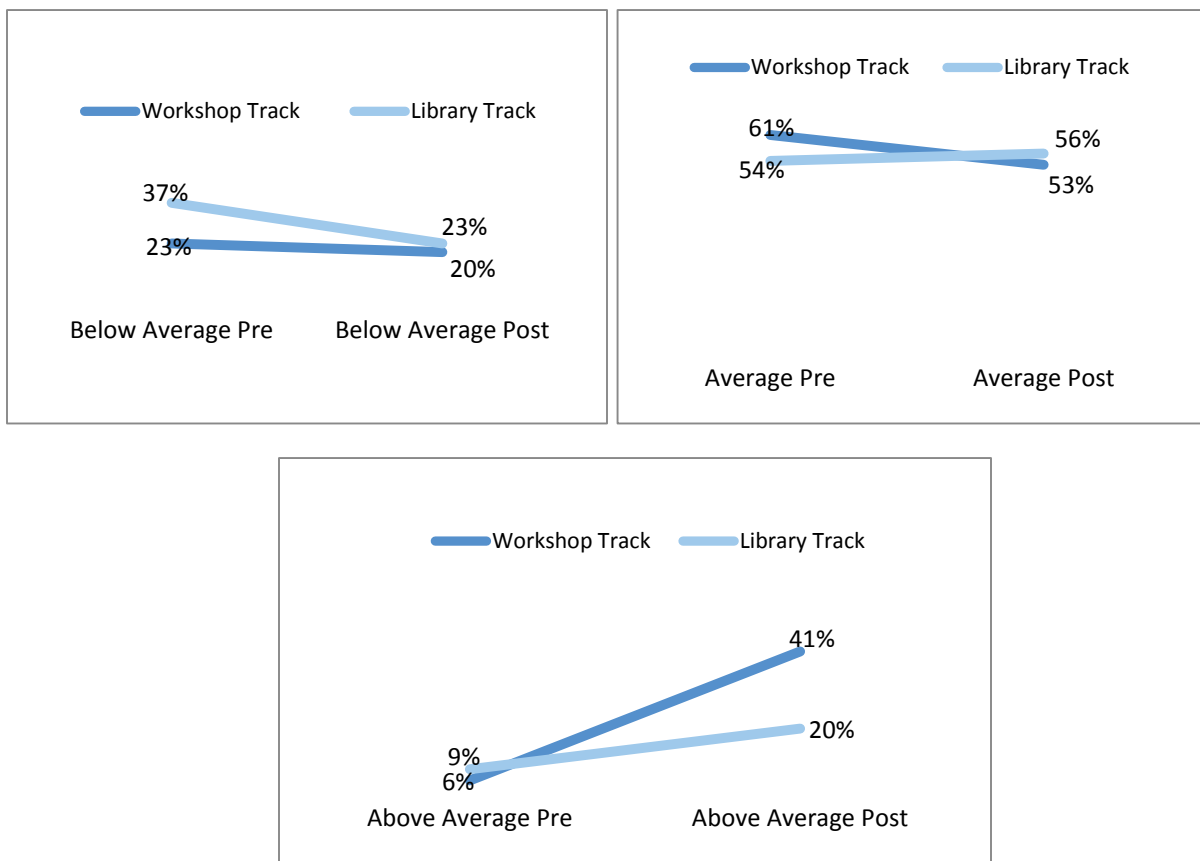
## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The seven-week Workshop Track continues to show progress in Year 2 towards raising GRTR scores and providing parents the tools and confidence to change reading behaviors in the home.

### Workshop vs. Library Track GRTR Scores

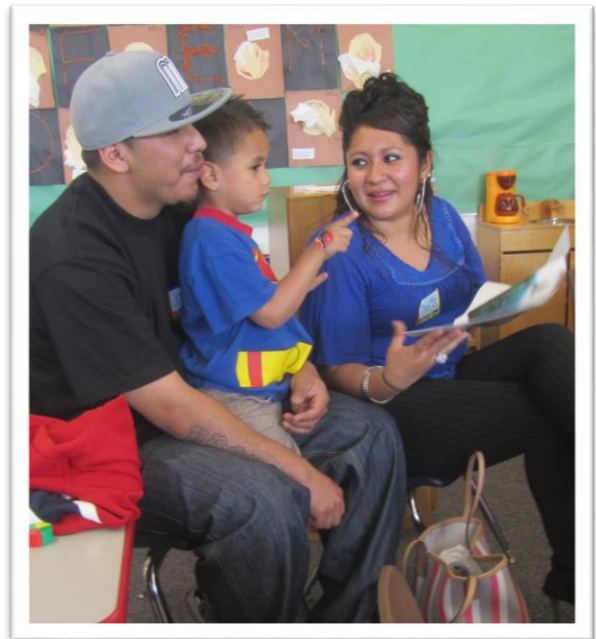
Figure 3 shows the percentage of students who scored below average, average, and above average on the GRTR for both the Workshop and Library Tracks. While both tracks noticed a decrease in the percentage of students scoring below average, the Workshop Track showed a much larger (i.e., double) increase in the percentage of children at the above average range.

**Figure 3. Comparison of Workshop and Library Track GRTR Scores**

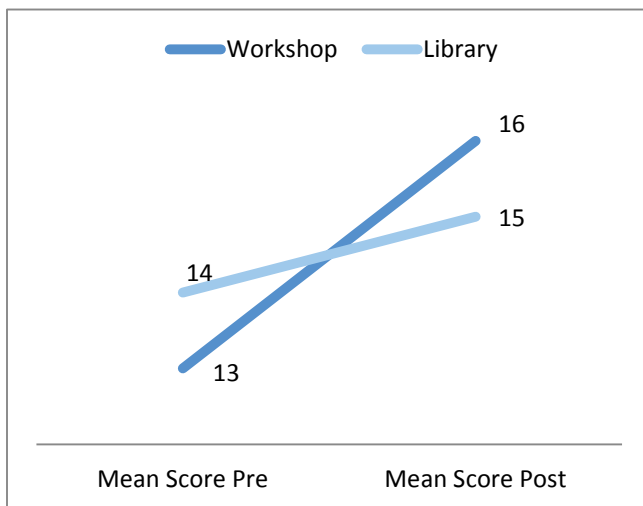


Data were also analyzed to assess if any demographic variables had an impact on post-GRTR scores, and there were no statistically significant findings. **The only variable that significantly increased students' post-GRTR scores was being in the Workshop Track.**

The change in the average (i.e., mean) GRTR scores was also calculated for both the Library and Workshop Tracks. The maximum score for the GRTR is 25. As can be seen in Figure 4, the average pre scores were 13 for the Workshop Track and 14 for the Library Track. The average post scores were 16 for the Workshop Track and 15 for the Library Track. This translates to a 23% increase in average GRTR scores for the Workshop Track as a whole, compared to 7% for the Library Track (see Figure 5).

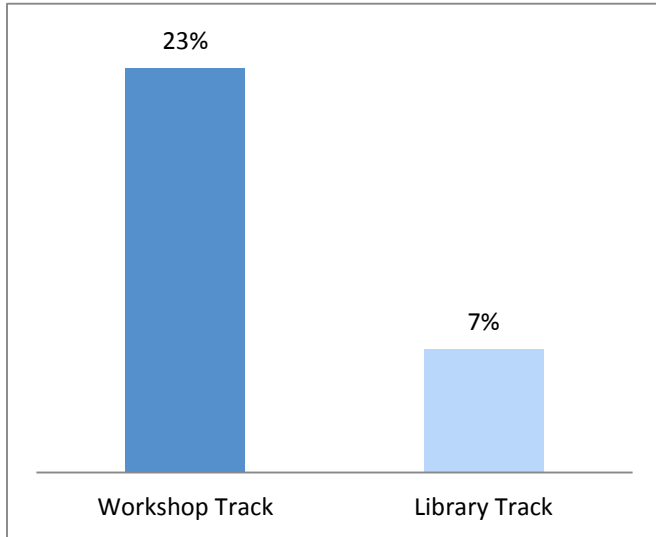


**Figure 4. Comparison of Average Pre and Post GRTR Scores for Workshop and Library Tracks**





**Figure 5. Percent Change in Post Intervention GRTR Scores for Workshop and Library Tracks**



*The only variable that significantly increased students' post-GRTR scores was being in the Workshop Track.*



## Workshop Track: A Closer Look at GRTR Scores

Data for only the Workshop Track were analyzed to assess if any demographic variables had an impact on post-GRTR scores. The results are summarized in Table 1. In sum, post-GRSR scores for the Workshop Track were higher for:

- Students whose home language was English;
- Non-ESL students (i.e., students who did not speak English as a second language); and
- Students who attended more workshops with their parent/caregiver.

**Table 1. Significance of Demographic Variables on Post-GRTR Scores**

Demographic Variable	Statistically Significant?
Parent Employment	No
Parent Education	No
Home Language - English	Yes *
ESL Student	Yes *
Gender of Student	No
CDC Site	No
Ethnicity	No
Number of Workshops Attended	Yes**

\* Students who were English speaking and non-ESL showed greater gains in the post-GRTR scores. However, overall students in the Workshop Track, including non-English speaking and ESL students, showed greater improvement in the Workshop Track than in the Library Track.

\*\* Students who attended more workshops had higher post-GRTR scores than those who attended fewer workshops.

## Evaluation Surveys

Two evaluation surveys were administered with parents both before and after the intervention periods.

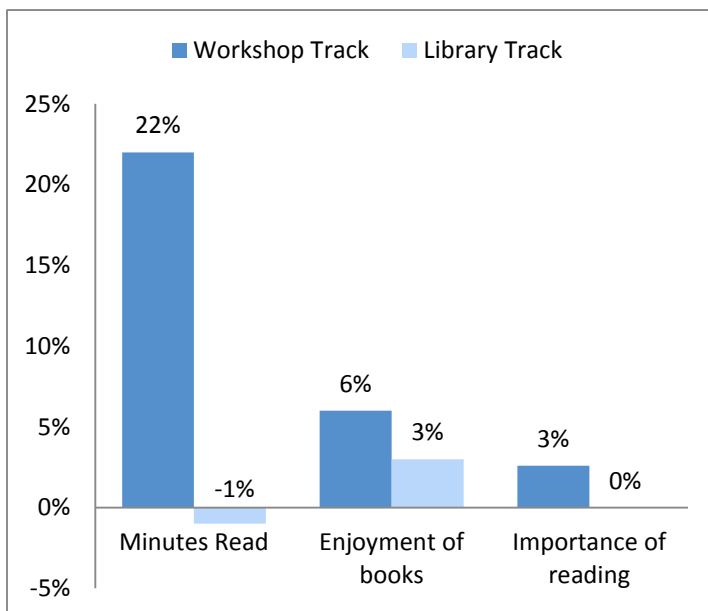
### Family Literacy Program Retrospective Survey

The Family Literacy Program Retrospective Survey was given to parents at the beginning and end of the intervention period for both the Library and Workshop Tracks to measure:

- Parents' rating of the importance of reading (1=not at all to 5=a great deal)
- Parents' rating of how much their children enjoyed books (1=not at all to 5=a great deal)
- Number of minutes spent reading

Figure 6 shows the percent change in the average scores both before and after the intervention period for each track. Parents in the Workshop Track reported positive increases in all three reading behaviors, whereas parents in the Library Track showed a positive increase in one, a decrease in another and no change in the third. Notably, there was a 22% increase in the average number of minutes spent reading for the Workshop Track, compared to a slight decrease for the Library Track.

**Figure 6. Percent Change in Reading Behaviors**



## Words Alive Survey

The Words Alive Survey, developed by Words Alive staff, was given to Workshop parents both before and after the intervention. It consisted of a series of statements related to four main Literacy Areas:

- Parent knowledge
- Literacy behaviors
- Child book exploration behaviors
- Parent book exploration behaviors

The results are summarized in Table 2, and show that the average scores and percentage of parents who responded, “Yes” increased after the Workshop Track.



Above: Families at Hawthorne Child Development Center celebrate graduation from the Family Literacy Program

**Table 2. Average Pre and Post Scores on Words Alive Survey**

Statement	Average Pre-score	Average Post-score
<b>PARENT KNOWLEDGE (RESPONSE SCALE: 1=LOW; 5=HIGH)</b>		
1. I see myself as my child's first teacher	4.15	4.94
2. I know how my preschool child learns	3.73	4.80
3. I know the importance of reading to my child everyday	4.27	4.99
4. I know the importance of talking and listening to my child	4.27	4.94
5. I know the importance of signing songs and saying rhymes with my	3.84	4.91
6. I know the importance of play in my child's learning	4.02	4.97
7. I know the importance of exploring the environment in my child's	3.94	4.93
8. Know how to effectively read aloud to your child	3.72	4.91
9. I know how to choose books for my preschooler	3.66	4.79
10. I know how to create language rich environment for your preschool	3.55	4.84
<b>LITERACY BEHAVIORS (RESPONSE SCALE: 1=NEVER; 4=OFTEN)</b>		
1. I visit the library with my child	2.29	3.20
2. My child looks at books by himself	3.20	3.90
3. My child uses books in playtime	3.02	3.76
4. My child tries to print letters or words	2.90	3.69
5. Family members try to help my child print letters or words	2.69	3.53
6. Family members try to help my child read words or letters that	2.93	3.79
7. Family members spend time with my child working on creative	2.99	3.72
8. My child sees adults reading and writing at home	3.17	3.69

<b>BOOK EXPLORATION RESPONSES</b>	<b>PERCENT “YES” PRE</b>	<b>PERCENT “YES” POST</b>
<b>CHILD BOOK EXPLORATION (RESPONSE SCALE: 1=NO; 2=YES)</b>		
1. Holds the book and turns the pages	76%	96%
2. Names items in the pictures	87%	98%
3. Ask questions about the story	69%	93%
4. Identifies some letters or words	47%	95%
5. Points to the words as I read	35%	81%
6. Tells when it's time to turn the page	61%	87%
7. Answers my questions about the story	77%	98%
8. Does not pay attention to the story	45%	59%
<b>PARENT BOOK EXPLORATION (RESPONSE SCALE: 1=NO; 2=YES)</b>		
1. Let my child pick the book	78%	98%
2. Point out words a letters in the book	56%	97%
3. Ask my child questions about the story	63%	96%
4. Praise my child for listening to the story and helping me read	71%	98%
5. Ask my child to tell me about the pictures	57%	97%
6. Link items to the story to aspects of my child's life experiences	45%	94%

Table 3 summarizes the behaviors with the largest percent increase (30% or more) after the Workshop intervention:

**Table 3. Percent Change on Words Alive Survey Questions**

Statement	Percent Change
<b>PARENT KNOWLEDGE</b>	
Know how to effectively read aloud to your child	32%
I know how to choose books for my preschooler	31%
I know how to create language rich environment for my preschooler	36%
<b>LITERACY BEHAVIORS</b>	
I visit the library with my child	40%
Family members try to help my child print letters or words	31%
<b>CHILD BOOK EXPLORATION</b>	
Identifies some letters or words	48%
Points to the words as I read	46%
<b>PARENT BOOK EXPLORATION</b>	
Point out words a letters in the book	41%
Ask my child questions about the story	33%
Ask my child to tell me about the pictures	40%
Link items to the story to aspects of my child's life experiences	49%

## Open-Ended Questions

The final section of the Words Alive Survey asked parents to respond to the following questions:

1. What, if anything, have you done for the first time while participating in this program?
2. How, if at all, has reading at home changed for you and your child?
3. What is the most valuable thing you have learned over the course of this workshop?

Just as in the Pilot Year, all (100%) of the responses from parents who participated in the Workshop Track in Year 2 were positive. Parents stated that reading had changed in many positive ways since the workshops. Some of the comments included:

*“I began to ask questions and look at the pictures with him.”*

*“My family and I have done arts and craft every Saturday based on a book that we’ve read during the week.”*

*“We have more books and she asks me to read them to her.”*

*“We both enjoy it more and take more time while reading our stories. We talk about it together instead of just reading.”*

*“[Child] is always hungry to learn. If I take out the ABC book that you gave us, she says “give me something to cut, glue, color... always ready to learn. We are the ones who sometimes don’t want to come up with ideas because we’re tired. But we have to. I didn’t go to school in Mexico, I don’t know how to teach her anything so this was good for me.”*

Some of the comments to the question: “What is the most valuable thing you have learned over the course of this workshop” included:

*“That you can enjoy reading to your child. It's not just a chore. “*

*“Patience.”*

*“I learned to allow my little one to be more involved.”*

*“How to be more interactive with her while reading.”*

*“Before I read to her, but now I learn how to read in a happy, fun way.”*



## Focus Group

Parents/caregivers who participated in the Workshop Track were asked to participate in a focus group on the last day of the workshop. During the focus groups, parents discussed how reading had changed at home, what they had learned that every parent should know, what were things they did for the first time, and what had changed about them as parents. What follows are some illustrative verbatim comments to various questions asked by the Words Alive staff at the focus groups.

### What is reading like now at home?

*“Now he likes to read more and asks to read ‘Amanda’s book’. He seeks them out and likes to read how we read here...sitting together talking about pictures and letters. Now we do other things with the books.”*

*“[Child]’s started to be aware of the print...yesterday she got a flyer from Sea World and started “reading” and pointing and said this says Shamu won’t bite you. “We take the book and look at all the pictures first to see what the book is about and then we read it.”*

*“I couldn’t get her to pick up a book before. She’d say, I don’t know how to read. Now she’s pretending and its fun.”*

*“I used to get so frustrated and cry. This is my second time raising kids and I just couldn’t get them to listen. They’d wander off. Now we have more fun with it and do it all together.”*

*“[Child] was excited to do something in a classroom with me. He told my wife that he learned something with me. I don’t think he knew that I spoke English since I speak Spanish at home. He looked surprised!”*



### What did you learn here that you think every parent should know?

*“Make reading enjoyable.”*

*“Almost anything can be a reading opportunity. Signs in the streets while driving and food labels are examples.”*

*“You DO NOT have to finish the book.”*

*“Reading is present in all life.”*

*“Not to force them to read. Have their interest drive reading.”*

*“There is not just one way to learn!”*

*“You can learn and read anytime!”*

*“Being able to watch examples of how to do it and make it fun, like with voices and touching the pages.”*

### What have you done for the first time as a result of this workshop?

*“Playing with the puppets in the bath.”*

*“The child looking for the title of a book.”*

*“Children asking questions about the story.”*

*“They can make the letter G. It doesn’t always look like a G but they’re very proud. They think it’s their whole name. They’re very proud.”*

*“He’s able to sit and look at a book!”*

*“[I have] seen examples of good ways to read a book to them.”*

What has changed for you as a parent?



*"I am encouraging my child to read in depth."*

*"We now play 'I Spy' a lot."*

*"We no longer have to read a certain way. I can be more flexible."*

*"I am calmer when reading."*

*"Reading is not about reading the entire book and has a better quality to it."*

Parents who participated in focus group used the following adjectives to describe the program.

- *Amazing*
- *Enlightening*
- *Informative*
- *Confidence!*
- *Enlightening*
- *Positive*
- *Progress*
- *Learning*
- *Influential*
- *Fun*
- *Magnifica!*
- *Helpful*
- *Interesting*
- *Fun*

*"Reading books has become the highlight of my child's day."*

*- Parent*



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Expansion of Workshops

Parent statements from the focus groups revealed they want to continue more of what they have learned in the workshops.

*“I think this class was just an overall great experience and I think every parent should try coming to it just so that they can get more learning ideas as well as get their children engaged in reading. I think coming here has made [the children] want to read more and do things like the rhyming. It helps them develop skills and habits that they wouldn’t have developed until later.”*

*“A bit more time with the kids in here. She loves it in here. Every day we walk by, [she] points to the classroom, and she wants to be in here every single day. She loves it in here and really doesn’t like it when we’re not in here.”*

*“More activities with the book, to continue at home.”*

Given parent pleas for wanting more, as well as evidence that the Workshop Track improved literacy behaviors and GRTR scores, it is important to focus on enhancing the Workshop Track in the future.

Obviously, the Library Track is able to reach more children and families, but not necessarily yield the higher quality and more favorable outcomes of the Workshop Track.

Words Alive will have to evaluate costs and benefits of the extra effort expended for the Workshop Track compared to the Library Track.



Below are some recommendations for Words Alive to consider (and continue evaluating):

- Increase the number of workshop sessions (i.e., more than seven weeks)
- Increase the length of the workshop class (i.e., more than 90 minutes)
- Add more activities and resources in the workshops
- Train more workshop facilitators
- Enhance focus on ESL students and families
- Offer periodic refresher workshops, classes, and/or materials that continue to engage parents and children

Hopefully, this evaluation data and evidence can help secure funding to continue, expand, and further evaluate the Words Alive program and workshops.

## Data Collection

Data collection for Year 2 continued to be thorough and accurate. Below are some recommendations for further refinement for Year 3:

- Minimize differences in participant demographics between the Workshop and Library Tracks. This will help in being able to attribute any differences between the two tracks to the specific intervention rather than the different demographic makeup of the participants.
- Use “1” as the lowest response for all survey questions that are coded numerically instead of “0.” This will eliminate the need for recoding, and reduce the amount of time and effort for data analysis and evaluation.