

**Planning Library Programs
for Children with Special Needs
2011**

Message from City Librarian

Toronto Public Library champions the principles of equity and social justice.

Recognizing that children with special needs are often forgotten or overlooked, it has embarked on an initiative to enhance the services offered to this community. Already a leader in the area of early childhood literacy, the Library determined that children with special needs deserve an equal opportunity to be supported in developing early reading skills, and their needs could be better served by developing collections, programs and services for them.

The outcome of a pilot project funded by SOLS, this resource guide, with its suggestions, program ideas and resource lists, serves as a starting point for those who wish to provide story time programs for children with special needs and their families.

The Library aims to be a warm and welcoming place for all families, and accessibility to all is a priority. Most branches are wheelchair accessible. All have computers with screen magnification software and reading aids, such as magnifiers. Books, music and movies are available in both regular and special formats.

In most of TPL's branches, Ready for Reading storytimes introduce children and their parents to six preliteracy skills through books, song, rhyme, fingerplays and play. Families learn how to build reading readiness through fun, everyday activities at home and at the library. This resource guide suggests ways in which Ready for Reading programs can be adapted for children with special needs.

Jane Pyper
Chief Librarian

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Ready for Reading is the name of Toronto Public Library's set of programs, services and resources for children from birth to five years of age. The initiative emphasizes the importance of early literacy and teaches parents and caregivers how to encourage the development of important pre-reading skills in their children through easy, everyday activities at home. During the course of this project, the participants explored ways to create *Ready for Reading* storytimes that were inclusive of all audiences.

The *Ready for Reading* philosophy shapes all library services for children five and under.

- Storytimes. Free storytimes introduce children and their parents and caregivers to six reading readiness skills in a fun and stimulating way.

	Print motivation	I LIKE BOOKS!
	Phonological awareness	I HEAR WORDS!
	Vocabulary	I KNOW WORDS!
	Narrative skills	I CAN TELL A STORY!
	Print awareness	I SEE WORDS!
	Letter knowledge	I KNOW LETTERS!

- Collections. Books that are especially suitable for building reading readiness are identified with stickers in branches, and noted in booklists.
- Outreach. A campaign to introduce kindergarten children to the library includes information specific to reading readiness.
- Non-traditional outreach. *Ready for Reading* presentations are made to caregivers at community agencies, workplaces and childcare centres. Storytimes are brought to those children who cannot come to the library.
- KidsStops. Interactive early literacy centres which build reading readiness through active play have been opened at four TPL branches, and more are being planned.
- Website. Kids' Space, the library's website for children 12 and under, includes *Ready for Reading* information for parents and caregivers.
<http://kidsspace.torontopubliclibrary.ca>

Introduction

Our Shared Stories: Writing the Future of Toronto's Library Toronto Public Library Strategic Plan 2008-2011 articulates a strategic priority of engaging diverse communities based on the principles of equity and social justice. With a focus on promoting greater participation in library programs and services and a commitment to support the development of early reading skills, the Library has determined that children with special needs could be better served by developing collections, programs and services.

In Toronto, community partners are asking the Library to provide programs and services for children with special needs and their families, and its own staff is asking for training and resources to meet these requests. With additional training, TPL can begin to provide services for children with special needs in the branches and in partnership with local service agencies, City departments and other groups.

Toronto Public Library, a leader in early literacy through its Ready for Reading programs, already offers many strong literacy and cultural programs for children of all ages. It offers quality collections and expertise in children's programming and is experienced in serving the diverse needs of the city. The Library is well positioned to be a leader in providing innovative programs for children with special needs and in creating welcoming and inclusive environments for families whose children have special needs.

Removing barriers to physical access to libraries for patrons with disabilities is only the first step in making sure libraries are welcoming spaces. TPL is not alone in addressing the need for service to children with disabilities. There are many examples of how libraries around the world are exploring ways to modify traditional services to reach those with disabilities. Adaptive technologies such as print magnification, DAISY talking books, audiobooks, closed caption and descriptive DVDs, text-to-voice databases and book kits (books with CDs) for all ages allow these patrons access to computers, books, movies and other library materials. In Sweden, many libraries have an "Apple Shelf" of books with pictograms and bliss symbols, video books in sign languages for the deaf, tactile picture books for children with visual impairments. (AFLS guidelines for Library Services to Babies and Toddlers, section 4). The Miami-Dade Public Library System in Florida has instituted a Braille Literacy Initiative, one component of which is a deposit collection of board and picture books in Braille for children. In the United States some libraries, including the Brooklyn Public Library, have gone so far as to create centres specifically for children with special needs.

The focus of this guide is to provide a starting point for librarians who are planning early literacy programming for children with special needs, who may include but are not limited to those with autism, developmental delay, ADHD, blindness and deafness.

Data from the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) 2006 conducted by Statistics Canada show that "among children aged 0 to 4, developmental delay is the most common disability. In 2001, 68% of children with a disability, nearly 18,000, had a

developmental delay, representing 1.1% of all children aged 0 to 4. In this group, 59% had a delay in their intellectual development, 54% a delay in their physical development and 38%, another type of delay such as speech difficulties.”

<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-577-x/4065023-eng.htm>

For children aged 0 to 4, the PALS identified the following five types of disabilities: hearing, seeing, chronic health conditions, delay, and other. For children aged 5 and over, the PALS identifies ten types of disabilities, substituting more specific types of disabilities for developmental delay, namely disability related to speech, mobility, agility or a psychological condition, as well as learning and developmental disabilities. For further information on the different types of disabilities among children, see the Statistics Canada website:

<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-628-x/2007002/4125020-eng.htm>

While all children can benefit from practices promoting early childhood literacy, few families with children with special needs attend regularly scheduled library storytime sessions. The reasons they would not attend may be anticipated: poor or erratic behaviour by the child, fear of judgment by library staff and other parents, and the lack of knowledge and sensitivity by library staff when choosing materials, resources and activities appropriate for the child’s needs. Parents, caregivers and the children need to know that their differences will be accepted and that they will be treated with dignity and respect.

In the library, staff without experience in conducting programs for children with special needs may feel uncomfortable in meeting requests from these clients; reluctance can be overcome with training and experience. The members of the project team set about to create and present a series of programs specifically geared to children with special needs, reporting on their experiences, and drawing on them to compile some useful tips. Experts were brought in to provide some background and training specific to the kinds of programs that were planned. In addition, the Library is committed to providing staff with opportunities for additional professional development.

An important step for library staff seeking to create appropriate programs is to learn about the variety of disabilities that can afflict children, and the ways their particular needs can be met. Library staff can draw on the knowledge and expertise of experts in the field, including parents and caregivers, educators and community partners.

Open communication among all partners is needed to improve the services that can be provided. Some parents are strong advocates for their children, and will press for inclusion and other services. For other parents, overcoming their reluctance to be open about their child’s challenges may be the first obstacle that needs to overcome. It may take time to gain the confidence of a parent who is already aware that their child is seen as different.

Creating or adapting programs for children with special needs can be another challenge, mostly because of the great variety of different abilities that may be encountered. Each

child's needs are unique. While some children may be included in a regular storytime program, in some cases, to ensure the dignity of the child with special needs, a separate or specialized program may be necessary (*Guidelines on Accessible Education*, OHRC, 2004; rev. 2009). Flexibility and adaptability are the keystones of planning programs for children with special needs, and communication with the parent or caregiver is essential. Allow parents to choose a developmentally appropriate program for their child. The child's social or cognitive level might not match their age level. It is a good idea to ask in advance if special accommodations need to be made.

The sample programs contained in this document are based on the experiences of project members who conducted story time sessions with local groups. Suggestions for adapting programs come from their experiences, from the advice of experts who shared their expertise with us, and from professional literature. The storytime foundation is *Ready for Reading*,

Outreach

Promoting programs for children with special needs can be especially challenging: how do you reach those who have not historically visited the library? Reach out to support groups, parent associations, local agencies, Early Years Centres and community centres, as well as the usual advertising outlets such as the library website and community newspapers.

You may wish to refer to the Government of Canada publication *A Way with Words and Images: Suggestions for the portrayal of people with disabilities* (2006) when advertising your programs, to ensure that what you have written is respectful.

http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/disability_issues/reports/way_with_words/way_with_words.pdf

Support

The library supports the needs of parents and professionals by being a repository of reliable information. A wealth of information in books, periodicals and databases is available for those seeking to learn more about disabilities, diagnoses and methods of treatment. Libraries could also make screening tools available to visiting families. Screening tools such as the Nippissing District Developmental Screen or the Toronto Preschool Speech and Language Services Communication Checklist could be completed by families and help identify areas of concern, thus leading to early diagnosis – and treatment – of problems.

Community partner

As an active member of the community each library branch also serves as an information hub, able to gather and disseminate information about local resources and agencies. It can act as an important point of contact for families looking for support in the area. In its function as a meeting place, the library can offer space for support groups and other associations engaged in helping those with special needs. By displaying books and other materials on the subject, libraries can promote awareness and sensitivity in the neighbourhood.

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Planning a program

Some background information can help you tailor the program you are planning to the needs and abilities of the children and will help you make appropriate decisions when selecting books, songs and activities for the group. For example, a teacher of a group of children with Down syndrome said that the children preferred natural depictions of animals over illustrations of animals in clothing. Knowing about certain behaviours in advance is also very useful, and together with the caregiver you can work out strategies to accommodate the children's specific needs. Asking questions in advance will allow you time to have available adaptive tools and technologies, such as books with tactile features for the sight-impaired or chairs for children with poor muscle tone.

Some questions to ask parents or caregivers

- How old is your child?
- What is your child's cognitive age?
- How does your child communicate? Does he or she understand what is being said? Can they express themselves – With language? With gesture? With eyes only?
- Are there any behavioural issues the program leader should be aware of? Can your child sit still, or does he or she need to move around?
- Is your child sensitive to loud noises, bright lights or touch?
- Are there any medical issues the program leader should be aware of, such as problems with hearing or sight?
- Are there any mobility issues? Is your child in a wheelchair? Are there any physical limitations to his or her ability to participate in activities?
- Can your child sit on the floor, or does he or she require a chair or assistive device?
- Has your child attended similar programs in the past? How did it go?
- What does your child like to read? What are some of his or her interests?
- Does your child have a favourite topic we could incorporate?

Sample programs

Research shows that you will need to be flexible, adaptable, and proactive in providing programs for children with special needs. Inspect your space continually for barriers to access. How can the library be made more welcoming? Learn about your clients, drawing on the expertise of others. An informed understanding of the problems faced by patrons, both parent and child, allows you to take the steps necessary to make the library a sanctuary for them. Adaptations for children with special needs may benefit all children. For some people with special needs, the library may become a lifelong haven, a place where they can feel safe.

Planning a program for children with special needs is challenging and rewarding. The range of abilities and disabilities is too broad to predict. For that reason, it is essential to confer with the parents, caregivers or teachers of the children in your program to find out as much as possible about the children and their abilities and limitations. It pays to do some reading about the disabilities you will encounter in the group. Knowing more about autism, for example, will allow you to modify your program in ways that will allow the child with autism to better enjoy it. Such modifications are not difficult, and will probably benefit everyone. For example, one caregiver recommended that the program leader slow down somewhat so that the children had little more time to look at the pictures before going on the next page.

The sample programs that follow are all based on the *Ready for Reading* format, adapted for a variety of audiences, from a large group of preschoolers containing only a few children with special needs, to a group home for adults with developmental delays. All the participants found that having a series of programs, rather than a standalone program, allowed both the program leader and the participants to become more comfortable.

Program 1

Group description: Children who are developmentally delayed or autistic, attending a summer camp

Diana Olford

Start by introducing yourself to the group; wear a nametag with your name in large, bold block letters. Make sure you wear the same nametag every week.

Tell the children what you will be doing in the storytime. Use picture cue cards; for example, if you will be starting with a song, hold up a picture of a musical note and tell them that this represents a song. You might say, “We will be singing a song,” (hold up music cue card); “then reading a story,” (hold up picture of book with STORY printed underneath); “and then a fingerplay” (picture of two hands, fingers splayed). Many children with autism spectrum disorders are much more comfortable when they know what to expect, and developmentally delayed children are less likely to act out if they know what is coming next.

Have a flipchart nearby with your cue cards attached (Velcro dots can work for this). If you have the time to prepare these, a photocopy or printout of the cover of the book(s) you will be reading is helpful as well.

Start with a simple action song; for example, “Shake Your Sillies Out”. This song works for kids who are in wheelchairs or have other physical limitations. A song like “Head and Shoulders” can be adapted so the caregiver is tapping the body part on the child if the child does not have the motor skills to do this on his or her own. Use the same opening song every week.

Hold up the cue card that shows a story, then read a bright, colourful story that is not too fanciful. Examples are: *Hooray for Fish!* and *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* Whenever possible, use the big book format if you have it. Practice dialogic reading. You may not get a response from the children; simply answer yourself and carry on. It is helpful for the parents to realize that it is quite acceptable to interrupt the story for discussion and that if their children want to discuss a story when they are reading to them at home, they should in fact be supportive of the behaviour. Kids may become more responsive as time goes on and they become familiar with you.

Hold up the cue card that shows fingerplays, and then do “Tommy Thumb is up” or “Where is Thumbkin”. Use a CD if you prefer not to sing; for example, *Tickles and Tunes* by Kathy Reid Naiman has lots of simple action songs.

Alternate stories, rhymes and songs as you would in any storytime, but be sure to let the children know what is coming up next. Be flexible and prepare to switch gears if necessary; if any of the children are having a particularly bad day, you may need to shorten the session. Conversely if the kids are attentive you may want to add a story or

two. It is quite acceptable to repeat a story, even within the same session; many children with autism thrive on repetition, and it can be useful to model this for the parents.

Always finish with the same closing song or ritual. Chants can be very popular, as the children may enjoy rhythm and repetition.

For children who have hearing disabilities, remember that TPL has assistive devices available. You may be able to use a microphone, or use a sign language interpreter who can sign the stories as you tell them. Again, use materials that are bright and colourful, enunciate clearly and make sure that you face children without blocking your mouth (don't hold the book in front of your face). Hearing impairments can vary in degree of severity. If a child cannot hear at all, your books and props will assume even greater importance.

For children who are visually impaired, again depending on the degree of impairment, it can be important that they are seated close to you and that your books are colourful and large. If a child is completely blind, you will have to use your voice entirely to convey the "magic" of the book; as a storyteller would. Using books that have tactile elements like *Pat the Bunny* would be great, as would using props like stuffed animals, or plastic animals to do "Old Macdonald Had a Farm."

While there is by no means a universal formula, remember that children with special needs are simply children. Programs that work for most children, like Ready for Reading storytimes, work for special needs kids too, with some simple variations to allow for their individual needs.

Program 2

Group Description: Five boys of kindergarten age, all with autism and some developmental delays. One or two could read.

1. Opening song: If you're happy and you know it
2. Name song. We did this every week even though there were only a few children.
3. Book: *Harry the Dirty Dog* by Gene Zion
4. Song: I have a dog and is name is Rags (with puppet)
5. Action rhyme: Zoom, zoom, zoom
6. Songs (with shakers):
 - Jingle Bells
 - Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star
 - Alligator Song
7. Book: *Dear Zoo* by Rod Carter
8. Rhyme: Grey squirrel, grey squirrel, shake your bushy tail
9. Book: *What do Wheels Do All Day?* by April Jones Prince
10. Closing song: Skinnamarink

Program 3

Group Description: Teenagers, aged 13 – 19 years; pre-school cognitive level. Some of the group are aware of their age and look to more mature interests. They are a mix of different needs, with some being verbal and others non-verbal.

1. Opening song: Shake your sillies out
2. Rhyme: Two little blackbirds
3. Book: *Bear Snores On* by Karma Wilson
4. Song: Old MacDonald had a farm
5. Book: *Shark in the Park* by Nick Sharratt
6. Book: *Seals on the Bus* by Lenny Hort
7. Song: If you're happy and you know it

Program 4

Group Description: Five classes which ranged from pre school to primary (chronological ages); 4 classes were entirely preliterate, one class was slightly higher functioning with a few early readers. All the children were developmentally delayed, with some having other challenges, one entire class of children were in wheelchairs and there were a couple with hearing impairments. Most of the children in wheelchairs were non-responsive and very low functioning.

1. Opening song: Shake Your Sillies Out
2. Book: *Barnyard Banter* by Denise Fleming
3. Song: Roly Poly
4. Book: *Where is the Green Sheep?* by Mem Fox
5. Book: *Peek a Moo* by Marie Cimarusti
6. Song: Tommy Thumb is up
7. Book: *Dear Zoo* by Rod Campbell
8. Closing Song: If you're happy and you know it

Program 5

Group Description: Elementary school children from 5 to 11 years old. Cognitive age varied – most were at a pre-school level, but some were more high-functioning, and could read and understand more sophisticated concepts. A few of the children had multiple developmental delays, while the majority had some form of autism. All of the students communicated in English.

1. Opening songs:
It's Time To Say Hello
If You're Happy and You Know It
These Are My Glasses (Laurie Berkner)
2. Book: *Dinosaurs, Dinosaurs* by Brian Barton
3. Rhymes/songs:
Slippery Fish
The Elephant
Open Them Shut Them
4. Book: *The Seals On The Bus* by Lenny Hort
5. Rhymes/songs:
Five Green Speckled Frogs
Red Says Stop
Wiggle Your Fingers
6. Book: *Maisy's Twinkly Crinkly Fun Book* by Lucy Cousins
7. Good-Bye songs:
Twinkle, Twinkle
It's Time To Say Good-Bye
8. Craft: Dinosaur Finger Puppet:
<http://www.sproutonline.com/sprout/print/printasset.aspx?id=80891433-e5dc-4a49-9644-9c0a00db65ea>

Program 6

Group Description: An integrated group of 25 preschoolers aged 2 to 5 years. There were four or five participants with special needs including autism, developmental delays, etc.

1. Opening:
 - I Wake Up My Hands
 - Five Fat Peas
 - Open Them, Shut Them
2. Book: *From Head to Toe* by Eric Carle
3. Rhymes:
 - Itsy Bitsy Spider – with puppet
 - Twinkle, Twinkle
4. Book: *Dinosaur vs. Bedtime* by Bob Shea
5. Songs:
 - Hurry Hurry Drive the Fire Truck
 - Wheels on the Bus
6. Rhymes:
 - Finger Family
 - Roly Poly
7. Book: *Go Away Big Green Monster!* by Ed Emberley
8. Goodbye:
 - Tony Chestnut
 - Zoom Zoom Zoom
 - Bye Bye Bubbles – children say goodbye by popping the bubbles

Program 7

Group Description: A class of six children aged four and five, all with Down syndrome. All were English-speaking. One to three teachers would stay in the program with me.

1. Opening: Hello everybody and how are you (repeated with all the children's names)
2. Fingerplay: Little Peter Rabbit (with rabbit puppet)
3. Song: Shake your sillies out
4. Book: *Go Away, Big Green Monster!* by Ed Emberley
5. Fingerplay: Eensy, weensy spider. And also Great, big spider
6. Fingerplay: Roly Poly
7. Book: *First the Egg* by Laura Vaccaro Seeger
8. Felt board story/song: Old McDonald had a Farm
9. Book: *The Wheels on the Bus* by Paul O. Zelinsky
10. Action rhyme: Zoom, zoom, zoom
11. Action rhyme: Sleeping Bunnies
12. Closing song: The more we get together
13. Closing song: Now it's time to say goodbye (song to the tune of London Bridge)

Program 8

Group Description: “Dad and Me” is a new, drop-in program offered by OEYC to serve the dads in the community. The age range is from birth to approx 4 years; all are preliterate. There were two boys with autism and two other children with delayed speech. There did not appear to be any language barriers until the final session. Many of the children or their dads had not had prior experience with being read to or attending a storytime. The video which accompanies this toolkit features this group. [Insert URL]

1. Opening song: If You’re Happy and You Know It
2. Fingerplay: Hickety pickety Bumblebee
3. Song: Shake my sillies out
4. Book : *That’s not my dinosaur* by R. Watt (Usborne touchy-feely books)
5. Rhyme: Humpty Dumpty
6. Book: *Leo the Late Bloomer* by Robert Kraus
7. Fingerplay: The moon is round
8. Book : *Hockey Opposites* by Per-Henrik-Gurth
9. Action song: Up Down, Turn Around
10. Rhyme: Traffic Lights
11. Closing song: If You’re Happy and You Know it

Booklist

All of the titles listed below would be valuable in any *Ready for Reading* program. They are also appropriate for use in programs with children with special needs. When we look for titles to read in these sessions, it can be helpful to be on the lookout for special features, never forgetting that many books can excite and entertain on any number of levels. For example, books that offer a variety of textures might be wonderfully stimulating for children with visual and hearing impairments, as well as those with autism. For children who have difficulty staying focused, there are books here that do not follow a storyline, but rather encourage attention to one page at a time. Many of the titles could be useful in groups that are composed solely of children with special needs or in integrated groups. Repetitive texts may offer comfort to children with autism, providing them with added elements of familiarity, but may, in addition, assist children with hearing loss to amplify their understanding through repetition of concepts/sounds/words.

The titles listed below are suggestions – a starting point. Each one has an annotation that is offered as a clue as to its value in a program. This is obviously not only a subjective list, but also a compressed one. It is meant to be illustrative rather than definitive and can be used together with the section on how to plan a story time program.

Ahlberg, Janet and Allan. *Baby's Catalogue*. 1982/2005
Depicts familiar objects and activities.

Barry, Frances. *Duckie's Ducklings*. 2005
Counting; simple storyline.

Brown, Margaret Wise. *Goodnight Moon*. 1947
Gentle, repetitive text stresses bedtime routine.

Brown, Margaret Wise and Stephen Savage. *The Fathers are Coming Home*. 2010
Repetitive; clear language.

Campbell, Rod. *I'm Hungry! : a touch-and-feel book*. 2003
Various textures add the sensory element of touch.

Carle, Eric. *From Head to Toe*. 1997
This is a large book with bright pictures and actions that children can do with the story.

Carle, Eric. *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. 1981
A simple, clear and repetitive story.

Cimarusti, Maria T. *Peek-a-Pet!* 2004
This repetitive, bright book is visually engaging. There are many books in this series.

- Cottin, Menena. *The Black Book of Colours*. 2008
Braille
- Cousins, Lucy. *Hooray for fish!* 2005
Bright and colourful.
- Emberley, Ed. *Go Away, Big Green Monster!* 1992
Repetitive text; simple images; audience participation.
- Fleming, Denise. *Barnyard Banter*. 1994
Bright pictures, and a chance to make lots of noise.
- Fox, Mem. *Where is the Green Sheep?* 2004
Bright, simple pictures.
- Freymann, Saxton. *How are You Peeling: Foods with Moods*. 1999
Uses photographs; humorous; emotions.
- Girnis, Meg. *ABC for You and Me*. 2000
Uses photographs; clear.
- Gravett, Emily. *Dogs*. 2009
Clear, repetitive text. Descriptive.
- Gravett, Emily. *Orange Pear Apple Bear*. 2006
Clear, repetitive text.
- Grover, Lorie Ann. *Hug Hug!* 2008
Simple and repetitive.
- Horacek, Petr. *Butterfly, Butterfly*. 2007
A colourful book with repetitive text and a simple storyline.
- Isadora, Rachel. *Peekaboo Morning*. 2002
Bright and repetitive.
- Kachenmeister, Cheryl. *On Monday When It Rained*. 1989
Photographs of boy depict a variety of emotions.
- Martin, Bill. *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do You See?* 1983
A bright, colourful book with repetitive text.
- McQuinn, Anna. *Lola at the Library*. 2006
A simple storyline with clear and descriptive language.
- Moses, Brian. *Animal Pants!* 2009

- Brightly illustrated rhyming book.
- Murphy, Jill. *Peace at Last*. 1980
Repetitive story line with opportunities for audience participation.
- Seder, Rufus Butler. *Gallop!* 2007
Seder, Rufus Butler. *Swing!* 2008
Seder, Rufus Butler. *Waddle!* 2009
Simple vocabulary, visually engaging.
- Seeger, Laura V. *First the Egg*. 2007
Bright; repetitive.
- Seuss, Dr. *Yertle the Turtle*. 1958
Feelings.
- Sharratt, Nick. *The Foggy, Foggy Forest*. 2008
Black on white images. Children can guess what animal is coming.
- Sharratt, Nick. *Shark in the Park*. 2002
Repetition, rhyme, anticipation.
- Shaw, Charles. *It Looked Like Spilt Milk!* 1947
Repetition; audience participation; clear illustrations white on blue; works well as a book or as a felt story.
- Shea, Bob. *Dinosaur vs. Bedtime*. 2008
This book has very simple text and large pictures, and the children also get to roar with the dinosaur.
- Slonim, David. *He Came With the Couch*. 2005
Humorous; great for slightly older groups.
- Stevenson, R. L. *The Moon*. 2006
Gentle poem.
- Stickland, Paul and Henrietta. *Dinosaur Roar!* 1994
Bright, rhyming and repetitive.
- Van Fleet, Matthew. *Fuzzy Yellow Ducklings*. 1995
Textures invite touching. Bright and clear illustrations.
- Whybrow, Ian. *Say Hello to the Dinosaurs*. 2009
Rhyming. Illustrations incorporate textures. Bright illustrations.
- Wilson, Karma. *Bear Snores On*. 2002

A simple story line, and it is fun to make the sound effects together.

Enhance the storytime experience by seeking out books to engage your audience. Funding for this project allowed TPL to purchase a large number of Braille board books, as well as books with added dimensions: texture, sound, even smell.

Tips and Inspiration

- If your program is a regular *Ready for Reading* program that happens to include a child with special needs, use the opportunity to learn from that child. Ask the child's caregiver about the child. If, for example, the child is non-verbal, ask the caregiver for feedback. It may appear that the child is not absorbing anything, while in fact the caregiver finds that the child is much calmer or more alert during storytime.
- If your group consists entirely of children with special needs, most likely you are dealing with a school class or day care group. Here the teachers will be invaluable. It can, however, be challenging to get the feedback you need because teachers may be inclined to think in terms of teaching, rather than conveying the joy of books and reading. Teachers worry, for example, about kids interrupting, while program leaders often encourage interaction.
- Keep it simple. If the group is developmentally delayed, gear your program for their developmental age or stage, not their chronological age. Don't worry that they appear to be "too big" to be listening to toddler stories - that's your perception, not theirs!
- It can be very difficult to do a great storytime when you are getting minimal feedback; it may feel like you're an actor without an audience. This is when you need to dig deep and find that "Oscar" worthy performance within. Keep in mind that quite likely the kids are absorbing far more than you think. Sometimes the adults with the group can be lifesavers, giving the much needed feedback or at least smiling at the funny books!
- Use short books with lots of repetition and participation. Try big books, books with large, bright pictures, textures, board books and pop-up books.

I read from two new tactile books ... These had an almost magical effect on the two hyperactive children who had spend the 10 previous minutes ricocheting from one side of the room to the other. Their dads were so excited by the concept of being able to feel different textures that they played a huge role in helping to focus the attention of the boys, who finally seemed able to stand next to me and concentrate on the contents.

Denise Drabkin, "Dad and Me," OEYC

- Plan to be at your storytime location a little before the scheduled starting time, so that you can assess the venue and meet the participants. If you are going to an outside location, try to schedule a visit just to meet the children and their caregivers or teachers. Then, when you arrive for storytime, they already know who you are.

I learnt that many autistic children do not handle new situations very well and that their comfort level increases with familiarity. To that end, I made the decision to arrive much earlier than the projected time the storytime was to begin. Thus I am able to interact with the dads and the children, learning about the children's preferences (eg. who likes imaginative play, who is nuts about rainbows, etc.) and subsequently incorporate these observations into the program.

Denise Drabkin, Dad and Me, OEYC

- Announce what you are going to do next (Who wants to sing a song?) in the storytime, so that children will not be surprised by any loud noises or sudden changes. A storyboard is a useful tool that shows children what is going to happen next. [See the video.[Insert URL]]
- Repeating songs and rhymes each week will help the children be comfortable and familiar with the words. Adding one or two new ones every other week will also keep you (the storyteller) motivated. Repeated visits allow a rapport to build.

One of the most successful moments emerged in our seventh week. The youngest student in the group has autism to the degree that it usually prevents him from socializing with the other students. He regularly spends the session at the back of the room with one of the assistants. At the seventh session, he came right up to the front of the room where I was telling a story, sat down, and listened intently. The teacher and assistants were really surprised and just followed his lead. He remained sitting through the entire story, two songs, a short rhyme, and part of another story before his attention lapsed. At the end of the session, the teacher commented on how happy she was with his progress, and how well he had responded to the storytime.

Diane Banks, junior school children with special needs

- Flexibility is essential. Listen to your group. Your program may change depending on the mood of the children. Always bring a few extra books, puppets, bubbles, and props in case something does not work and you need a substitute. Take your cues from the kids and their caregivers, don't take anything personally, and keep your sense of humour.

Today's program didn't go as well as planned. One of the residents who has Tourette's Syndrome was having a really bad day. We could hear him through the closed story room door yelling and screaming, and this was very distracting. One of the aides said this particular resident had been acting up all day. The storytime was OK but everyone seemed a bit on edge.

Even though all of the residents and aides were having an off day, they still were happy to have me and participate in the storytime. I did my best to try and get everyone's spirits up by having them make their own noise with the maracas.

This is the first time in 8 sessions that something like this has happened. The important thing to remember is try to adapt to the situation at hand.

Jesse Coker, A group of adults with special needs

- Find opportunities to reassure parents that you are fine with behavioural patterns their child might express. Before the program begins, tell parents that it is okay to remove a very disruptive child until he or she has calmed down.

Students like to sit in the chairs, rather than on the floor, except one who lies down throughout the session, and one who keeps wandering around. I learned that they like to hold something. I have a set of puppets for the Old Macdonald song, we always do it first. Each student receives one of the animal puppets, and I let them hold it until the end of the class visit.

Grazyna Grochot, with a group of middle school children with special needs

- Do some research – read up on the literature – to find out what others have done before you and find out as much as you can about the group of children and their needs.
- Find out if the children can sit on the floor or if they need chairs or other support. Many mobile children with special needs can take part better if seated on chairs rather than the floor. If chairs are not available, a carpet square can delineate the child’s “space.”
- Consider adding pictorial signage to story time areas. Such signage would be beneficial to all users.
- Focus on abilities.
- Adapt songs and rhymes so they include big hand or arm gestures.
- Keep the group small.
- Children prone to echolalia, which is involuntary, parrot-like repetition (echoing) of a word or phrase just spoken by another person, may respond better to whispering.

Tips for storytimes for children with autism spectrum disorders

- Treat misbehaviour matter-of-factly. Simply say it is against the rules. For an autistic child, often a rule is a rule.
- You may have to redefine your ideas about what constitutes problem behaviour.
- Don’t insist on eye contact.
- Avoid touching.
- Follow the same routine with every storytime. Consistency and structure are very important to many children with autism. If using music for transitions, use the same song for each one, so that the child learns that the song is a cue for something new. Other possible transitions include a soft chime or pointing to a picture (social stories).
- Try using puppets – children with autism will often feel more comfortable talking with an inanimate object than a new person.

Avoid bright lights, flashing lights and loud noises.

Equipment and props

The money supplied by the SOLS grant allowed the purchase of books and materials to enhance library programs for children with special needs.

Item	Supplier	Purpose
Rhythmic chikitas (mini maracas)	Empire Music www.empire-music.com	Music and rhythm instruments enhance any story time program.
Tambourine	Empire Music www.empire-music.com	Can be used by program leader to accompany music, focus attention, or provide sound effects for storytelling.
Scarves	Scholars Choice www.scholarschoice.ca	Scarves can be used to encourage movement, and to provide a silent accompaniment to music, if noise is an issue with participants.
Beanbags	Scholars Choice www.scholarschoice.ca	For movement, balance, coordination; might also be used as a fidget toy
Flannel board, 18" x 24"	Scholars Choice www.scholarschoice.ca	A handy prop in any storytime or outreach presentation.
Felt story sets	Wintergreen www.wintergreen.ca	To enhance storytelling.
Story glove	Wintergreen www.wintergreen.ca	To enhance storytelling.
Puppets	Multiple sources	Puppets encourage imaginative play; some children with autism will respond more readily to a puppet than to a person.
Mouse finger puppet	Carr McLean www.carrmclean.ca	A small puppet is easy to bring along on outreach visits.
Sensory balls	Scholars Choice www.scholarschoice.ca	A ball with surface interest can be used as a fidget toy, or for interactive play.
Teacher tote- plastic box on wheels with extendable handle	Carr McLean www.carrmclean.ca	Handy for outreach.
Ultimate carry-all	Lee Valley Tools www.leevalley.com	Handy for outreach.

House of latches	TFH Special Needs Toys www.specialneedstoys.com	Manipulative toy encourages fine motor coordination.
Pyramid of Play and the Busy Play Cube	Brodart www.brodart.ca	Variety of activities to encourage fine motor skills. Encourages exploration and movement.
Tabletop pathfinder	Scholars Choice www.scholarschoice.ca	Manipulative to encourage coordination.
Preschool lounger	Carr McLean www.carrmclean.ca	Some children may need extra support when sitting on the floor. May be used with parent and child together.
Sitting wedge	TFH Special Needs Toys www.specialneedstoys.com	Some children prefer the tactile stimulation of the sitting wedge; encourages the child to stay in one spot.
Fidget toys	Mothercraft provided a variety of small, hand-held toys that can be purchased at toyshops and dollar stores.	Children sometimes have trouble regulating their attention and emotions in group situations. Fidget toys help them focus and participate. Let the child choose from a variety of small manipulatives, and clearly explain the rules for their use.
Story boards	Software for creating story boards is available, but a basic storytime set is easily made with clip art.	A visual representation of a series of events often helps a child with autism cope with change.
Braille board books	Seedlings Braille Books for Children www.seedlings.org	These books can be used for a child with sight impairment, and also add a tactile element that other children find intriguing.
6 ft. Parachute	Scholars Choice www.scholarschoice.ca	Good for coordination; visual stimulation; a way to focus attention; participants do not need to be mobile to use them.

[The participants] were wondering why they were moving seats, but once I took out the parachute and a small beach ball they were very excited. I placed the handles in each of their hands and right away they started making the parachute move. I told them the object of the game was to keep the ball inside the parachute as the music was playing. I wasn't sure how this would work (if they were able to understand, as some are at different levels) but once I started the music I've never seen participants so excited! They formed teams on their own and even if the ball fell out, the participants, aides or I would quickly grab the ball and place it back in the centre. They were having such a good time that I repeated the song 3X and by the end of it everyone was so happy.

Jesse Coker, with a group of adults with a variety of special needs

Resources for children with special needs and their families

Listed below are a few directories in Toronto and Ontario with services and information for families with special needs children.

Specific agencies and organizations have not been listed to prevent leaving any out, and to avoid providing broken links to agencies that may no longer exist.

City of Toronto: Services for Children With Special Needs

<http://www.toronto.ca/children/specialneeds/index.htm>

Help! We've Got Kids: Special Needs

http://www.helpwevegotkids.com/35/1/146/special_needs_general.html

Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services: Special Needs

<http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/specialneeds/index.aspx>

Surrey Place Community Resource Directory for Children and Adolescents with ASD and their Families in Toronto

<http://www.surreyplace.on.ca/News-And-Publications/Pages/Publications.aspx>

To locate more information on the internet, try using a search engine like Google.ca, or Bing.com, and typing in search terms such as, “special needs children” or “services for children with special needs”. You may also limit your search by including the city, province or country where you live among your search terms.

Alternatively, to search for a particular disability, submit the name of the disability, such as autism or spina bifida, in the search engine to find more results.

Community partners

We would like to extend our thanks to the following groups for participating in our project:

Albion Child Care Centre
1545 Albion Road
M9V 1B2

Centennial Infant and Child Centre
1580 Yonge Street,
Toronto, ON M4T 1Z8
<http://cicc.ca>

Ontario Early Years Centre
332 Consumers Road, Toronto
M2J 1P8
416-496-2601
<http://www.ontarioearlyyears.ca>

Surrey Place Centre
2 Surrey Place
Toronto, ON M5S 2C2
Phone: (416) 925-5141
Fax: (416) 923-8476
<http://www.surreyplace.on.ca>

Toronto Catholic District School Board

- Holy Child Catholic School
- St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School

<http://www.tcdsb.org>

Toronto District School Board

- Greenholme Junior Middle School
- Birchmount Park Collegiate Institute
- Scarborough Village Alternative Public School, Developmentally Delayed Summer School Program
- West Humber Collegiate Institute

<http://www.tdsb.on.ca>

Toronto Preschool Speech and Language Services, Toronto Public Health
416-338-8255 (voice)
416-338-0025 (TTY)
tpsls@toronto.ca

Vita Community Living Services of Toronto

4301 Weston Road
Toronto, ON M9L 2Y3
www.vitacls.org

Yes I Can Nursery School
100 Ranleigh Ave.
Toronto, ON
M4N 1W9
416-486-4911
www.yesicannurseryschool.com

Additional training provided by

Mothercraft:

Through unique service collaborations, comprehensive programs, and flexible and responsive approaches, Mothercraft's early childhood intervention programs deliver interventions to support young children with established special needs and their families, or those whose development may be at risk due to biologic and psychosocial risk conditions including parental substance use problems and related issues, such as domestic violence and mental health problems.

CITYKIDS, one of Mothercraft's early intervention programs, is a network of agencies working together to provide single point access, coordinated intake and service delivery to children with special needs and their families. They serve children from birth to 6 years of age, and children from 6 to 12 years of age attending childcare, who reside within the Greater Toronto Area.

Mothercraft - CityKids
32 Heath Street West
Toronto, ON M4V 1T3
(416) 920-3515
<http://www.mothercraft.ca/index.php?q=citykids>

ConnectABILITY

TPL staff were introduced to ConnectABILITY, a website and virtual community dedicated to lifelong learning and support for people who have an intellectual disability, their families and support networks. The website provides self-directed access to valuable information and tools. Content is provided by a wide array of community partners.

www.ConnectAbility.ca

Colleen Didur

Colleen Didur is a music therapist and early childhood music educator. In her workshop for library workers she provided advice to help staff run inclusive programs for children with special needs, gave some practical advice about how to handle behaviours of children with special needs, and showed how to turn theory into practice when adapting programs.

Colleen Didur
Music Therapist and Early Childhood Music Educator
416-364-9413
ncd@stn.net

Sara Bingham

Sara Bingham is the founder of WeeHands, a sign language and language development program for babies, toddlers and preschool children.

WeeHands instructors teach parents how to use American Sign Language vocabulary with their babies. There is a strong focus on language development. Parents are provided with activities that help them teach their babies ASL vocabulary and with language development strategies.

<http://www.weehands.com>

Ada Vermeulen Spanjaard

Ada Vermeulen is an Orff music instructor and a member of the Early Childhood Music Association of Ontario. Ada demonstrated how to use a book or story as a starting point for music and action. In the Orff approach to music, each child is an active participant in an integrated, guided process, one which allows for differing musical abilities.

The Orff philosophy combines the elements of speech, rhythm, movement, dance, and song. And at the heart of all this is improvisation - the instinct children have to create their own melodies, to explore their imaginations.