



Dolly Parton's Imagination Library Program

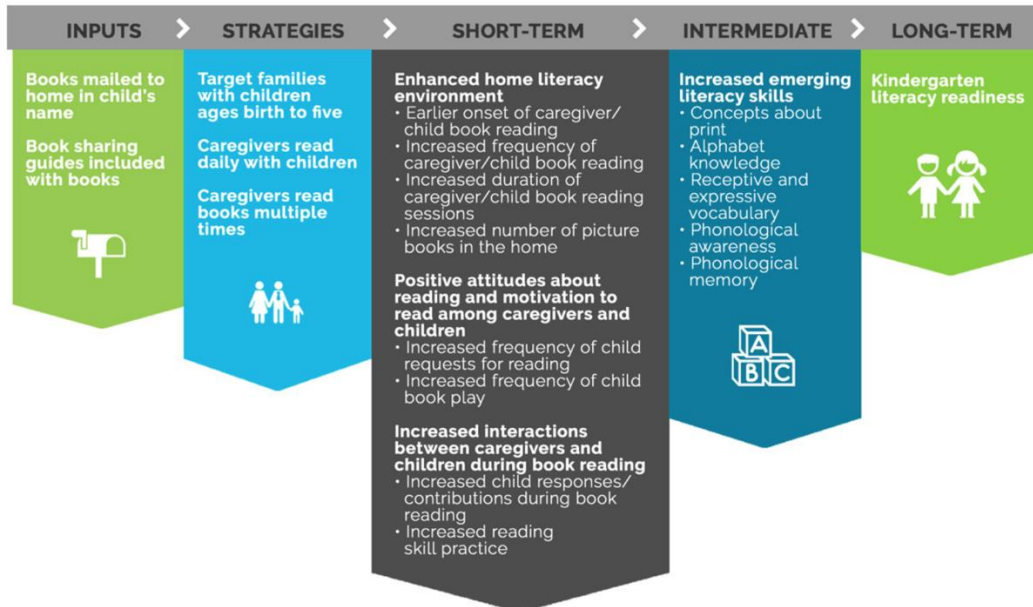
Impact Report 2020

Version 1.0

The Impact of the Imagination Library on the Home Literacy Environment and associated Emerging Literacy Skills in Infants and Young Children

Logic Model

Based on Imagination Library Research Findings and Literature Review.



SUPPORTING CHILDREN TO READ, LEARN AND SUCCEED.

Background

The critical early years

Research shows that the experiences we have as young children shape the adults we become. Over the past thirty years, the understanding of the importance of the first five years to life outcomes across health, education, and work has profoundly shifted due to a growing body of cross-disciplinary evidence. Scientists have shown that by age five, when most children enter school, approximately 90% of brain development has occurred, with the cognitive and linguistic “building blocks” largely set in place (Centre on the Developing Child, 2017). Anderson et al (2018) posit that ‘children’s readiness as literacy learners at kindergarten entry strongly predicts their early reading acquisition and trajectory toward reading success throughout their school experience.’

However, in Australia, 1 in 5 children start school unprepared for learning (AECD 2018). In some communities, this is as high as 1 in 3 children (AECD 2018). Entering school with a smaller vocabulary than classmates is a disadvantage that has lifelong impacts on an individual’s chances for success (World Literacy Foundation, 2018). Furthermore, without the ability to read or write, people can become trapped in a cycle of poverty with limited opportunities for employment or income generation (World Literacy Foundation, 2018).

Shared book reading and the building blocks of early literacy

“Helping children become excited about learning and making sure that they don’t enter school already behind their fellow classmates is extremely important for addressing illiteracy.” (World Literacy Foundation, 2018)

Shared book reading, the act of reading with a caregiver, promotes children’s vocabulary, story comprehension, language development and emotional development (Anderson et al 2018). Children who have engaged in shared book reading associate reading with enjoyable, positive experiences, setting the context for future literacy learning (Anderson et al). More broadly, shared reading contributes to a child’s ‘cultural toolkit’, which increases future academic success across disciplines (Hoyne and Egan, 2019). Research has found that the age at which a caregiver begins reading has impacts for development, with birth being the optimal time to begin (Hoyne and Egan, 2019).

However, shared book reading is by no means universal, and research shows that families living in low-socioeconomic circumstances, and those with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, may have fewer books in the home and engage less in shared book reading (Anderson, 2018). It is with this in mind that Anderson et al posit that ‘providing books for families who have few (or none) is another way to support families in their important role in preparing their children for school success’ (Anderson et al, 2018 p4).

Evidence for the Imagination Library literacy intervention

Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library empowers caregivers of children aged 0 – 5 to engage in shared reading by gifting their child an age-appropriate book each month. Accompanying each book is a tip sheet which provides ideas for engaging with the book in ways that are known to be beneficial for language acquisition and development.

Much of the existing evidence on the impacts of the Imagination Library has been conducted by program partners in the US and UK. Recent research from the UK from Tura et al (2021) shows that the Imagination Library increases frequency of reading in low-socioeconomic families, bringing them in line with their more socio-economically advantaged peers in the control group. Importantly, the study shows that families receiving the Imagination Library engage in significantly more beneficial parent-child interactions while reading than the control group who were not receiving the program, despite their lower socio-economic status (Tura et al, 2021).

A US study by Andersen et al. (2018) measured children's language and literacy abilities at the beginning of the Imagination Library program and then again on kindergarten entry. It found that frequency of shared book reading was strongly correlated with later measures of print concepts, reading behaviours, narrative retelling, narrative comprehension, and interest in reading. It also found that alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness measures were improved by stopping to ask the child about specific letters and words (2018).

These findings are supported by other studies. In 2017 Ridzi et al. examined whether consistent participation in the Imagination Library is associated with Letter Naming Fluency (LNF), which is considered a key marker of kindergarten readiness. They found that those children who consistently participated in the Imagination Library for three years or more had significantly higher LNF test scores than those who had not participated in the Imagination Library. In an earlier study, the same authors found that the length of enrolment in the Imagination Library was positively associated with measures of child-directed reading and story discussion (Ridzi et al., 2014). Another recent study (Samiei et al., 2016) also examined the association between the Imagination Library and kindergarten readiness, finding that program participation was positively associated with higher early language and maths scores.

In 2018 the *incus group* conducted an independent evaluation of the program rolled out to over 400 children in 'out-of-home' care in Victoria, Australia. They found that 90% of carers surveyed reported that they read more often and for longer with their children as a result of the Imagination Library, and 86% of carers reported an increase in child requests for reading. The report also showed that 79% of carers reported feeling more connected to the child through reading Imagination Library books.

2020 Outcomes

Evaluation approach

Based on the Program Logic, both quantitative and qualitative approaches to measurement are used to measure activities, outcomes and impact. Survey questions align with The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC data) and have been developed in consultation with educational professionals, data collection specialists and a senior statistician at Cerebral Palsy Alliance and Sydney Children's Hospital, Westmead. Evaluation relies on prospective data which follows families through time and collects real life data as time progresses. The initial baseline survey is conducted at enrolment, and therefore captures reading habits before the introduction of the Imagination Library to the home reading environment. Caregivers are surveyed again at 6 and 12 months after the introduction of the Imagination Library to the home reading environment. Surveys are conducted on an opt-in basis in selected Imagination Library communities across Australia, and are collected online, on paper and via phone. This report provides data from 287 caregivers who have volunteered to respond to surveys in selected Imagination Library communities across Australia.

This report provides results of the short and medium-term outcomes, as highlighted in the Logic Model. These outcomes, which include increased interactions between caregivers and children during book reading, and resulting emerging literacy skills, are known drivers of school readiness. Data from the first 6 months reveals increased reading time and frequency, and positive changes in caregiver behaviour, enjoyment and attitudes associated with reading to their child. Early results from the 12-month data suggest positive trends in reading time and frequency, and caregiver behaviour changes.

United Way Australia plan to further investigate the impact of the Imagination Library on school literacy readiness by focussing evaluation on the Tamworth Regional Council area, where the Imagination Library is implemented using a universal, whole of community approach. Since 2019 all children in Tamworth have been enrolled on the program from birth, with 1545 children currently

enrolled. This allows further investigation using the Australian Early Development Census statistics over time to see changes in school readiness. Due to the scope of this program, and the availability of resources to dedicate to evaluation, findings from Tamworth will also be examined in this report.

Overview of survey results

Indicator	Baseline	6 months	Gain
Enhanced home literacy environment			
Increased frequency and duration of reading			
Child is read to regularly (several times a week or more)	76%	90%	14%
Child is read to once a day or more	61%	72%	11%
Child is read to for more than 10 mins in a session	16%	47%	31%
Increased interactions between caregivers and children during book reading			
Increase in reading techniques beneficial for emerging literacy			
Caregiver repeating/teaching rhyming words	41%	59%	18%
Caregiver repeating/teaching letter sounds	31%	43%	12%
Caregiver counting images/objects	60%	80%	20%
Caregiver describing/discussing images	57%	79%	22%
Non-primary caregivers read to child	4%	47%	43%
Caregivers spend quality time as a family with books	4%	81%	77%
Positive attitudes about reading and motivation to read			
Among children			
Child initiates self-directed book time	4%	23%	19%
Child shows interest in books and reading	6%	43%	37%
Among caregivers			
Caregiver finds reading with child enjoyable	7%	66%	59%
Caregiver feels confident to read to child	8%	81%	73%
Caregiver seeks out books for child	5%	64%	59%
Increased emerging literacy skills			
Caregiver reports DPIL increased child vocabulary		58%	
Caregiver reports increase in child interacting with books		84%	

Discussion - National Survey

Logic Model - Enhanced home literacy environment

"I appreciate having the opportunity to consider how I am incorporating reading time into our day and thinking about how I can improve how we spend time - like swapping some screen time for book reading." – Imagination Library Parent, Smithfield SA

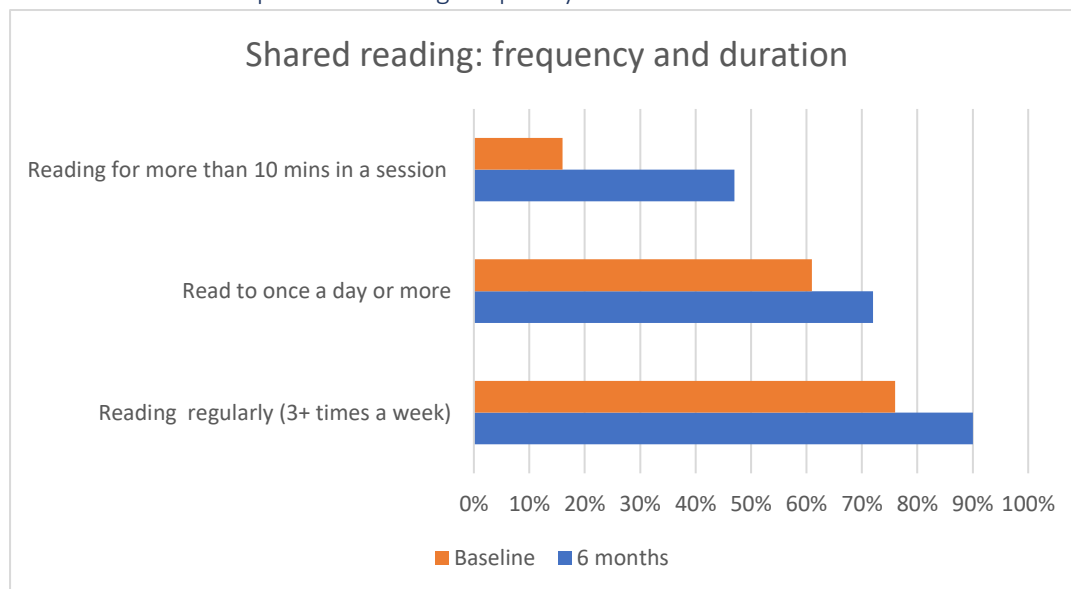
Survey responses showed that the introduction of the Imagination Library increased both the frequency of reading aloud, and the duration a child was read to. At the same time, it decreased irregular reading, that is, reading once a week or less.

After receiving the Imagination Library for 6 months 72% of children were being read to at least once a day, an increase of 11%, and 90% were being read to several times a week, an increase of 14%. Irregular reading, that is, reading at most once a week, and at minimum not at all, reduced from 24%

at baseline, to 6% at 6 months, and by 12 months, only 1% of parents were reading once a week or less.

Overall, the amount of time caregivers spent reading in one sitting increased substantially within the first 6 months of receiving the Imagination Library. The proportion of caregivers reading for more than 10 minutes increased by 31%. The proportion reading between 11 – 20 minutes tripled, from 10% at baseline to 34% at 6 months.

Table 1: National snapshot of reading frequency and duration



Logic Model - Increased interactions between caregivers and children during book reading

“The tip sheets have completely changed how I interact with the books and my children before, during, and after reading.” – Imagination Library Parent, Ryde NSW

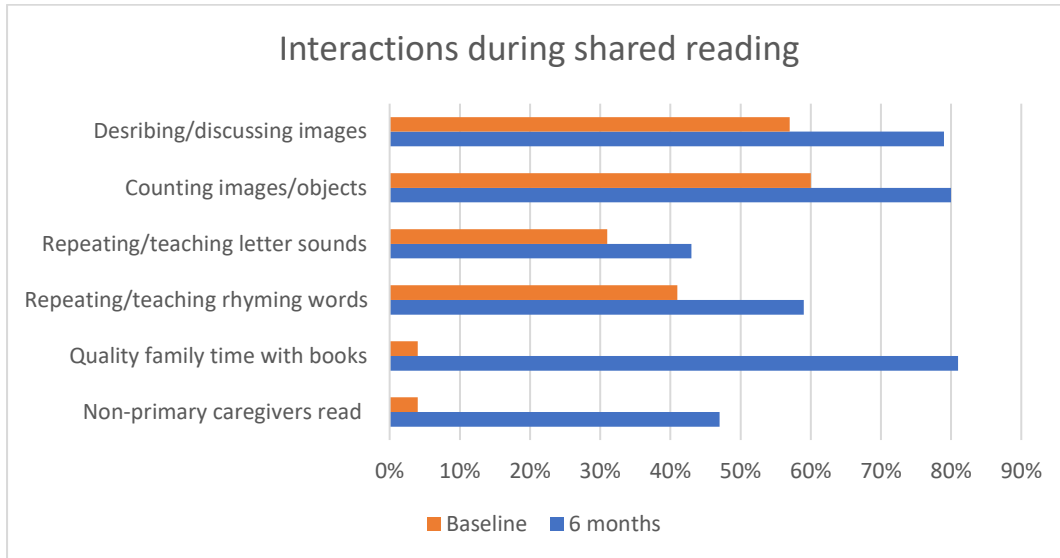
The Imagination Library changes the way that caregivers read to children, increasing reading techniques known to be beneficial for language acquisition and development. In the first 6 months of receiving the Imagination Library, the proportion of caregivers using repeating rhyming words during reading time increased by nearly 20%. The proportion of caregivers counting objects while reading also increased by 20% and the proportion of caregivers describing and discussing images increased by more than 20%.

“It's even got my husband reading to the kids too.” – Imagination Library Parent, Bendigo Vic

The data revealed a substantial increase in others reading to children in the first 6 months of receiving the Imagination Library, increasing from 4% at baseline, to 47% at 6 months, and remaining increased at 12 months. This is also shown in the optional comments field, with many caregivers noting an increase in reading with dad or other family members.

The Imagination Library also promotes family time with books. After 6 months of receiving the Imagination Library 90% of caregivers reported spending more quality time as a family with books. At baseline only 4% of respondents reported spending time together as a family with books.

Table 2: National snapshot of caregiver-child interactions during shared reading



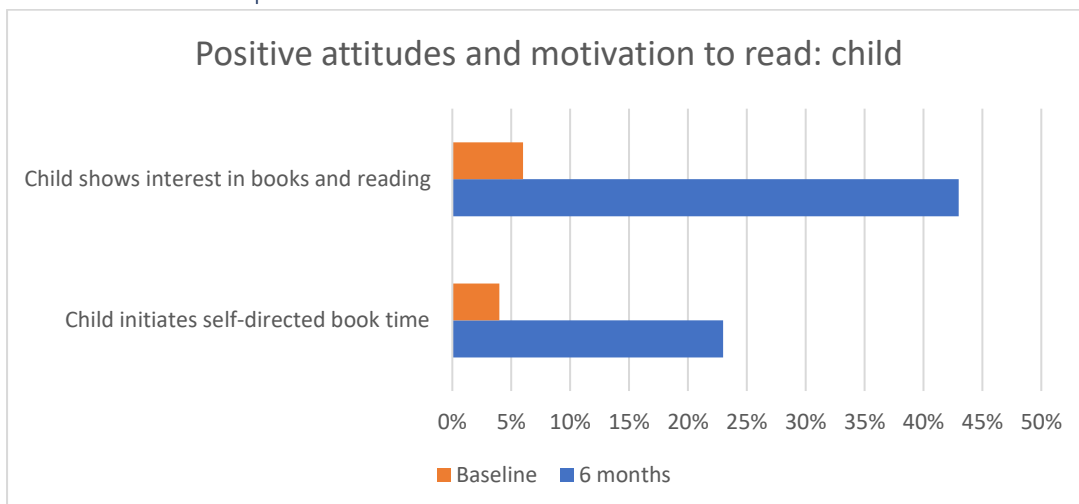
Logic model - Positive attitudes about reading and motivation to read among caregivers and children

Among children

“He knows how to turn the pages and what direction you read. I think a huge reason for this is because I enrolled him so young and started reading to him every day.” – Imagination Library Parent, Ryde, NSW

After 6 months of receiving the Imagination Library, caregivers reported an increase in child directed book play, with only 4% of children engaging in book play at baseline, and 23% after 6 months receiving the Imagination Library. Children also showed more interest in books after receiving the Imagination Library, with 43% of caregivers reporting their child was interested in books and reading, an increase of 37%.

Table 3: National snapshot of child attitudes and motivation to read

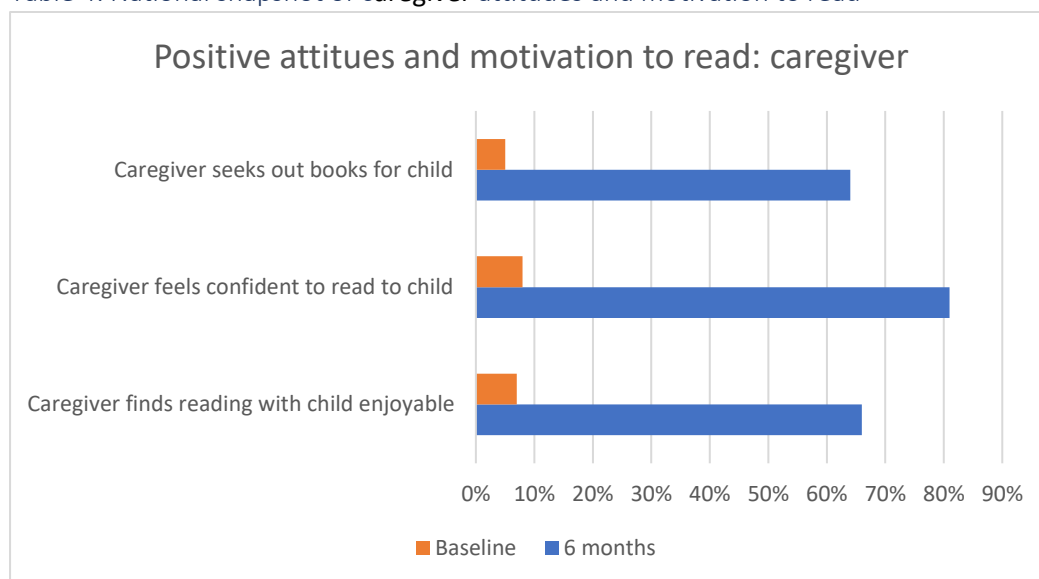


Among caregivers

“We enjoy our time together in reading the books.” – Imagination Library Parent, Ryde, NSW

After receiving the Imagination Library for 6 months, caregivers reported a 10-fold increase in their enjoyment of shared reading from 7% at baseline to 66% at 6 months. This remained elevated at 12 months after receiving the Imagination Library. Similarly, caregivers reported an 8-fold increase in their confidence to read to their child, with 80% agreeing that they felt more confident to read to their child after receiving the the Imagination Library for 6 months. The Imagination Library also prompted caregivers to seek out other books for their children, with 64% of caregivers looking for additional books for their child after receiving the Imagination Library for 6 months, compared to 5% at baseline. Furthermore, 46% of caregivers reported that their own reading habits had improved since receiving the Imagination Library.

Table 4: National snapshot of caregiver attitudes and motivation to read



Logic Model - Increased emerging literacy skills

“We thought our son might need speech therapy but since getting the books his speech has improved.” – Imagination Library Parent, Vale Grove SA

“I strongly believe it is the program and the beautiful quality books that have helped mould Charlotte’s interest in reading and even the interaction she is showing in wanting to touch the book and point at the imagery throughout. I want to shout to the world how amazing this program is, and how it bonds a family together each and every month!” - Imagination Library Parent, Tamworth NSW

84% of caregivers reported that their child’s interaction with books increased as a result of receiving the Imagination Library each month. 58% of caregivers surveyed reported that their child’s vocabulary had grown as a result of receiving the Imagination Library.

Table 5: National snapshot of change in child interaction with books due to the Imagination Library

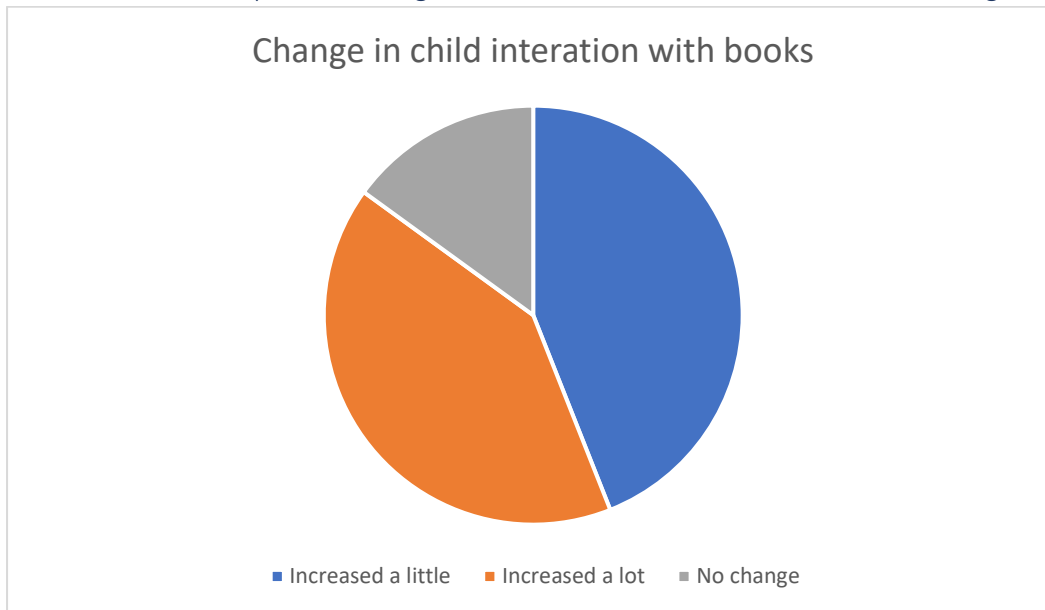
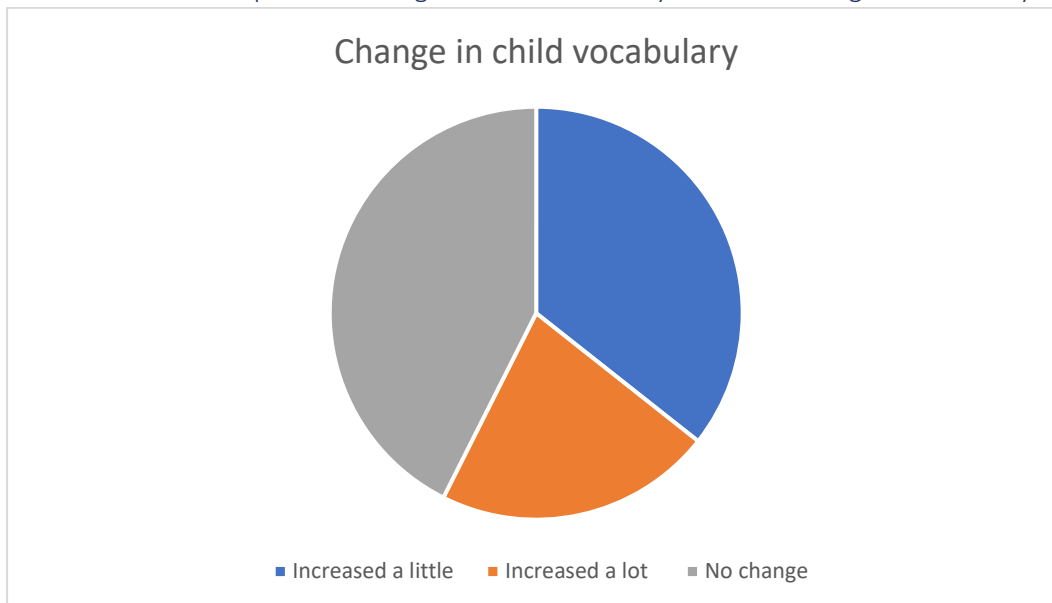


Table 6: National snapshot of change in child vocabulary due to the Imagination Library



Case Study: DPIL in the Tamworth Regional Council area

In Tamworth, the Regional Council, early childhood nurses, Libraries, Primary Health Network and local businesses have come together to support early childhood literacy by ensuring all children born in the regional are enrolled in the Imagination Library. Since 2019, the nurses at the hospital have been enrolling babies at birth, with 1545 children currently enrolled. This gives a unique opportunity to examine the impact of a community wide approach using a combination of prospective data collected by United Way Australia, and National Data collected as part of the Australian Early

Development Census, both current and future. While the age range of the children reported on for the National report is between 0 and 4.8 years at baseline, and 4 months and 5 years at 6 months, for the Tamworth data, children are aged between 0 and 6 months when completing the baseline survey, and between 5 months and 13 months when completing the 6-month survey. This shows an early onset of beneficial reading frequency, duration and caregiver-child interactions during shared reading.

Overview of Tamworth survey results

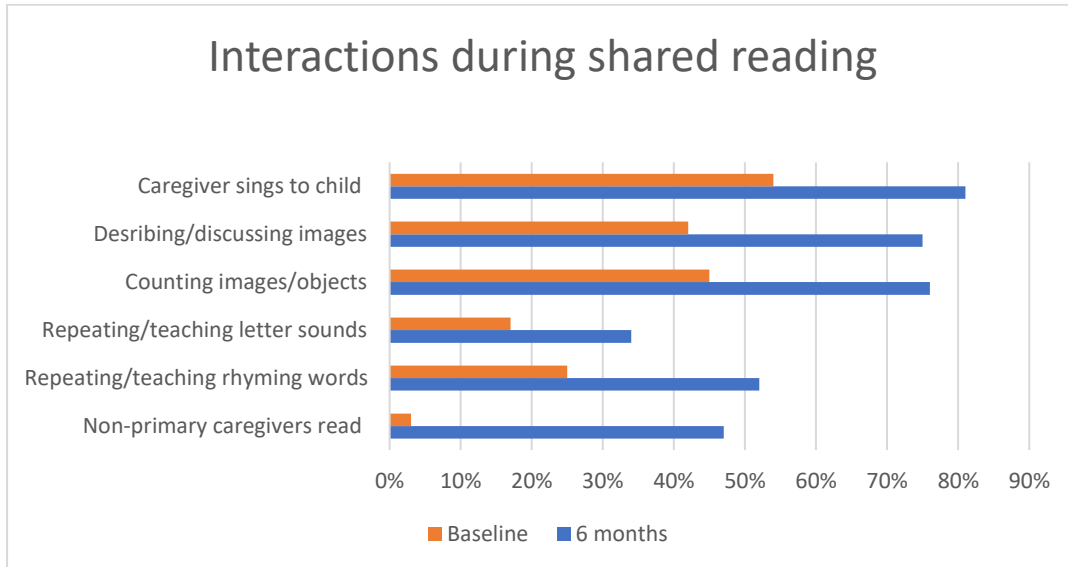
Indicator	Baseline	6 months	Gain
Enhanced home literacy environment			
Increased frequency and duration of reading			
Child is read to regularly (several times a week or more)	75%	88%	13%
Child is read to once a day or more	58%	72%	14%
Child is read to for up to 10 minutes in a session	24%	55%	31%
Child is read to for more than 10 mins in a session	14%	38%	24%
Increased interactions between caregivers and children during book reading			
Increase in reading techniques beneficial for emerging literacy			
Caregiver repeating/teaching rhyming words	25%	52%	27%
Caregiver repeating/teaching letter sounds	17%	34%	17%
Caregiver counting images/objects	45%	76%	31%
Caregiver describing/discussing images	42%	75%	33%
Caregiver sings to child	54%	81%	27%
Non-primary caregivers read to child	3%	47%	44%
Positive attitudes about reading and motivation to read			
Among children			
Child shows interest in books and reading	4%	41%	37%
Among caregivers			
Caregiver finds reading with child enjoyable	9%	64%	55%
Caregiver feels confident to read to child	9%	77%	68%
Caregiver believes reading is important	47%	96%	49%

Discussion – Tamworth Survey

Earlier onset of caregiver-child interactions during shared reading

While increases in reading frequency and duration, and positive attitudes about reading, were similar in both the national data and in the Tamworth data, it is worth noting that bigger gains were made in increased interactions between caregivers and children during shared reading in Tamworth (see Table 7). Notably, 15% of caregivers reported that their child was too young to be read to at baseline in Tamworth, reflecting the common misconception that shared reading is for older infants and children. With this in mind, it is clear that the Imagination Library results in earlier onset of reading and caregiver-child book interactions, particularly in children who are enrolled at birth.

Table 7: Tamworth snapshot of caregiver-child interactions during shared reading



What Tamworth caregivers tell us

“This program is absolutely fantastic! Every single new mum I have spoken to has been enrolled at the hospital (midwives enrol babies at the hospital so vulnerable or socially isolated people don't miss out). This not only helps our children's literacy, but our own as well. It is such a beautiful bonding experience and I just love our dedicated reading time each day. Thank you thank you thank you!!!!”
 – Imagination Library Parent, Tamworth NSW

“I can't thank you enough. This program gives me so much validation that my community cares about the future of my son.” – Imagination Library Parent, Tamworth NSW

Conclusion

International research has shown that the Imagination Library increases frequency and duration of shared reading, caregiver-child interactions during reading, and ultimately school literacy readiness. The evaluation of the Imagination Library in Australia is consistent with these findings. In particular, the Imagination Library in Australia is shown to boost positive attitudes about reading among both caregivers and children, resulting in more frequent, enjoyable and interactive shared reading sessions, fostering skills that are known to drive school literacy readiness.

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