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Summer Reading Initiative Curbs Learning Slide
United Way of San Diego County's "Readers in the Heights" Helped Prepare 479 City Heights Children for Back to School

SAN DIEGO (Oct. 19, 2018) – Last school year, as a second grader, Timothy struggled to read. He remembered, “As the books got harder, I had trouble with vocabulary and pronouncing words. I almost quit.”

But after participating in United Way of San Diego County's “Readers in the Heights” literacy summer initiative this past August, Timothy was ready to tackle third-grade reading and said he “doesn't have the jitters anymore. I'm feeling 99 percent confident.”

Along with 478 other students, Timothy benefited from the annual summer reading initiative that promotes active learning for kindergarten through fourth grade students to help prevent “summer slide” – when children without access to books during the summer break lose literacy gains made during the school year.

This summer, 86 percent of the elementary students assessed in the first and last days of the four-week program maintained or improved their reading scores.

“We use proven assessment tools to measure impact and they show that these literacy practices have made significant progress in student reading,” said United Way of San Diego County President and CEO Nancy Sasaki. “These practices help close learning gaps and open new worlds by creating happy, excited and confident readers.”

Starting with 40 students at one site just two years ago, Readers in the Heights has grown more than ten-fold with the 2018 summer reading initiative now serving 479 students through close partnerships with several community partners. Literacy partner Words Alive trained site staff on evidence-based reading practices, and United Way supported the staff to utilize that training to enhance their literacy programming. “Readers in the Heights” was integrated into seven sites this year, including the PrimeTime locations for extended learning at Franklin, Fay, Cherokee Point and Normal Heights Elementary Schools; Copley-Price YMCA; the City Heights Community Development Corporation; and Karen Organization, which serves Burmese refugees.

All the children live in the economically and culturally diverse City Heights neighborhood, which has the highest concentration of youth in the county – and, subsequently, the highest number of vulnerable children.

“Research shows that children who don't have access to books, camps or enrichment programs during the summer recess can lose more than two months of reading skills and can fall behind almost three months in their learning,” said San Diego Unified School District Superintendent Cindy Marten. “Each year, the Readers in the Heights literacy initiative works to increase summer learning opportunities,

and with the help of partners and volunteers, we are able to make a huge impact over four weeks. We look forward to continuing to expand the program in the future.”

Sasaki added, “The goal is to grow these practices in other summer programs across the county.”

In total, the children experienced almost 10,000 hours of learning. Volunteers read to the children and the children read to them. They worked individually and in small groups, asking questions to engage critical thinking and reasoning, and playing word games to build vocabulary skills. The 20-day program offered other education and enrichment programming, including trips to the library, a tour of the police station, STEM-related hands-on activities and the distribution of 900 free books.

Program partners include San Diego Unified School District, San Diego Public Library, San Diego Police Department, PrimeTime SAY San Diego, Words Alive and Traveling Stories, which provided a unique opportunity for students to earn Book Bucks and great prizes by practicing the reading skills that they were learning.

About United Way of San Diego County

For 98 years, United Way of San Diego County has disrupted cycles of poverty by developing long-term solutions for children and families. United Way plays a unique role in the San Diego community, bringing people and resources together to spark breakthrough community action that elevates every child and family toward a brighter future.

Developing regional partnerships around effective practices, the organization makes measurable, significant change in the education and success of children from cradle to career and helps families have the support needed to ensure that success. United Way focuses on educational milestones, such as kindergarten readiness, third-grade literacy, high school preparation, and college and career pathways. Learn more at www.uwsd.org, the [blog](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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