

Moms & Tots® Family Literacy Program Graduate Research: June 2017

On Friday, July 29, 2016 the Literacy Council Gulf Coast® held its fifth graduation for five Ft. Myers tots at Tice United Methodist Church. Four of the five tots and their families attended the ceremony. The graduation in Bonita Springs was the following Friday, August 5, 2016 for twelve graduates and many proud family members. Eleven tots participated in the eleventh annual Moms & Tots® Family Literacy Program graduation ceremony.

All seventeen graduates were from Lee County this year. Two children enrolled in Kindergarten. Four children qualified for the Head Start program and one child qualified for the Early Head Start program at Bonita Springs Elementary School. One of the graduates in Ft. Myers was unable to find a half day Volunteer Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) program at a private day care facility in their neighborhood to attend. However, she continued to come to the Moms & Tots Program® with her mom and continue the age appropriate skills so she will be ready for school the following year.

One child attended the Moms & Tots Program® with her grandmother. The child's mother was from Africa and her father was from Mexico. Both parents worked so our only contact was with her Portuguese speaking grandmother. When the grandmother was visiting from Africa she brought the granddaughter to the Moms & Tots Program® for both of them to learn English. Unfortunately, after the graduation the Literacy Council lost contact with the family.

An evaluation questionnaire for the classroom teacher to fill out in regard to the academic progress of each student was hand delivered to three public elementary schools in Ft. Myers. Two public elementary schools in the Bonita Springs area and two private VPK daycare centers also received hand delivered evaluation questionnaires for the classroom teacher to fill out. Eight evaluations were completed and returned to the Literacy Council in a timely manner.

One family in Ft. Myers is Coptic Christian from Egypt. Communication has been difficult. The father goes back to Egypt at times to work and leaves mom to take on all responsibilities in the United States. Attendance was very good at first. But as the mother acquired more English skills, her attendance has become inconsistent. The information given me has not been accurate for the Literacy Council to locate the VPK program for the tot. Therefore, the Literacy Council did not receive a survey from her VPK teacher. The child is very intelligent and has good social skills for her age. She should do quite well when entering kindergarten this coming August.

Our goal at the Council is for the children to begin school on an even level as their peers through English language instruction. Closing the achievement gap and eliminating the language barrier is important for their educational success. To evaluate the program, a rubric assessment is completed on each child before graduation at the Literacy Council. As with all children, they develop with different abilities. Some children are very shy and are just beginning to be able to separate without anxiety from their moms while other children are verbally articulate in English before graduating. Some of our children are so unstructured that to learn to sit, listen to a story and learn to say please and thank you appropriately is quite an accomplishment. All this information is recorded on the rubric in order to make a fair comparison of their academic growth from graduation through their first year in the public school system.

Many of the mothers in Ft. Myers do not know much about the public school system because they have had very little or no education in their native countries. The state of Florida now requires parents to do on line registration for a voucher for the child to attend VPK half days if the family doesn't qualify for Head Start. Many of our moms, especially in the Ft. Myers area, do not have a computer or an email. This is a challenging expectation for someone who has acquired very little English and is computer illiterate. The Literacy Council has tried helping them on the church computer at Tice Methodist Church. But there always seems to be a glitch in the system. The Literacy Council Gulf Coast encourages moms to participate in their child's education at school, at the Moms & Tots® Program, and at home since moms are their children's first teacher!

Some administrators and teachers have passed out flyers promoting our Moms & Tots® program in their neighborhoods. They have commented that we're doing a great job helping others with literacy.

Teachers' comments include:

1. He is able to focus on activities and exhibits well with on task behaviors.
2. He's a very skillful child.
3. He's well behaved.
4. He's always motivated to learn new things.
5. He has excellent communication/verbal skills.
6. He is an awesome student in all areas!
7. He's quiet but reacted positively to the staff.
8. He interacted well with the other children.
9. He's willing to learn.
10. He is very shy but quite inquisitive.
11. He showed interest in the VPK classroom when he visited.
12. He's pleasant and willing to learn.
13. He knew his colors, could count to 14 and knew the ABC song.
14. He's a very shy and quiet boy.
15. He had difficulty expressing his knowledge in English or Spanish.
16. He knew the alphabet and his numbers to 10.
17. He was very social and outgoing.
18. He listened well and was eager to learn.
19. He transitioned into the classroom successfully.
20. For a three year old attending Early Head Start, he was independent.....no crying!
21. He came into the program without insecurities.
22. He has speech deficiencies so severe that none of the teachers can understand him.
23. He has a lot of potential.
24. He is reading basic word books in VPK.
25. He has improved in reading, writing, and speaking.
26. He is ready for Kindergarten!
27. He likes to interact with the older kids because he is very high functioning.
28. He has a love for learning.

One teacher stated that she would like to know more information about this program. She requested more information about the Moms & Tots Program® at her school email address. The LCGC sent her information in a prompt manner. Another teacher thanked the LCGC for enhancing the student's lives.

She truly appreciates all that the Moms & Tots Program® and the tutors do for the children and families in our community!

The Literacy Council encourages our moms to continue in the Moms & Tots® program even when their child moves on to the public school system. Some do stay with the program and bring their child/children to our class when there is no school and during the summer school vacation. Those children love coming back to the program. It is wonderful for the LCGC staff to see the progress they make. It also allows the families and the Literacy Council to stay connected and help them when problems occur.

All in all, the recommendations for our program are positive. Some suggestions from the Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers are:

1. To focus more on phonological awareness and math skills
2. To build cooperation and communication skills
3. To provide more team activities between students
4. To encourage the parents to read to their child on a regular basis in English or their native language
5. To encourage parents to speak more English when at home
6. To encourage parents to take their child to the library or Bookmobile
7. To help their child improve their pronunciation
8. To watch TV in English
9. To focus on English vocabulary, math skills, letter/sound recognition, rhyming and phonological activities
10. To encourage parents to be more involved with their child's homework
11. To promote Literacy at home

In conclusion, the Moms & Tots® Program at the Literacy Council Gulf Coast has fulfilled its goal of preparing young ESL children to begin school on an even level with their peers. And according to the feedback of our student questionnaire, the Moms & Tots® program has exceeded these goals for most of our student graduates.