

Autism Welcome Here
End-of-Year Report
Due April 30, 2017

Please answer the following questions:

1. Briefly describe project activities during this report period. (What exactly did you do?)

During this report period we added a Saturday session of the Everybody Plays playgroup to the Children's Room line-up. Everybody Plays is now offered on the first Saturday and the third Friday of each month during our regular program year. We assessed the equipment that had been purchased and determined that the gross-motor component of the program was not as well-supplied as the others. We used the remaining grant funds to purchase a tent and tunnel and a bouncing horse in order to expand this component. We also purchased two sensory cushions and some fidgets that, in addition to being used in Everybody Plays, can be made available to children in regular storytime sessions. Finally, we solicited feedback from staff members who took part in staff training and from parents and service providers who took part in the inclusive playgroup.

2. Describe the ways in which your program has met its goals since the mid-year report

With the addition of the Saturday session, we accomplished the goal of offering Everybody Plays bi-monthly and including a weekend session for working parents. Attendance at Everybody Plays has been very consistent and has represented a mix of children with special needs and typical peers. Co-facilitator and birth-to-three service provider Erin Costa comments, "all my families are more comfortable coming to an activity outside of the home" and "[m]any of my families have said wonderful things about this program, but also the Simsbury Library in general. They look forward to coming to this group and having a place that is welcoming and judge free!" This suggests that Everybody Plays is accomplishing its goal of creating community connections for families of children on the spectrum and that it is making them more comfortable at the library in general.

3. What barriers did you encounter in the second half of the grant period? How did you deal with them?

In February we discovered that this program had required more staff time than anticipated, leaving that line item in the grant budget with insufficient funds to cover the March session of the Everybody Plays group. With Barbara's permission, we covered that need with about \$60 of the original sum that had been earmarked for equipment and supplies. There was ample funding left for the additional equipment we needed and we were able to staff the playgroup session.

This period also saw a change in administration of the Children's Department and the possibility of library budget cuts, leading to some uncertainty about the future of Everybody Plays. Clearly communicating the importance of the program and why it should be staff-led and allowing the new supervisor to experience the program first-hand seems to have solidified its ongoing presence on the Children's Room calendar. In the

coming months, I will be training one or two other staff members to lead the program, allowing it to continue even if I should be unavailable to facilitate it. I will also be meeting with our partner, Creative Interventions, to explore how we will continue our collaboration post-grant.

4. What was the most successful aspect of your project? The least successful? Describe why.

I would say that the playgroup itself has been the most successful aspect of the project. It is always a joyous hour, with children and caregivers alike interacting with the toys and activities and with each-other. I am almost always asked how often it is offered and if there are similar programs in the area. Families seem hungry for play opportunities like this. We observe children on the spectrum becoming more comfortable and more willing to try new things. We are able to share information about resources available to families. We are able to model and answer questions for parents and caregivers.

The least successful aspect was the formal assessment of the program. The tools that were designed to assess the change in how welcome families felt at the library and to gather feedback were not as effective as I would have liked. Though we did gather some good feedback, it was largely anecdotal. I don't feel that this negatively impacted the program itself, but it did make its impact harder to measure.

5. If you could do anything differently, what would it be and why?

If I could make one change it would be to target more autism-specific and special needs audiences for my marketing in order to get a better balance of special needs children and typical peers. We certainly attracted some children who would not otherwise have been taking part in library programs, but the ratio of special needs to typical peers was about 1:4 at best. Luckily, I will have an opportunity to do more marketing and publicity as we go into our next program year.

6. Is there anything your library has planned to build on or continue the work of this project? Please describe.

As mentioned, we will continue the Everybody Plays group as part of our regular Children's Room program schedule. We are exploring continued collaboration with our partners at Creative Interventions and we hope to blog about the program for ALSC. In May I will guest-facilitate the library's teen-adult book group, which will be discussing *Memoirs of an Imaginary Friend* (Matthew Dicks), a novel featuring a protagonist on the spectrum. We hope to share our experience with colleagues at other libraries and are open to new opportunities and partnerships!

7. Please attach photos, videos or anecdotes that convey the impact of your program or service, if available. Do we have permission to use these in promotional materials and on the Libraries and Autism: We're Connected and the Targeting Autism websites?

I am pleased to share a slideshow overview. The committee has permission to share the slideshow itself, or I will make available the folder containing the individual photos and videos.