

# Get Set Learn Summary Report 2017

**Get Set Learn** is a holistic family literacy program that provides a foundation for families with literacy challenges to experience successful lifelong learning.



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The Regional Municipality of Waterloo Social Services funds the **Get Set Learn** program, coordinated by Project READ Literacy Network Waterloo-Wellington and hosted by community partners in Kitchener and Cambridge.

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## Project READ Literacy Network Mission Statement

Our mission is to provide any adult or family in Waterloo Wellington with access to literacy training.

## Get Set Learn Community Partners



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## Executive Summary

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This report will explain the **outcomes and community impact** of the **Get Set Learn** program, its **successes and challenges** in 2017, and our **goals for the program's future**.

**Get Set Learn** is a literacy program for families. Our goals for the program focus mainly on the parents.

Our participants (parents) all experience low income and often arrive at the program experiencing **multiple life challenges**, which may include low literacy skills and can correspond with isolation and mental health issues. These challenges directly impact the ability to gain and maintain employment and to take part in and contribute to the community.

Our program outcomes include **providing parents with opportunities** to participate in their community and **increase their skills**. In this way our program seeks to break the cycle that can occur when parents experiencing low literacy pass those challenges on to their children. **When parent engagement and skills increase, outcomes for children improve.**

In 2017, **Get Set Learn** program participants exceeded our target number of 45 families by serving **47 families**. We witnessed parents learning and using new skills and passing those skills on to their children, by participating in activities together that can extend to the home. Our assessment results show that **Get Set Learn** continues to have a **significant impact on families and continues to meet program outcomes**.

The **Get Set Learn** program continues to act as a **stepping stone to entry or re-entry into the workforce** for parents who have been caring for a preschool-aged child. Project READ helps participants move to their next steps by providing a literacy assessment and referral service to each parent. In 2018, Project READ will report on numbers of participants who were assisted to transition to further literacy, education, or employment services through our program as part of our new follow-up initiative.

We also continued to work successfully with our community partners to meet the increasingly complex needs of families. Through our program we

were able to **guide and refer parents to needed community services for themselves and their children**. As well, we began a follow up evaluation with our participants to further determine the effects of our programs on the lives of parents and families.

This year we were able to build on our existing programs through grant-funded initiatives. We increased our number of program offerings, revised our curriculum and learning materials, added more program alternatives (parent workshops and a family literacy night at a local school in a low-income area), and were able to reach out to new demographic groups (newcomers to Canada and non-income-eligibility parents). **The continued support of the Regional Municipality of Waterloo Social Services has provided a base on which to expand our programs and help more parents and families.**


**In 2018, our goals for the Get Set Learn program** include growing our programs to reach more families, and creating more ways to measure the links between program attendance and outcomes for participants.

We aim to

- **create a sustainable model** to scale up family literacy programming, which we began to work toward this year
- **increase the number of referrals** to our family and adult literacy programs from OW and ODSP caseworkers by providing caseworkers with more information about our program and support for the referral process
- continue to work with community partners to **serve families** in need of literacy support
- **continue to partner with community service agencies** to meet the needs of our families through information and referrals
- **develop outcomes and methods to track outcomes for children** attending the program

- continue to **measure links between program attendance and increased life and employment opportunities**

In all, the **Get Set Learn** program met or exceeded its goals in 2017 and, with continued support, we look forward to a successful 2018.



We need to focus on the development of the adults who are important in kids' lives.

Harvard University

Retrieved from:

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/building-adult-capabilities-to-improve-child-outcomes-a-theory-of-change/>


# Get Set Learn 2017 - Outcomes achieved

## Introduction

**Get Set Learn** is a literacy program for families. Our goals for the program focus mainly on the parents. Our program outcomes include providing parents with opportunities to participate in their community and **increase their own skills**.

Parents who attend **Get Set Learn** programs **learn and practice skills they can carry to further education and to employment**.

Our program also seeks to **break the cycle** that can occur when parents experiencing low literacy pass those challenges on to their children.



The family is the strongest element in shaping lives. It is the most powerful support network there is. It's where the cycle of learning begins, where the attitudes of parents about learning become the educational values of their children.

Through education of more than one generation, family literacy programs build on families' strengths and provide the tools and support they need to become stronger and more self-sufficient.

National Centre for Family Literacy 2015

Retrieved from: <http://www.familieslearning.org/>

This report will show how the **Get Set Learn** program **met outcomes** in 2017.



## Get Set Learn Program Outcomes (revised in 2016)

Get Set Learn gives parents knowledge, skills and opportunity:

- to see themselves as their baby or child's first and most important teacher
- to engage in family literacy activities on a regular basis (talk, read, sing, draw and play with shapes and numbers) so that children are more successful at school
- to engage in positive discipline practices so that family literacy activities are more successful
- to develop relationships with other parents that help them not to feel alone
- to advocate for themselves and their children to get the help they need
- to develop community connections that can help them move forward with their goals

When our programs achieve these outcomes, parents

- **demonstrate increased confidence and skills** which they can carry forward to their next steps,
- **are more ready to use community services** to help them reach their goals, and
- **have begun to develop a plan for their future.**

## How does the Get Set Learn program achieve these outcomes?

The **Get Set Learn** program can appear to the casual observer as a preschool program. The families meet for 2 hours twice a week, and the first hour, or Parent and Child Together (PACT) time, consists of play, singing, story time, snack, and crafts or games.

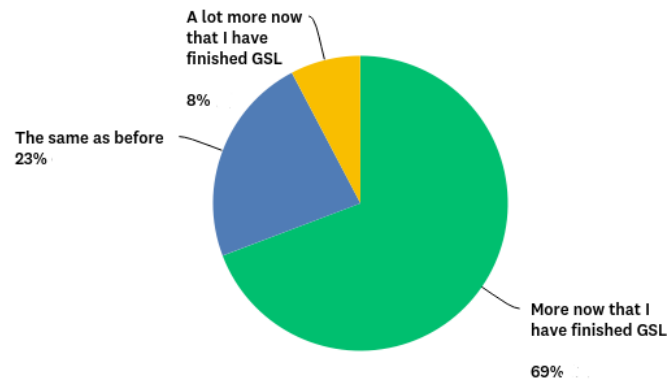
But there is a lot going on in that first hour of PACT time. **Get Set Learn** facilitators and staff **help parents learn the skills** they need to interact and play with their children in literacy-rich ways. For example, facilitators and staff might

- model how to get a toddler interested in reading a book together
- help parents develop strategies for getting children ready for school, such as by encouraging parents to teach children to listen, share, ask, say please and thank you
- show parents ways to discipline that are positive, using praise and teaching methods

Parents have the **opportunity to try out the skills they are learning**, together with other parents, in a friendly and supportive environment. For example, parents learn about the importance of engaging and communicating with their child, and practice strategies for effective communication.

This graph illustrates parents' self-assessment of their new communication skills at program's end.

Listening, making eye contact and having back and forth conversations during play and learning time helps children and parents "connect" to each other. I feel that my child and I "connect" during play and learning time



As well, parents see first-hand how their literacy skills influence their child's growing skills. **Parents become inspired to increase their own skills to improve outcomes for their children.**

Families also have the chance to **find out about community services** they can access. For example, as part of the **Get Set Learn** program families might take a field trip to the public library, where parents get a library card and learn what resources are available.

In the second hour of each **Get Set Learn** class, parents participate in their own program separate from their children. The parent program facilitator guides parents through a **series of lessons**, with topics such as

- how do we learn?
- read with your child
- be a role model
- your child starting school
- take care of health
- technology and your child

- your future story

Parents use a workbook to follow along with and complete lessons, and **actively participate in discussions and homework**. The skills parents learn during these lessons can transfer to further education and employment.

As the program progresses, parents think about next steps in their lives. **Project READ provides a free literacy assessment** for participants and refers them on to literacy training, further education, or employment services.

### **How do we measure program outcomes?**

Parents attending **Get Set Learn** programs complete an assessment (survey) at the beginning and end of the program.

By analysing survey results, **we can see a marked increase in parent awareness and skills**.

### **Get Set Learn 2017 Results**

- **47 parents** participated in the Get Set Learn program in 2017, exceeding our target number of 45.

After the **Get Set Learn** program, parents self-assess on outcomes.

Parents

- see themselves as their baby or child's first and most important teacher – 67% of parents say more or a lot more

- engage in family literacy activities on a regular basis (talk, read, sing, draw and play with shapes and numbers) so that children are more successful at school – 66% of parents say more or a lot more
- engage in positive discipline practices so that family literacy activities are more successful – 72% of parents say more or a lot more
- have developed relationships with other parents that help them not to feel alone – 47 % of parents say more or a lot more
- know how to advocate for themselves and their children to get the help they need – 93 % of parents say more or a lot more
- have developed community connections that can help them move forward with their goals – 80% of parents say more or a lot more

These assessments were drawn from spring 2017 final parent surveys. More data is currently being gathered in our 6-month follow-up initiative to further determine the longer-term impact of the **Get Set Learn** program. We will report the findings from our Fall programs along with our follow-up data collection to the Regional Municipality of Waterloo in 2018.

As well, **Get Set Learn** facilitators and staff document observations in the form of learning stories or **success stories**, that let us gauge our programs' effects.

The following success story stems from documented observations in one of our Fall 2017 **Get Set Learn** classes.

During the Parent Time, one participant shared that they rarely read to their children. When we asked more about this, we discovered that this person was never read to as a child and that reading is not something encouraged in her family. The Facilitator continued to encourage reading during PACT time, and modeled one-on-one reading to the child. The child began to show a great interest in books, and the child program staff shared with the parent how much the child enjoyed reading with them. Through modeling, practicing, sending home many books, and discussing the purpose of 'Home Reading' from school, the parent has shown an increased interest in reading to their children, and has increased their own reading skills.

**In summary, in 2017 the Get Set Learn program met its program outcomes.**

Parents learned and practiced skills which they can carry forward to their next steps.

Parents learned about and accessed community resources to help them move toward their goals.

Parents developed plans for their future and their family's future.

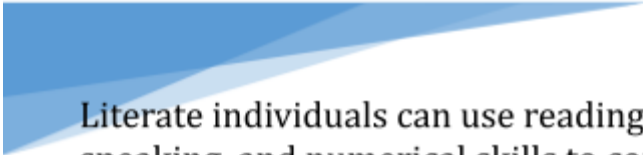
# Get Set Learn 2017 – Community impact achieved

## The effect of low literacy rates

We live in a community rich with resources. However, statistics show that a shocking number of **community members live with low literacy skills**.

**48% of Canadian adults have inadequate literacy skills.<sup>1</sup>**

Literacy is more than knowing how to read and write. Literacy includes all the skills needed to participate fully in school, work, and life.



Literate individuals can use reading, writing, speaking, and numerical skills to communicate and to understand the world around them. These skills are vital to an individual's ability to function and build security and wellbeing in their lives.

Project READ Literacy Network

For example, those with low literacy skills might struggle to fill out forms, understand prescriptions, pay household bills, or seek information or services they need.

Low literacy skills can prevent a person from accessing community resources needed to achieve their goals. Low literacy skills often coincide with lack of employment, poverty, isolation, and mental health issues.

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from: <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/provincial/education/adlt-lowlit.aspx>

**Literacy skills are vital to securing and maintaining employment.** These skills allow a person to function and be a productive member of our community.

## **A bit of background - how Get Set Learn came to exist**

In early 2000, the Literacy Service Planning Committee of Waterloo Region noticed that some low-literate parents were not able to attend a literacy program for themselves, since they had preschool children at home. They **identified a need for a program that would offer parents a place to learn** with their preschoolers. As well, parents wanted a quality program for their children. Research showed that parents are more likely to attend a program for their children than one that is solely for them<sup>2</sup>.

Project READ researched and piloted a family literacy program in 2003. The program would act as a **transition or bridging program** to ease parents into literacy classes, while also providing children's programming as the parents learned.

## **What Get Set Learn does today**

Since 2003, the **Get Set Learn** program has developed into what it is today, an **8-week program for parents receiving Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)** and their preschoolers who live in Waterloo Region. Our community partners host **Get Set Learn** programs in locations across Kitchener and Cambridge. **These programs help parents improve literacy skills and move toward further education and employment.**

**In 2017, Get Set Learn programs were offered in 6 sites/locations** in spring and fall sessions.

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<sup>2</sup> Sauve, L. (2006). *Get Set Learn! A Case Study of a Family Literacy Program in Waterloo Region*. Kitchener, Ontario: Project READ Literacy Network.



**Our community partners** who hosted these programs included

- Stanley Park Community Association
- Highland-Stirling Community Group
- Kinbridge Community Association
- Victoria Hills Neighbourhood Association

As well, with the support of the Regional Municipality of Waterloo, Project READ continues to **build community relationships to better serve our participants.**

For example, we connect **Get Set Learn** participants with **employment counseling and programs offered by the Regional Municipality of Waterloo.** Where possible, we engage a speaker from the Region to present information on employment supports available to our **Get Set Learn** participants.

As well, we frequently refer or guide families to access community services such as

- mental health resources through Carizon
- speech and language services through KidsAbility
- parenting support through KW counselling

Also, Project READ **continues its participation in several community committees and tables** to promote our programs and to share and receive resources and ideas for best practices in family literacy.

Our memberships include

- Children's Planning Table
- Positive Parenting Community Committee
- Early Literacy Alliance of Waterloo Region
- Family Literacy Day
- Let's Read

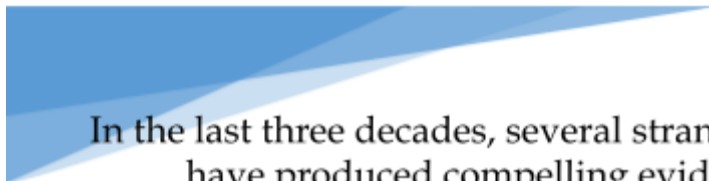
## Impact on families

**Get Set Learn** works with parents to build their confidence and skills.

Programs that focus on building parents' confidence and skills have **noticeable impacts on their children's future outcomes.**

When parents' skills improve, children experience a greater level of success in school. This impact affects a child's life in an ongoing way. Children grow into adults with **more opportunities in life and employment**, and are better able to take part in and contribute to their communities.

The National Literacy Trust in the UK report on their long standing research into the role of families and literacy reinforces these findings.



In the last three decades, several strands of research have produced compelling evidence justifying a focus on the family with a particular emphasis on early years in order to raise literacy standards.

National Literacy Trust, UK

Their  
key

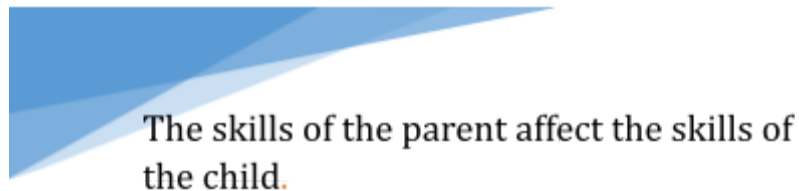
research findings:

- A parent's involvement in their child's literacy practices exerts a more powerful influence on academic success than other family background variables, such as social class, family size and level of parental education.
- The home is crucial. Families and parents are the most important factor influencing a child's future.

- Early intervention is vital. Learning begins at birth. The earlier parents understand and act on their role in their children's literacy development, the more impactful and long-lasting the result.<sup>3</sup>

Children are the future of our community. When parents receive the help they need to support their children's learning and literacy, our community grows stronger.

Family Literacy programs such as the **Get Set Learn** program are vital to the health and success of our community, and we thank the Regional Municipality of Waterloo for its continued support for our program.



Essential Skills Ontario

Retrieved from: <http://www.essentialskillsontario.ca/>

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<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from:  
[http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0000/7901/Research\\_review-importance\\_of\\_families\\_and\\_home.pdf](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0000/7901/Research_review-importance_of_families_and_home.pdf)

# Get Set Learn 2017 – New initiatives achieved

## Growing from our base

Support from the Regional Municipality of Waterloo has allowed **Get Set Learn** to fill a vital role in our community since 2003. These programs have provided a base for family literacy in our community. **Get Set Learn** has become well-known and these programs fill up quickly.

Starting in 2015 from this base, we were able to acquire grant funding to grow our programs and our scope for family literacy initiatives in the community.

### 1) Ontario Trillium Foundation 2-year grant

Within this project, begun in 2016, we were able to

- deliver **Get Set Learn** at test sites in Kitchener and in Wellington County, including 2 low-income areas, 1 non-income eligible site, and 1 rural site
- work with Capacity Canada to develop a model for program sustainability
- develop and deliver a series of parent workshops
- create updated curriculum and learning materials (parent workbooks and family homebooks) for **Get Set Learn**
- offer a series of parent workshops, as well as a family literacy event night at a local school in a low-income area, based on our experience helping parents improve literacy skills in our **Get Set Learn** program
- implement a procedure for collecting 6-month follow-up data for **Get Set Learn** participants

## 2) KW Community Foundation

Within this project, which will continue into 2018, we were able to

- build on our previous experience serving newcomers to Canada in our programs
- deliver **Get Set Learn** to a group of newcomers to Canada
- help newcomers become established in our community and build a sense of belonging and participating
- help newcomers make the transition to further education or employment

## 3) Lyle S. Hallman Foundation

Within this project, which will extend into 2018, we were able to

- work toward identifying a sustainable model for scaling up the impact of family literacy in our community
- begin the testing of 4 prototypes for sustainability
- develop outcomes and methods to track outcomes for children participating in **Get Set Learn**, to further demonstrate the impact of this program

These growth initiatives stem directly from the base we have been able to build through our work with the **Get Set Learn** program in our community, and so, through the continued support of the Regional Municipality of Waterloo. These initiatives, such as the increase in resources for newcomers to Canada and the development of updated learning materials, will benefit the participants in all of our **Get Set Learn** programs.



## Get Set Learn 2018 – Goals

In 2018, our goals for the **Get Set Learn program** include growing our programs to reach more families, and creating more ways to measure the links between program attendance and outcomes for participants.

We aim to

- **continue to create a sustainable model to scale up family literacy programming**

We recognize a strong need for raising awareness of the impact of family literacy and for family literacy programming in our community. Through funding from the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation, and in consultation with Capacity Canada, we will continue to work toward **identifying a sustainable model for scaling up the impact of family literacy** in our community, including the continued testing of 4 prototypes for sustainability.

This growth initiative stems directly from the base we have been able to build through our work with the **Get Set Learn** program in our community, and so, through the continued support of the Regional Municipality of Waterloo.

- **increase the number of referrals** to our programs from OW and ODSP caseworkers by providing caseworkers with more information about our program and support for the referral process

This area continues to be a challenge, and we are making plans to address this challenge in 2018. The large majority of **Get Set Learn** participants self-refer after receiving our advertisement (buck card) with their OW cheque. We feel that increased caseworker referrals would benefit

participants and add numbers of participants to our programs, as well as address caseworker outcomes for certain individuals.

In consultation with our contacts at the Region offices, we recognized that caseworkers may not have the information they need to understand what **Get Set Learn** is all about and how **Get Set Learn** can act as a stepping stone to employment. We aim to **increase support to caseworkers** by more frequently presenting information about our program at team and training meetings in 2018, and by including more information in our presentations about client life cycle with Project READ and how **Get Set Learn** impacts participants' journey to further education and employment.

Also Region representatives have made the suggestion that we **link caseworkers' recognition of our program to their familiarity with the Canada Learning Bond (CLB) initiative**. We promote the CLB in our programs, guide participants to take advantage of this opportunity, and teach participants about the long-term benefits of their involvement in their child's education and the importance of their attitude toward education. Without this help, clients are less likely to understand and utilize the CLB.

Thus, we are working together with caseworkers to promote the CLB, and caseworkers could use the CLB to open the discussion when referring clients to our program.

- **continue to work with community partners to serve families in need of literacy support**

We value the input and assistance of our community partners in determining and meeting the needs of families in our **Get Set Learn** programs. We will continue to build on our relationships with our community partners through open communication and sharing information to best meet participants' needs.



- **continue to partner with community service agencies** to meet the needs of our families through information and referrals

We will continue to work with community service agencies by presenting information about **Get Set Learn** at team and training meetings, maintaining contacts for key referrals, and participating in community committees to promote our programs and to raise awareness about the impact of family literacy.

- **develop outcomes and methods to track outcomes for children** attending the program

The outcomes for **Get Set Learn** are largely focused on parents' growth. But we recognize the significant gains made by children participating in the program, and how these gains lead to breaking the cycle of low-literacy and poverty, and so to a stronger community in future. Through support from the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation, we are developing outcomes for children and developing methods to track those outcomes. This initiative will be extended to all of our **Get Set Learn** programs and will allow us greater accountability when reporting the impacts of **Get Set Learn**.

- continue to **measure links between program attendance and increased life and employment opportunities**

We have clear indicators that participants in **Get Set Learn** experience increased skills, and through our literacy assessments we guide participants to next steps. We have begun gathering 6-month follow-up data from **Get Set Learn** participants to better determine the impact of our program on access to increased life and employment opportunities. This information will allow us to even more effectively gauge the efficacy of our programs in our community.



The Regional Municipality of Waterloo Social Services funds the **Get Set Learn** program, coordinated by Project READ Literacy Network Waterloo-Wellington and hosted by community partners in Kitchener and Cambridge.