

Get Set Learn

Summary Report 2020

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 Community 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.

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Executive Summary

This report summarizes the outcomes and impact of the **Get Set Learn** program, its successes and challenges in 2020, and our goals for the program in the future.

The pandemic has been a defining feature of the year 2020. As we continue to practice physical distancing precautions, all our programs were adapted and offered online this year. Get Set Learn was delivered virtually offering 2 classes per week. Duration of each class was 1 hour.

GSL Spring first cohort, 8 weeks: Attended by 9 families

GSL Summer second cohort, 6 weeks: Attended by 8 families

GSL Fall, 10 weeks: Attended by 15 families

Total number of families who attended GSL in 2020: 32

The **Get Set Learn** program had a productive year in 2020 despite all the challenges due to COVID 19. We were excited to witness high levels of engagement among families. Parent evaluations indicate a highly positive impact of the program on families.

- 100% of parents report knowing 'more' where to get help for themselves or their child if they need it, as a result of attending the program
- 89% of parents report knowing more families they can connect with as a result of attending the program
- 8 past participants of **Get Set Learn** were contracted by Project READ Literacy Network as peer workers



Impact Stories:

Get Set Learn facilitators and staff document observations in the form of learning stories or success stories that further allow us gauge our programs' effects. The following success story stems from documented observations from the facilitators in one of our Fall 2020 **Get Set Learn** classes.

After attending a presentation by Employment Facilitators, one of the parents contacted her caseworker who jumped on board with helping her get her son into full-time daycare. Because he's isolated, his development (esp. social) is delayed, so daycare will help to stimulate him. In addition to that, the participant has connected with an employment agency to build her resume because she's very eager to get back into the workforce.

Get Set Learn invites Employment Facilitators to talk about their services every session. It helps families to think about employment and next steps. This year we invited Employment Facilitators from:

- Conestoga College
- YMCA
- Lutherwood
- CCRW

The participating families were grateful for the opportunity to stay connected in a time of isolation. They were able to share their experiences, challenges and concerns with the other participants.

Here are some excerpts from the parents' anonymous surveys at the end of the session.

"I moved during lockdown and I have not been able to make connections in my new area but having Get Set learn helped me feel connected and less lonely."

"I just wanna say, I didn't know what to expect from this class when I started. I thought it was just going to be about my two year old learning and singing songs. But I'm realizing it's so much more, it's a great opportunity to meet new moms and share our experiences and uplift each other. I am grateful for this opportunity to disconnect from everything going on in the world even just for an hour, 2 days a week to talk, do activities and connect as moms."

"I got the Opportunity to meet new moms and share different ideas How to teach our children and new craft ideas."

"With covid I pulled my child from daycare, this gave us a chance to still learn with other children. Should covid not have happened I feel like it would have made for a good social experience for the both of us."

"We were not been able to see family or friends, having Get Set Learn gave her a sense of normalcy. Seeing other other kids singing and doing crafts was great for her."

“ The facilitator has created a community with the group I am forever great full to be apart of it.”

“Parenthood can be hard and lonely sometimes, get set learn is the support system that many of us moms need.”

“It gave me and my children something to look forward to every week.”

“Kept me engaging with people, ideas for self care and parenting advice, felt less lonely during the pandemic.”

“Help me and my child have some sort of routine and a sense of normalcy. Seeing other kids and families during this time.”

“It just give me a distraction from what is happening right now and i m grateful of the it.”

“It helped us to be more connected during the quarantine.”

“I’m very grateful with GSL, this program has been a very important part of our family life, since we got to Canada. My best wishes for all the amazing people who work here.”

About Get Set Learn

Get Set Learn is a literacy program for families. Our goals for the program focus mainly on parents. The results from our parent evaluations show that the program continues to have a significant impact on families and meets the defined outcomes. Parents reported learning new skills and using them with their children at home. Parents also self-reported the positive impact of this program on their family, their child's learning and social skills, and their own skills, attitudes, and confidence.

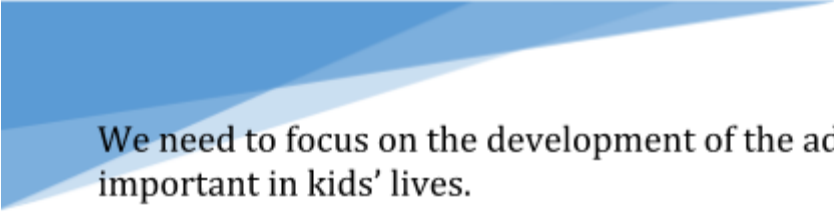
Our participants (parents) all experience low income and often arrive at the program experiencing multiple life challenges, which may include low literacy skills which often correspond with isolation and mental health issues. These challenges directly impact the ability to gain and maintain employment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

Our program outcomes include providing parents with opportunities to increase their skills and to participate in their community. 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. Our aim is an ambitious one, but we aim to raise literacy rates in our Region and to decrease the effects of poverty and poverty itself by improving the outcomes of parents.

This program guides parents to plan for their next steps on the path to employment. Project READ offers **Get Set Learn** participants access to a free literacy assessment to determine what they need to complete their education and supports them in their transition to further education. The program acts as a stepping stone to entry or re-entry into the workforce for parents who have been caring for a preschool-aged child. Families learn about community services and how to access them. Visits from

Employment Services representatives further help parents move to their next steps.

This report will show how our goals for the Get Set Learn program in 2020 were achieved.



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/>

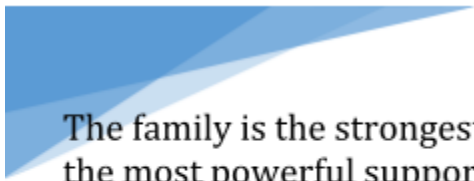
Get Set Learn 2020 - Outcomes achieved

Introduction

Get Set Learn is a literacy program for families. Our goals for the program focus 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 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 2020.

Get Set Learn Program Outcomes

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 invites families to meet virtually for an hour twice a week. We run a child program and a parent program once every week. The child program consists of singing, story time crafts, activities and games.

Get Set Learn facilitators and staff help parents learn and practice 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.

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.

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

- how do we learn
- playing with numbers and shapes
- 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.

Attending the program in and of itself represents a series of steps toward **employability**, as parents use a calendar, learn to attend the classes online, plan to attend a class on time or report ahead if they cannot attend, work with others and work in a group, find out about community resources and other programs, and choose other programs to attend. Parents often report increased self-confidence as a result of taking these steps into the community, which are all steps toward employability and employment.

As the program progresses, parents think about **next steps** in their lives once their children have started school. Project READ provides a free literacy assessment for participants and refers them on to literacy training, further education, or employment services. Many parents are able to take advantage of this service. Of those that do not, the reasons include that they have recently had a baby, they have already accessed this assessment in the past. Those who can benefit from the literacy assessment but do not access it at the program's end often register for it at a later date after having learned about it in the program.

This year, 3 parents registered for this literacy assessment directly as a result of participating in **Get Set Learn**. This opportunity, accessed free through the program, allows parents to increase their readiness for employment.

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.

We do a 6-month follow-up evaluation with our participants to further determine the effects of our programs on the lives of parents and families. The results show a marked positive impact on participants which continues after the program's end, increasing parents' potential to seek and gain employment.

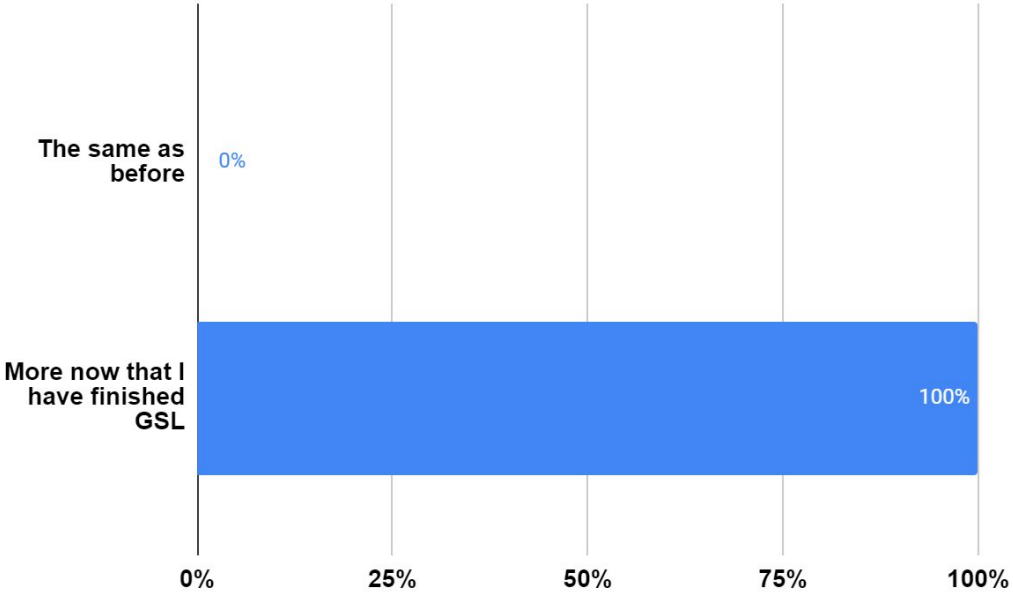
Get Set Learn 2020 Results

- These results were drawn from the post-program parent survey in the Spring and Fall 2020 sessions.

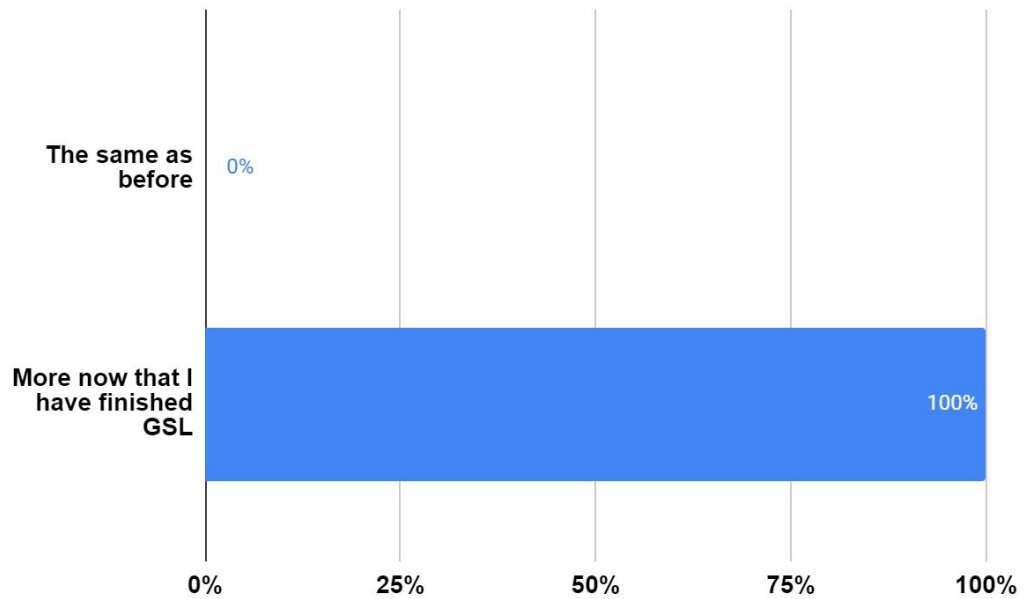
We asked parents to complete an evaluation at the end of the program. Questions and data are below.

Results Percentages:

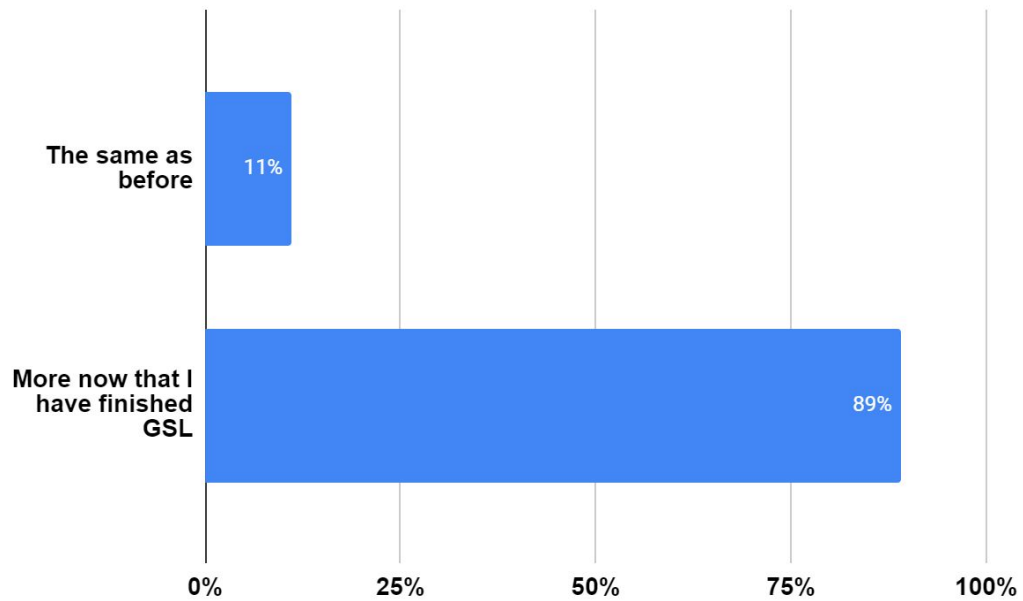
1. Did the program meet your needs?



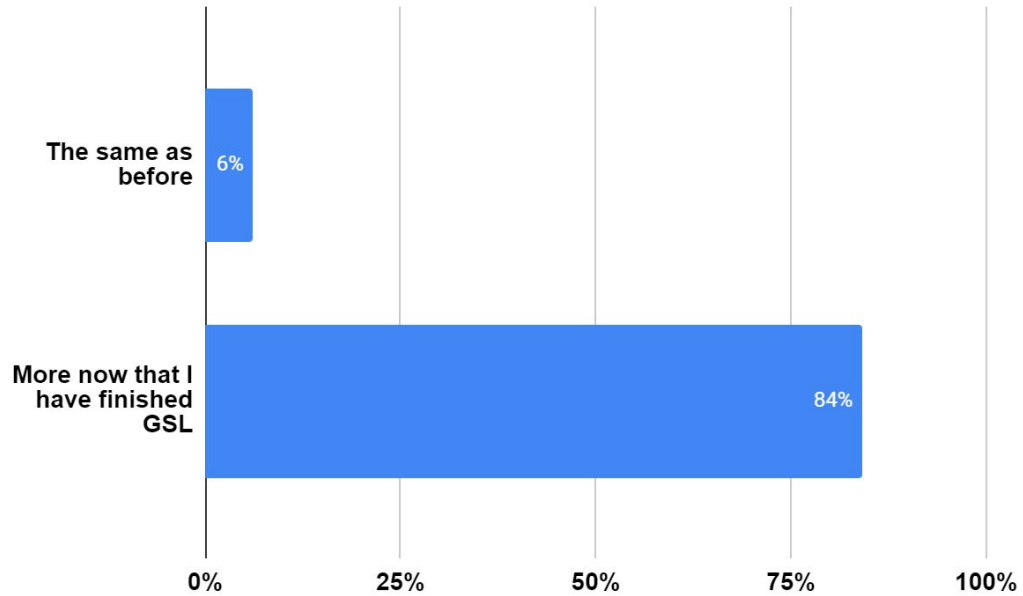
2. I see myself as my child's first and most important teacher.



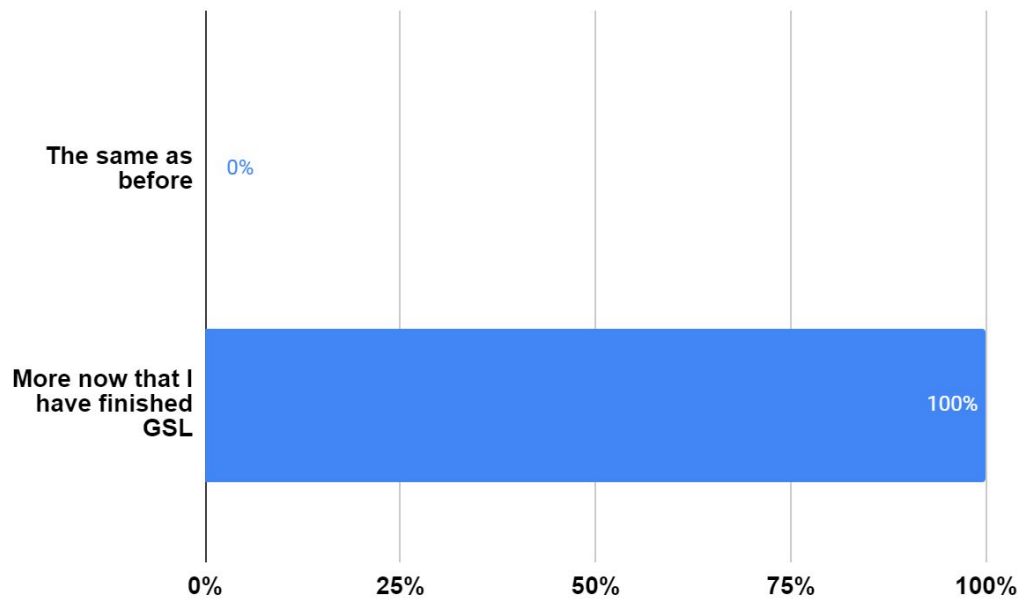
3. I know other parents who I can spend time with.



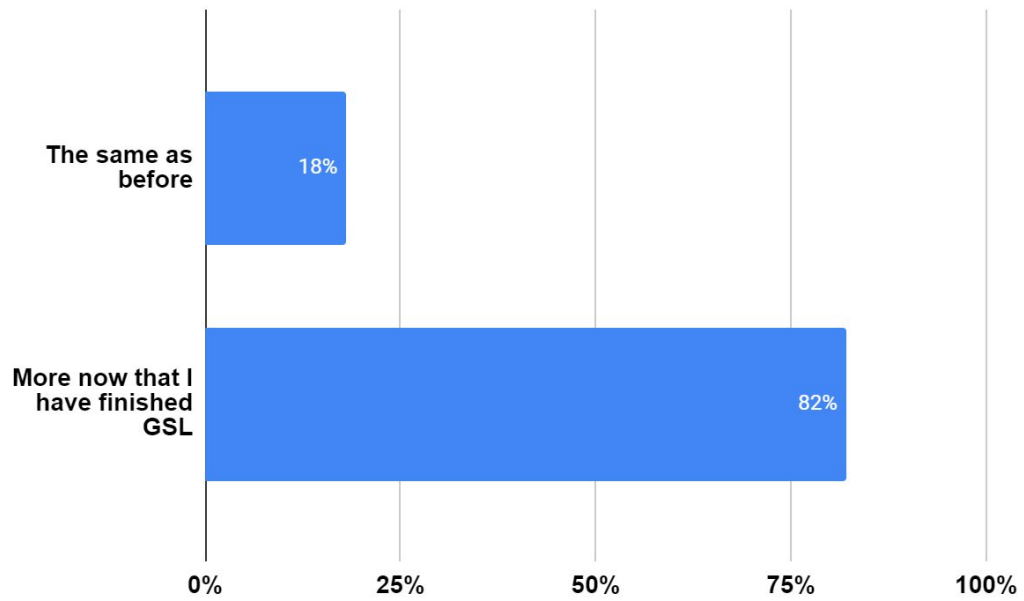
4. I can speak up for myself and my child if we need help.



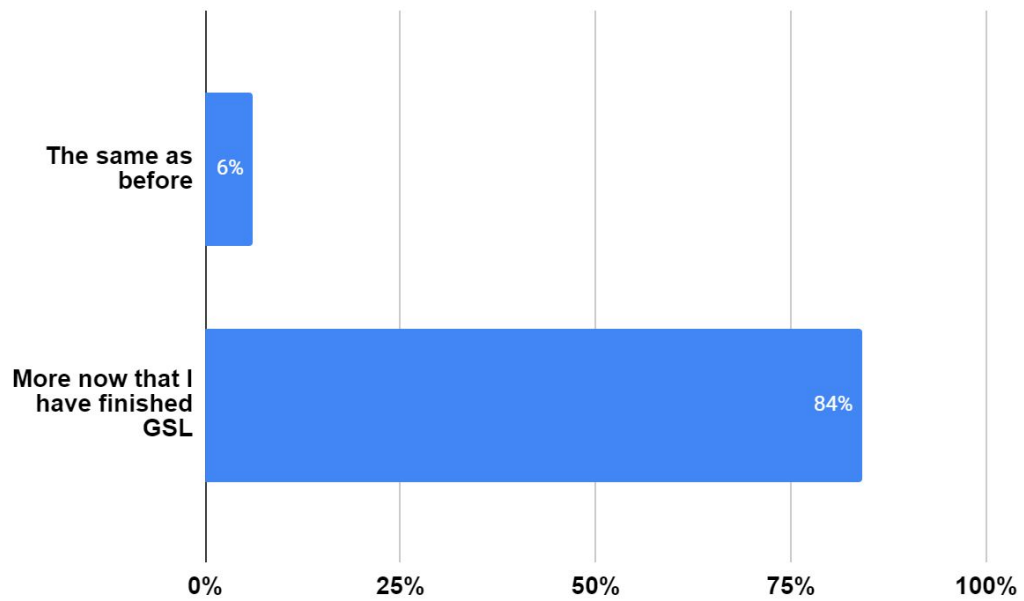
5. I know where to get information or help for my child and myself if I need it.



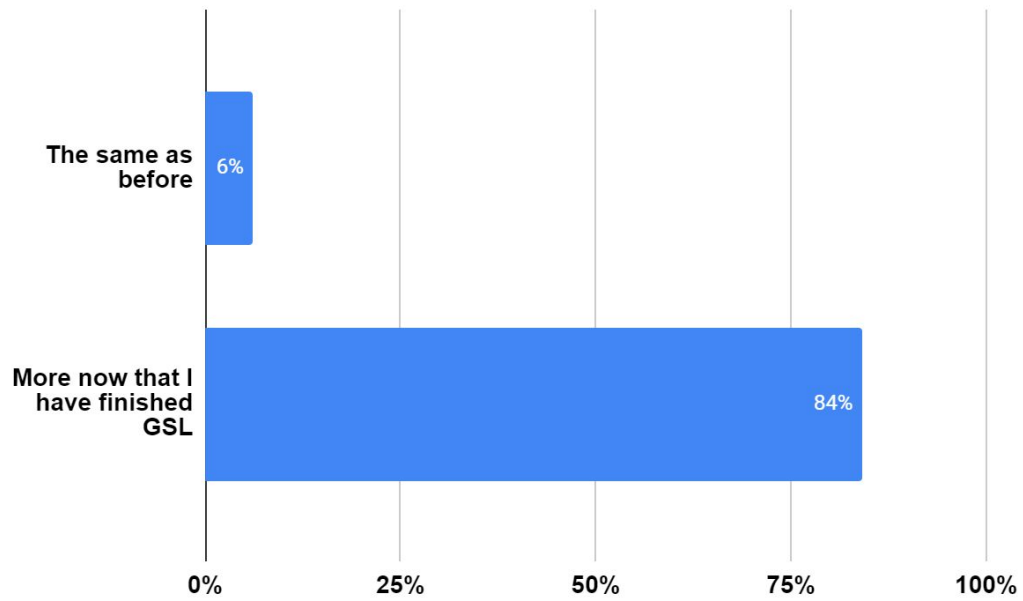
6. I use “Positive Discipline” with my child:



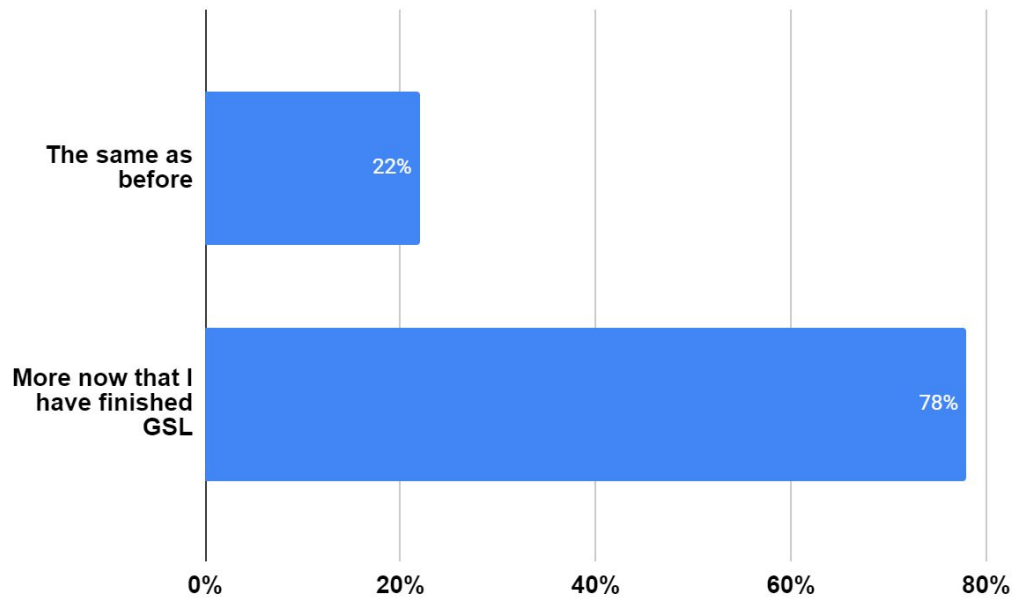
7. I talk with my child.



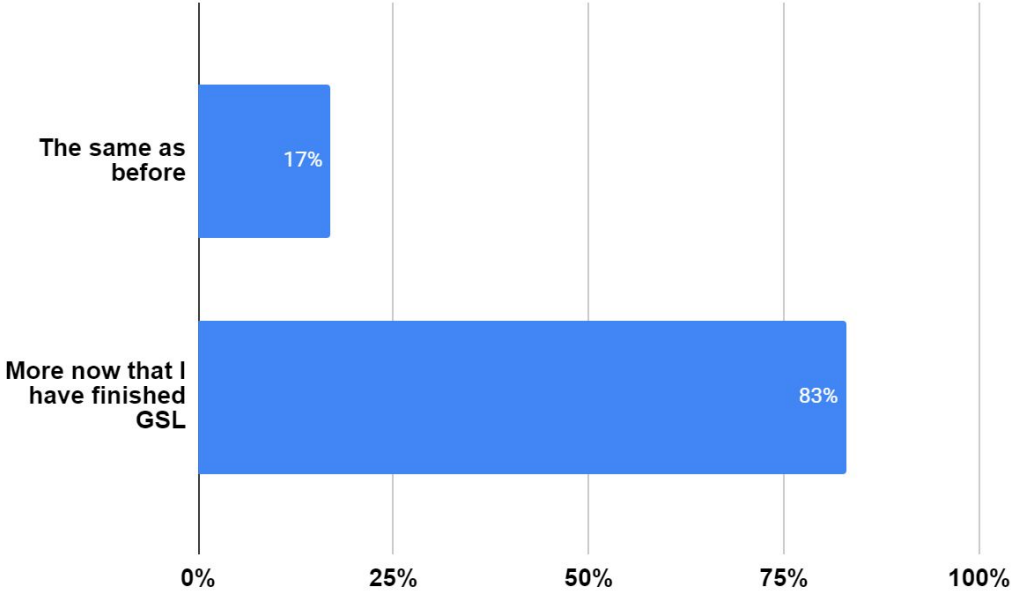
8. I read with my child.



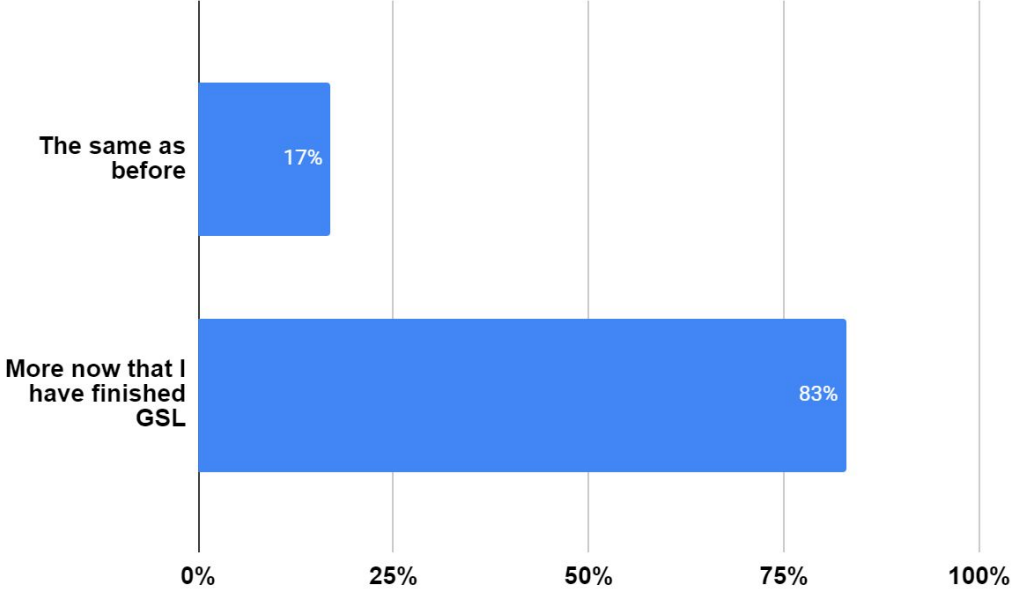
9. I sing with my child.



10. I draw with my child.



11. I play with shapes and numbers with my child.



Successes, Challenges, and Recommendations

Waterloo is one of the fastest growing regions in terms of population. A number of families are attracted to this region because of low cost of living and high quality of life. **Get Set Learn** program hence, reflects a diversity in participating families and their needs.

Newcomer families, for example, have to face a number of challenges including social isolation, language barriers, accessing resources and finding work. We have recently developed a guide to help facilitators understand the unique needs of the newcomer families and to serve them more effectively. Guest speakers from Employment Services and Family Outreach workers play an important role in supporting families to overcome the challenges they face.

With the help of the Regional Municipality of Waterloo, we were able to get referrals from caseworkers to our programs, by being able to provide information sessions for caseworkers, and through the online referral system. This represents a marked success in our partnership, as caseworker awareness and involvement in recruiting clients helps us reach those who can most benefit from participation in our programs.

We received a total of 3 referrals from 2 caseworkers in the spring. There were 10 families who learned about the program through their caseworkers and called to register. There were no direct referrals in the fall. 7 families learned about the program through their caseworkers and 2 of them attended.

In 2020, 32 parents were served by the **Get Set Learn** program.

Uncertainty due to pandemic and 2 missed cheque inserts in the spring session affected the number of self-referrals, typically our greatest source of participants. Historically 70% of those contacting us to register for the program self-refer after receiving a cheque insert (the other 30% are referred by a caseworker, a community worker, the hosting community centre, or the Project READ Educational Assessor). We continue to seek out new ideas and opportunities to recruit clients to **Get Set Learn**, including:

- distribution of promotional materials at community centres, literacy agencies and adult schools, libraries, and service organizations
- email blast to all service organizations and contacts
- attendance at community committees and events to promote **Get Set Learn**, such as Kitchener and Cambridge Mobilizations teams, Early Literacy Alliance of Waterloo Region, Children and Youth Planning Table, and Positive Parenting Waterloo-Wellington, and Family Literacy Day
- promotion efforts in cooperation with our community partners at the centres where the program is offered
- working within our new Family Literacy Peer Worker Program to increase word of mouth recruitment and provide testimonials of the impact of the program
- sign up option on **Get Set Learn** website



We recruited 8 peers under the Family Literacy Peer Worker Program in the year 2020. Peer Workers are former **Get Set Learn** participants who are trained and contracted to support parents in this program, as part of family literacy initiatives funded by the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation.

Peer worker programs offer many benefits to both participants and peer workers alike, as well as to program promotion. Peers were a valuable asset during the recruitment phase and session, as clients could identify with someone who has previously participated and can express and model the positive effects of program participation.

Project READ actively supports families to learn and practice essential skills that would help in their employability.

In summary, in 2020 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.

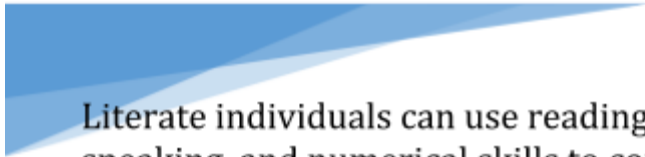
Get Set Learn 2020 – Community impact achieved

The effect of low literacy rates

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

48% of Canadian adults have inadequate literacy skills.¹

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

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

For example, those experiencing 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.

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

History of Get Set Learn

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, 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 them².

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 further education and employment readiness, while also providing children's programming as the parents learned.

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

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.

With the support of the Regional Municipality of Waterloo, Project READ continues to build community relationships to better serve our participants.

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.

This year, we invited guest speakers from:

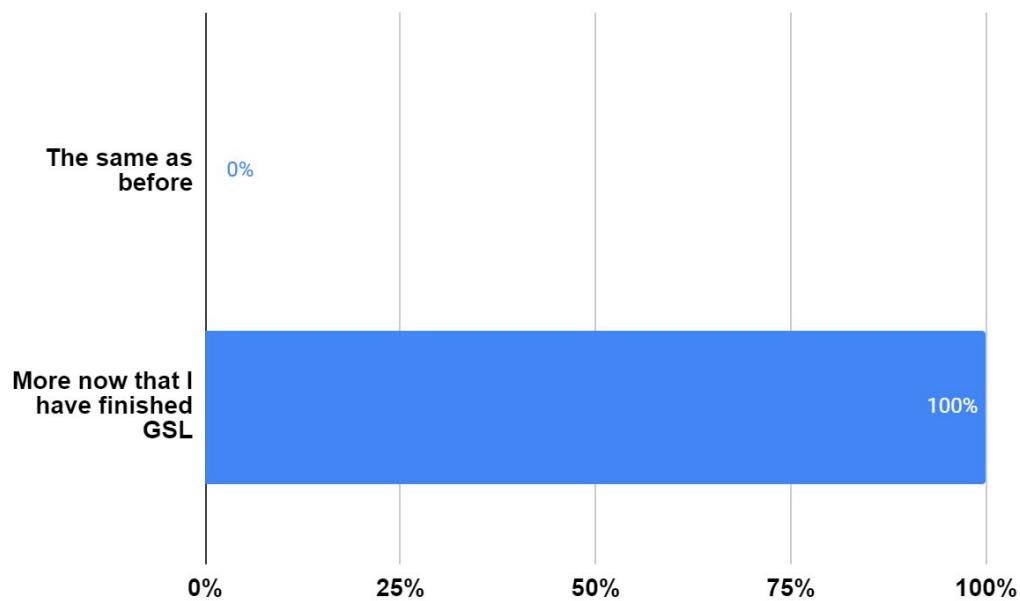
- Conestoga College
- YMCA
- Lutherwood
- CCRW
- House of Friendship
- Kitchener Public Library

We frequently refer or guide families to access community services such as

- help with basic needs such as through the food banks
- mental health resources through Carizon

- speech and language services through KidsAbility
- parenting and mental health support through KW counselling
- additional programs for parents and children held in community centres, libraries, and schools

The chart below illustrates parents' self-assessment of the increase in their ability to access community services as a result of attending **Get Set Learn** in the spring and fall 2020 programs.



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

- Child and Youth Planning Table (CYPT)
- Parenting Alliance of Waterloo Region (PAWR)
- Early Literacy Alliance of Waterloo Region (ELAWR)
- Family Literacy Day (FLD)

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

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.³

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.



³ Retrieved from:
http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0000/7901/Research_review-importance_of_families_and_home.pdf

Get Set Learn 6 month follow-up

Our new research initiative includes a follow-up procedure 6 months after the parent exits the **Get Set Learn** program. The following results reflect the information gathered from 6-month follow-up with parents who participated in the 2019 sessions of **Get Set Learn**.

During a phone interview, parents are asked a number of questions to determine the longer-reaching impact of attending the **Get Set Learn** program.

Parents were asked the following question:

What is the one thing that you learned or gained during GSL that has made the MOST difference to your family over the last 6 months?

After 6 months a majority of participants reported that they continue to engage in daily literacy activities (talking, singing, reading, drawing, playing with shapes and numbers) with their child as a result of attending **Get Set Learn**. They stated that the knowledge of community resources was most important and useful for them.

This finding suggests a longer-term impact of the **Get Set Learn** program. Not only are the parents continuing to practice their skills in raising literacy levels in the home, even more parents are indicating that the program changed the rate at which they are using those skills at 6 months' post-program, which seems to indicate that over time, participants are absorbing or finding new ways to use the strategies they learned.

This result demonstrates the importance of programs that build parent confidence and skills.

Other results from this 6-month follow up survey:

- Parents who reported that they started education or work: 40%
- Parents who reported taking part in other programs: 93%
- Parents who reported that they are still using the tools and strategies learned in the **Get Set Learn** program: 100%
- Parents who reported that they kept in touch with other families they had met at **Get Set Learn**: 88%
- Parents who reported that they access community services they'd been introduced to in the **Get Set Learn** program: 88%

It is clear from these results that the **Get Set Learn** program creates a lasting effect on families who participate. As well, these results point to parents experiencing increased life and employment opportunities as a result of participating in **Get Set Learn**.

During the course of the program, parents learn and use skills that they retain and continue to use. Parents make friends, decreasing social isolation and increasing contacts within the community and sense of belonging. Parents participate in community events and access community services at a much higher rate after attending the program. These changes all place parents in a more positive position to move to their next steps toward employment.

We will continue to use in-kind funds to gather 6-month follow-up data from participating families in order to examine the impact of this program in our community.

Get Set Learn 2020 – 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 the impact of family literacy is becoming more widely understood.

Our work aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations and we are happy to participate in this international effort to align local community-led transformation through global systems change.

In 2020, we were able to continue to acquire grant funding to grow our programs and our scope for family literacy initiatives in the community.

Families First Waterloo Region project

PRLN was funded by Lyle S. Hallman Foundation under Children and Youth initiatives for a planning project to scale up the impact of family literacy in our Region starting with our existing track record as our base.

Family Literacy Training and Certification program

We provide training to others to incorporate family literacy practices into their programs and services, and certify others to deliver **Get Set Learn**

Family Literacy Peer Worker program

We train and employ eligible parents who are **Get Set Learn** participants or past participants to offer peer support to parents in our programs and in our community

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.

Newcomer Families Learning Together program

PRLN received funding from Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation and the Spinnaker Fund to offer this program, Newcomer Families Learning Together. This project was offered virtually in the fall 2020.

Family Learning and Fun Night

This year, we could not offer any events due to physical distancing precautions.

Get Set Learn 2020 Goals achieved

In summary, beyond meeting program outcomes, in 2020 our goals for the **Get Set Learn** program included

- adapting our program to make it accessible virtually
- continue to learn best practices to offer the program online
- continue to research and test methods to create a sustainable model to scale up the impact of family literacy in our community
- increase the number of referrals to our **Get Set Learn** program
- continue to work with community partners to serve families in need of literacy support

Get Set Learn 2021 Goals

In 2021, we aim to:

- **continue to create a sustainable model to scale up family literacy programming**
- **continue to work with community partners to serve families in need of literacy support**
- **continue to track longer-term impact of the Get Set Learn program on parents and families**
- **implement new initiatives for program promotion**
- **find funding for the program**

The funding from the Region of Waterloo for Get Set Learn has ended starting in 2021. In order to ensure that the parents and children do not experience isolation and have a sense of well-being, we need to continue running this program. This will be possible only if we are able to find funding from other sources.

We are grateful for the Region's support in all these years to support the **Get Set Learn** program.

