



Building Faith | Inspiring Hope | Igniting Change



**The Literacy Wagon Program:  
Serving Migrant Farmworker Families in Central Washington State**

**In collaboration with the Diocese of Yakima, WA, Catholic Extension, and Saints  
Faith, Hope and Charity Catholic Parish  
Stewardship Report  
June 2020**

Catholic Extension is grateful for the opportunity to partner with Saints Faith, Hope and Charity Parish to support the Literacy Wagon Program, an educational initiative in the Diocese of Yakima, WA.

Children ran towards a tall tree and sat under its shade. The librarian sat in front of the children with a large bag full of books as the children whisper about what book will be read today. The librarian animatedly reads “A Bad Case of the Stripes,” and the children giggle and stare wide-eyed as they listen to a story about a girl with a horrible case of green, blue, and yellow stripes who learns that being yourself is more important than what others define you as.



The Diocese of Yakima formed the Literacy Wagon Non-profit Program two years ago, and this year marks its third year. This program serves Central Washington’s farm worker’s children who live in migrant camps in Wenatchee, Washington. Seminarians, volunteers, teachers, and facilitators visit the site three times a week from Tuesday through Thursday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The diocese has also partnered with Catholic Charities Housing Services this year to expand the program to other locations in the lower Yakima Valley: Sunnyside and Granger. At these two sites the program runs from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekly Tuesday through Thursday to serve low-income families.

The Literacy Wagon Program calls for a mobile summer education team that serve the children of farm workers and low-income families. So, while parents work in the fields, children participate in the Literacy Wagon Program. The team deepens the children’s literacy skills to prepare them for the next academic school year.

At the lower Yakima Valley sites, lead coordinator and seminarian Jacob Sevigny and his support staff of seminarians went door to door and spoke to parents about the program. They invited parents and children to stop by and look. “At first parents weren’t opening the door,” Sevigny said. “But now that they know more about the program and how it benefits the kids, we have more children coming in.” There are usually about 15 to 20 children, with their ages ranging from 2 year-olds to 12 year-olds at each site and the seminarians hope that with more time they can have more children attend.

Seminarian John Washington said they played cards and board games with the children, made crafts, and read books. “We try to be fun but still educational so that the kids want to stay and socialize and keep learning with the other kids. The program at these sites are still a work in progress because it is the first year that we are meeting and engaging with parents and children. Next year, I expect parents will remember us and want their children to be part of the program and not just sit at home,” John said.

At the northern site in Wenatchee, seminarian Michael Kelly, Lead Coordinator, can be found with a box of snacks in the morning walking through the farm worker camp informing parents about the program and inviting children to attend. Some parents nod and others are curious about the camp, as they hang up washed clothes to dry or make breakfast, and Michael tells them about the camp, and most importantly, that it’s a free Catholic program.

“Even though families travel from afar, families are not forgotten,” Kelly said. “We come out here and invest time to be with them and let them know that we—the Catholic Church—are with them.” Kelly also stated that parents at the camp are at work and often the children are left alone. The camp helps the parents out just as much as it helps the children. “Some parents have said that their kids were reading more and that’s always great to hear,” Kelly said. The camp has between 30 to 50 children between the ages of 0 to 13 years of age.

Seminarian William Lane has had previous experience in the program and this year supported the lead coordinator. He stated that the program has become better organized and structured. He enjoys the ambition that children have. “I remember one boy who was nine a couple years ago... the reason I remember him is because he grabbed one the thickest novels we had,” Lane recalls. “I thought he was a genius, and he is a really smart kid, but he had a hard time and returned it, but then he tried again the next day, and that’s what it’s all about, creating a desire to read.”



Besides reading, children use chalk to draw on the concrete, play board games, and learn about different topics like parts of flowers and animals. The teachers also focus on the importance of children maintaining their bilingualism. Teacher Oliva Jervis is a kindergarten teacher at Lewis & Clark Elementary School in Wenatchee, Washington. It is the only school in the state of Washington that teaches in both English and Spanish to ensure that students are biliterate. Jervis has taught at the Literacy Wagon program since last year. She ensures that both English and Spanish are part of her lessons since parent’s value that their children speak Spanish. One of her lessons involves drawing a flower and labeling its parts in both English and Spanish to

ensure children articulate their knowledge in both languages.

“It’s awesome seeing teachers volunteering because we have actual lesson plans. The children benefit from the lessons and allows them to stay on track for school,” Jervis said.



Lisa Martinez, teacher at Saint Joseph’s Wenatchee School, has also been a volunteer at the program. She has worked with elementary and middle school aged children and has been involved in various literacy intervention groups. During one of the days she volunteered, Martinez sat down with a group of boys to play the board game Kooky Criminal and the boys took turns playing and reading their cards. Martinez encouraged the boys to read their cards aloud and helped them sound out the words. The boys read through their cards and laughed without

realizing that they learned as they played.

The program also has a Play N Learn section led by Parent Engagement Specialist Beatriz Escalera. This section is meant for children zero to five years of age. There is always about four to seven toddlers at the Play N Learn section. The section is outlined by a red ribbon to keep the older children out, and there is a big rug placed on the ground for the toddlers to play on. Nine-month-old baby Francisco is one of the toddlers that attends the sessions. Francisco played with soft blocks and enjoyed playing with the other toddler—a two-year-old boy who helped Francisco build a castle with blocks. His mother, Maria, enjoys attending the session because her baby can play with other babies and she can participate, too. She likes the seminarian’s presence at the camp and that all children are being encouraged to participate instead of staying alone in their cabins.



This is Escalera’s second year participating in the program. She enjoys watching the toddlers learn, grow, and become comfortable with being more independent. “There’s always one or two babies learning how to walk or even crawl, and watching them learn and grow right before my eyes is amazing.”

Anni Ponder is the program’s librarian for the summer, and is the Bilingual Outreach Specialist for North Central Regional Library in the Wenatchee Public Library. She volunteers once a week every Wednesday and reads books like “Mae Among the Stars” and “A Bad Case of the Stripes,”



and organizes a craft for the children that fits the theme. This summer's theme is "Space and the Universe." Previous crafts included: space rockets, telescopes, alien head bands, and creating a paper planet. She also ties in other themes like: "Be yourself," "Don't let others define you," and "you can still be friends even if you don't like the same things."



This is the first year Ponder participates in the program, and she had no idea what to expect—perhaps chaos and too many kids running around. However, she found that the program was well managed and that there were plenty of volunteers to keep an eye on the children. "It's a great program and I'm glad to be a part of it," Ponder said. "I enjoy the continuous interaction that I get with the children...When I get here (at the Literacy Wagon Camp) I get children coming up to me saying "Oh, it's Ms. Anni!" And I get lots of hugs and questions about what we're doing for the day—It's exciting to see their enthusiasm."

When the librarian is not at the camp, other volunteers read to the children, like Amanda Stringham. This year was her first-time volunteering. She works at the Saint Joseph parish in Wenatchee and has previously worked as a librarian.

"Reading at any age is extremely important," Stringham said. "It provides not only an escape from reality, but allows you to enter any world, any story. It also helps kids become overall better readers and be more prepared for school."

According to Statista Data, there has been a high decrease of frequency with which a child reads or is read to. In 2017, only about six percent of responding parents stated that they read to their child once a week. Less than six percent of responding parents stated that their child read. Video games, online entertainment, and overall media use have decreased the frequency in which children read or are read to. At the camp, some parents give their children phones so that they may be entertained and not be left without something to do because parents work the majority of the day in the fields; which is why Kelly, Lane and volunteers invite children to the camp to play with others and to read.



One of the children, 10-year-old Daisy Santos, is from Bakersfield, California. She is an only child but has a couple younger cousins that she likes to play with and attend the program with, so she is not bored all day. During one of her days at the camp, she missioned to read one book to get her paper necklace punch holed so that she could get a popsicle. She enjoyed reading so much that she read four books and even read to her younger cousin. She not only likes to read, but she likes to participate in the new science stations.



This year, the Diocese of Yakima has partnered with the North Central Educational Service District (ESD). ESD is funded by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's Migrant Education Program, to work in partnership with schools, communities, and families, to support migrant students to ensure they reach challenging academic standards. The ESD provided the children with science stations and lessons during the program. Science is part of everyone's daily lives, whether its reading a map, cooking, or gardening. Being science literate will be a necessity for children growing in an advancing technological world.

Millie Watkins, Supervisor and Migrant Education Specialist at ESD wanted to work with migrant children at a camp without creating something new. When she found that the Literacy Wagon was established, and they could just integrate themselves into a program with migrant children, she quickly jumped on board. "Science is so important, especially with the job market moving towards more computer-based skills," Watkins said. "Children need skills like coding, but also data and problem-solving skills. We're teaching both science and life skills." There are always six staff members from ESD who coordinate and facilitate the science stations.



The children are divided into two groups: Preschool to Kindergarten and elementary students. The preschool to kindergarten students explored nature. They looked at rocks, plants, and animals. ESD members brought in furs and pelts and worked with the children on identifying to which animals it belonged to. The elementary group created solar ovens made from pizza boxes, aluminum, tape, and saran wrap to figure out at what temperatures marshmallows and cheeses need to melt at. The children have also worked with Ozobots. The children learned how to code the Ozobots to move them in specific directions.

Literacy Wagon "covers reading, games, and engage (children) with activities," Watkins said. "It's a safe place for children to get together, and just a well-rounded experience."

Towards the end of the day, Small Miracles, a summer lunch program that provides free lunches for children 0 to 18 years old of age, pack up 30 to 50 lunches each day. The outreach program operates under the Washington State Department of Agriculture and is managed by the State of Washington Superintendent of Public Instruction. Each and every lunch is made up of five components: meat or meat substitute, grain, fruit, vegetable and milk. Founder and Director of the program, Linda Belton, stated that they are always looking for opportunities to feed kids who may not have the luxury of an overabundance of food, especially when school is not in session and they are not able to get breakfast and lunch every day. "We are thrilled to be part of your (Literacy Wagon) program and love to not only see the happy kids but to visit with your amazing volunteers," Belton said.

The Literacy Wagon program has a lot of hands on board to ensure the children are happy and learning, but also so that the program functions properly day to day. "The program has grown in the last couple years," Lead Coordinator Kelly stated. "The kids always look forward to coming to camp...they are ready each morning and even want to help set up, their enthusiasm for the program is amazing."

Bishop Joseph Tyson has also visited the program and has helped and played with children during their daily activities. He also likes to sit down and talk to them about their day. He stated that the program is important because it gives children a sense of literacy just by sharing stories, reading, and learning vocabulary. "On the deepest level God is revealed as word, and word is basic in our faith tradition," Bishop Tyson said. "One of the building blocks of our faith is knowing language, words, and being able to read."



*Thank you card from the kids!*



**Thank you for your continued support and generosity towards the Literacy Wagon Program in the Diocese of Yakima, WA.**