



United Way of the Bay Area



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**“RAISING A READER” TAKES SAN FRANCISCO BY STORM**

Award-Winning Early Literacy Program Expands Into 56 San Francisco Classrooms

SAN FRANCISCO, December 13, 2004 – Raising A Reader, the award-winning early literacy program, announced it has expanded into 56 new classrooms in San Francisco this month. With these additions, the San Francisco program now reaches 210 classrooms and more than 5,200 children in San Francisco County.

Launched in San Francisco three years ago, Raising A Reader provides preschool students with bright red book bags filled with high-quality children's books featuring artwork, age-appropriate language, and multicultural themes. The San Francisco program is a collaborative effort among early childhood organizations, libraries and charitable investors such as United Way of the Bay Area. Raising A Reader was created in 2000 by The Center for Venture Philanthropy, a joint effort by public and private organizations to improve the well-being of children and youth in San Mateo County. Since then, it has expanded to 64 communities, 24 states, Mexico, Botswana and Malaysia.

Raising A Reader is aimed at child care centers and preschools in low-income neighborhoods and in communities where parents are often poor readers or do not speak English well. In addition to children's books, Raising A Reader bags contain instructions for parents in English, Chinese and Spanish, offering best practices for sharing books with their young children so they become lifelong readers. Book bags are exchanged weekly, so students are exposed to over 100 children's books over the course of the school year. New classrooms participating in the program this year are located throughout San Francisco.

“Literacy-rich environments are essential for ensuring healthy brain development, strengthening families, and can play a major role in breaking the cycle of poverty,” said Janell Flores, director of the San Francisco County Raising A Reader program. She points out that one in three children in the U.S. enters kindergarten without basic pre-reading abilities and, consequently, never develops strong reading skills -- a key factor in determining high-school graduation and lifelong success.

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The Raising A Reader program has achieved amazing results in San Francisco:

- San Francisco children using the Raising A Reader program for less than one year developed 58% higher pre-reading scores and 27% higher story comprehension scores than kids without the program, according to a Kindergarten Readiness Assessment conducted in 2003.
- Compared to Head Start children from a national sample, Raising A Reader four year olds scored 55% higher in book knowledge; Raising A Reader five year olds scored 69% higher in pre-reading and 59% higher in book knowledge than Head Start five-year-old or older children.
- Along with its educational component, the program also encourages healthy interactions between parents and children. From the start of Raising A Reader in the fall to the end of the school year, there was a 471% increase in parents reading to their children five or more times a week.
- Beyond San Francisco, Raising A Reader has reached more than 23,000 homes in six Bay Area counties since its inception in 1999. The program is also operating in child care classrooms in San Mateo, Santa Clara, Contra Costa, Alameda, and Napa counties, most recently expanding into Marin for the first time.

“We are thrilled by the growth and success of Raising A Reader,” said Anne Wilson, CEO of United Way of the Bay Area, which funds the program in San Francisco and Marin Counties. “We know that literacy matters – that reading skills build the foundation for lifelong success. In addition to Raising A Reader, we are investing in professional and leadership development programs for teachers to help them better prepare young children for school and help older students excel in reading.”

To learn more about Raising A Reader, visit [www.raisingareader.org](http://www.raisingareader.org), or call Janell Flores, San Francisco Raising A Reader Director, at 415-808-4343.

### **About United Way of the Bay Area**

United Way of the Bay Area is one of the largest private funders of health and human services in Northern California. For more than 80 years, United Way has been focusing on "what matters" -- improving lives and transforming communities in Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo and Solano Counties. Through the Bay Area Community Fund, United Way is helping to create meaningful change in the areas of early childhood education, health care access, youth violence prevention and economic independence for working families. For more information, please visit [www.uwba.org](http://www.uwba.org).