

District 7120 Literacy Conference

Saturday, September 20, 2014

Clifton Springs Hospital

“Cradle to Eight – Critical Years”

HIGHLIGHTS

The focus of this conference was early childhood literacy. The District got four excellent speakers with varying backgrounds on early childhood literacy to present.

The first speaker was Rachel A. Pickering, Director of Community Health Initiatives for the Children’s Agenda. Her presentation was titled “Hunger in the Classroom” and it stressed the negative impact of hunger on a child’s ability to learn. Here are just two of the staggering statistics that she shared:

- 1 out of 5 children in the U.S. go hungry
- 36% of Foodlink clients are children

What can Rotary do to help?

- National School Breakfast Program – only 40% of NY children participate. Geneseo Central School District does participate in this program.
- Summer Food Service Program – Genesee Valley Boces (Mt. Morris) is participating in this program. They serve breakfast and lunch on MTWThF during most of July and August. To be a Summer Food Service Site sponsors must be fully capable of managing a food service program.
- Regional Backpack Program - The Backpack Program helps alleviate child hunger by discreetly providing hungry children with backpacks full of nutritious and easy-to-prepare food on Friday afternoons so they have food to eat throughout the weekend. I am not aware of any programs in Livingston County. Perhaps Rotary can team up with the Food Pantry, other community organizations, and the school to provide this service.

The second speaker was Leonard M. Brock, Ed.D., MPA, Executive for Special Projects at the Children’s Agenda. Dr. Brock’s presentation was titled “Cradle to Career” and focused on the need for early literacy as so many children have trouble catching up once they start K-12. Highlights from his program are:

- Only 5% of students in Monroe County are reading at grade level.
- Kids cultivate 85% of their intellect, personality, and skills by age 5.

- There is an achievement gap for poor children who are not exposed to a wide vocabulary.
- This is a shared community concern.

To learn more about Ms. Pickering and Dr. Brock's initiatives visit <http://www.thechildrensagenda.org/index.html>

The third speaker was Dirk Hightower, Executive Director of Children's Institute, whose mission is "strengthening social and emotional health". RECAP, one service provided by the Children's Institute, was the emphasis of his presentation. The charge of RECAP is "Every child deserves high quality early childhood education." It strives to improve prekindergarten programs and school performance, enrich children's learning experiences, and promote informed decisions for early childhood. Results from extensive research and statistical studies administered by RECAP have determined that Rochester has great classrooms with all of the tools needed to gain knowledge and growth. The problem is that students are not prepared. Early literacy is essential for them to reach the level that they should be when they begin K-12.

To learn more about the Children's Institute and RECAP, visit <https://www.childrensinstitute.net>.

The final speaker was Bonnie Evers, preschool teacher at School #7. She shared touching experiences that she has had with refugee children who speak little or no English. Ms. Evers emphasized the importance that preschoolers have access to books, teachers, educators, and librarians. The children need role models and teachable moments. She suggests that Rotary members volunteer in classrooms, show the children that you are an adult who cares, and listen to them.

I found the presentations to be very educational. Geneseo Rotary may not be able to take on large initiatives but there is potential for future cooperative efforts.

Respectfully submitted,

Anna Grace, Literacy Committee

October 22, 2014