



Orange County United Way
UnitedWayOC.org

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 24, 2014

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Orange County United Way’s “OC Reads” Program Earns National Recognition for its Collaborative Approach to Early Reading

More than 60 Organizations and Agencies have signed onto the Program, a Key Foundational Component of “FACE 2024” Community-wide Action Plan to Cut High School Dropout Rates in Half by 2024

IRVINE, CA – Orange County United Way’s OC Reads program was recognized last week by the National Read Aloud 15 Minutes Campaign for success in developing a strong local network of community partners committed to ensuring that Orange County students are able to read by third grade.

The Read Aloud 15 MINUTES National Campaign informed United Way that it intends to highlight its OC Reads program as a national model for building partnerships and the successful rollout of its Read Aloud 15 MINUTES campaign.

“We’re impressed with the broad base of community partners you have mobilized and encouraged to join the campaign,” said Bob Robbins, Executive Director of the Read Aloud 15 MINUTES National Campaign, which encourages parents to read aloud to their children 15 minutes every day from birth to age five. “We believe that sharing how you have mobilized your community will be an inspirational story for other United Ways across the country and our 850 campaign partners across 49 states.”

Since OC Reads was publicly launched in March as part of the broader Educational component of the FACE 2024 community-wide action plan, the program has developed vital partnerships with more than 60 community organizations, including several Boys & Girls Clubs, school districts, city libraries, family resource centers, hospitals, children’s museums and non-profits organizations.

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“We’re extremely pleased with the progress our OC Reads program has made in four short months, developing partnerships with organizations throughout Orange County that share our commitment to early reading,” said Orange County United Way President and CEO Max Gardner.

“In order for us to meet our goal of cutting the high school dropout rate in half in the next decade,” Gardner continued, “we must build a solid foundation by ensuring kids can read by third grade.”

Indeed, studies have shown that children who read proficiently by third grade have significantly higher chances of finishing high school and holding a diploma than those who do not, and that children who are read to by their parents at least 15 minutes per day from birth to age five are much more likely to read proficiently by the end of third grade.

For that reason, it seemed natural for United Way to integrate the research-based Read Aloud 15 MINUTES National Campaign as a core component of its OC Reads program

United Way's FACE 2024 community-wide action plan was introduced in 2013 after a two-year strategic planning process as a long-term comprehensive effort to ensure that every child in Orange County has access to the building blocks for a good quality of life: Education, Income, Health and Housing. The goal of the Education component is to cut the high school dropout rate in half by the year 2024.

Phase 1 of the FACE 2024 Education program focusing on Early Grade Reading was launched on March 24 during a press conference and “Read Aloud” session with first-grade students at Eisenhower Elementary School. Representatives from the Garden Grove Unified School District, Westminster School District and Girls Inc. along with the Boys and Girls Club of Santa Ana and Boys and Girls Club of Westminster were on hand to accept the grant awards.

Since then, the OC Reads and Read Aloud programs have enjoyed tremendous success among the administrators, parents and students who have participated in the effort within the over 60 partnering non-profit organizations, school districts, libraries and hospital pediatrician offices.

“The Read Aloud 15 MINUTES program has made an immediate impact on our parents and their young children mainly due to its simple and empowering message,” said Christina Luarca, Program Coordinator, Hospital Association of Southern California. “Parents have the power to ensure their children read by third grade by simply reading to them 15 minutes every day.”

“At the City of La Habra Head Start we recognize the importance of reading to children. Read Aloud 15 minutes is a tool for parents to learn about the importance of reading to children every day,” explained Araceli Morales, program specialist for the City of La Habra. “One of our goals for this school year is to work on literacy, not only in school but at home.”

Jessica Prescott, Director of Site Based Program at Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Orange County, summed it up like this: “Partnering with United Way on the Read Aloud 15 Minutes program reinforces what our program practices and the importance of literacy across all grade levels.”

Along with mobilizing community partners, Orange County United Way has invested tremendously in helping spread the word about the Read Aloud 15 MINUTES program, launching a website and distributing more than 80,000 promotional print items throughout which the campaign’s message can be distributed.

For more information about United Way’s early grade reading programs, visit www.ocreads.com. For more information about the FACE 2024 campaign, please visit www.unitedwayoc.org/face-2024.

ABOUT ORANGE COUNTY UNITED WAY

Since 1924, Orange County United Way has been working to improve lives and strengthen our community by mobilizing the caring power of Orange County. To do this, we focus on the building blocks for a good quality of life: Education, Income, Health and Housing. By investing in Orange County’s children, families and individuals, we help them meet their most basic human needs, including food, shelter and medical care, while at the same time creating pathways to self-sufficient futures through education and training. In short, we help people help themselves. Through our new 10-year initiative “FACE 2024” (an acronym for **F**und, **A**dvocate, **C**ollaborate, **E**ducate), United Way is mobilizing local businesses, community organizations, governmental agencies and individuals to make a long-term measurable difference in the lives of local individuals and families. To learn more or to join our movement, visit www.unitedwayoc.org.

ABOUT READ ALOUD

ReadAloud.org is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that works to ignite a passion for reading aloud in families nationwide. Its reading program seeks to improve literacy skills, drive knowledge-based learning, and enhance communication across generations while building stronger family bonds. For more information, please visit www.ReadAloud.org.

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