

Joy of reading

TURN A PAGE, TOUCH A MIND

Children and their parents benefit from reading program administered during wellness checkups

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By GARY DEMUTH
Salina Journal

Oscar had just gotten a new book, and he couldn't have been more excited.

He even managed to turn a couple of pages before starting to chew on it.

This is the third book 1-year-old Oscar has received from his pediatrician, Dr. Ginger Senseman of Salina Pediatric Care, 520 S. Santa Fe.

Senseman had given Oscar two books already during his standard wellness check-ups at 6 and 9 months.

His parents, Salinans Rachel and Jerry Dix, have read the books to Oscar several times.

"Whenever he cuddles up to us, we show him the pictures in the book," said Jerry Dix, who balanced Oscar on his lap while Oscar examined his newest book, "Big and Little."

The Dixes also read to their 4-year-old twin daughters, Quincey and Olivia, who have gotten books from Senseman at every wellness checkup for the past three years.

"This reading program has been good for my kids," Jerry Dix said. "My daughters can read and write now."

The reading program Dix was referring to was "Turn a Page, Touch a Mind," initiated by the Kansas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics in 2003.

Based on a nationwide program called "Reach Out and Read," the Kansas program encourages parents to consistently read to their children during the most crucial developmental years — 6 months to 5 years.

Some parents never read

To promote this program, participating pediatricians give each child under their care a new developmentally appropriate book at each wellness checkup, which begins at 6 months and continues until the child is 5 and preparing to enter kindergarten.

Pediatricians also discuss with parents the value of reading daily to their children.

Some parents, like the Dixes, already are aware of the value of reading. Other parents may never have thought of reading to their children, Senseman said.

"Some are teachers, they have a lot of books at home, and you can tell that the child knows what a book is and how to hold it," Senseman said.

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Rosales



Shearer



TOM DORSEY / Salina Journal
Aimee Smith and her son Braden, 18 months, look at a book given to him as part of the "Turn a Page, Touch a Mind" program during an appointment at Mowrey Clinic.





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JEFF COOPER / Salina Journal

Dr. Ginger Senseman and Jerry Dix present a book to Jerry's son Oscar at Salina Pediatric Care, 520 S. Santa Fe. Senseman participates in the "Turn a Page, Touch a Mind" program, where she gives books to her patients at their standard wellness checks.



TOM DORSEY / Salina Journal

Brookelyn Barnett (left), 4, and her mother, Jennifer Barnett, look at a book given to them by Nurse Practitioner Monica Woolsoncroft at Mowrey Clinic, 737 E. Crawford.





Photos by **JEFF COOPER** / Salina Journal
Oscar Dix (left) presses his finger on the cover of a book. Oscar smiles as he looks at a book given to him by Dr. Ginger Senseman during his standard wellness checkup. The reading program encourages parents to read to their children.

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Shelves of books in Senseman's office are for the "Turn a Page, Touch a Mind" reading program.





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“Then you’ll have parents who have never read to their kids. This is a good time to talk to them about reading to their kids instead of just sitting them in front of the TV.”

In the three years Senseman has participated in the program, she’s given away several thousand books, from Dr. Seuss to Clifford the Dog to bulldozer books for boys.

“Parents can keep track of their kids’ developmental stages through the books they read,” Senseman said.

The Turn a Page, Touch a Mind program was brought to Salina in 2004 by pediatricians Dr. Edgar Rosales and Dr. Shashi Sharma at Mowery Clinic, 737 E. Crawford.

At that time, Rosales was president of the Kansas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

“I received a call from the Kansas Health Foundation, who were interested in funding a literacy program in Kansas,” Rosales said.

“The original program, ‘Reach Out and Read,’ was designed for indigent families, and they wanted to expand it to include all children in the state.”

‘We were flooded’

The Kansas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics received a \$760,000 grant from the Kansas Health Foundation to start the literacy program.

“We were flooded,” Rosales said. “A great grant would have been \$50,000, and we thought we’d get about \$10,000.”

By the end of the first year of the program, Rosales

and Sharma had given away nearly 1,500 books to children under their care.

“The program was created as much for parents as it is for children,” Rosales said.

“It creates an interaction between parents and their children. Hopefully, it will encourage parents to go

out and buy more books for their children.”

The Kansas Health Foundation was so impressed at the positive results that in 2005 they offered a challenge grant of \$1 million dollars, if a matching million dollars could be raised by the Kansas Pediatric Foundation, the charitable arm of the Kansas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

The \$1 million took about two years to raise, Rosales said, with funding from private donors.

The \$2 million will be used to create a permanent endowment fund to purchase books for physicians participating in the Turn a Page, Touch a Mind program in Kansas.

There now are 20 Kansas sites serving children in 14 communities, including Salina, Hays, Abilene, Topeka, Garden City, Hutchinson, Newton and Wichita.

“The money will be able

to buy books for generations to come,” said Beth Shearer, Salina, director of development for the Kansas Pediatric Foundation.

By 2007, books distributed by statewide sites totaled more than 46,000 at a cost of \$174,641.

Why this matters to you

To add more sites to the

program will require more funding, Shearer said, but the effort will pay off in great dividends in the long run.

“There are tests showing that kids who read books score better on vocabulary tests,” Shearer said. “By the fourth grade, they’re reading at a higher level.”

Salinan Jennifer Barnett and her daughter, Brookelyn, 4, have been reading books together since Brookelyn was 6 months old. That was when Dr. Rosales presented Brookelyn with her first book, “It’s All About Baby.”

“She took to books right away,” Jennifer said as her daughter shyly buried her head in her mother’s shoulder. “She loves books. She carries them around all the time, and we always read before bed.”

On this day, during Brookelyn’s 4-year check-up, she and Jennifer read Brookelyn’s new book, “Maisy’s Bedtime” three times before they left Rosales’ office.

Jennifer said reading at such an early age has made a marked difference in Brookelyn’s learning skills.

“She knows her ABCs and can count to 30 now because of the counting books she’s read,” Jennifer said. “I think it will help her out with her education down the road. I didn’t read a lot as a child, so it makes me feel good that she’s into books and enjoys them.”

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