

Working with children to transform communities, build a better future

Want to work for justice and peace at the most fundamental level? Work with children, the most vulnerable and easily exploited members of society. Help shape a more just and peaceful future by investing time in their development.

Presbyterian Women is taking a leadership role in supporting the PC(USA)'s Educate a Child Initiative. Through this program, the church hopes to improve education for one million children in the U.S. and around the world in the next four years, focusing particularly on strengthening early childhood education and decreasing the drop-out rate.

How can your church or PWP help? Maybe an after-school program that will help kids with homework or to improve their reading skills? Could you partner with another church to make a community impact for kids? Email Carol Winkler (winksmama@gmail.com) with ideas. And implement those ideas!

Toolkit available from the PC(USA)

A free toolkit to help congregations get started with or improve already-existing direct service and advocacy related to education is available at www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/child/toolkit. This toolkit is a fluid document, and the church hopes to expand it with more resources (including suggestions from you!) as the initiative continues to grow. If you would like to be part of a network that the PC(USA) is developing in order to better resource you and connect you with other Presbyterians doing the same work, fill out the brief network survey with information about yourself (share only as much as you feel comfortable). Go to <https://national.eac.wufoo.com/forms/educate-a-child-transform-the-world>. Finally, please don't hesitate to be in contact with any questions or suggestions you might have. Email Ginna Bairby at ginna.bairby@pcusa.org.

Plan now for May Together in Action Days, May 2-8, 2016

PW urges groups to plan events around Children's Book Week, May 2-8. Ideas:

- Community Story Hour (host it at your church and read aloud to children of the community; may be a one-time event or ongoing).
- Roving Readers (form a group of volunteers who go to community centers, hospitals and other sites where children are served, to read aloud to children). Focus especially on underserved children.
- Community book drive (for children who don't have books at home)
- Used book sale (selling books at very reasonable prices for families who can't usually afford books)
- After-school story hour (volunteers can "staff" this as frequently as there are volunteers)
- Lending library for families (donations might allow lending to anyone in the community who wants to avail themselves); emphasis on books with messages that address concerns of children and families; positive messages, empowering stories, etc.
- International Literacy Society suggests building a "Little Free Library"; see <http://literacyworldwide.org> for kit and ideas.
- Contribute to Thank and Birthday Offerings, which frequently give grants to education programs.
- Volunteer at local libraries (help for a day, or on a regular basis).
- Contact schools; volunteer to help children who are falling behind because of poor language skills.
- Think about donating books to organizations that supply books to children in areas of need.
- Consider equipping children in your community with electronic book readers.
- Supply nutritious snacks at story hours, cushy chairs, warm hugs—things hungry children need.
- Donate books to hospitals, schools, community centers and more.
- Play word and number games with children in after-school and community-center settings.
- Provide story Bibles for children in need.

The power (and importance) of words

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Words and language are critical shapers of a child's future. Dana Suskind, a surgeon who does cochlear implants, has found important data on language acquisition.² She has found that, among her patients, "The kids who received cochlear implants but struggled to develop language often did so because their parents didn't talk to them as much as their growing brains required." She references a study by Betty Hart and Todd Risley, "where they followed a group of children between 0 and 3 years old from all socioeconomic backgrounds. . . . [T]hey found, by the end of age 3, children from low-socioeconomic backgrounds will have heard 30 million fewer words than their more affluent peers. . . . The most stark findings of Hart and Risley were really the differences in affirmations versus prohibitions. . . . Not only does that impact children's language development, but it can often be related to toxic stress, which impacts children's ability to learn, as well as their own view of themselves. . . . We want to see a shift, where . . . every parent, every caregiver, every educator, every policymaker understands how powerful language is in allowing every child to reach their genetic, intellectual potential." (From report by Cory Turner, National Public Radio, September 14, 2015.)

See www.presbyterianwomen.org/justice for links to resources.