

UW System: Regents hear about innovative, influential Literacy Link project

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MADISON, Wis. – The University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents heard a presentation from Ashland and Bayfield counties on The Literacy Link, a UW System-funded pilot project that connects children and parents in justice-involved families through literacy-rich experiences and environments.

The Literacy Link pilot project is showing great promise as an approach that builds the reading, speaking, and listening abilities of young children in families throughout the criminal justice system. Through these literacy experiences, positive relationships are strengthened between the children and their caregivers. These relationships are critical because they can help children manage trauma or stress.

Mary Huser manages the project within the Human Development and Relationships Institute of UW-Madison's Division of Extension.

"Bringing more literacy and language-rich resources into these children's lives is critical to their well-being," Huser said. "The pilot program has shown how we can leverage partnerships with counties to provide resources that advance literacy needs, support young children, and connect parents involved in the justice system with their children."

The Literacy Link has provided more than 1,900 new, high-quality books for children, more than 280 parents with reading workshops, and more than 1,000

literacy-focused video visits, recorded book readings, and child-friendly face-to-face visits.

The project was initially funded with \$200,000 through the UW System's Office of the President in July 2017 and has used UW resources to provide educational outreach, support services, evaluation, curriculum, and, of course, books. The pilot counties for the program are Ashland, Bayfield, Dane, Dunn, Racine, Pepin, and Buffalo. Recently, a second round of funding was approved, which will allow the program to expand.