



Healthy Living

Durham Connects

Program urges parents to obtain a free library card as soon as their child is born | **C5**

Newborns need library cards, too

September is National Library Card Registration Month. So this begs the question: Does your newborn have a library card?

Durham Connects, Durham County's first universal home visiting program for parents of newborns, is working to develop babies' brains through early literacy. The program asks

parents to obtain a free library card as soon as a child is born. There is no age requirement for when a child can receive a library card.

It might seem odd to read to a newborn who can't read or talk. But research shows that children can learn the fundamentals of reading long before they enter school. In fact, according to a National Institute for Literacy study, 1- to 2-year-olds who were read to regularly had a vocabulary about 10 percent higher than those with little exposure to books. Newborns and infants can learn a lot just from touching, looking and even biting on books. They watch your facial expressions, hear voice changes and make a connection between you and the book. While infants are gazing at large printed letters, words and pictures their brain is wiring itself to read and learn. Studies show that the more infants are read to, the more successful they are in school, learning and life.

Using this information, Durham Connects is committed to distributing age appropriate books to families of newborns through its nurse visiting program. Currently parents receive Baby's First Dinosaur Touch and Feel board book. The Durham County Library system has made it easy to incorporate books into children's lives.



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Hana Sato, 16 months, reads a book from Durham Connects and shows off her library card.

free quarterly workshops for parents and childcare providers to enhance story time skills.

Because reading is such an important link to school readiness, Durham Connects has included a letter from Durham Public School Superintendent, Carl Harris and Durham's Partnership for Children about the importance of reading to your child every day. Only 45 percent of parents read to their children three or more times a week. For those that do, children are more likely to understand letter/sound relationships, have better verbal vocabularies, count to 20 or more and understand words in context by age 3, according to the National Institute for Literacy.

Durham County has many programs to help parents make reading a family activity. Motherread Inc. a free 10-week program coordinated by Welcome Baby of Durham provides literacy assistance and encouragement for families with children under 5 years of age. "Motherread teaches parents how to use books as a jumping point to engage kids in stories and stimulating their imagination," said Welcome Baby Program Co-

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The library has also launched a program called "Get set, Get ready, Let's read". The program provides assistance to child-care providers looking to incorporate early literacy reading skills into their center. "The program helps providers incorporate letter knowledge, narrative skills, print awareness and other basic literary skills in a fun and engaging way," said the library's Youth Services Manager, Karlene Fyffe. The library has a dedicated staff person who visits the centers to teach child-care providers how to transfer these skills to even their youngest children. The library system also offers

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Welcome Baby also started a new 10-week program called BABY to assist with infant care directed at the prenatal and newborn stages. Early literacy plays a crucial component in the program to foster healthy and appropriate brain development.

The message is that early literacy counts. Parents in Durham should obtain a library for their child as soon as they are able. A variety of books should be visible and available to children from the time they are newborns. And finally, parents should read to their child every day, regardless of age or reading ability. The experience will prepare their developing brains for a lifetime of reading, learning and success.