

Solutions for Success



Discussion Guide: Family Service Learning

An innovative, two-generation
approach to school success
for Hispanic families

Family Service Learning

Empower Your Community

At Southwest Solutions, we are proud of the many parents who have trained through our Family Service Learning program in Detroit—and, as a result, have become community leaders in their own right. Now, we are giving you free resources to share these proven ideas coast to coast. Perhaps you and your friends or co-workers will want to organize a Family Service Learning project in your part of the country. To encourage the spread of these ideas, we are providing this free Discussion Guide—along with a series of other guides to common issues in early learning. We are cooperating with five other early learning programs in Michigan that participated in recent years in grants from the Corporation for National & Community Service's Social Innovation Fund through the United Way for Southeastern Michigan.

To understand the full range of our work, glance at the last page of this guide to see a listing of all six programs and the six books we produced to tell our stories—along with various free Discussion Guides. Together, these six organizations helped children and their families with issues ranging from nutrition and social-emotional development to literacy and math skills—and also leadership training for parents. That's the subject of this particular guide, highlighting how Southwest Solutions took a two-generation approach to literacy and community service. That multi-year process helped to train and empower parents—many of whom had rarely ventured out of their family circles before our program. As a result, these parents have gained a new sense of ownership in their schools and neighborhoods.

For many years, Southwest Solutions has been a nationally known model of integrated services and neighborhood revitalization with more than 50 programs improving life in southeast Michigan. Within the overall scope of our work, Southwest Solutions has been providing family literacy programming for Spanish-speaking families in southwest Detroit since 2001. The particular effort we are inviting you to explore here started in 2012. You'll enjoy the entire, inspiring story of how teachers and parents developed this program—and you'll discover many more resources you can use in your community—by getting a copy of our book, titled: *Solutions for Success—An innovative, two-generation approach to school success for Hispanic families*. Our book is available in both print and eBook versions. (<https://www.amazon.com/Solutions-Success-Southwest/dp/1942011466/>)



Everyone works! A Family Service Learning cleanup day at an elementary school in Detroit involved parents and children.

In this Discussion Guide, we encourage you to invite family, friends, neighbors and co-workers to learn about Family Service Learning. If you inspire people to discuss this valuable idea, then you may build enough local interest to bring a Family Service Learning program to your town. Now more than ever, such efforts need to be lifted up and encouraged nationwide. For its part, United Way for Southeastern Michigan is proud to highlight these six programs because we know they work! Rigorous evaluation over a number of years proves that they shape children's lives and the entire community in positive ways.

So, Let's Talk!

Step 1 is inviting people to discuss what we are presenting to readers in these books.

Ask people you know: "Can we talk about some fresh ideas for getting parents involved in promoting early childhood learning?" Tell them: "This could help our neighborhood. We could use these ideas—right here where we live. Everybody—all ages—can get involved!"

Are you confronting especially difficult challenges? Well, these six books originated in neighborhoods wrestling with the impact of poverty, low rates of literacy and recent immigration. Our metro-Detroit region has become nationally known for the creative—and effective—responses by the talented professionals working for nonprofits focused on early childhood issues. We're finding solutions that can work for you, too.

Who might join the discussion? Look around you. Did you know that millions of small groups meet every week across the United States? Group settings include congregations, schools, libraries, civic centers, coffee shops and individuals' homes. The intentions of these groups range from religious to recreational, from educational to purely social. Whatever their purpose, many of these groups occasionally enjoy discussing a helpful new book. When offering these six books for discussion, you're likely to attract interest among parents, grandparents, teachers and community leaders who are attuned to the needs of children.

How do you get the conversation started? Tell people: "There are free discussion guides we can use. There are lots of interesting questions we can ask to get everyone talking. Best of all—researchers have shown that these ideas really work!"

America's next generation needs our help—today!

**Learn more and download at:
www.TalkAboutEarlyLearning.org**

As You Plan Your Discussion

Discussing these questions will be a richer experience if you have a copy of the book. The chapters are packed with helpful information—as well as inspiring stories from men, women and children who have shared their real-life experiences in these pages. This book will energize your efforts to get other people talking—and will spell out the specific steps you can follow.

For a discussion of Family Service Learning, in particular, look at these sections of this book:

Meet Sharon Darling—Starting on page 14, you will find Sharon’s story, which leads to the development of our approach to Family Service Learning through the organization Sharon founded. Who is Sharon? In the book, she is described by former U.S. Sen. Bill Bradley this way: “What started as the personal mission of a former elementary school teacher has blossomed into a nationwide movement. It’s about much more than reading and writing.”

The context—On page 32, we describe in detail all of the six components that our Southwest Solutions professionals combined in our work in Detroit, including the Family Service Learning program as one of those components. For an understanding of how this particular effort can fit into a larger early learning context, be sure to look at this section of the book.

A nationwide perspective—On page 37, two of Sharon Darling’s colleagues through her National Center for Families Learning provide a brief overview of Family Service Learning—as well as a series of citations from scholarly studies of these efforts. Are you looking for solid indicators that this program will make a real difference? Check out the suggestions for further reading in this section.

Challenges We Faced—Two sections of the book provide detailed descriptions of specific Family Service Learning projects, including one example of a multi-generational project focused on welcoming senior citizens (page 43) plus true stories about some of the barriers participants had to overcome before getting the full program rolling (page 49).

Six Steps for Family Service Learning—Starting on page 86 are the nuts and bolts of starting this kind of parent-powered program, developing the plan and ensuring that your project or event actually happens. Because Southwest Solutions specializes in working with Hispanic families, we provide these Six Steps in both English and Spanish.

**Learn more and download at:
www.TalkAboutEarlyLearning.org**

Organize and Adapt

Feel free to adapt these ideas: If you are a veteran of small groups, you may want to develop your own approach to this community discussion tailored to the experiences and needs of your own friends and neighbors. If you raise fresh questions that touch off lively and helpful interest in Family Service Learning, please get in touch with us and share your thoughts. These books—and the accompanying Discussion Guides—were published to encourage conversations nationwide.

Here are some ways you could start a discussion:

BEGIN by orienting your group to the book. Start by describing the book in your own words. Something in this book inspired you. Share that excitement directly with your friends.

If you want to read aloud from a passage of the book, you might choose to read starting on page 14, where you will find Sharon Darling's "origin story." She describes, in a dramatic way, her surprising experience in a classroom, many decades ago, when she first committed herself to helping adults learn to read. Sharon has told this story many times to inspire audiences to make similar commitments to helping others. Her story may inspire your friends, as well.

Want to share the hopes and dreams of parents? Our parents' desires for their families almost certainly mirror the desires of parents in your part of the country. Turn to page 5 for a short, uplifting invitation to this kind of work from parents in Detroit. The opening line is: "Want to see the American Dream?"

Another uplifting section of the book begins on page 61 with a section called *Our Day at School*. Over the next 12 pages, readers meet teachers, parents and children in a typical day at an elementary school. You may find excerpts in that section to read aloud.

The ultimate goal of your discussion is to explore ideas that seem fresh and helpful to you in your community. Perhaps you've never stopped to think about these challenges in this way. Keep asking yourself: How can we use the ideas shared in this book to spark new efforts where we live? The goal is not to completely agree, or disagree, with the specific steps of our Southwest program. The goal is to open up a lively dialogue with individuals who can help to expand this effort in your part of the country. Share that excitement with others!



Some of our projects directly promote family literacy. Here, Lynne McGregor (featured in our book) helps children who are eagerly choosing their own books at a free neighborhood Book Carnival organized by parents.

Want to get even more involved? The book is designed so that you can easily move from reading these stories—and discussing the ideas shared in these pages—to actually organizing a Family Service Learning project in your neighborhood. Certainly, if you want to develop a full-scale sustainable program, there are additional training and organizational steps you could take. The book offers many suggestions for additional resources. But the basic steps for a Family Service learning project are clearly outlined in the book. Consider trying this where you live! As you will learn in the book, the excitement that comes before, during and after a successful neighborhood program is a potent motivator to expand these efforts in the future!

Get in touch with us.

Share your ideas.

Are you finding people who are interested in these ideas? Please, share an update with us.

If you use ideas from this Discussion Guide and wind up touching off lively and helpful discussions about Family Service Learning, then please get in touch with us and share your thoughts. These books—and the accompanying Discussion Guides—were published to encourage conversations coast to coast. We would like to hear about your fresh ideas.

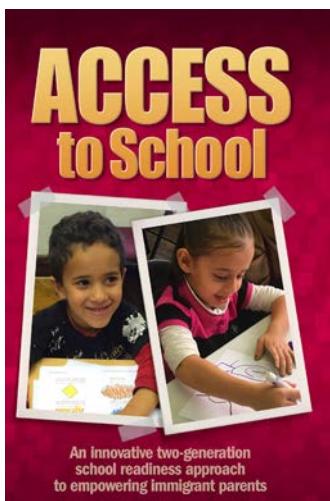
Please help with the larger effort, shared by all six programs featured on the last page of this guide. Now more than ever, Americans need to be reminded of the challenges we face in early childhood learning. Parents need get involved and become community leaders. With funding cuts and shifting public priorities nationwide, assistance from community-based nonprofits will be urgently needed. You can help meet these needs by letting others know about your personal interest—and the potential of group discussions. Many men and women feel isolated in their concern for the welfare of young children. Simply letting other people know of your concern can help to touch off a growing community-wide awareness.

One way you can expand the conversation is by visiting the book's Amazon page and adding a review of the book. Of course, we hope you've found this book helpful, so we welcome Amazon reviews that may prompt others to pick up a copy and extend the discussion.

But that's not all! Share your thoughts on Facebook or in your own newsletters. (*Note: You are free to quote from our book in a blog post or column you might write about your experience in reading and discussing Solutions for Success. We want you to share these important ideas far and wide.*)

Learn more and download at:
www.TalkAboutEarlyLearning.org

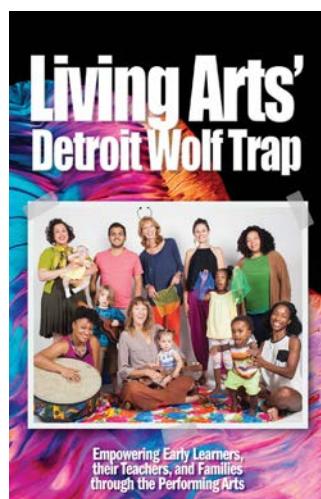
Discussion Guides



ACCESS to School
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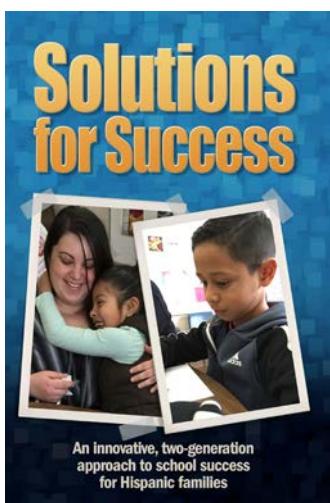
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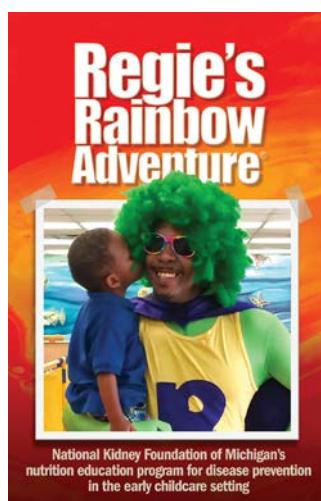
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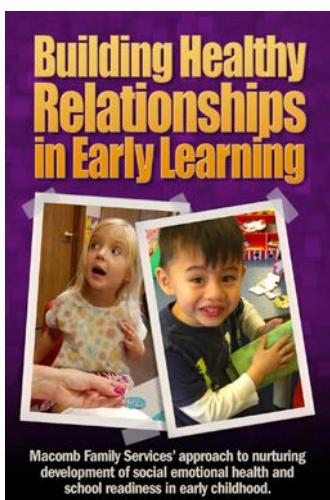
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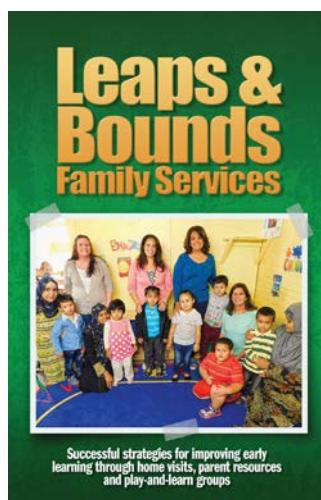
Discussion Guide:
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