



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education  
Colorado State Library

**Growing Readers Together**  
**Evaluation Report**

**Year Three**

**August 2019**



*Research & Evaluation Department*

## *Background*

---

The Growing Readers Together (GRT) early literacy initiative, designed and supported through the Colorado Department of Education's (CDE) Colorado State Library (CSL), was originally conceived and implemented in collaboration with the Buell Foundation. Buell funded the first year of the GRT program from September 1, 2016 through August 31, 2017, and subsequently approved funding for two more years, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. The goal of the program is to expand early literacy programming access to family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) providers across the state of Colorado. CSL contracted with the Clayton Early Learning Research and Evaluation (Clayton) Department to conduct an evaluation of the Growing Readers Together (GRT) in Year Three, as they had in Years One and Two. This report documents the libraries' successes, challenges, and accomplishments of the statewide project goals this year. We identify themes that have emerged over the three years, and present evidence of the extent to which alumni libraries have sustained GRT programming.

In this third year, the CDE provided sub-grants to 22 local library systems spread more widely than before across the state of Colorado. A map of the locations of these libraries appears in Appendix A. The libraries included: Aurora Public Library\*, Burlington Public Library\*, Cortez Public Library, Del Norte Public Library, East Morgan County Library (Brush), Garfield County Public Library District, Fort Morgan Public Library, Grand County Library District, Gunnison County Library District, Ignacio County Library District, La Junta/Woodruff Memorial Library, Lake County Public Library/Leadville, Montrose Regional Library District, Northern Chaffee County Library District/Buena Vista, Rangeview Library District (Anythink)/Adams County, Southern Chaffee County Regional Library District/Salida, Sterling Public Library, Trinidad Carnegie Public Library, Park County Public Library, Westminster Public Library, Wray Public Library, and Yuma Public Library. The asterisked libraries just completed their second year in August 2019. One of the GRT libraries that completed their first year in 2017-2018, La Veta Public Library, decided not to participate in a second year.

Clayton and CSL agreed on a scope of work for the evaluation in December 2019 and communicated regularly throughout the year via e-mail to monitor progress. On January 24, 2019, Clayton and CSL conducted a webinar for sub-grantee library sites. We introduced Clayton's GRT evaluation team and described the evaluation activities (i.e., bi-monthly phone interviews, "Peer Mentor" phone interviews, sustainability phone interviews, and monthly site reports), in which the GRT libraries' would participate and explained how the results would be shared.

Preliminary evaluation results were presented to GRT librarians, the Program Officer from the Buell Foundation, and CSL staff members at the GRT luncheon celebration at the Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales Branch Library in Denver, CO on August 21, 2019. The presentation was also live-streamed via the webinar platform Adobe Connect for those librarians unable to travel to Denver.

The following report focuses on the third year of Growing Readers Together activities that ended August 31, 2019.

## *Overall GRT Program Goals*

---

As described in the GRT Site Plans for 2018-2019, the libraries worked to achieve the following program goals:

Goal 1: FFN caregivers will have the skills, confidence, and resources to engage children in their care with early literacy materials and activities daily.

Goal 2: Public library staff will have strategies to connect FFN caregivers in their area with early literacy services.

Goal 4: Children under six in Colorado will be exposed to language and literacy-rich experiences in informal childcare settings and at the library.

*Since Goal 3 focused exclusively on state-level work, it was not included as a component of local plans in 2018-2019.*

## *Evaluation Questions*

---

The study was intended to address the following evaluation questions mutually developed by CSL and the Clayton GRT evaluators. The questions align with the program goals stated above. The first two evaluation questions remained the same across all three project years. In year three, a new question about GRT sustainability was added.

EQ1. How are GRT program activities affecting FFN provider knowledge, skills, attitudes, and resources?

EQ2. What strategies with FFN providers are employed by public library staff and how do these change as a result of the GRT program?

EQ3. To what extent were the alumni GRT libraries able to sustain the improvements they made with GRT funds after that funding ended?

## Evaluation Plan

---

The following table shows how the evaluation questions are aligned with the project goals, the measures used, the timeline for their administration, and strategies for data collection and analysis.

**Table 1: Year Three (2018-2019) Growing Readers Together Clayton R&E Evaluation Plan**

Evaluation Question	Project Goal	Measures	Timeline	Evaluation Activity
How are GRT program activities affecting FFN provider knowledge, skills, attitudes, and resources?	1	Bi-monthly phone interviews with the Library Staff of 15 sites. Peer Mentor Interviews	Ongoing data collection on the provision of GRT resources or outreach customized for each site	<u>Data Collection:</u> Clayton conducted 4 bi-monthly 30-minute phone interviews with each of 15 randomly selected sites representing small rural, medium rural, and large urban. At the end of the year, phone interviews were conducted with each of the 3 Peer Mentors about their interactions with Library staff. <u>Analysis:</u> Clayton collected and analyzed all phone interview data for the sites and peer mentors.
What strategies with FFN providers are employed by public library staff and how do these change as a result of the GRT program?	2	Library Staff Interviews Library Staff Monthly Activity Reports	Ongoing data collection	<u>Data Collection:</u> Clayton addressed these strategies in the bi-monthly phone calls. CDE provided Clayton with monthly activity reports on an ongoing basis. <u>Analysis:</u> Clayton provided qualitative analysis of

				phone interview and monthly report findings, identified major themes and lessons learned.
To what extent were the alumni GRT libraries able to sustain the improvements they made with GRT funds after that funding ended?	4	Library Staff Interviews  Peer Mentor Interviews	Ongoing data collection.	<u>Data Collection</u> : Bi-monthly phone interviews, and peer mentor interviews were conducted. <u>Analysis</u> : Clayton provided qualitative evidence to support understanding of these opportunities.

### Evaluation Methods

---

The evaluation focused on two main data collection methods: interviews and document reviews (i.e., site plans and monthly reports). Clayton conducted semi-structured phone interviews with librarians regularly over the year to more deeply understand librarians’ implementation of GRT and engagement of FFNs in Year Three, both during and after GRT funding. We've used quotes from these interviews with both current and previous GRT libraries throughout all the sections of the report. To analyze the interview data, a qualitative approach known as Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006)<sup>1</sup> was used. Grounded Theory allows for groups of new ideas and information to emerge from data collected from the libraries and project stakeholders. This approach specifically helped identify similarities and differences in the ways libraries were implementing GRT and the strategies participants used to reach CSL’s program goals. The technique of ongoing data-gathering and analysis was designed to allow categories and concepts to emerge from the data to “make sense” of the global and specific experiences of librarians and FFNs.

Data analytic activities included reviewing annual site plans librarians submitted to CSL. The site plans provided baseline information about the initial status and activities for each site. In addition, sites submitted monthly progress reports about the GRT-funded activities to CSL which were provided to Clayton for analysis. Before each of the bi-monthly phone interviews,

---

<sup>1</sup> Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage Publications.

Clayton reviewed the monthly reports, and then developed customized, open-ended questions to learn more about participants' experiences, perceptions and approach to implementing GRT.

Through the ongoing process of collecting data from bi-monthly interviews, analyzing responses, and creating categories of commonly reported data, many common themes emerged. Consistent and stable themes were identified when no new categories could be named in the ongoing process (Aldiabat & LeNavenec, 2018)<sup>2</sup>. The themes supported a strong understanding of librarian efforts to increase early literacy practices among FFNs, summarized lessons-learned from the "Peer Mentors" (former GRT participants) and current GRT librarians, and evaluated former GRT librarians' efforts to sustain GRT post-funding.

Of the 22 participating GRT libraries, 15 were randomly selected to participate in bi-monthly phone interviews beginning in February 2019, and continuing in April, July, and August. A total of 60 phone interviews were conducted. Topics included strategies used to identify and engage FFNs, community partnership development, staffing and grant administration, GRT programming and impacts on the library and the community, lessons learned and suggestions for GRT program improvement. The three library size designations were represented with five "small rural", eight "medium rural", and two "large urban" participating. (Please see Appendix B for the list of bi-monthly phone interview participant libraries).

Three librarians who completed their second year of GRT were invited by CSL to serve as Peer Mentors for the new and continuing GRT librarians. In August 2019, Clayton conducted end-of-year phone interviews with the designated Peer Mentors (Kirsten Dees of Pueblo City-County, Adam Gonzales of Canon City, and Chelsea Kueht of Pines & Plains). These interviews were intended to learn whether mentee librarians had consulted them for advice and, if so, what questions or concerns emerged in their conversations.

Clayton also invited eight librarians who had participated in prior grant years to participate in sustainability phone calls of up to 30 minutes. The discussions focused on extent to which they sustained the GRT program after their CSL funding ended.

#### *GRT Site Characteristics*

CSL designated GRT libraries as either "small rural," "medium rural," or "large urban" (See Table 2 below). This year, the large urban libraries included: Aurora Public Library, Rangeview (Anythink) Library, and Westminster Public Library. Libraries in a medium rural area included: Burlington Public Library, Cortez Public Library, Fort Morgan Public Library, Garfield County Public Library District, Grand County Library District, Gunnison County Library District,

---

<sup>2</sup> Aldiabat, K. M., & Le Navenec, C. (2018). Data saturation: The mysterious step in grounded theory method. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(1), 245-261. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol23/iss1/18>.

Montrose Regional Library District, Park County Public Library, Northern Chaffee County Library District/Buena Vista, Southern Chaffee County Regional Library District/Salida, Sterling Public Library and Trinidad Carnegie Public Library. Libraries in a small rural area included Del Norte, Ignacio, La Junta/Woodruff, Lake County, Wray Public Library, and Yuma Public Library.

**Table 2. Site-Size Sample Sizes by Data Collection Type**

Site-Size Classification	Total # of Sites Participating in Year Three	Bi-Monthly Phone Interviews	Sustainability Phone Interviews
Small Rural	7	5	2
Medium Rural	12	8	5
Large Urban	3	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>8</b>

The third year of GRT funding reinforced the understanding gained during the first two years that significant variation exists across library sites in terms of populations and patrons. In various ways, this variation contributed to both libraries’ successes and challenges with regard to finding FFNs and developing responsive GRT programming. How these characteristics influenced the project will be described below; but, as a preview, some sites experienced seasonal and/or economic fluctuation which impacted their community's cultural/ethnic demographics, while others experienced more stability. The more stable communities could more easily build and sustain relationships. Some libraries have significant Hispanic or immigrant populations who speak Spanish or other languages, which also had implications for tailoring their outreach strategies.

**Evaluation Findings**

---

Responses were collected from librarians about their approaches to and delivery of GRT programming, as well as their observations of FFNs’ engagement and the feedback they received from FFNs about GRT activities. The first two evaluation questions are related, but in a practical sense, question #2 precedes question #1, in that librarians must first engage FFNs before they can deliver the program and evaluate its impact. Therefore, the results described here first address how the librarians identified and engaged FFN and are followed by the strategies they used to expose the FFNs to early literacy tools and resources. Then, the

perceived impact on FFN is presented. In the last section, the results related to sustainability (EQ3) are shared.

- Evaluation Question 1 (EQ1): How are GRT program activities affecting FFN provider knowledge, skills, attitudes, and resources?
- Evaluation Question 2 (EQ2): What strategies with FFN providers are employed by public library staff and how do these change as a result of the GRT program?
- Evaluation Question 3 (EQ3): To what extent were the alumni GRT libraries able to sustain the improvements they made with GRT funds after that funding ended?

### Evaluation Questions 1 & 2 (EQ1 & EQ2)

*Libraries used a number of strategies to implement program activities and to improve FFN provider knowledge, skills, attitudes, and resources.* These include identifying FFN providers, conducting outreach, providing early literacy supports, observing FFN engagement, connecting with community partners, addressing common challenges to implementation, and learning from Peer Mentors. The thematic findings related to each of these are presented below and reflect the interviewees' perceptions of their own implementation and outcomes.

**Identifying FFN Providers.** Many librarians reported increased awareness of FFNs in their community as a result of the GRT grant. They recognized the importance of targeting this group because they are difficult to identify and often overlooked as a partner in providing literacy opportunities for children. As the librarian from Conejos noted, *"GRT was a real 'eye opener' to this subset of caregivers and the important role librarians have in introducing early literacy best practices to FFNs."* All librarians emphasized the importance of targeting FFNs, and indicated this group is difficult to identify because FFNs don't define themselves as FFNs. *"One of the challenges of this whole initiative is letting everybody else know what an FFN is, our community doesn't have a name for that."* (Park County).

*"The importance of the recognition of FFNs was phenomenal. It created a sense of value for them and introduced them to services they didn't know about or missed out on." (Wray)*

Librarians learned, especially over the summer, that older siblings are an important group of FFNs that they should target. Making connections with local schools and colleges reaped rewards in terms of reaching students who may already be or become FFNs. One librarian said, *"It's completely beneficial and you will learn about your community no matter how long you've lived there, and you can reach out to specific members of your community. I never thought of*



*FFNs as a subgroup before the grant. FFN's can be 11 to 12 year olds watching babies and 3 year olds.*" (Gunnison).

**Outreach Strategies.** Librarians used a combination of outreach approaches with varying degrees of success to reach FFNs. Many librarians reported it was challenging to know what form of outreach brought FFNs to the library, and using multiple forms of communication on a consistent basis increased the odds of attracting FFNs to GRT events. One librarian proudly announced that word was getting around and said, *"We're being talked about."* (Yuma). Librarians agreed that it took a layered approach for a successful outreach campaign. Another librarian said, *"When I can get in front of them face-to-face that works more than anything. For the younger families, it's Facebook. For the older FFNs, it's definitely more phone calls."* (Montrose).

*Word-of-mouth.* In smaller communities, chatting informally with FFNs at the hair salon, in the grocery store, and other locations was common. Librarians talked with everyone with kids who came to library to determine whether they were FFNs and recruited them to participate in GRT activities. As was true last year, one regular patron, by spreading the word with friends and neighbors about a library activity, might serve as a GRT ambassador to attract other FFNs. *"At the start of the project, I put a couple of FFNs in charge of locating other FFNs, wherever they are with kids they will see others like them (grocery store, park etc.)"* (Wray). Librarians also recruited FFNs at events outside of the library and made connections to people in their communities.

*Print and Radio.* Other methods of outreach included placing ads and articles in local newspapers (please see Appendix D for an article on GRT that appeared in the March issue of "The Flume" in Park County). Librarians also recruited FFNs through organizational newsletters, public service announcements on local radio (Nick McCarty did an informal radio interview for the library that aired on the local radio station this summer), by sending out invitations to GRT events by e-mail and mailing postcards, and by posting information on library websites and Facebook. One interviewee said, *"There's been lots of positive press locally, the local radio show highlighted the library and talked about what we offer including GRT. Word is getting out more."* (Southern Chaffee County/Salida).

*Collaborations with Partner Organizations.* Community support and partnership continued to be highlighted as a very effective outreach strategy. A new partnership strategy librarians' mentioned for the first time this year was connecting with local Head Start programs. It worked well to contact families on Head Start and preschool waitlists.

**Librarians' Efforts to Increase Early Literacy Practices Among FFNs.** Through conversations with FFNs, librarians identified their community's needs. Based on this, they researched the

*"In the last few months I've been able to reach out to patrons who speak more than one language, and I got them involved in a multi-lingual Story Time." (Montrose)*

resources that would most benefit the FFNs in their communities. For instance, based on FFN feedback, librarians increased the number of Story Times, adjusted the hours to maximize participation, and focused Story Times on

effective early literacy practices such as Every Child Ready to Read. As a result, some FFNs created relationships with each other and the library, increased their attendance, and formed informal groups that continue to meet after Story Time.

Many librarians talked about how GRT changed how they target FFNs and make their programming more specifically effective and inclusive for the population. *"I've worked very hard in the library being more inclusive to caregivers rather than just mothers, "Mommy and Me" is being changed to "Toddler Time." If you only babysit the child that morning, bring them, it doesn't need to be a parent. We've changed our verbiage, who we invited, and what we include."* (Yuma).

Librarians put a lot of thought into the preparation of early literacy bags or kits, and many assembled kits according to themes or adjusted for the child's age, either to be given away to FFNs or to be part of the permanent library collection. Librarians reported the flexibility of the grant was one of the parts they liked the most about GRT because it allowed them to decide whether to purchase, books, computers, or enhancing the environment based on the needs of their libraries. *"We are the hot spot for little kids. We used the grant money to buy board books and leveled books. I ordered 2 shelves for the kids' room, the grant partly paid for them and our library covered the rest. It was great."* (Northern Chaffee County- Buena Vista).



*Literacy kits included a bag to store the materials, crayons, handwriting book, sorting cups of different colors and sizes, and a variety of books. (Northern Chaffee Library District/Buena Vista)*



*Literacy kits included a variety of books, manipulatives to increase motor skills, puzzles to develop number and letter recognition, shakers to connect with a music theme, and finger puppets to develop vocabulary, and a song list. (Ignacio Community Library District)*

Each week the librarian from Ignacio Community Library District focused on one of the five early literacy practices and FFNs receive a plastic box to store all the materials. Librarians recognized their important role as early literacy teachers for FFNs as they modeled reading techniques during Story Times with young children and demonstrated activities that can enhance or build upon early literacy interactions. The information and tools provided to FFNs increased their level of comfort in using the resources at the library and at home in their role as teachers of the children in their care. *“One mom took our GRT class (Five Best Practices of Early Literacy). At first, she was hesitant about the books and why we chose them. Now she’s excited and tries reading at home. She’s more confident with literacy and reading with kids.” (Ignacio). As one librarian noted, “What could be better than sharing the love of reading?”*

The Fremont Librarian said, *“I am always thrilled to get books into the hands and homes of children learning the magic of reading. It was a double positive to assist FFNs, mostly grandparents, to feel like they are encouraging a valuable skill to their grandchildren. The materials were fun and educational, providing confidence to the learning experience for the FFN. One great-grandmother commented that she felt like she was playing, not ‘teaching’.” (Fremont Library)*

**Observations of FFNs Engagement.** Libraries increased the number of caregivers coming to the library to check out books and other resources and attend Story Time. Enhancements to physical environments encouraged patrons to linger after Story Time to meet and talk with other caregivers or just to hang out. One site purchased an espresso machine to make the library an inviting place for people to visit and believed it influenced FFNs to stay to talk longer after Story Time. A librarian said, *“The space we created has been great in engaging people, with the goal of getting them to linger at the library and stay after Story Time. We observed new connections being made, and FFNs talking to each other.” (Westminster).*

Librarians agreed Story Times provided an opportunity for caregivers and children to be engaged in high-quality early literacy practices and created a place for FFNs to socialize and bond with each other. Story Time encourages FFN-to-FFN interactions, and the interviews yielded many examples of FFNs staying for a cup of coffee and a conversation after Story Time. One librarian said, *“We’ve had a lot more library attendance. A lot of the families are realizing it’s not only a great resource for literacy, but a safe place to play and socialize. A*



*A child and her grandmother participating in a GRT event with hand puppets. (Park County)*

*large portion of the FFNs bring children to the library. A lot of times these people don't get out much. They talk about how they are teaching and raising their children.”* (Fort Morgan).

Through GRT, librarians shifted some patrons’ perceptions of the library. One library hired a Spanish Outreach Coordinator who helped build relationships with immigrants and non-native English speakers, and established the library as a safe, welcoming place for everyone. *“People assume since we're a public organization we're part of the government and would report them. We told them we're here to help you, we're not reporting you, we don't care who you are, and their viewpoint shifted.”* (Ignacio). *“They realize the library is a welcoming place, and story time is not just for parents. Grandparents and siblings are coming.”* (Gunnison).

The Burlington library reported in 2017-2018 that their dual-language resources were not being used, but this year, with the arrival of new migrant families, these resources were now of frequent use. Libraries that invested in Spanish language resources reported variability in their degree of use. Examples of these resources included books in Spanish, translated handouts, subscriptions to computer language learning programs (e.g., Mango Languages), and the hiring of bilingual staff.

A significant theme in the interviews was that GRT increased the visibility of the librarians and their library in the community. Reflecting this, several library staff shared examples of unplanned meetings of GRT participants and others outside of the library:

- *“Yes, I remember you...you're the library lady.”* (in a Park County grocery store)
- *[I'm] recognized outside the library...“There's the story time lady.”* (Gunnison)

Librarians were also pleased that FFNs increasingly realized, after attending GRT events, that libraries do more than provide books. FFNs learned they can play games, check out activity kits, use “Brain Boxes,” and so much more.

FFNs repeatedly expressed appreciation for the gift books, activity ideas, and manipulatives and other giveaways. Librarians also reported that FFNs liked the ideas librarians shared about how to engage the young children in their care with these materials. FFNs reported back to the librarians how much the all the caregivers and their children loved the materials. *“Grandparents love the kits. It makes them feel special when they get a bag.”* (Yuma). Another librarian said, *“A lot of caregivers had requested a play kitchen, and they've been really appreciative.”* (Westminster).

**Connecting with Community Partners and Other GRT and non-GRT Libraries.** Librarians reported the benefit of establishing or deepening partnerships with Early Childhood Councils, Licensed Childcare Centers, Head Start, Health Clinics, Home Visitation Programs, Alliance for Children, preschools and elementary schools, and organizations already working with families (e.g., Migrant Groups, the Woman’s Empowerment Group of Lake County, Aurora Parks & Recreation, the Fort Morgan Family Center).

*“GRT pushed me toward thinking about partnerships more. I’m more intentional now, and I contact all I can think of. The town does a good job of connecting the library and school. I’ll always be on the lookout.”*  
(Northern Chaffee County- Buena Vista)

Some libraries expanded existing partnerships, while others reported attempts to collaborate with new organizations. Some did off-site programming and held early literacy events outside the library. For instance, one site had a partnership with a local bookstore and held Story Time there, and another site had bi-weekly story walks at a community farm.

During the bi-monthly phone interviews, Librarians shared that they frequently reached out to other librarians in their same geographic area with similar demographics. They said they had more in common in terms of patrons and resources, and could partner in idea generation. They believed these informal partnerships were highly valuable. In some cases, GRT libraries said they shared information with non-GRT libraries in their region. For instance, Burlington collaborated with Stratton, Fort Morgan collaborated with Wiggins and Weldona, Ignacio Community Library District collaborated with Pagosa Springs, and Westminster collaborated with a library in Broomfield.

Specifically, the informal partnerships established with other GRT libraries included: Buena Vista, Leadville, Lake County, Park County, and Salida in the Central/Mountain Region, and Brush, Burlington, East Morgan, Fort Morgan, Wray and Yuma in the Eastern Plains Region. Common partnership activities included watching Story Times at other libraries, sharing information about how to implement GRT, discussing ideas for literacy kits and where to find materials, and planning different activities to avoid duplication of programming for FFNs who visit multiple libraries in the same region. Some GRT librarians shared photos of literacy kits they had prepared, or furniture they had purchased to create an inviting children’s area, which other librarians found to be very helpful.

They also shared information via the GRT e-mail distribution list on helpful websites or other sources of literacy materials. Librarians appreciated the opportunities to connect in-person with other librarians at meetings that CSL organized (e.g., the winter quarter meetings in the Eastern Plains Region, Central/Mountain Region, Western/Southern Region & the Denver Metro Region). They also valued the e-mails CSL sent sharing what other libraries were doing or activities or resources that libraries could explore. While libraries appreciated the e-mails from

the GRT Coordinator regarding instructional webinars and funding opportunities, many expressed little time to follow up with those leads.

**Challenges to Implementation.** Many new librarians worried, particularly at the beginning of the grant, about meeting program expectations and felt they got off to a *slow start*. Librarians reported they really appreciated reassurances from CSL and the Peer Mentors that they were on the right track. *“It took while to understand the mission of grant and the requirements. Are we overstepping by allowing others who show up who are non-FFNs to get a (literacy) bag? Joyce says don't worry. Are we doing things right and reaching who we need to? It was a big worry.”* (Wray). Many felt the first few months of the grant year should be devoted to in-person regional meetings with other GRT librarians to facilitate planning and provide encouragement. It was acknowledged that since most libraries have a January to December budget year, the first months of the grant the librarians will spend time planning their purchases and programming expenses. Due to variability in monthly activities, librarians often reported not having much progress to report.

Lipton and Wellman (2003)<sup>3</sup> wrote about a study of 1,000 preservice teachers whose concerns included, *“...managing time; for planning, scheduling, completing work load...relations with colleagues...worry about knowing what to do, when to do it and whether or not they will do it well.”* (p. 5). These concerns certainly resonated with first year GRT librarians.

Librarians shared other challenges in implementing the program as intended. It was learned that insufficient library staffing across all sized libraries made administration and implementation of the GRT program challenging. Librarians expressed the persistent trend of funding reductions and considered short staffing to be an intractable problem. Grandparents and other volunteers were viewed as more available during the summer months, which reportedly helped because libraries are busiest during this time.

*“The administration of the grant seemed overwhelming for a staff of one.” (Fremont Library)*

When recruiting FFNs, some smaller libraries indicated familiarity their patrons, and less inhibition about approaching them, while larger libraries have a higher patronage volume and were unlikely to already know their patrons. Some librarians reported being uncomfortable at times approaching people to inquire whether they were FFN providers. Libraries consistently shared the message that “everyone receives services” is a part of their culture, so in some cases parents and other non-FFNs received the GRT early literacy materials. The process of attracting,

---

<sup>3</sup> Lipton, L., Wellman, B. M., & Humbard, C. (2003). *Mentoring matters: A practical guide to learning-focused relationships*. Sherman, CT: MiraVia, LCC.

training and retaining adequate staff is a challenge for libraries of all sizes and locations. At certain points, several reported suspending GRT activities or community outreach due to limited staffing, especially with the onset of the Summer Reading Program. A concern across the majority of GRT sites had to do with the perceived administrative burden from accepting the grant. The number and frequency of the reports (e.g., the requirement to submit monthly progress reports) seemed excessive to librarians for the amount of funds received compared to other, larger grants. Some librarians, depending upon the level of activity that month, had more or less to report. In at least one case, the perceived administrative burden helped drive the decision not to participate a second year. *“I chose not to participate in GRT this year because it was too much of a time commitment for me as a part-time librarian.”* (La Veta).

Librarians varied in their perception of the timing and administrative requirements of the GRT grant. Many were not aware of the grant until they were told they would be managing it. All appreciated the funds, but many were concerned about making the right decisions related to their expenditure. For some, the fact that they were on a calendar year budget meant they could not begin to spend GRT funds until January. For others, this was not an issue because they needed those first few months of the grant to plan. Some would have preferred to receive the funds up front as opposed to making expenditures and getting reimbursed, while others appreciated the very rapid reimbursement turnaround.

**Learning from Peer Mentors.** New this year, librarians beginning their first year of GRT had the opportunity to consult with Peer Mentor librarians who participated in GRT in prior years. Three Peer Mentors were selected, and each one represented either a small rural, medium rural, or urban library. At the start of the grant, the three Peer Mentors presented to the GRT librarians. They shared tips and lessons learned from their outreach activities, staffing, purchasing materials, identifying partnerships, managing budgets, and resolving challenges. One Peer Mentor reported people were engaged and asked lots of questions at the meeting.

Phone interviews were conducted with each of the Peer Mentor librarians to understand the frequency of contact and types of support provided to the new GRT libraries. Two of the three reported they answered additional questions when contacted directly by a new GRT librarian. The other reported not being contacted by the libraries at all. It was unclear from the interviews with Peer Mentors whether they felt empowered to take action and independently call sites, and this may be a point of growth for future peer mentor activities and training.

Over the year, five librarians contacted the Peer Mentors for advice. In these conversations, the Peer Mentors reported they emphasized the importance of being flexible and encouraged librarians to be willing to experiment. They advised librarians to accept when a strategy failed

and to try a new approach. Peer Mentors also encouraged librarians to avoid getting discouraged if events had low attendance, and normalized that the success of an event are often affected by weather, competition with other events, and illness. Peer Mentors encouraged librarians to also focus on establishing community partnerships. Outreach to established organizations in the community, especially those working with families, local schools and child care centers, and Early Childhood Councils were suggested as great ways to share information about GRT activities. Additionally, Peer Mentors suggested collaboration with schools to reach students who are or will become caregivers.

Several librarians expressed their appreciation to Peer Mentors by sending thank you notes. Other librarians thought the Peer Mentors were a great resource to have available even though they did not contact them. One librarian said, *“I didn't reach out to mentors due to programming overload but it's a good thing to have. We're a small town with unique dynamics and calling other towns may not work here. Having a mentor from a small town to relate to other small towns is helpful since they have experience with limited population and partnerships.”* (Northern Chaffee County/ Buena Vista).

All the Peer Mentors indicated they would have contacted Peer Mentors if they had been offered during their first year. When asked if Peer Mentors should continue next year their responses were mixed. One Peer Mentor was in favor of discontinuing the mentorship because of a lack of use. Another suggested that the Regional Early Literacy Coordinators could fill this role, and one said they should continue with the practice.

### Evaluation Question #3 (EQ3)

**Sustainability of GRT.** In April, Clayton invited eight former GRT libraries to participate in a brief phone interview to determine to what extent each had maintained the early literacy work started at their library as a result of their participation in GRT. We've used quotes from these interviews with both current and previous GRT libraries throughout all the sections of the report. We've used quotes from these interviews with both throughout all the sections of the report.

It was challenging to quantify sustainability due to the very small numbers of respondents and the variation among former participating libraries; however, nearly all the librarians mentioned how GRT influenced their understanding of who FFNs are and the importance of reaching out to this subset of their community with whom they, prior to GRT, had no or limited levels of awareness. All libraries shared that they continue to promote the five practices of early literacy with youngsters and their caregivers, whether formally or informally.



GRT funding enabled librarians to develop early literacy curricula or workshops (some offered them at GRT nights or during GRT Story Times) that is now a part of their current repertoire. Librarians acquired resources to promote early literacy, as well as publicize access to early literacy services and resources available at the library. Librarians report the benefits of these efforts persist.

Several former GRT library sites indicated they continue GRT activities developed during their funded years. At the Conejos Library District, the librarian established a senior citizen volunteer reader group whose members volunteered to read to children in their community in their homes. These seniors continue to visit the same families and check out library books to take to these home-based reading sessions. This multi-generational literacy approach is a mutually beneficial experience for the seniors and for the children and their families. Another example came from the John C. Fremont Library District. Before GRT, the library only had one Story Time per week, but now *“We also added a Friday Story Time that we continue on.”*

Several libraries established “literacy centers” for their community. Physical enhancements to the library, such as these, attract patrons and make the library a desirable place to be. Changes to the environment constitute a long-term investment which would not have been possible without GRT funding. During a Peer Mentor call with Adam Gonzales, of Canon City, in the context of giving advice to other libraries, he stated, *“The best thing we've done was the [browser] bins. They were totally worth it.”* (Canon City). He explained the bins were made of wood and quite expensive. Another librarian said, *“We never had a collection of board books before. We added the collection to the system and it has been extremely popular...We are continuing to add things all the time.”* (Limon Memorial). The Burlington library created a toddler corral near the front door where caregivers could safely place their child and know they would have literacy materials to engage with.

As a key point of sustainability, many libraries planned for the resources they would need to continue giving away books, to create early literacy bags or to maintain literacy kits/bags in their collection for checkout. As items are lost or broken, they can be replaced from the regular library budget at relatively low cost. One librarian said, *“If we hear about a new baby in town, we give them the leftover touchy-feely board books and a library card.”* (Limon Memorial Library, a GRT alumni library.)

A universal theme related to challenges to sustainability was the concern over limited staffing and the time required for successful administration and implementation of the elements of the GRT program.

## *Summary of Findings*

---

This evaluation report highlights new lessons learned from the 2018-2019 (Year Three) Growing Readers Together program year and reflects a consistent results from all three years of implementation. Overall, the majority of GRT librarians demonstrated effective implementation of the GRT Program. Librarians are successfully educating FFNs and providing them with early literacy skills and support. GRT continued to reach its three program goals.

The following summary of findings is provided by each evaluation question and includes quotes from current and previously funded GRT libraries.

### **Evaluation Question 1 (EQ1): How are GRT program activities affecting FFN provider knowledge, skills, attitudes, and resources?**

The results reported here are sourced from bi-monthly phone interviews conducted with the librarians, who provided rich stories about their observations of FFNs in their libraries.

As in Years One and Two, librarians observed an increase in patronage at their libraries, in engagement in the children's areas, and use of the early literacy materials. Over time, librarians reported that FFNs changed their behavior with the children in their care as their confidence and competence in applying early literacy practices increased. FFNs took advantage of the manipulatives in the play area, tablets pre-loaded with literacy games, and the literacy kits or bags, either giveaway or checkout. FFNs stayed longer in the library, and interacted with librarians more often and with the children in their care in more ways, using the five best practices of early literacy (i.e., read, talk, sing, play, and write).

Eventually, some FFNs were empowered to share their knowledge of effective early literacy strategies with other FFNs, thereby developing their leadership skills. In addition, several libraries reported the same core group of FFNs regularly attended their GRT events. This presented an opportunity to develop FFN leaders within this group of dedicated participants to help expand GRT knowledge to others in the community. As reported by a Year Two library grandparent who was willing to spread the word about GRT, essentially taking on the role of GRT "ambassador" and bringing other FFNs into the library, a library this year asked their FFNs to reach out to and engage other FFNs in the community.

GRT funding also helped enhance the perception of the library in the community. FFNs increasingly understand that the library is a safe place, and that librarians have a wealth of knowledge and are there to support them. FFNs also have begun to realize the library offers a wide variety of literacy resources that goes beyond just books.

## Evaluation Question 2 (EQ2): What strategies with FFN providers are employed by public library staff and how do these change as a result of the GRT program?

Through the qualitative data gleaned from bi-monthly phone interviews, the following results stood out.

**FFN Outreach.** One of the first things a librarian had to do was explain to their patrons the definition of an FFN. When a grandparent, for example, said in response, “I’m not a teacher,” the librarians helped FFNs identify with their role so they would become more comfortable helping children in their care develop early literacy skills.

Librarians consistently told us that building trust is crucial in being able to establish relationships with different groups of FFNs. One librarian emphasized that developing trust with their Spanish-speaking community was particularly challenging, and that until that is successful, they cannot fully implement GRT programming with this group.

A new GRT programming strategy this year was to take advantage of partnerships with local organization to add an early literacy component to daycare licensing classes and Safe Sitter classes, held either at the library or at a local recreation center (CPR/First Aid/Childcare Classes). Even though licensed caregivers are not considered FFNs, providing them with literacy support benefits the entire community.

New subsets of FFNs were also identified this year. Librarians discovered that older siblings are an important group of FFNs. Partnerships with schools and local colleges reaped rewards in terms of reaching students who may already be or will become FFNs. A new outreach strategy this year was contacting families on wait lists for Head Start and other preschools to find FFNs and engage them in GRT. Another example was through a collaboration with a former colleague at a local university, and a librarian provided an opportunity for students majoring in early childhood education to prepare early literacy kits.

**Differences in Library Characteristics.** There is significant cross-site variability in terms of populations and patrons. Some libraries experience seasonal and/or economic fluctuation which has an impact on their community’s cultural/ethnic demographics, while others experience slightly more stability. One library that had invested in dual-language resources in their first year, was disappointed that these resources were not being used. However, in their second year, they reported that with the arrival of new bilingual families these resources were now being tapped. This highlighted the challenges in predicting and adapting to the changing needs of a library community.

**Differences in Implementation Context.** Librarian perceptions of the GRT Program influenced implementation. In some cases, the librarians carrying out GRT were not part of the grant

preparation and were unaware that it would become part of their job responsibilities. Depending on the size of the library, in some cases the director and program staff worked together to plan GRT activities and determine the materials to be distributed to FFNs, but in many small libraries one librarian was responsible for all aspects of GRT.

Some librarians considered GRT to be an add-on to their existing library programming. Others thought of GRT as an extension or enhancement of what they were already doing. At least one librarian had to suspend active outreach to FFNs because of the time needed for the Summer Reading Program, citing insufficient staffing support. Inadequate staffing and time emerged as reasons some librarians were unable to fulfill all the GRT requirements. Many librarians worried about meeting the GRT expectations at the beginning of the year.

Information that CSL shared about what other librarians had done (e.g., pictures of literacy bag contents, enhanced children's reading spaces) was very helpful. In-person regional meetings were also reported as very beneficial. For example, at the Directors of Northeast Plains Libraries meeting in May, the Wray librarian requested that GRT be on the agenda. Librarians took this opportunity to talk with each other about the strategies and challenges of implementing the GRT Program. They learned from each other and they wished they had met earlier. In fact, librarians would like to have more meetings with each other throughout the year. Most felt much more confident after these interactions.

### **Evaluation Question 3 (EQ3): To what extent were the alumni GRT libraries able to sustain the improvements they made with GRT funds after that funding ended?**

For each of the previously participating libraries, participation in GRT reinforced the importance of reaching out to FFNs with early literacy practices and resources. Though limited staffing and library budgets continued to be a challenge for implementing GRT initiatives on an ongoing basis, the librarians all maintained, in various ways, activities to promote early literacy knowledge and skills. The extent of this ongoing implementation is highly dependent upon librarians' initiative, available time, and current resources. Librarians report ongoing work with local organizations who support FFNs in the community. GRT provided the funds to transform children's areas into welcoming and supportive environments, which was viewed as a long-term investment. While libraries have sustained many elements of GRT in their interactions with FFNs, only a few report that they have continued formal, GRT-specific activities, like GRT workshops and GRT Story Times.

## *Appendices*

Appendix A. Map of GRT Libraries' Locations 2016-2020

Appendix B. List of Bi-Monthly Interview Participant GRT Libraries

Appendix C. Bi-monthly Librarian Phone Interview Questions

Appendix D. Media Coverage - Newspaper Article in "The Flume" (Park County)

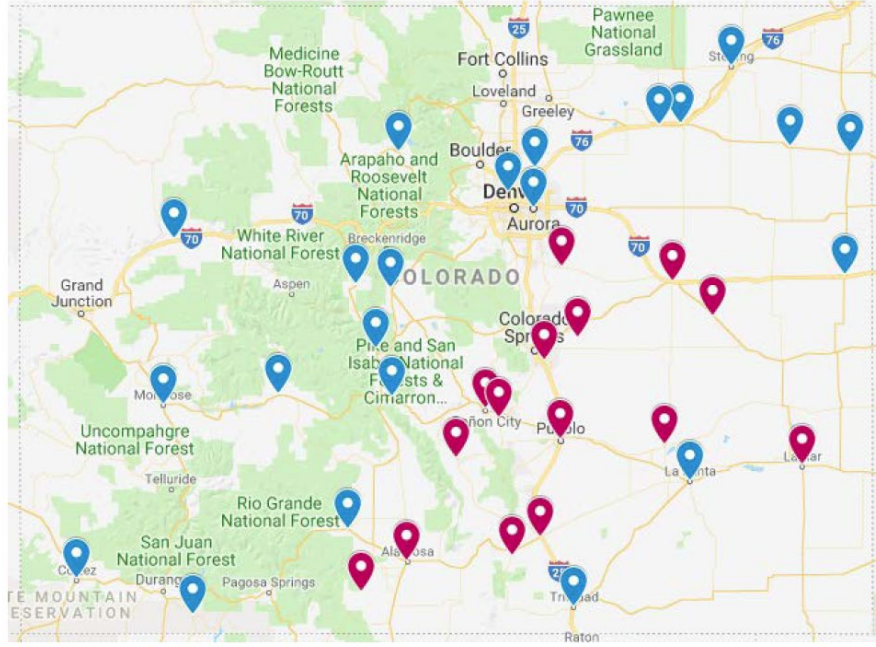
Appendix E. GRT Librarians Invited to Participate in Sustainability Phone Interviews

Appendix F. GRT Sustainability Phone Interview Questions

Appendix G. GRT Peer Mentor interview Questions



## Growing Readers Together Libraries: 2016 - 2019



<u>Participating Library Systems, 2018-19</u>	<u>Participating Library Systems, 2016-18</u>
Aurora Public Library	Alamosa Public Library
Burlington Public Library	Canon City Public Library
Cortez Public Library	Combined Community Library (Ordway)
Del Norte Public Library	Conejos County Library District
East Morgan County Library District/Brush	John C. Fremont Library District (Florence)
Fort Morgan Public Library	La Veta Public Library
Garfield County Public Library District	Lamar Public Library
Grand County Public Library District	Limon Memorial Library
Gunnison County Library District	Lincoln County Bookmobile
Ignacio Community Library District	Pikes Peak Library District (El Paso County, CO Springs)
La Junta/Woodruff Memorial Library	Pines & Plains Libraries (Elbert County)
Lake County Public Library/Leadville	Pueblo City-County Library District
Montrose Regional Library District	Security Public Library
Northern Chaffee County Lib District/Buena Vista	Spanish Peaks Library (Walsenburg)
Park County Public Library	West Custer County Library District (Westcliffe)
Rangeview Library District/Brighton	
Southern Chaffee County Regional Lib District/Salida	
Sterling Public Library	
Trinidad Carnegie Public Library	
Westminster Public Library	
Wray Public Library	
Yuma Public Library	

**Appendix B: Libraries Participating in the Bi-Monthly Phone Interviews**

---

<b>LIBRARY SITE NAME</b>	<b>SIZE</b>	<b>LIBRARIAN/DIRECTOR NAME</b>
<b>FORT MORGAN</b>	Med. Rural	Chandra McCoy & LynnDee Koehler
<b>BURLINGTON</b>	Small Rural	Nick McCarty-Daniels & Lisa Brewer
<b>YUMA</b>	Small Rural	Ashley Lynch
<b>MONTROSE</b>	Med. Rural	James Stetson
<b>LAKE COUNTY</b>	Small Rural	Jennifer Marruffo
<b>TRINIDAD</b>	Med. Rural	Mallory Pillard & Phyllis Kilgrove
<b>PARK COUNTY</b>	Med. Rural	Patricia Shepard
<b>WESTMINSTER</b>	Large Urban	Lauren Cockerill & Leigh Ramey
<b>SOUTHERN CHAFFEE CO./SALIDA</b>	Med. Rural	Susan Matthews
<b>AURORA PUBLIC LIBRARY</b>	Large Urban	Megan Ellis
<b>EAST MORGAN</b>	Med. Rural	Christy Bellis
<b>IGNACIO</b>	Small Rural	Hannah Horman
<b>GUNNISON</b>	Med. Rural	Kym MacNamara
<b>NORTHERN CHAFFEE CO.</b>	Med. Rural	Mary Beth Moser
<b>WRAY</b>	Small Rural	Shara Berghuis



## Appendix C. GRT Bi-monthly Librarian Phone Interview - Sample Questions

---

- How much time are you able to devote to your GRT project goals?
- How does GRT integrate with your other library tasks?
- What is your impression so far of the adequacy of your budget?
- Have you developed any new insights about FFNS in your community or the best methods to reach them?
- What have you found to be exciting and/or challenging when working with FFNs?
- What are you and your staff doing differently in your day-to-day activities with GRT funding?
- Did you need to develop new strategies for non-English speaking community members?
- Have you reached out to any of the 3 peer mentors for advice?
- What were you able to observe in terms of providers' engagement with the outreach and literacy activities and resources you have been able to provide? Please share an anecdote or two that provides evidence of a positive outcome for providers and the children in their care.
- What about informal partnerships between libraries, both GRT and non-GRT funded? How is that going?
- How is distribution or and/or circulation of the literacy bags/kits going?
- Has there been any change in library staffing related to GRT? If applicable, will you be participating again next year?
- What were the most valuable lessons learned in the last year? Prompt, if needed, related to FFNs in your community, to early literacy, library programs, time requirements)
- Confirm what we know about whether the library will or will not be participating again next year? How do you intend to sustain GRT, with or without funding next year and beyond?

THE FLUME 3-29-19

# Park County Libraries to offer Growing Readers Together program

New program offers resources for caregivers to promote early literacy activities

By Kelly Kirkpatrick  
Staff writer

Growing Readers Together, a pilot program which began in 2016, was recently expanded to include Park County Libraries. The library program, sparked by a grant from the Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation, provides early literacy activities and resources for family, friends and neighbors who care for children under the age of six.

"We appreciate the Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation's commitment to early literacy and their partnership with the Colorado State Library for implementation of the Growing Readers Together program," Head Librarian Pat Shepard said.

"In each of our Park County Public Library branches (Bailey, Fairplay, Guffey and Lake George), this grant provides funding for improving our materials available for children birth to five years of age. GRT also funds materials and activities for informal caregivers (family, friends or neighbors) of children birth to five years of age, we are creating custom tote bags of these high-interest materials to be given to informal caregivers at our spring events.

"In addition to regular story times and our 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten programs, each library branch will be hosting a GRT celebration event in April or May, so please check in with your local library branch for further details.

"It is an amazing concept, and the program promotes an extremely worthy cause. We look forward to enthusiastically helping to carry out the program's mission of assisting in early literacy for children within Park County."

Between 2016 and 2018, fifteen library systems piloted a variety of ways to engage with Family, Friend and Neighbor childcare providers through an enhanced focus on early literacy.

Building on these experiences, in its third year of operation, GRT is moving beyond the pilot phase and expanding into 24 library systems throughout Colorado, including Park County Libraries.

While the expansion means greater geographic reach, the overall goals of the project remain the same:

- FFN caregivers in Colorado will have the skills, confidence and resources to engage the children in their care with early literacy materials and activities daily.
- Public library staff in Colorado will have strategies to connect FFN caregivers in their area with early literacy services.
- CSL will develop state-level infrastructure for early literacy support to FFN caregivers and the children in their care.
- Children under six throughout the state will be exposed to language and literacy-rich experiences in informal childcare settings and at the library.

According to the 2013 report School Readiness for All: The Contribution of Friend, Family and Neighbor Care in Colorado, in 2013 an estimated 142,000 children under six experienced some type of unlicensed childcare, with an additional 160,000 receiving care from a stay-at-home parent.

For the report, FFN caregivers in eight Colorado communities participated in

See Readers, Page 8

## Readers

Continued from Page 4

a survey that revealed that in-home caregivers have strong interest in receiving training and resources to help them improve their knowledge and skills in educating and caring for young children, including the topics of child brain development, appropriate developmental milestones, enriching activities, and techniques to bolster early literacy.

FFN providers wished to receive such training and resources in informal environments with social interactions, rather than more formal classes. These findings all point to the excellent opportunity for public library staff to provide library services to FFN providers in their communities, with the ultimate goal of increasing the quality and quantity of early literacy activities that providers engage in daily with the children in their care.

GRT events will be offered at participating libraries. GRT events welcome those who care for children under six

in informal settings, such as neighbors who provide home childcare, grandparents, and others caring for young children who want to increase early literacy activities in their homes.

Caregivers can also meet others, gain new early literacy skills, and acquire fun early literacy activities and materials for young children to enjoy in their childcare home.

Along with food, fun, and fantastic activities to take home, caregivers will gain connections with others who can support them. Story time and craft activities will be provided for the children, while providers are enjoying these events.

More information about GRT can be obtained at [www.csl.state.co.us/odlib/grt/faq](http://www.csl.state.co.us/odlib/grt/faq), or by contacting Park County Public Libraries at 719-336-4299.

The mission of the Park County Public Libraries is to educate, encourage, enlighten and entertain. Park County Public Libraries are located in Fairplay, Bailey, Lake George and Guffey.

**Appendix E. GRT Libraries Invited to Participate in Sustainability Phone Interviews**

---

<b>LIBRARY SITE NAME</b>	<b>SIZE</b>	<b>LIBRARIAN/DIRECTOR NAME</b>	<b># YEARS</b>
<b>ALAMOSA PUBLIC LIBRARY</b>	Medium Rural	Holly Van Hoy	2
<b>CONEJOS COUNTY LIBRARY DISTRICT</b>	Small Rural	Maria DeHerrera	2
<b>JOHN C. FREMONT LIBRARY DISTRICT (FLORENCE)</b>	Medium Rural	Deborah Plonkey	2
<b>LA VETA PUBLIC LIBRARY</b>	Small Rural	Stephanie Masinton	1
<b>LAMAR PUBLIC LIBRARY</b>	Medium Rural	Cheri Aguilera	2
<b>LIMON MEMORIAL LIBRARY</b>	Medium Rural	Lucy Reimer	1
<b>LIMON BOOKMOBILE</b>	Medium Rural	Katie Zipperer	1
<b>PIKES PEAK LIBRARY DISTRICT</b>	Large Urban	Barb Huff & Evan Kendrick	2

## Appendix F. Sustainability Phone Interview Questions

---

1. First of all, I want to confirm that you participated in GRT funding for 2 years, is that correct?
2. What were some of the benefits of participating in GRT? (i.e. What early literacy materials did you purchase, what enhancements were you able to make to your children's area in your library, and what in library and outside library programs were you able to provide to FFNs?)
3. To what extent have you maintained the early literacy work you started at your library as a result of your participation in GRT?
4. Do you have any specific updates for me on GRT activities in the past 6-8 months since the funding ended?
5. Looking back, what are your most vivid recollections of the impact GRT funding had on FFNs in your community?
6. If there was an opportunity to participate in GRT funding again, would you participate? (Why or why not?) And, if so, would you do anything differently?
7. Is there anything you'd like to share about your GRT experience?

## Appendix G. Peer Mentor Interview Questions

---

1) Have you been contacted by any of this year's GRT librarians?

a) If so, how many times overall were you contacted representing which GRT sites?

b) And how (by phone, by e-mail, or in person)?

2) Did any librarian contact you multiple times?

For each contact, please respond to Qs 3-5:

3) What have been the most common question(s) you've been asked?

4) Have any "themes" arisen in your discussion(s) with the GRT librarians?

5) What were the results after you spoke with the GRT librarian(s)?

6) Would you have consulted a GRT Peer Mentor had you had the opportunity?

7) If a 4<sup>th</sup> year is funded, should CSL continue to engage Peer Mentors to assist continuing and/or newly awarded GRT librarians?

8) Is there anything else you'd like to mention?

9) Will you be joining us at the lunch celebration on August 21<sup>st</sup>?