

Increasing Reading Frequency to NICU Babies Through a Collaborative Read-a-thon Event (September 13-23, 2021)

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Background

Our NICU staff provide neurodevelopmentally supportive care for the babies in our unit. We also provide families with education and support that encourages neuroprotection and neuropromotion (nurturing encounters). Typical nurturing encounters include skin-to-skin holding (kangaroo care), hand hugging, cuddling, talking, singing, and reading.

We were invited to participate in the Babies With Books 2021 Read-a-thon. The Read-a-thon's purpose was:

- to promote early literacy and healthy brain development by increasing the amount all caregivers read aloud to babies,
- to help babies and families relax and enjoy time together through reading, and
- to hold a friendly competition between NICUs.

The Read-a-thon was held September 13-23, 2021.



Goals

We examined baseline data from March 2021, which showed our NICU babies received an average of 0.27 reading sessions per baby per 11-day period (the length of the Read-a-thon).

Our Goal: To increase the average number of reading sessions per baby per 11-day period from 0.27 to 3 by September 23, 2021.

Secondary Goal: to finish in the top 10 out of 101 NICUs participating in the Read-a-thon event.

Methodology

We encouraged families and staff to increase their reading to NICU babies by:

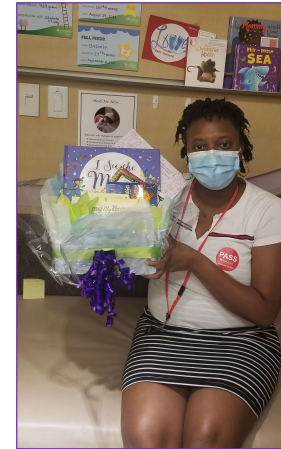
- raising awareness around the benefits of reading for healthy infant brain development,
- providing free reading materials to every family,
- building excitement around the Read-a-thon with family and staff draw prizes for reading.



Emileo and Adria, NICU family draw winner

Materials used:

- gift of a book for every baby,
- links to free e-books in over 50 languages,
- informational posters about the Read-a-thon for families and staff,
- four bookmarks with reading facts for families,
- a bookmark with reading facts and candy for staff,
- cards for families to decorate their babies' rooms and to share book recommendations in the family hallway,
- four starter library draw prizes for families,
- four bookstore gift card draw prizes for staff,
- a separate, staff-focused reading contest to promote reading for everyone, and
- lots of in-person chats to build awareness and excitement for reading!



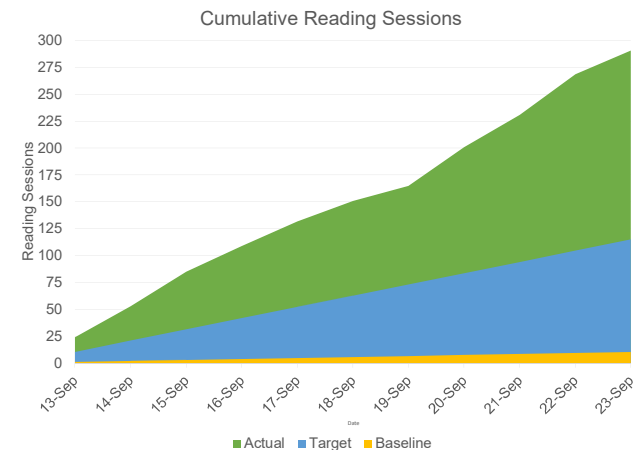
Lashana, NICU family draw winner

Results

Families responded positively to the reading education and materials, and were excited by the chance to win a starter library for their baby. Families also found it helpful to focus on a beneficial and enjoyable activity they could do with their baby.

Goal: We surpassed our goal of 3 reading sessions per baby. With an average census of 38.4 babies and 291 reading sessions during the Read-a-thon, we achieved 7.6 reading sessions per baby during the 11-day event.

Secondary Goal: We placed #37 out of 101 NICUs in the 2021 Read-a-thon.



Lessons Learned

- Families really embraced the boost in awareness and the excitement brought by the Read-a-thon event. They accounted for 67% of all reading sessions with babies during the 11-day period.
- COVID-19 restrictions meant it was not possible to host a kick-off party or share information about the Read-a-thon at group gatherings. If the situation remains the same next year, we will have a larger group of organizers who can promote the event through 1:1 chats with families and staff.
- The availability of reading materials in a baby's room made it easier for caregivers to read to them. We will encourage families to keep the free book from their NICU welcome bag in their baby's room so there is always a book to read.
- Due to an escalating 4th wave of COVID-19, our Cuddler volunteers could not safely return to the NICU for the Read-a-thon. We would greatly welcome their participation and hope they can read to babies in our 2022 Read-a-thon!

Next Steps

- Celebrate our Read-a-thon success with families and staff.
- Start planning our 2022 Read-a-thon by recruiting more organizers and securing supplies.
- Continue encouraging reading as a way to support babies' healthy brain development and to promote attachment with their families.

Acknowledgements

Sunnybrook's 2021 NICU Read-a-thon was organized by Karen Bong (graduate parent and NICU Family Support Specialist) and Luisa King (RN, IBCLC), under the coordination of Babies With Books.



We offer many thanks for the support from Lisa Sampson (RN, NICU Quality Improvement Project Leader), Beth Nolson (RN, IBCLC), Ophelia Kwakye (graduate parent and NICU Breastfeeding Peer Counsellor), Marilyn Hyndman (NICU Patient Care Manager), all the NICU families and staff who read to babies, and to Sunnybrook's NICU Physicians' Group for their generous sponsorship of prizes.