Language diversity

Children love learning in more than one language, which has long term benefits for literacy and for developing a sense of pride in one’s heritage.

- David A. says that his daughters sing songs in Creole that link them to their Haitian background.

- Julissye A. joined a Spanish-speaking church to link Sofia (8), Sarina (6), and Samuel (5) to their Honduran roots. This helped the family connect to a whole new community within Brooklyn.

- Evelyn V. said that her oldest daughter is teaching her youngest son, Jonathan, another language. “She’ll watch videos in Hebrew on YouTube and ask him to repeat words.”

Literacy is the ability to read and write. The path to literacy starts in infancy when families talk, sing, tell stories, and read books to children. Even kids who are too young to speak learn about literacy from watching and listening to the adults and children around them.

Brownsville families are literacy experts who make their children’s experiences rich in language. Several recently shared the ways they support their kids’ literacy wherever, whenever. Their tips match the advice that literacy professionals give for setting kids on the path to academic success.

Which of these do you do already? Which of your tips should United for Brownsville add to this list?
At home

Home is a child’s first and most important classroom. The families we spoke to discussed home routines that become bonding and learning experiences through books, songs, and play.

• Some caregivers talked about setting aside “storytime chairs”: special times and places just for books. Transitions like getting up or going to bed are easier when a book is involved, especially if the child gets to choose what to read.
  – Every morning, Evelyn V.’s son Jonathan (2) brings her his animal alphabet book. Though he’s too young to say the animal’s name, he can moo when she points and asks, “What sound does the cow make?”

• David A. says storytime brings him closer to his two young daughters, Davina (3) and Augusta (2), on busy days. “Any book where they get a chance to sit down or sit on my lap, they just love.”

• Books can be expensive. but Brownsvillians have tips to make them affordable.
  – Ruth H. gets discounted books from street vendors on Pitkin Avenue.
  – Evelyn V. and Audrey G. find deals in book club catalogs from school or stores like Sam’s Club and Costco.
  – The library is full of free books, other families, and helpful staff.

• Home literacy doesn’t need to involve books. Some families draw or use photos and magazine cutouts to make their own books. Others use alphabet magnets, posters, and labels to create word and vocabulary games.

On the go

The neighborhood is full of learning opportunities! Brownsville families engage infants, toddlers, and young children in literacy wherever they are. Some pack diaper bags with magazines, flash cards, and books for learning on the go.

• Shermaine A. says, “When I’m taking my five year-old, Melanie, to school, we play ‘I spy with my little eye’. This game teaches Melanie words for the world around her and makes trips with Mom more fun.

• On long waits for the B60, Ruth H. will point to signs and ask Anya (17), Olivea (12), and Savannah (3), “Which bus are we taking again?” As the bus approaches, she’ll ask them to read the display to make sure it’s the right one. Her kids learn numbers, letters, and how to get around.

• Other families make a game of finding colors, fruits, and vegetables at the supermarket; pointing out each letter of the alphabet in street signs and advertisements; or making songs part of every stroller ride.

In song

You don’t have to harmonize like Beyoncé or narrate like Morgan Freeman. Your voice is a foundation for your child’s speaking and reading no matter what it sounds like.

• Many families told us about special songs and rhymes they use to make daily tasks like changing diapers, bathtime, and meals more enjoyable.
  – Audrey G. says, “I recite the alphabet while Miguel (2), Ailani (4), and Analia (8) brush their teeth. They can’t stop until I sing it through three times.” This playful ritual helps children learn their ABC’s while following dentist recommendations.

• Music helps children recall complex information like letters and numbers.
  – Ashanti W.’s toddler, Callie (1), discovered a show on YouTube that teaches numbers and body parts through song. “Callie loves music and dancing” as a way to learn.