

“In the beginning, I assumed programs would go on after we left, Darling says, “but some would say, ‘well, the money is gone; how can we continue?’ Now, we help communities build their own program. It’s theirs. We get out of the way, and the baby bird flies. Programs we started have resulted in community-wide initiatives, state legislation, all kinds of things. It’s very gratifying. It was our partners asking those long-term questions that forced us to think about



the process in a different way.”

As for the future, Darling is hopeful.

“There was a time in education when we thought that if we just put more money into the system and did more, problems



would be solved,” she recalls, “but we did that and didn’t get the desired results. We’re asking different questions now; there are better discussions, better debates. That is encouraging to me.

“We need to focus on what we know

*Opportunity for educational success increases when families learn together.*

works, what research tells us works. Then let’s look at wraparound systems that need to be part of education, like home and family. If we work with families, we can overcome.” **KET**

## Hope for the future drives Toyota family literacy program

**THE TOYOTA FAMILY LITERACY** Program (TFLP) offers hope for parents and children, and for the nation’s future.

An initiative of the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) and funded by a \$3.2 million grant from Toyota, the program is designed to benefit all immigrant families but has a special concern for Hispanics. “These are hard workers with a strong work ethic, doing jobs our people don’t want to do,” explains Sharon K. Darling, NCFL president and founder. These look like positives now, but the future offers a different picture: Two-thirds of Hispanics live in poverty, and they record the highest drop-out rate.

“We’re not doing as good a job as we need to do to educate them. They’re at the bottom on achievement scores all through school, and when they reach the age to drop out, they do so. It’s not part of their culture for parents to talk to teachers or question the school and, in any case, parents do not speak the language. All of this will lead to a huge unskilled labor pool and not enough unskilled jobs for them. We have to capitalize on the strength of this culture: the strong family, the religious/ethical foundation. Otherwise, we miss our chance to build a positive future for everyone.”

Darling believes the answer lies in family literacy programs.

“Family literacy programs help parents and children,” she says. “Adults come to the classrooms with their children and learn. Family is such a strong part of their culture. If we can preserve that and educate both adults and children, we ensure that they can be our next generation of leaders.”

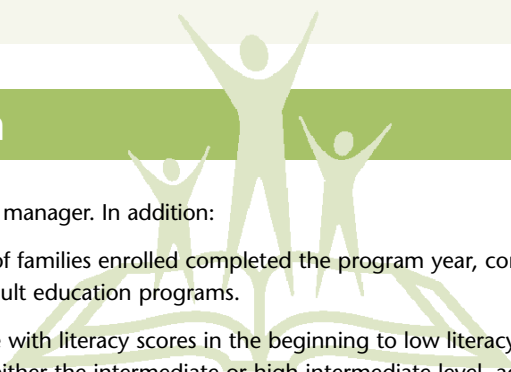
TFLP was implemented in August 2003 to increase the academic achievement of both children and adults. Programs were set up at three elementary schools in each of five cities: Chicago; Los Angeles; New York; Providence, RI, and Washington, D.C. Goals were to:

- meet the needs of English language learners (ELL) by addressing the population’s unique needs rather than retrofitting existing programs
- develop and share training and support materials
- use models to influence policy in support of family literacy

At the end of TFLP’s first year, several cities reported waiting lists at some program sites, according to Ginger Wilding, NCFL public

relations specialist project manager. In addition:

- More than 70 percent of families enrolled completed the program year, compared to 40 percent in typical adult education programs.
- Adults entered year one with literacy scores in the beginning to low literacy level and completed the year at either the intermediate or high intermediate level, according to National Reporting System standards (as measured by the CASAS Reading Instrument or the BEST oral language instrument).
- Teachers reported that TFLP children are succeeding at rates higher than children not enrolled in the program. For example, in overall academic performance, TFLP children were rated at 80.3 percent, vs. 71.8 percent for non-TFLP youngsters, and in likelihood of future success in school, TFLP children were rated at 91.7 percent vs. 86.1 percent for the non-TFLP group.



*Dr. Toyoda visits with family literacy students at Hazelwood Elementary School in Louisville.*

The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans periodically convenes experts who work to improve and expand learning opportunities for Hispanic families. Representatives from NCFL are regular participants in meetings and panel discussions hosted by the White House Initiative where TFLP is regularly referred to as a quality family literacy program designed to address the educational needs of Hispanic parents and their children. TFLP is only one of many NCFL programs focusing on family literacy, training for teachers, research and more.

Undereducated adults find increasing challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world of work, according to NCFL. For example, 75 percent of unemployed US adults have difficulty reading and writing, and 43 percent of low literacy adults live in poverty, compared to less than five percent of those with high-level skills.

If these numbers are to change, there must be strategies for strengthening families through education and moving them toward literacy and self-sufficiency, Darling says. “This is the key to breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty.”

To learn more about the National Center for Family Literacy, visit the website at [www.familit.org](http://www.familit.org). **KET**