



# Story Garden

Uplifting Individuals  
Strengthening Families  
Transforming Communities

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A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION  
OF ATD FOURTH WORLD'S STORY  
GARDEN IN GALLUP, NEW MEXICO

4THWORLDMOVEMENT.ORG



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# WHAT IS ATD FOURTH WORLD?

ATD Fourth World is a non-profit organization that works to overcome the injustices of persistent poverty and social exclusion by bringing together people from all walks of life, learning from people who face poverty every day, and running family and community projects.

It is staffed by an international Volunteer Corps dedicated to overcoming poverty through partnership with under-resourced individuals and communities.

In Northwestern New Mexico, ATD Fourth World actively participates in cross-sector coalitions and collaborative projects with both established stakeholders and everyday community members.

Together with these partners, we create innovative opportunities related to youth and adult education, the arts, technical skills, and meaningful service learning for community members from all walks of life.





# WHAT IS STORY GARDEN?

Story Garden is an inter-generational family literacy space that takes place weekly at the flea market in Gallup, New Mexico. Trained facilitators make books, puzzles, art activities and other educational resources available—free of charge—to families selling and buying goods at the market. Many of these families are low-income and have little access to uplifting educational programs and supportive social environments.

This market is a hub for the social and economic life of a population dispersed across a vast rural area. As such, it emerged as an ideal location for Story Garden. The flea market community is truly a community, taking shape each Saturday as vendors and visitors travel distances to come together—some driving 4 or 5 hours each way—and with a core population of consistent and long-term members.

Story Garden is truly a place of stories—stories found within our books and stories of life in our community: stories of struggle, hope, solidarity, and change.



# HOW DOES STORY GARDEN WORK?

Children and their families stop by for anywhere from five minutes to several hours. They float between various stations: reading, educational games and toys, a touchscreen computer, and artistic and creative activities. Materials reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of our area. Adult family members are encouraged to participate.

A trained team of long-term and volunteer facilitators hosts the space, interacts with and encourages children and their families, and builds relationships with families who attend over time, often for years. The facilitation team invests heavily in preparation, outreach, and reflective practice. Individual writing and team debriefs form the basis of this reflective practice approach, deepening our own learning and inspiring action choices.

Story Garden began in March 2012. Since then, thousands of children, adults, vendors, and visitors to the market have participated in or supported Story Garden, shaping and enriching it through their involvement.





# A PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

In 2016, we began a participatory evaluation of the first four years of Story Garden. The aim was to learn—directly from community members—what they, their children and their community gain from Story Garden. What has changed? What made that change possible?

The evaluation included quantitative data, found in the first pages of this presentation. The second section covers the analysis of changes pinpointed during the interview process, using questions that were developed through consultation with community members. Twenty-four individuals were interviewed at length, using an Appreciative Inquiry approach:

- Children
- Parents and grandparents (vendors or visitors)
- Vendors without participating children
- Staff of the Gallup Flea Market
- Volunteer facilitators from University of New Mexico (UNM) North Campus—Adult Basic Education

Three levels of change emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data: changes for the child, the family, and the community.



# LETS START WITH THE NUMBERS!

Between 2012 and 2016, **OVER 2,400** CHILDREN came to Story Garden at least once.

On average, EACH WEEK, we welcomed...

In 2012... **28** children each Saturday.

In 2013... **34** children each Saturday.

In 2014...**36** children each Saturday.

In 2015... **40** children each Saturday.

Each year, the number of NEW CHILDREN coming for the first time increased significantly:

In 2012... About **400** new children came.

In 2013... Over **500** new children came.

In 2014... About **700** new children came.

In 2015... Over **850** new children came.





# FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

What about the parents, grandparents and other adult family members? Their involvement is a key part of Story Garden!

Family members are invited to interact with their children or explore our books, art activities and computer games on their own. They are invited to rest, visit with family and friends, contribute ideas for Story Garden, and share their concerns and hopes.

Adults and elders in the community who come to the market without children are also welcome at, and enrich, Story Garden.

Adult attendance stayed about the same over our first four years—an average of 19 adults per week.





# LASTLY...

We meet families at Story Garden and then work with some of them outside of Story Garden times. For this accompaniment, we prioritize disadvantaged families facing multiple challenges. We always offer accompaniment that supports the family's own hopes and priorities. Some of things we do together are:

- Home visits and home workshops for more in-depth learning and support
- Going with a family to a weekly library program or special community event
- Giving families information and accompanying them to service providers to build on their hopes related to housing, food security, education, work, etc.

Over the first four years, we did this type of work closely and over an extended period of time with

**11 FAMILIES.**



# WHAT DOES STORY GARDEN BRING TO...



## THE CHILD

The people interviewed report children doing better in school, showing stronger friendships and family relationships, thinking creatively, and getting more involved in their own learning.



## THE FAMILY

The people interviewed report a change in the way they spend time with their children, and a change in the way they see others, both within their family and in the broader community.



## THE COMMUNITY

The people interviewed report less tension in relationships within the market community, and more friendliness, openness and peace within the flea market.



## THE CHILD

**"For that moment at Story Garden, they forget all their troubles and what they are going through."**

The mother of a family going through homelessness, explaining why her two children love coming to Story Garden



WHAT DOES STORY GARDEN BRING TO THE CHILD?

1. Social and Emotional Development
2. Cognitive and Intellectual Development
3. Creativity, Curiosity and Imagination
4. Opening a Window to the World

# THE CHILD: SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Families and observers attribute to Story Garden several aspects of social and emotional growth among children.

Children show higher self-esteem and confidence. They are less shy, more trusting, and more open-minded. Children talk more, are more active, and display more kindness to others. There are fewer tantrums and more resilience in the face of change. They become more patient. Children also exhibit more happiness, pride and enthusiasm to show what they made and talk about what they've done at Story Garden.



WHAT DOES STORY GARDEN BRING TO THE CHILD?

## Social and Emotional Development:

- Positive Attitude
- Self-Esteem
- Resilience and Change



## A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

A mother explained: "My daughter has a better attitude now, especially at school. She is more nice to kids now, way friendly. The teacher asked me what we were doing different. I told her we're not doing anything different [at home]. I told her I think it's on the weekend when she's with you guys."

A grandmother noticed: "There's a couple of children I've seen go to Story Garden, and they're not angry anymore. They're more at ease. There's no more foul language coming out of their mouths. One girl, she [used to be] frustrated with stuff. When I went back [to a later Story Garden], she sat there really good, doing it. She had patience. I think it comes from you guys being patient with them, teaching them how to be patient."

A mom and dad shared: "Our son is very kind-hearted and going to Story Garden brings out that kindness to where he is very nice to everybody and he is very helpful. He is a sensitive child, and I guess when he goes out there to Story Garden, he really gets to go ahead and be himself, and just be nice to everybody else. I think it's because it's open and all the kids are around, and I think he just got very comfortable with everybody that goes there."



# SELF-ESTEEM

A grandmother tells us: "I see a big difference in my grandkids' attitude changing. Before, my granddaughter was shy. She'd always say, 'They don't like me.' Now, it's like, 'Who cares?' I noticed that she's different. Her low self-esteem is not there anymore."

One mother found that her son gained the confidence to ask for help at school and communicate with his teacher:

"I noticed that my son is more comfortable at school, with how to act with the teachers. If he needs help with his work or if he has a question, they said he'll raise his hand. So I think he has that comfort level now. I always tell him, 'Son, if you don't understand, you got to ask the teacher or you got to raise your hand and tell him that you didn't understand.'

"Now he always tells me, 'I have to ask my teacher to slow down or to help me.' Now, sometimes my son says his teacher will sit next to him and explain more of it to him. When he started coming to Story Garden, he was more shy. After that, he opened up more and just interacted with the other kids. That's helped him with his communication."





## RESILIENCE & CHANGE

Some family members have noticed that children seem to deal better with change and bounce back more quickly when challenges arise.

One grandparent noticed: "My granddaughter has changed for the good. She learned to give people their space and now it's not always about her. She always wanted everything the same. She didn't want anything to change. I think what really helped her is learning that change is good. I noticed she's not throwing a tantrum like she used to.

"For certain things, I put her in the middle and said, 'Help us, we need help too. We don't have a mind like you because you're little, so we need a little mind to help our big minds. That means: voice your opinion.'"



# THE CHILD: COGNITIVE AND INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Families and children credit Story Garden with nurturing aspects of the child's cognitive and intellectual growth.

Many find that children gain the confidence to approach reading with less fear and frustration. Others note an overall improvement in school performance and, notably, an increased sense of engagement and personal agency in their own learning.

"My daughter was in special ed through last year. She's not anymore. I think it's because she's doing better with you guys," one mother told us.



## WHAT DOES STORY GARDEN BRING TO THE CHILD?

### Cognitive and Intellectual Development:

- Reading Skills
- Finding Joy in Reading
- School Performance
- Fine Motor Skills
- Engaged Learning



## READING SKILLS

A mother shared: "With my daughter, I've seen lots of improvements with her reading. We try to have her read more because she stutters a lot. We had her checked for that, and they said that her mind works faster than her mouth, so that's why she stutters so much. Reading a book calms her more. They told us to have her read books, and when she comes to Story Garden, she says she reads lots of books. Now she's started to buy books from the store and read them over and over. I am pretty sure she gets that from being here at Story Garden."

When asked what she gets out of Story Garden, her daughter added: "I learned that I am a better reader. I probably started at Story Garden when I was about six. Now, I'm gonna be nine. Reading the books actually helped me catch up with my reading in school."

A grandparent has noticed changes too: "Two years ago, my granddaughter was at the 48th percentile in reading. Then last year, she got a certificate for 'Most Improved Reading.' She is at the 86th percentile now. She really improved in her reading since Story Garden helped her with the books. I'm so proud."



# FINDING JOY IN READING

Many parents speak about their children simply enjoying reading more. Some attribute this to our emphasis on interest and choice, rather than obligation:

"To me, Story Garden gives them a choice to pick what books they want to read. If they want to pick an easy book, they can read an easy book. This freedom challenges them to read hard ones. There's no, 'You're in the fourth grade so you only read fourth grade level books.' You guys let them be free about it. You guys don't judge them. That's what I like about it."

Those words come from a grandmother who is often a volunteer facilitator at Story Garden, and who excels in living out the non-judgmental approach she describes:

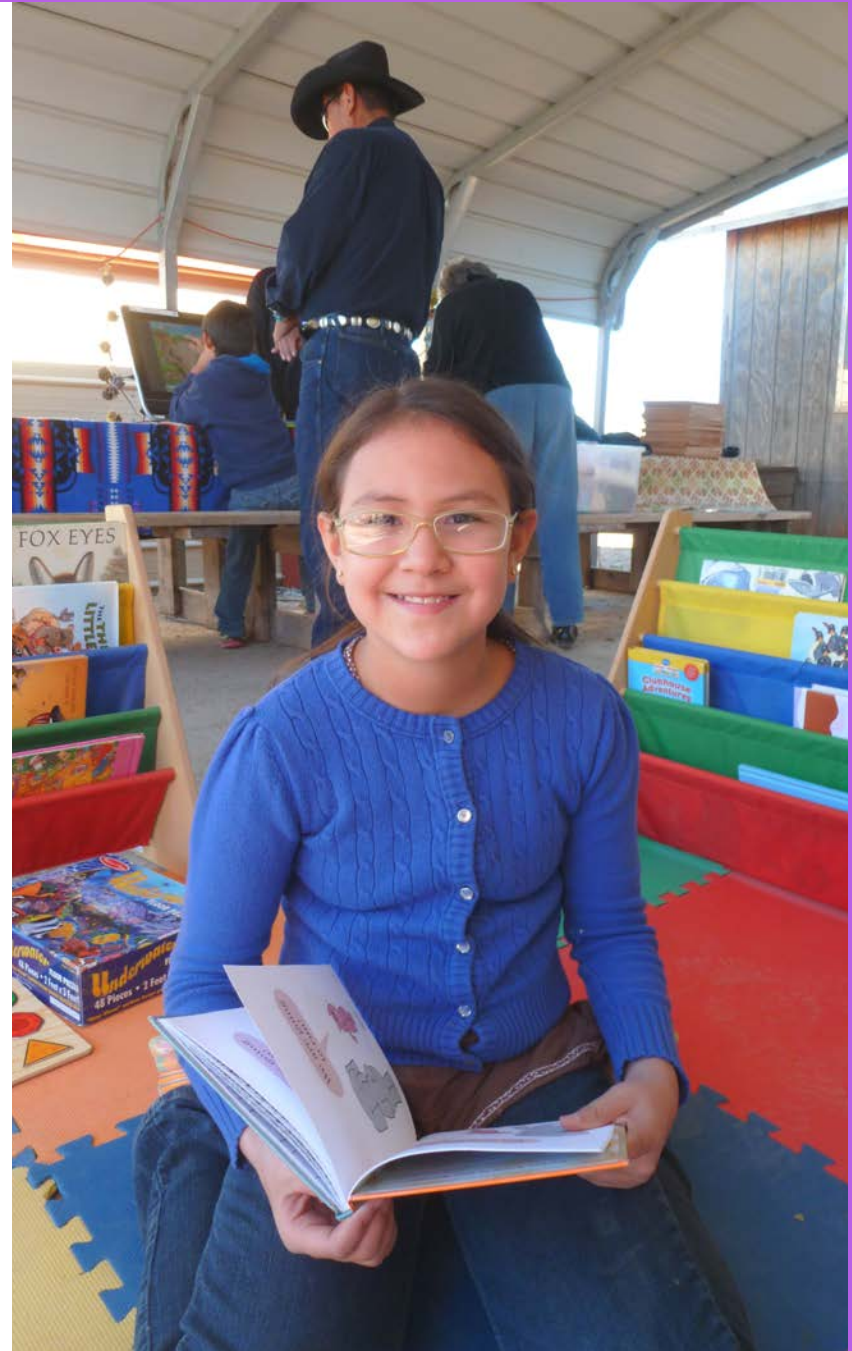
"My granddaughter's friend was stiff and tensed up about reading. I saw her facial expression, and I said, 'Go ahead and read it.' I knew how she felt about reading. She hesitated. I said, 'What word don't you know? Don't ever be afraid to say you don't know this word. Ask someone, and I guarantee some of us don't know the word either.' Then she was relaxed and comfortable. Her body language changed. She got comfortable reading."



# SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

A mother shares: "The puzzles helped my son with his memory. He's diagnosed with that short-term memory problem. Now the school says his memory is improving. They test him on sight words. He is already at fifth grade level, they said." (He is in 4th grade).

Another mother explains: "My daughter had low grades when she started at Story Garden. She had a hard time reading too. I tried to teach her how to do her math but she just gets mad at you or she doesn't want to do it like that. After she started going to Story Garden, she's picking up all those things: doing her math good, a lot of drawings and she reads a lot now. She does her homework all the time and she does it herself. She was in special ed through last year. She's not anymore. I think it's because she's doing better with you guys. To me, she's learning a little bit more. That's what I like about Story Garden."





## FINE MOTOR SKILLS

Both parents and observers have noted, often with surprise, how adept preschool age children are at interacting with the many tools and resources at Story Garden.

A mother put it this way: "I like the way your staff interacts with all the kids, like when you help them with the computer. I was amazed at this one little girl. She could get on that thing (computer) and she could go to the games. I asked her dad, 'How old is she?' She's almost three. I was watching her and I was like, wow!"

A grandparent of a preschooler shares: "I like the part when you would come in and visit us (home visits). That had a lot of impact on my granddaughter because now the preschool teacher brags about that: that she's really mature for her age, that she knows all the textures—the rough, the soft—the colors, the numbers. She can cut pretty good with the scissors. The teachers are like, 'Where did you learn to cut?' She knows more than the other little kids do and that's what you guys taught her."



# ENGAGED LEARNING

One grandparent observes the learning passing from adults to older children to younger ones:

"What I noticed, with Story Garden, is my older granddaughter reading to the younger one. She puts my younger granddaughter in front of her, and she'll read to her. The younger one is role playing that too. Do you remember that one Saturday they made the bats? My older granddaughter copied them [at home]. She did the bat with the circle and had the bat wings on. It was awesome. She was showing my younger granddaughter who would then show her dolls. So it's going down, the role playing."

A mom and dad shared: "They love the crafts because they always come up with something different. And it's different compared to what they do at school. So I am like, 'They should be doing this at school!' I think it's just certain materials that they don't get because the school funding is pretty short. But it's not just that: You guys come up with different ideas. I mean the stuff that you guys do is so unique! Our daughter takes all the arts and crafts she does with you, she takes them to school to show them, saying to the teacher, 'Try to do this! This would be awesome.'"





## THE CHILD: CREATIVITY, CURIOSITY & IMAGINATION



WHAT DOES STORY GARDEN  
BRING TO THE CHILD?

**Creativity, Curiosity and  
Imagination:**

- Unleashing Creativity
- Sparking Curiosity
- Thinking Outside the Box
- Art Skills
- Resourcefulness
- Pride & Joy Through Art



## UNLEASHING CREATIVITY

"There are youth here who have artistic talent but no one will ever know it, unless they get the chance to develop it."

Community member

Many parents and visitors to Story Garden have remarked on the effect the space has on children's creativity. They point out how this opening of the child's creative instincts seems to spill over into other areas, including creative thinking and more curiosity about the world around them.

"With our daughter, Story Garden sparked her creativity. Before, she wasn't into the whole arts and crafts, but now since she's been going to Story Garden, she is really into trying any type of art. She does a lot of drawing now. Before, she was never drawing or creating much of anything or trying to design things. That really came up once she started with you guys. Her creativity just came out."



## SPARKING CURIOSITY

Some parents and grandparents say that Story Garden helped unleash their children's curiosity about the world around them, while stimulating their interest in trying new things at home.

A mom and dad describe it this way: "Our kids tend to come home from Story Garden asking more questions. There are certain things that you guys do, and they're like: 'What's this? How does it work? How do we do this?' The crafts, the games, where they all come back saying, 'Mom, we gotta play this game! Look at this game we played over there!'"





## THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

Linked with increased creativity and curiosity, some parents notice a spillover into highly creative thinking from their child, leading to deep engagement in their own learning.

One grandparent describes: "Story Garden gives children a choice. It helps them to realize that they can think outside the box and use their imagination. To me, that's them creating their own activity; its theirs, what they created out of the box. Their minds expand further. In art, my granddaughter even got a certificate. The art teacher said, 'You have a creative mind.'

"At school, my granddaughter was using her hands like a calculator. The teacher said, 'What are those dots for?' She answered, 'It helps me with my math.' The teacher was amazed that she was thinking out of the box—those are the words she used—where her mind was way out there bringing her information in her own way. She had a system."





## ART SKILLS

Story Garden is a space for both individual art and collective art. Many vendors are artists and some of them have shared their skill with the children, creating some of our most successful art activities.

A vendor at the flea market told us: "What I like is you give kids a chance to develop skills through different crafts. I'm sure the kids do stuff with you that they've never done before, things they don't do at home."

A mother tells us about her daughter's progress with her art: "She's doing really good in colors right now. She does a lot of drawing at home. It's good. I like it. Back in the days, she used to draw her horses like stick people. Right now, she's good in that. She knows how to draw wolves, howling at the moon and all that. I think she's good. I think she's getting a lot of ideas from you guys."



# RESOURCEFULNESS

Some parents point out skills and creativity that their child developed at Story Garden and that they now use to help the family sell art at the flea market. One vendor-artist explains:

"My daughter does a lot of helping with my arts too. She does a necklace and makes it the way she wants it. She does the bracelets too. She helps me with the dream catchers, with the strings. She does the bead work on these. She does her own colors. I usually do all the fire colors on mine, all of it the same colors. She does a lot of different colors."

One dad tells us: "Ever since my sons have been coming to Story Garden, when they go to the park, they'll see something on a tree—a pine cone or a leaf—and automatically take it to make something out of it. They might find a rock, and color it with crayons to make it into an animal."





## PRIDE & JOY THROUGH ART

A mom and dad tell us: "Our kids keep lots of stuff they made with you. I am sure my daughter tells her teacher what you do at Story Garden, because she has taken the arts and crafts for show and tell, saying: 'I got to go show them!' I say, 'Yeah, show them! Cause it was awesome!'"

A mother speaks about her daughter's pride: "She brings her arts and craft stuff to me. I ask, 'What did you guys do?' And she tells me about everything. She'll say, 'I think Story Garden is a good idea for me.' She's happy. She's got all her stuff at the house, hanging up in her room and all that. Yeah, she kept a lot of it."





## THE CHILD: OPENING A WINDOW TO THE WORLD

Children and their families speak of the joy of meeting new friends from other places and cultures, the sense of curiosity and adventure that comes from discovering books and people from around the world, and the exposure to skills that form the foundation of meaningful employment.

A vendor says: "What we need to do is show the children that home is safe and home is right here, but the world is out there too. And I've noticed that a lot of your books show places other than Gallup, other than the United States, which is good. It's important our children learn that it's a big world, that it can be a fun world."



WHAT DOES STORY GARDEN BRING TO THE CHILD?

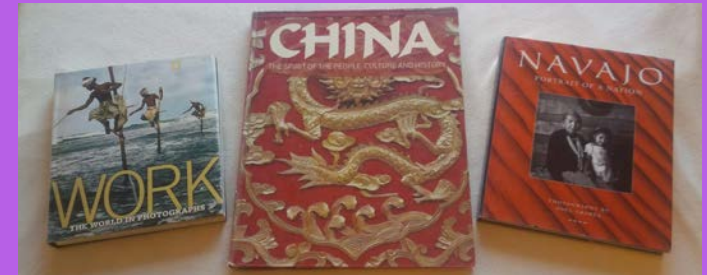
### Opening a Window to the World:

- Exposure to New Places & Ideas
- New Friendships
- Skills for the World of Work

# EXPOSURE TO NEW PLACES AND IDEAS

One grandfather has spent many hours devouring the illustrated books we bring on many subjects. "Bring more new books," he told us. "I like to dream."

A vendor observed: "It's like, you [a French facilitator] talk about France and your accent is different than these children are used to. And the young man that comes out and works with the children, it's totally different than what they're used to. Women are mostly the teachers and the caregivers. And we do need to express that men are just as good at it and also just as caring, just as capable of reaching out and giving a child an experience that they're going to grow with. It prepares them for the world, the world that they actually have to live in."



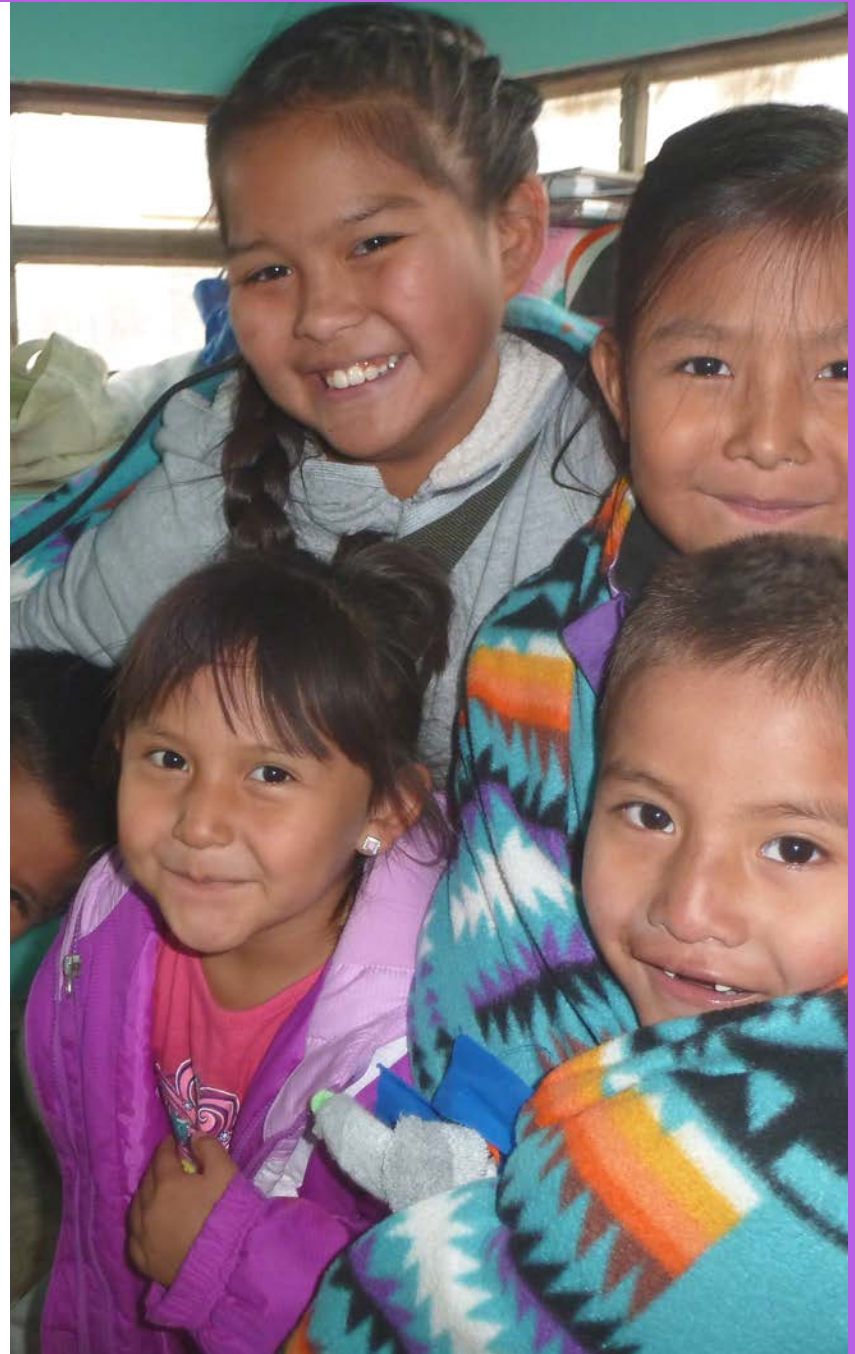
## NEW FRIENDSHIPS

Children, parents and observers alike mention the place of friendship at Story Garden.

In one child's words: "I usually feel happy at Story Garden. I made friends here. I wish I could just see most of my friends at school come too, and some of my teachers."

A man resting at Story Garden watched a group of children build something together with Lincoln Logs. Surprised by it, he asked, "Are all these kids related?" When we said no, he added, "I've never seen kids working together like that when they weren't family."

A parent and volunteer facilitator put it this way: "I wouldn't have imagined that it would be so wonderful to meet other kids and to interact with other people. It was really amazing and I'm really thankful that I got the chance to do it."





# SKILLS FOR THE WORLD OF WORK

One vendor, an observer of Story Garden since its beginning, notes that it's a space where the communication skills, social skills and commitment necessary in the working world can be experienced and practiced:

"You're steady. You're consistent. And that's part of what children need: people that are consistent. And that means standing out here in the mud. It's not just showing up when the sun shines and when you want to. Because if that's the way things work, then that's the experiences the children get too: 'I can do it whenever I want and if I don't want to do it, I don't have to do it.' And when you go out into the work-a-day world, that doesn't work. You have to show up every day to work. Which is why we need to teach our children those things now. And that's learning, 'Yes, thank you, may I,' and all the new ideas, not just in their own community. Because it's a big world. And if you just have your own community to bring from, then when you go out into that big world, you get surprises that you weren't ready for. And if we can give our children a little taste of everywhere, it's an experience that they're going to grow with."



## THE FAMILY

"My family met ATD Fourth World at Story Garden. It made me think about how my family is like a garden itself. And nurturing it is a lot of responsibility. When my family met ATD Fourth World, we had a story of our own. I really wanted my kids to learn even though we were going through hardships and hard times. We're not the only family struggling. We just want to encourage other families that are struggling to stay strong and keep going."

**A father from Story Garden**



## WHAT DOES STORY GARDEN BRING TO THE FAMILY?

1. Positive Interactions
2. Pride Among Family
3. Parental Support and Resilience
4. Fostering Agency
5. Strengthening Family Ties During Parent-Child Separation
6. Volunteer Facilitators: Enriching Their Families

# POSITIVE INTERACTIONS

Some families point out that Story Garden gave them ideas and inspiration to change the way they organize their family time at home:

"Since we've been doing Story Garden, it cut back on their TV time. There's reading, art work... I even bought a glue gun. My granddaughter's showing me what you guys have taught her. So she's teaching me."

One volunteer facilitator from UNM Adult Basic Education speaks about her and her husband's experience preparing an origami activity for Story Garden and how it created a positive experience for the whole family:

"My kids and my younger sibling helped my husband do the origami and they really got into it. They were doing it as a family activity, which I really thought was sweet. I watched them and I really enjoyed it. It brought us all together at one table. Being at Story Garden gave me the idea to interact more with my kids."





## PRIDE AMONG FAMILY

Adult family members often note with joy how Story Garden creates the conditions for them to feel and show their deep pride in their child:

"To me, as a parent, what she does at Story Garden, it brings herself out in the artwork and she puts herself into the artwork. So, even if it's something simple, I want to put it up to show it. I'm gonna show her I'm proud of what she made. With me, I was the oldest. I did not have a childhood life because I had to cook, clean, wash... I was the parent at the age of 7, 8, 9... So with my grandkids, I won't let them do that. With appreciating their artwork, I'm gonna take pride. I'm gonna show it. I'm gonna praise them."



## PARENTAL SUPPORT & RESILIENCE

Many parents and grandparents spoke about how Story Garden gives them a chance to catch their breath, whether they're enjoying some positive time with their child there, getting something done for the family while their child is busy at Story Garden, or taking a much needed break for themselves.

As one parent explains: "When our kids go to Story Garden, it's really nice cause you get that peace and quiet for a second while they're out there having their fun, and I get some stuff done. It's nice to know that they're safe and I trust everybody there."





## PARENTAL SUPPORT & RESILIENCE

One mother said that she really appreciates what the space offers her son, who is autistic and doesn't do well in classroom settings. Overwhelmed by the challenges of high medical bills and the strain and exhaustion of living out of their vehicle, she explains that the people involved in Story Garden give her son the one-on-one attention he needs, while she can take a breather, walk around the flea market, and check on her son from time to time.

A volunteer facilitator from UNM Adult Education noticed: "It really is an interesting place to spend time with your family even though you don't have much money to spend. It's always a place where you can just enjoy and relax and feel safe. It is really a good environment to be around."



## FOSTERING AGENCY

People interviewed report that children and adult family members learn by observing the way facilitators interact with children. One grandmother discusses the impact of Story Garden on the way she raises her grandchildren:

"When it comes to you guys, there's a couple of hours where she can come to you and say, 'Can you help me read or help me do this?' and you guys go ahead and help her. It's different because as a grandparent I'm usually in the kitchen doing something. I'm getting to a point where I'm catching myself. I'll turn off the stove and dinner can wait and I'll go help her. So I'm learning that as I see what you guys do because I watch how you deal with the kids. I'm learning to put stuff down and say, 'OK, I can help. What do you want me to do?' Or 'Can you show me?'"





## STRENGTHENING FAMILY TIES DURING PARENT-CHILD SEPARATION

Some families speak of Story Garden as a space for joyful, positive times with their children during a painful period of separation, often when children are placed in foster care.

A mother told us one Saturday that she was on her weekly visitation with her daughter who is placed in foster care. She spoke with a facilitator about her sadness and despair. Without resources and sleeping in her car nightly, she had nowhere to take her daughter to enjoy a short time together. She said she was happy to find Story Garden. She quietly watched her daughter read and play. "It's great what you guys are doing," she said.



## STRENGTHENING FAMILY TIES DURING PARENT-CHILD SEPARATION

Another family went through two years of separation from their children, who had been participating in Story Garden every Saturday before being placed in foster care.

During those two years, we brought Story Garden activities to them, in their town two hours away, to give some continuity to the children, support the parents, and provide a context for the parents to demonstrate their strengths to their case worker.

The mother said at the time: "We only get two hours of supervised visitation with them per week. It has to be a fun time for the kids." She and her husband say that Story Garden helped make these short visits festive, and helped them to hold back their tears until the kids had left with their case worker, so their children wouldn't see them cry. Today, the family is back together and comes regularly to Story Garden.





## **VOLUNTEER FACILITATORS: ENRICHING THEIR FAMILIES**

Among the positive changes that parents and grandparents see within their families after participating in Story Garden, there is a subgroup of changes specific to volunteer facilitators from the community. Most of the volunteer facilitators interviewed came to Story Garden just once or twice to volunteer their time. They did this through a partnership with University of New Mexico (UNM) North Campus, whereby Adult Education students become service learners. Many of these volunteers are parents or grandparents, and the strongest impacts they drew from this experience are related to positive relationships within their own families.



**WHAT DOES STORY  
GARDEN BRING TO THE  
FAMILY?**

### **Volunteer Facilitators: Enriching Their Families**

- Self-Confidence
- Re-Awakening the Joy of Learning
- Closer Ties With Their Children
- Children See Parents in a Positive Light



# SELF-CONFIDENCE

Volunteer facilitators speak about feeling their self-confidence increase through their involvement at Story Garden. One UNM student and grandmother:

"Growing up, I was like Cinderella: 'Do this, do that, can't go here, can't go there.' I would hide behind my brothers so my mom won't hit or spank me. I didn't have any friends. So you could say I was living it hard when I was a child.

"At Story Garden, at first, I blocked myself out from everybody because I was scared, I was nervous. I told myself, 'You won't be able to do it. You can't do it.' But then, as the morning kicked in, I loosened up. Then I wasn't scared anymore. I was reading to the kids over here. I was reading over there. I kept reading and that's the most wonderful experience I had. When I know I can do it and I have positive people around me who say, 'You can do it,' then I can do it. And that's what I did. It brought out my confidence."



# RE-AWAKENING THE JOY OF LEARNING

Volunteer facilitators from UNM Adult Education reconnect with the joy of learning with their own family.

One woman explains: "I really liked it because I like reading to kids. I use to read to my own kids a lot."

A father speaks about sharing with his children what he experienced at Story Garden: "I brought some material back [home]—like the origami, the billy goat activity—and my kids really got into it too and they started making their own plays. I think it's good."

A grandfather shared: "I wasn't a great parent to my own kids. But now here I am reading to children. I didn't know I had so much to give."





## CLOSER TIES WITH THEIR CHILDREN

Volunteer facilitators from the community say that the volunteering experience brought them closer to their own children. One father explains:

"Everything that I am learning from Story Garden, I am telling my kids about how it is. I think it's great too because I am communicating with my kids at the same time. It's getting me closer to my kids. I think that's what gets us together. I see it now, I see things on a different level."





## CHILDREN SEE PARENTS IN A POSITIVE LIGHT

Volunteer facilitators sense that their children see them differently through their involvement in Story Garden. One mother describes her experience:

"I really didn't have the confidence to do what I did out there: to read in front of those kids. I'm not a very good reader. It was something I was really scared of. But when I did it, I felt really good about myself."

She explains how her daughter was surprised that her mom was able to facilitate Story Garden and how proud she was that her daughter could see her that way: "It was like, 'Mom, you're actually doing something like that? It doesn't sound like you. You don't really interact with other kids, maybe my friends but no one else. You're actually doing that?' I want to show her that we did have time with the kids and that we did go out to Story Garden and we did what we said we were gonna do and it was really fun."



# THE COMMUNITY

"I noticed that you talked to everyone, when you were first here. You talked to the adults. You talked to the children. You talked to the managers of the flea market. You talked to everyone. And everyone had a different question or reason why you were out here. Because it wasn't something that the flea market had ever experienced: a group wanting to come out and sit and play and actually help the children to learn and to be. It was something totally different for the flea market. And the flea market has been here a long time. And it's changed in a lot of ways."

Vendor and Grandmother



## WHAT DOES STORY GARDEN BRING TO THE COMMUNITY?

1. A Safe, Positive Space
2. A Relaxed, Friendly Atmosphere
3. Interacting Across Generations & Languages
4. Seeing Struggling Families in a Positive Light

## A SAFE, POSITIVE SPACE

Through interviews of parents and staff, we discovered the prevalence of fear and worry around the children's safety in the flea market before Story Garden began. A vendor and staff member remembers what it was like before Story Garden:

"Mostly what the kids would do on a Saturday is gang up into little groups and they would climb onto everything that was climbable out there. They were not supervised. The moms and the dads were busy selling their wares and their foods or whatever. They did not have time to watch the kids so they would just let loose on the flea market. I remember getting some kids off that mountain up there—three or four-year-olds—because they'd be out there climbing it. One could lose their footing. So for this to happen—to see this kind of interaction with the kids and have them be somewhere other than running around—it's positive, it's good. After 30 years at the flea market, this is the first time I have seen kids settle down and do something."





## A SAFE, POSITIVE SPACE

Parents and vendors say that Story Garden helps channel the children's energy into something positive. One parent spoke about not letting his children go far from him because of bullying and fighting. He added, "When you guys are there, you don't allow none of that to go on." When we explained that almost no discipline is necessary at Story Garden, his wife added, "That's because they are busy doing something else, and they're like, 'I want to finish this!' It gives the kids the opportunity to go out and do something."

A vendor put it this way:

"This is actually doing something towards educating the kids and keeping their mind busy. Kids with nothing to do, we used to have them out there all the time, and they can be little terrors when they have nothing to do. It's an empty mind and it needs stimulation. I can see the parents, at first apprehensive and then they just relax. As soon as they know what's going on [at Story Garden], their shoulders drop, they go into relax mode and they're happy."



# A RELAXED, FRIENDLY ATMOSPHERE

A staff member spoke about changes he has seen at the flea market since Story Garden began:

"The relationship between staff and vendors was tense. The vendors stayed to themselves, and the atmosphere was often difficult. Parents and staff worried constantly about the children's safety in the market.

"Now, actually, since you all have been there, we know where the kids are going, and we know they're gonna be safe and we know they're gonna have fun. So we, as staff, are more comfortable. And their parents, I think, feel that way too, and they can relax a little more because they have that confidence in you all. The vendors are more approachable now. They're more open towards us. The atmosphere is friendlier. The atmosphere has changed a lot since Story Garden began."





## INTERACTING ACROSS GENERATIONS & LANGUAGES

Story Garden is truly an inter-generational space, often hosting three generations of a family spending time together. Many elders come on their own, watching children play or looking at illustrated books, some of which are in Navajo or Spanish, while others cover Puebloan stories or share traditions from the cultures of the area.

One father and volunteer facilitator puts it this way:

"What Story Garden brings to the flea market is mostly language. Everybody that goes there has that second language and first language. It's so cool that the elders want to know how to read a book. I saw an elder trying to work the computer, and a little boy was helping her. The boy didn't know the answers, so I had to help her too. So it seems like (...) Story Garden is mostly communication."



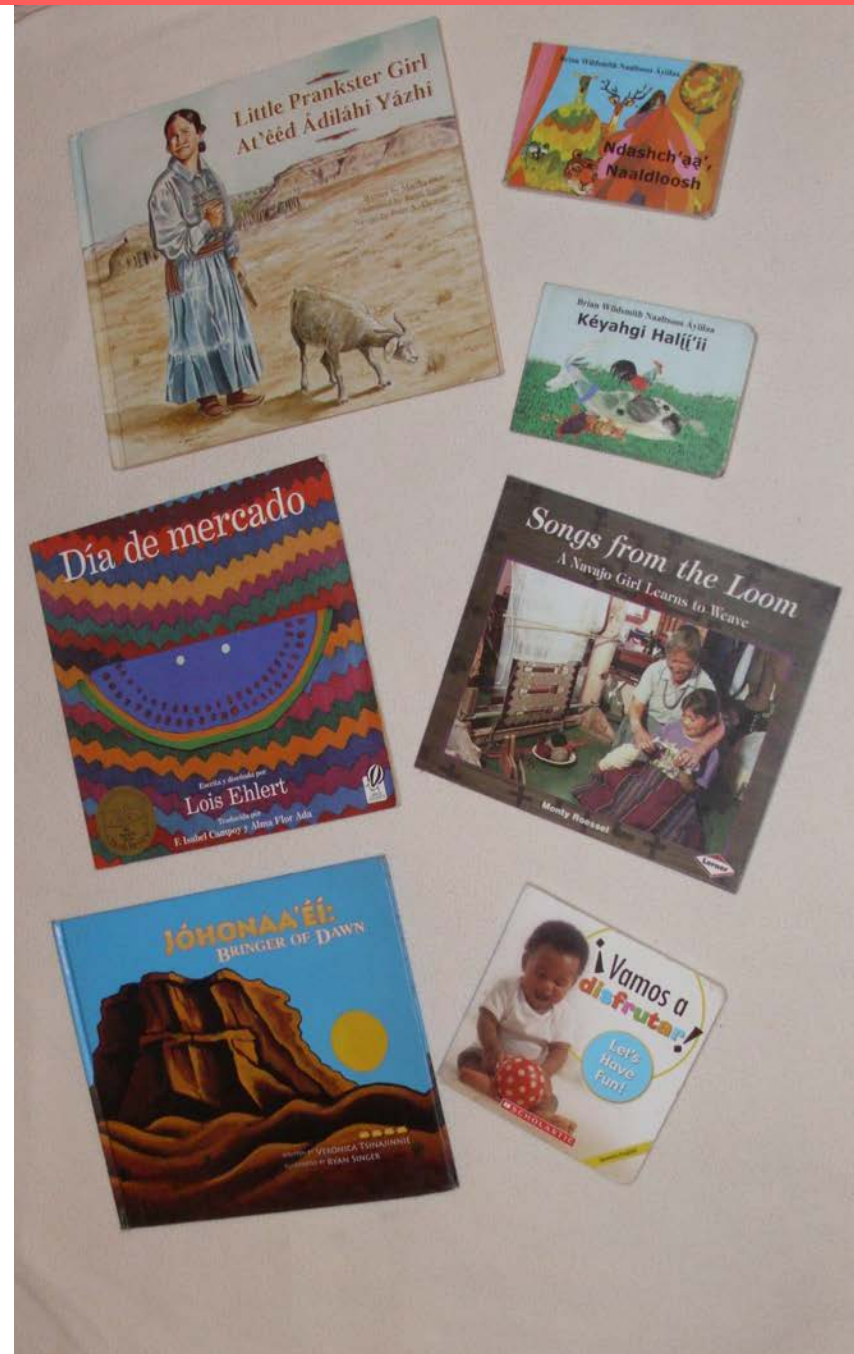


## INTERACTING ACROSS GENERATIONS & LANGUAGES

"I'm very happy that you have these Navajo books that I can show my grandchildren," said one Navajo grandmother. She said she didn't know there were books written in Navajo and she wants to buy some for her grandkids!

An elder who participated as a volunteer facilitator explains the role that Story Garden could take in keeping the Navajo language alive:

"From the start, I really got into Story Garden because the group decided for me to read in Navajo. Our kids, they understand it but they don't really know how to speak Navajo back to you. So I think it's kind of important that we read to the kids and the seniors and those people out there at the flea market in Navajo."



## SEEING STRUGGLING FAMILIES IN A POSITIVE LIGHT

A volunteer facilitator found that she was discovering a different side of community members through Story Garden:

"I've seen several people come to Story Garden that I've seen around town. When you look at a person, you think, 'They probably don't spend time with their children,' and automatically you'll judge them by how you've seen them talk to their kids in the store. But it isn't really like that when you actually get to meet the person and you see them at Story Garden. You see a different side of somebody. It's really amazing how you could see other people just come and join their kids—even if they're busy or just don't have the time in the world—they still come to interact with their children. And I think you guys have done that a lot for other people and it's really amazing."





# UPDATES & PERSPECTIVES

## UPDATES & PERSPECTIVES: STORY GARDEN BEAUTIFICATION

With the help of several vendors, and a group of students from UNM North Campus-Adult Basic Education, the Story Garden space has been literally transformed over the past two years! We now have a beautiful ocean-themed trailer and a pergola to protect from the sun, wind and snow.

A vendor donated the trailer, and community members volunteered their time to sand, paint and repair it. UNM students, led by an elder who is a skilled carpenter, designed and built the pergola. Vendors and parents continue to regularly support the Story Garden space through in-kind and monetary donations, always a big support and important sign of the collective ownership of the Story Garden space.



Before... and After!





## UPDATES & PERSPECTIVES: A SECOND STORY GARDEN

In 2013, A grandmother and vendor at the flea market invited ATD Fourth World to bring Story Garden to her community, Gamarco, NM, just outside of Gallup. Community members suggested a park on the main road in Gamarco for the location of the weekly Story Garden.

In 2017, through another grandmother met through Story Garden in Gamarco, we began a Story Garden in a second location, much further in the community, and hosted in the yard of this grandmother, who co-facilitates the program.

In 2018, we plan to experiment with making our Gamarco Story Garden mobile, in order to reach parts of the community that haven't been effectively reached yet. We are looking forward to this learning process!



Gamarco Story Garden, at the park & in a yard



## UPDATES & PERSPECTIVES: PARTNERSHIP WITH UNM ADULT EDUCATION

UNM North Campus Adult Education students and staff have been enriching Story Garden in many ways over the years. The stories told from their perspective, relayed in this evaluation, inspired both partners to think of new ways to keep working together around community engagement and positive social change.

We have three exciting projects in 2018 with this goal:

- A training series, whereby Adult Education students learn about and enrich Story Garden through workshops and hands-on involvement at the Story Garden
- A graphic novel writing and illustration project with men at the McKinley County Adult Detention Center, as a tool for healing and communicating with family during a period of incarceration
- Northfest! A new, and now annual, community literacy and arts event hosted by GallupArts, UNM North Campus, and ATD Fourth World in Gallup's Northside Community





## UPDATES & PERSPECTIVES: DISCOVERY EXHIBITS

ATD Fourth World has been designing and building mobile educational exhibits since 2014. The exhibits are designed around state standards for science education and were built with the participation of mid and high school students in the area. We loan these exhibits, free-of-charge, to local schools, to encourage hands-on, fun learning in communities that, otherwise, have little access to it.

The Dinosaur Adventure and Space Adventure Exhibits have welcomed a total of over 4,900 visitors in 11 elementary schools. These are all schools in communities in which children from Story Garden live. Another 800 community members have interacted with the exhibits through two public libraries and a community art gallery.

In 2017 and 2018, we have been prioritizing outreach to some of the most rural, isolated schools attended by children at Story Garden. This is a trend we will continue and deepen in the coming years.



# THANK YOU!



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