

# Executive Summary: Real Dads Read Study

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Barbershops represent an important resource for African American men, with barbers being widely regarded as trusted community members. Real Dads Read is a book-flooding program that leverages this resource by placing “little libraries” in barbershops. As part of the Real Dads Read program, barbers are encouraged to (1) talk with fathers about the importance of sharing books with their children, (2) engage fathers and children in book reading while they wait for haircuts, and (3) invite fathers to take books home to increase their home libraries. Books are intentionally chosen to be culturally relevant for African American families and represent a wide range of reading levels.

This study examines barbers' implementation of the Real Dads Read program in 21 barbershops that were randomly sampled from 80 shops participating in the program that were located in Atlanta, Georgia. During a semi-structured interview, barbers shared information about themselves, their understanding and implementation of the program, and insights into ways to best support fathers with sharing books with children. Interviews were conducted at barbershops at a time convenient for barbers. Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using an online qualitative coding software. Sociolinguistic analyses proceeded in phases and were guided by research questions. Findings demonstrate that barbers had varying degrees of knowledge about, and therefore

buy-in to, the program. Barbers' personal literacy histories and perceptions of their role as a community resource were tied to the manner in which they engaged in the program. Barbers who saw themselves as “readers” spoke at length about the importance of the program in supporting children's learning, articulated specific strategies that they used to encourage fathers to share books with their children while at the barbershops, and endorsed the need for taking books home to bolster children's home libraries. These barbers were also much more likely to speak of themselves as a personal and professional resource for families and to articulate the importance of the barbershop as a gathering place for African American men. Although all barbers were positive about the purpose of, and need for, the program, some saw the book distribution program as external to the nature of the barbershop as a place of business. Findings have implications for using barbershops as literacy-focused resources for families. In order to ensure universal program implementation, findings point to the importance of stronger onboarding of barbershops to the program. This onboarding process could leverage access to barbershops who were being particularly successful with the program by establishing a peer barbershop network. These peer-to-peer mentoring supports were identified by barbers as an important resource for sharing insights into how to seamlessly integrate the Real Dads Read program into the shops and as a space to brainstorm ideas for improved program implementation.