



Press Release:

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San Diego, CA -- In a ceremony today at the 4S Ranch County Library, South African immigrant Leora Lazarus, better known as Teacher Lee, received an award recognizing her “outstanding and dedicated service” to the San Diego County Library.

Teacher Lee is devoted to improving life-long opportunities for underserved children in San Diego county by offering a free mobile preschool program at local libraries and community centers. Her program, Teacher Lee Play-to-Learn, is a fiscally sponsored project of Mission

Edge San Diego, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. The organization targets the 49 percent of San Diego county children who can't afford to attend conventional preschools that cost upwards of \$8,000 per year. The program brings parents and children together in an interactive educational experience that teaches them to transform every moment of every day into a learning opportunity.

“It was a revelation to most parents in my program that they could ready their children for kindergarten on their own and do a great job...and it's fun!” said Teacher Lee.

The success of the Teacher Lee program lies in its dedication to encouraging free play and experimentation instead of relying on more traditional teacher-guided classes. Parents and caregivers are required to attend the sessions with their children since they are an integral part of the Teacher Lee construct. The children move freely through different stations where Teacher Lee instructs the attending adults on the benefits of their child's play and how to bring learning into the home.

“Through books, imaginative play, transportation toys, painting, puppets, puzzles, play-dough, blocks, legos and art, children develop the skills they'll need to be successful in kindergarten. These skills include: letter, number and color recognition; fine and gross motor coordination; spatial awareness; and social skills. All of which set them up for success not just in kindergarten, but for the rest of their lives” said Leon Lazarus, Teacher Lee's husband and partner in Teacher Lee Play-to-Learn.

There is both a short and long-term impact to what Teacher Lee offers. Kindergarten readiness is the immediate goal, and that positively impacts student achievement throughout the child's school career. According to the Committee for Economic Development, "high-quality preschool programs offer societal benefits that far outweigh program costs by improving later education, employment, earnings, and crime outcomes for students who attend preschool."

The Alliance for Quality Education provided statistics that show children who have attended preschool have a 29% better chance of getting into college. A RAND corporation study in 2008 on "The Nature and Quality of Early Care and Education for Preschool Age Children in California" estimated that high-quality preschool for all four-year-olds could result in 730 fewer dropouts, 1000 fewer children held back a grade in school, and 4600 fewer child years of special education in San Diego county alone.

A Chicago study indicated that children without a preschool education are 70% more likely to be arrested for a violent crime before the age of 18 while here in San Diego county, the RAND study estimated that preschool could result in 2150 fewer juvenile petitions.

The Alliance for Quality Education summarized these benefits by stating "every \$1 invested in pre-k saves taxpayers up to \$7."

“I believe that the major impediment to universal preschool is lack of funding and parent’s ability to afford to send their children,” said Lazarus. “That’s why we started our free preschool program...to reach the 17 percent of San Diego children who live in poverty and others who can’t afford it.”

Teacher Lee adds, “children play to learn, shouldn’t we all learn to play?”

About Teacher Lee Play-To-Learn™ Preschool

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