

Mission: Literacy Stimulates More Than Just Questions About Reading

Dawn Sharp: Tutor, Child Care & Literacy Consultant, New Jersey Division

Only 18 months after whispering to me that he could not read very well, Carlos beamed at the receipt of his very own brand new *Read and Learn Children's Bible*. He had earned it after reading 30 texts as part of the Mission: Literacy reading program. Upon completion, his reading ability had jumped from an early first grade level to a late third grade level.

Carlos' second grade teacher had referred him to the after school program at The Salvation Army because she had previously seen two of her other students significantly improve their reading proficiency after they had been part of a TSA *Mission: Literacy* tutoring group. Concerned about Carlos' struggle with reading, the teacher suggested to his parents that they enroll him with us.

Carlos tested as barely reading at a 1st grade level. He was very withdrawn and quietly told me, "I can't read very well." Our first lesson went quietly along with Carlos showing some spark when playing games with word cards. We talked about our first bible story, *In the Beginning*, and I explained that the stories we would be talking about were all from the bible. He asked, "What is a bible?" I explained but there was not one in the room where we were so I said I would get one to show him the next time we met.

Carlos' first question at our next lesson was, "Did you find one of those books – the one all of these stories are in?" He wanted to see where *In the Beginning* was in the bible. I showed him, pointing to the words as I read, and he smiled with each part of the story he recognized as being the same as our story book. He smiled like this was really a blast then picked up the storybook and looked up each "day" as I read its creative act from the bible.

Then, Carlos launched into a string of questions: Where are all of the other stories in the bible? Who is God? God was before people and everything? Pointing to the blankly dark picture representing the time before creation, he asked, "Was God there? Where is God? Would we call God "invisible?" He can see us all of the time? Remembering the sanctuary we had gone into to look for a bible, Carlos asked, "What is a church?" We talked about how we could talk to God anytime and he will listen – like in the prayer one of his classmates had just said thanking God for their snack.

Carlos accepted each simple answer, his mind quickly moving onto another question. His shyness was set aside for awhile as he was intrigued by an invisible God who knew him, whom he could talk to anytime, who could help him, who had a bible full of his stories and who was so powerful he could create something brand new by just saying a word. I was intrigued too – by the power of the written word of God speaking into the heart and curiosity of a little boy.