

Virtual storytime programs: Connecting with families through a socially distant approach

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Introduction

Storytimes have a unique place within public libraries' programming lineup, and they are valued for supporting school readiness (Cahill, Hoffman, Ingram, & Joo, 2020) and larger community needs (Cahill, Joo, Howard, Ingraham-Dwyer, King-Oaks, & Yates, 2020). Since the onset of the pandemic, public libraries, large and small and in communities of all sizes have experimented with virtual storytime programming. While these virtual programs are likely beneficial, researchers in the past have demonstrated a need to rely on research evidence drawn from "under our own umbrella," that is conducted specifically to investigate library programs within their actual contexts (Stooke & McKenzie, 2011).

Research Questions

RQ 1: How are virtual storytime programs designed to support ALL children and their caregivers?

RQ 2: What is the value of virtual storytime programs?

RQ 3: What resources and supports are necessary for those values to be realized?

Methods

- Data collection for storytime analysis:
 - 27 libraries, three in each US region, balanced across rural, suburban, and urban communities
 - video recordings of four VST sessions from each public library
- Data collection for community assessment
 - Survey library directors and children's librarians nationwide
 - semi-structured virtual interviews with at least one virtual storytime librarian at each participating library site.
 - online survey for caregivers of young children at each participating library site
 - virtual interviews with caregiver-child dyads

Interview Quote

"[When I'm] working, [virtual storytime's] an easy way for me to entertain her... [or] distract her because ... I need to get into a meeting"

--caregiver of 2-year-old

Interview Quote

"I'm smart, I'm loved, and I am wonderful"

--virtual storytime message conveyed to a 5-year-old child

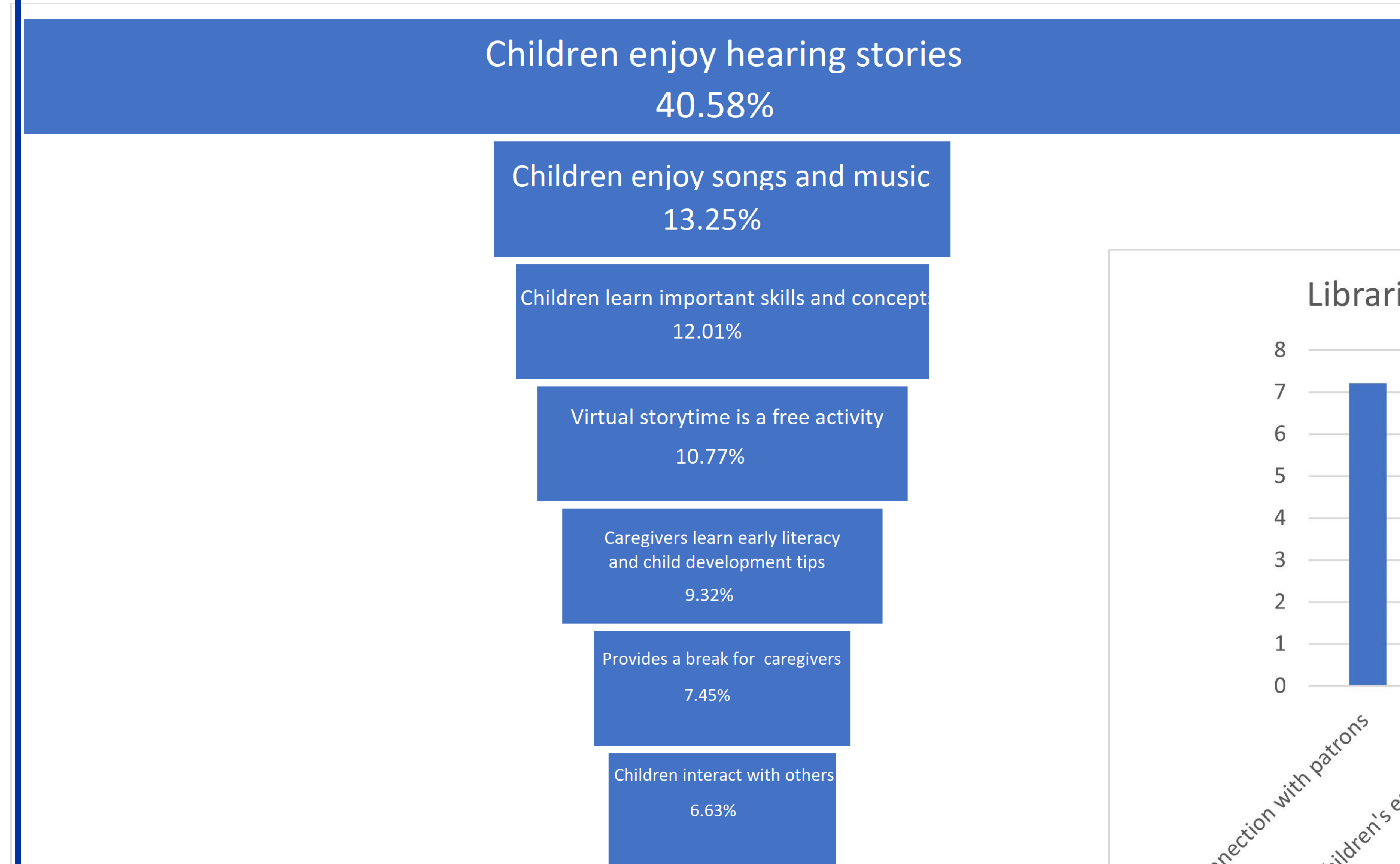
Interview Quote

"I got to help their little lives stay the same and be normal."

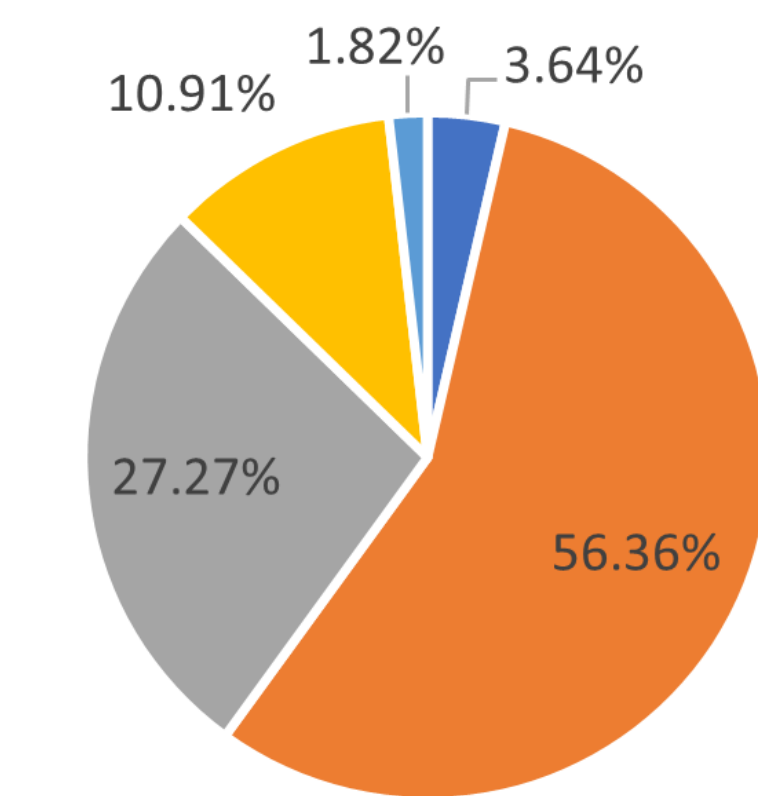
--virtual storytime provider from a rural library system

Select Preliminary Findings

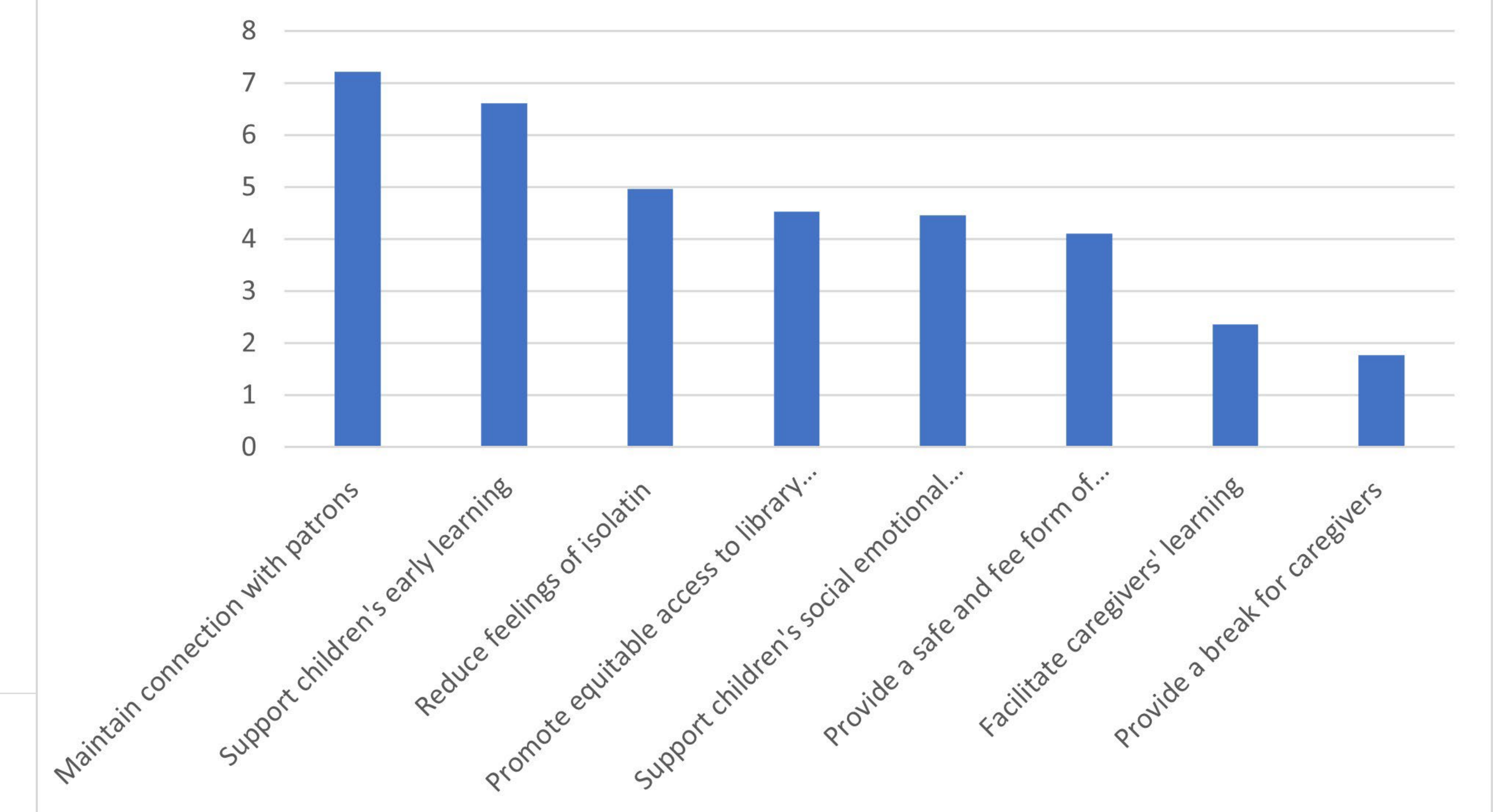
The most important reasons caregivers choose for children to participate in virtual storytime programs



Number of books shared in virtual storytime programs



Librarians' Rationales for offering Virtual Storytime



Interview Quote

"The library storytimes are now packed, and we don't feel safe going"

--caregiver of 4-year-old

References

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- Cahill, M., Joo, S., Howard, M., Ingraham-Dwyer, J., King-Oaks, K., & Yates, B. (2020). What is storytime good for, and what makes storytime good? A survey of public library directors. *Journal of Librarianship & Information Science*, 52(4), 1000-1014. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2f0961000619898224>
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