

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents four sets of findings and three conclusions drawn from an eight-month review of the ten-year Hefei Reading and Library Flagship Program, a joint program by the Chen Yet-Sen Family Foundation (CYSFF) and Stone Soup Happy Reading School Alliance in Hefei, Anhui Province, China. Through learning from the success and experience of the Flagship Program, the program review seeks to contribute to the creation of a replicable program model that promotes “happy reading”. Below is a summary of the key findings, conclusions and recommendations presented in this report.

### 1. KEY FINDINGS (SECTION 2)

#### 1.1 Key Finding One: Program Relevance (Section 2.1)

The relevance of the Flagship Program was found to be strong not only in meeting the needs of program stakeholders, schools and intended beneficiaries but also in being consistent with local and national policies promoting “Reading for All” (全民阅读).

Specifically,

- With its central focus on reading, particularly “happy reading”, the Flagship Program and its “School Free Voluntary Reading (FVR)” component were found to be highly relevant to the local and national contexts that promote “Reading for All” (全民阅读). (Section 2.1.1)
- The relevance of the “Leadership”, “Technical and Capacity-Building” and “General” components as well as their respective subcomponents in fulfilling the needs of local stakeholders and schools in reading promotion and alliance building has also been perceived as strong. (Sections 2.1.2-2.1.4)

#### 1.2 Key Finding Two: Program Effectiveness (Section 2.2)

On the whole, the effectiveness of the Flagship Program is perceived to be reasonably strong by alliance school principals, teachers, teacher librarians and students. Nevertheless, it was found that alliance schools vary in terms of their level of FVR attainment. In addition, adults’ level of familiarity with most of the program subcomponents was found to be moderately low.

Specifically,

- **Overall Program Effectiveness** (Section 2.2.1): The overall effectiveness of the Flagship Program was found to be reasonably strong based on the following three aspects: (1) adult respondents’ perception of the overall program effectiveness; (2) adult respondents’ level of familiarity with “happy reading” as perceived by themselves; and (3) student respondents’ extent of freedom in choosing books that they like to read in school.
- **“School FVR” Component** (Section 2.2.2): In general, FVR has taken root in all alliance schools but has yet to reach a mature level in most of the schools. The large majority of schools have attained

mid-level in FVR with veteran urban (higher income) schools at the high end of FVR attainment (often levels 4 or 5) while apprentice rural schools at the other end of the spectrum (often at or below level 3). Among the ten critical criteria fundamental to promoting FVR, “book diversity and suitability” under the “Resource” subcomponent performed best while “sustained silent reading” under the “Time” subcomponent scored the lowest in mean level of FVR attainment.

- **“Leadership”, “Technical & Capacity-Building” and “General” Components** (Sections 2.2.3-2.2.5): The adults’ perception of the effectiveness of the Principal Roundtable Meeting (PRM), apprenticeship system, Principal Coaching Workshop, Teacher Librarian Training, Teacher Librarian Association (TLA), Innovation Fund, policy-related efforts and Alliance Open Day is considerably strong on the whole. However, adults’ level of familiarity with most of the subcomponents, namely the PRM, apprenticeship system, TLA, Innovation Fund and the two Baohe’s policies, was found to be moderately low below level 3 on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest level of familiarity.
- **Broad Trends in Perceived Effectiveness** (Section 2.2.2-2.2.5): Although generally strong, the perceived effectiveness of all the program subcomponents varies by school role, district, alliance school type and school type with the following broad trends being observed:
  - *Veteran school principals and teacher librarians generally have the most positive perception of the effectiveness of the various subcomponents compared to other school roles.*
  - *Baohe schools tend to perceive the subcomponents as more effective than Changfeng schools.*
  - *Veteran schools generally view the effectiveness more favourably than apprentice schools.*
  - *Perceived effectiveness is often strongest in urban (higher income) schools, weakest in rural schools, and comparable between urban (lower income) and suburban schools.*

### 1.3 Key Finding Three: Program Sustainability (Section 2.3)

The Flagship Program was found to be strong in its social, technical and even political sustainability. Its financial sustainability is also reasonably strong to some extent. However, its operational sustainability may still be a cause for concern.

Specifically,

- **Social Sustainability** (Section 2.3.1): Through mobilizing different stakeholders within and beyond the Stone Soup Alliance in promoting “happy reading” in school, and establishing an extensive internal and external networks over the years, the Flagship Program has strengthened its program sustainability socially.
- **Technical Sustainability** (Section 2.3.2): Its technical sustainability is also strong by virtue of its own local expert team of professional teacher librarians, who can provide technical assistance to alliance schools and even schools beyond the alliance in reading promotion and library development.
- **Political Sustainability** (Section 2.3.3): The strong support from and connection with the local education bureaus have contributed to its program sustainability, particularly in Baohe District. In addition, being aligned with the nation-wide “Reading for All” ” (全民阅读) policy promoted by governments at all levels, the political sustainability of the program is strengthened.

- **Financial Sustainability** (Section 2.3.4): The strong political support from the national and local governments in reading promotion has also translated into more fiscal commitment to book procurement and library development compared to the past, which has thus strengthened its financial sustainability to some extent.
- **Operational Sustainability** (Section 2.3.5): The Flagship Program has developed a rather comprehensive operational structure and system through its ten-year efforts. Nevertheless, its operational sustainability may still be a cause for concern due to the voluntary nature of the Stone Soup Alliance, which is led and operated by a team of self-motivated and dedicated principals and teacher librarians. Any leadership or personnel change can weaken the viability and sustainability of school-level efforts, the alliance and even the program as a whole. Moreover, the widening gap between Baohe and Changfeng schools; limited familiarity with the different subcomponents by most alliance stakeholders; and lack of a monitoring and evaluation system to ensure accountability could affect the operational sustainability of the Flagship Program.

#### **1.4 Key Finding Four: Potential as a Model for Replication (Section 2.4)**

The overall potential of the Flagship program as a model for replication by other schools, organizations and regions has been viewed favorably by a large majority of its adult stakeholders. The program components and their respective subcomponents have been perceived as exemplary. However, there remain areas within each program subcomponent that can be further improved to strengthen its potential as a model for replication by others.

## **2. CONCLUSIONS (SECTION 3)**

### **2.1 Conclusion One (Section 3.1)**

The Flagship Program exhibits potential as a model for replication by other schools, organizations and regions both at the conceptual and practical levels, albeit to a lesser extent in the latter. By addressing the challenges it currently faces and strengthening its program effectiveness and operational sustainability, the potential of the program for replication by others can become stronger not only conceptually but also practically.

### **2.2 Conclusion Two (Section 3.2)**

The existing “Reading Mandala” within CYSFF can serve as a theoretical model for the Flagship Program in future replication. Regarding its operational model, the program can be conceptualized in terms of two submodels, i.e. a school FVR submodel and a school alliance model, serving different objectives but closely intertwining with and complementing each other. When it comes to program replication, it is best to define the operational model as a flexible and adaptable model consisting of the two separate submodels.

## 2.3 Conclusion Three (Section 3.3)

It takes more than visiting the Stone Soup alliance schools and replicating the program model(s) to become successful in promoting “happy reading”. There also exist critical conditions as well as other favorable conditions that are important for successful replication and adaptation of the Flagship Program.

### Critical Conditions

- *Change of mindset about “happy reading”, reading promotion and library development (Section 3.3.1.1)*
- *Committed principals with strong leadership (Section 3.3.1.2)*
- *Dedicated staff with relevant capacity entrusted with reading promotion (Section 3.3.1.3)*
- *Availability of diverse books suitable for and accessible to students (Section 3.3.1.4)*
- *Funding for reading promotion and library development (Section 3.3.1.5)*

### Other Favorable Conditions

- *Active engagement in reading promotion by other school stakeholders (Section 3.3.2.1)*
- *Accessible child-friendly library (Section 3.3.2.2)*
- *Technical assistance from professionals and experts (Section 3.3.2.3)*
- *Governmental and policy support (Section 3.3.2.4)*

## 3. RECOMMENDATIONS (SECTION 4)

The report closes with the following three recommendations proposed for consideration by CYSFF and the Stone Soup Alliance:

- Strengthen the potential of the Flagship Program as a model at the practical level, particularly in terms of the effectiveness and operational sustainability of the various program components (Section 4.1);*
- Broaden the notion of replication (Section 4.2); and*
- Formulate strategic plan for future replication and develop diverse replication strategies (Section 4.3).*