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Boosting Oral Vocabulary: The Words Count Program

Mabel Silva

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Community Partner

The Village for Families and Children is a social service organization that provides a multitude of services for children and families in the Hartford area, including behavioral health services, residential treatment, and prevention programming. Recently, the Village has implemented Words Count, an intervention aimed at enhancing young children's exposure to, and engagement in conversation.

Words Count Program

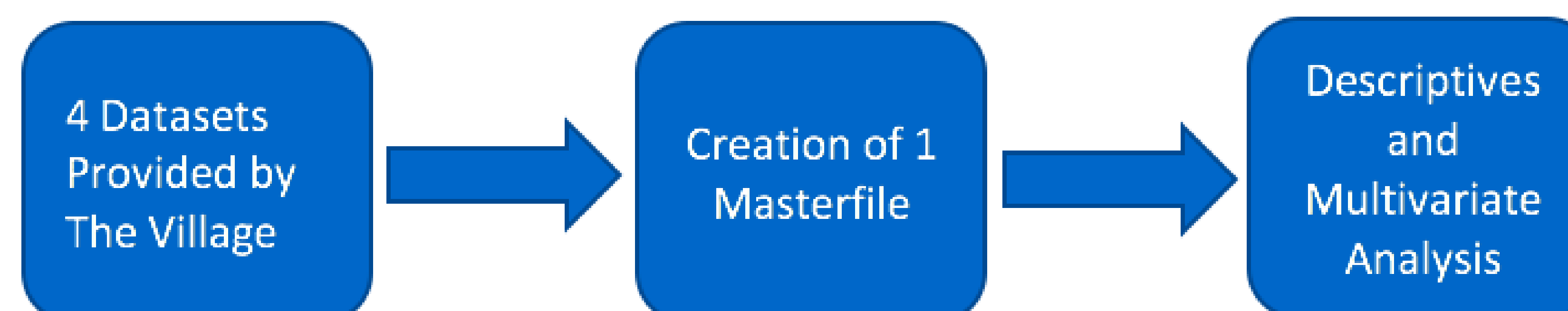
- Children under the age of 5 (and their families/caregivers) were eligible
- Literacy coach used in-home and community-based parent/caregiver-focused interventions focused on games and other interactive activities to enhance vocabulary and conversation
- Visits occurred over 9-10 months
- Child wore a LENA device for five, one-day recordings over the intervention
- LENA is a "Fitbit" like device that measures noises that children encounter in their day-to-day interactions



Research Aims & Question

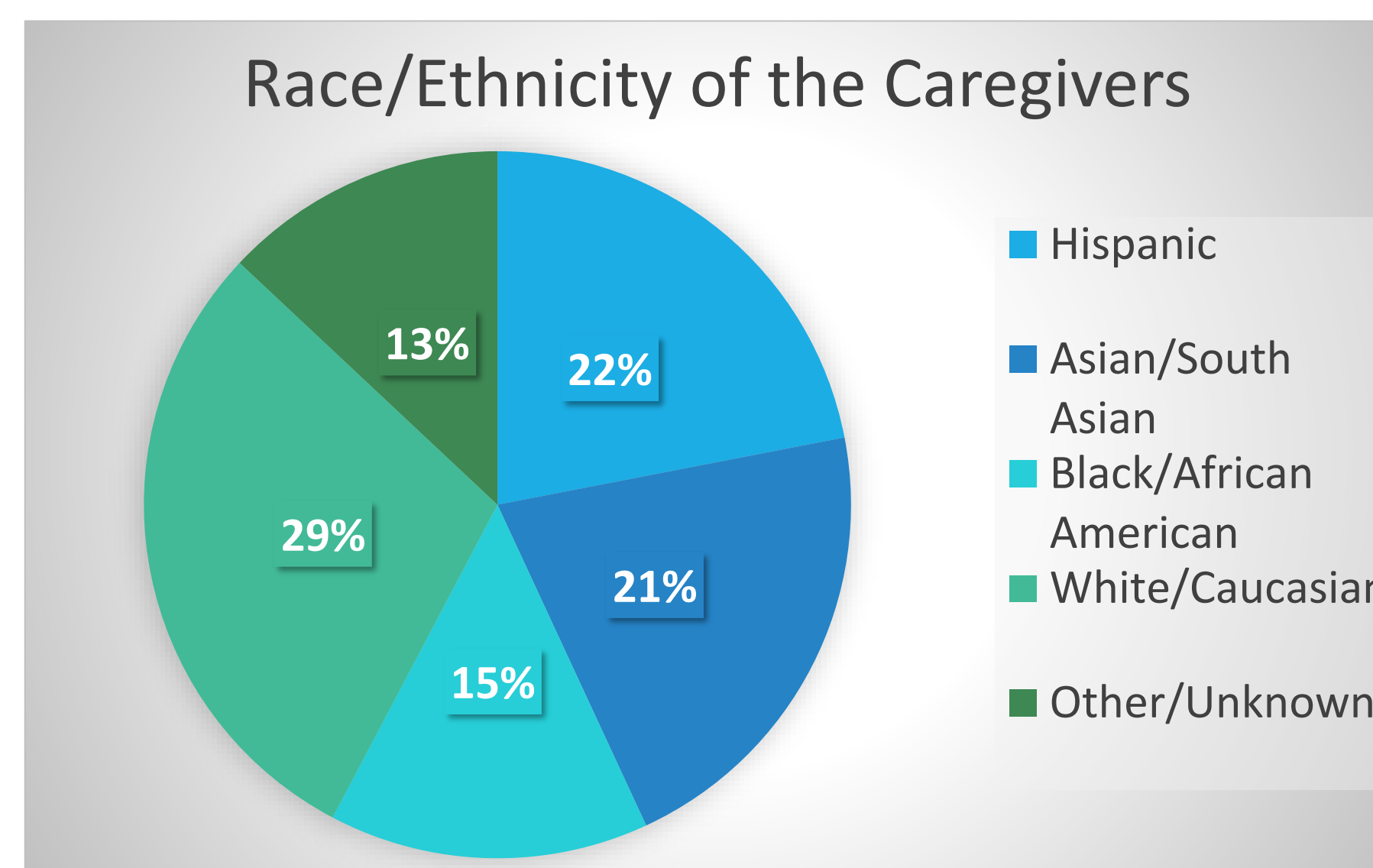
1. Characterize participants in the Words Count Program and those who completed all five recordings.
2. Examine changes in adult word count (AWC) exposure and conversational turns (CT) over the course of the intervention
3. Examine characteristics of children and families who benefited most from the Words Count program

Methodology



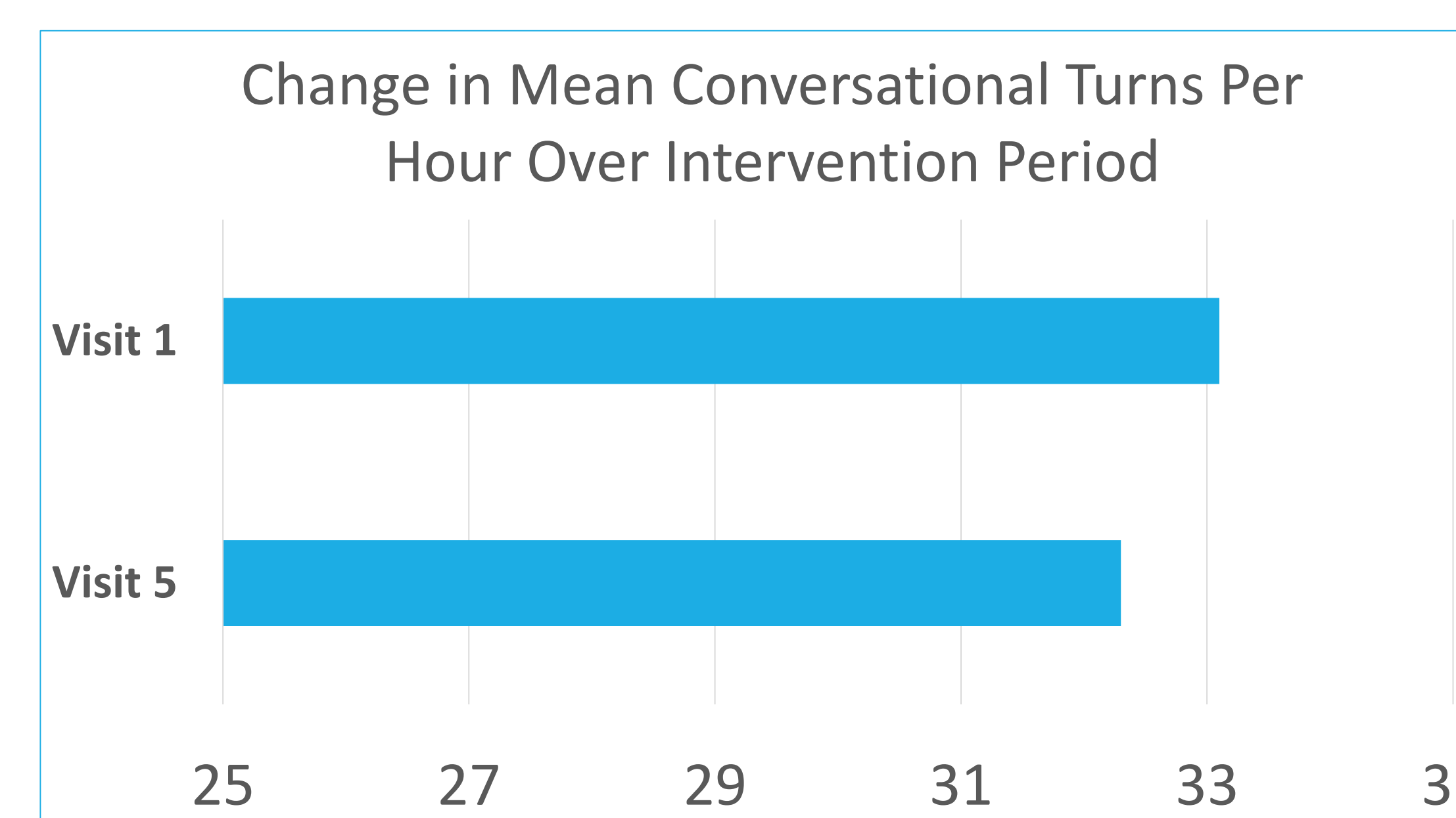
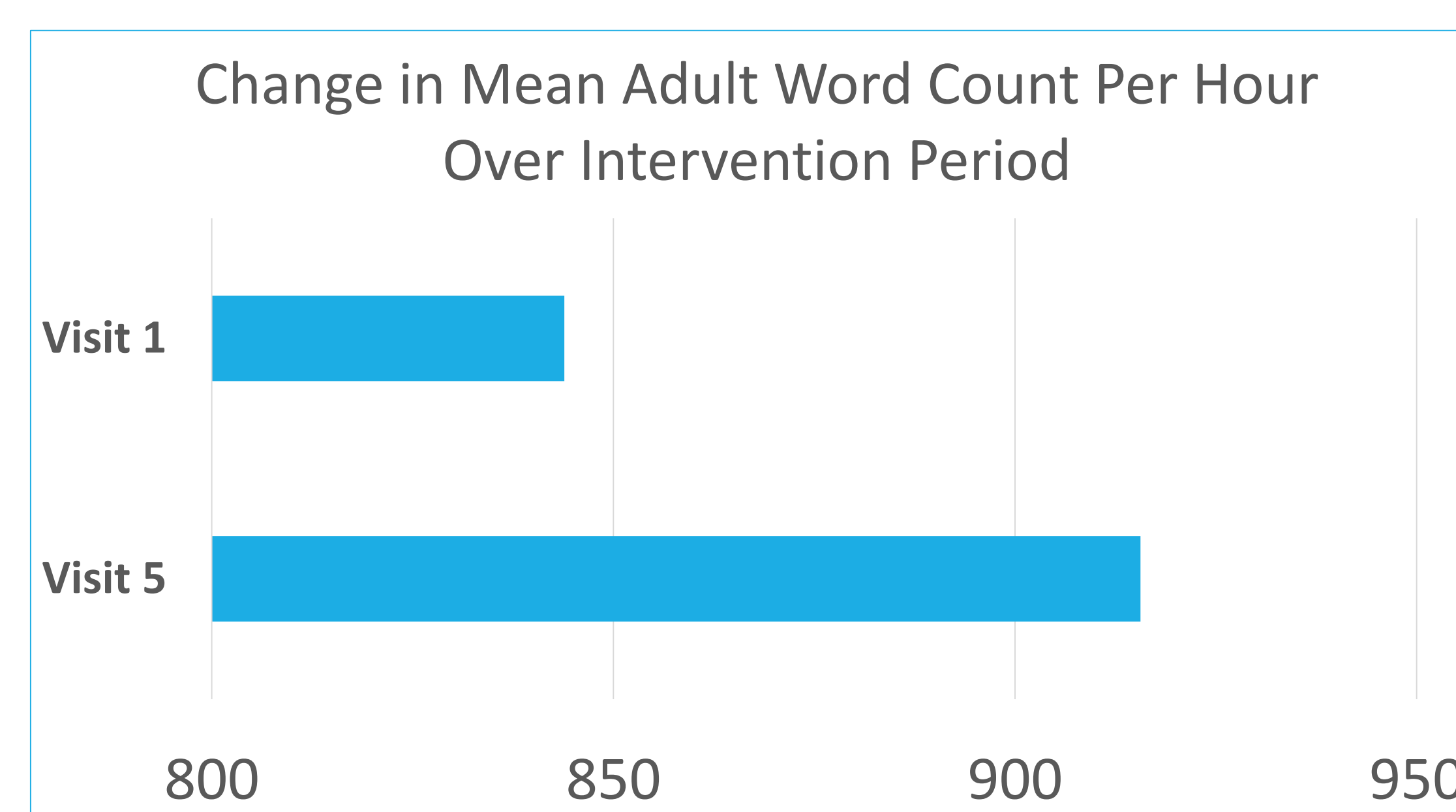
Program Participants

- N = 123 families started
- n = 81 completed all 5 recordings
- Mean Child Age = 2.7 years old
- 69% Hartford Residents
- Average Time Enrolled in program = 35.5 Weeks
- Baseline Adult word count/hr (Mean=767.1; SD=435.5)
- Baseline Conversational Turns/hr (Mean=29.5; SD=21.9)



- Participants were classified as "improvers" on **conversational turns** if they gained at least 5 turns between the first and last recordings.
- Participants were classified as "improvers" on **adult word count** if they evidenced at least a 100 word gain between the first and last recordings.

Key Findings



	Families with Five Recordings N=81	Conversational Turn Improvers N=34	Adult Word Count Improvers N=38
Mean age (Standard Deviation) at the start of the program	2.6 (1.2)	2.4 (1.3)	2.5 (1.2)
% Female	42 (52%)	17 (50%)	19 (50%)
Hartford Resident	58 (72%)	21 (62%)	25 (66%)
Weeks in program	38.9 (15.9)	39.5 (14.6)	38.3 (13.4)
Conversational Turns	33.1 (22.6)	27.9 (16.6)	29.0 (18.4)
Adult Word Count	843.9 (438.2)	776.5 (389.7)	721.5 (409.0)

Discussion

- Words Count served a range of families from different racial and ethnic backgrounds and with varying baseline word exposure and conversational turns.
- Full adherence to the program was challenging, as 81 families completed the program out of the 123 families who started the program.
- Words Count appeared to have a positive effect on the number of adult words a child heard per hour; conversational turns remained stable.
- Participants whose means scores for Adult Word Count and Conversational Turns were below baseline appeared to benefit most from Words Count.

Significance

Vocabulary before age 3 has been proven to have significant effects on later education; thus, the results of this analysis show that intervention programs like Words Count may be influential in equalizing educational opportunity and ensuring school readiness for children prior to their arrival in school.

Future Directions

- Include a measure of socioeconomic status, such as caregivers' highest level of education, to more fully comprehend the population served by the program
- Increase emphasis on interactive behaviors between children and caregivers in literacy coaching sessions to provide more opportunities for conversational turns to improve
- Provide additional incentives to enhance program retention and consistency with LENA recordings