

OUR MISSION: Read to Grow promotes language-building and literacy for children, beginning at birth, and supports parents as their babies' first teachers.

New Outreach Goes to Connecticut Families in Need Through Alliances

Read to Grow has launched two new initiatives extending our reach to tens of thousands of additional low-income families in Connecticut.

A dozen permanent Book Places now operating at other nonprofits allow their clients and families to get free children's books and information on how to build the language skills and literacy of their children.

In the second initiative—called Partnerships—Read to Grow formally collaborates with agencies to add an early childhood literacy component to services they already deliver to families living in need or at risk. While each Partnership is unique, all focus on one-to-one interaction in the delivery of books and literacy information to parents and other caregivers.

The Partnerships offer opportunities for Read to Grow to gather data on book use and language-skill activities within families.

Funding to launch the two initiatives has come from Seedlings Foundation, NewAlliance Foundation, Ronald McDonald House Charities of Connecticut and Western Massachusetts, and Catholic Charity League of New Haven.

These grants have enabled Read to Grow to: hire a bilingual staff member; purchase

bilingual children's books; purchase bookcases and other materials for Book Places; and help to meet costs from increased staff hours.

The motivation for both initiatives is two-fold: to reach more families who cannot afford books for their children and who might not otherwise have opportunities to learn the importance of early language skills; and to collaborate with other agencies for greater efficiency and impact.

Key findings from 50 years of research show that children of lower income, less educated parents typically enter school with poorer language skills than more privileged children. By some measures, 5-year-olds of less socioeconomic means score more than two years behind on standardized language tests.

As Pulitzer-Prize winner Nicholas Kristof wrote in his New York Times column: "One reason American antipoverty efforts over the



Mathew Correa reads to his 13-month-old son during the opening of a Book Place at The Village in Hartford. See page 5 for the story on Book Places.

last half-century haven't been more effective is that they mostly treat symptoms, not causes. To put it another way, we don't invest nearly enough in helping children in the first few years of life as their brains are developing. If we miss that window, then adult interventions like higher minimum wages can never be fully effective."



Odalis Melendez selects books and fruit inside the truck.

PARTNERSHIP WITH CONNECTICUT FOOD BANK

GROW! Truck – A Pantry on Wheels with Books Aboard

The books were ready for picking.

Near shelves of unshucked corn, dirt-dappled beets and frozen meats rested a big cardboard box filled with children's books.

All of these goods and more were being delivered by Connecticut Food Bank, in a bountiful array inside its GROW! Truck.

The truck—a mobile grocery store with both farm fresh food and refrigeration for packaged and perishable items—had just pulled up behind the George E. Pipkin Head Start Center. The pre-school operates year-round in a southeast Bridgeport neighborhood.

(Continued on page 4)

NEWSLETTER OF READ TO GROW
A publication of Read to Grow, Inc.
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From the Desk of Roxanne Coady, Board Chair

Over the almost 15 years of Read to Grow's work we have been asked about and are interested in the efficacy of the work we do. Sometimes the entrepreneurial side of me is impatient about spending time and money to conduct extensive studies to prove having books in a home, being read to, or sharing stories are effective in building language and literacy. It seems intuitive and simply true.

But, of course, intuition is not enough. Fortunately, over the last decade one study after another has proven the effectiveness of books in a home and reading with your baby. The latest report is from the American Academy of Pediatrics, which says that "reading aloud to young children beginning at infancy is one of the most effective ways to expose them to enriched language and to encourage specific early literacy needed to promote school readiness."

This has been our rallying cry and our work.

I recently saw a chart containing three images put together by Abbott Laboratories. The triptych shows the brain development of a child, using photo-panels, each depicting the neurological connections formed at different ages—one at birth, one at 15 months old, and the third between 2 and 3 years old.

The first panel has a few scattered twig-like images on a background of white. The second panel—showing the brain of the same baby after 15 months of daily language stimulation through human interactions—is a dense network of black lines going in all directions and crisscrossing. The final panel is even denser and wilder, with more black lines and intersecting connections.

The chart shows a wonderful development. I can literally see the impact of words and sounds on a young brain and how they create the network for young children to learn. It is abundantly clear: words and sounds dramatically change babies' lives.

We are thrilled and energized by our work at Read to Grow that reaches tens of thousands of families in Connecticut with this message and the tools and books they need. Of course I am happy that there is scientific proof of the efficacy, but I still cling to the simple magic of holding babies and regaling them with poems, stories and song.

Thank you for helping us to make this happen.

Jeff Hartmann Joins Read to Grow's Board

Read to Grow welcomed Jeff E. Hartmann in September as a Board Member and new Treasurer.

Jeff is founder and Chief Executive Officer of The Hartmann Group, which offers real estate, financial and gaming advisory services and has offices in Old Saybrook.

With more than two decades in CFO, COO and CEO capacities, Jeff had a seminal role in the creation and development of the casino gaming industry in New England. His career spans the casinos of Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun in Connecticut, Revel in Atlantic City and Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs in Pennsylvania.

"We've been trying to recruit Jeff to Read to Grow for many years," said Board Chair Roxanne Coady. "I'm thrilled that we've finally succeeded. He brings wisdom and passion for hard work that is the hallmark of Read to Grow's board."

Jeff has worked closely with major Wall Street firms including Goldman Sachs, Citibank, Wells Fargo and Bank of America. As Chief Financial Officer of the Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority, he played a pivotal role in securing \$4 billion in public and private financing. During his 16-year tenure at Mohegan Sun, he directed the strategic planning, collaborated with the senior leadership team, created the company's vision, and maintained and preserved the Mohegan Sun core values.

Jeff has addressed other divergent opportunities, from acquiring the WNBA Connecticut Sun franchise for Mohegan Sun to leading the Mohegan Sun executive team in its 2010 master plan as well as leading the acquisition team that acquired Pocono Downs racetrack and built a hotel and casino.

Since founding The Hartmann Group in 2012, Jeff has served as president of the firm, which specializes in the real estate, hospitality and gaming industries.

Jeff began his career as a certified public accountant with PricewaterhouseCoopers, LLP, working from 1984 to 1991 in the Philadelphia and New York offices as a specialist in real estate and casinos. He currently serves as the Chairman of the Board for the Ocean Breeze Management Company, LLC and is Vice Chairman of the Connecticut Sports Foundation Against Cancer.

The Hartmann family lives in Old Lyme.



Jeff Hartmann

Wallingford Girl Collects Hundreds of Books

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BY LEIGH TAUSS

Wallingford — Chelsea Fitzgerald filled her summer with reading but also made sure other children can do the same. The 9-year-old girl with a passion for literature collected 771 books for charity over two weeks in August.

This is the second year in a row she took the initiative to collect books for low-income families, to be given out through Read to Grow. Last year she collected 568 books. She aims to get more than a thousand next year.

Chelsea said her love of books started in the first grade. She wanted to find a way to share it with others. "It's so fun," she said. "It can take you to so many places."

The book drive ended with a bake sale on the Fitzgeralds' front lawn, with baked good donated by Sherman Heights Bakery of Hamden. Chelsea was able to raise \$120, which she used to purchase even more books for the drive from Goodwill and Savers.

"It feels great helping other people knowing that I love reading and that I can share that with other people," she said.

Her mother, Gina Fitzgerald, was very proud of her daughter.

"She always wanted to do something for charity," Gina said. "Why not pick something you love to do?"

Erin Fitzgerald, 17, was also very impressed by her sister's initiative. "She put this together pretty much all by herself," she said. "I'm really proud of her."

Jim Krupp lives down the street from the Fitzgeralds and was impressed by the young girl's effort. "Too often things like what she's doing go unnoticed," he said. "I think it's admirable that she's putting other people above herself."

Kyn Tolson, director of operations and development at Read to Grow, was delighted to hear about the large book donation. "I'm amazed with what she did," she said. "We couldn't ask for a better ally."



Chelsea Fitzgerald organizes books she collected.

New Faces at Read to Grow

The Branford office welcomed two new staff members this summer.

Evelyn Tomasello is a bilingual Books for Kids associate, helping in the new initiatives to open Book Places and form Partnerships.

Diane Visconti has joined the Books for Babies program as the new associate.

An East Haven resident, Evelyn came to our Branford office after a year as a Parent-Educator at the Family Resource Center at the D.C. Moore School in East Haven. Over the last 13 years she has worked in several literacy programs for children, including a 10-year stint as a literacy tutor at St. Francis & St. Rose of Lima School in New Haven. She has been a reading tutor to elementary school-aged children and a monitor or a site coordinator for other school-based programs.

In the 1990s, Evelyn volunteered in our Books for Babies program at Yale-New Haven Hospital.

"I know from first-hand experience how crucial literacy is," Evelyn said. "And, since way back when, at Yale-New Haven, I thought maybe (Read to Grow) would be the place where I'd work one day. I'm glad to finally be here."

Evelyn, who is a native of Puerto Rico, and her husband have two daughters who attend College of the Holy Cross.

Diane most recently worked with All Pointe Care, supervising families with children assigned by Connecticut Department of Children & Families (DCF). She worked with the same agency as a Parent-Educator.

In other professional experience, Diane was a Parent Liaison for Hospital of St. Raphael, Children's Day Hospital Program. In that capacity, she helped adults develop effective parenting skills and worked with children directly.

Diane has been a social worker for: Jewish Family Services in New Haven; DCF in New Haven and Meriden; and Vermont Department of Social and Rehabilitative Services. She served three terms on the Cheshire Town Council and currently is on the town's Planning & Zoning Board.

Diane and her husband live in Cheshire, where she loves to read. She is the mother of two grown children.



Evelyn Tomasello



Diane Visconti

The Vision of Read To Grow

Every family – regardless of income and primary language – will understand the critical importance of early childhood literacy and will take an active role in their child's reading development. All children in Connecticut will have books of their own.

DO YOU KNOW?

What percentage of young children in the United States are read to daily?

a. 35% b. 48% c. 52%

See answer on page 6

DO YOU KNOW?

The average child in a middle-class family has had how many hours of one-on-one reading before starting kindergarten?

a. 0-499 b. 500-999 c. 1,000-1,499

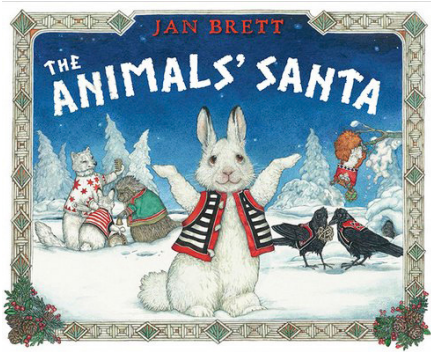
See answer on page 6

Enjoy The Wonder of Jan Brett

Bestselling children’s book author & illustrator Jan Brett will give a free presentation and book-signing of her new book “The Animals’ Santa” at IKEA in New Haven at 10 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 29.

Join R.J. Julia Booksellers of Madison and IKEA New Haven for this special event. Brett will give a 20-minute talk and illustration demonstration followed by a book-signing. The event will benefit Read to Grow, which is supported by IKEA.

Brett is the New York Times #1 bestselling author-artist of 35 books for children. Her books have been chosen as ‘Best Children’s Books of the Year’ by The New Yorker, Parents, Redbook, and others. “The Animals’ Santa” features a group of forest animals trying to discover the mystery behind treasures left for them every Christmas.



Jan Brett

Admission to the Nov. 29 event is free, but seating will be limited. Please register beforehand via R.J. Julia Booksellers’ website at rjjulia.com, where there is a link to sign up for the free IKEA FAMILY loyalty program. IKEA New Haven will be giving away an IKEA gift card on the day of the event. To enter the sweepstakes, you will only need to swipe your IKEA FAMILY card at the designated FAMILY kiosk.

Both “The Animals’ Santa” and a selection of other books by Brett can be purchased at the event or beforehand at R.J. Julia Booksellers or through the bookstore’s website. Pre-purchased books may be picked up at R.J. Julia beginning Oct. 21 or at the IKEA New Haven event at check-in. Please note that purchase of “The Animals Santa” from R.J. Julia in advance or at the event is required for admission to the book-signing line.

Attendees are invited to donate any gently used children’s books at the event for Read to Grow.

OUTREACH: GROW! TRUCK – A PANTRY ON WHEELS WITH BOOKS ABOARD

(Continued from page 1)

On this August morning, parents of children in the Early Start and Head Start programs were lining up outside the truck to eventually climb aboard, one by one, and select what they would take home to their families.

GROW! Truck is a three-year project run by the food bank and sponsored by Stop & Shop. Its goal is to increase nutritional education and healthy meals in the households of low-income families with children enrolled in early childhood, pre-school childcare and Head Start programs. The project operates at sites in Bridgeport, Stratford, New Haven, Hamden, and Trumbull.

Read to Grow formed a partnership with the food bank to enhance the truck’s offerings, adding an early childhood literacy component. The Pipkin site was the first place where Read to Grow joined the effort, providing at least two books for each family every week and participating in the educational aspect of GROW! Truck. Families enrolled at any site or in any session—each usually running 13 weeks—attend weekly workshops before heading to the truck to select their free food.

Workshop topics range from healthy eating and money management to early childhood literacy. One week parents might hear a presentation entitled “Eating Healthy on a

Budget.” The next they might learn easy ways to make daily reading to a child fun.

“Oh, this is good to have,” said Danielle Smith, one of 21 parents or guardians attending a workshop at Pipkin led by Read to Grow staff. “Getting books, hearing this, it’s a benefit for us. It makes a difference in our life.”

Danielle is a single mother and has worked with ABCD Inc., which runs the Pipkin site and others like it in Bridgeport, since 1998. She started out as a volunteer, then worked her way into the classroom as an assistant teacher and then into an office job. She has three children, ranging in age from 11 years old to 4 months.

“I came to the workshop to learn and to show the parents there’s no stigma,” she said. “They see me here, and that’s good.”

To meet the book needs in the summer session at Pipkin, Read to Grow gave out about 750 children’s books, many of them new bilingual Spanish-English. (Workshops led by Read to Grow staff were presented in English by Myra Healy and Linda Sylvester and then presented in Spanish by Evelyn Tomasello.)

“The parents really liked the workshops,” said Huwerl Thornton, the Mobile Distribution Coordinator for Connecticut Food Bank who manages GROW! Truck.

Linda Sylvester, one of the Books for Kids

coordinators at Read to Grow, said, “It’s exciting for us to participate in a program where we can connect with families directly and speak to families directly. We had so many wonderful conversations with parents who told us how they read to their children, and how happy they are to get books so they can continue to do what they know is important.”

For the fall and next spring, Read to Grow is set to be with the truck at two or three sites in Bridgeport and at least one in New Haven.

“Overall, it’s an outstanding partnership,” Linda said.

Huwerl concurs. The new collaboration, he said, “is a match made in heaven.”

“It’s worked out wonderfully, and it’s been great to watch parents get excited about books they see that were their favorites in childhood. When they pick them, you know they’re going to be reading at home.”

DO YOU KNOW?

The average child in a low-income family has had how many hours of one-on-one reading before starting kindergarten?

a. 0-25 b. 26-50 c. 51-75

See answer on page 6

OUTREACH: BOOK PLACE OPENS AT THE VILLAGE

Wake Up, It’s ‘Goodnight Moon’!

Mathew Correa selected “Goodnight Moon” to read to his son, even though the 13-month-old had just woken from a mid-day nap.

“He’s not quite there yet,” the father said. “But he likes to look at the pictures.”

Mathew was one of dozens of parents who brought their children on the last Friday in August to take part in a Book Place opening at The Village on Wethersfield Avenue in Hartford, across the street from Bulkeley High School.

The Village has been operating for over 100 years. It provides behavioral health treatment for children, foster care and adoption, and community support services for children and their families in the Greater Hartford region. It has three locations in the capital—the Wethersfield Avenue site, another on Spring Street and administrative offices on Albany Avenue.

A Book Place—one of Read to Grow’s new initiatives—is now a component at the Wethersfield Avenue and Spring Street locations, which serve thousands of people.

At each site, bookcases are filled with a variety of new and gently used books appropriate for a range of children from newborns to teens. Many books are bilingual English-Spanish. Clients of The Village and others are welcomed to come during operating hours to select free books for their children to keep.



Mathew Correa and his son

At each site, parents and care-givers can find information and resources on literacy and easy, fun language-building activities for them and their children. Also at Book Places, Read to Grow is offering workshops both to the staff and to the families.

“It’s great to have a partnership like this,” said Dr. Galo Rodriguez, president and CEO of The Village. He attended the Book Place opening. The day featured food, face-painting, an author’s visit, and time to socialize.

“We believe strongly that the only way to go forward and succeed is to join together to make life better for families,” said Rodriguez,

who has led The Village for the last eight years. “We have to partner. No one group can do it alone. It’s not just about health. It’s not just about finances. It’s about everybody working together in comprehensive ways to learn how to improve family life.”

At Wethersfield Avenue, Keith Gaston co-directs a program of The Village geared to engaging fathers in their families and household activities. He and co-director Linda Hawkins praised their new Book Place, saying it is a low-cost, low-maintenance feature but has high potential for helping young and old.

“We want people to walk in, to feel like this place is their place” said Gaston. “We really can make something happen here.”

The neighborhood around The Village has a large Hispanic population. Gaston was excited to see Mathew Correa and his young son at the opening.

“Mathew took our FatherWorks course,” said Gaston. “We want more like him here, taking advantage of the great opportunity.”

Along with Book Places at The Village sites, Read to Grow has opened 10 others, many at Family Resource Centers and Discovery communities. The goal is to have Book Places across the state so that parents and children can build libraries of their own at home.

For an updated listing of Book Places and information in both English and Spanish, visit our website: www.readtogrow.org

WHAT WE HEAR

From Mothers Receiving Our Literacy Packet in the Hospitals

“This is a great program. The tools and suggestions are great, even for my 10- & 7-year-old daughters. Reading is a powerful tool, and children are never too young to learn. Thank you.

Tanya Rosario, whose youngest child was born in Hartford Hospital in Sept. 2014

“I didn’t know how important it was to read, sing and talk to babies this young. My son loves (the book) and tries to imitate as best he can the sounds and shapes of lips.”

Kimberly Meister, whose son was born in Hartford Hospital in May 2014

“Henry is 10 months and loves “Welcome to the World!”. You should see how his eyes light up when we read this book to him. If you have any other books, please send them.”

Yvonne Kielhorn, whose son was born at Yale-New Haven Hospital in Nov. 2013

“What a wonderful program to promote literacy. Thank you. Read to Grow has been helpful in introducing me to new books by providing books appropriate for different stages of development and by providing tips for reading with my child.”

Kate Botta, whose baby was born in Hartford Hospital in Feb. 2013

From Those Who Get Free Children’s Books

“Due to the generous support of our donors we were able to help 344 children in the Greater Danbury area. These children were able to receive backpacks, school supplies and a \$100 gift card (for purchase of clothes). In addition, we were able to offer them books from Read to Grow. Having books available at the distribution event for children to take home further strengthens the program and promotes family literacy. Every child and sibling had an opportunity to select a book to take home that day. We could not have done this without your program.”

Betty Batista, at the United Way of Western Connecticut

“Thank you so much. My kids were so excited when they received the books you sent them. We sat and started reading right away. The choices that were sent were perfect. They loved them all.”

Ileana Alicea of Newington

Places for The Books & Books for The Places

Mary Bradley found 12 ways to help Read to Grow this summer. Several of the dozen bookcases from her home in Hamden that she donated are already set up at Book Places in New Haven, Bridgeport and Hartford.

Mrs. Bradley decided this year to downsize to a smaller residence after the death of her husband, Charles, a realtor for decades in the Greater New Haven area. His lifelong passion for books had led to an extraordinary collection. To accommodate the numbers, bookcases lined many of the rooms of their upstairs floors.

Bidding farewell to books and other treasures—not to mention a home of many decades—might seem a sad passage, but Mrs. Bradley delighted in finding new value for items that she could no longer keep and that her two grown children don't



Mary Bradley

want. Also, a 30-year career in fundraising for nonprofits that include Quinnipiac University has made Mrs. Bradley agile in connecting commodities with people who need them.

"It would give Charles great pleasure to know how the bookcases are being used," she said one August morning as the last of the sturdy, wooden shelves were carried from her house to a van. "I didn't want to have a tag sale. I wanted to give them where they're needed most. I'm so glad it's Read to Grow."

Throughout Read to Grow's 14 years, we have depended on donations that include hundreds of thousands of gently used books. Book-drive organizers provide a basic staple for operations. Today, with the initiatives, Read to Grow's new needs are being met by new friends.

With Help from Our Friends...

CATHOLIC CHARITY LEAGUE OF NEW HAVEN gave a \$4,575 gift to boost our initiatives last summer. The League raised the funds during their annual spring benefit luncheon. Pictured from left to right are: Diane Dow, of the League; Kyn Tolson of Read to Grow; Rose Ann Castiglione of the League; Roxanne Coady, Board Chair of Read to Grow; and Tom Gullotta, Read to Grow Board Member.



UNITED WAY OF COASTAL FAIRFIELD COUNTY's \$28,000 grant in July funds a sixth year of the 'Books for Kids Read at Home Initiative.' The long-term project is a partnership between Read to Grow and United Way to ensure that children in the 12-town region have age-appropriate books at home. More than 110,000 books have gone to the UWFCF region over the last five years.



You Can Help the Work for Literacy and Families for Generations to Come

LEAVE A LEGACY[®] CONNECTICUT

A statewide public awareness effort to promote charitable giving through wills and estate plans.

- Please consider:**
- Preparing a will and including a gift for Read to Grow.
 - Donating a dollar amount or a percentage of assets, including stocks, bonds, CDs, real estate, vehicles, art, jewelry, or other property.
 - Naming Read to Grow as a beneficiary of your IRA or pension plan.
 - Naming Read to Grow as a beneficiary of your life insurance policy.
 - Honoring friends and remembering loved ones with memorial gifts.



DO YOU KNOW?

What percent of children not reading proficiently by the end of 3rd grade do not graduate high school on time? (This is four times greater than for proficient readers in 3rd grade.)

a. 8% b. 16% c. 20%

QUIZ ANSWERS:
page 2 (b); page 3 (c); page 4 (a); page 6 (b)

We Thank Our Volunteers!

Read to Grow volunteers generously donate more than 10,000 hours of work every year. They bring a wealth of abilities and talents to our organization and help in everything from administrative & clerical duties and book cleaning & sorting to visits with families in our 12 partner hospitals across the state. The work of Read to Grow could not be done without the cadre of more than 70 people, many of whom have been with us for years. We are grateful to each and every one.

- | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| ACORD, Inc. | Kate Lee | Joan Roczynski |
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| Deborah Kelly | | |
| Evelyn Krevolin | | |
| Lynne Krupa | | |
| Jane Labbe | | |
| Wendy Lacasse | | |



Volunteers at Middlesex Hospital in Middletown who work in our Books for Babies program (left to right): Rebecca Armstrong, Lina Cardozo and Sherry Stekloff



Volunteer Deborah Kelly



Volunteer Mary Ellen Vincent



Volunteer Wendy Lacasse

Read to Grow Welcomes Your Help



Call us at: 203.488.6800
Or email: readtogrow@readtogrow.org
Visit our website for more details: www.readtogrow.org

If you would like to volunteer, there are a number of ways to help in our mission. You might:

- Train for our Books for Babies program at one of 12 partnered hospitals, where you would visit with new families to talk about our Literacy Packet
- Come to our office in Branford, where you could:
 - assemble Literacy Packets for the hospitals
 - sort and prepare books for our deliveries
 - assist with record-keeping and data-entry
 - lend a hand in website and social media development
- Organize or sponsor a book drive to collect gently used children's books
- Help in our fund-raising efforts

Books for Babies It's in Hospitals and Much More

Books for Babies (BFB) has been in hospitals for 14 years, delivering free books for newborns and literacy guides to their parents on maternity units. Today it extends into primary care centers, Family Resource Centers, and in-home visiting programs—all to reach both parents-to-be and many more low-income families.

BFB provides both our 'First Guide for Parents of Newborns' DVD and our new 'In the Womb' tri-fold brochure to nine OB-primary care centers across the state. The material also has gone to 40 Family Resource Centers and several programs with staff who go into homes for one-on-one services.

In another way to reach more parents, BFB gives new board books to four pediatric primary care centers for their 2-month well-baby checkups.

All the newer work is based on years of service in the hospitals. Partnered with 12 hospitals, BFB reaches about 22,000 newborns and their parents annually.



Commissioner Myra Jones-Taylor of Connecticut's Office of Early Childhood (center) visits Middlesex Hospital in Middletown on September 23rd to see our Books for Babies program in action. Also pictured are new father Jason Beaudoin with daughter, Joni, and BFB volunteer Sherry Stekloff, who explains our Literacy Packet that all parents receive.

Photo by Tricia Bohan of Branford

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