

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

## A Dozen + 2 = More Books for Babies Partners

Our family of partner hospitals is growing! Our Books for Babies program, which has been operating in 12 hospitals across the state, now has 14 partners.

The newest—Torrington's Charlotte Hungerford Hospital and William W. Backus Hospital in Norwich—joined in the summer and early fall, respectively.

Through our program, all mothers of newborns in the hospitals' maternity units receive our Literacy Packets and visits from trained volunteers or nurses who briefly discuss the importance (and fun) of sharing books with infants from birth. We now annually reach the mothers of about 22,500 babies, or 61% of those born in Connecticut.

Books for Babies, which is the flagship program of Read to Grow, started in 2000 in Yale New Haven Hospital. The other collaborating hospitals are: Bridgeport; Day Kimball in Putnam; Griffin in Derby; Hartford; Lawrence + Memorial in New London; Manchester; Middlesex in Middletown; Saint Francis in Hartford; St. Vincent's in Bridgeport; Sharon; and Saint Raphael in New Haven.

With an abundance of supporting research, Read to Grow teaches that children who are read to regularly from their earliest days are more likely to develop the language skills needed for starting kindergarten. Learning abilities and academic success can be predicted as early as kindergarten by measuring pre-literacy skills.

Charlotte Hungerford Hospital, where 408 babies were born in 2016, primarily serves southern Litchfield County. Torrington is the largest city in the county. About 25% of its students starting kindergarten have at least Level 3 literacy skills, which means, in part, they both understand that print conveys meaning and have the ability to match some letters to sounds, according to the CT Department of Education, 2013–14.



At Yale New Haven Hospital, a mother with her newborn learns about important, fun ways to build her baby's language skills from volunteer Joan Roczynski. Our free Literacy Packet has a new book for the baby and a guide for parents.

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**Books for Kids  
has been busy  
in New Haven.**

**See page 2  
for some of  
the activities.**

### COMMENTARY

## The Literacy Crisis—and One Way to Help

By Carla M. Horwitz

*Editor's Note: Carla M. Horwitz, Ed.D, is a board member of Read to Grow. She is director emerita of Yale University-Calvin Hill Day Care Center and Kitty Lustman-Findling Kindergarten. Also, she is lecturer at Yale Child Study Center, Yale University Department of Psychology and Education Studies Program.*

Do you remember learning how to read?

No, I'm not talking about the phonics worksheets and reading groups of early elementary school. I'm talking about something much, much earlier. Go way back....

Learning how to read begins when a baby is snuggled up close with a parent or a caregiver and a book. The adult holds

the book and the baby in a loving embrace, and reads the simple words in a loving and supportive voice. Maybe the newborn's eyes are not yet focused, nor can the infant yet hold up its head. But repeated experiences like this over time create an association and an expectation—reading feels good! The baby is learning to read—in a nurturing triangle of book, parent and baby.

Reading is learned long before we go to school. It is learned when reading is connected to an emotional relationship, one that lets the baby know “you are so important to me, and so is what we are doing together!” Set that close, warm feeling next to the familiar beloved voice and body of the parent

and incorporate a book. That's a recipe for learning to read and loving to read. And it starts at birth!

Read to Grow provides books to families with children. Over the years, it has given more than 1.6 million children's books, many of them through literacy services in your communities. But it's most distinctive aspect, I believe, is that Read to Grow, through its Books for Babies program, begins to nurture this literacy relationship for children and their families at birth, in the hospital.

By beginning at birth—meeting with moms in the hospital after they deliver their babies—Read to Grow starts an important

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# Books for Kids Keeps Busy in New Haven

## A BOOK THAT'S OUT OF THIS WORLD

Read to Grow gave out hot dogs all around New Haven this summer!

Thanks to a generous donation from Simon & Schuster and a partnership with New Haven Public Schools, we gave new copies of the book *Galactic Hot Dogs* to more than 3,500 third-, fourth- and fifth-graders before the end of the school year.

In total, 9,540 elementary school children were given "I LOVE READING" bags filled with books, all prepared by the school system's reading department. More books, including 1,500 other copies of *Galactic Hot Dogs*, were distributed around the city at places such as barbershops and restaurants so that business owners could invite visiting children to take home books to read.

The project was spearheaded by the reading department to prevent learning loss during vacation, which is commonly referred

to as "summer slide."

Referring to *Galactic Hot Dogs*, Lynn Brantley, a literacy supervisor for the schools, said, "Teachers have reported the kids love this graphic novel. The book is quite a success."



## PAL PROMOTES SUMMER READING

Read to Grow gave 400 books for campers in PAL's program this year.

The New Haven Police Department's Police Activities League (PAL) Summer Youth Camp enrolled 375 New Haven resident day-campers between the ages of 8 and 13.

PAL camp is held at Wilbur Cross High School and runs full-day, five days a week over five weeks in July and August.

Daily activities include athletics, arts and crafts, music, language arts, and mathematics. Weekly field trips are included, and campers are required to read for 45 minutes each day.

For the second year, Read to Grow has supported PAL.

Police Sgt. Al McFadden, camp coordinator, said, "It's important that the kids read during the summer in order to prevent summer slide."

The free camp is funded by Yale-New Haven Hospital, New Haven Athletics, New Haven Police Local 530, Town Green Association, Yale University's Office of New Haven & State Affairs, First Student Bus Company, Toni Walker, and H.L. Brenner Insurance.

*Stories by Linda Sylvester, Books for Kids Coordinator, and Evelyn Tomasello, Books for Kids Associate*

## Appreciation to Volunteers—We Couldn't Do It without Them

So many people who give generously of their time and talents help to make Read to Grow run year in, year out. We can never thank them enough for what they give to us and hundreds of thousands of children and families of Connecticut.

### IN OUR PARTNER HOSPITALS

**Bridgeport Hospital**  
Vilma Thompson

### Charlotte Hungerford

Dalia Acevedo  
Helen Alling  
Rosalie Strano  
Pat Zimmerman

### Griffin Hospital

Deborah Ahern  
Liz DePalma  
Pamela Harris

### Hartford Hospital

Susan Cohen  
Sharon Goldfarb  
Karen Manternach  
Aydeline Murdoch

### Lawrence +

### Memorial Hospital

Teresa Covill  
Linda Longo  
Amber Monteith  
Janie Pressley  
Lois Steinman  
Hope Stevens

### Manchester Memorial Hospital

Nancy Bojarski  
Shirley Cowles  
Angeline Fleig

Jane Labbe  
Fatma Vogli

### Middlesex Hospital

Rebecca Armstrong  
Corinne Brown  
Sheila Haverkamp  
Joanne Smith  
Sherry Stekloff

### Saint Francis

### Hospital & Medical Center

Judy Cohen  
Ann LoVoi  
Donna Meehan  
Anna Mary Mulhearn

Karen Murray  
Lynne Nathan  
Barbara Shuckra

### Saint Vincent's Medical Center

Ellen Conte  
Wendy Hyman  
Grisela Ruiz

### Sharon Hospital

Gretchen  
Hachmeister

### Yale New Haven Hospital

Gloria Amatrudo  
Meghan Andronaco  
Kathleen Dess  
Mary Jayne D'Eugenio  
Susan Klug  
Carol Lutes  
Joan Roczynski  
Margarie Vamvakis

### Yale New Haven Hospital, Saint Raphael Campus

Debreeda Jones  
Barbara Massey  
Judy Silverman  
Constance Walsh

### AT OUR BRANFORD OFFICE & WAREHOUSE

Faith Barrington  
Branford High School  
Grace Callejo  
Carolyn Casey  
Haydee Cartagena  
Angela Clark  
Mary Lou Cretella

Marge Cross  
Sandra Deitter  
Jan Donahue  
Susan Dudley  
Amanda Evans  
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Barbara Gibson  
Genevieve Goff  
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Aren Longo  
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Susan Moher  
Judy Morelli

Jack Mulqueen  
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Barbara Pendziwater  
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Perez  
Mary Russell  
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Elizabeth Schwammberger

Mary Ann Sjostrom  
Heidi Smith  
April Stefanovics  
Carolyn Stephan  
Anne Verzella  
Laura Vescovi  
Mary Ellen Vincent  
Dinah Virgulto  
Sandra Zalonski

### NEWSLETTER OF READ TO GROW

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# A New, Earlier 'Touch' Reaches Pregnant Women at Health Centers

Books for Babies is getting off to an earlier start.

Our new Prenatal Project is expanding to several community health centers across the state. The purpose of the initiative is to offer pregnant women receiving care at the health centers both our workshops on how to develop their infants' language skills and our new, free books for babies.

*Each health center tailors the project to fit its services for obstetric patients.*

A year ago, we completed a pilot of the initiative at Fair Haven Community Health Center in New Haven (FHCHC). In the spring, the Community Health Center Association of Connecticut presented a webinar about the Prenatal Project for all its members.

Today, the project is at FHCHC year-round and four additional sites: Optimus Health Care in Bridgeport; First Choice Health Centers in East Hartford; the Women's Center at the Yale Primary Care Clinics in New Haven; and the Neonatal Follow-up Program with Connecticut Children's

Specialty Group in Hartford. Three or four other health centers could adopt the project by the end of the year.

We hope to take our services to health centers and clinics where women in prenatal classes will likely deliver at one of our 14 partner hospitals. This early introduction to the importance of talking and reading to babies lays the groundwork for hearing the message again in the hospital.

We give the women information about Read to Grow, new baby board books, and IKEA storage bins in which to keep the children's books at home. The bins were given through an award from the IKEA Life Improvement Challenge. Even before their babies are born, the women can get as many as six new books.

"This partnership will give First Choice the opportunity to engage with prenatal moms and elicit their interest in their child's development from an early stage," said Colleen Rankine, PhD, Patient Engagement Manager at First Choice Health Centers in East Hartford. "We serve a vulnerable population and want to ensure that our patient population receives services that will not only treat their symptoms but treat them holistically for better health and overall outcome."

*By Elizabeth Cech, Books for Babies Coordinator*

## A Thank-You for Recent Grants

- The Katharine Matthies Foundation awarded a \$7,000 grant for our Books for Babies program at Griffin Hospital and the Valley Family Resource Center Book Place. This is our fourth grant from the foundation.
- For a third year, Near and Far Aid is giving \$5,000 for our work in Bridgeport. This year, funds will go for operating our Book Places in the city and our Prenatal Project at one or more community health centers.
- A \$4,000 grant from Jeffrey P. Ossen Family Foundation will support Windham Early Childhood Center Book Place.
- Seedlings Foundation awarded a three-year grant, supporting our Prenatal Project, our work in the hospitals, and our 43 collaborations with other nonprofits.

### This Is Sweet!

Middle-schooler Chelsea Fitzgerald ran her 5th annual summer book drive in Wallingford to benefit Read to Grow. She held a bake sale to raise money to buy books to give us. In August, she donated a whopping 3,991 books!



## COMMENTARY: LET'S MAKE SURE THERE'S A BOOK FOR EVERY BABY

*(continued from page 1)*

process. And it is one that has been demonstrated to make a difference. In a survey of over 6,000 mothers who received Read to Grow packets in the hospital at the birth of their children, 81% learned about the importance of reading to their babies. Of the same mothers, 72% then reported reading with their babies at least once a day.

Today, Read to Grow is partnered with 14 hospitals, where all families of newborns get our packets. Most of the mothers are visited by volunteers who engage in short conversations to emphasize the importance and fun ways of building their babies' language skills and love of reading.

Through these 14 hospitals partnerships, Read to Grow reaches about 61% of all babies born in Connecticut. The goal—promoted by the #BooksForEveryBaby campaign—is to reach 100%. To accomplish this goal, Read to Grow needs your help. Just \$15 will give a book to a newborn, a guide for parents, and more free books to the families who want

them.

As a member of the Read to Grow Board of Directors, I know firsthand the important work of this robust, pioneering, responsive organization.

As director, for the last 40 years, of Yale University's Calvin Hill Day Care Center, I witness intimately the crucial importance of literacy to the healthy intellectual, social and emotional development of young children.

As a faculty member at the Yale Child Study Center, teaching child development and the theory and practice of early childhood education to Yale students, I understand profoundly the significant role that learning to read and the ability to fluently negotiate language play in the development of the individual brain as well as in the preservation of our collective culture.

But Read to Grow's contribution does not stop when the baby goes home.

- It sustains the relationship with the family through sending follow-up materials, including other new books when the baby is

3 months old and 1 year old.

- It delivers books in collaboration with many other non-profits, those that serve primarily low-income families, many of whom are not native English speakers. For this population, it provides bilingual books.
- It has Book Places throughout Connecticut where children of all ages have access to free books to keep at home.
- It cooperates with health care and child care providers to make books available to their patients and clients.
- In its latest innovation, it is interfacing with pregnant women in community health centers and primary care centers.

Nurturing and sustaining the joy of lifelong literacy begin in the home. With help from us all, that will happen in every home in Connecticut. Please join the #BooksForEveryBaby campaign with your gift to make books and their magic, instruction, excitement, and possibility all a fundamental part of each child's experience, from the earliest moments to well beyond.



Visit us at  
[www.readtogrow.org](http://www.readtogrow.org)

On Facebook, be sure to like us at: ReadtoGrowCT  
Follow us on Twitter at: @ReadtoGrowCT

## You Can Help To Ensure There Are #BooksForEveryBaby!

### Five ways donations will make a difference:

- \$1,250 = 80 mothers with newborns at hospitals will receive new books for their babies and literacy guides for parents. They'll also learn, in one-on-one conversation, the easy and important ways to build their children's language skills.
- \$500 = workshops (with new books for babies and handouts) for 40 pregnant women receiving their care at community health centers.
- \$250 = 100 new bilingual books (Spanish-English; Arabic-English) for infants and children.
- \$90 = 2 literacy workshops (with new books for children and handouts) for Head Start families.
- \$50 = 50 books for 2 childcare providers.

## MORE HOSPITALS WITH OUR BOOKS FOR BABIES PROGRAM

*(continued from page 1)*

Four volunteers at Charlotte Hungerford have signed on with Books for Babies. They will visit mothers of newborns in their hospital rooms to discuss early brain development and best ways to share books with their infants.

At the hospital, Shelli Rhoades in the volunteer office; Kelli Odenwaelder, R.N., Clinical Manager at the Maternity Center; and Rosalie Strano, president of the hospital auxiliary, were among those who helped in launching our program.

Backus Hospital, which recorded 928 births in 2016, begins distributing our Literacy Packets this fall. The hospital, part of the Hartford Health Care system, serves northern New London County from its Norwich base. About 59% of the city's children are at Level 3 or higher in literacy skills when they begin kindergarten.

At Backus, Katie Van Dyke, MSN, APRN, IBCLC, Clinical Nurse Educator OB/Neonatal, and Sara Bouchard, BSN-RNC-OB, the nurse manager of the maternity unit, helped to usher in our program.

Read to Grow's goal remains to have Books for Babies in all 26 Connecticut hospitals with maternity units.

*By Diane Visconti, Books for Babies Associate*