

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

The Great Constant

A message from Read to Grow Executive Director Suzannah Holsenbeck

Each morning in the rush of packing school lunches, getting the puppy out, making sure my three-year-old wears socks and my five-year-old has a mask that fits him before the school bus comes, there's a moment where I take a deep breath and remind myself how lucky we are to find ourselves in this busy-ness. The realities of an ongoing pandemic face us daily: the news of a friend's parent being hospitalized, sometimes the bus doesn't come because there aren't enough bus drivers, the line at the food pantry near our home is always long, one child is home for the week because there was a positive COVID case in his classroom. The pandemic isn't over, yet we are building new routines and finding new ways to respond to all the uncertainty. At home and at work, the greatest constant is change.

At Read to Grow, the greatest constant is books. We receive and distribute a ton of books, nearly 130,000 annually. And continue to find ways to do so despite the constant upheavals of systems and policies and schedules. Our book *Hello Sometimes* and

the bilingual Spanish-English version, *A Veces Hola*, written by Amy Vatner and illustrated by Gabriella Svenningsen and created specifically in response to this very moment in history, has reached over 15,000 children and counting (see pictures on page 3). Our Early Steps to School Success program, originally launched in New Haven in 2019, has expanded to Bridgeport, serving close to 100 families with home visiting and home library services during this critical time. Our Books for Kids coordinators are working furiously to fulfill the over 1,000 book requests from families (up from an average of 250 per year) and continue honing our inventory to be reflective of and responsive to our communities and their needs. Our Books for Babies coordinators are supporting partner clinics and hospitals, many of whom are seeing monthly birth rates 20–30% higher than their regular monthly averages. Thanks to Centerville Bank, we received funding to purchase and launch a Book Mobile (coming Spring 2022!) and we are excited about all the ways this new resource on wheels will help us reach more children



A family from East Haven shares the joy of reading Hello Sometimes/A Veces Hola together.

across the state.

When I take that deep breath every morning, I think about the dedication our Read to Grow staff and volunteers show each and every day, I think about our generous donors and their steadfast belief in what we do, and I think about all of the children, much like my own, who are able to find solace in the Read to Grow book that is now a book they can call their own.

Early Steps to School Success Expands to Bridgeport

Read to Grow is thrilled to announce the expansion of our Early Steps to School Success (ESSS) program to Bridgeport, in partnership with Save The Children and Bridgeport Public Schools. Read to Grow has long had a presence in Bridgeport through the Books for Babies program, annually providing over 3,000 literacy packets to newborns at Bridgeport and St. Vincent's Hospitals, and hundreds of books and literacy support to expecting parents receiving care at community health clinics operated by Southwest and Optimus. The expansion of ESSS began August 2021 with two coordinators, themselves from Bridgeport, working at Bryant Elementary and Luis Muñoz Marin School and will serve at least 40 families, if not more, in this first year. Read to Grow is bringing ESSS to Bridgeport at a time when many long-time home visiting programs across

Connecticut have had to close their doors, due to both the pandemic and the most recent round of funding decisions through the Office

of Early Childhood. Early Steps is filling a need in Bridgeport and the goal is to add two additional coordinators over the next two years.



Bridgeport ESSS coordinator Lakenya reads to preschoolers on district read-aloud day.

Our Annual Report and Appreciations

Please see pages 4–7 for our annual report and treasurer's report for the 2020–21 fiscal year, which ended June 30, 2021. Also on those pages is our appreciation to donors and book-drive organizers.

Read to Grow Board Welcomes Joel Cruz

Read to Grow's board of directors is thrilled to welcome Joel Cruz to their membership. "Mr. Cruz's complex understanding of various Hartford communities, paired with his extensive experience developing programming and advocating for those among us who have the least make him a wonderful addition to the Read to Grow family," says Board Chair Jeff Hartmann. Mr. Cruz currently works as the Director of the Institute for the Hispanic Family and Family Strengthening Programs of Catholic Charities in Hartford, in addition to being a decorated Marine Corps veteran, father, and former minority leader/councilman-elected official for the City of Hartford.



New board member Joel Cruz Photo: Joel Cruz

Southwest Community Health Center and Read to Grow Expand Community Impact

Southwest Community Health Center, located in Bridgeport, proudly serves nearly 27,000 patients, including many pregnant women and young children. Alarming, only about 25% of Bridgeport's low-income children consistently demonstrate age-expected development when they enter Head Start at the age of three. To combat this, Southwest embraces the importance of early literacy as it helps support brain development, early language, and prepares children for academic success in school. We are honored to call Read to Grow a partner in this endeavor. Through Read to Grow's Books for Babies—Prenatal Project, expectant parents build a library for their babies before they are even born. Read to Grow's books and literacy message help to facilitate

a conversation between our medical providers and patients about bonding through books and reading to their babies, starting from birth.

In August, Southwest and Read to Grow partnered with News 12 in a back-to-school celebration and COVID vaccination event. Nearly 250 children and their families were in attendance and received backpacks, school supplies, and of course books! The highlight of the event was watching the faces of the children light up when they selected a book from Read to Grow. This partnership is a natural fit for Southwest, and we are thrilled to continue this crucial collaboration to support the children of Bridgeport. *Mollie L. Melbourne, CEO, Southwest Community Health Center*

NEWSLETTER OF READ TO GROW
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Senator Richard Blumenthal joins Early Steps coordinators Lakenya Watford and Yazmin Benitez and Books for Babies coordinator Laura Noe to give out books at an event hosted by Southwest Community Health Center in Bridgeport. Photo: Southwest Community Health Center

Books for Babies Partner Manchester Memorial Hospital Receives Network of Distinction Award

Since 2005, Read to Grow has partnered with Manchester Memorial Hospital to bring



Kimberly Forbes, Community Relations Manager for Manchester Hospital and Books for Babies Coordinator Laura Noe Photo: Read to Grow

books, literacy materials, and community support to new parents. Eastern Connecticut Health Network's (ECHN) Family Birthing Center located at Manchester Memorial Hospital is a shining example of a partnership that collaborates with the best interest of child and parent always at the center.

Over 22,400 copies of Read to Grow's timeless book, *Welcome to the World!*, have been distributed to babies born at Manchester Memorial in that time, welcoming newborns to the world and helping parents bond with their babies by reading to them. Nursing staff generously took on the task of conveying the Read to Grow message during COVID and we just received the good news that vaccinated

volunteers will be welcomed back on the floor by the end of the year. Averaging almost 1,400 births a year, Manchester Hospital saw a surge in births this summer, with July recording the highest birth rate on record.

This summer ECHN was recognized by the State of Connecticut and Signify Health as a Network of Distinction. One of the seven key procedure areas recognized was Maternity. As part of this network, ECHN has been identified as one that provides improved patient outcomes at a competitive fixed price for care from evaluation to recovery. Delivering high quality and affordable care is something to celebrate.

Laura Noe, Books for Babies Coordinator

Hello Sometimes Incorporated into Social Emotional Curriculum Delivered By Griffin Health in Valley Schools

Safe Kids Greater Naugatuck Valley Coalition at Griffin Hospital recently requested and received 300 copies of *Hello Sometimes*, for our children in the Ansonia and Derby public elementary schools. As part of our ongoing collaboration with the schools, we have developed a Social Emotional program for the kids that complements their Social Emotional district-wide program.

Last school year, we talked with children in grades K-6 about identifying their feelings, exploring ways to calm our bodies down, recognize in others and ourselves when we

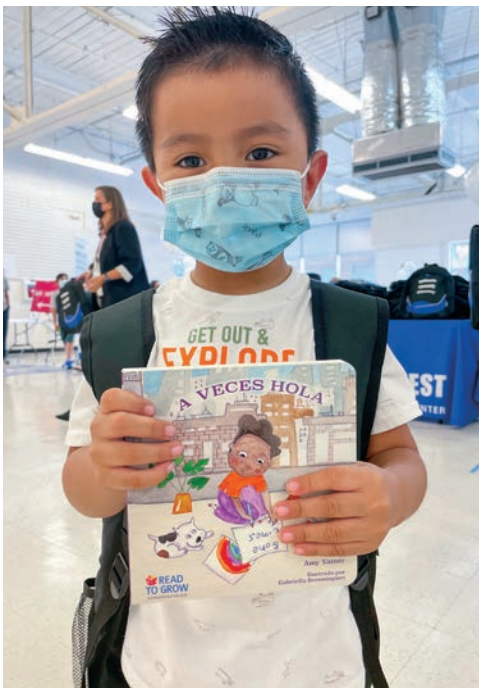
need to take a break and identifying an adult that we can talk to. We talked about the importance of eating healthy, exercising, and washing our hands and how all this plays into a healthy body.

This year we are so excited to be able to present each child with a book that is theirs to keep and share at home. The addition of *Hello Sometimes* to the curriculum really complements what the children in kindergarten and first grade are learning; the simple statements on each page are inviting a dialog with the children about how they feel

about missing in person school, missing family and friends, having to wear masks and just in general feelings of what our world is going through. *The Feelings Book* by Todd Parr is also being introduced for the children in grades 2-5. We are eager to provide meaningful avenues to help children navigate what is happening in our world and hopefully, help to give them a voice to express themselves in a positive way.

Cathi Kellett, BS, MA, Community Outreach & Parish Nurse Department, Safe Kids Greater Naugatuck Valley Coalition Coordinator

Hello Sometimes Reaches Over 15,000 Children and Counting Statewide





A MESSAGE FROM JANE LEE

As a newer member of the Read to Grow board, I am thrilled to step into the role of treasurer of this wonderful organization doing such meaningful work in the early literacy field. Like many organizations, Read to Grow continued to adjust to the realities of the ongoing pandemic during FY 2020–2021, pivoting the implementation of programs to meet the literacy needs of families and community partners. We distributed 126,699 books throughout the course of the year, including 31,903 books through our Books for Babies programming, 92,744 books through our Books for Kids programming, and 2,052 books through our Early Steps to School Success programming.

During the summer of 2020, Read to Grow continued to distribute books at school meal distribution sites around the state in response to the pandemic and in partnership with Senator Chris Murphy, RJ Julia Booksellers and many generous donors.

As schools reopened to in-person learning in fall 2020, Read to Grow dove into raising funds for the publication and distribution of a new board book, *Hello Sometimes*, in direct response to the COVID pandemic. The first printing run of 11,000 copies of *Hello Sometimes* landed in the Read to Grow warehouse in June 2021, and we are now deep into distributing a second run of 11,000 copies of the book statewide.

Read to Grow launched a new virtual event series in spring 2021: Popcorn & PJs: Virtual Family Storytime events with a dynamic array of children’s book authors and illustrators, including Hyewon Yum, Lizzy Rockwell and Abdul-Razak Zachariah. Families had the option to order just the link or for \$30 receive a box with the book, a link to the event, popcorn, crayons, sketch pads and more shipped straight to their door. Founding supporter Citizens Bank stepped up to sponsor the events, Alliance for Community Empowerment sponsored their Head Start families and other generous donors sponsored families enrolled in the home visiting portion Early Steps for School Success.

Read to Grow set a goal to raise \$10,000 through the Great Give, an annual giving event organized by the Community Foundation of Greater New Haven. Thanks to our committed supporters, Read to Grow raised over \$30,000 during 24 hours of giving in spring 2021.

The Roxanne J Coady Legacy Fund for Children’s Literacy saw a gain of \$26,851.

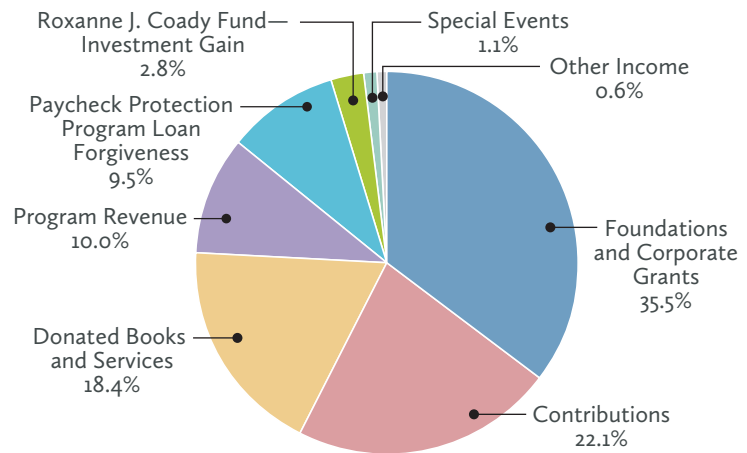
Read to Grow applied for and received a second-round Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan of \$109,348 and applied for and received full forgiveness of the loan in October 2021.

Read to Grow received an unqualified, or clean, audit opinion for the 2020–2021 fiscal year from an external auditor, Whittlesey.

This annual report is available online at www.readtogrow.org/about-us/annual-reports/

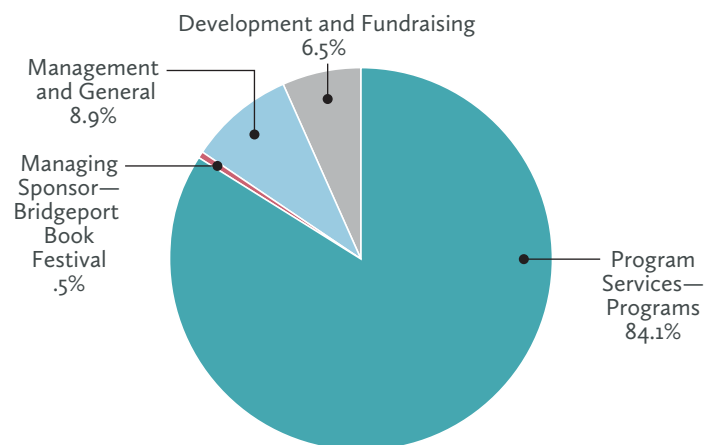
PUBLIC SUPPORT AND OTHER REVENUES

Foundations and Corporate Grants	\$ 346,406
Contributions	216,090
Donated Books and Services	180,078
Program Revenue	97,280
Paycheck Protection Program Loan Forgiveness	92,800
Roxanne J. Coady Fund—Investment Gain	26,851
Special Events	11,207
Other Income	6,179
Total Public Support and Other Revenues	\$ 976,891



FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES

Program Services—Programs	\$ 1,072,190
Managing Sponsor—Bridgeport Book Festival	6,267
Management and General	112,840
Development and Fundraising	83,154
Total Functional Expenses	1,274,451
Change in Net Assets	\$ -297,560





We thank all our donors in the last fiscal year (July 1, 2020–June 30, 2021). The names of donors who gave “In Honor” or “In Memory” of someone appear in those special categories near the end of the listings.

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READ TO GROW ANNUAL REPORT 2021



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In memory of Lee Zonis
Michelle Hatch

If we have inadvertently omitted a name, printed a name incorrectly, or categorized any donor incorrectly, please accept our apologies. Also, please call us at 203.488.6800 so that we can correct our records.

BOOK DRIVE DONATIONS (OVER 500 BOOKS)

Andover Elementary School	Collin Lamontagne
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Haddam-Killingworth Intermediate School	Ariana Napier
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Translating Read to Grow Materials for All Community Members

Read to Grow community partners frequently work with large immigrant communities and non-English speaking children and families. Read to Grow is committed to making our materials accessible to children and families and, thanks to a generous grant from the International Association of New Haven (IANH), we have been able to undertake the translation of select printed and online messaging materials and forms into high-

demand languages like Pashto, Arabic, Dari, French, and Swahili. Read to Grow worked with local agencies IRIS and ACES to identify translators, including Rahatgul Takoor, a Pashto translator who worked for NATO and the U.S. military and who had come to the U.S. just seven days before the fall of Kabul. The grant from IANH also allows Read to Grow to purchase and distribute books in languages other than Spanish and English.



Rahatgul Takoor, Pashto translator, and Paula Grimm, development and data specialist

Photo: Read to Grow

Recognizing Our Read to Grow Volunteers

Read to Grow celebrates the exceptional commitment of our incredible volunteers. Despite the challenges of COVID, Read to Grow volunteers gave a combined 2,602 hours of service—the equivalent of \$86,603 in funds—to our cause in the 2020–2021 fiscal year.

Deborah Ahern	Elaine Evans	Dianne Hughes	Patti Maciag	Kelsey Rider	Hope Stevens	Sandra Wendler
Lois Babey-Finn	Tracy Fagan	Wendy Hyman	Judith Martin	William Roberts	Diana Stricker	Anne Wernau
Sandra Betancur	Angeline Fleig	Janet Johnson	Susan Moher	David Roberts	Jade Thomas	Dorothy Young
Barbara Betkoski	Barbara Gibson	Deborah Kelly	Mary Molloy	Joan Roczynski	Vilma Thompson	Ann Zaaier
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