

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

Dreams Do Come True

A message from Read to Grow Executive Director Suzannah Holsenbeck

Do you remember the first time you were excited about reading? Do you remember where you were, what book it was, who was reading it—maybe you or a parent or a teacher? Do you remember why you were excited? Maybe you were in a library or a classroom or maybe you were at home with your family. Whatever the circumstances, something magical happened for you in that moment. Our amazing Read to Grow community knows that something magical happens for children when they have the opportunity to choose books of their very own, and we are united in our desire to make sure every child gets to experience that magic.

The fall before the pandemic, when I went through the intensive interview process for the position I now hold at Read to Grow, the board and hiring committee had the wisdom to have me meet with the entire staff. Each individual had the opportunity to ask me a question



Representatives from Centreville Bank Charitable Foundation, Norwich Public Schools, Norwich Mayor Nystrom, and State Senator Cathy Osten join Read to Grow for the launch of the Bookmobile.

and I had the opportunity to ask the team a question as well. My question was “if you had a magic wand, what is one thing you would make happen at Read to Grow?” The answers were varied and from the heart and when the Books for Kids coordinators answered, they said “we would have a Bookmobile that could travel all over Connecticut and reach all of the children we haven’t reached yet.” The vigorous head nods around the room confirmed that



Early Steps coordinator Cherese shares a read-aloud with Norwich kindergarteners attending the launch of the Bookmobile.

this dream was held by the whole team.

Thanks to the hard work of our coordinators and volunteers and with the incredible generosity of Centreville Bank Charitable Foundation’s seed grant, Read to Grow’s Bookmobile finally hit the road last month, making its inaugural stop at Mahan Elementary School in Norwich, CT. Nearly 80 preschool and kindergarten students boarded the big purple Bookmobile for the first time to choose books of their own to take home with them. Our coordinators, in their red Read to Grow t-shirts, held read alouds at picnic tables with the children waiting to board the Bookmobile. For a few hours on that September day, the troubles of the world seemed far away and the glee of children thrilled with the excitement of a new book and storytime filled the air.

Popcorn & PJs Returns for Third Season

We are happy to announce that Popcorn & PJs: Virtual Family Storytime returns for a third season this year, with thanks to our generous title sponsor, Citizens Bank. Over the course of six events starting in October and running monthly through March, families have the opportunity to tune in live from the comfort of their homes to hear seven engaging authors read their books, answer questions and guide children through quick, creative drawing exercises. Families receive the full package with a copy of the book, popcorn, crayons and sketch pads shipped straight to their door. These events make the perfect gift for families with young children. Please visit www.popcornandpjs.givesmart.com or scan the QR code at right to purchase links, books and full packages, or to donate packages to Read to Grow to give to families who wouldn’t otherwise have access.



Our Annual Report and Appreciations

Please see pages 4–7 for our annual report and treasurer’s report for the 2021–22 fiscal year, which ended June 30, 2022. Also on those pages is our appreciation to donors, book-drive organizers and volunteers.

A sample Popcorn & PJs package, including the hard-cover book, popcorn, crayons, sketchpads and more.

Chelsea's Story

Read to Grow has benefitted from the generosity of some truly incredible book donors throughout the course of our 22-year history. Every so often, a book drive goes way beyond collecting books. That is where Chelsea Fitzgerald comes in. Ten years ago when she was just seven years old, after being inspired by her older sister receiving a community service award, Chelsea set a goal to donate 30,000 books to Read to Grow before going to college.

In addition to holding a traditional book drive, Chelsea and her mother Gina began holding bake sales to help purchase additional books for Read to Grow. The bake sale idea blossomed and served as a way for the two of them to bond. Gina said that she "wouldn't trade the time in the kitchen together for anything. When we started 10 years ago I'd have to help her with the baking, now she's all on her own."

Chelsea ran her final book drive for Read to Grow this past August. She appeared in several news stories to promote her last efforts to collect books. Her passionate plea to her



Chelsea Fitzgerald drops off the final haul from her final book drive for Read to Grow.

community paid off, as Chelsea collected 3,714 books this summer, donating a grand total of 30,292 books to Read to Grow over the course of ten years.

"It's very bittersweet. I will miss baking in the kitchen with my mom and sorting through the books together," said Chelsea. "The outpouring of help from the community and local businesses over the last ten years has been so amazing. I wouldn't have been able to do it without their help." Though she's off to college and a new adventure next year,

Chelsea will always cherish reading and the good she has done for Read to Grow.

Abigail O'Keefe, Communications & Development Coordinator

NEWSLETTER OF READ TO GROW

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Una Nota de Viviana, Early Steps to School Success Coordinator/ A Note from Viviana, Early Steps to School Success Coordinator



Early Steps to School Success coordinator Viviana sharing a book with a child enrolled in the home visiting program.

Hola, soy una de las coordinadoras de ESSS New Haven. Para mi es un placer poder servir a la comunidad latina y tener acceso a materiales bilingües para trabajar y apoyar a las Familias en el proceso de guiar a sus hijos hacia el camino escolar. Es muy importante para mi como coordinadora poder conectar con ellos en su propio idioma. Aparte de apoyarlos con sus hijos y otros recursos, los padres reciben apoyo e incentivo para seguir siendo mejores cada día ya que ocupan el papel de primeros maestros en casa. Las visitas personalizadas y grupos de juegos nos dan la oportunidad de trabajar en detalle con cada una de sus necesidades. Esperamos que el programa siga dando frutos y seguir apoyando familias en nuestra comunidad.

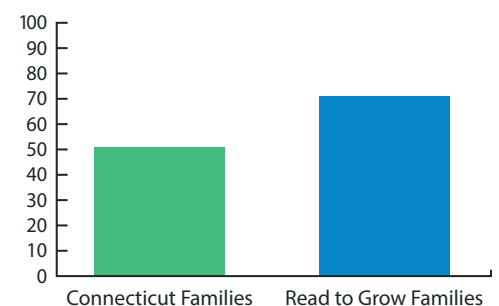
Hello, I'm one of the ESSS coordinators in New Haven. For me it is a pleasure to serve the Latino community and to have access to bilingual material to work with and support families and thus guide their children on the path to starting school. It is very important for me as a coordinator to be able to connect with families in their own language. Parents receive support and encouragement since they occupy the role of the first teachers at home. Personalized visits and play groups give us the opportunity to work in detail with each of their needs. We hope that the program continues to bear fruit and continues to support families in our community.

Viviana Nunez, Early Steps to School Success Coordinator

Read to Grow Parents Read to Children More Often

Read to Grow is frequently asked to prove our impact and while we have various ways of showing how powerful early literacy can be, one of the most salient metrics comes from families reporting how often they read to their children after they've received Read to Grow books and messaging. Throughout the past year, more than 2,500 families who received our newborn literacy packet in the hospital when their child was born enrolled in our

Follow-Up program. Of the 593 families who returned surveys to us, 71% report reading to their children at least once a day. According to the 2022 State of Babies report, only 51.5% of families in CT report reading to their children at least once a day. Read to Grow knows that when you provide families with access to books and empower parents with knowledge about literacy, children reap the benefits.



Reading Camp Makes Learning Fun

"I wanted to be that person to the children in my community I didn't have when I was growing up," Diasha Chatman, founder of Reading Camp, an informal reading group that supports local children in New Haven County. As a tutor and literacy coach, Chatman helps children discover the joys of reading and build confidence through personalized tutoring sessions.

A mother of three, Chatman first heard of Read to Grow when her oldest daughter, born at Yale New Haven Hospital, received the Read to Grow literacy packet for newborns. Chatman reconnected with Read to Grow when she started Reading Camp; she uses local resources such as the local library and even restaurants like Chuck E Cheese for her sessions. She provides a light snack at the end

of each session and the children get to choose books to take home with them.

"Read to Grow has played a very important role in the success of Reading Camp because before I was buying the books for the Camp from my own personal funds," says Chatman who also works as an Employment Specialist at the Apt Foundation. Chatman has been requesting books from Read to Grow's Books for Kids program to provide a variety of books to her group and uses the books to get children excited about reading and learning.

"Seeing the children enjoy reading books is my motivation and I find it very rewarding," says Chapman, who uses social media to reach the community and promote her weekly Reading Camp sessions.

Shitu Rajbhandari, Grants Writer



Daisha Chatman building a community of early readers through her fun literacy events featuring Read to Grow books.

Read to Grow distributed more than 120,000 books to 40,800 children and families since last fall





A MESSAGE FROM JANE LEE

Read to Grow's July 2021–June 2022 year saw the expansion of programming in response to community need. We celebrate the following highlights:

- Over the course of the year, we distributed 83,500 children's books to 17,500 children and their families through our Books for Kids program, 32,600 books to 23,000 expecting families and families with newborns through our Books for Babies program, and 2,900 books through our Early Steps to School Success program.
- Our volunteers served a total of 2,687 hours for Read to Grow, which is the equivalent of \$88,671 in funds.
- In July 2021, Read to Grow held a virtual book launch for the publication and subsequent distribution of our board book *Hello Sometimes*. Since then, nearly 33,000 copies of the book have been distributed to children across Connecticut in direct response to the impacts of the pandemic.
- We continued to build upon the strength of our Early Steps to School Success program in New Haven, launching in August 2021 in Bridgeport with two coordinators serving families at four schools.
- In Fall 2021, we debuted our second season of Popcorn & PJs: Virtual Family Storytimes with sponsorships from CHET and Citizens Bank and welcomed approximately 200 attendees to each of six author experiences.
- In May 2022, we held our first in-person event in three years at Dunkin' Park (Yard Goats Stadium) in Hartford; our outdoor "Make A Play For Literacy" celebration honored three Literacy Champions: Dr. Shabnam Lainwala of Connecticut Children's, Paula Lima of Charter Oak Health Center, and Kathy Rodgers of Sheldon Oak Communities. These Literacy Champions were recognized for going above and beyond to increase access to high quality early literacy experiences for children and families.
- Our second PPP loan was fully forgiven and we received a clean audit from our auditors at Whittlesey.

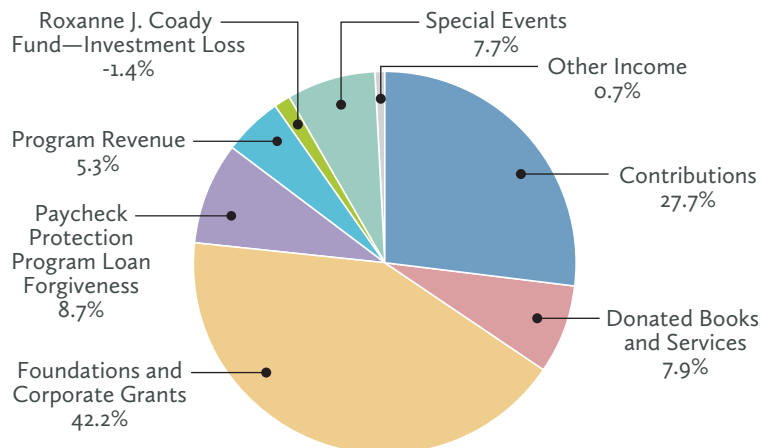
We are able to meet our literacy mission because of the incredible generosity of our volunteers, individual donors and foundations. We are deeply grateful for the time and funds our community contributes to Read to Grow.

Jane Lee, Treasurer
Read to Grow Board

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

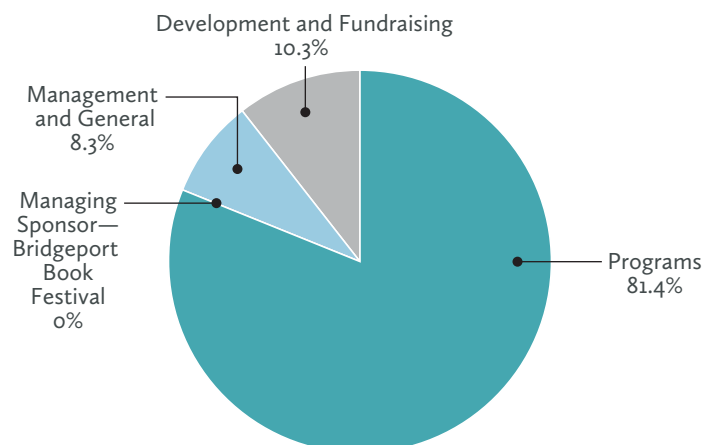
PUBLIC SUPPORT AND REVENUES

Contributions	\$ 347,410
Donated Books and Services	98,920
Foundations and Corporate Grants	543,117
Paycheck Protection Program Loan Forgiveness	109,348
Program Revenue	66,216
Roxanne J. Coady Fund—Investment Loss	-17,702
Special Events	96,138
Other Income	9,149
Total Public Support and Revenues	\$ 1,252,596



FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES

Programs	\$ 1,205,672
Management Sponsor—Bridgeport Book Festival	21
Management and General	123,572
Development and Fundraising	152,557
Total Functional Expenses	1,481,822
Change in Net Assets	\$ -229,227





We thank all our donors in the last fiscal year (July 1, 2021–June 30, 2022). 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 2022



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