

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

## *Branford High Volunteers Keep Read to Grow in Shape*

# With a Little Help from Our Friends

**S**top in at Read to Grow's Branford office any Tuesday morning and you are likely to hear the guys in the warehouse at the back bantering among themselves. They are hard at work—labeling books—but they are also having fun.

Justin Amos, Joseph Hines and Siva Sharma are volunteers from Branford High School who have been coming to the office every week since school began in September. Arriving in a school bus with two paraprofessionals, they are part of the school's Community & Life Skills program in the Special Education department. The program, says Allison Ufland, who oversees Community & Life Skills, provides instructional opportunities in vocation, daily living and social skills in the context of community work.

Volunteers from the high school have been coming to Read to Grow for a decade. The partnership began in 2005 at the initiation of the school's then-instructor Lynne Dow, who is now retired.

The students' responsibilities at Read to Grow include putting stickers on the backs of new and gently used books and discarding

the few donated books missing pages or otherwise in bad shape. Those books go into a dumpster behind the building.

Both tasks are important. Stickers on the books, each of which has Read to Grow's address and other contact information, let families know where to go for more books.

Clearing out the books—while not a glamorous job—makes more room in a crowded warehouse. At any one time the warehouse holds about 70,000 books, which are distributed regularly at our 12 partner hospitals in Connecticut through Books for Babies and at many more sites across the state through Books for Kids. About 150,000 free children's books are given out every year, most of them to families in need.

Justin, who is 20 years old and a senior at Branford this year, is often the one to discard



Students Siva Sharma (second from left) and Joseph Hines (third from left) label books as paraprofessionals Marisa Ceneri (far left) and Marisa Lefebvre assist in the Read to Grow warehouse.

the unusable books behind the building. He enjoys his task; it provides him with some independence and encourages him to use his math skills, because he is asked to keep a tally of all books discarded.

On a Tuesday in March, as he finished up at the dumpster, he held back one of the books—*Charlie Brown's 'Cyclopedia*. Standing

*(Continued on page 7)*

## Celebrate Connecticut's Champions of Children At Our 15th Anniversary Event on April 25



Read to Grow will celebrate its 15th year by recognizing 15 champions of children during a special event on Saturday, April 25.

Writer Amy Bloom will lead the "15 for 15 Evening of Celebration," which begins at 6 p.m. at Saint Clements Castle in Portland, CT. With State Sen. Ted Kennedy, Jr. as the honorary chair, the evening will feature cocktails, dinner and a lively auction of words drawn from Read to Grow's book for babies, *Welcome to the World!*.

Among the 15 people to be recognized for their efforts on behalf of children and families throughout the state is Chelsea Fitzgerald, an elementary school student who has organized book drives to collect gently used books for Read to Grow to distribute to those in need. Ten-year-old Chelsea began the drives on her own, collecting 1,000 books last summer in her hometown of Wallingford.

*(Continued on page 2)*

### Our Annual Report and Appreciations

*Please see pages 3 through 6 for our annual report and treasurer's report for the 2013–14 fiscal year, and for appreciations to donors and book drive organizers.*

*We are grateful to them all. They make our work possible and have helped to change the lives of hundreds of thousands of children and families over the years.*

# From the Desk of Roxanne Coady

It is exhilarating to realize the progress made in Connecticut in the 15 years since Read to Grow was founded. The amount of time, attention, energy, and understanding about the importance of the years from birth on has increased exponentially. We are proud to have been a part of the change. It is why we are celebrating our 15 years by celebrating all that is being done throughout the state. Imagine—a Connecticut Office of Early Childhood! As James Heckman, the Nobel laureate and economist who has done significant research on early childhood education, said, “Skill begets skill, and early skill acquisition makes later skill acquisition easier. Remedial programs in the adolescent and young adult years are much more costly in producing the same level of skill attainment in adulthood. Most are economically inefficient.”

In a world of scarce resources, we must remain committed to preventive steps. The enormous benefit of helping our children from birth is inescapable. The 15 honorees for our 15th year celebration are doing their parts in providing this help. I hope you will join us April 25 in celebrating the magic of making change.

## CELEBRATE CONNECTICUT’S CHAMPIONS OF CHILDREN AT OUR 15TH ANNIVERSARY EVENT ON APRIL 25

(Continued from page 1)

Myra Jones-Taylor, Commissioner of the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, will also be among those honored, along with Jessica Sager. Ms. Sager is co-founder and executive director of All Our Kin, a Connecticut-based nonprofit that trains, supports and sustains community child care providers.

Ms. Bloom, who will be master of ceremonies, has been nominated for the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award. Her most recent novel, *Lucky Us*, is a *New York Times* best-seller. She is one of three panelists of “The Ethicists” feature in *The New York Times Magazine* and *Writer-in-Residence* at Wesleyan



Honorary Chair, State Senator Ted Kennedy, Jr., and Master of Ceremonies, Amy Bloom



University. Her children’s book, *Little Sweet Potato*, was published in 2012.

Sen. Kennedy is serving his first term in the Connecticut State Senate for the 12th District, representing the towns of Branford, Durham, Guilford, Killingworth, Madison, and North Branford.

**Read to Grow has given more than 1.25 million free children’s books**

For the event, Citizens Bank is our founding sponsor. Presenting sponsors include: Seedlings Foundation; Alva G. Greenberg; First Niagara Financial Group; and Accel International Holdings.

Other sponsors are: Connecticut Education Association (CEA); Roxanne and Kevin Coady; Marisa and Jeff Hartmann; Yale New Haven Hospital; and Updike, Kelly & Spellacy.

For more information on the event, or to buy tickets or sponsorships for the “15 for 15 Celebration,” please contact the office by phone at: 203.488.6800, or by email at: [rbaker@readtogrow.org](mailto:rbaker@readtogrow.org). Information is provided online at: [www.readtogrow.org](http://www.readtogrow.org)

### NEWSLETTER OF READ TO GROW

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53 School Ground Road  
Branford, CT 06405  
203.488.6800  
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Mrs. Susannah Bailin  
Mr. & Mrs. Chet & Glenna Brodnicki  
Mrs. Robin Charney  
Ms. Maryanne Hall  
Dr. & Mrs. Ira Singer  
Mrs. Robyn Teplitzky  
*In Memory of Ms. Patricia Spencer*  
Mr. & Mrs. Howard Diamond  
*In Memory of Ms. Marion Tetreau*  
Mr. & Mrs. Howard Diamond  
*In Memory of Mr. Gary Wasserman*  
Dr. Walter Spigelman & Dr. Susan Richman  
*In Memory of Mr. James Welbourne*  
Mrs. Penny Welbourne  
*In Memory of Mr. Richard White*  
Dr. & Mrs. William Sherman  
*In Memory of Ms. Anne Zalenski*  
Mr. & Mrs. Howard Diamond

If we have inadvertently omitted a name, printed a name incorrectly, or categorized anyone incorrectly, please accept our apologies and contact us at 203.488.6800 so that we can correct our records.

### BOOK DRIVE HONOR ROLL DONATIONS OF 500 BOOKS OR MORE

W. Cox School  
Aaryne Antell  
Abraham Pierson Elementary School  
Academy of Information Technology and Engineering  
Samuel Applegate  
Dean Bilenker  
Annie Brown  
Citizens Bank

Coginchaug Regional High School  
CT Society of CPAs  
D.H. Ferrara School  
Philip DeLise  
Cynthia Dias  
Fairfield Ludlowe High School Business Club  
First Congregational Church of Guilford  
Chelsea Fitzgerald  
Girl Scout Troop, Easton  
Girl Scout Troop 32284  
Hartford Hospital Auxiliary

Sophia Haxhi  
Highland School  
Impact Trumbull  
Independent Day School  
Jane Ryan School  
Junior League of Eastern Fairfield County  
Kiwanis Club of Fairfield  
Long Lots Elementary School PTO  
Long Meadow Elementary School  
Mary R. Tisko School  
Memorial Elementary School

Middlebrook Elementary School  
Mile Creek School  
Joyce Ann Piepenbring  
Renbrook School  
Tashua Elementary School  
The Healthy Child  
Timothy Edwards Middle School  
Totoket Valley Elementary School  
Emily Trezza  
Johar Varma  
Woodside Intermediate School



## A MESSAGE FROM STACY RUWE, TREASURER

The launch of two initiatives to deliver more books to families living in need was a highlight of the 2013-14 fiscal year.

Within the Books for Kids program, Read to Grow began setting up Book Places and forming partnerships in June 2014. In conjunction with these initiatives, a bilingual staff member was hired to help coordinate the two new systems for our services and free children's books for low-income and at-risk families, many of whom are primarily Spanish speaking.

A Books for Babies associate was hired to assist the program coordinator with our formal partnerships with 12 hospitals in Connecticut. In these hospitals, we continue to reach more than half of all babies born annually in the state. Parents of newborns in the hospitals get our Literacy Packets and the opportunity to continue receiving new children's books and literacy tips during their babies' first year.

Read to Grow hosted two major fundraisers during the fiscal year. At the New Britain Museum of American Art, "The Mischief & Magic of Max" event in February drew a crowd of longtime supporters and new friends of Read to Grow to celebrate the 50th anniversary year of Maurice Sendak's book, *Where the Wild Things Are*. In April, author Arianna Huffington was our featured guest speaker at the Omni New Haven Hotel at Yale. Before more than 300 luncheon guests, Ms. Huffington spoke about her book, *Thrive: The Third Metric to Redefining Success and Creating a Life of Well-Being, Wisdom, and Wonder*. Both fundraisers were successful in building reserves to fund our two programs, Books for Babies and Books for Kids.

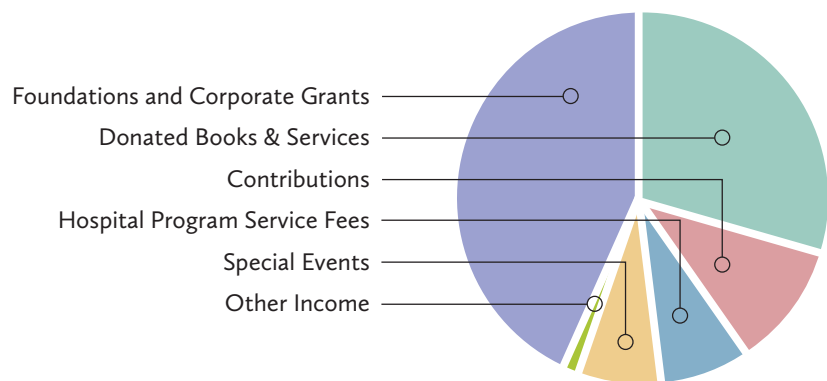
Read to Grow received an unqualified, or clean audit opinion from our external auditors, Bailey, Murphy and Scarano, CPA for fiscal year 2013-14.

As the last fiscal year drew to a close, Read to Grow began organizing for a 15th anniversary in 2015. Plans for a celebration to recognize 15 advocates of young children were well under way.

With groundwork laid in 2013-14, Read to Grow looks forward to the growth and enrichment of our programs and a wonderful celebration this April.

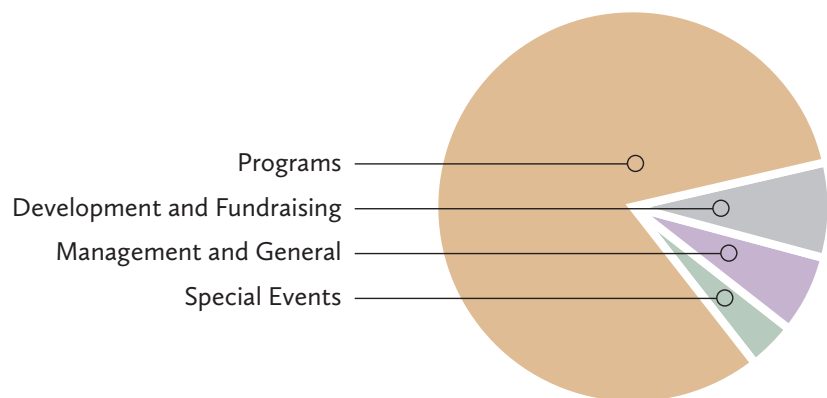
### PUBLIC SUPPORT & REVENUES

Foundations and Corporate Grants	\$ 392,298
Donated Books and Services	269,497
Contributions	97,906
Hospital Program Service Fees	70,031
Special Events	64,741
Other Income	13,865
<b>Total Public Support and Revenues</b>	<b>\$ 908,338</b>



### FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES

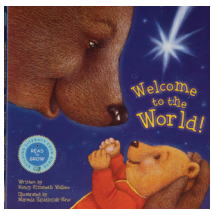
Programs	\$ 673,756
Development and Fundraising	64,943
Management and General	53,630
Special Events	29,747
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>822,076</b>
<b>NET</b>	<b>\$ 86,262</b>



Program expenses account for 82% of total expenses



# Read to Grow's Message Goes National



**R**ead to Grow's 30-second public service announcement promoting early childhood literacy aired nationally

for three months—from January through March—on The Newborn Channel.

The Newborn Channel is available in more than 1,000 hospitals in the United States, 17 of them in Connecticut. Launched in 1992, it reaches 2.5 million new mothers a year, according to The Wellness Network, which owns the channel and other broadcast, digital and print education products for hospitals and public health organizations.

The channel is available on televisions in rooms of hospital maternity units. It offers a wide range of information for parents, including infant and mother care.

David Ross, president of The Wellness Network, is a strong promoter of early childhood literacy and endorses the Read to Grow mission.

Ross enabled the free, three-month airing of the PSA.

The seven hospitals in Connecticut that are partnered with Read to Grow in our Books for Babies program and also offer The Newborn Channel are: Griffin Hospital in Derby; Bridgeport Hospital and St. Vincent's Medical Center, both in Bridgeport; Hartford Hospital and Saint Francis Hospital, both in Hartford;

Manchester Memorial Hospital in Manchester; and Middlesex Hospital in Middletown. Read to Grow is partnered with five other hospitals where the channel is not provided.

The Newborn Channel can be accessed in-room on a dedicated TV channel, on the web, and on mobile devices.

The channel follows American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines. Programs and transcripts from the channel are also available for parents on demand before, during and after their hospital stays.

Read to Grow's PSA can be accessed on our website: [www.readtogrow.org](http://www.readtogrow.org) (on the lower right-hand side of the homepage).

By **Diane Visconti**, Books for Babies Associate

## Book Places Open at 18 Sites in the State

Read to Grow has opened 18 Book Places in Connecticut, most of them in the Bridgeport, New Haven, Hartford, and New London areas.

Book Places are permanent, community-based sites where families have easy access to visit and select free books for their children to take home and keep. Sites are hosted by other nonprofits collaborating with Read to Grow to provide children's books and literacy-building information to the public.

Read to Grow will eventually open Book Places across the state.

At all sites, books are available to both the nonprofits' clients and other families in the communities.

Minimally, each Book Place consists of a bookcase of children's books—both English and bilingual Spanish-English—and literacy materials and resources for parents and child caregivers. Read to Grow will offer workshops on developing children's language skills and literacy for the benefit of staff and/or clients at the hosting sites.

For a full listing of Book Places, with detailed information on locations, hours and more, please visit our website: [www.readtogrow.org](http://www.readtogrow.org).



*A Bridgeport family enjoys the opening of a Book Place in the city. Pictured from left to right, Kent Woods, Latasha Cosby-Woods, Kent Woods Jr., Ariana Goodwin, and Tavares Barrett.*

## WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS

*(Continued from page 1)*

in the cold, wearing a woolen cap and coat, he coolly leafed through the pages.

"Just finishing up," he told a Read to Grow staffer who had ventured outside for a photograph. "I gotta take a look at this."

Justin will age out of the high school program when he turns 21 this year, as will

Siva Sharma. Joseph, younger and a junior, should have one more year as a volunteer.

Read to Grow is one of several places in Branford where the school regularly sends volunteers. Other places include Planet Fitness and Walgreens. In all, the program has nine students this year.



*Justin Amos takes a look at one of the books as he finishes up discarding the unusable books in a dumpster behind Read to Grow's office.*



*Paraprofessional Marisa Lefebvre assists student Joseph Hines as he labels books at Read to Grow.*

Marisa Lefebvre and Marisa Ceneri, both of whom are paraprofessionals, closely oversee the students at Read to Grow and other sites. "We match the (work) experiences and locations with the kids and their abilities," Ms. Lefebvre explains. "It's very rewarding to see them going to places and doing things they might not otherwise do."

Over the years, some of the Community & Life Skills students have returned to Read to Grow for more than one academic year. Others have come for only one year. What has remained the same from year to year is the positive attitude of the students, their hard work and their dedication to the jobs they complete.

By **Linda Sylvester**, Books for Kids Coordinator



53 School Ground Road  
Unit 3  
Branford CT 06405

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

## Read to Grow Welcomes Volunteers



**You can choose from a number of ways to help in our mission. You might:**

- ★ Train to volunteer in our Books for Babies program at one of 12 partnered hospitals, where you would visit briefly with new families to explain our Literacy Packets.
- ★ 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 or 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

Contact us at 203-488-6800