

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

Take a Book, Leave a Book, Build a Community

Something new is happening in Newhallville.

And it all began with books.

A Little Free Library (LFL)—offering free books to anyone of any age—has opened outside the New Haven Police Department's Newhallville Substation at 596 Winchester Avenue. Read to Grow supplies children's books when needed and will provide more for other LFLs that police hope to set up in the coming year.

The LFL in Newhallville, which is a tailor-made, wooden box, is attached to the outside of the substation and holds up to 50 books. There are titles for children, teens and adults. Passers-by do not need library cards to take their selections. Books can be returned or kept. Others can be donated at any time—either directly into the box or inside the substation.

The goal is for people in the community to take ownership and pleasure in sharing interests through books, explained Police Sgt. Shafiq Abdussabur, who was instrumental in setting up the LFL. He thinks Newhallville is an area where residents feel safe in taking advantage of the free resource based in their neighborhood.

While LFLs are popping up all over (There are more than 50,000 around the world, in over 70 countries.), the idea for one in Newhallville started with New Haven resident Jane Lewis, a retired librarian and volunteer at Read to Grow. Jane connected with Sgt. Abdussabur, who spearheads the Community Wellness campaign, which seemed the perfect starting point for neighborhood LFLs. The LFL, with its mantra of “take a book, share a book, add a book, return a book,” is similar to one started in Rowan County, North Carolina and is designed to break down prejudices and build trust and good will between police officers and the community.

“It's generated a life of its own,” Sgt. Abdussabur said. “Just last week a (police) captain donated a big box of books.” The



New Haven resident Jane Lewis and Police Sgt. Shafiq Abdussabur at the opening of the Little Free Library at the city's police substation in Newhallville. Photo courtesy of Catherine Avalone of the New Haven Register

sergeant is pleased by the traffic at the substation's LFL. “People come and go. Just in the last 10 days, the books have been going out, zoom, zoom, zoom. ... This will be a legacy that goes well beyond my time.”

Helping to oversee the LFL project and extending the police department's liaisons into the schools, Patrol Officer Scott

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COMMENTARY

Let's Make Sure There's a Book for Every Baby

By Joanne Cunard, Ph.D.

Editor's Note: Dr. Cunard is Professor of Literacy in The Graduate and Undergraduate School of Education at The University of Saint Joseph, West Hartford. She serves on the board of Read to Grow, as well as the board of The Connecticut Association for Reading Research.

For many of us, the trappings and habits of daily life are so often taken for granted. Books, reading and the regular sharing of thoughts and experiences from interesting “reads” can seem quite commonplace. Unfortunately, for many, they simply are not. Many children from low-income neighborhoods grow up without books and are unfamiliar with reading. In fact, there's about one book, on average, for every 300 children in a low-income neighborhood. Compare that to the

13 books owned by the average middle-class child, as reported in *Changing the Odds for Children at Risk* by Susan Neuman.

Strikingly, the number of books in a home has a more direct effect on the eventual level of a child's education than does the parents' education or their economic standing, as Mariah Evans of the University of Nevada, Reno, concluded after a 20-year study.

Fortunately for Connecticut, the 300-book average per low-income neighborhood does not have to be the norm. This is, in part, because of Read to Grow, which has been serving children and families of the state for 17 years. They have

(continued on page 7)

Our Annual Reports and Appreciations

Please see pages 3 through 6 for our annual report and treasurer's report for the 2015–16 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.

Organizing Book Drives

Our Giving Depends On So Many Others

To give out about 190,000 books a year, Read to Grow depends on tens of thousands of donations of gently used books from individuals, groups, organizations, and businesses. Along with books we purchase, those gently used books are necessary to our mission. All gently used books are cleaned and labeled with Read to Grow stickers before being distributed around the state. Here are a few of the book drives for Read to Grow in recent months:

GIRL SCOUTS DO A 'GOOD TURN'

The Girl Scouts of Connecticut did an extraordinary service for Read to Grow during the month of January. More than 37 troops collected over 13,800 gently used and new books for children of all ages.

"They were amazing," said Linda Sylvester, who coordinates the Books for Kids program at Read to Grow. "They really responded when I reached out to them to say we were running low on books."

Taking to heart their slogan of "Do a good turn daily," the Girl Scouts collected books through troops and service units statewide. Collection sites were set up in Hartford, Lebanon, North Haven, Waterbury, and Wilton.

SIXTH-GRADER HAS ANNUAL CAUSE

For the fourth year, Chelsea Fitzgerald collected boxes and boxes of books for Read to Grow. The 12-year-old from Wallingford gave us 1,870 books last fall, all because she wants children who might not otherwise have books to receive them so that they grow to love reading.

For her donation in 2016, Chelsea held a bake sale that raised \$200, which she spent on new books to supplement her collection of gently used ones. Her family—mother, father and older sister—helped. The community pitched in, too. The Record-Journal newspaper promoted her bake sale,



Chelsea Fitzgerald boxes the books she collected and purchased for Read to Grow

and Canelli Jewelers in Wallingford set up a collection box for donations that went to Chelsea for buying more new books.

Chelsea began her annual collections in the summer of 2013, after finishing second grade. In 2014, she collected 1,000 books. She topped 2,000 books in 2015.

"It feels nice, because I have so many books that I've gotten," she said. "But a lot of other kids don't have as many as I do, so it's nice that at least they get a few."

At James H. Moran Middle School, where Chelsea is a sixth grader, Emily Dehaan has nominated her for an annual youth volunteer service award from the City of Wallingford.

The entire Fitzgerald family enjoys the annual book drive. Chelsea's mother, Gina, said, "It's important. We're happy to do this

for (Read to Grow), because it's a wonderful cause and reading is becoming a 'lost art'!"

A RALLY FOR BOOKS AT HOSPITALS

Read to Grow is indebted to our partner hospitals that organized or are planning book collections for our benefit.

St. Vincent's Medical Center in Bridgeport recently collected almost 700 books. Those books will go to the siblings of newborns at the birthing center and to other children receiving care at the hospital.

Both Lawrence + Memorial Hospital in New London and Middlesex Hospital in Middletown ran book drives in January. Jamie Nadeau, the L+M volunteer coordinator, and Kate Kearns, director of volunteer services at Middlesex, helped to coordinate their respective efforts. At Middlesex, the drive was promoted with the Thomas Jefferson quote: "I cannot live without books."

The Hartford Hospital Auxiliary has wrapped up its annual book collection that runs for a month in late winter. Each year the Auxiliary collects hundreds of books for Read to Grow.

Griffin and Manchester Memorial hospitals have book drives on their calendars for this spring.

Recent Grants Empower Our Mission



WALMART STATE GIVING PROGRAM

With \$40,000 from Walmart Foundation, Read to Grow has purchased a new van. The 2017 Chrysler Ram ProMaster 1500 is already on the road, driven by Israel "Izzy" Oliveras. Izzy makes numerous book pick-ups and deliveries every week around the state. He expects to log more than 15,000 miles on the van's odometer in the coming year.

CFGNH

The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven awarded Read to Grow a three-year

grant totaling \$52,000 to fund our Books for Babies program in Griffin, Saint Raphael and Yale New Haven hospitals and to support nine Book Places and five Partnerships in New Haven County and the Valley.

PITNEY BOWES FOUNDATION

For the ninth year, Pitney Bowes has backed Read to Grow, this year with \$25,000. The grant is significant to our Books for Babies program in St. Vincent's and Bridgeport hospitals and will enable operations at four Book Places in Bridgeport.

THE BOWERBIRD

The Bowerbird gift shop in Old Lyme gave \$5,355 to Read to Grow as the beneficiary of proceeds from its gift-wrapping fee during the period from November 2015 through October 2016. We are grateful to have been selected for this philanthropic program at the store.

NEWSLETTER OF READ TO GROW

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A MESSAGE FROM JEFF HARTMANN, TREASURER

During our 2015-16 fiscal year, Read to Grow saw a record number of books both coming into our warehouse and given out to children and families across the state.

Book drives by Northeast Medical Group, St. Francis Hospital and the Kiwanis Club of Fairfield alone brought in more than 23,000 gently used children's books. Book publisher Simon & Schuster donated 43,500 new hardcovers and paperbacks. All those books were in addition to more than 40,000 gently used books donated to us from individuals and others who organized books drives. In 2015-16, Read to Grow purchased over 39,000 new books for specific needs in both of our programs—Books for Babies and Books for Kids.

The inventory of our new and gently used books continued to grow because of greater demand at the Book Places and Partnerships we have set up with other nonprofits to distribute more books and give literacy information to families living in need. By the end of the fiscal year, we had 27 Book Places and 12 Partnerships.

In a "first" for Books for Babies, we included material other than our own in the free Literacy Packets that went to some 22,000 mothers who delivered their babies in one of our 12 partner hospitals. In a fee-for-services agreement with the Connecticut State Treasurer's Office, we included information about CHET Baby Scholars in the Literacy Packets. This program from the Connecticut Higher Education Trust offers \$100 to start a college savings account for every baby born in the state. As part of the CHET Baby Scholars program, if others contribute at least \$150 to that same account before the baby's fourth birthday, the state gives a match of another \$150, putting the government's total investment at \$250.

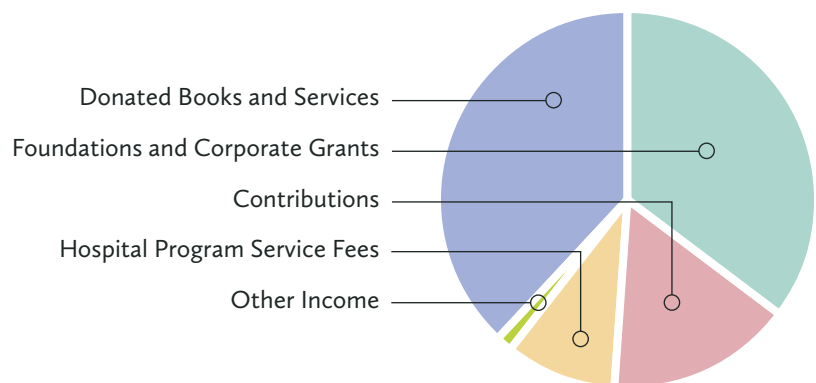
Books for Babies grew in other ways. Trial sessions of its new Prenatal Project, designed to bring free children's books and literacy information to pregnant women receiving care in community health centers, were held at Fair Haven Community Health Center in New Haven. Following those successful test sessions, Read to Grow plans to offer the Prenatal Project to other community health centers through the Connecticut association of these centers.

In the fall of 2015, we held our first annual Circle of Friends gathering to thank steadfast and generous donors. The complimentary evening of drinks and appetizers was held at Guilford Yacht Club and featured a talk by Annie Murphy Paul. An author and magazine journalist, she wrote "Origins," a book about the science of prenatal influences.

For fiscal year 2015-16, Read to Grow once again received an unqualified, or clean, audit opinion from our external auditors, Murphy & Company, LLC.

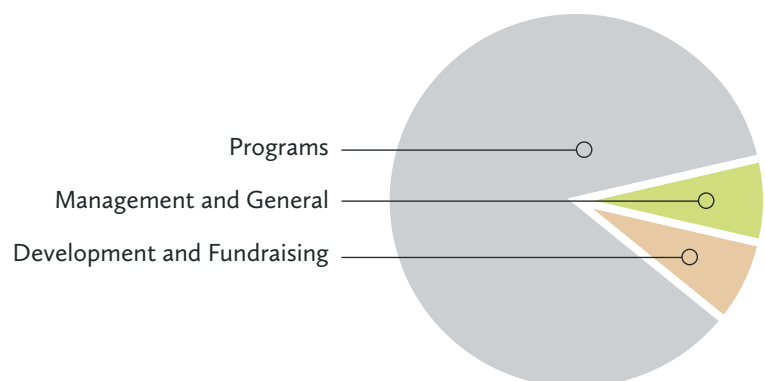
PUBLIC SUPPORT & REVENUES

Donated Books and Services	\$ 392,261
Foundations and Corporate Grants	365,594
Contributions	164,594
Hospital Program Service Fees	102,000
Other Income	4,071
Total Public Support and Revenues	\$ 1,028,520



FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES

Programs	\$ 870,708
Management and General	73,877
Development and Fundraising	71,526
Total Expenses	1,016,111
Increase in Net Assets	\$ 12,409



Program expenses account for 86% of total expenses

Volunteer Spotlight

More than 70 volunteers make our work possible. Many serve on the maternity units of our 12 partner hospitals, where they talk to mothers of newborns about the importance and fun of developing their children's language skills. Many others volunteer at our office and warehouse in Branford. A few help us from their homes.

MAURO ACEVES

A 17-year-old senior at Branford High School, Mauro started helping us last fall.

Mauro is fluent in Spanish and English and applies his language skills to edit or translate our bilingual materials. Mauro likes volunteering for Read to Grow, he said, because "my parents read to me (when I was young). I want to help other parents understand that reading to their children is important."

Mauro has been accepted at Yale University for the coming fall.



copy editor who takes pride in her work. In fact, without her skills, good cheer and cookies that she brings in, our office would not operate as well as it does.

"I just love the people here," she said, "and doing anything I can do to help."

Heidi is a Branford resident.

SHEILA HAVERKAMPF

Sheila is a retired educator who has been volunteering with our Books for Babies program in Middlesex Hospital for more than a year.

A Guilford resident, she and her husband have three grown children and three grandchildren. She has a Master's in Special Education and an Advanced Diploma (6th Year) in Educational Leadership. She has worked in several school districts, including Branford, Guilford and Woodbridge.

"As a retired educator, I know that parents are a baby's critically important first teachers," she said. "Those early influences are essential to development, and discussing this with parents and extended family members is an amazing experience."

After one of her days at Middlesex



Hospital, Sheila wrote:

"Today, I spoke to parents that had no books at home for their new baby. They said, 'This is her first book!' ... Being a bilingual family, they were given (Read to Grow's) bilingual copy of *Welcome to the World!* I also gave them two other early learning books. ... We discussed the resources Read to Grow has in terms of providing age-appropriate books at no cost to families that need them. I hope they'll follow through and contact the office.

"In all, I saw nine families, and each had a clear impact on me. ... Almost all parents, during each visit, were engaged in the discussions of early literacy and how they can, in fun and loving ways, significantly contribute to their child's early and continuing development. Most are astounded by the data we can share regarding vocabulary development and the impact on school success.

"It honestly feels like we are engaging in such important conversations, and I am so grateful for the opportunity to discuss and promote literacy. It's great work!"

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If you are interested in exploring volunteer possibilities, please fill out the volunteer application form on our website (www.readtogrow.org), or give us a call at 203.488.6800.



HEIDI SMITH

Heidi has been giving her time and talents to Read to Grow since 2011 and regularly comes twice a week to our Branford office.

Heidi does computer-entry of survey data, organizes mail, and helps to keep our filing systems in order. She is a careful

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

(continued from page 1)

given more than 1.5 million books to babies, children and families. They also have informed parents and others who take care of children about the importance of reading and talking to children during the critical stages of development from birth to 5.

But Read to Grow cannot do it alone. They need help from all of our citizens. And, perhaps, there is no better time than now. Read to Grow recently launched its **Books For Every Baby** campaign. Each year, it gives to more than 22,000 families of newborns free baby books and literacy information in the maternity units of hospitals. That number accounts for 58% of babies born in Connecticut. Read to Grow wants to reach 100%.

Outside of hospitals, the non-profit further supports literacy by giving free books requested by families, childcare providers, teachers, doctors, and dozens of programs

across the state. More than 190,000 books are distributed each year. They have 13 partnerships with agencies serving low-income and at-risk families. Also, they have set up 30 Book Places in towns and cities where families can select children's books to keep.

Read to Grow could not find better endorsement of its mission and work than in a policy of the American Academy of Pediatrics (A.A.P.) issued in 2014. It recommends that all pediatric primary care providers promote early literacy beginning in infancy and extending through kindergarten. The A.A.P. knows that babies begin learning the moment they are born and that a newborn's brain will grow to 80% of adult size by age 3.

Read to Grow's goal to reach every family with a newborn might be lofty. Yet, success seems signaled by its past record and its extensive network of partners.

The Books for Every Baby campaign — #BooksForEveryBaby — is Internet-based. It gives an easy, affordable opportunity for everyone to pitch in with a small donation that will provide significant support. Just \$15 will cover the costs for a new book to a newborn, a guide for the parents, and more free books to other families who need them. Simply go to the website —www.readtogrow.org — and click the DONATE button.

Also, follow Read to Grow on Facebook (ReadtoGrowCT) and Twitter (@ReadtoGrowCT).

You can be part of the change with a book for every baby.

Visit us at
www.readtogrow.org

On Facebook, be sure to like us at: [ReadtoGrowCT](#)
Follow us on Twitter at: [@ReadtoGrowCT](#)

Quinnipiac Class Examines Read to Grow

Read to Grow was the subject of a lot of study by a group of students at Quinnipiac University over the fall semester.

A class learning about social media and taught by Katie R. Place, Ph.D., assistant professor in the Department of Strategic Communication, adopted Read to Grow for a focus of their studies. More than a dozen students applied their new knowledge for recommendations for our Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts. They created sample content calendars, infographics, video content, and posts. They also hosted a Twitter chat.

We appreciate all the hard work and great advice!



The social media class at Quinnipiac University last fall takes a close look at Read to Grow's message.

TAKE A BOOK, LEAVE A BOOK AND BUILD A COMMUNITY

(continued from page 1)

Shumway has connected with fourth-graders at Lincoln-Bassett School, where he gave a presentation that included new hardcover copies of *Galactic Hot Dogs*. The books were donated by book publisher Simon & Schuster to Read to Grow for children in Connecticut.

In our developing partnership with the New Haven Police Department, Read to Grow has given an additional batch of multicultural, new books for an in-school presentation at Lincoln-Bassett this spring.

We intend to continue supporting police officers as they establish new ways at the substation and beyond to promote literacy and positive relations with children and the community at large.

(LFLs began in 2009 with Todd Bol and Rick Brooks, both of Wisconsin. Inspired by both gift-sharing networks and Andrew Carnegie and his creation of public libraries, they began promoting the do-it-yourself book repositories for the common good.)