Baby Steps to Literacy at L+M Hospital

It sounds so simple. That’s just the way that Hope Stevens, a volunteer at Lawrence + Memorial Hospital in New London, likes it.

Hope is one of six volunteers with our Books for Babies program on the hospital’s maternity unit. She and the others visit with mothers of newborns to chat about the free literacy packets from Read to Grow that they receive. They talk about baby brain development and the easy but important ways to daily engage and bond with their infants by sharing books.

When Lucero Zegarra, a New London resident, gave birth to her daughter, Penelope, she received a visit from Hope.

“We definitely plan to read to our child, in both English and Spanish,” she said after their conversation. “It’s good to hear about the importance of reading.”

Books for Babies, which has been in L+M since 2001, distributes about 1,400 literacy packets there every year. The program has been operating in Connecticut hospitals for 18 years.

During Hope’s volunteer rounds on the maternity unit, she likes to show new parents computerized images of child brain synapses at different early stages of development.

“If you hold your child, read to your child, cuddle your child, you’re a large part of those
(continued on page 8)

COMMENTARY
Little Books Can Make a Big Difference

By Roxanne J. Coady

Imagine a home with no books, no magazines, no mail coming and going, not even conversations between parents and their children.

It’s not far-fetched. It’s the kind of home that could be around the corner or in a neighborhood you pass every day.

For many of us, becoming regular readers happened organically, like learning to eat. Our parents, our homes, our teachers, and our schools were infused with an excitement about books, talking and learning.

For children in low-income homes there often is not enough to create this rich environment. The ramifications can be devastating. Many young children start with the most basic of setbacks — what has been described as the “30 million word gap.”

From birth to age 3, children from low-income homes have, on average, heard 30 million fewer words than have children from better-off neighborhoods. This disadvantage presents obvious challenges from the day they first walk into kindergarten. They simply lack basic language skills. The deficit deepens to their reading below grade level by third or fourth grade. Chances of school failure and dropping out spike. Achievements out of school become even more difficult.

What started as homes without basic enrichment becomes a community without the human resources needed for productivity and good health.

Read to Grow offers ways to avoid these outcomes. For 18 years, the Connecticut nonprofit has worked for early childhood literacy. We begin in community health centers, offering workshops and free books for
(continued on page 2)
Hats off to all the young students who participated in Read to Grow’s second annual Read-a-Thon! Children at a dozen elementary schools across Connecticut—from New London to Shelton—logged in at least 15 minutes of daily reading at home (after school) during the week of Friday, February 23—Friday, March 2.

Every year, our Read-a-Thon culminates on national Read Across America Day, established by the National Education Association to promote reading and to celebrate the birthday of Dr. Seuss.

At the Connecticut schools participating in our Read-a-Thons, students are only asked to fill in reading log sheets and then hand in their sheets to teachers at week’s end. They are also invited—not required—to donate gently used children’s books and dollars, all for the benefit of other children supported by Read to Grow. We turn the students’ donations into gifts for others who don’t have books of their own at home.

A survey of over 6,000 mothers who got our literacy packets, 81% of respondents said they learned about the importance of reading to their babies. Also, 72% reported reading with their babies at least once a day.

Lifelong readers can be made, even under adverse beginnings.

Our #BooksForEveryBaby campaign offers an easy opportunity for everyone to help in the mission of early childhood literacy. Just $10 will provide a book to a newborn, a guide for the parents, and more free books to families who need them. Your help would mean so much.

If you’d like to join the campaign, simply go to readtogrow.org and click the red button “DONATE #BooksForEveryBaby” appearing under the panel of photos on the homepage. Thank you.

A Look at Some of the Faces behind the Books

CALLUM’S GIFT IS 156 BIRTHDAY BOOKS
Six-year-old Callum likes to make the most of his birthdays.

On his big day last fall—as in years past—Callum asked that any gifts be children’s books that he could then give to Read to Grow. The South Glastonbury boy and his father delivered 156 new books, most of which have already been given to children through our programs.

Callum’s family learned about Read to Grow when he was born at Hartford Hospital, where his mother received our free literacy packet.

LOGAN DRISCOLL CARES
Teenager Logan Driscoll really does more than care. He takes action.

In work for a nonprofit that he founded, Logan donated 4,133 books in January to Read to Grow that he collected through book drives. He promises more.

The senior at Guilford High School said he is working with the Connecticut Association of Schools to get more schools around the state to join in his book drives for Read to Grow and New Haven Reads. He serves on the association’s student board.

Logan does his volunteer efforts through the nonprofit Driscoll Cares. The agency grew from an idea he had about seven years ago, when he was in the hospital with injuries suffered in a baseball game. While there, he became aware of other children who seemed in much worse condition than he. “At that moment I knew I wanted to give back and help others,” he writes on the Driscoll Cares website.

Today Driscoll Cares helps public high school students in Connecticut fulfill a graduation requirement of community service by providing volunteer opportunities and projects.
We thank all our donors in the last fiscal year (July 1, 2016 - June 30, 2017) and give special acknowledgment to those in our Circle of Friends. This recognition includes the Corporate Circle (CC), the Gold Circle (GC) and the Sustaining Circle (SC).

In the listings below, the designations of CC, GC and/or SC that follow names denote donors and their categories within our Circle of Friends. The names of donors who gave “In Honor” or “In Memory” of someone will appear in those special categories near the end of the listings.

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**SPRING 2018 | 3**
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- Avon Neighbor Helping Neighbor Project
- Calvin Lee Elementary School
- The Country School
- Tracy Daly
- Chelsea Fitzgerald

Girl Scouts of Connecticut
- Noah Gordon
- Haddam-Killingworth Middle School
- Hartford Hospital Auxiliary
- Highland Elementary School
- Samantha Hoffmann
- IMPACT-Trumbull
- The Independent Day School
- Island Avenue Elementary School

Jane Ryan Elementary School
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- Claire Keanna
- Kiwanis Club of Fairfield
- Long Meadow Elementary School
- Dan Lustberg
- Madison Middle School
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McGee Middle School
- Memorial Elementary School
- National Organization of Professional Organizers
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- Notre Dame High School
- Alison Partridge
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Roton Community Foundation
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- St. George’s Church
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- West Elementary School—New Canaan

If we have inadvertently omitted a name, please accept our apologies. Please call us at 203.488.6800 so that we can correct our records.
A MESSAGE FROM JEFF HARTMANN, TREASURER

Read to Grow’s two programs—Books for Babies and Books for Kids—continued their strong advancements in the 2016–17 fiscal year. Support from book donors, including individuals, foundations, and publishers such as Simon & Schuster, was essential to our robust activities and services.

A new van for Read to Grow has made our programs run even more smoothly. We purchased the Ram ProMaster, thanks entirely to a grant from Walmart. The van is used daily for book deliveries for our programs across the state and for book pickups from donors.

Other notable grant awards came from United Way of Coastal Fairfield County, Pitney Bowes, The Community Foundation of Greater New Haven, and Seedlings Foundation.

Two book author events, featuring Kareem Abdul-Jabbar in New Haven and Carly Simon in Madison, were among the year’s highlights.

We were grateful for many sponsorships for the New Haven event, which included those from Citizens Bank; McNerney Family Foundation; The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven; Accel; The Safety Zone; The Hartmann Group; Hy’s Limousine; Seedlings Foundation; Suzio-York Hill; Updike, Kelly & Spellacy; and Yale New Haven Health. Sponsors donated blocks of their tickets so that high school students could attend the event at College Street Music Hall and could also receive free copies of Abdul-Jabbar’s book Coach Wooden and Me.

Carly Simon drew people from far and wide. The audience for the lively Sunday afternoon event in November included travelers from Wisconsin and Florida.

The strength of our programs is reflected by these high watermarks reached in the 2016–17 fiscal year:

- Books for Babies added two hospital partnerships, making a total of 14 hospitals with our special services on their maternity units. Backus Hospital in Norwich and Charlotte Hungerford in Torrington are the latest partners.
- Books for Babies formally signed on the first six partners with its new Prenatal Project. This important initiative offers new baby books and workshops to pregnant women receiving care at community health centers and primary care clinics.
- Books for Kids was operating 32 Book Places across the state by the end of the fiscal year, up by five from the year before. It also had 12 Partnerships. All 44 of these formal collaborations are with other nonprofits.

For both of our programs, Simon & Schuster gave 53,341 new children’s books. We also received 6,818 new books in the Jumping Cow series through a grant from The Elkes Foundation.

Read to Grow received an unqualified, or clean, audit opinion for the 2016–17 fiscal year from our external auditors, Murphy & Company, LLC.
A Champion of Read to Grow Honored for Her Work at Saint Francis in Hartford

She’s a woman who makes the magic happen—not only for the patients, staff and volunteers at Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center but also for hospital friends like Read to Grow.

As longtime Director of Volunteer Services at the hospital in Hartford, Tobye Karl has championed our Books for Babies program, along with other causes and projects with healthy effects reaching well beyond the hospital campus.

For her talent, dedication and achievements, Tobye was honored in December as one of the annual Greater Hartford Health Care Heroes. Nominated by Read to Grow for the prestigious honor, Tobye was the top selection in the Healthcare Staff category and was recognized along with others in a ceremony hosted by Hartford Business Journal in Hartford.

“Tobye Karl is 110 percent heart, mind and soul involved in her work,” said Kyn Tolson, Read to Grow’s executive director. “We’re so grateful for Toby. She’s been key to the great involvement of Books for Babies volunteers at Saint Francis.”

Tobye facilitated introducing Books for Babies at the hospital in 2003, where about 2,750 babies are born every year. More recently, with her involvement in a Saint Francis Women’s Auxiliary children’s book drive, almost 10,000 books were collected. Some of that stockpile supplied the Books for Babies volunteers with books they like to hand out to siblings of newborns in the hospital.

“We’re making a major impact in turning around the literacy rate in the state of Connecticut,” said Tobye.

In her work, she oversees nearly 800 volunteers who help in 89 job responsibilities throughout Saint Francis.
Tax Benefits of Charitable IRA Rollover

A great way to support Read to Grow and receive tax planning benefits is to make a gift directly from your IRA to Read to Grow.

Charitable rollovers count as part of your required minimum distribution, but aren’t taxable income to you. This could be a big benefit, particularly if you don’t itemize deductions on your individual tax returns. Even if you do itemize, a rollover can save you more on taxes than by taking the IRA distribution in income and then donating it. How it works:

- You must be 70½;
- You can give from between $100 to $100,000 in any year;
- If you are married and have a joint IRA, your spouse can also make a gift of up to $100,000 from your IRA for a total of $200,000;
- Gifts can be made directly from your IRA to Read to Grow or any public charity;
- Gifts by check must be made out directly to Read to Grow.

To find out more, contact your financial institution and ask about charitable rollover procedures.

BABY STEPS TO LITERACY

AT L+M HOSPITAL

(continued from page 1)

(continuing brain) synapses, and that’s really important,” she said. “Kids who are read to, they hear more, they learn more, and they are better educated when they walk into school. Television doesn’t do the same thing.”

Hope recalled explaining to one father that it’s not about what you read, but the fact that you do it with interest, love and sincerity.

“He said to me, ‘I’m reading Moby Dick now, and I don’t think the baby will understand it.’ And I said, ‘The baby won’t understand Jane and Sally, but what the baby will understand is that you’re holding him and hugging him or putting him on your lap, and reading, and he’s getting the rhythm of language and vocabulary.’”

If a parent has trouble reading books in English, Hope and the other volunteers encourage reading in any language.

“Read to them in Spanish or Hindi,” she said. “The important thing is to hold the baby and read. And, it doesn’t have to be mom and dad who read. It could be an older brother or sister. Or grandma!”

Hope, a former teacher, finds her volunteer work rewarding. “I’ve been asked by parents, ‘How long do I have to keep reading? How many months?’ And I say, ‘I hope you read to your child until your child says—Mom, I can read by myself now.’”

Four Ways Donations Will Make a Difference

- $500 = workshop (with new books for babies and handouts) for pregnant women receiving their care at community health centers.
- $250 = 100 new bilingual books (Spanish-English; Arabic-English) for infants and children.
- $90 = Free follow-up for 10 families when their babies turn 3 months and 1 year old.
- $50 = 50 books for 2 childcare providers.