

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

From the Desk of Roxanne J. Coady

Ready for Read to Grow's Next Big Step

It's hard for me to grasp, but it was 20 years ago when we determined that every child born in Connecticut should have a book. That's exactly why we created Read to Grow, to ensure there would be a book for every baby.

It seemed a simple, even modest step.

Along with that measure, we would reach out to parents, letting them know how essential they are in forming their children's literacy.

Over these two decades, we have learned that the need is more urgent and critical than we might have imagined. Together, with the most extraordinary staff, tireless volunteers and devoted board of directors, we have given more than 1.8 million books to children, many of whom had never held a book of their own. Those books were in English, Spanish, even Arabic. Our workshops have been bilingual, too.

To reach the families who need us most,

in efficient and powerful ways, we have created 73 partnerships—from those with Connecticut Food Bank and The Diaper Bank to ones with hospitals and community health centers across the state.

Read to Grow's future looks more dynamic and important than ever. In order to ensure its continued success, it is ideal for our nonprofit to have a new Chairman. The time is right, so I am retiring as the Founding Board Chair on June 30.

The Board is already hard at work to have an effective transition. It is incredibly exciting to hear the ideas and witness the energy for accelerating Read to Grow's impact. It has been more gratifying than I could have imagined to watch the commitment of so many people to affect the trajectory of our children.

Yes, it is a simple step—giving children books and talking with parents—but it is also the simple step that can change so many lives.



Roxanne J. Coady

Volunteers Expand Our Workshop Outreach

Books for Kids has recruited a bilingual Volunteer Workshop Team to provide more opportunities to families for learning about the importance of sharing books and early childhood literacy.

Workshops by the volunteers augment

those given by Books for Kids staff, Linda Sylvester and Evelyn Tomasello. As the program's Co-Coordinators, they have given more than 20 workshops, most bilingual, over the past year.

The workshops are presented directly to families or to staff of nonprofits already in formal partnerships with Read to Grow. These nonprofits, located around the state, serve at-risk families in various ways and include Connecticut Food Bank and the consultation center at Skane School in Bridgeport. By instructing staff, Read to Grow hopes their nonprofits will offer even more workshops to the families they serve.

The volunteer team currently has seven members, among them retired educators and librarians. Several of the women translate for Spanish-speaking families who attend the presentations.

Lois Steinman, one of the volunteers, is a retired reading consultant and literacy coach



Rita Ordonez, a Branford resident who presents our workshops in Spanish

Our Annual Reports and Appreciations

Please see pages 3–6 for our Annual Report and Treasurer's Report for the 2017–18 fiscal year, which ended June 30, 2018. Also on those pages is our appreciation to donors and book-drive organizers.

for the towns of Colchester, Coventry and Plainfield. "I believe in Read to Grow's goals and want to help as much as I can in building a literate society," she said.

Ann Zaaizer, a retired TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) teacher, also volunteers for our Books for Babies program at Saint Raphael Hospital in New Haven. Now with the workshop team, she is particularly pleased that Read to Grow is "spreading the message" in Spanish

(continued on page 2)

Surveys Reveal Lessons Learned during Pregnancy



Surveys of 204 pregnant women in our Prenatal Project show that, after attending at least one of our workshops, 33% more of the women were aware that screen time is not recommended for children under the age of 2.

All the women completed the same survey given two times: before receiving our information about childhood brain development and pre-literacy and after getting our information. The surveys are intended to measure change in knowledge or behaviors after participating in workshops and getting free baby books provided by Read to Grow at the health centers or clinics where they receive obstetric care.

Survey results also show that our information led to an increase by 10% of the number of women aware of two important aspects of early childhood development. Those facts are: babies are ready to learn at birth, and brain development is greatest in the first three years of life.

The Prenatal Project aims to teach expectant mothers the importance of sharing books and talking to their infants. They receive developmental and literacy information and free books to create home libraries for their babies.

Surveys help Read to Grow to improve our programs.

VOLUNTEER TEAM EXPANDS OUR WORKSHOP OUTREACH TO FAMILIES, NONPROFITS ACROSS CONNECTICUT

(continued from page 1)

through the oral presentations and the free, bilingual children's books and hand-outs given.

There are three workshop topics, so our teams can present to the same groups several times. One introduces Read to Grow, the importance of sharing books and our various resources in different communities. The second workshop is about the whys and hows of reading aloud with children. The third is about choosing appropriate books for children. All usually run from 30 minutes to an hour.

By Evelyn Tomasello, Books for Kids Co-Coordinator

Anyone interested in joining the team should fill out a volunteer application form on our website (www.readtogrow.org) or should contact Linda Sylvester or Evelyn Tomasello at 203.488.6800.

Childhood: A Time for Parents to Turn Off Screens and Engage One-on-One

It's a hard message to drive home, but Books for Babies keeps delivering it: Screens are not good for the healthy brain development of babies and young children.

Parents' absorption in their own screens, when the distraction takes away from interaction with their children, can be harmful, too.

Both in our work with the Prenatal Project and on hospital maternity units, Read to Grow wants mothers-to-be and mothers with newborns to learn "best practices" when it comes to screen use and families.

They hear about recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP):

- children under 18 months should be kept away from screens, unless they are "face-timing" with adult participation/supervision;
- children 18–24 months of age should be allowed limited digital media use as long as parents or caretakers are with them;
- children 2–5 years old should use or look at screens no more than one hour a day.

During our workshops and when Books for Babies volunteers meet with new mothers in hospitals, we relay what scientific studies and medical papers say: babies' brains are not developed enough to make

healthy sense of screens, even though they are attracted to the lights and actions.

Infants and toddlers should have human interaction to learn language skills, so we urge parents to put away their phones and talk, share books and otherwise interact with their children.

Dr. Jenny Radesky, at the University of Michigan, is a developmental behavioral pediatrician whose research focuses on family digital media use, child social-emotional development, and parent-child interaction. She authored the 2016 AAP digital media guidelines.

"Parents who are absorbed with and distracted by their mobile devices," she has written, "tend to have less parent-child interaction, more conflict with kids and encounter more difficult child behaviors over time."

Books for Babies staff keeps our volunteers abreast of salient research findings about screen use.

By Diane Visconti, Books for Babies Associate



NEWSLETTER OF READ TO GROW

A publication of Read to Grow, Inc.
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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.

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A MESSAGE FROM JEFF HARTMANN, TREASURER

Maintaining stability. Preparing for growth.

Those were the guidelines at Read to Grow during the 2017-18 fiscal year.

While continuing to work with more than 60 partners through our Books for Babies and Books for Kids programs, we began building the foundation for the launch of a third program in our then-18 years. We started to raise funds and meet with community leaders in New Haven to introduce Early Steps to School Success. Read to Grow is now managing that program through a partnership with Save the Children and New Haven Public Schools.

A \$14,775 grant from the six Shoreline Rotary Clubs of Branford, Clinton, East Haven, Guilford, Madison, and North Branford provided much-needed funds for our purchase of bilingual books. The demand for books for children in Spanish-speaking families has risen dramatically—more than 300 percent—since initiatives began in 2014 and 2015 in both Books for Babies and Books for Kids. Those new programmatic components target at-risk populations.

Read to Grow welcomed a first-time grant from The Stocker Foundation. The \$10,000 grant has supported our work in the Greater Hartford area, at Saint Francis Hospital and in a partnership with United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut. Through the latter, we provide books for reading tutors in elementary schools.

A grant from Branford Community Foundation has allowed us to supply books for a town-wide, annual event that offers books to young residents. The “Week of the Young Child” takes place every spring, and the local celebration is organized by the Branford Early Childhood Collaborative.

To help fortify our work in eastern Connecticut, the Jeffrey P. Ossen Family Foundation granted \$5,000 to Read To Grow. That award supports our Book Place and other book distributions in Windham.

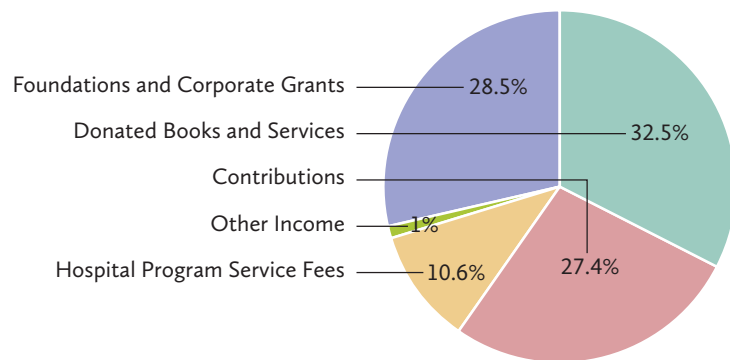
During the year, we planned to expand the distribution of information about the Connecticut Higher Education Trust (CHET) Baby Scholars plan to reach the pregnant women served by our Prenatal Project at sites across the state. Read to Grow began giving this information two years earlier to mothers of newborns in our partnered hospitals. CHET Baby Scholars (a 529 plan) encourages families to start savings accounts for their newborns’ future higher education. Enticements include as much as \$250 in contributions from the state.

In FY2018, our programs began to study the returns from various surveys that we give to pregnant women in our Prenatal Project and parents of young children in workshops. These surveys are essential in shaping the content of our services and the methods of delivering information and books.

Read to Grow received an unqualified, or clean, audit opinion for the 2017-18 fiscal year from our external auditors, Donald L. Perlroth & Company, CPAs.

PUBLIC SUPPORT AND REVENUES

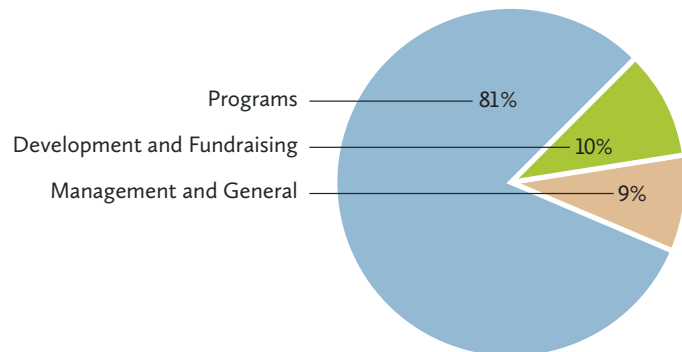
Foundations and Corporate Grants	\$ 203,254
Donated Books and Services	232,254
Contributions	195,701
Hospital Program Service Fees	75,501
Other Income	7,208
Total Public Support and Revenues	\$ 713,918



FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES

Programs	\$ 740,233
Development and Fundraising	92,150
Management and General	78,682
Total Expenses	911,065
Decrease in Net Assets	\$ -197,147¹

¹ In FY2018, the second-year donation of a significant three-year pledge was not recorded as income. As accounting standards stipulate, the total amount of a multi-year pledge appears as income only in the year the pledge is first made. Therefore, subsequent donations of the same pledge are not recorded as income.



Program expenses account for 81% of total expenses.

Driven by Love of Books, High Schooler Pays It Forward



Matthew Campbell shows some of the 2,001 children's books he collected for Read to Grow.

Matthew Campbell has some advice for anyone thinking about organizing a book drive: “Get the word out!”

The high school senior from Beacon Falls knows from experience the wisdom of his words. Just last fall, he ran a book collection that resulted in 2,001 children's books for Read to Grow.

Matthew, who is on the autism spectrum, worked hard—from beginning to end. He and his family posted news of the book drive on social media and made announcements at their church. Matthew made collection boxes and posters and put them up at his school. When people had books to donate, Matthew and his mother picked them up.

Not only did he collect thousands of beautiful books, Matthew counted them and neatly packed them in boxes. When his collection was complete and our van driver

arrived at Matthew's home for a pick-up, the high-schooler helped to load the books.

Matthew will be graduating from Woodland Regional High School this year, and he decided to run the book drive as his senior project.

He has loved books since he was 4 months old, his mother, Cynthia Campbell, said. When he was young, Matthew received books from Read to Grow. He and his family were excited and proud to pay it forward by giving back to an organization that will be able to reach out to more children.

By Linda Sylvester, Books for Kids Co-Coordinator

Read to Grow is always in need of new and gently used children's books to support our programs. To learn about running a book drive, download the Book Drive Tool Kit from our website (www.readtogrow.org), or call us at 203.488.6800.

Our Work Depends on Power of Generosity

Read to Grow receives more than 30 grants annually to fuel the work of our staff and more than 100 volunteers. Here are some of the grantors who made awards since September, 2018:

PITNEY BOWES FOUNDATION

The Pitney Bowes Foundation has awarded us a \$25,000 grant for our early childhood literacy work in Bridgeport.

The Foundation, which has been a benefactor for a dozen years, will provide literacy packets for Bridgeport Hospital and St. Vincent's Medical Center, also in the city. Additionally, Read to Grow's Book Places in Bridgeport, located at other nonprofits, will be financed by the grant.

FUND FOR GREATER HARTFORD

The Fund for Greater Hartford has given a \$20,000 grant for our Books for Babies program at four hospitals.

Hartford, Manchester, Middlesex and Saint Francis hospitals give our packets, all containing new baby board books and colorful, sturdy-stock guides for parents on how and why to share books with their infants.

These four hospitals reach a total of 8,800 families a year. Each family is also offered the opportunity to enroll in our free Follow-Up, which mails free baby books to them when their children turn 3 months and 1 year old.

CAROLYN FOUNDATION

Three Read to Grow programs at Fair Haven Community Health Center (FHCHC) in New Haven received a \$7,100 grant from the Carolyn Foundation.

Our Prenatal Project and two of our Partnerships—one with a Healthy

Start program and another with a Nurturing Families Network program, all operating from the community health center—are the beneficiaries of the grant.

The Carolyn Foundation serves economically disadvantaged children and youth in New Haven, and it supports programs in Minneapolis, MN.

HERMANOWSKI FAMILY FOUNDATION

A first-time, \$5,000 grant from the Charles and Joan Hermanowski Family Foundation of Florida is supporting Books for Babies at Backus and Bridgeport hospitals.

At Backus Hospital in Norwich, there are about 850 births a year. At Bridgeport Hospital, approximately 2,500 babies are delivered annually. More than one-third of the babies born at each hospital are eligible for WIC support, which means their household incomes are less than 185% of the federal poverty level.

INTERNATIONAL PAPER FOUNDATION

A grant for childhood literacy from the International Paper Foundation will help finance Books for Babies in Day Kimball Hospital in Putnam.

The \$4,000 contribution is significant, as it will pay for 60% of the cost for literacy packets (and Follow-Up mailings) to about 430 mothers who have their babies at Day Kimball every year.



Middlesex Hospital Says “Yes, We Can!”

We asked, and Middlesex Hospital delivered.

Our supply of donated books always ebbs and flows. Last December, we asked Kate Kearns, Middlesex Hospital's Volunteer Director, if she would consider holding a book drive.

Kate kindly and quickly agreed, and the result was 425 books collected in January.

Middlesex and Read to Grow partnered in 2011 to bring our Books for Babies program to the hospital so that every mother and her newborn there receive our literacy packet. Kate, a former reading teacher, has been a big supporter of the program from the start.

About this winter's book drive, she said, “We're happy to help, as we understand how important reading is to the well-being of children, families and communities.”

The gently used books, after a cleaning at our warehouse in Branford, are given to the siblings of newborns at our 14 partner hospitals across Connecticut.

Both the volunteers who deliver our early children literacy message to mothers on the maternity units and the nurses who work on those units routinely tell us that they love giving books to the young brothers and sisters visiting their mothers and new siblings.

During our past fiscal year, we gave 304 sibling books at Middlesex Hospital and 6,150 at all our 14 hospital partners.

By Diane Visconti, Books for Babies Associate

Visit us at
www.readtogrow.org

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You Can Help to Ensure There Are #BooksForEveryBaby!

Five ways donations will make a difference:

- \$1,250 = 80 mothers with newborns at hospitals will receive new books for their babies and literacy guides for parents. They'll also learn, in one-on-one conversation, the easy and important ways to build their children's language skills.
- \$500 = workshops (with new books for babies and handouts) for 40 pregnant women receiving their care at community health centers.
- \$250 = 100 new bilingual books (Spanish-English; Arabic-English) for infants and children.
- \$90 = 2 literacy workshops (with new books for children and handouts) for Head Start families.
- \$50 = 50 books for 2 childcare providers.

Hats Off to Students in Our 3rd Annual Read-a-Thon

More than 1,450 students at 13 elementary schools participated in our Read-a-Thon this winter.

We congratulate all the children and their families who read and shared books at home during the week that ended March 1. A special thank-you to the schools, which welcomed the opportunity to encourage reading at home and then agreed to collect the reading log sheets.

Participating schools were: in Branford: Mary T. Murphy; in Clinton: Abraham Pierson; in East Haven: Deer Run Elementary, Ferrara Elementary and Grove J. Tuttle; in Hartford: Plantsville Elementary; in Middletown: The Lawrence School; in New London: Harbor and Nathan Hale schools; in Waterford: Great Neck Elementary; in West Haven: Edith E. Mackrille and Seth G. Haley; in Wallingford: E.C. Stevens.

Once all the reading log sheets are tallied, the school with the highest percentage of student participation will win a presentation by a children's book author.

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

