

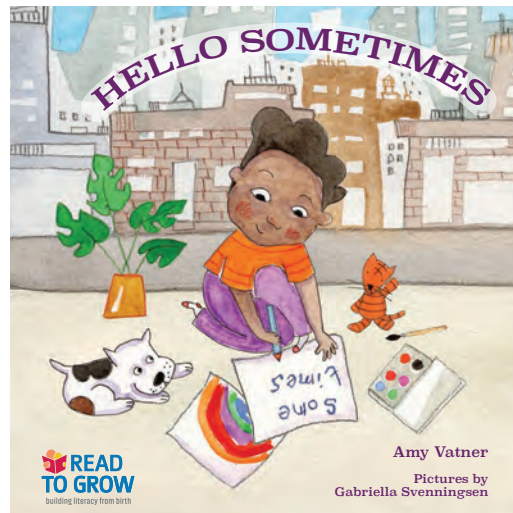
OUR MISSION: Read to Grow promotes language skills and literacy for children, beginning at birth, and supports parents as their babies' first teachers.

Read to Grow Publishes New Book, *Hello Sometimes*

How does one talk to the youngest amongst us about the uncertainties of daily life, brought crushingly into focus this past year? At Read to Grow we believe a simple but profound book can help parents and caregivers make sense of the ongoing effects of the pandemic and racial justice with young children and process what has happened as we move forward with hope.

Read to Grow is thrilled to announce the publication of a new board book, *Hello Sometimes*, written by Amy Vatner and illustrated by award-winning artist Gabriella Svenningsen. *Hello Sometimes* reads in easy-to-play-along rhymes and a little boy gives us a sweet and eternal message that life is about change.

"*Hello Sometimes* drives home diversity, immerses children in the vibrancy of unique cultural illustrations and encourages calmness and predictability for times that are uncertain," says LULAC Head Start teacher, Kashonda Lawrence Bowles. "It's a wonderful story book that allows families and teachers the perfect opportunity to talk with children during the most challenging times and it's an incredible way to allow children to see themselves and to build resilience in young minds."



The cover of Read to Grow's new board book that will be distributed to children across Connecticut.

At Read to Grow we know that how we read to children is just as important as how often we read to them. We hope that *Hello Sometimes* provides the images and words to allow the person reading the book with children to engage them in conversation about what they see, the connections they can make, and the questions they have. Ideally, the "child becomes the teller of the story" (Whitehurt, 2002). The back cover of *Hello Sometimes* includes a QR code linking

families, teachers and childcare providers to a webpage with updated resources focused on dynamic suggestions designed to engage young readers with the book.

Many generous donors have stepped up to ensure that we are able to distribute copies of *Hello Sometimes* free of charge to children ages birth to 5 years across Connecticut. Seed funding was initially provided by The Valley Community Foundation and from there, a multitude of donors joined forces to make the first run of 11,000 copies and the second run of an additional 11,000 books possible, including the Seedlings Foundation, Citizens Bank, The Scripps Family Fund for Education and the Arts, 100 Women Who Care Fairfield County, The Community Foundation of Greater New Haven, United Way of Greater New Haven, and The Children's Community Programs of Connecticut, and many other generous donors.

But the story does not end there. Please **SAVE THE DATE** and join us virtually **Wednesday, July 7**, for the official launch of *Hello Sometimes*. Check our website at www.readtogrow.org for more information about this exciting launch event, the book, and ways to purchase copies for yourself or others.



A few glimpses from inside the book.

Our Annual Report and Appreciations

Please see pages 4-16 for our Annual Report and Treasurer's Report for the 2019-20 fiscal year, which ended June 30, 2020. Also on those pages is our appreciation to donors and book-drive organizers.

Popcorn & PJs: Virtual Family Storytime Events

Read to Grow launched a new series of virtual events this spring, focused on children and families sharing the joy of reading together. We invited children's book authors Hyewon Yum, Lizzy Rockwell and Abdul-Razak Zachariah to join us one night per month to read their books, lead drawing sessions and answer questions. Families who participated received a package with a copy of the featured book, popcorn, sketch pads, and crayons in advance of each event. We raised over \$12,000

for Read to Grow programming, thanks to families purchasing tickets and generous sponsors like Citizens Bank stepping up to cover the costs for children who otherwise wouldn't be able to join. Although Read to Grow is a Connecticut based non-profit and the majority of children and families in attendance were from Connecticut, we also welcomed children from as far away as Virginia, Illinois and California. The sight of grandparents living in one state joining their

grandchildren living in another state became a frequent occurrence. While these events were developed in part as a response to the limitations of COVID-19, the resounding consensus is that Popcorn & PJs is here to stay. We are excited to launch our next series this coming fall; stay tuned for the announcement about upcoming authors and dates. We'll see you online!



Author and Illustrator Hyewon Yum



Author and Illustrator Lizzy Rockwell



Author Abdul-Razak Zachariah

Read to Grow Takes on Program Review with the Lectio Approach

In 2019, Read to Grow celebrated 20 years of deep investment in early literacy and supporting parents as their child's first and most important teacher. Fast forward to today and the pandemic has given us a chance to pause and hone in on the elements of our programming that really work to move the needle on childhood literacy and analyze and determine next steps for the parts of our work that should either be put to rest or deepened,

improved and expanded. This winter, Read to Grow undertook an in-depth program review and impact analysis with the Boston-based literacy consulting group the Lectio Approach (www.lectioapproach.com). Our entire staff and a Board-level Task Force participated in a month and half long series of in-depth sessions with Lectio. As we move into the next and perhaps most important phase of our work, that of moving from analysis to

action, we continue to think about a big question: is Read to Grow the organization that aims to give out the most books to the most children or the organization that gives books and literacy support to the children who most need them? We are excited to update our supporters as we engage in continuous improvement and look forward to hearing from you about the impact Read to Grow has had on your community.

Celebrating 10 Years of Partnering with Hotchkiss Library To Serve Sharon Hospital

The Hotchkiss Library, the library in the town of Sharon in Litchfield County, serves a population of 2,700. We are housed in



Hotchkiss Library Executive Director Gretchen Hachmeister visits with a family and their newborn with Candy Osborn, RN, at Sharon Hospital.

an historic and architecturally significant building from 1893. Part of our mission is to be accessible to the entire community and to make literacy and information accessible for all and community outreach is important to us. We delivered our first batch of literacy packets to the Birthing Suites at Sharon Hospital on June 11, 2011 and agreed to join forces with Read to Grow to bring literacy awareness to the Northwest Corner of Connecticut. Since then, our collaboration has distributed over 1,800 packets to the families of children born at Sharon Hospital.

Hotchkiss Library supplements Read to Grow's regular literacy packet with a Sandra Boynton board book, book marks, a guide to local parent resources, and our favorite part,

Baby's First Library Card, which encourages families to take their children to the library from the earliest age. The program has been supported by two community foundations and generous individuals over the years.

Read to Grow's Books for Babies program and our partnership has continued at Sharon Hospital even as it was sold twice and transitioned back to a not-for-profit hospital, currently part of the Nuvance network. Now that I am executive director of the Library, I rely on our wonderful volunteers to make the packets, but I still enjoy taking the books to the hospital and hearing from the nurses how much the patients appreciate the gift.

By Gretchen Hachmeister, Executive Director, Hotchkiss Library of Sharon

Donor Spotlight: The Scripps Family Fund for Education and the Arts

We would like to take a moment to recognize the incredible support we've received from The Scripps Family Fund for Education and the Arts (SFFEA). In May, 2019, SFFEA awarded Read to Grow a \$20,000 grant to expand our programs in Eastern Connecticut; these funds enabled Read to Grow to initiate new Prenatal Project locations in Putnam and Plainfield and new Book Places at Griswold Youth Center and Groton Human Services. In 2020, SFFEA deepened their relationship with Read to Grow by generously supporting our response to the overwhelming need for access to children's books during the pandemic. The new grants continued to support existing Prenatal Project and Book Place locations and expanded our ability to distribute new books to children picking up meals and diapers at schools and at social service agencies. Most recently, funding is providing copies of Read to Grow's new board book, *Hello Sometimes*, to children ages 0-3 living in Northeastern

Connecticut. In total, the SFFEA's investment in Read to Grow's mission provides literacy information and free board books to 350 pregnant women and thousands of books to children annually. A mother of a child who received books from TEEG, an organization SFFEA connected to Read to Grow, recently

shared, "Thanks for keeping the spirit of imagination and books alive for our family. It beats the tablet or TV any day." Words cannot adequately express our gratitude to SFFEA for their commitment to early childhood literacy. *By Paula Grimm, Development Associate*



Books selected by Read to Grow for a Book Place funded by SFFEA in Northeast Connecticut.



TEEG's Little Free Library, stocked with books from Read to Grow, funded by SFFEA.

Expanding Early Steps to Bridgeport

Read to Grow is thrilled to announce the expansion of our Early Steps to School Success program, in partnership with Save the Children, to Bridgeport Public Schools, starting Fall 2021. We are working closely with Bridgeport Public Schools leadership to identify the optimum school sites and ensure that our soon-to-be-hired coordinators are working with a full roster of families. The pandemic has increased the number of families eager to enroll in the program. Much like our implementation in New Haven, our expansion of services to Bridgeport will include both our 0-3 Home Visiting program and our 3-5 Home Library program. Our four coordinators for Early Steps to School Success—New Haven continue to work tirelessly to meet families where they are and safely deliver home visiting services, books and literacy resources to children across New Haven.



Maria Amado of Hartford Family Childcare Educators Community and Luz Martinez of All Our Kin reunite at Read to Grow's Books to Go! event for childcare providers from around the state.



Tricia Driscoll from Stratford, picking up one of the 4,000 books childcare providers selected for their programs through Read to Grow: Books to Go! Driscoll said, "coming to Read to Grow makes my heart bigger!"



Read to Grow distributed over 1,400 copies of "Jabari Jumps" to every single first grader in Waterbury Public Schools as part of an initiative to reengage our youngest learners in the joy of reading following months of online learning. Funding was generously provided by The Connecticut Community Foundation.

NEWSLETTER OF READ TO GROW

A publication of Read to Grow, Inc.
53 School Ground Road, Branford, CT 06405
203.488.6800 • readtogrow@readtogrow.org
www.readtogrow.org

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jeff Hartmann, Chair
Lisa Maass, Vice Chair
Carla M. Horwitz, Secretary
Lori Church
Jane Lee
Joshua Copel, MD
Sherene Mason, MD
Mary Kay Curtiss
Bonnie Patten
Monette Ferguson
Roxanne J. Coady, Chair Emeritus
Jennifer Fusco

ADMINISTRATION

Suzannah Holsenbeck, Executive Director
Robin Baker, Director of Administration

FOUNDING SPONSORS

Citizens Bank
Community Foundation for Greater New Haven
R.J. Julia Booksellers