

Read to Grow

NEWS

FALL 2008

Founding Sponsors:

Citizens Bank, The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven and RJ Julia Booksellers

OUR MISSION

To improve early literacy for all Connecticut children by providing books, by helping families share books with their babies starting at birth, by encouraging language development, and by promoting an awareness of literacy services.

Jackie Clegg Dodd Visits Read to Grow

Newborn Paige Stegner had a special visitor just one day after her birth at the Hospital of Saint Raphael. Jackie Clegg Dodd, wife of U.S. Senator Christopher Dodd, visited the hospital recently to catch our Books for Babies program in action and to meet the newborn and her family — one of the hundreds we reach each week, in partnership with HSR and seven other Connecticut hospitals.

Clegg Dodd visited with the Stegners in their room on Saint Raphael's maternity unit. Mrs. Stegner said that she has used books and information from Read to Grow with the couple's three older children, all of whom were born at HSR. She said that their oldest child, an eight-year-old boy, was reading above grade level last year, with the help of Read to Grow and having books in their home.

Mrs. Clegg Dodd also visited the Pediatric Primary Care Center to see our waiting room reading program there. On that day, students from Quinnipiac University's physician assistant program were reading to children while they waited to see the doctor.

Books for Babies coordinator Priscilla Russo emphasized the strong collaborative relationship between the hospital and Read to Grow as key in making the program run successfully. "It really works from the top down and bottom up," involving a commitment from administration, medical and

nursing staff, and the hospital volunteer department, she explained. "They reinforce our message all the time."

During her visit with the Stegners, the senator's wife, echoing Read to Grow's advice, urged families to take time out from their busy lives to "unplug and just sit down and read."



Jackie Clegg Dodd visits Brooke Stegner and her newborn at Saint Raphael's to see our Books for Babies hospital program in action.

SAVE THE DATE!



Friday, November 14, 2008

Author Toni Morrison, winner of both Pulitzer and Nobel prizes, will be the featured speaker at Read to Grow's fall luncheon at the Omni Hotel at Yale in New Haven. She will be signing copies of her new book, *A Mercy*.

Please call our office at 203.488.6800 or visit our website www.readtogrow.org for more details.

Books for Babies at Hospital of St. Raphael

The Hospital of Saint Raphael, which joined with RTG in 2000, is a model for hospital partnerships. Our program at HSR incorporates all of the components of Books for Babies, which maximizes our impact and allows us to have continuity of contact with families from birth through the first year, and beyond if they wish.

As in all our partner hospitals, our first contact with families at HSR is on the maternity unit, where parents of newborns receive our literacy bag. Trained volunteers visit each family to encourage parents to start reading to their baby right away, a message that hospital nursing staff reinforce. Books from RTG are available on the unit for siblings to take home, and HSR has set up a reading corner.

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A letter from the Executive Director: **Susanne Santangelo**

It was a busy spring and summer for Read to Grow. We have been dedicated in our work to provide a continuum of early literacy services to families through strong collaborations.

In May, the State of Connecticut invited Read to Grow to share our expertise with the statewide Nurturing Families Network. NFN provides home visiting services for first-time parents, beginning at their baby's birth, through the state's 22 birthing hospitals.

Over the summer, we selected developmentally appropriate books for all NFN sites for home visitors to use with parents in encouraging shared reading. At an August training conference, Read to Grow staff conducted early literacy training sessions for NFN staff in pre-literacy skills and concepts, book handling skills, and dialogic reading. NFN staff will integrate the early literacy education into their work with families. A spring 2009 conference is planned for the next phase of this early literacy initiative.

We continue to conduct training sessions on early literacy for our volunteers and maternity staff in our partner hospitals. Nursing staff reinforces the message about the importance of early language and literacy experiences, and families benefit from this team approach.

Looking forward to November, we are excited that our fundraising luncheon features Nobel laureate and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Toni Morrison. We hope that you will join us and support our efforts to promote early literacy for all Connecticut children.

Coady Appointed to Governor's Early Childhood Council

Roxanne Coady, founder of Read to Grow and board chair, has been appointed to the Governor's Early Childhood Research and Policy Council. Comprised of representatives from the fields of business, education, charities and government, the group will reinforce the state's drive to become a national model for early childhood education. The council is charged with a range of tasks designed to complement and support the work of the Governor's Early Childhood Education Cabinet.

Our New Look on the Web

We are thrilled to announce that our new website is up and running. The site, designed by Web Solutions of Meriden, will be managed in-house and updated weekly.

Some pages are still under construction, but we think you'll find everything you need right now to make a donation online, to apply for books, to join our team of volunteers, and to learn more about early literacy. Visit us at www.readtogrow.org

FAST FACTS

*Volunteers donated approximately 11,000 hours to Read to Grow in our last fiscal year. The total dollar value of their time is estimated at \$192,500.**



*Based on figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Books for Babies at HSR *continued from page 1*

HSR also collaborates in our outreach prevention initiative, which serves families receiving health care through the Pediatric Primary Care Center. New developmentally appropriate books are given at the two-month well-child visit; providers encourage families to enroll in RTG programs and to share books with their babies, again linking health and literacy. HSR's Primary Care Center also provides a waiting room reading program where volunteers read to children while they wait to see the doctor, and has books from RTG available for all children to take home with them after every visit.



Quinnipiac student Denise Wilbert reads to a young patient in the HSR Primary Care Center waiting room.

RTG Grow Welcomes New Board Members

Read to Grow welcomes Mary Kay Curtiss, Susannah Bailin and Mary Kay Long to our board of directors. “We are thrilled to have these three brilliant, dynamic individuals join our board,” says founder and board chair Roxanne Coady. “Each brings a unique set of skills and expertise at a key time in Read to Grow’s growth as a necessary resource for our children and families.”

A certified public accountant, Mary Kay Curtiss is a manager at the accounting and business consulting firm Blum Shapiro, where she provides services to a wide range of nonprofit organizations.

The Simsbury resident holds a bachelor’s degree from Gettysburg College and a master’s degree in professional accounting. She has served on our Finance Committee and also hosted one of our 10th anniversary house parties last September.

As a parent of a young child, “the importance of books and reading with my son is a top priority and part of our everyday life,” Mary Kay tells us. “What Read to Grow does to improve early literacy is a mission I feel very passionately about. It is truly an honor to work with people who share this passion and work tirelessly to make a difference.”

Susannah Bailin’s interest in Read to Grow stemmed from our “unique approach to literacy as an issue of health by focusing on the connection with hospitals and the birth of a child,” and the impact of low literacy on one’s overall well-being. “Without the skill of reading at a reasonable level, a person is so severely limited economically, professionally and in so many other ways that one’s sense of self-esteem, confidence and competence must be compromised.”

For Susannah, a Woodbridge resident, Read to Grow is a family thing.



New board members Mary Kay Curtiss, Susannah Bailin and Mary Kay Long.

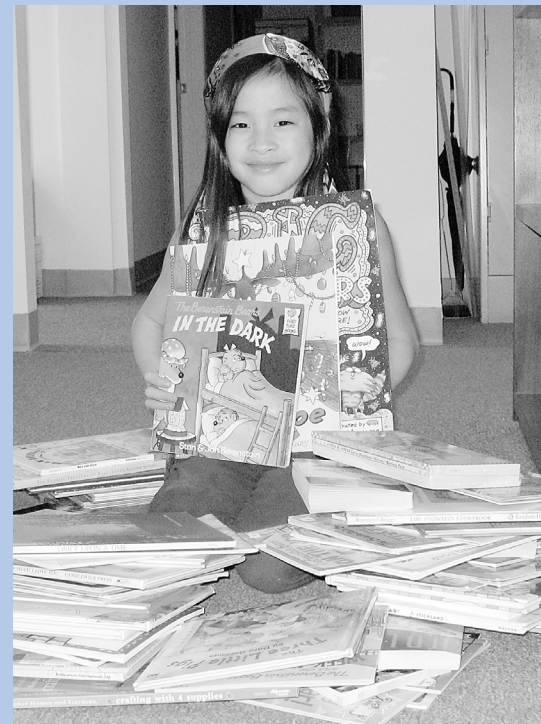
She and husband David are parents of three teenage daughters, each of whom chose Read to Grow to receive donations in lieu of bat mitzvah gifts; eldest daughter Alexandra has donated numerous volunteer hours to us.

Susannah holds a BA degree from Harvard/Radcliffe College and an MBA from Harvard University School of Management. The former president of Rabb Planning Center, a career development and training company, she is a tireless volunteer, serving on several boards, including The Hopkins School, and parent councils.

Mary Kay Long has always admired Read to Grow and its mission, and “jumped at the chance” to join the board, she says. “It was a privilege to be asked.”

An educator in her first career, Mary Kay brings to the board more than 25 years of fundraising and management experience. She is currently the director of institutional advancement at Goodspeed Musicals, and has held positions at The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts and at the Connecticut Children’s Medical Center (formerly Newington Children’s Hospital).

“As a parent and former teacher, I saw first hand what reading to a baby, infant, toddler can do,” she says, “and how important it is to read to your child and have books available.”



A Young Book Donor

In celebration of her eighth birthday, Cecile (pictured above) asked her friends to bring new children’s books for Read to Grow instead of gifts to her party. The result was a collection of 75 beautiful books that she brought to our office. Cecile is one of many youngsters who are raising public awareness of Read to Grow and helping us spread the joy of reading by donating books for children across the state.

RTG Partners with Children's Trust Fund

Read to Grow is being recognized for our expertise and experience in promoting early literacy by the State of Connecticut Children's Trust Fund. They have invited us to work with the Nurturing Families Network, a statewide network of programs that serves first-time parents from a child's birth through the first five years of life.

Read to Grow has selected developmentally appropriate children's books for home visitors to use with families to encourage book sharing that promotes early literacy skills, attachment and bonding. The books were distributed to 42 sites across the state.

RTG continues to work with the Nurturing Families Network, providing training to staff members to work effectively with parents in promoting early literacy.



Program at Hartford Hospital Going Strong

Books for Babies volunteer Nora Brugeuras visits with a mom and her newborn on the maternity unit at Hartford Hospital. Our program, which began there in March, has been well received by staff and families.

RTG INDUCTED INTO HALL OF FAME

We are proud to announce that Read to Grow was recently inducted into the Community Hall of Fame, sponsored by the Community Advisory Boards of Channel Thirteen/WNET New York and WLIW21. The award recognizes organizations for exemplary efforts in the fields of arts, culture, education and social concerns related to the stations' programming. Read to Grow was one of 11 recipients and the only Connecticut awardee.

Several board and staff members attended the awards ceremony in New York City, where we received a beautiful trophy in honor of our community service and leadership. Read to Grow's name has been added to the Community Hall of Fame commemorative plaque that resides in the studio's Visitor Center. Watch for us on a 30-second spot featuring this year's inductees, to begin airing in January 2009!



Attending the Community Hall of Fame awards ceremony were RTG Office Manager Robin Baker and Development Director Jean Caron, seated in front; back row, board members Janet Weiswasser Michaelson, left, and Suzannah Bailin, right, with RTG Executive Director Susanne Santangelo.

Did You Know...

Recent discoveries in neuroscience give us a new understanding of how the brain develops, and impacts the way we approach literacy. We now know that:

- The brain is built over time and early experiences directly affect how the brain is "wired." Babies are born with 100 billion brain cells; some are connected at birth but most are not. Connections that are formed and used repeatedly are reinforced; those that are not are eliminated.
- By the time a child is three, his brain is "middle-aged," with much of the basic circuitry already built.
- How the brain develops depends on a complex interplay between the genes we're born with and the experiences we have. Activity, attachment and

stimulation determine the architecture of the brain and whether a child will have a strong or weak foundation for all future learning, behavior and health.

- Children learn through a "give and take" in the context of important relationships with adults. Warm, responsive caregiving is essential to healthy brain development.
- Both brain architecture and developing skills are built "from the bottom up," with simple circuits and skills providing the scaffolding for more advanced circuits and skills over time. Reading, for example, cannot occur until the brain has been successfully wired, circuit on circuit, skill on skill.

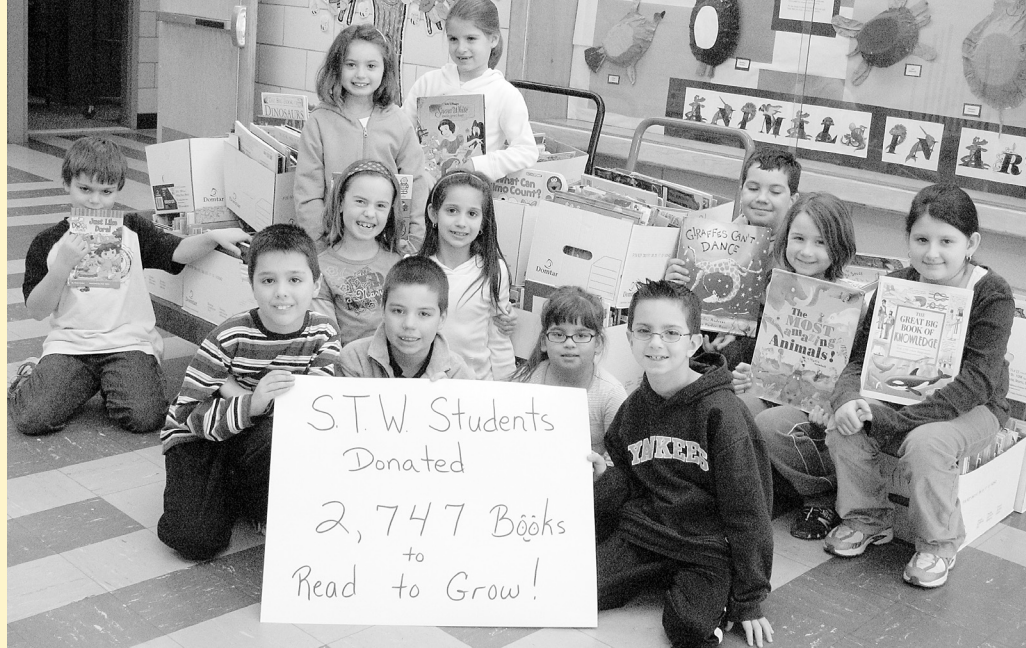
These findings support our work to help parents create a loving, language-rich environment for their children, beginning at birth, that will foster literacy development and lifelong learning.

Spring Book Drives Bring in 25,000 Books

Since it began in 2001, our Books for Kids program has been supported by your donations of new and gently used books. We redistribute these books directly to families, and to pediatric waiting rooms, underserved schools, and child care and social service programs where they are given to children to take home. Throughout the year, you donate the books your children have outgrown, and community groups, businesses, schools, scout troops and others run book drives to support our programs.

Last spring, book drives brought in more than 25,000 children's books; they left our warehouse as quickly as they came in to meet an onslaught of requests from families and summer reading programs. We are so grateful to all those who collected and donated books. Here are a few of our largest contributions:

- **Kiwanis Club of Fairfield** collected a record-breaking 9,000 books for Read to Grow in its second annual town-wide book drive, surpassing last year's outstanding collection of 6,000 books.



Students from Northford's Stanley T. Williams Elementary School donated more than 2,700 books to Read to Grow, collected during the school's spring book drive.

- **Stanley T. Williams Elementary School** in Northford collected more than 2,700 books. Neighboring Totoket Valley Elementary School contributed another 800 books.
- **New Haven Starbucks** led 10 area stores in a regional book collection that netted a donation of 2,000 books.
- **Fraser-Woods School** in Newtown donated 1,016 books to RTG.
- **Masonicare** in Wallingford collected 2,010 books from residents, families and staff, and raised about \$250 to purchase new books as well.

Books for Kids requests are up 9% over last year, and in order to meet the increased demand, we need you! Our program depends on donations of new and gently used books and our supply is low. Please consider running a book drive or setting up a collection box at your business or school. Help us to reach more children and share the joy of reading.



Angeliki Georgalopoulos and Kathy White, Books for Babies volunteers at St. Vincent's Medical Center, were among those who attended the recent educational session at RTG.

Volunteers Gather for Training Session

Books for Babies hospital volunteers recently attended an educational session on early literacy at Read to Grow, led by BFB coordinator Priscilla Russo. The session focused on brain development and the impact of nurture on learning, and is part of the ongoing training we provide for program volunteers and hospital staff.

Volunteers and RTG staff viewed a video presentation by pediatrician

Dr. Jack Shonkoff, professor of Child Health and Development and director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. Following the presentation, staff and volunteers engaged in a round-table discussion.

The evening event provided an opportunity for Priscilla, along with our on-site hospital program coordinators Erin Spaulding and Christine Mace, to meet with volunteers, and for volunteers to connect with their peers and share experiences in working with families.

SPOTLIGHT ON VOLUNTEER MARYANNE HALL



Maryanne Hall describes herself as a “professional volunteer.” Retired from a long career as a first grade teacher, she is involved in local politics, conservation efforts, fundraising for alma mater Hamden Hall Country Day School and many other causes she believes in — and we are fortunate that Read to Grow is among the organizations she’s chosen to receive her time and talents.

“I spent most of my life teaching children how to read,” Maryanne explains, “and this fits in nicely as an extension of all that work. I know about the importance of early literacy from first-hand observation of children who did and didn’t have the opportunities,” she says.

Maryanne joined our volunteer team a little more than a year ago, immediately taking on the responsibility of preparing mailings to families enrolled in our Follow-up Program. She spends about five hours a week in our office and puts together two large mailings each month, stuffing about 500 envelopes with books, literacy materials and our survey questionnaires, stamping and sealing them. Methodical

and precise in her work, she makes sure that envelopes contain any other information parents may request, such as resource information on literacy services in their area.

Maryanne’s service to Read to Grow is invaluable and the role she’s taken on essential. Follow-up mailings, sent to families at three and twelve months after our contact with them in the hospital, provide support and literacy guidance to parents and continuity of service, maintaining the link between families and Read to Grow during their child’s first year, and beyond.

RTG Is Going Green

Have you signed up to receive emails from Read to Grow? You can help us save paper and reduce our postage costs by providing us with your email address so we may reach out to you electronically whenever possible. If you haven’t given us your address yet, please call us at 203.488.6800, or email us at readtogrow@readtogrow.org.

RECENT GRANTS

Read to Grow has received recently grants from the following:

Bodenwein Public Benevolent Foundation; *Bank of America, Trustee*
Citizens Bank

Community Foundation of Southeastern Connecticut

Ensworth Charitable Foundation; *Bank of America, Trustee*

Mr. and Mrs. William Foulds Family Foundation; *Bank of America and Mr. Gerald A. Joseloff, Co-Trustees*

Maximilian E. and Marion O. Hoffman Foundation

NewAlliance Bank Foundation

Frank Loomis Palmer Fund

People’s United Community Foundation

Pitney Bowes Literacy and Education Fund

SBM Charitable Foundation

Scholastic Book Grant



A FAMILY MATTER

Sharing books is a family matter for Trish and her three children. She brought her four-year-old son and one-year-old twins to our office recently to pick up books for their home library. Trish received our Books for Babies literacy bag at Yale-New Haven Hospital when the twins were born, and enrolled in our Follow-up Program as well. She reads to her children daily, and all three of them love books.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Recent research supports our work: The first three years of a child's life establish the foundations for learning, reading and socialization. We know that children who are read to learn to read and to succeed.

Your support is needed so that we can continue our important work of helping children get a good start in life.



Here are just a few examples of how your donation can help:

- \$25 fills 20 hospital literacy bags with our publication, *A First Guide for Parents of Newborns*.
- \$50 sends 10 families a new children's book and literacy guidance.
- \$100 fills 20 hospital literacy bags with *Rabbit's Bedtime*, a newborn's first book.

To make a donation to Read to Grow, call our office at 203.488.6800 or visit us on the Web: www.readtogrow.org.

Helping Children Succeed

Read to Grow and United Way of Greater New Haven recently co-sponsored an early childhood development forum for about 30 parents and caregivers hosted by R.J. Julia Booksellers in Madison.

Priscilla Russo, Books for Babies coordinator, joined Madison pediatrician Dr. Dia Flanagan in the discussion about the impact of early development on building a solid foundation for raising successful children.



Pilgrim Furniture Supports RTG



We are pleased to announce that Pilgrim Furniture City has signed on to help underwrite Read to Grow's public service announcement, shot and edited by WTNH/WCTX and aired on the stations.

Many thanks to the Connecticut-based furniture company for its support. The daily showing of the 30-second spot enables us to continue broadening our reach, reinforcing the message that books and reading to children are important.

READ TO GROW BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Roxanne J. Coady, *Chair*
Jennifer Aniskovich, *Vice Chair*
Karen Pritzker, *Secretary*
Stacy Ruwe, *Treasurer*

Susannah Bailin
Mary Kay Curtiss
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Carla Horwitz
Susan Katz
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James Welbourne
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Rick Scavetta

Senator Meyer Tours Read to Grow

Read to Grow recently held an Open House to show off our newly expanded and renovated office and warehouse space, and the beautiful “gently used” furniture we received from Pitney Bowes. State Senator Edward Meyer stopped by for a tour and to speak with Susanne Santangelo, executive director, and Roxanne Coady founder and board chair, about our programs.

In the photo, the senator is holding a copy of *Rabbit's Bedtime*, one of several books Connecticut author/illustrator Nancy Elizabeth Wallace has created for Read to Grow through the years. Currently, every baby born in our eight partner hospitals goes home with a copy of



Pictured with Senator Meyer are Nancy Elizabeth Wallace, Susanne Santangelo and Roxanne Coady.

Rabbit's Bedtime included in the literacy bag families on the maternity units receive through our Books for Babies program.

FAST FACTS

Books for Kids distributes an average of 1,500 books weekly. Requests for books have increased by 9% since last year.



Founding Sponsors: Citizens Bank, The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven and RJ Julia Booksellers

Visit us at
www.readtogrow.org

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