

**YEAR-END REPORT
2023**

Read for Life works toward its goal of providing books to children and breaking the cycle of illiteracy through early intervention, direct service projects and community awareness.



Supporting Literacy in Tulare County Beginning at Birth

From the Co-Presidents

2023 was a very successful year for the Read for Life organization. Our volunteers spent many hours connecting with the youth of Tulare County and growing their love for reading.

We appreciate all the support we have received from individuals, service clubs and foundation grants. We also received many donations in memory of lost loved ones who were particularly instrumental in supporting the advancement of literacy in the children of Tulare County.

This year we were able to distribute 28,000 books to advance the learning and love of reading in our county.

We look forward to 2024 as we continue to provide quality books to children in our communities. We truly believe we are making a difference in the lives of children.

Katie Mann and Sue Sanders
RFL Co-Presidents



Soccer players gather at the Sports Reading Corner to receive books

Leo Connigo brings reading to sports corners

You've heard the expression "It takes a village to raise a child." That's the philosophy Leo Connigo (Read with Me) has adopted to make reading a priority for Farmersville children.

Read for Life is part of the Leo Connigo collaboration that takes books to where children are.

"We're bringing reading to their events," said RFL member Deborah Lagomarsino. "In Farmersville, that's sports events."

During a soccer game, all the partners brought their resources to a Sports Reading Corner.

RFL brought books. Save the Children brought "Lucy," the read-

ing bus. The Farmersville Library was signing up families for library cards. The Boys & Girls Club was reading books.

"After seeing a mother cry from emotion while reading 'The Giving Tree,' it motivated me to reach out to more parents and children to share the importance of reading," said Christian Cervantes, Boys & Girls Club manager.

Some of the soccer players got so excited about the books, they ran to their teammates and brought the entire team over to get books.

Leo Connigo emphasizes the impact of community and family involvement. Their goal is to make reading more accessible to children and to encourage families to read to their children daily.

Shelter Buddies helps young readers, socializes dogs

Board member Nancy Loliva has learned that the Shelter Buddies program she coordinates, where third graders read to dogs at the Visalia Animal Care Center, is more than a fun reading exercise.

"The humane education is much more than I thought when we started this program," Nancy said. "There have been some beautiful moments. How the kids and dogs respond is priceless."

The Visalia animal shelter is delighted with the program. It helps socialize the dogs and makes them more adoptable.

"It helps the dogs feel a little more normal. They'll warm up and start listening to the children," said Tracy Everett from the animal center. "After the kids come, the dogs actually have a little bit of a personality change."

Nancy began the program in 2017 after learning about a similar program. She partnered with ProYouth and the county-run Loop Bus, which provides free transportation to events for at-risk students.

During summer and the regular school



Hurley School students ride the LOOP bus to read at the Animal Care Center.

year, schools participate in individual six-week Shelter Buddies programs. This school year Hurley, Cottonwood Creek, Denton, Oak Grove and Exeter's Lincoln School are participating.

The last session awards them with certificates and their choice of four to five books from RFL to keep among the 100 they have read to the animals.

The students' favorite books? The "Dog Man" series, hands down.

Head Start teachers plan fun activities with their preschoolers to associate reading with pleasure when they give out books donated by Read for Life.

Here's what teacher Gina at the Clinite Head Start Center did with her class.

"We set up a bookstore, and the children were so excited! They used pretend money and went book shopping. They would shop around and were able to pick out their favorite book. Then they paid at the toy cash register. It was a great learning opportunity. The children enjoyed it, and they were able to take a book home.

RFL scholarship winner talks to parents about reading

Enrique Martinez, a Golden West High School grad, is the recipient of the 2023 Pass the Word scholarship. The \$1,000 award is given by Read for Life and the Visalia County Center Rotary.



Enrique founded Proyecto Ingles, which is a program designed to encourage Latino/Hispanic families to make literacy an essential aspect of their children's everyday lives.

Enrique graduated with a 4.25 grade point average and feels his success is due to his mother reading to him from an early age. This is noteworthy because his parents immigrated from Mex-

ico with very little background in education. Enrique has spoken in Spanish to groups sharing his story and encouraging them to read with their children. His mother often joins in answering questions. He reached out to Read for Life to help him find speaking venues.

Enrique is now attending UC Berkeley with a future goal of becoming a doctor and specializing in neurology.

The scholarship is open to all graduating high school seniors in Tulare County who have performed a minimum of 50 hours of volunteer service outside of school which focuses on improving literacy. Eligible applicants must have a 3.2 GPA and plan to attend a college, university or vocational school in the U.S.

For information on the Pass the Word scholarship, email Susan Graves at susan@readforlife.org

New mothers' support group gives out baby packets

Patty Villarreal Maldonado, a board certified lactation consultant and childbirth educator, knows that parenting is the hardest job in the world and comes with no instruction. She has talked to many mothers who feel they are failing their children.

Patty has created a new mothers' support group with several partners and First 5 Tulare County to provide childbirth classes, a support group for breastfeeding and a "warm line" to help parents.

"The mothers are so grateful," said Patty. "Some say they would have quit breastfeeding without that support."

Now she is giving out RFL baby packets and books to her clients.

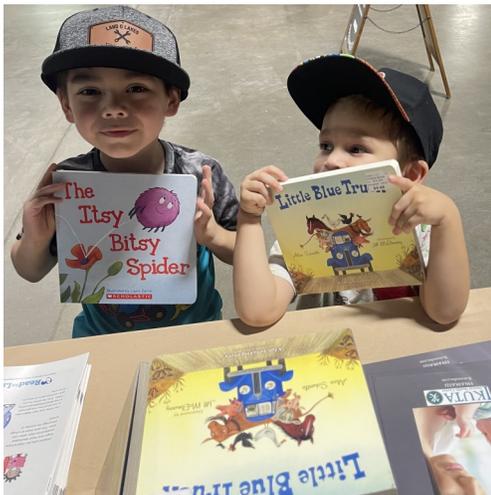


Ann Brodersen (left), RFL's Books for Babies coordinator, gives baby packets to Patty Villarreal Maldonado for her mothers' group.

Patty and her non profit group hosted a diaper changing station and nursing nook at the Tulare County Fair.

They hold a monthly support group at Lifestyles fitness center in Visalia and will be doing classes for Parenting Network.

"Tulare County has one of the lowest numbers for breastfeeding and one of the highest for C-sections," said Patty. "That's one of the reasons I felt we had to start this program."



Patty gave out RFL books at the Tulare County Fair.

RFL box locations where you can donate gently used books for ages 0-7:

- ImagineU Children's Museum, 210 N. Tipton, Visalia
- VUSD Visalia Learning Center, 630 S. Atwood, Visalia
- Central Valley Christian School Library, 5600 W. Tulare Ave, Visalia
- Monessori School
- 3502 S. Linwood, Visalia
- St. Paul's School, 6101 W. Goshen, Visalia
- Read for Life office, 132 N. Conyer, Visalia
- St. Anne's School, 385 N. F St., Porterville

We have one more box available. If your organization is interested in having it onsite, please contact Susan Graves at

info@readforlife.org

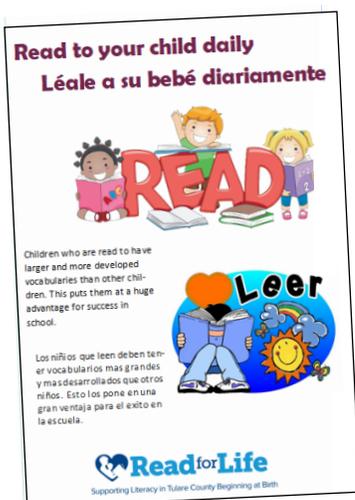
How to read to your child booklet

RFL has created a "Read to your Child Daily" booklet in both English and Spanish to distribute to new parents, who are often hesitant about how to read with their children.

The booklet gives tips on reading to children of different ages. It says:

"The most important thing in the first years of life is the growth of the mind and spirit. This is when a child learns to love and trust to speak and listen.

"After a child turns two years old, these things are very difficult to learn or teach ever again. Reading together 20 minutes a day is the most important gift you can give your child."



These are the children and programs who receive books from Read for Life

Books for Kids

Books for Kids provided four book distributions in 2023. We gave out books in the months of February, May, September and December, providing over 18,000 books to children who might not have access to them.

We continue to distribute books through Family Health Care Network clinics, Kaweah Health Clinics, Porterville Crisis Center, Emergency Aid, CASA, Valley Children's Hospital, Adventist Health, food pantries and other locations in Tulare, Dinuba, Orsi, Exeter, Pixley, Tipton, Woodlake and Lindsay.

The staff at these locations are not only giving a book to a child, but are also educating the parents and caregivers about the importance of reading to their children.

We appreciate donations of new or gently used books for ages 1 to 7 years. Drop-off box locations are located on page 3 of this newsletter.

For more information, call Katie Mann 559 972-0986 or Sue Sanders 559 909-1754.

Head Start

This year Read for Life will continue to promote family-based literacy through the Tulare County Head Start program. We will distribute over 2,200 books to 19 Head Start sites through the Tulare County Office of Education.

Each family will receive three book distributions throughout the 2023-24

school year, comprised of English, Spanish and bilingual new books.

Over 730 children from birth to five years of age will benefit from these donated books in an educational setting. Head Start site teachers plan interactive and brain enhancing developmental skills to share on book distribution days.

We are excited to share the opportunity for literacy growth among all our Head Start families and beyond.

For information, contact Deborah Lagomarsino at 625-3433

Preschool Programs

The Pre-School Program distributed 1,630 books for the 2022-23 school year, with books going to the Tulare County Office of Education Migrant Pre-K and Home-Base programs and the Earlimart State School Program

Book titles were bilingual, as the programs are advocates of dual language learning. This also allowed parents more opportunities to interact with the text. Books chosen were also culturally relevant to give families a connection to real world situations and a sense of inclusiveness.

Stories included social emotional learning and school readiness for preschoolers, showing them how to share, learn about emotions and appreciate differences.

In addition, 1,935 books were given to Bright Start, which serves children age 0-3 with developmental delays.

Literacy is always a focus in early intervention, and Bright Start is so grateful to Read for Life for their support.

For information, please contact Mimi Boyd at 559 967-5848 or Gloria Davalos at 559 750-9626.

Books for Babies & Teen Parenting Program

Books for Babies distributed 550 baby packets this year to Visalia and Tulare hospitals, pregnancy centers, breastfeeding centers and birthing providers. Each baby packet includes a board book, developmental cards with recommended books for each developmental stage and a bilingual songbook. We provide the packets in either English or Spanish.

We also distributed 1,100 books and baby packets to several "Early Steps to School" Programs in Strathmore, Farmersville, Tipton and Alpaugh.

Teen Parenting made three presentations at Visalia Charter Independent Studies School this year, distributing books and emphasizing the importance of reading to your child beginning at birth.

We also are providing books at the Young Lives Club Night each month and talking about reading daily to your children.

For more information, contact Ann Brodersen at 559-731-7977

RFL helps at school reading fairs

RFL participated in several reading fairs during the year, held at elementary schools to give out books and promote the joy of reading.

Pictured is board member Sue Sanders reading to children at the Crestwood Elementary Camp Read-a-Lot with the help of Tipper, Rawhide Baseball's mascot.

During the event, students could go from activity to activity to learn how to make snacks by reading recipes, play a variety of reading games, enjoy hot dogs and receive books to take home.

Children of all ages enjoy being read to, and the students were intent on hearing the stories.



Thank you to our 2023 donors—helping to increase children’s literacy in Tulare County

\$10,000 and up

Belay Foundation

\$2,000 and up

Dwelle Family Foundation Inc., G. B. Tantau Company, Ag Source Services—Lagomarsino Group, The Sence Foundation

\$1,000 and up

Mark Fulmer, Ed & Holly Kuykendall, Harvey & Tracy May – Paloma Development Co., Eric & Kathy Shannon

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\$250 and up

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\$100 and up

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& Barbara Tienken, United Way, Matt & Carole Warmerdam, Marilyn Watson, Michael & Elinor Wilder, Sharon Woolman

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Read For Life appreciates the donations made in memory of Lynn Beckers, Terry Garrett & Virginia Duysen

*Deceased

RFL supports Porterville Little Libraries



RFL continues to support the Little Library project in Porterville created after a devastating fire burned down their public library.

Pictured at the Porterville Literacy Fair, board member Karen Vanni receives an autographed copy of the children’s book Larry Segovia of the Porterville Fire Department wrote about fire.

Each one of the Little Libraries received a copy of his book.



Books given out at Rawhide game

RFL gave out books at the Rawhide baseball game on Aug. 18. It was encouraging to hear the majority of parents say that they had many of the books at home and read them to their children often.

Pictured is board treasurer Cydney Oster giving out books.



Supporting Literacy in Tulare County Beginning at Birth

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Learn more about us
on the web
www.readforlife.org

Email us at
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RFL promotes reading to children at library book festival

Read for Life's goal is to promote children's literacy and to give out books throughout the county.

Board members were at the Nov. 4 Book Festival at the Tulare County Library in Visalia along with other non-profit groups, authors, story readers and actors to show the fun of reading.



Deborah Lagomarsino talks to families and hands out books at the Visalia Library festival.