

**YEAR-END REPORT  
2024**

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**

This year Read for Life successfully completed its 35<sup>th</sup> year of supporting literacy in Tulare County.

Our volunteers spent many hours providing books to infants and preschoolers. We were able to distribute 35,000 books—both new and gently used—to advance the learning and love of reading in children.

We appreciate all the support we have received from individuals, service clubs, schools and foundation grants. We would not be able to reach those goals without you!

Because we buy so many books (two pallets delivered on Katie's driveway), we received an extra 200 free books we were able to give to children

We look forward to 2025 as we continue to provide quality books to children in our communities. We truly believe we are making a difference in their lives.

Katie Mann and Sue Sanders

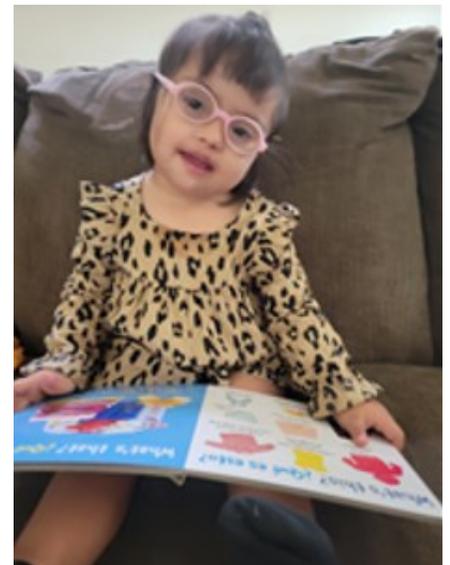
**Bright Start preschoolers learn preliteracy skills**

**B**right Start is always especially thankful to Read for Life for the books given to their children age birth to 3 who have developmental delays

A program under the umbrella of the Tulare County Office of Education, Bright Start has received thousands of books over the years, which are distributed to the families by the teaching staff.

During home visits, the teacher and parent begin to work on the very important preliteracy skills.

Teachers say that children have learned how to handle books, turn



pages and show greater interest in following a story.

One mom said, Allistair loves his Hi-Five Animal book. He's learned to give hi-fives, and now he gives them to everyone at his pre-school."

Another parent told the teacher that her little boy loved the dinosaur book so much that he brings it to her every night to read. She said, "It's part of his bedtime routine now."

Literacy is always a focus in early intervention, and our families love when a new book is taken out to them," said Stephanie Caldera, Bright Start parent liaison.

## Shelter Buddies helps young readers, socializes dogs

**V**isalia’s 2024-25 school year kicked off with the return of the Goshen Eagles to the Shelter Buddies program. What began as a pilot program with the elementary school in the Spring of 2017 continues with its return as the 28<sup>th</sup> site to participate in the program.



Together with its partners ProYouth and the Visalia Animal Care Center, Shelter Buddies has evolved into an enhanced literacy experience for its second- and third-grade participants. Goshen joins Global Learning Academy, Four Creeks and Veva Blunt for the 2024-25 school year.

Each year, four participating schools transport the students through the Tulare County-run Loop Bus to the Center on six consecutive Tuesdays after school to read aloud to the animals for an hour. The last session celebrates their successes and gives them their choice of four to five books among the 100 available to keep for their own use.

“Reading to dogs can help children build empathy, and it helps the dogs become socialized,” said Senior Animal Care Worker/Animal Behavioralist Tracy Everett. “A soothing voice and presence can calm fearful dogs, help them feel a little more normal and give them a moment of no stress.”

Emily Huiza, ProYouth’s Program Leader II for Goshen Elementary, added, “Every day, the kids who go ask me, ‘Are we going today to the Shelter to read to the dogs?’ Once Tuesday rolls around, they get so excited, and it gives them the opportunity to practice their reading skills which is always good to do.”

The Shelter Buddies Program expanded its reach in Tulare County with a Summer Session in 2022 with Elbow Creek and Ivanhoe Schools, and in 2023 with Exeter’s Lincoln School. Exit surveys consistently reveal the students enjoy their time as Shelter Buddies and continue their joy in reading aloud beyond the Animal Care Center.

Read for Life is committed to breaking the cycle of illiteracy and considers ProYouth and the Visalia Animal Care Center partners in these efforts.

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The timing of when a child learns to read is impacted by the reading that is or isn’t done in the home, since that’s where many kids first develop a love of books and reading.

Parents should also encourage language development through talking with their children and encouraging them to elaborate on what they have to say.

Point out letters and connect them to their sounds. This will create an awareness of and curiosity about reading.

USA TODAY

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## Car show donates proceeds to Read for Life

On April 27 Read For Life had a booth at the Pharaoh Car Show, which was a new venue for us. We distributed books and our “How To Read To Your Child” handbooks.

We were then the recipient of a \$1,000 check from the car show earnings. Each year the car show chooses non-profits to benefit from the show.

Pictured are co-presidents Sue Sanders and Katie Mann accepting the check.

## Keira Bixler presented with Pass the Word Scholarship

The 2024 Read for Life's \$1000 Pass the Word Scholarship recognizes a student who has volunteered in the community to promote literacy.

This year's honoree is Keira Bixler. Keira first started her partnership with Read for Life when she was in kindergarten and wanted to do something to help children who were not fortunate to own a book of their own.

For the past 12 years, she has collected and cleaned thousands of books for Read for Life. In addition, she has just published the second edition of her children's book in English and Spanish and is distributing 10,000 copies to children in need.

She has read to children at ImagineU, co-founded a tutoring program called Brainiacs Mentoring and is a podcast host.

Keira is a graduate of Redwood High School where she was a 4-year varsity cheerleader, co-president of FBLA, completed over 40 collegiate units, and was active in other activities on campus.

Now a freshman at UC Berkeley, she is majoring in economics and media studies with a minor in dance and performance. She plans on attending law school and someday being the CEO of a national news network.

This past June, Keira won the title of Miss California's Teen and will be complet-



**Keira Bixler is presented a basket of goodies for college by Susan Graves as thanks for her long association with Read for Life.**

ing for the title of Miss America's Teen in January.

Next year's scholarship application is on the RFL website and due April 4, 2025.

For information, email Susan Graves at [susan@readforlife.org](mailto:susan@readforlife.org)

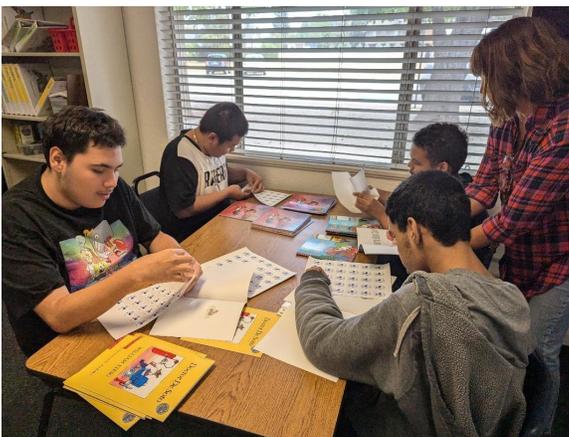
RFL box locations where you can donate gently used books for ages 0-7

- ImagineU Children's Museum, 210 N. Tipton, Visalia
- VUSD Visalia Learning Center, 630 S. Atwood, Visalia
- Central Valley Christian Preschool 5600 W. Tulare Ave, Visalia
- Monessori School 3535 S. Akers, Visalia
- St. Paul's School 6101 W. Goshen, Visalia
- St. Anne's School 385 N. F St., Porterville

## Disabled young adults sticker new books for RFL

Each year, young adults with moderate and severe disabilities from the Tulare County Office of Education AcCEL program sort and sticker books for RFL.

Thanks to our donors, we order close to 10,000 new books each year, and before we give them out, our sticker is placed on each one.



The young adults aged 18-22 enjoy doing that task for us, said instructor Jodi Fortney. One of the students, Chris, admitted he likes looking at and reading the books while doing the stickering.

The students also sort goods for Rick's Vending. In fact, their wall proudly shows that they have stuffed 200,000 plastic eggs with goodies.

So if you get a stuffed egg this Easter, it's a good chance it was put together by the class.

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

[info@readforlife.org](mailto:info@readforlife.org)

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

### Books for Kids

Books for Kids was able to provide three book distributions in 2024. We gave out books in the months of February, June and October providing over 20,000 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, Porterville 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 **0 to 7 years only**. Drop-off box locations are located on page 3 of this newsletter.

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

### Head Start

Literacy continues to strengthen bonds between children and their parents. Read for Life consistently enhances this connection by providing over

2,200 books to 18 Head Start sites operated through the Tulare County Office of Education. In the 2024-25 school year, each family will receive three new books, including English, Spanish, and bilingual options, to enrich their family literacy experience.

Over 730 children, along with parents and teachers, will have the opportunity to choose their books while developing essential educational and cognitive skills.

Richgrove Center toddler teacher Antonia shared how her children used library cards to select books during a Library Day activity associated with the Read for Life book distribution.

Once the children picked their books, they scanned them out using a toy cash register and their library cards. This approach teaches multiple skills.

For more information, contact Deborah Lagomarsino at 559 625-3433

### Preschool Programs

Over 1,700 books were distributed to preschools in 44 school districts and the Migrant Education Program run by the Tulare County Office of Education.

All books provided by Read for Life are selected to support the State Service Delivery plan. They include bilingual texts for dual language learning, giving parents more opportunities to read the texts.

Books are culturally relevant to connect students to real world applications and give them a sense of inclusiveness.

The books also include



**Head Start teacher Antonia had her class use library cards to select their books.**

social emotional learning to teach children to share, learn about emotions and appreciate differences.

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 833 baby packets to Kaweah Health NICU, pregnancy centers, breastfeeding centers and birthing providers.

Each baby packet included a bilingual songbook, developmental cards with book suggestions for each age group, plus a board book of either "The Itsy Bitsy Spider," "Wheels on the Bus" or "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star."

Board books distributed are in English or bilingual. We appreciate all the support we get from the health care supporters that help spread the importance of reading to your child beginning at birth.

Our Teen Parenting Program gave three presentations at Visalia Charter Independent Studies School this year, distributing books, songbooks and developmental cards.

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



**PreK students engage in a learning experience at the Migrant Education Program's Health and Education Conference where Read for Life Books were provided.**

## Thank you to our 2024 donors—helping to increase children’s literacy in Tulare County

### \$10,000 and up

Belay Foundation

### \$2,000 and up

Dwelle Foundation, Lagomarsino Group/Ag Source, Cathy Tantau

### \$1,000 and up

County Center Rotary, Ed and Holly Kuykendall, Paloma Development Co., Pharoah’s Car Club of Visalia

### \$500 and up

Gerry Beckers, Tom and Ann Brodersen, Mike and Joan Carpenter, Frances and Katherine Florio, Friends of Three Rivers Library, Stephen and Beth McAuliff, George and Carol Pilling, Deane Reed, Steve and Carmella Renton, Byron and Marilyn Riegel, Bruce and Sandy Wileman

### \$250 and up

Michael and Mimi Boyd, Rita Crandall, Bill and Cindy Delain, Joanne Dudley, Jody and Susan Graves, Robert and Anne Havard, Doug and Cyndy McBee, Bill and Katie Mann, Dennis and Cathy

Mederos, Dan and Cydney Oster, Ben and Rita Pena, Ed and Marla Reyes, Steve and Sue Sanders, Melody Schepp, Eric and Kathy Shannon, Drew and Leslie Sorenson, Paul and Linda Thompson, Mike and Vickie Torres, Sam and Megan Travioli, Valley Yoga – Holly Jones

### \$100 and up

Sandra Bennett, Charlene Blunt, Rick and Karen Carlstrom, Tony and Melanie Casares, David and Janis Christopher, David and Shelley Dever, Valerie Ehrlich, Pat Foster, Carol Frate, Jody Gilman, Ellen Gorelick, John and Carole Greening, John Hansen, Robert and Lori Hart, Janice Helgeson, Bob and Dana Hight, Susan Kampsen, Judy Lawsen, Tony and Nancy Loliva, Marlene McDonald, Dwight and Pam Merkel, Patricia Moore, Chris and Jennifer Morgan, Donna Orozco, Sharon Peck, Rosemary Pedretti, Dee Quatro, Ed and Becky Richert, Robert and Janice Riddle, Rich and Joy Sakai, Myron and Debbie Sheklian, Toni Si-

mons, Barry and Tricia Smith, Barry and Donna Sommer, Bonnie Thiele, Barbara Tienken, Stanley and Carol Trapp, Matt and Carole Warmerdam, Marilyn Watson, Michael and Elinor Wilder, Denise Williams, Victoria Wood, Steven and Neva Wright

### Other Generous Donations

Aaron and Norma Avedian, Joan Avedian, Paul and Doris Bratsch, Nancy Brevante, Mary Ann Brensel, Marsha Brooks-Smith, Marguerite Brown, Chuck and Carol Delap, Michelle Ducey, Linda Farsakian-Wall, Kate Gibson-Cate, Roberta Hagopian, Tom and Betty Johnson, Florence Kabot, Mary Ann Lawrence, Robert and Susan Machado, Maile Melkonian, Betty Miller, Fred and Clae Nave, Sandra O’Dell, Larry and Susan Poplack, Bonnie Preston, Dru Quesnoy, Rich and Andrea Sigmund, Renella Smith, Jonnie Stone, United Way, Stephen and Susan Welch

## Student book drives help RFL reach more children

**R**ead for life is so grateful for the many individuals and groups who donate gently used books that we can distribute to children who might not have books in their homes. Here are two examples.

Katie Ng (right) was a senior at Redwood High School at the time of the donation. She was taking a COS

course called Social Justice offered on the Redwood campus. The students were asked to complete a civic engagement project.

Katie approached friends and neighbors, asking for gently used children’s books to donate to Read for Life and was able to donate 44 books.

Gurtaj Sandhu (left) was an 8th grader attending St. Paul’s School. During the months of March and April, he appealed to neighbors, friends and classmates asking for book donations.

Children’s books were donated to Read for Life, while any adult books were donated to the Corcoran State Prison Library.



## Getting out the books...

- One day a month, students at Family Life Charter School don’t have to wear their traditional uniform, but they pay a small amount for this privilege. Then they donate the money to a good cause. One month they chose RFL and donated \$438.
- RFL had a booth at the Tulare County Book Festival on Oct. 5. It was a good place to hand out books and our “How to Read to your Child” booklets.
- When Teen Parenting Coordinator Ann Broderson takes books to the parents, she always enjoys hearing how they share the books with their children. They discuss the research that demonstrates the difference parents can make by reading to their child at an early age.



Supporting Literacy in Tulare County Beginning at Birth

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Learn more about us  
on the web  
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#### Board Members

Mimi Boyd, Corresponding Secretary, Preschool Program  
Ann Brodersen, Teenage Parenting, Books for Babies  
Gloria Davalos, Vice President, Preschool Program  
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Katie Mann, Co-President, Books for Kids  
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Donna Orozco, Newsletter  
Cydney Oster, Treasurer  
Sue Sanders, Co-President, Books for Kids  
Karen Vanni, Southern Tulare County Coordinator

#### Retired Board Members

Rita Peña, Woodlake Liaison  
George Pilling, Book Purchaser  
Joy Sakai, Honorary Member

## RFL promotes reading at Farmworkers' Conference



**Tulare County Office of Education's Childhood Education Program puts out the books donated by Read for Life to give out at the Farmworker Women's Conference.**

**E**ach year Read for Life donates books in Spanish to the Farmworker Women's Conference.

The goal of the conference is to improve health and safety and to provide advocacy and educational resources to farmworker families of Tulare County.

Over 700 books were provided to parents to encourage literacy in young children.

As RFL always says, reading to your child daily is the most important gift you can give them!