

**YEAR-END REPORT
2025**

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 volunteers spent many hours connecting with the youth of Tulare County and delivering books to support that love.

We appreciate all the support we have received from individuals, service clubs and foundation grants.

We were able to distribute over 35,000 books to advance the learning and love of reading in our county. We would not be able to reach those goals without you!

Read for Life is adding several new distribution sites in the upcoming year. With the opening of Salt and Light in Goshen, Navigation Center in Visalia and Woodlake Family Resource Center, we will be reaching out to a new group of young readers.

We truly believe we are making a difference in the lives of children by instilling the love of reading and improving literacy.

Katie Mann and Sue Sanders

Outdoor Storybook Walk to open early next year



Ann Brodersen holds the first book "The Big Slide" to be installed in the new Storybook Walk at Stonebrook Park.

Read For Life cannot wait to share our newest project which is coming soon to Stonebrook Park located at Stonebrook and Hemlock avenues in Visalia.

Early in the new year, a Storybook Walk will be installed along the path in the park featuring 15 kiosks, each with an enlarged page of a book so families can enjoy reading a story while walking through the park.

At the beginning of each month, a new book will be featured, so families can visit monthly for some outdoor exercise and enjoyment of a new reading adventure.

The project was proposed by board member Ann Brodersen after she took her 2-year-old grandson to a storybook walk on the Rucker Army Base in Alabama.

"He had been there before, so he ran right to it," said Ann.

Last summer, her grandson and family had moved to Colorado Springs, and they found another storybook walk at the library there.

Thanks to generous donations from our donors, Read for Life was able to buy the kiosks and has partnered with Parks & Recreation, which chose a location and will install the kiosks.

"We appreciate the support of the Visalia Recreation Department and donations from those who support our goal of reading to young children," said Ann. "We hope many families will enjoy the outdoor activity and reading together as a family."

Read for Life plans a ribbon cutting for the Storybook Walk, so follow our Facebook page to find out the date.

Scholarships presented to 2 high school seniors

Decades of research confirm that when families read, sing and learn together, children build stronger vocabularies, deeper emotional connections to reading and greater readiness for school.

With the passage of AB 1454, California joins a national effort to change how reading is taught in schools—having students decode words by sounding them out, called phonics. “Literacy is the pathway to success. All of California’s kids deserve to discover the joys and benefits of reading, and the power to formulate and express their ideas,” Gov. Gavin Newsom said in signing the bill.

Each year Read for Life, with the support of County Center Rotary, presents one (or two) \$1,000 scholarships to high school seniors who have done literacy projects.

Roxana Vazquez Tapia describes herself as an avid reader who enjoys sharing her love of books and finding topics of interest for those who say they don’t enjoy reading.

A volunteer with the Brother Big-Sister Program, she reads to her Little Sister and other Littles, helping them sound out words and make an effort to read. Afterwards, she asks them a couple of questions about the book and says it is always nice to hear their enthusiasm when answering the questions.

Roxana has been part of the Migrant Education Program since preschool, including the migrant speech and debate program where she presented to migrant families, advocating for environmental protection. She was involved with Future Farmers of America for three years and served as president and secretary.

A graduate of Farmersville High School, Roxana is attending UC Davis majoring in Environmental Engineering and plans to return to Farmersville when she completes her education.



Mayra Paniagua has done a number of internships that allowed her to help children with reading. She also volunteered at the Porterville Library and YES mentoring program where she read with children.

When Mayra interned at a summer camp at Santa Fe Elementary, she read all kinds of books to her assigned group of children, ranging from kindergarten to 7th grade, and was always able to find something they enjoyed. If they got bored, she began inviting them to take turns reading, which they ended up loving.

Most recently, she participated in a spring internship at Porterville High School. Sometimes, when a child didn’t want to complete their assigned activity, she would offer to read to them instead. Some even stayed afterward to thank her. The most rewarding part was hearing things like, “Thank you, Miss P. I usually have no one who reads to me or helps me read, but I enjoy you reading.”

Mayra is a graduate of Harmony Magnet High School in Porterville Unified School District. She is currently attending Porterville College with plans to continue to a 4-year university. Her goal is to become an elementary teacher where she plans to share her passion for books and learning with young children.



Exchange student donates

Lomave Maziya, an exchange student from South Africa, chose Read for Life as her Global Youth Service Day project while she attended Tulare Union High School as a sophomore last year.

The project is the longest-running annual youth participation event in the world.

She put out an announcement in the school bulletin to say she was collecting children’s books in March and ended up with close to 300 books. Her host family, Jason and Gina Nelson, helped her bring the boxes of books to the RFL office.



Shelter Buddies makes ‘fur’ever reading friends

Eight years ago, Read for Life found a special way to connect kids with literacy by having them read to dogs in the Visalia Animal Care Center.

Visalia’s 2025-26 school year kicked off with Houston School returning to the Shelter Buddies program as the 32nd school site to participate, after being one of the first chosen when the program started.

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.

Houston joins Crestwood, Mountain View and Crowley for the 2025-26 school year. Each year, four participating schools transport the students through the Tulare County-run Loop Bus to the animal center one day a week for six weeks after school to read aloud to the animals for an hour.

The last session celebrates the Shelter Buddies’ successes and awards them with certificates and their choice of books to keep from among the 100 available to read to the animals.

Shelter Buddy Promises are reviewed before each visit to the Shelter to ensure the safety of both the students and the



animals.

“Children can feel like experts when reading to a dog, which can help build confidence and self-esteem,” said Tracy Everett, senior animal care worker/animal behavioralist.

“Reading to dogs can help children build empathy, and it helps the dogs become socialized. A soothing voice and presence can calm fearful dogs and help them feel a little more normal.”

Exit surveys have shown the students enjoy their time as Shelter Buddies and continue their joy in reading aloud beyond the Animal Care Center.

Early Literacy series shows family how to read together

Among the families who joined the Family Foundations Early Literacy series in Terra Bella, one story shined brightly—a story of togetherness, curiosity and the



power of shared learning.

Little Julie, a bright-eyed toddler just 1 year and 8 months old, attended all four sessions hand in hand with both her parents, Esmeralda Ceballos and Salvador Leon, the only family to participate with both parents present at every gathering.

At each session, the trio could be found sitting together in the reading circle singing nursery rhymes, exploring sensory storytelling and crafting bilingual home reading kits.

Julie’s eyes would light up as she opened and closed her little books donated by RFL, pointing to pictures and babbling her own “baby talk” stories.

Her parents shared that she now reaches for books even at the store and proudly shows off her growing home library, complete with both board books for her and older books for her sister, Gabriela.

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
 - Visalia Life Charter School 3737 Aker St., Visalia
 - Monessori School 3535 S. Akers, Visalia
 - St. Paul’s School 6101 W. Goshen, Visalia
 - St. Anne’s School 385 N. F St., Porterville
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These are the children and programs that receive books from Read for Life

Books for Kids

Books For kids once again completed three book distributions in 2025, providing over 20,000 books to children in Tulare County.

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, Orosi, Exeter, Pixley, Tipton, Woodlake, Porterville and Lindsay.

We added a new site in Woodlake, provided books to The Navigation Center, which helps the unhoused in Visalia, and to Bubbles and Bleach, a laundromat on Mooney Blvd.

We appreciate donations of new or gently used books for ages 0 to 7 years old. Drop-off box locations are located on page 3 of this newsletter.

For more information or if you would like to host a book drive for us, please call Katie Mann at 559 972-0986 or Sue Sanders at 559 909-1754.

Head Start

Books enrich children's lives while enhancing essential educational and cognitive skills. Read for Life consistently provides this enrichment opportunity and will distribute over 2,500 books to 20 Head Start sites this school year, serving 851 preschoolers through Tulare County of Education.

We were able to include the newly-opened Head Start sites of Farmersville

and Woodville. Each child will receive three new books in English, Spanish or bilingual options during the year as part of fun activities that encourage children to love reading.

RFL is also excited to share our books with Home Base Head Start for the very first time. This program aims to support parents as their child's primary educators and promote school readiness. Head Start Home Base provides the same developmental components as center-based Head Start programs.

Read for Life will distribute 1,290 books to Home Base in Tulare County, serving an additional 430 preschoolers. These books help enrich children's lives and encourage parent child engagement through literacy.

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

Preschool Programs

Over 3,400 books were distributed to preschool programs in the county, including school districts and Migrant Education, along with Bright Start, which services children aged 0-3 with developmental delays. These educational programs hosted family workshops, resource fairs and literacy-based activities to encourage reading.

All books support the State Service Delivery plan, including bilingual texts for dual language learning, giving parents more opportunities to read with their children.

The books also include social emotional learning to teach children to



A Head Start Home Base parent learns how to read with her child.

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 almost 300 more baby packets this year than the previous year. Kaweah Health Support, which provides services to pregnant women and new mothers in Lindsay and the south county, became a new partner distributing our baby packets.

We support Visalia Library's Saturday Baby Story Time by providing materials and including a flyer in our baby packets. Each baby packet contains a board book, developmental cards with recommended books for each developmental stage and a bilingual songbook.

We appreciate our partners that distribute baby packets and encourage the importance of reading to their child, beginning at birth.

We made three presentations at Visalia Charter Independent Studies to their teen parenting class. We enjoy visiting with the soon-to-be parents and new parents, discussing the research that supports the importance of talking, singing and reading to their babies.

Board books are distributed each time, along with developmental cards and songbooks.

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



Bright Start connection

This year RFL gave 1,760 books to families in the Bright Start Program, which helps children aged 0-3 with developmental delays.

This continued partnership demonstrates what's possible when organizations unite around a common goal: giving every child a fair, joyful and hopeful start. It helps more Tulare County children discover that the pages of a book can open doors to endless possibilities.

Thank you to our 2025 donors—helping to increase children’s literacy

\$10,000 and up

Belay Foundation

\$4,000 and up

Sence Foundation

\$2,000 and up

Ag Source, Cathy Tantau

\$1,000 and up

Gerry Beckers, County Center Rotary, Mark Fulmer, Ed and Holly Kuykendall, Harvey and Tracy May (Paloma Development Co.), Stephen and Sharon Peck

\$500 and up

Tom and Ann Brodersen, Mike and Joan Carpenter, Robert and Anne Havard, Janice Helgeson, George and Carol Pilling, Deanne Reed, Steve and Carmella Renton, Melody Schepp, Eric and Kathy Shannon

\$250 and up

Mark Avedian, Sandra Bennett, Tony and Melanie Casares, Joanne Dudley, Keren Friedman, Jody and Susan

Graves, Susan Kampsen, Fred and Deborah Lagomarsino, Nancy Lynch, Doug and Cyndy McBee, Bill and Katie Mann, Dennis and Cathy Mederos, Dan and Cydney Oster, Ben and Rita Pena, Armida and Guadalupe Picon, Paul and Linda Thomton, Steve and Sue Sanders, Myron and Debbie Sheklian, Drew and Leslie Sorenson, Mike and Vickie Torres, Sam and Megan Travioli, Bruce and Sandy Wileman

\$100 and up

AAUW, Thomas and Joan Akin, Charlene Blunt, Rick and Karen Carlstrom, Judith Carreras, Gary and Marilyn Cascarano, David and Shelley Dever, Patti Fiormonti, Dave Franey, John and Carole Greening, Cathy Guadagni, Doug Snider and Marilyn Harper, Robert and Laurie Hart, Bob and Dana Hight, Judy Lawsen, Stephen and Beth McAuliff, Patricia Moore, Thomas and Marsha Peltzer, Diane Post, Rich

and Joy Sakai, Toni Simons, Barry and Tricia Smith, Barry and Donna Sommer, Janet Sward, Bonnie Thiele, Matt and Carole Warmerdam, Marilyn Watson, Michael and Elinor Wilder, Denise Williams, Sharon Woolman, Victoria Wood, Steven and Neva Wright

Other Generous Donations

Aaron and Norma Lee Avedian, Joan Avedian, Laurel Barton, Al and JoAnne Branco, Paul and Doris Bratsch, Mary Ann Brensel, Marsha Brooks-Smith, Marguerite Brown, Michelle Chenal-Ducey, David and Janis Christopher, Rosemary Jackson, Bonnie Preston, Mary Ann Lawrence, Sam and Joyanne Lukes, Robert and Susan Machado, Charlene Minetti, Fred and Clae Nave, Sandra O’Dell, Larry and Susan Poplack, Patricia Rosenberg, Jennifer Shirk, Jonnie Stone, Robert and Barbara Tienken, United Way, Stephen and Susan Welch, Sharon Woolman, Susan Zachary

Ducor Literacy Jamboree

Children build own home libraries

In the heart of rural Tulare County, the Ducor Union Elementary School District continues to shine as the central gathering place for its close-knit community.

Last spring, families came together for the Ducor Literacy Jamboree, a camping-themed celebration that transformed the school grounds into an outdoor adventure of imagination, storytelling and learning.

For many Ducor families, the school isn’t just a place for learning; it’s the heartbeat of the community. As one of the few gathering spaces in town, the school regularly opens its doors to host events that strengthen connections between home and school.

With tents, campfires and story trails setting the scene, families explored a variety of literacy stations designed to make reading fun and interactive. Students “camped out with a good book,” crafted reading bookmarks and practiced storytelling under a twinkling sky of string lights.

Each activity encouraged creativity, parent participation, and bilingual engagement—bridging learning between home and school in both English and Spanish.

Thanks to Read for life, every 0-5 age family received bilingual books to continue the reading adventure at



home. RFL’s support ensured that each child could build their own home library and enjoy stories that reflect their language, culture and imagination.

The event served as a powerful hub for community connection and educational opportunity. By blending joyful themes, hands-on activities and bilingual resources, the event reinforced the belief that reading is not just a skill; it’s a family journey and a shared experience.



Supporting Literacy in Tulare County Beginning at Birth

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Laundromat provides mini library for local families



Bubbles and Bleach laundromat owner Alex Ochoa said his little library is his proudest achievement. His mother was a teacher and worked with children with special needs. From her he learned the importance of getting children to read and making sure that families have books.

Read for Life was happy to donate books to Bubbles and Bleach laundromat in Visalia for their "library."

The laundry asked for donations from local organizations and makes the books available to read or take home when parents are doing their laundry.

In July they hosted a free laundry and literacy day, where laundry could be done free. They gave out 1,400 books that day.

Owner Alex Ochoa knows many Tulare County families do not have books in their homes and is glad people treat his business as a place where they are available.