

Reach Out & Read Reaches Over 1,000 Inyo Children

Local Rotary, Sunset Foundation, VFW Auxiliary & Others Invest in Children's Literacy



CAPTION: Rotarian and Police Chief Kathleen Sheehan and Pediatrician Charlotte Helvie share the delights of a good book with 2-year-old Esther Ellison.

In a world of crumbling financial institutions, one of the best investment opportunities around is reaping high rewards. What stock has such high promise? Local kids with their nose in a book.

Since October 2007, First 5 Inyo County has been partnering with local organizations like the Sunset Foundation, Rotary International District 5260, Sunrise Rotary of Bishop, Dr. Ramadan, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary Post 8988 to provide free books to distribute to children at Bishop Pediatrics, Toiyabe Indian Health Centers in Bishop & Lone Pine, and Bishop Family & Maternity Care Health Clinic during their routine well-child visits.

“Studies have found that you should start reading early and often to your child,” says Dr. Charlotte Helvie of Bishop Pediatrics and Allergy, who is also a member of the First 5 Inyo County Commission. “The benefits are so well-documented that the American Academy of Pediatrics even recommends that we prescribe reading to the parents of our patients 6 months and older.”

Reading to children enhances early brain development and can often help children perform better in school. Kids who read proficiently by 4th grade have lower dropout rates, fewer incidents of juvenile delinquency, and a greatly reduced likelihood of time spent in prison or on welfare as adults.

In Minnesota, the Federal Reserve Bank conducted a cost analysis study showing every dollar invested in early childhood development creates a savings return as high as \$8 to \$12 for the state. Hoping to see similar return on their investment, local organizations have all banded together to generously support Reach Out & Read with donations to purchase books.

"Reach Out and read is such a valuable program for our youth," says Susan Cullen, President of the Sunrise Rotary Club. "For the past 2 years Sunrise Rotary has contributed as a way of promoting literacy in our community."

"So often money is given to a great cause, but then we never get to see the impact," says Tom Hardy, President of the Sunset Foundation and Bishop Sunrise Rotary Member. "Seeing so many books placed in the hands of kids is great. We know that these young people will see that books are important, and they will be able to teach themselves virtually anything they need to know in the future."

Children in Inyo County received 1,081 books in the first nine months of the Reach Out & Read program from October 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008. Since July 1, 2008, doctors have distributed another 48 volumes, which means that this next full year may see even more families reading regularly with their young children.

"Local financial contributions have been key in our ability to give families free books to promote reading," explains Dr. Taema Weiss, the on-site coordinator of Toiyabe's Reach Out & Read program. "We couldn't have done it without lots of help."

In an effort to further promote reading, Altrusa of the Eastern Sierra is partnering with First 5 Inyo County to collect used children's books for reading stations they hope to place throughout local county businesses in 2009. On top of the local Trick-or-Treat for Literacy event which garnered a grand total of 1,012 used books and the Christmas Book Drive that garnered 300 books and counting, First 5 will continue to collect new and used books all year long. Call Jody at 760-873-6453 for more information on how you can donate books or funding to help support early literacy efforts in Inyo County.

"The great thing about this program is that it really sticks with parents when a physician tells them they can impact their child's future in a positive way by reading to them every day," says Jean Dickinson, Director of Inyo County Health & Human Services, and a member of the First 5 Inyo County Commission. "It's easy, yet it provides life-long benefits."