



RIF
Reading Is
Fundamental®

Pittsburgh

Annual Report



June 1, 2009 - May 31, 2010



Letter from the Executive Director

Mission:

To provide children with the resources, motivation, and opportunities to develop a life-long love of reading

2013 Vision:

Annually, 30,000 Pittsburgh children will have a greater potential for academic success because of their participation in Reading Is FUNdamental Pittsburgh programs



Dear Friends,

As I think back over my time here at RIF Pittsburgh, I am struck by all of the change that has occurred in this past year. Our offices that once held only 3 are now filled with 4 fulltime staff, 4 AmeriCorps members and several unpaid, smiling interns. The energy and enthusiasm is absolutely tremendous!

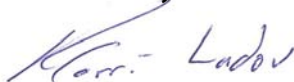
This past year was formative, marked by RIF Pittsburgh's commitment to an extensive organizational assessment and strategic planning process. The result of this process has led to a reinvigorated organization focused on quality programming and financial sustainability.

In order to ensure the greatest impact, we have worked hard to strengthen our relationships with other community initiatives and the sites we serve, as well as to build new partnerships. We piloted two new programs designed to further support literacy and learning and help cultivate "Promise Readiness" among our children. I invite you to check out our profile of our Math and Science program on page 11 and the details of our collaboration with the Be a 6th Grade Mentor project on page 13. Both of these programs work to take advantage of the integrative nature of reading, and help to build the foundations for a life-long love of reading and learning.

Although we have accomplished a lot, we have only just begun. As we move into a new year, we are prepared to embrace the many challenges and opportunities that lie before us. Following the devastating loss of our long term partner, Beginning with Books, RIF Pittsburgh has taken on the Everybody Wins! and Storymobile programs. These two programs will work hand-in-hand with our current programs enabling us to broaden and deepen our impact on the low-income children and families within our community.

Many thanks to all of you who have supported us over our 29 years, and a special thanks to those who helped us during this past pivotal year. Your support has helped ensure RIF Pittsburgh's value and continued success as we work to serve the children and families who need us most!

Sincerely,



Florri Ladov
Executive Director

Organizational Overview

2009-2010 Highlights:

- **61,121** free, new books provided for children to take home and add to their personal home libraries
- Over **1500** Reading Celebrations held
- **116** sites served
- **20,080** economically disadvantaged children reached in our community
- **5,300** stories shared as part of the Read To Your Family program

Reading Is FUNdamental (RIF) Pittsburgh is an independent affiliate of Reading is Fundamental, Inc., the oldest and largest children's and family nonprofit literacy organization in the United States. Founded in 1981, RIF Pittsburgh's mission is to provide children with the resources, motivation, and opportunities to develop a life-long love of reading.

Since 1984, RIF Pittsburgh has given more than 460,000 books to over 192,000 children.

RIF Pittsburgh is dedicated to developing the children in our community into lifelong, independent readers by building the foundations of literacy through book ownership, motivation, and positive reading experiences. In the 2009-2010 program year, RIF Pittsburgh gave away more than 60,000 new, age-appropriate books to more than 20,000 low-income children.

We focus our efforts on the schools, community centers, and after-school programs serving our city's most economically disadvantaged children. In more than 70% of our sites, 75% of the children meet the income requirement for free or reduced lunches, and in 35% of our sites, nearly all of the children qualify.

The core strength of RIF Pittsburgh is that we engage the children and families of our community throughout their elementary school years. **RIF Pittsburgh's impact is much more than a one-time encounter. RIF Pittsburgh is woven into the fabric of our at-risk children's elementary school experience,** building the foundation for literacy while fostering a life-long appreciation for reading.

A child that begins receiving RIF books in pre-school will continue to receive books and participate in motivational activities throughout his/her elementary school years, typically up to 5 times per year. This means that by the time a child completes 6th grade, he or she will have built a self-selected library of up to 40 books and will have been exposed continually, over an eight-year period, to the RIF name and philosophy that "Reading is FUN."

An organization that began at the grassroots level, RIF Pittsburgh is committed to providing resources that best meet the needs of our communities. We participate in local events and festivals, parents' nights, and open houses in an effort to deepen the family and community commitment to education. By engaging local volunteers and working with community organizations, RIF Pittsburgh provides programs that are an integrated part of the community experience.

Strategic Plan

With the introduction of new leadership, staffing changes, and the current economic climate, RIF Pittsburgh saw a need to revisit our historic mission and role in the community. With the support of the Buhl Foundation, RIF Pittsburgh engaged Dewey & Kaye to lead the organization through an extensive organizational assessment and strategic planning process.

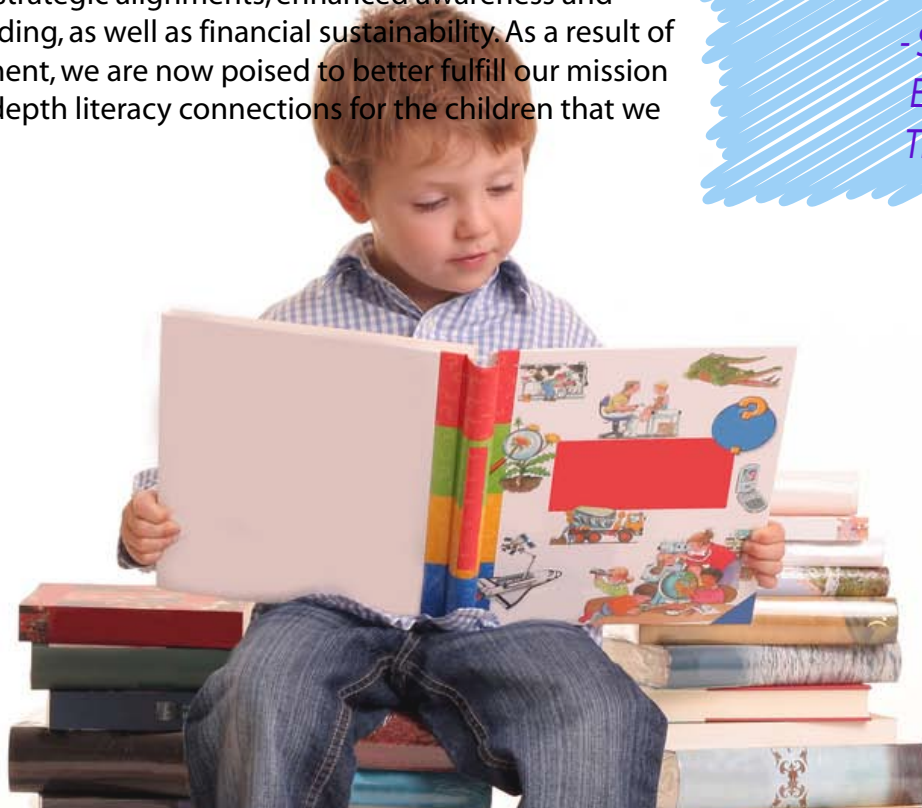
The strategic plan was developed based on the results of a comprehensive data collection process which included an online survey of our sites, interviews with key community leaders, the identification of key external trends, a competitive analysis of the local landscape, a national benchmark study with other RIF affiliates across the country, a full assessment of our programs, and an examination of our financial trends.

The results of this assessment were astounding! This process confirmed that RIF Pittsburgh offers a highly valued and unduplicated service that effectively fosters a love of reading in children, improves school performance, and builds self-esteem.

Our strategic plan focuses on quality control, building a strong foundation for future growth, key strategic alignments, enhanced awareness and community understanding, as well as financial sustainability. As a result of this strategic reassessment, we are now poised to better fulfill our mission and to create more in-depth literacy connections for the children that we serve.

"... a child's love of reading is an invaluable component for that child's future growth...RIF Pittsburgh's programs create a special experience where children discover that reading can be fun, and select their very own books to keep... Your alignment with key community initiatives, including your partnership with the 6th grade mentoring project, is strategic and important."

*-Saleem Ghubril,
Executive Director,
The Pittsburgh Promise*



Literacy in our Community

"My son loves to read and I don't always have the money to get him a new book. He made me read his RIF book almost every night before bed."

-RIF Parent,
Brightside Academy

"Most kids have never had the chance to go to a bookstore or library. Giving kids the tools to [read] is a blessing."

-RIF Parent,
Gwen's Girls

"Many of my students do not have books at home. They are so thrilled to pick a book. The RIF Reading Celebrations helped to showcase the importance of reading and, most importantly, the joy of reading!"

-Teacher,
Pittsburgh Beechwood

According to a study prepared for the Pittsburgh Mayor's Commission on Public Education, **a significant literacy gap exists for economically disadvantaged students in Pittsburgh, placing thousands of our city's children at risk of educational failure.** This study shows that more than 65% of economically disadvantaged children in Pittsburgh Public Schools cannot read at grade level ("Student Performance in PPS" RAND 2003).

In 2007, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) released its annual "Reading Report," which states that 33% of all fourth graders in the United States cannot read at even the basic level. The NCES also reports that children from economically disadvantaged families consistently perform significantly lower than other children in school, especially in reading. Research indicates that a lack of access to quality books and educational resources during childhood contributes to this achievement gap: **"Limited access to books is a problem for all young children, but for those in low-income areas, it may be tantamount to reading failure"** (S. Neuman, International Reading Association, 2001).

According to the NCES, nearly two-thirds of low-income American families do not own any books for their children. There is extensive research that supports the importance of providing children with access to books. Stephen Krashen, author of *The Power Of Reading*, states in *Literacy Network News*: **"If more access leads to more reading, and if more reading leads to better reading, writing, spelling, grammar, and a larger vocabulary, this means that the first step any literacy campaign needs to take is to make sure children have access to plenty of books"** (2007).

Research also indicates that parent and family involvement are crucial for developing literacy. The combination of access to books and a positive family environment that encourages good reading habits can make a huge impact on motivating children to read. According to a study conducted by the College Board, reading is more dependent on learning activities in the home than is math or science (1994). Reading aloud to children is critical in preparing them for reading on their own. However, less than half of families read to their kindergarten-age children on a daily basis (NCES 2000).

How We Help

The literacy gap that plagues our community is complex and has no simple solution.

Yet, by simply increasing children's access to age-appropriate print material, we can work to mitigate these challenges. **RIF Pittsburgh's programs are built upon a research-based model that emphasizes four key components:** increasing children's access to books, providing opportunities for children to self-select high quality books of interest, creating fun and motivational environments to allow children to develop positive associations with reading, and engaging parents and families in the literacy development of their children.

RIF Pittsburgh's programs and services:

- Provide low-income children access to a selection of quality, age-appropriate books
- Create exciting and motivational environments for children to learn to love to read
- Encourage and teach parents about the importance of reading and their role in helping their child learn to read
- Strengthen the family unit by providing families with resources, activities, and opportunities to read together;
- Engage families with programs and strategies to integrate reading into everyday family life
- Expose children to positive community role models who will help them increase their reading-related skills and discover the joy of reading

RIF Pittsburgh's programming puts books directly into the hands of the children who need it most and engages children and families in programs and events that encourage reading as a fun and integral part of life. **Our programs work to bridge the local literacy gap and foster a life-long love of reading in the children that we serve.**

"I loved when they read to us. The stories were very funny. My favorite part was getting a book that I got to choose."

- Student,
Kelly Elementary

"I feel the RIF program provides high motivation for children and gives them topics of interest. These are two big factors in literacy."

-Reading Specialist,
Pittsburgh Urban
League Charter School

"Giving students a library to call their own is the best gift we could give."

-Site Coordinator,
Children's Museum
Head Start

"I stayed up all night reading my book!"

-Student,
Pittsburgh Project





Books for Keeps

Each year, our largest program, Books for Keeps, provides more than 60,000 new, self-selected books to over 20,000 children, making us one of the five largest RIF affiliates in the country. Children at over 100 different schools, preschools, community centers, and afterschool programs participate in **Reading Celebrations** where they select a new, age-appropriate book, 3-5 times per year, throughout their elementary school years to take home and to keep for their very own.

Our Reading Celebrations engage children in interactive activities centered on favorite children's books, designed to emphasize the importance of reading while showing that reading can be FUN! Choosing a brand-new book to keep helps create pride in book ownership and motivates children to **learn to love to read.**

This year RIF Pittsburgh held **over 1500 Reading Celebrations!**

One of our favorite celebrations was held at Citizens to Abolish Domestic Apartheid, Inc. (CADAprgrams) in North Versailles. In November, Ken Kretchun, our site coordinator, decided that he wanted to feature his traditional Irish musical talents at CADAprgrams' first Reading Celebration, and we were happy to help him with this Celtic carnival!

The kids at CADAprgrams were shocked to see Mr. Kretchun arrive in traditional Irish dress and they enjoyed singing along to the songs Mr. Kretchun performed on his Irish-Whistle. After listening to the story, *The Irish Piper*, enhanced by Mr. Kretchun's musical interludes, the kids designed self-portraits and depicted the style and subject of music that would draw them from their homes to follow the Pied Piper. At the end of the event, all of **the children selected their very own books to keep!**







math and Science

This year, with support from the PNC Foundation's Grow Up Great initiative and the Bayer USA Foundation, RIF Pittsburgh piloted customized Books for Keeps programs to help increase science and math opportunities available to young children. Through specialized Reading Celebrations that combine storytelling, math activities, and interactive science projects, children experience reading, math, and science together in a connected and meaningful way.

Our Books for Keeps math and science programs introduce children to new books that explore the world through the lens of math and science. These new programs help to increase the quality and depth of the services that RIF Pittsburgh provides. By taking advantage of the integrative nature of reading, incorporating literacy into multiple areas of learning, and providing additional tools to help students achieve broader academic goals, RIF Pittsburgh is able to engage and excite the children that we serve. These initiatives work to give children basic tools of exploration that will help them prepare to succeed academically, open up new worlds of discovery, and build the foundation for a life-long love of learning.

Children participating in the program meet real scientists, build boats and skyscrapers, create chromatography butterflies, experiment with mixing colors in milk, make chemical worms, listen to dozens of awesome books showing math and science in action, get their hands dirty and have a lot of fun! The children hypothesize, estimate, observe, predict, measure, and explore the world around them. Arleen McAfferty, the Librarian at Pittsburgh Morrow PreK-5, said, **"They were so excited that they didn't even realize that they just learned science concepts!"**

Research:

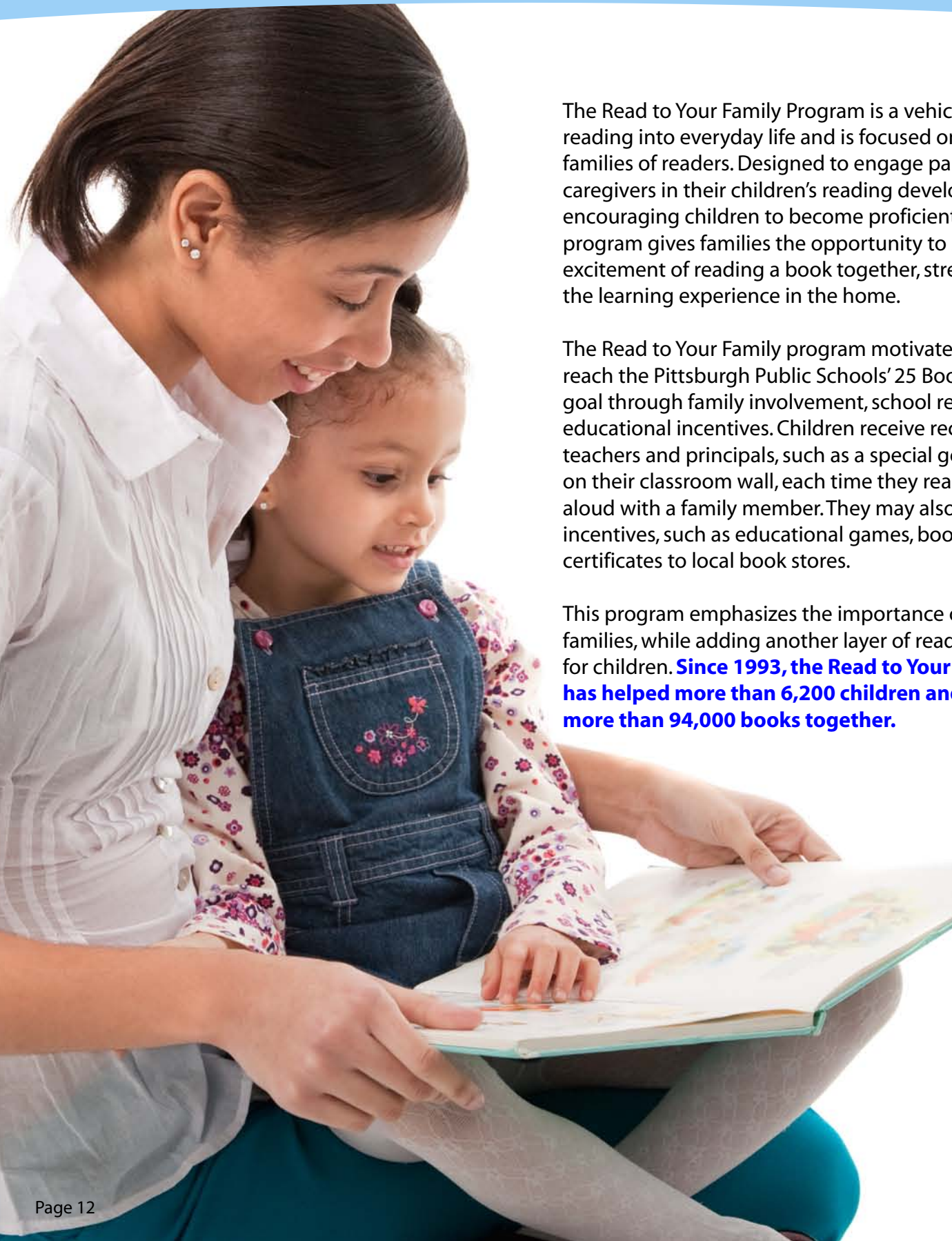
"The best way to promote science literacy is to expose students to a variety of books."

- Gilson and Cherry,
*Science in the
Preschool Classroom*

"We can inspire an interest in science at an early age by reading aloud high-quality science books, helping build science literacy and encouraging the next generation of scientists and engineers ... Science read-alouds... can increase science vocabulary, lessen the abstract nature of science principles, and enrich students' overall science experiences."

- Salley and Young

Read to your Family



The Read to Your Family Program is a vehicle to integrate reading into everyday life and is focused on developing families of readers. Designed to engage parents and caregivers in their children's reading development while encouraging children to become proficient readers, this program gives families the opportunity to share the excitement of reading a book together, strengthening the learning experience in the home.

The Read to Your Family program motivates students to reach the Pittsburgh Public Schools' 25 Book reading goal through family involvement, school recognition, and educational incentives. Children receive recognition from teachers and principals, such as a special gold star posted on their classroom wall, each time they read a book aloud with a family member. They may also receive incentives, such as educational games, books, or gift certificates to local book stores.

This program emphasizes the importance of literacy to families, while adding another layer of reading motivation for children. **Since 1993, the Read to Your Family program has helped more than 6,200 children and families share more than 94,000 books together.**

Community Collaborations

RIF Pittsburgh recognizes a significant opportunity to impact the children we serve by supporting the efforts of the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) to help ensure that children are "Promise Ready." We work with our PPS sites, as well as PPS administrators, to ensure that our efforts and programs are aligned.

Be a 6th Grade Mentor

One of the most notable collaborations to emerge in the last year was RIF Pittsburgh's collaboration with the United Way, Pittsburgh Public Schools, Mentoring Partnership of Southwestern Pennsylvania and Pittsburgh Youth Futures Commission on the Be a 6th Grade Mentor Project.

As a supporter of this new community program, RIF Pittsburgh customized our Books for Keeps program to connect with the project's career focus. RIF Pittsburgh created a book catalogue of new, age-appropriate books that explored future goals and dreams. With the support of his or her mentor, every participating student selects five books throughout the school year to keep, read, and discuss with his or her mentor. By incorporating book selection into the mentoring experience, this project strives to increase reading motivation while adding another tool to help mentors discuss future career opportunities.

This collaboration is a unique way for RIF Pittsburgh to expand our Books for Keeps program and other services into additional Pittsburgh Public Schools, providing additional children with free books of choice and motivational reading activities that encourage a life-long love of reading.

Community Collaborations

RIF Pittsburgh reaches out to the communities that we serve through many avenues. In addition to our core programs, we partner with other community organizations to best leverage our services and impact, as well as to provide books and literacy activities at community events and festivals.

This year, RIF Pittsburgh celebrated the arrival of fall at Pumpkin Fest in the North Side, helped get kids excited about Kindergarten at Carnival in the Hill in the Hill District, and kicked-off the summer at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh's Summer Reading Extravaganza! We also worked with the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, The Pittsburgh Pirates, the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh, and many more!

"I found the books to be one more way for us to communicate, a way to talk about things important for future success."

- Mentor,
Pittsburgh Arsenal



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 and Stephen Antonelli
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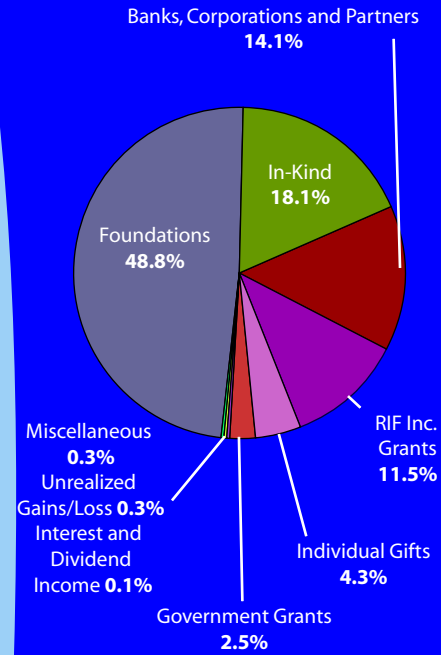
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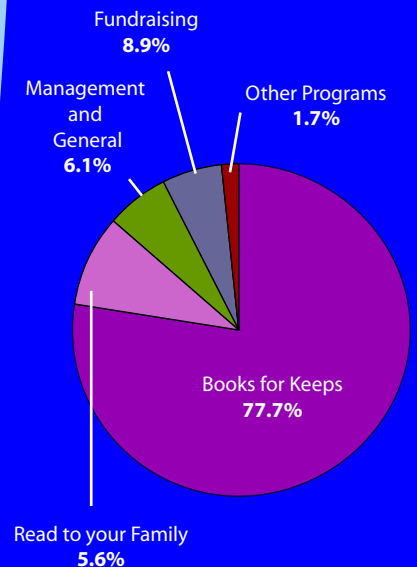
Revenues:

\$395,182



Expenses:

\$343,860



Give a child the gift of reading...



Our programs are supported by foundations, corporations, partners, and individuals who believe that all children should have access to resources and programs designed to foster a life-long love of reading. **YOU** can help a child experience the joy of reading!

- Mail a check to RIF Pittsburgh at 10 Children's Way, Suite 300, Pittsburgh, PA 15212
- Go online to www.rifpittsburgh.org and click on "Donate Now"
- Designate your United Way contribution to RIF Pittsburgh #35113
- Give us a call at 412-321-8022

Thank you for being part of our mission to inspire a life-long love of reading for the children in our community!