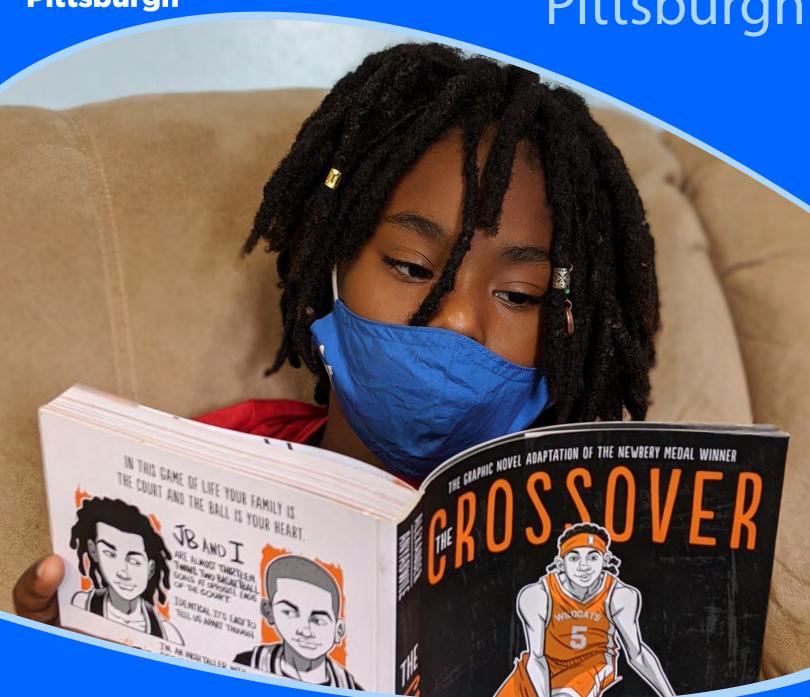


Reading Is **Fundamental Pittsburgh**

Reading Is FUNdamental

Pittsburgh



2019 - 2020 Annual Report



Dear Friends,

In preparing our annual report, I'm always excited to realize what we've accomplished and eager for our current projects to unfold. This year has been different in so many ways, but the feelings are as powerful as ever!

Over the first three quarters, RIF Pittsburgh continued to operate and grow at a robust pace. Our corporate literacy mentoring program, RIF Readers, added two partners, Duquesne Light and UPMC, enabling us to match even more students with Reading Buddies. On the Storymobile, we added programming sites and community stops in neighborhoods near public housing communities. We refreshed literacy kits and theme bags for educators to borrow. Book Babies continued to flourish with weekly sessions of coordinated storytimes and resource bags.

Everybody Wins! enjoyed a solid year at four schools, sharing books and forging important relationships among young readers and community volunteers. A tremendous group of AmeriCorps members brought boundless energy and enthusiasm to Books for Keeps Reading Celebrations in hundreds of classrooms. And we continued to focus on increasing our selection of diverse books. When children see themselves in the books they read, not only does research show huge benefits in their motivation to read, self-esteem, and connections to others, but kids, parents and educators tell us they can't get enough!

Then came March 16. Overnight, the pandemic shutdown eliminated our access to kids, families and site partners – even to our offices and storage areas. As an organization geared to providing programming wrapped around books, we had to rethink how best to serve RIF kids. Two things quickly became clear: First, we serve the most academically at-risk children in our community, who would need us now more than ever. Second, the best way to boost kids' excitement about reading and learning would be by making sure they have a steady supply of great books. Working with our extensive network of partners, we've responded to the changing educational landscape with flexibility and innovation. Inside, you'll read how we've been adapting to meet chronic and emerging needs, including these highlights:

- 1) Providing books, resources, support and real-time virtual storytimes to a core group of little ones through Book Babies, which has remained a beacon of stability for many young families through the pandemic
- 2) Using our relationships to develop creative and strategic channels to supply books to thousands of children, including donating libraries to partner sites and setting up book drops; offering virtual Storymobile and BFK programming; and piloting online mentoring
- 3) Responding as an ally -- alongside service organizations, site partners and RIF families -- amid the twin crises of COVID-19 and the systemic racism underlying the literacy gap.

We plan to resume face-to-face operations whenever possible, and look forward to incorporating the best of these innovations when we do.

Moving forward, we're inspired by the everyday determination of our RIF families and partners to provide the best opportunities for their children. We're grateful for your continued support as we stand by the communities we serve and face this challenging time together.

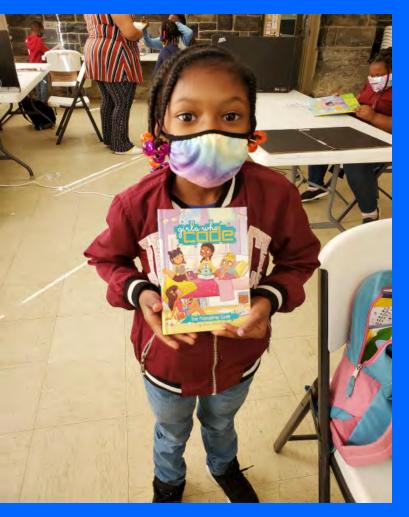
Florri Ladov, Executive Director

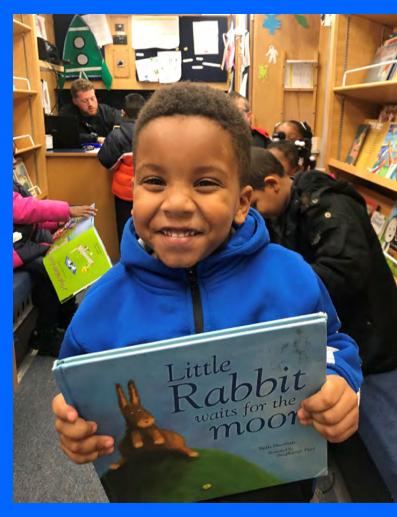
Read on!

"Their mom said how much the supplies are needed and appreciated!

Then she said that the boys were excited to read last night! Those comments made my day!"







"Wow that is so generous!! Every child will walk away with a book or two."

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RIF Pittsburgh approaches each year as a fresh adventure. Still, the twists and turns in the last quarter of 2019-20 were unexpected and momentous, requiringa major strategic shift to continue serving the best interests of RIF kids and families.

Our network of hands-on literacy support primarily reaches children in seven neighborhoods of need – East Liberty, Hazelwood, the Hill District, Homewood/East Hills, North Side, South Side and Wilkinsburg – where many kids are at academic risk before they even step foot in a classroom. Book Babies works with families with tots up to age 3; Storymobile offers school-readiness and after-school programming, plus community stops in and near public housing; Books for Keeps Reading Celebrations visit pre-K to 6th-grade classes; and Everybody Wins! and RIF Readers mentor pre-K to 3rd-graders.

Our program year began like any other, with terrific read-alouds and awesome activities; exciting inventory and giveaway books; and new and returning faces in classrooms and on the Storymobile. For much of the year, we were on track to surpass previous numbers, pursuing thoughtful growth focused first on children, families and sites we already serve. As research tells us, engaging kids early and often – in their schools, neighborhoods and homes – holds greatest potential for impact. When possible, we added sites and collaborations to reach more kids, deliver more resources, and help more families snuggle together over a book. Our newest program, RIF Readers, continued its promising success, expanding to four corporate partners.

Then, in mid-March, the cascade of events that unfolded hit particularly hard in the Black neighborhoods that RIF serves. The coronavirus outbreak erased our access to kids while intensifying their need for literacy support: Students already at academic risk, in homes with fewest resources, were at risk to fall even further behind as the economic fallout of the pandemic increased the divide between the city's haves and have-nots. In addition, COVID-19 proved disproportionately severe among Black Americans, bringing home how society's lopsided allocation of resources is indeed a pressing issue of racial justice. Lastly, outrage over persistent police violence against Black people broadened recognition of the urgency of the Black Lives Matter movement and greater awareness of systemic racism.

It has been a year fraught with challenge and met with a powerful spirit of collaboration and opportunity. We have responded with action, doubling down on providing books and resources; expanding diversity in our inventory; and pledging to work toward a more just Pittsburgh where racial equality is fundamental. We continue our commitment to encourage families to incorporate reading into their daily lives and to motivate children to find and follow their passions through literacy.

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"Thank you so much for bringing us books for the library. I am so happy to read the books that you brought to our school."

-student on receiving books through the Books for Keeps program

*Please note, our program figures are for our program year 2019-2020 (school year 2019-20 and summer 2020).

Our mission is to provide children with the resources, motivation, and opportunities to develop a life-long love of reading.

DIVERSITY

Issues of race and inclusion are integrally tied to RIF Pittsburgh's work to mitigate the literacy gap. Black children growing up in neighborhoods of need face inequalities in access to resources and opportunities that contribute both to the achievement gap and to poor life "outcomes" – from higher rates of teen pregnancy and incarceration to underemployment, limited access to health care, chronic medical conditions and, as 2020 has shown, the severity of COVID-19 cases among Black Americans.

For thousands of Pittsburgh children and families, RIF's mission to improve access to books, opportunities and motivational relationships to get kids reading, and keep them learning, makes a difference. But the larger equation must change: On a societal level, the lopsided allocation of resources is another offshoot of systemic racism with short-term and long-term ramifications.

Broader awareness of such systemic racism, brought so powerfully to the surface by the Black Lives Matter movement this spring, spurred us to intensify our staff training on race and elevate our thinking around issues of equity.

This includes looking inward, committing to redoubling our efforts to increase diversity of staff, board and volunteers; offering training to our team and mentors on issues of race and racial engagement with children; and examining the racial dynamics of our relationships with families, and with community and site partners.

It also extends to heightening our focus on purchasing contemporary titles by Black and multicultural writers and illustrators. From Anna McQuinn's Lola picture books, to Jason Reynolds' Track series, to Jacqueline Woodson's "Brown Girl Dreaming" and Rita Williams-Garcia's "One Crazy Summer" trilogy, recent years have seen a wider release of titles with characters who look and talk, think and dream in ways that speak to a much broader spectrum of children.

We are responding to this growing availability of diverse books – and insatiable demand for them from RIF kids, parents and sites. Such relevant, relatable stories clearly inspire children to read. Seeing themselves, their families and neighborhoods reflected in books strengthens their voices, validates their goals, and elevates their thinking about the great, wide world of possibilities open to them!

Racial equality, safety and human dignity are fundamental.





BOOKS FOR KEEPS

Reading is truly a class act in Books for Keeps. Three to five times a year, our oldest and largest program throws a party, one classroom at a time, for thousands of kids in schools, preschools and other learning sites across the city. Reading Celebrations bring it all together for young readers: a spell-binding story, a hands-on activity, and the best party favor of all – a book of their choice to keep, forever!

In COVID times, we're coordinating with BFK sites to distribute books to remote students or to offer books for self-selection to children attending in-person. For select sites, we're delivering live programming online; for others, we're offering the "party fixings" to enable them to hold their own Reading Celebrations, with suggested read-alouds, packaged activity kits that build on a central theme of the reading and, as always, great giveaway books!

In the 2019-20 program year, Books for Keeps:

- Presented Reading Celebrations at more than 80 sites across the city
- Engaged over 13,500 students in early childhood centers, schools, and after-school programs in struggling neighborhoods
- Provided almost 43,000 books to the children who need them the most

"Thank you for the books and your kindness and for being nice and the books are so very good to us and thank you"



STORYMOBILE

"Welcome to the Storymobile. We're so happy you're visiting today!"

Children climb aboard with their class for storytime, smiles wide with anticipation. Peppa Pig, Lola, and Pete the Cat all live among these shelves of books, peeking out from the covers to delight their eager, young friends.

For thousands of Pittsburgh toddlers, preschoolers, kindergartners and schoolchildren, the Storymobile is their own enchanted chariot, whisking them off every two weeks to a reading adventure. Songs, read-alouds and skill-building activities follow, whether puzzling out what comes next in a sequence, or matching pictures to sound effects in a memory game.

Finally, it's time to choose a book to borrow or keep from our onboard inventory, which has a heightened focus on titles by Black and multicultural authors. Kids are so thrilled to see themselves in the books they read! Under pandemic restrictions, we're using our deep community connections to double down on getting books, books and more giveaway books to kids. We're supplying partners with on-site libraries, activity kits, staff videos and online programming. Most of all, we're encouraging children and families to keep on turning those pages!

In the 2019-20 program year, our Storymobiles:

- •Traveled to nearly 100 sites, serving over 6,100 children, in our target communities: East Liberty, Hazelwood, Hill District, Homewood/East Hills, North Side, South Side, and Wilkinsburg
- Helped children self-select nearly 18,000 books to keep during our bi-weekly visits in public housing communities and after-school programs, as well as during our Reading Celebrations 3-4 times a year, and 6,000 books at events
- Loaned nearly 10,000 books to children from our circulating Storymobile collection, and loaned over 1,200 books and resource materials to educators

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Families in need face many difficulties in preparing little ones for school success, from trying to squeeze books and other educational resources into a barebones budget, to finding time and energy to read 1-on-1 with kids amid all the stressors of daily life.

They don't have to face those hurdles alone. Our Book Babies program enrolls new and expectant moms, with tots up to age 3. Weekly sessions are part-storytime, part-support group, providing help, friendship and encouragement from other neighborhood parents sharing similar joys and challenges.

Storytime on the Storymobile introduces songs, rhymes and finger plays, as well as read-alouds and learning games – lots of material that parents can use to help them read, sing, talk and play every day with their babies. While tots are learning to sort and count, share and take turns, moms and dads are getting tips and support to engage kids around books and learning, developing confidence as their children's first teacher. They revel in each success and love to share progress as little ones grow. Tiny ones we meet as Book Babies are all too soon leading their preschool class up the steps. Before we know it, they're off to kindergarten!

During COVID-19 restrictions, we moved storytime online and began delivering hundreds upon hundreds of resource bags and books directly to families' homes. Our blog and Pinterest page explain activities and help nurture pre-reading skills. We offer participation incentives and a Zoom parent support group, so families can connect with neighbors outside of storytime. And we text parents with tips to encourage reading-friendly homes.

Our Book Babies virtual "village" helps alleviate the isolation many new parents experience under COVID-19 restrictions. Twice a week, Ms. Jordon holds storytimes on FaceBook Live. These sessions, held in different neighborhoods of need on the Storymobile during non-COVID operations, model ways to engage in a motivating way around reading. On FaceBook Live, families can chime in and participate in real time; but if they miss a session because baby is napping, or mom or dad is working, they can enjoy the recorded storytime at their convenience – once, or many times over.

Finally, virtual storytimes eliminate the geographic barriers and scheduling conflicts that arose when serving neighborhood groups with the Storymobile, and are among the innovations we will consider incorporating into regular operations once inperson restrictions ease.



LITERACY MENTORING

Learning to read is a huge developmental leap for children, giving them the tools to explore the world and to find out everything about everything! Everybody Wins! (EW!) and RIF Readers match community and corporate volunteers with early readers for weekly sessions that provide youngsters with the self-confidence, encouragement and opportunity needed to make that leap.

The relationship between Reading Buddies young and old not only develops reading skills but builds a larger, caring community. Mentoring shows kids that they matter, while activating volunteers – and corporations – to take a personal interest in neighborhoods of need.

EW! brings friendly visitors to neighborhood schools to read with their K-3 buddy, play literacy games, and talk about books and life. These relationships can last for years, from sounding out words early on, to discovering new authors and genres together in later grades. Parents report that kids are less likely to miss school on EW! day; and teachers notice the difference in students' willingness to read aloud in class, among other benefits.

RIF Readers transports pre-K to 3rd-grade children to their mentors' offices, enabling busy workers to volunteer practically at their desks. The corporate setting exposes students to environments they don't typically see, and promotes a workplace culture of volunteerism and engagement. This corporate mentoring program matured from a pilot project to a model program that now includes four partners.



"The most significant benefit for students who participate [in Everybody Wins!] is developing a love of reading."



Amid the pandemic, RIF's literacy mentoring programs have been developing and implementing strategies to enable Reading Buddy pairs to continue to communicate around books, as well as to share some of their experiences of daily life. These personal relationships continue to be a point of light for mentors and mentees alike. Children and families enjoy receiving and exchanging read-aloud videos, texts and emails with their buddies.

As in previous years, students browsed a custom catalog and chose books for summer reading. Once they were mailed out to chlidren's homes, we dove right into preparations for the fall. We're super excited to continue our partnership with Manchester Academic Charter School (MACS) as we pilot virtual mentoring with UPMC.

In the 2019-20 program year:

- EW! hosted weekly one-on-one mentoring sessions at four PPS schools: Allegheny, Arlington, Faison, and Weil, matching 185 K-3 students with community volunteers to share great books and conversation
- RIF Readers matched 108 pre-K to 3rd graders from MACS and Training Wheels with volunteers from Eckert Seamans, PNC, UPMC and Duquesne Light
- RIF provided a giveaway book each month to help build home libraries
- RIF mailed out six self-selected summer reading books to each child's home

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Listing includes individuals and organizations who donated between 6/1/19-5/31/20

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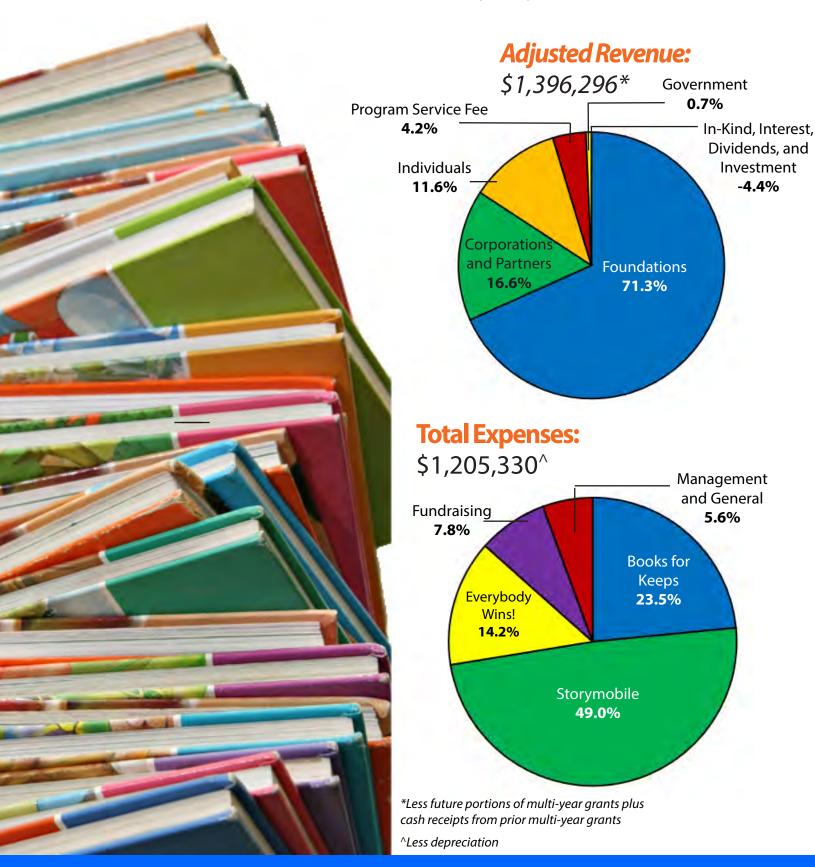
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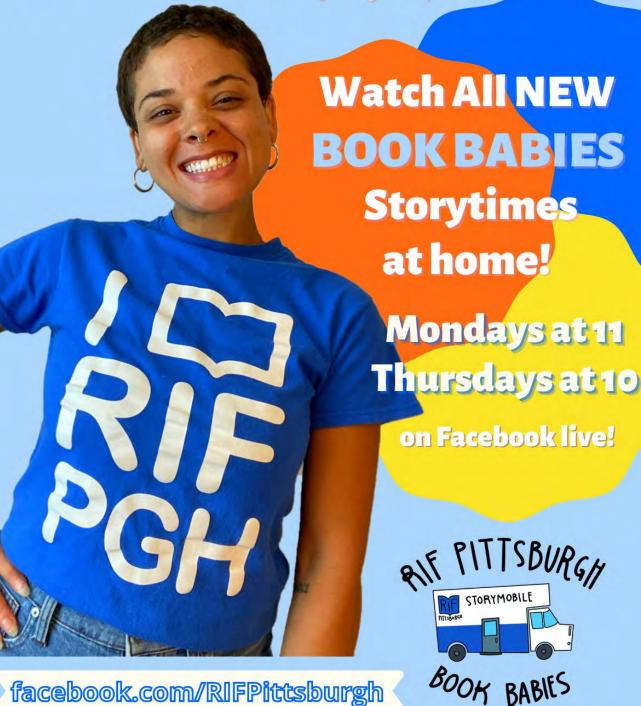
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