

Reading Is FUNdamental



2022 — 2023 Annual Report



Dear Friends,

It's been another rewarding year of constant growth here at RIF Pittsburgh! Since last fall, we've recruited a host of talented new team members, relaunched all of our programs in person, fully reintroduced our beloved Storymobiles back into the community, and designed stellar new program activities for our kiddos. Most importantly, we've nurtured a life-long love of reading in more children's hearts and homes, and we couldn't have done any of it without the help of supporters like you!

Last year, we were thrilled to finally restart holding biweekly storytimes at partner sites, community time stops and weekly Book Babies sessions aboard our enchanted libraries-on-wheels. It has been a true delight to watch kids of all ages and adults alike discover the magic of the Storymobiles all over again! Throughout the year, more and more kids, families and neighbors have joined us to learn, play and explore their interest in reading further by selecting a book to borrow or keep from our rich inventory of high-interest, culturally diverse titles during each and every visit. This past year, we provided nearly 84,000 books to the more than 15,000 children and families served through all our programs, plus more than 8,000 at community events!

We also returned to nearly all of our school sites for more Books for Keeps (BFK) Reading Celebrations, during which our team guided students on more fun reading adventures with books such as *Goosebumps: Please Don't Feed the Vampire*, and put their critical thinking and debate skills to the test with a 'Who Would Win?' class vote while reading *Animal Smackdown: Surprising Animal Matchups with Surprising Results*, to name a couple of the stories kiddos enjoyed reading!

This school year, we were officially back in person for our Everybody Wins! literacy mentoring program at PPS Weil, and Reading Buddies enjoyed getting the chance to meet with their mentors in person each week to read, share conversation and tackle new learning challenges. For RIF Readers, we continued to hold sessions virtually each week, giving two classes of students at Manchester Academic Charter School (MACS) the opportunity to connect with our corporate mentoring partners at Eckert Seamans. To top it all off, we welcomed a new Director of Mentoring to our team this July, and look forward to working with him as we expand both programs this upcoming school year!

Again, we want to thank you for your partnership that has helped to ensure thousands of children in our community receive more books to fuel their love of reading, motivational relationships to build their confidence, and opportunities to achieve their brightest futures.

Best wishes.

Florri Ladov

Executive Director







Reading Is
Fundamental
Pittsburgh

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reading Is FUNdamental (RIF) Pittsburgh is an independent affiliate of Reading Is Fundamental, Inc., the oldest and largest nonprofit children's literacy organization in the United States. Our mission is to provide children with the resources, motivation, and opportunities to develop a life-long love of reading. We specifically work to mitigate the literacy and achievement gaps that disproportionately impact Black youth and children from low-income households even before they start kindergarten.

Founded in 1981, RIF Pittsburgh has grown from a single city resident, reading to neighborhood children on her North Side porch, to a team providing a network of literacy programming for thousands of kids throughout the city. Our strategic approach to building literacy is to improve children's access to books, quality literacy resources, and skill-building activities that align with PA learning standards; to offer early, positive experiences surrounding reading; and to engage families and other important adults in children's lives to provide motivation and support.

Our largest and oldest program, Books for Keeps (BFK), has served as a longstanding model, visiting pre-K to 6th-grade classrooms 3-5 times a year to host exciting reading celebrations that entail storytime, an activity, and the chance for each child to pick a book to keep. Over the years, we have added and expanded our **Storymobile** program for early -childhood through school-age kiddos that provides magical read-aloud experiences, engaging literacy activities, and lending or giveaway books during biweekly visits to early childhood centers, schools and after-school sites; **Book Babies** for parents and tots, up to age three, that provides weekly storytimes, as well as books, literacy activities, and educational toys to families to strengthen at-home literacy development; and two literacy mentoring programs, school-based Everybody Wins! and corporate-based RIF Readers, that pair early and emerging readers with volunteer mentors for weekly reading and activity sessions. During the 2022-2023 program year, we delivered nearly 84,000 books, including many high-interest, diverse titles, to more than 22,000 underserved children!

In all programming, we are committed to providing powerful diverse titles, by Black authors and illustrators, that foster racial equity, resonate with the primarily Black neighborhoods we serve, and enable families of all backgrounds to celebrate the lives, voices, and rich experiences of Black culture and communities.

*Please note, our program figures are for our program year 2022—2023 (school year 2022—23 and summer 2023).

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"It was energizing to see how much these books meant to the kids!"

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

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Our RIF team is extremely cognizant of the environments in which we work, the inequities that our Black youth face, and the violence that has closely impacted children and families in our target neighborhoods, especially over the past few years. With the reintroduction of the Storymobiles last year, we have observed how our work has helped to not only foster a love of reading in our communities, but has also helped to counter this painful reality that many RIF kids endure, at least to an extent. For thousands of kids, our Storymobile libraries-on-wheels offer a personal sanctuary - a safe and welcoming space to read, learn and play together. During community time stops, storytime visits, and special events, we consistently reinforce expectations aboard our trucks that help to promote inclusiveness, empathy, respect and healthy, positive relationships among children, RIF staff and community members.

Moreover, our increased focus on powerful, culturally diverse titles, by Black authors and illustrators, is helping to rewrite a new narrative for our children and families. These books not only reflect the predominantly Black communities we serve, but also act as powerful tools for parents and caregivers of all backgrounds to spark conversations with their little ones about Black excellence. As we know, research shows that diversity in books spurs children to read more, boosts their self-confidence, and inspires them to dream big for their futures. For many RIF kids, Black-centered stories help affirm that they have a place in this world – that their lives matter.

Oftentimes, we have heard parents, caregivers and other adults note the way that children's literature has changed in their lifetimes, and express their appreciation for RIF embracing contemporary titles that celebrate multicultural authors and





stories. During a special event at PPS Minadeo, for instance, a mother picked up a copy of "Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History" by awardwinning illustrator Vashti Harrison, and said she "couldn't wait to read it with her daughter," then thanked us for offering so many diverse titles. As another example, during a BFK Reading Celebration at PPS Faison, one teacher hyped up her entire class about one of our giveaway books, "Sulwe" by Lupita Nyong'o, because she exclaimed that it was written by "Black Panther's girlfriend!" She was referring to Nyong'o, who also played the character Nakia, Black Panther's girlfriend, in the Black Panther film. After that, almost every child (and the teacher!) wanted a copy of the book because of its link to such a culturally significant and popular film, especially within the Black community.

This past year, we also collaborated with PPG once again to continue our "Read Today, Change Tomorrow" initiative. At our year-end Books for Keeps (BFK) Reading Celebrations, kids in kindergarten through fourth-grade classrooms enjoyed the opportunity to self-select a book from a wide array of diverse titles that PPG helped us to purchase. We were excited to offer kids terrific page-turners like Jacqueline Woodson's acclaimed "The Day You Begin," Stonewall Book Award winner "Julián is a Mermaid," and "Abdul's Story" by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow, featuring people who look and talk, think and dream in ways that speak to and empower an ever-broader spectrum of children.

Our team is committed to giving our kiddos and the important adults in their lives more opportunities to make connections through diverse stories and celebrate the things that make each of us beautifully unique!

"Children's books look so different than they did when I was growing up. It's wonderful to see RIF offering lots of diverse stories that have been published in recent years, and to be able to share them with my daughter!"



BOOKS FOR KEEPS

Since last fall, we have been able to return in person to most of our school sites for more funfilled Books for Keeps (BFK) Reading Celebrations in pre-K to sixth-grade classrooms, giving away more books, reading stories, and engaging students in fun, hands-on learning activities!

A few of the popular read-alouds that kids have enjoyed this past year include "Brains! Not Just a Zombie Snack" by Stacy McAnulty, a book filled with facts about the human brain that enticed even our pickiest of readers... and the zombie narrator on each page; "Mister Fairy" by Morgane de Cadier, which teaches kids to recognize and celebrate their own unique gifts; and "Drawn Together" by Minh Lê, the story of a boy and his grandfather who learn how to bridge the language barrier between them through their love of art and drawing.

At the end of each visit, every child got the opportunity to explore their unique interests by self-selecting a book from our inventory of culturally relevant, age-appropriate titles to take home and cherish forever!

The response from our teachers and students alike has been overwhelmingly positive upon our return to their classrooms: "The RIF representatives were very patient and engaging with my students...They are extremely knowledgeable about not only the RIF program but also the science material they were reading! My students and I learned a lot of new facts!" said one site coordinator from PPS Langley.

In the 2022-23 program year, Books for Keeps:

- Served nearly **80** different sites in Pittsburgh and Wilkinsburg.
- Provided **nearly 35,600 books** to **nearly 14,500 children** in early childhood centers, schools, and summer camp programs in struggling neighborhoods.
- Provided an additional **8,460 books** to children at community events, including the PPS back-to-school event at Acrisure Stadium.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Our young family engagement program, Book Babies, serves as an early stepping stone on the pathway to literacy for many children. The program to motivate and encourage reading-friendly homes. provides books, resources and modeling for parents and their tots, up to age 3, to foster early at-home literacy development. We are now offering families the option to watch virtual storytimes on Facebook Live at least once a week, in real-time or on-demand, and/or join us for weekly, in-person programming on our Storymobiles in five different locations. During weekly sessions, our team has plenty of opportunities to connect with parents, grandparents, and other caregivers who hold enormous power to nurture children's love of reading at home and encourage them to read even more. Book Babies moms are often our biggest ambassadors and literacy advocates, welcoming newcomers in their neighborhood during storytimes and sharing their experience in the program with others.

Book Babies families also receive monthly resource bags, filled with books, crafts, activities and even

educational toys, delivered directly to their homes! And, we text families regularly with updates or tips In addition, parents in our Book Babies program can select books from our RIF-provided catalogue or specially request any book for themselves, or anyone in their family of any age, at any time, and we will order it for them. Again, it's all about building the foundations of literacy by providing ample opportunities for children and the important adults in their lives to connect meaningfully through reading!

In the 2022-23 program year, our Book Babies program:

- Delivered more than 5,800 brand-new books, as well as literacy activities, crafts and educational toys directly to families' homes.
- Served 63 enrolled families, including 88 children ages 0-3, in East Liberty, Hazelwood, the Hill District, Homewood/East Hills, Northside, Southside and Wilkinsburg, in addition to those 30 moms served by our partner site, Teen ELECT.





STORYMOBILE

Our Storymobile libraries-on-wheels have continued to be a safe, fun learning environment for thousands of kids at our early-childhood, school and after-school sites. During biweekly storytime visits this past year, kiddos have enthusiastically sung along to catchy tunes like "Old MacDonald Went to the Wild," building new vocabulary and learning sign language for different letters of the alphabet; practiced a "healthy habits" chant after reading the acclaimed children's story "Hair Love" by Matthew Cherry; and repeated positive affirmations about themselves after listening to "I Am Brown" by Ashok Banker.

At the end of every visit, kids excitedly await their turn to select a book from our inventory to borrow or keep, then hold out their hand to receive a blue Storymobile stamp (it's the little things!). When they get back home, kiddos can show off their stamp, allowing their parents, family and friends to share in their excitement and joy. Teachers also

enjoy the opportunity to borrow our theme bags, filled with books and pre-made literacy activities that align with standardized curriculum, they can use as supplemental resources in their classrooms. In addition, we continue to deliver monthly storytime kits, filled with new books and complementary literacy activities, to our early childhood centers for teachers to keep and reuse for students!

With each passing Storymobile community stop, more and more children, families and other community members have started joining us to select terrific giveaway books, color pictures, play games with each other and RIF staff, and simply spend time surrounded by books. Our rich inventory of giveaway books, from which kids can pick one to keep each and every visit, include a slew of diverse, STEM-based titles – from "Future Astronaut" for tots, to picture books like "Ada Twist, Scientist" and fascinating science comics like

"The Brain: The Ultimate Thinking Machine" - that foster an interest in STEM learning and careers. Additionally, we carry a wide selection of titles for older teens and adults - including the acclaimed "The Hate U Give" by Angie Thomas, the graphic novel "March" by late U.S. senator John Lewis, and an assortment of popular thrillers - to get whole families invested in the rewarding experience of reading together! Children and adults alike can also make special book requests, and we will order them for our next visit. We have encouraged kids to get active as well, whether that involves participating in hula-hoop competitions, playing with bouncy balls, or chasing bubbles! The presence of the Storymobile in neighborhoods once again has allowed us to reestablish ourselves and rebuild important relationships within the communities we serve, extending our work and impact well beyond the classroom.



In the 2022-23 program year, our Storymobile:

- Increased access to books and high-quality literacy programming for **more than 5,300 kids** in our seven target neighborhoods.
- Provided **more than 2,300 library books** in our storytime kits for early childhood centers, helping to build robust libraries for children to read books in their classrooms every day.
- Provided more than 19,200 giveaway books for RIF kids to take home and add to their home libraries.
- Loaned nearly 11,000 books for children to read in their classrooms, each and every day.



"I know you didn't have to, but taking their interests and requests into consideration really showed how much you cared about the kids, and it did help keep all of them engaged with reading."

LITERACY MENTORING

Our literacy mentoring programs, school-based Everybody Wins! (EW) and corporate-based RIF **Readers**, pair early and emerging readers in pre-K through third-grade classrooms with adult volunteers in the community or from our corporate partners for weekly one-on-one reading sessions. Mentors commit to meeting with their Reading Buddies once a week for hour-long sessions to read stories together, complete fun, brain-boosting activities provided by RIF staff (e.g. word searches, crack-the-code puzzles, create-your-own comic sheets, etc.), and cultivate strong relationships that help our RIF kids to keep growing as readers, and future leaders. Mentors enjoy spending time getting to know their buddy's unique interests and the chance to make a real difference in a young person's life, while students benefit greatly from the one-on-one interactions that help support them both academically and personally.

This past school year, we were thrilled to be back in person for Everybody Wins! (EW) at PPS Weil, giving some 3rd grade students and mentors the chance to finally meet with each other face-to-face once again! For corporate-based RIF Readers, we continued to hold sessions virtually each week,

serving two classes of 2nd grade students at Manchester Academic Charter School (MACS). The year-long experience culminated in a special celebration where reading buddies and mentors in both programs met in person to exchange letters, eat lunch together and say their goodbyes. We even bussed RIF Readers reading buddies from MACS to Eckert Seamans in the U.S. Steel Tower, where they rode an elevator all the way to the 44th floor to meet their mentors for the first time in person, a moment they will likely not soon forget! We were excited to welcome our new Director of Mentoring to the team this July, and look forward to working with him to expand both programs back to their pre-COVID numbers.

In the 2022-23 program year:

- Our literacy mentors helped support **a total of 61 young readers** in our Everybody Wins! and RIF Readers mentoring programs as they continued to meet with their paired mentors once a week.
- Kids in our literacy mentoring programs received **1,159 giveaway books** to keep, adding even more books to their RIF home libraries!



2022-2023



"This is a great program. I am very proud to participate and appreciate all the work that goes into setting this up."

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Listing includes individuals and organizations who donated between 6/1/22-5/31/23

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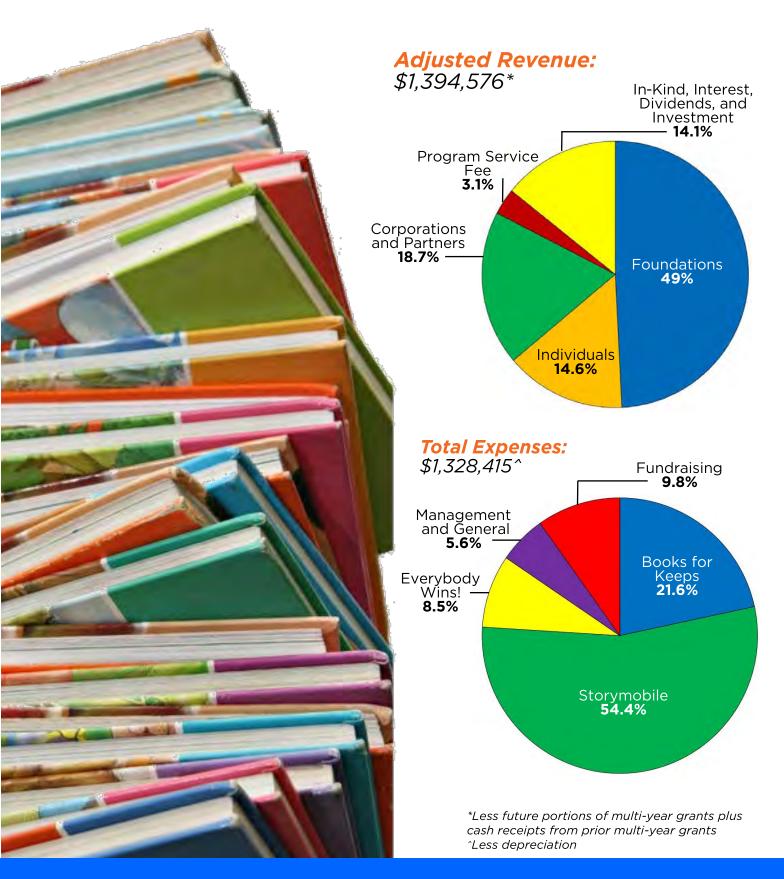
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"I am a first-grade teacher at Pittsburgh Lincoln Pk-5 and are visited by RIF often....They are phenomenal with the kids. They are very energetic, enthusiastic, and the kids really enjoy them! I just want to extend my gratitude to the two of them and the whole RIF program! Thank you!"

FINANCIALS

Total Revenue:

\$1,284,576







Be a RIF Pittsburgh Book Hero!



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!

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Thank you for being part of our mission to inspire the children in our community through reading!



