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The Liberty Bank Foundation Funds Reach Out and Read Connecticut

\$2,500 Grant Will Help Promote Early Literacy and School Readiness in Mansfield and Windham, CT

Mansfield, CT (July 15, 2013) – Four-year-old Faith Mbabali actually looks forward to visiting her pediatrician—in part because at each visit she gets to read a new book that she can then take home with her. This is possible because of a nonprofit program called “Reach Out and Read,” which provides new, developmentally-appropriate books to young children and early-literacy guidance to their parents during regular pediatric checkups. The agency recently received a \$2,500 grant from the Liberty Bank Foundation to supply books to young patients at Mansfield Pediatrics and Pro Health Physicians/Windham Pediatrics, the two Reach Out and Read programs in Mansfield and Windham. Reach Out and Read serves over 2,000 young children annually at these two pediatric offices.



Four-year-old Faith Mbabali and her father, Muggaga Mbabali, enjoy a children’s book during a visit to pediatrician Anne Willenborg, M.D., as part of a curriculum provided by Reach Out and Read, a national organization that trains and support pediatricians to deliver early literacy programming to their young patients.

Reach Out and Read’s model includes providing a new, age-appropriate book for each child to take home and keep at every checkup from 6 months through 5 years. Along with the free book for every child, doctors and nurses provide individually tailored guidance to parents about the importance of reading aloud with their children every day.

“Reach Out and Read is a wonderful program that helps us give the gift of books to young children, and provides us with a perfect opportunity to enrich our time with our patients,” said Dr. Anne Willenborg, the Reach Out and Read Medical Champion at Mansfield Pediatrics. “Reading with the children also provides us with a developmental screen—for example, if we give a six-month-old a book, we expect her to put it in her mouth, which is a normal reaction. With a one-year-old, we look for them to point at pictures and words in the book.” Dr. Willenborg noted that 30-40% of the patients at Mansfield Pediatrics come from low-income families served by the Husky insurance program.

“We are so grateful to the Liberty Bank Foundation for helping to support our critical early literacy intervention to children and families in Mansfield and Windham,” said Reach Out and Read Program Director Christine Garber. “We know that the first five years of life offer a critical window for learning, with rapid brain development that does not occur at any other time. Many children, especially those from low-income families, are not read to from birth. Reach Out and Read’s medical providers work with families to prepare children to enter kindergarten ready to read, learn, and succeed. Our state is making early-

literacy and early-learning a priority and we are thrilled to have the support of the Liberty Bank Foundation to help us do our part in preparing young children to read and succeed.”

“Research has shown that exposing children to reading at a very early age supports their success in school and in life,” said Sue Murphy, executive director of the Liberty Bank Foundation. “Reach Out and Read accomplishes this by leveraging the trusted relationship between parents and their child’s pediatrician to make reading a part of their family life. It’s an innovative approach, and the research demonstrates that it works.” She noted that the grant funds were part of almost \$77,000 in grants awarded by the foundation in the first quarter of 2013.

Faith’s father, Mugagga Mbabali, said, “Whenever my daughter comes to the doctor, it gives her an opportunity to further expand her skills in reading, identifying colors, and other skills while she waits for her appointment. It instills in her that visiting the doctor is something that’s fun, not frightening.” He added that he reads to his daughter frequently, often using the books from Reach Out and Read. Faith’s comment on reading was succinct and enthusiastic: “I like Daddy to read the best!”

Nationwide, Reach Out and Read doctors and nurses serve 4 million children and their families annually at nearly 5,000 pediatric practices, hospitals, clinics, and health centers in all 50 states, with a focus on centers that reach low-income communities. In Connecticut, Reach Out and Read reaches over 44,000 children and families each year through their 68 clinical locations.

Since its inception in 1997, the Liberty Bank Foundation has awarded over \$7.3 million in grants to nonprofit organizations within Liberty Bank’s market area. The foundation seeks to improve the quality of life for people of low or moderate income by investing in the areas of preventive programming for children and families, affordable housing, and nonprofit capacity building. Along with its grant making, the foundation strives to foster the convening and collaboration of nonprofits, funders, business, and government to address community issues.

Reach Out and Read is a proven intervention, supported by 15 independent, published research studies. During the preschool years, children served by Reach Out and Read score three to six months ahead of their non-Reach Out and Read peers on vocabulary tests, preparing them to start school on target.

For more information on Reach Out and Read, please visit www.reachoutandread.org.

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