

Books For Kids, Erie Chapter

Volume 16 No. 2
 Spring 2006

An affiliate of The Books For Kids Foundation, New York, NY

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Every so often it is good to review for ourselves and our supporters what it is that Books for Kids, Erie Chapter is and what it does—and who does what within the organization.

We are taking this opportunity, therefore, to update everyone on our goals, working methods, and personnel, partly to remind our readers of why they support us, and partly to encourage those reading this newsletter to pass it along to a friend or colleague who might be interested in joining our organization and supporting our efforts.

Our Goals

Books for Kids is an organization dedicated to furthering literacy and life-long learning among the children and youth of Erie County. To this end, we distribute brand new, high quality books to underprivileged children from birth to age 18, in the belief that young people who own their own books are much more likely to develop good reading habits both in school and throughout life.

How We Operate

The large majority of the books we give away each year are distributed through other non-profit agencies and schools. These groups apply to us for up to 400 books per year (or one per pupil in the case of schools), and once

an application has been approved by our distribution team, **Jane Levin** and **Florence Smith**, someone from the agency or school comes to our warehouse at 2419 Holland St. and picks books appropriate for the age and reading levels of the children who will receive the books.

We fund nearly all the applications we receive, in part because over the years local agencies and schools have come to know how we operate, and because we deliberately make the process and criteria as simple as possible. Our main rule is that at least 50% of the recipients must be disadvantaged by some objective criterion, such as living in subsidized housing or receiving free or reduced school lunches.

The **Books for Birthdays** program distributes books in a different way. At present we have six locations—The Book Mark, GECAC Learning Center, GECAC Charter School, The Neighborhood Art House, Erie Heights, and The Union City Family Support Center—that participate in the program.

Under the Books for Birthdays program, parents may register their children and select up to three books a year for each child—for a birthday or other special occasion. The advantage of this program is that it directly involves

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Books for Kids, Erie Chapter

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parents in encouraging reading in the home, and provides a way in which parents can give their children a gift at no cost, without the child's knowing that the books came from Books for Kids.

Who Gets Our Books?

In the sixteen years of our operation, we have given books to many, many agencies and schools. The list below is merely a sample of the many who have benefited from our programs.

- Erie County Dept. of Health
- Holy Family School
- Perseus House
- Summit Community Food Pantry
- Greater Calvary Church
- St. Benedict Education Center
- YMCA Kids Club
- Achievement Center
- Waterford Food Pantry
- Emerson Gridley School
- Fairview Community Council
- Gannon University Social Work Club
- Sunny Days Child Care
- Neighborhood Art House
- International Institute
- Erie County Juvenile Probation
- Booker T. Washington Center
- Edison Elementary School
- Emmaus Ministries
- Erie School Parenting Program

How Do We Raise Money? Most of the contributions to Books for Kids come in amounts of \$100 or less from individuals, businesses, and companies. Some very generous donors give up to \$500, and for the past several years, we have been lucky to receive matching gifts from the General Electric Foundation of over \$1,500. This is made possible by GE employees and retirees who donate to Books for Kids and ask GE to match their gifts. We have also received grants from the Erie Community Foundation of \$5,000 to purchase expensive multi-cultural books.

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Dean Baldwin, President



Traci Shuman, Vice President



Dr. Juan Fernandez, Secretary



Bob Monahan, Treasurer



Kathleen Cantrell, Acquisitions



Shantell Hilliard, Books for Birthdays



Jane Levin, Distribution



Dr. Mary Jo Melvin, Board Member

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These facts explain why you are so important to us. **Without the generous support of our readers, we could not continue to operate!**

How Do We Spend Our Money?

As we never tire of saying, Books for Kids is an all-volunteer organization, with no paid staff and very low overhead. **Nearly 90% of our funds are spent on books.** The other 10% goes for direct operating costs, primarily rent on our warehouse (\$100 per month), insurance, postage, and printing.

Most importantly, we buy books at deeply discounted prices. Board member **Kathleen Cantrell**, who owns the Erie Book Store, keeps her eye out for publishers' sales and close outs, and sometimes even wangles free books from publishers. As a result, nearly all the books we purchase cost between 25 cents and \$3 each. From time to time, we also receive free books from our parent organization in New York City.

Do We Cooperate With Other Literacy Groups?

Literacy is not a problem that can be solved by any one group or any one approach. Therefore, Books for Kids takes every opportunity to cooperate with other area literacy groups and programs to maximize our collective efforts and avoid duplication.

President **Dean Baldwin** also serves on Erie's Local Advisory Board of **First Book**, whose goals and operations are very similar to ours. Such cooperation enables the two groups to provide books to many organizations, and reinforces the

work of both groups by providing such services as applications workshops so that non-profits and schools can learn how to apply from one group or the other—or both!

Former board member **Dolores Serafinski** has been working full time as head of **Hooked on Books**, a dynamic organization that matches adult readers with young students. One-on-one "Reading Pals" read to their students at the Neighborhood Art House, Diehl School, and other locations. Books for Kids has frequently provided free books to these students, reinforcing Hooked on Books' efforts to improve students' reading and encourage their love of books.

Most recently, Books for Kids has joined forces with **WQLN's Family Literacy Program** to promote in-home reading among families below the poverty line. After a series of four workshops on literacy and related issues, parents are introduced to Books for Kids, given the chance to select free books, and enrolled in the Books for Birthdays program. Response to the Books for Kids portion of this program has been extremely positive.

What's In The Future? A Spelling Bee!

Books for Kids' biggest challenge is to publicize its efforts to the community and raise additional money so that even more children and young people can receive our books and benefit from our programs.

As announced in the last newsletter, we are planning a

publicity and fund-raising event for March 20, 2007 that we hope will accomplish both ends. This is not the usual kind of spelling bee, however. This one is for adults. Teams of three adults sponsored by a business, company, or office will compete against each other at Jr's Last Laugh in downtown Erie. These events have proven to be very successful and popular elsewhere, and we are hoping to make this the first of an annual event that will promote the work of Books for Kids and raise considerable money so that we can expand our selection of books.

If your office, company, or business would like to sponsor a spelling bee team, or if you would like more information, contact Traci Shuman at 864-3001, extension 120.

Become a Reading Pal

If you would like to become one of Hooked on Books' adult "Reading Pals," or if you would like more information about the program, please phone Dolores Sarafinski at 871-7422.

Thanks to New and Renewing Members

Benefactors \$100.00+

Dean & Vicki Baldwin | S. & H. Fuller | Chester & Dorothy Giermak | Allan Slovenkay | Summit Community Food Pantry

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[Has your membership expired? The date on the mailing label indicates your last donation.]

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Donations to Books for Kids are tax deductible for those who itemize.