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JUN 2011 | BY LIZ LOGAN | COMMENTS (0)

Brian Floriani, Bernie's Book Bank, Lake Forest

TAGS: Brian Floriani, Unsung Heroes, Bernies Book Bank, literacy program



How many books have you owned since the day you were born? Probably thousands.

But many children in low-income neighborhoods have never seen a book before their first day of school.

"They're light years behind," Brian Floriani says. His goal is to change that pattern by giving each child not just one book, but a modest library.

His nonprofit, **Bernie's Book Bank** (BBB), takes care of the collection and the distribution, and makes sure every child receives a dozen books per year, over several years. In roughly a year and a half, BBB has distributed nearly 300,000 books, working closely with the United Way of Lake County and other partners.

Inspired by his late father, Bernard, who was director of reading instruction for the State of Delaware, Brian started teaching reading in 2005, and then found a unique way to combine that interest with philanthropy. When he's not working on BBB or spending time with his family, including his 2-year-old daughter, he has a part-time cleaning job so he can make ends meet.

"You'd think we were giving them ice cream—they're jumping up and down," he says of the kids who receive the books.

One principal in Waukegan told him, "We have some homeless kids here, and one of them sleeps on her BBB books, so no one will take them." Another student, Parrish, on Chicago's South Side, called Brian to get more books. Brian says five minutes with Parrish made all his work worthwhile.

And Brian has lofty goals for the organization. He wants BBB to distribute a million books per year by 2013, and he would like to replicate the model in other major cities. "I want us to be an American institution," he says.

To learn more about supporting Bernie's Book Bank, visit berniesbookbank.org

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about the author



Liz Logan recently earned her master's from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism. Her writing credits include Time, The Cleveland Plain Dealer, Time Out Chicago, and Poets & Writers. When she's not writing about the arts and food, Liz bakes killer chocolate-cranberry-almond-pistachio biscotti and pumpkin-chocolate-chip muffins.

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