



By Catherine Driscoll

If you're a child born into a middle-income family in this country, you have an average of 13 age-appropriate books in your home.

But if you're born into less fortunate circumstances, you have an average of one book to share with 300 other children in your neighborhood.

The fact is more than 61% of low-income families have no books at all in their homes for their children (source: Reading Literacy in the United States). And of greater concern, two-thirds of students who cannot read proficiently by the end of the 4th grade will end up in jail or on welfare. (source: BegintoRead.com)

"We have a problem in this country, where many children show up to their first day of Kindergarten never having seen a book before in their lives," said Bernie's Book Bank Founder and Executive Director Brian Floriani of Lake Forest. "We can change that."

Bernie's Book Bank (BBB), a non-profit organization, connects children needing books with books needing children. BBB encourages people to take books off dusty shelves and put them in the hands of at-risk children. Since its founding in December 2009, BBB has managed more than 58 book drives in partnership with schools and businesses to collect more than 200,000 quality books, which it distributed to 30,000 children throughout Chicago and its suburbs. Children in more than 40 schools--from Zion to the south side to the west side--receive books from Bernie's Book Bank at least twice a year.

Bernie's Book Bank relies on a volunteer force of more than 175 to process books in its Lake Forest warehouse. A steady stream of individuals, families and corporate groups keep the wheels turning, processing more than 20,000 books per week. The 10-member Board of Directors focuses on fundraising and long-term visioning, bringing

resources to fuel growth.

“At Bernie’s Book Bank, we have one main focus,” said Floriani, “and that is to be the logistical bridge – between where books are and are no longer being used, to where they are not and desperately needed – and significantly increase book ownership of at-risk children in Chicagoland. Because it is through books – holding them, touching them, reading them, learning them – that children have the best opportunities to succeed in this world.”

Bernie’s Book Bank sorts the books it collects into age appropriate, ready-to-distribute bags, which are then given to large populations of at-risk children through schools and other programs like Women Infant Children (WIC) and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA). Schools are chosen to become distribution partners based on a needs matrix — schools in which 50% or more of the children are in the Free and Assisted Lunch Program are eligible.

“Each child served by Bernie’s Book Bank receives an average of 12 books each year until that child passes through sixth grade,” said Tom Clark, BBB Board Member, Golden Apple Award Winner, and former Zion Kindergarten teacher. “These books are theirs to keep, to share, to cherish forever.”

Because of its lean operating focus, Bernie’s Book Bank can collect, process and deliver a bag of six quality books to a child for \$1 – less than the price of a cup of coffee.

“I wish you could have been here to see the faces of the children when they opened their bags!” wrote a 2nd grade teacher from Rupley School in Elk Grove Village. “The excitement in the room was explosive! Your book donation offers many of these children their only source of books. We are so thankful to be the recipients of these magnificent gifts. Your organization is truly making a difference in the lives of children!”

“I can’t imagine a better way to make a tangible difference in so many children’s lives,” said Dan McGowan, Bernie’s Book Bank Board Member and President of Big Bowl restaurants. “With the right funding, this organization is set to explode.”

“By 2013, BBB will be distributing 1,000,000 books per year in the Chicago area alone,” said Graham Cook, BBB Board Member and Investments Executive of Copia Capital. “We believe children in every city, in every state, deserve the same opportunities.”

Once the operating process is mastered, Bernie’s Book Banks will be established across the country — Detroit, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Atlanta — in every major city where children are starved for books, for knowledge, for the opportunity to succeed.

“Similar to Goodwill or Salvation Army, we envision Bernie’s Book Bank becoming a National institution,” said Ben Rubin, BBB Board Member and Vice President of Lake Forest Bank & Trust Company.

“So far this year, we’ve distributed 70,000 books to children, and we’ve barely scratched the surface of meeting the need,” said Floriani.

If you believe in Bernie’s Book Bank’s mission, be sure to save June 17 on your calendar for Rock the Bank! A Bernie’s Book Bank Benefit. Held at the new warehouse, the evening will include fabulous food, drinks, live music and dancing, and is open to all who care about children and love books. All proceeds from the event go toward the collection, processing and distribution of more books to more children in need. For more information and to RSVP, go to www.rockthebank.org.

Find us on Facebook and Twitter and help spread the word!

Click here to view a short video about Bernie’s Book Bank: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QP7-avOCJGk>

For more info, contact us at info@berniesbookbank.org

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