Annual Report
2018
Dear Friends,

We took a big leap in 2018. Ferst Foundation for Childhood Literacy officially became Ferst Readers! Our name is new, our logo is refreshed, and our mission is recharged:

*Strengthening communities by providing quality books and literacy resources for children and their families to use at home during the earliest stages of development.*

What hasn’t changed is our steadfast commitment to the children and families we serve and our utmost gratitude to the amazing volunteers and donors who share our mission.

Thanks to you, in 2018 Ferst Readers reached more children and families, in more innovative ways, than ever before. We launched our parent literacy workshop, Conversations Count, to enhance the family engagement focus that is so crucial to the success of our mission. We partnered with under-resourced daycares and preschools to reach more children and families that might not have otherwise participated in our traditional home mailing program. We partnered with more hospitals to enroll babies at the earliest possible moment. In all, we added twelve new community programs including two in new-to-Ferst-Readers states: South Carolina (in partnership with the Kevin & Brittany Kisner Foundation) and Alabama (in partnership with our Tallapoosa County Community Action Team). With your help, we mailed more than half a million books to almost 55,000 children and their families in 2018!

Many of the children participating in our program have never owned a book - until now. Now they are building their own home libraries with the quality, developmentally-appropriate books they receive every month - in no small part due to your support. We are energized by research that shows children’s earliest exposure to literacy and language—through books—wires their brains for success in reading. These experiences are the building blocks for future successful readers.

Because of friends like you, we are closer to ensuring that every child will have these experiences and enter school with a bright future ahead. Every time we enroll a child or secure a financial or volunteer commitment, we are making a direct, positive contribution to the future of children and their community. We are enormously grateful for your support!

Cheers,

Betsy Wagenhauser
President
Poverty is one of our greatest barriers to education and I believe that Ferst Readers is helping us lessen the impact of this barrier. In just two years, program enrollment has grown to more than 50 preschoolers, and we are seeing steady improvement in the readiness skills of our students entering school.

Rebecca Thomas, Johnson County Superintendent of Schools

Ferst Readers works to improve early literacy outcomes by mailing free, developmentally appropriate books monthly to children, birth to five, as well as providing literacy resources to parents. Success is due largely to Community Action Teams, or CATs, composed of dedicated volunteers who, at the local county/community level, are responsible for registering children, raising funds and promoting literacy through partnerships with other local organizations. The cost of the program, $36 per child/year, is raised through private donations.
What about Ferst Readers...

Ferst Readers mails bookstore-quality books directly to enrolled children, from ages birth to five, every month at absolutely no cost to the family. Our books are age-appropriate and have been carefully selected by a panel of reading specialists, children’s librarians, educators and child development specialists.

Leap Into Books Newsletter
What sets Ferst Readers apart from other book-giving literacy programs in that we provide valuable resources to guide parents as they help their children develop early literacy skills. Each book is accompanied by a parents’ newsletter with extensive literacy resources like helpful tips and book centered activities to help parents better engage with their child and get the most out of reading as well as information on local libraries and other literary resources. We also engage parents through our new workshop, Conversations Count, and through our new partnerships with Ready4K and Vroom.

Conversations Count
Building a Foundation for Reading
We recognize that parents are their child’s first, best teachers. Our goal is to give them the tools they need to be the most effective in that role. Our new parent literacy module, Conversations Count, is an easy to implement workshop that teaches parents that the words they speak to their child actually build their child’s brain and wire it for success. Parents come to realize that by creating meaningful interactions through conversation and books, they are helping their children become future successful readers and learners! Developed in collaboration with Morgan County Schools and the Rollins Center for Language and Literacy, Conversations Count was piloted in Carroll County, Georgia and is now available to all Ferst Readers partners.

Read4K and Vroom
Ferst Readers offers access to more parenting tools through our partnerships with Ready4K, a text messaging program delivering evidence-based family engagement curriculum three times a week, and Vroom, an app that targets children’s early brain development by turning everyday activities into “brain building moments.” Parents can automatically enroll in Ready4K when registering their children for Ferst Readers and our monthly parent newsletter promotes the Vroom app. Both formats are designed to help parents develop good habits and behaviors to facilitate the growth and development of their child. And both are perfect complements to our monthly Ferst Readers book and parent newsletter!
...and where?

Ferst Readers is healthy and growing, just like our target audience! We expanded our reach (again), adding twelve new programs and two new states in 2018!

Georgia
Georgia is always on our mind! Our Georgia programs thrived in both urban areas and small rural towns in 2018. In partnership with United Way of Greater Atlanta, Ferst Readers served approximately 1650 children in Atlanta’s Westside (with a grant from the Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation) and 1150 children in Clayton County. In addition, new programs were launched or revitalized in Charlton, Cobb, Dekalb, Emanuel, Laurens, Newton, Whitfield, Toombs and Walker counties.

Texas
“Once Upon a Month”
Ferst Readers partners with the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas and the Boone Family Foundation to bring the Ferst Readers program to almost 6500 children in Dallas and Collin counties through the Once Upon a Month literacy campaign. Launched in 2017, the Dallas program fills a critical need by providing families access to books and parent literacy resources in both English and Spanish.

Mississippi
Our dynamic Lincoln County Community Action Team has not slowed down since launching their Ferst Readers program in September 2017. More than 750 Lincoln County children were receiving books and resources by the end of 2018. This represents 34% program participation of all children under five in the county—in under two years!

Montana
Founded in 2016, our Great Falls, Montana program served about 230 children in 2018. As part of the Great Falls Early Childhood Coalition, the Ferst Readers program helps serve the coalition’s birth to five component—with special emphasis on their Native American population.

Florida
Ferst Readers continues to grow in the Sunshine State. Since its founding in 2016, our Nassau County Community Action Team has mailed more than 12,000 books and resources to 665 children! We also partner with Early Learning Coalition to provide resources to children in Baker and Bradford counties.

South Carolina
“Tee Up to Read”
Ferst Readers “teed up” in Aiken County in partnership with the Kevin & Brittany Kisner Foundation and Public Education Partners. For pro golfer Mr. Kisner and his wife, Ferst Readers is a family affair. Mrs. Kisner’s father, Stan DeJarnett, is a long-time Ferst Readers board member and the former school superintendent in Morgan County, Georgia. Knowing the impact Ferst Readers had on Morgan County, the Kisners “drove” the effort to bring Ferst Readers to Aiken County under the program name Tee Up to Read.

Alabama
Our dedicated Tallapoosa County Community Action Team volunteers knew they had to bring the Ferst Readers program to their community as soon as they learned of its valuable impact in other states. Beginning with 34 participating children in July 2018, the Tallapoosa County team increased the number of enrollments to more than 300 children by the end of the year!

Ferst Readers Annual Report 2018
**Audited Financial Highlights**

**Ferst Readers** received $2,061,360 in revenue in 2018 including $586,287 in general unrestricted donations. Ferst Readers serves as fiscal agent for the majority of its local, volunteer-run county/community programs. Funds raised locally from individual donors, businesses/corporations and grants are held in restricted accounts for use in the local community in which it was received.

*Program costs represent 94% of the annual expenses with the remaining 4% for general administration and 2% for fundraising activities.*

**2018 Revenue**

- **17%** Local Program Contributions
  - $1,458,673
- **81%** General Unrestricted contributions
  - $586,287
- **2%** Board Donations
  - $16,400

**2018 Expenses**

- **94%** Program
  - $1,533,960
- **2%** Admin
  - $84,330
- **4%** Fundraising
  - $27,868

**Charity Navigator**

Ferst Readers has maintained a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator—in recognition of our strong financial health and commitment to accountability and transparency. Only one in four nonprofits achieves this highest-rating distinction.

Ferst Readers is Charity Navigator’s highest rated literacy nonprofit in the nation!
Rebranding
As our program has grown beyond Georgia, serving more children and providing even more literacy support services, we thought it was the perfect time to freshen up our look with a name and message that more accurately reflects what we do—providing quality books and literacy resources for children and their families to use at home during the earliest stages of development. Moving from Ferst Foundation for Childhood Literacy, we feel our new name, Ferst Readers, more clearly conveys our focus and objectives. We are energized by our updated vision and mission statements, along with our new tagline and refreshed colors and logo. We are proud of our new look and feel it will serve us well as our reach expands across the U.S.

Program Expansion
Ferst celebrated a program expansion of 13% for 2018. Specifically, we added 12 new community programs and two more states. At the end of the year, we more than 45,000 children were enrolled and receiving books every month in seven states.

CAT Summit
Community Action Teams (CATs) are essential to the success of our mission. We had the pleasure of hosting fifty-one amazing CAT volunteers (representing 26 counties and five states) at our annual CAT Summit in Madison in August 2018. Ferst Readers board member Amy Storey presented an overview of our rebranding process. From social media to brochures to signage, we have the tools in place to promote a unified brand across the markets we serve. Other summit topics included a preview of the new online CAT Toolkit, our Conversations Count parent workshop, and successful fundraising strategies in partnership with the local school districts. We are privileged to work alongside such an outstanding group of enthusiastic, creative, and dedicated volunteers!

Georgia Librarians Conference
Ferst Readers president Betsy Wagenhauser presented the keynote address at the Georgia Libraries Conference in Columbus, Georgia in April. The conference was an opportunity to talk to librarians from across Georgia—including public, school, academic and special libraries—about Ferst Readers’ efforts to be one of the preeminent influencers/accelerants for early childhood literacy. Libraries and Friends of the Library chapters are valued supporters of the local Ferst Readers program in many of the communities we serve.

2018 Book Selection Committee
The annual selection committee met in late summer to review new titles submitted from our publishers - Peachtree Publishers, Our Rainbow Press and HarperCollins. Our book selection committee is composed of respected reading specialists, children’s librarians, educators and child development specialists. An additional 100+ stellar titles were added to our list of top-quality children’s literature as part of our Read To Me Library.
Making an Impact - when it matters most

The single most significant factor influencing a child’s early educational success is an introduction to books and being read to at home BEFORE kindergarten. Reading to young children activates their brains in the same areas they will later use when they learn to read on their own. Yet, 61% of low-income families do not have a single book in the home that’s suitable for a child. Lack of access to books leaves many children starting school up to two years behind their more affluent peers in language and literacy skills. Some children never catch up. Thanks to your support, we can close the achievement gap and impact children from birth and on a regular basis during the crucial first five years.

While the early years are incredibly important, the impact of the Ferst Readers program goes far beyond the first five years of a child’s life.

*Positive short-term effects*
Ferst Readers participants perform at a higher percentage in kindergarten than non-Ferst Readers children (according to a Program Effectiveness Evaluation gauging the kindergarten GKIDS scores of Ferst Readers graduates).

*Positive long-term effects*
In communities with a high concentration of Ferst Readers enrollment over a number of years, graduation rates increase while unemployment and incarceration rates decrease.

*And it positively affects the family dynamic, too*
Ferst Readers’ parents are shown to be more engaged in their children’s academic progress as they progress through school.

YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT MAKES A LIFELONG, COMMUNITY-WIDE IMPACT!
Partnersing for Impact

Ferst Readers is extremely grateful to our donors, partners, volunteers and friends who share our vision of creating better learners, brighter futures, and stronger communities by giving every child under five access to quality books in their homes.

Thank you for moving this vision closer to reality for over 55,000 children in 2018!

Atlanta Speech School/Rollins Center for Language & Literacy
Bd Managed IT
Boone Family Foundation
Brookhaven Rotary
Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta
Dollar General Literacy Foundation
Early Learning Coalition of North Florida
Get Georgia Reading - Campaign for Grade Level Reading
Georgia Electric Membership Corporation (EMC)
Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL)
Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS)
Georgia Family Connection Partnership
Georgia Public Library Service
Georgia Retired Educators Association
Georgia Southern University
Georgia State University
Harper Collins

Junior League of Atlanta and Dekalb
Kisner Foundation
Kiwanis
Knockout! Inc.
Literacy for All
Milk Crate Media
Northwest Georgia Healthcare Partnership
Our Rainbow Press
Optimists International
Peachtree Publishers
Printing Finishers
Pro Bono Partnership of Atlanta
Quality Care for Children
Rotary International
United Way of Greater Atlanta
United Way of Metropolitan Dallas
Voices for Georgia’s Children
Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation
University of Georgia
University of West Georgia
Walton Communities

Mission
Strengthening communities by providing quality books and literacy resources for children and their families to use at home during the earliest stages of development.

Vision
Creating better learners, brighter futures, and stronger communities by giving every child under five access to quality books in their homes.
5,626,269
number of books mailed since Ferst Readers began in 2000

511,808
number of books mailed in 2018

252,704
number of children to have participated in the Ferst Readers program

15,438
number of new children registered in 2018

54,881
total number of children receiving books in 2018

112,858
number of children who have graduated from the Ferst Readers program and started kindergarten with skills to be successful learners

Reading aloud is widely recognized as the single most important activity leading to literacy acquisition.

A child’s brain grows to 80% of its full size by age 3.

In the first few years of life, a child’s brain builds 700 connections per second.

By age three, children from low-income families may hear 30 million fewer words than their more affluent peers.

In middle income neighborhoods, the book to child ratio is 13 to 1, compared to 1 to 300 in low-income neighborhoods.

Children with as few as 25 Books in the home complete an average of two more years of schooling than those with no books.

Only 43% of children in the United States are read to each day.

Ferst Readers Annual Report 2018
Beyond the Numbers

Ferst Readers is making a difference in the lives of children, one book at a time. We know this, not only from impressive data showing Ferst graduates’ school readiness, but from our participating communities and their parents who tell us every day how much they value their children being part of the Ferst Readers program.

Our parents say...
“‘My child’s favorite books have come from Ferst Readers. My husband and I were just starting out after we had our son, so we had little money for toys or books. Ferst Readers provided Bear Can Dance and Freight Train (among many others) to my son, and they’re still his favorite books.”

“Ferst Readers’ books have made a significant impact in the lives of my children. They are reading more—and the more they read, the more books they want. They learn sight words, their ABCs and more. Thank you very much for this great blessing to our home. May God continue to bless your organization.”

“Getting a book in the mail every month is exciting for my kids. They always want to sit down and read it together as soon as it comes. I appreciate the diversity represented in the books. We have foster kids so our family is always changing and I appreciate the books representing that.”

“My sons love the library, but returning books is a struggle. Sometimes they just don’t like to share with the library, not understanding that the library is actually sharing with them. When their Ferst books come in the mail, it is a happy day. Each child recognizes his name on the package, he knows that book is his. He knows he can read it over and over and over and never have to give it back.”

“My kids get so excited to receive their books in the mail, it’s like the ultimate treat. They know their books are coming. They open them up and we read them together right away. It helps us to create a bond together that we may not have gotten without Ferst Readers books coming in the mail.”

Our school superintendents say...
“When our youngest of learners develop an early love for reading they are in a much better position to be highly successful learners throughout their K-12 career—and graduate college, career and life ready.”

- Rodney Bowler, Henry County Schools Superintendent

Ferst Readers has played a pivotal role in getting age appropriate literature into the hands of our children at risk and there is no doubt that it’s impacting student success.

- Wayne Randall, Franklin County School System Superintendent

“I have had the privilege of working with Ferst Readers of Polk County Community Action Team (CAT) for many years. This outstanding team provides our parents/children with the opportunity to register their preschool children/younger siblings for books and resources. For many of these children, this program provides the first books brought into their home. The CAT’s commitment to our county is outstanding, and our district is grateful for being able to reap the benefits of children coming to school with a good start towards their literacy skills.”

- Laurie Atkins, Polk School District Superintendent
Ferst Readers
A child’s path to a brighter future is paved with books.

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