



FACT SHEET

Promoting Literacy Right From the Start

Born to Read is the signature project of the Rotary Club of Traverse Bay Twilight. Its mission is to promote early literacy by spreading the word about the importance of reading, talking, and singing with children everyday from birth on.

When and how did Born to Read start?

In 2009 The Rotary Club of Traverse Bay Twilight approved literacy awareness for new parents as the focus for their signature project. Rotarians convened collaborating partners in October 2010 with the goal of delivering a book to every baby born at Munson Medical Center. Since then, our efforts have expanded.

Why is spreading the Born to Read message so important?

- **In Michigan, almost 70% of 4th graders are NOT reading at grade level.** And the trend is going in the wrong direction. In 2003, Michigan ranked 28th in fourth-grade reading. In 2015, the state was ranked 41st. If nothing changes, it's projected to fall to 48th place by 2030.
- **Brain development** –birth to 3 is the greatest period of brain growth. There are visible differences at age 3 between those children whose caregivers read, talk and sing to them and those who don't.
- **School readiness and success** –by the time children enter school, there is a huge gap in learning readiness between those who are read to and those who are not. 40% of Michigan's children enter Kindergarten at the lowest level of school readiness.
- **Children's vocabulary skills are linked to their economic backgrounds.** The vocabulary gap is evident in toddlers. By 18 months, children in different socio-economic groups display dramatic differences in their vocabularies. By 3 years of age, there is a 30 million-word gap between children from the wealthiest and poorest families. This gap only gets worse as children struggle with reading and get further and further behind in school.
- Reading, interacting with, telling stories, singing to babies 0-3 is the **single most important thing parents can do** to help ensure their child succeeds in school.
- Yet - **Only 40%** of parents read to their preschool children everyday
- **Only 15%** read to their babies!

How does Born to Read's message reach parents?

We start with **expectant parents**, delivering a post card in English and Spanish during their last trimester visit at Munson. The card introduces Born to Read, describes the importance of reading to babies everyday, and offers simple tips on how to read to infants and toddlers.

After the baby is born, parents at Munson receive a gift packet with a book for their baby, more information about why reading is important, a certificate they can take to Traverse Area District Library branches to receive a tote bag with another free book, and more.

To get our message out into the community, we partner with Great Start to reach parents of young children participating in Great Start's 5toOne neighborhood centers and play groups. We provide age-appropriate books for parents of children 0-3 to use and take home. We also participate in community events, like the Traverse City Family Expo and Traverse City Children's Book Festival, passing out books along with the Born to Read message. We have a Born to Read website, Facebook page, and we spread the word through the media.

And, recently we started an **exciting new outreach strategy** - *Born to Read Ambassadors!*

What is the Born to Read Ambassador Program and why is it important?

Born to Read Ambassadors are **trained volunteers and outreach workers** who go where parents and young children are – they read with kids and talk to parents about how important it is to read with their babies and toddlers everyday. We give children books to take home, a sticker that says, “I’m Born To Read”, and give parents tips on reading with babies and other information.

We know that **children from low-income families face an uphill climb in school readiness** with a huge gap in vocabulary that starts at birth and multiplies each year before kindergarten. We also know that the best way to teach both children and adults is face to face – talking to them, showing them. Passing out a packet with a book and information is a nice introduction – but it is far from sufficient to create lasting change and build new habits. Some parents get this kind of on-going support and reinforcement of reading at their local libraries. But many parents don’t have the time, transportation, or energy to make use of this fabulous resource. So we are going where parents and children already are to deliver this important message.

Twilight Rotary started the Ambassador program in December 2015 with early literacy training for Rotarians and other interested community members. In January 2016 we piloted the program with 8 volunteers reading with kids and talking to parents at two Laundry Project sites in Traverse City. In 2017, we trained more volunteers and expanded the program with **20 Ambassadors now reading at 10 sites in Grand Traverse and Leelanau Counties**. We recently received a grant from the Community Foundation’s Youth Endowment Fund to work with high schools to start a BTR Youth Ambassador program in Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Antrim, and Benzie counties.

How many people does Born to Read reach and how much does it cost?

- Last year, Born to Read reached nearly **3,000** parents in the 5-county region.
- In 2015 we incorporated the **Rotary Club of Traverse Bay Twilight Foundation** as a vehicle for financially supporting and expanding our literacy projects and now receive grants and tax-deductible contributions.
- **This year’s budget for maintaining Born to Read activities is \$19,700.** Funding sources include the United Way of Northwest Michigan, the Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation, Friends of the Traverse Area District Library and 100 Women Who Care, as well as fundraising by the Rotary Club of Traverse Bay Twilight. We are also grateful for in-kind support provided by several community businesses and organizations, including Cherry Capital Foods, Grand Traverse Pie Company, Traverse City Children’s Book Festival, and T.J. Maxx.
- **All funds are used for program expenses.** Our partners – Munson Medical Center Healthy Futures, Traverse Area District Library, Traverse Bay Area Intermediate School District - Great Start – provide staff for reaching parents with our message. And, our trained volunteers and outreach workers are spreading the word at community sites. We need books, printing, supplies, professional services, and training resources to make all this happen.
- Our **goals** are to expand community outreach to more sites, enhance the quality of the books and educational materials we are distributing, and provide more books and supplies to community organizations serving low-income families, such as Migrant Head Start and the Father Fred Foundation. We are also seeking resources for sustaining and replicating Born to Read so that our message can reach more families with young children across northern Michigan and beyond.