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Born to Read – Promoting Literacy Right From the Start

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A group of 30 men and women from the Rotary Club of Traverse Bay Twilight in Traverse City have built a program that reaches parents of newborn babies which is making a lifetime of difference for the children of their region. **Born to Read** is the signature project of the Rotary Club of Traverse Bay Twilight in Traverse City, Michigan. Its mission is to promote early literacy by spreading the word about the importance of reading, talking, and singing with children every day starting from birth.

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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 the collaborating partners consisting of Great Start Collaborative of the Traverse Bay Intermediate School District; Munson Healthy Futures; Traverse Area District Library; and Read Aloud 15 MINUTES in October 2010 with the goal of delivering a book to every baby born at Munson Medical Center, which serves the 5 counties in the Grand Traverse Region.

How does Born to Read spread this message?

- 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 right from the start, and offers simple tips on how to read to infants and toddlers.
- After the baby is born, parents receive a packet with a book for their baby, more information about why reading is important, and a certificate they can take to Traverse Area District Library branches to receive a tote bag with another free book.



This certificate is good for one free children's board book and tote bag available at the Traverse Area District Libraries. See list on back.

- We also partner with Great Start to get our message out to parents who participate in Great Start neighborhood centers and play groups. We provide age-appropriate books for parents of children 0-3 to use and take home.

- Whenever we can we also participate in community events, like the Traverse City Children's Book Festival, passing our books along with our Born to Read message.



- We have also established a [website](#) and provide information to the media.
- We are very excited about our newest strategy for getting the word out – the *Born to Read Ambassador* program!

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 to children and talk to parents about how important it is to read to their babies and toddlers every day for at least 15 minutes, and give them a book to take home.

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 and showing them – so, we are going to places where parents and children already are to deliver this important message. 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 ongoing support and reinforcement of reading at their local libraries through story times, summer reading programs, and other very effective programs. But many parents don't have the time, transportation, or energy to make use of this fabulous resource.





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 eight volunteers reading to children and talking to parents at two Laundry Project sites in Traverse City. In 2017, we trained more volunteers and expanded the program with 15 Ambassadors now reading at four sites in Grand Traverse and Leelanau Counties. We recently received a grant from the Community Foundation Youth Endowment Fund to start a BTR Youth Ambassador program in Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse and Leelanau 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 (501c-3) as a vehicle for financially supporting our literacy projects. In addition to funds from our Rotary Club, we now receive grants and tax-deductible contributions for Born to Read. Thanks to new funding from the United Way of Northwest Michigan, the Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation, and Friends of the Traverse Area District Library our Born to Read budget grew from \$7,500 in 2015 to \$18,900 in 2017.

Our 2017 goals are to expand community outreach to more sites, enhance the quality of the books and materials we are distributing, translate and print Born to Read materials into Spanish, and provide more books and supplies to community organizations that serve low-income families, such as Migrant Head Start and the Father Fred Foundation.

All funds are used solely for program expenses such as books, printing, supplies, and training resources. Our partners, Munson Medical Center; Traverse Area District Library; and the Traverse Bay Area Intermediate School District, provide staff for reaching parents with the Born to Read message, while trained volunteers and outreach workers are spreading the word at community sites. As our program has grown we have added partners including PoWeR Book Bags, Central Lake Early Opportunities, Great Start 5toONE, and the local chapter of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library.

For more information on how to get a Born to Read program started in your region, please leave a message for Sharon Workman, Born to Read Coordinator, [here](#).

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