

# Team First Book Philadelphia

Carolyn Ashburn 27 February 2015

Team First Book Philadelphia has a simple mission: to provide new books to children in need in greater Philadelphia.



It's surprising to people that some children don't have books. None. Not a single one. To those of us who grew up surrounded by books—at home, in our school libraries, and at public libraries—a house without books is nearly

unimaginable.

But it is really not so difficult to see that in many Philadelphia households, dollars must be spent on food and shelter, not books.

When Kyle Zimmer, a Washington, DC, attorney, founded the national nonprofit First Book in 1992, she did so knowing that learning to read is critical to a child's success, and price is the number one barrier to book ownership. Ms. Zimmer was determined to change that.

First Book established the online First Book Marketplace, through which hundreds of books from major publishers are available to qualified recipients at an average cost of only \$2.50 per book. These are new books, hardback and paperback, available in many languages and covering a wide range of subjects.

This was an exciting development for Philadelphians who wanted to address the problem of illiteracy here. In 1998, a group of volunteers from various professional backgrounds joined together and started First Book-Philadelphia. Today, under the name Team First Book Philadelphia, their determination to address the illiteracy problem in this area continues to grow.

Team First Book Philadelphia volunteers raise money locally, from individuals, foundations and corporations, and 100% of it goes directly for new books for children in this area (Philadelphia, Montgomery, Chester, Bucks, and Delaware counties).

The books are distributed through recipient groups such as schools, after-school programs, hospitals, etc. Team First Book Philadelphia volunteers review applications, make site visits to new programs and meet every other month to make decisions on which recipient groups to fund.



Recipient groups must meet the following requirements:

- Incorporate the reading of any books received into their program activities
- Offer programs in which at least 70% of the children come from low-income families or be a Title I or Title I eligible school
- Ensure that the books received through the grant become the personal property of the children participating in the program and that the books go home with the children
- Not discriminate against individuals based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion or physical or mental disability

By providing books, Team First Book Philadelphia complements the work of many organizations in the area

that are already doing excellent work to combat illiteracy. Teachers and literacy program directors at the recipient groups get to select the books that best meet the needs of their children, so the chances of the books meeting education goals or inspiring a child to read are much better than if the books were selected and shipped by someone outside of the program.

Qualified organizations can also buy directly from the First Book Marketplace, and some do, but others need the assistance of Team First Book Philadelphia to get the books for free.

For dedicated teachers and program leaders, making do the best they can with limited resources, a grant from Team First Book Philadelphia is a treasured gift. Not only does it mean books for kids, it means another organization recognizes and appreciates their efforts and it sends the encouraging message "We care."

First Book is focused on results, for both the children served and the programs that are our partners.

The First Book National organization reports the following:

## **Outcomes for Children**

### **A 14-month longitudinal study of 2,564 students found that First Book:**

- Improves interest in reading. Students demonstrating

a high interest in reading nearly tripled after they received books from First Book.

- Increases children's desire to learn. 69% of program administrators found that books from First Book were "very important" in children's decisions to read more and improve their reading skills.
- Increases reading at home. More than 70% of children reported increased home literacy activities after receiving books from First Book.

## **Outcomes for Schools and Programs**

A survey of 1,800 members of the First Book network of schools and programs found that First Book:

- Increases educational opportunities. 99.1% said that new books from First Book would allow them to increase education opportunities or activities, including parent involvement.
- Increases volunteer engagement. 96.5% of those who used volunteers said their current volunteers would be more engaged if they were given the opportunity to distribute First Book resources.

Team First Book Philadelphia collects evaluations from its recipient groups that support the First Book national outcomes for schools and programs.

In 2014, Team First Book Philadelphia distributed grants providing more than 50,000 new books to children in the following programs: African Family Health Organization,

Andrew Jackson Multicultural School, Bainbridge  
Mentoring at EM Stanton, Boys Latin, Bryn Mawr  
Presbyterian Tutoring Program, Caring People Alliance,  
Chester Charter School of the Arts, Children's Crisis  
Treatment – Therapeutic Nursery and Outpatient,  
Chinatown Learning Center, Communities In Schools of  
Philadelphia – Frankford High and ELECT, Children's  
Hospital of Philadelphia Early Head Start, Delaware  
County Juvenile Detention Center, Educating  
Communities for Parenting, F.A. Bregy Elementary School,  
Gesu School, Grandma's Kids, Health Federation Early  
Head Start, John F. Hartranft School, John B. Stetson  
Middle School, Ken Crest Services, Mighty Writers,  
Neighbor to Neighbor, New World Association,  
Philadelphia Head Start Partnerships, Schools Without  
Borders, Springboard Collaborative, Southwest  
Leadership Academy School, Tree House Books, Turning  
Points, Westminster Mayfair Early Child Center,

Feedback from our recipient groups reminds us why what  
we do matters, and what a difference a single book can  
make in a child's life.

"First Book allowed us to distribute new books that were  
culturally relevant, challenging, and in line with what our  
students read during our school year programming...The  
success of Words on Wheels belongs to the First Book  
book grant. Without it we would not have had as much of  
an impact simply because families were excited about the  
quality and selection of the books they'd be

receiving." (From Tree House Books)

"We have seen a change in selection of books offered, our parents are greatly appreciative of the bilingual books we can give them since for most of them English is not their first language." (From Chinatown Learning Center)

Donations to Team First Book Philadelphia can be sent to PO Box 166, Gladwyne, PA 19035 or made online at [www.firstbook.org/philadelphia](http://www.firstbook.org/philadelphia)