



POWeR! BOOK BAGS

Empowering children to Play, Write, and Read today for a better tomorrow!



Annual Report 2019

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Once Upon A Time...

March 29, 2020

Dear Friends of PoWeR! Book Bags,

Once upon a time, once upon a time, once upon a time...well, that is how fairy tales start at our house. And this indeed feels like a fairy tale that began in our home and has grown and grown and grown, complete with fairy godmothers (and fairy godfathers, too).

This May 4th, we will celebrate our GOLDEN BIRTHDAY. PoWeR! Book Bags will be 4 years old. So much continues to happen every day. It is as if we are on a spectacular magical adventure that just keeps getting better and better. Time just flies when you are having fun!

It seems like just yesterday we met our little friend, Warren. He and his mom were waiting for food at one of our first pantry partners. As they waited, I started to talk with them, asking Warren if he'd like to find a book to take home and keep. He wasn't interested. His mom told me he didn't like to read. When offered a book bag, there was a little glimmer of interest, especially when he saw the finger puppet inside. However, he played it nonchalantly. "No, thanks," to the book. His mom tried to not hurt our feelings and took a book, but he clearly wasn't interested. I asked what Warren liked and she told me, "Dinosaurs."

For the next year, I made it my mission to find dinosaur books and stock that particular pantry with as many dinosaur books as I could. Warren 'found' them on the shelf and began a home library collection! Soon his mom was telling me about the dinosaur names that Warren was learning. He was starting to read. He was getting better at reading.

When I saw him at the pantry, HE would tell me about his favorite dinos. One day, about a year later, his mom asked me directly to stop the dinosaur books because his bed was full of them. There was no room for him to sleep. Hearing this, Warren told me with a grin that now he also liked joke books. And so the quest for the joke books began. Another volunteer and I kept our look out for the funny ones. We would add them into the shelf, sometimes even leaving them on top of the shelf so that he would easily find them.

Time has gone on...then a few weeks ago, I ran into Warren's mom. She was looking at the new books that we had just put out for children to take. Her eyes lit up as she picked up the deluxe version of Rick Riordan's *The Lightning Thief*. She said he'd be SO excited to get it. I asked if she would be reading it to him, and she proudly told me that he was an excellent reader now. He would read it himself or maybe to kids in the neighborhood. She went on to tell us that Warren wouldn't let her get rid of any of his books and that when other kids came over, he would read to them. I then asked how many books she thought that they had at their house. She laughed and said, "About 500."



At this point, my jaw dropped. You see, there are some numbers I call the “magic numbers” for reading. In the research, these special numbers are correlated with a child’s future life potential. When there are 10-20 books in the home, this is “typical” and the child is likely just to do OK. If there are 100 books in the home, the child is more likely to graduate from high school and go on to post graduation degrees, such as college or skill training. BUT if there are 500 books in the house, it is the equivalence of the mom having a university degree. These children are likely to graduate college and go on for further education. These children are *unlikely* to live in poverty!

I asked if I could tell this amazing story, I told her I would not use his name. She proudly stood taller and said, “You use his name. Tell them about my Warren. He was born early and they called him a special needs kid and look at him now.” Pure magic!

There is no greater spell than that of the power children can acquire from language, literacy and human interaction.

It continues to be our pleasure to share the wonder of literacy with children and their families. Since we began four years ago, we have allowed children to choose 110,000 books for their very own, along with 27,722 book bags which contain playing and writing materials.

We have grown incrementally. We now serve children at 21 pantries and sites of assistance and 17 schools (soon to be 21).

We began offering children very gently used books. With new partnerships and some great grants and donations, we are now offering children at the participating schools and pantries (and sites of assistance) brand new BEAUTIFUL books!!!

Thank you to everyone for joining us on this adventure. We look forward to many more chapters in our evolving story.

Gratefully,

Kara Murphy Gregory, Ph.D.
Founder and Executive Director of PoWeR! Book Bags

PoWeR! Book Bags At a Glance...

PoWeR! Book Bags is a local non-profit that works to break the cycle of poverty through literacy.

Two well documented predictors of how well children will do later in life are:

- How many words a child has experienced before kindergarten, and
- How many books a child owns.

PoWeR! Book Bags provides free books and literacy materials to children and families. This increases their access to literacy through:

- Our books, which increase the number of words in kids' experience.
- Our book bag materials, which support literacy experiences by encouraging kids to play, write, and read, increasing their interactions with language and with each other.

PoWeR! Book Bags partners with local schools, food pantries and social service distribution points already at work in the community, which means:

- We target kids where they already are, using structures already in place.
- Every donation goes straight into literacy materials and programming for kids in the community where it's donated.

Our mission is to expand the number of books that children own and to increase children's experiences with language, literacy, and human interaction.

We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization comprised of many enthusiastic volunteers and donors. We target thousands of children each year in Lower Northwestern Michigan.



PoWeR! Book Bags Programs



The Original Book Bag Project

In The Original Pantry Project, children and families visiting food pantries and other sites of assistance select a book bag and books for each child. The book bags contain a finger puppet, two blank create-your-own-story booklets, a pack of crayons, and a bookmark. With each visit, children select more books and writing materials to keep.



Currently, we are serving children and families at 21 sites and counting!

The Salvation Army (Traverse City)

Empire Food Pantry (Glen Lake)

The Goodwill Inn (Traverse City)

The Salvation Army (Ludington)

HELP Ministry (Ludington)

C.O.V.E. (Ludington)

Mancelona Pantry and Resale Shop (Mancelona)

Fountain Area Community Center (Fountain)

Immaculate Conception Food Pantry (Traverse City)

Grace Episcopal Church Food Pantry (Traverse City)

Department of Health and Human Services Foster Care of Mason County (Ludington)

Department of Health and Human Services Foster Care of Oceana County (Hart)

Bread of Life Food Pantry (Baldwin)

Generations Ahead (Traverse City)

Children's Advocacy Center (Traverse City)

Leelanau Christian Neighbors (Suttons Bay)

The Tabernacle Food Pantry (Buckley)

Fresh Wind Pantry (Honor)

Lakeshore Food Club (Ludington)

Catholic Charities West Michigan (Ludington)

Oceana's Home Partnership (Hart)

Summer PoWeR! Days

We host a free summer literacy fair at participating parks and beaches throughout the regions we serve in Lower Northwestern Michigan. We call these fairs Summer PoWeR! Days. Children that attend these events are invited to listen to books read by librarians from participating libraries. Children also are invited to write stories and play literacy games. Finally, they fill book bags with as many books to take home as they desire. We give away thousands of books at the Summer PoWeR! Days.



School Vacation Book Give-Aways

School Vacation Book Give-Aways are a special part of our program. Prior to vacations from school, all children in the school are invited to select a book (or two) to take home and keep (and read over and over and over again). Once a year, the children are also invited to select a finger puppet and receive a book bag with writing materials inside. This combination of the playing, writing, and reading materials is intended to boost language, literacy, and human interaction.



Participating Schools:

Mancelona Elementary, Traverse Heights Elementary, Blair Elementary, Suttons Bay Elementary, Leelanau Montessori, St. Mary of Lake Leelanau, Fife Lake Elementary, Baldwin Elementary School, Lakeview Elementary, Franklin Elementary, Fountain Head Start, Pere Marquette Preschool, Foster Elementary, Covenant Christian, Ludington Area Catholic School, Traverse City High School Generations Ahead Program

Books on the Bus!

With Books on the Bus, the kids riding the buses to Suttons Bay Schools have access to PoWeR! Book Bags. Children select books to add to their personal libraries either on their way onto the bus or as they are leaving the bus.



Summer “Specials”

During our Summer “Specials,” we give books and book bags to kids at local camps and summer school programs. Our previous partners have included the Salvation Army Summer Camp programs in Traverse City, Eat Up and Meet Up summer food program in Mason County, and the Migrant camps/schools in Suttons Bay and Frankfort.

We also give books away in Ludington during Friday Night Live. Children are invited to fill their bags with as many books as they can carry! In 2019, we gave away over 5,000 books at the event.



PoWeR! Book Bags Boards

Governing Board

Kara Murphy Gregory, Ph.D., President
Karla Gerds, Secretary,
Leslie McInerney, Treasurer
Connie Riopelle, Grant Writer
Nancy Pringle, Fundraising Chair

Northern Advisory Board

(Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Kalkaska,
Montmorency, Otsego,
& Wexford Counties)

Penny Campo-Pierce

Mary Woods

Kathy Walter

Gloria Dean

Anneke Wegman

Leigh Fairey

Denise Palmer

Robert Randall

Aimee Lehmann

Southern Advisory Board

(Lake, Mason, & Oceana Counties)

Kathy Bromley

Mykila Althouse

Lisa Makowicki

Jacquie Gerould

Susan Boes

Kerri Wood

Ed Makowicki

2019 Financials

Individual Contributions	\$23,277.89
Business Contributions	\$15,750.00
Corporate Matching Donations	\$6,543.18
Grants	\$22,867.11
Indirect Public Support	\$688.93
Total Income	\$69,127.11

Fixed Business Expenses	\$7,510.01
Literacy Supplies/Operations	\$42,183.60
Management	\$4,980.44
Total Expenses	\$54,674.05

Net Income

\$14,453.06

By the Numbers...

60,000 books distributed in 2019 = 110,000 books in 4 years

2016: 8,000+

2017: 17,000+

2018: 25,000+

2019: 60,000+

These books are all selected by the kids and families,
making them more likely to be read over and over again!

9,500 book bags distributed in 2019 = 27,722 total

12,490 kids served in 2019

21 sites of assistance

17 schools for School Vacation Book Give Aways in 2019



Testimonials

Baldwin Community Schools

Ms. Joanie Wiersma, Elementary Principal Phone: (231) 745-3261 · Fax: (231) 745-7481

"Preparing Students for the Promise of Tomorrow"

Dear Members of the Lake County Community Foundation:

It is with great enthusiasm and hopefulness that I recommend the PoWer! Book Bags organization for LCCF grant consideration. This is the second year that we have been fortunate enough to receive the gifts and services of this nonprofit. PoWer! Book Bags is an organization that places service as its core mission while empowering children through literacy. Literacy skills are currently at the forefront of education in our school, state, and community. The volunteers of PoWer! Book Bags come to Baldwin Elementary School prior to every school break and distribute books to ALL our students. What makes the volunteers and this organization unique is the intention and time they spend with our students. Their friendly volunteers help individual students pick out books that are high interest and engaging. Our students leave the room with a bag of books to read, and a sense of gratitude for the connection made with another adult.

I genuinely appreciate the PoWer! Book Bags organization and its volunteers. I hope that we can continue to be benefactors of their gifts, and they receive grant money to fund the excellent services and resources they provide our school family.

Sincerely,

Ms. Joanie Wiersma

Principal Baldwin Elementary School

525 Fourth Street · Baldwin, Michigan 49304-9525

WWW.BALDWIN.K12.MI.US



Building - Challenging - Succeeding

Testimonials cont.



Hands Extended Loving People

Demonstrating God's love through practical acts of mercy.

To: Community Foundation

Subject: Letter of support for the Mason County PoWeR! Literacy Project

To whom it may concern:

HELP is pleased to be able to support this project as well as the entire PoWeR! Books effort. This program has done great work in providing books to children in our community to encourage reading. This project encourages children of all ages to read, write, and play.

As an organization that works with the needs of the economically challenged in Mason County, this program is a complement to our programs.

We are proud to be affiliated with them and strongly encourage the Community Foundation to provide the requested assistance.

Respectfully submitted,


Larry Lange
Executive Director

Testimonials cont.

December 17, 2016

Dear Power Book Bdg PePoale-

I Love Reading So

Thank you soooo

Much I always

excited when you

come to school

I wish you could

come more often!

Thank you!

