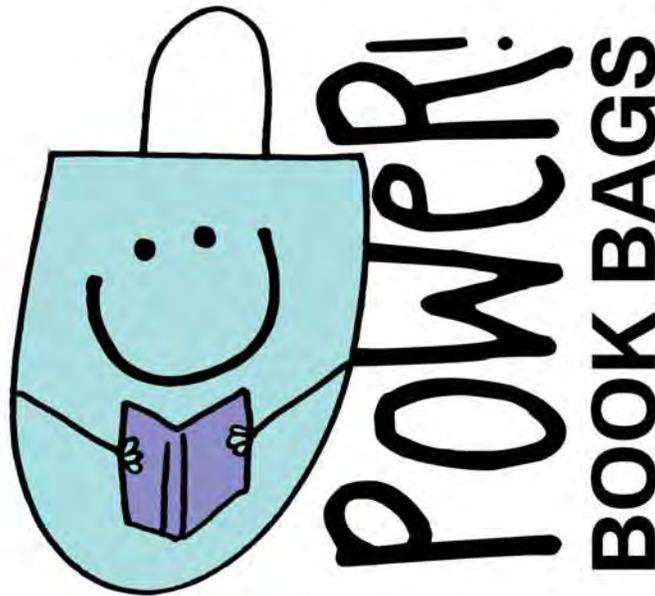


PoWeR! Book Bags Annual Report for 2020



www.powerbookbags.org

Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 533
Suttons Bay, MI 49682

Volunteer Site:
101 Dame St. # 5
Suttons Bay, MI. 49682

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Dear Friends of PoWeR! Book Bags,

Oh, what a year it has been! In last year's annual report, we described 2019 as a fairy tale. I'm not sure that you could say the same for 2020. However, you know the saying, "If a business or organization can make it through five years, it is sustainable?" I think we can add "If an organization can make it through the *pandemic*, it can make it through anything!" Based on that, it looks as though the future for PoWeR! Book Bags is very bright. Not only have we made it past our five-year mark, but we are also surviving the pandemic. It seems, at times, that we have never worked harder or struggled more to find quality materials: affordable books, composition books, finger puppets, and crayons. Costs are rising each month, and grants and donations are all harder to acquire. However, at this moment in time, it is all working BECAUSE of our committed volunteers, donors, and grantors AND our ever-growing network of partners throughout all of the communities that we serve. We not only are surviving, but also growing to meet the need for children to have at-home literacy experiences. Even though our name is an acronym to stand for Play, Write, And Read, this past year, we have shown an additional type of POWER as we moved through the events of 2020 into 2021.

Many might expect our numbers of books and bags distributed to be down due to the time of Stay-at-Home orders and inability to distribute in our 'normal' manner. Instead, we managed to bring even MORE books to children in 2020 than the past year! We delivered over 60,000 additional books and 9,000 literacy-filled book bags. As of today, we have gifted children nearly 190,000 books and more than 40,000 literacy book bags over the past five years since our inception in 2016.

When we were not able to hold our free book fairs in the form of School Vacation Book Give-Aways, we pivoted, inviting schools to partner with us in a variety of ways. Some schools that were not in person took our book and writing packages on their bus runs, and as they delivered lunches to students, the PoWeR! Literacy supplies were the added surprise. Others mailed our packages to their students. School volunteers also gave book and literacy packages away at drive up meal sites throughout the summer and fall. When students came back in person, we invited classroom teachers at the participating schools to host their own book and literacy book bag give-aways within their classrooms. Our volunteers packed boxes of a variety of books for selection for each classroom and delivered these to every school, with the extras as a gift to the classroom libraries. Principals, teachers and students have been so happy this past year to have received our materials, and we actually added four new school districts to our family.

At pantries and other sites of family assistance, the focus has been primarily on getting food out the door to feed the bellies, as it should be. Yet, there is still great need to feed the minds too – and our partners in the pantries all agreed. One of the baby pantries safely slid baby books into the diapers so that all of their families would have nice things to anticipate with each visit. To ensure our materials were ‘safe’, we began packaging our books in bags, writing the titles and ages on the front of the bags. At first, these surprise bags were not very appealing. However, the volunteers at our host sites (pantries and all) so strongly value the gift of literacy that they advertised the ‘books of the week’ and soon, the books and writing booklets were once again flying out of the sites.

Throughout the year, we made a conscious decision to expand our work with our youngest citizens. We’ve created new partnerships with health departments in seven counties to increase literacy experiences for families that receive WIC services (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children). Each time participating families visit for the WIC program, they now receive books, writing materials, and a once-a-year literacy book bag (sewn by volunteers with an extra touch of love) that holds supplies for writing and a finger puppet to stimulate language interactions. Tune in over the next year to see how this program blossoms as more and more in-person visits occur.

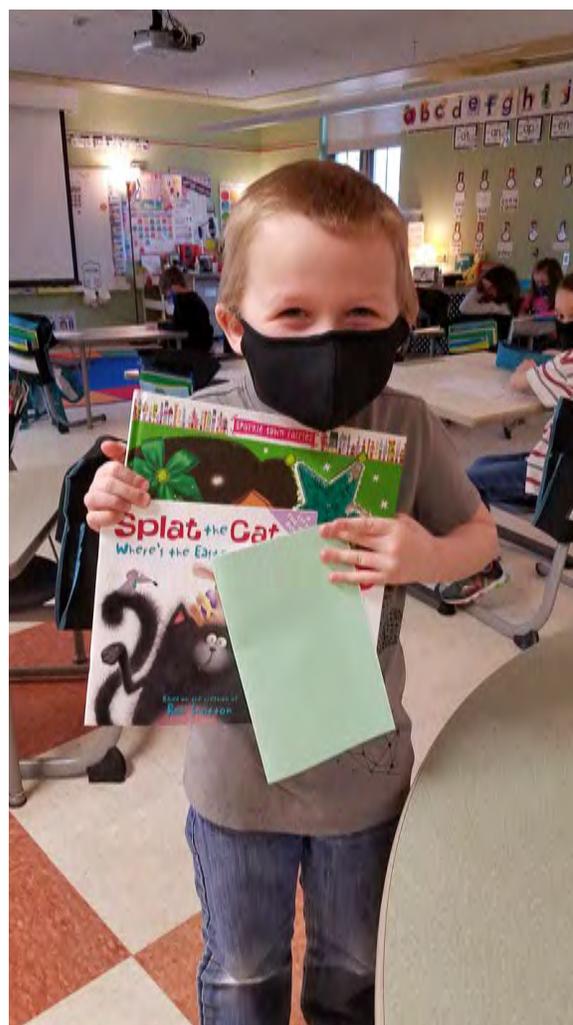
The Early Head Start Home Visiting program was another adaptation-addition. Each month, the home educator visits families in the program at their homes to work on child development goals. Starting in January, the home visiting education professional began taking a book, writing materials, and the literacy book bags into each home. Families are benefitting from both the free high-quality materials and the mentoring by the educator, who models ways to use the materials in a developmentally appropriate way with the children. When health restrictions prevent the in-home visit, the families have received their materials on their porches and the guidance has been provided with ZOOM. The continual adaptations to make everything work have been so heart-warming, and reports from these home visitors have been overwhelmingly positive.

Left without the possibility of summer programming, last year we expanded and created our partnerships with libraries in two counties. As libraries moved to weekly activity pick-ups, we provided our literacy materials (books, writing materials, puppets, and bags). One librarian shared that their family participation numbers increased because the kids were able to get the brand-new books to KEEP! Depending on funding, we plan to continue working with libraries to share summer literacy experiences.

We look forward to the new collaborations and partnerships that we are currently creating and exploring. It is an honor that our volunteers, donors, and grantors continue to believe in our mission. As a volunteer non-profit organization, “WE” is all of us. I hope that each of you can take a moment and celebrate the role that you have played to make this all possible. I urge you to stay involved and join in whenever and however that you are able. As our work expands to meet the demand, the adventures will continue! I do believe we are continuing to roll out our fairy tale.

Wishing you wellness, happiness, and peaceful days!

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





By the Numbers...

Books delivered to children

2020: 62,000+

2019: 60,000+

2018: 25,000+

2017: 17,000+

2016: 8,000

Total Number of books at the end of 2020 in the hands of children in Lower Northern Michigan:
170,000+

Literacy Book bags delivered in 2020: 10,000+

Nearly 40,000 delivered over the 5 years!

Approximately 14,000 children served in 2020

Present in 19 counties

Partnering with 91 sites to bring experiences with language, literacy, and human interaction

PoWeR! Book Bags empowers kids to Play, Write, and Read TODAY for a better TOMORROW!

The WHAT

Our Mission is to increase children's experiences with language, literacy, and human interactions so that they are better able to understand themselves, communicate with others, and connect with the world.

PoWeR! Book Bags delivers literacy materials to children of all ages in a very strategic manner, based on research findings.

The goal is to increase the number of books and writing materials in the homes of primarily underserved children.

Whenever possible, children are invited to select their own books of interest to keep, read, and reread! They are also offered a constant supply of writing materials.

We offer our materials in a variety of places, where children and families in need are already visiting, in a consistent, reliable manner.

Once a year or so, depending on the program, all Children receive/select a literacy book bag that includes:

- A finger puppet — for play and language interactions
- A pack of crayons — for creating and writing
- Create-your-own story writing booklets and/or —to stimulate storytelling and writing
- Composition book —to write, create, imagine, journal

Throughout the year, children select books to keep. Children will receive between 6-12 books each year, depending on the program.



The Where & How:

PoWeR! Book Bags Service Area



PROGRAMS

			
Community	Sites of Family Assistance	Schools (PreK-12)	Women Infants Children (WIC)
Libraries	Food Pantries		Health Department
Early Head Start	Baby Pantries		
Play Groups	Foster Care		
Women's Resource Centers			

We offer our materials through four separate programs in 19 counties, partnering with 91 sites.

The WHY...

There is an unfair burden to being economically disadvantaged. Beyond struggling to meet basic physical needs, the tools to stimulate children's verbal and cognitive abilities are less likely to be available in the home. Multiple studies have found a distinct difference in the amount of language that children experience in homes and the life-long impact that this can have.

One longitudinal research study found that children from “rich” language homes are likely to experience 45 million words prior to entering school. With this lavish base, these same children are likely to possess larger vocabularies and have experienced more time hearing books read. They are likely to learn new ideas more readily, continue to expand their vocabulary quickly, and progress well academically, socially and emotionally. Their counterparts, coming from “impoverished” language homes, will have experienced only 13 million words before school. Possessing less vocabulary, and having experienced very little book time, these children take more time to learn new concepts. Their progress academically is slower than the other group, often they fall behind. Their academics, as well as their self-esteem and social experiences often suffer too. This early language gap that has become known as the “30 Million Word Gap” continues to expand, with the “rich” getting richer – in positive experiences and progress and the “poor” becoming poorer, falling further and further behind, especially in language and literacy ability. Tragically, this division most often falls between economic divides.

In order to develop the literacy skills necessary to be successful in this modern century, children must be surrounded with rich language experiences early and throughout their development. Tools for these experiences rest in the centuries of the past: human interactions, play, writing, and reading. Books, writing materials, and finger puppets, all found within our PoWeR! Book Bags program, are the old-fashioned, low tech methods which will actually increase children's chances of fully participating in the techy world of today and their future. The more books and writing materials in a home, the more likely children and their families will engage in reading, writing, and talking. Even when the family members are not literate, a picture book is a marvelous tool to use to have a conversation or create a new story. Books are a springboard for sharing memories and creating new ones. The research is very clear that the more books in the home, the more likely children are to read them, especially if they are allowed to select their own to keep. And the more time a child spends reading, the better that child will do academically, not only in reading, but in other areas too!

Further, the more books and writing materials that are in the home, the more the culture of the family shifts into one that appreciates and promotes learning. Research indicates that the culture of a home can be changed with a steady diet of books and writing materials. When we invite children and families to bring print materials into the home, we are inviting a positive change and a cultural shift that will impact not only the children of today, but the children of the future. We can help children move beyond their current circumstances by feeding their minds.

Our Financials:

PoWeR! Book Bags
Statement of Activities
For the Year Ended December 31, 2020

	<u>2020</u>
<u>Support, Revenue, and Reclassifications:</u>	
<i>Support and Revenue</i>	
Grants	\$ 43,314
Individual Donors	42,325
Business Donors	3,429
Corporate Matches	7,652
Indirect Public Support	4,515
In-kind Donations	<u>5,342</u>
Total Support and Revenues	106,577
<i>Net Assets Released from Restriction</i>	(1,014)
Total Support, Revenue and Reclassifications	<u>105,563</u>
<u>Expenses:</u>	
Program Services	
Books	57,610
Bags	6,938
Puppets	3,450
Composition Books, Writing Booklets	5,297
Crayons	<u>3,750</u>
Total Program Services Expense	<u>77,045</u>
Supporting Services	
Facilities	7,351
Insurance	1,381
Legal and Professional	730
General Supplies	316
Fundraising	1,452
Other Miscellaneous	<u>448</u>
Total Supporting Services	<u>11,678</u>
Total Expenses	<u>88,723</u>

Our Boards:

Board of Directors

Kara Murphy Gregory, Ph.D., President
Karla Gerds, Secretary
Leslie McInerney, Treasurer
Nancy J. Pringle, CPA, Fundraising Chair
Connie Riopelle, MA, Volunteer Grant Coordinator
Penny Campo-Pierce, Volunteer Coordinator

Northern Advisory Board

**(Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Crawford, Emmet, Grand Traverse,
Kalkaska, Leelanau, Montmorency, Presque Isle, Otsego, Wexford Counties)**

Gloria Dean
Leigh Fairey
Margaret Lott
Kim O'Connor
Denise Palmer
Dawn Shields
Kelly Slater
Anneke Wegman Plamondon
Kathy Walter
Mary Woods

Southern Advisory Board

**(Manistee, Mason, Missaukee, Muskegon, Lake, Oceana, and Roscommon
Counties)**

Mykila Althouse
Susan Boes
Kathy Bromley
Jacquie Gerould
Aimee Lehmann
Lisa Makowicki
Ed Makowicki
Kerri Woods



Expressions of Gratitude to PoWeR! Book Bags

Quotes from students:

"The books look incredible!"

"They're awesome!"

"Thank you! I will read my book!"

"Thank you! I think everyone will really enjoy all of the books."

"

"Thank you! The books are so cool!"

Dear PoWeR! Book Bags,

Thank you so much for the book bags that we received in the fall. The day I handed them out, the students were so excited! They could barely make it to the bus without digging into the bag. For days the students talked about their books and told about what they wrote in their journals.

The book bags were a great opportunity for the students because we have many students who come from homes that are without books. This program allowed the books to stay in the homes of the children so they can continue to read and look at them. The best part of the program is that the books are theirs to keep.



It would be a wonderful opportunity for our school if we were to get another set of power book bags. The students would be able to add to their library at home and have even that many more books to use.

The journals were also a nice addition to the books because often times children who struggle to read will use a journal and begin drawing or writing about things they know and this will encourage them to begin to read more.

There is not a better gift that we could give our students than the gift of reading. I sincerely hope that we will be able to take part in this experience again.



Thank you for giving us the opportunity to take part in this extremely valuable program!

Sincerely,

Mrs. Beth Marshall
2nd grade Teacher
South Maple Elementary School
Gaylord Schools



*“Thank you for everything! Your work changes lives.”
Mother of a recipient of the School Book Give-Aways*



LUDINGTON AREA SCHOOLS

Foster Elementary School

Brian A. Dotson
Principal

Tim A. Hansen
Dean of Students

February 10, 2021

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing this letter of recommendation for the PoWer! Book Bags program in Ludington, Michigan. As principal of Foster Elementary School in Ludington, I get to see the impact that various programs have on students and families in Ludington. Some programs come and go without much impact, but PoWer! Book Bags is not one of those programs. We are in our third year of implementation of PoWer! Book Bags and the program continues to grow. They are giving out more bags of books, as well as reading and writing material, this year than they did in previous years. PoWer! Book Bags supports multiple best practices that are outlined in the Literacy Essentials set forth by General Education Leadership Network (GELN).

Volunteers from the program put together bags of books and writing supplies before extended breaks in the school calendar and deliver them to schools across Mason County. The bags are then dispersed to all students to take home. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, students would come to the gym to peruse the hundreds of books and choose one that piqued their interest the most. I asked students what they think of the PoWer! Book Bags program and they all agreed that PoWer! Book Bags is an important part of our school and community. "It's helpful that it comes with crayons in case you don't already have some." "It helps to have books so that I'm never without one and always have something to read." "I like the books because I didn't have any at home, now I do!" We know that putting books in the hands of children is one of the most powerful tools they have to be lifelong learners. PoWer! Book Bags is putting books into the hands of every child.

The Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) developed a task force to establish literacy essential practices to increase Michigan's capacity to improve children's literacy by identifying a small set of research-supported instructional practices. This document is our new standard for teaching literacy. The PoWer! Book Bags program supports many of the best practices outlined in the document. Practices like, abundant reading material and reading opportunities, collaboration with families in promoting literacy, and deliberate, research-informed efforts to foster literacy motivation and engagement within and across lessons. To reach three of the ten best practices is a great benefit to the children of Foster Elementary and Mason County.

In closing, PoWer! Book Bags has donated over 1,000 books to Foster Elementary over the past two years. To organize that amount of books, and distribute to local schools using only volunteers is a huge undertaking and I am thankful for the hours of work the volunteers put forth each year. I highly recommend PoWer! Book Bags as being recognized and honored by your agency so that they may continue to improve the lives of children through the power of literacy.

Respectfully,

Brian A. Dotson, Principal

505 East Foster Street † Ludington, Michigan 49431 † Phone: (231) 845-3820 † Fax: (231) 845-0146



Bread of Life food Pantry
P.O. Box 729
Baldwin, MI 49304

January 28, 2021

PoWer Book Bags
Kara Gregory
P.O. Box 533
Suttons Bay, MI 49682

Dear Kara,

What a wonderful program you offer! Thank you so much for continuing to bring books for us to share with the families that visit Bread of Life Food Pantry. Our children love to receive this awesome resource of books, doodle pads and crayons. We are glad that you have found a way to keep supplying books, even with Covid. Thank you to your team who bring books for us to share.

Thank you again, for helping to improve reading skills in our community. It is such a blessing and an honor to participate in your generous program.

Gratefully,

Lynne Mills
Director – Bread of Life pantry
Baldwin, MI





Johannesburg-Lewiston Area Schools

10854 M-32 • JOHANNESBURG, MI 49751 • 989-732-1773 • FAX: 989-732-6556

January 29, 2021

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

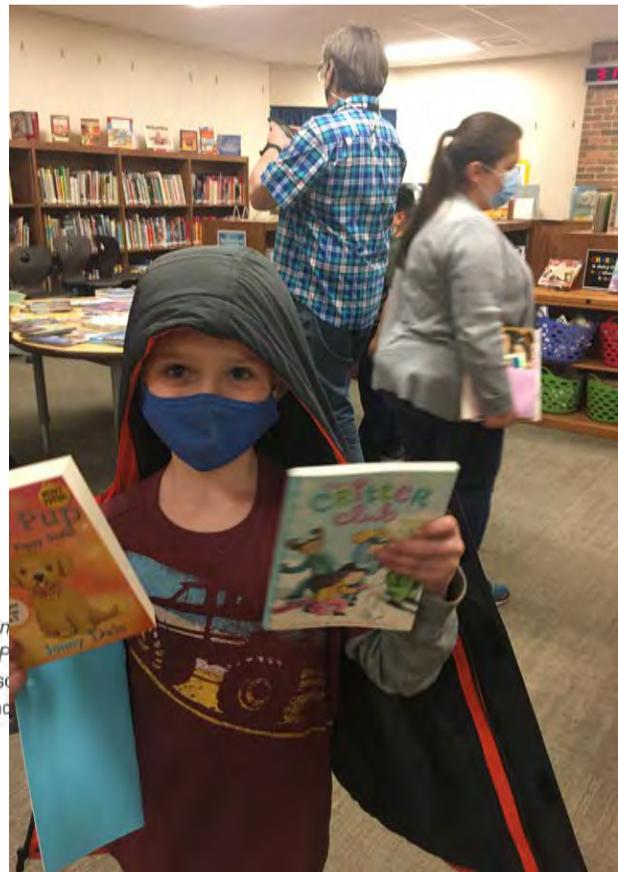
Dear Kara:

I wanted to reach out and thank you for the amazing donations of books bags and high quality books for all 355 students in our PreK - 8th grade students. One of our school focus areas is to provide high quality, diverse reading materials to our students. The PoWeR! Book Bags allowed us to give students choice in the 6 books they are reading as well as diverse titles. Students and families were appreciative and excited about these gifts that your initiative has provided them.

Thank you for bringing this amazing program to the Johannesburg-Lewiston Area Schools and others across our community. If there are ways that we can support this program please reach out as we definitely experienced the value and positive impacts that it has brought to our community. We look forward to partnering with you moving forward.

With Appreciation,

Nancy Odren, Principal
Johannesburg Elementary Middle School



Kathleen Xenakis-Makowski, *Superintendent*
Curtis Chrencik, *High School Principal* • Nancy Odren, *Johannesburg P*
Michael Vogt • Ursula Owens • Scott Mathews
Linc Campbell • Frank Claeys • Nanc

Expressions of Gratitude FROM PoWeR! Book Bags

To our volunteers: We just couldn't do this without you. We are filled with gratitude for the countless hours you spent hauling, sorting, stamping, stapling, tying, and packing materials to share with children!

To our sewing volunteers: You are creating the heart of this project that lets children and families know that they are valued, capable, and deserving of the gift of literacy. These bags are true treasures, valued by all! Thank you.

To our donors: Without your financial support, we would not be able to serve so many children with the high quality language and literacy supplies that we distribute. You are helping us to change a lot of lives and we are grateful.

To our grantors: Thank you for believing in our work and so graciously allowing us to continue our mission with your support!

WE are collectively the POWER in PoWeR! Book Bags. We are making a positive impact on the world and in the lives of thousands of children each year. Thanks for joining in our adventure. Our fairy tale continues. We are so very hopeful for our next chapter together!

