

April 2022 Newsletter

Together We Read Community Engagement Grants

Together We Read has been a wonderful partnership between BELRAG and Save the Children (US). Our common goal to promote the importance of quality early childhood literacy programs resulted in Save the Children generously supporting grants of up to \$10,000 for US based Rotary Clubs working with community partners to support innovative, community based programs to increase access to quality books, improve awareness of the importance of early childhood programs, build capacity within the community to provide programs for early learning and healthy development, or build community partnerships to leverage resources or strengthen support for young learners and their family's involvement.

It is an honor to announce the recipients of these early literacy community engagement grants:

Carroll County Rotary (Arkansas) This collaboration among three Rotary Clubs will enhance the Dolly Parton Imagination Library. A robust media campaign promotes the importance of early literacy and parent involvement in reading with their young children. Rotarians partnered with the local meat packing plants to reach Burmese families in the community and offers the program through multiple languages to include more families.

Bad Axe Rotary (Michigan) Rotarians increased enrollment of more children in the Dolly Parton Imagination Library program. To enhance the experience of families involved, partnerships are established with local libraries to host family events to demonstrate activities to engage young children with books. A community gala is planned to increase awareness of early literacy programs (and raise funds for next year's program)

Cleveland Rotary (Texas) Rotarians are partnering with local organizations to host "Books and Breakfast" and "Lunch and Literacy" workshops for parents and children. The goal is to promote reading every day, using the strategies of *1000 Books Before Kindergarten*. In addition, small libraries will be established in local neighborhoods where parents and families can access books on a regular basis.

DeRidder Rotary (Louisiana) Through a partnership with their local library, Rotarians jumpstarted *1000 Books Before Kindergarten* to increase access to books, providing literacy building resources and guidance on effective use of these resources. By working with a wide variety of community partners (day care providers, family physicians, etc) and implementing a strong media campaign, Rotarians intend to increase use of local library programs by families with young children. Community events, such as the recent Spring Storytime Showcase, are events to engage more families.

District 6000 Literacy Promotion Team (Iowa) The district literacy team hosted a Rotary Reading Summit for all Rotary Clubs to create greater awareness of early learning gaps, strategies to support development of language, literacy and brain development, and opportunities for creating a literacy rich environment in each community. Community Partners - including university programs - are invited to participate as partners. Small grants are offered by the district for clubs implementing new early learning literacy projects.



Hartford Rotary (Wisconsin) This project involves Rotarians with local pediatricians and health care facilities to provide books to families during well-child visits. A series of bookmarks, emphasizing developmental stages of young children was developed by Rotarians in coordination with local health and education partners. The bookmarks will be provided explaining the cognitive and social benefits of reading to young children and suggestions for family activities to promote reading. Next steps are for Rotarians to secure ongoing funding through healthcare partners to sustain this program.



Manhattan Rotary Club (Kansas) The Rotary Young Readers Program will expand the Dolly Parton Imagination Library to young readers programs in the 10 local public libraries. Working with a local used book store gift certificates will enable families greater access book sat minimal or no cost. To overcome challenges of remote communities, Little Free Libraries are being created and stocked in local neighborhoods.

Whitesburg Rotary (Kentucky) To improve the impact of the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, Rotarians are partnering with the business community to promote awareness of the importance of early reading. They plan to increase the program, reaching more families. They will work with the local schools to develop at-home activities and to assess the impact of this early reading program.

Tulelake Rotary (California) Tulelake Rotarians partner with local children’s clinics to provide books for children, birth to age 5, when they visit for well child check ups. The program is offered in collaboration with Reach out and Read and All About Books, which can access Scholastic books at a discounted rate. Books are offered in both English and Spanish to meet the needs of more families in the community. In addition to this program, Rotarians will create and stock Little Free Libraries throughout the community. A strong media campaign to promote these programs is planned

Maysville Rotary (North Carolina) Maysville Rotarians partner with their local primary schools to help rebuild libraries that were destroyed in Hurricane Florence. They work with local educators to create take home kits to help increase interaction between school and home. This project helps increase the availability of books in the home for young children, supporting parents’ efforts to support their child’s reading achievement and build positive home-school relationships.

Texarkana Oaklawn Rotary (Texas) This project brings together Rotary, community-based adult education, and the local schools. Monthly interactive programs are offered throughout the school year to provide a social time for families, demonstrating activities on literacy development. Families will leave each time with a menu of activities they can do at home with their children.

Meet Us In Houston!

Meet us at the House of Friendship: Booth # 807



Visit us to learn more about BELRAG and successful BEL projects. If your club has a BEL project you would like to promote, a schedule will be developed and posted. If you share your project, we’d ask you to sign up for another shift at the booth to promote literacy and BELRAG

Break out Session: How Technology Can Bridge COVID Learning Gaps

Tuesday, 07-Jun-2022, 3:30 - 4:30:00 PM.

George R. Brown Convention Center (GRB), Room 352 DEF.

With extended school closings from COVID, the need is critical for Rotarians to actively engage in building capacity of communities to support education. This session will explore how technology can support learning under challenging circumstances and a variety of settings, to make up for lost time, and to be proactive to minimize impact of future disruptions. A panel of experts will explore best practice using technology in BEL projects
 Panelists include: Bruky Tigabu (Whiz Kids Workshop, Ethiopia) Eneclsey Escobar King (Digital Interactive Classrooms, Panamá), Heather Lennie (Free Reading Program, Canada), Rajendra Rai (e-Patachale e-learning centers, India)

BELRAG Social

Houston Public Library

Monday, June 6 (late afternoon, specifics to follow)

Join us at the historic Barbara Bush Literacy Plaza at the Houston Public Library (one mile from the convention center) for great conversation, light refreshments and an opportunity to get to know Rotarians involved in effective local and international literacy and education projects. We are excited to welcome members of the Houston Metro Research Center who will give a short presentation on Houston’s Literacy Crisis and Blueprint for Community Action.

How is your club involved in supporting literacy and education projects? Share your stories through the BELRAG newsletter. Articles should be 500 words and include a photo or two. Send to: Carolyn Johnson at cfj2@mac.com

Grant opportunity to Promote Summer Reading Twenty-five Block Grants of \$2000 available to US Rotary Clubs

Without daily reading practice, children can lose up to three months of literacy skills over the summer. In the aftermath of school closings and decreased access to summer learning programs, children are at a higher risk of losing greater reading skills than ever before. However, reading at least 20 minutes a day can significantly boost vocabulary and prevent learning loss. To keep children in rural America learning this summer, Save the Children and BELRAG are hosting a 100 Days of Reading Challenge.

What is the 100 Days of Reading Challenge? Rotary Clubs can apply for a \$2000 grant to support programs to challenge children and families to read at least 20 minutes every day from June 1 to September 8. Save the Children is providing partners with resources, tools, and funding to support a local reading challenge in their community as a fun way to encourage reading all summer long.

Who is this for? Children and youth through grade 12; children can read on their own, to someone, with someone, or be read to. Rotary Clubs may use this link to apply for funds to support a local summer reading challenge: [Save the Children US Programs Grants Management System](#).

- **Applications are due April 30th.** Applicants may refer to the attached *Summer Reading Challenge Grant Application* to preview the information they will be required to include in their application. *These should not be completed offline/in PDF, they are simply included for reference only.*
- Applicants may refer to the attached *100 DOR Challenge one-pager* for information on the summer reading challenge and to access the recording of an informational webinar cohosted by Rotary and Save the Children.
- We are not able to amend/extend the grant period. Partners must spend all funds by September 8.
- Partners will submit data monthly (no final report). Data will be due July 5, August 5, and September 15.
(See www.BELRAG.org for more information and a short Q&A video)

BELRAG Board of Directors: Call for Nominations

Would you like to get more involved with BELRAG by serving in a leadership role? We are seeking new members to serve on the BELRAG Board of Directors. Interested candidates should send a brief bio outlining your professional background, involvement with Rotary literacy projects. Include a brief statement of why you are interested in serving on the BELRAG board. Send information to Nancy Leonhardt, Vice-chair of BELRAG wlrrotary@gmail.com **Nominations must be received by 15 May 2022**

BELRAG Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting is an opportunity for BELRAG members to learn more about our organization and how you can get involved. We will update information about our work over the past Rotary year and share goals for 2022-23. All are welcome and encouraged to participate. The Annual General Meeting will be held at twice to accommodate more participants from all time zones and enable greater involvement. *Registration is required*

Tuesday, June 28, 8:00 PM (Eastern Daylight Time) [Register here](#)

Wednesday, June 29, 8:00 AM (Eastern Daylight Time) [Register here](#)

Details and agenda will be shared closer to the meeting dates

Rotary Day With UNICEF: Empowering Girls

On March 24 and 25 Rotary and UNICEF held an event in New York City focusing on creating a safe and resilient world for girls. BELRAG Chair, Carolyn Johnson, participated in this event by facilitating the education component of the summit. This discussion focused on the challenges for girls resulting from school closures during COVID. Lauren Rumble, UNICEF Associate Director, Gender Equality discussed the inequities in access to education for girls, how COVID has exacerbated the situation and UNICEF's response to create more equitable learning access. Dr Helen Crompton, Associate Professor, Old Dominion University, shared opportunities and challenges with digital learning and discussed how we can reduce those learning losses for girls during emergencies. [Watch a recording of the full event](#)



We are Back-to-School!

Over 300 schools have been transformed since April 2021 with e-Patashale Digital classrooms as part of the on-going e-Shala program, in partnership with Rotary Bangalore Junction & Menda Foundation.



We would like to thank Rtn Velu Kumar, from Rotary Bangalore Junction for co-ordinating on the timely delivery of resources & Mr. Vinoden, from Menda Foundation for proactively conducting the timely inspections that has overall helped to achieve quick implementations



Doddaballapura

Sira

Maddur

1,500+
Teachers trained

Tumkur

Ramanagara

Pavagada



12,000+
Students using e-Patashale

Mulbagl

Kunigal

Magadi



700+
Classrooms transformed

300+
Schools

Kolar

Teachers at the Heart of Learning

Education is associated with better life outcomes especially for the poor and the most vulnerable. The unique power of education to act as a catalyst for wider development goals can be fully realized, only if it is equitable. Children from marginalized families experienced more learning losses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis has starkly highlighted the inequalities in digital access and taught that "business as usual" will not work for the delivery of education to all children. There is a need to re-imagine education, to provide an equitable and engaging learning experience for all children. The vision and mission of CLT India have been just that, to provide access to quality education for all. More than 4500 rural government schools and 2.4 million children have benefited from our digital interventions. Our high-quality learning apps Jigi, the teacher app, and Jigi-Jigi, the student app were offered free to students and teachers during COVID.

We at CLT India believe that teachers are still central to learning in spite of digital innovations. Evidence is growing that bypassing Teachers does not lead to student learning improvement. That's why our e-patashale program is a classroom-centric one, and implemented by engaging with and training teachers. After all education at its heart is more about human connections and relationships.

Nixon Joseph
CEO, CLT India

Digital Literacy Training Program

in partnership with Rotary Bangalore West

Teacher up-skilling training conducted at the CLT campus for 30 faculty members from various Government Schools across Bengaluru. The workshop is a certified course on Basics of Computer education, which will further be used by the participants to train their students. Rn. Naveen Kolavara has been CLT's long-running supporter who ensured the smooth execution of the workshop.



Rotarians Support Afghan Refugees Through Literacy

Rotarians in the District of Columbia, Northern Virginia and Maryland are partnering with to provide mini-libraries of children's books (کتابتون or کتابخانه) in Dari, Pashto (the official languages spoken in Afghanistan) and English to Afghan families who have emigrated to the United States.

For the Dari and Pashto language titles, we've pulled these from the **100's of free and digital early grade titles** on the mEducation Alliance's [Afghan Kids Support Hub](#) site.



Through our partnership with HP and [NABU](#), a number of these digital titles have been converted to print. **Starting mid-April 2022, 6,600 of these children's books** will be disseminated through a network of institutional partners, with half of the titles sent to the District of Columbia, Maryland, and No Virginia area and the other half to various locations in California.

For the English language titles, we will purchase **new** pre-primary/primary leveled books selected by an expert panel of individuals and organizations with deep familiarity with children's literacy. Along with the print titles in the mini-library collections, we will also disseminate low-cost **educational games** (e.g., dice and card deck-based, chess sets and other tabletop games). The goal is to develop and distribute 2,000 mini-libraries, each expected to include:

- 4 volumes of 12 children's stories in either Dari or Pashto
- English language children's books
- Educational games (e.g, card decks, dice games, chessboard, other tabletop) with accompanying beginning instructions in Dari or Pashto
- **Kid-friendly tablets with 100s of digital books and other multi-media educational materials in Dari, Pashto, and English for use by the entire family**
- Connections to a variety of literacy and math-serving organizations, including linkages with local libraries
- Opportunities for Afghan youth and kids to participate in educational training events (e.g., math game youth ambassadors) in the DMV area

Rotarians can support getting more Dari and Pashto digital titles into mini-library print collections and expand our [Afghan Kids Support Hub](#) efforts.

Learn more about this campaign and donate by visiting the web page linked below or contact us at AKSH@meducationalliance.org for more information!

Anthony Bloome, RC Washington Global
Founder/Executive Director
Mobiles for Education Alliance

BELRAG seeks Rotarians and Rotaractors to become involved to help expand our outreach and impact.

Opportunities to become involved include:

- **Newsletter:** identify great Rotary stories of impactful projects - local or international. An editor is needed to oversee the design and layout of the newsletter
- **Website:** oversee updating our website so that it remains current. No tech expertise is needed (we have a great webmaster to post the information) - someone to regularly review the site, hare new information to be posted and move dated information.
- **Social media:** help keep develop and support BELRAG social media - share our good work!
- **Technical expertise:** join a topic-focused teams to provide technical advice to Rotary BEL projects and to share stories of program best practices. Teams are needed to collaborate on topics such as early literacy/education, technology to support learning, students with disabilities, adult literacy, mentoring underperforming or out of school youth, girls education, library support or development, professional development for teachers.

To get involved, contact Carolyn Johnson cj2@icloud.com

Rotary Overseas Recycled Playgrounds

In Australia, we take a lot of things for granted – including the school and council playgrounds that are beloved by generations of kids and parents across the country. But in countries like Sri Lanka, Timor L’Este, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Nepal and Egypt, many children grow up without experiencing the joy of flying high on a swing, skimming down a slide on a warm summer day, hanging from monkey bars, or simply hanging out with other kids in a playground tower.

In Australia, playgrounds can have a life as short as 4 years or as long as 20 years, before they need to be upgraded or replaced. By Australian standards, it is deemed uneconomical or unsafe to re-install them in another park or school, so landfill or potentially recycling some components used to be the only option. Enter **RORP!**

RORP was established 4 years ago by PP Peter Cribb from the Rotary Club of Flemington Kensington (RC FK) in D9800. The original **RORP** covered all 5 Victorian Districts. Over time, D9790 and D9820 formed their own **RORP** teams, with RC FK looking after the remaining districts under the banner of **RORP Central**. Since RORPs’ inception some 120 playgrounds which would otherwise have gone to landfill have been rescued by Rotarians. Not only have all these playgrounds not gone to landfill, they have been “harvested” at the time the contractor has commenced demolition of the playground. Each separate piece of the playground is coded with a part number and color, and then the pieces are stored pending dispatch to a developing nation where they will bring untold joy and excitement to new generations of children.



Early this year, Peter was looking to pass on the **RORP Central** baton to another club which could make an ongoing commitment to source, harvest, store, and dispatch playgrounds. Rtn Bob Allardice and the Rotary Club of Nunawading were excited to take up the challenge, and since then have harvested another 25 playgrounds. They range in size and condition – but all of them are inspected to ensure that they can be safely shipped in a container and re-installed overseas.

Once a playground has been pulled apart, all the components are transported by ute or truck (whichever can be sourced from a friendly Rotarian for free) to a storage site. RC Nunawading has been given an extraordinary amount of support by John Arena, from Arena Gardens in Kilsyth South, who has kindly been storing 19 of the playgrounds harvested this year, and which the pandemic to date has prevented from being shipped. Donations In Kind in West Footscray are also an invaluable partner, helping with storage, shipping, and interminable paperwork.

Once a playground has been shipped in a container to its destination, **RORP’s** local contact – most often a Rotary Club – will organize for the playgrounds to be sent to communities previously identified as keen to receive a playground, and oversee its installation. The installation is akin to the largest jigsaw you have ever seen – moulded parts like swings and slides, with dozens of steel poles and rails, bolts, and more bolts.

A **RORP** partnership operates between clubs in Districts 9810, 9800 and 9790, and works happily with the D9780 and D9820 **RORP** chapters. No challenge (rusty bolts which refuse to loosen, poles which refuse to relinquish their concrete foundations) is too great for these very determined Rotarians in their quest to make sure that every possible playground is saved and re-purposed for kids who have never even seen a swing or a slide, let alone enjoyed playing on one.