

Bring Me A Book

A local nonprofit ignites a passion for reading.

There are many ways to bring about positive change in a community. Mountain View's Bring Me A Book (BMAB) foundation, however, has chosen one very simple tool for the task: books. By bringing libraries to schools that have none, and by putting children's literature in the hands of parents who have never read to their kids, the foundation hopes their tool of choice will establish the change they know it has the power to create. "One of the best things about what we do," says BMAB's President Dianne Calvi, "is that we're really working to convey a message—that reading can make a difference."

For a world in which nearly 80 percent of low-income preschool and kindergarten classrooms lack age-appropriate books, and one in three children enter school without pre-literacy skills, this message is an important one indeed. And reading does, in fact, make a difference. Students who begin reading early in life are more likely to stay in school and continue their education. "If you really look at the statistics, it's clear that getting books to children is such a simple solution to a nationwide problem," explains Founder Judy Kochs. "The most important activity parents can do is read aloud to their children."

But not all parents do. Kochs was motivated to create BMAB in 1997 after she noticed that many of her employees at RSP Manufacturing, her company at the time, did not have access to books they could read to their young children. "I thought, if I'm able to go home and read to my kids, my employees should be able to as well," she recalls.

In response to her observation, Kochs started the Book Bag Library program, in which parents can check out a bag of children's books from their workplace each day to bring home to their families. Then, in 2004, she was inspired to create the foundation's First Teachers program, which works to instruct and inspire parents and teachers to read aloud to kids. "It's simple," adds Calvi. "If parents read aloud to their children, they will grow to be successful readers. But a lot of parents don't have that knowledge. If we can get parents to read to their kids, those children will someday read to their kids, and the cycle of reading will continue. It's a never-ending story."

Along with teaching schools and families about the importance of reading, Calvi and Kochs see value in providing only the best reading material to those they donate their Bookcase Libraries or Book Bag programs to. The books they select for each are always brand new. "If we're trying to convey that reading is important, we can't be providing bad books—we want to give children the best," says Calvi. And BMAB has even started giving overseas. Through partnerships with other organizations, they have helped set up programs in Hong Kong, China, India, Guatemala, Mexico, the Philippines, Kenya, and Malawi.

By providing children with the books they all deserve to have, BMAB is undoubtedly helping build stronger families around the world, but also providing children with literary inspiration that can last forever. "The most important thing about a good book," says Kochs, "is that it stirs the imagination of a child, that it takes them out of one world and into another." With the foundation's hard work and community support, there's hope that many children will similarly be taken from one world to another—from a world where books are few and far between, to one that is filled wall-to-wall with colorful stories waiting to be read. ■



Local reading specialist Regina Day uses books from a Bring Me A Book Bookcase Library to teach reading skills to kindergartners.

Ways You Can Help

- Purchase and donate a Bookcase Library in someone's honor. BMAB's library gifts include 30 – 40 books and are built to include a plaque that acknowledges in whose name they have been donated.
- Attend BMAB's annual "Ante Up" fundraiser event on May 2 at SPUR Projects art gallery in Portola Valley, 888 Portola Road. All proceeds go directly to buying books for children.

www.bringmeabook.org

—LINDSAY SCHAUER