

WHAT IS THE LITERACY FOR LIFE INITIATIVE? WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The Beloit Literacy for Life Initiative had its humble start in the Fall of 2016. Spearheaded by the Stateline Community Foundation in collaboration with hundreds of community business and civic leaders, healthcare providers, educators, non-profits, churches, and literacy advocates who shared the belief and a passion for the importance of early childhood education.

This passion is based on research that supports the importance of the first five years of a child's life when 90% of brain development occurs. During this time of rapid brain development children acquire the ability to think, speak, learn, and reason. While in Beloit giving a presentation, Dr. Dipesh Navsaria, a nationally recognized expert and proponent for the importance of early childhood literacy made the compelling case for why this is so important for every child to be prepared for success in personal, educational and career pursuits. Young children's ability to use language and understand the meaning of spoken and written words is connected to later achievement in reading, writing, and spelling.

"If children miss the opportunity to acquire foundational language and literacy skills, they are set-up for immediate struggles with literacy as soon as they arrive at school," said Tara Tinder, Executive Director of the Stateline Community Foundation and Co-Chair of the BLFLI. "BLFLI wants and is committed to ensuring all children in our community no matter what school they attend start Kindergarten with literacy skills that will put them on a course of success throughout their lives.

Research has demonstrated repeatedly that children who enter Kindergarten with poor literacy skills start school behind their peers and tend to stay behind throughout their schooling. This often leads to poor academic achievement, high drop-out rates, and a lifetime of struggle. "We can change that outcome. Our community can change the outcome for all of our children," shared Bill Flanagan, Co-Chair of BLFLI. "High-quality early childhood literacy exposure and learning can result in improved health, education, teen risk behaviors, income and employment for our entire community.

From its inception BLFLI is for ALL children from all schools and has no political affiliations or allegiance to any specific group locally or nationally. Constant efforts to recruit diverse representation to our monthly Partners and Pillars meetings is an ongoing priority for the BLFLI. We are committed to reaching families and children in every neighborhood. Our primary tenant is to develop relationships with families built on trust, respect, honesty, and a sensitivity to the fact that many families are struggling with significant difficult burdens due to COVID and other societal factors.

HISTORY



From its beginning, the BLFLI has had significant impact on the Beloit community, and has worked to create an organization that will continue to champion the importance of early childhood literacy. For example:

1. The initiative would be organic, built from the ground up. Community partners who recognized the importance of early childhood literacy were encouraged to implement an approach that best met their mission, strengths, talents and needs. Information, materials, and data was shared by Rachele Elliott, Director of Early Childhood Literacy for the SDB at monthly meetings where partners could evaluate what might work best form their individual organizations.

2. BLFLI worked to create a nucleus of key organizations/Pillars whose presence signaled a critical belief in the importance of early childhood education in our community. These Pillars are the Stateline Community Foundation, School District of Beloit, The City of Beloit including, Fire, Police, City Hall, and the Beloit Public Library. Beloit Health System, Community Health Clinic, Non-profit and Faith Based organizations and Corporate and Business partners.

3. An organizational mechanism was needed to ensure the perpetuity of the BLFLI. A guiding group was formed to make plans, prepare for the future, keep the initiative cohesive and coordinate marketing efforts to ensure success. Thus, the "Rudder" group was organized to accomplish these tasks. This group meets monthly to discuss strategies and options to ensure the BLFLI remains relevant and moving forward. There are no officers and decisions are made by consensus.

MILESTONES

Significant milestones are occurring thanks to our Pillars which include the following:

- A City proclamation in support of the BLFLI. A bookcase placed in City Hall.
- "Little Kids Libraries" placed in the Fire stations along with fireman and policemen reading to kids, particularly at Culvers with Cone with a Cop and Fries with a Firefighter.
- The support of Beloit Health System and the Community Health Clinic with the adoption of the Reach out and Read program.
- Over 8000 books have been distributed by the SCF to various non-profits and programs.
- This summer we will see a "Book Mobile" brought to our community by a former BMH's student, Gloria Heiss now a student at UW Madison. Gloria has organized the use of a van from a collaboration with SDB along with procuring two grants to fund this program. Watch for the van this summer!
- 4. The BLFLI has had the benefit of bringing leading experts to Beloit to share their research which has provided substantial and definitive evidence that early childhood literacy and brain development significantly increases a child's chances for success in life. It is proven that this early investment in our children results in a 7-13% annual return per child through improved outcomes. This amounts to a \$7.00 return on investment for every dollar spent.

The BLFLI is committed to transparent use of data and evidence to track progress. Key statistics to be used in evaluating progress include the 4K and 3rd grade reading scores, PALS evaluation of kindergarten readiness, survey information, family feedback, school's data on student progress which measures student readiness for learning and reading.

Currently we are preparing for the launch of 5 strategically placed billboards in English and Spanish that will be emphasizing the tag line, Build a brain, Build a Life, Build a Community!

The BLFLI will be providing the Beloit Health System Family Care Center and the Beloit Community Health Clinic and other non-profits serving young families a gift called "Brain Bags."

These bags will be given to new parents and will contain information about their babies' brain development, a resource guide, babies first toy and first book. These bags are being provided by the BLFLI in conjunction with the Women's Fund of the Stateline Community Foundation and collaboration with PlayMonster, and Lands' End.

As we continue to look forward, BLFLI will continue to partner with organizations that understand the impact and importance of early literacy. "When passion meets possibilities, anything is achievable, especially when it comes to early childhood literacy" said Tinder. "We owe it to our children to work collectively and as hard as we can for each child from birth through school-age. Every child deserves to start school ready to learn and with a strong foundation in literacy and language."

Monthly meetings are hosted virtually at this time for all BLFLI. If you are interested in becoming a partner, please reach out to the Stateline Community Foundation for more information.



BLFLI Partners

K-12 Community Schools
Beloit Cares
Beloit College
Beloit Daily News
Beloit Even Start*
Beloit Historical Society
Beloit Parks and Recreation
Beloit's Planning and Building Services
Beloit Public Library
Blackhawk Technical Institute
Beloit NAACP
CareerTek
Central Christian Church
Col. Robert Morse Foundation
Community Action
Culvers
Family Services of Southern Wisconsin and Northern Illinois
Head Start*
Even Start*

Hendricks Family Foundation
Latino Services Providers Coalition
Nutrition and Health Associates, WIC
Reach Out and Read Wisconsin
Rock County Sheriff
Roscoe United Methodist Church
Rotary Club of Beloit (Adopt a Park Program)
RSVP-Retired Senior Volunteer Program
South Beloit Public Library
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Stateline Community Foundation, Inc.
Stateline Literacy Council
United Way-Imagination Library
Visit Beloit
Welty Environmental Center
Wisconsin Literacy, Inc.
Women's Fund of the Stateline Community Foundation
*Pre-K Early Literacy Programs



For more information, contact Stateline Community Foundation

608-362-4228 | statelinecf.org