



Volunteers at MacArthur Park Elementary. Photo by Ariel King.

Reading to Kids — a Los Angeles Volunteer Institution

Inspiring a Love of Reading in Children for Nearly 20 Years

BY JACKIE RIVERA

A story is important to us in so many ways: it builds memories, inspires us to explore, dares us to learn, and beckons us to imagine and create. In our case, a story also encourages us to help others and make a difference in the community.

Reading to Kids is dedicated to this kind of inspiration, holding monthly reading clubs for children grades K–5 in underserved communities.

Every second Saturday of the month, 400–500 volunteers visit eight elementary schools partnered with Reading to Kids throughout the Pico-Union and Westlake neighborhoods for these reading clubs. The partner schools are part of the Los Angeles Unified School District and are all designated as Title I, located in economically distressed areas just west of downtown.

At the Saturday Reading Clubs, volunteers are paired with small groups of students, where they read aloud a teacher-selected book and

lead arts and crafts activities with the children. The read-aloud books are then donated to the schools' libraries where they can be enjoyed for generations of students to come. Since the organization's launch in 1999, Reading to Kids has been committed to sharing as many stories as possible, and no book has been read aloud twice. Next May, Reading to Kids will be celebrating its 20th anniversary with over 166,000 books donated to children, 47,000 to parents and teachers, and more than 30,300 hardcover read-aloud books to partner school libraries.

While the students are in the reading clubs, parents are invited to a workshop held by the school staff. These parent workshops cover a variety of topics: family health and well-being, emergency preparedness, where to find free family resources and activities throughout the city, and how to encourage reading and learning at home. At the end of the reading clubs, all students and parents are given a book which can become a part of their own library at home.

Reading to Kids is a volunteer-driven organization with a small staff of three and a large base of committed volunteers made up of college students, career professionals, and retired adults. Many volunteers like to “grow up” with their students — reading to kindergartners at first and moving to a higher grade after each year. Some students who attended the reading clubs as young children have since become volunteers as adults.

Everyone has a story — and if you ask anyone who has been involved with Reading to Kids, not only will they share a story with you, they will want to know your story, too.

Reading clubs are held every second Saturday of the month, year-round, rain or shine, and you only commit to one reading club at a time. To see how you can help make a difference, please visit www.readingtokids.org.

Jackie Rivera is a long-time volunteer with Reading to Kids, whose office is on Sawtelle.



Volunteer Andy at Leo Politi Elementary. Photo by Robert Voets. Volunteers and Board member Ali Oktay at Magnolia Elementary. Photo by Reading to Kids.



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