

Aaah,



School's out, pool's open, vacation's coming, books galore. Summer seems the realization of every child's dream.

But in the summer of 2009, a second grader in Athens shared a different version of the summer story. That little girl told her teacher that she dreaded summer because she did not have any books at home. She would not be able to read again until school started in the fall. It was true of other students in the class as well.

Melaney Smith heard that story, and it stuck with her.

"Why doesn't somebody do something about this?" she thought.

And then:

"I am someone. I can do something."

Her inspiration was a **BOLD** idea:

Get books to those children who did not have access to books over the summer, with help from her friends. Like many of the best things in our world, Books for Keeps began with a passionate and committed advocate who saw a way to make that world a better place. It is also a manifestation of this truth: A single person with a bold idea is enough to begin but it takes the entire community to make real, lasting change.

Books for Keeps has since evolved

into an organization that is research-based in how it seeks to improve literacy – for both its individual and societal impact – through intentional and thoughtful programming. Students are allowed to select the books they take home for the summer, and Books for Keeps maintains a database of children's preferences, adjusting the books offered according to that feedback.

Literacy mentors work closely with individual elementary school students, applying science-based techniques to encourage and support their improvement in reading.

A Bookmobile now provides more on-site access to books at festivals, fairs, and community events.

A little girl who wanted books to read and a community that wanted to do something to help. That intersection lives on in the Books for Keeps mission:

To inspire joyful experiences around literacy that can forever be associated with learning.

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Justin Bray, Executive Director

Books are the beginning, not the end, of what we do at Books for Keeps.

We see books as a bridge. They're a tool to inspire joyful experiences around literacy that children can forever associate with learning. It's a series of links: reading to learning to literacy to lifelong skills. It isn't about making every kid into a book

lover; that's not realistic. But we do want to inspire them all to become lifelong learners by applying literacy research to the work we do.

We first have to build relationships with our youngest citizens. Listen to their wants, needs, dreams and desires. Figure out what makes them tick and then support them on their path in a way that is personally meaningful to them. Help them see what waits ahead for them by using books as windows to allow young readers a view of the endless possibilities the world can offer them.

We see book access as supporting children's autonomy to choose what, when, and how they will read.

We also recognized along the way that what our students need is for their community to show up for them and then keep showing up for them over and over again. At Books for Keeps, we offer our community three program areas to provide that support: **Distribute. Demonstrate. Leverage.**



This Impact Report tells a powerful story of an organization that began with a second grader, came alive with a visionary founder, grew through greater and greater community support, and has now distributed more than 1 million books.

HIGH-INTEREST, RELEVANT READING MATERIALS THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY WE SERVE

It's just the best thing to be there when we bring the books. I love to watch the kids line up to come into the library;

they're so excited that they are almost shaking!



We distributed

214.093

total books in 2023 through our various programs.



LONGTIME VOLUNTEER EMBODIES OUR MISSION

Angela Welch has been a Books for Keeps volunteer for so long that she laughs and admits she can't remember exactly when she started.

"I had retired from state government and was really looking forward to not doing much of anything." she said with a smile.

"But I saw an ad in the paper that Books for Keeps was looking for volunteers, so I showed up at the warehouse and said, 'Hi, I'm Angela and I want to help." At that time, Books for Keeps was an all-volunteer organization led by its founder, Melaney Smith. The warehouse where Angela went was a small part of a larger warehouse occupied by a local food production company.

"It was an exciting time," she said. "We were all figuring out how to do this thing, how to get books to the kids who needed them. It was special to be there at the beginning." She and her fellow volunteers would help unload books donations, sort them, and pack them for distribution. And with no consistent source of books. Angela frequently visited Goodwill stores to purchase books she could donate.

"I read all the time as a child," she recalled. "One of my fondest memories is the summer reading program at the library - we would read books and get something put on the wall to recognize how much we had read."

Nancy Drew and the Bobbsey Twins series were favorites of hers, and a book called The Pink Ballet Slippers, about a "chubby girl who gets to perform on stage at a recital, resonated with her. "She reminded me of me and made me believe I could do something like that."

Angela grew up in Rome, GA and came to the University of Georgia after high school. When she graduated, she really wanted to stay in Athens but was offered a job that became a career with a state agency. She always hoped to come back to Athens, and when a position opened here in the late 1980s, she jumped at the opportunity. "Athens is fabulous! I never thought I'd have the opportunity to come back, and I definitely never want to leave."

The highlight of her many years as a volunteer is the Stop Summer Slide book distributions at the partner schools near the end of the school year.



Each year, more than

students from

elementary schools take home

brand new, free books to keep forever through our Spring Book Distributions.

All this takes place annually in an effort to Stop Summer Slide: the learning loss that occurs over the long summer months due to a lack of access to resources. in this case books. In FY2023, Books for Keeps distributed 84,681 books through this program.

Dolly Parton Imagination Library

This year, we distributed

books to children ages 0-5 through the Dolly Parton **Imagination Library. Books for** Keeps is responsible for funding each child's membership and promoting the opportunity through the community.

Pre-K Book Bundles

We provide more than

with 27 books to start their

home libraries by the time they reach Kindergarten.







"It's just the best thing to be there when we bring the books," she said. "I love to watch the kids line up to come into the library; they're so excited that they are almost shaking!"

Books for Keeps, and the opportunity to be a part of an organization that aligns with her sense of the importance of reading in the lives of children, is a big part of what makes Athens the place that she calls home.

DEMONSTRATE

THE INHERENT VALUE OF BOOKS, LITERACY, AND LEARNING THROUGH THE EQUITABLE DELIVERY OF CO-AUTHORED COMMUNIT ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES



LITERACY MENTORS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

A passionate advocate for economic justice. A social worker and therapist. A book publicist at an academic press.

All three are Books for Keeps literacy mentors, sharing their love of reading and commitment to literacy with elementary students in the Clarke County School District.

The Literacy Mentor program is grounded in research that proves that pairing a trained reading mentor with a student who is struggling with reading can result in significant progress. Reading on level in third grade is an accepted predictor of academic success even into high school.

For Sarah Clemmons, becoming a literacy mentor is the next logical step in a lifetime of reading and service. "My parents were always involved in community service in Oconee County, and my mom told me she had heard something about the mentor program," she recalled. "In high school I had gotten involved in reading to elementary school students who needed help and I loved it." She now works with two second-grade girls, one who loves to read and one who is in the process of learning to love reading.

Jami Mays moved to Athens from the Atlanta area in 2011, a single mom with an eight-year-old son who found a job as a teaching assistant at a Montessori school. She met and later married a chef, and they have a child together. The pandemic and its impact on school operations led her to become an advocate for workers and worker's rights, especially teachers.

About 10 years ago she met BFK staffer Rainey Lynch and was immediately attracted to the "intersection of educational advocacy and the Books for Keeps mission." When the mentor program was launched, she signed up for the training.

"I was really nervous," she said about her first meeting with her student. "I wanted to feel confident so that I knew what I was doing and could help him. But I was able to capture a connection in 30 minutes a week that I didn't get in a full day at Montessori." Her third grader is "an awesome, hilarious and thoughtful kid" who likes to read, but sometimes they just sit on floor, roll a ball back and forth, and talk.

Candice Lawrence grew up in Savannah and moved to Atlanta in her teens where she continued to attend performing arts school. At Columbus State University she majored in English and soon hatched a dream of "promoting books." She attended a publishing institute at the University of Denver and was later hired at the UGA Press.

"I was new to Athens and wanted to get involved in the community. I wanted to learn about Athens," she recalled. "I looked for opportunities that aligned with what I was passionate about and heard about Books for Keeps." She took a chance, stopped by the warehouse, met Bryce (a fellow Savannah native), and got on the weekend volunteer schedule. When she read a BFK newsletter story about the new mentor program, she thought "that sounds fantastic!" Her boss at the Press saw the connection and worked with her on scheduling. She attended the training and was assigned a student.

volunteer mentors participated in the 2022-2023 school year

"My parents are retired elementary school teachers and reading was always a part of our lives," she said. "Now I get to be back in an educational environment and around kids that age." Her first student was not an avid reader (neither was Candice, she admits), and wanted Candice to read to her. As their time together progressed, she came out of her shell and by the end of the year "she was choosing what we would read, where we would go to read, and she was reading to me."

Different backgrounds, common purpose: Combining a love of reading with research-based training to improve literacy, student by student.

I was new to Athens and wanted to get involved in the community – I looked for opportunities that aligned with what I was passionate about and heard about Books for Keeps. -Candice Lawrence, Volunteer





97%

of the time, teachers felt confident this program had a positive impact on students.



1,433 hours

55 volunteer mentors completed 1,433 30-minute visits, resulting in nearly 717 hours of 1:1 literacy support for students.



95% of books on the BFK Bookshelf received 4 or 5 starred reviews from students. 3.4x

Students
enrolled in
the program
showed 3.4
times the growth in
reading proficiency over
the course of the year
compared to their peers.

55%

of mentors continued with the program in it's 2nd year.

2,903 books



Collectively, students and mentors read 2,903 books together this school year!

OUR STAFF EXPERIENCE, ADAPTABILITY, AND BOOK RESOURCES TO HELP OTHER LOCAL COMMUNITY SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS FULFILL MISSIONS THAT ALIGN WITH **OUR OWN CORE VALUES**

MEDIA SPECIALISTS SEE THE MAGIC

If there is a more organic pairing than media specialists and Books for Keeps, we'd like to know what it is.

From the beginning, school librarians have been key partners in the Books for Keeps program to get books into the hands of elementary school students during the summer.

"I follow the media specialist at Barrow Elementary on social media, and he posted about Books for Keeps one day," recalled Kathi Edwards, the media specialist at Morgan County Elementary School. "My school had participated in another book program, but it was really just a way for a publisher to get rid of some excess books. When I saw the kinds of books that Books for Keeps was providing, I knew I had to try to do this for my students."

The economic standing of many of the families at her school meant they weren't eligible for the free book program, so she applied for and received grants to help cover the cost. "The day we got to take the books to the kids was just amazing," she said. "It was like Christmas morning. And they didn't have to turn their books in at the end of the school year - these books were theirs!"

Tanya Hudson is the media specialist at Chase Street Elementary School in Athens. Her grandmother took her and her brother to the library in Hartwell almost every week, where she would "max out my library card. I was always a reader," she said, with a grin. "I even got in trouble at school one day for reading ahead!"

After teaching high school English for a few years, she decided to get a Master's in English education; in her class were several school librarians, and she was inspired to redirect her career path.

"Books for Keeps is committed to getting books to kids however they can and figure out creative ways to do that," she said. "I would love to see it everywhere it's needed - and it's needed everywhere."

Kathi and Tanya have both seen the positive impact Books for Keeps has had on individual students and their schools as a whole. "I think it's the option they have to pick the books they want to read that makes the difference," said Kathi. "Reading becomes something they enjoy instead of something they dread."

Tanya recalled the story of "a couple of little dudes who were in the 2nd or 3rd grade who really only liked graphic novels or sports books. Rainey (Lynch, on the BFK staff) had some sports books that were really for older kids, but we let them pick out some., They were so pumped to take home those books!"

In media centers throughout the Books for Keeps service area, under the direction of committed and caring professionals like Kathi and Tanya, Melaney Smith's dream comes alive.



The Book Mobile is dedicated in memory of **Brittany Feldman** – a champion of joy, connection, and literacy.

It is very touching for us to know that the Book Mobile is dedicated to her and that her memory is being kept alive. Brittany's legacy is loving books and loving children and that's why Books for Keeps is the right place. It's helpful for my healing to know there is a purpose.

- Dawn Feldman



We work with

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

in the community and beyond





80,000+

books available for FREE at our annual Community Book Fair



Local artist Claire Jordan designed the custom art that wraps the Book Mobile.

Working on the Books for Keeps Book Mobile was more than just a really fun project. It opened a new chapter in my life as a creative professional. BFK provided the support that I needed to be curious and take risks in the creative process. I am filled with joy and pride when I see the bus - not only because I get to see my work on wheels, but because this organization is thriving in my community.

-Claire Jordan Book Mobile Artist

OURTEAM





Justin Bray Executive Director SPARKBOOK: "Redwall" by Brian Jeques



SPARKBOOK: "Harriet the Spy **Director of Finance** and Administration











BOARD DIRECTORS

Mary Alston Killen

President

Profession | Director of Donor Relations, Franklin College at UGA Sparkbook | "Slaughterhouse-Five" by Kurt Vonnegut

Keith Roberson

Treasurer

Profession | Owner, Barron's Sparkbook | "Dragon Riders of Pern" by Anne McCaffrey

Nipuna Ambanpola

Profession | Research and Public Service Manager, Fanning Institute at UGA Sparkbook | The Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling

Ben Jacobs-Nichelson

Member

Profession | Owner, Fully Financial

Sparkbook | The Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling

Kathleen Adams

Member

Profession | Marketing and Brand Manager, Leon Farmer & Company

Leigh Dillard

Secretary

Profession | Professor, University of North Georgia Sparkbook | "Frog and Toad" by Arnold Lobel

Terris Thomas

Member

Profession | Program Director, Neighborhood Leaders FC-CIS Sparkbook | "Daddy's Little Girls" by T.D. Jakes

Chandra Mincey

Member

Profession | Scientist, Ethicon Sparkbook | "Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret" by Judy Blume

Tiara Smith

Member

Member

Profession | Program Manager, Brightpaths

Profession | Banker, First

American Bank & Trust

Susie Weller

Stephen Nobles

Profession | Governance and

Flexibility Specialist, Clarke

Sparkbook | "The Odyssey"

County School District

Vice President

Julie Denton

Profession | Marketing &

Centennial Academy

Pamela Garcia

Communications Manager,

Sparkbook | "Charlotte's Web"

Profession | Principal, Fowler

Drive Elementary School

Sparkbook | Anything by

by Homer

Member

by E.B. White

Member

Dr. Seuss

Member

Profession | Executive Director, Children First

Sparkbook | "My Sister and the Moon" by Sue Harrison

Shakeeta Daniel

Sparkbook | "Amelia Bedelia" by Peggy Parish

Deirdre Sugiuchi

Member

Profession | Writer

Sparkbook | "Goodnight Moon" by Leo Lionni

Fiscal Year 2023

Financial Report

Every gift we receive is an affirmation of our mission and an expression of your confidence in us.

We are humbled and honored that you have chosen Books for Keeps as the beneficiary of your responsibility. Thank you for making literacy for all a reality in the communities we serve.



Where Our Funds Go

Programs

70%

Fundraising

18%

12%



≥\$10,000 ≤\$100,000

Riverview Foundation, Inc. Robins Financial Credit Union Jackson EMC Foundation The Thomas M. and Irene B. Kirbo Charitable Foundation

Abigail & Philip Russell John & Mary Franklin Foundation Sigma Delta Tau ETA Chapter **Melaney & Bayne Smith**

The Alice and Noah Langdale Foundation, Inc.

≥ \$1,000 ≤ \$10,000

Catherine Niehaus Celia Baker Coaching for Literacy The Irving Family Fund at the **Athens Area Community** The Kirby Smart Family Foundation, Inc. **Walton Electric Trust RTI International Community**

Partnerships

Georgia Power

Wiggans Family Fund

Camilla Bracewell Marcus Wiedower **Riverstone Resources, LLC Kares 4 Kids Partners** Kim Klonowsk **Orange County Community** Foundation **Phicas Foundation** Susan Wilson United Community Bank **Foundation Inc** JP Baker Construction, LLC Margaret Hruschka Todd & Lisa Van Meter

The Unitarian Universalist **Fellowship** Jan Weaver Rebecca Moor **Georgia FCCLA** Marne Matthews Sara Andreou Holiday Benevolence Market **Brooks & Elizabeth Mendel AFUMC Circle 3 Ann Bascle Becky & Jeff Engel CS Craig Family Foundation**

David & Melanie Bradford **Elevate Wealth Advisory** Imex International, Inc. Mercer Brockenbroug Stephanie Cork The Home Depot Foundation The Legacy of Stipe Tim & Kelly McCabe Tonia & Thomas Paramore Physician's Alliance of

Thank you, donors!

> \$5 < \$1,000

ACC Charity Drive

Kathy Poss Angela Welch Diane & Fred Lutz **Wavne Myers** J. Williams Realty First Presbyterian Church **Nancy Brim** Hanover Insurance **Group Foundation** Laurel Taylor Aaron & Leslie Hale Athens Housing Authority Carol Allen Chris Dickson Christina Houlahan Damon Lockwood Fritz Yoder James Rhodes Lewis and JoBeth Allen **Lucy Rowland Mary Williams** Sarah Grandstaf Wanda White **Brenda Rawson Anne Layton Blake Hartis Briscoe Family Darlene Brown Doug Hensler Gayle & Arthur Horne Harbin Lumber** Company Jimmy Willis **Kingery Family** Foundation Larry & Mary O'Toole Leigh Dillard Lewis Hudgins Northeast Georgia Bank Patricia Winning & John Shuev Stephanie Garcha Susan Smith The Rook and Pawn The Winthron Foundation of Athens **Timothy and Amy** Hulsey **Diane Todd** Linda Dodson Jennifer Nettles John & Barbora Snuggs Julie Duke Karen Page Kimberly Castle **Larry Dent** Mark & Georgette Copeland **Morrison & Foerster**

Keith Roberson

Nancy Burnham Diane Holbrook **Patricia Booth** Abigail Donaldson The Kiwanis Club of Alice Mancini Athens **Alicia Battle** Pinnacle Bank **Amy Medlock** Iva Velickic Ann-Alyse Kebler **Princeton United** Chandler Methodist Church, Inc. **Athens Clinic** Miranda Russel Barbara Armstrong **Anne Avers** Barbara & Rod Wright Dan & Becca Fari Barbarra Bloom-Fisher Sara Turley **Beth Huev-Levine** William and Julia Burke **Brandy Anderson** Allison Clements Caitlin Zygmont Carol and leff Rishor Arnold Feinstein Ashlev Keogh Carolyn & Randall **Abney** Athens Luncheor Cecile & Kyle Riker & Ontimist Club Paul and Carol Kurtz **Bickwit** Salesforce Cole Libby **Sharon Mudd Daisy Mathis and Ellen** Stephenie Harr Walker Wayne Peacock **David Seawrigh Whitney Goodstone David Sweat** Cvndi Clark **David & Taylor** Dee Elliott Alexander **Emily Stone Denise Sims** Mary Alston Killen **Devera Chandler** Pamela Garcia Eileen Budd Stephanie Tiller **Em Headley** Julie Denton Four Corners Woman's Alan & Jill Langford Cindy & Elmer Geograph Kuhlman Technologies, LLC **Emily Hanson George Webber** Jane Keene Glen Giese Kellie Callaro Jane Keene Lisa Jones Moore **Jane Rattray** Lynda Askew Janet Field **Pamela Norman** Jim & Phyllis Flanagan Rebecca Baggett Joan Prittie William and Kathy John Breen Pharr John & Carol Cuff Jenny Durham Julie Adams Karen Revnolds Alex Marchante Justin Bray Karen Wamsley Katherine Edison **Abigail Phillips Kelly Robinson Brvan Reber Kelsey & Chaz Ripley** Carol Taylor Erica Lee Leslie Whitelaw **Lindsay Cameron** Fiona Bradford Kathleen Walsh Lisa Surgi **Laura Evans** Louis Marchetti Marjorie Hilliard **Lucy Lee Nancy Tisdale Margaret Bolton** Shanna Johnson Marilynn Youngs **Christopher Evans** Maureen Miller **Amy Share Rick Johnson Bryan McCullick** Roy Felts Jaime Collazo Sam Welch Jennifer & Randy **Shirley Stone Blackmon** Stacie Carson Kimberly Haltiwange **Tamara Suiza Maureen Sheeran Taylor Cain** Tanya Hudson Ted & Brenda Cool Theresa Hurlburt Tina Cook Victoria Macchi Tom and Michele Tiara Smith Simpson Jordan Shoemake Veronica Tai Lauren Holcomb Vicki & Keith Connell

Kay Tammy Gilland Alex McIntire Daniel & Alyssa Fowler Kimberly Oliva **Lindy Weaver** Pamela Snelling Sara Beresford **Amy Riker** Megan Weatherford Nava-Joi Martin **Beth Gavrilles Cindy Moran** Deirdre Sugiuchi Duncan Flkins Hanover Insurance **Group Foundation** Kristine Stilwell Lauren Kucera **Keith Ordan** Ali Elyaman Alysia Poon **Amanda Gibson Amy Sweetapple Ashley Jaekel** Barb Roller **Barbara and Richard** Schuster **Cassie Clark** Diane Holbrook **Elizabeth Bartlett First Baptist Church of** Elberton **Geraldine Besharat Gwynn Powell** Helen Perry Holly Simmons Iris Hart Jane Erwin Janet Estrada John Garth Julie Busking June Mevers Kara Stuhr Karen Blanchard Katie Cox Lauren Bittick Leona Walfield **Margaret LaFontaine** Mary Lassite **Mary Young** Midge Gray Miriam Henson **Sheila Sanders** Stacy McLeod-Brooks **Susan Fortson** Susan & Al Henderson Susie Weller T. Morris **Terry Nestor** Virna Mendoza **Kathleen Adams Ellen Schorsch** Irina Rozovsky John Weatherford **Melissa Durand Abridge Aging Life Care Management** Angela Megaw

Anne Manalo

CaNeil Kabzinski Deborah Fiorella Diane Ambuehl Gabrielle Fein Heather McCov Janice Garrett Jennie Wenger Jennifer Cardone Jennifer Garrett Jessica Barr John Pendley Kitty Donnar Loni Metter Lori Crawford Louise Hadden Marnie Dodd **Marty Brendel** Mary Miller **Mary Catherine Hawks** Megan Park Nicholas Lepp Niki Jones **Robin Stewart** Samantha Plotino **Sarah Terry** Terri Rav Terry Nesto Tripp Greer Tyler Lynn Anjela Filipova Anna Ciulla Jill Read **Kerry Stubbs Kurt Bogenrieder** Liz Shah Chosewood **Robert & Suzanne** Griffin **Sharon McArthur** Susan Bolen Camille Belnan Christelle Duncan Craigie-Lee Paterson Heidi Davison Kathy Venable Katie Shivers Laura Hennighausen **Neil Sandell** Rich Heinsman Sydney Nghiem Lvnn Keenan **Ashley Tootle Brian Kite** Cara Simmons Claire Lampp Ja, ÄôMel and Alphonso Mills Ware **Kara Krewer** Lisa Vaughan Madelyn Drane Rebekah Thompson Sue Kelder Norman **Brittany Vanderstine Gracie Morris Lauren Davidson** Meg Inscoe



A message from the Board President:

President, Board of Directors

Since its founding in 2009,

BFK has become a dependable partner for the community we serve through book access programming, literacy mentoring, and collaboration with literacy organizations across the country. Giving children the tools and resources to become lifelong learners remains the core mission of Books for Keeps.

As Books for Keeps grows and matures, our goal is to remain a reliable presence in students' lives -

a presence that demands nothing of them other than their willingness to engage and learn. Our impact is greatest when we show up for kids year after year, providing books that inspire, educate, and entertain, as well as the guidance and confidence to read them.

None of this would be possible without your unwavering support.

Our impact is greatest when we show up for kids year after year, providing books that inspire, educate, and entertain, as well as the guidance and confidence to read them.

Your dedication, be it through volunteering, donations, or advocacy, fuels our mission and inspires us to reach greater heights.



We can make Books for Keeps an even more formidable force for positive change in the lives of children across our communities.

Thank you for being a part of this meaningful work. Together, we will write the next exciting chapter in the story of Books for Keeps.

Mary Alston Killen



Like a really good book that you hope never ends, the Books for Keeps story is still being told by many co-authors.

The first pages were written 14 years ago by a second-grade student who didn't have books at home and by a caring person who wanted to do something about that.

The chapters written since then have been authored by volunteers and staff; board members and donors; teachers, principals, and media specialists; students and their families.

What's on the next page? Do you have a page to write? What happens in the next chapter?

We may not know, but we will write the story together. One thing is for certain you're going to love this book!

Thank you, sponsors!

































burton+BURTON

SYNOVUS°

Denise Ricks
Edward Jones
MAKING SENSE OF INVESTING





