

## Reading to Kids improves literacy

Oct 13, 2011

Juliana D. Norwood | OW Staff Writer

### Club celebrates giving away 100,000th book

A program was developed at Gratts Elementary School in May 1999, that emphasized learning and reading in an interactive and fun environment. It was called the Gratts Reading Club. The success and growth of that reading club led to the formation of Reading to

Reading to Kids is a grassroots organization that began with a small group of volunteers, teachers, and administrators who shared the same dream: to improve reading skills among the elementary schoolchildren of Los Angeles. Dedicated to inspiring underserved children with a love of reading, the organization strives to enrich the lives and opportunities of these youth for success in the future. To this end, Reading to Kids gathers on average 759 children and 313 volunteers at reading clubs on the second Saturday of every month at seven Los Angeles elementary schools.

At the monthly reading clubs, pairs of volunteers read aloud to small groups of children, while their parents receive training on how to encourage their children to read at home. Kids, parents, teachers, and school libraries receive book donations at the end of the reading clubs. These are important donations, because 60 percent of low-income homes do not have age-appropriate reading materials for children.

Since its inception in 1999, Reading to Kids, has donated more than 17,660 hardcover books to school libraries, and the organizations volunteers have spent more than 113,529 hours reading to kids. This week the organization celebrates having given away its 100,000th prize book to children who attend the reading clubs.

“The biggest accomplishment of this organization is that we do so much with such a small staff, we actually only have two staff members and we rely heavily on our volunteers,” said Karen Kiss, managing director of Reading to Kids.

“The API scores of the schools that we partner with have all increased. We are only in these schools once a month so we can’t take full credit for that, but we consider ourselves an important component in the increase. Being involved with the students has a profound effect on them and by reading to them and showing how enjoyable of an activity reading can be—just as entertaining as video games—we make reading fun. The students come back eager to get a new book to add to their home library.”

Many students living near downtown Los Angeles reside in a densely populated area with numerous apartment and commercial buildings and little or no access to safe recreational areas.

Many of the children in this area are from low-income families, some are recent immigrants to the country and are English language learners, and others have room for substantial improvement in their reading test scores. Helping these students is Reading to Kids’ highest priority.

“I couldn’t grasp it until I got here, but we come in contact with thousands of children and the effect that we have on them is so gratifying—that such a small organization could do so much for the community,” said Kiss.

A large part of Reading to Kids’ success is due to the generosity of its donors, through grants, and many of the books and craft supplies and other items needed to makes these reading clubs a success are purchased by the organization. If you would like to assist in their efforts and to learn more information about the organization, visit the website at [www.readingtokids.org](http://www.readingtokids.org).