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# Honors Senior Project

EXPANDING THE IMPACT OF READ N' GIVE

**Expanding the Impact of Read n' Give**  
**Karl Lubinski**  
**4/29/2016**

The central focus of my Honors Senior Project was to help spread the impact of Read n' Give, primarily in the greater Grand Rapids area. Read n' Give is an organization developed by Crowe Horwath through cooperation with the LEAGUE, a national service-learning organization. The mission of Read n' Give is, according to their website, "Collect, share, read, donate, and pass on books in a continuous cycle of giving". This organization is geared toward providing books to underprivileged youth throughout the community, helping them have access to books during times in which they are out of school, i.e. during summer break. For this paper I will summarize and establish the importance of reading during childhood and highlight the disparity between income levels in terms of access to books as well as the process I undertook this year at GVSU to raise books and the results.

**Importance of Early Education Reading and the role Read n' Give Plays**

The ability to read is vital in the development of children, yet as a country we face a large number of students who struggle to read. The vast majority of these children live in lower income families and lack access to books to read. Their lack of access places them at a significant disadvantage to graduate high school and attend college. On the other hand, children of more affluent families tend to have a plethora of books available to them. This access to books typically correlates to higher reading abilities and greater chances to graduate high school and attend college (Hernandez, 2012). The civic engagement project, Read n' Give seeks to collect books and place them in the hand of at-risk children who lack access to books. In doing this, Read n' Give hopes to improve the reading ability of underprivileged youth throughout the community.

In terms of early education, one of the most important things students learn is the ability to read and write. These are skills that are universally important for children in their development. The ability to read is the greatest tool a child has moving forward in school. A study published by Dr. Donald J. Hernandez titled, *Double Jeopardy: How Third Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation* (2012), found that students who do not read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely *not* to graduate high school than those who can read proficiently. This means approximately 1 out of 6 students who do not read proficiently at this time will not graduate high school. With such a strong

correlation, it is important for early educators to place a strong emphasis on their students' reading levels. However, for students to become proficient readers they need access to books. Without access to quality reading materials they lack the ability to practice and improve their reading levels.

We see the greatest discrepancy between lower and higher income-families in terms of reading materials available. According to Reading Literacy in the United States: Findings from the IEA Reading Literacy Study (Binkley, 1996), 61% of lower-income families have no age-appropriate books in their homes. Another study found that children from middle-income families had on average 13 books per child, whereas there was on average 1 book for every 300 children in low-income neighborhoods (Dickinson, 2006). These differences are striking and play a part in the greater percentage of children from lower-income families not graduating high school.

This discrepancy is what the civic-engagement project, Read n' Give, seeks to mitigate. The project was founded by Crowe Horwath LLP and the LEAGUE Michigan in 2008 and is a book drive that aims to help in the redistribution of books into the hands of lower-income children. The book drive is run with the help of AmeriCorp employees throughout the state of Michigan and lasts through the month of March. Read n' Give seeks to raise books in the communities that it is involved in via both book drives and money collections. The participating organizations and schools are given a Read n' Give kit that includes all marketing materials required to promote the book drive as well as a box to collect the books.

The books that are raised by Read n' Give are collected and sorted according to age group/reading level and given a Read n' Give sticker. These books are then distributed through a variety of different avenues. The main goal of Read n' Give is to get the books into the hands of individual children to take home with them over the summer. In this way, they hope to increase the number of books the children have access to during the time that they are not at school. In addition, Read n' Give has also donated books in bulk to lower income schools and organizations that cater to these families. Doing this provides these locations better means to help instruct and encourage children to read.

With the need of books in the hands of children in lower-income families and the strong correlation between reading success and high school graduation, organizations like Read n' Give are more important than ever. To date, Read n' Give has helped raise nearly 100,000 books throughout Michigan since its inception in 2008. These books have been raised throughout communities across the state and are given to families and children in need. The civic-engagement project continues to grow and

raise even more books toward their goal of mitigating the discrepancy in book ownership between higher and lower income families.

## **The Process**

While the book drive typically takes place in March, there is much that needs to be done in the months leading up to it. First and foremost, I had reach out to Crowe Horwath and the leaders at the firm who provide the oversight for the project. In my position at Crowe Horwath they allow me a lot of flexibility to take Read n' Give where I want it, however I still had to have my ideas approved and budgeted.

After discussing the goals for Read n' Give with Crowe and developing an initial game plan, I had to begin the process of updating our 'Recruitment' materials for this current year. As a part of the program, Crowe provided all marketing materials book donation sites may have required, in addition to all the documents we used to recruit at donation sites. This included creating hand-outs, email templates, posters and boxes. In addition, we needed to update the Facebook and Read n' Give websites to accurately represent the current year.

The majority of this work was done in January allowing for February's focus to be recruiting donation sites/ organizations. This was when I began work on spreading Read n' Give into the GVSU community. This process included all the communication between myself and prospective sites such as email, phone calls and in-person meetings. In addition, each of the sites brought into Read n' Give program needed to be provided a donation-kit that included posters, hand-outs and boxes.

Throughout the month of March the donation sties collect books for the project. I assisted them with anything they may have needed during this time. I provided them more marketing materials, additional boxes or I may have collected books for them prior to the April collection period.

In April, I collected the books from the various sites. After they have been collected they are stickered, counted and sorted by age groups. This process gave us an idea of what resources we had and the number of books collected during this year. Once this has been done, we began the process of distributing books to various groups in need of books. In previous years, we have done things such as create libraries, donate to individual children or donate to organizations who service at-risk kids.

## Collection Results

Specifically, these are *my* 2016 results, as Read n' Give is a state-wide program run with the help of a team of Americorp employees. This result section will *not* include books raised by their efforts.

**Total Books Raised:** 1,173

**Total GVSU Books Raised:** 776

Kids in Motion: 450  
College of Ed: 149  
Honors College: 111  
Seidman: 66

**Northwestern Mutual:** 397

A majority of the books raised will be used to create a library at Boys and Girls Club South Holland. The remaining books will be given to an Americorp employee to supplement the books raised by her efforts.

## Challenges

There were many obstacles for Read n' Give this year. The challenges can be summarized as a lack of support from Crowe and the AmeriCorps. In my position within the firm, I am unable to approve purchases or other peoples' schedules. This meant that a lot of the steps that needed to be accomplished early on in the process required that I receive pre-approval before I could begin work. In addition, there were a lot of tasks that I needed assistance with that required the professional help of the marketing team within Crowe. In both regards I was unable to receive the necessary support required to move forward. This lack of support from the top, meant that a lot of the work that is required to be done in the month of January wasn't done until middle to end of the February. The delays and lack of communication left me with an extremely curtailed recruiting season and unsure if I would be able to properly support my sites. Another challenge I faced was a lack of communication between myself and AmeriCorp employee. The organizational delays from Crowe Horwath delayed their process as well and as a result they did not begin their work on Read n' Give until March. Typically, Read n' Give in the Grand Rapids area is supported with the full-time help of an AmeriCorp employee beginning in January. Their full-time role matches the process I laid out in the beginning of this report and is vital to the success of Read n' Give as a whole. The inability to work with the AmeriCorp employee in the January and February meant I had to perform additional work throughout the project that I did not anticipate. Overall,

the organizational delays and the resulting lack of support were two challenges that limited the overall success of this year's book drive

## **Conclusion**

The challenges that Read n' Give faced this year limited the success of the program as a whole. The combined efforts of myself and the AmeriCorp employee raised approximately 2,000 books in the Grand Rapids area. In comparison, last year the Grand Rapids area raised approximately 10,000 books. Despite this, there were many positives that were the result of this year's efforts. First and foremost, is the growth of Read n' Give into the GVSU community. My main goal of this senior project was to introduce Read n' Give into Grand Valley and with the support of three colleges and two student organizations, we were able to raise nearly half of all books raised in the Grand Rapids community. In addition, through connections at GVSU I have created relationships with Michigan Literacy Project and the Grand Rapid's Drive. The GVSU student newspaper, The Lanthorn, wrote a front-cover article in regards to Read n' Give and my efforts this year. Finally, through the student organization Kids in Motion, I have found a viable recipient site to create a library with the books I've raised. These long-term connections that I have made within the Laker community will hopefully continue to contribute to the growth and success of Read n' Give for years to come.

## Appendix

### GVSU students collect books for local children

By [Maddie Forshee](#) Published 03/27/16 9:46pm Updated 03/27/16 10:21pm

Photo: [Read n' Give](#) / Grand Valley Lanthorn

GVL / Courtesy - Read n' Give Lincoln Elementary School in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, holds a school-wide book drive throughout the month of March. The school collected a total of 3,191 books.

March is national reading month, and though the month is almost over, the Grand Valley State University community can still get involved with the celebration by taking part in the Read n' Give book drive initiative.

Started over nine years ago through Crowe Horwath, an accounting firm, and nonprofit The LEAGUE Michigan, the Read n' Give book drive is a statewide effort that aims to collect old books from community members, then partner up with nonprofit organizations to distribute the books to local schools.

GVSU student Karl Lubinski is responsible for bringing the effort to GVSU's campus as his honors senior project for the Frederik Meijer Honors College.

"I love the idea of raising books for at-risk kids," Lubinski said. "I viewed Grand Valley as a potential resource to raise books and raise money. I saw it was an opportunity to give back to Grand Valley."

Lubinski brought the book drive to campus in early March and plans on keeping the drive going until the third week of April. There are three drop-off locations: the faculty office areas in each of the Honors College, the College of Education and the Seidman College of Business buildings.

Thus far, Lubinski estimates that he's collected a few hundred books. In the Grand Rapids area, Lubinski said there is an estimated need for around 3,000 books.

Megan Lendman, a GVSU alumna and service learning coordinator for AmeriCorps in Grand Rapids, is also hosting a Read n' Give book drive to raise books in downtown Grand Rapids.

"Last year, this campaign raised and distributed over 10,000 books throughout Grand Rapids," she said.

After receiving and counting the books, they will be sorted by age group. Lubinski is a member of the Kids in Motion student organization, an organization that works with underprivileged kids to get them physically active. The student organization will get together to make bookmarks for the kids and will host a book fair at local schools to bring a portion of the books directly to the kids.

The rest of the books will be donated to family recipients of the Salvation Army, to resettled students through United Way Schools of Hope, to the Boys and Girls Club and to students who are part of the IMPACT program.



Lendman said she also plans on working with nonprofit community organizations like the West Michigan Refugee Center and the Kent County Department of Human Services, as well as hosting charity events at local breweries, where a portion of people's bills will benefit the cause.

"All of these organizations and schools are within the downtown area, so the idea is to encourage the people of Grand Rapids to pay attention to the literacy competency of our youth and have an active role in it," she said. "People in Grand Rapids really like to buy beers for a cause."

Lubinski said that though the initiative is still ongoing, he's optimistic about raising plenty of books for local kids.

"A lot of us have books sitting on our shelves that we haven't touched in 10, 15 years," he said. "It's a pretty easy task to bring in old books that you're not going to be using that can be the gateway to future success for kids and someone's new favorite book."

Lendman agreed and encouraged anyone to get involved in any way they can.

"Books that collect dust on our bookshelves are much more useful if they are passed around," she said. "By giving and receiving books, we are cycling information in a way that only humans are capable of."

Lendman is hosting a book drive and fundraising event at Harmony Hall on March 28. \$1 of every beer sold will be collected to purchase books for the initiative.

For students who can't partake in that event, there are drop-off locations on GVSU's Allendale Campus at the Frederik Meijer Honors College in the faculty office suite. On GVSU's Pew Campus, drop-off locations can be found on the second floor of the Seidman College of Business and in the faculty office suite of the College of Education.

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