



Massachusetts Coalition Newsletter

Reach Out and Read Massachusetts Coalition ■ 29 Mystic Avenue
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Spring 2005

A Coalition of 123 ROR Sites and Satellites ■ More than 200,000 new books provided to MA children

Reflections from the Road

From A New Massachusetts Programs
Administrator's Journal

Quantum physics reminds us that our thoughts certainly can shape our reality. Political and spiritual activists firmly advise us our deeds do count. Yet where in the working world do we witness everyday people taking positive action?

I think I may know a few places. Since beginning in December as the Programs Administrator for the Massachusetts coalition of 121 ROR programs, I've seen ROR coordinators and medical consultants throughout the state manifesting principles of compassionate caring. Day in, day out, these practitioners make a significant impact on individual lives. They have both readjusted their own vision of "what's possible" and reshaped the visions of the families they serve. One patient at a time, they know that to hand out a book and encourage parents to read aloud to a child is to positively affect the arc of that child's development, to perhaps be part of shaping a different future.

Each time a doc uses *Goodnight Moon* to test a child's vocabulary development, knowledge of colors, or motor skills; every time a nurse practitioner watches for clues to the emotional bond between a parent and a 6 month old eagerly gumming and exploring a brand new book; each time a busy pediatric nurse doubling as an ROR coordinator places a book order - benefits result. These small, intentional acts are then paid forward: one less half hour of TV watching, a better prepared class of kindergartners enters local schools, a more energized and engaged group of pediatric practitioners offers their services to sometimes stressed families.

I've seen other things, too. Entering through the waiting room doors of Harvard Vanguard-Kenmore, I

witness whimsy and color; at Brookside Health Center in Jamaica Plain a quieting calmness and sophistication; at Great Brook Valley in Worcester a bustling hub of bi-lingualism and staff enthusiasm; in Turner's Falls a small, connected group of caregivers; in Greenfield a vibrant all-male private practice whose ROR Coordinator is a committed volunteer from the community; and in Fall River a pedi developmental specialist incorporates ROR accordingly. In the 54 sites I've visited so far, ROR looks different in every single site and works as well in Leominster as it does in Brockton. I can't wait to see what it will look like in places it might soon reside...Great Barrington and Medway, Athol and Waltham.

Thus, the odometer on my car just passed 208,000 miles. My Boston area and Massachusetts maps look increasingly tattered. My arms are stronger from lugging materials and books. But it's my eyes that have seen. Like the patients our ROR practitioners treat, no ROR

program looks exactly the same, yet through an interesting mix of styles, ingenuity, and group effort emerges a coalition of programs that has at its root a dedication and openheartedness that indeed is transformational. Turning families on to books and reading does make a difference.
-Gretchen Hunsberger



State Senator Theresa Murray reads to children at Falmouth ROR program on April 26th.

As I take on my new role, it's been a pleasure and a joy to finally put names to faces, get a lay of the land, learn a few of your stories, and better understand the make up of your patient populations. I can't wait to meet the rest of you who passionately work to ensure the success of your ROR programs in the remaining sites across the Commonwealth. Through speaking with and listening to you, I can better help individual programs. Your ideas and creativity spark solutions for others. Keep the ideas coming, and thanks for all you do! -GH

QUESTIONS?

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Coalition NEWS of Note

Reach Out and Read-Massachusetts has recently forged a unique partnership with the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers' Community HealthCorps program. Community Health Corps members volunteer (for approximately one year) to work in health centers across the country, usually right after graduation from college. They are folks interested in going into various health care professions and deeply committed to giving back.

By joining forces, our goal is to provide participating health centers with skillful assistance for the administration of their ROR programs. Any Boston area health center that applied for and received a Community HealthCorps member is encouraged to set aside five hours of that volunteer's time per week to work with the ROR Coordinator.

We are aware of the overarching economic realities under which most health centers operate these days, and the concomitant multi-tasking of most health center staff. As such, our cooperative arrangement seeks to provide a concrete solution by addressing the staffing issue. HealthCorps members are now playing vital roles in maintaining ROR programs at 7 Boston health centers.

Welcome and many thanks to this year's HealthCorps members: Thomas Blair, Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center; Ellie Swemba, Whittier Street Health Center; Sheila Ormond, Brookside Community Health Center; Kristin Wadhwa, Codman Square Health Center; Erica Jurgensen, Joseph M. Smith Community Health Center; Karen Finnegan, Geiger-Gibson; and Pravin Pant, South Boston Community Health Center.

Invite a local representative to visit YOUR Reach Out and Read program!

Contact Kelly Taranto at 617.629.8042 x224 or email: kelly.taranto@reachoutandread.org

Brookside Community Health Center's Read-A-Thon

To celebrate UNESCO's World Book Day, ROR Coordinator Sheila Ormond held an all day Read-A-Thon at Brookside Community Health Center in Jamaica Plain. Falling on April 21st, it also filled local families' need for interactive, kid-friendly activities during school vacation week! There was a table stocked with information on ROR and a sample display of books that their pediatricians provide to children at well-child checks.

But, the best part? Throughout the day, local politicians and community members volunteered as guest readers to BCHC's pediatric patients and to children from local Head Start programs, daycare and community centers. Among the local celebs reading that day: State Reps. Jeffrey Sanchez and Liz Malia; City Councilors John Tobin and Michael Flaherty; Sandee Storey, Editor of the Jamaica Plain Gazette; Peter Roby from the Center of the Study of Sport and Society; and Gretchen Hunsberger, ROR Massachusetts Programs Administrator. Sheila even arranged a visit from a popular red canine from a favorite children's book!!



Congressman Richard Neal reads to children in support of of Mason Square Neighborhood Health Center's ROR Program on April 5th. ROR Coordinator, Dr. Elizabeth Boyle, is pictured with him.

NEW ROR SITES: Welcome to Reach Out and Read!

■ **Children's Health Program, Inc.**, a community health center in Great Barrington, Berkshire County. With 86% of their patients at or below 200% of poverty, they have a 30 year history of serving rural children for whom social isolation was leading to delays in language, cognitive and pre-literacy skills. ROR will be a welcome addition to their

already established reading support groups.

■ **South Cove Community Health Center**, in Quincy, until now was a satellite of SCCHC in Boston. A relatively small site serving a 99% Chinese and Vietnamese speaking population, 95% of its patients are living at or below 200% of poverty.

COMMUNITY LINKS

How are Reach Out and Read programs supported by the larger community? Here are a few recent examples:

- **Verizon's Telecom Pioneers**, (employee volunteers) donated new books to Marlborough Hospital's ROR program in December.
- In January, the independent **Park School**, in Brookline, collected 1,000 books for Boston Children's Hospital ROR program.
- In February, each **Borders Bookstore** in Massachusetts collected and donated new books to nearby ROR programs.
- In March, a **Campfire Troop** in Lynn collected 3,000 gently used books for ROR at Lynn Community Health Center.
- In April, **Hill House, Inc.**, a Beacon Hill community center held a large book drive for ROR-Massachusetts.

Perhaps you and your site can initiate and grow similar partnerships with your local merchants, service organizations, places of worship, day care centers, and/or scouting troops. What can they do? Hold a bake sale, book fair, or sponsor a used book drive!

OVERHEARD...

After sitting and reading for over thirty minutes as he waited for his dad, 9 yr. old Matthew Aubry, son of pediatrician Rich Aubry at Greater Roslindale Medical and Dental Center, finally said rather glumly: "*Dad, the only bad thing about reading is that I am getting worried that pretty soon there won't be any more books left for me to read!*"

Grace McMann, R.N., C.P.N.P. and Reach Out and Read Coordinator there, loves this anecdote about Matthew's fear of running out of books! (Dr. Aubry is obviously doing his job both in and out of the health center!) Like hundreds of kids statewide, Matthew and his sister, Caroline, have graciously given their gently used books to their favorite ROR program.



"*It is so rewarding to see how much our families benefit from Reach Out and Read!*" says Susan Curley, M.S., ROR Coordinator at MGH Revere, who offers the following story:

Alexis was living with her mother, Christine, and her father came to visit often. Dad was of Hispanic descent and spoke Spanish in the home. Mom primarily spoke English, but wanted to support her daughter as she learned a second language. Christine loved reading to Alexis! (They'd started a library before she was born, but was unable to find many children's books in Spanish.) So she was thrilled to see that ROR provided multicultural/multilingual books. At each visit it was interesting to see who would be more excited about receiving the new book!

Alexis is now 7 years old and loves to read. Christine recently stopped me at the health center to report that Alexis' teacher is impressed with her reading skills. Christine enthusiastically gave some of the credit to ROR and the medical providers at MGH Revere who promote early literacy.

She then went on to say her nieces are also seen at the health center. They received their first ROR books at 6 months of age and enjoyed mouthing the books. But, their father kept taking the books away from the twins, stating "they are not ready for books because they keep eating them." Christine immediately told their father that they're getting an early taste for reading and it's an important part of their development! She asked me to please be certain to speak to him about this the next time the twins came in for a visit!

FOR OUR ROR MEDICAL PROVIDERS...

Encourage parents to talk with their children! According to one study, in professional families, children heard, on average, 2,150 words per hour, while children in working class families heard 1,250 words, and children in families receiving public assistance heard only 620 words. Since children learn language by what they hear, this correlated with vocabulary at age 3: The children from the families on public assistance had vocabularies averaging only 500 words, close to the cutoff for developmental delay. This compares to average vocabularies of 700 and 1,100 words respectively for the working class and professional class children.

Remember:

- Reading aloud is only one tool for parents to use in helping them advance their child's language development.
- Therefore encourage not only reading aloud, but consistently talking to their child or baby throughout their day! Read cereal boxes, make up stories, chat about what they see on T.V. or learn at school or daycare, and ask them how they are feeling!



Massachusetts

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PLEASE PLACE
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THANK YOU for submitting progress reports on time!

And congratulations for jobs well done! As you know, we cannot release sustainability monies until reports are all received. Additionally, it is because of the information contained in the reports that we are able to successfully make our case on Beacon Hill and Capitol Hill.

As you may already know, this year Reach Out and Read National received \$10 million from the federal government in support of ROR's mission for its growth and expansion throughout Massachusetts and the rest of the country. Why? They believe what we already know: early intervention betters chances for school readiness.

On April 13th, the Ways and Means Committee of the Massachusetts House of Representatives released it's version of the Commonwealth's budget for FY06, and for the 7th year in a row, funding for ROR is included. While this is the first step in a long budget process, this is the best possible result at this stage. Stay tuned for more in the months to come.

EXPANSION PLANS

Expansion in the Commonwealth will include reaching into cities such as New Bedford, Taunton, Stoughton, and Pittsfield. Therefore, should you have any contacts in these communities, or know of providers anywhere in the state who want to practice ROR, please contact me with names of pediatricians and/or health center staff. Such personal connections always make expansion efforts a little easier.

Forward this to a provider who may be interested in starting a ROR program anywhere in the Commonwealth...

Did You Know?

Prospective ROR programs can now complete their applications on-line. For complete information please go to:
www.reachoutandread.org/program.html