What’s New in the Northwest Area
Serving Lincoln, Marion, Polk, Tillamook and Yamhill counties

Thanks All Around!

In this year of continued change and adaptation, we’ve been awed by the commitment and support of our volunteers, donors, educators, and partners who stand alongside us to bring a love of reading and learning to local kids. Thank you for being an important part of SMART Reading!

Corporate and Foundation Sponsors
Many thanks to these businesses and partners for helping us spark joy and opportunity through the magic of a shared book.

2021-22 Local Impact

Staff Member Spotlights

Elide Sanchez-Rivera, Bilingual Program Manager
Before coming to SMART, Elide worked part-time at the McMinnville Community Center and the Nicholson Library. She joined the SMART team in 2020 and loves being able to give away books to kids who may not have access to them (and looking through the SMART collection to find new kids books to read)! Her current favorite is Marisol McDonald Doesn’t Match by Monica Brown.

Amy McCormick, Area Director
Amy has over 16 years of experience in nonprofit fundraising and communications. She enjoys hearing stories from supporters and volunteers as to why they choose to support organizations like SMART, and seeing firsthand the impact on kids across Oregon. In her free time she can be found gardening and wrangling her sassy dog Moxxi in her backyard. She is currently reading Deer-Resistant Design by Karen Chapman for utilitarian purposes but otherwise historical and autobiographies are her favorite reads.

SMART Mural Comes to McMinnville

We’ve partnered with the McMinnville Public Library to install a mural celebrating the joy and power of reading in honor of SMART’s 30th anniversary. The mural, designed by artists Elide Sanchez Rivera and Allison McClay, was completed last month.

Hello, SMART Reading Community!

It’s my honor to greet you as SMART Reading’s new Executive Director. When I joined SMART as Communications Director over 11 years ago, I knew right away I’d discovered a magical combination of factors: A mission that is undeniably critical; a hard-working, dedicated staff team; and a cadre of thousands of wonderful volunteers and supporters who care deeply about setting Oregon kids on the path to literacy and learning success. The opportunity to lead this incredible organization is a true honor.

As you’ll read in this newsletter, this year was a momentous one for SMART as we celebrated our 30th anniversary, finalized a merger with The Children’s Book Bank, prepared for a leadership transition, and continued to adapt our programming to serve kids and families throughout the pandemic.

Looking ahead to the future, we’re planning for a return to significant in-person service while continuing to offer some of the pandemic-era adaptations that have proven to be valuable complements to classroom curricula. Our focus continues to be on providing the best possible service to students and being a responsive partner to our schools and sites. We’re hopeful that this return to in-person SMART will mean more opportunities for volunteers to join us in the critical work of supporting young readers — we’ve missed you!

With the finalization of our merger with the Book Bank, we’re excited for the opportunities for expanded impact across the state! In this next year, we’re focused on integrating our teams and beginning to plan for the eventual expansion of the Book Bank, which currently serves Multnomah County, to additional communities. Read on for more information about the Book Bank.

Looking ahead, I feel a deep sense of hope for what’s to come for this organization. I’m thrilled to have handed over the reins to Jessica Bowersox, who’s been part of the SMART family for nearly a decade and has been an incredible partner in this new chapter for SMART, and to all of the great work ahead to inspire a love of reading and learning in Oregon’s kids!

On June 30 I officially retired from my post as Executive Director after 11 ½ years. It has been a true privilege to lead this organization doing such impactful work for the kids of Oregon. As I begin my retirement from my new home in Walla Walla, Wash., I do so feeling tremendous pride in all that SMART has achieved over this last decade -- especially over the last two years -- and gratitude for the community of people who’ve made it possible.

Our small and mighty staff team has inspired me with their resiliency, flexibility and unrelenting commitment to our mission as we’ve developed new innovations and adaptations that, while necessitated by the pandemic, have exciting potential to help us reach more kids in different ways into the future.

In addition to our staff, I am deeply grateful for the thousands of Oregonians -- volunteers, donors, partners, educators, businesses, community leaders -- who’ve supported this critical work over the last 30 years. Without you, it wouldn’t be possible.

Looking ahead, I feel a deep sense of hope for what’s to come for this organization. I’m thrilled to have handed over the reins to Jessica Bowersox, who’s been part of the organization during my entire 11-year tenure and will lead SMART with capable, steady hands. The recent merger with The Children’s Book Bank also begins an exciting new chapter with the potential to reach many more kids and families across Oregon!

As I watch SMART continue to expand its impact into the future, I’ll be toasting you from afar with a glass of Walla Walla Syrah.

Chris Otis

A Message from Outgoing Executive Director, Chris Otis

On June 30 I officially retired from my post as Executive Director after 11 ½ years. It has been a true privilege to lead this organization doing such impactful work for the kids of Oregon. As I begin my retirement from my new home in Walla Walla, Wash., I do so feeling tremendous pride in all that SMART has achieved over this last decade -- especially over the last two years -- and gratitude for the community of people who’ve made it possible.

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Summers, 002 SMART NEWSLETTER}
The Children’s Book Bank is an organization that gives new life to community-donated children’s books in order to fill homes and lives with engaging, culturally diverse books. SMART Reading and the Book Bank have worked together serving children in Multnomah County with books and reading services for many years. With natural alignment between our respective missions -- and the pandemic presenting an inflection point -- our Boards of Directors moved last year to explore a merger of the two organizations.

After a year of due diligence, our collective leadership voted to move forward with a merger, which was finalized on July 1, grounded in the belief that our collective whole is greater than the sum of our parts. By becoming one organization, we’re poised to better serve Oregon kids with reading support and access to books.

In the 2022-23 school year, we plan to implement our programming side-by-side, learning from one another and identifying areas for integration and expansion. In the year ahead, our collective team will engage 8,000 volunteers and serve 20,000 students across Oregon. Over the course of our histories, we’ve collectively given away over 4 million books and have served 373,000 children, helping to spark a lifelong love of books and reading in our youngest learners.

We look forward to the future of expanded impact and putting more books into kids’ hands and homes throughout the state. To learn more about the merger and the work of The Children’s Book Bank, visit: www.SMARTReading.org/merger