

At a recent gathering of the National Reading Campaign Summit, Dr. Clara Bohrer, an advocate for early childhood literacy in the United States, stated that in the U.S. 35% of the children entering kindergarten do not have the skills needed to learn how to read. Talking with a child in a home setting is important, but reading and sharing books with them from an early age introduces them to words and ideas that are different from those they hear in everyday conversation.

There are many ways even very young children can be introduced to books and reading. One of these is by attending Children's Story Time sessions at a local library, many of which have age appropriate stories that are shared with the group. Children who leave the library with books and have them shared at home have another opportunity to increase their learning skills.

Our Rotary Clubs can make many different contributions to these early learning experiences. For example, a Rotary Club in Kingston, Ontario raised funds to purchase new books for pediatric wards in hospitals, as well as purchasing books to distribute to families at local Food Shelves. Other groups have prepared "Baby Bags" which are presented to newborns at local hospitals. Among other things, these bags contain information for parents on the importance of reading to children, a book for the child, and a library card.

Still another example of promoting reading is volunteering at an elementary school to read with-not just to-children. This not only benefits the students as they improve their reading skills, but also highlights another aspect of Rotary Service in the Community. Our Dictionary Programs are another valuable literacy tool.

These are but a few of the ways we as Rotarians can help improve the Early Literacy of children, which as they grow will lead to increased knowledge of and the ability to use other Literacy skills. Your local librarian can suggest and even provide program topics for your Club.

-Marge McPeak