

Contact:

UW-Madison Division of Extension
Danielle Y. Hairston Green
Director, Human Development and Relationships Institute
Danielle.HairstonGreen@wisc.edu

First Book
Melanie Boyer
202-639-0114
mboyer@firstbook.org

UW- Madison Division of Extension Program “The Literacy Link” Awarded \$21,000 for New Books by Nonprofit First Book

MADISON (April 2020) – UW-Madison Division of Extension’s The Literacy Link is the recipient of a \$21,000 award for new, high-quality books. The award from the nonprofit First Book, will expand The Literacy Link’s mission to bring evidence-informed literacy and learning opportunities to young children who have a parent or caregiver involved in local correctional systems.

The Literacy Link aims to promote language and literacy skills in children, as well as foster healthy family relationships between young children and their justice-involved family members. Ashland, Bayfield, Buffalo, Dane, Dunn, Kenosha, Pepin, and Racine counties are piloting the program. With the award, the program will provide more than 5,000 new books to children across the state. The books will be distributed to jails, libraries, courts and other community spaces where children in justice-involved families interact, at no cost to the families.

“This award strengthens our capacity to distribute new, high-quality books that are culturally relevant and also foster parent-child relationships in families affected by the criminal justice system,” said Danielle Hairston-Green, Director of Extension’s Human Development and Relationships Institute. “Research clearly shows that the number of books at home is linked to children’s school success and lifelong well-being.”

First Book, the nonprofit social enterprise focused on equal access to quality education for children in need, awarded the funds as part of its OMG Books Awards: Offering More Great Books to Spark Innovation. This program will give more than \$4.7 million in funding to distribute 1.5 million brand new books and eBooks to children living in low-income communities in 33 U.S. states and territories. Awardees used the funding to select books and eBooks from the First Book Marketplace (www.fbmarketplace.com), First Book’s award-winning eCommerce platform, that best meet the needs of the children they serve. First Book estimates the total value of the books distributed will be more than \$12 million.

“We know that access to books and eBooks makes a significant difference in a child’s future success,” said Kyle Zimmer, First Book president, CEO, and cofounder. “Children do not thrive in deeply under-resourced environments, and too many of the schools and programs have far too little. This deprivation has long-term consequences for the children, their families, their communities, and our nation. This could not be more urgent. With the OMG Books Awards, First Book and The Literacy Link are investing not only in the future of the kids we’re reaching but in the overall well-being of our nation.”

Access to adequate resources is one of the greatest contributors to educational success in the United States.¹ Research indicates that just the presence of books in the home improves educational outcomes. Yet, low-income communities across the U.S. are plagued by vast ‘book deserts’—with one community having only a single book per as many as 830 children.² Additionally, members of the First Book Network, who exclusively serve kids in need, have indicated that without First Book, the children they serve would have access to very few books, if any at all.³ (References below).

¹ Sikora, et al. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2018.10.003>

² Susan B. Neuman, Naomi Moland. “Book Deserts.” Urban Education, 2016.

DOI: [10.1177/0042085916654525](https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916654525)

³ First Book Member Survey, 2016

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About The Literacy Link

Over the past two years, University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension has been implementing strategies through a University of Wisconsin System-funded pilot project called The Literacy Link to engage children with justice-involved parents and their families in literacy activities and to develop language-rich learning spaces in local correctional systems. For more information, please visit theliteracylink.extension.wisc.edu.

About First Book

First Book believes education offers children in need the best path out of poverty. Through sustainable, market-driven models, First Book breaks down barriers to quality education by making new, high-quality books and educational resources, including sports equipment, winter coats, snacks, and more, affordable to its member network of more than 400,000 registered educators who exclusively serve kids in need. Since 1992, First Book has distributed more learning materials than any other program of its kind: 175 million books and educational resources, worth more than \$1.5 billion, reaching more than 5 million children annually across the U.S. and Canada.

First Book also expands the breadth and depth of the education field through a family of social enterprises, including First Book Research & Insights, its proprietary research initiative, and the First Book Accelerator, which brings best-in-class research to the classroom via relevant, usable educator resources.

Eligible educators, librarians, providers, and others serving children in need can sign up at firstbook.org/join. For more information, please visit firstbook.org or follow the latest news on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Photos – from First Book visit to Dane County

Left to Right: First Book representatives-Candace Radoski and Alyssa Matteucci; The Literacy Link staff- Elizabeth Shaver and Mary Huser; Dane County Jail staff- Lieutenant Brian Mikula, Security Support Specialist Susan Whitbeck



Left to right: Candace Radoski, Alyssa Matteucci, Lieutenant Brian Mikula, Security Support Specialist Susan Whitbeck