Belk Foundation Invests in Efforts to Double 3rd Grade Reading Proficiency

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Grant to Library Foundation dramatically expands Active Reading training initiative
CHARLOTTE, NC: A grant of $100,000 from The Belk Foundation to the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Foundation will dramatically expand the Library's efforts to address the challenge of third grade reading proficiency through Active Reading training. "Active reading means reading *with* children, rather than just reading aloud *to* children," says Johanna Anderson, Executive Director of The Belk Foundation. "Research has proven that Active Reading builds vocabulary and comprehension, core components to literacy. Parents, caregivers, tutors and volunteers will be empowered with Active Reading training to best support young readers in Mecklenburg County."

In 2013, the National Assessment of Educational Progress found that only 40% of Charlotte's third graders were reading on grade level – important because third grade reading is a strong predictor of both high school graduation and college enrollment. Community initiative Read Charlotte was formed with a bold goal: to double third grade reading outcomes by 2025. Equipping caregivers with the tools of Active Reading is a key strategy to achieve this goal, and as a partner to Read Charlotte the Library has offered 4-part Active Reading workshops for caregivers at Library locations for several months. With this grant, the Library will make these very popular workshops available community-wide upon request.

This summer, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library will hire a grant-funded Active Reading Training Coordinator, who will serve as the community point person for all Active Reading training interest, and oversee a corps of trained volunteers and staff members to fulfill requests. In addition to the existing 4-week session for caregivers and children, the Library and Read Charlotte will develop a 90-minute interactive session geared towards equipping reading buddies and other community volunteers with important skills.

Library CEO Lee Keesler notes, "This grant will be catalytic and transformative. By reaching more caregivers and community volunteers with Active Reading workshops – and connecting them with Library resources – the number of young readers impacted will increase exponentially." Over one year, it is projected that the Training Coordinator will affect 7,000 caregivers, reading buddies, and non-profit staff throughout Mecklenburg County. Additionally, the Library's 9500+ annual storytime programs have been adapted to incorporate and demonstrate Active Reading strategies.

"Our partnership with the Library is vital to transforming a bold idea into a community-wide movement," says Read Charlotte Executive Director Munro Richardson. "Active Reading has the power to significantly move the needle for children. We are grateful for the support of The Belk Foundation to help us scale these efforts across the County."

About The Belk Foundation

The Belk Foundation is a Charlotte-based family foundation that supports public education by strengthening teachers and school leaders, and ensuring that students are achieving on or above grade level by the third grade. Now in its fourth generation of family leadership, The Belk Foundation serves as the public expression of gratitude and commitment shown by the family that created the Belk department store organization. The Belk Foundation had assets of more than $50 million as of March 31, 2017. Since 2000, The Belk Foundation has distributed more than $46 million to charities across the Southeast. More information is available at www.belkfoundation.org.

About the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Foundation:

The Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Foundation exists to help the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library improve lives and build a stronger community. Created in 2012, the Foundation supports the Library's programs and services through advocacy, fundraising and building relationships with others who share a passion for the Library's work. The Foundation believes that free and open access to information can change lives for the better, and build a brighter future for our community. For more information, visit www.foundation.cmlibrary.org.

About Charlotte Mecklenburg Library:

The Charlotte Mecklenburg Library is one of America's leading urban public libraries, serving a community of more than one million citizens in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. Through 20 locations, targeted outreach and online, the Library delivers exceptional services and programs, with a mission to improve lives and build a stronger community. For more, visit cmlibrary.org.

About Read Charlotte

Read Charlotte is a collaborative, community-wide initiative to double the percentage of third grade students reading at grade level from 39% in 2015 to 80% by 2025. Housed under the Foundation For The Carolinas, Read Charlotte is organized as a backbone organization leading a collective impact effort across Mecklenburg County. Focusing on the continuum from birth through third grade, Read Charlotte builds collaborative partnerships and provides resources on proven practices and/or programs. Read Charlotte plays a leadership role but does not directly operate the programs. Working groups comprised of experts and community members have helped to select strategies, identify community indicators and define a strategic plan that will guide Read Charlotte's work through 2025. For more information, visit www.readcharlotte.org.

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