

**Read to Me!  
Quarterly**

# CONNECT

## GREETINGS FROM THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR

*Read to Me!* is delighted to launch our first issue of *Connect*, a newsletter that celebrates connections.

*Connect* celebrates the magical connections between parents and children that help nurture reading and the many connections throughout Nova Scotia that build a web of literacy support for families. *Connect* helps us connect with you to share the latest news, research and resources for early literacy.

*Connect* also provides a forum for families to connect and share their own experiences with books and reading.

We invite your letters, photos of families reading together and feedback on the *Read to Me!* Bag.

Since the launch of *Read to Me!* In 2002 we have blanketed the province with over 60,000 high quality baby books.

Every baby in Nova Scotia is now

welcomed into the world with the gift of books and the message that literacy is their legacy.

By supporting the literacy of our youngest citizens, Nova Scotia is building a strong and vibrant future - one book and one baby at a time!

Happy Reading!



### Did you know?

**Read to Me!** gives a bright yellow bag of baby books and literacy resources to every baby born in Nova Scotia!

To date, **Read to Me!** has given out over

**30,000**

bags containing

**60,000**

high quality baby books!



## SEE YOU AT THE READ TO ME! JAMBOREE!

**Attention all babies and toddlers! It's time for the 3rd annual *Read to Me!* Jamboree!**

The Jamborees, organized jointly by Nova Scotia Public Libraries and the *Read to Me!* Program, are celebrations that feature stories, and rhymes for babies, toddlers and their families. Library branches around the province also hold 'books and babies' programs, where babies can hear stories, learn rhymes and play together. Parents and caregivers benefit, too. They receive resources and learn fun activities to try at home with their baby. Since the Jamborees began in 2004, over 2100 babies and toddlers have joined in on the fun! The Jamborees, which are open to the public, will take place this October. To find out where a *Read to Me!* Jamboree is being held in your region, check with your local library!

## MEET THE IWK *READ TO ME!* COORDINATOR

It's hard to believe that I've been with the *Read to Me!* Program for a full year! As the IWK Coordinator, I spend time visiting with the families and delivering the *Read to Me!* bags. I love the excitement and enthusiasm of families as they realize the joy and benefits of story, songs and rhymes in their new baby's development.

I recently met a family on the elevator as they were being transferred from the birth unit. In her arms, mom had a baby that was only 3 hours old. She stopped me and asked when I could bring her a *Read to Me!* bag. She had intended to bring baby books with her to the hospital but had forgotten them! Mom and Dad were thrilled to receive the *Read to Me!* bag so they could start reading with their little one right away.

When I started with *Read to Me!* I was amazed to see how many babies are born in Nova Scotia each year. Half of those births take place at the IWK Health Centre. I get to meet with over 4000 new families each year! We also have a team of dedicated weekend volunteers who cover weekends and holidays so that no one misses receiving their bright yellow bag.

Another exciting part of the *Read to Me!* Program at the IWK is the volunteer Reading Program. An enthusiastic crew of over 30 trained *Read to Me!* volunteers read to children awaiting medical treatment in Same Day Surgery, Emergency Department and Outpatient Clinics. Our volunteers have read to over 2000 children this year! Some of the readers' favourite books are '*Bark, George!*' and any of the books starring *Froggy* or *Olivia*.

It's wonderful to see the way a book can have such a positive impact on our families. Whether it be handing out books for newborns, or reading to children awaiting medical treatment, books are a fun way of reminding parents to read to their children - today and everyday.



IWK Coordinator  
Tracy Lowe

## A SPECIAL THANKS TO ...

Thanks to the generous support of Dexter's Subaru and Subaru Canada, *Read to Me!* has been crisscrossing the province bringing the gift of books to every child born in Nova Scotia. Dexter's presented *Read to Me!* with a Subaru Legacy, which has been fondly named "**The Readmobile**". It is fitting that Dexter's have given us a Legacy, as they are helping to create a literacy legacy in Nova Scotia.



"The Readmobile"

This spring we were thrilled to receive a \$500,000 grant from the Counselling Foundation of Canada. The Counselling Foundation has helped to nurture *Read to Me!* through our developmental years with operating grants of \$250,000. The Foundation's latest contribution to the program brings their support to \$750,000.

The Counselling Foundation Grant was matched with a \$500,000 grant from the Halifax Youth Foundation. The Halifax Youth Foundation, a Founding Partner of *Read to Me!*, had a vision for a province-wide early literacy program, and have provided ongoing financial support to make that dream a reality.

In future issues we will be highlighting donations and gifts in kind from our many generous supporters.

## RESEARCH UPDATE

*Read to Me!* is committed to research and evaluation to ensure we are meeting our literacy goals.

To help measure the impact of the program our Research Coordinator Dr. Patrick McGrath, working with a wonderful team of students, has conducted research on the *Read to Me!* Reading Program in Day Surgery looking at whether reading to children awaiting treatment reduced their anxiety levels. Results of the research show anxiety levels of children aged 5-8 years old were **significantly** reduced after being read to.

This spring Dr. McGrath and his research team began a survey of approximately 1,000 families who have received *Read to Me!* Bags. The results of the survey will help us evaluate each of the gift bag components and measure shared reading practices in families.

We have also partnered with Research Works! For Child Literacy, a five-year Social Science and Humanities Research Grant which is helping to build research capacity and evidence-based decision making about child literacy.

## UPDATE FROM THE REGIONAL COORDINATOR

Doesn't September seem like the true start of the new year? So many things seem to begin at this time – and this year it seems particularly true as we publish the first issue of Connect.

In each issue *Read to Me!* will connect you with the many people around Nova Scotia who support early literacy, with the work we are doing around the province and with each other. As the Regional Coordinator I provide support to the ten regional hospitals with the *Read to Me!* Program. This year I have logged hundreds of kilometers as I visit each site and will be logging hundreds more. I am so lucky to get to know the many wonderful people who support the *Read to Me!* Program—over 100 dedicated individuals ensure the success of the program around the province. You will get the chance to meet one of them in each issue of Connect.



Regional Coordinator  
Shanda LaRamee-Jones

This summer I was pleased to introduce the new book '*Baby Boo*' to the bags handed out at seven of our eleven sites. This book has grabbed the attention of babies and parents around Nova Scotia. '*Baby Boo*' was short listed for the Sainsbury's Baby Book Award in 2003 and was recently recommended in Today's Parent magazine.

As editor of Connect, I look forward to hearing the stories from parents who have received our bag and the wonderful volunteers around the province who deliver it. I am excited to share these stories with you in future issues of Connect!

### VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT ON ... HENRIETTE WORTH



The Maternal and Newborn Health Unit at **St. Martha's Hospital** in Antigonish has been giving out the *Read to Me!* bag since 2003. An important part of the success of the program here has been Ward Clerk Henriette Worth. Last year, Henriette and the other ward clerks on the unit handed out 433 bags containing **866** books – a 100% delivery rate! "It's a part of what we do—it's a matter of grabbing that bag. We're obligated to pass information along to the moms. The papers are kind of boring, but the bag is like a bonus for having a baby! It brings a smile to my face to think that I am adding to the literacy of the population", says Henriette.

The proud mother of two children, 16 and 23, Henriette has long been a strong proponent of early literacy. "When my babies were in utero I read anything I happened to be reading - Reader's Digest, or the newspaper - aloud, while I rubbed my belly - I knew it was an important thing to do and it calmed the baby."

Handing out the bag is fun, says Henriette. "The first time new mothers receive the bag they are surprised that they get this wonderful package. They are thrilled to see that they get another one when they have their second baby! Literacy is an extremely important component in a child's development. I am so proud to be a part of *Read to Me!*"

### NEWEST READ TO ME! BOOK, IN BAGS NOW!



Seven hospitals around the province are now handing out a new book '*Baby Boo*' in the *Read to Me!* bag.

'*Baby Boo!*' was designed by developmental specialists who looked at research on how babies develop and learn during the first two years of life.

They selected the bright colours, bold patterns and rhyming text that babies love. Each page features wonderful black and white photographs of lively and expressive babies. This stimulating book is also a chunky size that makes it easy for little hands to hold. At the very end of the book there is a mirror surprise that makes every baby the star of the show! Our book selection committee knew that '*Baby Boo*' would be the perfect addition to the bag and comments from new parents have reinforced that.

A new mom recently called us up to say how popular '*Baby Boo!*' has been with her baby. "My daughter is eleven weeks old and she has loved '*Baby Boo!*' from the moment we started reading it to her. She seems to imitate the expressions of the babies in the book. She likes it so much that we make sure that we bring it everywhere!"

# SYDNEY SHOWS *READ TO ME!* DVD DURING PRENATAL FETAL MONITORING

Every Read to Me! Bag contains a copy of the award winning DVD, "**...the best start in life**". The DVD, produced by CBC Atlantic is a powerful and moving portrayal of the joys and benefits of reading to a baby right from birth.

"**...the best start in life**" is now being shown in Sydney, in the Prenatal Clinic at Cape Breton Regional Hospital where women attend a prenatal fetal monitoring. The monitoring takes about fifteen minutes to complete. This is the perfect length of time for patients to lay back, relax and enjoy the DVD.

Fetal monitoring nurse, Theresa Donovan said that her patients have enjoyed watching the video immensely. "It's a wonderful way to pass the time. And the music is so lovely - nurses often pop their head in to find out where the beautiful music is coming from."

Danielle Mugridge, a mother of a two year old, with another baby on the



Danielle Mugridge watches the *Read to Me!* DVD during her prenatal fetal monitoring

way, stopped in for her prenatal monitoring in July. After watching the Read to Me! DVD, she told us that she was surprised by how intently the infants in the video focused on the books. "I didn't know that babies so young would be that interested in the books", she said. "It is amazing to see!"

Ward Clerk, Wendy Jobe delivers the Read to Me! Bag at Cape Breton Regional. "Now that the DVD is shown during the prenatal monitoring the mothers know that they are going to receive a Read to Me! Bag when they come to the hospital to have their baby".

"The DVD is a very powerful resource tool," says *Read to Me!* Director, Carol McDougall. "Our literacy practitioners have only a short time to meet with each family but the DVD reinforces and expands the message of the importance of starting early with books and reading. It is exciting that families in Sydney are getting the opportunity to learn about the importance of early literacy during the prenatal period."

The Read to Me! Program was pleased to provide the DVD player and television monitor for the Prenatal Clinic to show the DVD during the monitoring.



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We're on the web!  
[Readtome.ca](http://Readtome.ca)

Read to Me! is a provincial, hospital-based program developed to help families enrich their child's early years with books and reading.

We present parents with a bright yellow bag of books and literacy resources at the hospital bedside within 24 hours of the birth of their baby.

The program is delivered at 11 hospitals in Nova Scotia that offer maternity services, reaching every baby born in the province.

### Each Read to Me! Bag contains:

- An award winning DVD with tips for reading with baby
- Two high-quality baby books
- An invitation to join the library
- A resource booklet
- A CD of lullabies and nursery rhymes
- Coupons from local booksellers



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