

The most important skill learned in school is the ability to read. However, far too many public schools around the country don't have libraries or enough books that elementary school children can read either in their school or borrow to read at home. Literacy rates are closely linked to living in impoverished areas. Many children living in these areas don't have access to books or reading material to practice their skills at home or in a classroom. Growing up, I constantly embraced every opportunity to read, appreciating the chance to explore new worlds and ideas through various books. This love inspired me to find a way to help other children find as much joy in reading as I had. Seven years ago, I began volunteering with the Book Fairies. This organization redistributes donated books to underfunded schools in the New York City and metropolitan area, focusing on underserved schools and communities.

Two years ago, I raised over \$1,200 through their Read-A-Thon program and had the opportunity of serving on the organization's charity board. This experience was incredibly fulfilling, knowing that the money I raised is helping children learn to read. Additionally, I collected over 3,000 books through various book drives, including at Levittown Swim Association's Summer Swim League Championships and various Nassau County indoor track championship meets. Throughout the year, family, friends, neighbors, and fellow members of my community would generously bring books to my doorstep, looking to donate and support as much as they could. This past summer, I worked as a student intern for several weeks, helping to sort donated books and redistribute them to various schools. I assisted in organizing books and packing them into boxes for distribution to schools, libraries, prisons, homeless shelters, and international locations. I've also volunteered at multiple book fairs, helping over hundreds of teachers and librarians find books to fill their classrooms and schools.

During Covid, many students in these impoverished areas struggled to learn remotely, not having the resources to properly participate in online classes. Without having access to books at home and the school district not having the money to send every child home with reading materials, many students were unable to continue their education properly. Thankfully, The Book Fairies was still able to collect and distribute books to children in need. My father and I would pick up books from the warehouse and drive them to various locations, including schools, libraries, homeless shelters, and hospitals. This allowed for students to continue their education and have access to reading materials during this difficult time.

Having recently distributed their 5 millionth book, the impact to the lives of children in disadvantaged areas is immeasurable. Graduation rates have greatly increased, and lives have been changed for the better. Next year, I will be in the Boston area at Babson College. In Massachusetts, 60% of elementary school students are below the grade level and 12.4% live below the poverty line. My fellow college student volunteers

and I intend to keep gathering books and striving to reduce literacy rates during our time in college.