

Treasures at the Hearing Clinic

THE CHEERFUL PRINCESS sits on her velvety plum-colored chair and watches over her treasure. The old, leather-strapped box is closed and is beginning to show signs of wear. Giggling children are heard and the princess braces herself for small, rough hands.

The lid to the aged box is slowly lifted in hushed anticipation. The children have worked hard for a reward. “Ahhhhhh,” they sigh as they fumble through the box, touching and contemplating each precious treasure. Finally each child selects just the right one and sits down to read.

This is the story of our clinic. The princess is a Groovy Girl and the treasure box is a small trunk filled with new books for all ages. Each child visiting our clinic for the first time gets to pick a book from the “treasure chest.” Many of the regulars like to pick one every time they come, and we encourage them to do so. One can never have too many books!

We don’t give candy or stickers because most kids don’t need either. However, children do need good books. Most of the children coming to the clinic already are being seen for speech delays or hearing loss. The majority qualify for state insurance and free lunches at school. They are already at risk for being illiterate.

Initially, we thought everyone would want to participate in getting books into the little hands of those who need them. But after unsuccessful attempts to get large retail book chains to participate in partnering with us, our clinic started applying for grants from nonprofit organizations. We figured the investment would pay off in years to come.

FirstBook is one of the organizations we use to get new books into the hands of our pediatric population. It is a nonprofit organization providing books through several different venues for those who work with

children and families at risk for illiteracy. There are several book-bank distributions throughout the year; if your organization qualifies, you are able to receive books for a nominal shipping cost. Our first distribution was for early readers, and *Thomas the Train* “lift the flap” and *Barbie’s Island Princess* have been huge hits.

Through its Marketplace, FirstBook also allows qualified organizations to purchase hardback classic children’s literature for a fraction of retail price. After adopting an elementary school around the holidays, we used the Marketplace to purchase age-appropriate books for gifts. Just prior to the school’s winter holiday break, we presented 300 books along with hats we had made ourselves to children in kindergarten to fifth grade. I’m still not certain who enjoyed it most—they or us!

An online library of all Pediatric Pointers columns is available in the columns section at www.advancweb.com/hearing.

We also work with Scholastic Book Clubs, which has a variety of monthly specials where you are able to purchase a preselected title for \$1. You can purchase online or find order forms at your child’s school. You don’t have to prequalify to purchase from Scholastic. If you purchase these through your child’s school, your child’s class will receive bonus points for new books and you won’t pay additional fees for shipping. When a teacher spends \$500 or more per calendar year, he/she is upgraded to Red Apple Awards. This gives your child’s teacher an opportunity to take advantage of more perks for her class. Your purchase benefits your practice, the school and many children. It’s a win-win for all.

All the expenses to provide new books for children at your practice are tax deductible. Grants are available even if you are not a nonprofit business. We are a for-profit




business serving an impoverished population. You have to apply to find out if your clinic is eligible. Criteria are based on the demographics of the population you serve.

Storage has proven to be tricky. We were surprised when our first shipment arrived and we had to line the halls with boxes. We’ve since learned to submit for smaller quantities more often. We also have learned creative

ways to make stacking boxes functional.

It takes more time to apply for book grants and also costs more per child. We average around 75 cents per book by the time we add distribution grants and Scholastic bargains. However, the additional pennies we pay are part of a long-term investment in our community. The real treasure will come in the future in the form of literate taxpayers.

You can visit Scholastic Book Clubs at www.teacher.scholastic.com/clubs or contact your local school. FirstBook is found online at www.firstbook.org. 



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