

SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY ISSUE!

Our mission now is the same as it was at our founding in 2001: The Reading Team helps young children become strong readers, writers, listeners, and speakers. We do this by engaging them in a wide range of literacy-nurturing lessons and activities so they can succeed in school and in life. All of our free programs are made possible by the generosity of supporters like you.

It Was 20 Years Ago Today...

Dear Readers,

We have much to celebrate in this newsletter, starting with the Reading Team's 20th anniversary. The organization first opened its doors to Harlem's children in the fall of 2001. Maureen Rover, our founder, had seen a need. The majority of children in the neighborhood were failing the New York State English Language Arts Exam (NYS ELA), and their inability to read was setting them up for disengagement with school. Maureen's germ of an idea grew over two years of careful planning, with lots of pro-bono legal help from her husband Ed Rover. There were many meetings with Bertrand Brown, the retired Superintendent of New York City Department of Education District 5 in Harlem. (Today, like Maureen, he is a Reading Team board member.) The result is the Reading Team, which has helped more than 13,000 children master reading, writing, speaking, and listening—the key elements of literacy.

Setting up a classroom in space generously provided by Sam Brown, founder of Our Children's Foundation, Maureen ordered desks, books, and computer tables—all the gear needed to welcome students. She and her new Program Director, Margaret Banier, hit the streets, handing out flyers to parents to drum up interest in the free program. Then came the September 11 terrorist attacks. For a while it seemed as if the Reading Team might not launch at all. The supplies Maureen had ordered sat on delivery trucks that were backed up for miles at the entrance to Manhattan. When parents called, Margaret had to tell them, again and again, "We aren't ready to open." Finally, in mid-October, the Reading Team welcomed its first After-School Program students, a group of 12 that grew to 30 by the school year's end.



Reading Team founder Maureen Rover visits with students from the After-School Program.

The first funders came on board, most notably the Dana Foundation, which has supported the Reading Team unflinchingly for two decades. The Reading Team's tiny board of four (Maureen, Ed, Bert, and Lisa Fox Martin), came to its aid as well. Later, supporters and board members, including Marvin Ellin, Evelyn Halpert, John Jay Iselin, Stephen Meringoff, and Marc Weisman, arrived and reached out to friends. Gradually the organization got on its feet. Its Preschool Program served neighborhood classes. The children blossomed. "We were spot on in terms of the mission

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and what we had to do,” says Maureen. “The children needed to be in small groups, taught by people who care deeply about reading and who feel an admiration for young children.”

The need for the Reading Team’s work in Harlem remains; if anything it has been heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. “The literacy crisis is without limit—and that’s not true just in Harlem but in all of New York City, the state, the country,” says Maureen. In 2019, the last year in which the NYS ELA was administered, the pass rate among New York City children in Grades 3-5 was 47%. In Harlem, it was an abysmal 30%. Yet, at the Reading Team, 84% of children passed—a rate that is right on track with the rate of Scarsdale, New York, one of the country’s premier public school systems.

The Reading Team plays an important academic role for our children, but that’s not the whole story. Children in our After-School Program come back year after year, and the classroom here is a safe, happy place where they can see friends and teachers. “I still have a painting by a Reading Team child who was asked to draw a picture of her family,” Maureen recalls. “She drew her mother, herself, a little black dog, and me. We were family.”

Happy 20th to the Reading Team!



Dana Points
Executive Director

“The children needed to be in small groups, taught by people who care deeply about reading.” —Maureen Rover



Clockwise, from left: Children in our After-School Program work hard but have fun learning to read. The Reading Team’s end-of-year celebration is one of the After-School Program highlights. Program Director Margaret Banier, today, with two college-bound Reading Team alumni, Salmatou and Amara.

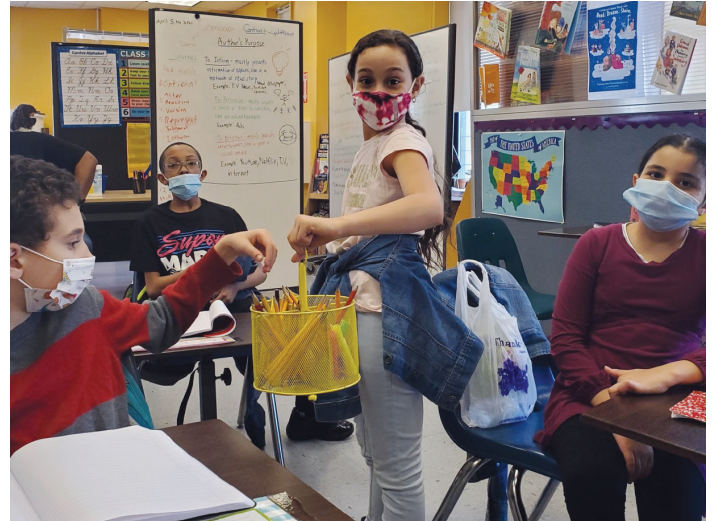
Student Spotlight: Lujain, Grade 4

Pre-pandemic, Lujain was an average second-grade student in the Reading Team’s After-School Program. After coming to the Reading Team since kindergarten, She displayed a strong grasp of literacy skills expected for her age, got along with her classmates, and finished the year reading slightly above grade level.

You’re probably expecting a pandemic story where everything goes off the rails. To the contrary, during the 2020-2021 school year, Lujain flourished, becoming an above-average student and a leader of her third-grade class. When the After-School Program switched to virtual mode shortly before Thanksgiving, Lujain didn’t miss a single day of online instruction—quite an accomplishment since her family’s internet could be unstable and her home life was (happily) disrupted thanks to a newborn sister.

Lujain says that she loves the Reading Team because her teachers allow her to express herself freely. That comfort likely helped foster her self-confidence and ingenuity. She regularly assisted other students, troubleshooting technical glitches in the virtual classroom. Chris Bueso, her Literacy Mentor, reported that Lujain was a “valuable assistant” in the online delivery of his class. When the program resumed in-person classes at the beginning of April, Lujain continued to make significant gains. The Reading Team is using LightSail, a digital library and reading program, with its

older students. LightSail periodically assesses students’ Lexile level (reading level). Lujain’s score rose over 200 points, she logged more than 1,300 minutes read during free time, and she consistently scored high on her assessments. “Lujain, is smart, gregarious, and resourceful,” says Chris, “Nothing is going to stop her from excelling in school or in life—not even a pandemic.”

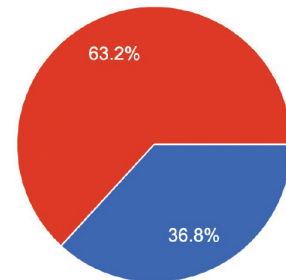


The Parents’ Perspective

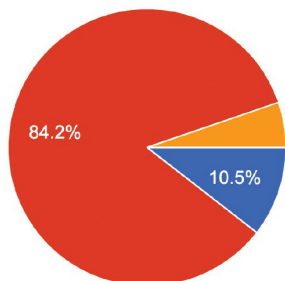
With help from volunteers from the Tamer Center for Social Enterprise at Columbia Business School, the Reading Team administered its first-ever survey of parents to assess their attitudes about and experience with the program. And the results were off the (pie) charts. Here’s a sample:

● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Disagree ● Strongly disagree

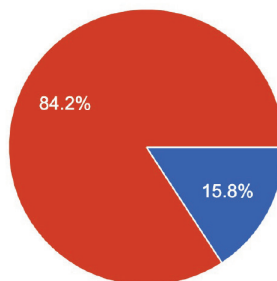
My child enjoys the Reading Team program.



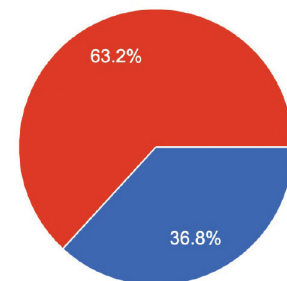
My child enjoys reading now more than s/he did at the beginning of the school year last fall.



Being in the Reading Team this year improved my child’s reading ability.



The Reading Team has done a good job of keeping its programs running safely during COVID-19.



The Reading Team: A Cure for Covid-Related Learning Loss

With children heading back to school, parents and policymakers are calling on educators to help reverse the learning losses students suffered during the pandemic. A July, 2021 report by McKinsey & Company suggests that, on average, students fell four months behind in reading in the 2020-2021 school year, with children of color and those from low-income households experiencing the greatest losses. Students in majority-Black schools ended the school year twice as far behind in reading as those in majority-white schools. A research brief by Curriculum Associates, which makes educational products, finds that the youngest children, particularly first and second graders, are most at risk of what the company calls “unfinished learning.”

“While all students are suffering, those who came into the pandemic with the fewest academic opportunities are on track to exit with the greatest learning loss.”

—McKinsey & Company

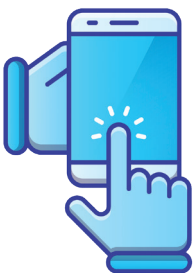
Education experts—from think-tank researchers to government officials—have proposed evidence-based intervention strategies to address these setbacks. These programs, sometimes called “acceleration academies” or “high-dosage tutoring,” closely resemble the Reading Team’s time-proven early literacy approach, which has been helping children ages 3 to 11 achieve lasting academic success for 20 years. Most recommend a combination of small group instruction, academic rigor, substantial time on task, skilled teachers, and enrichment activities. For two decades, these



For the Reading Team’s end-of-year celebration last May, first graders created a Harlem mural and memorized and recited stanzas of Langston Hughes’ poem, “My People.” The night is beautiful,/So the faces of my people./The stars are beautiful,/So the eyes of my people./Beautiful, also, is the sun./Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people.

building blocks—supplemented by computer-based lessons, book giveaways, parent support, and professional development training for teaching staff—have characterized the Reading Team’s highly effective instructional model.

Our children’s success tells us that this approach works—the key is getting more kids access. The McKinsey authors foretell a costly future: “Unless steps are taken to address unfinished learning...the impact on the United States economy could amount to \$128 billion to \$188 billion every year as this cohort enters the workforce,” they write. Your investment in the children we serve in Harlem can change their lives—this year perhaps more than ever.



Visit ReadingTeam.org!

Our refreshed web site offers reading resources for parents of children preK through Grade 5. Stop by and have a look today, and sign up for our e-newsletter for more frequent Reading Team updates.

GIVE CHILDREN THE GIFT OF FUTURE SUCCESS

It is easy to make a difference today. We hope you will partner with us at this time as we continue to improve the lives of our community’s most important asset, its children.

Please go to readingteam.org to donate today!