

making a difference

# LITERACY FIRST

By **Tory Newby**, Preston Ave and **Helen Watkins**, Jarratt Ave



From Right to Left: Tabatha Brown, Tory Newby, Helen Watkins, Lori Pickle, Patti Hart, Teresa Oppedal, Ellen Arnold, Marian Wallace



in AISD and Literacy First works tirelessly each year to ensure that the children receive the help they need to learn to read.

### How can others get involved with this organization?

Each year in March on Dr. Seuss's birthday, Literacy First has a Reading Day where anyone is welcome to join a tutor at a local school and read to one of the students in the program.

Follow the organization on social media (Twitter, Instagram, FaceBook).

Lawyers in Austin are invited to join the Lawyers for Literacy infinity group that provides support for the tutors and sponsors the Reading Day.

Sign up for a site visit. They love to show off this amazing program and you are welcome to come see the tutors and students in action.

Spread the word to anyone who might be interested in joining the organization as a tutor.



Do you volunteer? Email [LifInTheHeights@n2pub.com](mailto:LifInTheHeights@n2pub.com) to share about your organization.

**Literacy First is an early childhood literacy program at the Charles A. Dana Center, an organized research unit within the College of Natural Sciences at The University of Texas at Austin. Their mission is to place highly-trained AmeriCorps members in low-income schools to deliver intensive and effective literacy tutoring to advance K-2 students to grade level in reading by 3rd grade.**

Each year, Literacy First works in about 26 Austin area Title I, high poverty schools to help approximately 2,000 children read. Their tutors work one on one with each child in their caseload every single day. The curriculum used is research-based and can be delivered in Spanish or English depending on the child's first language. Research has shown that the skills gained while in this program are maintained in their later school years. These children develop confidence in learning and reading thanks to the skill, encouragement and positive relationship with their tutors.

Each tutor must complete 1,700 hours of service in order to receive an end of term education award. Working in the schools provides 1,400 hours and so each tutor has a partner program they spend additional time volunteering with. These programs range from their assigned school's after-school programs to horse therapy for autistic children. Second year tutors can apply to obtain an alternative teaching certificate and there are approximately 60 teachers in AISD that are Literacy First alumni. Research shows that Literacy First teachers stay with their schools longer than the average teacher.

Reading by third grade is critical. In 2011, the Annie E. Casey Foundation report "Early Warning! Why reading by the end of third grade matters" showed definitively that low-income children who are not reading on grade level by 3rd grades are six times more likely to drop out of high school than their peers are. Low-income children of color who are not at grade level by 3rd grade are eight times more likely to drop out of high school. Every student who does not complete high school costs our society an estimated \$260,000 in lost earnings, taxes and productivity. There are approximately 43,000 low-income children

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