

SOAR IS DEDICATED TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION,
COLLABORATION AND ALIGNMENT IN MUHLENBERG COUNTY, KY



REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY
2016

Vicki Yonts
Program Manager & CECC Director

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SOAR	2
LITERACY CAMPAIGN	4
READY! FOR KINDERGARTEN	6
COMMUNITY EVENTS	10
HEADSTART	12
EARLY HEADSTART	14
DAYCARE/PRESCHOOL	16
READING POSSE	18
MAYORS READING CLUB	20
CECC/KINDERGARTEN CAMP	22
NEW BABY LITERACY PROGRAM	24
READ15	25
R.HERO	26
MISC.	28
LITTLE LIBRARIES	32
IMAGINATION LIBRARY	32

A young child with short brown hair is sitting at a wooden table, holding a yellow book to their face and reading. The child is wearing a green sleeveless shirt with a colorful pattern. In the background, there are educational cards on the wall, one of which says "one".

SOAR

STRATEGIES, OPPORTUNITIES, ADVANTAGES & RESOURCES

The Felix E. Martin Jr. Foundation has recognized the critical need for early childhood education by committing over \$1.3 million to date in support of programs across Muhlenberg County which strive to help each child arrive at kindergarten ready to learn. In 2011, the Board of the Felix E. Martin Jr. Foundation created an early education program called SOAR: Strategies, Opportunities, Advantages & Resources. Since that time, SOAR, led by Program Manager, Vicki Yonts, has implemented many county-wide educational programs for children. Based on research showing a dramatic correlation between the number of books in the home and future academic achievement, the Foundation has placed a special emphasis on literacy and has given away over 150,000 books to children in Muhlenberg County. Nearly 26,000 were distributed by SOAR in 2015-2016.

DURING 2015-16, 25,540 BOOKS WERE GIVEN AWAY IN MUHLENBERG COUNTY

SINCE THE FOUNDATION'S INCEPTION IN 2009, OVER 150,000 BOOKS HAVE BEEN GIVEN AWAY IN MUHLENBERG COUNTY



SOAR

READY! FOR KINDERGARTEN

COMMUNITY EVENTS

HEADSTART

DAYCARE/ PRESCHOOL

READING POSSE

MAYORS READING CLUB

CECC

NEW BABY

READ15

R.HERO

MISC

EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY CAMPAIGN



**Read To Me
15 Minutes
Everyday**

FELIX E. MARTIN JR.
FOUNDATION
Missouri Department of Education

Read 15 MINUTES
A Day EVERYDAY

Soar



**FREE BOOKS
IN THE MAIL**

REGISTER AT  OR ONLINE

Muhlenberg County
Public Libraries

WWW.IMAGINATIONLIBRARY.COM

FUNDED BY
FELIX E. MARTIN JR.
FOUNDATION

Soar



**HELPING CREATE
A NEW GENERATION
OF READERS IN
MUHLENBERG
COUNTY**

Soar

FELIX E. MARTIN JR.
FOUNDATION
Missouri Department of Education

READY!
for Kindergarten

Read 15 MINUTES
A Day EVERYDAY

Reach
Out & Read

Soar

PRESCHOOL

Read 15



SOAR is committed to promoting the importance of reading in early childhood. To assist in reaching the entire community, SOAR has created several billboards featuring local families which encourage everyone to read to their child at least 15 minutes each day.

FELIX E. MARTIN JR.
FOUNDATION



SOAR
KINDERGARTEN
COMMUNITY
EVENTS
HEADSTART
DAYCARE/
PRESCHOOL
READING
POSSE
MAYORS
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CLUB
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NEW
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READ15
RHERO
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Ready! for K

SOAR introduced the Ready! for Kindergarten Program in Muhlenberg County in January 2014. The program is available at no charge to all families who have a child starting kindergarten in Muhlenberg County. Each family attends three classes which teach age-appropriate targets to the parents and caregivers of pre-school children. The families receive learning toys and tools at each session. Along with these toys, the families are taught about desired learning goals and how to “play with a purpose.” The Ready! for Kindergarten program has been implemented across the country and has demonstrated excellent results for ensuring children begin kindergarten ready to soar!

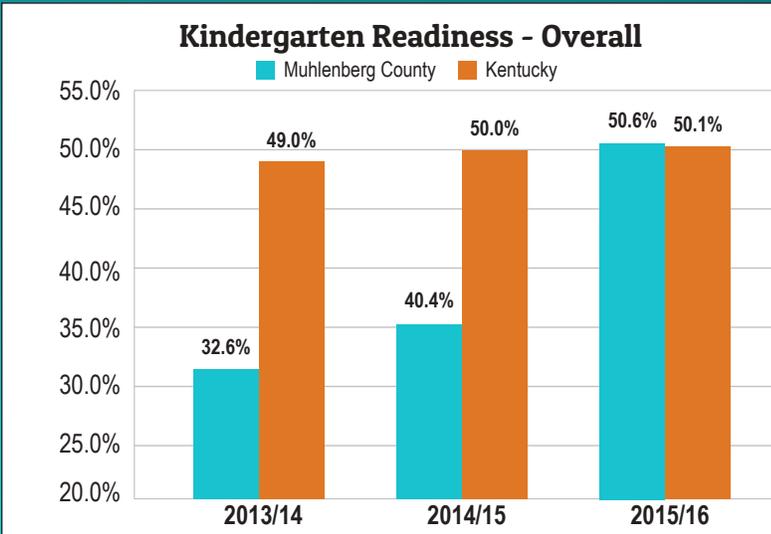
SOAR also partners with Pathway of Hope to offer Ready! for Kindergarten programs for families with younger children from birth to age 3.



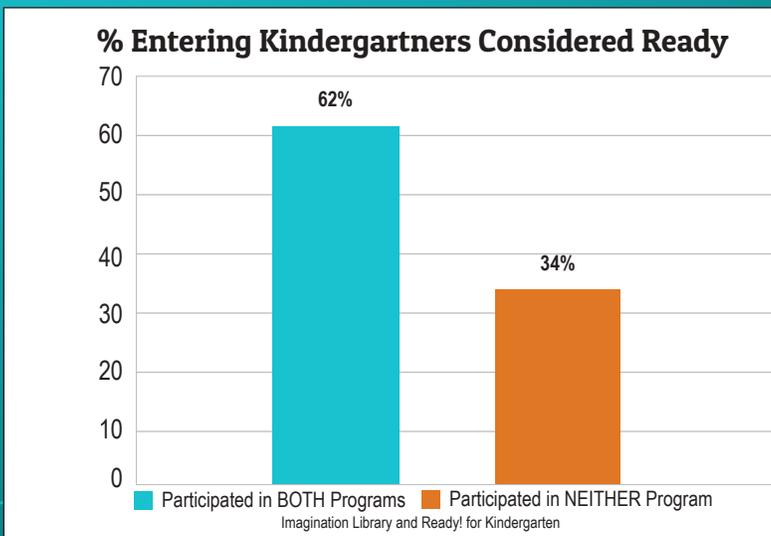
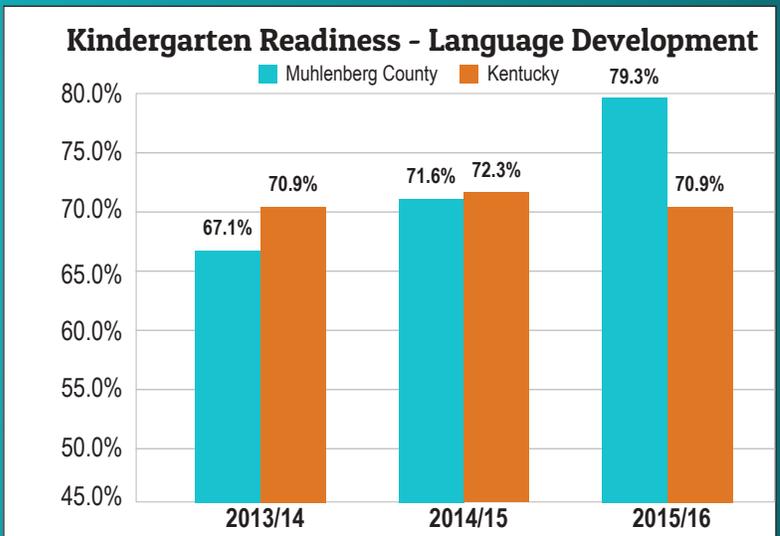
READY!
for Kindergarten

Kindergarten

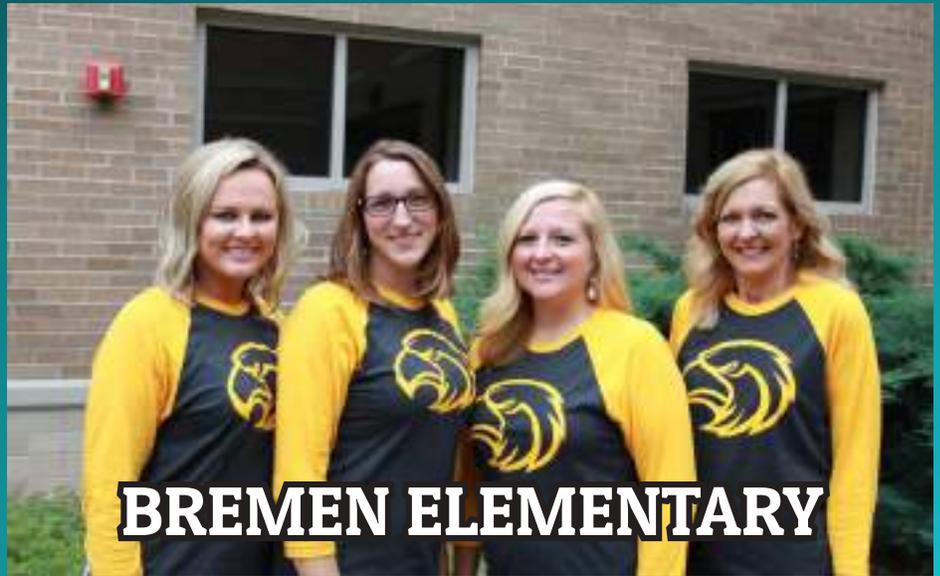
SOAR
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During 2015-16
 191 families participated
 (62% of Muhlenberg
 County families)



Ready! for Kindergarten FACILITATORS



BREMEN ELEMENTARY

Laci Galyen, Mary Beth Thomas, Meagan Brannon, Kathy Payton



CENTRAL CITY ELEMENTARY

Amanda Davis, Morgan Dameron, Sharon Halliburton, Sandy Knight



GREENVILLE ELEMENTARY

Amy Fitzhugh, Jennifer Jones, Holly Browning, Millie Williams



LONGEST ELEMENTARY

Sarah Wester, Whitney Riggs, Tequia Staples, Shanda Fogle, Kelcea Smith



SOUTH ELEMENTARY

Karen Rice, Skylar McCarraher, Tammy McDonald, Kelly Chrisman



Facilitators say...

"I have taught Ready! for Kindergarten each year that we have had it in our district. From day one, I knew that this was going to be a great program for our community and incoming kindergarteners. More than not, students come to kindergarten "not ready", and statistics show that when you start behind, you generally stay behind. Teaching to the learning gap is the hardest part of being a kindergarten teacher. Ready! for Kindergarten helps parents understand exactly what is expected of incoming kindergarteners as well as what they can be doing at home to help. The activities and materials are ALL fun and play based learning. Another aspect of this program that I enjoy is getting to know the parents of some of my future students. It is so beneficial to already have a relationship when they come to me as a kindergarten-er. The parents are less nervous to leave their child with a stranger; and I already know a little about their child. This program just makes sense. It connects parents to teachers and schools to homes. It is my hope that this program will continue in our community for years to come!" - Skylar McCarraher - South Elementary Kindergarten Teacher

"I just wanted to share a quick success story with you. During our recent READY! for Kindergarten event that was held on Tuesday, September 13th, I had a parent come up to me and share her thoughts. She shared that she learned more that evening on "how" to work with her child on school readiness activities than she learned in all her years of college preparation for her Elementary education degree.

I thought this was a powerful testimony of how well READY! for Kindergarten implementation is working. This brings to light the reality of this complete process and how much we need this program in our county. READY! for Kindergarten equips parents with training and the appropriate manipulatives in order to provide hands-on experiences they can do with their children. Parents are excited about this program and I wanted to thank the Martin Foundation for helping provide this program to our families in Muhlenberg County. "

Wendy West - Preschool Coordinator Muhlenberg County Schools



BOOKS DISTRIBUTED

SOAR
READY! FOR
KINDERGARTEN

COMMUNITY
EVENTS

The community events that SOAR participates in promote both SOAR and Imagination Library within the community while distributing books and early childhood education information to Muhlenberg County families.

SOAR initiated or sponsored 16 events in 2015-16 serving almost 8,000 children and their families. At these community events, nearly 5,000 books were distributed.

HEADSTART

DAYCARE/
PRESCHOOL

READING
POSSE

MAYORS
CLUB

READING

CECC

NEW
BABY

READ15

R.HERO

MISC

EVENT	ATTENDANCE	BOOKS
Unfrozen	600	450
Kids Fest	800	620
World's Greatest Baby Shower	36	72
Casper Outdoor Movie	300	175
Back to School Nights (5)	500	300
Central City Christmas Parade	700	200
Greenville Christmas Parade	800	200
Imagination Library Character Breakfast	840	1500
Jubilee of Trees	350	300
Relay for Life	200	25
Salute to Education	16	32
Safety Day	500	425
Take a Kid Fishing	450	400
Read Across America	1200	150
Lifestyle Expo	480	100
Greenville Elementary School Lunchbox Program	100	35
Total Book Distribution		4984

A partnership with Head Start staff, parents and students helps establish the importance of reading by supplying resources, funding, trainings and supporting registration drives. Head Start locations are at Bremen, Central City, Greenville, Longest and South Elementary.

SOAR offers three parent and child training events in conjunction with Head Start/Preschool Teachers and Head Start Family Advocates. These trainings cover topics including literacy, nutrition, safety, and social and emotional development as suggested by state standards. SOAR also provides resources and funding for an end of the year event for each school focusing on kindergarten readiness. In 2015-16, SOAR also assisted in sponsoring a recruitment event for Head Start / Preschool to increase the enrolment of eligible families.

2015-16 FAMILY/CHILD EVENTS:

“The Magic of Nutrition”

226 Families Attended
400 Books Distributed

“Hats Off to Literacy”

168 Families Attended
200 Books Distributed

“Let’s Get Ready for Kindergarten”

353 Children Participated
353 Books Distributed

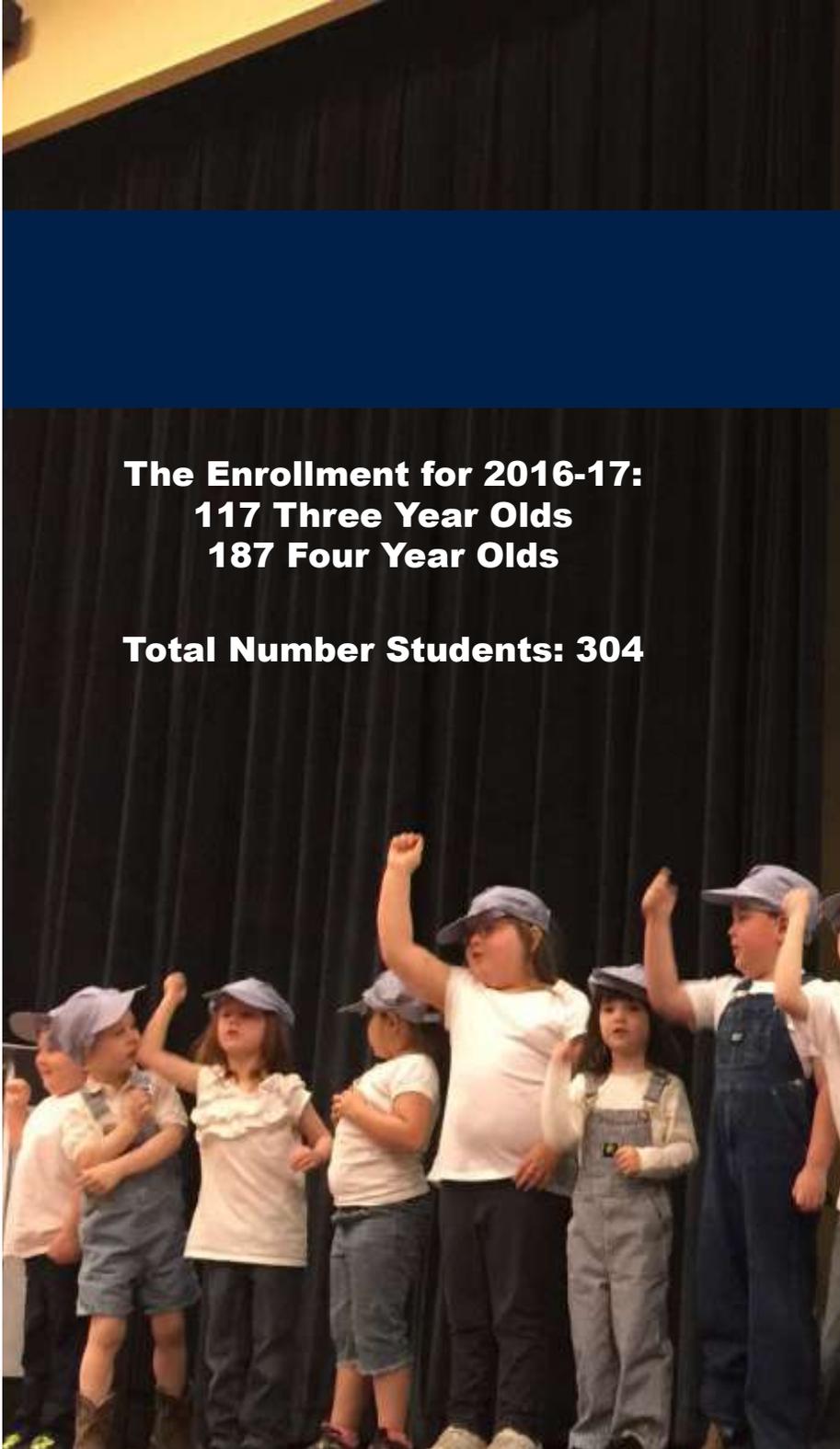
HEAD START/PRESCHOOL TUITION

State income guidelines for Head Start/Preschool can be very limiting. Each year, there are students who are in need of services but fall just short of the income guidelines and are, therefore, denied services.

In 2015-16, SOAR worked with the Muhlenberg County Preschool Director to identify four children who did not quite meet income guidelines, but would greatly benefit from Head Start services. SOAR provided scholarships for Head Start for all four children.

**The Enrollment for 2016-17:
117 Three Year Olds
187 Four Year Olds**

Total Number Students: 304



HEAD START

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POSSE

MAYORS
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CLUB

CECC
NEW
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NEW
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READ15
R.HERO

R.HERO

MISC



EARLY HEAD START HOME BASED PROGRAM



EARLY HEAD START HOME BASED PROGRAM

The Early Head Start Home Based Program provides services to pregnant mothers and children ages birth to three. Home Based Head Start offers and supports comprehensive services to children and their families through weekly home visits and group socializations.

For several years, SOAR has supported the program with the purchase of materials and curriculum for the use of the 2 in-home educators and the families of which they work.

HANDS

(Health Access Nurturing Developing Services)
Muhlenberg County Health Department

The HANDS program is a state wide service hosted by the Muhlenberg County Health Department with a mission of providing support to parents "right from the start, right in their own homes." The program provides free home visits for parents as well as fun activities to learn more about having a healthy pregnancy, child development, and community resources. HANDS is available to all parents from the time they are expecting until the child is age 3.

SOAR's partnership with the HANDS program has allowed SOAR to reach additional families with its early childhood education efforts. SOAR provides funding for educational events and materials which will teach parents about both child welfare and the importance of reading and education in early childhood. Literacy packets are distributed to families of newborn babies and families are informed about additional available early childhood programs including READ15 and Imagination Library.

In 2015-16 SOAR Distributed:
50 Ready for School Backpacks
800 books to families
126 families are currently enrolled in HANDS

COMMUNITY BOOKSHELVES

SOAR provides bookshelves stocked with children's books throughout the community with an emphasis on locations where children spend time waiting, encouraging family reading.

In 2015-16, over 2,000 books were placed into community bookshelves.







DAYCARE/PRESCHOOL SUPPORT

SOAR provides grants to local daycares to assist them in implementing early childhood education curriculum into their traditional daycare services. The components emphasize kindergarten readiness and early literacy skills.

SOAR continues to strengthen their partnership with local daycares by providing school readiness materials at 9 preschool centers. In return, the preschools support enrollment efforts in SOAR's Ready! for Kindergarten program by communicating with their enrolled families.

The Centers received library materials, play-with-a-purpose toys, curriculum and learning materials, Training and resources were also provided for employees.

PRESCHOOL/DAYCARE PROGRAMS SUPPORTED

- Central City Elementary Preschool*
- Central City First Baptist Preschool*
- Longest Elementary Preschool*
- Ms. Rhonda's Preschool*
- Nanny's House*
- New Paradise Preschool*
- Second Baptist Preschool*
- Tiny Treasures*
- United Methodist Preschool*



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 EVENTS
 HEADSTART
 DAYCARE/
 PRESCHOOL
 READING
 POSSE
 MAYORS
 CLUB
 READING
 CECC
 NEW
 BABY
 READ15
 R.HERO
 MISC

THE READING POSSE

TOTAL NUMBER OF BOOKS DISTRIBUTED 2015-16: 1430

Through the Reading Posse book distribution, First Responders are given an opportunity to combat illiteracy in our communities while fostering a positive relationship with local community members in many of the most remote and poverty stricken areas of the county. Since its inception, the program has expanded to include Fire Departments, EMS, Bus Drivers and a Barber Shop.

Police, Sheriff and EMS personnel will carry children's books in their vehicles and will distribute the books free of charge, encouraging children to interact with responders in their area. In addition, School District bus drivers of young children will encourage good behavior with books distributed on buses, and the local barber shop will give books with a haircut, encouraging them to Read 15 minutes a day!

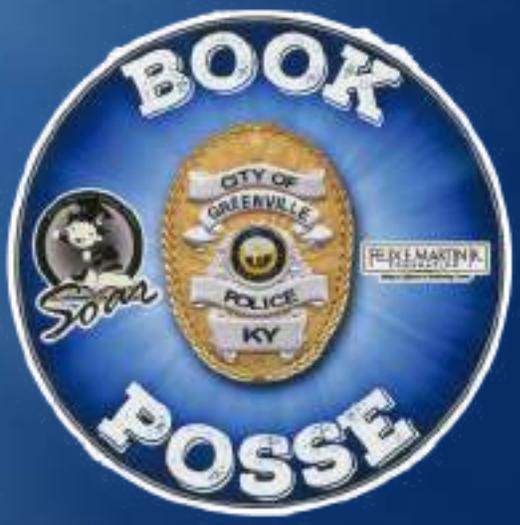
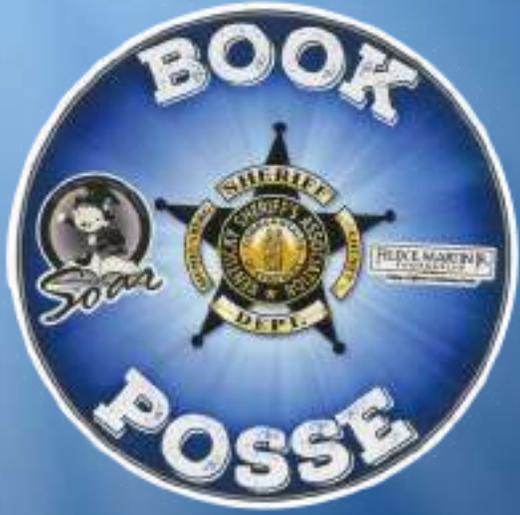
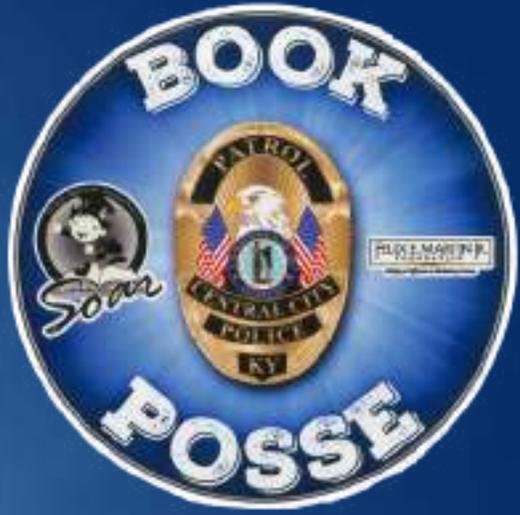
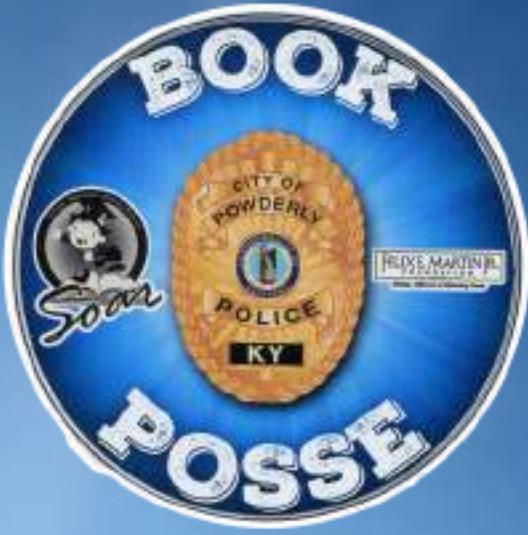
"The Muhlenberg County Sheriff's office has distributed several dozen books throughout Muhlenberg County. The books have been distributed to children in low income housing areas by officers during their routine drive by and to children who have been in the Sheriff's office under adverse circumstance and at times to children who seemed curious regarding officers at local restaurants.

The sheriff and deputies are appreciative of The Felix Martin Jr. Foundation and their efforts to encourage reading among children.

- Sheriff Curtis McGehee

"As we go out into the homes, working disturbing calls where kids are present, I've found that the books are better than offering them a piece of candy. Especially a Disney book that really excites them. I had a young one even ask if I could come to her grannies and read to her. That was so touching and the hug she gave me teared me up again. Thanks for sharing these books to give to those less fortunate. It does make a difference in the eyes and minds of that child and even the parent!"

Cecil Bard – Chief of Police Powderly, KY







MAYOR'S READING CLUB

Muhlenberg County mayors visit their neighborhood school up to three times during the school year and read a books to preschool/kindergarten classrooms. At each visit, all participating students receive free books.

Total Books Distributed 2015-16: 600



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COMMUNITY
EVENTS
HEADSTART
DAYCARE/
PRESCHOOL
READING
POSSE
MAYORS READING
CLUB
CECC
NEW
BABY
READ15
R.HERO
MISC

TRANSITION TO KINDERGARTEN

In partnership with the Governor's Office for Early Childhood and the Muhlenberg County School District, every County child who will enter kindergarten in fall 2017 will receive a backpack filled with supplies designed to increase school readiness skills to help them successfully transition to kindergarten. Head Start teachers will personally deliver each backpack to the home and demonstrate how the supplies inside can be used to help ensure their child is ready for kindergarten.

KINDERGARTEN CAMP

SOAR began to support the KDay program in the summer of 2013. With grant funding, all Muhlenberg elementary schools hold a Kindergarten Camp (KDay) event which allows incoming kindergarteners and their families to spend time at school in anticipation of the first day. Approximately 300 students and their parents/caregivers attend the event each year - visiting classrooms, meeting teachers, riding buses and even eating in the cafeterias. This preparation allows both students and parents an increased level of comfort with the schools, and sets them up for a successful first day and first year of kindergarten.



Renee Boggess - Longest Elementary - Kindergarten Teacher

“KDay is always a success with the new kindergarten students entering school. It helps them to have an easier first day of school knowing where things are and who their teacher is. KDay is always fun to prepare and hand out all the extra goodies for our new students.”



Amanda Davis - Central City Elementary - Kindergarten Teacher

“KDay is always a wonderful way to start positive relationships with our parents as well as our students. Due to this grant, we are able to provide our students with a fun experience that they remember all through their kindergarten year and reflect back on. I am so grateful for this grant and what it means to our kids!”



Tammy McDonald - South Elementary - Kindergarten Teacher

“Students were excited to receive shirts this year at our school for the first time. They are always excited about coming to school and KDay helps everyone, including the teachers, feel more prepared for the first day of school. Great opportunity to meet families and begin positive communication.”



NEW BABY LITERACY PACKETS

Each of the approximately 300 children born in Muhlenberg County receives a New Baby literacy Packet designed by SOAR to encourage reading from day one. Items include a parent book, baby books and a library card, as well as a SOAR designed brochure which explains the importance of continuing education and how to plan for it. Additional items include bibs, rattles, and a rubber duck all featuring literacy messages. A follow-up postcard is included in the packet that parents return to SOAR to receive additional information and resources.

Total Books Distributed 2015-16: 300



BEECHMONT *Read15* PROGRAM

In conjunction with the county-wide Read 15 reading awareness campaign, volunteers in Beechmont have established a weekly program for preschool children and their parents, with the SOAR program providing books and craft materials. This program not only encourages families to read 15 minutes each day but also promotes kindergarten readiness skills.

Funding for this weekly year-long program provides books and craft materials. This program also promotes kindergarten readiness skills.

**Approximately 20 preschool children attend weekly
Total Books Distributed 2015-16: 1905**



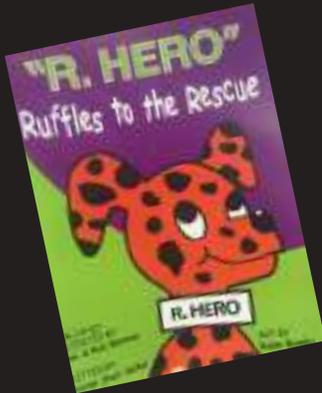


R. HERO PROGRAM

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KINDERGARTEN
COMMUNITY
EVENTS
HEADSTART
DAYCARE/
PRESCHOOL
READING
POSSE
MAYORS
READING
CLUB
CECC
NEW
BABY
READ15
R.HERO
MISC

The R. HERO program is offered in conjunction with the Hero in You Foundation, dedicated to honoring the heroes in our lives, particularly first responders. The program hopes to inspire children to be heroes in their lives.

The program's signature Dalmatian statue was unveiled during Muhlenberg's Annual Safety Day in 2015. A parade of children, teachers and community members followed the statue to its new home on the lawn of Thistle Cottage. Today, students are encouraged to visit Thistle Cottage to hear about the R. Hero Program and to receive a free R. Hero book.



The Hero in You Foundation has released children's safety videos and has published a new coloring book that coincides with the videos. Muhlenberg's school resource officer uses the program in local elementary schools where he shows the video, teaches students about safety, and presents each child with a coloring book.

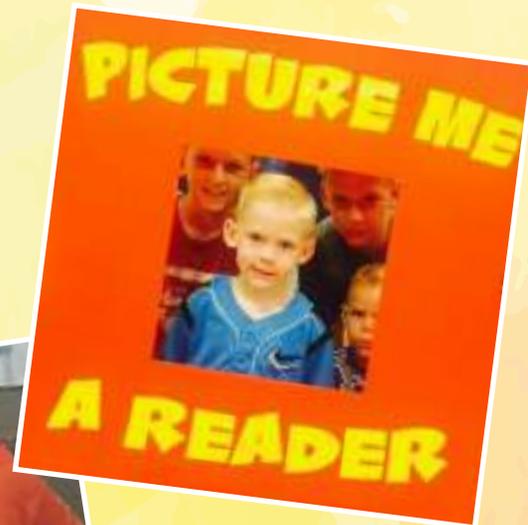
Total R. Hero books distributed at Safety Day 2015: 400
Total R. Hero books distributed to visitors 2015-16: 300





Books 'n Cream is SOAR's weekly summer reading program which offers parents and children a place to read and play together during June and July. Books 'n Cream is offered at three locations in Muhlenberg County: Beechmont, Bremen and Powderly. Each participating child from birth to 5th grade receives a free book and ice cream coupon every week after reading a book with a buddy. They are also invited to play at learning centers while attending.

In 2015-16:
Total Children Reached: 418
Total Books Distributed: 1,964





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EVENTS
HEADSTART
DAYCARE/
PRESCHOOL
READING
POSSE
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CLUB
CECC
NEW
BABY

READ15

RHERO

MISC



REACH OUT & READ

Since 2012, SOAR has partnered with local healthcare providers to bring the Reach Out and Read program to Muhlenberg County. This national program works with medical facilities to incorporate books into pediatric care and encourages families to read aloud together, beginning in infancy.

In 2015-16, the program was offered at four area providers, where medical staff give pediatric patients a free book at each well-child visits and ER visits while promoting literacy skills. Muhlenberg Reach Out and Read partners are:

2015-16

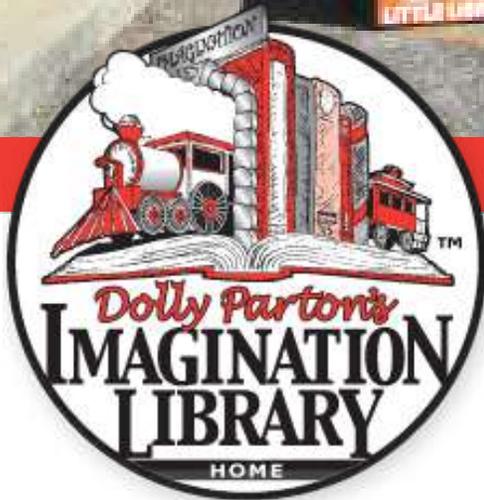
Community Health Center	3,900 books distributed
Muhlenberg County Health Department	1,674 books distributed
Central City Clinic	56 books distributed
Owensboro Health Muhlenberg Community Hospital ER	1,694 books distributed



Dr. Susan Hawkins

Little Libraries

In 2016-2017, SOAR will expand community bookshelves with the addition of 10 free Little Libraries which will be installed across the county. These libraries encourage community members to read and return books in their community. Community champions will monitor and fill the libraries as needed. Little Libraries will be registered with the National Little Libraries Organization. This year we will also purchase a large outdoor book drop where community members can donate their gently used books to stock community bookshelves and Little Libraries.



DOLLY PARTON'S IMAGINATION LIBRARY

In 2009, the Felix E. Martin Jr. Foundation partnered with the Muhlenberg Public Library to bring Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to Muhlenberg County. Since that time, the Foundation has provided almost \$250,000 to provide a monthly book in the mail for any child under the age of 5 living in Muhlenberg County.

Total Kids Currently Registered: 1208

(72% of Muhlenberg County children under 5)

Books Distributed in 2015-16: 14,496

Total Books Distributed since 2009: 87,072

SOAR

COMMUNITY EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL



Vicki Yonts
Felix E. Martin Jr. Foundation
Program Manager/CECC Chairman



Angie Todd
Retired Kindergarten Teacher
CECC Vice-Chairman



Jennifer Whitehead
Retired Pre-School
Director



Carla Embry
Community Relations Specialist
Muhlenberg County Schools



Betty Hendrix
HANDS Director
Muhlenberg County Health Dept.



Tonya Stovall
Head Start
Family Advocate



Jennifer Lambert
Head Start
Family Advocate



Debbie Arnold
Head Start
Audubon Director



Jan Yonts
Retired Kindergarten Teacher
Mayor



Penny Roberts
Elementary Instructional
Supervisor - Muhlenberg County
Schools



Heather Phem
Pre-School Director
First United Methodist Church



Janet Harris
Muhlenberg County Public
Library Director



Terri Key
Head Start
Family Advocate



Cindy Stovall
Head Start
Family Advocate



Kelly Chrisman
Head Start Teacher



Tammy Piper
Director Central City
Convention Center



Gail Johnson
Felix E. Martin Jr. Foundation Post
Secondary Success Program Manager



Wendy West
Muhlenberg County
Preschool Coordinator



Debby Ingram
Read 15
Coordinator



Heather Cheek
Audubon Head Start
Local Area Chairman



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