Building a world of readers

Summer 2023
Dear friends and supporters,

The last six months have been momentous for Worldreader.

I’m beyond grateful to have been appointed CEO of our mission-driven organization. I want to thank you, our talented staff, and the Worldreader Board for your unwavering support in getting children reading. Very special thanks go to former CEO David Risher, for thirteen years of vision and leadership and for deciding to continue supporting our mission as Founding Chair of our Board.

I also want to celebrate our victories in the fight against the global learning crisis. With your help, we’re nurturing communities of readers so that caregivers, educators, and reading champions can work together to get and keep children reading. From the US-Mexico border to the rural schools of Rajasthan, India, from laundry mats to prison visitor centers, your support empowers us to be laser-focused on fostering family reading. Thanks to you, we’re building parent and caregiver confidence, training teachers and facilitators, and providing children with opportunities to read daily, in and out of school.

That’s where behavior change happens. That’s how together, we win. Thank you for helping readers build a better world.

With gratitude,
Rebecca Chandler Leege
CEO of Worldreader
“Parents are key partners of teachers.”
The World Bank
children's lives changed with books

Your impact over the last six months:

163k children's lives changed with books

875k books distributed to children and families through BookSmart

84k hours spent reading on Booksmart
Coming by the end of 2023:
New reading solutions powered by you

An exciting user experience

We’re making BookSmart the ultimate digital reading experience! The exciting new look is designed to engage children and encourage their love of reading.

More support for caregivers

BookSmart empowers parents and caregivers to champion their child’s reading. We’re increasing our focus on family reading, including a dedicated parent dashboard and new family reading time.

A unique reading journey

Because each reader’s journey is unique, BookSmart’s enhanced profile creation and login features help users set individual goals, track progress, and build their personal daily reading habits.
You're empowering teachers in India

When Nirma Swami decided to follow her dream of becoming a teacher, she had great challenges to overcome – safe and reliable public transport wasn’t available, and she faced bias in her community against women who left the house to work. Plus, she had a young kid to take care of at home. But Nirma convinced herself and those around her that she could do it.

Today, Nirma works as a teacher at Kachnariya Night School in Rajasthan, India, where she encourages her students to reach their full potential through reading. Through Worldreader’s training, Nirma felt supported and empowered, finding her confidence in her own skills both as a teacher and a person.

She now loves using BookSmart with a projector to lead interactive storytelling sessions that make reading more engaging for students. Thanks to your support, Nirma now has access to countless digital books, engaging activities to complete with the children in her class.

Nirma has seen what the power of reading and consistent education can do, and she wants the same for her students. She says: “If you’re not educated then people can take advantage of your illiteracy. Education and schooling are necessary because only good education can make you independent.”
You're changing stories along the US-Mexico Border

Providing children and caregivers with safe, secure environments is essential to healthy development. It can make all the difference, allowing children to thrive throughout their education, social-emotional learning, and mental health.

When Pastor Merelda Gonzalez learned that families in her community needed childcare, she decided to make a difference. By working with World Vision, Urban Strategies, and Worldreader’s BookSmart app, she launched the Early Head Start program. This initiative provides immigrant and unaccompanied children with education and stability while allowing their caregivers to work. Together, we have brought hundreds of stories in English and Spanish to families and unaccompanied minors along the Texas border.

Two children in the program, 3-year-old Rodrigo and 2-year-old Rodolfo, have felt the power of books. “[The stories] get their attention. They will sit there and go over it with the teachers,” their mother, San Juana, says. “They like reading. They’re going to go and learn something that’s going to help them get prepared for school.” Kimberly Padilla, Rodrigo’s teacher, says BookSmart also helps Spanish-speaking parents who “enjoy that it comes in both languages because they’re trying to teach their children both English and Spanish.” Learn more here.
You're getting where education systems can't reach

To end learning poverty and solve the global learning crisis, we must work with caregivers and educators to provide children with equitable reading opportunities in and out of school.

Family reading fosters a positive learning environment, improving reading comprehension, attention span, and communication from an early age and setting children up for success later in life.

When families read together, everyone wins.
You're championing behavior change worldwide

"Worldreader excites me because of its scalability. Its global focus allows impactful, powerful words to reach kids everywhere. As I often say, if we can all change the words we use, we can change the conversations we have. If we change the conversations, we can change behavior. And if we change behavior, we can change the world."

Dwight Smith
Co-founder of My Special Word
In Ghana – Leveraging technology to better support teachers

It takes a community to get a child reading. And when we strengthen a teacher’s capacity, we strengthen their engagement with the families and reading champions in their communities. For over two years, we’ve been supporting Ghanaian teachers with professional development journeys that provide them with key skills to effectively reach parents, caregivers, and their children, further empowering reading at home.

Thousands of teachers have signed up for the training program. Find the in-depth report here.
In South Africa – Reaching 100,000 readers

81% of South African children in Grade 4 cannot read with understanding, up from 78% in 2016 (PIRLS 2021). In partnership with Moya App, powered by Datafree, we’re committed to reversing this trend by providing continuous free data access to reading materials and mobile-led solutions to the country’s reading crisis, making sure all South African children have the reading opportunities they need to reach their potential.

Since the start of this year, 100,000 South African readers have read on BookSmart. Most excitingly, children are reading an average of 16+ minutes per session, showing an increased love of reading and improved reading habits.
In Kenya – Empowering reading champions in the community

Worldreader, in partnership with Kidogo, now witnesses the power of reading in 141 Early Childhood Development Centers across 8 Kenyan communities, where entrepreneurs (commonly known as Mamapreneurs and Papapreneurs) were trained in digital and mobile reading and learned how to harness the power of BookSmart to read to and with children.

With the understanding that a child’s love of reading starts at home, Worldreader uses a holistic approach to strengthen caregiver engagement. This includes an expanded English/Kiswahili bi-lingual library for 3 to 5-year-old children, with added age-appropriate Vroom science-based tips for parents.

"Financial challenges made it difficult to buy storybooks for the centre, but with BookSmart, we can get books for free. Since we started using BookSmart, my learners are more interested and active in class."

Terresia Nyabundo
Mamaprenuer, Glory Hope Centre, Mathare, Nairobi County
In India – Partnering with educators to power family reading

With District Administration in a leading role and in partnership with the Society for All-Round Development (SARD), The National Independent Schools Alliance (NISA) and Moradabad’s Association of Private Schools, the Moradabad District Reading City initiative will encourage and support families across the city of Moradabad to read together at least 25 books throughout the year. The program is designed to serve over 50,000 homes with BookSmart, including books, activities, and daily prompts and tips for caregivers and their children.

The first schools and daycare centers to join the program completed the orientation in April – the program has already reached 1,000 teachers and an estimated 30,000 children across schools and daycares.
In the US – 27 new partners will get more children reading

In March, Worldreader launched its first-ever community-based organization (CBO) grant initiative to provide financial support to CBOs dedicated to working with families and caregivers to read to and with their children.

27 selected organizations receive access to BookSmart and a total of nearly $170,000 in funding, which will help them implement innovative approaches to championing family reading and building the reading confidence of parents and caregivers to support their child’s learning.

You can learn more about our wide array of partners by visiting the list of grantees here.
In Peru – Expanding our reach one school at a time

In partnership with World Vision and GRADE, we’re expanding BookSmart to 70 new schools in Ayacucho and 64 schools in Moquegua.

Launched in 2019, our initiative reached about 10,000 students in six Peruvian regions and provided key support to the education system during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond in a country where primary-age students are on average 3 years behind their grade level in reading skills, according to data from the Peruvian Ministry of Education.*

Thanks to this year’s expansion, BookSmart will soon grow to support a total of 170 schools and 40,000 students across eight Peruvian regions.

*Evaluación Virtual de Aprendizajes - EVA 2021.
Over the last 6 months Worldreader has attended and presented at various events, contributing towards important conversations around the future of learning.

- We celebrated Accra being named as UNESCO’s World Book Capital 2023 at the opening ceremony.
- At the Dehli World Book Fair 2023, Worldreader and partner Jio showcased BookSmart to thousands of children, parents, and teachers.
- We hosted a reading event at Chicago’s Primo Center family shelter to support reading through transitional living situations.
- We highlighted how we are helping advance UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 and the value of equitable access to education at multiple CIES panels.
- The eLearning Africa 2023 conference in Dakar helped us promote the power of digital reading.
- We spread awareness of Worldreader and BookSmart with local officials, potential partners, and children in Moquegua, Peru.
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Spreading the word
Artificial intelligence could make a difference for young readers around the world—or make literacy even less equitable.

The Role of Worldreader in achieving SDG 4-Inclusive, Equitable and Quality Education: The East African Perspective

Beyond Bedtime Stories: How Worldreader and BookSmart are Revolutionizing Reading for Children Everywhere

Only 7% of children in Ghana have access to books at home – Worldreader

Access to Reading in Digital Times (Spanish)
Thank you!

With your support, we can continue to provide children and their families with the resources they need to thrive.