



**Extension**

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON  
RACINE COUNTY

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**UW-Madison Division of Extension Program “The Literacy Link” Awarded  
\$21,000 for New Books by Nonprofit First Book**

KENOSHA— A new grant award to UW-Madison Extension aims to increase reading and literacy among children in Kenosha and Racine counties whose parents are involved in the justice system.

UW-Madison Extension’s Literacy Link project was selected to receive an award of \$21,000 — \$7,000 of which was allocated to Kenosha and Racine counties — to provide new, high-quality children’s books.

The Literacy Link aims to promote language and literacy skills in children, as well as foster healthy family relationships between young children and their justice-involved family members. Ashland, Bayfield, Buffalo, Dane, Dunn, Kenosha, Pepin, and Racine counties are piloting the program.

With the award, the program will provide more than 5,000 new books to children across the state. The books will be distributed to jails, libraries, courts and other community spaces where children in justice-involved families interact, at no cost to the families.

**Division of Extension**

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“With this award, we are supporting families in providing literacy-rich experiences for their children during parental involvement with the justice system. We are also creating opportunities for parents to maintain their relationships with their children through reading and other literacy activities,” said Pam Wedig-Kirsch, School Readiness & Family Resiliency Educator for Extension Racine County. “Why a focus on literacy? Research tells us that early literacy skills lead to school success, which in turn, leads to life satisfaction as an adult. Also, a nurturing parent-child connection can reduce the effect on the child during a parent’s involvement with the justice system.”

The high-quality children’s books donated by First Book Marketplace allow for more literacy opportunities for children in our community impacted by their parents’ involvement in the justice system.

The children’s books will be used to:

1. Educate parents who are involved with the justice system on ways to use books to create positive interactions with their children.
2. Connect children with their parents through a recorded reading program.
3. Add literacy opportunities to visiting areas in justice settings.
4. Provide books to children visiting their parents, building their home libraries.
5. Create child-friendly, literacy-rich video visiting spaces.

First Book, the nonprofit social enterprise focused on equal access to quality education for children in need, awarded the funds as part of its OMG Books Awards: Offering More Great Books to Spark Innovation, a program that will give more than \$4.7 million in funding to distribute 1.5 million brand new books and eBooks to children living in low-income communities in 33 U.S. states and territories.

Awardees are using the funding to select books and eBooks from the First Book Marketplace ([www.fbmarketplace.com](http://www.fbmarketplace.com)), First Book’s award-winning eCommerce platform, that best meet the needs of the children they serve. First Book estimates the total value of the books distributed will be more than \$12 million.

“We know that access to books and eBooks makes a significant difference in a child’s future success,” said Kyle Zimmer, First Book president, CEO, and cofounder. “Children do not thrive in deeply under-resourced environments and too many of the schools and programs have far too little. This deprivation has long-term consequences for the children, their families, their communities and our nation. This could not be more urgent. With the OMG Books Awards, First Book and the Literacy Link are investing not only in the future of the kids we’re reaching, but in the overall wellbeing of our nation.”

Access to adequate resources is one of the greatest contributors to educational success in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Research indicates that just the presence of books in the home improves educational outcomes, yet low-income communities across the U.S. are plagued by vast ‘book deserts’—with one community having only a single book per as many as 830 children.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, members of the First Book Network, who exclusively serve kids in need, have indicated that without First Book, the children they serve would have access to very few books, if any at all.<sup>3</sup> (References below).

Eligible educators, librarians, providers, and others serving children in need can sign up to receive resources from First Book outside of OMG Books Awards at [firstbook.org/join](http://firstbook.org/join). For more information, please visit [firstbook.org](http://firstbook.org) or follow the latest news on Facebook and Twitter.

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### About The Literacy Link

Over the past two years, University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension has been implementing strategies through a University of Wisconsin System-funded pilot project called The Literacy Link to engage children with justice-involved parents and their families in literacy activities and to develop language-rich learning spaces in local correctional systems. For more information, please visit [theliteracylink.extension.wisc.edu](http://theliteracylink.extension.wisc.edu).

### About First Book

First Book believes education offers children in need the best path out of poverty. Through sustainable, market-driven models, First Book breaks down barriers to quality education by making new, high-quality books and educational resources, including sports equipment, winter coats, snacks, and more, affordable to its member network of more than 400,000 registered educators who exclusively serve kids in need. Since 1992, First Book has distributed more learning materials than any other program of its kind: 175 million books and educational resources, worth more than \$1.5 billion, reaching more than 5 million children annually across the U.S. and Canada.

First Book also expands the breadth and depth of the education field through a family of social enterprises, including First Book Research & Insights, its proprietary

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<sup>1</sup> Sikora, et al. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2018.10.003>

<sup>2</sup> Susan B. Neuman, Naomi Moland. “Book Deserts.” *Urban Education*, 2016. DOI: 10.1177/0042085916654525

<sup>3</sup> First Book Member Survey, 2016

research initiative, and the First Book Accelerator, which brings best-in-class research to the classroom via relevant, usable educator resources.

Eligible educators, librarians, providers, and others serving children in need can sign up at [firstbook.org/join](https://firstbook.org/join). For more information, please visit [firstbook.org](https://firstbook.org) or follow the latest news on Facebook and Twitter.