



Partnership Promotes Talking with Children from Birth to Improve Future Success in Reading

PRESS RELEASE • FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE • 02/17/20

MISSISSIPPI CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

MEDIA CONTACT

Susan Branson
Director of External
Affairs
sbranson@mcm.ms
P: 601.709.8354

Jackson, Miss. (February 17, 2020)—The Mississippi Children’s Museum (MCM) received a grant totaling \$150,000 from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) supporting a partnership between the Barksdale Reading Institute (BRI) and MCM to develop the early literacy initiative *TALK From the START: Growing Mississippi Readers*. This engaging literacy program is designed to raise awareness that talking with and to children from birth is essential to learning to read and will be unveiled at the museum during a Literacy Summit on February 28, 2020.

“Our museum is committed to developing innovative programs that address the needs of Mississippi’s children and set them on the path to success,” said MCM’s President and CEO, Susan Garrard. “Struggles with literacy are among the biggest challenges that our children face. This project is an unprecedented opportunity to partner with an acclaimed educational institution, The Barksdale Reading Institute, to create resources that will raise awareness and positively impact children and families in our state.”

MCM, through the partnership with BRI, will begin introducing TALK From the START in four pilot communities, including: Jackson, Biloxi, Meridian, and Indianola. A custom mascot, Rocky the Reader, is the ambassador for the campaign. Rocky will travel the state to share the campaign’s message with parents, caregivers, and educators. “Our goal is to provide examples of ways to incorporate talking with babies and children in everyday situations, which over time will strengthen their experiences with words and eventually with reading. Studies have shown time and again that strong oral language and listening comprehension are critical to learning to read. This is a simple and no-cost way to boost literacy in our state,” said BRI CEO Kelly Butler.

“We knew that we needed a character to be the face of our campaign, so we created Rocky the Reader to be a playful pup who wears a backpack and glasses, has a friendly smile, and loves to read,” shared MCM’s Director of Education, Monique Ealey. “The students of Spann Elementary School in Jackson, MS voted and selected his name, and they will be the first people to publicly meet Rocky the Reader, which is so fitting!” Members of the MCM Education team will soon begin scheduling appearances for Rocky the Reader throughout the state with schools, libraries, educational fairs, and events.

The funding provided by WKKF has provided initial planning and staffing for the TALK From the START project, allowing the staff of both BRI and MCM to work towards drawing attention to the fact that early language development is essential to learning to read.

For more information, visit www.TALKFromtheSTART.org or email talkfromthestart@msreads.org.

About the Mississippi Children’s Museum

The Mississippi Children’s Museum (MCM) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering in its visitors a passion for lifelong learning, improving the health and well-being of Mississippi children, and instilling a sense of state pride in all Mississippi residents. The mission of MCM is to provide unparalleled experiences to inspire excellence and a lifelong joy of learning. The vision of MCM is to inspire Mississippi’s children from all backgrounds to discover and achieve their potential. The 40,000- square foot museum is designed around five primary initiatives, with correlating exhibits, programs and outreach efforts. These initiatives include: Literacy, STEAM, Health and Nutrition, Cultural Arts and Mississippi Heritage—the keys to helping our children mature into healthy and productive adult learners. Museum exhibits provide engaging, explorative, hands-on educational activities for children of all ages. MCM has broken ground on a 25,000-square foot satellite campus in Meridian, MS with the expected opening date in February 2021. To learn more about MCM visit www.mschildrensmuseum.org.

About the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF), founded in 1930 as an independent, private foundation by breakfast cereal innovator and entrepreneur Will Keith Kellogg, is among the largest philanthropic foundations in the United States. Guided by the belief that all children should have an equal opportunity to thrive, WKKF works with communities to create conditions for vulnerable children so they can realize their full potential in school, work and life. The Kellogg Foundation is based in Battle Creek, Michigan, and works throughout the United States and internationally, as well as with sovereign tribes. Special attention is paid to priority places where there are high concentrations of poverty and where children face significant barriers to success. WKKF priority places in the U.S. are in Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico and New Orleans; and internationally, are in Mexico and Haiti. For more information, visit www.wkkf.org.

###