



The Mississippi Children's Museum Announces Partnership with UMMC and National Program, Reach Out and Read

PRESS RELEASE • FOR RELEASE ON 9/27/2023



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Jackson, Miss. (September 27, 2023) – The Mississippi Children's Museum (MCM) is excited to extend its work in early childhood development, with a new partnership with Reach Out and Read and the University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMMC) and its pediatric arm, Children's of Mississippi.

Reach Out and Read is a national nonprofit that supports healthy early parent-child relationships through shared reading. During routine well-child visits, Reach Out and Read medical providers discuss with parents and caregivers how to use books to engage with their infants and young children. They also give the child age-appropriate books to take home and read together with their family.

MCM, in partnership with UMMC's Center for Advancement of Youth (CAY), will undertake the work initiated by Barksdale Reading Institute (BRI) and CAY. The reading initiative began as part of the project, Mississippi Thrive!, funded by Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) in 2017. MCM looks forward to strengthening relationships with the 30 existing pediatric clinics in the program, as well as expanding to additional clinics statewide.

Reach Out and Read is the nation's only pediatric literacy model endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). In the program, families of all backgrounds and economic means are encouraged to read with their young children using strategies that promote parent-child bonding and connection. About one-third of young children, and half of children living in poverty, arrive at kindergarten without the skills they need to do well in school. Giving every young child a foundation for success strengthens our society and helps combat the effects of income inequality.

"In addition to building literacy, reading together is the kind of positive interaction that promotes long-term bonding, health and well-being," said Reach Out and Read CEO Marty Martinez. "We're excited to work with the Mississippi Children's Museum and University of Mississippi Medical Center to further our work in the state, setting families on a lifelong path of learning and wellness."

MCM's literacy initiative, *Talk from the Start (TFTS)*, shares a similar mission of influencing early childhood development between ages birth to five years old. Both TFTS and Reach Out and Read agree engaging in language-rich activities from birth improves learning and language development. Reading together promotes healthy brain development, furthers language acquisition, and helps families build meaningful bonds.

Through Reach Out and Read, MCM and UMMC will be able to reach more children and families statewide, meeting parents where they are – at their children's wellness visits. This partnership allows MCM to work with medical professionals and early childhood clinics to serve their TFTS audience.

“CAY, Children’s of Mississippi and UMMC are thankful to have the Mississippi Children’s Museum as a partner to continue the work started by the Mississippi Thrive! initiative,” said Dr. Susan Buttross, a professor of pediatrics at UMMC, host of “Southern Remedy: Relatively Speaking” on Mississippi Public Broadcasting, and an expert in early childhood development. “Together we can aid more children reach their full potential through helping them develop the love of reading.”

MCM’s *Talk from the Start* campaign encourages caregivers and patrons in the community to talk to children from birth in order to build language development and literacy. MCM’s education and marketing teams created the program’s mascot, a playful and intellectual pup named Rocky the Reader. Rocky’s House is a traveling exhibit created by MCM, BRI, and the Kellogg Foundation, with the help of Kraemer Design. Rocky’s House has traveled statewide, spreading the message and the importance of early childhood learning and development. Visit talkfromthestart.org to learn how to bring Rocky’s House to your organization or community.

“MCM is honored to have the opportunity to extend our current work in early childhood development by partnering with Reach Out and Read, and local medical advisors at UMMC,” said Susan Garrard, MCM President/CEO, “We all have a mutual mission of improving language development in Mississippi, and we’re so excited for the future of this program. We’re especially grateful to Reach Out and Read and Scholastic for investing in this program and will be seeking additional funding to make this program a valued resource and success story for our state.”

The nationally acclaimed Reach out and Read program brings a wealth of knowledge and value to MCM’s vision by making early childhood literacy and development accessible to more Mississippians. Reach Out and Read is investing \$15,000 in MCM’s new initiative, which will support book funding and assist MCM as they begin championing this program. In addition, Scholastic, the global children’s publishing, education, and media company, is matching Reach Out and Read’s investment with an additional \$15,000 in books. MCM is also honored to have the support of the University of Mississippi Medical Center physicians Dr. Susan Buttross and Dr. Ruth Patterson as medical advisors and supporters of the Reach Out and Read program in Mississippi.

“Scholastic is proud to match Reach Out and Read’s donation of \$15k for books to inaugurate this exciting new work with the Mississippi Children’s Museum,” said Judy Newman, Chief Impact Officer, Scholastic.

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About the Mississippi Children’s Museum

The Mississippi Children’s Museum (MCM) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization with a mission of creating unparalleled experiences to inspire excellence and a lifelong joy of learning in all children. MCM’s two award-winning museums in Jackson and Meridian collectively offer over 100,000-square feet of exhibits and educational programming designed around five primary initiatives, Literacy, STEAM, Health and Nutrition, Cultural Arts, and Mississippi Heritage – the keys to helping our children mature into healthy and productive adult learners. MCM offers exceptional resources for children, families, and educators through MCM at Home virtual programming, traveling exhibits and programs, community outreach, *Launch into Learning* afterschool program, professional development for educators, and *Talk from the Start*, an initiative for parents and caregivers to promote language development in children from birth to five years old. MCM is honored to have received an Institute of Museum and Library Services National Medal, the Mississippi Tourism Association Governor’s Award for Travel Attraction of the Year, and USA Today’s ‘10Best Travel Award for Best Children’s Museum. Learn more: www.mschildrensmuseum.org

About Reach Out and Read

Reach Out and Read is 501(c)3 nonprofit that gives young children a foundation for success by incorporating books into pediatric care and encouraging families to read aloud together. As the only evidence-based national pediatric model focused on emotional connections endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, Reach Out and Read serves children in all 50 of the United States through 6,000 clinics and 33,000 clinicians. For more information, visit reachoutandread.org.

About Children’s of Mississippi

Children’s of Mississippi, part of the University of Mississippi Medical Center, encompasses all the pediatric services available at UMMC and at clinical sites throughout Mississippi. At the heart of these services is the state’s only hospital devoted exclusively to the care and treatment of sick and injured children. The Children’s of Mississippi network brings specialized clinical care for children to communities across the state, making it easier for families to get the treatment they need closer to home.

About the University of Mississippi Medical Center

As the state’s only academic medical center, UMMC seeks to improve the health of Mississippi’s population and eliminate health disparities through education, research and patient care.

UMMC encompasses seven health science schools of medicine, nursing, health related professions, dentistry, pharmacy, graduate studies and population health. The Medical Center includes the state’s only Level I trauma center, only children’s hospital, only organ and bone marrow transplant program and the only Telehealth Center of Excellence, one of two in the nation. For more information, visit www.umc.edu.