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Bookcase for Every Child project
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The jails and prisons across America all have one basic thing in common -- they are filled with people who are functionally, or even totally, illiterate. It is virtually impossible to succeed in today's society without being able to read and write and possess adequate communication skills.

Realizing this need, a nationally-syndicated columnist, Jim Davidson of Conway , Arkansas , founded and with the help of a Central Committee, developed the best, unique literacy program in America . It is a copyrighted project called "Bookcase for Every Child." Using all volunteers, the committee supervises the building of quality, personalized, oak bookcases and then gives them to pre-school children being reared in low-income homes. Statistics reveal that 61% of low-income families have few, if any, books in the home for their children to read.

Without foundational literacy skills, a high percentage of these children will later drop out of school. The problems for society are manifold because of this need that goes unfulfilled.

Members of this all-volunteer group use no tax money or grants of any kind and these children are provided with a starter-set of appropriate level books to begin their own personal library, tools that will be most helpful during their formative years. No one personally earns a penny for their contribution to this project. It is all about giving back. In many cases volunteers also read to the children on a weekly basis. What makes this effective approach truly unique is that the project is community-wide, as they reach out to everyone in the community with encouragement to come together to improve literacy -- a goal every community in America should, and will, embrace.

The focal points of a project are two events that take place during the school year. The bookcase project committee hosts a Bookcase Literacy Banquet to raise funds to purchase materials to build the bookcases, and an Awards Ceremony to present the bookcases to Head Start children and their parents. Since the inception, the Conway project has awarded 400 personalized bookcases to these special children.

Another unique feature of the project is a book written by the project founder titled, "New Revised Edition of Learning, Earning & Giving Back" that is given to each person who attends a banquet anywhere in the country. This book was paid for by 143 bookcase project supporters giving \$100 each to pay for the cost of printing. This action demonstrates the level of support for the project in Conway, and it also transcends to other communities who have a project underway. Of the \$15.95 banquet ticket price, \$3.95 is set aside in a special fund to provide "seed" money for other projects to get started. Every new project receives \$500 start-up money and, in-turn, they provide start-up money for other start-up projects down the road. This is how it spreads without using any grants or tax money.

This unusual project has now grown from a humble beginning in Conway, to nine other projects in five different states. As time passes the vision of the founder is to have thousands of projects taking place, in every state in the nation. At the present time, in addition to Conway, projects are underway, in Wynne, Greenbrier, El Dorado, and Mayflower, Arkansas; Bridgeport, Texas; DeKalb,

Illinois ; Cleveland and Jay , Oklahoma; and Ashland , Ohio . To vastly improve literacy in our nation among children in low-income families, who are in the greatest at-risk group, Jim's Facebook friends, such as yourself, are encouraged to get involved by providing a forum for the founder to inform our fellow Americans about the project. The details for a successful project can be found on the project website: www.bookcaseforeverychild.com.

This is a great project for any community, and support from local and state government officials has been fantastic even though there are no tax dollars or grants used to fund this project. Literacy is a non-partisan issue and the goal of the Bookcase for Every Child project is to help these needy children learn to read and develop a passion for reading. The best way to achieve this goal is not spending large amounts of money, but to foster parental and community involvement. This is grass-roots at its best.

Some of the highlights of the Conway Bookcase Project included Governor Mike Beebe proclaiming October 12 -18, 2008 as Bookcase Literacy Week in the State of Arkansas ; and local State Representative Linda Tyler and Senator Gilbert Baker co-sponsoring a Joint Resolution in the Arkansas General Assembly to commend the project for helping children and encouraging every Arkansas community to develop their own Bookcase for Every Child project.

In 2010 the Conway Public Schools selected the Conway Bookcase Project to receive the Distinguished Service Award, and Founder Jim Davidson was presented a plaque at the school's Commencement Exercises at Verizon Area, in North Little Rock . Jim was given the opportunity to speak to over 12,000 people. In August of 2011 *American Profile* magazine ran a front-cover feature article about the Bookcase for Every Child project. This publication is inserted into 1400 newspapers across the country and has a readership of ten million. Jim received dozens of calls, E-mails, and letters based on that article.

As a first step, please contact founder Jim Davidson direct to receive a complimentary copy of his book, "*New Revised Edition of Learning, Earning & Giving Back*" as it will give you more insights into the value and potential of this unique project. The key to success of each local project is to have the right people on the Central Committee. If you happen to be, or know someone, who would

love to be involved in this worthy project, consider the following list of potential committee members:

1. Local Head Start Director or similar pre-school program. These people have the 4-5 year old children we want to reach, along with their parents.
2. City, County or College Librarian. These are the people who represent literacy in the local community. They may also have valuable contacts.
3. One or more good woodworker craftsmen. Someone with management skills should be the leader as they will order wood and supplies.
4. A literacy-minded pastor. Remember, larger churches have members who can be involved in various parts of the project.
5. A literacy-minded banker, who can serve as your treasurer. Encourage only small donations as we are not a 501 (3) © Corporation. Most of the funds are raised at your annual bookcase banquet.
6. A retired teacher, who has a “reading” background and who can enlist other retired teachers to get involved, reading, sorting books etc.
7. A representative from your local newspaper, publisher, editor or reporter who can give a project the kind of publicity it deserves.
8. Others may include a retired legislator, business person, city official, a representative from local civic clubs and two-to-three others who are results-oriented and who know how to get things done. The ideal number of a Central Committee is twelve to fifteen people.

The name of each project should bear the name of the city, community or county, such as the Conway Bookcase Project or Delaware County Bookcase Project. This is a stand-alone project and should never bear the logo or other identify of a civic club or any other community organization. It will belong to every member of the community because illiteracy affects us all.

We can all do something whether it's reading to children, building bookcases, donating children's pre-school books, attending or helping with the Annual Bookcase Literacy Banquet or Annual Awards Ceremony, donating name plates, lending your paint and spray equipment to stain and vanish the bookcases, and just being available and helpful. Feel free to share this document with your Facebook friends. Fighting illiteracy is a challenge for all of us.

The following is a testimonial from Debbie Merritt, daughter of Former Senator Stanley Russ, after she attended our most recent Bookcase Awards Ceremony:

"This one particular family that I have known for many years was one of the recipients. Since they do not have a car, Lynn asked if I could take her to the program. I was excited to know that her daughter, Hope, would be receiving a bookcase since this child is extremely lacking in verbal skills.

"I thought the speaker was excellent and I was very pleased with her remarks hoping that they would be taken to heart. At the end of the program, Senator Baker walked up just as I was telling the mom that I would bring the car around in order to load the bookcase, but instead he picked it up and carried it out for us. I was very thankful for his observation and help. As soon as we got in the car, the first thing out of the mom's mouth, was asking what was the verse in Deuteronomy that the speaker mentioned. I was elated. All the way home Hope played with and talked to her stuffed animal she received. Upon entering their home, she immediately sat on the floor and began taking the books out of the sack one by one. Hope enthusiastically held up each book, I would read the title and she would put it neatly in a stack.

"Once she got to a Dora the Explorer book, her grins turned into shouts of excitement and began kissing and hugging the book. That routine was performed once again when she came to another book she recognized. While she was going through her books, her mom saw that the stuffed animal had a hole in its neck and she asked me if I could sew it together. After Hope finished going through all the books she reached for her animal, but I showed her the hole and explained to her that I would take it and try to fix it and then bring it back to her. She looked at me and then the animal, kissed and hugged it and then gave it back to me. Needless to say, you made

one little girl extremely happy. I did fix the hole and took the animal back the next day. I asked the mom at that time if she had read to Hope yet and she said yes.

"I realize you probably do not hear back from many of the recipients, but I did want to thank you and your team all for the many hours you invest in this and assure you that there is much benefit.

With gratitude,"

Debbie Merritt

Jim is available for interviews that reach state, regional and national audiences to explain the project in more detail. Of course the best source of immediate information is the project's website: www.bookcaseforeverychild.com Following is his contact information:

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*Dr. Schick retired in July 2004, after twenty-five years as Executive Director of the Arkansas Press Association, and after sixteen years teaching at the college level, and another five years working for newspapers.

