



## **Reading Helps Build Homes**

*With BookSmart, Habitat for Humanity Atlanta  
creates a book-rich environment*

October 2022

## ***BookSmart removes barriers for families to access books in traditionally under-resourced areas.***

**Reading and education** shouldn't be limited to school

Linking reading and housing services **reaches families and children where they are**

Families read more when they are **supported and their progress is celebrated**

## **Challenge**

### **Schools are often the only focal point for reading and education**

Reading comprehension skills are foundational to learning and are critical contributors to educational outcomes, social emotional learning, and success in life. However, children don't have sufficient time within the school day to practice reading.

“When we talk about education and how it ties into people’s growth and well-being, [Habitat for Humanity Atlanta] is right at the center. Not only are we concentrated on making sure we provide people a safe, quality place to live and a great neighborhood, we’re also tying in other opportunities to help them grow and thrive – and education is one of those elements we help support.” – **Alan Ferguson, President and CEO of Habitat for Humanity Atlanta**

## **Solution**

**Worldreader partnered with Habitat for Humanity Atlanta to make reading accessible and fun.** Habitat for Humanity’s model asks new homeowners to play an active role in making their dream of owning a home a reality. Since the organization’s founding in 1976, future homeowners and volunteers have worked side-by-side to build affordable homes. This investment into their home and community is called ‘sweat equity’ and can take many forms. To fulfill the requirement of 250 sweat equity hours, families can contribute to the construction of their new home, work at the Habitat ReStore or warehouse, or attend classes on anything from home maintenance to personal finance.

With the BookSmart digital reading solution, Habitat for Humanity Atlanta introduced a new way for future homeowners to put sweat equity into their homes: completing reading hours with their children. Participating families accessed digital books and activities that helped them support and track their children's reading journey at home.

**A library of digital books:** BookSmart provided parents with more than 1400 books in English, Spanish, and Ukrainian for children aged 3-12 and their families. This summer, BookSmart allowed families to earn rewards for reading five, ten, and 30 books, as well as provided engaging activities with each book for children and their caregivers to complete together. BookSmart automatically tracks reading progress, and offers engaging activities to extend children's learning with each book.

**Direct access to families' home environments:** Program leaders sent information to each family about how to access BookSmart and how reading would contribute to earning sweat equity. BookSmart proved particularly effective as Covid limited external engagement, allowing families to complete their sweat equity hours right in their new home. BookSmart continues to be used as the books are always available and families find reading together is valuable bonding time between caregiver and child.

**A meaningful partnership across sectors:** Habitat for Humanity's affordable housing structure can be and is an anchor in the community ecosystem. BookSmart brought reading access directly to residents, creating an onsite book-rich environment while eliminating the need for transportation or costs to access books.

## Partnership Goals

**Worldreader and Atlanta Habitat for Humanity had short-term and long-term goals to boost children's reading time and completion of learning activities by families.**

### Short-term goal

Change reading behaviors for children in the home setting by providing direct access to a multitude of books.

### Long-term goal

Increase the number of families active in reading to their children and in the program and increase the time existing families spend reading, and completing the accompanying activities.

## Results

"BookSmart is a good fit [for a partnership] because when Covid hit, everything went virtual. Using Booksmart meant families were able to get sweat equity hours in their homes and it fits in well with our youth initiatives of building education for youth and families." - **Jacolvy, Family Services Education Manager, Habitat for Humanity Atlanta**

### Reach

The partnership launched in South Fulton County in Atlanta, Georgia. Families from Habitat for Humanity's affordable housing communities were invited to join the project. Most of these families are first-time home buyers below 80% Area Median Income (AMI).

#### In total, this project:

- Reached **32 readers**
- Read **468 books**
- Engaged young readers in **110 activities**

#### On average, each family completed:

- **11 books** over the summer
- **11 minutes** of reading per day

### Responses

"The program has been a joy for both me and my son and we both get to spend time together. My son loves to do the activities and it has been great to earn sweat equity hours and spend time with him at the same time." – **Jasmine, Habitat for Humanity Atlanta homeowner**



In this picture, Carmello is reading from the BookSmart digital library with his mom, Jasmine. By reading together, Jasmine helps Carmello interact with the book's content by asking questions about what he would do in certain situations. Children can learn from the experiences that characters go through, which improves their behavioral and social-emotional development. For example, Jasmine and Carmello discussed what he should do if he makes a mistake like one of the characters in the story. Jasmine spent time with her son and earned sweat equity hours at the same time.

## Future Plans

**We will foster ongoing reading opportunities and continue to engage young readers.**

This initial partnership was just the start. We will build on the launch in Summer 2022, expanding it through the 2022-2023 academic year.

**Partnerships that draw from each organization's strengths are the most successful for long-term growth**

To make this project a success, Worldreader contributed its digital reading solution, BookSmart, and our experience with inspiring community-led reading and education. Habitat for Humanity Atlanta provided local expertise and the structure for reaching families in their homes. This partnership demonstrated that a collaborative relationship with similarly value-driven organizations can be mutually beneficial and open new opportunities to promote reading and education.

## Get in Touch

**Partner with Worldreader to bring reading to homes in your community**

If you'd like to learn more about partnering with Worldreader, please contact us at [development@worldreader.org](mailto:development@worldreader.org).