

2022 Freedom Through Literacy Application - Entry #16

Who are you nominating for the Judith's Reading Room Freedom Through Literacy Award?

Someone else

----- If nominating someone else, please provide your name, phone number and email. -----

Your Name

Rose Marie Sondergeld

Your Phone Number

+14053668120

Your Email

sondergeldr@cox.net

----- Nominee Information -----

Name

Lisa Gerard

Address

3825 Sierra Vista Way
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US

Phone

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Email

littlereadwagon20@gmail.com

Website

<http://www.littlereadwagonok.com>

Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/LittleReadWagon>

Instagram

<http://www.instagram.com/littlereadwagon>

Select the category that best describes you

Literacy Nonprofit

Title of Literacy Project

Little Read Wagon

Please write a brief description that captures the essence of your project.

Little Read Wagon is dedicated to increasing book and literacy access in underserved and marginalized populations. We aim to close the literacy gap resulting from poverty by distributing free books through our multiple book outreach programs. Little Read Wagon strives to share a love of books and reading with all ages providing a diverse and inclusive selection of books for those who use our services. Little Read Wagon puts books directly in the hands of children and adults who need them in order to foster a love of reading while developing literacy skills.

It became obvious while volunteering at a free laundry event in Norman that the children attending with their parents really had nothing to do. Lisa Gerard, a certified special education teacher and founder of Little Read Wagon, decided that a story hour coupled with art activities might be the perfect way to entertain the waiting children. She wanted to share her personal love for books and reading hoping to inspire the same in her audience. Soon, that initial story hour grew to include stocking a bookshelf “library” at the laundromat and multiple requests for a return visit from the book lady. In July of 2020, story hour mushroomed into a grassroots effort to supply new and donated books to children particularly those living in a book desert community or without books of their own at home. Requests for books for adults, books for domestic violence education classes at Norman’s Women’s Resource Center and books for the book cart at Center for Children and Families quickly followed. As Little Read Wagon researched book deserts, book access, and laundromat libraries, the #look4abook program hiding books in local parks was born. Little Read Wagon adopted Oakhurst Park and installed and stocked a Little Free Library there. Books have been hidden in almost all of the sixty-five parks in Norman as well as in surrounding cities. Volunteers have even hidden books for Little Read Wagon in vacation destinations out of state. Little Read Wagon soon developed #bookdroptuesday selecting, delivering, picking up and resupplying age, interest and reading level appropriate books to children at home. The delivered collections are assembled specifically for the children requesting books based on their interests and reading level. This program was extremely popular during the pandemic when libraries were closed and many of our clients were parents or grandparents homeschooling or supervising virtual school. This very popular program remains active today. Our newest program, #pjsandpages, encourages parents to read to their children daily, particularly at bedtime, to develop foundational literacy skills while encouraging parent/child bonding. Our younger clients are given new pajamas and a stuffed animal along with the books they choose.

Our overall target population includes all ages needing or wanting access to books. We work to reach low income populations, disability populations, marginalized populations, minority populations, senior citizens, rural populations, homeless populations, urban populations, illiterate populations... basically anyone who lacks access to books and literacy materials. Little Read Wagon is based in Norman but as we have grown, we have expanded into Oklahoma City and nearby communities.

Little Read Wagon participates in many free community events where our target audience is likely to attend. The areas served are primarily lower income areas that struggle with unemployment and poverty where a large percentage of local children receive free meals at school. We are devoted to furnishing quality reading material to our clients providing books that reflect the lives of the people served taking into consideration age and reading ability. We aim to provide books that reflect area demographics and are culturally relevant, books containing characters that share similar experiences with those in attendance, books with timely messages that mirror current experiences within the community, books that foster pride in heritage and books that highlight positive role models that inspire. Little Read Wagon is mobile and meets people where they live sharing the experience of book ownership. Clients self-select books but volunteers are always available to guide children and adults who are looking for age, interest and topic appropriate books. Our volunteers interact with people at these events providing literacy and community education while supporting friendship.

Express your individual philosophy about literacy. Include key elements you believe are the foundation for literacy.

Literacy is the ability to communicate with others through speaking, listening, reading and writing allowing people to participate fully in everyday life. Little Read Wagon promotes literacy by putting books directly into the hands of children, teens and adults especially those not inclined to read, those who may not read fluently and those without books of their own.

There is a direct correlation between early reading and school readiness. Developing early literacy skills in children sets the stage for learning and success in school. The availability of first quality reading material is particularly important when working with children. They need access to a wide variety of books in order to develop imagination, explore their feelings, understand and appreciate multiple perspectives and values while discovering who they are and how they fit in today's world. Little Read Wagon seeks to inspire and encourage children to read by providing interesting books engaging them in stories and read alouds. At the same time, we empower parents with information resources needed to establish reading routines at home. Research suggests that children benefit the most from book giveaways when parents and guardians are instructed on ways to support young readers. Children who develop strong reading skills become lifelong learners improving their quality of life as well as the life of the community they become part of as adults.

Access to literature looks different for everyone. Little Read Wagon promotes literacy by giving its clients the experience of book ownership. Little Read Wagon strives to meet people where they are in life helping them navigate their personal literacy journey. We are attempting to close the literacy gap one book at a time.

In as many ways as possible (e.g. anecdotal evidence, statistical data, media reports, awards), please describe the impact of your project. How has your project fostered and sustained a love of reading in others?

All free events that will include Little Read Wagon are posted on Facebook and Instagram. In addition, Little Read Wagon uploads a monthly impact report detailing events previously attended and the number of books distributed. Since achieving 501 (c) (3) status in July 2020, Little Read Wagon has distributed more than 25,000 free books to children and adults. Through Wagon Reads, Little Read Wagon posts about themed book months, suggests books of interest, highlights authors and provides literacy instruction. Little Read Wagon has been profiled in the Norman Transcript, Metro Family magazine, Oklahoma Gazette, The Advocate, JNews.UK , The World Outside Our Window and

the University of Oklahoma Daily. Little Read Wagon's director and volunteers contributed 958 hours supporting our numerous programs.

In addition to #look4abook, #bookdroptuesday and #pjsandpages, Little Read Wagon is growing community by participating in multiple free community events and furnishing books to multiple child centered outlets while stocking free libraries and book carts at partner organizations. Our outreach continues to grow because of monetary donations from generous supporters which allows us to purchase new books. We also regularly receive many first quality books donated by community members and locally sponsored businesses' Annual Day of Giving drives.

Anecdotal evidence from book recipients confirms the value and impact of our programs. We see "repeat customers" at many events who share how much they look forward to choosing books from Little Read Wagon. So many of our clients tell us in the sincerest terms how Little Read Wagon books have encouraged their children to read. Adults, especially our homeless clients, eagerly choose books that allow them to escape the situation they currently occupy. Many event attendees verbalize their past struggles with reading expressing the sincere hope that this program brings children better opportunities. Our Spanish speaking clients are delighted to choose books in Spanish as their English skills are limited. A teacher recently wrote on our Facebook page: "You are making a difference". One of our young readers sent a note expressing his older brother's gratitude. He said that during testing his brother was stressed out but reading books from Little Read Wagon after each test session helped him to feel better! Little Read Wagon is attempting to meet the literacy needs of all who will benefit from book ownership.

Describe with concrete examples how and why your project is innovative and/or creative.

Little Read Wagon distributes free books to the attendees of many community free events. We attend multiple sessions of Laundry Love/Sox of Love, Ice Angels of Mosaic UMC Ministries, Mutual Aid Fair and Red Dirt Collective. We displayed the Little Read Banned Wagon at the February Mutual Aid Fair and at the May Norman Pride Fest where an hourly book draw for a banned book was highly anticipated. Little Read Wagon established a free lending library in Oakhurst Park in Norman and regularly restocks free libraries at laundromats and at book carts located at the Center for Children and Families, Crossroads Early Head Start, Crossroads Youth and Family, Teens in Crisis as well as at Texas Children's Hospital's genetic counseling center. Little Read Wagon provided activity and coloring books for our local Veterans Center. Little Read Wagon routinely stocks a teen library at the Children's Recovery Center, a residential treatment facility in Norman.

Little Read Wagon's #look4abook program has inspired similar programs in Shawnee and Northwest Oklahoma as well as in Granite City, Illinois! Lisa has participated in and distributed books at a Women in Science event and, dressed as Ms. Frizzle, has read and given books away at Share a Book events. To encourage reading for those without access to a public library, #bookdroptuesday brings books directly to their clients for a two-week period before those books are picked up and replaced by others. #pjsandpages encourages reading to children, especially young children, at bedtime to develop the most basic literacy skills. Parents and children choose a new pair of pajamas along with the book(s) they receive. Reading glasses are available through our homeless outreach to enable our clients unable to afford prescription lenses the pleasure of reading. Little Read Wagon receives multiple requests for books and to date, has been able to respond to all requests.

Is there any other information that would be important for us to know that you would like to share?

What started as a simple story time for children at a laundromat has evolved into so many programs that impact

many different people. Little Read Wagon is unique because we bring books directly to people where they are. We seek out events and locations where people who lack access to books and literacy services are likely to be. We drop off custom book bags to Norman porches on request. We leave books in local parks for kids to find. We conduct story times, give away books at free community events and stock free libraries. We gave out 3608 books in 2020, 12,037 books in 2021, our first full year of operation, and to date, we have given out 9604 books in 2022. We serve about 50 families per month at Norman free laundry events. We have approximately 10 regular bookbag drop families in Norman. The bookbag program reached 30 families when Covid numbers surged. We have hidden over 3500 books in Norman parks. We stock book carts at multiple community organizations. We attend many free themed community events. Little Read Wagon hosted story time weekly at Scissortail Park in Oklahoma City; we gave out 1500 books during their Halloween Treat Trail. Little Read Wagon joined Sox of Love at a "street corner" Halloween event. Our book giveaway, in partnership with the Homeless Alliance on Valentine's Day, brought incredible happiness to attendees. We distributed 400 books, 100 coloring books, 50 crossword puzzle books, 25 pairs of reading glasses and 200 comfort Beanie Babies. Bob's (Black Owned Business) Shamrock event, the second street corner outreach we attended, had significant attendance and high interest in our book give away. Little Read Wagon delivered a bookshelf, coloring books and puzzles to Joe's Addiction, an Oklahoma City coffee shop that provides a safe community for anyone struggling. We are unaware of any other organization in the Norman and greater Oklahoma City area that is providing and delivering free books and literacy materials directly to people in need of the same right where they live. By addressing the needs of all, we hope to facilitate an increase in the number of literate community citizens. Please visit Little Read Wagon's profile on guidestar.org and greatnonprofits.org.

How did you learn about Judith's Reading Room and the Freedom Through Literacy Award?

Initially, we learned of Judith's Reading Room while online searching organizations supporting literacy. That led to liking and following Judith's Reading Room on Facebook. When the 2021 application for the Freedom Through Literacy Award was announced on Facebook, Little Read Wagon applied. We are most grateful that Lisa Gerard was awarded a Board Option Award in 2021 celebrating her work towards building a reading community.

----- **Additional Documents (All files must be in .pdf format).** -----

One Page Bio (MUST be a .pdf)

 [2022-Bio-Judiths-Reading-Room.pdf](#)

Letter of Reference (MUST be a .pdf)

 [Little-Read-Wagon-final-draft-June-8-2022.pdf](#)

****If selected as a Judith's Reading Room Freedom Through Literacy Award winner, we require that you agree to provide materials to use on Judith's Reading Room's website and social media.**

----- **Confirmation** -----

BY TYPING YOUR NAME BELOW, YOU AGREE TO THESE TERMS AND CONDITIONS AND CONFIRM

THAT THE INFORMATION ABOVE IS CORRECT TO THE BEST OF YOUR KNOWLEDGE.

Rose Marie Sondergeld

Date

06/11/2022

[Judith's Reading Room](#)