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Media Contact:
Reach Out and Read Washington State
Jill Sells, MD
206.914.1783
Jill.sells@reachoutandread.org



REACH OUT AND READ EXPANDS TO 100 U.S. MILITARY BASES IN RESPONSE TO FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA AND DR. JILL BIDEN'S JOINING FORCES INITIATIVE

School readiness initiative will model expansion based on success at six Washington state military facilities

Seattle, WA – April 12, 2011 – First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden today launched *Joining Forces*, a national initiative to support and honor America's service members and their families.

Based on the successful implementation of the Reach Out and Read school readiness initiative at Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane; Madigan Army Hospital and McChord Air Force Base at Joint Base Lewis McChord in Tacoma; and Bremerton Navy Hospital locations in Bremerton, Bangor and Everett, the research-proven program will expand to 100 U.S. bases by 2013 in support of Joining Forces. After expansion, Reach Out and Read will serve more than 200,000 children of military families.

[Joining Forces](#) aims to educate, challenge, and spark action from all sectors of our society — citizens, communities, businesses, non-profits, faith-based institutions, philanthropic organizations, and government — to ensure military families have the support they have earned. Earl Martin Phalen, CEO of Reach Out and Read, attended the White House press conference, where the organization was announced as an official partner of the initiative.

“By ensuring that children grow up with books and highly-engaged parents, we are helping military families to cope with stressful situations – and succeed in school,” said Phalen. “We are proud to partner with First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden in this extraordinary initiative, and are grateful for their commitment to both Reach Out and Read and the children of military families.”

[Reach Out and Read](#) prepares America's youngest children to succeed in school by partnering with doctors to prescribe books and encourage families to read together. Doctors incorporate Reach Out and Read's evidence-based model into regular pediatric checkups, by advising parents about the importance of reading aloud and giving developmentally-appropriate books to children. The program begins at the 6-month checkup and continues through age 5.

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Reach Out and Read currently serves 3.9 million children and families nationwide, including 90,000 military families at [47 U.S. bases](#). In Washington State, Reach Out and Read serves over 67,000 children, including more than 6900 military children and families at Washington’s six military locations.

Through the new initiative, Reach Out and Read will double its [impact on military families](#) by expanding to 100 total military bases, serving more than 200,000 children and families. “We are thrilled that we have been able to expand Reach Out and Read’s military programs in Washington state from one military program to six in the past three years,” said Dr. Jill Sells, Director of Reach Out and Read Washington State.

Early Learning and support for military families are high priorities in Washington state. “We appreciate the First Gentleman’s efforts to raise awareness about Reach Out and Read,” said Dr. Sells. Mr. Gregoire, an Everett native, helped launch Washington’s newest military Reach Out and Read program at Navy Station Everett Branch Medical Clinic in January. In March, Colonel Homas welcomed Mr. Gregoire and the Reach Out and Read team to the Madigan. In both cases, Mr. Gregoire read to children in the waiting room, while thanking the doctors and staff for their work with families.

“There’s no greater skill a parent can teach their child than the ability to read,” said Mike Gregoire. “That’s why I spent so much time sharing stories with my own two daughters, and why I’ve made reading to children a priority of mine. At a time when resources are thin – and many parents are struggling to make ends meet – promoting literacy can sometimes be placed on the back-burner. I applaud the work of Reach Out and Read, which has come up with a unique way to place books in exam rooms, and use the trusting relationship between parents and their child’s doctor to reinforce the importance of reading.”

Fourteen published research studies demonstrate that Reach Out and Read works. Families served by Reach Out and Read read together more often, and their children enter kindergarten better prepared to succeed, with up to 10 books in their home libraries, larger vocabularies, stronger language skills, and a six-month developmental edge. Reading aloud to young children is a proven technique to help them deal with the stress and anxiety associated with separation and deployment.

“Reading to children improves family relationships, reduces stress, and promotes resiliency,” said Dr. Eric Flake, Major, U.S. Air Force, and developmental-behavioral pediatrician. “In fact, parents reading daily to their children may be one of the greatest protective factors for families during deployment.”

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About Reach Out and Read

Reach Out and Read is an evidence-based, national nonprofit organization that prepares America's youngest children to succeed in school by partnering with doctors to prescribe books and encourage families to read together. The Reach Out and Read model is endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the program has one of the strongest records of research support of any primary care intervention. This year, more than 700 Reach Out and Read Washington State volunteer doctors and nurse practitioners will provide new books to over 67,000 young children at 119 healthcare locations in 28 counties. For further information, please visit Reach Out and Read Washington State's website at www.reachoutandreadwa.org. For more information on Reach Out and Read's national military initiative, visit www.reachoutandread.org/military.