

Worldreader

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2019 Annual Report

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The reading crisis

Every day, millions of people around the world continue to be held back because they are unable to read.

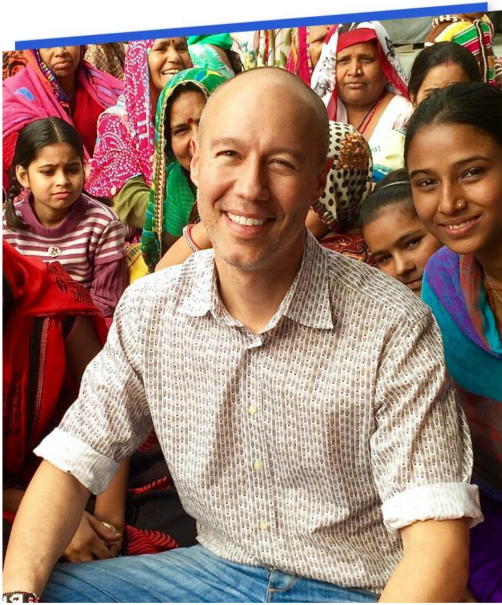
more than 250 million children around the world lack basic literacy skills and risk falling behind permanently.

Over half of the world's children living in low- and middle-income countries cannot read by the age of 10.

115 million youth around the world and more than 50% of youth in Sub-Saharan Africa are illiterate.

Worldreader believes readers build a better world

We work with partners globally to support vulnerable and underserved communities with digital reading solutions that help improve learning outcomes, workforce readiness, and gender equity.



A message from our CEO

As I write this letter, citizens across the US and around the world are protesting police violence and years of injustice against people of color – even as we try to make sense of the impact COVID-19 will have on us going forward. It's nearly impossible to reflect back on a year of Worldreader progress, let alone cover the 10 years since Colin and I founded the organization.

So rather than focus on the short-term, I'd like to lay out a few beliefs which have guided our work since the beginning, and will guide us for years to come. I hope that in reading these, you'll understand the relevance of our work not just now, but for many years in the future.

We believe in the power of reading. It's like a turbo-charger for all other human development: education, health equity, social justice, prosperity, self-reliance – even empathy. Imagine trying to care for your child's health without being able to access high-quality information. Consider seeking work, but having to hide the fact that it's hard for you to read basic instructions. And think of how important it is to put yourself in the shoes of someone from completely different circumstances. As we say in our vision statement: Readers build a better world.

We believe in partnership. Nobody ever did anything interesting completely alone. Yes, history is full of the hero myth, and I love reading about great individuals as much as anyone. But if you scratch below the surface, you'll always find a team of like-minded, like-valued people moving ideas forward. When I look over the past 10 years since Worldreader was founded, I'm fully aware that we would have never helped 13.5 million readers without partnering with organizations like Pencils of Promise, CAMFED, Pearson, Microsoft, Amazon, Simon & Schuster, Penguin Random House, Opera Software, and others. (For a great deep-dive into one of these partnerships, have a look at [Scaling Storytime](#) featured in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* about our partnership with Pearson and how together we got more mothers reading with their children in India.) As the African proverb says, "If you want to go fast, go alone, But if you want to go far, go together."

High impact requires low cost, now more than ever. Reading programs (and education more generally) never have sufficient funding. It's a structural issue: the benefits of reading can take years to realize, but the costs are immediate. So even though the return on investment is off the charts, it's hard for political systems to fund them properly. For the past few years, we've been hard at work driving down the costs of our work, even as we improve the quality. Our newest program, BookSmart, delivers a high-quality set of 150 digital books onto low-cost tablets and individual mobile phones for less than \$0.50/student/month. That's a cost that's so accessible, even very vulnerable and underserved communities can afford it, particularly when so many of our donors help subsidize the cost even further.

Learning takes place at home *and* at school. We've seen this for years. One of my favorite moments over the past 10 years took place at the Kibera School for Girls, where one of the parents ran up to me and announced: "Tuesday is my favorite day of the week. It's when my daughter brings home her e-reader, and reads to herself, to her sister, and to me." Our work in India doubled-down on this idea, where we worked with mothers and caregivers to read with their children at home on their mobile phones. Our work in Jordan doubled-down on it again, as we worked with refugee parents to keep their children reading wherever they were. And it's more important now than ever, with 1.5 billion children out of school because of COVID-19. We believe this home-school blended approach will be with us for years, because it reflects reality: most children learn more outside the walls of their schools than within. So increasingly we're focusing on helping parents help their children. [Here's](#) an audio guide we distribute via WhatsApp in India.

Our work matters more than ever to the most vulnerable – and unfortunately, that’s a growing population. For years, we’ve focused on vulnerable populations. Our history started with work in low- and middle-income countries in Sub Saharan Africa – and even then, we largely avoided working in capital cities, instead focusing on more rural areas like the eastern region of Ghana or libraries in rural Kenya. Many of our partners over the years have taken our work to even more vulnerable populations: refugees in Jordan; prisoners on the coast of Kenya; deaf children in Kakamega, Kenya; physically disabled children in Zimbabwe. Our many projects focused on women and girls, who are so often left behind as technology changes and the world moves forward. Examples include our [Girls Read project](#) in Zambia in collaboration with the Population Council, which shows a marked increase in reading ability and self-reliance and our [Inspire US project](#) in Ghana, which gave voice to critical issues like gender violence, family planning, and women’s autonomy.

You’ll see much more of this work going forward. As we said from our earliest days, as a nonprofit, we can and must go where the market is failing.

Data or it didn’t happen. In our earliest years, we could see our impact with our own eyes. (I still love reading some of our earliest dispatches, like this [one here](#), where we first heard about the importance of including a children’s dictionary into e-readers.) But now that we’ve reached over 13.5 million children, we increasingly get insight from our data. For instance, as I write this, our most-read children’s book of the last week was “Feeling Sad,”— not surprising in a world of COVID-19 as children try to process their feelings. (Meanwhile, young adults are turning to romance and fantasy— clearly somebody wants to escape!) Technology allows us to lower costs and achieve great scale – that’s wonderful. But just as important, it lets us understand how many students are reading above our benchmark of 15 minutes/day, and shines light on the books that are most inspiring and motivational. For all that’s been written about the problems technology brings, it’s important to remember that it can also help us improve, when used properly.

These six principles have guided us from our beginnings back in 2010, and they’ll guide us for years to come. In hard times and in easy times, our goal remains the same – to help billions of people improve their lives. Thanks for being a part of the journey.



David Risher
CEO & Co-Founder, Worldreader

In 2019, Worldreader helped millions of people improve their lives

Since 2010, Worldreader has brought a library of digital books to over
13.5 million readers around the world.



7 million
books read
in 2019

2.4 million
readers in 2019
13+ million
total readers since
2010

10.5 million
hours reading
in 2019

**In 2019, we doubled down on
supporting readers with the
greatest need**



**Mrs. Sapna Roy helps young children learn
through stories.**

"Before there was less focus on teaching the children. They would just come to eat food and leave. Then we received tablets and I started reading to the children."

Mrs. Sapna Roy teaches at an Aanganwadi in Delhi, India. She reads to the young children from Worldreader's library of over 500 books, using tablets and a projector.

**We support
readers in their
earliest years**

The early years of a child's life are critical for healthy brain development. Yet 250 million children are at risk of not reaching their full cognitive potential and falling behind by the age of five. In 2019, Worldreader worked with partners whose programs reach families, communities, health care workers, and pre-schools to normalize a culture of reading and storytelling early on in a child's life.

**We improve
reading skills
in primary schools**

All children should be able to read with fluency by the



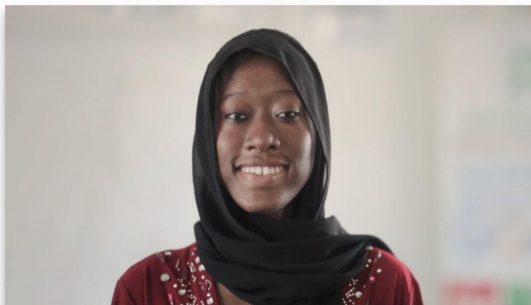
age of 10. Yet over half of children in low- and middle-income countries cannot read and understand a simple story by the time they leave primary school. In 2019, Worldreader sought to improve children's reading proficiency by focusing on the five core reading skills: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.



Our CreceLee project will reach thousands of students.

Last year we launched our first-ever project in Latin America. The opportunity to help people read in this part of the world is great. CreceLee, a project launched in Peru, will bring digital reading to an estimated 4,500 children via tablets and mobile phones.

The project will reach over 10,000 households and up to 50 schools by the end of its third year.



Aisha helps empower girls in her community through inspiring stories.

"I have learnt how strong one can be as a woman. I have learnt that you can be whatever you put your mind to regardless of your community or your gender."

Aisha comes from Nima, one of the largest slums in Ghana. She often volunteers to help vulnerable girls in her community. Through Worldreader's Inspire Us project, Nima was able to bring empowering content to these girls, using stories depicting strong female characters to teach them to believe in themselves.

We empower young people to become global citizens

There are 1.8 billion people between the ages of 10-24, the largest generation of youth in history. More than a fifth of them, the majority of them women, lack sufficient training, education, and employment opportunities. In 2019, Worldreader aimed to engage young people through empowering content and book clubs.



Our financials



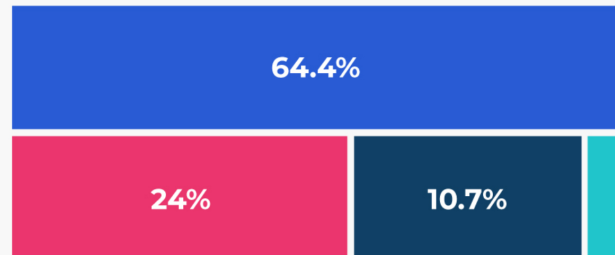
Worldreader is committed to high financial integrity and transparency. We apply our various resources in innovative and responsible ways to build a better world, powered by readers.

\$9.8 Million
total contributions

\$2.3 Million
in-kind donations

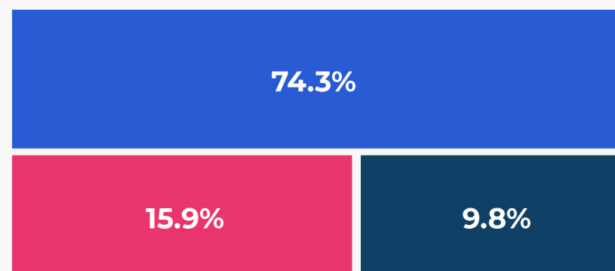
\$2.83
cost per reader

Revenue



Donations & Grants	\$6,374,042
In-kind Gifts	\$2,369,849
Earned Income	\$1,056,183
Other Revenue	\$60,260
Total Revenue	\$9,860,334

Use of funds



Program services	\$7,007,693
Management and General	\$1,498,414
Fundraising	\$920,412
Total Expenses	\$9,426,519

[See More](#)

Your support makes all the difference

Sponsor a school or pre-school

When you sponsor a school or preschool, students will receive e-readers, e-books, and Worldreader's expertise.

[Get in touch](#)

Join with your colleagues and volunteer

Does your workplace have an employee volunteer program? Find out how you and your team can help.

[Get in touch](#)

Host a virtual event

Utilize your networks and host a virtual event that brings your family & friends together to discuss Worldreader and the impact you can be a part of.

[Get in touch](#)

A year in thought leadership

The Benefits of Digital Reading for Vulnerable Families in Crisis Settings

This report highlights the key findings of Worldreader's Tuta Tuta pilot program in Jordan. The program was designed to support the educational and social-emotional needs of families impacted by the refugee crisis by promoting the adoption of digital reading.

[Read more >](#)

November, 2019



Promoting Gender Equality with Digital Reading

Gender sensitive program design, data tracking by gender, and research on the role of content to challenge stereotypes are key principles that guide Worldreader's efforts to promote gender equality.

[Read more >](#)

October, 2019



Ending Learning Poverty: How Worldreader is making a difference

According to The World Bank, the world is in the midst of a global learning crisis. In a recent report, The World Bank highlights Worldreader's digital reading programs as an accessible and cost-effective solution to the problem.

[Read more >](#)

November, 2019



Harnessing the Power of Digital Reading to Overcome Development Challenges in Kenya

Nearly 150 participants from across sectors in Kenya and around the world attended Worldreader's 2019 Global Digital Reading Summit. The theme was Disruptive Technology. Sustainable Solutions: Digital reading as a cross-sectoral approach to the SDGs.



[Read more >](#)

May, 2019

Leveraging Digital Reading to Help Children Learn in their Mother Tongue

Four in ten children do not have access to education in a language they speak or understand. Worldreader's LOCAL project aimed to address the demand for local-language books in 20 libraries in Uganda and Zambia through partnerships with local publishers.

[Read more >](#)

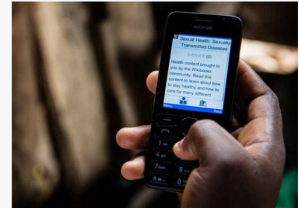
February, 2019

Working with Publishers to Build Lasting Change

At Worldreader, we work with over 400 publishers worldwide and after 8 years of publisher capacity-building, we were eager to better understand the impact of digital reading on the book market in three of our primary target countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

[Read more >](#)

January, 2019



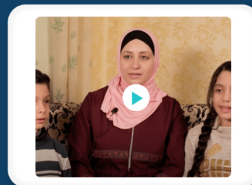
A year in videos



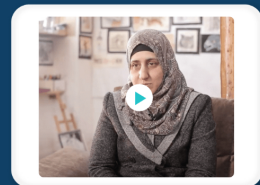
One woman's journey from Kenyan slum to university: the power of digital reading



Read to Kids program in Delhi: an aanganwadi teacher's story



Reading brings Shadya closer to her four children



Mayada uses books to help her daughter overcome fears

A word from our featured partners

PUSSYCAT FOUNDATION

"Partnering with Worldreader was our first-ever foray into international programming and we are thrilled to have made that leap."



"Our partnership with Worldreader is a perfect match. We aim to give our Opera subscribers the best experience online."



"The Foundation aims to uplift, inspire and educate, sharing our founders' love of education with others. We are proud to support."

and we are thrilled to have made that leap. Results from the gender-focused Inspire Us program in West Africa have been outstanding and exponentially furthered our mission to empower women and girls.”

The Pussycat Foundation

customers the best experience online. Worldreader’s library gives our readers a chance to access great books. Worldreader aims to scale reading across Africa. Since Opera browser is the number one choice for mobile users in the region, it provides a fantastic opportunity to get more people reading. In 2019, 88% of Worldreader’s new readers accessed books via the Opera browser – that’s something I’m very proud of.”

Jan Standal, VP of Product Marketing and Communications at Opera

adventure writing. We are proud to support the Worldreader digital platform, which reaches readers across the globe, and publish the stories shortlisted for the Author of Tomorrow award, showcasing the adventure writers of the future.”

Georgina Brown

Our community



2019 Individual and Family Supporters

Multi-Year Support

We are pleased to recognize these forward-thinking donors who have committed multi-year pledges to sustain our growth and impact for years to come.

Epic pledges

\$500,000 – \$1,000,000 and above

Chris Capossela and Leigh Toner
Cynthia and Steve Hammer
Jennifer and David Risher
Kaphan Foundation
Karen Van Dusen and Joel Spiegel

Anthology pledges

\$250,000 – \$499,999

Kate James and Hans Bishop
Otis and Elizabeth Chandler Foundation

Novel pledges

\$100,000 – \$249,999

Carolyn Kroll Reidy and Stephen Reidy
Charles and Lorie Brighton
Donna and Matthew Bellew
LJ Ross
Peter and Elisabetta Mallinson Trust
Star Soltan and Dillon Lerach
Wilke Family Foundation

Poetry pledges

\$25,000 – \$99,999

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Colleen and Clyde McQueen
Fraser and Dierdre Black
Kartik Raghavan
Klintworth Family Foundation

Larry Hitchon and Dana Reid
Lauri and Greg Nakamoto
Maryam Mohit and Erik Blachford

Sponsor pledges

\$10,000 – \$24,999

Martin and Victoria Nye

Supporter pledges

\$1,000 – \$2,499

Brian and Carrie Pratt
Pamela Bynum

Annual Gifts

Worldreader is pleased to recognize these generous donors for gifts supporting our 2019 programs and operations.

The novel circle

\$100,000 – \$249,999

Tod and Allison Nielsen

The poetry circle

\$25,000 – \$99,999

Brad Horwitz
Dana Johnson and Mark Nelson
David and Martha Dominguez
Harrison Miller and Clare McCamy
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Thacher Family Philanthropy Fund
Venky Harinarayan

Sponsor

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Ambassadors

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David Zapolsky and Lynn Hubbard
Gina Centrello
Christopher and Elizabeth

Gregory and Elisabeth Fowler
John and Jessica Fullerton
John and Martha Stewart
John Jameson
Justin Anderson
Keith Edwards
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Mary Bacher
Mike Nugent
Raffiq Nathoo
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Timothy and Jennifer Kingston
Tom Alberg and Judi Beck

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\$2,500 – \$4,999

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Robert Short and Emer Dooley
Steve and Heather Murch
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The Family of Sibyl Frankenburg and Steve Kessel

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Helen Gurley Brown's Pussycat Foundation
Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, Menlo Park, California
Hunter-Jelks Fund
IENG Ghana
Jane Austen Literacy Foundation
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Purpose Portfolio Foundation
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R.Y.T.H.M. Foundation
Salesforce Foundation
Samuel Affi
Somebody's Mama
Tableau Foundation
Tellumind Foundation

Thank you

All of this impact has been made possible by passionate supporters like you. Thank you for sharing our vision of a better world, powered by readers. We hope you'll share these incredible milestones with your friends and family.



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