



Thank You

FOR HELPING CHILDREN
BECOME BETTER READERS

OCTOBER 2022

INSIDE

Camp iRock
Women United's Preschool Pages
Bright By Text
And More!



United Way
of Pickens County

www.uwpickens.org



WE THINK YOU ROCK!

THE TRUTH! **Thanks to you**, after two shaky years- one virtual and the other shortened by two weeks- Camp iRock Year 8 was back to normal with swimming, field trips, Reading Buddies, YMCA fun, and of course, intensive literacy instruction- all wrapped up in a Camp iRock bow of enrichment and learning!

Preschool Pages, Women United's premier signature early literacy program, is also in full swing this year with eleven Pickens County Elementary Schools participating. We are so excited about the growth of this program and the impact it will have on young learners.

Camp iRock and Preschool Pages are part of United Way of Pickens County's BOLD GOAL that 70% of all Pickens County's third graders will read at grade level by 2025. Why is this important? Because third grade is the final year children are learning to read. After third grade, children are reading to LEARN. If they are not proficient readers when they begin the fourth grade, as

much as half of the curriculum they will be taught will be incomprehensible.

United Way donors, volunteers and partners like YOU have a "Go Big or Go Home" attitude. You accepted the challenge and doubled the number of first and second graders PLUS added a K4 pilot to the fully expanded K5 -3rd grade Camp iRock classrooms. This was so important because they lost most or all of their "reading years" due to the pandemic.

The Camp iRock partners- the School District of Pickens County, the YMCA of Easley, Pickens and Powdersville and the Call Me MiSTER interns- built the bigger program... but not without challenges. Hiring enough counselors and MiSTER interns was a real issue. Camp iRock is nothing without them.

The price tag for Camp iRock was huge, but not to worry because when the going gets tough, **you come through**. You made sure that 434 SUPER READERS had the summer of their lives. **You Rock!**

FROM SHY TO CONFIDENT- YOU MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Eric was shy, sometimes had trouble focusing, and wasn't a confident reader.

Even though his parents spent a lot of time reading with Eric at home, his reading scores were lower than they needed to be.

Eric's father, John Eby, is now at Clemson University, but previously worked for the School District of Pickens County. Through his work with the School District, he became very knowledgeable about every aspect of Camp iRock. As the end of the school year approached, Eric's parents secretly hoped Eric would be invited to Camp iRock.

"Thrilled" doesn't begin to describe how John felt when Eric was invited to attend Camp iRock, but he still wasn't sure how Eric would respond. "I knew that the camp was a fantastic program overall, but you just never know how your child's unique experience is going to play out," he said. He need not have worried because Eric LOVED Camp iRock from day one. Every morning, Eric was up, dressed and ready to go before his parents. He loved the field trips, helping his teacher keep the classroom clean, and adored his



The proud look on Eric's face is priceless, and is all thanks to you for supporting Camp iRock!

Call Me MiSTER mentor. His parents saw Eric's confidence and reading abilities grow each day.

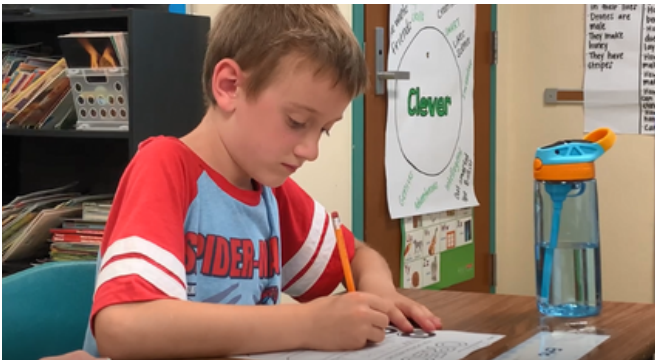
The ultimate reward was when Eric was named the coveted "Camper of the Week," awarded to the child who embodies hard work, effort, kindness and excellent behavior. Not only did Eric love camp, but his reading scores improved.

"The reading growth was just icing on the cake," John said. "The look on Eric's face when I can tell that he's really happy and proud of himself is priceless. Camp iRock made that happen."

Epilogue

We couldn't stand it. We just HAD to know how Eric was doing at school, so we reached out to John. "He seems great," said John. "He had his first spelling test and got an A!"

Eric's family wants you to know how much your support of Camp iRock means to them. They thank you and so do we. THANK YOU!



Because of you, Eric aced his first spelling test.

ABEL BISHOP: FROM BROKEN TO BLOOMING

Chapter 1- Before Camp iRock

Abel Bishop was a broken little boy.

According to his mom, Melissa, last year's school experience was a nightmare consisting of daily meltdowns. Not a day went by when she wasn't called to the school because Abel was freaking out. She wasn't sure what direction Abel's life would take. Abel suffered from debilitating anxiety and possibly ADHD. He had recently been diagnosed on the autism spectrum. Could Abel overcome so many barriers? Melissa wasn't sure.

Chapter 2- An invitation to Camp iRock

"I've got to go, Mom," insisted Abel. "I've been invited!" Melissa wasn't sure he could handle it but she signed him up immediately, not knowing anything about Camp iRock. She crossed her fingers and said a prayer.

Chapter 3- The Miracle of Camp iRock

The first few days were rocky and Abel wasn't sure he could do it, but Melissa insisted because, "When we start something, we finish it."

Camp iRock was wonderful for her son. "His teachers and counselors knew Abel's challenges and they met him where he was. They encouraged him and got him through the rough spots. For the first time in his life, Abel was excited about learning. **Because YOU supported Camp iRock, you walked with Abel every step of the way.** By the time Camp iRock was over, Abel was high fiving everyone. He was so excited about school!



Abel was all smiles on the first day of school because you built his confidence through Camp iRock.

Chapter 4- The School Year Begins

"How is Abel?" We all wanted to know.

Melissa wrote back immediately.

"Well so far so good. He is a little anxious about the afternoon bus ride (he gets anxious and thinks nobody likes him). I just told him if they are mean, you be nicer. It's hard to be mean to people who are nice to you. 😊 He says he really likes his teacher, so I am hopeful.

He did tell me someone came in and read a story yesterday about an autistic boy with ADHD, and he said, Hey that is me. When the kids said no you aren't, he said, yes, I am! God made me a special autistic ADHD, and I am smart and loveable."

Melissa credits Camp iRock for Abel's new found confidence. She credits YOU!

Chapter 5- More good news!

A note from Abel's teacher...

Good Afternoon,

I am Abel's reading teacher this year and I wanted to spread some celebratory news! We took our reading MAP test today and he scored a 216! That is up from his third grade score in the spring of 171! I am so proud of him for taking his time and working hard today to show his skills!

Ms. Bosch



Abel's mom credits Camp iRock and YOU for Abel's newfound confidence and success in school.

Prologue

If you ever wonder if your donation to Camp iRock matters, just think about Abel Bishop and you'll never regret it. Melissa tells us he reads constantly. He reads instruction booklets, labels, his favorite books. He reads on the way to school and on the way home. **Abel's future is so bright, thanks to you!**

CAMP iROCK WORKED!

Because of you, 434 children attended Camp iRock this summer and received intensive, personalized reading intervention in an enriching summer camp environment. **Thanks to you**, of the K5-3rd graders who were post-tested, 95% maintained or grew in their reading level!

434

K4-3rd graders
attended
Camp iRock

95%

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grew in their
reading levels



EVERYBODY NEEDS A BUDDY

"EVERYBODY NEEDS A BUDDY...especially a cool grown up who is awesome at helping me read."

Camp iRock kids love their Reading Buddies, and Reading Buddies love their students. Reading Buddies are community volunteers who meet with campers that need a little extra support. It's the perfect opportunity for companies to engage their employees in community projects, for retirees who love children, or for anyone who wants to lend a hand one-on-one with a child.

Join us next summer as a Reading Buddy. You'll be glad you did. For more information, contact Karen Culley, 864-850-7094 x102, kculley@uwpickens.org



Reading Buddy volunteers make a huge difference! Join us next summer and experience first hand the joys of helping a child go from struggling to striving.

CAMP iROCK: EDUCATION'S SECRET SAUCE



Award winning teacher Josh Miller comes back to Camp iRock year after year.

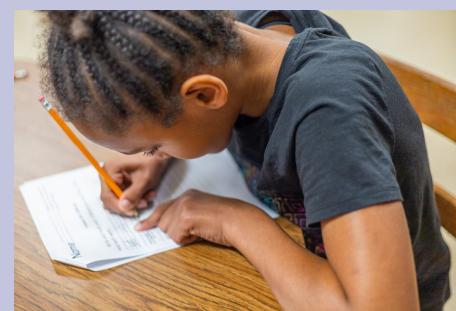
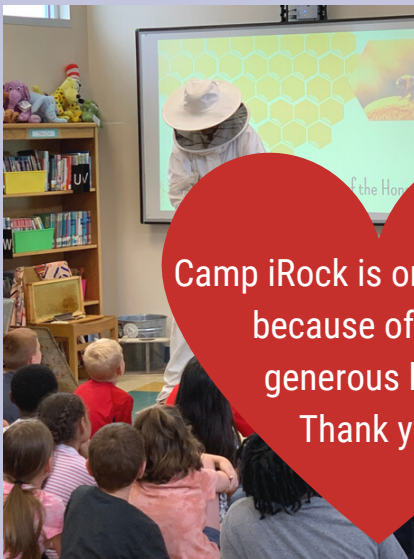
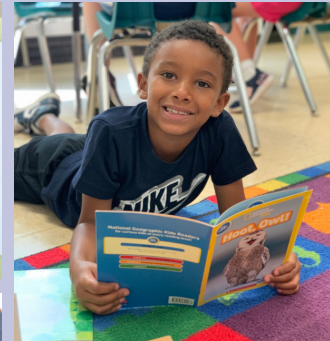
Josh Miller, last year's Golden Apple Teacher of the Year, has represented the YMCA as a Camp iRock counselor every year except 2020 and 2021. He commutes every day from Spartanburg, where he teaches orchestra at Boiling Springs Middle School. We think that is pretty amazing and wanted to know why. He shared these thoughts with us.

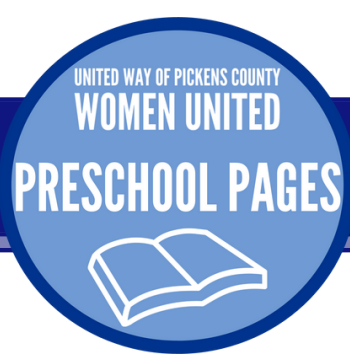
"Camp iRock is undoubtedly a special place for the kids. The data and results are undeniable. I've seen kids arrive scared and hesitant and leave a part of a family. For me, the greatest reward of Camp iRock -and the reason I can't give it up- is witnessing kids grow to trust us. Without trust, kids don't learn.

Camp iRock is also a model for education. Many former Camp iRock YMCA counselors and Call Me MiSTER interns are now some of the most amazing educators I know. I can only imagine what education could be like if all prospective teachers were able to work with veteran teachers in a "hands on" learning environment.

We have the secret recipe for success in education...it's called Camp iRock. Much that I learned at Camp iRock has been incorporated into my own classroom. Sometimes, the students and I just stop and talk. It's magic."

A PICTURE'S WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS: CAMP IROCK 2022

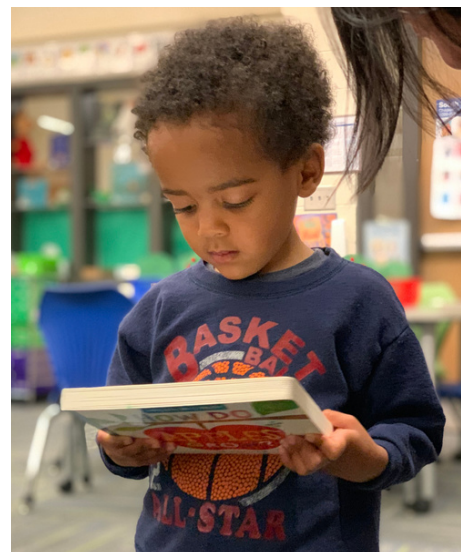




SUPPORTING THE YOUNGEST LEARNERS

Women United, an affinity group of United Way of Pickens County, is committed to promoting high quality early literacy programs for preschoolers. **Thanks to the incredible generosity of this community,** we are happy to share that Women United will support Preschool Pages programs at eleven elementary schools this year.

Preschool Pages gives young children and their caregivers an opportunity to participate in story time with related crafts and activities which helps these budding readers develop important early literacy skills while learning that school is a safe and nurturing place. So when it is time for them to go to school, they are comfortable and ready to seize the day.



Your donation to Preschool Pages provides the building blocks for kindergarten success!

TWO PROGRAMS, ONE FAMILY

Three-year-old Brantley has the confidence and “I can do it myself” attitude that makes his mother Johanna so happy. When he was a year old, Johanna and



You gave Brantley confidence through Preschool Pages.

Brantley participated in Preschool Pages

Pup Tails at McKissick Academy. Brantley was shy, but Johanna said that he opened up more and more each time he attended Pup Tales. **She now calls him "Mr. Independent" and credits wonderful donors like YOU for supporting this amazing program.**

Her youngest son, one year old Liam, just started attending Pup Tails and even though he is “mamma’s boy,” he now lets others hold him and **LOVES** the books.

Johanna’s daughter Ava attended Camp iRock in the 2nd grade and she is now a voracious reader and lover of books.

This is the perfect example of how **your support of early literacy programs** will help reach the United Way bold goal that 70% of 3rd graders will read on grade level by 2025.



You are building generations of strong readers through Camp iRock and Preschool Pages.

YOU FILLED THE GAP



Because of you, Preschool Pages fills the early education gap.

As a former teacher, Sarah Strutton, mother of 3-year-old Delcie, knows the value of early education. That is why Delcie has participated in Women United's program Preschool Pages for the past 2 years.

"Whenever I tell her we are going to the 'big school,' she gets really excited," said Sarah. "She just loves it."

Sarah has nothing but praise for Miss Cummings, Delcie's Preschool Pages teacher. Delcie not only gets to hold her own book while the teacher reads to the class, she also participates in fun activities related to the story. Sarah recognizes how skilled Miss Cummings is in teaching preschoolers.

Delcie spends most of her day with Sarah, and in addition to church friends, Preschool Pages has been an excellent social experience that will benefit Delcie when she enters school.

Sarah appreciates this opportunity for her daughter. **Without YOU, programs that address early education wouldn't happen.**

"There is a real gap in quality education programs for preschool aged children. The work that United Way is doing to fill that gap is invaluable."

SAVE THE DATE

UNITED WAY OF PICKENS COUNTY
WOMEN UNITED

Luncheon for Literacy

to support Preschool Pages

Thursday, March 16 | 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. | Tri-County Technical College, Easley Campus



Keynote Speaker
Jessica Patterson
Award Winning Principal,
Liberty Primary



Emcee
Jane Robelot
Nationally Acclaimed Anchor,
WYFF News 4

Sponsorship opportunities available now. Tickets go on sale in January.
www.uwpickens.org/luncheon



PRESCHOOL PAGES: MORE THAN JUST A BOOK

Finn Saleeby was born in October 2019- just in time for the pandemic to interrupt the preschool plans his parents had for him.

Even though his parents read to him every day, Finn had no social interaction with children his own age, and it worried his parents.

Finn and his mother, Mary, started attending Preschool Pages last spring and he loved it. Playing with children his own age had such a positive impact on his development. He loved taking a book home and when his parents re-read the Preschool Pages books, Finn would remember the fun activities that accompanied the story.

Preschool Pages is so much more than just reading a book. Each selection has a special activity that reinforces learning.

Finn is currently attending his first preschool at Fort Hill Presbyterian Church and Mary says he is doing great. **It is because of donors like you that gave children like Finn a great start to a lifetime of learning. We appreciate you so much.**



Finn is doing well in preschool thanks to the foundation you provided through Preschool Pages.



BECAUSE KIDS DON'T COME WITH INSTRUCTIONS

Kids Don't Come with Instructions

That is why, **thanks to you**, "Bright by Text" is providing age appropriate tips for parents of young children.

Bright By Text- a partnership with Pickens County First Steps- is for anyone who cares for and loves a child, prenatally through age 8: parents, parents-to-be, grandparents, babysitters, aunts, uncles, neighbors, friends, teachers, and more.

Bright by Text can help!

Bright By Text sends free text messages with easy, practical tips and activities right to your cell phone. Content comes from trusted partners like PBS and Sesame Street. Messages are targeted to your child's age and include information on development, language and early literacy, health and safety, behavioral tips, and more.



Your support of Bright By Text helps parents like United Way staffer Lyndy Schonhar receive customized parenting tips and resources.

The only information required is the child's birth date and zip code. Messages are timed to their exact age and information about local events and resources. Bright by Text is completely free, but message and data rates may apply.

United Way of Pickens County teammates, Lyndy Schonhar and Jeremy Price, have young kiddos and signed them up for Bright by Text. They LOVE it, and we do too. Lyndy tells us:

"As a first time mom of a one year-old, I've found Bright By Text tips to be very helpful, and I love that the tips are customized to my child's age. From expected milestones, to activities and exercises that promote learning and development, I look forward to receiving tips and links each week!"

Do you have young children in your life? Lyndy and Jeremy highly recommend you sign up for Bright By Text. Simply text SCKIDS to 274448 to sign up.

YOU HAVE THE POWER TO CHANGE A CHILD'S LIFE

Your support is needed...urgently and right now...to write the next chapter in the story of a child in Pickens County who is struggling in school and in life.

Right now, a child is broken and her story will not have a happy ending. Not only is she behind academically, the drastic changes she has had to endure during the past two years of the pandemic have impacted her emotional and social development as well.



Every child's story deserves a happy ending.

Experts predict that it will take five years before we know the true impact the pandemic has had on children. Too many innocent lives will be ruined if intervention stops now. Their stories will be bleak without you.

But, when you give to United Way of Pickens County, you write a NEW story for a struggling child. It will be a magnificent story of a child who learns to read, and goes on to do great things...because of YOU!

The Stark Reality

Did you know that third grade has been identified as the FINAL year children are learning to read? After third grade they are reading to LEARN.

If they are not proficient readers when they begin the 4th grade, as much as half of the curriculum they will be taught will be incomprehensible.

But you can provide the intensive, personalized education programs children in our community need to thrive.

Every child's story deserves a happy ending, don't you agree?

My next gift to help a struggling child!

YES! I will help a struggling child and support the work of United Way of Pickens County. Enclosed is my gift of:

☐ \$ 50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$500 ☐ \$ _____ to help as much as possible.



Scan with your phone's camera
to donate securely online.

Support children today: uwpickens.org/donate | PO Box 96 Easley, SC 29641 | 864-850-7094