Facebook founder's foundation to fund Newark literacy program

Foundation for Newark's Future is giving $400,000 to launch Raising a Reader program in Newark, which lends kids a stack of books to take home with them each week, officials announced today. (Naomi Nix | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com)
NEWARK — The foundation overseeing Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg’s $100 million donation to Newark’s schools is funding a new literacy program in the city.

The Foundation for Newark’s Future is giving $400,000 to the United Way of Essex and West Hudson to launch Raising a Reader program in Newark, which lends children a stack of books to take home with them each week, officials announced today.

Under the program, 3 and 4 year olds will receive four books to take home. At the end of the week, the children exchange the books for a new set.

Raising a Reader, which operates in more than 30 states, provides “culturally-sensitive” books in the hopes that adults and children will read together, said Tymisha Sweet, East Coast senior manager of Raising a Reader.

“We want to install the habit,” Sweet said.

The $400,000 donation will fund the program for about 18 months, after which local organizations are expected to continue to fund the program.

“Early childhood education has always been one of our priorities, said Foundation for Newark’s Future CEO Kimberly McClain. She added that the Foundation will likely continue to fund projects into 2016.

United Way of Essex and West Hudson is sending applications to area organizations including Head Start programs, Pre-K providers, preschools, religious institutions and community organizations.

Within the next few weeks United Way will choose its partner organizations to work with. The initiative will serve about 3,000 kids, said Catherine Wilson, senior director of community impact and strategy.

“We wanted a program where we would have books for kids to read,” she said.

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