



Many Hands. Volunteers helped make a "Books to Dreams" guest reading by David McKiever (center) a memorable event. From left to right are: Pat Dubiel, Amy Henry, Mary Cox, Brenda Rosen, Norene Sweet, Director Miriam Stannard Epstein. Photo by Sue Nimerowski.

'Books to Dreams' Spreads Love of Books and Reading

BY SUE NIMEROWSKI
The Broadcaster

WILLIMANTIC — To the eight children and 10 adults who settled in for the Books to Dreams-sponsored monthly visit to the Holy Family Shelter in Willimantic, "What's a Wudd?" was both the title of a new children's book and a question they very much wanted answered.

David McKiever of New Milford, author of the book, revealed all.

The story begins with a very depressed character named Dave, who is visited by some Gumby-like beings that, through music, teach acceptance and perseverance.

Wudds to the rescue!

Miriam Stannard Epstein, director of Books to Dreams, believes each person is unique and important. In a before-the-book-reading exercise, in fact, the audience repeated, "I'm special, I'm precious, I'm amazing."

And she encourages children, "Don't ever forget how special you are. Help your families. And keep reading."

Epstein, a petite and vivacious former teacher, had earlier, with the help of volunteers, spread out dozens of books.

And "reading buddies," stuffed animals with tags that encourage children to read everyday and start their own libraries, waited to be chosen.

Each family received a free copy of "What's a Wudd?" And "To" and "From" were inscribed into each book, because ownership is an important theme of Books to Dreams.

Epstein's love of books dates back to her childhood. She still has the Mother Goose book given to her by her grandmother in 1948, when she was six, although the covers have been "loved away." She credits her love of reading to her late father, Joseph Stannard.

In 1993, she began a preschool, Toddler Time, and an after-school tutoring program called "The Key," which became The Holy Family Home and Shelter Education Program.

Books to Dreams, a literacy program for children and parents in homeless shelters, soup kitchens, and in need, was started in 1996.

And Books to the Streets brings books, bookmarks, and reading buddies right into neighborhoods.

From 1996 to June 2004, 178,429 books were given out to more than 80 organizations. In addition, 21,987 special request books have been distributed since 1998. And children's books are now being sent to Costa Rica, Cuba, Iraq, South Africa, Honduras, and Haiti, hand-carried by the group's volunteers to assure delivery.

The organization has become well-known, receiving a number of honors and awards in recognition of its work.

Contributions come in from many sources and are always timely.

For more information about the program, e-mail bookstodreams@yahoo.com For more information about the author of "What's a Wudd?" visit www.Wudds.net.