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Please Help Author a Future!

Ready to start school in September, five year old, Aleisha Sargeant, put on her best dress in preparation for the battle of a lifetime. Aleisha would soon face the daily challenge of education versus ignorance, and opportunities versus missed choices. For children in poverty, like Aleisha, and the teacher hoping to make a difference in her life, the fight for literacy offers few second chances.

Since the establishment of reading achievement examinations, at-risk children from Buffalo and across the country have consistently performed poorly. According to federal guidelines, approximately 80% of the children in Buffalo live in poverty; third highest in the nation. It is not surprising that children such as Aleisha fall victim to an achievement gap. For children like her, who live in poverty and attend a school with limited resources, chances to be successful soon begin to dwindle.

Project FLIGHT learned about Aleisha's plight in an email written by a teacher from her home at 5:00 am:

**"I am a teacher on the East Side of Buffalo. We care so much about our children, but we are having a hard time meeting the standards for many reasons. One of our biggest concerns is lack of any materials for the children to read. Last night, one of the fourth grade teachers was nearly in tears because her children are so far behind. How do you teach reading when there's nothing to read? (She does have books for the fourth grade level, but her children cannot read at this level.) It isn't a matter of intelligence either. They have no preparation; they've never been read to. We just need to take them through the process. I told her I would talk to you. I am more than willing to do anything I can to help. Just point me in the right direction. Thanks for your time. I'm keeping my fingers crossed on this one."**

Within 48 hours, Project FLIGHT had delivered 100 books to every single classroom in the school, not just the fourth grades, but to all grades, for a total of 12,000 books. Project FLIGHT's commitment to helping underprivileged children and families was known to this teacher. In fact, not only had immediate help been given to this school but too other parents, teachers, and school districts served by Project FLIGHT for over 17 years.

The dimensions of Aleisha's portrait become tragic as one contemplates the stark future for which she is positioned. Researchers agree that educational attainment is one of the strongest predictors of an individual's success. As reported by Rod Watson, of *The BuffaloNews*, (November 20, 2003) "...according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), kids with lots of books typically score 25% to 30% higher than their peers." One of Project FLIGHT's assumptions is that First one learns to read; then, one reads to learn. But, how do our children learn to read when they have limited access to books in the home and at school?

Who is behind Project FLIGHT? Project FLIGHT, as we know it today, is the result of the professional and personal vision of two internationally known Professors at Buffalo State College, Elizabeth J. (Betty) Cappella, Ph.D. and Geraldine Bard, Ph.D. Their concept for helping impoverished children become better readers has been honed by 40 years of effort and has demonstrated the success of their model in Public and Private Schools locally, nationally and internationally. Their vision acquired a national focus through a Strategic Plan funded by the Margaret Wendt and John R. Oishei Foundations. With a proven model (Aleisha's school raised its scores) and a growing awareness of the importance of literacy, Project FLIGHT plans to continue its work.



Through its BookBank concept, and other pioneering family literacy initiatives, Project FLIGHT is working to tackle illiteracy at its roots by:

- Ensuring that every child will have a book of his own and be able to read it at grade level;
- Ensuring that each child will live in a literate environment at home and in school;
- Ensuring that literacy will be a pathway out of poverty.

FLIGHT accomplishes its mission by working with schools, teachers and parents, by:

- Providing schools and community agencies with trained tutors
- Pioneering and developing model educational literacy programs,
- Training teachers and parents on strategies that increase student performance,
- Collaborating with schools and community organizations on grants, research, assessment, and evaluation that operationalize research based knowledge for practical use and dissemination,
- Maintaining a BookBank that has provided over 3 million free books to children and by establishing over 1,000 supporting libraries in over 500 schools and community organizations.
- Initiating programs that focus on the New York State Standards, closing the Gap Programs, the federal reading Excellence Act, and the Leave No Child Behind Initiative.

Project FLIGHT has been characterized as a community “jewel” by **Robert Bennett**, past Chancellor of the New York State Board of Regents. According to **Marion Cañedo**, past Buffalo Superintendent, “Project FLIGHT has been an invaluable educational resource for our teachers, students, and families.” **Dr. Muriel A. Howard**, Past President of Buffalo State College, states that: “Even in this age of remarkable technological innovation, literacy itself stands as the greatest tool for access to a universe of ideas. We at Buffalo State College embrace and advance the goals of Project FLIGHT.” According to **Marv Levy**, National Football Hall of Fame member and past coach of the Buffalo Bills” I find it so unfortunate that many children aren’t able to build a foundation of literacy or love of reading and that’s why I’m so proud to support the initiatives of Project Flight.”

As a major supporter, the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library in down town Buffalo houses our BookBank. In the years to come – and with the support of people like you – we will continue our mission. We realize the promise of literacy as an inalienable right and that the legacy of literacy is democracy and freedom. Project Flight is a not- for-profit 501(c) (3) agency with overhead costs of less than 1%.

While countless children have been helped, there is still much to be done. Filling out the information on the enclosed envelope and making a donation in any amount will make a huge difference. Thank you in advance for authoring a future and giving a child the gift of literacy.

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Co-Director, Project Flight  
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