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# Boston University School of Medicine news: February 1990

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## Boston University School of Medicine

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# NEWS

For Immediate Release  
February 1990

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### BCH SEEKS ADDITIONAL VOICES TO ROAR

Boston, Mass.--There is an unusual sound in the Pediatrics Clinic at Boston City Hospital (BCH), and it is gaining the attention of both children and their parents. The sound is ROAR, a volunteer reading program that not only offers children stories, but also addresses their need to read. To strengthen and enrich its voice, Reach Out And Read is now reaching out for volunteers, particularly members of the community who speak Spanish or Haitian Creole.

For some children, learning to read is a difficult or even unpleasant experience. While most children overcome these obstacles, some face an even greater one--illiteracy. By demonstrating that reading can be fun rather than frustrating, ROAR volunteers help nurture children's desire to read--an essential contribution to promoting literacy.

Exposure to books at an early age, even before a child can read, is important to future success in learning to read, according to Robert Needlman, M.D., the co-director of ROAR, a pediatrician at BCH and a fellow in the Division of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics at Boston University School of Medicine. "By sharing books with children, ROAR volunteers express a love of reading that can help shape a child's attitudes and perceptions. They learn that books are meant to be enjoyed, not avoided," says Needlman.

While volunteers entertain children with stories, they also convey a positive message to parents. "Watching their child react enthusiastically to books can have a tremendous effect on parents' beliefs about reading to their children," says Needlman. "It provides encouragement for them to share books with their children and to enjoy the time they spend together reading," he adds.

## ROAR Seeks Volunteers

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In addition to the volunteer program, ROAR encourages pediatricians to integrate books into their consultation. The presence of books during the office visit reinforces the positive reading experience in the waiting room and allows parents to ask the pediatrician such questions as what books are appropriate for their children. Books also provide pediatricians with a useful diagnostic tool to measure a child's cognitive as well as emotional development.

When the pediatrician introduces a book during a visit, it offers a non-threatening means of assessing a child's reading skills and evaluating the parent's interaction with the child. The pediatrician can discuss these issues with parents and encourage their involvement in their child's overall development. After each visit, parents can choose a book for their child to keep.

ROAR began a year ago as an initiative of the Child Development Project, a unique collaboration between BCH pediatricians and Boston-area educators to identify and provide treatment for children with developmental problems. This year's funding is provided by the Francis R. Dewing Foundation, Ronald McDonald's Children's Charities and a Boston Globe grant awarded through the Reading is Fundamental (RIF) program. In association with the Boston Partners in Education, ROAR encourages community participation in helping Boston-area children succeed in learning, and in life. For information about becoming a ROAR volunteer, please contact Ms. Marilyn Rollins in the BCH Community Relations Office at 424-5122.

Boston City Hospital is a principal teaching hospital of Boston University School of Medicine.