



# The Mississippi Children's Museum and Barksdale Reading Institute Unveils a New Traveling Exhibit: *Rocky's House*

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## MISSISSIPPI CHILDREN'S MUSEUM and BARKSDALE READING INSTITUTE

### MEDIA CONTACT

Angela Mitchell  
Director of External  
Affairs, MCM  
[angela@mcm.ms](mailto:angela@mcm.ms)  
P: 601.709.8354

**Jackson, Miss.** (Feb. 24, 2022)— The Mississippi Children's Museum (MCM) and Barksdale Reading Institute (BRI) hosted a ribbon cutting on Thursday, February 24 to unveil a new traveling exhibit, *Rocky's House*, which promotes the literacy campaign *Talk from the Start* and its mission to raise awareness that talking to and with children from birth is essential to learning to read.

*Rocky's House* introduces caregivers and children to a cast of characters representing the diverse population of Mississippi, Rocky's Friends. Along with Rocky, they guide guests through three primary methods of language and literacy development: playing, talking, and reading. Visitors will learn about these methods and have a chance to play them into practice. MCM's Education Team played an important role in creating the characters known as Rocky's Friends and contributing to the educational and thematic development of the *Rocky's House* traveling exhibit.

"Our museum is committed to developing innovative programs that address the needs of Mississippi's children and set them on the path to success," said MCM's President and CEO, Susan Garrard. "Struggles with literacy are among the biggest challenges that our children face. This project is an unprecedented opportunity to partner with an acclaimed educational institution, The Barksdale Reading Institute, to create resources that will raise awareness and positively impact children and families in our state."

A custom mascot illustrated by MCM's Senior Graphic Designer Lori Nesbit, Rocky the Reader, is the ambassador for the campaign. *Rocky's House* will travel statewide with its first stop at MCM-Jackson until March 20 and then it will travel to MCM-Meridian. Following its time at MCM, *Rocky's House* will travel to the Coast and the Delta. Rocky's tour will share the campaign's message "We all play a part, talk from the start," which encourages parents, caregivers, educators, and community supporters to talk to and with young children. You can request to book *Rocky's House* in your community by visiting [www.talkfromthestart.org](http://www.talkfromthestart.org).

"Our goal is to encourage and provide examples of the many ways that parents and adult caregivers can talk, read, and sing with and to infants and toddlers to help build their brains for reading. Studies have shown time and again that strong oral language and listening comprehension are critical to learning to read. This is a simple and no-cost way to boost literacy in our state," said BRI CEO Kelly Butler.

The *Talk from the Start* Campaign and its companion project, the *Rocky's House* traveling exhibit, have been made possible through funding by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

For more information, visit [www.TalkfromtheStart.org](http://www.TalkfromtheStart.org) or email [talkfromthestart@msreads.org](mailto:talkfromthestart@msreads.org).

#### **About the Mississippi Children's Museum**

The Mississippi Children's Museum (MCM) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization with a mission of creating unparalleled experiences to inspire excellence and a lifelong joy of learning in all children. The 40,000-square foot museum is designed around five primary initiatives, with correlating exhibits, programs, and outreach efforts. These initiatives include: Literacy, STEAM, Health and Nutrition, Cultural Arts, and Mississippi Heritage – the keys to helping our children mature into healthy and productive adult learners. In response to community needs due to the COVID-19 pandemic, MCM shifted operating and programming priorities to best serve Mississippi's children and combat learning loss through facilitating virtual schooling and creating online educational enrichment – services that continue today through a robust, daily afterschool program and an online platform for teacher professional development.

In 2021, MCM celebrated a monumental year by receiving an Institute of Museum and Library Services National Medal, the nation's highest honor for museums, and through opening its first satellite museum, MCM-Meridian, which received the 2021 Governor's Award for Travel Attraction of the Year. Learn more: [www.mschildrensmuseum.org](http://www.mschildrensmuseum.org).

#### **About the Barksdale Reading Institute**

The Barksdale Reading Institute (BRI) was founded in 2000 by Jim Barksdale with a commitment of \$100 million dollars. The mission of BRI, based on the Science of Reading, is to improve the overall quality of literacy education in Mississippi so that all children are reading on grade level by the end of third grade. This goal is achieved through strategic literacy initiatives including school readiness programming, professional development for educators and school leaders, improving the quality of education for undergraduate teachers before they enter the field, forming key partnerships with educational organizations, and influencing educational public policy in Mississippi. BRI is headquartered in Oxford and Jackson, MS and works with educators throughout the state to dramatically improve the quality of reading education in Mississippi. For more information visit [www.msreads.org](http://www.msreads.org).

#### **About the W.K. Kellogg Foundation**

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF), founded in 1930 as an independent, private foundation by breakfast cereal innovator and entrepreneur Will Keith Kellogg, is among the largest philanthropic foundations in the United States. Guided by the belief that all children should have an equal opportunity to thrive, WKKF works with communities to create conditions for vulnerable children so they can realize their full potential in school, work and life. The Kellogg Foundation is based in Battle Creek, Michigan, and works throughout the United States and internationally, as well as with sovereign tribes. Special attention is paid to priority places where there are high concentrations of poverty and where children face significant barriers to success. WKKF priority places in the U.S. are in Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico and New Orleans; and internationally, are in Mexico and Haiti. For more information, visit [www.wkkf.org](http://www.wkkf.org).

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