



Irene M. Barton
Cobb Collaborative
ibarton@cobbcollaborative.org
678-766-5574

For immediate release July 28, 2021

New Little Free Library Established by BNI Smyrna Business Exchange in Marietta, GA

COBB COUNTY, GA: Nationwide more than 80 percent of children from low-income families are not proficient readers by the time they finish third grade. This deficiency has significant and long-term consequences not only to the children, but also to the communities around them.

One of the most successful ways to improve the reading achievement of children is to **increase access to books**, especially at home and in their native language. Cobb Collaborative is dedicated to the process of making that happen. In partnership with Cobb County School Psychological Services Department, the Collaborative is leading an initiative to increase access to books in Cobb through Little Free Lending Libraries. The Little Free Library (LFL) is a nonprofit dedicated to putting books in the hands of children and adults in communities around the world. The book-sharing boxes play an essential role by providing access and encouraging a love of reading. They operate under the "Take One, Leave One" theory.

As the local point of contact for the Get Georgia Reading Campaign, the Cobb Collaborative works to improve 3rd grade reading levels in Cobb County. Data reveals that children who read proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to graduate from high school—paving the way to higher education, better employment opportunities, and improved health outcomes.

With a goal of installing 21 libraries in 2021, the Collaborative's sixth LFL was dedicated on July 26, 2021. This Little Free Library was established by BNI Smyrna Business Exchange. BNI® (Business Network International) is a closed networking organization founded by Ivan Misner in 1985 and now franchised worldwide with over 283,000 members in over 10,000 chapters. BNI Smyrna Business Exchange has over 50 members who meet weekly to provide referrals and support to each other's companies. BNI Smyrna Business Exchange is participating in a BNI Foundation movement known as Business Voices™, an initiative to help schools solve challenges through community support and relationships. Kay Eller, a BNI Smyrna Business Exchange member, has taken on the role of leading the BNI Smyrna Business Exchange

Business Voices™ program. Through Eller's outreach, BNI Smyrna Business Exchange adopted Fair Oaks Elementary School, a Title 1 school in Cobb County, as their partner school. Over the last 3 years, BNI Smyrna Business Exchange has provided monetary donations, equipment donations, and participated in other events promoting learning at Fair Oaks Elementary. The most recent project is the donation and ongoing support for the Little Free Library which was installed at a local apartment complex that houses many Fair Oaks Elementary students and their families. Members of BNI Smyrna Business Exchange Chapter were present for the ribbon-cutting of this LFL. BNI Smyrna Business Exchange will share in the efforts of keeping the library stocked and maintained in ongoing support of partnering with Fair Oaks Elementary School.

More Little Free Libraries are in progress for installations across Cobb County. This is a quintessential collaborative effort, made possible by additional partners including the United Way of Greater Atlanta Northwest Region funding LFLs in Austell and Marietta, and Girl Scout troops and Eagle Scouts building LFLs as well.

"We are beyond thrilled to serve as the local point of contact for the Get Georgia Reading Campaign and to build a partnership of engaged stakeholders in order to move the needle on access to reading materials in our community. There is a direct link between reading skills and high school graduation rates, which of course leads directly to employment opportunities, economic stability and ultimately, the health of our communities," stated Irene Barton, Executive Director of the Cobb Collaborative. "It's not an exaggeration to note that proficient readers become engaged citizens," she added.

For more information about the Little Free Library program, contact Irene Barton, Executive Director, at ibarton@cobbcollaborative.org

Cobb Collaborative is a nonprofit organization in Cobb County seeking to improve outcomes for children and families. To learn more, visit our website at www.cobbcollaborative.org

###