



# 2018 ANNUAL REPORT



GLOBAL REACH



# LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

Dear Partners, Participants, Professors, Supporters and Friends:

The Irish novelist James Joyce once explained his interest in writing about the lives of ordinary people: “I always write about Dublin, because if I can get to the heart of Dublin I can get to the heart of all the cities of the world. In the particular is contained the universal.”

This universality of the particular forms the very magic of Books@Work. Life, as expressed every day in the experiences of ordinary people, helps us to connect to and understand the fullness of the human condition. And, we would argue, there is no better chronicle of the triumphs and tribulations of ordinary people than narrative literature.

One of Joyce’s Dubliners, Eveline, faced with the choice to follow her true love or stay back in familiar but restricting circumstances, calls us to consider every “fork in the road” decision we’ve ever made. And Joyce’s Little Chandler (in his story “A Little Cloud”) questions his stable work and family in the face of the glamour of his former classmate’s life and stories, reminding us that the seeming success of others tends to make us doubt our own decisions. In a world so marked by social media “personas”, Joyce’s Dubliners stay eerily relevant and universal.

But Joyce’s comment also reminds us that whether we read of Dublin or Detroit, Haiti or New York, the human particulars are consistent - for the characters and the readers.

In 2018, we were privileged to see our work expand around the globe, with programs that took us to the United Kingdom, Mexico, China, Portugal and Spain, adding to our previous experience in Canada, Brazil, Ireland, France and Germany. This international experience produced our most

powerful learning for 2018: the human hunger for authentic social connection knows no borders.

In 2018, we grew in breadth (adding new companies) and in depth (deepening our relationship with existing organizations). We entered new geographies around the world and reached new groups of readers in workplaces and the community.

In this Annual Report, we are delighted to share our progress and impact in 2018, together with the highlights of some of our favorite stories - either from other parts of the world, or discussed in other parts of the world. Specifically, we will highlight one element of this work - the human desire for authentic social connection and its ability to transcend culture and difference.

We will also share our progress closer to home - in the community, with veterans and with Cleveland police officers and residents.

But most importantly, we thank you for your partnership and support as Books@Work continues to grow. We are honored to break down barriers and build up companies and communities, and to foster healthy and meaningful human experiences through shared narratives. And we are proud, humbled and grateful to have you by our side.

Cheers and thanks,

Ann Kowal Smith  
Founder & Executive Director

Felix M. Brueck  
Chairman of the Board

## The human hunger for authentic social connection knows no borders.



## WHAT IS BOOKS@WORK?

Books@Work fosters the connections that create cultures of trust, respect, inclusion and productivity. Through dynamic literature discussions, facilitated onsite by professors, Books@Work transforms individuals and organizations from the front line to the C-suite.

Books@Work is an inquiry-based approach to engaging individuals at work and in the community. The text provides an initial context and an invitation to explore personal and collective narratives occasioned by the story. The literature is both catalyst and pressure valve, provoking conversation while providing a safe context in which to retreat.

Grounded in scientific principles, the Books@Work approach offers open-ended opportunities to practice humble and generative questioning, active listening and meaningful connecting, habits and behaviors that shape inclusive and respectful organizational cultures and communities. The collective nature of this work unleashes powerful outcomes, supported by our own evidence and by rich multidisciplinary research.

# GLOBAL VOICES

At Books@Work we use global literature all over the world. In this report, we have elected to share a few specific examples, including the themes and ideas raised by these stories, in discussion among working colleagues.

It's important to remember that although we highlight the story, the story is but the platform. The universal nature of human experience encourages us to see ourselves in these stories and invites us to share our own experiences, perspectives and points of view. In sharing, we learn about ourselves and each other.

## VISIBILITY

**Title, Author, Nationality:** "Without Inspection" by Haitian-American author Edwidge Danticat

**Who read the story:** Manufacturing colleagues in Bavay, France

**Short description:** A short story about a Haitian immigrant who falls from the high rise he's helping to build. As he falls, he reflects on the new life he's building in the US with the woman who saved him from drowning when he arrived.

**The group discussed:** Our dreams and the risks we are willing to take to make them come to life (as well as the risks others will take to help us), the legacies we'd like to leave behind, and the ways in which we work to make our way in new places. Work and the invisibility of certain workers, especially immigrants doing temporary work.

## EMPATHY & RECOGNITION

**Title, Author, Nationality:** "Beauty and the Beast, or, the Wound Too Great" by Brazilian author Clarice Lispector

**Who read the story:** Colleagues in an appliance manufacturer in Sao Paolo, Brazil

**Short description:** A banker's wife encounters a beggar on the street in Sao Paolo. His simple request causes her to reflect on her life and the qualities they have in common.

**The group discussed:** The ways in which listening to others helps us to recognize ourselves, and the awareness of our fears and our own histories. The surprise when we encounter someone we rarely get to see. The unusual opportunity to share a uniquely Brazilian story among Brazilian colleagues in an American company, recognizing elements of shared culture.

## VALUE

**Title, Author, Nationality:** "The Amber Bracelet" by Chinese author Zong Pu

**Who read the story:** Manufacturing colleagues in Shanghai, China

**Short description:** A hospice nurse bonds with one of her patients whose daughter is a high powered executive. The nurse and the daughter trade amber bracelets, one real and one fake, to gauge the reactions of others.

**The group discussed:** The extent to which our judgments differ based on perceptions of social class and standing, relationships among family members and how they parallel with relationships among colleagues, and the caring roles we hold with respect to others.





# OUR WORK IN THE COMMUNITY

We devoted all of the annual fund donations received at the end of 2018 to our ongoing work in the Veterans Administration Domiciliary in Cleveland. We are deeply grateful for your support in helping us to deliver Books@Work in this unique and important context.

One of the Domiciliary participants says it best:

“We get to hear a short story that takes us out of our day-to-day lives, it takes us to another world. It also allows us to listen to different perspectives. It can shed light on your own [perspectives] because you’re usually looking at certain things through your own life experiences and if you haven’t lived someone else’s life, which none of us have, then it may give you more information to make a better decision that you might have overlooked.

Books@Work is really open-ended. A lot of [our] curriculum

is more educational, so it’s informative but it’s more curriculum focused. Books@Work allows creativity to step in.”

In addition to working with Veterans, we continued our growing work with police officers and residents in the City of Cleveland, including children engaged in Police Athletic League programming. Stories provide a powerful opportunity to come together on a level playing field and to explore desired elements of a shared community. As one police officer commented,

“It gave me and other officers a chance to connect with civilians. A lot of time there’s a disparity between the two - civilians don’t realize that police have the same heart, the same lungs, breathe the same oxygen, eat the same food. Police don’t realize that civilians aren’t so different from them. This is one way to cut down the barriers.”



## LESSONS LEARNED

- 1 The human need for connection is universal. All over the world, colleagues hunger for the chance to connect to each other professionally and personally.
- 2 Short stories pack a punch! For teams and groups with constrained time, a powerfully written short story tees up the perfect blend of plot and themes to trigger thoughtful reflection and discussion.
- 3 The Books@Work model is based on humble and generative questioning, active listening and meaningful connecting, both in method and in outcome.





# 2018 BY THE NUMBERS

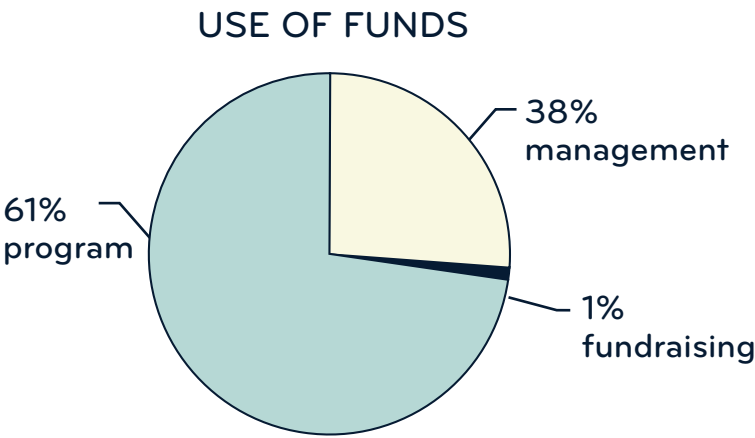


“We often have deeper, more expansive, conversations in Books@Work than in other spaces. I love Books@Work because of all of the minds coming together, sharing an experience, being guided through new discoveries. It's a pleasure and gift to get to do this.”

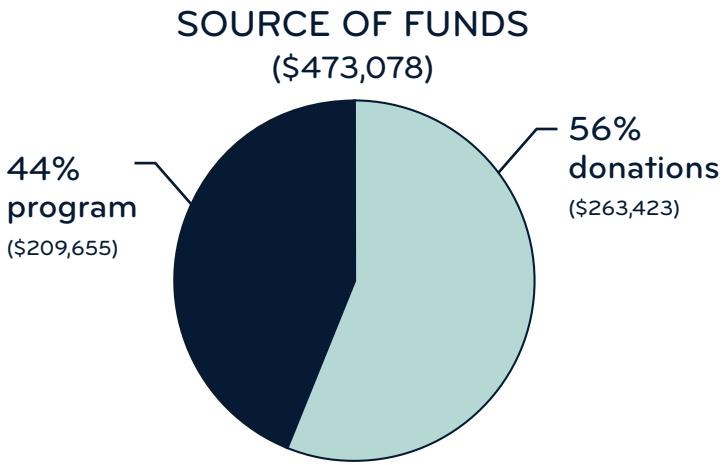


# FINANCIALS

TOTAL EXPENSES: \$392,970



\* In 2018, 53% of our total expenses were covered by program revenue.



# THANK YOU

You – our donors, partners, participants and professors – give life to Books@Work. Your dedication to lifelong learning helps individuals, families and communities. You are making learning accessible and inspiring. Together we are breaking down barriers and building collaborative workplaces and communities.

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