## Non-Profit Organization: Aspire


## 2022 Impact Grant Award: $100,000

## Project Title: Aspire Community Reading Buddies Expansion

## Focus Area: Education

## Description: Aspire Education’s Community Reading Buddies (CRB) program delivers one-on-one literacy mentorship for K–5 students (Buddies) from underserved communities. These students are paired with middle and high school Youth Mentors. This dual-impact model improves early literacy while building leadership and social-emotional skills in teen mentors. The Impact100 East Bay grant was awarded to help CRB reach an additional 400 Buddy-Mentor pairs, primarily from Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), expand programming, and generate data to validate CRB’s impact on early literacy with the goal of achieving broader educational adoption.

**Results:** Thanks to Impact100 East Bay’s funding, Aspire Education not only met but exceeded its recruitment and impact goals. The program empowered hundreds of young readers to close their early literacy gaps and prepared teen mentors to become compassionate community leaders. Buddies gained confidence, reading fluency, and a love for learning—transformative progress for students often furthest from opportunity.

• More than 450 Buddy Mentor pairs participated in the project and more than 1,400 youth served as mentors.

• Young readers averaged 4.5 months of reading growth after participating for eight weeks.

• 95% of youth mentors showed gains in leadership, problem-solving, and communication skills.

CRB’s success depends on deep collaboration with many supportive organizations. Partnerships with Oakland Unified School District, Oakland Public Library, and numerous funders like the Warriors Community Foundation facilitated critical access to students, volunteers, meeting spaces, and technology.

CRB’s model was also strengthened by community organizations, which offered wraparound support and recruitment pipelines.

## Quote/Testimony: Natalia, was a first-grader who joined CRB at the Oakland Public Library implementation site. Over seven weeks, she advanced two full grade levels in reading, supported by her Youth Mentors in a nurturing, affirming environment. This leap prepared her for success entering 3rd grade.

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