



## Sharing a love of books.

*One young member gives back by hand-selecting books for the Children's Rehabilitative Services Clinic.*

Jonah\* is a 10-year-old boy who loves books. He's also a boy with more than his share of medical challenges, including leukemia, chromosomal abnormalities, hypertension, asthma and speech impairment. After a successful bone marrow transplant, his leukemia is now in remission, but the procedure resulted in some serious complications, including frequent fevers, blood infections and seizures.

Jonah is also wheelchair-bound, has a feeding tube and rarely goes out because his immune system has been compromised. While his health has improved enough for him to venture out, his mother is still very protective and prefers to keep him at home.

Through his love of reading, however, Jonah has been able to explore the world in a different way. Every time he opens a new book, he travels to new places, meets new characters and experiences new adventures.

Another person who loves books is Sandra Paz, Jonah's UnitedHealthcare Community Plan case manager, who decided to hold a children's book drive in March for "Love of Reading" month. "I sent out an email to all our employees, asking for new or gently used children's books, as well as trading credits for Bookmans, a popular used-book store in our area," she explained.

Paz was amazed at the response she got. "People were so generous — I didn't expect to get so many books and credits so quickly," she said. "Then I thought who's going to go with me to Bookmans to use the credits and pick out books to donate?"

Paz immediately thought of Jonah. She knew that Jonah's mother was looking for an opportunity for him to give back, instead of always being the one receiving gifts. "His mother talked about the many holidays he's spent in the hospital, where he's received many very generous gifts from donors," she said. "Instead of always being on the receiving end, his mom was looking for a chance for him to give to others."

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**"It was so fun to watch him carefully look at every book that was handed to him."** *Sandra Paz*

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In addition, engaging long-term care members in special projects is a key tenet of the me\* Program, an initiative created by the UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of Arizona. The program's name stands for "member empowerment," and case managers like Paz participate by finding ways for their members to take part in activities that are meaningful and engaging, and help raise their self-esteem.

Paz talked with her manager and Jonah's mother about making Jonah her assistant book buyer. Jonah's medical team gave their permission, confirming that his health was stable enough for him to spend time in a public setting. With their approval, Paz presented the invitation to Jonah. "As soon as he heard about the project, he was so excited that he kind of took over," she said.



She asked Jonah where he thought the books should be donated and he suggested the Tucson Children's Rehabilitative Services Clinic, where he receives pediatric services. She then talked to the manager at Bookmans, who helped out by making an additional financial contribution, offering an extra discount on the entire purchase and assigning a store employee to help Jonah go through the children's books and make his choices.

On the day of the big book buy, Jonah took his work very seriously. "It was so fun to watch him carefully look at every book that was handed to him," said Paz. "If he didn't know the book, he would ask questions before he made a decision. He chose books for every age, from toddlers to teens."

By the end of the shopping trip, Jonah had filled up two shopping carts full of books, and on April 9, he and his mother delivered the books to the Children's Rehabilitative Services Clinic. Paz said Jonah was delighted to make doctor visits more fun for children by sharing good books to read while they're waiting. Jonah's mom also reports that Jonah's health has continued to improve, allowing him to spend more time out of the house. That's the kind of happy ending a hero deserves.