



Carson: Put power of books to work

By Ben Carson, Guest Columnist

Posted Jul 15, 2018 at 5:05 AM

Books saved my life. My mother always encouraged reading and made sure my brother and I were surrounded by books. We weren't rich. In fact, we were poor. But books opened more doors for me than anything else in my life.

I became a doctor because of books. My brother became a rocket scientist because of books. And today I serve in President Trump's Cabinet as the secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) because, early on, books were a part of my life.

Last week, I had the opportunity to share my love of reading and books with children who live in Sarasota's public housing by handing out free books and ice cream with the Sarasota Housing Authority and Police Department.

Low-income communities often lack access to reading materials, but through the Book Rich Environments Initiative, HUD and its partners at the National Book Foundation are working to change that by bringing books to those without them, by connecting communities with the resources that build relationships between readers and books.

These "book deserts" are the very same places where we see kids who are struggling in school and who are at a much higher risk of leaving the classroom with far fewer opportunities later in life.

The research is clear and convincing — where there are books, there is learning and growth and all of the benefits that flow from early access to the written word.

When parents read, their children read. When parents read to their children, those children become excited by books. When families have books in the home, children become interested in books. Where there are books, there is literacy. Where there is literacy, there is academic achievement. And success in the classroom gives children the opportunity to achieve their American Dream.

Today, despite all the good intentions and billions of dollars in taxpayer investment, only one in four households that would otherwise qualify for rental assistance receive any help for their housing. Clearly, the supply of federal support is limited while the need continues to be very high.

We must find more ways to help families along their path to self-sufficiency if we are to achieve our mission of creating strong, sustainable, inclusive communities, and quality affordable homes for all Americans.

Reading can help break the cycle of poverty. Initiatives like Book Rich Environments can help children learn to love reading and, in the process, become better students with greater economic opportunities later in life.

HUD is committed to helping all HUD-assisted households have the same opportunities I had by giving them the tools they need to climb the ladder of opportunity.

Most children of Sarasota I gave books to probably came for the ice cream, but they left with books. Hopefully, these new books will create a life-long love of books and open new doors.

Ben Carson is the secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.