

For Good Spotlight:

Beyond Kids Reading

Proskauer For Good on **March 30, 2023**

Proskauer performs pro bono work for a number of innovative and impactful nonprofit organizations, including [Beyond Kids Reading \(BKR\)](#). This week we had the privilege of speaking with BKR's founder Dr. Craig N. Horning.

Beyond Kids Reading is clearly a passion project for you. Why was BKR founded and what was your inspiration?

My inspiration for founding BKR is based upon my soul-crushing struggles as a parent trying to get appropriate educational support for two of my own children. My personal journey striving to help my own children navigate their challenges in school uncovered the vast injustices and glaring shortcomings in our broken education system. These factors provided the impetus for BKR.

I am now aware of the truth that basic literacy is a national crisis. Too few people realize that 65% of children are not proficient in reading by the 8th grade. This is compounded by an additional 20% of children who are Dyslexic. Dyslexia is a type of neurodiversity that unexpectedly impacts a person's ability to learn to read. What many don't know is that Dyslexics are highly intelligent with critical 21st century thinking skills sorely needed in our future workplace and society. The Dyslexic brain simply needs to be taught to read in a structured way to unlock boundless potential. The great news is that the scientifically-proven teaching methods for reading that work for Dyslexics work for all children learning to read.

However, only about 5% of children are getting the reading support they need. Sadly, the other 95% of children in need of specialized and structured instruction often develop poor self-esteem and severe social and emotional issues related to their struggles with reading acquisition. This leads to low grades, at-risk behavior problems, school dropouts, and is a factor in the school-to-prison pipeline. BKR was founded to provide accessible and efficient evaluation and support services to families and their children who struggle with reading.

How is BKR different from what parents and children do today?

Based upon my knowledge and the input of countless professionals, BKR is the first service model of its kind for this neurodivergent population in the United States. A one stop service model developed *by* parents and educators *for* parents and educators, BKR produces comprehensive and action-oriented evaluation reports tailored to each child's individual needs and learning profile. We then help parents advocate for appropriate support services and reading instruction. Unlike other services, BKR's program integrates cognitive and academic evaluations with immediate gold standard reading intervention, as well as parent education and advocacy services. The traditional services available to support families on this journey are often fragmented and all-consuming to navigate. However, BKR takes this fragmented service space in the areas of psychology, education, and mental health and brings it all together for our clients and community partners.

What is the child's experience like?

Every child's experience at BKR starts with our team working directly with them to understand their needs and to create a safe learning space they need to excel. This work happens even before the evaluations are completed and reviewed by our BKR specialists and the family. At BKR, every child immediately gets one-to-one highly individualized and specialized support. Our parents and BKR service providers report an immediate increase in our students' self-confidence, self-esteem, and academic progress. Equally important to the child's experience is the drastic decrease we observe in parent and caregiver anxiety once they realize BKR is in their corner guiding them along the way, and they see the positive impacts on their child.

Who are you serving today? How do you think that might change in the future?

Currently we are serving children primarily in Massachusetts and also piloting some of our virtual services in five different states. We primarily work directly with families and our client base is diverse. Despite our smaller footprint as we get started, we're very proud of the life-changing impact we're seeing for these families. For example, after only four months working with BKR, one of our third grade students went from throwing books at their parents to reading a six book series with confidence and joy. It is truly a dream that through initial philanthropic support we are able to offer services to any child who fits our student profile regardless of financial need during our startup phase.

Our future vision is that all children, regardless of their neurodiversity, will be appropriately educated and thrive in school. To realize this vision, we're focusing on building a strong foundation from the start. The infrastructure we developed in our first two years of operations would not have been possible without the immense support of the Proskauer pro bono team – incorporation, contract, and trademark engagements – and countless other volunteer hours from neuropsychologists, teachers, private and public sector professionals, and philanthropists that helped bring BKR's collective vision to life. In the future, we are seeking to establish partnerships with funders, school districts, universities, and health clinics to broaden our capacity and impact.

Who can benefit and why do you think this is the model of the future?

We truly believe that the BKR is a model that can change how we view educational evaluation, reading instruction, and collaborative efforts between educators, parents, and mental health professionals. It is somewhat akin to proactive health care. When we provide children with what they need early on in their educational experience, they can thrive. BKR believes innovation in the education and mental health sectors will transform how we view neurodiversity as a society and enable us to appropriately educate all students for future success.

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