When Billy Molasso first learned about Reading Recovery® it was from a teacher in Upper Arlington, Ohio. Carrie Williams explained to him how the one-to-one individualized instruction helps children who are struggling with early reading and writing skills — including his twin boys. Ricky (who is 4 minutes younger) and Eli are now thriving fifth graders.

Carrie shares her memories
Eli and Ricky were as adorable on the outside as they were on the inside! Although they were twins and had many similarities, they were quite different when it came to their literacy development! One of the many hallmarks of Reading Recovery is the individualized, customized lessons, based on each specific child’s strengths and needs. Never was this more apparent than when these twins walked through my door. It served as a great reminder that no series of lessons are alike! They kept me on my toes—not because they were hard—but because they forced me to stay focused on their specific needs, regardless of the similarities they shared, the home-life they shared, the parents they shared, the physical appearance they shared, and the school community they shared.

Although they have many similarities, the twins took very different paths in their literacy development.

Their different paths to a common outcome were just that: different. While one moved faster, the other needed more time. While one loved writing, the other loved reading. While one’s interests were gymnastics, drawing, and painting, the other enjoyed baseball and playing outdoors. They both LOVED Legos. We wrote about each of their different interests and we wrote a lot about their wonderful family. Reading Recovery laid an incredible foundation for both boys. Watching them grow was a treat, and I was reminded, while reminding their fathers, that each would take a different path to a common outcome.

One twin left Reading Recovery having met most of the benchmarks, while the other twin meeting all the benchmarks. While they required further support after their series of lessons, I am certain that their accelerated growth, their learning to be strategic problem solvers, and working towards independence played a pivotal role in their subsequent success. I am indebted to these boys for making me a better teacher and a better problem solver for every student that sits next to me. And, I am grateful to both of their fathers who did not flinch for a second when I shared what their responsibilities were with the twins’ daily homework — 2 SETS of Reading Recovery homework, nightly!

Billy tells their story
Ricky and Eli were just a year old when Billy and Joe welcomed them into their family through adoption in Washington, DC. Wanting to raise the boys with Midwest family values, they identified several cities and began job searches — agreeing that whomever got the first/best offer is where they would move. Billy was hired as dean of students at Franklin University, and the family moved to Columbus.

When they started school, both boys struggled with reading and with math. Ricky recognized that his skills were less than other kids sitting around the table, and it impacted his sense of self in a very real way. He went into first grade with a stigma and came out as a firecracker, and he’s still that way. He struggled a little in second and third grades — they change the goal post every year. But he’s at the top of the thermometer instead of the bottom. He has a great sense of self and knows how to figure out problems by asking the right person. He’s even doing better in math now.

Where Are They Now?

Different Paths to Common Outcomes

Although they have many similarities, the twins took very different paths in their literacy development.
Eli had the same biology, same nurture and nature, but he continues to struggle with reading and math. Reading Recovery helped him move from hating books to hating books that he can’t read. He has been diagnosed with ADHD and we all continue to look for ways to help him figure it out.

They’re 10-year-old boys. Messy. Love video games. Love to be loud. Both like baseball. Ricky is a gymnast with the OSU younger boys club. Eli likes bugs and insects and being outside and is still trying to find his love and passion. They still talk about Carrie who had the right attitude and understood that the instruction needed to be different with each boy. I hope they connect the building of their self-confidence back to that first-grade Reading Recovery experience.

**RRCNA welcomes Billy Molasso**

Billy (Dr. William R. Molasso) is learning even more about Reading Recovery as the new executive director of RRCNA, replacing Jady Johnson who retired in August. Among the first things he learned is the depth of commitment — something every Reading Recovery person he has met displays.

“You have to have some degree of passion and love what you’re doing,” he said. “I’m amazed at how deep that goes. It’s part of their identify, not just part of their heart.”

As he’s becoming acquainted with his staff, he’s also learning the role RRCNA plays and how all the pieces of the Reading Recovery community fit together. He is impressed with the strength of the volunteer leaders who help guide the work of the Council. His goal, in the short run, is to spread our messaging wider and farther to other stakeholders.

“I’m a strategy person. I think three steps ahead and backtrack two steps to see where we are and how to get there,” Billy said. “We need to revisit who we are and where we want to be,” something he recognizes the Hub and improvement science work with the Carnegie Foundation will help establish. (See article on page 38 of this issue for more about the history and work of the Hub.)

“This renewal process will help,” he said. “We have to change the trajectory of where we are. Look at the cities and populations we serve. What do parents need and want to know? What do principals and administrators need to make informed decisions? We need to take the rich legacy of Reading Recovery and tailor our messages to meet the needs of those stakeholders.”

Before coming to RRCNA, Billy was the director of research and education for the Association of College and University Housing Offices-International, based in Columbus. He coordinated volunteer leader engagement strategies and facilitated learning for the association’s nearly 1,000 campuses and 200 companies worldwide—over 16,000 individual professionals—including conferences, online courses, webinars, books, and other resources.

He earned his PhD from Michigan State University in 2004. His rich academic background includes a variety of positions and locations — graduate assistant, adjunct instructor, program coordinator, assistant professor of higher education, and advisor to the dean among them. When the family moved to Columbus in 2011, it was after accepting a position at Franklin University, where he created the division of student affairs and served as its dean of students. He has facilitated undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral courses in tenure-track appointments with teaching, research, and service responsibilities, and directed extensive assessment and data-based decision-making processes. He has authored numerous scholarly publications and papers, presented at regional and national conferences, and has extensive experience with grant writing/reviewing and fundraising.