Alex Ricciardelli loves to read, and strives to share his passion with young patients at Lynn Community Health Center. For the past year and a half he has come every week to read to children in waiting rooms through the health center's Reach Out and Read Program. He has also collected books from schoolmates and recruited other volunteers to join him as volunteer readers. He recently wrote and published "A Small Tale: The Adventures of Melvin" to inspire children and raise money for the Reach Out and Read program.

On August 12, Alex's efforts were honored as he was recognized as the 5020th "Point of Light" by the Daily Points of Light Foundation, started in 1983 by President George Bush. Today the foundation is the largest organization dedicated to volunteer service. This week all "Points of Light" will be volunteers from health centers around the country in honor of National Community Health Center Week.

"Congratulations to Alex for this impressive recognition of his dedication and generosity to others," Congressman John Tierney said. "The Reach Out and Read program at Lynn Community Health Center is one that I personally enjoy participating in, and I commend Alex for taking such initiative to get involved, read to children, and raise money for the program. All that, and he is a budding author as well! Thank you Alex for your continued leadership and service."

"I love watching the kids get excited about a book when we read together in the waiting room," he says. "Then when I tell them they can take the book home they really light up."

Reach Out and Read promotes family literacy for children ages birth through 5 years old during their checkups. This includes a free, brand-new book they can keep for their own, and advice to parents about the importance of reading aloud to children. Volunteers like Alex provide key support to this program by creating literacy-rich environments in our waiting rooms. They read to children while they wait, demonstrating interactive reading techniques to parents, and offer children gently used books to take home.

Alex noticed that some children are difficult to engage. "The greatest barrier to getting a kid to talk to me is not shyness or the ability to speak English," he says. "It is that they are always playing on their parent's phones." He decided that one way to draw children away from the small screen is to demonstrate the joys of reading and writing, thus "A Small Tale" was born.

"A Small Tale: The Adventures of Melvin" is about a second grade boy who is only three feet tall. He frets about this until his small size helps him save the day. "The story is actually based on something that happened to me when I was little," says Alex. "I thought..."
that if I could talk to the kids and tell them 'I wrote this book' they might be more interested." Written in English, Alex is also working on a Spanish translation and hopes to have that version ready soon.

Dedicated to the health center Alex decided to use the publication of the book as a fundraising opportunity. All proceeds will be donated to the health center's Reach Out and Read program, with the goal of raising $9,000. "A Small Tale" is available on Amazon.com for $9, or you can support this project at Alex's "GoFundMe" page at http://www.gofundme.com/3m08ko.

"Alex is a beloved figure in our waiting rooms," says Clare Hayes, Reach Out and Read program coordinator. "We are so proud of him for this accomplishment and very grateful that he wants to use it to benefit our program."