

Programming in Time of Pandemic

The Year Libraries Went Touchless

COMPILED BY ALLISON GRASSEL

From virtual storytimes to contactless pickups, libraries truly had a challenge to remain relevant in spring 2020. When COVID-19 fears caused many nationwide libraries to close in March and April, librarians—especially children’s librarians—had to shift gears to reach patrons who could no longer walk through their doors.

A challenge indeed given the fact that libraries have always been thought of as “third places” with open access to all.

Many quickly developed plans for providing contactless or curbside pickup of materials; others focused on providing and directing patrons to online services; still others dusted off (or invested in) video equipment to tape storytimes and other programs. Phone reference was, of course, available in most places; some brightened their outdoors with cheery chalk drawings or posted hearts in windows as a way to say, “We miss you; wish you were here.”

And as the pandemic continued into summer, many had to drastically alter summer reading programs—several of which opted for virtual, app-based programs such as Beanstack.

Each library did things a little differently based on their location, size, staffing, and patronage; here’s just a snapshot of what some did, collected from various sources noted below.

San Rafael (CA) Public Library

Submitted by Margaret Stawowy

When the shelter-in-place order was enacted, the San Rafael Public Library immediately began becoming a virtual library. Before leaving the actual library building, librarians began



Joel Shoemaker, librarian at Illinois Prairie District Public Library, reads a story via phone during the pandemic as part of its Dial a Story program. With a dedicated phone number, a new story every Monday, and daily statistics, the program saw as many as twenty people call daily to this rural branch in Metamora, IL.

gathering books, props, and other items to set up a workspace at home that would allow them to offer their services virtually.

They had used LibraryH3lp, a customer service software for libraries, so converting to online communication was familiar. This, along with the use of Microsoft Teams, has been especially helpful in staying connected to each other and to patrons. With an effective form of communication now in place, the team boosted their promotion of digital offerings, including e-books, live storytimes on Facebook, book club meetings, poetry events, and many other virtual events. Some librarians invited their own children to be an audience in person to show that online storytimes were “just like storytime at the library!”

San Anselmo (CA) Library

Submitted by Jennie Waskey

At the San Anselmo Library, librarians worked hard at the beginning of 2020 to create fun and exciting events to increase their patrons’ passion for reading; however, with the sudden requirement to temporarily close their facility, it became impossible to hold those events in person. Librarians worked quickly, though, to find ways to subsidize those events. One of their new offerings was a YouTube channel filled with craft videos and storytimes in video format; this was received so well that librarians chose to do live storytimes once a week and a chapter book read-aloud twice a week live.

Librarians have also created a reading challenge for multiple age groups where participants can win a gift card to a local establishment twice a month. With the cancellation of



Early in the pandemic, many businesses, homes, and libraries were putting hearts in their windows to stay connected. This was seen at the Ashwaubenon branch of the Brown County (WI) Library.

German Conversation Club. Librarians also made informational videos and uploaded them to their YouTube channel to be accessed any time. They also started Creative While Isolated, a collaborative creativity journal where patrons are able to submit their own work to share their pandemic experiences.

South Carolina State Library

Submitted by J. Caroline Smith

A main goal for the South Carolina State Library was to find a way to provide virtual multilingual storytimes. One of the events that librarians were most excited for this spring was *Día de los niños, día de los libros* (Children's Day, Book Day). With all in-person events being canceled, librarians wanted to find a way to help their patrons to celebrate language and diversity in their own homes while also providing a model for other libraries to plan an online event in their state.

The Parenting Center of Lexington District One and the South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind connected librarians with bilingual guest readers for their programs. The event included Spanish-language storytime, American Sign Language storytime (accompanied by an interpreter), and a Mandarin Chinese storytime, all of which were live-streamed on YouTube as well as on their website. They shared this plan with the other forty-two county libraries in their state in hopes that their plan would spread. Overall, the South Carolina State librarians found great success in their virtual

their annual Night of the Poets event, the librarians chose to record a Poem a Day for April during National Poetry Month. They have found great success in their virtual events, and they plan to continue to provide online services via Facebook and YouTube.

Howard County (MD) Library System

Culled from the library system's newsletter (<https://hclibrary.org/about-us/news/enewsletter>)

Virtual classes included meditation for children and families and the

Children's Day, Book Day celebration and they are excited to implement their new skills in other aspects of their library in the future to increase the scope of their audience.

St. Marys Public Library (PA) and Illinois Prairie District Public Library

Culled from St. Marys newsletter (www.stmaryslibrary.org) and shared by Joel Shoemaker

St. Marys Public Library created an activity walk outside of their facility and encouraged their patrons to participate. The activity walk is painted onto the sidewalk in bright colors and will be touched up as needed throughout the summer. Participants were encouraged to hop, skip, jump, dance, and spin around, and to get moving. Several other nationwide libraries also offered similar outside programs, including the Illinois Prairie District Public Library. The walk inspired patrons to not only get outside and enjoy nature but also to find a reason to visit their local library; while the building itself was closed, this course made it impossible for children to forget the magic that libraries can bring.

And inspired by the Denver Public Library, the Illinois Prairie District Public Library went "old school" and implemented a Dial-A-Story program; patrons could call in to hear a story read to them. Librarians felt this would be an awesome way to still provide a weekly storytime for their patrons, and they have seen up to twenty people call in per day!

Boston Public Library

Excerpted from *Library Journal* (www.libraryjournal.com/?detailStory=boston-public-library-finds-ways-to-safely-serve-homeless-recovering-patrons-thru-pandemic)

Boston Public Library (BPL) creatively teamed with city-wide organizations to deliver books, reallocate library iPads to shelter guests, and loan Wi-Fi hotspots to recovery and treatment programs.

The library worked with local, independent bookstores to deliver new books pulled from in-store inventory to selected nonprofits, funded by both the BPL's collections budget and a fundraising campaign by the Boston Public Library Fund.

They also collaborated with the Boston Public Health Commission and the Department of Innovation and Technology to deliver hotspots to a few of BPHC's residential recovery programs and walk-in substance use treatment centers that lack Wi-Fi for clients and staff. It also donated sixteen refurbished iPads for guests of similar facilities. &