

## Lockdowns and Lobby Service Partnering in Time of Pandemic

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As libraries closed physical doors to protect the families we serve, collaborations and partnerships to meet the needs of children and families took on an even greater importance.

Libraries scrambled to ramp up virtual programming, grew digital collections and resources, and built outdoor story walks, all while facing the very real concern that many families continue to lack access to these important services. The ongoing lack of equitable access, further exacerbated by the pandemic, left staff with the need to do what we do best—get creative.

One of the most impactful results of this creativity can be seen in the growth and strengthening of partnerships. Libraries looked outward to find where families were receiving services, identified organizations who maintained a clear line of communication with children and students, and worked to align service delivery models to meet users where they were.

### Summer Reading Challenge To-Go

Virginia Beach (VA) Public Library (VBPL) strengthened existing partnerships with local public schools. The library provided to-go programming kits and books to children at ten elementary school meal sites across the city. These partnerships allowed both participants to better meet the needs of children at a time when they were most vulnerable. To reach vulnerable teens, VBPL looked to their on-going partnership with Seton Youth Shelters. Through this collaboration, sixty age-appropriate outreach kits were delivered to shelters. And, following a similar service model, the library's annual partnership with Virginia Beach City Public Schools Title I office, free books and four virtual field trips were provided to more than thirteen hundred elementary students.

### READ to the Pets Virtually

Thomas Ford Memorial Library (TFML) in Western Springs, IL, in partnership with Hinsdale Humane Society (HHS), has been offering a very successful READ to the Pets program since 2009. When the pandemic hit, HHS approached TFML to offer the READ Program virtually.

HHS staff observed the library's virtual storytime and collaborated on how to offer this program virtually—and the Virtual Read to a Therapaws Pet program was born. In this virtual program, since there was only one volunteer team of an owner and their pet, reading time per child was decreased so more children could participate in an hour.

Due to the success of this program, it became the model for other libraries in the area.

## Neighborhood Arts

The Metropolitan Library System (MLS) in Oklahoma County, OK, partnered with the Arts Council Oklahoma City (ACOKC) on a grant to offer performing arts summer programs in libraries across the service area, from urban to suburban to rural communities. Neighborhood Arts performances include musicians, dance, opera, plays, improv, storytellers, and puppets. Performers are local artists and the program is aimed at families with school-aged children.

Normally artists would do ten performances in one week at libraries across the county. With the shift to virtual programming, the ACOKC and the performers held brainstorming sessions to discuss how to provide performances in a way that was accessible to patrons, allowed the artists flexibility to tailor their shows to what best fit their individual style and needs, and also respected the artists' intellectual property.

We prerecorded several performances in May: some artists recorded and edited their own videos; other artists opted to

do live streams of performances or tours of their studios, and others came to either the library or the ACOKC offices where we could live stream their performances. Live streams at the library or ACOKC had the added benefit that staff could monitor comments to share with the performer and make the performances more interactive.

The virtual format not only expanded the audience to include people from out of state, but these performances had significantly more views compared to in-person attendance in a week's worth of shows. MLS decided that moving forward, at least one virtual performance will be included each week, in addition to regular in-person performances.

These examples are a small snapshot of the positive impact of library collaborations during the pandemic. The benefits of added virtual programming and community-housed services will undoubtedly impact the future of library services long after lockdowns and lobby service ends. &