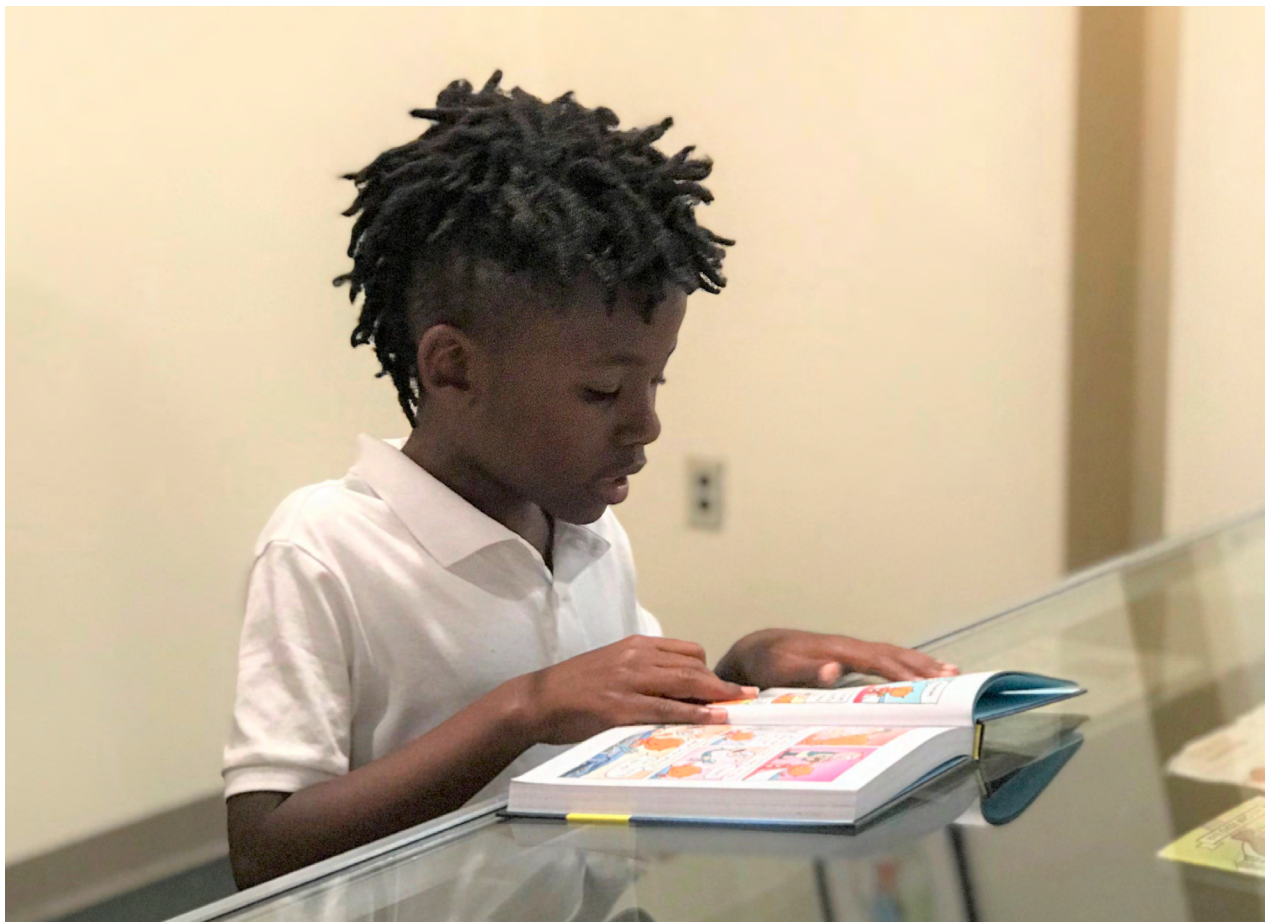


# Children &

the journal of the  
Association for Library  
Service to Children

# LIBRARIES

Spring 2019  
Vol. 17 | No. 1  
ISSN 1542-9806



Great Author Messages:  
Dav Pilkey, Philip and Erin Stead  
Homeschoolers and the Library  
Creating a Cool Comic-Con



Together  
with

**DÍA!**



Día, is a nationally recognized initiative that emphasizes the importance of literacy for all children from all backgrounds. It is a daily commitment to linking children and their families to diverse books, languages and cultures. Día is also known as **El día de los niños/El día de los libros (Children's Day/Book Day)**.

Día happens year-round, since sharing good books with children should take place every day. On **April 30**, libraries, community partners and families have extra special celebrations to mark the Día year.

### Through Día, libraries work to...

- Celebrate children and connect them to the world of learning through books, stories and libraries.
- Nurture cognitive and literacy development in ways that honor and embrace a child's home language and culture.
- Introduce families to community resources that provide opportunities for learning through multiple literacies.
- Recognize and respect culture, heritage and language as powerful tools for strengthening families and communities.

### Diverse children's books serve as mirrors and windows...

- In libraries all over the country, children and parents celebrate Día with family book clubs, multicultural storytimes, guest appearances by children's authors, crafts, music and more.
- On the official Día website, librarians and parents have access to book suggestions, toolkits, a resource guide and promotional materials.
- Locate Día programs in your community by visiting our National Día Program Registry at [dia.ala.org](http://dia.ala.org).
- Every year, more and more libraries celebrate Día; visit your local library to find out more about Día!

For more information and to learn about the history of **Día**, visit [dia.ala.org](http://dia.ala.org)

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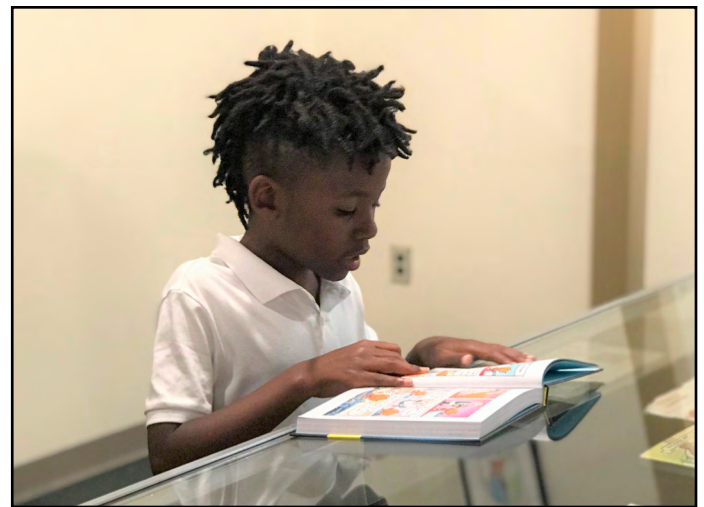
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ON THE COVER: Author Derrick Barnes' son reads a Dav Pilkey book at the de Grummond exhibit room at The University of Southern Mississippi. Photo courtesy of the de Grummond.





## Editor's Note The Year I Discovered Graphic Novels

By Sharon Verbeten

As a book lover, I always thought it seemed blasphemous when I declared, "I don't like graphic novels." In truth, I really hadn't given them much of a chance. I always had assumed their format would be difficult for me to follow—sensory overload, of sorts.

Of course I had been familiar with their popularity in my library—most pre-teens had asked for them. It made reader's advisory a bit more challenging if I hadn't read any, so I finally cracked one open—I started with *Roller Girl* by Victoria Jamieson. The story really drew me in; I grew up in the 1970s, when roller derby was televised (and my parents let me watch it!). I was absorbed in the story, and by the time I was done, well, I guess I had read my first graphic novel!

I moved on to *Fish Girl*, illustrated by my fave of faves David Wiesner. While not as captivated by the story, I was drawn into the lushness of the atmospheric illustrations. And then, of course, I had to read the books I had long overlooked—but had been handing to patrons every day—*Sisters* and *Smile* by Raina Telgemeier.

But the book that may have hooked me for good was *Be Prepared* by Vera Brosgol. I loved her picturebook *Leave Me Alone!*, and the summer camp theme of her graphic novel was something I knew I could relate to. I was right.

I laughed. I winced. I reminisced.

I ended my year of discovery with Jarrett Krosoczka's *Hey, Kiddo*. Raw, authentic, and dark, it showed me the breadth of emotion that both graphic novels and memoirs can present and how they can expose an author and their thoughts. Amazing!

In short, I'm sold. I look forward to being better prepared to serve my patrons with books I can now heartily recommend from my own perspective. Just don't try to hook me on manga or anime . . . just yet! &

# Children & LIBRARIES

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# Starting Early

## A Revised Early Literacy Strategy

KELLY KIPFER

In 2014, Waterloo Public Library (WPL) in Ontario, Canada, threw out the playbook for how early literacy was done and created the award-winning Explore, Play, Learn strategy based on Every Child Ready to Read 2 (ECRR2). This resulted in dramatically increased program participation, noteworthy circulation results, and measurable customer satisfaction with feedback that demonstrates impact.

Like many public library systems, we implemented ECRR2 but knew that our fidelity to that program was lacking in practice. Explore, Play, Learn is a holistic reimagining of what it means for us as a public library to support, model, and facilitate early literacy and learning.

From programs and collections to public spaces and community collaborations, starting over meant thinking about how we might support caregivers as children's first and best teachers every time they interact with the library.

Step one for us was to make a commitment to our community to do better: building an early literacy plan became a strategic goal. A team from across our system, composed of programmers, managers, and outreach staff met to get started on this objective. Research into early literacy best practices, what other libraries are doing, and what is happening beyond libraries helped shape a framework for programming.

For each age and stage of learning from birth to school, we established consistent standards for all of our programs. While stories, songs, parent asides, and resource recommendations were all included, play-based activity hubs became central to our programming landscape. Participants in any program in the WPL system now spend most of their time



Library activities encourage play and spark conversation.

in child-led, multi-generational activities. Our staff support them in exploring open-ended experiences by providing parents with asides contextualized within activities that can be duplicated at home.

The newly implemented play-based centers were a hit. Families enjoyed the surprise of encountering new ways to play together in everything from dress-up to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and wanted more of this. Clearly our children's spaces could and should be transformed to mirror this play-based, third space approach to family learning.



*Kelly Kipfer is the Manager of Community Engagement and Children's Services at Waterloo Public Library in Ontario, Canada. She is part of the Early Literacy Alliance of Waterloo Region (ELAWR), working with other local stakeholders to ignite and drive a sustainable early literacy movement.*



Play centers provide context for ECRR2 parent asides.

We conceptualized spaces, furniture, and equipment that could be altered into ever-changing opportunities for families to interact. A homemade stand in our children's department became a farmer's market in July and a lab for freaky scientific exploration in October. Loose parts pop-ups and pieces of cardboard invited families to create without structure or time limits, while flexible table spaces offered building zones with varied materials from one week to the next.

Transforming our spaces to intentionally include open-ended discovery materials and toys helps us to underscore our message to parents about the importance of play. We tell parents to read, write, sing, talk, and play—engage in these five practices every day with your child, whenever and wherever you are able, and you will be on the road to early literacy success.

To make this message stick, we needed to model it in the spaces where we invite families to spend time. We could see right away that this was an exciting new way of doing things. At our market stand, very young children were now counting money as they exchanged currency for veggies from their parents. At the Frankenstein lab, little ones traded guesses and grand ideas with grandparents about the kinds of monsters they could make by crossing centipedes and beetles.

The work we were doing to promote the role of play in shaping early literacy was exciting. To build upon that, we wanted to help parents choose reading materials that promoted play as well as the other four practices. Across our system, we solicited recommendations from all child-serving staff for books that bring the five practices to life. We compiled an impressive list of kid-tested, great-to-read-aloud books to make our Explore, Play, Learn (EPL) collection.

Books like *Tap the Magic Tree* by Christie Matheson and *Windblown* by Édouard Manceau are playful books. The rhythm and cadence of *I Got Rhythm* by Connie Schofield-Morrison and *Stretch* by Doreen Cronin make it easy to sing along, and *Scribble* by Ruth Ohi and *A Squiggly Story* by Andrew Larsen highlight the scaffold skills for writing. Books for each practice were given bright colored Read, Write, Sing,



Active spaces foster family play.

Talk, or Play stickers and displayed separately with attractive signage and marketing “sell sheets” for each practice. Intended to be an easy to browse, sure-bet collection, the EPL books have been extremely popular. The collection circulates at more than double the rate of the regular picture-book collection. Books are displayed and shelved separately as their own collection. New titles have been added to the collection to ensure variety and to respond to high interest.

One of the best parts of doing a bold, big-picture refresh in service delivery is the opportunity to create new champions for the work. Restarting early literacy from brass tacks was an organization-wide, multidepartment process. Children's services, library collections, administration, branches, marketing, IT, facilities and borrower services all played important roles in this project.

As a result, there is investment from across the system in this initiative and sustained interest in continuing to improve it. For example, when our website was redesigned, marketing put the practices front and center with tips for caregivers to use at home. Library collections added to this enhancement by making the EPL books discoverable by each practice. Choosing one of the practices from the website brings users immediately to a catalog listing of all of our EPL books for Read, Write, Sing, Talk, or Play.

This integrated thinking about early literacy in our varied work spheres has moved outside of the library as well. We have worked with early literacy partners in the community to adopt the promotion of the five practices as a regional literacy approach and these partners are now working with Waterloo Region's prolific tech community to develop new tools for caregivers to support early literacy development.

Early literacy has gone from being the work and concern of children's services at the library to a dynamic priority that is continually being improved by players across our organization and our community. We are proud that Explore, Play, Learn is a literacy game-changer for children and families in Waterloo. &

# Homeschoolers' Experiences with the Public Library

## A Phenomenological Study

SARAH PANNONE

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of homeschoolers using the public library. A phenomenological design using interviews, a survey, and a writing prompt was used to give voice to the public library experiences of seven homeschool participants. From the data, three primary themes surfaced. First, most of the participants felt that the library was a home away from home. Next, many of the participants valued how the public library saved them money, and finally, many of the participants voiced a desire for more library daytime programs, especially daytime programs that catered to older, homeschooled children.

When modern day homeschooling began in the 1970s, it was largely considered to be a fringe practice of primarily Evangelical Christians.<sup>1</sup> Now, the number of those who choose to home educate increases every year. In fact, according to the US Department of Education, the homeschool population has doubled from 1 to 2 million in the last decade.<sup>2</sup> The makeup of homeschooling families has also changed—the once predominately White, middle class, evangelical population has become more diverse, with a variety of ethnicities and socioeconomic statuses now represented.<sup>3</sup> While the makeup of homeschooling families has changed, there are several commonalities. For instance, authors Allan and Jackson state, “The common denominator is that, often those conducting homeschooling will draw on the resources of the community to support resources accessed from home.”<sup>4</sup>

Particularly, one community resource homeschoolers tend to utilize is the public library. According to the National Center

for Education Statistics, almost 80 percent of homeschoolers use a public library.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Thomas noted that homeschool parents tend to maximize community resources and that some families based their educational program around the offerings of libraries, museums, and state parks.<sup>6</sup> Willingham elaborates, stating, “Homeschoolers often develop close associations with local librarians, frequenting their local libraries often, but freely using interlibrary loan systems, as well. Homeschooling families will often decide whether or not to purchase a media product by borrowing from the library first, to determine if the product fits their needs.”<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, the ability to customize and choose their own curriculum is something most homeschool families value.<sup>8</sup> While previous studies have highlighted the demographics of library users, there is limited research that explores the lived experiences of homeschoolers who utilize the library.<sup>9</sup> As such, the purpose of this study was to give a voice to homeschool participants who use the public library.



*Sarah Pannone is an adjunct instructor and dissertation chair for the School of Education at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. Her research interests include homeschooling, international education, English instruction, and online education.*

## Related Literature

### Library Use

According to Moore et al., more than 95 percent of the US population lives within the service area of a public library.<sup>10</sup> In 2011 alone, there were more than 1.5 billion visits to the United States' nearly nine thousand public libraries and their seventeen thousand associated branches.<sup>11</sup>

Homeschoolers, in particular, use the public library widely—Bauman found that 78 percent of the home educators in his study utilized the public library for their homeschooling.<sup>12</sup> The benefits of the public library abound; for instance, Cowley notes that “public libraries are free, neutral shared spaces—inclusive and open to all. They are vital for sharing information and gaining knowledge.”<sup>13</sup>

Erich takes it a step further, contending that public libraries provide “formal education, life-long learning, after-school activities, information culture, leisure time activities or access to information. Another aspect covered by the public library is related to social cohesion, the area of the institution becoming a meeting place and a community development center.”<sup>14</sup>

Skelly, Stilwell, and Underwood concur, noting that the public library does much more than just provide books. Modern libraries have extended their services to highlight resources for health, employment and education.<sup>15</sup> Specifically, however, public libraries encourage literacy and life-long learning.<sup>16</sup>

Bhatt reports that library use increases the amount of time individuals spend reading by twenty-seven minutes a day and decreases the amount of time spent watching television by fifty-nine minutes a day.<sup>17</sup> In the same vein, Krashen notes that leisure reading increases literacy levels, improves cognitive functions, improves emotional states of mind, and provides economic advantages.<sup>18</sup> Bhatt also states that library use significantly increases the probability of homework completion and good behavior among school-aged children.<sup>19</sup>

### Homeschoolers and Curriculum

According to Thomas, one of the benefits of homeschooling is that home educators have the freedom to design their own curriculum.<sup>20</sup> Hopwood, O'Neill, Castro, and Hodgson also note that, since there is no uniform curriculum used by homeschooling families, there are limitless curricular options and methods for them to follow.<sup>21</sup> Hanna found in her study that homeschool families tend to be creative in their curriculum choices,<sup>22</sup> while Davis found that many home educators employ a number of sources to develop their curriculum.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, Bauman found that homeschool families use a variety of curriculum options.<sup>24</sup> A heavy emphasis on reading

in the curriculum, however, is common in many homeschool families and reading often (both to and with children) is a popular method of teaching in many homeschool families.<sup>25</sup> Willingham states, “Homeschoolers routinely clear library bookstore shelves, enthusiastically shop at Scholastic warehouse sales, and prowl bookstores and conventions for interesting books and potential learning resources.”<sup>26</sup>

Still other homeschool families build their curriculum around special goals or student interest.<sup>27</sup> In Bell, Kaplan, and Thurman's study, home educator participants used materials other than textbooks, took the student's preferences into consideration when choosing curriculum, and encouraged the pursuit of the student's own interests.<sup>28</sup>

## Research Questions

**Central Research Question:** How do homeschool families describe their experiences with using the public library?

**Sub-question 1:** What do homeschool families value about the public library?

**Sub-question 2:** How do homeschool families think the public library could better support them?

## Design

To examine the experiences of homeschoolers and their public library use, a phenomenological design was used. Phenomenology looks at the personalized experiences of individuals and focuses on the shared, lived experiences of individuals,<sup>29</sup> thus making a phenomenological design the best fit for this study as the goal was to simply give voice to the participants' experiences with using the public library.

## Participants

Seven participants shared their experiences in this study. While the number of recommended participants for a phenomenological study varies in the literature, Creswell recommends five to twenty-five participants,<sup>30</sup> and Morse recommends having at least six participants.<sup>31</sup> Participants were recruited through an online posting to a local Florida Homeschool Facebook Group. Two postings were made, through which seven participants were found, all of whom resided in Florida. Information about the participants can be seen in Table 1 below (pseudonyms are used to protect participants' identities).

## Data Collection

Three data collection methods were used to understand the experiences of homeschoolers' public library use—interviews,



Table 1. Participant Information

Name	Number of Children Homeschooled	Age of Children	Frequency of Library Visits
Melissa	1	6	1x a week
Heidi	3	5, 8, 9	2x a month
Morgan	3	11, 14, 15	1x a week
Tianna	1	11	1x a week
Jelena	6	5, 7, 9, 12, 15, 17	2x a month
Belinda	2	9, 11	1x a month
Rita	1	6	5x a week

Table 2. Library Information

Name	Length of Visit	Av. # of Items Checked Out	Number of Branches Visited
Melissa	2 hours	5	1
Heidi	1 hour	30	3
Morgan	1.5 hours	4	1
Tianna	1.5 hours	0	3
Jelena	As short as possible	5	1
Belinda	30 minutes	10	1
Rita	2 hours	5	10

a survey, and a writing prompt. The survey was administered first, to gain some basic demographic information and to better understand what a typical library visit entailed for the participants. While surveys are typically found in quantitative studies, they can also be used in qualitative studies as a source of triangulation.<sup>32</sup> Information from the survey was used to compile table 1 and table 2.

The writing prompt (*"Please describe a typical visit to the public library"*) was administered in conjunction with the survey to help better understand the participants' experiences with the public library. The third and final data collection method was a semi-structured interview. According to Yin, interviews are an essential part of a qualitative study, and as such, the interviews in this study served as the primary source of data.<sup>33</sup>

Two of the interviews took place in person at a location that was convenient to the participants, while the remaining six interviews took place via Skype or Facebook due to the distance of the participants from the researcher. The interview questions are outlined in table 3.

Questions 1 and 2 were designed to help answer the central research question of this study—"How do homeschool families describe their experiences with using the public library?"

Questions 3 and 4 were designed to see if participants used the public library as part of their curriculum, as the literature shows that homeschool families tend to use a variety of creative sources when compiling their curriculum.<sup>34</sup>

Table 3. Interview Questions

What is your primary reason for visiting the library?
How do you utilize the public library?
Please describe how you compile curriculum for your homeschooling.
Do you utilize the public library as part of your homeschool curriculum? If so, how?
What do you value about the public library?
How could the public library better support homeschoolers?
Do you have anything else you would like to tell me about in regard to your public library use?

Questions 5 and 6 were designed to help answer both sub-question 1 and 2 of the research questions. Finally, question 7 served as a catch-all question that allowed participants to give voice to whatever they felt was pertinent to the interview.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research depends on a deep understanding of the collected data.<sup>35</sup> As such, thematic coding and analysis were employed to better understand the data. Initial codes were developed for the research question, and then combined and compared in axial coding, allowing for a more concise and thorough understanding of the phenomenon.<sup>36</sup> All the data was hand coded and color coding was also used to help the researcher better determine the salient themes.

## Themes

Three primary themes emerged from the data analysis. First, the participants viewed the library as a home away from home. Next, participants felt that the library was a money-saver. Finally, participants in this study felt that more library programs were needed. A discussion of each of the themes follows below.

### Home Away from Home

Of the seven participants, five shared that the library was more than just a building housing books—it was a home away from home. In fact, when Morgan was asked what she valued about the library, she said, "just the whole home feel of the library." Morgan said, "My kids love to hang out at the library. Not even to check out books, but just to hang out."

Similarly, Tianna related that she enjoyed the library not only as a quiet space, but for the good environment. "So a lot of time we will go there because it is a good environment. It is the coffee shop environment but for little kids, but they still feel like they are in a learning environment."

Tianna added, "We go during school day hours when it's quiet and use the children's space to do school work. It gives us a change in our environment and a quiet place to work."

In a similar vein, Melissa and Rita relayed that they enjoyed the library because it was an alternative to doing work at home. For example, Melissa shared, "I honestly really like it that it is something for the kids to do to get out of the house. And just to experience new books and to get a feel for the library so it is not a foreign place to them when they get older."

Likewise, Rita felt that the library was a good space to learn apart from the home. In fact, Rita visited the library five or more days a week to utilize the library as schooling environment.

However, while five of the seven participants noted that the library was a "hangout" spot for them, two said they spent very little time in the library. For instance, Belinda lived in a county where books were delivered through the postal service, so when she did go to the library it was for a specific purpose, not to hang out. Jelena also noted that she ordered books and primarily only went into the library to pick up books.

## Money Saver

Half of the participants in this study noted that they valued the library for the free materials and services it provided. Since homeschoolers must purchase their own curriculum, having a place to obtain free educational resources was valuable to the participants. For instance, Heidi shared that her favorite part of the library was "definitely the free resources. In homeschooling we are just on one income. So, it saves us a ton of money and it also allows us to try different things."

Likewise, Jelena shared that what she most valued about the library was that it was cost-effective. "For all the supplemental materials, it would be too much to purchase those." Melissa agreed, stating that she valued being able to get books she needed from the library without having to order books from an outside source. However, while half of the participants did note that they appreciated the free resources the library offered, two felt more could be offered. For example, Melissa suggested the library offer curriculum from different sources and grades so homeschoolers could try out the curriculum before making a purchase. Likewise, Rita suggested that libraries offer additional free programs.

## More Programs Needed

The third theme to surface from the data was that participants felt the library needed to offer more programs, particularly programs during the school day that catered to homeschoolers and older children. For instance, Morgan shared, "I think if they had more homeschool geared activities like clubs or

something like that we would love it in our library. It seems like everything is geared towards public school children when they are out of school. When they are out of school they will have a plethora of activities for them to do and we join in on those things, but it would also be nice to have those things during the school year."

Likewise, Tianna said, "Definitely doing things during school hours, during the day time. They love to have things at 3:30 p.m. or 4 p.m when school lets out, and we are done with our day by then and we don't want all the chaos of the public school environment that tends to happen. We would love to see them grow the programs that they have during school hours."

In a similar vein, Rita and Heidi felt libraries should develop programs and classes that catered specifically to homeschool families. For example, Rita did not like that she had to pay for classes at the library. "I believe that they could provide some type of homeschooling classes which could be basically at no-cost instead of charging \$35 for a class that lasts two hours only. For example, there are some libraries that offer Mommy and Me classes that are only up to 5 years old then what happens from 6 years old and up? There are other older kids that are homeschooled."

Heidi added, "We are in a big homeschooling community, so I think there should be something specific to homeschoolers. I like that idea of getting homeschoolers together and having a book club or just something to cater more to homeschoolers."

## Discussion

As a phenomenological study, the value of this study was primarily in giving the participants a voice. That voice corroborated and extended existing research about the public library and about homeschoolers. For example, many of the participants used the library as much for the environment as they did for its services. This is in keeping with Erich's assertion that the library assumes the role of a multifunctional cultural center and community development center.<sup>37</sup>

Since the environment was so important, public libraries should seek to make the surroundings welcoming to homeschoolers. For example, meeting spaces such as conference rooms or multipurpose rooms should be made available for homeschool groups and individuals. Public libraries may also want to invest in additional seating, particularly comfortable seating like couches as several of the participants noted that they enjoyed "hanging out" at the library.

However, while Willingham noted that public libraries often cater to homeschoolers by developing daytime programs to serve them, the participants in this study did not have access to these libraries, demonstrating the need for more libraries to develop programs that cater to homeschoolers.<sup>38</sup>

In particular, public libraries may want to develop additional programs for older kids, as Skelly et al. note that modern public libraries offer a range of services to cater to all their clientele and the participants in this study felt that there was a dearth of daytime programs for older kids.<sup>39</sup> For example, just as many public libraries have a summer program schedule, they may also want to develop a homeschool program schedule for the school year. That could include daytime programs in a variety of subject areas like coding or consumer science areas like budgeting and nutrition.

Additionally, while all of the homeschool participants in this study related that they used a variety of sources for their curriculum, instead of just one boxed set of curricula, which is in keeping with research,<sup>40</sup> only one of the participants used the public library for their curriculum, with the other participants only utilizing the library resources for supplemental things like pleasure reading and interest reading.

While several of the participants did note their appreciation for being able to obtain these supplemental books for free, several participants also noted that they would also like to be able to obtain curriculum from the library. For example, when asked about what the library could better do to support homeschoolers, Melissa replied, "I guess with advertisement for co-ops or curriculum or different books. I don't know if they carry curriculum, but if they did, better advertisement for that would be beneficial."

Similarly, Jelena related, "We moved down here from Northern Virginia and they had some of the history curriculum books on CD and you could check them out. That was super helpful, but down here they don't have them."

Based on these responses, public libraries may want to invest in curriculum purchases. Curriculum publishers may even provide libraries with free sample copies, as several publishers offer sample textbooks (also known as inspection copies

or evaluation copies). If libraries were able to make these textbooks available for loan, or possibly just for in-library viewing depending on resource availability, homeschool educators could make more informed curriculum purchases.

## Conclusion

This study helped us gain limited, but valuable, insight into homeschoolers' use of the public library. However, as a qualitative study, there is an inherent lack of ability to generalize the findings from this study to a larger population.

Additionally, since all the participants in this study utilized Florida public libraries, libraries in other states may not have the same setup or offerings, again limiting the empirical significance of the findings. Despite these limitations, public libraries with large homeschool populations should consider providing more specific supports to homeschool families, including offering more daytime programs, specifically daytime programs for older, homeschooled children. When purchasing books for the library, librarians may also want to consider purchasing curriculum as several participants in this study voiced an interest in trying out curriculum.

Catering to homeschool families is important; as Willingham notes, "Homeschoolers will always be a large, anomalous group, and they'll always be closely connected with our public libraries."<sup>41</sup>

Finally, to expand the knowledge of homeschoolers' experiences and use of public libraries, additional research should be done in this area, particularly in areas outside of Florida. Future studies may want to just examine the experiences of homeschool families with older homeschooled students, as the age of students affected the responses of several of the participants in this study. &

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# A Superhero . . . in Person

## Dav Pilkey's Remarkable Visit and Message

ELLEN HUNTER RUFFIN

**O**n Thursday, April 14, 2018, I received an early morning text from an old friend. It said:

Just wanted to share the below text with you. It came from my daughter, whose son was at the Dav Pilkey celebration yesterday . . . He is in the second grade and suffers from apraxia and dyslexia and is struggling to read. My daughter sent this to our family's group text:

"Today Tyler got to listen to Dav Pilkey [author of *Captain Underpants*] speak at USM [the University of Southern Mississippi]. He got a signed book. I know it's the excitement of meeting him but tonight was the first time he picked up a book to read 'just because.' He read the whole first chapter."

Sometimes we forget that lives can be changed through the work we do. Thanks for bringing Dave [sic] Pilkey to Hattiesburg!

That's right. Author Dav Pilkey came to Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and lives were changed. He was the honoree at the fifty-first Fay B. Kaigler Children's Book Festival, April 11–13, 2018, and he is the fiftieth individual to receive the silver medallion from USM. The first was Lois Lenski in 1969, so this tradition has a remarkable history.



Just another caped fan waiting for his superhero—Dav Pilkey!

Pilkey graciously agreed to speak to some of our area children, which meant finding a venue large enough for the throngs of requests we had received once it was announced he would be in town! When Karen Rowell, director of the festival, listed the free event on social media, we were besieged with requests. Within two hours, we had requests from more than eight hundred people. It was clear the space we had originally reserved would not suffice.

We decided on the university's coliseum—the only place able to handle the crowds this particular rock star commands. It also meant we would not have to turn away any teacher's request or any parent's plea.



**Ellen Hunter Ruffin** is the Curator of the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection at The University of Southern Mississippi. A longtime member of ALSC, Ruffin has served on the Newbery Committee, the Legacy Award Committee, Arbuthnot Committee, and is serving her last term as the ALA Councilor for the state of Mississippi.





Author Dav Pilkey checks out artwork by one of his favorite artists, James Marshall, in the DeGrummond exhibit room.

The only concern would be the weather. We didn't want to deal with school buses circling around the coliseum and dropping children off in the rain. The venue required us to jump through some hoops, not the basketball kind, but the accommodating type. We would not be able to open the coliseum up to guests until the women's volleyball practice was finished, around 9:30 a.m.

And we were to use only one side of the coliseum, AND the assistant athletic director had a child who loves *Captain Underpants*. Interpretation: Make sure his child could attend.

The day dawned, and the weather was perfect, sparkling and clear, as a Mississippi spring day can be. The athletes who were supposed to be practicing were not in the coliseum (had Captain Underpants supplanted the women's volleyball practice?!), and all fifty of our volunteers were there with their red capes Scholastic had provided ("Reading gives you Super Powers!") securely fastened. Excitement was building. We were ready! Buses began arriving at approximately 9:30 a.m.—perfect.

What fun it was to observe the children filing into the coliseum. They were respectful and orderly, anticipating seeing one of their favorite authors in person. Upon entering the coliseum, everyone received a red cape, so the entire venue looked festive.

The university's mascot, a golden eagle known as Seymour (full name: Seymour d'Campus), came to entertain the children. He was dressed in underpants and a red cape, and the children loved it. Music was playing, Seymour was dancing, and the audience was excited.

At 10:30 a.m., the mayor, donning a red cape, welcomed Pilkey to Hattiesburg and presented him to the crowd. Captain Underpants himself bounded onto the stage and bellowed, "HELLOOO, MISSISSIPPI," and the audience exploded. From the moment he appeared, the children, parents, and teachers were spellbound. Of course, his presentation was creative and fun, weaving technology and "real time" together. Quite simply, Dav Pilkey was in charge.





Left to right: Ellen Ruffin, Seymour the Eagle, Sarah Mangrum of the Mississippi Library Association, and Karen Rowell, director of the Fay B. Kaigler Book Festival.

When I say Pilkey “told his story,” I mean he was transparent with the audience. As a child, reading had not come easily for him. He struggled with dyslexia, something his teachers did not know how to treat. His experiences with a disapproving librarian colored his entire school existence. She would sniff at the books he chose, making comments about the picture-books he loved. It was an isolating experience for him because he was certain he was the only one with reading difficulties.

However, during those trying years, Pilkey learned he could entertain his friends by drawing pictures, by telling stories with his drawings. He drew cartoons depicting his teacher, which his classmates loved. His teacher did *not* appreciate his drawings, and he remembered what she would say to him—“You can’t make a living drawing silly pictures!”

Fortunately for Pilkey, his parents knew he was not stupid. They encouraged him to read what he *wanted*. Since *words* gave Dav problems, he liked books with lots of *pictures* because he *could* read those. Even though his school librarian did not always appreciate his selections, he knew his parents supported him.

All the while, he continued to draw. He even invented a character known as Dogman, who is still with him! He eventually discovered comics, and he read the classics in comic book form. The point . . . he *was* reading, *and* he was learning.

The talk Dav Pilkey delivered to Mississippi children gave them hope and courage. The text message I received from my friend is proof of that. For the *first* time, her grandson picked up a book to read “just because.”



Dav Pilkey was eager to meet his fans, and fans of Captain Underpants, at his book signing.

The excitement of the morning carried on throughout the entire book festival. I, for one, wore my Super Power cape every day, and I wasn’t alone.

On Thursday, when our university president presented Pilkey with the fiftieth silver medallion that stated, “His talents have enriched the lives of children,” he, too, donned a heroic red cape. The medallion has the likeness of Pilkey on one side, and on the other side is a depiction of his beloved Captain Underpants.

Dav Pilkey is a hero. He is generous and warm to a fault. Children love his books. Teachers and librarians become heroes when they introduce children to Captain Underpants or Dogman or any other Pilkey work.

Much has changed since Pilkey was in school. Librarians and teachers *want* children to read books of their choice. We understand more about how to unlock the puzzles to words. It is a better time. Learning disabilities no longer signal a dead end. Children acquire decoding skills and apply them.

This is not to imply the road to reading is easy. However, teachers and librarians can connect their students to the joy of story. I saw it for myself during that festival when more than two thousand people were transfixed by a true superhero author. &

For more information about the USM past medal recipients, visit <https://www.usm.edu/childrens-book-festival/past-medal-lion-recipients>.

# All Aboard the Darien Express!

## A Creative Mystery-Themed SRP

SAMANTHA CARDONE AND ELISABETH GATTULLO MARROCOLLA

Storytimes. STEM initiatives. Outreach visits. Book groups. Together, these services form the foundation of youth library programming. Although a mix of programs is important to year-round librarianship, one time of year stands above the rest, providing a framework to draw people into the library in numbers far exceeding the school year. We speak, of course, of the *pièce de résistance* of youth library programming—summer reading programs.

Many elements make Summer Reading Programs (SRP) such a special time of year. Because school is not in session, librarians are able to offer daytime programming to school-age children. Summer is also a unique time in a reader's life, when reading is primarily for pleasure. SRP programs allow librarians to show their creativity and try out new services and ideas. And because the theme changes every year, SRP always feels fresh. Best of all, it creates a common bond among youth services librarians in our busiest and most invigorating time of the year.

In summer 2018, librarians in Darien, CT, pushed their SRP in a new direction. If you're looking for a twist on an old favorite, this mystery-based program might be for you.



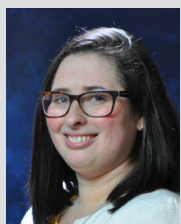
Suspects, and youth service librarians, line up for the Mystery on the Darien Express.

## Summer Reading at Darien Library

For almost two decades, Darien Library, which serves a population of around twenty-two thousand, has created its own SRP theme and complementary program. This allows us to shape our programs around the theme, or shape the theme around our programs as we see fit.

Although it looks different every year, two parts of the program remain constant. Like most libraries, our SRP has a reading component. Some years we've asked patrons to track the minutes they've spent reading. Other years, we've asked them to record the number of books they read. In recent years, we've moved towards a challenge-based reading program. Participants have to read certain types of books – i.e., "Read a book with a blue cover," "Read a book with magic in it," "Read a comic book."

The other half of our SRP is composed of activities that children who may not love reading might enjoy. This allows both readers and non-readers to feel like they're achieving goals, giving everyone the opportunity to win prizes. Whatever theme we've chosen becomes especially important in determining



*Samantha Cardone is the Children's Program Coordinator and Elisabeth Gattullo Marrocolla is the Head of Children and Teen Services, both at Darien (CT) Library.*



what these activities look like each year. Some years, these activities are woven into the reading challenge itself. Some years, they are presented as a separate game for participants. The year our SRP theme was Spies, we offered online “quests” once a week that our spies-in-training could participate in.

Each year, the children’s librarians meet in early September to debrief from SRP while it’s still fresh in the mind. What worked? What didn’t? What should change next year? These meetings sometimes result in radical adjustments to the Summer Reading program. In September 2015 we decided to eliminate tracking minutes read over the summer and switch to a challenged-based reading program. And after many seasons of frustration, we also decided to eliminate the online portion of SRP entirely and switch back to a paper/in-person-based program.

These debriefings also lead to small changes, like adjusting when SRP starts or ends or recalculating how much staffing is required for sign-ups. For that alone, debriefing is vital to the continued success of the program. But the post-summer meeting is also a time to throw contenders for the next SRP into the ring. As soon as one summer ends, it’s time to set our sights on next summer. We make as big a list of potential themes as possible, talk through potential program ideas, write them all down, and schedule a time to meet in late December/early January to vote on a theme and start the process all over again.

## Finding Inspiration

Inspiration comes from everywhere. To shape our themes, we look to real-world events, personal passions, and the interests of our patrons. Although we don’t use the national theme, sometimes our theme parallels the national one, particularly when there is a big event happening in the world.

In 2016, the national theme was “On Your Mark, Get Set, Read.” That year, SRP at our library was Darien Olympians, based on Greek gods and goddesses. Both themes were vaguely related to the 2016 Summer Olympics. Other years have no relation to anything but the enthusiasm of children’s library staff, such as the year a department of former theater nerds hosted Lights, Camera, Action. As long as staff is fired up about the theme, anything goes. This try-anything attitude has served us well for many years, and is the key to our continued enthusiasm for a big, unwieldy program.

## Mystery on the Darien Express: Planning and Execution

When our librarians met in January 2018, we were enthused and inspired by the movie release of *Murder on the Orient Express*. As a town along the Metro-North route to New York City, we have a large community of kids whose caregivers and/or parents take the train to work every morning, and many children who have developed a fascination for trains.

Summer Reading, we decided, would have a train theme—participants would receive a copy of a Railway Route at the beginning of the summer. Trains had been the theme way back in 1999, which we discovered after beginning our planning, but we were confident that any patrons who participated in 1999’s program would not be participating in 2018. We continued to offer a challenge-based reading program, but we wanted to offer another challenge for our patrons—an interactive mystery.

We crafted a simple but compelling mystery shaped around the maternity leave of the Head of Youth Services. A rare book was stolen on the train ride from Grand Central Terminal to Darien Train Station—and our head librarian, who was carrying the book, was missing as well. The only suspects? The other passengers who were traveling aboard the Darien Express!

Our Youth Services librarians transformed into characters including a Broadway actress, a train engineer, a flight attendant, a blogger, and a personal chef. Upon the August return of the department head, the missing librarian reappeared at the scene of the crime to become a suspect as well.

## Behind the Scenes

Actively seeking inspiration, Program Coordinator Samantha Cardone dove into reading Agatha Christie novels during her free time. To recreate a train station inside the children’s department, we started brainstorming style ideas. We needed a secure way to deliver the clues, and we installed IKEA lockers that we decorated in a style reminiscent of a train station. Readers would receive small prizes along their Railway Route from inside the lockers, and any aspiring detectives could collect paper clues from each locker. Each of the six lockers was decorated as if it belonged to a possible suspect. To plot the mystery, we started out by creating a web that showed how each suspect was related to the other suspects and a possible motive for committing the theft.

Then we started to flesh out details for each suspect. Participants would only collect six clues — which didn’t give us a lot of space to include all the details of a full-fledged mystery. We designed a clue book that patrons would receive if they wanted to participate in the mystery component. A suspect list inside this brochure contained facts about each character *and* helped us place additional clues that might help participants while they were solving the mystery.

For example, our train engineer was noted as a big fan of Big Red gum and a locker clue would refer to another type of gum—a red herring in this particular instance. The suspect lockers would contain visual details like a Broadway playbill or a business card for a catering company that aided our detectives in solving the mystery.

## THE SUSPECTS



**Miss Samantha**  
*Personal Chef*  
Collects rare books;  
Used to work for Anna  
until she was fired.



**Miss Mia**  
*Blogger*  
Great-uncle illustrated  
the missing book;  
Cannot quit her  
"slice a day" pizza habit.



**Miss Anna**  
*Broadway Actress*  
Trying to finance her  
own Broadway show;  
Childhood friends with  
Elisabeth.



**Miss Tori**  
*Stewardess*  
Sorority sister with Baily;  
Wants to quit her job to  
become a donut taster;  
roommates with Mia.



**Miss Baily**  
*Train Engineer*  
Collects vintage train  
memorabilia;  
Loves "Big Red" gum.

## SOLVE THE CRIME

Your mission: figure out what happened to Elisabeth and who stole the book.

Each of these six lockers belongs to one of the passengers on the Darien Express.

You will find a **paper clue** inside of each locker that you may keep.

Don't forget to look around the contents of the locker for **additional hints**. You may want to write down what you see. The more lockers that you open, the more clues you will discover to solve the mystery.

When you think that you have solved the mystery, you may ask for a **suspect sheet** from a librarian. Then you can submit your answer!

If you collect all six clues and submit an answer, you will be entered into the Mystery on the Darien Express Grand Prize Raffle.

The winner of the Grand Prize Raffle and the mystery will be unraveled at the **Mystery on the Darien Express Finale Party** on Wednesday, August 15th.



A STOLEN BOOK.  
ONE MISSING  
LIBRARIAN.  
FIVE SUSPECTS.

MYSTERY  
**CLUE  
BOOK**  
ON THE  
DARIEN  
EXPRESS  
SUMMER 2018



Summer 2018 Mystery of the Darien Express Clue Book.

The SRP at Darien Library encompasses children from kindergarten to the sixth grade, so we knew there would be a wide spectrum of comprehension levels. We did not want the mystery to be unsolvable, but rather accessible to all ages. The paper clues each had a different type of challenge to solve—one of the clues involved looking for specific items in each of the six lockers; another clue required the decoding of an alphabet cipher for a secret message. The general idea was each paper clue would rule out a suspect, letting participants eliminate potential culprits as they played. Our paper clues included an inventory list, passenger receipts, a train car schematic, an email, a newspaper article, and a text conversation between suspects.

The development process to write the backstory, create the characters, and design the clues took around a month during our busy schedule of other SRP prep and library activities. We took inspiration from everywhere—the actual disappearance of Agatha Christie, beloved childhood series like *Nancy Drew* and *The Boxcar Children*, and our own imaginations.

All of the paper materials (the clue book, each individual clue, the Suspect Sheet) were designed in-house through various web generators, Microsoft Publisher, and Canva. Continuing our locker idea, we transformed our children's department into a train station with decorations like vintage-inspired travel posters, steamer trunks, hat boxes, and an international wall of clocks. At the beginning of the summer, the Youth Services team had a lot of fun taking photographs in costume that we later used in our promotional materials.

When our readers registered for SRP 2018, they picked up a Railway Route. There were six station stops on the Railway Route with our reading and non-reading challenges in between the stations. Interested detectives were given a clue book that included the backstory for the summer's mystery, a suspect list with facts about them, and free space to write down notes.

When the participants "reached" each Station on their Railway Route by completing challenges, they could open one of the six lockers and select a prize and a paper clue if they

## Getting Creative with Your SRP

How can you implement creative components in your SRP? Libraries have limited time, money and resources, but you don't have to start from scratch or turn your library into a train station to create new elements to get your readers excited about reading.

- **Choose your theme.** Decide whether you want to use the national theme or create a new one. Your choice can dictate what resources will be at your fingertips when you are planning for the upcoming summer. There are perks in following the national theme; local performers and programmers usually cater to the national theme. Plus, you will have the wonderful world of Pinterest and librarian listservs within reach! If you choose a personalized theme, start planning early.
- **Develop creative elements.** What additional components do you want to add? This is my favorite part of the planning process, the time when you get to use your imagination. Look for inspiration in your chosen theme. Since we riffed on *Murder on the Orient Express*, we wanted to give our readers clues to solve a mystery, but you could develop other types of challenges. Figure out how you want to challenge your readers and what will get them excited about participating. Be certain to evaluate how much staff time will be needed to develop these ideas—and don't bite off more than you can chew.
- **Create a budget and to-do list.** Before you dive into your aspirational dreams of turning your library into a train station, take a look at what potential resources you will need. This will mean looking at your programming budget and deciding what you want to spend on SRP programs. How much can you allocate to creating an ambiance in your library environment? Can community businesses donate prizes or decorations? Making budget decisions in February or March will save you headaches as you creep closer to summer. An early start gives you time for more DIY projects. We put in a lot of research into purchasing the lockers that we would use for our small prizes and clues. Eventually, we chose white IKEA lockers that we spray-painted (thanks, Dad!) in bronze and decorated with imitation train stickers.
- **Designate staff responsibilities.** If you have a staff of one, it becomes clear who will do the heavy lifting in the creative elements. If you are lucky enough to have either volunteers or other staff members, designate specific responsibilities to spread the weight of your program. Once summer begins, you'll want to know in advance who is in charge of reordering your prizes, handling patron queries, and printing extra copies of materials. The brainstorming process of SRP is certainly more fun when you can share your ideas with co-workers and colleagues.
- **Don't forget to have fun.** Adding creativity to your SRP is meant to create more fun for your library patrons — and you! This is not a process that should be draining on your staff or library resources. Your library patrons have no idea what you have planned for them, so if you need to reevaluate your ideas and think smaller, that's okay. Use your strengths and those of your staff.

were participating in the mystery. If a participant completed their Railway Route, they would be entered into a grand prize raffle at the end-of-summer party.

Once a child had collected the clues for the mystery, they received a Suspect Sheet that contained a final statement from each of the suspects. Participants could submit their culprit and receive an additional entry in the raffle. We would announce the culprit at our end-of-summer party, with a dramatic arrest.

## Challenges

Adding new features to your SRP is bound to create challenges; we anticipated some early; others took us by surprise.

One of the early challenges we faced involved explaining the newest component to our young readers and families. The extra information about our mystery component added another minute or two onto our jam-packed explanation. When we have a deluge of excited children who want to register in the first weeks, that extra minute created a longer line of patrons. There were two ways of addressing this challenge—when time allowed, we would explain the program when patrons first registered or we would explain the mystery when the patrons returned to the library to check in for the first stop on their Railway Route.

An unexpected challenge arose concerning the speed in which our patrons finished challenges and reached new stops on their Railway Routes. In previous years, we offered a grand prize raffle for completing the SRP. The new (to our library

patrons) component of choosing small prizes at each railway stop proved to be an exciting incentive, so exciting that we had children coming to us multiple times during their library visit to announce that they had reached the next station.

We thought that it would take a couple of days for participants to reach beyond the third and fourth lockers, but we had readers eagerly awaiting the contents on day two!

Behind the scenes, there was the question of how many prizes to order and what particular prizes to offer. In previous years, more than eight hundred fifty children registered for SRP, but not everyone completed the program. We would have to consider the cost and quantity of these small prizes. Additionally, we did not want to give away prizes that would end up in the dust bin by the end of the day.

Our prize lockers boasted small prizes like pencils, emoji keychains, and sunglasses—trying to find appealing prizes for all age groups and avoiding landfill fodder was difficult. It required a few weeks of research and price comparison to pick our prizes, and we had to reorder three more times during the summer.

When we register our patrons for SRP, we encourage caregivers and children to read on their particular level when completing challenges. But because not every reader was reading at their age level, we had fourth and fifth graders reading picturebooks because they were eager to get to the next locker. We ask participants to write the titles of books they read to complete challenges on their Railway Route. In the situations where they were noticeably reading books under their level, we would ask whether this was normally a book that they would read in school and suggest that they read something more challenging for future check-ins.

Associated with the extreme speed in which our readers were finishing the program, it took a significant amount of time from the staff member on desk to open the lockers for patrons, all while registering new participants and assisting other patrons. Shortly after the start of SRP, we instated a rule that readers could check in once per library visit to open the lockers.

In future programs, we plan to make this part of our program write-up. If participants reached two stations at home, they could open the corresponding lockers when they visited us. While we encouraged our patrons to read during their library visits and add those titles to the Railway Route, it did not seem as credible that they could achieve three or four challenges (usually the number of tasks between the stations) during a short visit.

One anticipated challenge never turned into a real issue—would the clues be inaccessible to certain age groups? We were concerned that younger children would be frustrated

and unwilling to commit to solve the mystery; likewise, we were unsure if older children would find the challenges too easy. Imagine our surprise when “solving the mystery” became a family activity for all ages!

Younger children worked together with parents, older siblings, and grandparents. Clues were solved at home and often on the floor of the library, with families spreading out the collected clues and scribbling down notes. Older children teamed up with friends or their younger siblings to dissect the clues. There were amateur detectives who preferred to solve clues independently. We discovered that the concept of simply solving a mystery was enough for so many participants that the required skill to solve each clue was not as crucial as we had predicted.

## Measuring Success

The Mystery on the Darien Express delivered success in ways that were difficult to capture. Patrons seemed happier and more enthused. Participants spent more time in the library, and appeared to visit the library more frequently throughout the summer than they had in previous years, though circulation was comparable to the previous year. There was a definite uptick in the number of patrons who expressed appreciation for the complexities of the program.

Various librarians heard that this was “the most fun” families had had at the library, that it was “so great!” Unfortunately, it didn’t occur to staff to record these messages of praise in any way beyond word of mouth, and we were left with the intangible, but happy, feeling that we had done a good job and patrons were pleased.

Luckily, the numbers backed up our anecdotal impressions. Registration was up 15 percent from the previous two summers to 1,562 pre-readers, readers, and teens. Impressively, one hundred thirteen kids finished the Mystery Challenge and submitted a guess at the end of the summer. This number blew past our previous year’s number of participants who finished the activity-based challenges, which usually started out the summer with around one hundred participants, but ended the summer hovering around twenty-five. Thirty-five participants correctly chose the villain. That felt like a good ratio to us, as the mystery was easy enough to solve but not so easy that everyone would solve it.

We also had the largest finale party we’ve had in the past decade, with nearly three hundred people joining us for food truck grilled cheese, crafts, and a pantomime who revealed the culprits. That’s nearly double the average number of attendees at a finale party. We were extremely pleased with our numeric successes. Next year, we are looking at more official ways to capture those esoteric compliments that speak to the community’s feeling about the program as a whole. &



# Blowing Up Summer Reading

## One Library's Approach

KATHERINE LOVAN

Summer reading can be a beloved and anticipated, but sometimes loathed, tradition among librarians...and, let's face it, some kids as well. Once we had reached the people who liked our traditional approach to our summer reading program (SRP), we sought to increase participation. Surveys helped us identify barriers to participation. We found that families struggle with time to visit the library or they may be frustrated with restrictive SRP rules (they lose their tracking sheets, go on vacation, etc.). The families are, however, looking for programs that target their children's specific interests, especially ones to help the children build skills, as opposed to regular programming designed to appeal to a wider audience.

In the summer of 2017, we decided to mix it up. We changed the format of our SRP, adding a remote option that included mailed postcards; we changed the programs by eliminating large events and focusing on camps with experts; and we changed our prize structure to reward reading all summer long, with no limits on how many prizes a single patron could receive for reading.

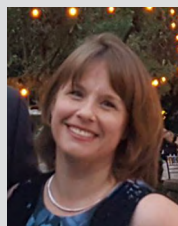
### Summer Reading in a Postcard

While many parents found coming to the library to be a hassle, they still wanted their kids to be engaged and learning over the summer. To reach them, we mailed postcards with information and tickets to educational activities, free of charge. We got the tickets in the same way we have always gotten tickets for our SRP—by soliciting donations. The difference this year was that rather than asking our donors to print them, we obtained permission to print them ourselves on our

postcard. We sent the families everything that they would need to participate in the SRP and let them choose how to engage. The postcard included the ticket, information about upcoming programs, book recommendations, and links to fun online databases and activities. To make the postcards affordable, we printed them in house, and our library foundation registered with the United States Postal Service (USPS) as a non-profit, resulting in a 50 percent decrease in the price of postage. The participation in our SRP increased from 464 participants in 2016 to approximately 750 participants in 2017, measured in both years by the number of patrons who participated in our incentive programs and camps.

### High-Interest, High-Engagement Camps

Attendance at targeted programs like our robotics camp was much better than at free weekly programming, so we added two-hour camps throughout the summer. The camps ran for two days and focused on high-interest topics such as robotics and tattoo art. We brought in experts and marketed the camps to kids interested in the subjects.



*Katherine Lovan is Director of Middleton (ID) Public Library and Co-President of the Idaho Library Association.*

We took one controversial step by charging small supply fees for expensive programs. We addressed access issues by offering scholarships for anyone who asked for one and made up the funds from a combination of library and donated funds. We found very little resistance to the small charges, and in fact we found a positive change in the number of participants who signed up actually attending the event, reflecting what we believe is an increased perception of value in library programs in our community. Additionally, to ensure the quality of programs, we enforced age requirements. We continued regular free programming for babies and preschoolers, as they have always been popular.

## Less Rules, More Reading

We eliminated the weekly structure that required kids to do the reading in specific weeks and get specific prizes allotted to that week. Our goal was to free up our participants to read more and also to reduce the amount of time library staff spent tracking participation.

Basically, we took away limits. Kids could keep reading and receiving prizes as they achieved goals. This meant that some kids could get prizes several times a week, as there was no limit to how many prizes they could get.

There was a big prize bucket, and they could choose from it every time they came in with a completed card. We learned, however, that the bucket wasn't an awesome idea—we filled it with prizes of varying value, so some participants would get better prizes than others if they were lucky enough to come in right after it was filled.

However, the no limits approach was successful. We were a little concerned that it would go crazy, and we wouldn't be able to supply all of the prizes, so we budgeted a cushion, just in case. Our prizes included tickets to local events and attractions, restaurant meals, and a whole bunch of little prizes that we purchased.

Avid readers didn't turn out to be a serious problem. Some kids went crazy, but not so many that it sunk our budget. Parents loved the freedom, and the unofficial survey results were that kids were reading more. &

### Early Literacy Hard at Work!



Left: Debbie Denissen of Green Bay reads to her newborn granddaughter, Trinity. Right: Melissa Morwood, senior youth services librarian for the Palo Alto City (CA) Library, presents storytime with her nephew, Wyatt.

# When Gym Met Dewey

## The Unexpected Collaboration of the Library and Physical Education

BREON DERBY AND EMILY BENVENGA

A whole-school approach to education integrates multiple components of the school system to create balanced, well-rounded students who can transfer and apply knowledge and skills into their current, and future, lives.

Supporting and incorporating cross-disciplinary units, lessons, and ideas fosters student engagement, helps students build connections and form relationships between topics and disciplines, provides students a chance to explore and discover a deeper meaning and understanding of multiple concepts, and allows students to apply their knowledge and skills. One cross-disciplinary connection not often considered—or seen—is how the library can support the physical education classroom.

Traditionally, physical education has been looked at as a “bat and ball” content area. However, the new era of physical education aims to create a well-rounded, physically literate individual by equipping students with the knowledge and skills to remain physically active throughout their lifetime. The book *SHAPE America National Standards & Grade-Level Outcomes for K–12 Physical Education* outlines what students should

know and be able to do by the time they graduate high school. Physical literacy is attained through the use of the following five standards outlined in the framework. The physical literate individual

1. demonstrates competency in a variety of motor skills and movement patterns;
2. applies knowledge of concepts, principles, strategies, and tactics related to movement and performance;
3. demonstrates the knowledge and skills to achieve and maintain a health-enhancing level of physical activity and fitness;
4. exhibits responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others; and
5. recognizes the value of physical activity for health, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression, and/or social interaction.<sup>1</sup>



To celebrate National School Library Month and promote physical activity, Black Hills State University physical education students set up a mini golf course in the Spearfish High School Library.



**Dr. Breon Derby** is an Assistant Professor, College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, at Black Hills (SD) State University. **Emily Benvenga** is the high school librarian in Spearfish, SD.

Physical education not only builds a foundation for enjoyment of lifelong physical activity, but also emphasizes applying the knowledge and skills gained to make healthier choices throughout one's life. Standard 4 reflects an additional emphasis on character building. The physical education curriculum promotes the development of responsibility, respect for self and others, self-management, problem solving, honesty, effective communication skills, and continuous reflection and goal setting for personal growth. Traditionally, libraries have been perceived as quiet environments. However, today's libraries foster inquiry and creativity, requiring a flexible environment. Within the library, students are encouraged to pursue curiosities, develop character, and become conscientious users of information. As the learning world for students has changed and evolved, the standards for the school library have also changed and evolved, and a new picture of libraries has developed.

Three key standards in the new American Association of School Librarians (AASL, 2018) framework stand out as support components to the physical education classroom:

1. Inquire: Build new knowledge by inquiring, thinking critically, identifying problems, and developing strategies for solving problems.
2. Collaborate: Work effectively with others to broaden perspectives and work toward common goals.
3. Explore: Discover and innovate in a growth mindset developed through experience and reflection.<sup>2</sup>

Based on the desired outcomes of the AASL and the SHAPE America frameworks, the librarian and the physical educator can collaborate to create experiences that transfer beyond the classroom. The librarian's role emerges as one that supports collaboration in the physical education classroom. Both areas work together to achieve the common goal of immersing the learner in more than just knowledge and skills and providing experiences that carry over to the real world.

The standards lay the foundation for the following activities. Many of the concepts listed below meet multiple AASL and SHAPE America standards. The teacher or librarian can combine and interchange the standards based on the lesson focus. Consider the following scenarios:

- **Elementary (K–5):** The librarian comes into the classroom

or gymnasium as a guest. The alphabet, or a portion of the alphabet, is emphasized at stations where the letters are tied to actions introduced by the physical education teacher (i.e., J = jump). At each station there is also a book with a title that starts with the letter J. The same stations can be set up at the students' next library visit.

- **Middle School (6–8):** The librarian and physical education teacher work together to come up with fitness facts that are true and untrue. During the next physical education class, the class visits the library to play a trivia game where students view fitness facts from various sources and determine whether the fitness fact is credible or not. If the class gets the fact right, they perform a physical activity, and if the class is wrong, they perform a different physical activity.
- **High School (9–12):** As an out-of-class assignment, students in the physical education classroom choose a relevant topic (i.e., wellness, sport specific, fitness, etc.) to research. Students work with the librarian to learn about the research process.

## Additional Ideas

- To celebrate School Library Month, the school library hosts an expert visit with upper level students or local university students who are working towards their degree in physical education. The expert students set up a mini-golf course or other activities in the library that students can complete as a team or individually during their free hour. Students view the library setting as a welcoming and actively changing place.
- The physical education teacher sets up an obstacle course or activities to mimic a story/theme being presented in the library. Alternatively, the librarian finds a virtual reality experience in the library that mimics skills/activities being taught in the physical education classroom.

Collaboration within the school environment creates a holistic, standards-based curriculum that leads to rich, diverse, memorable experiences for students that will carry on to their future lives. The library and physical education classroom have always been familiar elements to a school system. Combining the two disciplines is unexpected, but can lead to positive outcomes that have a lasting impact on students. &

## References

1. SHAPE America-Society of Health and Physical Educators, *National Standards & Grade-Level Outcomes for K–12 Physical Education* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2014).
2. American Association of School Librarians, *AASL Standards Framework for Learners* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2018).



# On Their Turf

## Serving Refugees as an Off-Site Outreach Program

HEATHER LEA JACKSON, MEISYWE M. CAVANAUGH, GIA SCHWATKA, GIOVANNA SANDOVAL, AND CLAUDIA PARRA ACEVEDO

Prince George's County (PGC), Maryland, has been a place of resettlement for more than two thousand refugees, asylees, and those with special immigrant visas (SIVs) since 2012. The PGC Memorial Library System was recently awarded a \$3,000 ALSC Light the Way Grant to expand its programming to the refugees in the community.

Developing robust library programming with a refugee community can be challenging—even beyond the obvious challenge presented by language barriers. Cultural differences can be huge barriers. For example, for many Afghani refugees, it is culturally unacceptable for women to leave the apartment complex unless accompanied by a male relative. These male relatives are frequently at work or engaged in work readiness programs, so they are not available to serve as escorts to the library. This means the library must go into the

refugee communities rather than expecting them to come to the library.

In December 2015, the New Carrollton Branch Library closed for a multiyear major renovation. We realized that the closure could be a catalyst for engaging with underserved or previously unidentified potential customers when we found out there was a large refugee, SIV, and asylee population at an apartment complex in the branch's catchment area.

Parkview Gardens Apartments in Riverdale, Maryland, has been the place of resettlement for a huge number of refugees placed in Prince George's County. The complex has 592 units, most of which are leased to refugee families from Afghanistan, Syria, Nepal, Iraq, and Ethiopia, resettled there by the International Rescue Committee (IRC). The pop-up programming we began there has grown into something



**Heather Jackson** is the Area Manager for the Hyattsville, New Carrollton, Bladensburg and Mount Rainier branches of the Prince George's County (MD) Memorial Library System. **Meisywe M. Cavanaugh** is the Librarian III heading the Youth Services department at the New Carrollton

Branch Library of the Prince George's County Memorial Library System. **Gianna Schwatka** is a member of the Youth Services department at the New Carrollton Branch Library of the Prince George's County Memorial Library System. **Giovanna Sandoval** is a Library Associate in the Youth Services Department of the New Carrollton Branch Library of the Prince George's County Memorial Library System. **Claudia E. Parra Acevedo** is a Library Associate in the Youth Services Department of the New Carrollton Branch Library of the Prince George's County Memorial Library System.



more rewarding and more essential to this community than we initially envisioned.

Two days a week, we offer two programs at the complex. The first is a mother-and-child storytime and language learning program. When the families arrive, the children can choose to play with Duplo blocks or do crafts that are designed to build fine motor skills, to teach the ability to follow directions, and to reinforce key language concepts, such as color and number identification.

The children develop school readiness since they acquire many of the skills (language, using writing implements, predictable routines, group work, and numeracy) they would learn in formal preschool. While the children are playing and working on crafts, the mothers participate in an English Language Learning (ELL) and technology program using Rosetta Stone, a program that our library system offers for free to library card holders. The women gain proficiency on laptops and tablets as they engage in staff-supported language learning activities.

Child care has proven to be a huge barrier to participation in services for women in this community, so adult programs that provide concurrent child care or programming are essential. After an hour of play or study, everyone joins in as we sing a clean-up song, clean up the room, and gather for storytime.

To encourage the mothers to participate and not just observe, we had our Ready 2 Read storytime guidelines translated into Dari, the most widely spoken language among the women. At the beginning of each storytime, we read one guideline in English and have a participant read the written translation in Dari. This dramatically improves participation in the storytime, allowing the women to relax and engage in the activities.

We design ELL storytimes, which also help the mothers acquire key language elements for their everyday life. Themes include colors, numbers, greetings, letters, transportation, food—critical vocabulary to being able to function in daily activities, such as going to a grocery store or riding a bus.

Since these are new words for both child and adult, we repeat many of the same rhymes, fingerplays, and songs each week. Staff also get creative about ways to communicate with the participants due to language barriers. Graphic representations of words, photos, physical objects, pantomime, and exaggerated facial expression are useful tools. We try to communicate using pictures or props whenever possible.

Recently, we have added some guidelines in graphic format for the children. They seem to enjoy mimicking the graphic “criss-cross applesauce” rules, which will serve them when they begin preschool. This is also helpful for the adults and mimics the teaching model they will find in both adult new reader materials and online language learning platforms.

The books usually have limited or repetitive text, use easy to see pictures or photos, and focus on reinforcing the vocabulary themes. Whenever possible, we follow up with an activity to reinforce the vocabulary we just practiced. This could be a matching game identifying colors or animals or a create-a-story game using felt animals to retell the story and reproduce language learned from the book.

Sung books, or book versions of children’s songs such as “Old MacDonald” or “Brown Bear, Brown Bear,” are probably the favorite books of both the children and parents. The children love to sing and mimic whatever actions match the lyrics. The rhythm and meter of songs also helps the adults become more accustomed to the prosody of English language, which can differ significantly from their native languages.

Books on the topic of diversity are also engaging for these families. We use books that explore different cultures, holidays, languages, and disabilities, seeking out books that represent multicultural characters in their illustrations or photographs. Refugee and asylee families are generally an eager audience; they want to integrate into their new community, and libraries are a natural fit for partners to help them develop the language and literacy skills they need to truly feel included, engaged, and productive.

Most of the families we serve have received their very first library card while attending the mother and child storytime at Parkview Gardens, and they have developed a sense of agency and self-sufficiency by being able to borrow items. The card has been empowering in a way we never anticipated. Library staff bring books each week for them to select. Unfortunately, we don’t have books in their native language, but when we show them why they might like particular books, or how they might enhance their learning, they usually check them out. Recently, we added adult new reader titles, which have been popular with the mothers.

## Getting Siblings Involved

Our second program focuses on the older children and siblings of the storytime attendees. Kids Achieve Club provides homework assistance for students in grades K–6. We connect students with community mentors and library staff members to improve the students’ reading level and math skills.

For each weekly meeting, we bring a small collection of books, many of which are hi-lo books with lots of scaffolding in the form of graphics and illustrations, as well as worksheets and games. When students arrive, we divide them into groups by grade level to work with mentors on their homework. We keep the mentor to student ratio of one-to-three since class sizes can be very large, and due to language barriers, these students cannot get the “kitchen table” homework help that many of us got from our parents.

The small groups allow for more intensive help with the homework, but it also helps develop a relationship between the mentor and the student. The bonding and trust between mentor and student is also important, as many of the children in the refugee community spent their early years in places in which everywhere outside of the home (including school) was a potential danger zone.

The program regularly draws more than twenty children on a regular basis. We attribute the success of this program to mentors who are enthusiastic, loving, and patient; the time of the program (held in the morning); and the word-of-mouth community support of the program by attendees.

Programming for refugees can present serious issues in terms of logistics and a space to present programs or establish library services. We were lucky to be able to arrange for the donation of a model unit from the apartment complex as space for the programs, though we are at capacity with both programs now. This room is shared by many groups who work with refugees in the complex.

Due to its small size and the fact that it is used by multiple groups, it's not feasible or safe to keep library materials and equipment there. This presents logistical headaches for staff since everything must be packed and unpacked each of the days we are on site.

Developing procedures and designating people to be in charge of equipment, books, and supplies has been necessary to function efficiently. Costs were limited to the craft supplies so far, though we recently were able to purchase more materials in Nepali and Pashto via the ALSC Light the Way Grant. The grant is also allowing us to purchase additional tablets and materials for the mothers to continue working on their English language and basic literacy skills.

Programming must also be given time to grow organically. Establishing trust in these communities is a process, and finding partners already working in the refugee community can be helpful in speeding the process along. It is also critical to develop cultural competence with the families you work with by learning about their culture, respecting their values and practices, and being sensitive.

Refugee programming is a space that libraries can and should enter to truly be inclusive and provide needed service to underserved communities. While these programs are unlikely to be possible on site in a library, they must be more than one-off outreach events to be successful. The trust and relationships built and the quality library services provided via pop-up programming in refugee communities foster what we believe will be a lifelong love of literacy and libraries in the children we are working with and will contribute to their future success. &

## *Thank you!*

Thank you to our friends at **Baker & Taylor** for sponsoring the 2019 ALA Youth Media Awards live webcast and the ALSC/YALSA joint member reception at the 2019 Midwinter Meeting. This sponsorship was received to recognize the invaluable role high-quality literature plays in the lives of children and young adults.



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# Couples Who Collaborate

## Erin and Philip Stead

MARY-KATE SABLESKI



Photo courtesy of Penguin Random House

**H**usband and wife Philip and Erin Stead are well-known as the team behind the Caldecott Award-winning *A Sick Day for Amos McGee* (2010), as well as several other titles that are a memorable part of any library collection.

Erin illustrated *A Sick Day for Amos McGee*, which, according to National Public Radio, was the first debut picturebook to win the award. Since that debut, Erin has illustrated five more books, with her sixth illustrated book, *Music for Mister Moon*, coming in 2019 (written by Philip). In addition to collaborating with Philip, Erin has illustrated two books written by her longtime friend Julie Fogliano.

Philip is author and/or illustrator of many highly acclaimed picturebooks. As an author, Philip has written three books, and has both written and illustrated fourteen books. The couple has collaborated on three books.

Both grew up in Farmington Hills, MI, and met in high school art class. They married in 2005, and moved to New York City. After moving back to Ann Arbor, they began writing and illustrating books together. They currently live in Ann Arbor with their toddler daughter.

The couple is often asked how they can possibly spend so much time together, in their personal and professional lives. They say they cannot imagine it any other way and shared more about their process, the arrival of their first child, and their thoughts on creating books for children.

**Q: How has the arrival of your first child influenced your work?**

E: It has re-ignited my drive for how important I think reading to your child is. I am not surprised, but I am surprised at how strongly I feel all over again. It's like I found picturebooks all over again. I always thought it was important, and always thought my job was one of the greatest jobs in the world, but to see it in action is really fun every day. She's a great reader!

P: I think we'd always been making the case that children tend to be better readers than adults give them credit for. We shouldn't assume that they don't have capabilities, but even I was surprised at how good a reader can be at one year old. I think before having a child, we were imagining our audience as the three and up crowd, but more and more I'm realizing that our audience can be even younger.

**Q: Will your work shift now that you can imagine it reaching a younger audience?**



**Mary-Kate Sableski** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Dayton. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in children's literature and literacy instructional methods. Her primary area of research interest is diversity in children's literature.



P: I think I am the more likely candidate to start moving down the age range. Obviously, we've been reading a lot of Eric Carle lately. I've always liked Eric Carle, and I'd like to try a book like that. I don't think I had really thought of that until now.

E: And many of the people we knew who were our favorites, it has just reinforced for us how envious we are of their careers.

**Q: Have you read any of your books to your daughter?**

E: *Amos McGee* came out as a board book recently, so she was read *Amos* early on.

P: It was the only thing I could recite out loud as we were walking to calm her down. It is the only book I know all the way through because I've read it hundreds of times.

E: I struggle because I want her to love reading, but I don't want her to love reading because it's what her parents do.

P: I had experience with that growing up, because my parents were both musicians. As a child it felt important to me to have my own independence, so we want to be really careful about forcing our world on her.

**Q: How are your processes different when you work alone or together?**

E: I think what we would normally tell you is that we never really work separate, but this year has been different.

P: Yes, this year has been an outlier, but I think we will probably return to normal, once she is a little bit older. The old answer to this question was basically that we don't work alone and that the finished products might look different from one another, but behind the scenes they are completely integrated processes. I am often helping with the design of Erin's books. Erin is one of the only people I trust with revisions as I'm working. We both are very tight lipped as we're working. We don't share things with our editor, and we don't share things with our agent, and it's not until the book is done basically until we put it out there. So that means that until that time we only have each other to kick things back and forth with and decide if good decisions are being made.

E: We have good colleagues, but within the studio, it's always just the two of us. It is unfortunate for the editors or the agents, because it's always just two against one. We do need help solving problems, but most of the time, it cycles between the two of us in the studio.

**Q: How is it different to collaborate with other illustrators?**

E: Julie Fogliano and I have known each other for over fifteen years. She also used to write in secret, like I used to draw. The list she has been able to work with is pretty impressive. She has been a great resource for me because she has three



Artwork from *Music for Mister Moon* (2019), used with permission of Penguin Random House.

children. Working with Julie has been really fun because she is my friend, and she was also really trusting, so once I got her manuscripts, I was able to kind of hide and work in the same way. Phil really helped me with parsing that book out.

P: I think that the work we do with others, still tends to be the work we do...

E: Together. I have been able to work with some great authors, but the most fun I've had is working with you, Phil, although it is the hardest.

P: Well, what's nice working with your partner is that when you have an idea you can talk about it and then execute it immediately. And when you don't work with your partner, it might be someone hundreds of miles away or maybe you don't even know them, you don't have that immediacy, and sometimes the excitement about the idea can wane.

E: Or sometimes it's a matter of trying an idea, and five minutes later we realize it's a failure. And, through an email to the editor, the agent, the author and back around and sometimes





Artwork from *Music for Mister Moon* (2019), used with permission of Penguin Random House.

by that time you've played telephone and it's not quite what you had in mind. So I think a lot of experimentation and failure occurs without anyone even knowing.

**Q: What is most difficult about working together?**

E: We want to impress each other.

P: While we are working in the studio, we are not very sentimental about the work being made. So one of us can walk into the studio and can recognize that a person is not doing something well or is just down a wrong track, it can just be said.

E: The problem is, you're at work, and you know what you're working on is not good enough, and the person comes in and says, that's not good enough, and it's that realization that, I know...and I think that can bring a little frustration. It's an immediacy of emotion without any time to temper it. Do you think so?

P: Yeah. I've come to rely on it though.

E: Oh yeah, I would be lost without it; it's just that it took us a little while to separate some of the little kid emotions to relying on each other.

**Q: We would love to hear about your newest book, *Music for Mister Moon*.**

P: That book is the book that Erin worked on towards the end of her pregnancy; [the book] didn't get done on time. The early stages were really kind of a blur.

E: I laid the book out before the baby was born and I got a lot of the artwork done, and I decided right before she was born that it wasn't good enough and I had to start over. And I think at that point you had a heart attack, Phil. I knew what I wanted the book to look like and it was all laid out, so it was just a matter of executing it. I was lucky because she was so small at the time that I was able to draw with her, most of the time. Towards the end of the book, Phil ended up taking her out. I really enjoyed having an infant, and I wasn't really willing to compromise either life that I had, so since she was so small, she stayed with me. The book has a lot of meaning for us. It is about loving something that maybe not everyone in your life fully understands. The protagonist loves playing the cello but doesn't really want to do it in front of a crowd of people. So that spurs an adventure that kind of is in her imagination.

P: It is a book about an introvert, and it is a book for introverts. Introverts are often put in positions where they have to defend their introvertedness. I think that we're often feeling as though the thing we are doing has value even if we're doing it alone. And I think that is an especially important thing to think about because it's almost impossible to be alone right now.

**Q: What is it like to share your books with children?**

E: I feel like this is one of those questions where I am going to have a better answer. With *Amos* we have had so many different experiences reading it all over the world.

P: Yeah, I didn't know *Amos* was funny until reading it in front of children. A lot of things that adults point out in the book are that it is sweet or kind or has a tinge of melancholy. Those are the things that we thought made it, but it turns out that when you turn the page and there is an elephant playing chess with an old man, that is really funny to five- and six-year-olds. I think I learned more about the things that we made after having seen them in their intended context, which has been pretty cool. We avoided speaking in front of large groups of just children for a long time in part because it is unpredictable. When you get into a school, you don't know what it's going to be like. But, I have come to enjoy it because while those situations can be unpredictable you get nothing but realness and honesty from those children.

E: Which is why we got into this in the first place. Making children's books as an art form is, I think, the most honest audience you are going to get, and I think that is the best part for me.



The Steads working in their home studio. Photo courtesy of Penguin Random House.

P: I actually started reaching out this year, actively seeking more library and school visits, because I feel like I really need the presence of children because the whole world has become so toxic. I just want to be around kids, because grown-ups have just made a complete mess of everything, so I am more and more trying to get myself in front of kids. Because while they might exhaust me, I feel later on rejuvenated in a way that I wouldn't if I was just speaking in front of grown-ups.

**Q: What are your thoughts on the #we need diverse books movement, and how does your work fit into that landscape?**

P: I think the real missing piece in the landscape right now is that for a long time "universal books" were still featuring primarily people with white skin and that was part of what made them universal in people's minds. If you were to feature a person with any other color skin, those books were specific in some way and they weren't universal. We have made some choices to try and push back against that in our work.

E: We did before this became a hashtag, which is not to belittle anything that has happened since.

P: I think in part because we have always been a huge fan of Ezra Jack Keats. I think this was on his mind decades ago. *The*

*Snowy Day* is a perfect example of a universal story, and it is a book that I pull off the shelf constantly as I am working.

E: Right and I think too that if you are a librarian or a book seller you are constantly around the books that are coming out every year and you are unboxing new books and I think you are just aware. When you are living in a world where you see different people and then you go into a store and you realize it's not very representational of what you are seeing out in the world. I think that it is good if we all do a better job. I think that because we work in very short books, and you can't solve every problem per book. I think that can weigh us down a little bit in trying to correct decades of bad behavior. It is a difficult thing at the moment because there is some nuance to the correction because of the format we are working in. But what I say is that I make stories about human experiences, and there are some experiences I should not make stories about and there are other ones that if I feel like I see a certain child or character in the story and I don't feel like I'm telling a story that I shouldn't tell then I feel pretty free to move forward.

P: One example that I have brought up a few times is that when I was a kid I was a huge baseball fan. I used to absorb so much information about baseball. I would go to the library, check out a million books, memorize statistics, everything.





Artwork from *Music for Mister Moon* (2019), used with permission of Penguin Random House.

When I was around nine years old, I learned for the first time about the Negro Leagues, and I remember feeling incredibly cheated because there was this entirely separate universe of baseball that had all of these other incredibly interesting characters and this whole set of statistics and all these things and I didn't know how to learn about it. There was so little about it in the library and when I would see it, I know this now as a grown up, but when I would see it, it would be Black History Month or other small relevant times throughout the year where it might pop up. But that stinks not just for children of color but also someone like myself who was just interested in baseball. Baseball should be universal and yet we have even found ways to compartmentalize the experience of baseball and I think the more we can push our reins past that and recognize that it is one big human experience it would be better.

E: Well, none of us are in this job because we think well we've nailed it. We have done the best we can do in reading and making books anyway so let's just quit while we are ahead. I

think there is poor representation in board books, speaking of someone who is outnumbered by now and I think we can all do better and we are working on it.

**Q: Is there any professional jealousy between the two of you, since Erin won the Caldecott Medal?**

E: I mean you have won it a few times . . . [sometimes Phil is mistakenly listed as the winner]

P: There are a number of times *I am* listed as a Caldecott winner. I tend to think of the books we do together as "books we have done together."

E: I definitely don't feel like I won that without Phil. That book was Phil's brainchild with our editor, and I would not have made it without the two of them. Not just because I wouldn't have had anything to illustrate, but I wouldn't have been an illustrator. The other thing is that everything that came with it, our whole life, we got to experience that together and we made a book together so it all makes sense. The only real difference is that I have a different Wikipedia page than you. I couldn't do my job without Phil, I think that he is one of the best picturebook authors out there right now, and I am really picky about my manuscripts. It is a real joy to be able to demand a book out of you whenever I want it.

P: I get to have a Caldecott winner as my default choice to illustrate my stories and not a lot of people can say that.

**Q: It sounds like you really are living the dream.**

E: Well, I mean, most of that is because of librarians, so thanks to all of you!

**Q: Any advice or words of wisdom for librarians that you would like to share?**

P: My words of wisdom would just be to be enthusiastic. I think we are living in a time right now that has forgotten the value of enthusiasm and instead has embraced the value of criticism. I think very few things come from criticism and a whole lot of good things come from enthusiasm.

E: I feel like, and I have felt this for a long time, specifically after the Caldecott, that librarians are by nature incredibly generous people. The Caldecott itself is an example of that. I mean you guys go to school forever, spend a lot of time on a panel judging books, and then change somebody's life and you know it, and you don't get anything for it, and I think that is an incredible thing that you do. But that is an example that is separate from the thing you all chose to do every day which is you have a job where you have to be interested and enthusiastic about everybody's interests and that is very, very generous. &

# Putting the “Extra” in Extraordinary

## Creating a Library Comic Con

MOLLY VIRELLO

I am a lady of many hats—children’s librarian by day, Renaissance faire rogue and comic con cosplay queen by night (and weekend). I was drawn to these activities not only because of my passion, but because of other people’s exuberance for the characters, the activities, and the stories. It’s something I see in the library all the time when children want to share stories about their hobbies or their new favorite book.

That exuberance got me thinking—how could I share my weekend passions with my library patrons?

You might be saying to yourself, “It’s cool that you have such interesting hobbies, but WHY would I want to throw a comic con in my library when patrons can just go to one on their own time?”

Our profession focuses on closing access gaps. We know that libraries bring communities together, are avenues of learning, and help people have experiences they might otherwise not have for whatever reason. Comic cons are expensive, and not everyone is privileged enough to be able to afford them. Aren’t we, as librarians, all about equity of access? Why



The original band of heroes from FCBD 2.0 (2014) with author and librarian Molly Virello second from the right dressed as Wonder Woman.

should access to experience be any different from access to physical materials?

“Great,” you might say, “but throwing this kind of program is a BIG job, and I’m not sure that is something my library/budget/staff can handle.”

While those are valid concerns, throwing a comic con or other big idea program doesn’t have to break the bank or be mentally, physically, or financially exhausting. I’m here to show you that throwing such an event is doable. And while my experiences and planning techniques might not be the exact way you would throw a similar program at your library, they are a starting point. You can learn from my experience, take those ideas, and improve upon them. And don’t be afraid to program what excites you. While we traditionally strive to ignite passion in others, we should also take that fire and use it to fuel our own ideas.

When I started as a part-time children’s librarian, I inherited a Free Comic Book Day (FCBD) program. FCBD is always the first Saturday in May, when participating comic book shops around the world give away comic books to people who visit



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their stores. It’s a fabulous day full of comics and camaraderie, and I wanted to keep it going at my library.

In 2013, the FCBD program at my library had been run as a two-hour passive program. There was a craft, a table with some coloring sheets, the opportunity to take photos with a cardboard standee, and a scavenger hunt, all in a single room in the lower level of the library. As this was my first real program as a new librarian, and already established, I thought I would keep everything the same and see how it went. We had about thirty people attend.

At this point in my life, I enjoyed reading comics and graphic novels, I liked dressing up for Halloween, I had watched all the superhero movies released so far, and I had even written my MIS thesis on why graphic novels should be included in school settings. Yet I had never been to an actual comic convention on my own. I didn’t know what I was missing at the time, but I did know there was some work that I needed, and wanted, to do to make the FCBD program better.

The next year rolled around and, taking a page out of Walt Disney World’s book, I decided I wanted to have live-action characters. I reached out to some of my friends who cosplay, or dress up, for comic cons and asked them if they would be willing to come in costume.

I managed to cajole two of my best friends, a Wolverine and a female Robin, into service with the promise of a homemade dinner. I dressed up as Wonder Woman, complete with duct-taped boots. Another friend, who couldn’t make it, graciously donated his Spider-Man costume to the cause, provided I could find someone to wear it (*spoiler alert: I did*). The friend I asked to wear Spidey got stuck in the web of wearing the costume with the promise of his favorite cookies, and I spent some time coaching him on poses and key Spidey phrases (“With great power comes great responsibility” after all).

Live action heroes now sorted, I thought about activities that would be more active and engaging. I made stations like Kryptonite Disposal (foil balls that had to be moved with chopsticks to a box without being touched by hand), Professor X’s Guess (guess the number of jelly beans in the jar), and Spidey’s Web (a spider web made of masking tape where kids had to toss objects and see if they would stick). Activities finalized, I found a local comic book shop who donated some comics for our giveaways. With more hands-on activities, live superheroes, a trivia contest and prize, and the encouragement of families (and staff) to dress up, we had seventy attendees that year. I knew I was on to something and pressed to make it bigger.

It was shortly after FCBD 2.0 that I experienced my first *real* comic con, ComiConn—a small (at the time) event in Connecticut, where I was bitten by the proverbial radioactive spider, and my life was forever altered.



As the word spread, heroes answered. The heroes of FCBD 3.0 (2015) with Virello in the center dressed as Supergirl.

I got to see what all the excitement was about, find out what other people loved about the day, and figure out what it was that I loved. I attended panels on how to cosplay, looked at exhibits, met some amazing cosplayers, and watched as many shows as I could. I left the con plotting how I could make an event like that happen at my library.

I attended several more cons that year, walking away from each one with more ideas. I worked on creating my own costumes. I volunteered at the Connecticut Children’s Medical Center’s Superhero Day, where I met a few reporters, and we got to talking about superheroes, comic cons, children’s excitement regarding anything hero-related, and the library. They were interested in what I was programming and invited me to contact them as my FCBD event drew closer.

I reached out about a week and a half before the program, and they published a little blurb online and in print about what was happening. Getting out in my community and doing what I loved allowed me to meet the right people, essentially getting my program free publicity.

That year, more than two hundred people attended. We outgrew that single lower level room of the library and had to move up to the main level. This not only gave us more space but also more visibility. We got a lot of feedback from families about how much they liked the program and how much they’d been looking forward to it, especially how kids got to meet their real-life superheroes.

With the success of FCBD 3.0, and with everything I learned from the conventions I’d attended, I knew it was time to go big or go home. And so, in 2016, our fourth year of FCBD programming, we introduced our first full-blown Southington Library ComiCon. This event took an entire year of planning, budgeting, organizing, brainstorming, and nail-biting.

Staying true to the spirit of comic cons, we looked at what was happening in pop culture and what our patrons were

interested in. That year (2016) saw the rise of Pokémon Go. We already had the established popularity of the old GameBoy game and TV show, and then with the hype of the impending app release among patrons, we went with an All Things Pokémon theme.

## Spreading the Word

For publicity, we contacted local newspapers, created a Facebook event page, used some of our budget for online advertising (also through Facebook), and made a giant sign to hang on the outside of the library building the week leading up to the event. I also looked into other free places to get the word out online, all through location-specific events listings.

We also had a series of e-mail blasts sent out to our patrons and ran Facebook teasers in the month leading up to the event.

To generate excitement and awareness among our patrons, we held a series of monthly superhero events—storytimes with a superhero guest who would come and take pictures, read a story, and interact with the kids. We posted signage on all of the public desks and tables around the library, alerting patrons about the upcoming event. We created displays of our superhero materials to draw attention and interest (which also boosted circulation!). We were slowly preparing our patrons for the extravaganza that was coming.

During the planning stages, we dove deep into what we wanted to see at the event. I thought about what I had seen at the bigger events and how we could apply that model to what we offer at the library. The entire children’s department brainstormed what we were good at and tapped into our in-house talent to stretch our budget. One librarian made a Pokéball craft, another started planning superhero storytimes, and a third got creative with edible Pokémon creations.

We created Pinterest boards for all our crafts and activities, weeding out ideas that proved too impractical or expensive. From previous FCBD programs, I’ve found that hands-on activities work best for this kind of event. Kids and adults like to get up close and personal with the action, the characters, and the experience. When you’re allowed to touch everything, it becomes that much more real, and we strive to bring fantasy to life.

While we were adept at creating some things, I also knew our limitations. We couldn’t make *everything*. So, for exhibits, I tapped the connections I had made at other cons and local businesses who gave us good deals.

We were loaned a life-size Star Wars prop area that was built for another local con happening later that year. It was mutually beneficial; we promoted their event, while also providing a cool experience for our patrons. They also gave us passes to their con for a giveaway. Again using my comic con

connections, I contacted some display vehicles who would set up in our parking lot, so kids could see S.H.I.E.L.D cars in action—lights and sirens blazing.

With the static exhibits finalized, I booked a face painter, a professional princess sing-along, and a balloon twister. I reached out to three comic books shops about donations, to which they readily agreed.

For all our planning, we couldn’t predict how busy the day itself was going to be—but judging from our past programs, we were hoping for a large turnout. To be safe, we contacted the local police department to help us monitor traffic and ensure the safety of everyone involved. They sent over a few officers who directed traffic when the parking lot was full and helped give directions about what fun things were happening where.

Since we had outside exhibits, we blocked off one of our parking lots, therefore needing cones and a police monitor to make sure no unauthorized vehicles snuck in, effectively keeping our patrons safe.

With the outside safety concerns addressed, we took pains to enforce existing policies about food and dress code inside. We wanted to ensure that we kept things family-friendly, safe, and fun for all involved, while not stifling creativity and expression. After all, we encouraged our attendees to dress up for the occasion, just like a real con!

For our dress code, we limited the amount of exposed skin allowed in costume, what props and replica “weapons” were allowed—making sure there were absolutely no sharp objects or anything that fired a projectile (not even a Nerf object)—and tried to keep costumed characters from being too scary. We also kept a fairly strict count of attendees because of building and fire codes. We looked at the rules and regulations that other comic cons already had in place when writing our own policies, since we didn’t want to reinvent the wheel.

Not wanting to waste an opportunity to give back, we partnered with a local Boy Scout troop, and together we ran a can and bottle drive—making us Recycling Superheroes. Anyone who came to our con was encouraged to bring their cans and bottles for free recycling, which we included in all the publicity and event pages, well in advance of the day. A portion of the money collected was donated back to us for the Library Expansion Fund.

## And . . . Action!

The day of the Southington Library ComiCon arrived, and we were ready. The library opened at 9 a.m., but the event didn’t start until 10 a.m. We needed that extra hour to set-up all the events, exhibits, crafts, and performers. We opened the doors with an Anna and Elsa sing-along—to rousing applause.

After that, we kept the ball rolling with constant activities. We arranged our schedule so that we had some activities happening for the entire event—scavenger hunts, coloring, video game tournaments, tabletop gaming, storytimes, specific crafts, Superhero Training Camp, and other activities—scheduled to start every half hour or hour and only lasting for a specified amount of time. This constantly rotating schedule, we hoped, would keep people from getting bored and encourage them to stay in the library to try all the activities.

A nonstop line-up works up an appetite, and that meant having food readily available for our patrons. We had a free water tent, and we invited a local food truck to set up in our front parking lot. Attendees were advised to bring cash if they planned to purchase food, which was the *only* out-of-pocket expense for patrons.

When all was said and done, we had almost nine hundred people attend the very first official Southington Library ComiCon in 2016—a major increase since our humble FCBD beginning three years earlier.

Those numbers and this story might seem daunting, but it should also reassure you. This program didn’t happen

overnight. It took time, patience, and a lot of planning and commitment.

An event like a library comic con has longevity and fluidity. It grows with you and reflects your experiences, what’s happening in pop culture, and your patrons’ interests. People are always seeking out new and exciting experiences. Libraries are uniquely positioned to offer just that—often in a budget friendly way.

With a little elbow-grease, determination, and perseverance, you too can throw a big idea program. Do you have a passion for Renaissance fairs? Host your own! (I did, but that’s a story for another time.) Are you obsessed with *The Greatest Showman*? Throw a small-scale circus. Love *The Great British Bakeoff*? Conduct your own. Stuck on *Downton Abbey*? Host a high tea. Have you noticed something else your patrons are interested in? Think of how you can use it to get them through your front doors.

When an idea strikes, write it down. No matter how far-fetched, dream big and make it a reality with the resources available to you. Don’t underestimate the power of your community’s interest, engagement, and generosity and your staff’s creativity. &



Army Specialist Ivory Mitchell, 21, of Green Bay, WI, loves sharing book time with her little sister, Solara, 3. Ivory was stationed at Fort Carson in Colorado and spent nine months in Iraq, so she relished coming home to the comfort of family and books. Photo courtesy of Leah Liebergen.

# Free Book, More Reading?

## Assessing the Impact of a Free Book Collaboration

BRIAN PETERS, MARISSA MARTINEZ, AND SUSAN SPICER

A growing body of research points to the positive impact parents can have on their children when they read to them on a regular basis. This includes improved future academic performance as well as the promotion of important social and emotional development skills.<sup>1</sup>

The Salt Lake County (UT) Library wanted to better understand the impact a free book program can have on reading frequency. Staff at the county library's Byington Reading Room put together a thirteen-question survey in both English and Spanish for parents of children receiving a free book. The survey was distributed over a four-week period in the winter of 2018, and 183 surveys were completed by parents visiting the reading room.

The Byington Reading Room, located in the South Main Public Health Center, is a partnership among Salt Lake County Library Services, Salt Lake County Health Department, and the University of Utah Hospital and Clinics, serving a population in excess of 150,000 and pulling from a number of nearby cities and neighborhoods. Each child who comes to the South Main Public Health Center can take and keep one book. The 500-square-foot reading room is located in

the same building as two health clinics. University of Utah Health operates a sliding-scale health center on one side, and the Salt Lake County Health Department runs a low-income clinic for women, infants, and children on the other side.

In a typical year, the reading room gives away more than fifteen thousand books. The books come from a combination of discards from the other eighteen county libraries, community donations, and a small book budget funded by the county library.

The two librarians at the reading room also do offsite programming for school-age children and teenagers at area refugee and low-income housing complexes, as well as at a nearby youth services housing center. Those offsite programs serve more than thirteen hundred youth each year.

### The Survey

The anonymous survey consisted of thirteen questions and a comment section. The survey had four "yes or no" questions



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and nine multiple choice questions. The queries included the following:

**Do you use your neighborhood library?**

**If not, why?** Too far away, Fines, Don't know where it is, Don't have a library card

**How many times have you been to the Byington Reading Room?**

Once, 2–5 times, 6–10 times, 11–20 times, 20+ times

**How many books do you have at home?**

1–10, 11–40, 41–70, 71–100, 100+

**How often do you read to your child each week?**

0, 1–2 times, 3–4 times, 5–7 times

Because both health clinics serve a large refugee community, one of the questions asked what language the families spoke at home and to list that language. Respondents listed seventeen different languages, including Farsi, Nepali, Somali, Arabic, Afaan Oromoo, Swahili, Tongan, Vietnamese, and Thai. Spanish-language speakers comprised 45 percent of the completed surveys.

After an analysis of the survey results, several important patterns emerged. First, the number of books a family owned appeared to be a good indication of the frequency at which parents read to their children. The analysis showed that the more books a family owned, the more frequently the parents read to their children each week. This is illustrated in figure 1.<sup>2</sup> For families with only one to ten books, which represented one-third of respondents, 45 percent read to their children only one to two times per week. But as the number of books a family owns increases, so does the reading frequency.

Other researchers have found a similar correlation between books at home and reading frequency. Mol and Bus did a meta-analysis of print exposure research in 2011, and the authors found that “home literacy activities from an early age contribute substantially to young children’s language and reading comprehension. . . . Children who have had storybooks read to them frequently—and who have parents who read themselves and own many books—enter school with larger vocabularies and more advanced comprehension skills than their peers who grow up in poorer home literacy environments.”<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the number of books at home, library use was another good indicator of parental reading frequency. Of the parents surveyed, 60 percent used their local library, and of those who used the library, 81 percent read to their children three or more times per week. In contrast, 40 percent of the

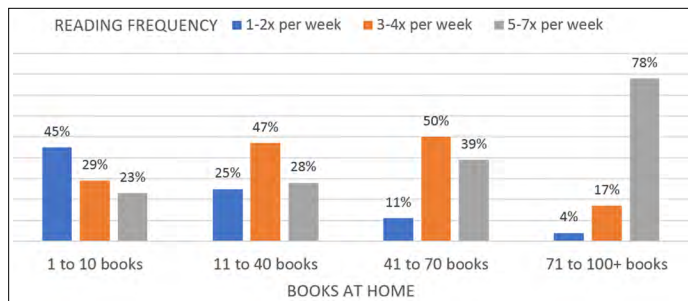


Figure 1. Number of books at home vs. reading frequency

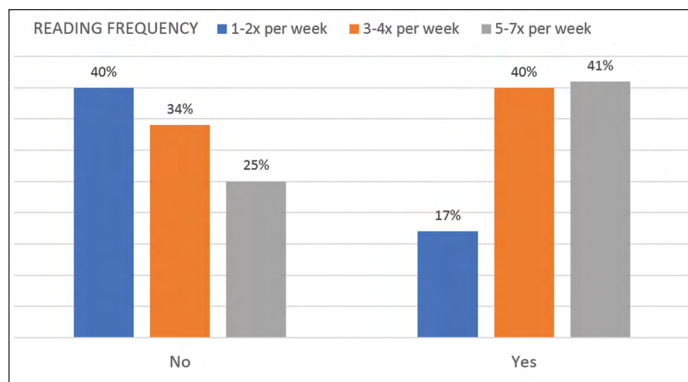


Figure 2. Do you use your neighborhood library?

parents who did not use their local library only read to their children once or twice a week, as shown in figure 2.

The survey results also pointed to the important role the reading room’s free book program had in growing a family’s home library. For those families on their first visit, 52 percent had only one to ten books at home. Compare that to families who have visited the reading room six to ten times, and the number of families with one to ten books at home drops to 17 percent, which is illustrated in figure 3.

The number of visits a family has made to the reading room also appears to positively impact parental reading frequency. As shown in figure 4, 44 percent of first-time visitors read to their children only one to two times a week. Reading frequency gradually increases with the number of visits a family has made to the clinic’s reading room.

Research has consistently shown the important connection among parental reading frequency, school readiness, and academic performance. Gottfried et al. found that “reading to children during the opening years of their development has long-term educational benefits that extend throughout the academic lifespan.”<sup>4</sup>

The recent study by Mendelsohn et al. looked beyond academic performance and concluded parenting activities such as “reading aloud and play . . . promote social-emotional development as reflected through reductions in disruptive behaviors.”<sup>5</sup>

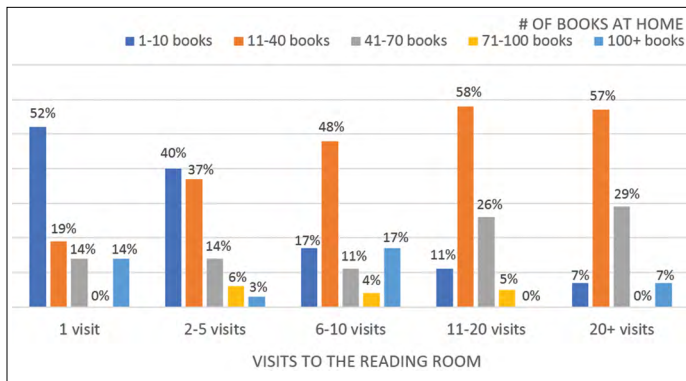


Figure 3. Number of books at home vs. number of visits to the Reading Room

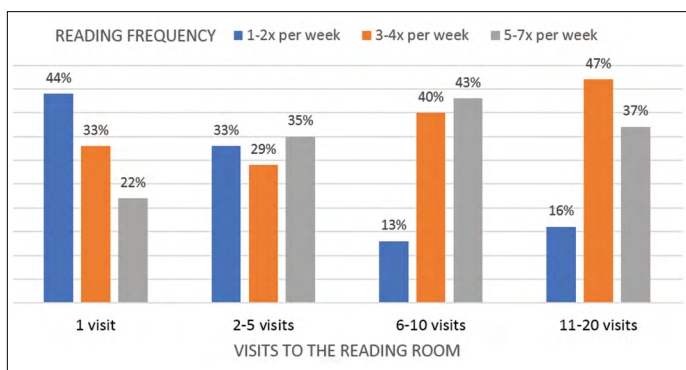


Figure 4. Reading frequency vs. number of visits to the Reading Room

The reading room's fairly limited survey illustrates the important interplay between a family's access to books and how frequently parents read to their children. These results reinforce the findings from other similarly focused research.

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2. Figures 1–4 do not add up to 100 percent because of rounding. For figure 1, three people responded that they do not read to their children at all each week, and those responses are not included in the figure. For figure 3, three people responded that they did not have any books at home, and those responses were not included in the figure.
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A free book program is particularly important in low-income and refugee communities where the opportunity to access books can be limited. Poverty has been shown to be a risk factor in a number of child development areas. For example, research by Buckingham, Beaman, and Wheldall reported children in economically disadvantaged households are far more likely to start school with low emergent literacy skills, and that literacy gap continues to grow as those students move into higher grades. The developmental stage where family income plays the greatest role is early childhood.<sup>6</sup>

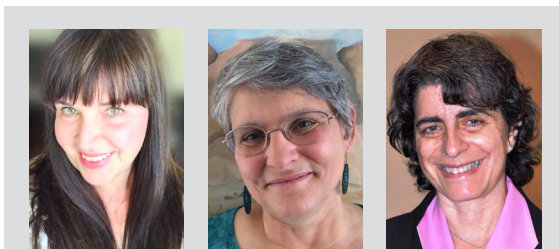
Another important, and often overlooked, aspect of the free book program is the child. For most children, merely receiving a random free book isn't enough. It is just as important for the child to find a book they are excited about.

The power of a child approaching a parent and asking to be read to should not be underestimated. While the survey did not ask this question directly, it is clear from discussions with parents that the children are as responsible for instigating storytime as the parents. Services such as reader's advisories at an early age can accelerate a child's association between reading and enjoyment.

Research by Tadesse and Washington suggests a similar interplay between the child-parent interaction where the children "beseech their parents to read the book to them." Their research also showed how a modest investment in a free book program made "an appreciable difference in young children's education and their relationship with family members."<sup>7</sup> &

# Reaching Out to Parents

Tess Prendergast, Betsy Diamant-Cohen, and Annette Y. Goldsmith



**Tess Prendergast, PhD,** is a Canadian children's librarian, researcher, and educator. Her most recent scholarly research explores early literacy in the lives of children with disabilities with a focus on the role of children's librarians. She works as a children's librarian in Vancouver, British Columbia, and teaches youth services courses at two post-secondary library education programs.

**Betsy Diamant-Cohen, DHD,** is an early literacy trainer and Executive Director of Mother Goose on the Loose, Baltimore. **Annette Y. Goldsmith, PhD,** is a synagogue librarian at the Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel in Los Angeles.

Most parents will agree that parenting, while rewarding, is also a very difficult job. When we provide for families in our library spaces, we really need to “be there” for parents so they feel welcome bringing their children to the library. Smiling at everyone, adults and children, when they enter the children's room, can go a long way towards making them feel comfortable.

Also, parents are very sensitive to what they perceive as surveillance and judgment from other parents as well as library staff. A withering look or brisk admonishment from a staff person is all it takes for a frazzled parent to decide they are not welcome and they likely won't be back. We need to ensure that we give parents consistently welcoming messages and encouragement, especially when we are addressing specific issues or problems with them. This column's links are meant to help all children's library staff members to develop in our roles as supportive resource people in *all* parents' lives as they raise their children.

## Ideabook: Libraries for Families

<https://www.packard.org/insights/resource/ideabook-libraries-families/>  
From a partnership between the Public Library Association and the Harvard Family Research Project, Ideabook offers a research-based framework to guide libraries' work in family engagement. Well-organized, easy-to-read, practical and flexible, this free, downloadable guidebook is a must for those who are looking to bolster and reinvigorate the way they are connecting with and supporting families. The five foundational practices of effective family engagement (Reach out; Raise up; Reinforce; Relate; and Reimagine) are defined and fully explained with case examples.

## Zero to Three

<https://www.zerotothree.org/parenting>  
This site for parents with babies from birth to age three focuses on transforming the science of early childhood into helpful resources, practical tools, and responsive policies for millions of parents. It contains practical information for early childhood and health professionals who work with young children and their caregivers as well as directly for parents. Short video clips supplement handouts and clearly written information on a variety of topics such as potty training, early literacy, developing self-esteem in the early years, and preparing for parenthood. This site supports ECRR's claim that parents are a child's first and best teacher and maintains that there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to raising children.

## Early Learning with Families 2.0

<http://elf2.library.ca.gov/>  
Early Learning with Families (ELF) is a Californian initiative that aims to support the ongoing evolution of library services to young children (0-5), their families and caregivers. This straightforward website contains small segments of information that can be used by anyone in any library to help rationalize a family-centered approach to developing impactful library services, programs, and collections for families with young children. Their approach to parents is based on Brazelton Touchpoints Center

(<https://www.brazeltontouchpoints.org/>) and emphasizes, among other things, that all parents are experts on their own children, bring their strengths, and have critical things to share during each of their child's developmental stages.

#### **Working with Teen Parents at Your Library: Where to Begin**

<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2018/08/working-with-teen-parents-at-your-library-where-to-begin/>

Kathryn Woody's blog post on behalf of the ALSC Library Service to Underserved Children and Their Caregivers committee outlines how to locate community partners, define your goals, and design your program for teen parents. A libguide covers general resources, including a handy list of nonfiction titles designed to help these teens develop their parenting skills. For inspiration, check out the links to four quite different but successful library programs, all of which have in common a respectful approach to teen parents as library users. Programs often include donated or purchased giveaways (books, car seats, etc.) along with the requisite training in early literacy.

#### **The Right Stuff listserv**

<http://fpg.unc.edu/presentations/right-stuff>

Compiled by Camille Catlett, this is a free monthly one-way listserv supported by the Vermont Agency of Education. Funded by the Vermont Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant, each issue features resources for supporting the learning and development of young children who are culturally, linguistically, and individually diverse, birth to Grade 3, and their families. Past issues can be accessed at the website above; all issues may be freely shared or reproduced.

#### **Scary Mommy Blog**

<https://www.scarymommy.com/>

The Scary Mommy blog was started in 2008 by mom Jill Smokler as an online baby book to chronicle her stay-at-home days with her children. Other moms who were feeling challenged, lonely, frustrated, and clueless latched onto her perky words conveying the theme that parenting doesn't have to

be perfect. Although the site is now run by the *Some Spider* media company, the cheerful irreverent tone accompanying the practical advice and everyday life stories has attracted millions of parents. This is a great site to recommend to parents who seem to be overwhelmed and want to hear what other mothers have to say.

#### **Read-a-Rama**

<https://read-a-rama.org/>

Developed by Dr. Michelle Martin, Read-a-Rama is an action-packed literacy program for children ages 4-11 and their families, especially underserved families, that uses children's books as the springboard for all the activities. In addition to running forty-hour week-long summer camps, Read-a-Rama also partners with churches, libraries, community centers, and homeless shelters for year-round programming. Read-a-Rama combines books, music, art, physical activity, and more to get families excited about reading.

#### **¡Colorín Colorado! Parent Guide: The Resources at Your Library**

<http://www.colorincolorado.org/guide/parent-guide-resources-your-library>

Research-based bilingual education site Colorín Colorado is well known to children's librarians, but as with any large site, there are often hidden gems. This handout for parents (also available in Spanish) is an excellent outreach tool for families new to library services. You will also find a four-minute video, "Reaching out to Latino families," featuring author and literacy advocate Pat Mora, which emphasizes developing a relationship of trust to dispel families' feelings of fearfulness and vulnerability in coming to the library.

#### **Vroom**

<https://www.vroom.org/>

Vroom is a free subscription service of videos and developmental tips sent to a parent's phone daily. Each tip, available in English and Spanish, is based on brain science and targets the age of children. &



# ADVOCACY SHADE!

IT'S NOT A COMPETITION...  
... IS IT?

A. MARTIN 2018



Amy Martin was the 2018-19 Member Content Editor for Everyday Advocacy, an initiative of ALSC.



**PUBLIC LIBRARY & SCHOOL LIBRARY**  
**COLLABORATION TOOLKIT**

*Discover best practices for initiating and engaging in public and school library collaborations.*

Both public and school libraries are community centers at heart, with the same goal: providing safe, welcoming environments and access to information. When public and school librarians and library workers engage in collaboration, community members reap the benefits.

This toolkit includes context and suggestions for creating partnerships of all sizes.

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**FREE DOWNLOAD AT**  
**[WWW.ALA.ORG/ALSC/COLLAB-KIT](http://WWW.ALA.ORG/ALSC/COLLAB-KIT)**

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## What's Inside...

How to Initiate the Collaborative Process

Research to Support Your Collaborative Efforts

Concrete Examples of Successful Collaboration

How to Keep the Collaboration Going

*and much more!*

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AASL/ALSC/YALSA  
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Louise Seaman

# BECHTEL FELLOWSHIP

\$4,000 grant given to a qualified children's librarian to spend four weeks or more reading and studying at the **Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature of the George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville.**

The Baldwin Library contains a special collection of 130,000 volumes of children's literature published mostly before 1950. The fellowship is endowed in memory of Louise Seaman Bechtel and Ruth M. Baldwin.

## CRITERIA:

Each application will be evaluated on the following:

- The description of the topic of study for the fellowship period.
- The applicant's demonstration of ongoing commitment to motivating children to read.
- The applicants must be prepared to spend a minimum of four weeks in Gainesville. **The time spent does not have to be successive weeks.**

**APPLICATIONS OPEN MARCH 2019**

To learn more about the Bechtel Fellowship, please visit <http://bit.ly/bechtelalsc>

Photo Credit: Allison Kaplan, 2011 Bechtel Fellowship Recipient

Photo taken at the Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature as part of fellowship research project