



Accessibility Hour at the Northbrook Public Library

Planning an outing for the whole family isn't easy for Liz Wang. Aiden, her second-grade son, has autism and needs special tools to feel comfortable and focus. When the library began organizing Accessibility Hour and other sensory-friendly family events, the Wangs immediately noticed that Aiden was participating and enjoying his time. During Accessibility Hour, families with special needs are invited to visit the library one hour before the regular opening to tour the building, check out materials, and participate in sensory-friendly activities.



Living History in Oak Park

Teens engage with people who lived through some of America's most notable historic events and eras, such as the Civil Rights Movement, via this grant-funded project in Oak Park. The project, led by youth for youth, features teens meeting regularly at the library to research a topic of their choosing, not for school or a grade, but purely out of interest. Their research, conducted over six months, culminates in a public presentation to an audience of family, friends, and community members. This past year, the group of ten youths age 13 to 23 met twice a week at the Oak Park Public Library, with their work facilitated by Billy Che Brooks, former deputy minister of education for the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party who later joined the Better Boys Foundation in Chicago's North Lawndale neighborhood. Azrienna Winston, a senior at Oak Park River Forest High School who organized the presentation event, cites the significance of learning about history from someone who was really there, in person. Librarian Jose Cruz notes the benefits to the young people in the opportunity to set their own curriculum, take initiative, and work collaboratively with one another to educate themselves.

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Introducing Students to Creative Technologies at the Joliet Public Library

Through an LSTA-funded Project Next Generation Grant, the Joliet Public Library offers learning and access to cutting-edge technology for students in grades 5-12 at its Ottawa Street Branch Digital Media Studio. Creative learning sessions include development and launch of a streaming channel for video games, virtual reality technology programming, printing a robot kit in 3D, and video interviewing Illinois veterans. With this grant, students with limited access to computers can learn about ground-breaking technology at the library with trained staff as mentors; skills that will be useful in their studies and when they seek to enter the workforce.



Legal Assistance at the Freeport Public Library

In partnership with Prairie State Legal Services of Illinois, Freeport Public Library is bringing free legal assistance to library patrons one day per month. Lawyers from nonprofit Prairie State participate by making presentations starting at noon, then offering one-on-one sessions, with the goal of enabling low-income residents avoid evictions and other types of civil legal problems. The organization does not handle criminal cases. The program furthers the library's goal to collaborate with local organizations to expand the library's services. County residents are eligible if their household income is less than 125 percent of the poverty level or are at least 60 years old.



The Chicago Collections Consortium

Founded on the premise of digital collaboration and scholarship, Chicago Collections is a consortium of over 40 libraries and museums focused on the preservation and promotion of Chicago's history and culture. The creation of Chicago Collections' EXPLORE portal connects users including students, teachers, researchers and the general public to free open access to member collections' holdings. Chicago Collections' connected learning offerings are made possible by the collective impact of institutions working together. Through curation of digital exhibitions and free public programs, Chicago Collections provides scholarship and discussion on Chicago's history. Chicago Collections' approach recognizes the power of working together and collectively pooling resources and talent to build a stronger community.



Internet Access at Belleville Public Library

Today, broadband connectivity and connected devices are essential, but far too many lack access to these tools. The Belleville Public Library is helping close that gap, enabling library card holders to check out portable WiFi "hot spots" for 30 days at a time. Borrowing the units is free, and so is the data. "The bandwidth is more than adequate for one device," library director Lee Spearman says, but they aren't meant to support streaming TVs or video games. Instead, they are intended to enable tasks from reading the morning paper, to online tax prep, applying for jobs, and doing research for school.



Business Incubation at the Champaign Public Library

"A lack of enough information is a top reason for startup failure," according to Champaign Public Library business specialist Stephanie Pitts-Noggle. To address this issue, the library opened Launch at the Library, a co-working space that offers events, research resources, collaboration areas, as well as assistance learning how to analyze competition, assess risk factors, find business contacts, and understand markets. The combination of dedicated space, resources, and expertise makes Launch at the Library, funded in partnership with the city of Champaign and the library's foundation, a valuable asset to would-be entrepreneurs and University of Illinois students, as well as current area businesses.



Eleven Days of Peace and Compassion in Carbondale

Since 2011 the Carbondale Public Library has worked with local organizations to create an annual 11 Days for Compassion, or 11 Days for Peace. On average, 35 programs will take place throughout the community over the course of the 11 Days. Programs bring community members together to network, problem-solve, learn, create art, and build cross-cultural understanding. Over the years 256 programs and exhibits have served thousands of participants through dozens of collaborating partners. The library won the ALA Excellence in Library Programming Award for this work in 2013, and Nobel Peace Prize Nominee John Dear used Carbondale as the model for launching the Nonviolent Cities Project. There are now 50 Nonviolent Cities projects across the U.S. and Canada.