

Ideabook

Libraries for Families



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Reimagine: Healthy Children, Healthy Families

What: Libraries are expanding their community partnerships to include health care professionals so that families are healthy and strong.

Why: Today, libraries are linking to a more varied group of community partners than ever before, such as schools, early childhood programs, parks and recreation departments—and especially, health care providers. Children are ready to learn when they are healthy. Making health information and resources available through libraries helps families support young children’s brain development, promote good health and nutrition habits, and access preventive services.

Ideas in Action:

Teaming Up with Nurses for a Healthy Community

Through a partnership with the Pima County Health Department, **Pima County Public Library** (AZ) hosts a Library Nurse Program. Responding to data showing that many families who come to libraries lack shelter, health insurance, or medical care, the library was inspired to do something different—add a registered nurse to its payroll. Today, one nurse is employed by the library and stationed at the Joel D. Valdez Main Library; ten others, who work for the health department, visit eleven of the twenty-seven branches in the system at least once a month. Wearing stethoscopes, the nurses provide health education and referrals to other health care resources in the area rather than actual medical care. In addition to helping patrons get the health information they need, the program has also reduced the number of 911 calls from the libraries.

Partnering with Pediatricians

Inspired by research showing the importance of parent-child relationships and reading for healthy brain development, pediatricians throughout Kansas have become part of the Turn A Page, Touch A Mind program, modeled after the national program Reach Out and Read. Funded by the Kansas Pediatric Foundation, Turn A Page, Touch A Mind supports doctors in giving reading advice and books at well-child checkups for children, ages six months through five years. The **Wichita Public Library** (KS) has been able to augment this program with the Checkup and Check Out For Kansas Kids initiative. With state library funds, librarians give participating physicians additional information to share with families, including flyers promoting local library events, and information about the key literacy skills children need before they enter kindergarten. In addition, librarians give physicians vouchers to give to families at well-child visits for free, new, developmentally appropriate books, redeemable only by visiting the library. This program has helped families build their home libraries and also brought new families to the library.

Engagement:
The 5Rs

Reimagining Libraries to Promote Healthy Lives

High youth and adult obesity rates are significant community health concerns in Houston. To address this community need, more than fifty agencies have partnered with **Houston Public Library's** (TX) Healthy L.I.F.E. (Literacy Initiative For Everyone) program to empower families, particularly youth and families from low-income backgrounds, to live and lead healthy lives. The initiative offers families information and tools for healthy living. Its approach is intergenerational, with topics such as "Creating Healthy Lifestyles Together" and "Organizing the Home for Stress-Free Living and School Success." Families can access other available services through the program, like signing up for a library card or enrolling in Your Texas Benefits. Over 3,100 family members have received services or resources through this program.

What Library Leaders Recommend:

- Meet with health care providers throughout the community in order to better understand community needs and focus activities and outreach efforts on the greatest health needs (e.g., obesity, asthma, etc.). Ask health care partners what they recommend for the library so it can assist filling identified needs and gaps.
- Start healthy initiatives in your library, such as yoga classes, walking book talks, and other events.



Create Welcoming Spaces: Outside the Library

What: Libraries support family engagement by bringing services and programming beyond the physical space of the library.

Why: Librarians are increasingly reaching out beyond the brick-and-mortar walls of the physical library to bring library resources, materials, and services to locations frequented by families. This practice makes libraries accessible to all families, and further integrates the library into different functions of community learning. Libraries are also being creative about utilizing outdoor spaces, developing gardens and other interactive nature areas.

Ideas in Action:

Bringing the Library to the Mall

Bookmarks, a local branch of the **Dallas Public Library** (TX), is drawing crowds of families to a rather unique location—the shopping mall. In this unconventional spot, the library provides story time, homework help, free Internet access, and, of course, books! Whether they are practicing yoga, dancing and singing to nursery rhymes, or exploring STEM through stories, Bookmarks offers parents and children ages birth to twelve a variety of enriching parent-child activities that transform the shopping experience. The library's activities, with about thirteen events each week, have become so popular that many library programs are now held in the center of the shopping mall. On any Saturday, about 200 to 300 families flock to the mall to attend events like French story time, singing puppet performances, and shoelace-tying workshops. Given the program's popularity with the community, the Dallas Public Library plans to expand to another local mall, providing even more families and children with meaningful educational opportunities.

Taking Flight with a Library in an Airport

The **Free Library of Philadelphia** (PA) brings a taste of its digital resources to weary travelers in need of a relaxing time at Philadelphia International Airport. Visitors to the all-virtual location have access to free Wi-Fi and can download from a selection of e-books and author event podcasts, or explore a catalog of over 40,000 digital images. Families on the go can visit the Free Library's Kids Page for literacy activities, resources, and events while en route to their next destination.

Covering More Ground through Pop-Up Libraries

Suffolk Public Library (VA) has literally left the building with its pop-up library. A pop-up library simply takes whatever is in the library and makes it mobile and accessible to be used outside. Whether it's a crate of books, a system for checking out the books (laptop, iPad, pen and paper), library resource information (i.e., posters, program brochures), or a quick story time set up on a mat, it can be as big or small as needed. Pop-up library blitzes, or a series of pop-up library events, can be used as a part of National Library Week or as a kickoff to a library campaign, such as a summer reading program. Hosting regular pop-ups at various locations (retirement homes, YMCA, farmer's market) allows library staff to meet families where they are. With the pop-up library, the Suffolk Public Library now covers more ground and has raised public awareness about the library and its services, including those for families with young children. The pop-up has even increased library card registrations—over 800 new cards in the first nine months.



Bringing the Indoors Outdoors

Middle Country Public Library (NY) is encouraging families to spend time exploring and appreciating the outdoors. It is the first library in the nation to be certified as a Nature Explorium classroom. The Nature Explorium, an outdoor learning space for children and families, features a variety of areas geared toward connecting children to different aspects of nature. Through the outdoor space, the library offers a unique way for children and families to connect literacy, learning, and appreciation for nature. For example, after growing tomatoes in the outdoor garden, the librarians held a salsa celebration day where children and families prepared salsa using the fresh ingredients, read books about salsa, and danced the afternoon away!

What Library Leaders Recommend:

- ✓ Talk with different community organizations and businesses about using their spaces to share library materials with families. The presence might range from a box of books to a whole new branch!
- ✓ Assess the area outside of the library. Is there an opportunity to build a learning space beyond the library's walls?
- ✓ Create a traveling cart of books and art supplies to bring to community fairs and events.

“ We approached the Colorado State Park and Wildlife division to see if they wanted to partner with libraries to promote curiosity and learning about nature. They jumped on it, and we recently released a Check Out Colorado State Parks program in 287 libraries throughout the state. Libraries now check out backpacks; each one is filled with a park pass, binoculars, brochures, and pictorial nature guides—and we are already seeing heavy use of these from families. One grandparent wrote on a survey, ‘This park pass is a blessing to have!’ ”

—Sharon Morris, Colorado State Library (CO)