

2015 Achievement Awards Virginia Association of Counties

APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2015.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.


PROGRAM INFORMATION

Locality: Caroline County, VA
Program Title: Imaginations Building Communities @ your Caroline Library: Pre-K Services with Mrs. D and Benny
Program Category: Health and Human Services

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: Charles M. Culley, Jr.
Title: County Administrator
Signature: 

2015

IMAGINATIONS BUILDING COMMUNITIES
@ YOUR CAROLINE LIBRARY



Maureen Dorosinski
Caroline County, VA
6/1/2015

Overview

“You can be anything, do anything, and anything is possible, in your imagination.”

This is how “Mrs. D & Benny” open every pre-k story and craft session at any of the four branches of the Caroline County library. Director of the Caroline County library system Maureen Dorosinski (Mrs. D) and Benny (puppet sidekick from the Library of Virginia) bring pre-kindergarten age outreach and reading programs all year long to the library system and to area daycares and Head Start locations. These stories, crafts, and pre-literary activities, particularly highlighted during summer reading, winter reading, and school year times, are aimed to engage the pre-k set and their families to create lifelong readers and lifelong library users. This program, combined with passive programming, displays, and anytime crafts placed at all of the library branches, spotlight pre-literacy development and ultimately, builds a community with exposure to new ideas by way of imaginative reading programs both inside and outside of the Library all year long. By focusing with special attention with the pre-k and building lifelong readers, we are building a continuous stream of readers, users, for a strong community throughout a lifetime. The winter, summer, and Pre-K Outreach reading programs have shown explosive growth in the past year, with the addition of Mrs. D and Benny, and all the activities they host.

It is at this age that all the blocks are put into place, and a true collaborative, functioning community is built from the ground up, with a solid foundation, using these tiny minds with big imaginations. Through solid partnerships and collaborations, the Caroline Library has made this dream a reality and can look forward to lifetime supporters of the library, and productive, civic minded members of the Caroline County community.

The Need

It used to be that the first thing a family received when moving in to a new home was their library card. With this age of Google and everything available literally in your hand in some form of a smart phone, this urgency to get to the library and find entertainment or establish a network of friends and neighbors has almost vanished. The problem is declining usage and low community involvement at many libraries. The global challenge is showing the library is relevant in the 21st century. The Caroline County solution is starting with a good base and being able to build on or follow users as they age. According to some research, library usage and community involvement wax and wane dramatically throughout a person's life. Many people remember having a library card when they are very young, and many do not return again until they have children of their own. Another gap usually follows, and not until after retirement age do many realize the treasure the library is. By making such a powerful impression early, the children are more likely to ask their parents to bring them back to the library as they get older. And while the parents were the captive audiences while their very youngest were in programming, they were exposed to the great offerings of the library, for all ages. So we have begun this at the Caroline Library system.

According to the Library of Virginia, children develop much of their capacity for learning before entering kindergarten. This is a critical time and children entering school with pre-reading skills, social skills, and diversity exposure have the advantage. It is at this age that Mrs. D and Benny shows the library is not just a place to house books, but a place where your imagination is king and anything is possible. The parents learn that communities are developed and characters built. The Library makes sure there is always something exciting to do or see.

Dorosinski calls the Pre-K set her “Peanuts”, of that magical age where she feels the beginning seeds are planted and images and ideas about who they are and who they are to become are being formed. It is now that they are being introduced to the images, sounds of the words, and attitudes that will shape how they process the world and respond to it. It is critical to make sure those images and exchanges they hear be a positive impression for years to come.

At the pre-k ages of 3& 4 , there is a prime opportunity when their minds are so open and ripe to all possibilities, to instill in them a sense of the great variety that is the world, and be able to confront and process the differences they see as normal and friendly, not something to be feared and ridiculed.

The Program

The “peanuts” many times see only Dorosinski and Benny the puppet dog every week telling them stories, reading books, passing out crafts, and helping them learn their letters using games, songs, interactive dances, exercise, and literacy toys; but multiple state agencies, county agencies, and local agencies have partnered with the Library and collaborated to create the magic.

Statewide partnerships include the Library of Virginia and their donation of an Early Literacy Center at the busiest branch of the system, Ladysmith. This center holds a wealth of toys and games designed to encourage playful, educational interaction to promote early literacy. The Library of Virginia also provides publicity, website support, bookmarks and other literature for both the summer and winter reading programs, which encourage early reading skills and prevent summer slide between school years. The Science Museum of Virginia gave the Caroline Library over a hundred STEM backpacks promoting science, technology, engineering, and math experiments in a fun and accessible way for pre-k through elementary ages. One backpack has 5

separate experiments inside, ranging from growing a garden in a plastic glove, to seeing how static electricity works.

County partnerships include the Caroline County Sheriff's Department. They have provided programs aimed at pre-k children at the Library such as Be Kind to Animals and Fingerprinting/Child IDs. The Caroline County Department of Fire-Rescue has also provided exciting programs, including Your Friendly Firefighter storytimes.

Local daycare centers and Head Start facilities who have hosted Mrs. D and Benny, or visited a library branch on a regular basis include Ms. Alyson's Daycare, the Caroline County Summer Exploration Day Camp, Madison Elementary School Head Start, the Bowling Green Elementary Pre-K program. Ms. Joni's Shining Stars is a daycare who has received book donations from Mrs. D.

Costs and Logistics

Benny himself was donated by the Library of Virginia. He is a tousled grey furry cloth hand puppet with his own multicolored painted cardboard house with a hinged roof where he brings stickers, and all the supplies one could need to engage a roomful of energetic peanuts. Benny's signature, a paw print stamp, is left over from last year's summer reading program, Paws to Read, and hundreds of sheets of stickers are bought from area dollar stores along with a self-inking stamp pads. Books used are all part of the library collection and purchased with our regular library book budget and include classics like Goodnight Moon as well as New York Times bestselling series like Pete the Cat. Alphabet flash cards are carefully hand lettered using Sharpies and surplus poster board donated from a local paper mill. Custom library logoed printable and worksheets have been created, and are duplicated using the copiers at each branch

and absorbed into the routine maintenance costs of the machine. Crafts costs are also very manageable. Paper plates and a carton of popsicle sticks create about a hundred masks for less than ten dollars, and our usual office supply budget includes items like this. Large classroom sized crayon boxes take care of most “writing” needs. The cost for crafts is around a hundred dollars for a year.

The summer reading program budget is usually set at around five hundred dollars per year, and this covers candy, prizes, T-shirts for staff, and food for the kickoff parties, and the concluding ice cream socials. The winter reading budget is about one hundred dollars and includes small prizes. The Library of Virginia provides publicity posters, bookmarks, and incidentals.

Travel costs are minimal, as the director normally runs courier for all the libraries in her own car to all the branches. Being a rural county, all routes are about twenty minutes apart. Many of the daycare centers are located in the aforementioned Ladysmith area or the Bowling Green area where the headquarters branch is.

Other staffing needs besides the director are minimal as well, and are confined to the summer reading parties. In this instance, staff are shuffled around the branches to cover a few extra hours where supervision of children is necessary for an extra two or three hours during the one week all the four branch parties occur.

Measurable Results

The most quantifiable result is the explosive reading program participant numbers. From one year to the next, with the addition of Mrs. D and Benny, there was a 38% jump in summer

reading participation, from 340 readers to 470 readers in 2014. But the most stellar result is the **339% rise** in the winter reading program, from 18 readers to 79 in 2015.

There has not been a program that brings the Caroline Library out of the four walls and directly puts services into the hands of children so dramatically in quite some time. Creating an innovative program, where children give and receive one on one immediate feedback and guidance is immeasurable. Creating friendly, accessible people out of community leaders and giving nicknames during the programs makes them humans and not scary, mysterious creatures. “Fearless Firefighter Tim”, “Tommy the Magical Medic”, “Cool Major Moser,” and “Friendly Deputy Carty” are all people, not scary individuals behind a uniform. Community leaders who build a rapport with the tiniest of the community is vital at this age as to instill positive connections and impressions at this extremely fragile age.

Another factor introduced in the programming is introduction to diversity. Storytimes feature all ethnicities and the various differences that children may see, and to learn these differences are a normal part of life. All of these steps help in building a whole person who is able to read, write, and interact positively with all members of their community.

Some of these children truly benefit from having a constant like Mrs. D and Benny to look forward to on a regular basis. More evidence of the working of the program is when the kids run up to Dorosinski at public events and bury themselves into her leg in a cute crushing hug. It’s the crudely written cards with yellow crayon that you can barely make out. It’s the wide smiles each and every time.

The Future

The future of the program is limitless. As the vision statement of the Caroline Library says: “Globally Connected, Traditionally Centered,” the Library will continue to offer this

program as well as a revived Bookmobile service possible over the next year. Mrs. D and Benny can look forward to the opportunity to bring more books and a variety of services to more children in Caroline County.

The Caroline Library as a whole will continue to offer the beauty of books freely to the open imaginations of the peanuts of Caroline County, in the hopes of growing circulation of books, usage of services, attendance of craft and service programs, and volunteer involvement and a continuous stream of people flourishing in the community built by feeding into the imaginations of our little peanuts, one story at a time.

