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Professor Bielefield
Guidebook

Guidebook for Managing Children's Services—Wilton Library

Mission, goals, and objectives

The mission of the children's library in Wilton, CT is to encourage exploration, information, and literacy development for children from birth through age twelve. In addition, the children's library strives to be an enjoyable place for families and friends to gather. We want to provide a variety of materials, both print and non-print, that foster learning and entertainment.

Goals of the children's library include adding and updating our collections and providing excellent programming for the community we serve. Current objectives are moving and recataloging the fairytales collection to make it more visible and user-friendly and filling remaining programming spots in our summer schedule related to the theme of "Farm."

Community analysis

About 27 percent of Wilton's population is under the age of fifteen, so the children's library is charged with providing excellent programming and collections for children and families (ePodunk, 2007). In addition, the high median income at about \$141,000 annually indicates that the families in town expect a high level of service and quality (ePodunk, 2007). The low student-to-teacher ratio in the public schools along with numerous childcare centers, private schools, and many in-home childcare providers

shows that children are used to individual attention and programs at the library should take this into account (ePodunk, 2007).

With local attractions like the Maritime Aquarium, Ambler Farm, and Stepping Stones Museum for Children, the children's library has the opportunity to partner with these organizations and improve in-house library programming (ePodunk, 2007).

However, the fact that so many opportunities are available for local families makes it trickier because the library is not the only show in town. Programming has to be consistently good to stand out from the crowd.

Personnel

The head of the children's library is supported by eight children's library assistants. While the head is ultimately responsible for the department, each assistant has different duties. These include conducting storytimes, ordering and processing media items, and conducting other programs like adult/child book club, Lego club, and special events. Assistants are also charged with collection maintenance (weeding, shifting, reclassifying, etc.), creating reader's advisory materials, reading book reviews, and staffing the children's reference desk.

During the summer months, the children's assistants also sign up children for the reading program and all other programs, hand out prizes, and show movies. Often, there are seasonal children's assistants (college students who are back for the summer) that fill out the staff in order to have enough coverage.

The head of the children's library is responsible for delegating all these responsibilities to the children's staff, scheduling, ordering materials, staffing, and

administrative tasks. The administrative side of the job includes attending all staff, department head, and staff training meetings, attending demos related to implementing a new integrated library system, and meeting weekly with the library director. Furthermore, she must handle her own storytimes and programming, often serving as the point person for larger programs like author talks, school tours, and outreach. Excellent organizational skills are vital, as is the ability to multitask and maintain a cool head under pressure from a demanding public.

Available programs

The library offered about 400 children's programs in the last fiscal year (Annual Report, 2010). The following is a sample of current children's programming with a brief description of each.

Storytimes: Appropriate books, songs, fingerplays, videos for ages birth through six.

WINRs Circle: Book group for grades 4-6 to discuss the year's Nutmeg Book Award Nominees.

Have Your Cake and Read It Too!: Adult/child book discussion and dessert for grades 3 and up.

Good Reads, Great Kids: Adult/child book discussion for children in grades 1-2.

Chess: Beginner chess for grades 1-7, advanced chess for grades 3-7.

Lego Club/Lego for Littles: Kids in grades 4-6 (or K-3 for Littles) learn about a topic, e.g. castles, and build a Lego sculpture based on that theme.

Lights Out at the Library: Annual fundraiser for the children's library. Themed sleepover

for kids in grades 2-4 (alternating boys and girls each year). This year was for girls and the theme was Nancy Drew.

Summer Reading: Themed summer reading program through age 12 with programming based on the theme. This year the theme is “Farm” and the number of books kids read will be translated into a dollar amount that will be donated to Heifer International.

Disney Princess Tea: Disney princesses come to the library to have a tea party. Craft, fancy finger food, chocolate fountain, and the princesses are on hand for photos and autographs.

Haunted Library: Haunted house for kids including games and a walk through spook-filled stacks.

Enchanted Library: Storybook characters on hand to read stories and play games—for smaller children or those who may not enjoy the Haunted Library.

Author Visits: This past year included visits from Patricia Reilly Giff, Gail Levine, and Jane O’Connor.

Ambler Farm Reads: Storytime at a local farm for ages 4-6 related to a theme (chickens, sheep, etc.)

Policies affecting the children’s library

The library’s Code of Conduct (2002) restricts cell phones, loud talking, and other similar behavior, but the specific clause that affects the children’s library is “Children under the age of twelve must be accompanied by a responsible adult.” One can deduce from this rule that a “responsible adult” means someone eighteen or older who is present

with the child in the children's library. Too often, children are left to their own devices while their caregivers are distracted or absent.

Wilton Library's Internet Use Policy (2010) explicitly stated that the Internet is filtered in the children's library but then takes a similar tone to the Code of Conduct indicating that the library allows children to use any of its public computers and responsible adult supervision is recommended. The policy then restated the Connecticut law that children under twelve must be supervised. While filtering may be seen as censorship, there are many more unfiltered computers than filtered ones and children may use them if they wish.

The library's website has links to the American Library Association's Bill of Rights and Code of Ethics, both which mention not censoring materials based on age and respecting the privacy of individuals. Connecticut General Statute S 11-25(b); Confidentiality of Library Circulation Records similarly respects privacy of circulation records being disclosed to the public, but parents or guardians are not considered "the public"(Bielefield, 2011). Therefore, they could request and obtain circulation records (if they are kept) of the children under their care.

Summary

While this guidebook pertains specifically to the Wilton Library, the guidelines regarding personnel and programming may be applied to all libraries. Children's librarians must do a lot of behind-the-scenes work and need a strong support staff. Also, any of the programs mentioned may be used at other libraries. It's important for different

libraries to share their ideas with others so collectively, libraries (especially children's libraries) remain vibrant and relevant.

Policies regarding children in libraries are integral to the functioning of the library as a whole. Unsupervised children, especially in areas where childcare is not available, are a concern. Parents or responsible adults need to understand that the library is not a drop-off babysitting service. In addition, the library staff is not going to censor materials from a child, and children can easily access unfiltered Internet. The point is not to deter library use, but to inform parents that they are ultimately responsible for their child and the materials or digital content they access.

An analysis of the community is important to identify the library's users and can help shape the library's mission and collection. For a wealthier town like Wilton, this may include a larger media collection, for example. A library is not a static entity, especially for children, and we need to understand what the community needs in order to be a gathering place for people, not just materials.

References

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