

Playful Learning Mini Grant

Children have increased opportunities for playful learning at the library, thanks to a grant received by GRRL from the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Services.

The grant opportunity, called “Playful Learning in Libraries,” addresses the need for “welcoming and engaging spaces and experiences for children ages 0-8 years old and their caregivers in public libraries.” Researchers have established links between early learning and play.

Grant funds have purchased 20 We Play Here kits, materials to enhance the early learning environment in each library, and materials to enhance Baby Bounce and Toddler Time storytelling kits.

We Play Here kits

The kits will be rotated among GRRL’s 32 library locations for use in-house. Each kit contains educational toys, instructions for parents, and printable handouts.

Materials to enhance the early learning environment

Branch libraries have received items such as kid-friendly signage that encourages parents to engage their children in conversation.

Materials to enhance Baby Bounce and Toddler Time Storytelling Kits

Adding a sensory play component to the existing Baby Bounce and Toddler Storytelling Kits increases the engagement, learning, and motor skills of children.

Promoted Through Ranks, Pundsack Takes Charge

She’s only moving from one office to the office next door, but it’s a big transition for Karen Pundsack.

After serving as Great River Regional Library’s interim director for nine months, Pundsack was promoted to executive director on May 6, 2015. A lengthy hiring process led by a library executive search consultant culminated in a unanimous vote of approval to hire Pundsack into the role she had filled as interim. The search included a series of Skype interviews with leading candidates, then in-person interviews with three finalists, including Pundsack.



Executive Director Karen Pundsack (left) discusses a patron account question with Patron Services Supervisor Brandi Canter.

The other finalists were well qualified with experience managing multi-branch library systems in other states. But Pundsack’s thoughtful replies to the board’s questions, as well as her able performance as interim director, convinced them to hand her the leadership reins.

Pundsack joined GRRL in February, 1999 when she was hired to manage the Sauk Centre branch. She transferred to the Albany Public Library in 2002. In 2009, she took charge of patron services region-wide, a promotion that saw her move to the headquarters in St. Cloud. Since then she has been responsible for many aspects of the library patron’s experience, including patron policies and programming. During her nine months as interim director she has also been responsible for overseeing the annual budget process, and communications between the library administration and staff and board members.

One of Pundsack’s first questions for the board was what their priorities are for her. She was told they expect her to focus initially on budgets and organizational culture. To that end, Pundsack has provided ample updates to staff on the hiring process, kept her office door wide open, and sought input on budgets, policies and strategic planning.

Prior to joining the library, Pundsack had several workplace experiences that helped prepare her for a career in libraries. She gained customer focus working as a retail sales coordinator at Sears, and sharpened her communication skills with work at the Melrose Beacon newspaper and on-air at KASM radio in Albany. She was also actively involved in her family’s dairy farm operation for 14 years.

She has a mass communications degree with news editorial emphasis from St. Cloud State University, and a Master of Library & Information Science from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.



Library Staff Get Above The Line At Annual Training Day

The entire Great River Regional Library staff as well as several members of the Board of Trustees gathered at the St. Cloud Public Library on April 27 for the annual all-staff day.

It's the one time each year when staff from all 32 GRRL locations get to put a face to the voices on the other end of the line, renew friendships, and receive important training.

This year, staff experienced a slate of terrific, motivational, uplifting presentations by Top 20 Training. Their three presenters spoke about the benefits of bringing a positive attitude to life in general and provided tools for individuals to reset attitudes from thinking "below the line" to "above the line."

In essence, they described how a person's thinking governs their experience, and how purposeful thinking can be used to improve life, both at work and away from the workplace. They demonstrated how easy it is to get sucked below the line by negative conversation, and how to bounce back above the line with a positive, hopeful attitude.

A day that at 8:30 a.m. seemed like it might stretch a long time was over too quickly for many. More than 90 percent of staff rated the day at 4 or 5 on a five-point scale in evaluations. Many of their comments indicated the training was beneficial and would have continued impact.

Policy Change Allows Library Card Registration At Schools

Children used to have to visit the library to get a library card. Not any more.

This winter, the GRRL Board of Trustees agreed to a library policy change that allows for collaborations with education partners who assist in verification of identity. School teachers can now register their students for library cards without taking them to the library.

The change took place in response to a request from the school media specialist at Sauk Rapids/Rice Middle School. The school has moved to a 1:1 technology model and every student has a computer tablet. As area residents, the students are entitled to GRRL membership. Having a library card opens the door to GRRL's Digital Library and reference databases which provide a treasure of research materials. Knowing the value of library membership, the school wanted to ensure every student has a library card.

Sharon Strack, St. Cloud's circulation coordinator, received the request. Strack used to be a school media specialist and was in a perfect situation to see the advantages to students, as well as the path that could be created within library procedures.

"I imagined how this would work if a student were standing in front of me," Strack said. "What if the student already has a card? What if the card has charges on it? What if the student used to have a card but has lost it? We developed a set of procedures that respects

the privacy of the student, but makes it possible for the school to take responsibility for getting the card to the student."

Procedures in place, GRRL completed the pilot registration with Sauk Rapids/Rice. Their 826 applications resulted in 253 new library accounts, 346 renewed accounts, and 227 current cardholder accounts. The 599 new cards were distributed at the school.

A similar process took place in Little Falls, where middle school registration was added to an established Grade One At the Library (GOAL) registration program. Little Falls Library Services Coordinator Cindy Bruggenthies is also preparing for a registration drive with the Swanville schools. St. Cloud's North Junior High School has registered students and so has Sartell Middle School. Forty of Sartell's registrations were completed by school staff using a new online registration procedure being tested by the library.

The opportunity for school registration, with data entered either online by students or at the library by staff, is being gradually rolled out across the region so staff are not overwhelmed. As more and more schools replace expensive textbooks with digital technology, collaboration between families, schools and libraries looks increasingly useful and likely.

If you know of a school that would like to register their students for library cards, please contact your local library.

All Summer Long Read To The Rhythm

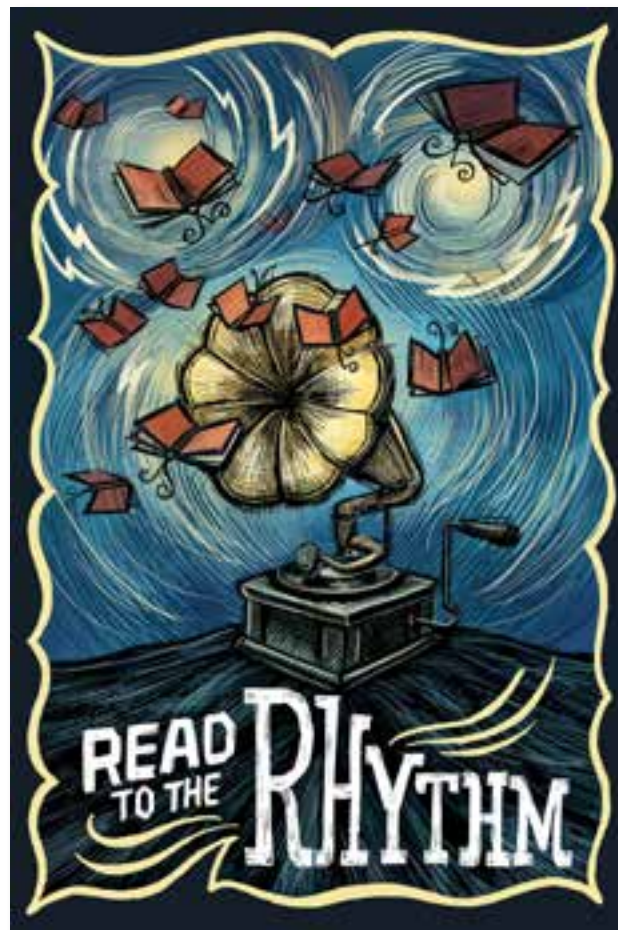
Read to the Rhythm is this year's Summer Reading Program (SRP) theme.

The program begins Monday, June 8 and ends Saturday, Aug. 8. Three age group programs are offered: 0-3, age 3 to 6th grade, and 6th to 12th grade. Each program will have fun activities to keep children engaged through the summer. Visiting musicians include singer/songwriter Paul Spring, polka man Mike Schneider, and Bob Bovee, singer of cowboy songs and veteran of the Prairie Home Companion radio show. It'll be a fun summer for reading.

The SRP emphasizes free reading, meaning reading done for pleasure outside of school. Since at least 1988, researchers have found a positive relationship between free reading and growth in vocabulary, reading comprehension, verbal fluency, and general information. People do better at things when they practice them. Reading is no different. Students who read independently become better readers, score higher on achievement tests, and have greater content knowledge than those who don't. Children don't need to be from privileged homes to learn how to read early, but they must have access to books and someone to read to them. The amount of access a child has with books at age five is directly related to their reading comprehension at later ages.

Participating in the SRP, especially with the support of parents, provides children with the kinds of literacy events that can help them have success throughout school. They get to select books that they enjoy to read on their own time, and maybe take part in library storytimes as well as other activities.

Many thanks to the Friends of the St. Cloud Public Library and the other donors who provide support for the SRP at Great River Regional Library.



Female Inmates Produce Creative Fiction In Workshops

Sixteen incarcerated women have taken part in writing workshops that resulted in printed booklets now part of the GRRL collection housed at the Elk River Public Library.

Women at the Sherburne County Correction Facility wrote stories in two creative writing workshop series. Workshop instructors were spoken word artist/writer Tish Jones, playwright and poet Marcie Rendon, and writer Diego Vazquez Jr., author of "Growing Through The Ugly," a coming-of-age novel set in a Tex-Mex community.

The women wrote and edited the pieces to be published and received copies of the edited stories in booklets. The booklets are also available for checkout at GRRL.

The workshops and publication was made possible through a collaboration including the Advisory Task Force on the Woman and Juvenile Female Offender, Bookmobile (a book printer), the Central Minnesota Arts Board, Great River Regional Library, and the Loft Literary Center.

Great River Regional Library's is seeking support for its Summer Reading Program. Your support and tax-deductible donation will help make the program attractive to kids. Visit griver.org/support-library to make an online donation.

Support 2015 Summer Program With Donation To GRRL

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My/our donation, payable to GRRL: \$250 \$100 \$50 \$25 Other \$ _____

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Every time of year is the right time for the Bistro Mug, a store favorite at only \$6.99 and sized for that big morning cup.

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griver.org/GRRL_store

Provide Input To Library Planning

Something that gets talked about in library circles is how best to stay relevant.

Part of this conversation revolves around technology. Another part grows out of a general requirement that institutions be held accountable.

What do you expect from your community library?

Is GRRL meeting your needs?

Are you getting value for your tax dollar?

This summer, the library will begin a series of community visits and library open houses to gather input directly from area residents. GRRL will also survey library users to determine their needs.

Executive Director Karen Pundsack will use that input in strategic planning to assess how GRRL is meeting expectations, where libraries fit into their communities, and whether the library's mission is being met.

Three meetings have already been scheduled:

Little Falls Carnegie Library

Tuesday, June 9, 1:00 p.m.

Swanville Public Library

Tuesday, June 9, 7:00 p.m.

Long Prairie Public Library

Wednesday, June 10, 7:00 p.m.

Please look for notices about further meetings on the library website and attend a meeting that is convenient for you.

Save a Tree: Get Your Currents By Email

This Currents newsletter is available to library supporters requesting it via email. To reduce costs, save trees and, of course, protect our environment, we encourage as many supporters as possible to consider taking full advantage of this by switching to the electronic .pdf version. Please contact Julie Henne at currents@grrl.lib.mn.us if you would like to receive the newsletter by email or have any questions or comments. As always, the newsletter is produced just for our library supporters. We thank you warmly for your support, and if you have any suggestions we would love to hear from you.



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