

Case Study: Brooklyn Public Library

Background

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| Name of library: | Brooklyn Public Library |
| Location(s): | Located in Kings County, New York City. 58 branches, a Central Library and a Business Library |
| Size of collection: | 3.4 million (books, cd's, dvd's) |
| Size of staff: | 1,094 Full time employees, 553 part-time staff |
| Annual budget: | \$87,000,000 |
| Sources of core funding: | New York City Tax Levy; New York State |
| Population(s) served: | 2.5 million residents, 484,000 adults over the age of 25 without a high school diploma. Born in US: 1,533,357, Foreign born: 931,769. |
| Language spoken at home: | English only: 1,217,121 Other than English: 1,068,102 |



Literacy programs or projects at the Brooklyn Public Library since 1990

I. Projects:

√ **Title: PRE GED**

Start date: 9/1/2003

End date: 6/30/2008

Objectives: Initiate Pre GED program/Hire Instructors/Computer Aids

Funding source: WIA-Title II

Funding amount: 2003-2004 \$161,208, 2006-2008 \$279,000

Outcomes: Project is ongoing, building collaborative relationships with GED providers, one of the largest providers in Brooklyn. We offer 37 classes annually. Registered 906 students in FY 07.

√ **Title: EL/Civics**

Start date: 7/1/2000

End date: 2006-2008

Funding source: WIA Title II

Funding amount: \$274,794

Outcomes: Project is ongoing, offering 64 English Classes in 4 cycles, Pronunciation Class. Registration in FY 07 is 1765.

√ **Title: Adult Literacy Education**

Start date: 1/1/2007

End date: 6/30/2007

Funding source: New York State Education Dept.

Funding amount: \$86,096

Outcomes: One Full-Time Workplace Literacy Advisor, Purchase of Rosetta Stone Software for Five Learning Centers, recruit staff with multi-lingual proficiencies, host one day Adult Basic Education Conference for Adult Literacy Instructional Staff-LD3.

√ **Title: BPL Literacy Connection**

Start date: 7/1/2002

End date: 6/30/2003

Funding source: New York State Division of Library Development

Funding amount: \$20,000

Outcomes: Implement a borough-wide outreach campaign to recruit students and volunteer tutors. Funds will support the development of an Interactive Outreach Database. Outreach materials to include postcards and flyers.



√ **Title: Computer Aid Handbook**

Start date: 7/1/2001

End date: 7/2/2002

Funding source: New York State Division of Library Development

Funding amount: \$20,000

Outcomes: Created a computer aid handbook with job descriptions, explanation of program's philosophy, techniques to be used in computer rooms with students. Instructions for using scanner, digital camera, troubleshooting common problems.

√ **Title: The W.R.I.T.E. Workshops**

Start date: 7/1/2003

End date: 6/30/3005

Funding source: New York State Division of Library Development

Funding amount: \$20,000 a year for two years.

Outcomes: Writing, Reading and Imagining Through Thematic Engagement (W.R.I.T.E)

Enhance the writing abilities and life skills through workshops on playwriting and other creative and non-fiction writing, business writing and life skills (accessing health care, HIV/AIDS).

Five eight session workshops on essay writing, five four session workshops on business writing, 20 single session life skill workshops serving 709 students with a 72% retention rate.

√ **Title: Technology Toolkit**

Start date: 1996

End date: 1999

Funding source: Lila Wallace - Readers's Digest Foundation

Funding amount: \$212,430

Outcomes: Created a guide to usher in technology into adult literacy education, create a curriculum and upgrade the five learning center computer rooms with new technology. Toolkit was distributed throughout the US and some international countries.



II. Programs:

√ Title: **First Five Years**

Start date: 2003

Objectives: Early literacy project for babies, toddlers, pre school children

Funding source: Anonymous Gift

Funding amount: \$1,000,000

Evaluation method(s): Numbers of programs, librarians trained, partners trained, library card registrations for babies and toddlers, circulation and programs.

√ Title: **The Learning Centers**

Start date: 1977

Objectives: To create a learning environment where adults develop a foundation of basic skills needed to maneuver through a print oriented, technology rich society, and achieve their personal, family and work goals.

Funding source: NYC Tax Levy and BPL Operational Funds

Funding amount: \$801,000 (NYC)

Analysis

Why did your library, or libraries with which you have been involved, first become involved with literacy programming?

We first became involved in the adult literacy piece in the 1950's because someone noticed that there were adults who could not read. The program was run out of our Brooklyn Heights Branch. In 1974, we invited Literacy Volunteers of NY into the Central Library to start a tutoring program in order to serve more people throughout Brooklyn.

In 2003, the new Executive Director, building on work in Oregon and brain research, started our First Five Years program. There have been many literacy efforts over the years that focused on early reading. Libraries ran pre school programs before pre school was a popular offering of the traditional education establishment.

How did your library, or libraries with which you have been involved, first become involved with literacy programming?

While tutoring was taking place in a more or less informal basis prior to 1977, in 1977 the New York City Municipal Assistance Corporation under the direction of then Mayor Ed Koch decided to form a library literacy program in all five boroughs. Miriam Schwartz (former spouse of FAO Schwartz) was a prime mover and shaker in this effort and became the first Director of the Mayor's Office of Adult Literacy.



New York City Adult Literacy Initiative were the Department of Education, City University of New York, DYCD (Community Based organizations) and the three public library systems. Funds were allocated for construction, renovation and staffing. Brooklyn placed their five learning centers in areas of high unemployment and low educational attainment. Four of the five centers remain in place today.

If you have been able to sustain and integrate literacy programming in your own library mission or mandate or if you know institutions that have done this, how was it achieved?

The Literacy Program at BPL has moved from the periphery of services to being a core part of library service. Much of this can be credited to innovations, ability to attract grants and having a librarian as the head of the program. The current Literacy Program Manager is a member of the Executive Management Team and as such can always advocate for services to the underserved. Librarians have become much more accepting of taking an active role in serving the public. In BPL, we are removing reference desks from new renovations and encouraging staff to interact more closely with patrons. Literacy education is very personal and in the past librarians shied away from the close interaction. We are developing staff to become advocates for library services and library users. Literacy staff and students are great advocates for library services.

Funding: New York City tax levy is dedicated funding for adult literacy. If the library did not spend it on adult literacy, it would be withdrawn.

Market Share: We serve the lowest level learners and in essence are the feeders into the more traditional educational systems. Libraries specialize in non-readers up to a fifth grade reading level. We use volunteer tutors in small group instructional model. BPL uses project based learning. The other sectors have in some sense ceded this share of the market to us – it is the sector that shows the slowest learning gains. BPL has led in the area of technology use by adult learners. The use of technology attracts and retains students – especially male students.

Library Mission Statement:

It is the mission of Brooklyn Public Library to ensure the preservation and transmission of society's knowledge, history and culture, and to provide the people of Brooklyn with free and open access to information for education, recreation and reference.

Innovations: Through the use of grant funds we have been able to build our program and use cutting edge technology with the students. We offer a quality education with visiting professionals. We offer education in specific high need areas – health literacy has been very important as a tool that connects students to the program and the library.



Advocacy: Literacy students and tutors are brilliant advocates. The students do not comprise a very visible or politically savvy bloc; however they so appreciate the opportunity to learn to read that their voices and numbers are powerful when they advocate for themselves. Students write hundreds of letters a year to politicians. We invite staff, politicians to events. Our tutors are powerful advocates, they come from all walks of life.

We invite staff to spend a day in the learning centers to see what it is that we do. We have many converts through this effort.

We publish and collaborate with the two other library systems to develop staff and we work on advocacy together.

We have opened the learning centers to the general public for education/instruction-computer basics, learning English, studying for GED. We also recognized an unserved niche – the PRE GED student. We now run one of the largest PRE GED programs in the City.

Quality of instruction: Students remain with the program because of the richness of the environment, the ability to bring family members to programs, to feel part of the community. Instruction is project-based and directly related to the students' needs and desires. Professionals are brought in to enhance instruction. Students are given opportunities to visit the cultural riches that abound in NYC.

What local circumstances or conditions contributed?

The letter writing campaign to Hillary Clinton, resulted in an earmark for \$800,000 specifically for the expansion of the Brooklyn Public Library Literacy Program. Letters to Governor Elect Spitzer helped to add another 2 million in New York State Adult Literacy funds.

Right now in Brooklyn, we have two very powerful council members, Domenic Recchia and Vincent Gentile. They both serve on citywide committees that impact libraries. What is good for libraries is good for literacy. We have been asked if we could expand, our answer is yes but you must fund the libraries better so that we can open more hours to serve more people.

We continue to evaluate our program's effectiveness and concentrate on writing. We offer new programs, we look to serve new constituencies. We are collaborating with more colleges. We are very highly rated as effective by the Mayor's Office. We just created a new position, the Learning Assessment and Goals Counselor. Students get one-on-one counseling sessions that have proven to be extremely helpful in assisting them with advancement.



What are the benefits of such partnerships or collaborations?

Our partnership with Brooklyn College and the SUNY (State University) BEOC is extremely valuable. Our Pre GED students are given priority in moving into GED classes. We visit vocational schools and assist our students with exploring opportunities for work. We work with the New York City Housing Authority so that their tenants can attend our programs. The PRE GED is so successful because often students who have dropped out of high school need a short refresher to get them into a GED class. Our classes give writing instruction, instruction in technology along with the traditional classroom curriculum. We share some teachers with these institutions.

What are the challenges?

There are no downsides to collaborations. New York State is working on a metric to measure collaboration efforts and programs which interact with students at any level will get credit if the student moves on. That is wonderful for libraries because we get students ready to enter mainstream educational experiences.

The challenges to literacy in libraries: Libraries in the past did not view themselves as direct education providers – not part of the core mission. Education was left to the traditional schools – their budgets were bigger, they were more knowledgeable. Libraries have been part of the traditional middle class value system as are schools. As immigrants overwhelm the schools, the middle class must look beyond itself. There are still big struggles within our institution in allocation of resources for world languages. It is miniscule. The collection development people almost refuse to allocate resources to building collections.

Since libraries in New York serve the lowest level learner, the gains are smaller and harder to come by. The National Reporting System does not recognize the difference between a small group led by a volunteer tutor for four hours a week and a classroom experience of up to fifteen hours, thus our results look bad. We have struggled and made some nationwide gains. It is constant vigilance and advocacy that is needed.

What generalizable lessons can be drawn from your experiences?

Libraries are extremely important community resources where literacy is valued above all. People trust libraries. The volunteer tutor when properly trained and respected and monitored can achieve wonderful milestones both for themselves and their students. How many people wanted to be teachers but found other paths?



Information Literacy is vital in the 21st century. Libraries are often the only provider of free high speed internet access in the community.

What is the most exciting library-literacy collaboration you know? Why?

Well not that I know, but for us it was very exciting to collaborate with private businesses who needed their students to learn English in order to advance. We cooperated with finding a teacher, creating a curriculum and holding classes on the factory floor. The owner allowed the families also to take part. We have been asked by other businesses to collaborate.

I think what Queens Library is doing around Health Literacy is very exciting and could be a model. We have brought health professionals in through grants and responses have been overwhelmingly positive. We have been asked to work on websites for low level learners and exhibits in museums.

What do you see as the future of such collaborations?

The future is very bright in NYC. The latest issue of Literacy Harvest talks about the contacts between health providers and legal organizations to literacy organizations.

Additional personal reflections

I will be meeting with the Children Services people next week so I can present the family literacy and childhood and adolescent literacy efforts. We have identified adolescent literacy as an urgent need in our society and the library has assigned a leadership team of librarians to create an adolescent literacy pilot. These librarians are working with the adult literacy staff to create resource and referral lists as a first step.

The public library is the most democratic of institutions and welcomes people from all walks of life. I am totally committed to free and full access to education, an education without tests and an education that is joyful. The library has it all.

Submitted by:
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