

The Building Bridges Project

*Monroe County Library System Library Services and Technology Act Grant
Library Services to Youth with Developmental Disabilities: FY-2004*

Outcome #1: Youth with developmental disabilities will acquire basic library skills (including a library card) necessary for them to become lifelong library users. Each of the four libraries held a "Library Card Day" to promote children with disabilities in taking the first step in becoming lifelong library users; getting their very own library card. Each library chose a variety of fun activities in celebration of "getting a library card." By participating in fun, educational and recreational activities youth will learn libraries are places they can enjoy throughout their lifetime. Each library was required to develop a minimum of six programs for children and teens with developmental disabilities. Each library either met or exceeded this expectation.

Outcome #2: Older youth will be encouraged to develop self-advocacy skills that will enable them to ask library staff if they cannot find what they are looking for. Librarians realized to accomplish the outcome the first step was to get teens with developmental disabilities into the library. Fun programs, like the Pizza Taste Off, Poetry Night, and volunteer opportunities were offered to encourage teens to come to the library. However, this is only the first step toward promoting self-advocacy. Additional time is needed to reach this goal. It is important for librarians to develop a trusting relationship with teens. As we continue to strive to reach this goal, it would be beneficial for libraries to offer self-advocacy classes to youth with developmental disabilities. In addition, librarians will need to become more aware of the issues a teen with disabilities faces each day.

Outcome #3: Libraries will include young children with developmental disabilities in their regular story times when it best meets the needs of the child. To reach this outcome, it was important for librarians to understand any program can meet the needs of a child with or without disabilities when the appropriate support is given. Librarians attended a workshop allowing them to see any "regular story time" could meet the needs of a child with a developmental disability when the appropriate supports are provided. Training included information on how to modify a program or provide accommodations, enabling youth with developmental disabilities to participate to their fullest potential. Handouts explaining the differences between accommodations and modifications were developed and distributed.

Outcome #4: Parents will acquire enhanced skills in selecting materials for their children. Linda Burcham, of the PERL (Parent and Educator Resource Library), provided librarians with a criteria list on how to determine the appropriateness of reading material for children. In addition, the grant committee developed an extensive 60-page "recommended reading" list on a variety of disabilities and topics beneficial to youth with developmental disabilities.

Outcome #5: Thirty library staff will acquire skills enabling them to better meet the library needs of the target population. After completing the training, staff will know how to better communicate with and address the needs of youth with disabilities and will be able to impart this information to their library colleagues. We held two countywide workshops for library staff. The Webster Public Library offered an awareness training to its teen volunteers and the Greece Public Library offered training to its entire staff. The first countywide training included 1) an introduction to common childhood developmental disabilities, 2) what is person first language, and 3) what to say when you are speaking about a person with a disability. The focus was to help librarians understand youth with disabilities are youth first, who happen to have a disability that affects how they learn. Fifty-seven librarians and library staff attended.

The second training provided librarians with examples of how to make accommodations and/or modifications to a library program enabling youth with developmental disabilities to participate to their fullest potential. Lisa Wemett, the Teen Services Librarian of the Webster Public Library shared how their library supported youth with disabilities under this grant. During a breakout session, librarians were given the description of a child with a developmental disability; labels (like Autism or Downs Syndrome) were not listed. Only the strengths, needs, and personality of the child were given. Librarians also received a description of a program chosen randomly from libraries within the Monroe County Library System. Working in teams, librarians needed to look at the program description and determine if the special needs child would be able to participate. If not, how would they modify it and what accommodations would be needed to successfully include this child to his/her fullest potential?

This goal of the teen training at the Webster Public Library was to assist typically developing teens to better understand how to be respectful (People First Language), how to welcome and include peers with developmental disabilities in library programs, and to assist the library in identifying volunteer assistants for upcoming grant programming. The Greece Public Library felt it would be beneficial to have awareness training for all staff members. Therefore, a similar training to the initial countywide training was provided during monthly staff training at the Greece Public Library.