

KiPS: A Community Success Story

By Sandy Petrie

KiPS – Kindergarten Prep School. You may have heard of it at a conference or read about it when it won the Public Library Association Highsmith Library Innovation award at ALA in 2011. You may have never heard of it at all, but are now curious and if so, I encourage you to read on.

I thought about all the things I wanted to say about the KiPS program, but I think the following write-up from the Dekko Foundation's 2009 annual report sums it up well and with their permission I have included it here, with a few updates and final thoughts at the end.

Dekko Foundation turned them down, but stick-to-itiveness got the job done. Sandy Petrie and Dr. Stacey Hughes just couldn't stand it. So many children in their community of Albion, Indiana were coming to school unprepared to learn. The librarian and then-superintendent hurt for these kids. They'd seen the statistics. They knew what happens to so many children who struggle early at school. Petrie offered the library building and staff to help address the problem and Dr. Hughes had teachers and buses to add to the equation. Together they hatched a plan for a summer kindergarten prep school called KiPS.

Year one carried a \$30,000 price tag, but Petrie didn't worry. She planned to approach the Dekko Foundation for support, and this project was right up their alley. No problem. Except it was 2009, and the Dekko Foundation's granting resources had been shrunk by the economic downturn. What resources did remain were needed to sustain important programs and services already underway. 'We weren't totally surprised that the Foundation didn't support us,' Petrie said. 'In fact they'd kind of warned us. But KiPS was so good we still thought they'd fund a piece of it. When we got their letter we told ourselves, 'We're doing this with or without the Dekko Foundation. What can we cut?'

KiPS was launched in the summer of 2009, thanks mostly to cooperation and creative ingenuity. Teachers volunteered their time and classroom resources, businesses and individuals gave goods and services and precious financial resources.

The Central Noble School Community School Corporation found a way to kick in transportation.



The result was that children learned the skills they needed to set them up for math, reading and social success. Did the cash crunch mean KiPS had to cut the number of kids served? Nope. In fact more kids came than anticipated. The cost? Just under \$2,000.

With a year's perspective, Petrie now sees the Dekko Foundation's declination as something of a blessing in disguise. 'If we'd have gotten the grant we wouldn't have gotten our community involved' she says. 'We wouldn't have given so many people the opportunity to help.'

Planning for KiPS 2010 is underway and the experiences of the past year have given leaders a new mindset. 'As we move forward with KiPS, and other projects, it's realistic to think that we may not have the resources we've had in the past,' Petrie says. 'From now on I know I'll ask myself 'Is there a better way? 'Should we even do this?''

By the time this special issue of *Indiana Libraries* goes to print, KiPS will have completed its sixth successful year. Even as I write this in February of 2014, businesses have already begun to send in their checks to support this program. Many of those businesses now have KiPS as a line item on their budgets. Last year, we even had a township trustee call and offer to give us \$500 with a promise to do so annually since this program serves the children in their township. As a result of the total community support through donations and volunteers, KiPS is entirely self-sustaining.

Basic facts about KiPS

- Funds come from donations from businesses and individuals, families are asked to pay \$10 for the entire 10 week program. We received award money from the Highsmith Library Innovation Award, which we keep in reserve for years it may be needed. The Dekko Foundation also granted us \$3000 in our second year to keep in reserve if needed.

- The financial cost of the annual program is between \$1700 and \$2000 which is also the approximate revenue. Out of that we buy supplies for the program and school supplies for each child so they begin the school year with the same things. With any money left over we try to give teacher stipends to our KiPS teachers to help with gas or small expenses. They don't expect or demand it, but they do appreciate it.



- The program itself is a 10 week program that meets once a week for three hours. The kids are divided into six groups and have a group leader that stays with them as they rotate through six learning stations: Math, Art, Reading, Writing, Fine Motor Skills, and Large Motor Skills. Social skills are learned throughout the program such as raising your hand, walking in a line, washing hands after going to restroom, and taking turns.

- We attend Kindergarten round-ups where we are invited to speak about KiPS and begin to enroll children at those events, but the school continues to encourage KiPS involvement as other Kindergarteners register at the schools.

- The program is open to ALL incoming Kindergarteners of our local school district. Some parents give more than their \$10 to ensure that other families can participate. Regardless, no child is turned away.

- Since year one, we have enrolled approximately 70% of each incoming class which is anywhere from 50-80 students. We found the ideal group size to be 10-12.

- It takes about 15 people to run this program; six instructors (we use the Kindergarten and other teachers for this and possibly our children's librarians if needed), six group leaders, one person to call parents if a child does not show up (similar to what the school does), and two people to prepare and provide snacks at snack time.



- The school provides bus transportation which is CRITICAL to the success of KiPS. We have set stops in communities where we know we have large groups of children, such as at daycare centers. Parents can meet the bus at those locations or choose to bring their children themselves. We meet the kids at the bus once it arrives at the library or we have parents pull through and drop off kids similar to at school. Parents may NOT come into the library with their children which helps begin to deal with separation anxiety (mostly on the parent's part).

Some of what KiPS does:

- Begins to build relationships with other children and

teachers before school starts. We have two elementary schools and by allowing the kids to get to know each other in KiPS we hope it will help them merge better once in school.



- Deals with separation anxiety and lessens it, so that kids are eager and ready to learn on day one of school.

- Gets kids acclimated to the bus before they have to ride with older children.

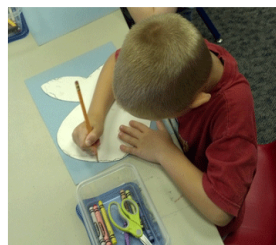
- Teaches social skills so that teachers can dive right in to teaching on the first day of Kindergarten. KiPS kids model behavior for the small percentage of students who do not attend KiPS.



- Levels the playing field for kids who may not have had opportunity to attend pre-school.

- All kids benefit and love KiPS even if academically advanced.

- Because KiPS meets the entire summer and ends right before school starts, they don't lose what they've learned.



- Almost all of the children will be able to write their name, know basic colors, know upper and lower case letters, jump on one leg, count to at least twenty (usually much higher), and be able to follow simple directions.

- And finally, KiPS brings our community together for a common purpose.

For those of you that swear by statistics, we have tracked achievement levels for each KiPS year through pre and post testing. The overall average increase in skill improvement is 18%. We saw a 36% increase in ability to "cut on a line" and a 29% increase in ability to "write name." For those interested in "stories", our biggest success story was in our first year when a child had taken the KRT (Kindergarten Readiness Test) in the spring achieving only a score of 24. The parents were told that the child was not ready for kindergarten and recommended he be held back one more year. The parents enrolled the child in KiPS hoping it could improve his scores and he was tested again at the end of KiPS scoring a 36 which was a huge improvement and showed he was more than ready to enter kindergarten.

In closing, KiPS is a program that can be adapted for any community. We are willing to share our documents and what we've learned with any library that would like to start

something similar or at least begin a conversation with your schools. Though every community is different, there are concepts of KiPS that can be applied anywhere. Please email me with any questions at spetrie@nobleco.lib.in.us.



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KiPS



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