

INSPIRED FAMILIES READ TOGETHER SUMMER FAMILY READING CLUB

*by Diana Melton, Ferdinand Branch Library,
a unit of the Dubois County Contractual Libraries*



HOW WE ARE

Ferdinand, Indiana, is a light retail, manufacturing and agricultural community of 2,500 citizens in the southern part of the state. Our one-room, 1,800, sq. ft. branch holds about 21,000 volumes, has 2 staff members, one Internet PC, one regular PC, a manual check-in/out system and manual card catalog. We are open 41 hours a week. Our Dubois County Contractual Library system operates 2 units, the Ferdinand Branch Library and the Dubois County Bookmobile.

AN INSPIRED BEGINNING

In March, we read in *Focus on Indiana Libraries* that Inspire Kits were available, so we called and asked for one. When the kit arrived, we were very impressed with the professional quality of the pencils, bookmarks, pamphlets and other items available, at a reasonable price. A “seed” was planted that perhaps we could use these materials for Summer Reading Program. Since January, my assistant, Trina Emmert, and I had been discussing ideas for the program. We knew we were ready to try something different.

A CHANGE IN FOCUS

For 15 years, I had participated in planning and executing summer reading programs at Evansville-Vanderburgh County Public Library. Over the years, EVCPL staff had discussed the incentive value, for the reader, of food coupons, and how to count books read, minutes of reading, or pages read. The program was persistently refined every year. Two of my former supervisors, Evelyn Walker, Assistant Director at EVCPL, and Linda Hahus, Head of Youth Services, have greatly influenced my current views on the how and why of library programming. In a nutshell, the philosophy is this: If the programming does not directly focus on the library’s services and its collection, it should not be done. Our Board of Trustees for the Dubois Contractual Libraries has been very supportive of our efforts, so we felt a well-constructed new program was “do-able”.

TESTING THE WATERS

These were the ideas Trina and I discussed in January and February, but I understood that old habits are hard to break. Summer Reading programs are for kids, aren’t they? Food coupons and trinket incentives are traditional, aren’t they? Huge circulation figures are important for funding, aren’t they? Our answer is, “Maybe not!” Maybe summer reading club could be for everyone. Perhaps bribing the kids to read isn’t the best incentive. Circulation is not a true measure of library usage or a measure of its importance to the community. Our major concern was the reaction of the children to the shift in the prize structure from individual incentives to prize baskets and drawing chance incentives. We drafted a plan and submitted it to storytime moms. The moms were very supportive and gave valuable advice.

THE INSPIRED PLAN

This is how we structured the program: 1) It would be open to all ages—infants to seniors. 2) Non-readers could be read to by family members. 3) Local merchants would provide prize baskets for incentives. 4) Participants would register at the library and pick up their Club Kits: a “Love My Library” bookbag from Demco, an Inspire pencil and bookmark, and their reading record. 5) Participants would complete tasks that teach about the library and read books to earn a chance at a prize basket. 6) Completing 10 tasks earns a chance at a grand prize basket.

THE TEN TASKS

Participants kept track of their reading and tasks completed. The tasks were designed to teach patrons about library services and collections. The tasks were: 1) Read a fiction book. 2) Read an information book. 3) Find “Inspire Indiana” webpage on home or library computer. 4) Read a book aloud to my family. 5) Read a library newspaper or magazine article. 6) Attend a library program. 7) Check out a library video or audiobook. 8) Ask a librarian about large print books. 9) Bring a friend to the library. 10) Read one more book to finish. After completing these 10 tasks, participants could enter their name in the grand prize

drawing and continue to read more books for more chances at prizes.

THE PRIZE BASKETS

To garner community support, we sent letters to 20 businesses for contributions. We asked each business to include family-oriented prizes. They could fill the baskets with goodies that inform the community about their business: including logo items, candies, children's books about their profession. Ten businesses responded to our appeal. We asked for logo samples or letterheads to use in our publicity and displays. We publicized their participation with a news release, in-house displays, publicity flyers and the reading records. At the end of the program we photographed each winner with their basket, gave the winner a sponsor-addressed, stamped thank-you card and sent our own thank-you letter, with a photo of the winner, to the sponsor.

THE PUBLICITY

We used Inspire Clip Art on all of our flyers and bulletin board displays. The high-contrast magenta, blue, yellow, green and black color scheme was easy to duplicate and created sharp-looking displays. Trina used Velcro to hang the Inspire pencils, buttons and other items for display on the bulletin boards. She cut oversize confetti and generally translated the design concept of Inspire graphics to our needs. I gave a presentation to the Ferdinand Kiwanis and received funds to support our printing expenses. In April, we ordered bookbags from Demco and 500 Inspire pencils and bookmarks from ILF. In May, we delivered flyers to the Ferdinand Elementary School. For the final touch, a reporter from the "Ferdinand News" wrote a front-page newspaper article about our reading program.

"INSPIRED READING" AT A GLANCE

In June, participants visited the library, registered for the Club and received their Club Kits. They were very excited about the beautiful baskets from our sponsors. Three hundred forty people registered, ages 4 months to 81 years old. Readers used over 1,700 drawing slips. Additional programming included storytimes, a contest, a family book swap, a recycling craft, a teen volunteer club, a visit from the Dubois Dragons baseball team, a kids' collections show-and-tell, and a sock puppet chorus. Our most popular program was our "Inspired Families Computer Class", open to all ages, where we taught about the Inspire Indiana database. We created Inspire bags filled with promotionals and included a "Child Safety on the Internet" pamphlet from the Center for Exploited and Missing Children. We talked in general about Internet safety for kids and our policy for handling this issue.

HOW WE FARED

Participant registration tripled over last year. Materials circulation was 1,600 items over summer 1998. We feel we really reached more people about the services we provide and the different collections in the library. The gift baskets generated a lot of enthusiasm for all age levels. Another business called to participate next year.

WHAT INSPIRE MEANS TO US

Without access to the Internet and Inspire our services would be greatly hampered. Our budget does not allow us to buy the equipment required or the software products that Inspire provides. We found that patrons with the Internet at home did not know about Inspire. We are very grateful to our Indiana Legislature for the benefits Inspire brings to our modest library in this small rural town. Thank You So Much, Inspire!