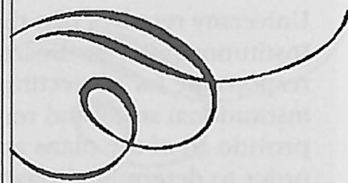


**FABLE AND FACT:  
SERVING THE HOMESCHOOL  
POPULATION IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES**

*by Tamara Marquam with an introduction by Vicki Parker*



## INTRODUCTION

*Vicki Parker*

Once upon a time, many librarians seemed to think that teaching homeschoolers how to use the library was a fabulous program idea. However, homeschoolers are avid library users, and they already know *how* to use the library. Their library use has depth. They use the library as: a meeting place; a resource for learning and research; a cultural resource that provides programming and materials; a recreational reading resource; an environment where intellectual and social growth and interaction are facilitated; and a fun place to visit. In fact, homeschoolers use the library in a manner that is unequalled. When polled, a whopping 77.9% of homeschoolers reported the library as their number one resource (Princiotta & Bielick, 2006).

In the past, homeschoolers were often viewed as religious fanatics who were eagerly awaiting their chance to burn a few books. As difficult patrons...well, who could be worse? Actually, this outdated view is far from the truth. There are many misconceptions about homeschool families and why they choose to homeschool. The reasons for homeschooling are both numerous and vastly diverse. Homeschoolers are dedicated to the education of their children and the welfare of their family. They are loyal library users. During the last 25 years the homeschool population has burgeoned (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). The few homeschoolers we used to see on occasion have grown to the many families we see quite often.

With minimal added cost, the library collection can be adapted to better serve these many homeschool families. For example, Westfield Washington Public Library chose to support the *Sonlight* literature-based curriculum—a perfect fit for our library. Many of the books in this curriculum are ones that would be purchased anyway. Homeschoolers pay attention to the library collection's strengths and weaknesses. They know which library collection best supports a specific subject or media. They are multiple library users seeking the best possible resources that will fulfill the needs of their curriculum. They talk to library staff

members, and they *will* share this information with each other.

The Westfield Washington Public Library initially established the title of Homeschool Liaison and committed funds to pay for the creation, implementation, and maintenance of a Homeschool Folder. The cost was relatively small with a huge return. Homeschool families use our library often, requesting programs and services because they know we will respond. We are reputed to be a homeschool friendly library.

## FABLE AND FACT: SERVING THE HOMESCHOOL POPULATION IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

*Tamara Marquam*

Homeschoolers and libraries...they definitely go together! As homeschooling increases in popularity, there is more and more demand for libraries to accommodate the special needs and wants of the rapidly growing homeschool population. This article will address five basic questions regarding libraries and homeschoolers: Why should libraries serve homeschoolers? Who are homeschoolers? Is homeschooling legal? What do homeschoolers want? How can libraries provide special services to homeschoolers without breaking the budget?

### Why should libraries serve homeschoolers?

We are expected to serve them – in fact, they depend on it. Public libraries are where most homeschoolers go first for books and other homeschooling materials. In a 2003 study, 77.9% of homeschoolers polled said they use their public library as their primary source of materials (Princiotta & Bielick, 2006). If you look around in your library during the day, you are almost certainly going to see some homeschoolers.

Homeschoolers are an entire population of library-lovers. Many have PLAC (Public Library Access Cards) cards and use several libraries regularly. PLAC cards cost \$30 per year and allow the user to obtain library cards at any public library in Indiana. For many homeschooling families, purchasing a PLAC card is the

Educational Philosophy	Examples of some common sources used
formal curriculum	A Beka, Bob Jones, Alpha Omega, Christian Liberty, Calvert, Rod and Staff, Houghton-Mifflin, Scott-Foresman
classical education	<i>The Well-Trained Mind</i> , by Jessie Wise; Trivium Pursuit, Memoria Press; Tapestry of Grace; Biblioplan; TruthQuest; WinterPromise; Tanglewood, Charlotte Mason
literature-based education	Sonlight, Winter Promise, Robinson Curriculum, Accelerated Achievement, Living Learning Books, Charlotte Mason
Principle Approach	The American Christian History Institute, James Rose, Stephen McDowell, Rosalie Slater, F.A.C.E., The Pilgrim Institute, The Mayflower Institute, The Providence Foundation, Richard "Little Bear" Wheeler - Mantle Ministries
Homemade curriculum	free internet sources, workbooks, library sources, etc.
unit studies	Konos, The Weaver, Five in a Row, Alta Vista, ATI (Bill Gothard), Delight Direct Studies (Gregg Harris), Valerie Bendt, Katherine Stout
child-directed learning	Montessori Method, less formal/planned use of library materials and community opportunities
eclectic homeschoolers	Tend to use bits and pieces of all types of sources to fit individual needs.
unschoolers	<i>Teach Your Own</i> , by John Holt; <i>Homeschooling for Excellence</i> , by David and Micki Colfax; <i>Life Learning Magazine</i>
Distance learning	Clonlara School; Calvert with the tutorial option; Home Study International; Laurel Springs School
Electronic education	Bob Jones satellite, Switched on Schoolhouse, ACE

Figure 1.

least expensive thing they can do to enhance their curriculums. Inter-library loan is nice, but PLAC cards give the users the ability to browse multiple collections as well as instant access to materials from multiple libraries. Homeschoolers tend to use all parts of the collection, all formats of materials. They are frequently very aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the collections of several libraries in their area.

These are children who are going to the library every week and who will become lifetime library users as a result. These children are our future Friends of the Library members, library board members, and staunch library advocates. The best part is that we don't have to do anything special to lure them to the library – they are visiting us already. We need only to strive to make their experiences as positive as possible. If we make that extra effort, they will always remember these positive experiences and their future libraries will benefit greatly.

### **Who are homeschoolers?**

The homeschooling population has changed drastically in the past few decades. It is a rapidly changing demographic, including families from all walks of life and representing all faiths and viewpoints. Although the homeschooling movement was primarily pioneered by Christians who were homeschooling for religious reasons, the current population of homeschoolers is far more diverse. More recently, religion is still ranked as one of the top three reasons for homeschooling – but it is no longer the number one reason, and there are many more religions represented these days. In a recent study, when asked about their most important reason for homeschooling, 31.2% cited “concern about environment of other schools,” 29.8% cited “to provide religious or moral instruction,” and 16.5% cited “dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools” (Princiotta & Bielick, 2006, p. 13). According to a recent Harris poll, 65% cited “dissatisfaction with academic instruction,” 60% cited “to provide religious or moral instruction,” and 53% cited “concern about safety at school (or on the bus)” (Harris Interactive, 2006, p.2).

Families have many other reasons to homeschool as well, such as meeting the special needs or learning styles of the child, enjoying the flexibility of the schedule for those who travel, dissatisfaction with state/government regulations at school, to provide individualized teaching, to improve family unity, to provide year-round schooling, and many more. If you were to ask five different families about their reasons for homeschooling, you are likely to get five different answers...and it is getting easier and easier to find five families to ask about homeschooling. In fact, according to that same Harris poll, one-third of U.S. adults knows someone who homeschools their child.

While the demographic for homeschoolers keeps expanding, there are some general factors that still apply to most homeschooling families. The majority of homeschooled children (77%) are white and live in two-parent households (81%) (Princiotta & Bielick, 2006). Over half of homeschoolers (54%) live in two-parent households where one parent works and the other stays home, and homeschooling families are more likely to have three or more children (66% compared to 44% of families using public schools) (Princiotta & Bielick, 2006). There is some indication that the higher the education level of parents, the more likely the family is to homeschool children ages 11 and under, although there seems to be no such relationship between the parents' education level and homeschooling children over the age of 12 (Isenberg, 2006). In 2003, there were no appreciable differences in rates of homeschooling among students when considering their household income (Princiotta & Bielick, 2006). Regardless of their demographics, one fairly universal trait of homeschoolers is that they are, almost without exception, avid library users.

There are many educational philosophies utilized by homeschoolers. Of these mixed philosophies, there is a wide spectrum ranging from formal curriculum, classical education, literature-based education, Principle Approach, homemade curriculum, unit studies, child-directed learning, eclectic homeschoolers, unschoolers, and more. (See Figure 1.) There is an increasing market of resources targeted for use by homeschoolers. Some are basic educational philosophy books, while others are commercial curriculum sources, textbooks, and workbooks.

One thing to keep in mind is that, as with any large population, homeschooling families employ a wide variety of philosophies, values, approaches, opinions, etc. There are those who excel and those who struggle. There are going to be those who exemplify the best and the worst of the homeschooling population. As the homeschooling population continues to grow, there will be a wider and wider distribution of types of people choosing this educational option. This makes stereotyping less and less accurate. In fact, the stereotype of children practically chained to the kitchen table all day, doing schoolwork, and being sequestered from the world simply does not apply these days. Homeschooled children are generally very active in local homeschool groups, extracurricular activities, and in their communities (Basham, 2001). But what about socialization? That is the single most common question that people ask about homeschoolers. For most homeschoolers, this is such a non-issue as to be almost humorous. Between their local homeschool groups, extracurricular activities, and interests in the communities, homeschooled children are generally very well “socialized.” In fact, several studies measuring children's self-esteem, communication skills, and social



development have concluded quite firmly that homeschoolers perform as well as or better than children in public schools (Klicka, 2007).

### Is it legal?

Homeschooling has been absolutely legal in every state since 1993 (Basham, 2001), although states have different legal guidelines. Homeschools are viewed as non-accredited private schools by the state of Indiana (Indiana Department of Education, 2007). In fact, the term *homeschooling* is not a legal term in any Indiana legislation. All students are required to attend school from the ages of 7 to 16 (Indiana Department of Education, 2007). Homeschools have the same guidelines that parochial schools and other private schools follow. That is to say, they are expected to keep attendance for at least 180 days of instruction. Attendance is the ONLY legal requirement (Indiana Department of Education, 2007). There are no curriculum rules, no testing requirements, and no teacher qualifications. In Indiana, there is no such thing as "registration." Parents may choose to report enrollment, at which time they would receive a private school number from the state. However, they only are required to do so if requested by the State Superintendent of Schools (Indiana Department of Education, 2007).

Many families choose to report enrollment when pulling a child out of public school. Often those whose children have never attended public school opt to not report enrollment. Reporting enrollment involves nothing more than reporting the number of students – no names, no grades, and no specifics. Reporting enrollment is frequently and incorrectly referred to as "registration." Many states do require formal registration. Actual registration requires far more detailed information about the students, the teachers, and sometimes the lesson plans. Registration is usually accompanied by restrictions, formal curriculum guidelines, and/or testing requirements. This makes it an important distinction - in Indiana there is no "registration."

Studies indicate that as of 2003, over 2% of students in the United States are homeschooled (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2005; Isenberg, 2006). This number continues to rise. The percentage of homeschooled students in Indiana is likely to be higher than 2% due to the laws which make homeschooling in Indiana less cumbersome than it is in other states. Those laws are unlikely to change any time soon. We have several state senators who are homeschooling parents themselves. There is occasionally some proposed resolution introduced to examine the need for homeschooling guidelines, but it usually dies in committee. Indiana remains one of the least restrictive states in which to homeschool.

### What do homeschoolers want?

New homeschoolers especially want books about homeschooling from recognized leading authors in the field such as Rebecca Rupp, Linda Dobson, Mary Griffith, John Holt, John Taylor Gatto, Grace Llewellyn, Penny Gardner, Susan Wise Bauer, and others. They are eager to learn the language of this new world they are entering, so they frequently want to read about the different educational philosophies and decide where their family fits into the world of homeschooling. They want to be familiar with classical education, the Charlotte Mason method, Montessori, unschooling, and more – the whole array of approaches from which they can choose. Sometimes it is possible to gauge from talking with a new homeschooler which sources might resonate best with their family. That is always particularly rewarding to both the patron and the librarian. Another good general source of homeschooling information can be homeschooling magazines, such as *Homeschooling Today*, *Life Learning*, the free bi-monthly *Homeschooling Parent*, and others.

Homeschoolers do look to their libraries for curriculum support, but not in the way many might think. They are usually not seeking textbooks or formal curricula so much as they are looking for historical fiction titles, activity-based materials, audio books, circulating encyclopedias, and teacher resources. Many of these are items that are included in the collection anyway, so it is no great hardship or strain on the collection budget to include titles from popular curricula. This may mean making an effort to purchase books recommended in sources like *The Well Trained Mind* or popular literature-based curricula catalogs such as *Sonlight*. Most libraries have a good portion of those recommended titles already, as many of them are award-winning books. Occasionally a title may be out of print or unavailable for purchase. Some homeschoolers will not want to deviate from their source recommendations, while others are open to alternate suggestions. For those unwilling to use substitutions, sometimes interlibrary loan is the answer. Other times they might benefit from sources the librarian can point them to so that they might be able to purchase the titles more cheaply themselves (examples: <http://www.bfbooks.com/> and used book sites). Often, the more experienced or relaxed homeschoolers are fine with substitutions as long as the topic/historical timeframe and the reading level are about the same as the unavailable book.

Teacher resources such as guides from Scholastic, GEMS guides from the Lawrence Hall of Science (Great Explorations in Math and Science), History Pockets, activity guides, phonics programs, etc. are especially well-received. At Westfield Washington Public Library, we have had several programs developed from GEMS

guides, which are also used by local school teachers and parents leading co-op classes. Many of the resources preferred by teachers are heavily used by homeschoolers as well.

Newer homeschoolers are especially seeking information about local support groups. The single biggest obstacle for new homeschoolers is finding support! This is not a trivial obstacle. It is very important to the success of this venture to have adequate support. There are many homeschool groups in every county. Some have a particular world view, while others may be secular or inclusive. Some are for social support only, while others may offer co-op classes. It is very important to the new homeschooler to find these resources in his or her community. There are a number of ways libraries can help in this regard. One way is to compile a list of local support groups which may seem daunting at first. It isn't as hard as it sounds, though. Simply talking to homeschooling patrons is a good place to start. Other ways of finding out about local groups include posting signs seeking homeschool group information; checking the IHEN.org web site's database of support groups (organized by county); and contacting any state and local groups to inquire about other groups in the area, as local groups are generally somewhat aware of each other. Another easy tool is the homeschool social. Simply post signs about a homeschool social event, and many will show up. It's an inexpensive and easy way to help homeschoolers to connect with each other while it also enables gathering information about the local support groups. The cost is minimal – basically staff time and refreshments if you choose to serve them.

The single biggest obstacle for homeschool support groups is finding cheap (free) space to meet and hold educational events. This is a great free and easy way to help local homeschoolers. If the space is there, why not use it? Homeschoolers normally meet during school hours, which are typically lower library usage times. Most libraries aren't using their space for programs or storytimes every day all day long, so there are usually times that the space could be otherwise utilized. If library policy doesn't allow it, request a change in policy. One thing to consider is that if you make space available to one group, it must be available to all groups. A simple solution is the first come, first served policy. Opening your space for use by the community will only increase library usage, which is a good thing. Be prepared for the consequences: increase in circulation, profuse heartfelt thanks from homeschoolers, and increase in PLAC card use.

There are other services that libraries can provide for homeschoolers, such as daytime programming for school age children, educational workshops, or foreign language classes. Also, libraries can provide academic team and competition opportunities such as Lego

Mindstorm, chess, Odyssey of the Mind, Scrabble, Math Pentathlon, Word Power Challenge Club, geography bees, spelling bees, science fairs, international fairs, and more. It might seem too much for the library budget or resources, but that is not necessarily true. It may take some creative financing and outsourcing, but it can be done. And the more it is done, the easier it gets to do more.

### **How can we serve homeschoolers without breaking the budget?**

At Westfield Washington Public Library in 2006, we offered 188 supplemental program events targeted to homeschoolers. These programs were attended by 1594 patrons and cost the library a total of only \$308. Our budget is pretty tight and we have no excess of staff persons. So how did we do it? We let the homeschoolers fund the programs they wanted by requiring pre-registration and pre-payment. All checks are made to the Friends of Westfield Library, and the treasurer of the Friends simply writes one check to each instructor. With the cooperation of the Friends, this system has allowed us to provide far more than we otherwise would be able to offer our patrons. The library provides space, opportunity, and registration only for programs outsourced to local instructors. Occasionally the library programming budget contributes a portion of the presenter's fee in order to reduce the cost to the patron to an affordable level. Knowing what patrons will pay is important and usually discovered through trial and error. We have had to cancel a few programs on occasion, but that is fine. It was often an indication of a price point or the day/time the class was offered. In almost all cases, the program was offered again at another time or price and was well-received.

These programs occurred during low usage times (school hours) and increased circulation and program statistics while successfully meeting the needs of local homeschoolers. After offering a couple of classes in this manner, patrons started recommending instructors or requesting particular types of classes. The more we offer the more instructors we learn about and the easier it is to offer programs of this type. This fall we actually had more class opportunities than we had time to offer in one season. There are so many types of programs that are well-received: foreign languages, sign language, science workshops, music classes, writing classes, chess instruction, drama classes, knitting/crocheting classes, art classes – just to name a few. Many of these classes were taught by patrons. Every community has resources like this – it is just a matter of seeking them out and taking advantage of the resources at your disposal.

There are some useful guidelines that simplify this process. When dealing with instructors, we ask them



for a price per participant, as well as the minimum and maximum number of participants they would like to teach. This is far easier than setting a fixed amount per class, which leaves us to guess at how many might sign up, and therefore to guess at how much to charge per child. Requiring the instructor to set a price per participant solves a lot of potential problems. Another simple policy that reduces problems is the no refunds policy. Unless a program is cancelled, there are no refunds. If someone is ill, forgets, oversleeps, has an emergency – sorry, no refunds. If the instructor agrees, occasionally we will pro-rate a class for students who know they will miss a week or two – but that is up to the instructor. On the rare occasion that we have had to cancel programs due to low registration, we encourage patrons to apply that money to future programs. This reduces the number of refund checks we issue and patrons are generally happy to do this. This is made easier by the volume of programs we offer – they know there is likely to soon be another class in which they are interested.

Our registration form is very simple. We ask for the caretaker's name, phone number, and e-mail. Then they list the children's names, programs, and prices. We record whether cash or check was received, the amount received, and who accepted payment and registration (employee's initials). At that point, the child's name and phone number go on the instructor's sign up sheet for that class – with, again, the employee's initials. Once or twice per week, we enter the information from the registration form into an Excel spreadsheet. It is always good to check to be sure the same number of registrants appears on both the spreadsheet and the sign up sheet for the instructor. It is also good to verify that the total amount recorded on all registration forms equals the total funds received. In over three years of taking registration in this manner, we have had remarkably few problems. Occasional errors occur, but rarely have they impacted the classes in any real way. After a class session has begun, we simply tally the column for that class and have a check written to the instructor.

We offer classes and programs on a quarterly basis. There is generally much time spent in scheduling and arranging classes about six to eight weeks prior to each session. Promotional brochures and registration forms are available approximately a month prior to the beginning of each session. The time spent decreases over time, as the process is the same each time. Forms and sign up sheets are easily modified for each session, as are some promotional materials. We had one instructor who taught Spanish classes for over three years. Setting up her classes took very little time – usually a quick phone call and a few minutes changing dates on forms and signs. It truly does get easier the more we do.

The Westfield Washington Public Library also received an LSTA grant this last year. It was a diversity grant, written with homeschoolers as the diverse group to be served. This grant allowed us to better serve the diverse population (homeschoolers) by providing no-cost art programs. This grant allowed us to purchase quality art supplies far beyond the scope of our usual budget. The art programs were very well received.

The library also has a Lego Mindstorms team. The team does not consist exclusively of homeschoolers, but many homeschoolers have participated. The initial supplies were obtained through a technology grant from Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology three years ago. The team is coached by parent volunteers, so the cost to the library is minimal. Last year we actually had two teams, both of which performed very well at the Regional Competition and went on to win medals at the State Competition. For more information about forming a Lego Mindstorms team, visit [http://www.etc.ipfw.edu/~fll/web\\_objects/documents/Starting\\_FLL\\_Team.pdf](http://www.etc.ipfw.edu/~fll/web_objects/documents/Starting_FLL_Team.pdf).

So, with few resources but some creative effort, the Westfield Washington Public Library has found ways to offer additional daytime programs for homeschoolers. We also offer a homeschool information folder free to anyone. This folder contains relevant library collection and services information as well as community-based information. The library information sheets include a welcome letter, a list of items of particular interest to homeschoolers, a guide to our foreign language materials, and a bibliography of books about homeschooling. The community information sheets include a list of support groups in and around Hamilton County, an information sheet about the legalities of homeschooling in Indiana, a list of local merchant who offer discounts to homeschoolers, a list of extracurricular activities for homeschoolers, a list of statewide homeschool organizations, and a list of national homeschool organizations. With the folders purchased every fall during back-to-school sales, the cost of this service is kept very low. The advantage to local homeschoolers is great, and it actually saves the library time and money in the long run. The folders are far less expensive than the time it would take to personally disseminate that much information. Contact information in the folders is verified once or twice per year. After offering this to patrons for a few months, people started bringing us information to include in the folder as well. In this manner, our list of local support groups has grown to include 17 groups with brief descriptions about each group as well as relevant contact information. This is probably our most popular service to homeschoolers. There are peak times when more folders are taken, such as just before school starts, just after school ends, and December/January. These are times when more parents are considering

not sending their children back to school and are seeking more information about their local homeschool communities.

## CONCLUSION

As the homeschooling population grows, there are more and more ways in which libraries can serve homeschoolers. Providing homeschool-related information, meeting opportunities/use of library space, resources, and programs are a few key ways to meet some of the needs of this rapidly expanding population. These friendly library-loving patrons are very appreciative of any efforts on their behalf and generally are quick to offer suggestions and share ideas as well, so a little effort can go a long way towards serving this segment of your communities.

## REFERENCES

- Basham, P. (2001). *Home schooling: From the extreme to the mainstream*. Retrieved August 6, 2007, from <http://www.fraserinstitute.ca/admin/books/files/homeschool.pdf>
- Harris Interactive. (2006). *The Harris Poll, #29*. Retrieved July 9, 2007, from [http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris\\_poll/index.asp?PID=653](http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=653)
- Indiana Department of Education. (2007). *Indiana homeschool help sheet*. Retrieved August 1, 2007, from <http://ideanet.doe.state.in.us/sservices/homed.htm>
- Isenberg, E. J. (October 2006). *The choice of public, private, or home schooling*. Retrieved August 2, 2007, from [ncspe.org](http://ncspe.org).

Klicka, C. (2007). *Socialization: Homeschoolers are in the real world*. Retrieved August 6, 2007, from <http://www.hslda.org/docs/nche/000000/00000068.asp>

Princiotta, D. & Bielick, S. (2006). *Homeschooling in the United States: 2003*, (NCES 2006-042). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Washington D.C: 2005.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2005). *The condition of education 2005*, NCES 2005-094, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Tammy Marquam has been a children's librarian at Westfield Washington Public Library for over seven years and is a homeschooling mother. As the library's Homeschool Liaison, she also assists homeschoolers, compiles local homeschool information for distribution, arranges classes, and more. Contact Tammy at [tammy@marquam.org](mailto:tammy@marquam.org)

Vicki Parker has worked at the Westfield Washington Public Library for 25 years. She has been the Head of Children's Services for 20 of those years. Before becoming a librarian, Vicki worked as a graphic designer and illustrator. Ms. Parker firmly believes that to be a children's librarian is to encourage the love of literature with the ultimate goal of creating lifetime library users. Contact Vicki at [Vicki@westfieldlibrary.lib.in.us](mailto:Vicki@westfieldlibrary.lib.in.us)



Children at a recent Bubble Festival science program, based on the GEMS guide, *Bubble Festival*.