

## Volunteer Programs for Young Readers in Southeast Indiana

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### **New Albany-Floyd County Ruth A. Houghton**

What do you do when it's summer reading club time at your library, circulation soars, and you can't get any extra page help?

At the New Albany-Floyd County Public Library over 2300 children were registered in the 1988 summer reading club with a circulation of 41,991 books during the months of June and July. Of this figure, 55 percent were easy readers and picture books. Shelves in these two areas were virtually empty with books going out as quickly as they came in. How to keep these books reshelved was a real problem. The burden weighed heavy until we adopted a program of student volunteers.

At New Albany-Floyd County, easy readers and picture books are filed alphabetically by the author's last initial, not by the complete name; therefore, shelving these books can be done by upper elementary students with a minimum of training. We started our student volunteer program on a small scale in 1984, and during the past two summers have had

twenty active volunteers, a good number with which to work. Originally, volunteers were recruited during school visits promoting the summer reading club but each year, as word has spread, less official recruiting has been needed. Students come to us before we have to ask.

Volunteers must have completed the fifth grade and must be willing to work on a regular weekly basis (allowances are made for family vacations, camp, etc.). We have found a 1 - 1 1/2 hour period once a week works well. If volunteers work more hours or more often, they tend to tire of it quickly. We schedule three shifts - mid-morning, afternoon, and evening with some flexibility around an individual student's transportation. We NEVER have more than two volunteers on duty at a time; usually one works even better. (We learned this the hard way!)

In working with volunteers, we deal with the student from the beginning. Parents may sit in on the initial interview to find out what is expected, but we let students know they are the ones making the commitment and the responsibility is theirs, not their

parents. (Parents are consulted on scheduling because of providing transportation.) For almost all of the volunteers, this is the first "job" experience, and we treat it as such. An evaluation note on job performance and total hours volunteered is kept on file.

When students first talk with us about volunteering, they fill out a simple information form. During the middle of May, we contact them to schedule a work time. They usually do not know their other summer activities schedules before this. They are asked to attend a training session the last week of May. We usually have two sessions from which they can choose.

At the training sessions volunteer guidelines, adapted especially for age considerations, are distributed. These are kept as simple as possible; i.e., clean clothing and hands, call if you can't make it, no goofing off behind the desk. Each student is responsible for keeping a simple time sheet and a record of different jobs performed. Each also wears a name badge printed with first name and "volunteer." With so many new volunteers at once, the staff needs this to help remember who is who! Their basic task is to reshelve the easy readers and picture books, but volunteers have helped us with many other simple tasks as well.

We have found these students to be eager, enthusiastic workers who want to please and do a good job. Some have found it not to their liking and have quit. (We tell them at the outset that that is OK, but to please let us know and not just quit coming. That way we know a slot is open for someone else from the waiting list.) Other volunteers really like the work and sign up again the following year. Several have been with us several years and, as junior high students, "graduated" to shelving fiction books

and helping sort non-fiction.

Thanks to area fast food and pizza restaurants, we reward volunteers with several free coupons along with our certificate of appreciation and letter of thanks at the end of the summer.

Summer reading club time is a wild, hectic, chaotic period at our library. Staff members are overloaded with reader guidance, reading club registration and record keeping, circulation, and programming. These young volunteers have "stepped" right in and filled a very great need. Their time and dedication are invaluable to us and the library program. We would never want to try a summer without them again.

## **Jeffersonville Township Pamela W. Federspiel**

A problem that faces most children's librarians is how to keep the young reader interested in the library after he/she has become too "old" to participate in the annual summer reading program. This age group (twelve-fifteen years) is one of the most difficult to reach.

Four years ago, purely by accident, I found one solution to this problem. At a time when manpower was short and more students were in the library due to spring break, I found myself becoming frustrated with having to do more shelving and straightening of materials in conjunction with my duties as Children's Librarian. The idea occurred to me that I might enlist the aid of my daughter Courtney Carmean, age twelve, to perform the tasks of shelving picture books, paperbacks, records and picking up the toys while she was off on spring break. To my surprise, she found volunteering at the library interesting and a lot of fun. It then occurred to me that perhaps other young people

her age would also enjoy the opportunity to volunteer at the library. I consulted with our library director Bill Bolte, about implementing a volunteer program for this age group. He agreed that this would be an excellent way to increase participation in the library. Plus, it would be an aid to us during our busiest time, June through July.

Next, it was decided that each volunteer would be scheduled for three hours a week for the seven week period, the same day and time each week. Scheduling shifts were set at 9:00 a.m. - noon and 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

If the volunteer would be on vacation or one week presented a problem, a substitute would then be scheduled. Two volunteers would be scheduled per shift. An orientation program would also be scheduled the week before the volunteers would begin to work at the library.

During spring visits to the schools to promote the Summer Reading Club, I asked school librarians to recommend students who would be interested in volunteering at the public library in the summer and who would also be reliable and self-motivated. From this list, I sent a letter to parents, describing what we were trying to accomplish and emphasizing what the requirements were and what the benefits were for their child. Besides the benefits of teaching responsibility and giving them their first job experience, the students would also be treated to a pizza party and to the freebies of the Summer Reading Club (i.e. skating party). The parents were asked to respond by phone a week before their child was scheduled for the orientation program. Out of the thirty-five letters mailed, I received twenty-two positive responses.

On the day of the orientation program, twenty volunteers actually attended. The orientation program consisted of the following objectives:

1. to acquaint the volunteers with an overview of the library - a slide/tape program about the library was shown and a walking tour to each department was conducted.
2. to stress good working habits - signing in and out for the job, reporting to the supervisor, being on time etc.
3. to relate how important each volunteer was to the operation of the library. Refreshments were then served and volunteer badges distributed. Actual job training was given "on the job" the first day volunteers were scheduled to work.

The ensuing seven weeks were a pleasant experience. The volunteers worked like busy bees while doing an excellent job. It was hard sometimes to get them to take a break during their work shift, as they preferred to continue working! The program's initial year was so successful that it ensured it would be an annual program. In the fall students in the township even asked to be put on the volunteer list for the next summer's program.

The only change that has been made from the original planning was in the number of volunteers in the program. The first year we had twenty-two volunteers, which we reduced to twelve regular volunteers and two substitutes. The smaller number was still able to meet our needs, but did not have a lot of "free" time as did the larger group of volunteers.

The volunteer program has benefited our library and staff. It has helped us to develop a better rapport with this age group and has improved community relations.

An unexpected bonus was the hiring of one of the first volunteers as

a part-time employee of the library. The job knowledge she acquired while volunteering gave her self-confidence for her new position.