

SPARK A PASSION FOR READING WITH LARGE PRINT BOOKS

Thorndike Press Large Print—Learn how a public library system that supports one of the most diverse counties in America is helping children become more comfortable and confident with reading.

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Don Giacomini,
Youth Services Specialist,
Gwinnett County Public Library
Gwinnett County, GA

BACKGROUND

Head 30 miles northeast of Atlanta, Georgia and that’s where you’ll find Gwinnett County Public Library (GCPL). This 15-branch library system serves a diverse community of over 900,000 people and is well-established with 52% of the population as library cardholders. Among the 150 public schools, there are nearly 100 languages spoken and more than 200,000 students—many whom are English Language Learners (ELL).

Don Giacomini, youth services specialist at GCPL, works primarily with the public school system and is focused on finding ways to incentivize children to go beyond in their reading. Along with their original purchases, GCPL was able to secure grant money that enabled them to build on the Thorndike Press large print titles they have available for middle readers. “The fact that we can say we have these targeted resources is nothing but good. So, working with Thorndike, you know getting these materials, has been nothing but a positive for us. It’s made my job that much easier, and it makes me feel good that we really have something tangible to give to these kids who might be reluctant to dive into something else.”

ABOUT THE CHALLENGE LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

GCPL had been working closely with nonprofit organizations, reading intervention specialists, home school networks, and public schools. The most immediate need from these partnerships is in the area of literacy. Media specialists they talked to suggested that resources like large print books could help reduce the anxiety that surrounds reading.

“Not all kids are created equal,” says Giacomini. “We obtained this collection after we realized there was a real literacy problem here in Gwinnett County. Only about half of our 3rd graders last year were reading on level. If you’re not on level in 3rd grade, then you’re really going to struggle to keep up and excel. We didn’t want to leave all of those kids behind. The library can be a tangible force for good in the community and we should all think of ourselves that way. To have a resource that is specifically for this group of people [middle readers] is something we weren’t going to say no to.”

Shelly Schwerzler, director of development and community outreach at GCPL, agrees with the importance of this initiative. “Serendipitously, Thorndike Press had come to us and said, ‘Hey, we have this youth large print collection,’ says Schwerzler. “Knowing the statistics in our county and what the need was, we felt very strongly that we’d place an order on it.”

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■ BRIDGING THE GAP

BUILDING AWARENESS, PUSHING PAST STIGMAS

According to Schwerzler, GCPL started out with 505 large print books (88 titles) that went to four of the 15 branches. They made their selection based on the locations that were closest to Title 1 schools. During the next fiscal year, they added titles for two more branches. Then that same year, they applied for a SPARK Grant through the United Way of Atlanta. After being awarded a \$10,000 finalist prize, they expanded the collection to the rest of the 15 branches.

“From a personal perspective, my son is a struggling reader and could benefit from having access to these books,” says Schwerzler, “...They’re about the same size and have the same covers as the regular print versions. He really wouldn’t know that they’re different.”

While they currently interfile large print titles with regular print, Giacomini acknowledged that this may be a stigma coming more from the library than the kids. He says, “In the near future, as we increase our own collection, we may separate it and put it in its own area.”

■ THE RESULT

GROWING OPTIONS AND OUTREACH

When GCPL began offering these titles in July of 2017, the first 505 copies of large print books circulated 2,042 times in six months, which was pretty impressive on its own. With the SPARK Grant money, they were able to purchase 732 more books that circulated 1,073 times in just two months.

This resource will help GCPL expand its outreach efforts by offering materials for tie-in to reading buddy programs and more. They also plan on adding bookmobile and delivery services to communities/schools. “We want to do our best to make sure that this particular collection is available to the people that need it most,” says Giacomini.

LEARN MORE ABOUT LARGE PRINT



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