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Meet Ms. Becky

I am the newest staff member of the Murrysville Community Library, having started in my new position on December 14. Previously I served for two years as District Consultant of the Johnstown District, and prior to that as Youth Services Coordinator for six years at the Cambria County Library. By accepting this position in Murrysville, I have come back to my first love.

As a professional librarian for nearly a decade, I need not be convinced of the proven fact that not only do libraries strengthen communities, they help create a more literate and just society. It is also my belief that libraries today are driven not as much about what they have in their spaces, but what they are doing for people and with people in those spaces. I am the new Coordinator of Youth Services, and my goal for the coming year and beyond is to carry on this notion in adapting and responding to the needs of the community, especially youth and families.

Children's services, some might argue, are the heart of any library. More than a third of U.S. library users are under the age of 12. Since the New York Public Library's founding in 1895, millions of books have been checked out by patrons of all ages throughout the city, with the top two check-outs being children's books: *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats and *The Cat in the Hat* by Dr. Seuss. Whereas an adult library user may come to the library for a 400-page novel or two to keep her/him occupied for weeks, a young child library user can eagerly and easily fill up a basket with a dozen only to last a week.

As to what librarians lovingly refer to as their "collections," I invite you to explore books you typically wouldn't check out. The collections that libraries curate strive to entertain readers but also to expose readers to other points of view, perspectives, and issues they may not face in their own day-to-day lives. Literature is a powerful tool for building children's empathy and awareness. As Dr. Seuss has famously said, "The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go." I welcome hearing suggestions of books you and your children love. I also hope to generate interest and excitement about current and new titles through sharing book reviews and displays either within a virtual capacity or as part of future in-person events.

While many, including myself, may believe there's no equivalent to making a family trip to the library to see, smell, and browse the books on the shelves, searching the online catalog from home has never been easier and is a great way to place books on hold for pick-up. This can be done by visiting catalog.wlnonline.org. Here, you may search titles not only located at Murrysville Community Library, but many other libraries that are part of the Westmoreland Library Network. From touch & feel board books for babies to award-winning picture books for preschoolers, thousands of books are available to you with your library card. If you're not sure where to start, simply contact the library or stop in and I would be happy to put together a customized book bundle.

For caregivers of young children, the library can be an instrumental partner in fostering early literacy skills. Early literacy, of course, does not equate to teaching your baby to

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read, but rather, to setting baby up for success so that s/he will be ready to read when s/he enters school. The literacy-rich experiences that libraries provide in the form of storytimes do just this. Though it is yet to be determined whether the format of storytimes will be in-person for 2021, I encourage checking out the virtual offerings on Murrysville Community Library YouTube channel. In these Storytime Soundbites for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers, I read aloud some of my favorite picture books. These clips also provide demonstrations of songs, rhymes, crafts as well as tips on how you can help your child get ready to read.

I have written here mostly about the youngest of our patrons. Next time I will say a little about how I view the opportunities for school-age readers. In the meantime, I welcome that you contact me (rebecca.martinazzi@wlnonline.org). I want to meet you all.

Becky Martinazzi
Coordinator of Youth Services
Murrysville Community Library
rebecca.martinazzi@wlnonline.org
(724) 327-1102, Ext. 148