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IF/THEN Gender Equity

Recently, a collaboration of Delmont Public Library (DPL) and Greensburg Hempfield Area Library (GHAL) won a fourth grant award in 2022, adding to plans for new, synergistic programming in STEM/Digital Literacy. All are timed to begin for the public by early 2023; some programming is already being offered. This latest award is from the Association of Science and Technology Centers, and is part of the IF/THEN® Gender Equity Project (<https://www.ifthenshecan.org>) funded by Lyda Hill Philanthropies. Just the “Gender Equity” name itself announces the emphasis on encouraging young women into careers in STEM, much of that by ambassador example. I thought to share with you readers some of the language from the successful grant application so as to direct your attention to a growing and distinguishing future for public Libraries.

If public Libraries are to remain truly relevant in the 21st century, they should be willing to take on new and challenging roles. One that we feel strongly about is promotion of STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) and, along with that, gender-equitable development of patron skills for career success in the modern and always changing world. Libraries need to do this, as the informal educators that they are, as complement to formal or scholastic education. They need to do this for all ages, especially for the youngest of learners, in formative years.

GHAL and DPL, as members of the Westmoreland Library Network, are WLN STEM leaders. The WLN is a District of 23 Libraries among 29 Districts under the PA Office of Commonwealth Libraries, Department of Education (DOE). That PA public Libraries are governed under the DOE, as are public schools, is testimony to the shared responsibility to teach STEM subject matter, even while traditionally emphasizing the joy of reading and enriching language skills. The case for both Libraries as awardees can be made based on the following three existing activities, and strengths built from them. The IF/THEN® Gender Equity Project opportunity is entirely complementary to these three.

First, DPL’s home is, uniquely, a recently constructed “green” building (2019), energy self-sufficient so far with its solar collectors on the roof and geothermal heat pumping. It has electric car chargers outside and an actively used exterior teaching garden space. So, “green” engineering is synonymous with DPL as a model and information source. GHAL recently underwent a major renovation and included in it various exemplar “green” engineering features, including recycling and energy efficiencies. It too is a model.

Secondly, both already participate in CCSS (Common Core State Standards for Math and English Language Arts) and NGSS (Next Generation Science Standards) standards-based preK-2 STEM learning through Storytime STEM-packs (<https://www.aiumsc.net/storytime-stem-computer-science>). Storytime STEM-packs grew out of a staff training project initiated in 2014 within the WLN (Murrysville Community Library on lead) in collaboration with the Allegheny Intermediate Unit Math & Science

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Collaborative. The WLN sought in this collaboration to take advantage of existing MSC scholastic expertise to train Library staff to STEM programming.

And lastly, both Libraries are in the early stages of a collaborative Digital Literacy initiative. The two share three new Digital Literacy grant awards, whose goals include being a Center of Excellence for STEM career capacity-building for all ages. Two of the awards (PA Department of Labor & Industry and United Way) are specific to preK-2 through pre-teen/teen ages, including the use of Sphero robots for kids in grades 3-8. Thus, both are already deeply engaged with children in the IF/THEN age span.

So, GHAL and DPL envision a lot of great overlap with their existing activities described above, and they look forward to the opportunity to engage further with their most recently funded IF/THEN Gender Equity Project.

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