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ALA Great Stories Club

If you can imagine a portfolio of grant awards, as many as eight over the past 1 ½ years, with four more pending, then you are becoming witness to what is a model for collaborative “Public Resource Centers” at Delmont Public Library (DPL) and Greensburg Hempfield Area Library (GHAL). The Centers feature Digital Literacy & Workforce Development on the one hand and Special Needs (autism) on the other. I promised to keep telling you more about this as new news breaks. It has broken! The latest award was announced publicly by the American Library Association (ALA) just on June 1. It is for DPL and fits into the category of Special Needs (autism). It is the second awarded DPL by the ALA recently on this subject (see January 5 issue).

Financial support for the latest award comes from the National Endowment for Humanities. It is one of 58 such awards granted nationally in the current cycle of awards. DPL’s objective with it is specifically to reach kids on the autism spectrum, who often are troubled to find identity in society, not unlike some kids in other minority groups.

The award is an ALA “Great Stories Club” grant, actually given in this case as two associated stipends, one for the theme “Deeper Than Our Skins,” and the other for “Finding Your Voice.” “The themes, created by scholars Maria Sachiko Cecire [Bard College] and Susana M. Morris [Georgia Institute of Technology], feature books that explore questions of race, equity, identity and history.” The project is laid out as “a thematic reading and discussion program that engages teens who are facing difficult challenges through literature-based library outreach programs.”

The ALA’s printed materials about the program say that the “‘Deeper Than Our Skins’ theme is grounded in literature that can help us look beneath the surface of racism in America to reveal how the past is alive in the present. This theme uses powerful stories of oppression, resistance, suffering, and triumph to identify the roots of racialized experience in the United States, and to inspire discussions about how to construct more equitable futures for the people in our country and world.”

“‘Finding Your Voice’ includes texts that highlight the necessity and power of young people speaking up despite challenges, social pressure, and even the threat of bigger dangers. Whether it is finding righteous anger as a superpower or speaking up through poetry and art, ‘Finding Your Voice’ features young people speaking out against racism and other injustices in order to make the world better.”

For each theme there are selected novels for reading and discussion by participants. The teens get to keep copies of the books used in programming as their own, these books being provided by the grant in addition to a monetary distribution for program expenses.

Also provided as part of the grant, for staff, are virtual theme facilitation workshops. The two scholars and librarian advisors provide training for effective use of the materials and

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success. As Delmont Public Library has received now four generous grants in all to address this issue of building identity for individuals on the autism spectrum, with its partners, the training for staff is of great value and can be applied to the other grant goals as well. This is truly an integrated and comprehensive Public Resource Center project. Watch The Magic Library Card! for more.

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