Digital Literacy Grant Renewal

One of the great bonuses about some grant awards is that, beyond the generous financial benefits to programming designed to serve community, there are also benefits that stimulate the awardee's institutional growth and sustainability. I have written at various times about the collaborative strategy shared by Delmont Public Library (DPL) and Greensburg Hempfield Area Library (GHAL) to build Public Resource Centers based on such grant awards in three areas: (1) Digital Literacy & Workforce Development; (2) Special Needs: Autism; (3) Family Learning Place .

The first, about which I write today, began with a grant award in 2022 that was one of 20 in the state approved by the PA Department of Labor and Industry. The awardee group was characterized as Group 2, because there is another that preceded it with funding and like purpose. The DPL/GHAL project title is "STEM Career Ramps @ Public Libraries."

It was always Labor and Industry's intent that these Group 2 awardees would be sustained with additional, renewal funding beyond 2022-23, if they wished to continue, although that was not necessarily made known to the awardees at the outset. And, it was always the intent to hold monthly peer group meetings to share results and successes, and to be observed by a third-party consultant. This sustained and interactive approach takes this award beyond simply just a one-year financial benefit.

In the case of DPL and GHAL what the consultant got to see during the on-site visit on May 8 was a typical example of core children's programming funded under the grant. Sue Burd, Children's Librarian at DPL, gave an excellent demonstration of the programming with Bee Bot robots used to teach PreK-3 children the basics of algorithms. In this instance, with 4-5-year-olds. Yes, algorithms at 4 to 5 years-old! There is another program with Sphero robots for children of grades four through eight, as well as adult programming for those with immediate workforce needs, as well as database searching instruction for teens.

As testament to the demand for this kind of program offering from public Libraries, by Group 2 project-end the number of participations in the robot programs had reached 291 in 37 sessions across both Libraries; six instructors had been trained. Adult participations totaled 99 in 14 programs. Teen participations totaled 170 in five programs. Many of the adults are first of all simply learning how to do an on-line job application, because that is how applications are accepted by employers these days. The adult programming is given by an outside expert, Gina McGrath, with outstanding credentials from prior experiences with the YMCA and Computer Reach (https://www.computerreach.org).

So, where are we now? DPL/GHAL did apply for a renewal of the grant for an additional year, and it was approved on August 17. That is both a pat on the back for work well done and support for sustaining the effort into the future. The Group 2 awardees being renewed now constitute a Group 4 going forward.

If you have not participated before, whatever the age, the opportunity to do so has not been lost. To get on board, just contact either one of the two Libraries of this great collaboration.

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