

Published in the Penn-Franklin News on March 31, 2021.

## **Creativity in the Time of COVID**

To folks weary of a year of COVID-19, and who isn't, I want to offer a bravo! to two community services that are actively working to ease the moment by adapting. I wrote of one last time (archived at <https://www.murrysvillelibrary.org/about-us/the-magic-library-card-series/>), namely the WLN and its weekly virtual children's book-related programming.

COVID-19 time is a time to be creative about doing what you do, and that includes what you do if you are a formal or informal educator. Library staff members and others who are about books are the latter, so I want to highlight a second new book model for advancing reading skills for children.

This model comes from an organization named Reading is FUNdamental Pittsburgh. I am a modest supporter, who receives RIF Pittsburgh's periodic newsletter. The newsletter comes with this mission statement: "RIF Pittsburgh provides children with the resources, motivation and opportunities to develop a life-long love of reading and learning." That certainly reads like a library mission statement too. Under a headline reading "RIF in the House!," RIF also says that it always "believed in meeting children where they are." These days, of course, that's likely to include being at home. It can also include the home culture.

In partnership with the PPG Foundation, RIF Pittsburgh is initiating for 1,000 Pittsburgh kindergarten to 4<sup>th</sup> graders a project called "Read Today, Change Tomorrow."

Under this project title, RIF is on the way to distributing book bags to homes, each with five books by Afro-American authors and illustrators, "with storylines, settings and characters drawn from and reflecting the rich, varied experiences and communities shared by most of the children we serve." Selected books celebrate the accomplishments of such diverse individuals as first-ever female and Afro-American Vice President Kamala Harris, popular singer Beyonce, astronaut Mae Jemison, and renowned astrophysicist Neil DeGrasse Tyson, who is also Director of the Hayden Planetarium at the Rose Center for Earth and Space in New York City. This builds on RIF's ongoing method, putting books in children's hands to keep, and cherish. Not just lending books, as is a library's normal mission.

Since May, RIF Pittsburgh has given 67,000 books to more than 20,000 children, as part of its ongoing mission.

A Library Director who got me into this world of libraries as almost, it seems, a full-time job, once reminded me that rural kids can be just as disadvantaged in respect to reading and information skills as might be inner-city kids. WLN libraries, representing a largely rural Westmoreland County, serve a lot of rural kids, and, as I have already mentioned, are also reaching out in new ways, virtually. I gave examples last time of programming being offered around the county for kids also homebound, which you can check out if you have not already done so.

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So, I say that the WLN's virtual programming and RIF Pittsburgh's "Read Today, Change Tomorrow" are great adaptive examples for all of us, and I suspect that at least some of what has been done by both will live on beyond COVID-19. Bravo!

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