

COMMUNITY

Libraries Are Not Just About Books Anymore

NewsUSA

(NU) - Parenting is one of the most important jobs a person can undertake.

Although it is often said to be the most rewarding, it can also be difficult, lonely and, at times, overwhelming.

Adding to the struggle is the need to find activities that are engaging, fun and educational for both child and parent.

Many families are discovering that their local library meets many of these needs. This is especially true if it happens to be part of the 450 libraries nationwide that comprise the Family Place Libraries network, a place that boasts welcoming, age-appropriate, interactive play areas and programs, parent groups, resources, and, of course, books.

Family Place Libraries are a network of children's librarians nationwide who believe that literacy begins at birth, and that libraries can help build healthy communities by nourishing healthy families.

"The Family Place Libraries initiative is transforming how libraries work with young children and their families – from the librarians themselves, to the parents, to early childhood specialists," says Kathy Deerr, National Coordinator Family Place Libraries. "And it is transforming entire libraries."

In late 2012, Middle Country Public Library, the facility that created Family Place Libraries, was awarded a National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The grant's goal was to look at this model as a vehicle to effect institutional change as it relates to early childhood and family support in



public libraries.

A three-year evaluation of this grant by Nagle & Associates, a full-service national consulting firm, supports Deerr's statement.

This study follows 28 libraries implementing the Family Place Libraries model. The evaluation found positive changes in children's librarians' knowledge, attitudes and practices; children's services; and attitudes toward children's services. The evaluation also found positive changes in parents' perceptions of libraries.

"Parents who made connections to their local libraries came to deeply appreciate and use the library as part of their support network," according to the evaluation.

"The Family Place Libraries changed how librarians view their role," Deerr says. "They are really early childhood and parent supporters. These libraries are more interactive and meet family needs of playful early learning, parent engagement and connecting to resources."

For more information, visit www.familyplacelibraries.org.