

FAMILY

Initiative Transforms Libraries into Early Learning Centers for Families

NewsUSA

(NU) - Remember your first library card? For many children, the library opened up doors to other worlds and was a haven to study, learn, and explore. And it still is.

While most libraries around the country offer summer reading programs and story time to engage families, one organization is encouraging libraries across the country to do more.

The Family Place Libraries initiative is a national program that advocates the idea of the library as a community center for early childhood and family development.

“Family Place gives the librarians a comprehensive framework,” Kathleen Deerr, national coordinator for Family Place Libraries told Publishers Weekly in an interview last year. “It’s about connecting people with everything they need to build healthier, better families.”

The point, Deerr told the magazine, is to “empower librarians and families.”

The program began as a collaboration between New York’s Middle Country Public Library and the now-defunct, nonprofit Libraries for the Future. The Family Place Libraries model features interactive, hands-on spaces within libraries that focus on the early learning and literacy of children from birth to three years old, while also supporting the needs of parents and caregivers.

“When we can share the research about how the program can build strong brains and that children learn through play, people begin to understand that we are creating a rich environment where



children can explore and discover, and adults can meet friends and get support,” Deerr told the magazine.

Currently, the Family Place Libraries network includes more than 450 sites in 29 states, and continues to grow. With its national impact clear, the Institute of Museum and Library Services has thrown its considerable weight behind the program and awarded a \$450,000 National Leadership Grant to Middle Country to demonstrate the value of Family Place. With this added support, 25 libraries in eight states have established new Family Place sites.

Stacey Aldrich, former state librarian for the California State Library, says that she was introduced to the Family Place Libraries concept through Libraries for the Future and was impressed, adding that, “to watch the model flourish in California has been immensely satisfying.”

“To see a grown man sitting in a kids’ chair, playing with his child, or a grandparent doing a puppet show – it’s special. It’s gratifying to provide this kind of space, where people can meet, talk to other parents, and learn and grow with their kids.”

For more information, visit www.familyplacelibraries.org.