

Summer Outreach Crew: An Experiment

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AMY enthusiastically serves as a Youth Services Senior Librarian at Beaverton City Library in Beaverton, OR where she works with a team of creative librarians to plan and facilitate unique programs for the amazing children, teens, and families in the community. Before landing in beautiful Oregon, she worked as the Teen Services Manager at ImaginOn in Charlotte, NC. Amy especially loves offering STEM programs and hosts an annual Science Geek Out Festival where families come to dig deep into all sorts of science topics. She co-authored a book called *Career Programming for Today's Teens: Exploring Non-traditional and Vocational Alternatives*, which was published by ALA in 2018; it is a terrific resource for any library staff looking to increase workforce development programming for young adults.

In an effort to bring engaging and interactive programming to families around our city and to promote summer reading, the Beaverton City Library formed a Summer Outreach Crew (SOX) of six staff members that visited parks, apartment complexes, free lunch sites, camps, and summer school sites from June to August 2019. Each member of SOX visited an outreach location in the community for approximately one hour once a week where they interacted with lots of children, teens, and caregivers who in some cases were not regular library users. We brought science experiments, games, trivia, robots, art activities, and much more and left families excited about what the library has to offer! Regardless of the size of your staff or the funding available, we believe there are aspects of our outreach plan that would work for any library.

When we set out to start planning our summer outreach efforts, we wanted to ensure we visited some areas of our city that were not close to either of our two library branches and were not already receiving services from the library. We also wanted to be sure to visit locations where families were already present, rather than asking families to come to us. We put together a team of staff who were especially excited about bringing library services outside our four walls and programming in non-traditional spaces. So where did we end up going?

Apartment Complexes

Apartments were a natural fit for SOX because children are already present, and during the summer they often have a lot of free time. We selected two large apartment complexes that also served as free lunch sites where youth could receive a lunch on weekdays during the summer months. Lunch is provided by the Beaverton School District's Nutrition Services department. We contacted the apartment managers and Nutrition Services and they were supportive of our plan. When we visited, kids and teens ate lunch while we read stories or played games with them. Visiting apartment complexes was one of our greatest successes because



many of the families we met there had never been to the library or rarely visited, and therefore had never heard of our summer reading program. Many families did not have transportation to visit or have a caregiver available to take them to the library during the summer. If the staff at your library have limited time for outreach during the summer, we think visiting an apartment complex in your area for a weekly or monthly program would be a great use of your efforts. A supportive apartment manager can help to market your visits to families by word-of-mouth or by posting a flyer in the lobby.

City Parks

We selected several city parks with playgrounds that are popular with families. We had varying levels of success bringing activities to the local parks; sometimes we found a good number of people present, but at other times, the park would be completely empty. At one park, a sports camp was always on site during our visits with about 18–25 kids participating. The counselors and campers were excited that we brought activities and technology for them to test out. For next summer, we plan to contact local camps to coordinate a time for visits that works with their schedule. We may also test out visiting other parks in the area to see if another location would be busier.

Summer Program Sites and Camps

Before the start of the summer, we reached out to local camps and program sites. The administrators of Club K (an afterschool and summer childcare site for elementary school students) were really excited to have us visit two of their sites on a weekly basis. This was a great fit because the facilitators of the program were always looking for educational activities to keep their students engaged. We also visited a number of camps for one or two visits each, bringing activities but also information about our summer reading program so we could reach a broader range of students in our area.

What Did We Bring

Initially we were not sure what to bring along, but after a visit or two, we were able to design our activities to best suit the age of the children present and to respond to any requests from the program facilitators. In addition, the sites all had their own constraints; for example, visiting a park in a sunny location meant we could not bring any activities that required screens because of glare. Some sites with younger children were more conducive to a traditional storytime with books and songs. When older kids, tweens, or teens were present, we often brought STEM activities, such as Dash, Ozobots, supplies to make giant bubbles, Roli blocks, Keva planks or slime-making materials. This older group also enjoyed trivia and quiz books, as well as art supplies. Some favorite interactive books included, *Ripley's Believe it or Not*, optical illusion books, *Looking Closely* series by Serafini, *Weird But True*, *Quiz Whiz*, *This or That*, and really any of the other National Geographic Kids record books. Board games were popular everywhere, including Uno, Apples to Apples, Jenga, giant checkers, and Yeti in My Spaghetti.

In order to promote the summer reading program at outreach sites, we created special logs for summer 2019 that allowed youth to begin reading and tracking their hours without needing to visit the library to sign up for the program, which deviated from our standard practice for all prior summers. We handed out outreach logs (printed on green paper so we could track that these had been distributed outside the library) to all youth at the sites. We



encouraged participants to read and then return the completed logs to the library. Unfortunately, the return rate for the outreach logs was very low. We do believe the logs encouraged kids to read; however, as I mentioned above, some of the children we met at these sites lacked transportation to the library so they may not have been able to return the finished log to collect their finisher incentives. We are considering options for allowing kids to finish the program remotely next summer.

The Future of SOX

The work of the Summer Outreach Crew was hugely successful in that we extended the reach of our library programming and the summer reading program to new members of our community, many of whom were not regular library users. At apartment complexes, we met a number of families who had just moved to our area, some of whom were recent immigrants or refugees. We were able to make a connection with families in a location that was comfortable for them and share information about the free services available from the library. Conversations at our outreach sites often drifted from the activities on hand to other valuable services that parents could utilize such as English conversation classes or free homework help for their children. Next summer our library plans to continue these outreach efforts, utilizing the information we gained about our community to inform the selection of locations we visit, as well as what we bring out to those sites. The staff members that were able to be a part of the Summer Outreach Crew overwhelmingly enjoyed the opportunity to make meaningful, and we hope lasting, connections within our community. 



SOX member Brenda shares trivia with a group of tweens and teens at a free lunch site.

