

A special PLACE

BY KRISTEN DUCA

Read All About It!

Boasting Top-Notch Programming Ranging From Story Times To Tutoring To Talent Shows, The Brooklyn Public Library Is A Treasured Resource For Local Families



Andrea Vaughn, BPL's coordinator of school age services.



Every parent hopes to impart a love of reading to their children, and Brooklyn parents have a priceless resource for literacy and learning less than a mile from their home—whatever their neighborhood. Founded in 1892, funded in part by Andrew Carnegie and anchored by the Central Library at Grand Army Plaza, the Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) operates 60 branches throughout the borough—in fact, there's a library within half a mile of every Brooklyn resident. The library system—the fifth largest in the United States—boasts over 5 million circulating and reference items and offers materials in over 50 languages. Together, BPL's over 1 million cardholders visit the library approximately 12 million times a year.

And Brooklynites come not just to check out books, but for free BPL pro-

grams, services and events, including author talks, literacy programs, poetry discussions, craft workshops, job search help, educational assistance and more. The library's extensive community outreach programs also mean the library brings its offerings to schools, hospitals and other locations.

"Attention to quality programming, as well as our staff members getting out in the community so often, makes BPL unique compared to other library systems," says Andrea Vaughn, BPL's coordinator of school age services.

What is more, the library's commitment to bettering neighborhoods and communities means that, at BPL, families come first. Extensive programming for kids begins with infants and continues all the way through teens, making it possible for a Brooklyn kid to literally grow

up at the library. "Our goal is to make learning fun," says Vaughn.

First Five Years, BPL's early literacy program, encourages parents to share books with babies, toddlers and preschoolers through story times, children's concerts, singing and story play. One of its many initiatives, the Brooklyn Reads to Babies program, was launched to develop early language and literacy skills and encourage bonding between parents and babies.

Children ages 3-8 are invited to attend monthly Ezra Jack Keats Bedtime Stories at the Central Library, where librarians engage them in singing, rhyming and play based on books by the Brooklyn-born children's author and illustrator. All children in attendance receive a free Keats' book after each session. "Kids come in their pajamas and we bring out stuffed puppets to create a cozy story time atmosphere," Vaughn says.

When it comes to school-aged kids, BPL volunteers offer after-school homework help, tutoring programs and workshops for students in kindergarten through 12th grade. While there, students can take advantage of BPL's Databases for Kids—comprehensive databases that search countless newspapers, encyclopedias, magazines and books for students' information needs. The library also offers an array of programs for adolescents that allow them to "blow off steam after school as well as learn," Vaughn says. Resources include SAT practice tests, teen health and wellness programs, volunteer opportunities, Wii and PlayStation gaming, dance workshops, arts and crafts, t-shirt and jewelry-making workshops, scarf decorating, movies, talent shows and special performances.

BPL also offers a program for children with special needs at six accessible branches. Called "The Child's Place for Children With Special Needs," the program enables children with disabilities from birth through age 12—along with their family and friends—to participate in events like after-school story times and weekend programs with guest educators who lead children in puppet shows, sing-alongs and hands-on musical play. Parents

Sunny Days At The Brooklyn Public Library!



As part of BPL's celebration of Sesame Street's 40th anniversary, families are invited to a special exhibition featuring scripts, sheet music, photographs, props and book art spanning the show's history and illustrating its global scope—plus, kids can see Elmo, Grover and Prairie Dawn! The Central Library will host monthly special events in conjunction with the exhibition, and kids can get a limited-edition Elmo library card and a limited-edition Sesame Street bookmark from any BPL branch through February or while supplies last. **Through February 21, 2010. Central Library, Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn, 718-230-2100, brooklynpubliclibrary.org.**

of children with special needs can attend workshops on topics like education, advocacy, discipline, medical issues and language development.

BPL's resources for families extend well beyond library walls—community outreach is another major focus of the library. BPL staff and volunteers regularly visit local schools, hospitals and pediatric clinics to lead story times and distribute books.

Vaughn says the library's mission—to make accessible to all Brooklynites society's knowledge, history and culture for the purposes of education, recreation and reference—is an exciting one to be a part of. "The best thing about working in Brooklyn is that you really feel people need your help," she says. "In a large urban system, people of all ages and backgrounds rely on the library to get books and information to move their lives forward." 🌟

For more info, visit brooklynpubliclibrary.org.

Sign Me Up

The Brooklyn Public Library encourages parents to sign their children up for a library card. For children 12 and under, parents will need to sign the application as well as provide a piece of mail bearing the child's address. Children aged 13-16 can receive a Young Adult library card but must provide proper ID if they are not applying through a class visit. **For more info, visit brooklynpubliclibrary.org.**