

2019 NEW JERSEY

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# STATE LIBRARY AWARDS

*Best  
Practices*

*Multicultural  
Programs*



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*Connecting people with information through libraries*

**NJ**   
**State Library**  
*An affiliate of Thomas Edison State University*



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# LIBRARIES AT THE HEART OF COMMUNITIES

New Jersey public libraries lead the way in promoting the essential role that library programming plays in building community engagement and individual empowerment. As community anchor institutions, libraries are uniquely situated to address the various needs of the communities they serve, however they are often challenged with stretching their resources and reaching beyond existing partnerships.

The New Jersey State Library awards were developed to recognize those hard-working public libraries and their staffs in laying out the groundwork for successful community coalition-building and carefully targeted programming. The winning programs all exemplify the essential role that library programming plays in the lives of residents across the state.

We applaud these award winning libraries on their exceptional programs that highlight some of the best early literacy and multicultural programming currently being offered around the state. All of these programs show that it is not the size or budget of the library that counts, but the desire to encourage lifelong learning as they fulfill roles as community centers of cultural and civic engagement.

## CATEGORIES:



**SHARON RAWLINS**

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### EARLY LITERACY

The *Best Practices in Early Literacy Award* honors up to four outstanding public libraries that currently provide exemplary literacy programs for children from birth to six years, their families and caregivers.

The award provides a \$1,000 honorarium, a certificate and promotion of the winning library as a model program for other libraries.



**MIMI LEE**

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### MULTICULTURAL PROGRAMMING

The *Multicultural Program Award* recognizes library programs that increase understanding and promote diversity and multiculturalism in New Jersey's libraries. Libraries are encouraged to develop long-term partnerships with community organizations that result in sustainable cultural programming.

The award provides a \$1,000 honorarium, a certificate and promotion of the winning library as a model program for other libraries.

# BEST PRACTICES IN EARLY LITERACY *Winning Libraries*

*Burlington County Library for:*

## ABC STEAM

The Burlington County Library developed its **ABC STEAM** program as a way to introduce the alphabet and early literacy to children. Each session focuses on a different letter of the alphabet, along with activities to develop reading readiness and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art & Math) concepts. The sessions allow up to 25 children with accompanying caregivers to learn, play and create through exploratory, hands-on stations. Each of the five to six stations features one element of STEAM, with an additional art station focused on the session's letter (i.e., letter U for umbrella). The stations, equipped with signs explaining what the station is and how to participate, allow for easy movement between them.

While the program is designed for children ages 4-6, siblings are welcome to attend and participate, as most, if not all, activities can be done by children as young as two with caregiver assistance. After every session, children walk away with, at minimum, two take-home items (usually in the form of the art they created). Offering **ABC STEAM** at the same time each month, and always on the same day of the week, has been very helpful to maintain a consistent following of attendees. **ABC STEAM** has been impactful on the community because it offers other options for early literacy programming and exposes young children to the STEAM concepts. Moving forward, the library plans to elevate the stations by offering more technology based components for children to explore.



*"We try not to miss a session because we want to create the whole alphabet with our artwork."*

-MOTHER WITH TWO CHILDREN UNDER AGE OF SIX

*Old Bridge Public Library for:*

# SENSORY PLAY, SENSORY SURPRISE



In 2017, the Old Bridge Public Library served nearly 22,000 children at their programs, but less than five percent were children with special needs. Staff began offering these services after noticing the same non-verbal child run around the library every Friday night while his family tried to keep him occupied. Every other Friday in the summer, the multi-generational *Sensory Play Series* offers kids the chance to improve social play and develop their fine motor skills, while investigating and exploring sensory stations.

During *Sensory Play*, the librarians focus on satisfying at least three of the six early literacy skills at the sensory stations, including letter recognition in sand and having the children create letters with foam. They also hunt for letters and famous children's book characters in rice bins and water bead tables. By labeling each station with words and pictures, the children are visually learning what the activity is. Librarians continuously use vocabulary with

*"It is imperative for Gavin and other children like him with similar disorders to be able to socialize and feel wanted and be accepted as part of our community."*

—SUSAN MOUZES-AARNE, PARENT

the attendees and take the time to interact with each child individually in some way. *Sensory Play* branched into *Sensory Storytimes* where staff read and sing with visual cues, to Braille Tales (led by a blind community member).

Their newest venture is *Sensory Surprise!* - storytime, STEM program, movie showing or children's presenter tailored to fit the audience's needs. The library's focus of teaching early literacy skills to the special needs population continues to grow. As a new family with a child with a different disability comes to the library, the staff looks to adapt the stations or programs to suit their needs.



*Stafford Branch of the Ocean County Library for:*

# READY, SET, READ

Originally titled Ready, Set, School, *Ready, Set, Read* was created in 2018 with the goal of re-igniting the connection between the library and preschool (ages 3-5) children by incorporating Every Child Ready to Read practices and S.T.E.A.M. activities. Each session begins with a storytime (two books with accompanying songs and movement) and finishes with open play opportunities wherein children practice motor skills, early childhood concepts, socializing and more.

The three-week series was successfully offered in spring 2018 and fall 2018. In 2019, the title of the program changed to Ready, Set, Read to engage families further in the joy of books, reading and the library. The program is always changing and allows the librarian to shift focus throughout seasons and experiment with many activities. The library considered monthly sessions versus the three-week series, but found the community-building and social components of the series to be beneficial to attendees.

*“My child loves the program at the library.  
The activities and social time help her  
laugh and learn.”*

-CAREGIVER

Staff has found that the key components for success are in utilizing books, songs and rhymes to engage children and caregivers with common early childhood themes (colors, alphabet, building, creating, etc.) paired with unique and customized activities to reinforce said concepts. They also position the library, via the program’s title(s), descriptions and marketing, as an institution that supports lifelong learning and success in reading. Caregivers now expect engaging, creative and educational early childhood programming at the Stafford Branch. The staff also share diverse and bilingual titles, bringing the “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors” (Rudine Sims Bishop, 1990) of the world into their library and community.



# MULTICULTURAL PROGRAM AWARD *Winning Libraries*

*Bridgewater Library of the Somerset County Library System for:*

## LITTLE EXPLORERS

**L***ittle Explorers* is a preschool (3-5 year old) series designed to introduce and support an environment that is positive about diverse countries, values, cultures and different languages. Many library programs for new Americans tend to be focused on orienting immigrants, citizenship and learning English. *Little Explorers* focuses on supporting self-esteem and building a welcoming and receptive mindset about diversity in children. This approach helps children better understand why people sometimes choose to wear traditional dress and continue to speak their native language, and that those choices should be respected and appreciated. We hold the series in the fall and the spring; each series consists of 6-8 programs. Countries we have included are India, Cuba, China, Ecuador, Colombia, Israel, Ireland, Ukraine, Canada. *World Explorers Festivals* include Diwali, Christmas and Eid Al Fitr Celebrations Around the World.

This series provided the opportunity to partner with multiple organizations, including Bridgewater Township and Senior Center, Bhaarat Nritya Academy, Wellspring Women's Health and local businesses. We have included immigrant community members. Feedback has been very positive. For example, a family newly immigrated from Australia came to a China program and were so pleased to see a program with an international focus, even though Australia was not the topic of the program. This feedback illustrates the broad impact of internationally focused programming.



*“Many of the children in our community are in preschool, we know that we could be reaching more children. This spring, we will take Little Explorers to preschools and host events for their families. This series has triggered contacts and connections with our diverse community organizations and businesses.”*

—ALKA PATEL, YOUTH SERVICES LIBRARIAN  
BRIDGEWATER LIBRARY-SOMERSET COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM



*Summit Free Public Library for*

# A TASTE OF CHINA



Over the past five years, Summit Free Public Library hosted a Chinese New Year Festival organized by children's librarians and community members. This year, the library expanded the one-day event to multiple programs throughout the week.

*A Taste of China* launched with a reading of *Stone Soup*. Following the story, participants made Chinese dumplings, sticky rice balls and "pig-style" cookies. Wednesday's program demonstrated Chinese painting and calligraphy. Participants learned history of Chinese characters, and practiced creating characters on peg boards, and created crafts using Chinese characters. Festivities continued Thursday with "Chinese Movie Night & Peking Opera." The library showed a traditional cartoon in Chinese, and a community member performed.

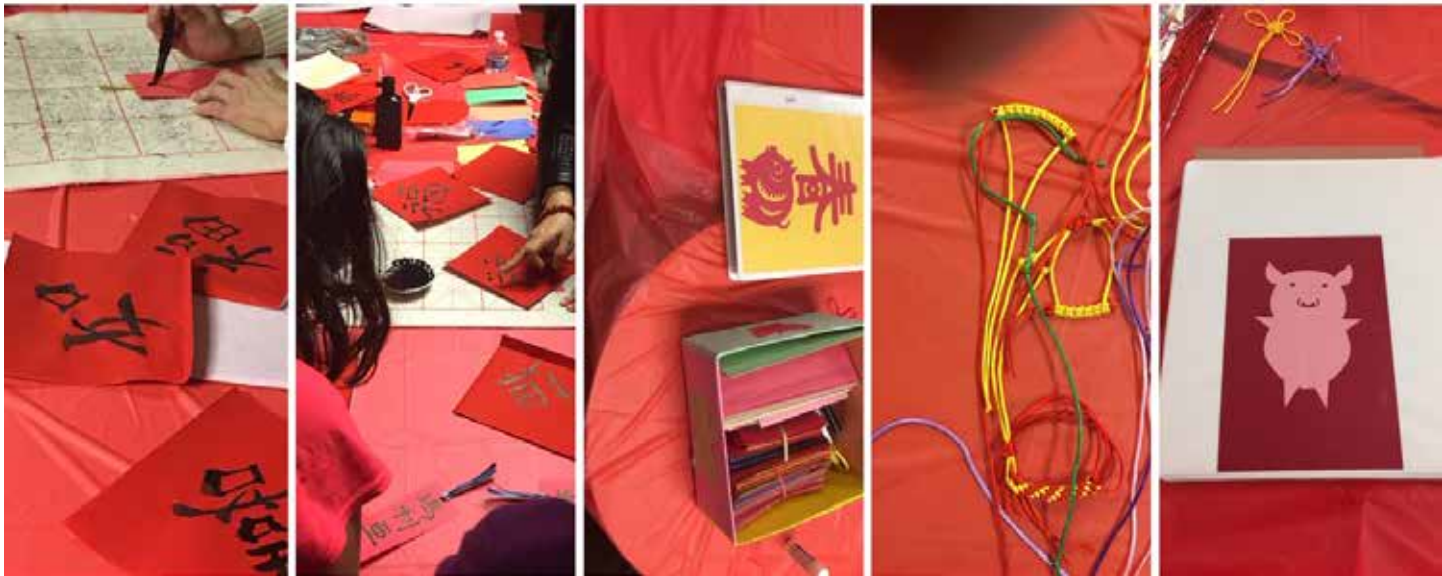
The series ended on Sunday with a Chinese Culture Fair, featuring craft workshops, home-cooked dishes, riddles

and games. The fair also boasted a traditional Chinese outfit contest, a photo booth and a hand-crafted dragon parade, as well as a lion dance. Throughout the month, the children's section transformed with decorations including over 200 trivia questions in English and Mandarin. Patrons submitted answers to earn a chance to win prizes.

The library's 2019 Chinese New Year Festival was a massive success. The program drew nearly 600 attendees. Many participants who had not attended a program at Summit Free Public Library have returned for additional library programs. The festival's success prompted other community organizers to approach library staff about collaborating on future library programs. The library is poised to strengthen existing relationships and form new partnerships with the hope of providing even more cultural programming.







*"A key component of the success was the promotion via local Chinese media, which led to the library's record number of participants at the festival."*

-ANN-MARIE AYMER, HEAD OF YOUTH SERVICES  
SUMMIT FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

*Princeton Public Library for:*

# FESTIVAL CULTURAL LATINO: MERCADO ON THE PLAZA!

**P**rincenton has a large Hispanic community with many of our residents coming from a variety of countries in Central America (with Guatemala being very dominant) and we wanted to find a way to celebrate the diversity of the residents in our town in a fun way during Hispanic Heritage Month.

The rich cultural life of Princeton's Latino community was celebrated on October 7, 2018, with an afternoon of music, dance, food and crafts. The plaza outside the library

It's an opportunity for over 350 to people come together to enjoy a day outside during Hispanic Heritage Month where they can be entertained, taste new and delicious foods, discover locally made crafts, and witness art being made or take part in crafts. It allows Latin and South American residents a chance to highlight their culture to others in the community and confirms Princeton as a welcoming community for all. It is an all ages event for everyone from families with very young children to senior citizens.

*“Cultural events like the Festival Cultural Latino help establish within the Latin American community the role that public libraries in the United States play in building and supporting connections, providing cultural experiences, and being trustworthy resources for all members of the communities they serve.”*

—JANIE HERMAN, PUBLIC PROGRAMMING LIBRARIAN  
PRINCETON PUBLIC LIBRARY

was transformed into a Mercado (public market) during this three-hour annual event featuring local artisans and restaurants, along with family-friendly activities and free entertainment. Co-sponsored by the library, the Arts Council of Princeton and Mi Pueblo Lindo, a local grassroots organization that connects our diverse Hispanic community, this was our fifth year co-sponsoring and it has grown in size and popularity since 2014. The event is a little bit different each year with some years being more focused on music and others on dance. We try to change it up a bit from year to year so that it does not become stale.

This program took us to the next level in that it allowed us to partner with a new grassroots organization (Mi Pueblo Lindo) and also strengthened our existing relationship with the Arts Council of Princeton, especially their Artistic Director Maria Evans, in allowing us to work together to create what is now an annual signature event for both organizations. This event has allowed us to reach one of our harder to reach communities and build a better relationship with community members from Latin and South America.







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