



Virginia Association of Counties ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS



APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 3, 2019.** Please include this application form with electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

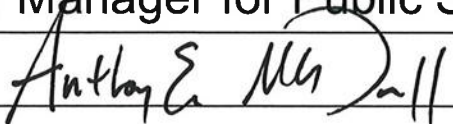
PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: County of Henrico
Program Title: Next Chapter Book Club
Program Category: Customer Service

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Anthony McDowell
Title: Deputy County Manager for Public Safety
Signature: 

Program Overview

The Next Chapter Book Club at Henrico County Public Library is a weekly book discussion group for adults with developmental disabilities. Next Chapter Book Club is a national organization that provides guidelines for starting and hosting similar groups. In Henrico, the club started in 2017 at the suggestion of a prominent local author and activist. It is hosted through an innovative partnership between Henrico County Public Library and Henrico's Department of Mental Health and Developmental Services (MHDS). The partnership combines the literacy expertise of Librarians with the human development expertise of Mental Health services staff, breaking down inter-agency silos to better serve adults with developmental disabilities in the Library and the County. Participants meet once weekly in a public area of Tuckahoe Library to read a book of appropriate Lexile level and discuss as a group over the course of eight weeks. Feedback for the club has been highly positive, from participants, staff, and the public. While adults with developmental disabilities are often kept separate from the general public, this club provides them an opportunity to not only increase their literacy skills, but also form meaningful social connections and have a positive experience in a community space.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

Adults with developmental disabilities are traditionally underserved in libraries, and prior to 2017 HCPL did not offer any programs designed specifically for this demographic. Partnering with the Department of Mental Health and Developmental Services allowed this program to be sustainable by incorporating the expertise of experienced County staff from outside the Library. In addition, people with developmental disabilities often are disconnected from the public: they have separate classrooms at school, have limited employment opportunities, and attend specialized programs at day facilities. Next Chapter Book Club takes place in public out on the Library floor, allowing them a unique opportunity to engage with the public. Finally, the club's primary aim is to engage

adults with developmental disabilities with stories, which supports the Library's mission to promote reading and lifelong learning, connect people with the information they need, and enrich community life.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

The Next Chapter Book Club at Henrico County Public Library supports an underserved population by providing supportive, social, life-long learning experiences in a community setting. While NCBC is a national program, Henrico County Public Library and Henrico's Department of Mental Health and Developmental Services formed an innovative partnership to host this club by sharing their existing resources and expertise across departments. This collaboration, the first ever between Libraries and MHDS in Henrico, broke down silos while minimizing costs and ensuring sustainable staffing and attendance. NCBC staff and attendees have reported highly positive feedback for the program, and the Library is looking into how it can expand the program to accommodate demand. This program achieves universal values of public library service, such as increasing access to information, enhancing literacy skills, and fostering community through learning, in a way that is feasible for library systems with budgets of any size. Next Chapter Book Club helps Henrico County Public Library achieve its mission, to promote reading and lifelong learning, connect people with the information they need, and enrich community life.

How Program Was Carried Out

Meg Medina, a celebrated local Children's and Young Adult author and activist for greater inclusion in libraries, suggested that Henrico County Public Library begin an affiliate of the Next Chapter Book Club in 2017 in order to increase library services to adults with developmental disabilities. Next Chapter Book Club (NCBC) is a national organization that aims to promote authentic inclusion of adults with developmental disabilities in libraries and other community

spaces, by fostering a love of books and stories, and establishing and strengthening relationships between members. Nationwide, NCBC has over 300 clubs and has been going strong for 16 years. The end goal of the program is to create a positive public outing for a group that often learns and socializes in separate, more private spaces.

HCPL Programming Librarian served as the contact person between the Library and Next Chapter Book Club. An initial training in August 2017 was setup by the HCPL Programming Librarian and NCBC. Library Administration contacted the Department of Mental Health and Developmental Services (MHDS) to inquire about a potential partnership. To bring in the expertise of MHDS staff could add a layer of credibility to the new program, help recruit members, and ensure that Librarians leading discussions had the support of a trained professional. Five Library staff members and four MHDS partners attended the first training and planning meetings. It has made the program more sustainable to have several staff capable of facilitating the program to ensure there is always a staff member available. MHDS shared that the training's "curriculum was not only comprehensive and well organized, but it contained many of the same principles that staff in Henrico Area Mental Health and Developmental Services use to best support the individuals we serve in a safe and inclusive manner. The training program had modules about the best places to hold Next Chapter Book Club meetings, who and how many should participate, how to communicate in a respectful manner and how to best support individuals with varying reading abilities and social skills."

The Library worked with MHDS to plan the club, and decided to keep NCBC small, limited to eight members. Four members are participants of programs with Henrico County Mental Health, and four spots are open to the public. MHDS met with their clients and determined who among them were interested in participating in the club. MHDS staff make an effort to rotate clients through each session to give everyone a chance to be a part of the group, and ensure that the same people participate in each session to further facilitate social bonds and reinforce learning within

the club. MHDS transports their four participants to the book club each week, and their staff member assists Library staff in facilitating the book discussion. Registration is available through the event listing on the Library's website for the four open spots in the club. Members must be 16 or older and have an intellectual or developmental disability.

NCBC has requirements that must be met in order for a club to be an official affiliate, and one of these is to ensure the club meets in a public space within the Library. The lobby-level periodicals area in Tuckahoe Library was selected as an ideal location. This part of the Library is highly visible, well-trafficked, and does not typically function as a quiet reading area, as it is within earshot of the entrance and Circulation desk of the Library, and so could accommodate a group talking in the space.

The first book club was held in January 2018. The club meets for eight-week sessions, four times per year, and has just entered its second year and fifth session. Because of the schedule, the selected books need to be relatively short. Selected titles also need to fall within a range of complexity that is accessible to participants. Staff select books that fall within a Lexile range of 700-800. Titles are preferably already owned by the library in sufficient quantities to be reserved as a book club set. The Friends of the Library have offered to purchase additional sets when needed. Short stories, animal stories, and adventure stories have proved popular. Graphic novels would probably work well, and staff are exploring including a graphic novel for a future session. Library staff work from a general list of books they think would be appealing, and also solicit feedback from club members, to determine what to read next.

At each meeting, facilitators begin with brief check-ins and icebreaker questions to stimulate sharing and open conversation. Participants then take turns reading aloud from the book. Facilitators learned techniques to assist struggling readers, such as mirroring, reading along with participants, or helping them get started on a word or phrase that is difficult by sounding it out. Staff ask questions to help connect participants' personal lives to the title and to the larger group,

bonding everyone to the story and to each other through shared experiences. At the end of each eight-week session, staff try to plan something special. After reading *Seedfolks*, staff distributed seed packets; after *The Canine Companion*, staff arranged for a visit from a therapy dog, which was a huge hit; and at the conclusion of *Bunnicula*, staff shared Halloween candy. The group met with Library and MHDS staff at Panera Bread for a holiday gathering.

As the club has grown, staff have learned a lot about how to best facilitate these meetings. It is wise to let other patrons using the library know that the group may be a little loud. Because the Library requires registration for the four publicly available slots, they are prepared for unregistered guests as well as no-shows. It has proved best to hold onto the books for participants in between sessions, and to provide magnifying bookmarks for reading, and nametags for easier recall of names. Staff have become accustomed to leading a group with wide-ranging reading abilities, as well as working with members who do not want to read or talk at all. It is also helpful to avoid having anything distracting on the table during the meeting.

Since its inception, the club has frequently had a waitlist. Staff have learned to talk to the disappointed or waitlisted attendees and their caregivers. Because the need for programs like this is high, and availability is low, it was decided to keep promotion soft until a clear idea of the demand came into focus. The program was promoted to other area organizations serving adults with developmental disabilities to recruit participants. Groups range in size from session to session due to scheduling and availability of participants. Staff report an average of six attendees at each session, with high repeat attendance. Plans to begin a second group in Henrico are underway.

Financing and Staffing

The Next Chapter Book Club at Henrico County Public Library provides a low-cost and high-demand community service at a time when programming funds are limited. Material costs are

low, as the program largely uses books already owned by the library. By partnering with experts at the County's Department of Mental Health and Developmental Services, HCPL drew on existing County resources, while bolstering the program's credibility, and ensuring more sustainable staffing and attendance for the program.

To start a Next Chapter Book Club, affiliates must attend a 2.5-hour training for a flat fee, with additional trainings at additional, reduced cost. Book sets can be created from existing library materials, or for systems with smaller collections, can be obtained by trading with other NCBC affiliates through the affiliate forum.

- Next Chapter Book Club Training Fee: \$350 (a one-time fee of \$350 is charged by NCBC for a 2.5-hour training. To train additional facilitators, there is a \$30 fee.)
- Book Sets: \$0
- Magnifying bookmarks and nametags: \$40
- **Total: \$390**

Program Results

Next Chapter Book Club at Henrico County Public Library has proven highly popular with a consistent waiting list. One participant even drives 45 minutes to attend. Facilitators report positive outcomes over time: members come out of their shells, reading ability and comprehension improves, and members volunteer to read more often. Members have requested evening sessions and the formation of additional groups at other HCPL libraries, and staff are working out how to expand the club. Some members of the group started a walking club that meets after NCBC, where they continue to socialize in a positive, public way. The Programming Librarian was asked to present in a webinar for Next Chapter Book Club about HCPL's experience to a national audience of prospective Library hosts. Richmond Magazine wrote an article about

the club, which the Library approached with care, to avoid overexposing this vulnerable population. The Library worked with the reporter to express its goal of increasing awareness of the program and inspire the creation of more NCBCs in the area. Staff members love leading the program, some stating that NCBC is among the most rewarding experiences of their careers.

Kara Williams of Henrico Area Mental Health and Developmental Services says:

“I have personally seen some of the more reserved individuals I work with grow increasingly comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings with the group over time. It is apparent they feel safe and supported and like a valuable member of the group regardless of their abilities. They enjoy the opportunity to socialize with others in a community-based setting. This gives them opportunities to make friends with people they might not otherwise be able to meet. Their faces often light up during conversations and they are able to share difficult and important events in their lives with the group. I recall a particular conversation where one lady was telling the group how her mother had been sick and she was very worried about her. The group was supportive, asked her questions and gave her encouragement that seemed to lighten her mood in ways that paid staff cannot do effectively. The social aspect of the Next Chapter Book Club is an opportunity that many of the people we serve do not get enough of but benefit greatly from. The setting has also been beneficial to the participants. The club meets in the main room of the library alongside other community members. Often my clients participate in their communities in marginal ways. They are in a room to themselves or not out at all. Here, we are front and center in our community. The inclusive nature of the Next Chapter Book Club has been one of the most fulfilling aspects of this experience.”

Participants love the program, too. According to Virginia, an NCBC regular, “It actually is a good thing for me to do, because I actually like reading...It shows people how smart I really am, because of my disability.”

Brief Summary

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Adults with developmental disabilities do not have the same access to public spaces as the general population, often living and learning in private programs and facilities. NCBC allows

participants to take up space in public, to improve their literacy skills, and to form relationships centered on learning at the Library. It is a truly inclusive and community-building program.