

Burley Community Youth Get Gaming at Library Thanks to Wal-Mart Grant

Youth Services Librarian Valerie Bame keeps up-to-date on the needs of the youth in her community. When she examined the results from Burley High School students' Idaho Standard Achievement Tests (ISATs), she was disheartened to find that less than half of the 10th graders scored at a level of proficiency in the area of Language Arts.



As a participant in the ICFL-sponsored "Teens and Tech" seminar, Bame was familiar with the research linking Gaming with strengthening of language and literacy skills. Thanks to the "Strengthening Library Services for Youth in Idaho" grant opportunity from the Wal-Mart Foundation, Bame developed a Gaming program plan designed to increase library usage by area teens and strengthen the partnership with the local high school. The \$5,000 grant award allowed the library to install a complete gaming system, several current game titles, and a collection

of books about gaming. The library launched its weekly gaming programs in the spring of 2009.

The program has been a learning experience for library staff. Although they had originally targeted middle and high school students, they found the programs were mainly attended by children ages 8-11. The older students were more likely to attend special events and tournaments. However the goal of getting more teens into the library certainly was met through the program.

The library experienced a seven percent increase in library attendance and an amazing 77 percent increase in circulation during the grant period. The increases demonstrate that their target audience is reading more often and using the library services more frequently. Children's Librarian Valerie Bame stated circulation has continued at the increased level after the grant period was over.



In addition to the above outcomes, the library staff collected anecdotal information that highlights other benefits of their gaming program. They witnessed increased cooperation and camaraderie between children during play. Some of the tweens attending the programs have severe behavior or cognitive issues and attend with psycho-social rehabilitation workers. Regardless of this challenge, they come together and interact in a fun, social, and recreational activity and demonstrate support and encouragement with their peers each week. A small group of neighborhood children have also started visiting the library on a weekly basis outside of gaming days. They are staying for an hour or two and are accessing different library services during their visit.

The gaming program is ongoing. Because all of the basic equipment is already purchased, minimal funding is required to keep the games current and maintain the temporary support staff position. The library could not be more pleased with the positive impact this program has had teens in their community.