

Garden City Public Library Creates Cognitive Play Kits and Programs Thanks to Wal-Mart Grant

The **Garden City Public Library** had a vision to create programs to target the underserved, ethnically diverse, and low income families in their community. With the help of Beverly Taylor, a retired teacher and patron, they began developing their vision. Ideas included a “Cognitive and Constructive Play” collection and programming around the use of the collection that would enrich existing literacy activities at the library and extend the learning through outreach partnerships. After speaking with local educators, parents, caregivers, and organizations such as Head Start and The Learning Lab Preschool, they determined there was a need for these kinds of resources in their community. Applying for the Wal-Mart grant to help accomplish their goal was the next logical step.

Upon receiving the \$4,000 grant from Wal-Mart they went to work to fulfill their vision. Beverly helped the library select appropriate resources and they built the “Cognitive Development Toy” collection. Utilizing these materials, they also designed a six-week workshop called *Play to Learn*. One of their goals was to reinforce the early literacy and cognitive development skills emphasized in their current children’s programming and add depth to available resources. The sensory cognitive processes and guided play activities that were included in their programs were chosen because they encourage literacy and develop skills related to school readiness.



As sometimes happens, the implementation of the project was not without struggles. The library lost their youth services coordinator right after a successful pilot program of *Play to Learn* and delayed the start of the next workshop to allow the new coordinator time to settle in. In an effort to keep the momentum going and use the purchased



materials, they developed *Bubbles and Puzzles*, a weekly class where parents and children were given free play time using the toys. The class was a hit and they now offer an updated version on an ongoing basis. The class now introduces different cognitive toys weekly along with a short overview of the skill being taught and ideas for parents on how to play with their children. Parent and children alike love the opportunity to play and interact with high-quality and fun toys while learning valuable skills.

By fall, Tami Tipton, the new youth services coordinator was fully engaged and ready for the next challenge. They implemented another *Play to Learn* workshop that was met with great enthusiasm and demonstrated the community's need for such programming. The library estimates that they reached over 200 children age birth to three and another 15 children age four to five. The results from parent surveys were encouraging and highly complementary of program content and effectiveness. Participants commented that they walked away with a greater understanding of the importance of play for cognitive development, and ideas on how to continue the learning at home.



Another way the Garden City Public Library is sustaining and extending the program is through the creation of the "Cognitive Development Toy Catalog". This catalog has been distributed to local schools and care facilities in Garden City such as the Learning Lab, Anser Charter School, Whittier Elementary, and Garden City Community School. The kits are available to check out by approved facilities on a 'first come, first served' basis for four weeks. They can use them to supplement and enrich their own programs and foster cognitive development and early literacy skills.

Some of the materials that were purchased with the grant include:

- Big Book Theme Packets
These kits contain a big book version of a favorite children's story, props and materials that encourage discussion and help act out the story. They also include a guide with activities that span the curriculum. *Polar Bear, Polar Bear, Is Your Mama a Llama?*; and *The Cow That Went Oink* are some of the titles available.
- Storytelling Puppet Kits
Five Green and Speckled Frogs, Teasing Mr. Crocodile, The Itsy Bitsy Spider, and *Little Red Hen* are just a few of the many kits available.
- Alphabet Sounds Teaching Tubs
- Magnetic Geo Builders
- Five Senses Theme Box
- Stack and Build Chunky Puzzles
- Bead Sequencing Kit
- Literature-Based Measurement Center

Approximately 3/4 of the grant was used for materials, equipment, and storage. The remaining funds were used for personnel, publicity, and marketing activities.

Tami Tipton states that the goal of the program was to increase first time library users and attendance, circulation, and the depth of their outreach services in order to strengthen their relevance within the early literacy institutions in Garden City. They have seen more families and new families come into the library due to the classes offered. They will also be tracking the use of the Cognitive Development Toys offered through the catalog.