

## “Wii Reads” at Kuna Library Thanks to Wal-Mart Grant

Video gaming had been a proven method for drawing school age children to the Kuna Library. Afterschool program attendance increased by roughly 80 percent when the library purchased a Wii gaming system in 2008. Staff felt this was a great start, and they envisioned their library becoming a central hub for the youth in Kuna. However, the one gaming system was soon maxed out and video game programming became painfully time intensive to run. In addition, most of the users were elementary-age children-- teen usage was noticeably low.

Kuna staff did some research, collaborated to define goals and objectives, then applied for and received a Wal-Mart grant from ICFL to implement a gaming program designed to increase literacy and library usage among middle and high school students. “Wii Reads” sought to bring these students back into the library by integrating gaming programs with their children’s and young adult book collections.



Grant funding allowed the library to purchase two additional Wii consoles, along with projectors and screens, so that three consoles could run simultaneously during each gaming session in Kuna’s community room. New board games were purchased, and tables were set up around the perimeter of the room for board games, card games and reading zones. Gaming magazines and books were also purchased with grant funds and displayed in close proximity to the gaming zone.

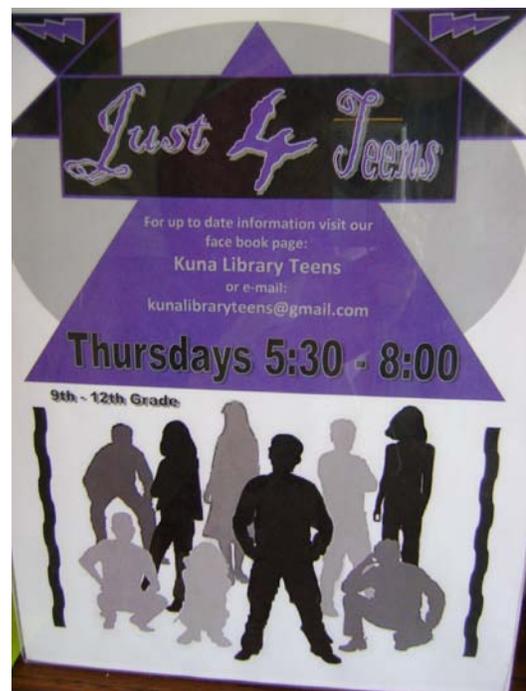
Staff created new teen and family programs to add to their existing school-age lineup, such as a special summer reading program targeting teens, a year-round Just for Teens afterschool program, and a specific teen gaming program. “The rewards of this have been significant for our library,” said Youth Programs Coordinator Sara Pemberton. “By reaching out to teens, we were actually able to recruit over a dozen teens who, though their volunteering, helped make our summer family and young adult programs a giant success. In addition, we have a regular crowd of teens who attend our Just for Teens program.”

The program has now been in existence for a little over one year, and has allowed the library to successfully reach out to kids who were not regular library users. School fliers and word of mouth helped bring in a noticeably different clientele. “Having a gaming program and gaming-related materials was a fantastic way to show non-library users

that there were materials at the library *just for them*,” Sara said. “These children tended to snap up the gaming magazines, which remained available to kids at all gaming events instead of going into circulation.”

The board games in particular paid tremendous dividends. While the Wii games were a large draw, the board games have been used heavily. “It’s been a joy to watch children teach each other how to play and revel in a mix of low-tech and high-tech offerings,” Sara expressed.

“Anyone who claims games have nothing to do with literacy has never seen seven-year-olds stretch their skills to read the rules of *Life* or *Sorry!*”



Attendance and circulation records showed that though there was no discernable change in checkout rates, the programs reached 372 school-age youth, and teen usage of library programs increased from 0 to 71. Sara also said that on an anecdotal note, Wii gaming offered a fantastic method for encouraging group participation. Children who don’t normally participate heavily in group activities were sometimes the stars of the show on gaming days, and sets of kids who normally didn’t pair up would play side-by-side on Wii days. Gaming creates social situations in which kids have to learn and use social skills to interact with one another.



Kuna has plans to keep these programs going. Sara said, “Now that we have the equipment, we can easily refresh the game collection to keep the programs fresh, exciting and relevant to our target audiences.” Kuna is also choosing to add gaming magazine subscriptions to their regular collection due to the success of the grant-funded magazines. In the fall, Wii Reads programming will include interactive leaderboards and avatars.

“In terms of creating a welcoming, engaging environment for all ages and genders, the Wii programs were a giant success,” Sara concluded.