

Post Falls Library Creates Puppet Outreach Program Thanks to Wal-Mart Grant



The **Post Falls** community was experiencing rapid growth and the library was racing to reach the growing number of young children. Their popular storytimes and other children’s programs were filled to capacity, and they knew the next step was to expand their outreach offerings in order to impact more children. The Post Falls Public Library envisioned a unique outreach program called “Early Learning-

Puppets & More” which would target the underserved, non-traditional, and non-user population of the children’s demographic. Applying for the Wal-Mart grant to help accomplish their goal was the next logical step.

Thanks to the generous Wal-Mart grant of \$7,000, the “Early Learning-Puppets and More” (ELP&M) project has enabled the youth services staff to greatly expand and enhance the outreach services to childcare facilities, preschools, developmental preschools, before and after school programs, and elementary schools. Their goal was to use puppets to reinforce language skills and foster early literacy skills. The programs modeled effective techniques to encourage early literacy in children.

Community partner Jenn Ross, Program Coordinator for the Idaho STARS Child care Resource Center, shared that there are still quite a few childcare providers who either do not read to the children, or if they do, do not choose the appropriate reading level, or do not share stories in a way that promotes early literacy skills. “Being able to observe the way library staff present these shows is a great way for them to learn these techniques” Ross said.

While performing puppet shows at the library, Children’s Librarian Lucy Barnard observed the power of puppets to fully engage children, even those with developmental challenges. “Puppets provide an ideal tool to promote early literacy skills and to introduce little ones to classic children’s tales and literature,” Barnard shared.

With a custom-built portable puppet theater, new puppets, books, props, and two original storytime-based puppet shows—“Farm Fun” and “Jungle Time”—staff hit the road performing a total of 545 shows reaching over 1,600 children. Additional funding from the Lillian Henderson Foundation allowed staff to provide 1483 picture books to children in the community. Each book was stuffed with a library card application, library fliers, and a custom bookplate.





In addition to the live puppet shows, Barnard and Morgan Chevalley—ELP&M outreach assistant—have co-written an original puppet show script titled “Walter and Wanda Wolverson meet the Three Little Pigs.” The library produced this short video with Senior Library Specialist Charlotte Limesand lending her media expertise to the project. This video was also produced as a DVD and is circulated with each of the ten pre-reading kits. Custom zippered hanging bags accommodate the contents of the kits which include: mini puppet theaters, finger puppet sets, books, children’s music CDs, and early literacy materials. A few of the titles include:

- Old MacDonald’s Farm
- Little Red Riding Hood
- Three Little Pigs
- Swashbuckling Sidekicks
- Cinderella
- Day at the Castle

The project is ongoing thanks to the addition of a Youth Services Assistant position—held by Morgan Chevalley—co-creator of the program. She continues the outreach program and will continue to write more original shows with Barnard. A plan to collaborate on a puppet outreach to childcare facilities with the Kootenai-Shoshone Bookmobile is in the works and they hope to have it in place by fall 2010. The mini puppet theaters will be circulating by the end of June and funds from the Lillian Henderson Foundation are still available to purchase books as giveaways. The filmed shows, mini puppet theater kits, and outreach shows will also be featured on the library’s website.

Partners in the outreach program could not say enough about how much they enjoyed and appreciated the program. The *I Can Do It Learning Center Staff* said, “Thank you so very much...your program encourages children to want to read, to visit the library, and encourages literacy...this is what teachers want and children need.” Cynthia Parter at *A Growing Place* stated, “The kids love it and the program promotes the love for reading.”



The library is pleased with the results of this unique program and looks forward to new additions from the creative talents of Chevalley and Barnard.