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Library adds satellite branch for English learners, families

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Warren County Public Library satellite librarian Brittany Blackerby sorts through books in WCPL's new satellite branch at the International Center of Kentucky on Thursday.

Photos by Grace Ramey McDowell / grace.ramey@bgdailynews.com

The Warren County Public Library's newest satellite branch brings a selection of programs and resources to the International Center of Kentucky's new building – open to the public, with a focus on English learning for children and families.

The partnership, between the library and the refugee resettlement center, combines resources from both organizations at the Dr. Catherine Center for New Americans, directly across from the International Center of Kentucky's older building at 806 Kenton St.

“This allows us to offer library resources to a demographic that is often underserved – that's new Americans. It's folks who are accessing services from the International Center – but it's also open to the public,” WCPL Community Outreach Manager Emily Witthuhn said.

Brittany Blackerby, a Western Kentucky University alumna with degrees in Spanish and history, staffs the library, a multipurpose room with multiple shelves that mostly provide a range of juvenile-level books for new English readers. The collection, to be continually updated as the library learns about the location's needs, also contains numerous DVDs and some Spanish children's books. Patrons can request additional books for pickup.

Typically, Blackerby said, she explains to visitors how the library works and what it offers, and she sets them up with a library card, which grants patrons a wide variety of resources such as eBooks and audiobooks from hoopla and the Libby app.

“I think this is going to open doors for a lot of people once they realize what's available to them,” Blackerby said.

She hosts basic English story times for mothers and their babies. Often, the mothers of very young children have difficulty attending classes on English as a second language, and these story times provide some English instruction outside of the traditional classroom setting.

Blackerby also plans to bring children over in the coming weeks for story times and craft times while their parents take English-as-a-second-language classes at the nearby center.

Meanwhile, the International Center of Kentucky has brought instruction for refugees on computer usage and social media into the same room, International Center of Kentucky Executive Director Albert Mbanfu said.

Around 15 to 20 people – counting both mothers and babies – have visited the library about two and a half weeks in, Blackerby said. The most popular books have been resources to supplement their English language instruction, such as English picture dictionaries.

“The library is focused on English learning because these are individuals coming from countries where the primary language is not English, and as a result, they have to learn English in order to acculturate to the community,” Mbanfu said. “In order for them to do that, they will need to have the resources necessary.”

Among other things, he said, this means providing a facility with English second learners teachers, a library with accessible books and volunteers who can guide them on how to use them and teach them alphabets and phrases.

One program idea under development is Swahili story time, which would be hosted by the International Center. Blackerby said she may add Spanish story time down the road.

For her, the best part of the job is working with the mothers and babies.

“It’s just kind of an instant reward when you can see somebody learn a new word,” Blackerby said.

— *Prospective volunteers can call 270-781-8336 and ask for Tare Ugulah.*

David Horowitz