

Bright Ideas for Our Haitian Public Library Idées brillantes pour notre bibliothèque publique haïtienne

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For the Cange Library friends & supporters in Haiti and the US to consider as possible program components for the library. Just "food for thought." News and ideas that could be adapted or redesigned for Cange Community Library.

IDEA #1: How a Volunteer Literacy Project Aims to End Violence....One Book at a Time

Originally published in: [The Brooklyn Reader, August 20, 2014](#). *(below is an edited/excerpt)*

Here is an article about the importance of early reading, the impact of reading on reducing violence, and the effect of high school volunteer readers. It was found in weekly news service from Rocket Blasts Daily Headlines from [Reading Rockets.org](#).



Little Sun People Day Campers take part in the Youth Volunteer Literacy Development Project





“Literacy prevents violence,” said Betty Davis, a retired educator and Crown Heights resident. “What it boils down to is, most people who commit violence have no hope. Reading develops a person inside so that they have a vision of themselves as something other than hopeless.”

Davis, who has a master’s degree in library science and has worked for many years as a principal in the New York city public schools, said that underlying concept—that literacy prevents violence—many years as a principal in the New York city public schools, said that underlying concept—that literacy prevents violence—is the reason why, when Bed-Stuy resident Arlena Adams, Betty Davis, Education Committee Coordinator and Co-founder of The Youth Volunteer Literacy Development Project approached Community Board 8 with the idea to form a youth literacy program, immediately, she was on board.

CB 8, where Davis is co-chair on the Education Committee with Kwasi Mensah, already had been in discussion about how to deal with the drastically decreasing enrollment of students of color in the city’s specialized high schools. “All of us agreed this was a big problem and that it was time the community have an intervention before these kids get to school,” said Davis.

Together, Davis, Adams and Mensah helped form the Youth Volunteer Literacy Development Project, an intergenerational reading project that pairs teens with preschool-aged children to encourage reading in the home. The teens volunteer to hold reading circles—a way to encourage them to become active contributors to their community as they carve out their own roles in life while also engage children early in the love of books.

“Anytime you have a child come out of the 12th grade and they’re only reading at a third-grade level, that is an act of violence. Because by the time a child fails the third-grade reading test, the prison begins to designate prison seats for them.”

Davis is referring to the controversial and oft-refuted claim made in 2009 by Virginia gubernatorial candidate Terry McAuliffe in a television ad promoting his plan to expand preschool: “We feel comfortable using third-grade reading scores as a way of communicating, in shorthand, the importance of education in predictions of long-term social behavior, including predictions about crime rates, which are then used to determine the number of prison beds that we are constructing,” said McAuliffe’s communications director.



That claim— later repeated by dozens more people, from Hillary Clinton to Colin Powell— has since been called out as an urban legend. But empirical data does in fact show a direct link between reading, literacy and those who serve prison time. So the way Davis sees it, literacy is a viable and effective way to prevent violence.

So Davis contacted Little Sun People Daycare Center in Bed-Stuy, spoke to parents, and reached out to Nizjoni Granville of the Catalyst Network Foundation for young interns.

“We wanted to work with young people between the ages of 15-17 interested in attending college, because we wanted them to be good speakers and readers and also motivated about education,” said Davis.

The program secured a grant from the Citizens Committee to pay stipends to the interns. With the help of the New York Black Librarians Caucus, they were able to secure training space in the Grand Army Plaza library. And the College of New Rochelle gave them classroom space.

“So many agencies collaborated so beautifully, donated and were so cooperative in this, because they understood the importance and impact a program like this can have,” she said.



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