

What's Going On

Auburn Public Library to become a "Family Place Library"



One-year-old Henry and Paul, 3, Dimitri of Auburn have fun in Auburn Public Library's Family Place play space.

If it is true that "It takes a village to raise a child," then it takes more than parents and their extended family: it takes edu-

cators, medical professionals, councilors, therapists, religious leaders and, yes, even librarians.

Public libraries have

always been involved in childhood development. Involvement earnestly starts with preschool story hours at most libraries, although many offer some programs for younger children.

Even the smallest libraries have collections of indestructible board books and a corner or nook for parents and children to read together.

Few, though, have a coordinated program of services that support children from birth to age three, and their parents or caregivers.

But all that is changing with Family Place Libraries.

In 1996, Libraries for the Future began working to create and showcase libraries as family centers. These centers would offer well-defined and coordinated programs of services to support children from birth through age three, by helping parents to raise healthy and inquisitive children, destined to be life-long readers and learners.

Dubbed "Family Place Libraries," they have been established in 175 libraries in 23 states, including Maine.

Waterville, Topsham, North Berwick, Norway, Hallowell and Wilton Public Libraries are designated Family Place Libraries in Maine. In February, Auburn Public Library will be added to the list and will christen its Family Place.

With the help of grant funding, APL has committed time, space and resources to healthy child development by providing babies and toddlers with collections of books, toys

and other materials; giving parents access to conveniently-located parenting resources; creating cozy space for young children and parents to share; programs; and offering parenting and child development workshops.

Deb Cleveland from the Auburn Public Library says that Family Place is "as much an attitude as it is a place. It's an attitude that has permeated through the entire staff and is reflected across the board in the services we offer."

Partnerships with local agencies, organizations and professionals form the cornerstone of all Family Place Libraries. APL's growing list of local Family Place Partnerships includes Pathways, Advocates for Children, Community Concepts, Literacy Volunteers-Androscoggin and the YMCA. These partnerships make it possible to organize parent/child programs that link child development experts (such as speech therapists, nutritionists and occupational therapists) with parents and their chil-

dren.

Family Place partners generally donate their time and expertise, while librarians act as facilitators by organizing and promoting the workshops. At the workshops, experts mingle with parents and casually observe children, while they make themselves available to answer questions.

Parents and families grow in Family Place. Toddlers who were very shy and didn't know how to interact with other kids learn how to be social and are soon ready to graduate on to story hour. Parents find companionship and answers to questions about child development and learn how to seek additional help.

Local agencies and organizations that learn about Family Place Libraries often refer clients to them, completing the circle of collaboration and support.

For more information about the Auburn Public Library's Family Place, call 333-6640, or visit www.AuburnPublicLibrary.org.

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