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parents & children

FREE

family place Libraries™

Building Strong Families and Communities

By Lisa G. Kropp



When my first child, Nicholas, arrived in June 2000, I was certain I was ready for the roller-coaster ride of motherhood as the awesome, sometimes scary adventure began in earnest. I'd read almost every parenting book. I had a wonderful support system, with parents and in-laws all local and eager to come see their new grandchild and offer advice, and a husband at home for that entire summer, offering me much needed support.

Yet there were days where I yearned for more. I ventured out to local libraries, hoping to meet other moms with babies, to trade stories with them, to be validated and to have someone say, "Yes, you're doing it correctly." I was amazed at how much better I felt after visiting the library, often just sitting on a couch with Nicholas talking with other moms who told me their five-month-old didn't sleep through the night either.

The library became a regular stop for me on my parenting adventure. In today's world where talk of infant brain development, early literacy knowledge and the family bed is abundant, the library made sense to me not only as a parenting education center, but as a family-friendly community center because libraries have so much more to offer to their communities than books alone.

A Local Support System

The National Family Place Libraries™ Project, a joint project of Middle Country Public Library and the Americans for

Libraries Council, was created 10 years ago and is now operating in over 230 libraries in 23 states (with 33 sites on Long Island). Focusing on families, parents and children beginning at birth, Family Place Libraries expand the traditional role of children's services and build upon the knowledge that good health, early learning, parent involvement and supportive communities play a critical role in young children's growth and development. Key features include:

- developmentally appropriate programming for young children age birth through five and their parents or caregivers;
- specially designed interactive space for families;
- collections of books, toys and other materials for babies, toddlers, parents and family service professionals;
- access to electronic resources that emphasize early literacy, reading readiness and parent education;
- and networking and coalition building with community agencies that also target families with young children, such as Departments of Health, Head Start/Even Start centers, cooperative extensions and other human service agencies.

Five years ago, Family Place Long Island (FPLI) was

launched. This regional cluster of Nassau and Suffolk libraries (see map on page 46 for locations) focuses on serving new and underserved local audiences, and works with other community agencies to help families cope with the unique challenges that arise when moms and caregivers feel cut off or overwhelmed with their responsibilities.

Parent-Child Workshop

The core program of a Family Place Library is the Parent-Child Workshop. Though it looks like an early childhood class with colorful toys, blocks, puzzles and crawl-through tunnels, it's really a parent education class in disguise. The strength of the workshop and of Family Place in general lies in the belief that learning for young children takes place within the family context, that parents are a child's first teachers and that it's through play that the young child learns. The workshop is conducted one day a week in 75-minute sessions for five consecutive weeks. During those sessions, the librarian facilitates family interaction and learning by providing age-appropriate materials, communicating with the parents and children and connecting the families to community services through the inclusion of special resource professionals at each workshop.

The librarian acts as the facilitator and introduces the families to the structure and format of the workshop. Throughout the series, a nutritionist, speech and language pathologist, child development specialist and physical movement specialist all visit the workshop, getting on the floor to play with children and talk one-on-one with parents. They encourage parents to ask questions, to speak freely about their concerns for their children and communicate whatever anxieties and fears they have as parents. The effect is often profound, with parents opening up to these professionals, relaying their concerns about development, nutrition or feelings of isolation they're experiencing.

Mothers' Groups

Many Family Place libraries offer more than the parent-child workshop. Story time, Mother Goose classes, music programs and preschool activity classes are the norm. Some sites realized the need for local moms with very young children to come together informally beyond the five weeks of the Parent-Child Workshop to chat and share their fears, their concerns and their joys about motherhood. By partnering with The National Association of Mothers' Centers, headquartered in Levittown (an organization that addresses the needs of mothers through programs that offer information and support), Family Place and the NAMC placed centers directly into certain libraries. This way moms would not only have a site where they could meet weekly, but one that also provided ready access to books, periodicals and other resources on a wide variety of topics



A Project of Libraries for
the Future & Middle Country
Public Library

family place sites

pertaining to child-rearing and parent-hood. Many of the libraries put out toys for the young children to play with while their moms are engaged in conversations, and display books, videos and other materials that pertain to the discussion topics for the moms to check out on their library cards. The partnership has been a wonderful success, with many of the mothers noting that having the group meet in the local library created that longed for sense of community.

Kids in Care

The network's latest venture involves both the Child Care Councils of Suffolk and Nassau to identify family home child care providers that would be interested in becoming a partner with the councils and their participating community library. The purpose is to utilize the many resources and materials that the different libraries and the councils offer to parents and child care providers. Recently, MCPL began working with nine family home child care providers, offering training on early literacy and infant brain development, among others, and has created special early literacy kits that will be dropped off at the child care provider's home by an early childhood librarian for use with the children in their care. Our goal is to strengthen the early literacy skills of the child care provider, to educate them on the important role they play as one of the primary teachers for the children in their care and to offer another avenue of support to their families, while providing age-appropriate materials for the children.

So, the next time you're feeling overwhelmed by parent-hood, visit one of the local Family Place sites on any given day of the week and share a lift-the-flap book with your child, do a puzzle together, join a Mothers' Center group, sign up for an

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East Meadow Public Library
Farmingdale Public Library
Freeport Memorial Library
Great Neck Library
Lakeview Public Library
Levittown Public Library
Long Beach Public Library
Port Washington Library
Rockville Centre Public Library
Uniondale Public Library
West Hempstead
Public Library
Westbury Memorial
Public Library

SUFFOLK

Amagansett Free Library
Amityville Public Library
Brentwood Public Library

Brookhaven Free Library
Central Islip Public Library
Commack Public Library
Half Hollow Hills
Community Library
Hampton Bays Library
Harborfields Public Library
Hauppauge Public Library
Lindenhurst Public Library
Mastic Moriches Shirley
Public Library
Mattituck Laurel Library
Middle Country Public Library
Northport-East Northport
Public Library
Patchogue-Medford Library
Quogue Library
South Country Library
South Huntington
Public Library
Westhampton Free Library

early literacy story time class or just sit and chat with some of the other parents and caregivers utilizing the library with their little ones. Chances are you'll see for yourself that there's indeed a lot going on in libraries. 😊

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