

## Summer 2021 at BPL: Tails and Tales

Much planning and discussion goes into preparing for summer reading and programs every year. It is not for the faint of heart! At BPL we are fortunate to have gifted, experienced and enthusiastic staff actively participating on the programming committee. We know that libraries, *our Library*, can help families avoid summer slide in academics, and prevent summer doldrums for anyone and everyone. Year Two of the COVID pandemic found patrons excited to return to their Library, and staff happy to explore new ways to program, new ways to connect, and new ways to bring the Library to Bridgeport. This year's theme was Tails and Tales, focusing on animal stories for all ages.

### Readership

Children used paper forms this year to keep track of their reading. Participation approached pre-Covid numbers, which was very rewarding for staff. Children received the components of an art kit: bag, scissors, crayons, drawing paper and glue stick, as well as stickers and activity sheets as they read their books. These proved so popular we plan to continue this practice in summers to come. Kids who completed 15 books or more were entered into a drawing for Michael's gift certificates to augment their art kit.

Teens were not as ready to participate. Participants in programs as well as readers were given points toward prizes and entered into a drawing for Dunkin' and gaming gift certificates, but the results were disappointing. We continue to look for new partnerships and ways to overcome the challenges and connect with this age group in our urban environment. Virtual teen chess was successful. A Mayor's Summer Youth Initiative Grant provided funding for our Chess partnership with DIG USA, culminating in a well-attended party and tournament in September.

Adult participation also proved challenging this year. Less than 12 adults participated in our reading program, even though so many were back to weekly visits and browsing, ebullient in their joy of being out and about again to pick books to read. The Mah Jongg ladies started meeting in person again, and Forest Bathing (shinrin-yoku) provided a deliberate and meditative immersion into nature for the senses.

Staff used Google Docs to keep track of reading and prizes. Going forward we will be exploring different methods of marketing summer reading and programs to adults and teens in particular.

### Programs

The Friends supported our summer programs with a \$1,350 gift. An anonymous donor provided an additional \$1,000. We used several formats and options and had our own free programs as well. It remains vital to determine the best platform for each type of program, based on the level of interaction and participation desired. What a joy it was to provide some in-person opportunities such as the Seaside Storytime. The return to live programming remained cautious and slow due to ever-changing virus protocols. Safety for one and all was paramount. The money remaining will be used for programs this fall. Going forward we will be evaluating each type of program and how best to present it. We will also be providing hybrid and online alternatives for patrons even after more inhouse programs are back.

### Marketing

Covering all our social media and using all our partnerships and connections to get the word out to the community required much time and many hands. We continue to expand in this area.

On to planning for Summer 2022!

Paula Keegan and Bina Williams, on behalf of the BPL Summer Programming Committee  
(See attachments)