Dear Friend: Quarantine Pen Pal Campaign

Germantown Community Library

Children

|

Teens

|

Young Adult

|

Intergenerational

Dear Friend: Quarantine Pen Pal Campaign

May 6, 2020

$51-100

$
Byline

Daniel Page, Library Director, Germantown (Tenn.) Community Library

The Dear Friend pen pal campaign launched as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We connect quarantined youth with senior citizens in our community through a traditional letter-writing program. The program has been tremendously helpful to provide youth and senior citizens a way to stay active and connected during a tumultuous time for the whole world.

We had over 100 registrations in the first month and people are still signing up. We hope to continue long after the quarantine ends.

Advanced Planning

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, city leaders formed committees to plan an effective response. A couple weeks into that effort, longtime City Administrator Patrick Lawton contacted me with the idea of starting a traditional pen pal letter writing program to help quarantined youth connect with homebound senior citizens. Alderman Mary Anne Gibson, the library's liaison to the Germantown Board of Mayor and Aldermen, recommended that at a time when we all might feel isolated, the program could provide a bright light during a dark and unsettling time.

With that affirmation, the library staff organized a plan to facilitate and publicize the program. We started by setting up a short online survey to collect patron registrations, and in addition to using our traditional marketing tools, we reached out to all of our senior living facilities.

Marketing

We used social media, the library's website, printed fliers, email and phone calls to announce the program. Those efforts were successful, especially once they were all used in unison. The city has a very attractive magazine, in partnership with the Germantown Chamber of Commerce, that will be mailed to all residences to further promote the effort. We also had a story on the local news.

Budgeting

Using a free or low-cost online survey platform was great for us. Otherwise, there is almost no cost for the library or the participants.

Day-of-event Activity

It was necessary to have a plan to manage registrations and to match youth with senior citizens. We have managed the program with four staff working a total of two hours a week to do the work.

Program Execution

Our library staff speak to participants to confirm their interest in the program and to verify their mailing address. During those conversations, and in follow-up conversations, we get feedback from the participants on how they feel about the program and what we might do to improve it.

Through this program, the city, library and community have connected in a new and meaningful way. We suspect participants, including those who might not have previously been regular library patrons, could consider engaging with other library services as a result of their participation in the Dear Friends program.

Advice

We had the initial challenge of connecting with some senior citizens who were not accustomed to signing up online. We adjusted our outreach to include a greater number of letters and phone calls, and that helped a lot.

The pen pal program might not be a good fit for every community, but it has great potential and is worth consideration. Being creative in how you publicize it might help, too.

Did you try this program at your library? Share your experience using this form.

Supporting Materials

Download this Program as a PDF

- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

More Programs

Oct 31, 2019
Teens (13-16)+ | □□
Image



4 Writing Prompts to Break the Ice

Audiences:

Audience
Teens (13-16)
Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)
Intergenerational
Oct 31, 2019
Adults (21 and up)+ | □□
Image



Obituary Writing Workshop

Audiences:

Adults (21 and up)
Intergenerational
Apr 29, 2020

+ | □□
Image



Quaranzine (A Quarantine Zine)

Audiences:

Apr 30, 2020
Teens (13-16)+ | $$$
Image



To-Go Crafts

Audiences:

Teens (13-16)
Adults (21 and up)
Intergenerational