International Pen Pal Program with New Zealand

Kent County Public Library

Intergenerational

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Feb 6, 2024

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Byline

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International connections are being made through snail mail! Hundreds of patrons in Delaware, USA and Wellington, New Zealand are participating in an ongoing pen pal program that began in June 2023.

All letters are dropped off and picked up at the library for safety and convenience. Letters are shipped together in one batch and then distributed to the individual branches. Ten Delaware branches and 12 New Zealand branches are included in this fantastic project.

Advanced Planning

We began planning this program six months prior to opening it up for patron participation. There was one coordinator in each country who handled the legal issues and general paperwork to get it started.

Once we opened to patrons, all relevant data was put into one shared spreadsheet. Patrons were matched by the Delaware coordinator. We did not expect so many people to sign up so we had the unexpected, but very welcome, challenge of matching hundreds of patrons right away.

Marketing

We started promoting the program a month or so before registration opened in all libraries. We were very successful and had a huge response when we first began.

More patrons are joining each week and the program continues to grow. We continue to use social media to highlight the program and some libraries still have displays up.

Budgeting

There was no pre-planned budget associated with this program. We do have to ship a large box to New Zealand approximately every 6 – 8 weeks. The cost of shipping each box runs between $120 - $150. There isn’t much we can do to cut costs there. Shipping is expensive. If the partner country is closer, shipping may be less expensive. and if fewer people participated the cost would also be lower.

Day-of-event Activity

There is now a coordinator in each of the Delaware libraries who keeps track of their branch participants and one main coordinator who keeps track of all participants. New Zealand also keeps track of all participants.

Each round of letters is logged to be sure patrons remain active. Our main challenge with running the program is that some patrons miss the due date. If a person doesn’t write, we contact them to see if they are still planning on participating. If not, their pen pal is rematched.

Program Execution

The program has surpassed expectations and goals. Feedback is consistently positive with people truly making connections and creating new friends through letters. There is real excitement when a new package of letters comes in — excitement that is seen equally in both countries.

We began with 300 and now, six months later we have over 540 patrons participating with new patrons joining every week.

We have seen an amazing amount of positive feedback from many patrons. This program has encouraged even the most reluctant writers to sit down and write long letters to their new friends. We now feel very connected to Wellington City Libraries — with information about the country being shared through books, maps, letters and more. It has been wonderful connecting not only patrons but library staff in each country. We're able to learn about their best practices and fabulous programming and share ideas on a global level!

We have also seen a huge amount of interest from other libraries wanting to start a similar program, so we are trying to make international connections that will lead to more programs such as this throughout the United States. To that end, we started a Facebook Group with FAQs and information for those interested in joining.

We will also be presenting this program at the MLA/DLA Conference in May 2024.

Advice

This program has absolutely been worth the work it took and still takes to maintain. Be sure that your partner library is as enthusiastic as you are. This takes work on both ends of the program.

Don’t underestimate the amount of time it takes to carefully match pen pals. Stay organized and on top of things.

If you have any questions at all, just reach out and ask. We are happy to share our experiences with everyone in the hopes of helping other libraries connect in this way.

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

Slideshow Images



Image









Image









More Programs

May 6, 2020
Children (9 and under)+ | $

Image



Dear Friend: Quarantine Pen Pal Campaign

Audiences:

Children (9 and under)
Teens (13-16)
Young Adult (17 - 20)
Intergenerational
May 28, 2020
Adults (21 and up)+ | □□
Image



Virtual Language Conversation Hour

Audiences:

Adults (21 and up)
Intergenerational
Jul 16, 2020
Adults (21 and up)+ | $
Image



Global Neighbors Series

Audiences:

Adults (21 and up)
Children (9 and under)
Intergenerational