LIBRARY NEWS
Sharing stories of Georgia’s libraries changing lives and communities
Summer 2024

1,000 Books Before Kindergarten makes early literacy fun!

NEW at libraries: Update your social service benefits with self-service kiosks

Voices from library boards
Storycamp and Tech Boot Camp share children’s program ideas and the latest tech

Georgia Public Library Service offers professional development for library staff to enable them to use the latest technology, learn new skills, and strengthen their ability to meet local community needs.

It’s one way that GPLS empowers libraries to improve the lives of all Georgians.

So far in 2024, GPLS has hosted two conferences, each uniquely designed to help staff who work in different areas of libraries.

Top and middle photos: Storycamp attendees received a hands-on drum lesson and behind-the-scenes look at creating a shadow puppetry show. Participants use what they learned to provide engaging children’s programs in their communities.

Bottom photo: Staff get hands-on experience using the latest technology at Tech Boot Camp.

New ideas coming soon to your local library!
In April, GPLS hosted Storycamp, a one-day conference modeled after summer camp and designed to help library staff who work with children strengthen their knowledge of hands-on programming and early-literacy techniques to provide engaging and educational programming for families in their community.

62 participants representing 25 library systems engaged in indoor and outdoor interactive learning sessions at Camp Will-A-Way at Fort Yargo State Park in Winder and had the opportunity to connect with their peers while enjoying nature. Sessions covered a range of topics including drumming, storytelling, shadow puppetry, folk dancing, and more to help attendees incorporate new programs at their respective libraries.

These activities were chosen to re-introduce traditional children’s programming skills that participants may not have been exposed to in past trainings or education and focused on hands-on experiential learning. They were led by a mix of librarians and other guests, including award-winning author Laurel Snyder and Dr. Arvin Scott, former professor of music at the University of Georgia.

“Part of our goal at Georgia Public Library Service is to make sure children's librarians from around the state have an opportunity to learn from experienced professionals,” said Evan Michael Bush, director of Youth Services at GPLS. “We want to energize people, give them new creative ideas, and have them leave with hands-on training that they can use in their libraries for summer reading and programming throughout the year.”

Since in-person trainings were not held during the pandemic, one of the goals of Storycamp was to help attendees meet and reconnect with other children’s librarians.

“I took something away from every single session, every single share of books and crafts, and every single conversation during our meals,” said Beth Ratliff, youth services coordinator at Winder Public Library. “Being with other children’s programmers was uplifting, and one of the best trainings I’ve ever been to since becoming a librarian.”

BOOT CAMP EMPOWERS STAFF TO USE THE LATEST TECH

GPLS also hosts Tech Boot Camp annually for library staff whose roles intersect with technology in some capacity. Over 160 attendees, 99 in person and the rest virtual, across all 60 public library systems, attended this year’s Tech Boot Camp for an opportunity to share their experiences and ideas, as well as learn about topics such as cybersecurity, emerging technologies, applying for technology grants, and more.

Tech Boot Camp sessions were planned around the technological needs of libraries and led by GPLS team members, library staff, and other organizations including Google and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.

Several sessions featured library staff sharing projects they have worked on including how to budget for technology needs or implement cybersecurity training for staff, which attendees could then ask questions about and share their own experiences.

Since many IT staff at libraries are not initially hired in IT and take on additional responsibilities due to their library’s need, Tech Boot Camp provides essential training and learning opportunities libraries would typically not have funding to provide.

“I've been coming to Tech Boot Camp for 12 years, and it really helps to have this group of people that I can go to to ask questions like ‘How do I get funding to do what I want to do?’ or ‘How do I work with my staff to implement certain ideas?’ I can come here and learn how to do those things because other people are asking the same questions, and we share our answers,” said Scott Martin, technology manager at Flint River Regional Library.

Attendees also had an opportunity to explore and get hands-on experience with Technology Loaner Kits that libraries can borrow through GPLS. These include a variety of technology from virtual reality headsets to 3D printers to live streaming equipment. With these kits, library staff can become familiar with new tech without having to spend limited local funds, as well as borrow them to use for programming at their library such as stargazing using the telescope kit or a field trip with the virtual reality kit.

“What we provide to libraries is shaped by what we learn from them at this conference,” said Daniel Zeiger, director of IT at GPLS. “They tell us what they’re looking to do, and it shapes the programs that we create for them. So next year, the things that you will see us roll out will all be influenced by this event.”

“Getting to see some of the technology in person and being able to handle it and see it in action has been great. One of my favorite things was learning all the different things we can do with Google Workspace that I wasn’t aware of,” said Nyisha Key, director at De Soto Trail Regional Library System. “As a new director, all these tools that I’m now realizing we have access to is going to help me familiarize my team with the technology.”
Kids build early literacy and earn prizes through 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten
The graduates proudly wore their caps, walking one by one to collect their certificates to loud applause. Colorful streamers adorned the walls, along with phrases like, “Oh, the places you’ll go!”

After the inspirational words of the keynote speaker, 47 pairs of arms reached up and many young voices yelled in excitement for a balloon drop. This was the scene at Sequoyah Regional Library System’s annual 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten graduation.

“Parents have told us that they love celebrating the achievement for their little ones through the graduation,” said Sarah Childers of Sequoyah Regional Library System. “We have many families who send each of their children through the program to build that love of reading for everyone.”

1,000 Books Before Kindergarten is available at nearly 300 public libraries across Georgia and growing, and is one of Georgia Public Library Service’s primary ways to support the Early Literacy Act. The premise is that reading books aloud to your baby or toddler, which is important for a child’s brain development and builds up necessary vocabulary for when they enter school, also builds strong family bonds – and is fun!

“The most important predictor of school success is being read to at home during early childhood,” said Evan Michael Bush, director of Youth Services at Georgia Public Library Service. “Children who are read to in that pivotal window from birth to age five will enter school with more than 30,000 words in their vocabulary.”

While 1,000 books may seem intimidating, if a parent or guardian reads one book a day to their baby or toddler, they will reach the program’s goal in just over three years.

Children receive prizes for reaching milestones along the way, typically at 250, 500, and 750 books, which helps keep them motivated to continue.

“We read a ton of books before bedtime, and we get to discuss things we normally wouldn’t,” said Casey Romanos. “My child’s reading skills have expanded exponentially through 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten. The program has opened her mind to vocabulary and recognizing new words. It’s been amazing to see the progression.”

Any child can participate in the program, even without a library card. However, a free library card is useful for accessing the many books, ebooks, and audiobooks at the library.

Learn more about 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten at georgialibraries.org/1000books or ask your local librarian.
What’s a kid to do at the library?

Have fun!

Georgia’s public libraries are places where children and families can discover the joy of reading, get help with homework, learn through hands-on STEAM activities, and get free admission to great places around Georgia. Learn more at georgialibraries.org/kids

**eRead Kids:** This digital library for kids in pre-K to fourth grade features more than 40,000 ebooks and audio-books. It is freely available through all public libraries in the state. Families can use their library card number and PIN to access eRead Kids from any device with an internet connection.

**Makerspaces:** A makerspace is a room for making, learning, and sharing that uses no-tech to high-tech tools. These may include a variety of maker equipment like 3D printers, virtual reality glasses, Legos, paint sets, soldering irons, and even sewing machines.

**Storytime:** Weekly storytime read-aloud sessions at the library are a vibrant early-literacy experience that enables children to learn new words, concepts, and ideas from a skilled, professional children’s librarian. Rich in movement, music, and vocabulary, it also teaches children to interact and pay attention in a group setting, while children and their caregivers make new friends.

**Summer Reading Program:** Throughout the summer, all Georgia public libraries offer creative, fun, and free ways to build a love for reading. Kids can earn prizes for achieving reading goals, there are fun events like magic shows or crafts for a variety of ages, and families can check out opportunities to explore Georgia.
Voices from Georgia’s public library boards

Library trustees are local leaders, active members of their community, and neighbors. They are important volunteers and advocates for the library. Here are perspectives from a handful of trustees across Georgia.

**Terry Raifod, trustee, O’Kelly Memorial Library**

“My role involves overseeing the financial operations of the O’Kelly Library in the Azalea Regional Library System and providing support to the director. Drawing on my experience as a CFO for a state agency, I possess the expertise to anticipate economic shifts and guide the library in preparing for these changes effectively.

I felt a deep sense of pride when the board and the city of Loganville united in their decision to establish a new library. It was the culmination of numerous meetings with city officials, community members, and other stakeholders. The addition of this new library is poised to significantly benefit our city by providing the next generation with the essential resources they require for success.”

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**James Coleman, chair of Cobb County Library Board**

“I’m curious and I ask lots of questions. My goal is to understand how each library process works. The library team is wonderful, patiently answering and providing helpful context. If something is persistently hard to grasp, there could be an opportunity for improvement or added efficiency. We have 15 libraries in Cobb County. Though well maintained, some of the facilities are aging and in need of renovation. Securing funding for such projects given all
county priorities is a constant challenge. This past year, we worked with members of the library team to advocate for an additional $2.2 million to complete the Gritters Library renovation project. We are excited that the new facility will open later this year.”

**Sami Mastrario, Victoria Evans Memorial Library and Coastal Plain Regional Library System boards**

“The library and its board have faced significant financial challenges in recent years, further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As reading habits have evolved over the past decade, libraries nationwide have experienced notable declines in patron usage. However, I am particularly proud of the remarkable turnaround our library and board have achieved in the past year and a half. We secured additional funding from local agencies and hired a passionate branch manager dedicated to promoting the love of libraries. Our community demonstrated overwhelming support through donations. I believe my social media advocacy, marketing within our local newspaper, and event volunteering have contributed to the increase in patron visits, programming, and our collection.”

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**Kelly Lane, Cook County Library Board chair and Coastal Plain Regional Library System Board**

“The role of the library board is advocacy. Advocacy. Advocacy! The function of the board is to take care of the ‘business’ of the library and be good stewards of the resources we are given to carry out its mission, but I have always believed the board also needs to be strong advocates for the library and share the story with all segments of our community. The library should be one of the cornerstones of each community in Georgia. As board members, we should ensure that the library remains vibrant and relevant.

When I began my appointment, I was the youngest board member by several years. The board was not representative of the demographics of our community. At that time, trustees came to a meeting four times a year and that was all that was expected. As I moved into the chair’s seat, I pushed for more activity between board meetings and stressed the advocacy piece of being a trustee. We have a different and more diverse board today.

We have built positive relationships with our funding partners, patrons, and our community. Over the last 10 years, we have had some substantial requests from our partners. This goes back to advocacy and the board always telling the library story.

Recently, we faced a challenge when we were notified of substantial increases to employee health insurance costs. We delayed passage of our FY24 budget, and our budget committee took some time to plan for the increase and analyze our proposed budget, looking out several years. We developed a plan to once again tell our story in a more formal way to our funding agencies prior to asking for a significant funding increase. That plan went as well as we could have expected, and we received our requested increased amounts from all three funding partners. It was our goal not to have to ask for additional funding for several years.”

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**Linda Most, former trustee on South Georgia Regional Library Board**

“I represented Valdosta State University (VSU) for two terms on the board. VSU has a library degree program, and someone from the university always has a seat on the library’s board. I consider myself a working volunteer. If I take on a service position such as this one, I am willing to take part in the work of the organization, not just show up to vote at meetings. I brought hands-on knowledge of standard public library policies and procedures from my time as a public librarian and as a Library & Information Studies (MLIS) faculty member in an MLIS degree program. My area of expertise is in public libraries, library history, and public library management. I also bring strong

“Two board members attended the Public Library Association conference to learn more about the role of libraries and how to better support us. Our trustees are engaged with us and in the community, supporting our requests for funding and sharing our impact with local leaders,” said Alan Harkness, director of Chattahoochee Valley Library and 2023 Georgia Public Library Director of the Year. Harkness is pictured here with regional board member Darcy Brito (top row, beige coat) and staff at Library Legislative Day at the Georgia Capitol in February 2024.
Georgia public library trustee 101

The basics. There are two types of library boards, governing and advisory. Board members are called trustees, and they are representatives of the community, library volunteers, and advocates. A governing board has legal and fiduciary responsibilities, hires the library director, sets policy, determines the library mission, and is directly accountable to the public. An advisory board also gives input into a library’s planning process and marketing plan. Trustees of either type of board should understand the local ordinances and state laws that impact the library and its operations. They should know the library’s budget and funding sources, be involved in planning, and develop library policy. The most important role, however, is that trustees should be strong library advocates.

How many public library boards are in Georgia? There are 60 governing library boards across Georgia, which is one per library system. Each library system may have other subsidiary boards, called advisory boards, in addition to their governing board.

How are trustees nominated? Appointments to library boards are made by governmental agencies such as cities, counties, and school boards that financially support the library. Sometimes, board members may recommend an individual to the appointing authority to fill a vacancy.

Revel Pogue, board chair, Mary Vinson Library
“When we were faced with potential cuts from city and county officials, we had to become more active and engaged with community stakeholders to save our library funding. The board rallied the community, engaged the media, and protested in front of the local courthouse.

And then, when our library merged with another system, we served as guides for our library in the transition process. This has made our board transition from a governing board to an advisory board. There’s been intentional work by all of the board in bringing our priorities and culture into a larger organization. We are advocates to our funding agencies and community for library usage and support.

The board has been instrumental in rehabbing and creating the Hancock Branch area, opening a north branch of the library, renovating the main branch building, and planning a Harrisburg library branch in the near future. We have an excellent board that works hard in our community.”

Interested to learn more about serving on a library board? Contact your local library to get involved.

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Problem-solving skills to groups where I volunteer.

For many years, the South Georgia Regional Library had wanted to move the main library to a new building and location. The old building was in poor condition and sitting on land the regional medical center wanted to acquire to support its expansion plans. In a community that did not want to spend money on much of anything, the library board was not encouraged to try to build a new building.

Instead, the board found a centrally located, empty medical lab building that had easy access from main roads and local neighborhoods and lots of parking.

During my tenure, the board worked with the library director, the county, the city, and the community to acquire the building, find an architectural firm that specializes in renovation and restoration of public buildings, get community buy-in for the plan, and then arrange the financing to build and open the new library. It was a very successful project. Getting buy-in for the need for a new main library in a more accessible location also took time and work.

The new board chairman and the new library director and staff were able to accomplish this with much hard work and outreach.”

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**PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARDS IN GEORGIA**

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The number of boards for a library system ranges from a single governing board to one governing board with ten advisory boards.

**Typical length of board service**

3 years
Libraries connect Georgians to the resources they need.

Georgians now have free, self-service access to update social services benefits at public libraries.

Review, change, or renew Medicaid; PeachCare for Kids®; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS); and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).
The Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS) and Georgia Public Library Service are partnering to provide free self-service benefits kiosks at Georgia public libraries.

The kiosks provide convenient access for the public to access Georgia Gateway, the state’s integrated eligibility system, to review, change, or renew their benefits including Medicaid; PeachCare for Kids®; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS); and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

“We are excited to offer these self-service kiosks to Georgians, allowing them more flexibility to manage their benefits. With weekend hours and internet access in rural parts of the state, public libraries offer our customers additional access points so they can complete a renewal or manage their cases easily,” said DHS Commissioner Candice Broce.

The self-service kiosks will reduce wait times and provide access at the point of need, helping benefits-eligible Georgians to maintain their own and their family’s coverage.

A map of kiosk locations is available at georgialibraries.org/kiosks.

At Dougherty County Public Library in Albany, about three hours south of Atlanta, patrons have commented that the kiosk is easy to use to manage their benefits, enabling them to manage any updates on their own, without staff engagement.

“Our library is open during evening and weekend hours, which is convenient for people who are working during the day and may not be able to visit the DHS offices when they’re open,” said Library Director Gail Evans.

“This gives the community more time to access a service that might otherwise only be available at a DHS office. Through this partnership, the library is able to provide access to this essential service,” she said.

The kiosks are supported by Google Chrome and light-weight enough to be wheeled anywhere, capitalizing on familiar technology to help connect Georgians to the services they rely on. While library staff are not trained to answer benefits eligibility questions or handle sensitive data, they will be able to direct customers to the appropriate Division of Family and Children Services office for support.

“Georgia Public Library Service is proud to partner with DHS and provide our expertise in scalable technology and tools to help people update their social services benefits,” said Vice Chancellor for Libraries and Archives and State Librarian Julie Walker. “The kiosks are one more way our libraries are helping to bridge the digital divide and ensure that Georgians have access to the resources they need to make life easier.”

ACCESSIBILITY OPTIONS: The kiosks have a Spanish-language option, which users can access by tapping the language option in the upper right corner of the tablet, as well as accessibility settings like a built-in screen reader, zoom and font size adjustment, dictation, high contrast, and alt-text image descriptions. The kiosk stand is height-adjustable, with a gooseneck that allows for maximum visibility regardless of whether the user is standing or seated.

“With weekend hours and internet access in rural parts of the state, public libraries offer customers additional access points to renew or manage their cases easily.”