PA Forward Health Literacy Partner Spotlights

by Meghan Lynch

The Alzheimer’s Association, Greater PA Chapter, has been partnering with PA Forward for about a year and a half. The partnership was started when their Education Outreach Coordinator learned of the Pennsylvania Library Association conference and learned about PA Forward while browsing the exhibit hall.

They are able to provide educational programs in libraries, and have had success partnering with libraries during existing awareness campaigns, such as Alzheimer’s and Brain Health Awareness Month. They are interested in working with libraries that would be willing to host community forums, examining the needs and opportunities that arise when a friend or family member is diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease. They’re also developing tool kits that will be made available to libraries that are interested in hosting Memory Cafes, informal support groups for individuals with dementia and their caregivers, family members, and friends. These groups meet to socialize and provide support, encouragement, and understanding.

The partnership feels natural. Both libraries and the Alzheimer’s Association want to help get information and resources out into communities, and both want to ensure that the information being provided is correct and from a reputable source. The Alzheimer’s Association would encourage other organizations curious about PA Forward to explore partnerships. They have benefited from the network of PA Forward Partners and have had the opportunity to network with and learn from other organizations involved in the program.

When asked to share a story of how libraries have impacted her personally, Sara Murphy, Alzheimer’s Association of Greater PA’s Vice President of Programs and Services, spoke about how after moving to a new community with two small children she found the library to be a welcoming place to bring her kids. Her daughter loves attending the Blasco Memorial Library’s “Block Party” and playing with the AWE Early Learning Computers and her son had his first interactions with other babies in the library’s story time.

If you are interested in scheduling a program or requesting resources, please contact their 24/7 helpline at 1-800-272-3900 and they can connect the interested librarian with the correct staff person.

Prevent Suicide PA can provide trainers to libraries to deliver seminars, such as the Question, Persuade, Refer: Suicide Prevention workshop that was held at the Peters Township Library in September 2018 during National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. Mr. Martin believes that partnering with libraries is mutually beneficial. Offering programs about suicide prevention, and about health literacy in general, shows that the library cares about the well-being of the community. Having conversations about difficult topics like suicide in places like libraries can help normalize the conversation and hopefully help remove some of the stigma around the topic.

Following the September workshop at the Peters Township Library, Mr. Martin received a phone call the following day from a woman who had attended the training with her teenaged son. Her son had used the techniques that he had learned and applied them to a friend who was going through a difficult time. With only a few hours of training, he felt his friend responded positively knowing that someone cared enough to talk to him. It is proven that knowledge of suicide prevention techniques can truly make a difference and can even save lives.

Prevent Suicide PA can provide handouts, wrist bands, gunlocks, along with national, state, and county resources (National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255, Crisis Text Line, etc.) at their programs and are also happy to supply interested libraries with Prevent Suicide PA brochures to make available to their patrons. If you are interested in scheduling a program or requesting resources, please contact Govan Martin at gmartin@preventsuicidepa.org or info@preventsuicidepa.org.
In January of 2017, the Pennsylvania Library Association launched the PA Forward Star Library Program. The initiative was designed to recognize the valuable programs offered at Pennsylvania libraries that promote and encourage five key literacies to their constituents of all ages: Basic, Civic & Social, Financial, Health, and Information. The initiative is a three-step star achievement process, with libraries first completing activities for Bronze star status, then completing activities and connecting their programs to each of the five literacies to receive Silver stars, and finally achieving Gold star status.

Tredyffrin Public Library, a Chester County public library in Strafford, PA, started this campaign in 2018 and achieved Bronze star status on September 21, 2018. Below is an interview with Library Director Chris Kibler, who provides insight into Tredyffrin Public Library’s journey so far through the PA Forward Star Library Program.

Tell us about your path so far. Is the process easier or harder than you had expected? Has it changed the way you think about the programs, services, and materials your library offers to the public? CK: Progress is about what I expected. The Bronze Star was fairly reasonable to achieve. The Silver Star requires substantially more progress on the literacies, which also requires more effort and some cross-collaboration among departments.

Has community engagement with the library changed after having implemented Star Library actions? CK: It’s somewhat changed the way we consider what programs to offer and the way we evaluate whether we’re offering too much or too little of certain types of programs. It’s also made us reconsider what interests the community has and what we should offer as we move toward the Silver Star achievement.

What does Bronze Star status mean to you and your staff? CK: It’s reassuring to know that our efforts to promote literacy are on the right track and our initiatives are in line with PA Library Association initiatives. We also see this initiative as a way to redefine the library’s role and increase its importance in a larger statewide effort.

Do you have a sense of what the library’s accomplishments under the Star Library program will mean to the local community? CK: I’m hopeful that we’ll be able to use participation in the program as a way to engage with people in the community who we may not have engaged with in the past. This will not only help us receive Gold Star status but refine our offerings in a way that caters to community interest.

Do you have any advice for other libraries currently involved in the program and those that have just begun? CK: Thoroughly read the achievement requirements and plan ahead. When planning monthly programs, plan them in conjunction with promoting the different literacies and make sure that you are branding or promoting the programs in order to apply them toward achieving your star status.

What is your advice for those libraries considering starting and those that have not yet considered involvement in the program? CK: You should consider participating in the program as a way to align your current offerings with established literacy standards and to generate some publicity and interest for your library and the program.

More information about the PA Forward Star Library Program and how to get started can be found at PAForwardStarLibraries.org.

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Contact Us
Please direct any questions, including presentation requests and partnership opportunities, to the Pennsylvania Library Association, at 717-766-7663 or paforward@palibraries.org. This newsletter was produced by: Samantha Bardarik, Jefferson’s Scott Memorial Library; Stephanie Bragg, Paoli Library; Frank Consenette III, University of Scranton’s Weinberg Memorial Library; Tammy Garrison, Annie Halenbake Ross Library; Meghan Lynch, Chester County Library; and Tess Wilson, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.