

SWEET READS

Flexible, Adaptable Outreach Service



KDSK Link

Year 1

<http://archive.ksdk.com/news/local/story.aspx?storyid=386641>

Here is a glimpse of the service as it is in year 2..

<http://www.ksdk.com/story/news/local/2014/06/16/sweet-reads-st-louis-county-library-summer-reading/10570385/>

Now let's talk about how we got there...

Background

The St. Louis County Library has a long history of bookmobile and outreach service. Bookmobiles began helping to build the library district almost as soon as it was conceived in 1946. The first unit was deployed on March 13, 1947.



Initially, bookmobiles were intended to provide service across the county while branches were being constructed.



Thought was given to particular portions of the county population and what their unique needs might be. At one point, bookmobiles were created solely to serve junior high and high school students lacking a sufficient school library.



This vision of service for the whole county continues today with adaptations for the current needs of the community.



Building a relationship

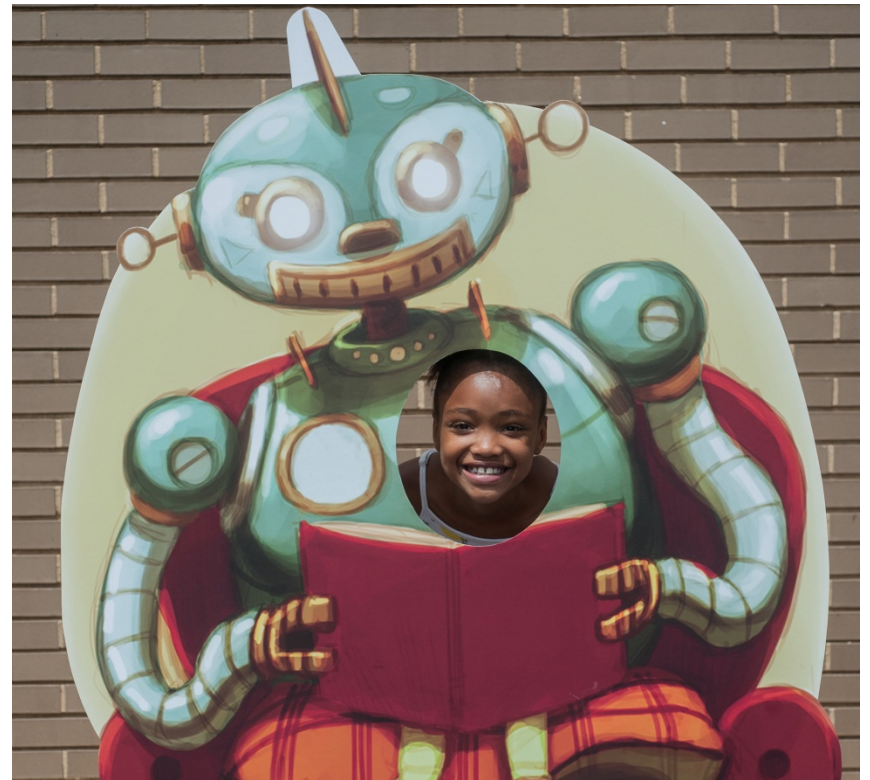
The library's relationship with the 22 school districts in our service area is dynamic, as it is for many libraries. The needs of the schools continue to evolve as does the ability of the public library to respond.



The St. Louis County Library currently has 3 school bookmobiles visiting an average of 17 schools each. While we are able to reach a good number of students in this way, there are still many underserved areas in the district.



Recently, the school bookmobiles have provided service to schools during the summer session to support both the curriculum and the Summer Reading Program.

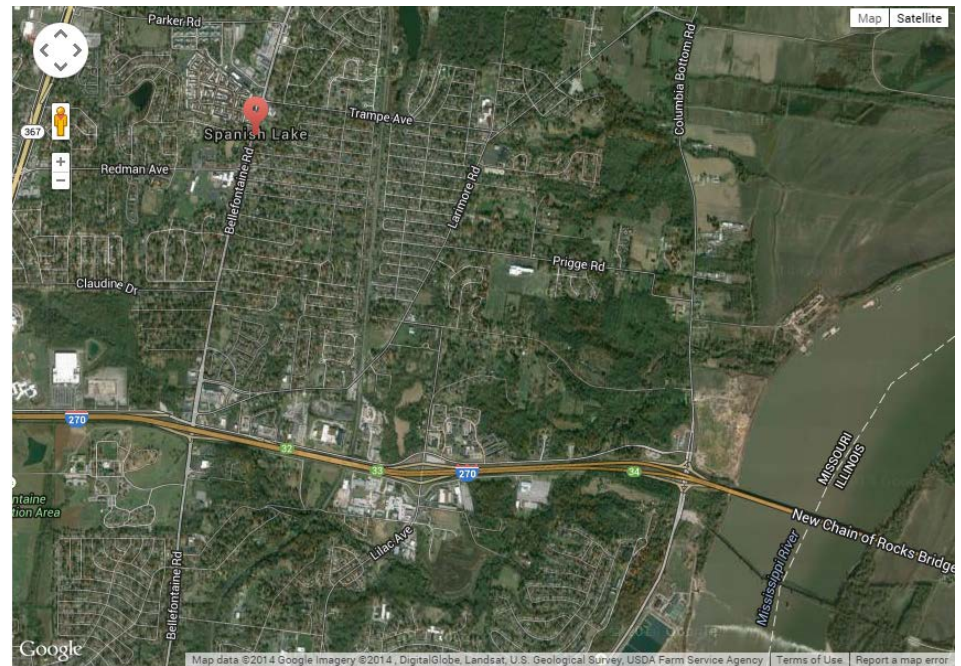


A New Partnership

In the spring of 2013, in an effort to target school service even more effectively, SLCL met with a representative Hazelwood School District, one of the largest school districts in our service area.



“Summer slide” and lack of access to reading materials were identified as the most critical needs for the district. While SLCL has a really robust summer program, due to the geography of the district, some neighborhoods were chronically underserved.



In ten years, the population of Spanish Lake increased at double for rate of the County and the youth population grew by 30%. In that same ten year period, both the number of children living in poverty and the number of families with children living in poverty increased by 200%. The changes in the demographics of the Spanish Lake region create an increasing need for services, programming and facilities



Transportation to library branches was identified as a major barrier in terms of access to materials and participation in the summer reading program.



In a meeting of library staff discussing possible solutions, the idea of an ice cream truck was thrown out. As preposterous as it sounded at first, it quickly became evident that it was possible, we just had some “details” to work out.



The Basic Idea

The basic idea is really simple! We decided to bring the library to them! We filled a minivan with surplus materials (deleted and donated items) and bought a loudspeaker that played ice cream truck music.....



We drove around the target area once a week during the summer, played the music and families came out to get books.....they were really happy!



How It Really Worked

Of course, like most ideas, in order to make a really simple idea work, there was a lot of coordination. However, this was a really easy “sell”. The idea captured people’s imaginations, and they wanted to participate.



Library Strategy

Where are the books coming from?

How many people will have a valid library card?



Decisions that were made contributed to the success of the program.

Collection:

- Inventory
- Taxes

Policies:

- No card needed
- Requests taken



Steps to Success

School District “buy in”

We acted at their request and on their recommendation in terms of the geographic focus. Tailoring the service to the needs identified by the district has been key to the success of the program.



Communication

The first year we had a short turn around time, maybe 4 weeks. The district contacted families in the target areas before school ended to let them know the library was coming to their neighborhoods during the summer.



Marshaling our Resources

The District identified 2 elementary schools within Spanish Lake to target. We worked with the Principals to create a “plan of attack”.



Time/Geography ratio

Apartment complexes were identified as the most potentially successful places to begin. A study of the area determined that the residential housing was too spread out for 1 day a week service.



Enlisting Cooperation

We identified 4 major apartment complexes in the neighborhood. The largest of these, Spanish Cove, had over 700 units. We visited the management and got permission/support for summer program.



Asked for support

The local McDonalds franchise provided ice cream coupons that we distributed when books were returned the first year. It was a great motivator for the kids.



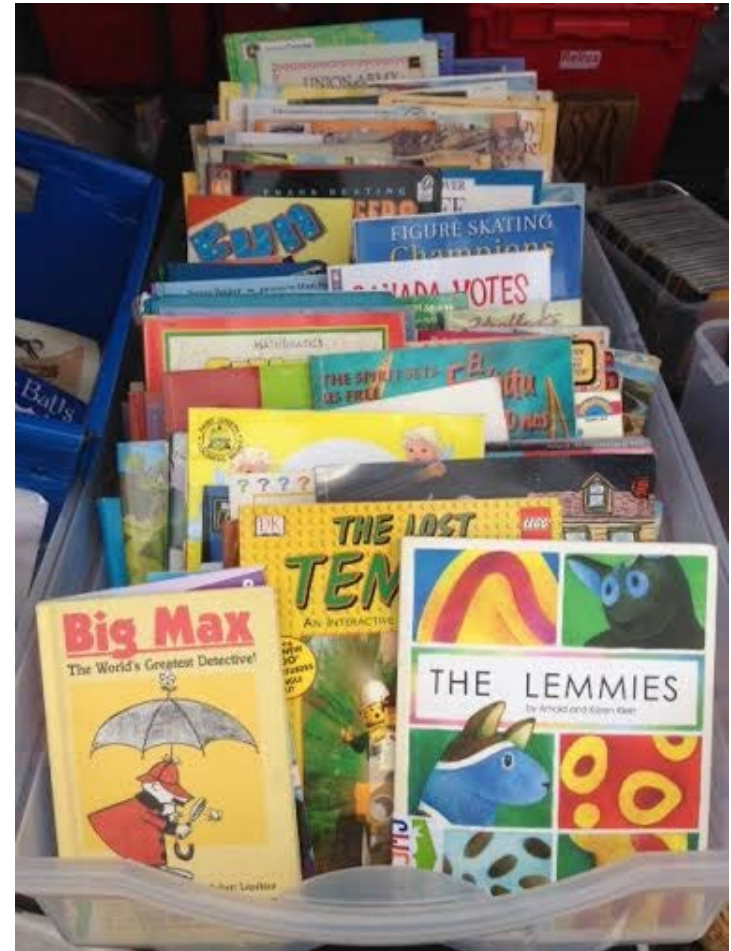
School District Support

We asked the district to recognize the kids who participated in the Sweet Reads and/or Summer Reading Club at the beginning of the next school year. This provided wrap around support and promotion.



Materials

SLCL put out the word about Sweet Reads throughout the system and Branch Managers began sending items that had been deleted or donated. The timing happened to coincide with the library's decision to move to online book sales rather than sale tables in the branches, so there were books to send.



Summer Reading Club

Outreach staff wanted to be sure children using the Sweet Reads service had every opportunity to participate in summer reading. We brought logs and prizes every visit.



Schedule and GO!

We got the ice cream speaker attached, loaded up with books and off we went...



The first visit was great.
The 2nd visit was really surprising for everyone. The media wanted to come along (made me nervous), school officials attended and there were TONS of people waiting for us to arrive.





Big Surprise!

The biggest surprise of the year was that the adults we encountered wanted books as much as the children. The outreach response to this was to re-tool and fill one van with children's materials and one with items for teens and adults.



The first year was its own kind of wonderful magic. It was amazing, great work, with real challenges...heat, rain, police.....



Rewards:

- teens and “real” ice cream truck event...
- Don Quixote
- Eagerness of everyone to get books































Year Two

What happened next...

Neighborhood/Library Connections

SLCL spent a lot of time asking questions. We gathered information from key stakeholders:

- Urban Planning Dept
- Community Association
- School District

Questions surrounded what should be the next phase of the program. SLCL Admin supported looking at a full time version complete with a bookmobile.

Let's remember why we're doing this...



Year 2

Year 2 Decisions:

- Go full time to serve the community
- Request a bookmobile as it was determined that would be the best service for the area
- Figure out a plan and timeline



Year 2 began in June with summer service 5 days a week. Locations included the apartment complexes visited the first year and stops with new partners at County buildings and in residential settings.



The biggest change (for me) was the addition of staff specifically for Sweet Reads. The first year Sri Upadhyaya and other Outreach staff provided all of the support for the program on top of their regular duties.





Susan and Kevin were transitioned to 1 panel (work) van and added flair decorating and coming up with creative display methods.



New Logo



Stops for the second summer included a County Recreational Complex and Youth Center as well as a church run food pantry and community garden site.



Now that the service was running 5 days a week, collection supply and demand became a bigger issue. Demand for children's materials was already high at the branches because of summer reading.



A partnership was formed between the library and ½ Price Books. HPB generously agreed to donate materials for children and teens in support of the program. This partnership has ensured the success of the program since demand far outpaced supply once we grew to a 5 day a week schedule.

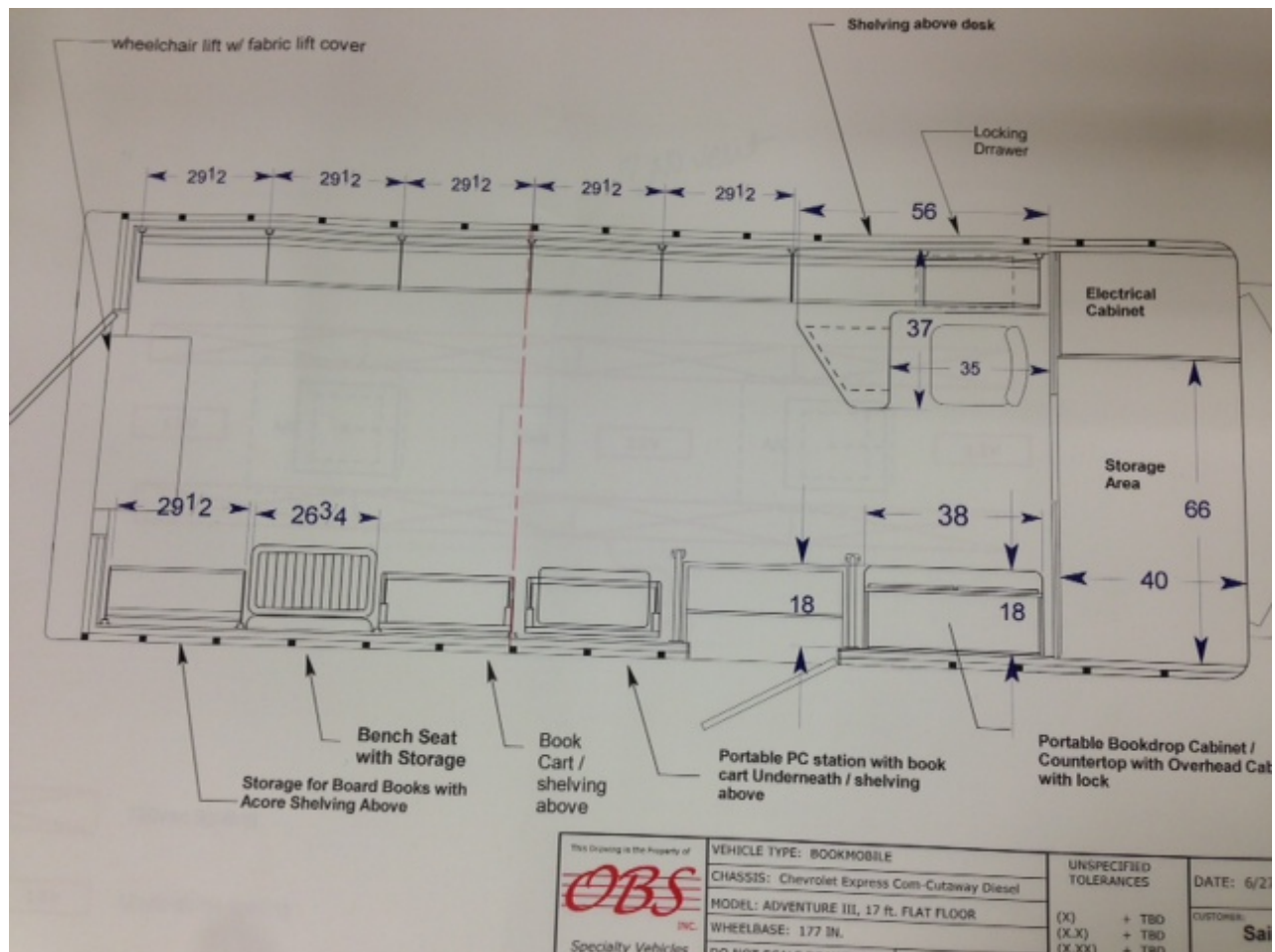


SLCL has been able to handle the demand for adult materials since the demand is not as high for Sweet Reads.

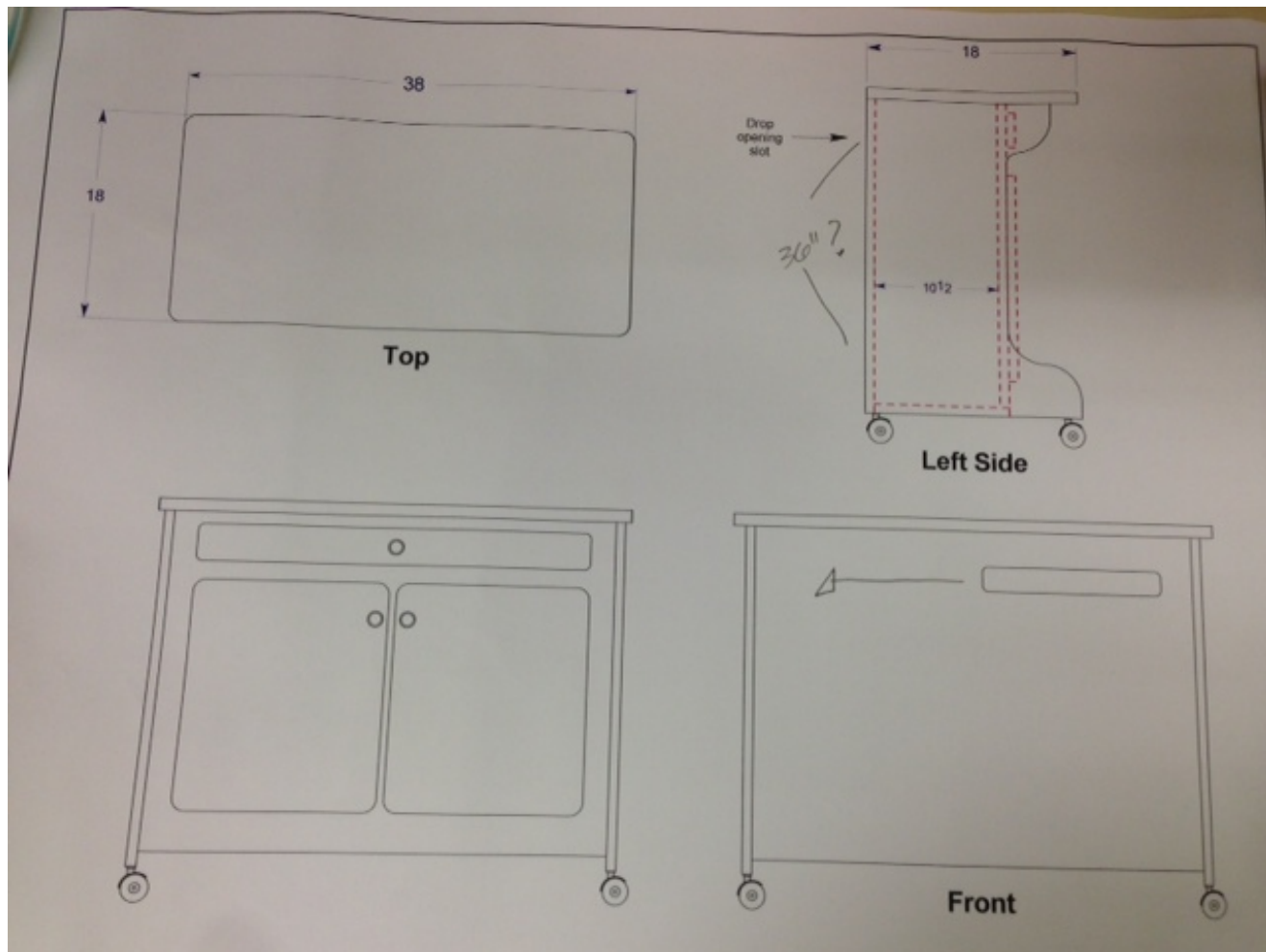


After all of the usual research etc, OBS was selected to build the new bookmobile.





Floor plan



Bookdrop design

After months of design decisions and waiting, the shell has arrived at the OBS shop! (2 weeks ago!)





Technology comes to Sweet Reads

Marie Conlin, Library Planner, has applied for a grant to get 3 laptops and an ipad for the unit. The laptops will be used as additional public access points, to conduct small classes and assist with the new online summer reading club registration.

The ipad will be used for early childhood literacy apps such as:
Mother Goose on the Loose & Felt Board)
sound apps (i.e. Free Animal Sounds)
age-appropriate nonfiction video apps (i.e. National Geographic for Kids) will also be utilized.

Stats so far...

2013

Sweet Reads	Sessions	Gate Count	Items Issued
June	3 (weeks)	444	1449
July	4 (weeks)	405	1895
TOTALS		849	3,344

2014

Sweet Reads	Sessions	Gate Count	Items Issued
June	46	1011	5812
July	63	1220	4025
August	20	446	2010
Sept	28	181	918
TOTALS		2,858	12,765

Scenes from Year 2 so far





















Summary



Imagination, sweat equity
and determination....

Thanks to Geri Clifton in
Hazelwood and the
team in Outreach for
making it possible...

Storm Reyes

Bookmobiles change lives....

<http://storycorps.org/listen/storm-reyes/>

Ms. Hall, this is Storm Reyes. Petra forwarded your kind email to me. I sincere appreciated it.

Please know that you are my hero. You do reach out to people every day and make a difference in their lives - informing, empowering and sometimes just helping them to get through a day by allowing them to put down their cares and escape into another world. Libraries - and particularly library staff - never receive the recognition and gratitude they should and yet they keep pushing forward.

I was the Executive Assistant to the Executive Director so I have never had the privilege or joy of putting a book in someone's hands, but I worked hard to ensure that operational matters ran as smoothly as possible so that book could reach someone's hands. You play a vital role and on behalf of all the faceless and nameless people you serve, thank you.

Storm