Book It Forward: Library Outreach to West Baltimore

Slide 1: Hello, and welcome to our presentation: "Book It Forward: Library Outreach to West Baltimore." This was a project we at the HSHSL completed in the spring of 2022, and plan on making an annual event. Through this presentation, we hope you can learn how to put on a similar event at your library.

Slide 2: The Health Sciences and Human Services Library (or HSHSL) provides collections and services for faculty, staff, and students of the University of Maryland, Baltimore (or UMB) located in downtown Baltimore City. We have over 50 library staff who are passionate about serving our community.

Slide 3: The dean of the library identified a need for parents to place books that their children had outgrown. We contacted local organizations to see who would accept book donations: We started with emailing the CEC, or UMB Community Engagement Center, which offers programs and support to the local Baltimore community.

Slide 4: A Community Partnership Specialist from the CEC contacted local schools that would receive the donations, and found a high school with two day care centers, a second high school, and an elementary and middle school. These schools were happy to receive our book donations.

Slide 5: The HSHSL Community Service Committee partnered with the library's Diversity Committee, along with three other interested staff, for this service project. We had one virtual meeting and then created a Microsoft Teams chat to brainstorm ideas and provide updates on this project. We came up with the name: Book It Forward.

Slide 6: We went through our contacts for the different UMB Schools and buildings to ask permission to place donation boxes in their buildings and to coordinate pickup of boxes. We had 7 boxes total on campus: in the library, the law library, the campus center, and four other academic and school buildings.

Slide 7: We started planning this project in early March, so we tied kick-off into National Library Week, which is early April. We wanted to complete this project before the end of the school year because we would have more students on our campus during that time. Collection took place during April and May.

Slide 8: We included a list of the kinds of books we wanted in our advertisements. We decided that based on our location in downtown Baltimore, we wanted to highlight accepting books that featured diverse characters and themes. And based on the target audience, which would be schools or daycare centers, we wanted books about STEM.

Slide 9: Based on the range of organizations we were reaching out to, we knew we would accept books for ages from baby through high school. We also asked for books about health and wellness, as we are a health sciences library. And we asked that all books be new or gently used. It was helpful to have this criteria for when people asked.

Slide 10: To advertise for this book drive, we put announcements in our university publication as well as the library's newsletter. We also published posts on our social media pages and the library's blog. One person would volunteer to make a write up and then share it with the group for suggestions and edits.

Slide 11: One HSHSL staff member created the graphic that we would use in advertisements as well as print on the collection boxes. We created an email for people to contact with questions, as well as a QR code for the graphic. Everyone gave their input during this process through the Microsoft Teams chat.

Slide 12: During the period we were collecting donations, different librarians from our team checked the boxes in each building periodically. For large pickups, someone from the building contacted that librarian and we picked up the books in one of our cars. We stored the books in an empty cubicle in Administration.

Slide 13: To sort the books, we started by creating an Excel document with each book's title, author, condition, and reading level, but after a few days of this we realized we were getting so many donations that keeping a list would not be necessary! So we started just keeping a count. We divided the books into five categories:

Slide 14: "Preschool" contained board books and picture books geared towards being read *to* a child. "Lower Elementary" had books for kids in kindergarten through 2nd grade, such as early readers and longer picture books. "Upper Elementary" contained books for 3rd through 5th graders, including shorter chapter books and nonfiction.

Slide 15: The "Middle School" category was books that were *juvenile* fiction, nonfiction, or graphic novels, and "High School" had books that were *young adult* fiction, nonfiction, and graphic novels. Two of us who had experience in public and school libraries did the majority of the sorting, and we wrote up the list of criteria for other people to use to sort.

Slide 16: When collection had concluded, we boxed up the books and labeled them according to the grade level and which school they were going to. We coordinated a time for pickup with our contact from the Community Engagement Center. She and another person from the CEC picked them up and delivered them to each school. We appreciated partnering with the CEC on this project.

Slide 17: After the project had finished, we were able to look back and see some of the difficulties we faced. Initially, it was a bit tricky finding out who to contact for box placements in the different buildings. We also went back and forth on the language used in the different advertisements and spent a good bit of time on that.

Slide 18: Additionally, we received some book donations that were out of the scope of our collection criteria, such as books that were in bad condition, craft supplies, and many books for adults, both fiction and nonfiction. One school ended up taking the craft supplies and the adult books after we asked.

Slide 19: We learned that we did not need to divide up the elementary age into two categories. Because the books in the "lower" and "upper elementary" categories were going to an elementary school, they could have been combined. And, the success of the project led us to conclude that this is a project that can be done on an annual basis.

Slide 20: In total, we collected and delivered 1,214 books. The donations will be used to hold Summer Reading programs in the schools. We were very happy to have been able to support our local area in partnership with the Community Engagement Center and are grateful for the generosity of our UMB community.