



NEUSE REGIONAL LIBRARIES

Inspiring Creativity. Fostering Learning. Engaging Community.

Overview

The Neuse Regional Libraries' (NRL) mission is to serve as centers for community connections that provide evolving technologies, programming, and services to meet 21st-century literacy needs, while making accessible a collection that is as diverse and intergenerational as the people of Lenoir, Jones and Greene Counties.

NRL's original roots are in the Up-to-Date Club of Kinston, formed in February 1896 with the goal of "stimulating a careful consideration of Up-to-Date topics." This organization partnered with local dentist T.H. Faulkner to establish a small private lending library in his office. From these humble beginnings the Library's Headquarters in the City of Kinston has changed locations several times until it moved to its current location on Queen Street in 1983 and was renovated in 2008. NRL was officially established as a Regional Library in 1962 through an agreement between Lenoir, Jones, and Greene Counties in order to share resources to improve collective library services across the region.

Neuse Regional Libraries deserve to win the National Medal for Museum and Library Service because of their success in fulfilling a mission that focuses on embracing the Library's role as a true community center, open to all, by strategically introducing innovative services, programs and access that specifically address and target the community's needs, both inside and outside the Library. The Library has embraced the philosophy that taking an outside-the-box approach to serving the needs of the community should steer every new undertaking, and that has led to a Library that is deeply valued by its users, prioritized by its community, and exemplifies the vision of our tagline: #WhereCommunitiesComeTogether.

The evolution of initiatives such as the Library's Coming Together series, Literacy Without Barriers, Wi-Fi for All, and workforce development programs exemplifies the Library's approach to adapting services to address new needs of the community as they arise while collaborating with key partners. The results of this community-focused approach are clearly demonstrated in the programs and services described below, and by the success stories the Libraries and their communities have experienced firsthand.

Community and Community Needs

NRL serves an area in an economic state of transition, historically an agricultural region highly dependent on tobacco farming that now urgently needs to create new economic development paths. Lenoir and Greene Counties are designated as Tier One Counties and Jones County is designated as a Tier Two County by the State of North Carolina, meaning that they are among the most economically challenged counties in the state. These Counties also rank comparatively low in education levels, median income, and internet connectivity as well as lack of public transportation availability.

Lenoir, Jones, and Greene Counties have a diverse collective population of 86,437 with 57.5% of residents identifying as "white alone." The percentage of residents with a high school diploma is 79%, significantly lower than the state average of 87.4%, and the percentage of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher is 13.4% vs. 30.5% for the state. The average of median household incomes for each county is \$37,862 vs. \$52,413 for the state of NC, and the percentage of residents in poverty is 21.8% vs. 13.6% for the state. The crime index for the City of Kinston, where the Library's Headquarters is located, is three times the national average, 69.2 compared to 22.7.

The region served by NRL faces unique challenges with regard to broadband access in rural areas, exemplified by Jones County. According to North Carolina's Broadband Infrastructure Office, Jones County ranks 93rd of 100 North Carolina Counties in terms of broadband availability. Over 50% of all Jones County residents only have access to DSL services, which require telephone landlines and are significantly slower than true broadband services. According to county level data from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, one in twenty Jones County residents has no access to Internet providers, and 25% of residents do not have access to a home computer. The severity of the need for increased broadband access in these communities inspired the Wi-Fi for All and Digital Resource Rover projects, and the vital role NRL plays in providing this access led to North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper visiting the Kinston-Lenoir County Public Library in August 2021 to highlight the Library's innovation in addressing this need.

These communities have also faced the unique challenge of experiencing two one-hundred-year flood events in the span of two years, after hurricanes Matthew and Florence in 2016 and 2018, respectively. The COVID-19 pandemic compounded barriers to access and exacerbated existing problems like the digital divide and the homework gap for local residents who were already facing problems created by a harsh economic climate. Despite these challenges, the Library and stakeholders are determined to provide residents with tools for success. Because of their prominent role, NRL's locations serve as community centers that partner with individuals, schools, government organizations and nonprofits to address the challenges faced by local patrons. One area of need that came to light through outreach initiatives in underserved areas was the lack of literacy programming that addressed the whole family. Additionally, it was discovered during community forums that a lack of transportation and internet connectivity creates difficulties for job seekers as well as for students relating to the digital divide. In response the Library, along with key partners, developed the programs below that meet community members where they are and address these issues directly.



21st Century Literacy



Adaptability & Innovation



Digital Inclusion



Trusted Spaces & Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Programs and Services

As communities rebuild from disaster and attempt to reshape local economies, the Library embraced its essential role in fostering educational opportunities for all ages to promote a stronger economic future for the region and break the cycle of poverty, while also providing inclusive spaces for community engagement. NRL developed multiple holistic programs to address the aforementioned areas of need in our communities in connection with our foundational programs and services.



Coming Together

NRL makes it a priority to offer programming that is as diverse as the communities it serves. To support these goals, the Library partnered with the City of Kinston and Lenoir County Government to present the "Coming Together: A Community Celebration" series. Coming Together consisted of several book discussions led by local educators and leaders, an informative lecture by UNC-Chapel Hill professor Dr. Danielle Purifoy, and a Juneteenth commemoration held at the African American Music Trail Park, attended by over 1,200 local residents. Each distinct program in the series provided opportunities for community members to share their experiences and explore new perspectives, while acknowledging and strengthening the connections that NRL community members have to each other. The important conversations fostered by these programs encouraged action and inspired hope for a more unified and equitable future.

In June 2020 Kinston Teens, a nationally recognized local youth organization, was looking for a safe place to start a peaceful protest for racial justice and equality. The group requested the use of the Library's parking lot as the starting point for its Black Lives Matter march through Downtown Kinston specifically because the Library represents access and inclusion within the community. This request highlighted how successfully NRL has established its libraries as places where people of all backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs can come together and participate in their community.

Testimonial: "The Coming Together series accomplished what it was designed to do. Every member of our community was represented and allowed to share his/her experiences in a safe and brave space."—Felicia Solomon, City of Kinston Mayor Pro Tem



Community Connections

NRL began collaborating with East Carolina University's College of Health and Human Performance to establish a Social Work Intern at the Kinston-Lenoir County Public Library. The internship and corresponding Community Connections initiative began in Spring 2021. The selected intern scheduled one-on-one meetings with individuals to help with concerns such as housing, transportation, mental and physical health, food insecurity, employment, and veteran's assistance. The intern also began support groups for caregivers, LGBTQA+ youth, and stress management. Participants expressed that the accessibility of the intern acting as a Resource Specialist allowed them to discuss their concerns and needs in a more anonymous environment. The needs of rural communities are frequently neglected, even though statistically they are often more at risk in regards to employment, mental health, transportation, housing and food insecurity. NRL's Community Connections initiative was created in an effort to combat these inequities and provide vital services to populations that have been consistently overlooked and underserved, particularly now that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the burden for communities that were already suffering.

In response to the detrimental psychological effects that many are experiencing due to COVID-19, NRL has partnered with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) and Eastpointe Behavioral Health Care to provide patrons with online access to live webinars on a variety of mental health issues. As it became increasingly apparent that many community members needed help dealing with the fear and worry instilled during the pandemic, NRL made it a priority to collaborate with knowledgeable agencies to help meet these needs.

Testimonial: "For me, having the opportunity to be a part of Community Connections really illuminated the potential that every library has as a place of intervention in its community." —El Perry, College of Health and Human Performance Intern



Digital Media Lab

One of the Library's new initiatives in 2021-2022 is the Digital Media Lab, a state-of-the-art creation space open to the public. This lab includes video and audio recording equipment and powerful computer workstations that allow users to create their own edited video content, mixed music and audio content such as podcasts, as well as 3D animation and modeling. The Library provides one-on-one assistance during Digital Media Lab sessions and is sharing selected projects created in the Lab as a way of building awareness and opening doorways to new career and artistic pathways in the community.

Testimonial: "I'm excited to use the microphone for recording vocals, the high quality equipment will allow me to step up my recording quality." —Greyson Smith, Lenoir Community College Student



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Digital Resource Rover



In response to the pandemic, the Library designed the Digital Resource Rover (DRR), a customized vehicle that transports library materials and digital resources to destinations throughout the region. A modern twist on the traditional bookmobile, the DRR offers free Wi-Fi access and provides a new outlet for Library programming and marketing of digital resources to the public. The DRR allows for expansion and continuation throughout the region of many of the Library's existing projects in the categories of workforce development, digital media training, STEM education, early literacy, and increased access to technology. The DRR allows the Library to bring the benefits of these programs to identified communities with one or more barriers to access.



Testimonial: "I am so appreciative of the library for bringing the bookmobile to Jack Rountree [Kinston Housing Authority apartments]. I remember going to the bookmobile and checking out books when I was a kid and I am so glad that my kids got to experience something from my childhood. My sons enjoyed awaiting the arrival of the bookmobile and running over to check out books!" —Santana Cannon, Parent



Enhancing Cultural Awareness Through Virtual Reality



The Library regularly offers demonstrations of new technologies such as virtual reality. During Black History Month 2021 the Library found an exciting way to use the virtual reality documentary *Traveling While Black* to enhance Programming. This included a presentation on the African American Heritage Commission's Green Book Project, focused on locations in Kinston that were featured in the Green Book for black motorists. The presentation included Dove's Auto Garage, one of a handful of Green Book sites still operating today. The virtual reality exhibit offered an interactive experience that increased interest in the subject matter, which resulted in historical markers being placed to commemorate the sites.



Testimonial: "It was so amazing to have the immersive experience of how it must have been to be black living during that time!" —Noa Evans, Program Participant



Gateway to STEM



Through the Accelerating Promising Practices grant from IMLS, NRL has been able to further increase the level of digital literacy in its communities' children by supporting STEM education. STEM 4 All and STEMology programs take the library's learning resources and programming directly to students who may not have access to the library due to multiple factors, including transportation issues, to ensure that they have maximum access to digital tools that help eliminate homework gap barriers. Furthermore, the program incorporates diverse guest speakers to help students experience people who are reflections of themselves in an array of careers, breaking barriers and opening students' eyes to future possibilities.



NRL also provides outreach through the STEM program umbrella that includes a tailored Summer Reading program for children who are unable to visit the library, on-site checkout of library materials, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, care kits with STEM activities, books and special treats mailed directly to student's homes to keep connected. The Library has been offering STEM programming since August 2019 and it has been a tremendous success, making a significant difference in the lives of its participants.



Testimonial: "STEM has been awesome for my oldest. He is enjoying learning and experimenting! STEM has grown his love for science to a much deeper level!" —Brandy Moulton, Parent



ICE HOUSE Entrepreneur program and Career Lab



NRL is also committed to increasing access, inclusion, and workforce development in its region. In partnership with Lenoir Community College, NRL created a Career Ready Lab where an instructor provides one-on-one assistance with resumes, job applications, Career Readiness Certificates, and more at a central location easily accessible to many patrons who lack transportation.



The Library is also one of the pilot hosts of the ICE HOUSE Entrepreneurship Program, a free course sponsored by the NC IDEA Foundation designed to engage participants by creating an entrepreneurial mindset. Upon selection by the Foundation, NRL's Marketing Librarian received specialized training on how to present the ICE HOUSE program. Several participants have started their own businesses, such as custom doll making and health and wellness coaching.



Testimonial: "The workshop helped me start focusing on rebranding my business." —Barbara Street, Owner - Street Communications



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Literacy Without Barriers



With the onset of COVID-19 schools went virtual in a blink of an eye, and the homework gap was widened even further as students gathered outside the library steps early in the morning to connect to Wi-Fi to join their online classrooms. It was in this moment of uncertainty that the NRL rose to serve community members in a relevant manner and became a lifeline for many that still continues today through the Literacy Without Barriers (LWB) program. The project took active steps to build strong partnerships with the public school systems, the Kinston Housing Authority, and non-profits to help address the intergenerational nature of literacy and support parents in their new role as teachers. The Library created inclusive literacy centers at locations throughout the region to meet the essential educational and technology needs of families through (1) Homework Help one-on-one tutoring by teachers and volunteers that helps students remain at grade level and succeed academically; (2) Adult Literacy one-on-one tutoring by trained staff and volunteers that promotes economic growth, increased self-esteem, and empowerment; (3) Bilingual Family Literacy programs that address an underserved segment of the population; and (4) access to an array of technology tools like hotspots and Chromebooks that can be used with expanded Wi-Fi services to complete educational and career-related tasks. LWB acts as a bridge to support individuals, families, and students as well as develops stronger partnerships with local organizations that have the same goal of increasing 21st century literacy skills throughout our region.

Testimonial: "From the bottom of my heart, thanks for helping me keep my sanity and lessening the strain on our mother/daughter relationship because of homework."—Miltia Grady-Wheatley, Parent



PopUp StoryWalks



The implementation of PopUp StoryWalks presented a unique opportunity for students to work with local artists to create an original story centered around health, wellness, and nutrition. Students participated in StoryWalk Camps engaging with a professional storyteller, experiencing immersive healthy cooking demonstrations, collaborating to compose an original story, and working with the artists to illustrate their work. Designed to be mobile, these StoryWalks® will travel to schools throughout the region and community events as a PopUp program.

Testimonial: "It is important to raise awareness through literacy. These types of programs allow children to use their imagination to connect to their own creativity."—Jamil Burton, Local Artist



StudentAccess



The Library works with the NC Cardinal consortium and local school systems to offer the StudentAccess program, which allows students to use their student ID as a Library Card Number. This program gives NRL staff the opportunity to provide hands-on demonstrations to students on library resources, developing meaningful connections with students and teachers in the process. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Library made a detailed LibGuide and video demonstrations on YouTube available to students to ensure they remained informed of resources available through StudentAccess.

Testimonial: "Neuse Regional Library has been phenomenal in helping our school implement the NC Kids Digital Library with our students. Their guidance in instructing and helping our students learn how to access e-resources during a normal school year and especially during the pandemic has been tremendously helpful."—Leigh Bright, Greene County Middle School Teacher Librarian



Wi-Fi For ALL



NRL sought innovative ways to increase access to wireless broadband by establishing 10 free drive-in Wi-Fi locations through the installation of two under-200-foot towers placed in strategic locations in the heart of Jones County to reach formerly inaccessible areas. The Library also made laptops available to the public to ensure that every Jones County resident can access a device to complete educational and career-related tasks. By increasing access to wireless internet, the Library has reduced the homework gap facing local students while also providing residents with new opportunities for educational and career growth.

Testimonial: "I like to be able to come by the pond and work on my school work with my mom with the free wi-fi access point. Its a great place to relax and work. The internet there is a lot better than at home and it's a lot faster. I love having it available."—Santana Roberts, Student

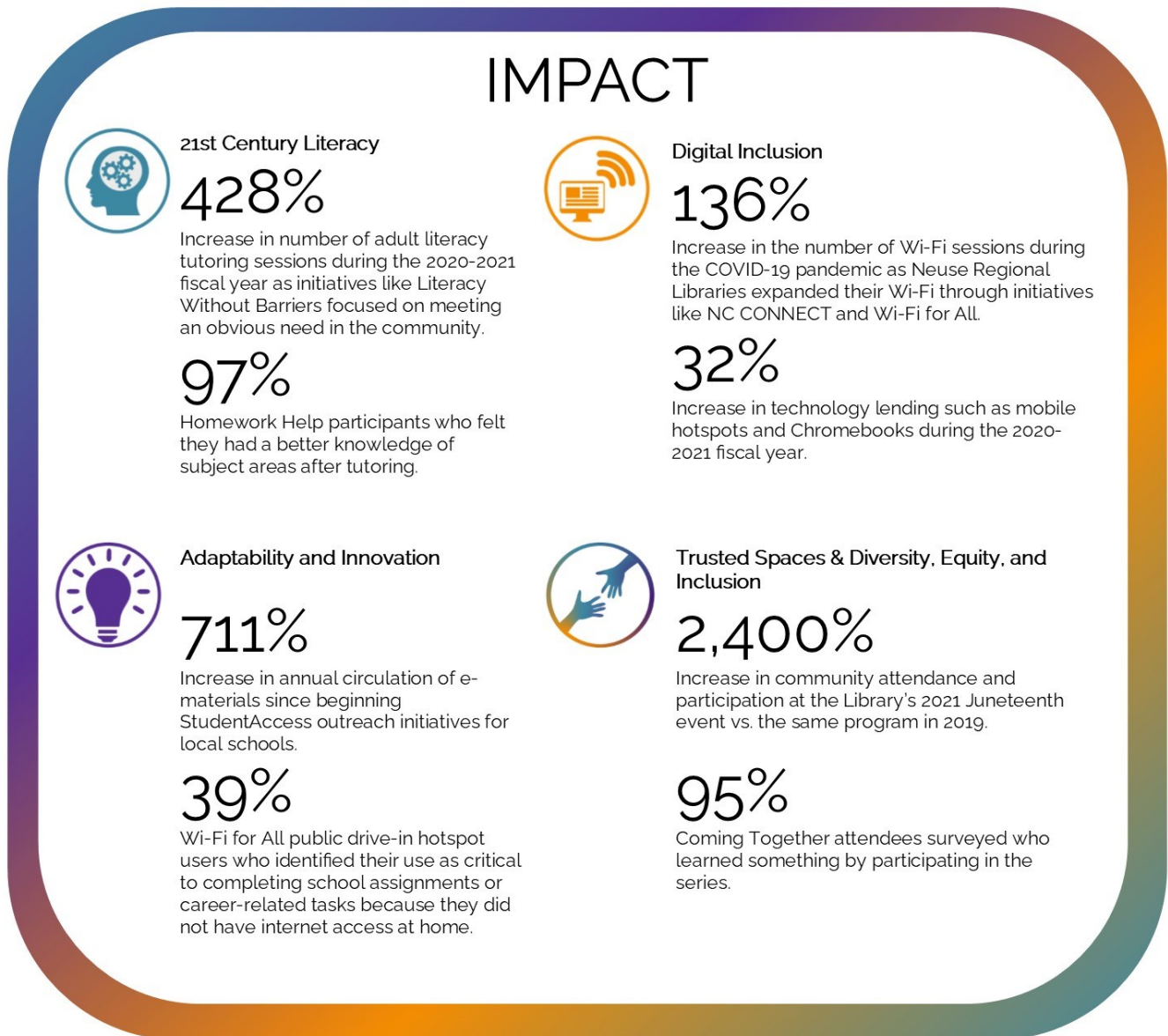
Foundational Programming

In addition to the above holistic programs, NRL, with community partners, offers a wide range of foundational programming for all ages inside and outside the library, including early literacy and summer reading programs, annual multicultural festivals, financial literacy, health and wellness classes, and active outreach to senior centers throughout the region.

Impact

NRL continuously evaluates and adapts programs as part of its Action Plan using outcome measurements and diversity audits. Before a program launches the Library develops assessment tools to measure outcomes throughout the program cycle with scheduled implementation dates to ensure continuity of data. Additionally, as seen above, the Library collects testimonials to demonstrate the impact of each library initiative through one-on-one exit interviews with participants. As reflected in the narrative, qualitative feedback informs planning for future projects, which supports the Library's overall holistic approach to developing new services. This process of outcome-based development of new programs will be highlighted in the Library's upcoming session at the 2022 Public Library Association conference.

These programs reflect the Library's approach to providing services that respond to patrons' 21st-century literacy needs and embrace the Library's role as a community center. The COVID-19 pandemic made addressing barriers to access even more crucial. The Library has seen increases in usage and received direct responses from the community that reflect how much more essential these services have become.



Financial Sustainability

NRL receives funding from the counties and municipalities of its region, which makes its primary sources of revenue Lenoir, Jones, and Greene Counties and the City of Kinston. The Library also receives State Aid from the State Library of North Carolina, and regularly receives federal Library Services and Technology Act grant funding for pilot projects. While the Library carefully evaluates sustainability with each grant application and new project, this philosophy has been successful in introducing many of the services that have done the most to increase community engagement and best addressed the identified needs of the community.

The Library is also supported by Friends of the Library organizations in Greene and Lenoir Counties. These organizations are composed of local citizens who support the Library through volunteering and fundraising to help advance the Library's strategic plan. NRL is also thankful for legacy gifts bequeathed to help sustain a brighter financial future through annual private foundation donations.



*Empowering young people through service, leadership,
and civic engagement!*

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Office: 327 N. Queen Street, Suite 111, Kinston, NC 28501

October 12, 2021

To Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services:

It is my pleasure to submit this letter of support in regards to the nomination of the Neuse Regional Libraries for the National Medal for Museum and Library Service, particularly due to their community-centered approach to serving the people of Lenoir, Jones, and Greene counties. Neuse Regional Libraries consistently offer services and programming that benefit all members of the population, demonstrating their dedication to embracing inclusivity. They have also adapted their services to combat the negative aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic in an effort to continue bringing the community together during a time when it is the most challenging and extremely vital.

As the founder of Kinston Teens, a non-profit organization that exists to amplify the voices of young people in civic engagement, I recognize how valued the Library is to our community. When planning a Black Lives Matter March in the summer of 2020, I contacted the Library in hopes of using their location as a starting point for this march because the Library's role would signify that our message was one of inclusion. Their support emphasized the important role that the Neuse Regional Libraries fill as safe spaces for everyone.

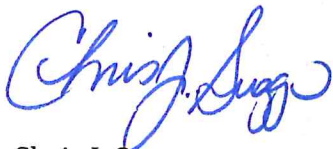
An excellent example of how Neuse Regional Libraries bring people together in the spirit of equity is their Coming Together series. Local educators and leaders led several book discussions on titles such as *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo and *How to be an Anti-Racist* by Ibram X. Kendi. This series also included a screening of the film *Just Mercy*, which resulted in a discussion on racial justice led by a board member of the African American Heritage Commission of Kinston and Lenoir County. Another feature of this series was a virtual presentation by a lawyer and Professor of Geography at UNC-Chapel Hill on the history of environmental racism in Eastern North Carolina. The programs offered by the Neuse Regional Libraries as part of Coming Together were a wonderful opportunity for our local residents to have conversations they might not otherwise have had and gain new perspectives on these topics that are so essential to making our community a more equitable place for everyone.

The most popular event of the Coming Together Series was the Library's 11th annual Juneteenth Celebration. This special community gathering commemorating the end of slavery in the U.S. was held at the African American Music Trail Park and included presentations, performances, food trucks, and vendors. The Health Department was even onsite to provide free COVID-19 vaccinations. The Library partnered with several local

organizations such as the Kinston Arts Council, the Parks and Recreation Department, the African American Museum and Cultural Center, and my own organization, Kinston Teens, to make this celebration successful and bring the community together. While this program had been offered at the Library in various forms in previous years, the expansion of the program this year into a true festival of community inclusion was evident in the massive turnout and tremendous positive response from attendees.

Programs like those included in the Coming Together series provide our community with opportunities to have important conversations in a safe space. It is a perfect example of how Neuse Regional Libraries acknowledge and strengthen the connections that community members have to each other while helping to inspire hope for a more unified and equitable future. Examples like those above demonstrate why I enthusiastically recommend the Neuse Regional Libraries for the National Medal for Museum and Library Services. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at chris@kinstonteens.org.

Sincerely,



Chris J. Suggs
Executive Director
Kinston Teens, Inc.





Housing Authority of the City of Kinston

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October 13, 2021

To Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services:

The Kinston Housing Authority is pleased to support the Neuse Regional Libraries' nomination for the National Medal for Museum and Library Service due to their unwavering commitment to extraordinary and innovative approaches to community outreach service.

The Neuse Regional Libraries are clearly centered in community. The Library invests heavily in the skills and personal development of residents; offers a welcoming and inclusive place for the community; and builds partnerships and programs that have significant community impact. Moreover, the Library excels at innovative programs and services, including outreach to the underserved. A firsthand example of this commitment to community is the evolving STEM 4 All program. Through strong collaboration with the Kinston Housing Authority and Northwest Elementary School, the Library provides increased access to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) programming and homework help to elementary and middle school aged children. Essentially, STEM 4 ALL takes the library's learning resources and programming directly to students in our community who may not have access to the library due to multiple factors, including transportation issues, to ensure that they have maximum access to tools including hot spots and digital devices that will help pave the way to future success.

The STEM 4 ALL program also invites guest speakers to represent the community, and exposes students to future career opportunities in a safe environment. Guest speakers have included the City of Kinston Mayor, who helped participants understand how he uses STEM in his job every day, and an Instructor from the Lenoir Community College Aviation Department, who taught participants how wind lifts such large vehicles off the ground through an engineering hands-on activity. However, the most eye-opening lesson learned from this collaborative program is how much students value the Homework Help portion of the STEM 4 ALL program. While the STEM portion was fun and educational, it was remarkable to see that students ultimately understood the importance of their homework and its correlation with school performance. Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic the Library mailed care kits with STEM activities, books and special treats directly to student's homes to keep connected when physical visits were prohibited.

Additionally, Neuse Regional Libraries provide outreach to other Kinston Housing Apartment complexes through the *Reading Colors Your World Summer Reading* program that brings color, action, adventure, and fantasy to the world and minds of school-aged children. The summer outreach reading initiative aims to provide, not only books, but summer fun and prizes to elementary and middle-school age students who reside in public housing communities. By bringing multi-level reading materials to children during the summer, we are able to help prevent the "summer slide" which often has a negative effect on test scores for the upcoming school year. Due to the success of the *Reading Colors Your World Summer Reading* program, the Neuse Regional Libraries have begun to expand outreach to Kinston Housing Authority apartment complexes through the new Digital Resource Rover which will provide expanded access to resources, technology tools, and 21st literacy programming to students and families. Still, the impact of the STEM 4 ALL program is best demonstrated by testimonials from participants who have benefited from our collaboration with the Library.

Testimonials:

“As soon as Aubree gets off the bus, she runs in the house, drops her things off, and says, “Mom can I please go to the office for STEM?” She grabs her backpack and runs straight out the door. I don’t think she ever waits for a reply. I love that she is so excited about learning.” Antoinette Plymouth, Parent

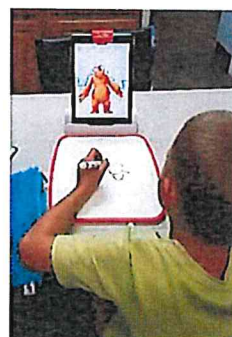
“I am so appreciative of the library for bringing the bookmobile to Jack Rountree. I remember going to the bookmobile and checking out books when I was a kid and I am so glad that my kids got to experience something from my childhood. My sons enjoyed awaiting the arrival of the bookmobile and running over to check out books!” Santana Cannon

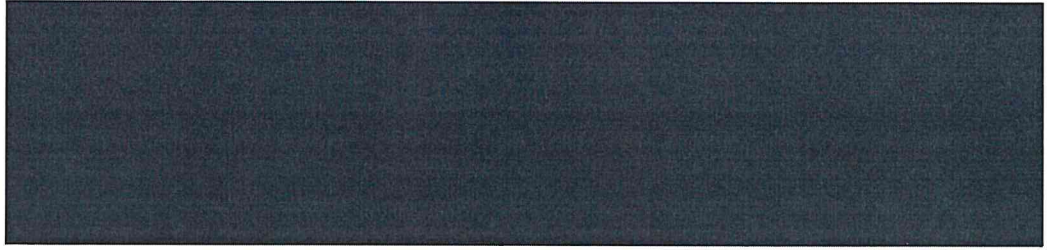
As the Director of Kinston Housing Authority, I without reservation recommend the Neuse Regional Libraries for the National Medal for Museum and Library Service. If you need more information, please do not hesitate to contact me at rabbott@khanc.org.

Sincerely,

Rhonda Abbott

Rhonda Abbott
Executive Director





October 18, 2021

To Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services:

I am very happy to have this opportunity to write in support of the nomination of the Neuse Regional Libraries for the National Medal for Museum and Library Service. I am a local business owner in Kinston, North Carolina who has benefited greatly from the Library's ICE HOUSE Entrepreneurship program.

I came up with the idea for my custom natural stone bracelet business back in 2018 but I did not officially get my LLC until April of 2021. My first bracelet was made for my little sister, Rika. I have always loved this style of bracelet since I was given my first natural stone bracelet by a friend in high school. I knew my sister loved purple so I made her one. Unforeseeably, she passed before I could give her the bracelet I had made for her. At that very moment I decided that if I was not able to give her the bracelet, I would give them to the WORLD! She was my inspiration for starting my business and every time I make one I think of her.

In November 2020 I first learned that the library would be offering the ICE HOUSE Entrepreneurship program, a free three part course sponsored by the NC IDEA Foundation. This program had been offered twice in the previous year; as I learned from Jennifer Nelson, the Library's Marketing Librarian who facilitated the workshop, the Library had been selected as a pilot location for this new program designed to inspire and engage participants with the determination and perseverance of an entrepreneurial mindset. Since I was hoping to start my business but needed some help with learning how to market it, I felt like this was a great opportunity.

Jennifer had received specialized training from NC IDEA on how to present the ICE HOUSE program. My fellow classmates were all residents of our community. Some of them had already started their own businesses like custom doll making and health and wellness coaching. The program was centered around the Eight Life Lessons from the book *Who Owns the Ice House? Eight Life Lessons from an Unlikely Entrepreneur* by Clifton Taulbert and Gary Schoeniger.

Through this program, I learned about developing an entrepreneurial mindset. I was surprised by how much of a difference a one week program could make in putting me on the road to developing my own successful business. The program inspired me to see that starting my own business was not only possible, but the perfect way to profit from my personal expression. The class also opened my eyes to other resources in the community that were available to help me start my business.

One of the most effective techniques I learned as part of the program was developing my 30 second “elevator pitch” that I could share with potential clients and partners. Since developing that pitch, I have been able to use it to network and help my business grow. When Governor Roy Cooper visited Neuse Regional Libraries in August 2021, the Library invited me to share my story with him and I got to share my 30 second elevator pitch with the Governor of North Carolina! None of this would have been possible without the ICE HOUSE program.

Since I completed the ICE HOUSE Entrepreneurship program I have begun operating my business, MadeByChi, which sells handcrafted natural stone Chakra Bracelets and Necklaces. I have opened an online store where customers are able to browse existing products or request custom order jewelry. I have also used what I learned in the class to promote my business, madebychi-brand.myshopify.com, and participating in Library classes and programs has helped me network and gain new customers at events such as the Library’s Coming Together Juneteenth celebration.

I feel that my experience perfectly illustrates how essential the Library is in ensuring that people like me have access to resources that allow for creating new businesses, finding new career opportunities, or pursuing new educational opportunities. Because of how critical they are in transforming our communities in these ways, I offer my sincerest recommendation of the Neuse Regional Libraries for the National Medal for Museum and Library Services. If you have any questions, I will be happy to answer them at haftime919@gmail.com.

Sincerely,



Kashif Tyson
MadeByCHI LLC