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Berks Libraries Offer Grab-and-Go Kits for Kids and Teens During Summer Quest Program

For immediate release—While many libraries in Berks County haven't yet opened their doors to in-person service, librarians are reaching out to their younger patrons this summer through grab-and-go learning kits called Craft Packs, aimed at school-age kids 5-10, and Teen Book Drops for teens ages 13 and older. Sponsored by the Friends of Berks County Public Libraries, these kits aim at providing hands-on learning opportunities over the summer months with the purpose of reaching at-risk youth with limited ways to connect virtually with their library.

During the first few weeks after Berks began to feel the effects of COVID-19, members from the Berks County Public Library System and the Reading Library District met to discuss how to best serve library patrons should pandemic distancing recommendations continue to summer. Traditionally, public libraries in Berks County would host a summer-long learning program to combat the "summer slide," a term referring to the tendency for students to lose some of the achievement gains they made during the previous school year. The Summer Quest program offers fun and creative ways for children and teens to explore their curiosities while continuing to learn over the summer months, better preparing them for the new school year.

"The goal of Summer Quest is to reach kids most at risk for summer slide," said Marissa Guidara, Youth District Consultant for the Reading Library District. "Public libraries have been providing these summer programs for decades, but the current situation makes it difficult to offer similar experiences on a virtual platform especially for those who may not be able to connect to the Internet."

According to a [2014–2018 report](#) from Berks Vital Signs, only 81% of Berks County households had Internet access, leaving 19% digitally stranded.

Amy Resh, system administrator for Berks County Public Libraries, reached out to the Friends of Berks County Public Libraries with a proposal and a request for help.

“The Friends have always been big supporters of the summer program and make annual donations to the libraries to help with Summer Quest events,” Resh said. “Our planning team came up with a proposal to create and distribute these kits for both kids and teens. The Friends Board convened an emergency meeting to review the plan and came back with immediate approval to move forward with the project.”

Each Craft Pack contains two craft activities for children to complete without the use of screens. The first round of Craft Packs made their way to public libraries in Berks County, which will distribute through library pick-up service or local daycares and community organizations. Two additional distributions are scheduled for later this summer, one in July and one in August, with an expected 3,750 Craft Pack kits reaching kids and families in Berks County.

Teen Book Drop (TBD) kits offer a similar learning experience aimed at Berks teens. The TBD kits are designed to feel like a subscription box with a young adult book selection paired with themed activities and souvenirs. The book selection for this distribution is *My So-Called Bollywood Life* by Nisha Sharma. Everything in the TBD kits are for teens to keep and enjoy. A virtual book discussion and online programs slated for the end of summer will close out the experience, but the box contents can be enjoyed on its own.

“I’ve received some very positive feedback from the county’s youth librarians,” said Guidara who took on the lead role of creating the ideas behind the kits and the distribution recommendations. “Both myself and other librarians have high hopes for these programs, and we’re already talking about what they might look like for the future.”

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If you would like more information about this topic, please contact Marissa Guidara by emailing marissa.guidara@reading.lib.pa.us.