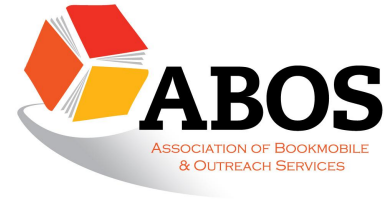


Association of Bookmobile and Outreach Services

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Press Release – For Immediate Release

The Southington Public Library of Southington, CT, is the recipient of the 2022 Innovation in Outreach Programming Award. The Innovation in Outreach Programming Award, sponsored by the Association of Bookmobile and Outreach Services, recognizes a library’s achievement in planning and implementing an innovative or creative outreach program, which has had a measurable impact on its community.

Connecticut’s Southington Public Library feels very deeply about the people it serves. The library understands that the past few years have been difficult for everyone and has taken great care to ensure the community has had continued access to library services, even if it meant changing its methods. COVID made it imperative to reach people; those with physical access to the building and/or technology and those certainly without.

In the fall of 2021, the Southington Library started the SPL Express, a pop-up mini-mobile library delivering materials and services to underserved populations on a regular basis. During SPL Express initial runs, Southington Librarian Lynn Pawloski imagined connecting the Library and the Southington community through the transformative power of improv comedy or, unscripted theatrical performances. She found her own improv training quite helpful in outreach endeavors. Building community partnerships requires the tenets of improv: communication, empathy, collaboration, creative and decisive thinking, listening, and combatting failure with resiliency and positivity. And so, *The Literacy of Laughter: A Community Gets Schooled in the Art of Comedy* was forged.

The Library is partnering with Hartford-based Sea Tea Improv Comedy Theater to offer six one hour-long improv workshops and a final performance, *Southington Night Live*, to diverse community groups and ages as part of our 2022 Summer Reading Program. Each event includes exercises and group discussion designed to help participants learn how practicing improv strengthens listening and communication skills; that taking risks and making mistakes sometimes leads us to better, unexpected places; and how we can process the collective trauma of contemporary life through a comedic lens.

Sea Tea Improv performs original comedy productions and offers classes and workshops in their studios, businesses, and schools, tailoring courses for all ages, experience levels, class size, and lengths. Performers and instructors have trained at America's top comedy institutions, including the Upright Citizens Brigade Theater and The Second City, and performed hundreds of shows and classes for thousands of audience members and students since 2009.

Three closed workshops held in June were geared specifically and on location with Bread for Life, the local soup kitchen; The John E. DeMello Sr. Veteran's Coffee Hour; and The Arc of Southington, a human service agency serving people of all ages and their families. Three open workshops for kids, adults, and teens are being held in July and August. The series concludes August 18th with Southington Night Live, an all-age improv comedy performance and community discussion.

The Literacy of Laughter aims to fold in marginalized and often overlooked populations and let all participants know yes, you are a part of us, and our joint expression, creations, and interactions construct and transform our collective experiences. At every event, participants have the ability to open library cards, register for the Summer Reading Program, learn about library resources, browse displays of humorous library materials, and be entered into weekly prize drawings for program attendance. This project strengthens existing partnerships, starts conversations about future programming and wished-for borrowing materials, and showcases our similarities outweigh our differences.

The Innovation in Outreach Programming Award will be presented at the Awards Ceremony during the 2022 Conference of the Association of Bookmobile and Outreach Services in Scottsdale, Arizona.