

Cumberland County Library System's STAR – Service to Adult Readers - Program Celebrates 35 Years of Service to Homebound Residents

Mechanicsburg, Pa – Since 1987, the Cumberland County Library System has been providing a unique service to its homebound residents. The STAR – Service to Adult Readers – program involves volunteers, homebound residents, and adult care facilities. Trained volunteers are partnered with homebound residents to discern their reading preferences, then select and deliver reading materials for their partner, and return materials that have already been read to the library. Volunteers also stock and maintain self-serve “mini libraries” in nursing homes and assisted living communities throughout the County, for residents who can get to the community room but not to their local public library.

STAR provides more than reading materials to the County's homebound residents. Its volunteers develop longtime friendships and provide much-needed companionship to their patrons. Roberta Grace, a volunteer from Camp Hill, wrote of her experience with STAR, “I brought books to a homebound resident, Agnes Thompson. She described the books she liked and I brought them to her, sometimes including some surprises the librarian helped me to choose. Two weeks later we would discuss what she had read. That was all either of us expected of the program. Five years of visits before she died in 1992 included much more than book talk. We shared family stories. I learned she taught school in the 1920s, rode a donkey in the Grand Canyon, and taped her voice reading stories to mail to her grandchildren in Germany.”

STAR volunteers often report that they get as much fulfillment from the experience than their patrons. Volunteer Heidi Stadnicki wrote, “I am a retired librarian, grateful to be able to give back to people who need services the most. Previously, I selected and delivered materials to four homebound individuals at the Claremont Nursing and Rehabilitation Center.”

Current STAR program participant Christina Hoffman adds, “Having the library is important especially during this crisis (Covid). Books are important. STAR is a very important service.”

STAR depends on its network of trained volunteers to provide direct services. These volunteers receive their training from the Library System's Adult Outreach Services Coordinator, who also maintains relationships with the nursing homes and assisted living facilities that house self-serve mini-libraries for their residents and oversees all aspects of the program.

Initially, the STAR Coordinator position was funded by a federal grant from LSTA (then called LSCA), the Library Services and Technology Act and is now staffed by a full-time employee of the Cumberland County Library System. In its history, STAR has had five coordinators: **Judy Smoyer**, 1987; **Mary Linn Faries**, 1988-1990; **Nan Cavanaugh**, 1990-2010; **Carol Linderman-Justice**, 2010-2017; and **Christa Bassett**, 2018 to the present.

In its 35-year history, more than 250 STAR program volunteers have served 400+ homebound residents. In its first year, 33 homebound residents were served by 10 trained volunteers, and there were 28 self-serve mini libraries. Currently, there are 78 trained volunteers serving 72 homebound participants and self-serve mini libraries at 23 locations throughout the County.

Supplemental STAR funding for the purchase of large-print books is provided by individuals, foundations and organizations, and the Cumberland County Library System Foundation.

In 1989 during National Library Week, U.S. Representative Bill Goodling commended the STAR program in a Congressional Record as part of a larger appreciation of public libraries and the need to continue federal funding. He had stated in part that, “In my view, this type of service is beneficial to community unity and the well-being of its citizens.”

During Volunteer Month and National Library Week 2022, we celebrate 35 years of the STAR – Services to Adult Readers – program, the dedicated volunteers who make it possible, and the homebound residents who benefit from this special library outreach service.

For more information about STAR – about volunteering, about receiving services, or about making a donation – please visit cumberlandcountylibraries.org/STAR.

The Cumberland County Library System is a federated library system consisting of seven member libraries, one branch facility, an administrative headquarters, and a non-profit foundation. Member libraries include: Amelia S. Givin Free Library in Mt. Holly Springs, Bosler Memorial Library in Carlisle, Coy Public Library of Shippensburg, East Pennsboro Branch Library in Enola, Fredricksen Library in Camp Hill, John Graham Library in Newville, New Cumberland Public Library, and Simpson Library in Mechanicsburg.