

Reading=COOL or Staying Busy with the After-School Book Club or Lovin' Literacy: Sneakin' in Reading After-School

By Dr. Leslie Rosenfeld

Take a walk around North Shore Park Youth Center, Flamingo Park and the 21st Street Recreation Center during after-school hours. Things may not look exactly as you would expect at most municipal recreational facilities.

In one room, children are working on homework or sharing their favorite part of a book they just read. Down the hall at the computer lab, students with headphones on spruce up their reading and writing skills. And in the next room, teens peruse the in-house library for their next big literary adventure.

Yes, recreational facilities on Miami Beach have their own libraries with hundreds of age-appropriate books and magazines for children to read or take home and share with their siblings or parents. It's all part of the City of Miami Beach after-school literacy book club, in place since 2005.

"In order to become recreational and life-long readers children need the opportunity to practice and develop their reading skills in a relaxed and enjoyable environment," said Miami Beach City Manager Jorge Gonzalez.

The after-school book club services many children who may not have access at home to literacy-building resources such as books, magazines and the Internet. Youth enrolled in the after-school program have an opportunity to access books from our in-house libraries at the facilities.

"I love that the kids can check out books from the Flamingo Park library," said Dinorah Rosario, mother of Noah, 8, and Miah, 7. Both children attend the after-school program at Flamingo Park. "They have more time to search for which books they like and more time to read during after-school and with us at home," added Rosario. On a weekly basis, parents sign off that both the parent and the child have read an age-appropriate section from a book.

The program also includes activities such as group discussions, storytelling, leisure reading and literacy games, which can foster our youth's interest and motivation to read. Students spend five days a week working on homework and reading with coaches.

"I think the library is awesome. When I'm in the library I feel very peaceful. It's the perfect place to do my homework and read a great books," said Damaris Agurcia, 11, who was at the North Shore Park Youth Center recently, catching up on reading and homework.

Anjelica Sanchez, 10, a student at Feinberg Fisher Elementary, also enjoys doing her homework at the park's in-house library. "I like that I can use the books in the park library for my homework," she said. "I don't have to wait to get home to finish my homework when I need to use a book."

The book club also encourages daily "read-alouds" through an intergenerational approach that improves the literacy, language and life skills of both parents and children. And they receive one-

on-one support when it is needed. This is one of the many ways kids can sharpen their skills and get the attention they are not always able to get at home.

Local schools have seen improved academic performance demonstrated by students who attend the Miami Beach after-school literacy program and book club. Participants earn extra credit at school for reading and top readers receive monthly prizes including free books from the library and group recognition.

"Many students appreciate help with reading and homework because English may not be their parents' primary language," said Miami Beach Parks and Recreation Director Kevin Smith. "It's a wonderful program and a perfect example of how the community can come together to support our youth."

Summer Reading Splash

As part of the after-school literacy program, this summer the City of Miami Beach partnered with the Miami-Dade Family Learning Partnership and The Children's Trust to join the Reading is Fundamental, Splash into Reading book ownership program.

The event took place at the North Shore Park Youth Center and Flamingo Park where camp goers from North Shore, Flamingo, and Muss parks had a chance to participate. Event organizers handed out over 2,000 free books to children in grades Pre-K to 5.

"It's all part of the City's larger mission – to enhance learning opportunities for Miami Beach youth," stated Miami Beach Mayor Matti Herrera Bower, a staunch advocate for children and education.

During the event children had the opportunity to partake in a "read-along" as well as other fun, education and interactive activities, which motivated and gave them an incentive to read and boost their comprehension levels.

"We have had many kids come up and say 'thank you' at the book give-away, where each child received two free books," said Smith.

After-school recreation programs can connect with in-school time without being more of the same. Miami Beach after school programs offer literacy and enrichment activities that help kids develop an interest in, and an appreciation for, the literacy skills they work hard at during the school day.

For more information on after-school literacy programs, please contact the facility manager at our local park program or call 305-673-7730. Visit us at miamibeachfl.gov and click on the Education tab on the homepage.