



Supporting the Development and Retention of a World Class Workforce

Jeffrey S. Swartz, Executive Director

Matthew Verney, Board Chair

LITERACY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, JULY 6, 2021
ZOOM MEETING AT THE WDB OFFICE, 1111 MARLKRESS ROAD, CHERRY HILL, NJ

ATTENDANCE – LITERACY COMMITTEE

MEMBERS		2-Feb-21	2-Mar-21	4-Apr-21	4-May-21	1-Jun-21	6-Jul-21
Brahl, Ken CHAIR	Ravitz Family Shoprites	X	X	X	X		X
Patti Beach	Learning Link, Camden County One-Stop Career Center		X	X		X	X
Cirii, Frank	Local Area Operations Director, Camden County One Stop		X	X	X		X
Dann, Carol	Hopeworks Camden				X		
Daunoras, Heidi	Pine Hill School District	X	x	X		X	X
Druce, Jennifer	Camden County Library		X			X	
Fugee, Antoinette	Center for Family Services, Inc.		X				
Hill, Lauren Dr.	Camden County College		X	X			X
Kalitan, Marlyn Vice Chair	Kalitan Consulting	X	X	X	X	X	X
Knopf, Dick	Marketing Professional Services	X		X	X		X
Mitchell, Danielle	RobinsNest Inc						
Strobl, Holly	Council Women, Clementon Borough						X
Walker, Eric	RobinsNest Inc			X	X		X
Young, Jennifer	Verizon						X
Levitt, Alex	WDB						X
Swartz, Jeffrey S.	WDB	X	X	X	X	X	X
Varallo, Kathleen	WDB	X	X	X	X	X	X

WELCOME

Ken Brahl, Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:44am. He welcomed attendees and they discussed attending some of the National Night Out events. Kathleen Varallo, Administrative Assistant, WDB, reported the County will be celebrating National Night Out on Tuesday, August 3rd. She said the County left it up to the individual townships as to how they would like to participate. Holly Strobl, Councilwomen, Clementon Borough, joined the call and said her local area would be celebrating it on Monday evening, August 2nd. Jeffrey S. Swartz, Executive Director, asked her to reserve a table at the event for the WDB. Ken agreed to attend along with Jeff to promote the activities of the Literacy Committee and WDB. Ken also welcomed Jordon Grabelle, Letters of Love, to the call. She has been recognized with several awards for her organization and its efforts to promote literacy in the local area and around the country.

Ken asked the committee to review the minutes dated Tuesday, June 1st, 2021. He abstained from making a motion and thanked Marlyn Kalitan, Vice Chair, for running the last meeting. He did notice one error in the minutes on page three where he was quoted. He asked for a motion to approve the minutes pending that and any other corrections. Dick Knopf made the first

motion, Patti Beach, made the second motion. By unanimous vote to the affirmative, the motion was carried, and the minutes June 1st were approved.

Ken welcomed Jordan Grabelle and announced she was nominated for the Princess Diana Award and other awards with recommendations from the WDB and Literacy Committee. He asked Jordan to explain more about the award and commended her for awesome work with literacy efforts. He also congratulated her on receiving the award. Jordan said she founded the non-profit, "Love Letters for Literacy" and has been lucky enough to work with the WDB and support the efforts of the committee throughout the years. She said the organization has expanded within the last few years. The project now has a reach in all fifty states and thirty other countries across six continents. Love Letters has inspired more than 19,600.00 volunteers to join the cause to help more than 43,000.00, at risk children, learn to read. She was happy to join the call to meet the committee and thank them for all their support and help over the years. Love Letters consists of a handmade packet of letters in the alphabet, instructions about ideas for how to use the letters to make words and suggested activities to make it fun for a child to play with the letters. The package also includes a personal note of encouragement from the maker.

Love Letters for Literacy – Mission Statement from website:

Love Letters for Literacy equips families in need with handmade literacy packets to make teaching the letters of the alphabet easy and fun! A child's ability to succeed in school, attend college, and earn a higher salary all begins with the ability to read. But to read you need to know the letters of the alphabet and the sounds they make. Love Letters sets out to change the fact that lower-income children may know only 1 or 2 letters of the alphabet when entering kindergarten, compared to middle class children who know all 26! Love Letters teaches families how to make learning the alphabet into a game. Love Letters promotes early literacy while encouraging a lifelong love of reading!

More information can be found by visiting the website: <https://lovelettersliteracy.org/about/>

The Committee congratulated Jordan saying her work was incredible and wished her well with her future goals. Jordan said she will be entering her senior year of high school, going off to college and continuing to expand her mission to help more children to learn to read. Ken asked Jordan to expound on her inspiration to start her cause. Jordan said when she was a child, she learned to read by playing with large foam letters. As she grew and was made aware that some children in lower income ranges were having trouble learning to read, she formed the idea for creating the package in a slightly more accessible way using construction paper, maker letters. The package contains 26 letter flash cards A-Z, a list of games that can be used to play with the cards and get familiar with the letters in an engaging way. The volunteer creating the packet writes an encouraging personal letter that can be read to the child. In this way, it becomes an engaging process that empowers families to become actively involved with teaching their child

how to read. She found that in some lower income areas, the parents do not have the proper tools to teach their children how to read or do not have the awareness of how important it is to the child for them to engage in the process. Ken said the committee has enjoyed giving the packets to families at their outreach events. Ken noted the incredible effort Jordan has built and the network she has put behind her efforts. He also noted it is incredible to see a young generation that is willing and getting involved with literacy efforts such as this and youth getting involved with collecting books for the Booksmiles Organization. He recognized the efforts of Heidi Daunoras, Director, Curriculum, Pine Hill Schools, her son, and other youth, in the local area for helping to further the outreach of Booksmiles. He recently read that Booksmiles raised enough donations to purchase an additional truck for book collection and distribution.

Ken said when he first joined the Literacy Committee ten years ago; he was not sure where the work would lead but supporting these efforts in recent years has made him sure members are on the right track of promoting Literacy in Camden County. Dick Knopf, Independent Business Consultant, said he visited the Booksmiles warehouse and collection facility and was impressed by thousands of books well sorted in boxes. He said Larry Abrams, Founder Booksmiles, is doing an incredible job distributing the books. John Martin, Haddonfield Rotary Club, joined the call and introduced himself and the interest of the club to get involved with the committee's efforts. He also complimented Jordan's efforts. John said he builds the Book Arcs that are placed around the Camden area. He said, to date, he has made about sixty arcs, and they have been placed on the sidewalks of Camden to give books away. The club has a catch of approximately 10,000 books stored in a facility in Pennsauken Township. Heidi said the main book bank for the Booksmiles Organization is located on Cuthbert Boulevard in Cherry Hill. She said Booksmiles is still in the process of purchasing the new truck with donations collected and they have recently expanded to the Jersey Shore so there is now a Jersey Shore Booksmiles. She complimented Jordan's commitment to Literacy. She is seeing a tremendous effort placed on literacy with her own students in Pine Hill. Their commitment, understanding and the ideas that are flowing from them is incredible. She also noted the ideas coming from Jordan are so commendable because she has the big picture prospective and is putting those ideas into action to make something very beneficial happen.

Heidi said Booksmiles has 27 book drop locations placed around the county and the website lists those locations. Follow this link for more information: <https://www.booksmiles.org/>. There are locations expanded in the Lawrenceville, Ocean City, and Long Beach Island areas and they are trying to tap into locations all over the State of New Jersey as well as going across the bridge into the Philadelphia areas. She suggested contacting Larry Abrams to orchestrate a larger donation of books. Ken took a moment to ask committee members to introduce themselves to

John and Jordan. Ken called on each member to introduce themselves to guests. (*See attendance records as noted above for those on the call.*)

Ken asked John Martin to re-introduce himself and tell the committee a little more about his efforts toward literacy. John said he was asked to join the meeting by Scott Tourtellotte, current President of the Haddonfield Rotary Club. He said Scott is spearheading a mission for the year spread the word that literacy is important, especially among young people. As mentioned earlier, he is building Book Arcs in the fashion of Noah's Arc with the idea of filling the arcs with books instead of animals. This effort has been joined by Tom Martin's Camden County Pop-Up Libraries (CCPUL). John said Tom started out two years ago by going to places where people were gathered, opening the trunk of his car, and giving books away. Tom approached John about building the arcs saying he worked well with his hands because he was a dentist, so with this running joke, he began this mission. John said he is now retired from dentistry but grew up on a farm where he began his love for building things. He is enjoying the project and is now getting help from others and it has become a wonderful mission. He thanked the committee for allowing him to join the meeting. Ken thanked John for attending. Ken said the job of the committee is to promote and spread the word about these wonderful efforts that expand literacy resources in the community. He directed the committee back to the agenda and regular business of the meeting.

ONE-STOP & LEARNING LINK UPDATES

Patti Beach, Counselor, Learning Link reported the One-Stop will be re-opening to public access on Monday, July 12th. They will be using the QLess scheduling system to safely schedule in-person customer appointments for counseling, testing, and learning link services. Customers will be given an instruction sheet on how to contact partner services such as state Employment Services, Unemployment, and other divisions not yet back in the facility. All services can be accessed virtually. Follow this link to the Camden County One-Stop Career Center -Virtual Services Directory: <https://www.camdencounty.com/service/employment/job-training-placement/>

METRIX NJ UPSKILL LAUNCH

Jeff asked Kathleen Varallo, Administrative Assistant, WDB, to report on outreach of the program. Kathleen said the WDB continues to promote the NJ Metrix Upskill program within the committees and on social media platforms. The WDB is also using the program in the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and has assigned work-readiness courses in 2.5 hours segments per week of paid learning. This was a state requirement of the SYEP for this season. Metrix staff also attended and spoke at the WDB Quarterly Board of Trustees meeting on Wednesday June 23rd. which was very informative. They offered a very nice PowerPoint

presentation and reported some statistics about sign-ups in Camden County. Each course contains a pre-test and provides a certificate of completion after passing a quiz at its end. She said there are many courses available on the site and some employers are considering signing staff up for refresher courses in Quick Books and other office applications. Registration is easy and users are assigned a username and password which they can change once they are in the program. Ken said he may be using some of the courses for refresher and staff development and he would like to see the program promoted to other employers in the county. Follow this link to the NJ Career Services Website: <https://www.nj.gov/labor/career-services/education-training/skillup-nj/index.shtml>

LITERACY LIBRARY RESOURCE GUIDE

The Committee reviewed the latest draft version of the Library Resource Guide. Ken noted the layout shifted to an extra page. Ken asked Marlyn to weigh in on any additional changes. She said the changes discussed at last meeting have been made and the guide is more consistent in the address, and phone numbers listings. Kathleen pointed to the One-Stop ad and wording to confirm and approve the wording. Heidi said there was some question about how to clearly state obtaining a High School Equivalency for Diploma. The Committee discussed the wording to make it as clear as possible to the general public. All agreed gaining a Diploma is stating it clearly. The Committee noticed some other minor edits. Kathleen said she will make the changes and send it to the committee for final approval. Ken said he hoped it will be ready to print for distribution at the National Night Out events in August.

SUMMER YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM WORKSHOPS

Kathleen reported the WDB has 30-35 youth signed up to participate in the Summer Youth Employment Program. They have been placed in worksites around the County and started their work experiences on Monday, June 28th. Part of their paid work week will include assigned course work in the NJ Metrix SkillUp program based on skills expressed during their interview that they would like to learn more about. Another part of the program will include a weekly 2-hour workshop focusing on skills development topics such as resume writing, financial literacy, and customer service. She asked members of the Committee to volunteer to join the Zoom workshops as guest speakers. Kathleen described the format and highlights of the workshop. She is hoping youth will get more engaged in sharing on the calls and it will develop more over the eight weeks of the program. She said youth did begin to engage toward the end of the first workshop. Dick asked about the worksites and types of jobs youth are participating in. Kathleen said some are working as camp assistants at the Camden Kroc Center, and Jewish Community Center Camp, some at the KIPP School and Ken said he had 3 youth placed at one Shoprite location. Jeff said some have been placed in office positions and the work varies. The goal was to place youth in areas of their personal interests and matched to their skills. Alex

named A-1 Basketball Fitness, Austin Kaliff, Center for Family Services, and a few other worksites.

Marlyn asked the ages of the youth. Alex said the youth are between the ages of 16-24. The Committee discussed the difficulty in attracting youth to the program this year due to the same issues facing area employers such as pandemic conditions and the \$12.00 per hour stipend which is now lower than many employers, who've had to up wages to attract help. Alex noted there seems to be a shift in the ideal of a job for youth as well, given what they are exposed to on social media. Ken said he is happy with the youth interns and is considering offering them a job after the program ends. He expressed his concerns about attracting help back into the workforce and until state and federal stimulus benefits end in September. He does not expect the situation to change. Ken also spoke about the challenges in working with today's youth. His stores are grooming a future star's team of youth and management has had to adjust to a new style of leading them.

Ken asked John to speak about what the committee could do to help the Rotary Club of Haddonfield.

John said Scott Tourtellotte, incoming president, would like to distribute a book to youth in underserved areas of the County. The idea will be to challenge the child to read the book and complete a project, report, or essay about the book to be exchanged for some type of prize or incentive. John was open to suggestions from the Committee. Marlyn suggested John look at the Literacy Needs Assessment, created by the committee, to find those areas in the county named as being underserved. John said the club has identified those areas and they will also be contacting some reading teachers for additional advice about how to launch the program. Heidi offered her assistance to help shape the initiative. The Committee also discussed and remembered a reading passport that was given out a few years ago at the Clementon Memorial Library Family Literacy Day. Holly said the Rita' Water Ice, in her local area, is very generous when it comes to literacy efforts. Ken said the club could join the committee for the next Family Literacy Day. He asked Holly to look at dates in October to host that event at the library again. Jeff said the committee will be happy to join forces with the Rotary Club of Haddonfield and their literacy initiatives. He said the committee is very active. He complimented the committee and said their efforts are really making a positive impact in the lives of families around the County by promoting Literacy.

Dick asked when in-person meetings would resume. Jeff said the WDB will follow the policies of the County and hoped to resume in-person meeting sometime in September. He would also follow the advice of the Executive Committee. Ken said the zoom meetings have been well attended and the committee seems to be more active than many of the virtual meetings he has attended. Everyone has their camera on and is contributing. He is happy to continue virtual

meetings making it more convenient for members to attend from their home or office. He said the committee and its members are very inspiring. Dick asked and Ken confirmed that the committee will look forward to planning a Family Literacy Day at the Clementon Memorial Library in October and attend some of the National Night Outs around the county. He and Jeff will attend the Clementon event on Monday, August 2nd and be able to report back to the committee on the August 3rd meeting. Jeff said the WDB will put a schedule together of locations and times for some of the other events around the county. He encouraged committee members to attend as their schedule allowed. He also invited John to continue attending Literacy Committee meetings on the first Tuesday of every month. Holly said she will make sure there is a table set up at the Clementon event which starts at 6pm on August 2nd. She will send out the address of the field and suggested those attending bring chairs. Heidi said the Pine Hill event will probably consist of a movie night, but she will let the committee know if anything changes.

Eric Walker, Orchards Family Success Center, said the center is planning to host a back-to-school youth backpack drive. He was not sure of the date yet but asked if the committee might offer some involvement at the event. The event is usually hosted in block party fashion with attendees bringing something to add to the backpacks. The Center has books so they don't need them but maybe the committee could attend and offer some resources for the parents. Jeff asked the ages of the youth. Eric said they don't place a limit on age-appropriate donations. He said the youth tend to be younger elementary school age children. Heidi and Holly both agreed that placing adult or parent information in the backpacks was a good idea. They have both included this type of information in the backpack drives in their local area. Heidi said it will be a good idea to insert the One-Stop Virtual Services Directory in the backpacks. Ken told Eric to inform the committee about the date of the event and members will surely attend. Jeff encouraged committee members to forward information about their local events to the WDB for publishing on social media platforms and the county's website as well. Ken thanked the committee for their contributions and time. He asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:10am. Dick Knopf made the first motion; Heidi Daunoras made the second motion, by unanimous vote to the affirmative, the motion was carried and meeting adjourned.

NEXT MEETING: The next Literacy Committee Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, August 3rd, 2021, at 8:30am. The WDB will send out meeting materials and Zoom conferencing information prior to the meeting.

Submitted by

Kathleen Varallo,

Administrative Assistant

