Bookmobiles for Foster Care Kids

Contra Costa County Libraries

Presented by Gwen Starck

Contra Costa County library will convince foster kids and their guardians that by utilizing the library's bookmobile they will be able to access library materials in a more accessible way than in the past which will encourage library engagement and overall literacy and academic achievement of kids in foster care because our library is committed to meeting our community members where they are at, figuratively and literally, to support their information needs and overall wellbeing and quality of life.

Service Idea

The intention of this service is to provide a bookmobile for the Contra Costa county library district in order to encourage literacy, academic success, and curiosity about information and knowledge. Specifically, this aims to fill the gaps of information needs for a population in this community that is otherwise under supported.

Currently, the Contra Costa county library district has a Rolling Reader van that partners with local community organizations, such as First 5 and Headstart, to support early literacy development services. However, this is not a bookmobile and does not support library and information needs of people in the community outside the 0-5 years age range. (The Rolling Reader, 2024)

An additional bookmobile service would assist in supporting those with library and information needs outside of this specific child population, and this program would support children in foster care programs specifically

Contra Costa County California. (2024). *Rolling Reader*. https://www.contracosta.ca.gov/ImageRepository/Document?documentId=81981

Participatory Aspects

"Users and their knowledge have the ability to reshape library services, but libraries must first change the way they craft their services and tools so that users have a clear and open avenue on which to communicate and participate"
*(Casey & Savastinuk, 2007)*

The foster care focused bookmobile would be a resource developed and created intentionally in order to provide an avenue for underserved populations to access the library services and tools.

Connecting to the Mission

▷ This service connects to the library's mission not only by supporting underserved populations to promote library access, but also by dismantling barriers to library and information access for vulnerable and underserved populations.

Community of Focus

Children in foster care
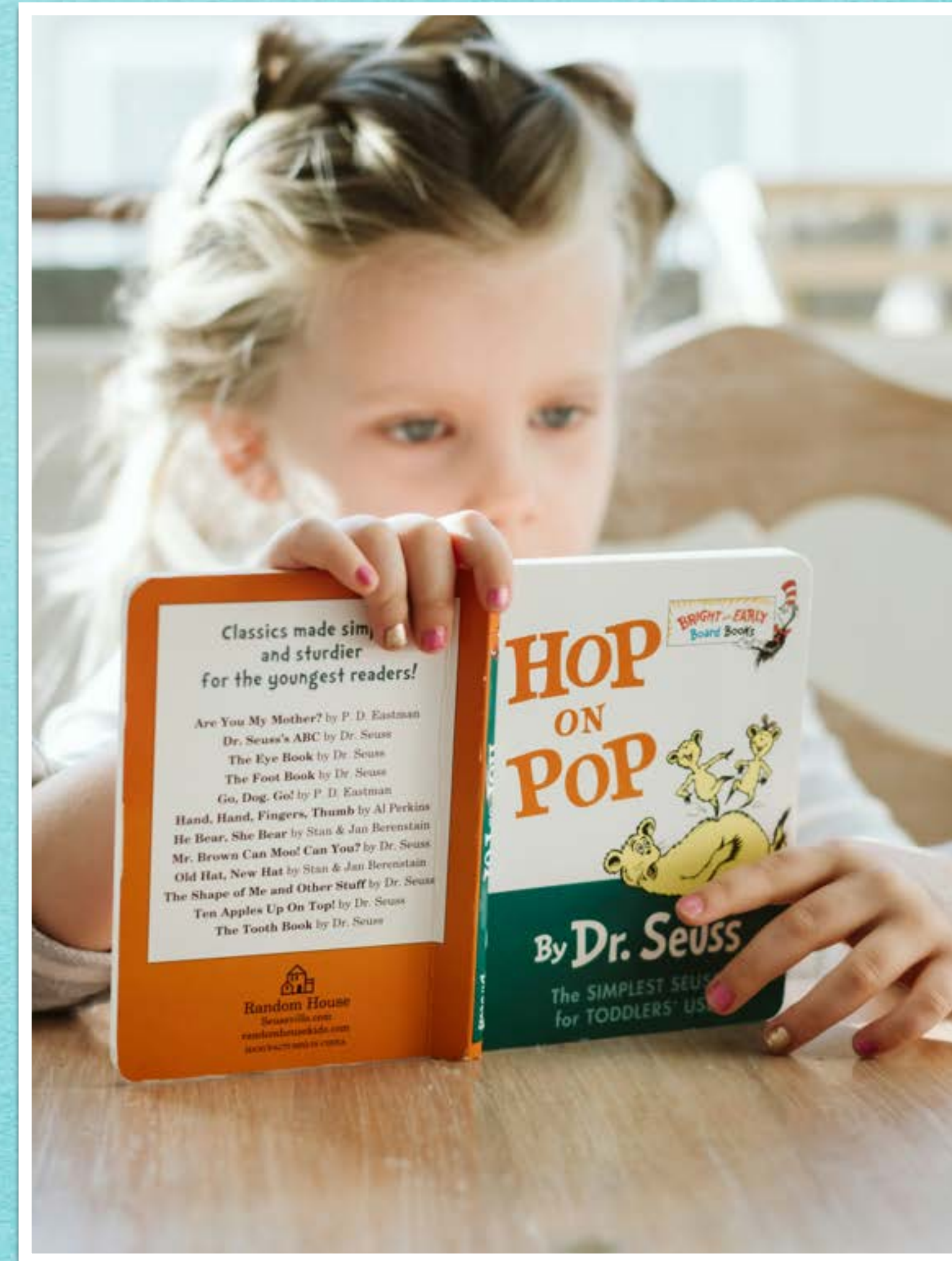
Josh Applegate via Unsplash, February 9, 2019

▷ According to the U.S. Department of Education, "children in foster care are at high-risk of dropping out of school and are unlikely to attend or graduate from college. A coordinated effort by education agencies and child welfare agencies is necessary to improve the educational outcomes for students in foster care" (U.S. Department of Education, 2025). Children in foster care face significant barriers to academic success and high quality of life, and an active effort to reach out and connect with this population can play an integral part in eliminating additional barriers and stressors on these kids and their caretakers.

Inspiration

▷ Mountain View

　▷ The Mountain View library's bookmobile provides an excellent example of how to update a bookmobile after the program has been established. They updated their vehicle in January 2024 with the intention of having a smaller vehicle that can better navigate the narrow roads in Mountain View, as they'd noticed their previous bookmobile had been struggling to make it down the narrower streets. With the feedback and creative thinking, the bookmobile is now able to access more service areas and serve more members of the library community population. (Bookmobile Service | Mountain View, CA, 2024)

▷ Hayward

　▷ The City of Hayward's bookmobile website includes plenty of helpful information for people to learn about what the bookmobile offers. They include a calendar that provides a visual representation of where and when future bookmobile stops will be, and they also include an explanation of the services and materials offered through the bookmobile. The website also includes a thorough explanation of how to request a bookmobile visit, which can be helpful for adults trying to coordinate a visit for their community. (Bookmobile, 2024)

Guidelines and Policies

Development

▷ During the development process, our project flow dependencies greatly impact the options that we have when it comes to final implementation of the service. A primary factor is gaining approval of funding for the requested services, as it's much more difficult to make a concrete plan without a budget in place. The conversation of funding falls to the library district as well as the city to approve.

▷ Ideally, we would begin by determining whether an additional vehicle can be acquired for the program. This is a crucial part of the development process, because there is a big difference between preparing a new vehicle and converting the previous Rolling Reader (the alternative plan if a new vehicle cannot be acquire). We would need to examine the vehicle and make estimates on what we need to do to the vehicle and how we can best utilize it. This assessment would include determining the cost of maintenance for the vehicle, the cost of refurbishing a vehicle for bookmobile purposes, and how much space in the vehicle we can allocate for library materials.

▷ After finalizing the plan about the vehicle itself, our next step would be the selection and acquisition of materials for the bookmobile. This would be highly dependent on the needs and requests of our served population, so we would likely include copies of our library district's most popular children's materials, a balanced mix of educational and entertaining materials, and the inclusion of non-English language books such as Spanish or Tagalog.

Development Continued

▷ The next portion of development will consist of determining specifics of implementation. Broadly, we will determine when and where we want the bookmobile outings to be, then we will determine who is able to drive and supervise bookmobile outings.

▷ Figuring out the bookmobile visit schedule will include research that is partnered with the local foster care representatives, as they are likely to have information and relevant suggestions to best support our target population. For example, if there is a community center that regularly hosts events for foster kids, it may be beneficial to plan a monthly stop at this center during one of the aforementioned events.

▷ The final step of development will be internal and based on the information gathered and plans made so far. The Contra Costa county library district will take the bookmobile plans to interested employees and determine who of the staff is the best fit to drive the bookmobile and/or supervise bookmobile outings. It would be ideal to have staff that are familiar the materials included in the bookmobile and the unique needs of the foster kid population. However, the staffing will also be determined by the availability of the staff, interest in supporting the bookmobile program, and the number of staff available to spare their time and expertise to the bookmobile. Ideally, 3-4 staff would be incredibly helpful, especially for larger groups of kids, but we may need to plan on 1-2 staff if there are significant limitations to acquiring more.

Implementation

▷ With development complete, we begin the transition to implementation.

▷ This process begins with a check in with local foster system to put out a call to foster parents who are interested in bookmobile services. At this point, we would already have a connection with the local foster care representatives, so we would likely communicate with the same parties when possible.

▷ This process would gather information about requests in addition to clarifying what their barriers to library access are. These barriers may include children living or attending school in parts of the city far from libraries, transportation access limitations due to guardians' work hours or cost of public transit, availability only outside of regular library hours, various disabilities, lack of access to childcare, and more.

▷ We would likely have some ideas for times and locations of bookmobile visits based on conversations with previous foster care representatives, so we could then use this cumulative data to determine best locations and times of day to reach the target populations. These times and days could be changed in the future, especially in context of future assessments and evaluations of services, but it would give us a good place to start.

Timeline

The full timeline consists of a 3 year plan including a development and planning stage as well as a period for trials prior to official service implementation

- *Development and Planning*

  - 1 year to develop budget, request resources, and gather data to determine plan for location, materials, and staffing
- *Trial Period*

 - 1 year trial run w/bookmobile

    - During trial, record data about number of events/visits, materials checked out (which materials are most popular, are there any issues with lack of checkout or trouble with returns), and request feedback from patrons and staff

  - Update library collection and bookmobile strategies based on the data collected from the first trial year

    - Additional 1 year trial period, also collecting data to assess before final implementation
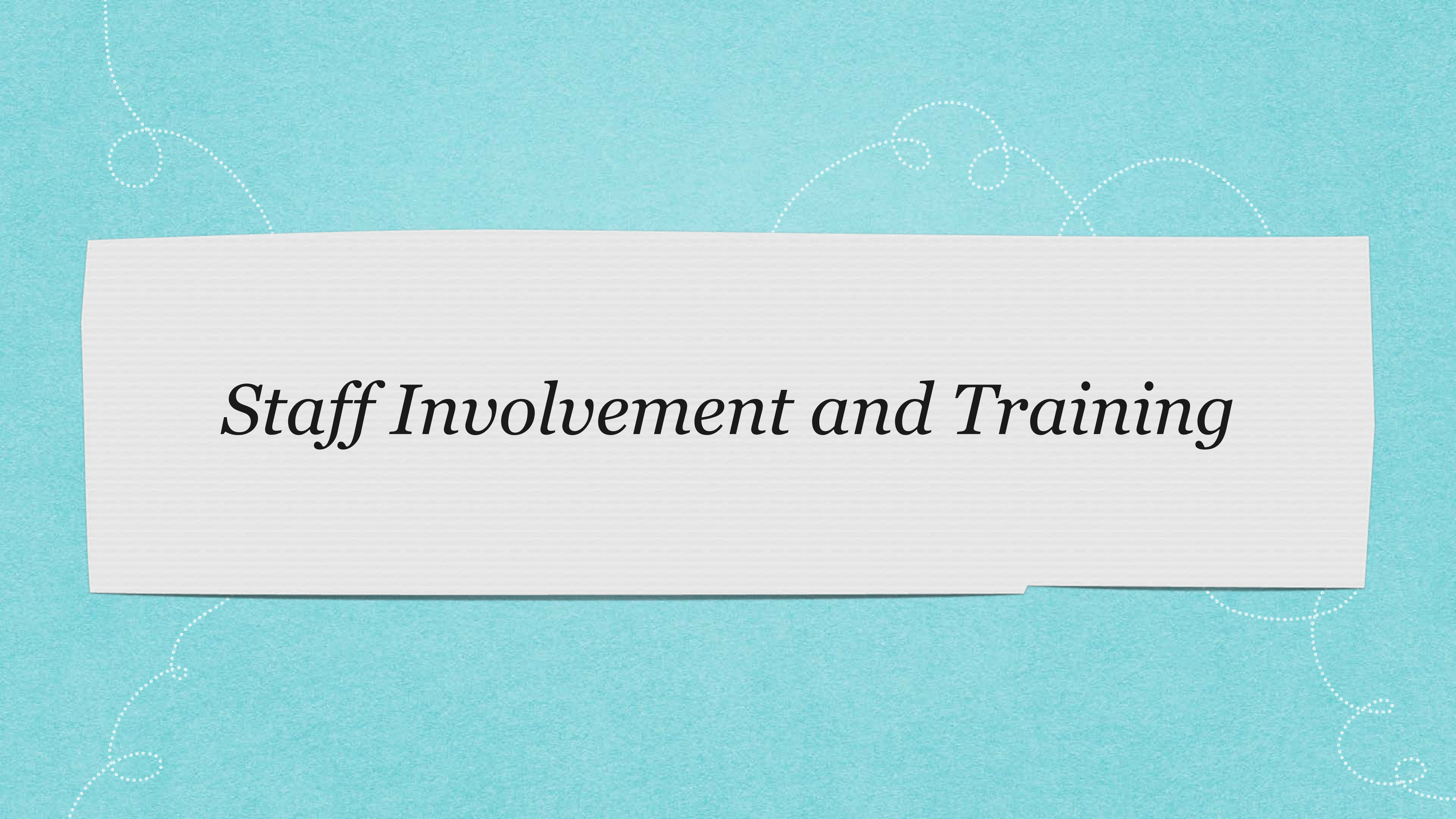- *Official Implementation*

  - After initial 2 years, new assessments will be done every 5 years, with info gathered every 6 months from staff and patron participants

Marketing

- Posters/Flyers

  - Physical and PDF

  - About the bookmobile program and upcoming events

  - Provide to foster care employees such as social workers to give out to foster families, also provide to local schools and foster care oriented programs (like summer camps or after school programs)

- Emails

  - Updates about bookmobile included in regular library email list to interested subscribers

  - Reaching out to aforementioned foster care employees, local schools, and foster care focused programs to promote the bookmobile events and services
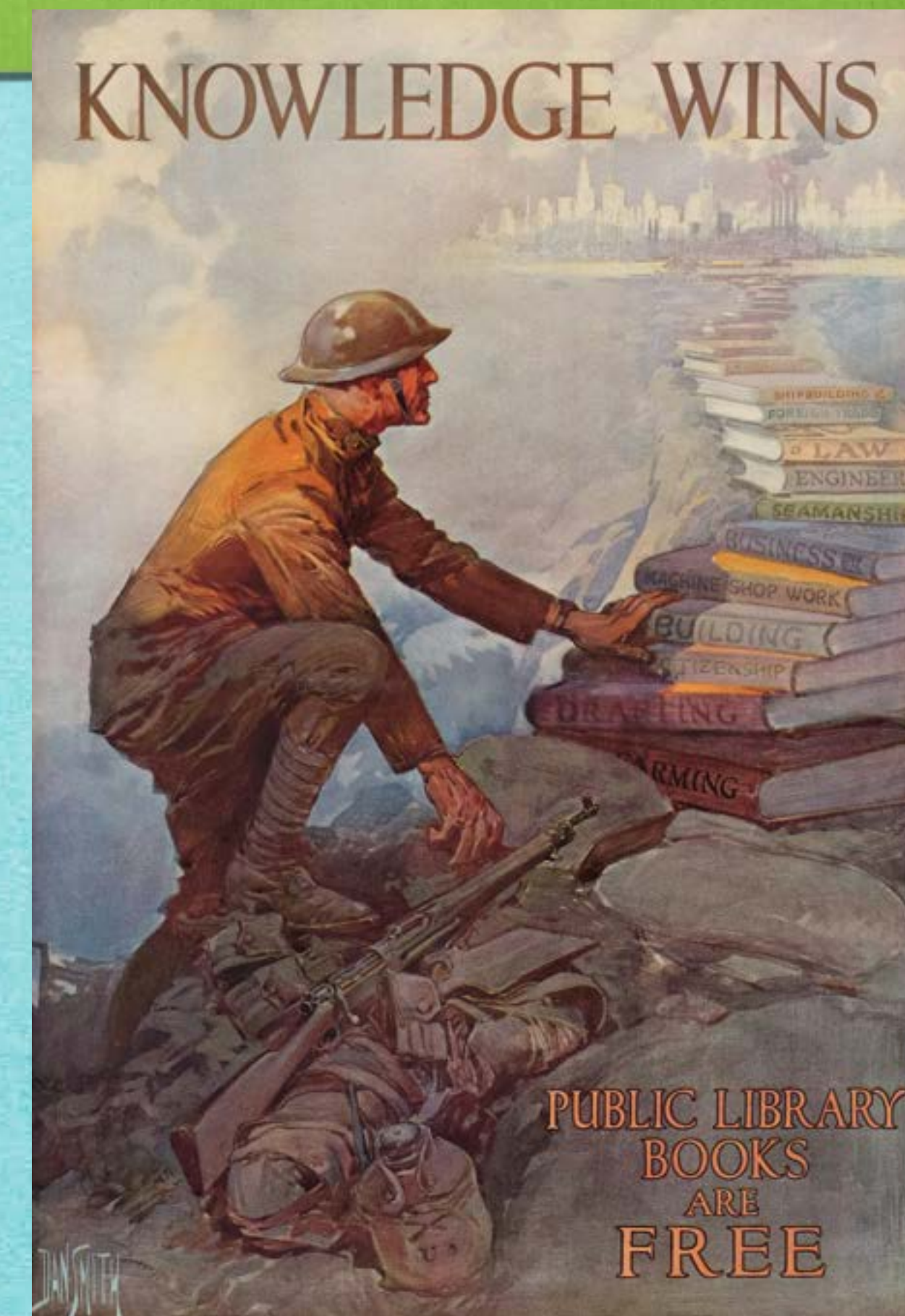
Title: Knowledge wins. Public library books are free
Artist: Smith, Dan, 1865-1934 Sponsor: American
Library Association Date: [ca. 1918] https://
www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/
commonwealth:ft848v27f

Staff Involvement and Training

Training

- Partner with neighboring counties that have established bookmobile programs (Alameda county and Santa Clara county) to take turns training select instructors in Contra Costa library district

- Designed by other instructors from neighboring counties as well as Contra Costa county library leadership

Trainees

▷ Information will be shared with staff through organization wide email updates and by leadership/management during regular meetings similarly to other library project updates.

▷ The people selected to train for the new bookmobile will consist of staff of the current Rolling Reader van and any other interested current library staff.

▷ Training will be provided and completed during normal workdays with coverage coordinated by the relevant managers and library leadership.

Evaluations
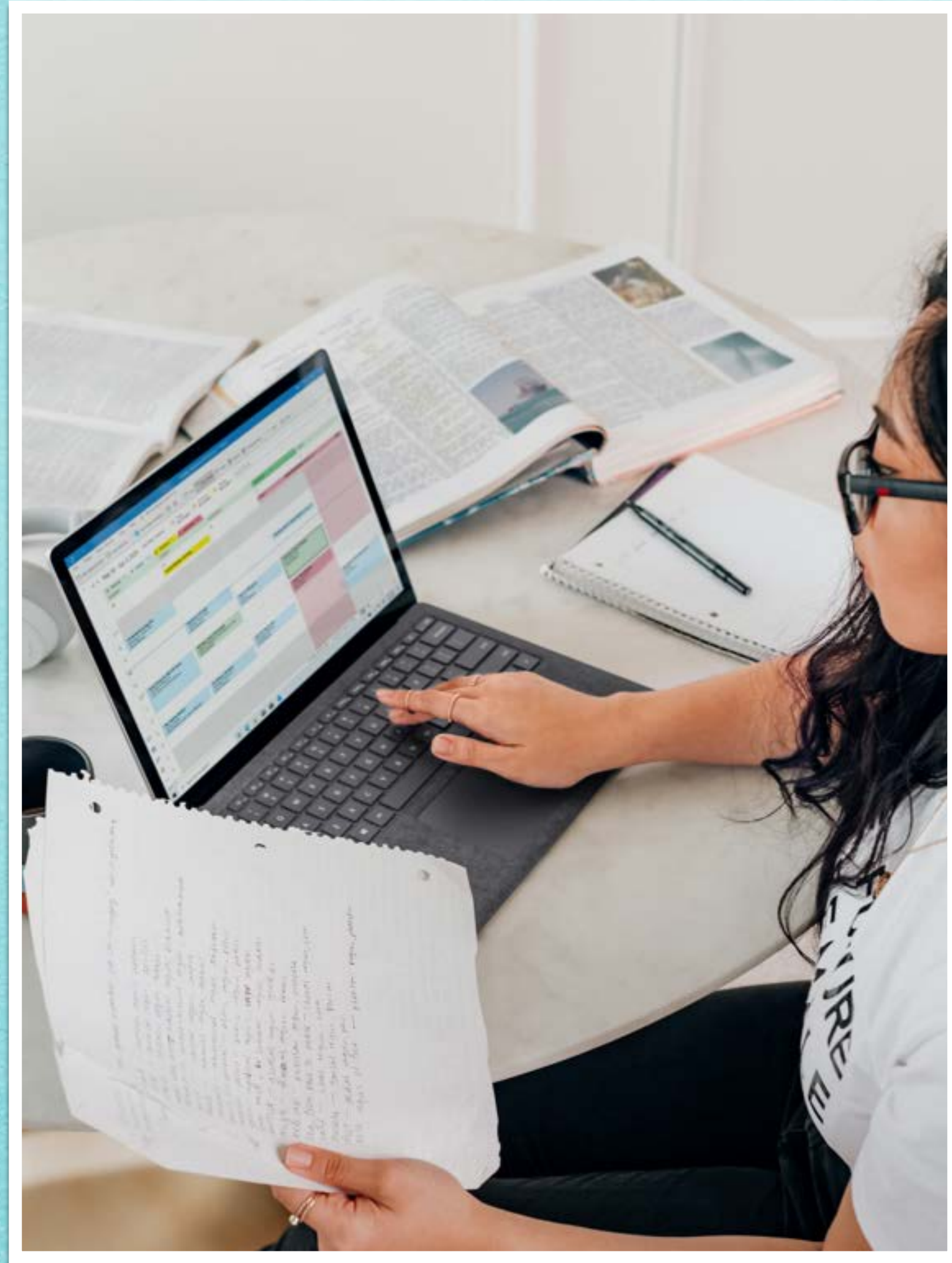
Christiann Koepke via Unsplash, 2020

Performance Variables

▷ Number of people visiting and using the bookmobile at each visit or event

▷ Numbers of materials checked out from bookmobile in a given month

▷ Feedback from library community via e-surveys and physical surveys at the bookmobile, including questions such as:

  ▷ "What area or bookmobile stop do you frequent most often?"

  ▷ "What kinds of materials do you want to be available on bookmobiles?"

  ▷ "What do you want to experience more of from the bookmobile?"

  ▷ "What would you like to see change about the bookmobile going forward?"

Evaluation Results

▷ As discussed in the timeline, evaluations/assessments will be held yearly for the first two year trial period, and they will be held every five years going forward from the trials.

  ▷ Smaller check-ins will still be held yearly to review staff and patron suggestions, critiques, and feedback, but quantitative data will be statistically analyzed every five years.

▷ The data collected through these processes will be reviewed by the supervising staff of the bookmobile program, and they will consult with appropriate parties (billing and finance department, human resources, etc.) as needed prior to implementing changes to the program.

Expansions and the Future

- *Use info from evaluations*
- *Advocate for more funding*
  - *Another bookmobile, more books, further outreach, more frequent outreach*
- *Share ideas with other local libraries*

Sven Brandsma via Unsplash, 2019

All Kids Deserve Libraries!

Catherine Hammond via Unsplash, 2020

Gabriel Tovar via Unsplash, 2021

Vitaly Gariev via Unsplash, 2024

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