Everyone’s Welcome: Inclusive Library Programming
A workshop presented by
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NYLA Youth Services Section
April 4, 2014

1) Introduction to programming for special needs

   Special needs programming is a recent development in library service

   Why we do the programs:
   Ensuring that families with special needs members know they are welcome at the library.
   Fostering a sense of community.
   Providing an opportunity for parent-to-parent support
   Providing an opportunity for siblings of special needs children to meet
   Socializing for all participants.
   Having fun! Playing! Sharing literature, music, games...

2) Inclusive or exclusive?
   There are valid reasons for inclusive programs and valid reasons for separate programming.
   How to decide based on your library, your community, your staff, etc.

3) Goals
   Who is the program for?
   Special needs kids?
   Siblings?
   Parents?
   Other caregivers?
   What ages do you want to serve? (Why/why not limit?)

   What special needs might you encounter?
   Developmental delays
   Hearing impairment
   Vision impairment
   Mobility issues
ADHD
ASD
Others???

A few things to bear in mind:
Special needs kids may or may not appear typical in appearance.
About 1 in 6 children in the US have a developmental disability according to CDC - range from mild to severe.
Libraries are a haven for patrons (and staff !) with ASD.

4) Getting Started-- Outreach
Contact schools, daycare centers, special needs schools and programs, pediatricians, psychologists, birth-to-5 providers, special needs providers, town recreation department, Special Ed PTO/PTAs.
Talk to play therapists, behavior therapists, speech therapists, occupational therapists who may meet with children at your library.
Talk to parents of special needs kids. Sometimes these families visit the library at “off” times when the library is quiet and they feel that their children are not disturbing other patrons.
It may take time to build your program.

5) Educate staff
Make sure they’re aware that special needs kids do not always look “special”
Kids with special needs are not contagious!
Vocalizations may occur.
Some special needs kids are non-verbal or have other communication issues
Kids are usually not deliberately misbehaving - they may be overwhelmed or their actions may be a manifestation of their disability
If a disruption is occurring it can be helpful to ask, “Is there something I can do to help you?” (Ask adult with child.)
It may be easier to redirect or move the other children (or adult patron) rather than the overwhelmed child.

6) Try to find a sensory neutral area for your programs
Sensory Processing Disorder often occurs with Autism.
Lower/dim lights.
Remove or cover distractions. Use sheets/tablecloths to cover doll houses, puzzle storage, art carts, etc.
Limit interruptions.
Use flexible seating, if possible - bean bag chairs, carpet squares, wash cloth or towel sit-upons to mark personal space.
Dimming lights, removing distractions, and using a low soothing voice help calm reactive individuals.
Providing fidgets, weighted toys or similar devices can help children stay focused.
Strollers can be helpful for families:
Children may be bolters.
Families may be using strollers instead of wheelchairs for late walkers.
Families may have more than one child with special needs.

7) Program Structure
Provide a visual schedule, so everyone knows what to expect (but expect the unexpected!):
These help with transitions
Many kids use them at home and at school

Examples on Pinterest--
You can easily make a low cost version

A flap visual schedule - close flap as activity is completed
http://lessonpix.com/articles/9/33/Visual+Schedules
Magnetic version
http://www.autismschedules.com/

Make program about 30 minutes long.

Allow time after formal part of program for play/socialization - 15 minutes or more. This can be a good time for parents to socialize/share

Alternate activities and media- books, songs, fingerplays, whole-body activities, iPad, big book, lift-the-flap books, puppets, flannel-board—this can help children to retain focus or refocus

Keep some of the activities consistent from session to session

Have handouts available for some of the songs for parents to bring home

Some activities that have worked well for us—

Sensory tubs or stations:
(Inexpensive tubs are available at many stores.
Fill part way with pasta, rice, beans, modeling clay, shaving crème, flax seed, oatmeal, etc
Make it seasonal - small plastic frogs for Spring, Lego people if doing Legos, butterflies for Summer, rubber duckies, small cars and trucks magnets, I spy, small kitchen tools, doll house items, small goody bag items from Michaels, etc
Lots of ideas on Pinterest)

scarf play
thera-bands
modeling clay
shaving cream fingerpainting
**fidgets**

**adaptive toys**

**jigsaw puzzles** (dump all pieces on the floor, give each child a frame & let them sort to solve)

**textured puzzles** (for sensory input)

**yoga**

**Simon Says**

Bubbles and other oral motor play, such as blowing scarves, pom-poms

“sticky, sticky bubblegum”

“human bowling”

**balloon-bopping**

**apps**

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8) **Evolution of program**

Celebrate the small success as they happen.

Be flexible with expectations, goals, objectives on a given day *BUT* be clear about long-term goals. Remember the reasons you decided to do the program to begin with.

Be realistic:

Sometimes there are meltdowns—and sometimes there is a good reason for the meltdown. The cause may be sensory over-stimulation.

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“If you can do a program for two-year-olds, you can do a program for anyone!!”