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Maine Community Foundation, area childcare centers and NMCC celebrate opening of children's section in College library made possible through MaineCF grant

Aroostook County - Children and employees from two area childcare centers, advisors of the Maine Community Foundation's Aroostook County Committee, and officials with Northern Maine Community College came together recently for an open house and inaugural story time in the new children's section of the NMCC library.

The celebration marked the official opening of a recently completed area of the library to house the College's growing collection of children's literature. The furnishings and shelving for the section were purchased through a \$1,045 award to NMCC through MaineCF's Aroostook County Fund.

"We are most grateful to the Maine Community Foundation and the Aroostook Fund for their support of this project. The newly designated space emphasizes our commitment to serve all library users," said Peggy O'Kane, NMCC assistant dean of learning resources and author of the grant proposal to the Maine Community Foundation.

Participating in the official opening were several advisors of MaineCF's Aroostook Committee, including Richard Engels of Presque Isle, who chairs the County group and Pam Scheppele of Caribou, who serves as the regional coordinator.

"The committee's recommendation to provide funding for the new children's section of the Library is directly in line with the overarching goal of the Aroostook Fund, which was established in 1986 by Aroostook businesses and individuals to ensure that the County would have the local charitable resources to address community issues. This project will reach across the spectrum by benefiting both the youth of the region and their adult caregivers," said Scheppele.

Since 2001 the NMCC library, through donations, regular book purchases and grant opportunities, has grown its collection of children's picture books and children's literature from non-existent to nearly 300 titles. The dedicated section, complete with counter height and wall hanging shelves specifically designed to hold larger picture books, now houses these publications. Previously the books had been shelved alongside the library's general stacks which are not designed to hold picture books.

The NMCC collection is unique in that O'Kane has purposely purchased selections that are either classics, such as Newberry or Caldecott prize winners, or bibliotherapy books. Bibliotherapy or issue books are designed to be used by parents or other caregivers with children who are experiencing stress. These issues include divorce, bullying, nontraditional families, death and/or disease.

"Given the unique emphasis of our collection development policy, our titles are circulated to local daycare providers who may have children in their care who are confronting these issues," said O'Kane. "Providing an appropriate browsing space for the collection will encourage local day care providers to become even more familiar with the resources available."

The need for children's literature and a special section to house the material at NMCC was first identified in 2000, when the College expanded its offerings to include an associate degree program in early childhood education.

"What a marvelous opportunity for the ECE students! The availability of high quality children's literature in a child-friendly and literacy-centered environment is exactly what the students are learning to create – what a great model and resource for our students. The community will have the benefit of the facility and materials and our students will have the opportunity to work with the children and materials as an embedded component of the program," said Heidi Broad-Smith, NMCC early childhood education instructor.

Aside from the benefit to NMCC students in the ECE program and local childcare facilities, the collection is also heavily used by parents and grandparents in the NMCC community who have young children. The student body is comprised of a significant number of non-traditional students, an estimated 26 percent of whom have children.

"It is quite common for students to bring their children with them to the library. Providing a specific shelving area for these books will serve these visiting children especially well," said O'Kane.

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Northern Maine Community College early childhood education student Suqi Yu (left) of Presque Isle and instructor Heidi Broad-Smith (center) are assisted by a child from Little Feathers headstart and one from ACAP childcare in cutting the ribbon for the official opening of the new children's section of the NMCC library at a recent ceremony. Looking on are Peggy O'Kane (back, left) NMCC assistant dean of learning resources and Richard Engels (right) chair of the Maine Community Foundation Aroostook County Committee.



Early childhood education students Melinda Clark of Caribou and Molly Burton of Presque Isle (seated on the floor, from left) read to some of the children from Presque Isle's ACAP daycare center, with ACAP employee and NM alum Leslie Levesque looking on. Nearly 40 children from ACAP childcare and Little Feathers headstart were divided into small groups throughout the library so that ECE students could read to them as part of the grand opening activities of the children's section of the NMCC library.