

## ON MY MIND

TOPICAL COMMENTARY ON ISSUES OF INTEREST  
TO THE PUBLIC LIBRARY WORLD

# Bringing the Library to the People . . . On a BookBike

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Valerie is the Youth Services Librarian of Hoboken (NJ) Public Library.  
 Valerie is currently reading *A Court of Wings and Ruin* by Sarah J. Maas.



While often used in rural areas, mobile libraries are also useful in urban communities where, for whatever reason, getting to the library can be difficult. This is especially true for patrons under the age of 18 who don't have the ability to venture outside their neighborhoods alone. A too-distant branch is a challenge for patrons of any age.

Hoboken, New Jersey, has a population of more than 60,000 despite being but one square mile in size. While one might think such a densely populated city would not require a mobile library, the opposite is true. In such a small but concentrated area, where nearly everything is but a few blocks away, many residents aren't always able to

leave their neighborhood to visit the library that is literally in the center of the city. (As with other libraries in dense urban areas, parking is not an option.) The challenge faced by the Hoboken Library was that if people don't come to the library, then the library must go to them. The Hoboken Library addressed this challenge with its own version of a mobile library: The BookBike.

The BookBike was introduced in summer 2019. The intent was to create a mobile library where customers could borrow and return books, sign up for library cards, and use free Wi-Fi; it was intended to also serve as an eye-catching rolling promotion for the library and its products and services. Since its launch,

the BookBike has become central to the library's outdoor programming and has enabled the library to introduce services to both new and existing patrons throughout the city.

One particularly effective use of the BookBike is the partnership between the library's Youth Services and Community Engagement departments wherein library staff members hold Story Times for children. This has proved so successful that the service has extended to community events, schools, and local summer camps. As the BookBike has a distinct appearance not unlike an ice cream truck, lately the teams have taken to giving out ice pops.

Many children aren't able to dictate their own schedules to



Our BookBike full of books for a cloudy Story Time at Hoboken's Pier A Park—a half mile walk from the Hoboken Library's Main Branch.



The author helping a young patron at the BookBike.

make time for visits to the library. In other circumstances, some might not be allowed to travel through the city on their own in order to come to the library. Staff witnessed this when a local summer camp came to visit the library and showed the kids' desire for library cards and books.

By coordinating with Community Lifestyles Camp—a free or subsidized summer camp for kids and families living in Hoboken—the Youth Services team was able to arrange for the BookBike to visit the camp. This provided a great opportunity for kids to sign up for cards since they typically visit the library without their parents or guardians. It also provided an even better chance to make the library a part of their weekly

schedules by giving the kids an opportunity to browse the stacks, place requests, and return books.

Since instituting BookBike visits, there has been a dramatic increase in attendance at youth programs, both in the community and at the library's three branches. The mobile library has been an effective way to reach kids and teens who otherwise cannot come to the library. This past summer, HPL's BookBike was able to serve nearly 1,500 patrons, 77 of whom became new card holders.

Hoboken's success can be applied to other urban areas. A mobile library is a fun and engaging way to make an impact within the local community and attract new patrons along the way!

## About the Hoboken Public Library

Founded in 1890, the library is a cultural and educational centerpiece of the City of Hoboken, New Jersey. Its mission is to connect people with each other, ideas, and opportunities, and to support lifelong learning, personal growth, and community development. Full details on the library, its programs, services, and collections—including a renowned Local History Collection—are available at [www.HobokenLibrary.org](http://www.HobokenLibrary.org). The Main Library building at 500 Park Avenue is listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

For more information about the BookBike, please contact the author at [valerie.coughlin@hoboken.bccls.org](mailto:valerie.coughlin@hoboken.bccls.org), or visit [HobokenLibrary.org/bookbike](http://HobokenLibrary.org/bookbike). [PL](#)