

One step closer to preschool literacy

Bisbee council approves funds for program outreach coordinator

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BISBEE — The City of Bisbee accepted a \$7,500 donation from the Friends of the Copper Queen Library and the Bisbee Foundation during a city council meeting on Jan 16. The donation will help fund a temporary outreach position for a proposed childhood literacy program in the Bisbee area. The move is one of the first steps the city has taken to help make the program come to fruition, which will be operated by the library.

Council members voted unanimously Tuesday night to accept the donation, which will fund a temporary outreach coordinator to assess the city's need for early-childhood literacy programs. The position calls for a six-month evaluation of Bisbee families and children to judge how the future preschool literacy program should run.

"It's an opportunity, in these first six months, to make contact with parents of preschool kids, assess the needs, to develop relationships with parents and promoting the reading of children from prebirth and on in hopes of preparing them for kindergarten," said Douglas Dunn, Bisbee council member and president of the Bisbee Foundation.

The Copper Queen Library plans to implement a preschool literacy program in the San Jose area of Bisbee, said Alison Williams, assistant program coordinator at the library. The program will focus on early-childhood learning for kids ages 0 to 5 years old to help prepare them for reading in kindergarten.

Williams said studies show that students who are well prepared for reading when they enter kindergarten are more likely to graduate from high school and have better education outcomes, like high grades, throughout their education. That's why the library, with help from the Bisbee Foundation and Friends of the Copper Queen Library, is moving forward with a preschool literacy program. This new plan could potentially have a positive impact on all the locals schools in the future.

"Children are not kindergarten ready, in terms of literacy. Our goal is to provide learning opportunities before they reach kindergarten," Williams said. "It's different from preschool because it's specifically targeting literacy."

Right now, the plan is in the first of three phases. The second phase calls for the library to train and support community volunteers to get involved in the literacy program. The third and final phase of the plan calls for full implementation of the program in schools and mobile locations that can reach families at local parks, food banks and other community centers.

The overall goal, Dunn said, is to increase literacy in Bisbee's third-grade students. Only 30 percent of Bisbee third-graders passed the AzMERIT reading exam in 2017, Dunn wrote in a letter to the rest of city council. The test is a mandatory exam administered to third-graders in the state to assess proficiency in English language arts and math, according to Expect More Arizona.

Though third-graders in Bisbee saw a boost compared to 2016 scores, Dunn's letter stated there's more than enough room to improve student reading scores.

"The Bisbee school has performed under other schools and certainly the long-term objective is to improve scores," he said. "The more immediate (goal) is that kids show up to kindergarten more prepared."