

Family Place Space

Library staff is proposing the creation of a Family Place Space. The space will convert the existing meeting room into a space which is dedicated to:

- encouraging literacy through play for children and their families (with resources that emphasize the enhancement of skills such as motor, cognitive, writing, and communication and the use of imagination),
- serving as a meeting place for community families,
- increasing the ability of the existing children's area to better serve the community, and
- enhancing the library's relevance by incorporating national and contemporary library service trends.

In the following paragraphs, I will outline how the concept of the Family Place Space relates to the challenges associated with the children's room, how it reflects the Eagle Public Library Strategic Plan, the vision for the Family Place Space, and how it will benefit the library, the city and the community.

Challenges Addressed by the Family Place Space

Space in the children's area is a constant challenge. The current space, which is roughly 1,800 square feet, houses the most well utilized collection of the library. The number of items borrowed from the children's collection by far surpasses either that of the teen or adult collections (in Fiscal Year 2021-2022, the total number of items borrowed from the children's collection was 270,000; from the teen collection the total number of items borrowed was 18,000; and from the adult collection, the total number of items borrowed was 190,000). The turnover rate (the number of times an item is borrowed in a given period) for the children's collection is over 8 times per year. That's a very high turnover rate and justifies describing the children's room as busy and well utilized.

In recent months, the Eagle Public Library has worked toward the completion of certification to be recognized as a Family Place Library. The work toward the certification was undertaken with the full endorsement of the Library Board of Trustees. Due to the pandemic, the certification process was delayed several years, but the library is now in the final stages of the certification process.

One aspect of a Family Place Library is the emphasis on early childhood literacy through play. As a library staff and through our collective experience, we know that play is popular at the Eagle Public Library. Prior to the pandemic, the children's area was frequented by children who routinely utilized the various toys and imaginative play resources that were available. During the pandemic, as parents clamored for resources to stop the learning loss they feared their children were experiencing, toys and the imaginative play resources left the public floor to make space for resources such as the popular audiobook players and learning



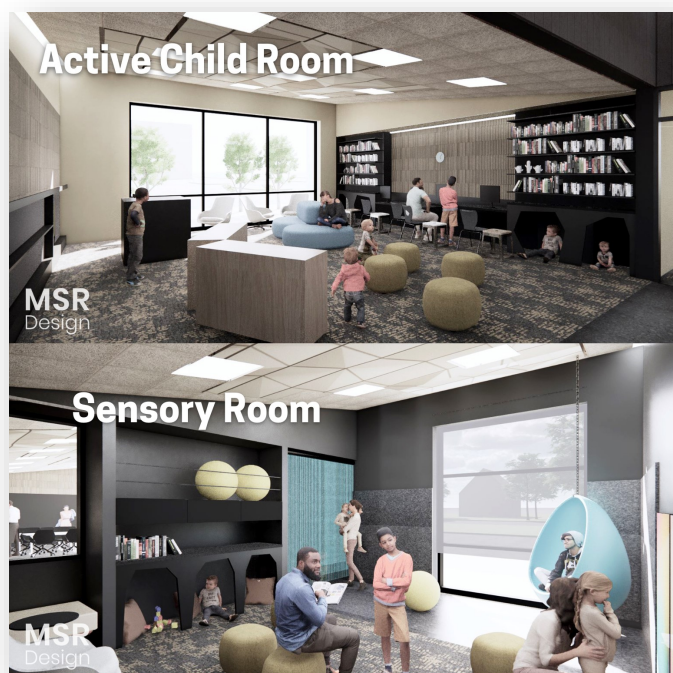
tablets. Recently, toys were re-introduced to the public floor, but the space allocated to the popular and well-used toy collection is small. While the reintroduction of toys to the public floor is very positive, it does present an on-going challenge for staff as they try to work around the toys and the users who are on the floor, as well as to other library guests who must step-over other users to get to their sought-after library resource.

Another aspect of the use of the children's room, and one that from a staff perspective is very satisfying, is the number of people who utilize the room as a form of destination. Residents frequently bring out-of-town guests to the library to show off the resources and space, and to brag about their library. Users also bring their local friends to the library and their friends are frequently very impressed and begin to routinely use the Eagle Public Library. Residents will deliberately arrange with friends to meet at the library, where they and their children will spend significant time in the children's room. Even better, some families become friends as a result of meeting while in the children's room. The parents will spend time visiting while the children will play with toys or build at the genius table (the workstation featuring items such as magnetic tiles, building blocks, Lincoln logs, or other STEM based building resources). The Library went for years of no one utilizing the room in such a manner, and to see the use of the room grow as it has is wonderful.

The Children's Room is a busy room used by many people. An unintended result of the activity in the room is an increase in noise and the subsequent (but not frequent) complaints from adults utilizing the other part of the building. There's an expectation on the part of the complaining adults that libraries are supposed to be quiet (though it's highly likely that the quiet library they remember from their childhood wasn't nearly as quiet as they recall). Libraries that are relevant today have completely dismissed with no-talking library stereotypes. Any library that remains relevant (busy) is a welcoming place, not a place of shushing.

When the room is filled with users looking for reading materials (very positive), with children playing with toys or at the genius table (very positive), and with the library users who wish to meet friends and families in the children's area (again, very positive), the activity of people in the room and the unintentional increase in noise can create difficulty for age-appropriate users who either wish to utilize the space to read, study, or work with a tutor. All of these activities are valid uses of the space; but it's a very active, shared small space and the surrounding activity presents a challenge for those who wish (or need) to study.

An additional challenge that the Eagle Public Library currently faces is the opening of the Meridian Library District's 15,000- square-foot Orchard Park Branch Library, scheduled to open in within the next few weeks. When the branch opens, I anticipate seeing significant declines in library usage as the Meridian branch is likely to attract users not just from Meridian but also from City of Eagle neighborhoods along Chinden, many of the City of Eagle neighborhoods west of Ballantyne, and current Eagle Public Library users from Star. Upon opening, the Orchard Park Branch Library will include two rooms that are likely to be very attractive to families: an Active Child Room and a Sensory Room (see photos, right). While the photos are architectural renderings and are designed to sell a project, I'm confident that the rooms will be very attractive and popular. The rooms are likely to serve the same community gathering/play functions that the Eagle Public Library's children's room currently serves.



Family Place Space in Relation to the Eagle Public Library Strategic Plan

Creating the Family Place Space reflects four of the five service responses as outlined in the current Strategic Plan.

- **Create Young Readers (Early Literacy)**

Play, in all its forms is crucial for developing children's early literacy skills as it:

- is the best way for children to learn language, literacy, social and other skills, all while nurturing creativity;
- helps children think symbolically, ultimately leading to an understanding that written words stand for real objects and experiences;
- helps develop thinking and oral language skills as children put their thoughts into words;
- helps develop narrative skills through dramatic play;
- can help children act out real situations, work through worries and fears, and solve problems using their imagination; and
- builds self-confidence and imparts a sense of accomplishment in children.

For younger children, the utilization of the Family Place Space will focus on various aspects of play. For elementary school-aged children, the utilization of the Family Place Space will emphasize creative play and STEAM skill development. For adults, the Family Place Space has the opportunity to encourage play with their children and to connect with friends (or make new friends) in a relaxed atmosphere.

- **Stimulate Imagination (Reading, Viewing and Listening for Pleasure)**

In relation to the Family Place Space, some of its users may be too young to read on their own. But through play, they're able to stimulate their imagination. While all play is beneficial, pretend play (which is part of the Family Place Space):

- encourages development of imagination and creativity;
- supports social and emotional development;
- improves language and communication;
- develops thinking, learning, and problem-solving abilities; and
- enhances physical development.

- **Satisfy Curiosity (Life-Long Learning)**

Elementary school-aged children who utilize the Family Place Space will be able to enhance their life-long learning through the resources available at the multiple genius tables. Based on the popular genius table found in the library's children's area, the genius tables will feature resources such as magnetic tiles, Kapla blocks, circuitry, puzzles, and more.

- **Visit a Comfortable Place (Physical and Virtual Spaces)**

The space currently available for play and gathering in the children's area is very limited. Creation of the Family Place Space will:

- provide additional play space for children;
- provide increased space for parents and caregivers;
- provide increased space for families who wish to utilize the space to meet other families;
- reduce noise emanating from the children's area (which can be a constant source of irritation to other library users); and
- increase opportunity for younger library users to utilize the children's area for study and tutoring.

Family Place Space Vision

Creating the Family Place Space involves converting the library's Meeting Room from a public meeting space into an area that will encourage learning through play for children, as well as a place for their parents for caregivers to either interact with their children in a public setting or to meet (or make) friends. The space will have a variety of resources similar to the toys currently found in the children's area, including resources (toys and furnishings) focusing on imaginative play, motor skill development, reading and writing skills, and STEAM skills. There will be age appropriate furniture for children and age-appropriate furniture for their accompanying adults and caregivers. For older elementary school-aged children, resources will focus on duplication of the "genius" table found in the children's area which emphasizes STEAM skills and abilities as well as problem solving.

During the recent strategic plan survey, comments from library users included a desire to utilize the library as a place for families to meet, to have toys for children, and for space for users to simply be. As noted above, space in the library is at a premium and the creation of the Family Place Space would help fulfill the expressed user wishes. When I speak with families about how they utilize the children's area, I might ask if they're at the library with friends. So often they are with friends and when they learn about the idea of the Family Place Space they're very supportive.

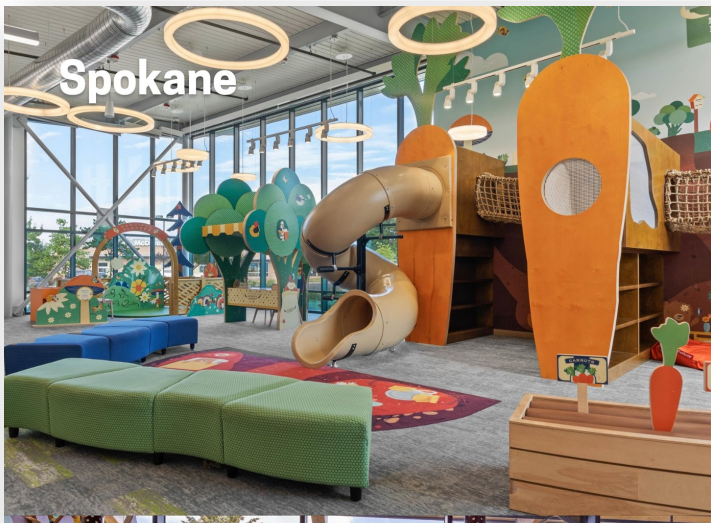
What we'll work toward is moving all picture books, beginning readers, and read-along books to the Family Place Space. Most books will be placed along the walls, leaving the floor generally open for the play literacy and seating. This benefits the library and the guests by creating an age division between the two areas, where the focus on reading materials in the Family Place Space is for the preschool through about first grade; higher elementary school age materials will remain in the children's room. The placement of the picture books in the Family Place Space frees up considerable space in the children's room and will allow additional shelving for the series books, children's genre fiction (chapter books) and children's non-fiction. To accomplish this, we'll need additional shelving components for both rooms. Depending on the shelving cost, we may be able to complete the project this year, or it may need to be extended into next. It will also allow for more age appropriate seating and activities in the children's room for elementary school age children. As a staff, we believe that the sooner we can split the collection and create the Family Place Space, the better.

The creation of such a space would not be unique to the Eagle Public Library. As mentioned above, locally, the Meridian Library District's Orchard Park Branch Library will feature a play room for children. At the Fort Vancouver Regional Library's main library (see photo, below, right), a large portion of the children's area is devoted to exploratory activities (space to be active, to climb, to discover, and more). At the Spokane Public Library (see photo, top left of following page), learning through play is an important component of library service. Other libraries such as the Cecil County Library in Maryland (see photo, bottom left of following page) created what they call the "Our Town Literacy Center", while the Barrington Public Library in Illinois (see photo, bottom right of following page) created a play area very much focused on STEAM play. Looking at the photographs, it's probably obvious that the areas devoted to learning through play at these libraries far exceed what we're planning and able to do at the Eagle Public Library. However, we are able to create a comfortable play space on a much smaller (and less expensive scale) and that library staff believe will be well-used. At the Eagle Public Library we would combine toys, STEAM resources and comfortable seating to achieve the same effect. For the recent Staff Development Day, as staff setup the Family Place demonstration area, there was much interest in the room from library guests who walked past. By no means did the room approach the level of the environments in the pictures, but it was a very inviting setup.

The library already has many of the resources that would be utilized in the space. The largest immediate expense is adult seating (probably about \$8,000), shelving (to be determined), and other fixtures (about \$3,000). Funding for these initial expenses would come from unexpended library funds. In addition to future library budgets, possible future funding assistance may come from grants or the Eagle Public Library Foundation.

Prior to the collection being split, I anticipate that the space would be open Monday through Saturday from 10:00am until one hour prior to closing, and on Sunday during all open hours. Once split, the Family Place Space would be open regular library hours. For safety reasons,





Spokane

the room would be continuously staffed by library staff members and staff at all levels would be used to staff the room. During evenings and weekends, the room will primarily be staffed by Programming Assistants. The Family Place Staff will also have a catalog and checkout station for families to search, request, and borrow materials. Posted in the room will be the usage guidelines, emphasizing that in accordance with the Board of Trustees approved library policy, unattended children under the age of seven (7) are not allowed and that the room and the staff do not constitute a baby-sitting service, nor is neither the Library nor the City responsible for unattended children.



Spokane

When I spoke to Mayor Pierce, he was in agreement with the creation of the Family Place Space and the splitting of the current children's collection between the two rooms. The Mayor cited the availability of the meeting space at City Hall for groups who wish to use City meeting space. Once the room is converted to the Family Place Space, the library staff can continue to conduct programs at City Hall, on the library's public floor, and outside the library. Library users (including library support groups such as the Friends of the Eagle Public Library and the Eagle Public Library Foundation) wishing to reserve the room for their functions will be directed to use the Community Hall at Eagle City Hall. The City of Eagle policies regarding the use the meeting spaces at City Hall would apply.



Cecil County, Maryland

Library staff is excited about this opportunity to more effectively utilize the building's space to better serve the community. In addition to the Mayor and library staff supporting this idea, senior City of Eagle staff do as well.



Cecil County, Maryland



Barrington, Illinois

Family Place Space Benefits to the Library, the City, and the Community

There are benefits to creating the Family Place Space to the library, the city, and community.

Benefits to the Eagle Public Library:

- Creating the Family Place Space is a response to the wishes of library guests and is inline with four (4) of the Board of Trustees approved service responses.
 - It focuses on early literacy through play.
 - The emphasis on play to stimulate imagination encourages creativity, supports social and emotional development, improves language and communication, and develops thinking, learning and problem-solving abilities, and enhances physical development.
 - For older children, the space encourages life-long learning through STEAM activities.
 - The space provides adults with a space to either interact with their children in an environment intended for educational play, to meet friends, or to make new friends.
- The Family Place Space may reduce the congestion in the Children's Room. The Family Place Space moves a great deal of activity that currently occurs in a very small space into a much larger area, providing more space for the users of the current resources found in the Children's Room, and more space for those wishing to more thoroughly utilize the print collection.
- The Family Place Space may reduce the number of noise complaints from users of the adult area who may believe that the noise emanating from the children's area is the antithesis of proper library etiquette.
- The Family Place Space will create an interactive learning space in keeping with national library service trends.
- The Family Place Space will allow the Eagle Public Library to better serve residents with existing resources. With no building expansion in the foreseeable future, the creation of the Family Place Space will provide an opportunity to enhance service and maintain relevance while faced with the expansion of neighboring libraries.

Benefits to the City of Eagle:

- The creation of the Family Place Space will encourage the public to consider utilizing the numerous meeting spaces at the expanded City Hall.
- The Family Place Space responds to the expressed desires of the library users and potentially displays to the citizens of the City of Eagle that their local government is responsive to their comments.

Benefits to the residents of the City of Eagle:

- The Family Place Space increases the opportunity for all children of the City of Eagle to benefit from the developmental and educational opportunities provided through childhood play.
- The Family Place Space provides a place for parents and children to play together. Resources available in the Family Place Space may introduce a family to learning opportunities with which they may not be familiar, thus providing a new early literacy experience for their child.
- The Family Place Space provides a space for parents and caregivers to meet friends and other families at the Library, while simultaneously providing their children the opportunity to learn through play.

Conclusion

It may be difficult to imagine what the library's Family Place Space will look like. Certainly not like the libraries featured. But it will provide many opportunities for learning through play.

As we continue to work through Family Place, as we watch how library users interact with the current children's space, how they interact with toys, how families and friends have positive interactions with one another in the library, and as we think about Meridian's Orchard Park branch library's possible impact on the Eagle Public Library, the opportunity to create an age appropriate, family-based, interactive and fun learning opportunities for the community is a very productive use of library resources and one with benefits to the Eagle Public Library, the City of Eagle, and the community.

Future users of the Eagle Public Library's Family Place Space

