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Library to offer health literacy education thanks to countywide grant

Oklahoma Department of Libraries kicked off Health Literacy Month by announcing a grant award of \$4,000 to the Bartlesville Public Library and BPL Literacy Services. Funds made possible by the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services will allow the BPL program to promote health and wellness information, programs and resources to the community.

“America’s Health Rankings,” an annual report by the United Health Foundation, ranks Oklahoma near the bottom of the list, according to Leslie Gelders, director of ODL’s Literacy Resource Office.

“We rank 45th out of the 50 states,” Gelders said. “Among health conditions considered, Oklahoma received alarming scores in such areas as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular deaths, high cholesterol, annual dental visits, availability of primary care physicians and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables.

“The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that nearly nine out of 10 Americans have problems reading and using consumer health information. If the majority of Americans have problems understanding health information, imagine the obstacles faced by people with low reading skills or a limited understanding of English.”

The local grant will address several health and wellness issues. In October the Bartlesville Public Library will kick off a free to the public Refit Class with instructor Ashley Burson. This class will run Wednesday evenings for six weeks beginning on Wednesday, Oct. 5, at 5:30 p.m. in the upstairs meeting room A. (The class will run though Nov. 9.) On Thursday, Oct. 6, from noon to 1 p.m. everyone is invited to attend a presentation by Teresa Watson, an infection prevention nurse who will talk about ways to prevent the flu.

“We are excited to collaborate with other organizations in our community to carry out this effort,” said BPL Literacy Services Coordinator Karen Kerr-McGraw.

In addition to Burson and Watson, BPL's partners include local nutritionist Josh Wright, clinical nurse specialist board certified gerontology Cheryl Hart, health educator Renetta Harrison of the Washington County Health Department, clinical psychologist Dr. James Hutchins, the Fort Wayne, Ind., McMillen Center for Health Wellness Services Manager Dawn Lundwall, Oklahoma Cancer Specialists and Research Institute and members City of Bartlesville Health and Wellness Committee.

"Together, we hope to make a difference in the lives of our fellow citizens by encouraging healthier choices and improving access to health information," Kerr-McGraw said.

Along with the many reported health concerns, Kerr-McGraw said there are also concerns when it comes to the ability of many Oklahoma adults to access, read and understand credible health and wellness information.

Studies reveal that an individual's ability to read and understand health information is actually a stronger predictor of a person's health than his age, socioeconomic status, education or ethnicity, she said.

"In order to improve the state's health outcomes, Oklahomans need to be able to access and understand reliable health information," Kerr-McGraw said. "We also need to be able to speak effectively with our medical professionals, follow dosage instructions and use available resources to make informed health decisions for ourselves and our families."

Gelders said health literacy programs and partnerships are a relatively new concept for Oklahoma library and literacy programs.

"The better understanding individuals have about their health choices, the better the outcomes. That's why this project is so important, and that's why the Oklahoma Department of Libraries and the Institute of Museum and Library Services are providing the funding for these grants."

For information on Oklahoma's adult literacy efforts, visit <http://libraries.ok.gov/literacy/>

To learn more about the local effort, contact Kerr-McGraw at literacy@bartlesville.lib.ok.us.