

Autism Speaks Grant Application: Kansas City Public Library Sensory Support Collection

Rachel Kercher and Shelby Thomas

<https://www.grantinterface.com/Form/Preview/QuestionList?urlKey=autismspeaksfs&form=357315>

Project Name*

What is the name of your project? Kansas City Public Library Sensory Support Collection

Tax Exempt Status*

Does your organization have 501c3 tax exempt status? Yes

State*

In which state will your program take place? Missouri

City*

In which city/cities will your program take place? Kansas City

Website*

What is your organization's website? <https://www.kclibrary.org/>

Applicant(s) name and title:

Rachel Kercher, Children's Librarian; Shelby Thomas, Librarian

Category*

Which category does your proposal fall into? Please select one. Please note, each organization can submit one application per category (up to nine), but only ONE will be funded.

Supportive Technology/Sensory Equipment

Participant Ages*

Which age group/s of people with autism will ultimately benefit from your program? For example, if you are training parents, please choose the age group/s of their children with autism that will benefit. Please select all that apply.

0-2 (Early Intervention), 3-5 (preschool), 6-15 (school age)

Target Audience*

Which population/s will your program serve? Select all that apply.

Individuals who need limited support, Individuals who need moderate support, family members, teachers, other (librarians)

Numbers Served*

What is the expected number of people to be served through the grant, if funded?

With this new collection, we expect to serve 1000 people on a monthly basis, both children and their families. This number includes both in-house programs and outreach programs. We are estimating 100 people per branch per month and slightly under that for our outreach programs, depending on that department's schedule.

Organization*

Provide a brief history of your organization, its mission, and a description of current activities.

The Kansas City Public Library (KCPL) consists of 10 branches, including the Central Library. We have been serving the residents of Kansas City, MO in various buildings and locations since

the 1870s (Kansas City Public Library, n.d.). Our mission statement is, “The Kansas City Public Library is a doorway to knowledge for all people in our community” (Kansas City Public Library, 2010). To fulfill this mission, the KCPL hosts a variety of programs for children and families, including several different story times, a healthy food program, book clubs, and STEM programs at eight of our branches (Kansas City Public Library, 2019). We also provide community outreach. Based on a recent community needs assessment, we have recently added a sensory story time at each branch that hosts children’s programs. We are also adding sensory aspects to our other programs, including STEM programs. We want to make our programs and events more accessible to children with ASD and sensory processing issues.

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Please describe where you envision your organization's presence in the local community in the next three years.

A recently completed community assessment survey has shown us that our patrons and members of the community would like to see more accessible programming for children and teens. In the next three years, we plan to add at least two more special needs children’s programs, and update existing programs to improve their accessibility. We also plan to work with members of the teen library staff in order to create programs for teens with disabilities. We are also planning to extend outreach to agencies that serve people and families with disabilities. Our current community partners are helping us to identify potential outreach sites, as well as additional partnership opportunities. Additionally, we are planning to increase our social media presence, with the creation of a Facebook group, and the use of Twitter.

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Abstract*

Please describe the services to be provided in the following format, with 4-5 sentences per answer. Applications that do not answer the questions below will be disqualified.

1. What is the need or problem the program for which you're requesting funding is trying to address?

Based on the results of our community needs assessment, we have discovered that our patrons and their families would like to see an increase in programs that serve autistic patrons, especially sensory programming. In partnership with Autism Works, Inc. and Missouri Family to Family, we have completed several staff training sessions in order to expand our understanding of this population and their needs. Based on the trainings and discussions with our partner organizations, library staff have developed a sensory storytime program. At this time we are lacking autism and sensory appropriate toys, manipulatives and related materials needed to improve library programs and the overall library experience for patrons with ASD.

2. How will you address the need or problem described above?

The planned Sensory Support Collection includes three different aspects. Firstly, funding will be used to create "break boxes." These boxes will contain items such as weighted lap pads, headphones and fidgets to help calm and comfort children with sensory issues who become overwhelmed by the library environment. With these funds we would be able to create one box for each of the eight participating branch locations. Secondly, we will purchase items to supplement and support our sensory story times and help add sensory aspects to existing programs. These materials will be shared between the participating libraries and, if not needed

for programming, will be made available for patrons to check out. Thirdly, developmentally appropriate toys will be added to library play areas for use by children and families visiting the participating libraries. Materials were selected with the assistance of staff from Autism Works, Inc.

3. What will the outcome/s be?

We anticipate that the creation of the Sensory Support Collection will lead to several important outcomes. Firstly, we believe that this collection will improve the quality of our sensory and accessibility programs. Although library staff have received training and advice from our community partners, the additional resources this collection provides will ensure that we offer the best possible services to our community. Secondly, we anticipate an increase in story time attendance and play area usage by families of patrons with ASD and sensory issues. We believe these increases will effectively provide unambiguous justification for the expansion of programming in the future. Thirdly, this collection will help the KCPL create safe, sensory-friendly spaces for special needs families throughout our community, including those Kansas City neighborhoods in which this type of support is currently inadequate or nonexistent.

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Recruitment*

How will the program recruit clients to participate in the program?

This program will be advertised within the different branches of the KCPL, and information will be distributed to our community partners, community organizations including Headstart, local homeschool groups, Kansas City Social Services, and Kansas City school districts. Information

about the program will also be posted on library social media. Many of the early clients for this program are either active library users or are familiar with our current resources.

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Outcomes and Impact*

What do you expect to be the result of your project? Please discuss how you will measure the true impact on the lives of participants, their families, caregivers, peers and support networks.

Creation of the Sensory Support Collection will substantially improve programs and services for patrons with autism and sensory issues and their families. We also expect to see increased usage of the children's areas in the participating Kansas City Public Library branches. In order to gauge the success of this project, we will use a combination of informal and formal data collection.

While library patrons are getting used to the new items and programs, we will use informal observation and conversation to determine the impact and success of this collection. In these early stages, observation of library use will be valuable in helping us identify any developing trends, especially with regard to play area usage and program attendance. Informal conversation between library staff and patrons will also be considered. Patron feedback is important to us and is often taken into consideration when planning programs and purchasing materials.

We are also planning a formal survey of patrons who participate in sensory programming and use materials purchased with funds from this grant. The survey, which will be available both online and in paper format, will be given four months after the collection is established. We

decided against taking the survey immediately following the collection's implementation in order to give patrons and community members ample time to experience the library's new environment and programs and to interact with the materials that we will be providing. We feel this will provide more useful and carefully considered feedback.

Brief surveys will be given to patrons and community members at library programs and outreach events to measure the appropriateness of the activities presented. Generally, library users will also be surveyed in order to determine the value of autism and sensory toys and materials provided for in-library use. Surveys will include questions on developmental appropriateness of the materials and services, frequency of use, pros and cons of the collection, and impact on users. There will also be questions to help us gauge the effectiveness of marketing efforts. These surveys will be brief, and made accessible to patrons of various ages and abilities.

We will also provide a short survey to organizations and professionals who borrow sensory programming materials for use with groups, including homeschoolers, daycares, and youth groups. This survey will include questions to gauge how items were used, developmental appropriateness of the item, their interactions with library staff, and how they learned about the collection.

We anticipate learning about the different ways these items will be used, their appropriateness for the target group, and positive outcomes from the collection. We also hope to learn about ways that the collection could be improved, items that families would like to see the library provide, and about the reach of our marketing campaign.

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Sustainability*

How will you ensure financial sustainability and continued demand and participation in the program after funds from Autism Speaks are spent?

After the initial large purchases are made for our Sensory Support Collection, we believe it will simply be a matter of maintenance. New items will be added when they become available, and worn out materials will be replaced as needed. We hope to secure funds from the Friends of the Kansas City Public Library to make these purchases. We are confident that once this collection has been in use for an extended period and quantitative data provides evidence of its benefits, requesting funds directly from the library budget to be used for sustaining the program will be met without opposition. However, should an additional external source of ancillary funding prove necessary, we are confident materials purchased with funds from this grant will provide adequate support for our programs and services in the short term.

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Replicability*

Please describe your plan to establish best practices and replicate them in your community, state and region. How will your organization grow and thrive as a result of funding?

We intend to establish and follow best practices by working in conjunction with Autism Works, Inc., and Missouri Family to Family. Trainings recommended and provided by these agencies have already enabled Kansas City Public Library staff to improve the service we provide to families with autistic and sensory sensitive children. Additionally, following their expert

recommendations for materials funded by this grant will help us locate and acquire the kind of high quality developmentally appropriate materials these patrons need and deserve.

Furthermore, we intend to help others replicate our programs and collections by presenting information about our programs and how we created them at the Missouri State Library Association annual conference next year. We also plan to publish a short article in our regional library associate magazine. We want other librarians in our state and region to learn more about our successes and the challenges that we have faced while improving library services for special needs patrons.

We have no doubt that the KCPL will grow as a result of this grant opportunity. It will allow us to increase our program offerings and extend their reach throughout the wider community. It will bring more people into our library and very likely introduce citizens to the services we provide. It will allow us to enrich our partnerships with community agencies and cultivate new ones. All of these things will reinforce the value of the library in the Kansas City area.

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Underserved*

Does the program address the needs of the following populations? Select all that apply.

Economically disadvantaged (near or at the poverty line), Other (ESL/Refugee population)

Please explain your selections below.

Economically disadvantaged people are able to visit any branch of the KCPL, and utilize all library services, programs and collections free of charge. These families who have children on

the autism spectrum will be able to participate in sensory story times, use sensory toys and materials within the library, and receive needed support from library staff. The same is true for diverse populations, such as English language learners and refugees. People who fall within this demographic may not be as familiar with the community resources available to them, or they may experience language and financial barriers. Librarians at the Kansas City Public Library are used to assisting these different populations and helping them access the resources they need.

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Staff*

Please briefly describe the qualifications of the staff who will be directly running the program. What degrees, certifications, and skills do they have to successfully run this program? There is no need to upload resumes.

At this time, one children's librarian from eight branch locations and three outreach librarians have received continuing education on Autism Spectrum Disorder and related disorders such as Sensory Processing Disorder. Trainings were done by local professors and medical experts with knowledge of autism and special needs; they were highly recommended by our partner organizations, Autism Works, Inc. and Missouri Family to Family. Each of these librarians volunteered to host sensory story times, provide input about the programming needs of their branch patrons, and assist families with sensory sensitive children. The three outreach librarians are able to bring sensory programs to different locations in the community. All eleven librarians have master's degrees in library science (MLS). They all have experience working with children and families, and several have experience working with people with special needs. These staff

members are committed to helping the KCPL provide quality, accessible programs to families with ASD and sensory issues.

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Budget*

What is the total dollar amount of funding you are requesting from Autism Speaks? The maximum is \$5,000.

We are asking for \$4,500.00.

Budget in Detail*

Please list what is included in the \$5,000 or less budget. Budgets that do not provide an exact breakdown of the \$5,000 or less request will be disqualified. Include costs for staff, materials, equipment, indirect costs and other with explanation.

Supplies for 11 break boxes for each participating branch and outreach librarian. From National Autism Resources we will be purchasing two multipacks of Theraputty (\$42.00), a fidget set (\$50.00), and 11 Tangle Jrs (\$55.00). From Autism Community Store we will be purchasing 11 Creative Comfort Weighted Lap Pads (\$385.00) and 11 Em's 4 Kids Noise Reducing Headphones (\$330.00). 11 Bumpy Gel Cushions (\$275.00) will be purchased from Fun and Function. The kits will be stored in Sterilite 15 Qt. bins (\$57.00) found on Amazon.com. Total cost of break box supplies is \$1,194.00.

Supplies for story times and other library programs will be shared between libraries. These supplies may also be borrowed by daycares and youth groups if not needed in the library. From

National Autism Resources we will purchase three sets of mini massage balls (\$54.00). From Lakeshore Learning we will be purchasing three sets of Touch and Learn Picture Cards (\$120.00); three sensory star bean bag sets (\$51.00); two silly shapes sensory mat sets (\$120.00); one 10-piece set of sensory balls (\$35.00); and four Bristle Builders Starter sets (\$80.00). From Fun and Function we will purchase two Jumper Mats (\$300.00). From Amazon.com we will be purchasing four sets of 3D Magnetic Blocks (\$140.00); three Calming Sensory Projectors (\$78.00); and four 63-piece sets of spot markers (\$76.00). The total cost for programming supplies is \$1,054.00.

Additional toys and materials will be purchased for in-library use at each of the eight participating branch libraries. From National Autism Resources we will be purchasing eight Klickities (\$240.00) and eight weighted stuffed animals (\$360.00). From Constructive Playthings we will be purchasing eight Tactile Search and Match sensory puzzles (\$400.00). From Amazon.com we will be purchasing eight Fat Brain Toys Teeter Popper Balance Boards (\$296.00) as well as eight sets of water beads (\$64.00). The total cost for in-library use materials is \$1,360.00.

The remaining \$892.00 will be used to cover staff time, item processing, printing costs for promotional materials, radio ads, and Facebook marketing.

References

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