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the removal of blinds on interior windows. However, other renovation projects elsewhere in the library edged us out for funding.

In 2018, we proposed the project again, this time with a multilevel service model. In addition to the development of a family study space, we also suggested creating “family kits”—children’s backpacks filled with age-appropriate activities and made available for checkout. These kits would be affordable for us to assemble, easily integrated into current services, and functional with or without a family study room.

We were delighted when the UMD Student Facilities Fund financed the entire project, including the development of the family study space and family kits, as well as the creation of a separate reflection space for meditation and prayer, at \$10,340. That funding also covered the relocation of the existing lactation room to the same floor as the family study space for the convenience of caregivers; in addition, changing tables were installed in all restrooms on that floor, as well as in a gender-neutral restroom on another floor.

Family kits are a creative, affordable way for academic libraries to support caregivers and their families. Our kits—targeted at age groups newborn–4, 4–8, and 8–12—feature developmentally appropriate materials such as books, crayons, puzzles, small toys, coloring books, and games. The kits are available for checkout at our tech desk, which manages the loan of other nontraditional items such as laptops, chargers, yoga balls, whiteboards, and hammocks. Each

Helping Parents in a Pinch

An academic library becomes more family friendly

Children are present in many types of libraries—not just the public variety. The expense and difficulties of arranging childcare means that even academic library patrons often need to bring young ones along when studying or browsing the stacks. Now, through the creation of a family study space and other amenities, University of Maryland Libraries has made it easier for parents, caregivers, and children to visit.

BY Rachel Gammons and Kelsey Corlett-Rivera

The University of Maryland’s (UMD) diverse campus community includes parents and others who provide care to children. It’s not just faculty and staff who have kids to look after; many of our students do too. In 2018, 12% of our graduate students reported having children under 10, while in 2019, 1.7% of our undergraduates indicated that they were parents or primary caregivers. That number is much higher for our undergraduates who are military veterans: 24%.

Here in the Washington, D.C., metro area, finding childcare often means navigating waitlists that are months—or even years—long.

Once obtained, that care can easily cost \$2,000 per month, per child, with very few part-time options. These barriers mean that students are increasingly studying alongside their children in community spaces—such as UMD Libraries.

While you may not consider academic libraries child friendly, creating a welcoming space for families is easier and more cost-effective than you might think. That said, it took us more than one attempt. In 2016, we proposed the creation of a family study room—a private room with two computer workstations and desks, plus child-sized furniture, children’s books, toys, and safety measures such as

kit can be checked out for up to four hours and is marked with a luggage tag featuring a barcode and itemized list of contents. The patterns on the backpacks correspond to the age groups: the youngest features dinosaurs, 4–8 zoo animals, and 8–12 rockets, which help staff quickly identify the appropriate kit for each child.

While we were fortunate to have the resources to create a family study room, the kits mean that families can make use of the entire library. For example, parents may need to use specialized equipment, such as book scanners or 3D printers, that is available only in certain areas or attend meetings in group study rooms. For libraries without the financial resources or space to create a dedicated family room, the family kits offer an alternative way to support patrons with children.

For us, the family inclusion effort also presented an opportunity to partner with internal stakeholders. For instance, while developing the proposal for the family study room, we involved access services staff members, who would be the ones responsible for enforcing policies and checking out the kits; public services librarians with small children, who were able to provide input on the kits' contents; and outreach and communications staff, who helped develop promotional campaigns and create signage.

Staff and system resources were necessary to enter the kits into our ILS so they were available for lending. We ensured that lending policies matched policies for equipment loan and included standard replacement values to reduce the burden on frontline staff.

We also recruited partners outside the library. The UMD iSchool's iDiversity student group gathered and donated most of the materials in the kits. The UMD Infant and

Students are increasingly studying alongside their children in community spaces.

Child Studies Consortium donated a portable play yard, diapers, and baby wipes. Every item an external group donates is marked with a sticker to acknowledge the group's support.

The family study room and family kits launched in fall 2019, and initial response has been positive. One graduate student, spotted trying to study in a general area with her two small children, was visibly relieved when told about the family study room (to which she and the kids immediately relocated). So far, the family study room—which can be reserved for two hours, with immediate renewal if no other patrons are waiting—has been booked about 150 times, and dozens of families have emailed grateful messages.

If you see someone studying in the library with children, there is generally a reason. Whether it is a childcare issue, finances, or a partner who is ill, that patron is often facing some challenge. In that moment, the last thing you want is for the library to present another barrier. Having a family study room, family kits, or both demonstrates compassion for the lived experiences of users and, hopefully, makes their day a little easier. **AL**

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