

**For Immediate Release**

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## **“Calming Kits” Improve Library Visits for Kids with Sensory Issues**

The Springfield-Greene County Libraries are often busy buildings filled with noise, lights and many people. Visiting a library can be difficult for children with sensory issues, including those with autistic spectrum disorder and developmental disabilities.

The 10 Library branches have introduced Calming Kits to help make their visits more successful. Families with children who may feel anxious or overwhelmed when visiting a library can check out one or more of the items in the Calming Kit.

The Kits include noise-canceling headphones, wiggle cushions, weighted lap pads and other items designed to calm, assure and channel energy.

“We know there are families who hesitate to bring their children to the library because they have sensory issues which are exacerbated by the sounds, smells and size of our buildings,” said the library district’s Youth Services Coordinator Nancee Dahms-Stinson. “There are families who fear their children will struggle to process all the sensory input if they attend a program or storytime. Our goal is to remove barriers for these families and individuals, assure them that the Library welcomes and supports them, and provide them with tools to make their visit successful.”

A Diversity & Inclusion grant from the Community Foundation of the Ozarks is supporting these new efforts and tools to make all the branches more welcoming and inclusive, she said.

As the year progresses, families visiting the Library’s website will find narratives accompanied by photographs they can use to prepare their children for a library visit. These narratives, referred to as “social stories,” explain in simple terms what a visitor will see, hear and what to expect at the library. They’re written to help children and adults with autism understand social challenges and potential triggers in unfamiliar environments.

The Library’s social stories for each branch and the Mobile Library will help visitors plan their trip before they enter a building, and promote the Library’s commitment to making that trip a positive one, Dahms-Stinson said.