Sensory Friendly Story Time and Services

by Bama Hagar, PhD.

Sensory friendly opportunities at family friendly facilities have gained attention during the past years. Many special needs populations share sensory integration challenges. Recent public facility and public library accommodations to foster inclusion have focused on decreased sensory stimulation. The recent trend of sensory story time offerings at Alabama public libraries have improved opportunities for participation by those in sensory sensitive populations. Youth Services Librarians play a vital role in the development of special needs programming.

Children and adults diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, Down Syndrome, Intellectual Disability, Cerebral Palsy, ADHD, Sensory Integration Disorder and other developmental disorders often share sensory symptoms. These children and adults may be overstimulated by sound, light, colors, touch, smells, crowds or movement. Likewise, some individuals in these populations may be under stimulated by sensory input and seek sounds, visual input, touch, odors and environmental activity. Careful programming to create sensory story time opportunities at public libraries can foster inclusion and expand a library’s reach to all members of the local community.

Alabama public libraries successfully have included children with special needs in their programming for years. The emergence of sensory story time has reached a new population of kids and teens who have sensory integration symptoms in addition to or in lieu of physical or cognitive challenges. Sensory story times take the story time opportunities for special needs population to a new level. With identified sensory story time opportunities, kids and teens with sensory issues are embraced and welcomed to the library story time environment.

continued on next page
Jennifer Wolfe, Instructor of Bibliography at Athens State University is the parent of a 7 year old son who has autism and is a Sensory Story Time advocate in Alabama. Jennifer shared her thoughts on sensory story time in Alabama libraries:

According to a publication of the Association for Library Service to Children, “Library service to special population children and their caregivers: A toolkit for librarians and library workers,” children on the Autism Spectrum are one of those special or underserved populations. If you are already comfortable with story time in your library, it is easy to adapt your already successful routine into an Autism-friendly sensory story time. Some of the accommodations include:

- using a picture schedule,
- dimming the lights,
- having fidget items available,
- being more flexible
- not worrying about shushing or keeping still
- being open to include everyone.

Jennifer first discovered sensory story time in 2014. Barbara Klipper, a librarian, and a mother of two boys on the spectrum, outlines this concept in her book, “Programming for Children and Teens with Autism Spectrum Disorder”. It was an honor for her to present these concepts at the Alabama Library Association Convention in 2016 with Charisse Jennings, a parent advocate for the Autism Society of Alabama. It was amazing that the Athens-Limestone County Public Library immediately piloted the program in their Summer Reading line-up in 2016. In 2017, Amanda Coleman, Head of Youth Services at ALCPL, also added Spectrum Spot for teens as well. If you are not quite ready to commit to a series of new programming just yet, a great way to get started is to meet the families by inviting the local support group families to a Special Access Browsing Event while the library is closed to the public.

These principles can work in school libraries, as well public libraries. Jennifer conducts Sensory Story Time every other Friday for a K-3 resource room in a local elementary school. “It is an amazing way to share great children’s literature and music through scarf, songs and shaker eggs. They often respond well to the picture schedule and the routine. It is a great way for me to serve, as well as for me to learn what we have in our children's literature collection and to see what we need to add to the collection.”

Another way to raise awareness in your regular story time groups #AutismMatters is to share Schneider Family Book Award winners, as well as children’s literature that has characters with ASD, such as Lesley Ely’s Looking after Louis and Holly Robinson Peete’s My Brother Charlie.

Jennifer Wolfe’s success in Limestone County at the local public library is an example of several success stories across the state. Alabama public libraries are adding sensory story times to their

continued on page 6
2017 Summer Reading Statistics & 2018 Summer Reading Materials order form is due September 30th! The survey will close on September 30, 2017 at 11:59PM. Make sure to get your survey done so you can receive summer reading materials for 2018! [https://goo.gl/forms/3j2xWTJjZODc8g222](https://goo.gl/forms/3j2xWTJjZODc8g222)

Remember Banned Books Week is September 24–30, 2017! There is still time to prepare. This year’s theme: Words Have Power – Read a Banned Book.

Get ready for Teen Read Week, October 8–14, 2017! This year’s theme: Unleash Your Story.

Libraries and Autism Grant: The “Autism Welcome Here: Library Programs, Services and More” grant is sponsored by Libraries and Autism: We’re Connected. This grant honors the groundbreaking work of Libraries and Autism: We’re Connected co-founder Meg Kolaya for her contributions in promoting inclusion, connecting libraries and the autism community, and bringing awareness of the needs of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their families to the library community. Applications open: September 1, 2017; Deadline for submissions is December 1, 2017. For more information: [http://www.librariesandautism.org/grant/](http://www.librariesandautism.org/grant/)

Interested in serving on the Summer Reading Committee? Email gsheldon@apls.state.al.us for more information!

The Association of Library Services to Children (ALSC) offers new, FREE, Dia Program downloads such as “Building STEAM with Día”. El día de los niños/El día de los libros (Children’s Day/Book Day), commonly known as Día, is a celebration every day of children, families, and reading that culminates yearly on April 30. The celebration emphasizes the importance of literacy for children of all linguistic and cultural backgrounds. [http://dia.ala.org/content/free-program-downloads](http://dia.ala.org/content/free-program-downloads).


Steaming Along Books


If you have ever seen the movie about Temple Grandin (and if you haven’t, I highly recommend that you do) when she was stressed and having what many caregivers of ASD children describe as a “meltdown”, she had no physical means of comfort. She noticed on her uncle’s farm a cow being restrained in a livestock “squeeze” and he explained it was like giving a cow a hug to keep them calm. Temple remembered this idea and built her own in her dormitory room. When she was stressed and having difficult controlling her emotions, she would go to her room and put herself into her “cow hug machine”.

When explaining it to kids, you might equate it to the Thunder Vest that is currently advertised for dogs who have anxiety during thunderstorms. The vest applies a gentle pressure, which is like a hug, helping to keep the dog calm and relieves some of the anxiety symptoms. The activity below can be used in in conjunction with one of the books listed in on page 3 about Temple Grandin depending on the age of your group.

Materials: Glue, green construction paper, wide craft sticks, spring clothespins, scissors, narrow craft sticks, duct tape, mini dowels, ruler, felt, rubber band, plastic cow.

1. Glue three wide craft sticks side by side to the green paper. This is the base.
2. Glue a wide craft stick to each side of the base. Let the glue dry.
3. Glue another wide craft stick on top of one of the sides. Use clothespins to hold it together while the glue dries.
4. Cut 2 pieces of narrow craft stick. Make them as long as the side is tall. Glue them vertically across the side sticks; this will make them sturdier.
5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 on the other side of the base.
6. Cut a strip of duct tape the length of a narrow craft stick. Cut the tape in half length-wise.
7. Lay one half of the tape down sticky side up. Set two narrow craft sticks next to each other on the tape. Make sure there is a slight gap between them.

8. Place a wide craft stick on each side of the narrow sticks.

9. Cut ten 2.5 inch pieces from the mini dowel.

10. Glue the dowel pieces between the narrow and wide craft sticks. Space them as evenly as you can. Let the glue dry. This is the frame.

11. Cut two rectangles out of felt. Make them each 2.5 by 4.5 inches. Glue the felt pieces across each side of the frame. Let the glue dry.

12. Place the hugger over the cow. Use a rubber band to secure the hugger to the cow. This will cause the frame to squeeze the cow gently. Set the cow on the base.

**Digging Deeper**

Squeeze chutes are used when an animal needs special care. A cow doesn’t understand what the farmer or veterinarian is going to do to it. So, the cow gets scared and resists. Using a squeeze chute calms the cow and holds it still. It is safer for the cow and the people.

NOTE: Usually I don’t publish such complex crafts and activities, but as soon as I saw this it reminded me of the Temple Grandin movie. I asked for written permission from the publisher to use their images and activity, explaining the purpose and why. Within two days, I had written permission. I apologize for some of the pictures - they do not scan well. Since the materials were simple and inexpensive (except for the plastic cow), I thought it might be interesting to include. Also supporting books for this section can be found on page 3. --Editor
their established story time schedules and enjoying the benefits of embracing a new community while enjoying new challenges and opportunities associated with special needs program development.

After a public library youth services department investigates the addition of a sensory story time, there are additional steps that can be made to include sensory sensitive populations. For teens with sensory symptoms, a quiet zone for reading or hanging out is desirable. Bean bag chairs or comfortable chairs in a space with lowered light and barriers to ambient sound may be inviting to those with sensory issues. In addition, availability of disposable ear plugs may be a nice addition to a teen quiet reading zone.

Public Libraries have always been leaders in community inclusion. Sensory-friendly programming is the next step in leadership of inclusion initiatives.

Please feel free to use the toolkit below or contact Jennifer Wolfe or Bama Hager for further information.

www.ala.org/alsc/lsspcc-toolkit

The Association for Library Service to Children Toolkit for Special Population Children and Their Caretakers.

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Since we featured an article about Autism and Sensory Storytimes, we thought we would include an article from one of our youth librarians who is actually doing it. Pictures are featured on the following page.

Sensory Storytime @ Homewood Public Library

by Laura Tucker

The Birmingham based organization, Kulture City contacted me about training our children’s department staff on creating a sensory inclusive atmosphere in the summer of 2016. In September 2016 the Homewood Public Library launched a monthly Sensory Storytime where stories and songs and play are presented in a sensory friendly atmosphere.

To get started with Sensory Storytime, Kulture City provided us with sensory kits that included weighted lap mats, noise cancelling headphones and fidget toys. They also helped us create “social stories” about coming to the library. These are posted on our website for parents and caregivers to use to prepare their child for the library experience. This visual schedule is an important tool for the story time that I place on the flannel board. You can make this with board maker or using clip art. It is important to reference the schedule throughout the Storytime. I even printed out the visual schedule and put it on a binder ring so participants could follow along. I also purchased fluorescent light covers to mute the light in the storytime room.

This is the outline that works best for me:

Opening Song (using scarves or bean bags
A bubble machine, cushion-balls, and other sensory "fidget" objects are staples of Homewood's Sensory Storytimes.

These story times work best in smaller groups, so larger libraries may need to do registration in order to limit to 10-15 kids per session. I have had manageable size groups each time and have not done registration. Since the story time is open to everyone I am not aware of every individual’s sensory needs or abilities. However, all of the aspects that make Sensory Storytime sensory inclusive are beneficial to all children and can be incorporated into regular story times at your library. Reach out to local organizations such as Kulture City, Marshall’s Place, Autism Society of Alabama, local colleges with occupational therapy students, and special needs teachers in local schools.

Throughout the years, the Homewood Public Library has partnered with the Exceptional Foundation and the Bell Center to provide storytimes for these groups. However, it wasn’t until last year that we finally provided a Sensory Storytime that was open to the public. I encourage everyone to incorporate sensory inclusive elements into regular story times whether it be through a visual schedule, interactive storytelling or sensory play stations. This program reaffirmed our mission to expose children to a sensory rich environment no matter their developmental ability.

Laura Tucker is Head of Children’s Services at Homewood Public Library.

A child with Autism is not ignoring you, they are simply waiting for you to enter their world.

—HeartsandMindsUK
Eclipse 2017 - Staff Fun
Mobile Public Library Hosts:

“Library Price is Right: Back to School Edition”

Cherold Rhodes, Children’s Services Librarian at Mobile Public Library, created the game based on the TV show “The Price is Right.” Everyone in the audience received a ticket when they entered the room. They called ticket numbers from a bucket to determine who would have a chance to play on stage. Four numbers were called to get contestants down to the front row or our “contestants’ row”. Those four contestants then bid on the price of a book. The one contestant closest to the actual price of the book, received the book and got to go on stage and play a pricing game with back to school supplies for a chance to win more prizes. They did this four times for a total of four pricing games played. The audience was invited to participate by yelling out prices and “helping” the contestants on stage. They even had commercials for library services between each pricing game. That was a great way to inform people about services they had no idea existed.
**Title:** The Girl Who Thought in Pictures  
**Author:** Julia Finley Mosca  
**Illustrator:** Daniel Rieley  
**Release Date:** August 2017

Once upon a time there was a girl named Temple, but she was no fairytale princess. She was different from the beginning - she didn’t like hugs, she had horrible tempers, and even as she grew older she never said a word. But her mother didn’t give up. Eventually Temple learned to speak and be a part of the world she had been born into. Her journey took her to school, but when that ended badly she was sent to her aunt’s farm for the summer.

It was there she found her true passion: animals. She went to a new school where a wonderful teacher introduced her to her second passion: science. Temple’s determination to succeed, not despite her limitations but because of them, led her to not only earning a bachelors degree, but a masters and PhD. Her ideas revolutized how humans managed farm animals, and more than that, she went on to become a world-renowned advocate for both autism and animal rights. The girl who would not speak became the woman whose words influenced the world.

It is a story you may have heard before, but this time Dr. Temple Grandin’s story has been put into rhyme and set into an attractive book for children. And I absolutely adored it. The story was written at a level that was perfect for its intended audience without losing the elements that made it so important. The illustrations, even more so then most books, were vital to showing how Dr. Grandin thinks in pictures instead of words, and suited the story to a “T”.

On its own, the story stands as a solid children’s picture book. Above and beyond, however, the book gives children who feel different a “real life” heroine like them who succeeds beyond everyone’s wildest imaginations. For the rest, it promotes understanding that different doesn’t mean bad. And for all, the book teaches that success is something you do, not something that just happens to you. The fact that this is a true story makes it that much better. In addition, for older children or just the curious, there are several additional facts after the story to delve into. I highly recommend this book as a solid addition to any collection. Also, if you feel so inspired check out some of Dr. Grandin’s books for further reading if you’re curious. I love them as well.

**Recommended for:** Everyone

**Watch out for:** Temple hits a classmate with a book in a fit of temper. Some of Temple’s work revolved around making meat processing more humane. That being said, you do not see Temple hitting a child with a book, for which there are consequences, and nothing is ever mentioned about where the cows are going so calmly. It’s a children’s picture book, and I feel it is appropriate for any age range.