

Library Branch Hopes to Enrich the Lives at Charles Jail

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Charles County Public Library and the local detention center have come together to create a fully functioning library branch to serve people in jail.

Library and sheriff's office officials along with local and state government leaders came together to celebrate the grand opening of the Charles County Detention Center Library on April 26.

"Providing access to services and literature is definitely going to combat challenges with repeat offenders," Abigail Worden, program and outreach services supervisor for the public library system, told Southern Maryland News.

According to the library's website, the detention center library serves as a fully operating branch of the county library system. The branch provides incarcerated people access to recreational, educational and legal materials to assist in facilitating community reentry and help enrich their lives.

Library services are provided weekly by library staff to assist in borrowing books and finding legal resources.

In addition the detention center library provides for a pair of programs aimed at promoting early childhood literacy and skill building.

Through the storybook program, incarcerated individuals record themselves reading a children's book provided by the library that is sent to the person's family with a stuffed animal.

According to the library, the program allows children of incarcerated people to be able to hear their parents' voices at any time.

The branch also provides "Skillready Workshops" facilitated by library staff.

The workshops cover improving digital literacy skills and workforce readiness for returning citizens and include topics such as resume writing and how to use free database resources.

The library was helped in part by book donations from Derrick and Ramunda Young, owners of MahoganyBooks, a Black-owned bookstore specializing in books from Black authors based in Washington, D.C.

“Books are important to us whether they get them for free through the library or through our book store,” Ramunda Young told Southern Maryland News. “We shipped several hundred books here to the Charles County Detention Center because access to books is important to us.”

Sheriff Troy D. Berry (D) told Southern Maryland News that the library services could help reduce recidivism in the community.

“We want to definitely give them the necessary life skills to be successful and go on and live a productive life for them and their families,” Berry said.

Commissioner President Reuben B. Collins II (D) called the library branch a “full circle” moment for him after participating in previous book donations to the center with the Black Leadership Council for Excellence.

“I commend Charles County’s public libraries for focusing in on the possibility of establishing, directly in the detention center, this type of facility,” Collins said.

Due to the steps required for processing book donations and limited space, the library is not asking for book donations at this time for the program.

Residents that would like to support the project are asked to make a monetary donation through <https://ccplonline.org/donate>.