

Bridging the gap

Multigenerational event encourages reading

THE DAILY NEWS
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Residents at a retirement home in Longview read to over a dozen preschool students earlier this month as a way to encourage literacy even before kids can read.

Children enrolled in Lower Columbia College Head Start, Early Head Start, and Early Childhood Education Assistance Program, or ECEAP, joined residents of Longview's Canterbury Park, an independent living community for seniors, on Dec. 7 for reading and snacks.

The experience was a treat for the 3- to 4-year-olds, as well as residents, said Jeanne Devitt, executive director of Canterbury Park, in a press release from the organization.

Our residents have so much to offer to the Longview community, and this opportunity brought so much joy to them and the students, she said in the release. It is a win-win.

The Imagination Library of



A Canterbury Park resident reads to a preschooler on Dec. 7 in Longview.

CANTERBURY PARK, CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Washington, a state-run program, helped conceptualize the event. The organization works to expand throughout the state, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, the nonprofit that mails children up to 5 years old a new book every month.

A 2022 state law created Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Washington, which is sponsored by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Department of Children, Youth, & Families, and managed by United Ways

of the Pacific Northwest. Employees of Canterbury Park, including Devitt and Community Liaison Diane Craft, knew about the Imagination Library through local Rotary clubs, the press release states. Craft said she brainstormed with the state library to figure out how residents could help the nonprofit, headed by Brooke Fisher-Clark, former director of the United Way of Cowlitz & Wahkiakum Counties.

...I mentioned how the residents

in another Koelsch Community loved reading with children from a local elementary school, she said in the release. Brooke recommended Head Start, and it was a natural fit.

Canterbury Park is owned by Koelsch Communities, which has facilities across Washington and in seven other states.

Mindy Leasure, director of the LCC Head Start program, said students benefited from the event because children retain information through experiences.

Opportunities like this, to interact with their community, build their skills to establish and maintain positive relationships, and to balance the needs of themselves and others — these are crucial social and emotional skills, she said.

When we do this in the context of literacy, the learning environment is so rich ...

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