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Library Takeovers:

After Hours Nerf Games and More at the Corvallis-Benton County Public Library

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BONNIE BRZOWSKI is a Reference Librarian at the Corvallis-Benton County Public Library where she has worked since 2011. Bonnie has been selecting graphic novels and cookbooks for libraries for ten years and leading a Graphic Novel Book Club for seven years. She is a Texas native and University of North Carolina alumna. She loves graphic novels, origami, hip-hop, Tex Mex, and gardens. She lives on an acre with her husband, two chickens, and three cats.



ELIZABETH JOHNSON is a Youth Reference Librarian at the Corvallis-Benton County Public Library. She received her MLS from Emporia State University in 2012 with an emphasis on children and youth services. When Elizabeth is not organizing the chaos of Tween Nerf, she spends most of her time planning programs for tweens, leading baby storytimes, and managing the juvenile non-fiction collection. She loves middle grade fantasy fiction, knitting, and the Great British Baking Show. She lives with her husband of ten years and two young children.



KRISTY KEMPER HODGE is the Teen Services Librarian at the Corvallis-Benton County Public Library, where she's approaching her fourth anniversary. She discovered a love and passion for working with teens while employed at a hospital as a volunteer and career development coordinator, and, to this day, teens remain some of her most favorite people (especially middle schoolers). She serves on the YALSA Great Graphic Novels for Teens Selection Committee and loves to talk books, bake, visit the beach, unabashedly read YA lit, and dabble in arts and crafts.

Photos by Lindy Brown of the Corvallis-Benton County Public Library.

The Corvallis-Benton County Public Library (CBCPL) has been hosting action-packed after-hours events for all ages since July 2017. Referred to as Takeovers, these events involve crafts, video games, Nerf games, and more—all while the library is closed. Each Takeover event is tailored to a specific age group (either tweens, teens, or adults) and people from



outside that age group are not permitted in the library during the event. Takeovers are all about having fun and connecting with others and have proven to be incredibly popular; for example, registration and attendance caps are necessary for the Tween Takeovers to be sure the library can accommodate all that want to attend. This article will discuss the origin of the idea for CBCPL's Takeovers, how these events are planned and coordinated, tips for any library interested in hosting their own Takeovers, and the ways in which these events tie into the CBCPL mission.

The first Takeover event was offered in October 2016 to teens. Kristy Kemper Hodge, Teen Services Librarian, found that teens were eager for events that allowed them to be the only ones in the building. She had also heard from teens that they wanted to try Nerf games in the library, an activity that would only work when the building was closed to the general public. The initial popularity of the after-hours Nerf games led to the development of a monthly Teen Takeover on Friday nights. Each Takeover involves playing games (not always Nerf), watching a movie, and arts and crafts. Many Takeovers are themed, such as Games After Dark, featuring hide-n-seek, and a Winter Party featuring a movie, cookie decorating, and gift-making. An average of 35 teens attend Teen Takeover but, when Nerf games are featured, attendance doubles.

At the end of 2016, Youth Services staff recognized a gap in services offered to fourth through sixth graders, so a tween advisory group was formed in January 2017. During the first meeting, tween advisors enthusiastically asked for an after-hours Nerf night modeled after the teen Nerf events. The first Tween Takeover featuring Nerf games was in May 2017 with more than 100 fourth through sixth graders. Subsequent Tween Takeovers have been just as well attended. Due to the enormous popularity of Nerf games with this age group, Tween Takeovers have only featured Nerf; a separate monthly event (Be-tween) involves a meetup for games, a movie, and crafts for only tweens during the library's regular hours.



Adults pose with their Nerf blasters at the end of a Library Takeover for Adults. (Photo by Bonnie Brzozowski.)



The success of the Teen and Tween Takeovers had many adults asking when it would be their turn for Nerf games in the library. In July 2017, just over 50 people attended the first Library Takeover for Adults. The event included Nerf games, video games, and arts and crafts. Library Takeovers for Adults are now offered quarterly and have had up to 60 people in attendance. These events have also featured the Vive, a virtual reality headset the Friends of the CBC Library purchased for our Maker Club events.

For teens and tweens, Nerf Takeovers begin with a participant check-in period where it is verified that a permission form has been signed and received in advance from participants and their guardians. For adults, Nerf Takeovers begin with all participants signing a waiver. The permission form/waiver includes the library's code of conduct and waives the library of any liability relating to risks taken or injuries incurred during the event. The form also requests an emergency contact or parent/guardian contact. By signing the permission form, teens and tweens and their guardians are also agreeing that teens and tweens will not leave the building until the guardian who signed the form comes inside and checks in with staff or volunteers at the end of the event.

Once a permission slip or waiver has been verified or obtained, participants are invited to choose a library-owned Nerf blaster and some Nerf darts. If participants brought their own equipment, it may not be modified in any way or shoot any ammunition other than Nerf darts, and the participant is asked to label it. Targets are set up for practice and to get acquainted with blasters.

After a check-in period of approximately 15 minutes, there is a brief rundown of the rules: 1) no headshots; 2) no running (fast walking is acceptable); 3) safety glasses must be worn at all times (if you already wear glasses, that is sufficient); 4) don't be a jerk; 5) play nice; 6)



Tweens (fourth through sixth graders) wait anxiously with their Nerf blasters for a Tween Takeover to begin. (Photo by Lindy Brown of the Corvallis-Benton County Public Library.)



don't let people into the building; 7) no stacking furniture; and 8) no climbing on furniture or shelves. If any of these rules are broken, participants may be asked to sit out for the remainder of that particular Nerf game. Any egregious or repeated rule breaking could lead to a ban from the entirety of that night's Nerf games; however, this has never been necessary.

After everyone has their Nerf equipment, participants are ushered from our event room into the library itself. Anyone involved in other activities such as video games or crafts is invited to stay in the event room, where a staff member and a few volunteers will also remain. Only those participating in Nerf games are allowed on the library floor. Prior to the event, staff and volunteers remove all potential tripping hazards (e.g., footstools) and put caution tape over restricted areas such as stairwells and service desks. Play is limited to the first floor for ease of staff and volunteers in keeping an eye on all the activity. Typically, participants play three games for the duration of about an hour. Examples of Nerf games include Humans vs. Zombies, Capture the Flag, and a free-for-all game.

A number of supplies are crucial to Takeover success. If Nerf games are involved, a supply of Nerf blasters and darts is essential. The library began with 25 Nerf blasters and a few hundred darts. Because many teens and tweens bring their own equipment, this remained an adequate supply for the first several Takeovers. However, when we added the event for adults, we assumed fewer adults would bring their own equipment and purchased another 25 blasters. Over time, we have accumulated another 20 blasters, making it an arsenal of 70. Each library-owned blaster is labeled with marker and duct tape. Other supplies include video game consoles such as a Wii or Xbox One, board games, instructions and craft supplies for self-guided crafts, signage for the check-in station, snacks, and water. All equipment and supplies are funded by the Friends of the CBC Library.

One of the biggest surprises in hosting these events has been the extraordinary attendance at the Tween Takeovers. The high attendance prompted staff to require registration for future events. Getting everyone registered and making sure permission slips were received ahead of time was challenging; however, at the last event, we required online registration, helping to streamline the process.

Further, because so many people are playing fast-paced, unpredictable games, it is important to have adequate staffing and ample volunteer help. Up to six volunteers typically assist at Nerf Takeovers with three staff members; this augmented presence helps ensure there are eyes all over the library as well as in the event room when there are additional activities. High attendance can also impose a limit on the type of Nerf games played.

Other surprises have included the realization that the air conditioner does not get left on after hours unless we ask ahead of time. More than 100 sweaty (i.e., smelly) tweens certainly helped us remember for the future. Adequate snacks and water are also important as participants work up a sweat and need refreshments. Examples of snacks we typically offer are granola bars, fruit snacks, and pretzels. We have several water coolers ready and we encourage people to take water breaks throughout the evening. In addition, Nerf darts will be all over the library at the end of this event. We enlist the help of the participants and volunteers in picking up as many darts as we can find at the end of the night. We email our colleagues the next morning to let them know where to put darts when found. A basket is kept in our Circulation Workroom for ease of dart collection.



Takeover events are perfectly tied to the CBCPL mission: Enrich! Excite! Explore! The events enrich participants' lives through social interaction and play. The events are intrinsically exciting and they give the specific age group targeted a sense of ownership of the library space. The events encourage exploration by bringing many brand new people to the library and introducing them to a range of activities available in our space. Though these events can feel chaotic, the excitement and energy of everyone involved in Takeovers is uplifting, thrilling, and completely different from what we typically see at library events. 🐉



Bonnie, Elizabeth, and Kristy are always ready for Nerf fun. (Photo by Lindy Brown of the Corvallis-Benton County Public Library.)

