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PBS Wisconsin Education and community partners support early learning for Beloit families with Neighborhood Nooks

Neighborhood Nooks add play and learning to spaces where families can connect

PBS Wisconsin Education and community partners are proud to announce the unveiling of two “Neighborhood Nooks” in Beloit. Neighborhood Nooks are spaces that invite young families to engage, outfitted with PBS KIDS activities and media that evoke self-exploration and learning, whether through creative play or by reading a book together.

One Neighborhood Nook will be installed in the Beloit Women, Infants, Children office, which offers health and nutrition assistance to caregivers with a low to medium income and those who are part of other programs such as foster care, medical assistance or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. The other will be in the Next Steps Family Resilience Center, which supports families transitioning out of homelessness. Both play spaces are thoughtfully tailored to meet the unique needs of each organization, considering noise level, space usage and ease of maintenance.

Each Neighborhood Nook includes a reading nook with a curated selection of books that connect to learning goals found in PBS KIDS shows, toys to encourage hands-on building and tinkering, and conversation prompts to promote meaningful parent-child engagement. There are also comfortable seating areas, such as beanbag chairs and colorful rugs for toddlers, to ensure the spaces feel as welcoming as possible for children and families of all ages.

The main goal is to provide a space where learners and their caregivers can pause and connect and to introduce families to a world of free-to-use learning resources. PBS Wisconsin’s Director of Education Megan Monday notes that these simple but important changes promote family bonding. “Neighborhood Nooks demonstrate how waiting areas can foster a culture that learning can happen anytime, anywhere,” she said. “It reinforces the message that parents and caregivers are their child’s first and most important teachers.”

To create the Neighborhood Nooks, PBS Wisconsin Education partnered with local Beloit organizations, including Literacy for Life (Stateline Literacy Foundation) and Hendricks CareerTek.

Jessica Austin, director of Early Brain Development for Stateline Community Foundation, asserts that the impact of the Neighborhood Nooks correlates to many small moments adding up to make a big difference in a child's life. "When there are more opportunities for families to connect with one another through curious play and reading, young children build those essential early literacy skills, build more resilience and are better set up for success," she said. "This builds stronger communities and a more competitive Beloit."

In addition to the launch of two Neighborhood Nooks, PBS Wisconsin Education partnered with organizations in Beloit, including Early Head Start and Children Wisconsin, to create home visiting kits to support families with children prenatal to age 3. The kits offer meaningful tools and resources designed to promote early learning, responsive caregiving and mindful media use. Trained professionals from local agencies who provide support, guidance, and educational resources to families in their homes, or home visitors, will use these kits during visits with parents and caregivers.

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