



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Of course, not every homeschooler has a librarian for a mom, but every homeschooler has access to a library. And one of the main things I realized is that for homeschoolers, libraries are an invaluable resource.”

-From Ann Slattery's "In a Class of Their Own," in *School Library Journal*

A few weeks ago the guest speakers at our monthly children's services meeting talked about homeschoolers and public libraries. Mary Musgrove, a homeschool parent and president of the Circle of Independent Learning Charter School (COIL), and homeschool parent Deb Bontadelli did a great job of letting us know how we can be of help to the homeschooling families in our communities.

This is a topic that has become more and more pertinent, as the number of people teaching their children at home has increased. According to Ann Slattery, the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education "found that in 2003, the number of students being homeschooled was about 1.1 million...a whopping 29 percent increase from 1999..."

This is quite a change from many years ago when I homeschooled one of my daughters for a school year. My daughter had been unhappy in school for months and one day I realized she needed something else. I

clearly remember the day I notified the school I was going to teach her at home - I felt apprehensive yet liberated. It felt like I was breaking the rules by not sending her off every day with her sisters, however at the same time I knew it was the right step for her. Since homeschooling wasn't as widespread as it is now, there weren't many resources out there for families like ours. There are now many support groups, agencies and even charter schools involved in this alternative to regular public or private schools but then all I found was a group who met regularly for picnics and field trips.

Musgrove and Bontadelli described some of the homeschooling organizations and talked about the range of reasons people homeschool their children. Some are for health reasons - teaching at home can be much more flexible for a child who has missed a lot of school because of a chronic health problem, like asthma or migraine headaches. Others

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homeschool for social reasons: they are reluctant to expose their children to the many social pressures that can exist in public schools. Religious beliefs are another factor, as is the simple conviction that teaching at home can be rewarding for the child as well as the parent. In addition, as Slattery mentions: “a growing number of parents see homeschooling as a way to distinguish their children from other students in the college admissions process.” This may be one of the reasons that of the 246 students enrolled at COIL, 126 are at the high school level.

Bontadelli was familiar with many of the resources we offer, such as Link +, our online databases and career centers. She also mentioned the fact that a library – as opposed to a bookstore – has older as well as newer books, which gives depth to any work they are doing.

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One of the most interesting points these two women made was about the language we use at the library to advertise some of our services. The word homework, in particular, doesn’t seem relevant to them, and so they may not think to explore opportunities – like the Live Homework Help and the homework centers – that may be of use to them.

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As librarians it is important for us to keep in mind our local homeschoolers. I found it particularly helpful to hear directly from these committed parents and to get their insights into what it is like to use a local library.