



Applicant Organization: Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library	Amount: \$20,130
Proposal Title: If you seed it, they will read it: growing a community of readers in juvenile corrections through access to books, audiobooks, and educational devices	
Project Goal: To provide our local juvenile detention center with new materials appropriate for the reading level and interests of incarcerated children. The current library within the center consists of donated used adult books. Through our project, we will support this hidden community of young readers with access to juvenile and YA books. This project is a first step in building connections to incarcerated youth who need and deserve access to high-quality library services and collections.	

Our project will address the reading needs of children and teens housed in the Shawnee County Juvenile Detention Center (JDC) located in Topeka, KS. The detention center is a pre-sentencing facility adjacent to the adult correctional complex. In 2022 and 2023, the JDC housed 588 youth. Demographically, 76% are male, 24% are female and 47% are BIPOC. The center houses children as young as 10 though most are 13 or older. Some children are at the center for only a few days while others may be there for over a year. Youth in the facility are incarcerated individuals, residing in locked residential units. Some children do not have access to their families during their stay. The children receive school services within the facility from a small team of teachers who are employed by our largest local public school district. During our visits to the center, librarians are restricted from interacting directly with the youth.

We are applying to the Lyrasis Catalyst Fund to seed the first stage of replacing JDC’s library collection. The JDC collection consists of approximately 3,000 books stored in twelve metal cabinets. These books are mostly older adult fiction and nonfiction donated from a local civic organization. Many of the books are in extremely poor physical condition. Staff at the JDC do purchase a small amount of new juvenile and young adult materials though budgets are limited, and they have struggled to secure funding and prioritization for developing the library. The same funding used for library materials also supports funding for sports equipment, items for school and other essentials. The lack of books written for kids and teens in the library presents a challenge in creating excitement for reading. Metal cabinets full of old Danielle Steel books are not engaging collections for young readers. Even with the challenge of having relevant materials, JDC staff shared with us that many children are eager for books of any kind and want to engage with fiction and nonfiction collections. There is an awareness and desire within these incarcerated youth to improve academically. One incarcerated student shared that “the library [in JDC] has helped me while I’ve been here to improve my vocabulary and reading skills. I now read every chance I get and enjoy doing it.” JDC staff tell us that books are comforting and reading time provides an opportunity for calm, especially during the periods of the day when the youth at the center are locked in their individual units.

In the article, “The Gender Gap in Reading: Boy Meets Book, Boy Loses Book, Boy Never Gets Book Back”, the authors share that for both boys and girls, “reading books, especially fiction, is related to social acuity, helping readers learn about other people and comprehend their motivations. When we read, we put ourselves in the characters’ shoes to see their points of view, fears, hopes, and experiences.”¹ According to JDC’s Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) data, the children housed in corrections are underperforming in reading scores compared to their peers outside corrections. However, these students were able to increase their reading scores from the 11th percentile to the 13th percentile in about 6 months. It is our hope that, along with the instruction provided by JDC teachers, providing access to new books and other literacy tools will continue to improve their reading scores for closer positioning with their peers outside corrections. This project could help model the way for other public libraries interested in engaging with incarcerated youth populations.

¹ Auxler, Brooke et al., “The gender gap in reading: boy meets book, boy loses book, boy never gets book back,” *Deloitte Insights*, December 1, 2021, <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/technology/technology-media-and-telecom-predictions/2022/gender-gap-in-reading.html> (accessed February 12, 2024).



Funding from the LYRASIS Catalyst fund will allow us to enrich our growing relationship with the Shawnee County Juvenile Detention Center by providing us with resources to start replacing many of the adult books in the current JDC collection with new books written for children and teens. Our plan is to purchase 1,000 paperback fiction and nonfiction books and 60 graphic novels/Manga books. We also plan to purchase 20 Playaway audiobooks so that children who struggle with reading physical books can participate with their peers in library activities. JDC shared with us that children can download some audiobooks through tablets provided to them, however, they have no free options available. The downloadable collection mirrors what's available in the adjacent adult correctional facility, and there are charges billed to the incarcerated person to download digital content onto the tablets. Children who are without families or those with families that do not have financial resources to pay for downloads have no access to digital audiobooks. Providing Playaway audiobooks will make access to reading materials equitable to all the youth at the JDC. Finally, we plan to purchase 10 Playaway Launchpads. These pre-loaded tablets include a variety of activities that help the children learn through play. Playaway Launchpads offer brain games, test prep & educational courses and interactive learning activities in core subjects. Both Playaway audiobooks and Launchpads do not require an internet connection and meet the safety requirements of the JDC.

Our long-term plan is to establish a full partnership with JDC for collections and library services. Providing new books is the first initiative, however we would like to expand into offering library programming at the center. Currently, the Program/Training Officer at the JDC also serves as the librarian. She expresses a strong commitment to providing the youth in her care with materials that are relevant to their identity and life experiences, and she is excited about working with librarians at the public library. If selected, our plan is to use the Lyrasis Catalyst Fund to purchase and install the new items into the JDC library by the end of 2024.

The key participants in this project are Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library's Technical Services Manager Scarlett Fisher-Herreman, Cataloging Paraprofessional Alex Henault and Shawnee County Detention Center Program/Training Officer Duarena House.

Line	Basis	Cost
Paperback books	1000 books at \$15/book	\$15,000
Graphic Novels/Manga	60 Graphic Novels/Manga at \$33/book	\$1,980
Playaway audiobooks	20 Playaway audiobooks at \$80/device	\$1,600
Playaway Launchpads	10 Playaway Launchpads at \$155/device	\$1,550
Total Budget Request		\$20,130