

Military OneSource Podcast — DOD MWR Libraries 2024 Summer Reading Program

Episode transcript

Intro voiceover:

Welcome to the Military OneSource Podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department, with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit militaryonesource.mil.

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody. We're going to talk about the Summer Reading Program, something that MWR Program does for you. So we're going to talk about this with Chloe Barbour. Chloe is the Navy General Library Program's technical information specialist.

Chloe, welcome to the podcast.

Chloe Barbour:

Thanks for having me, Bruce.

Bruce Moody:

What a great title. We've had you on the podcast before, we've worked with you a bunch of times to get out information about the Summer Reading Program. I have to tell you, folks, the library program folks are the coolest people. They're chill and they have great book recommendations. We were just going over some of those before we started recording. It is just great to have you on the program.

Chloe, what I'd like to do is just have you give us just a general overview of the MWR Summer Reading Program. How does that work?

Chloe Barbour:

Yeah, absolutely. I'm super excited to be talking about Summer Reading Program today, because it's such a valuable program, and so many people still don't know about it, even though it's been going on for years.

For listeners that have never participated before, it's helpful to know that DoD Summer Reading is so much more than just reading more often during summer vacation. Our annual program allows readers from all over the world to improve their reading habits, explore new fields and subjects, and connect with others. Like I said, this is an initiative that we've offered for many years. But with innovative programming from our staff in

the field and new technology each year, I found that each summer is its own new experience for readers in many ways.

Bruce Moody:

All right. Well, let's get into what people can expect from this year's Summer Reading Program.

Chloe Barbour:

There's a few different ways to get involved with Summer Reading Program activities, depending on where you're located. Each installation program is totally unique, and will offer events and activities that relate to this year's theme, which is Read, Renew Repeat. That focuses on subjects like conservation and the world around us, but also improving one's self-confidence and establishing healthy habits. There will be all kinds of in-person opportunities for all ages to learn, create and enjoy themselves.

However, all readers, regardless of their proximity to an installation, can participate in Summer Reading through our Beanstack platform. We have a website and an app that makes logging reading really easy, whether you're at home or on-the-go. Beanstack also gives readers a space to write book reviews, browse our curated reading lists and share their progress with their friends.

Bruce Moody:

When we look at the Summer Reading Program, there's benefits to it. One of them is addressing something called the summer slide. Chloe, what's the summer slide, and what is that all about?

Chloe Barbour:

Yeah. This is a great lesson not only for our parents and caretakers, but also for students who are getting ready to start college or pick up a new term. Studies show that a drastic learning loss can occur when there's no engagement in educational activities throughout the summer. We have research that spans over 100 years that demonstrates students will typically score lower on standardized tests at the end of the summer if they don't have some kind of academic or educational stimulation through the summer season. We aim to make libraries a part of the solution to that problem.

Bruce Moody:

Okay. Part of the solution. How so? How does that work?

Chloe Barbour:

Summer Reading Program provides an easy way to encourage and incentivize education between school years. By providing a platform where families can work together to learn and earn rewards for their hard work, we assist with combating the summer slide. There have been countless readers all over the world, of all ages, who have mentioned that making a simple commitment, like reading 15 minutes a day, had significantly improved their mental agility and helped them stay prepared for school in fall.

Bruce Moody:

Obviously, reading good for the mental agility, get that. What are some of the other benefits for reading? How does it help us?

Chloe Barbour:

Yeah, totally. There are numerous studies that show that access to books and magazines, that that directly relates to higher reading achievement and increased competence in verbal and written communication. Our teams do a phenomenal job, all year round, of providing materials that inform and engage readers, as well as events that teach people new skills.

This is a great time to mention that reading is accessible in a variety of ways through MWR. In addition to our fantastic library facilities on installations worldwide, we also have the DoD MWR virtual library, that has hundreds of thousands of titles for all reading levels. Our DoD virtual library collection is available to all eligible MWR users through dodmwrlibraries.org.

Bruce Moody:

That includes adults, right? The Summer Reading Program is not just for children. How can adults participate?

Chloe Barbour:

Yes. We'd like to remind everyone that everyone is a reader, whether they realize it or not. Most working adults will spend at least a few hours a day reading emails alone, which totally counts. Same thing with audiobooks. Listening to an audiobook while you're exercising or during your commute is a great way to accumulate time read for those that have a busy schedule and may not have the opportunity to sit down and actually open a book.

Bruce Moody:

Yeah. I can relate to that. You do have to carve out time.

We were talking about the benefits of reading. Specifically, what are we looking at the benefits of reading for adults?

Chloe Barbour:

There's lots of benefits for adult readers, on top of the prizes that they can earn when participating in a local reading challenge. I'm referring back to all these studies because they do clearly demonstrate that reading on a regular basis, especially for fun, will improve your memory, reduce your stress. I know we all need that. And, increase overall cognitive function. Speaking personally, I know that life can get overwhelming. That's especially true during the summer, when everyone has something going on. I love being able to escape the real world for a little bit and put myself into a character's shoes.

Bruce Moody:

Escaping the real world, improving your cognitive functioning, reducing stress and fabulous prizes. That's it! All right.

There's another thing about the Summer Reading Program, in that you can fold it into the PCS experience. If a family is moving from one installation to another, it might be a good opportunity for a family to get involved in the program. Why don't you talk about that for us, please?

Chloe Barbour:

Yes, I'm glad you mentioned it. DoD Libraries have worked really, really hard over the last few years to ensure that our services are available to all eligible users, regardless of where they're stationed or if they're transitioning between duty stations. All of our platforms for summer reading, our library catalog and the virtual library are joint service across Army, Department of the Air Force, Marine Corps and Navy. So if your family is PCSing during summer break, we can easily transfer your existing accounts from one location to another, with no interruption to your progress.

Since these resources are hosted online, whether you're moving to a new base or just spending time away from your home base for the summer, users will still have access to our digital e-books, our audiobooks and of course Beanstack to log their reading time.

Bruce Moody:

Very cool. Thanks, Chloe. Do you have any stories to share, parents who are participating in the summer reading program?

Chloe Barbour:

Of course, yeah. I don't think we have enough time to cover all of the great stories that we hear from parents and kids. We receive tons of feedback from our patrons each year about how Summer Reading has given them the opportunity to rekindle their reading habits or try a new activity.

One story that sticks with me is from a base last year. There was a retired staff sergeant who was a huge Dungeons and Dragons fan but didn't have a group to play with. His local library started hosting D&D games, he got involved after not playing for years. We love hearing about participants that maybe haven't visited a library in a long time and have the chance to realize what a great community space it is for our service members, their families, retirees and our civilians.

Bruce Moody:

Very cool. Let's get back to the summer slide. Let's just talk about parents who have addressed the summer slide. They've gotten their kids reading, they've got some momentum going. How can they take that summer reading and turn that into a habit? To make reading a habit for their kids.

Chloe Barbour:

Yeah, there's so many ways. We found that parents and caretakers, and teachers are often more creative than even our teams and develop great ways to incentivize their kids. I highly encourage readers to continue using Beanstack throughout the year to track their reading time. Whether your installation has an active challenge or not, during the non-Summer Reading Program time, the Beanstack app is a very easy way to ensure that your reading time is tracked. You can see statistics on how much you've logged over the course of a month, or even a year, which is a really great tool for parents.

Libraries, unfortunately, don't always have the means to distribute rewards during the off-season. But caretakers can always make it a fun game. We've seen people get really creative and implement things like sticker charts. Or we were discussing before we started recording, taking someone out for pizza or ice cream, or a sporting event once they reaching a milestone. Over time, we've seen those kids develop a love for reading that exceeds the need for a prize, which is truly the best reward.

Bruce Moody:

Okay, all right. Yes, there is benefits, something to be appreciated when you've improved your cognitive functioning, you've escaped reality and you've reduced your stress. You can call it good at that point, and forego the fabulous prizes.

Chloe, I had a question for you. I just wonder, you mentioned that people are logging in the amount of reading that they're doing. Do you happen to have any number from previous Summer Reading Programs, of just how many logged-in minutes of reading the military community has done?

Chloe Barbour:

Yes. We love the opportunity to brag about how-

Bruce Moody:

Brag? Go for it.

Chloe Barbour:

Passionate our readers ... Last year, for summer 2023, across all DoD MWR, we accumulated over 78 million minutes read. Which is a ridiculous amount of time, it's hundreds of years of reading that our users accomplished in just a few short months.

Bruce Moody:

I had a number in mind, it was not 78 million. That is awesome!

Chloe Barbour:

It's really impressive.

Bruce Moody:

Yes!

Chloe Barbour:

Yeah, it's super impressive.

Bruce Moody:

Good, good. Oh, that's so fantastic. All right. Yeah. So hopefully, we'll even top that number this year. That's great. 78 million minutes?

Chloe Barbour:

Yes, absolutely.

Bruce Moody:

So cool, so cool. All right. As amazing as that is, I wonder if there's other activities at installation libraries during the year for children and adults that the libraries offer.

Chloe Barbour:

Yeah. This is another topic that I could talk about all day long. Our library staff are ridiculously creative. They provide some of the most fascinating events I've ever heard of. Sometimes I see pictures of these events and I get really jealous that I can't participate, too.

A few really good examples are our library in Itsumi, Japan hosted a ghost bicycle tour in the fall, where attendees were led on a guided bike tour across base. They stopped to learn about some spooky local history and legends. We have many, many libraries, I can think of a couple off the top of my head, Dahlgren in Naples, they have partnerships with local service animals to provide programs where kids can practice reading to service dogs to improve their confidence in a stress-free environment.

Bruce Moody:

Oh, wow.

Chloe Barbour:

We have events that tap into pop culture for all ages. Whiting Field in Florida recently did a Bridgerton-themed event for adults. Everyone got to dress their best for a fancy tea party. There's something for everyone, and I always encourage people to check out their local MWR website to learn more about events near them.

Bruce Moody:

Fabulous. Well, we'll put a link in the program notes so people can read about the DoD MWR Summer Reading Program.

Chloe, as we wrap up, what is it about you guys at the library that makes you so cool? How does that coolness serve as a benefit to the military families?

Chloe Barbour:

Oh, that's a good question.

Bruce Moody:

How's that for a softball question?

Chloe Barbour:

I think that the best answer is that sometimes, we're not cool and we embrace that. It's okay to try something new and read a book that you've never tried before, or maybe you're learning something that you've never done before. But I love that the library community always embraces change and innovation. It's such a welcoming community where people can really collaborate, and help each other, and learn something new.

Bruce Moody:

Which, even if you're not trying to be cool, is still cool.

Chloe Barbour:

Yeah.

Bruce Moody:

All right. Chloe Barbour, thank you so much. Good to talk to you today, always welcome on the podcast.

Chloe Barbour:

Thanks, Bruce. I appreciate it.

Bruce Moody:

All right. I want to remind everybody that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. Always love to hear from you. Click on the link in the program notes to send us a question, a comment, maybe an idea for a future episode. Be sure to subscribe to this podcast wherever you listen to your podcasts because we cover a wide range of topics to help military families navigate military life. I'm Bruce Moody. Thank you so much for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.