

Military OneSource Podcast — 2023 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. It is summertime, and we are going to be talking about MWR's Summer Reading Program. My guest today is Chloe Barber, and she is the Navy General Library Program's Technical Information Specialist. Chloe, welcome to the podcast. Tell us a little bit about yourself and what the title of yours means.

[Chloe Barber]:

Thanks, Bruce. It's great to be here. I am the technical information specialist, and yes, one of my interview questions was, "Can you spell your job title?" I work in Navy Libraries, kind of with a little bit of everything. As a technical information specialist, I mostly lean towards the programming and policy side of things, but it's a great team effort. It's a wonderful team to be on. I've worked at the bases and now all the way up to the headquarters level. It's a great job to be in.

[Bruce Moody]:

It's a great group of people and it's been a pleasure working with you all in putting this episode together. For those of you who haven't been in all these meetings and meeting all of you, and maybe you're new to the military or new to MWR, what is your Summer Reading Program?

[Chloe Barber]:

Yeah. DOD does an annual Summer Reading Program. Our 2023 program has kicked off, and it's an initiative that has been offered for many years to all ages. But because we incorporate innovative programming from our staff members and new technology each year, it really does feel like each summer is a new experience for readers in many ways. Summer reading is more than just reading a book and getting a prize. Readers from all over the world are welcome to participate and earn rewards and connect with each other through virtual programming and book reviews.

[Bruce Moody]:

All right. Each year is a little bit different and each year you have a theme, right? What is this year's theme and how do you generally come up with these themes?

[Chloe Barber]:

We don't. We have smarter people develop them for us. Readers of all ages have the opportunity to learn and grow through this year's theme, which is "Find Your Voice." It's not just the theme for DOD Summer Reading. It's used by many libraries all over the world. We work with a nonprofit organization called iRead, which is developed by the Illinois Library Association, and they provide libraries with these inspirational themes, incentives and tons of resources for readers and families. But this year's theme really is compelling because our voices do have power. We use our voices to share stories, express ourselves and spark change. And our voices include not only the sounds that we make, but the words we write, the art we create and the actions that we take each day to impact the world around us.

[Bruce Moody]:

Excellent. Good to hear. Tell me about your target audience. Who is eligible to be in this? Is it just for children and youth or can adults also participate?

[Chloe Barber]:

Everyone is a reader. That's a great question. Whether they believe it or not, the program is... It definitely helps kids stay mentally active during the summer, but adults benefit from the program, too. Adults do way more reading than we give ourselves credit for. We were talking before we started recording about... I said that I probably spend most of my reading in my inbox every day or reading articles or policies for work. That counts. That's reading. So I think a lot of potential users would be surprised by how much time they can accumulate over just a few short weeks.

[Bruce Moody]:

That's an interesting point. It's not just books. What qualifies? How do I get credit? What do I have to read in order to be participating in this?

[Chloe Barber]:

It all counts: books, magazines, newspapers, audiobooks. Anything that you are using as a reading material, that definitely counts towards your time. This is a great time to remind listeners that our joint service virtual library, dodmwrlibraries.org, has dozens of e-resources that are useful for users. E-reading, of course, is available, but maybe someone out there wants to find their voice in a new language, Mango Languages, or even platforms that teach coding languages are available for users.

[Bruce Moody]:

Oh, very cool. Yeah, there's a whole lot in there. It's more than you think. It's a whole lot of resources in there.

[Chloe Barber]:

Absolutely.

[Bruce Moody]:

For the summer reading program, what is the tool that you use so that a reader can track their progress? What's the tool? How do you use it? Is it complicated or how do you go about using it?

[Chloe Barber]:

The DOD Summer Reading Program uses a platform called Beanstack to track each reader's progress. And Beanstack is super simple and engaging for readers. Users can find their nearest installation at beanstack.org/dod and then register and start reading. The site walks you through everything, and there's also a Beanstack app that makes logging reading time very easy on the go.

[Bruce Moody]:

What are some other features that readers might expect on Beanstack?

[Chloe Barber]:

Well, in addition to Beanstack being super easy to use, it's actually fun and provides an additional safe space for readers to use their voice. There's a Friend feature that allows readers to connect with one another. You can read and write book reviews, use a stopwatch to get a precise reading time. We advertise local and virtual events lots more. Summer reading program really is what you make it. So the more you read and explore it, the more fun and opportunities you'll find.

[Bruce Moody]:

This is interesting to me, because when I did the summer reading program, they basically gave us a form to fill out and you come up at the end of the summer and, however accurate it was, it says, "Oh, yeah, I read all these books." Sure, I did. But this Beanstack tool is obviously very different. It's online. Can you talk a little bit about the connecting opportunities that you have, the way to write a review or share thoughts about books with other people who are in the summer reading program?

[Chloe Barber]:

Yeah, absolutely. The Friend feature is pretty new, but it gives you the chance to see what other readers in your community are reading if they want to volunteer that information. And same thing with book reviews. If somebody in your reading level or age range reads a book and decides to write a review, that can inspire future reading choices for you as a reader. It really ensures that there's strong connectivity between the readers in your community and throughout the world, depending on which program you're participating in.

[Bruce Moody]:

Okay. It is summertime and how long does this program run, and is there a point at which it's too late to join the Summer Reading Program?

[Chloe Barber]:

That's a great question. Each installation will have specific dates for their program. I definitely encourage readers who are near a military installation to reach out to their MWR program to learn more. For the DOD Virtual Summer Reading Program, which is open to everyone regardless of where you are, we are live. Readers can participate and log their time now through Sept. 4, but please keep in mind that Beanstack is also available as a resource to track your reading time all year round. Even when we don't have an active challenge running, you're welcome to log in and track your time.

[Bruce Moody]:

Okay. Regarding the challenge, what are the specific program goals?

[Chloe Barber]:

We love that every reader is unique, so we offer four programs at most installations. We offer pre-readers, kids, teens and adults, but keep in mind that these programs are open to all ages, all four programs. If, for example, you're 11 years old but you're reading at a high school level, you can join the teen program. There's no rules that say you can't. For parents with kids that have developmental challenges or struggle with their reading confidence, feel free to select the program that's right for your child's reading level. And then once you've chosen the right program, Beanstack will guide you through the badges and help you reach your target goals. Additionally, your reading time will contribute to the overall reading goal for all military branches. Last year, we read almost 68 million minutes across the DOD, so we're asking everyone to help us top that time this year.

[Bruce Moody]:

Very cool. 68 million minutes of reading. Very neat.

[Chloe Barber]:

68 million. Yep.

[Bruce Moody]:

Oh, very, very cool. What are the benefits of being in this summer reading program? And I mean this in two ways. What is the benefit of reading and what's the stuff that we can win?

[Chloe Barber]:

Yeah. The gift of reading is a benefit of itself, of course. As I mentioned, the program is great for all ages, but looking at the progress of our younger readers really shows how much the program shines. National research finds that readers who participate in summer reading programs score higher on reading achievement tests at the beginning of the next school year than those who don't participate. Parents of children enrolled in summer reading programs report that their kids are better prepared for school in the fall and read more confidently.

But, of course, in addition to the reward of simply improving, we also have prizes offered at each installation. The teams there do a fantastic job of incentivizing their communities. Each base handles prizes a little differently, but most readers can expect to earn at least a few incentives throughout the summer, which could be water bottles, tote bags, t-shirts, as well as Bluetooth headphones, picture frames, mini ring lights. And a little birdie tells me that if you participate and you're a strong reader, there's also Kindles up for grabs this year for some of our top readers. Keep that in mind.

[Bruce Moody]:

Will do. All right. Thank you. Let's kind of wrap this up. We're going to put in the program notes a link to the DOD program. Just to be clear, this is not a DOD site, but it's the beanstack.org/dod. Do two things for me. Let's give people a sense that, yeah, this is the site that they should go to. It's an okay site. We're coordinating with Beanstack to make this available to the military community and tell them generally what they would be doing on this site in order to sign up.

[Chloe Barber]:

Yeah. [Beanstack.org](https://beanstack.org) is a fantastic, very reliable, safe website for readers and families to use. If you have any questions about signing up or accessing, you can always reach out to our team at [nglp@navy.mil](mailto:nvglp@navy.mil). But once you find your installation or if you choose to participate in the virtual reading program, we ask for very minimal information. We just need your name, your contact information, your branch of service, and then you're ready to read. So no big questions that'll ask for too much information.

[Bruce Moody]:

Got it. All right. Chloe Barber, it's great to have you with us. One last question. Tell me what it's like to work in the library field.

[Chloe Barber]:

Never a boring day. I like to think that everybody assumes that day-to-day libraries are quiet, relaxing spaces, but you can generally find more noise and excitement in a library than you can anywhere else. It's a great day-to-day experience, always learning, always growing.

[Bruce Moody]:

Excellent. Good. We'll cap it there. Thanks, Chloe Barber, for joining us and talking about the MWR Summer Reading Program. Want to remind everybody that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department, and you can click on a link in the program notes and go ahead and send us a question, a comment or an idea for a future episode. And be sure to sign up for our podcast wherever you listen to your podcasts because we cover a lot of issues that help military families navigate military life. I'm Bruce Moody. Thank you so much for listening today. Take care. Bye-bye.