

SRHA starts lobby library

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Boxes of free books known as “Little Free Libraries” have become a concept sweeping the nation, including in Suffolk.

However, the Suffolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority has taken the concept to the next level.

“I thought, ‘What if we did something just a little different and had a library right in our lobby,’” said Executive Director Clarissa McAdoo.

She got the idea at a conference this spring of the Virginia arm of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials.

The president of the organization encouraged officials to think about how they could develop reading skills among the children in their communities.

“I was excited about that,” McAdoo said. “I felt compelled that I needed to do something, and it didn’t take a whole lot.”

The authority got a large donation of children’s books from a publisher, and staff members donated books their children have grown out of. Most are fiction books, but there are some biographies and some science books.

The collection includes classics like “Stone Soup,” “Where the Wild Things Are,” “Charlotte’s Web,” “Goodnight Moon” and “Caps for Sale,” as well as dozens of lesser-known titles. There are popular series like the Magic School Bus and Berenstain Bears.

“We’ve been reading to the children when they come in, and they’ve been leaving with books,” McAdoo said. Board members and staff have volunteered to be available to read.

McAdoo gave her favorite book a place of honor on a stand on top of the shelf in the lobby.

“‘Lola at the Library’ is my favorite one,” she said. “It gets at the heart of a little child excited about going to the library to get books. That’s what we want for our children.”

McAdoo said her staff is working on resources to get books so there is always a good supply. Children should be able to take the books home, she said.

“Hopefully, they will build their collection of books at home,” she said. “That’s our way of trying to be a part of a national effort that’s going on in public housing communities, to focus on building those vocabularies for our children.”

McAdoo is set to retire at the end of this month, but she sees the lobby library as part of her legacy and hopes it endures for many years.

“I’m just hopeful when I come visit the housing authority years from now, that that library’s still functioning and still doing what it has the potential to do in changing a child’s life,” she said.