

## Keeping kids reading during the summer

Carver Center partners with Brown Educational Consultants

Wednesday, August 03, 2016, By Casey Watts, Reporter

Summer learning loss is a big problem in the world of education and academics, which is why the Carver Center partnered with Brown Educational Consultants to keep kids reading and writing during their time away from school.

Literacy is a cornerstone of the Carver Center's summer program. Director of Youth Programs Eric Rios explained that many of the kids involved in the center's summer program attend Port Chester schools. They are sent home with a reading list. To help the students with that summer reading, five to six hours a week are dedicated to helping them work through the books, but they don't only read them. Counselors, who are all certified teachers, help the kids identify character and plot development without the stress of having a grade attached to the process. Rios believes that helps make the summer camp a fun academic experience.



*Fifth grader Aryanna works with Jim Brown, the founder of Brown Educational Consultants. Courtesy of Tracey Vitale*

"Ideally, I'd like to say the kids go back to school ahead of where they were, but realistically, I'm happy if they don't lose what they gained during the summer," Rios said. "It's academic in nature, but not rigorous like in school. Kids are able to read in a fun perspective and not read because they have a test on Monday."

Jim Brown, founder of Brown Educational Consultants, and his team go to Carver Center twice a week to work one-on-one with some of the students who might need a little extra help, such as those who are from a lower income family that cannot afford books or necessary learning resources.

Brown and his team of three other teachers work with about 28 kids going into pre-kindergarten through seventh grade. Honor Simeone and Jane Daley each work with eight younger students and Debby Southwick and Brown each work with six older children.

"The kids are great and very sweet," Brown said. "I think they like the one-on-one attention. They are often curious and interested in what we have to teach them. At first, they might be shy about leaving their classroom, but once they get used to it, they are full of energy."

The four spend a majority of their time focusing on literary skills beyond maintaining the kids' reading levels. The younger children are learning the alphabet and sounds and getting ready to start reading in a pre-school like setting. Kids in the middle grades of the program are working with Debby to decode literary devices and develop stronger reading skills.

The older students offer a new challenge for Brown, who is used to working with kids just on their reading skills at his office in Greenwich, Conn. The Port Chester students are on par with the district's required reading level, but he notices they often lack background information that is pertinent to helping them understand the story. He recalled reading a book about an octopus with a fifth grader only to find out that she didn't know what an octopus was.

“I had my phone on me and pulled it out,” Brown said. “We learned about the ocean together.”

Another student, a seventh grader, was reading a book about the 1950s and 1960s, but he didn’t know what a “hooligan” was. Because of these experiences, Brown shifted his goal of combating summer reading loss to helping the children connect and comprehend what the characters are going through.

“This is our way of giving back,” he said.

The older kids are also a little more hesitant to read one-on-one with an adult than the younger ones, Brown observed. He thinks this might be because they don’t have the resources or time at home to read with their parents and the fact that in a classroom, kids can hide behind their more outgoing peers. To combat this hesitation, Brown takes assessments of the children’s skills and makes sure they know that they are exactly where they need to be. He found that telling the student exactly where they are and giving them encouragement helped them be more comfortable in the one-on-one setting.

“I think they just like the attention,” he said. “It’s been interesting and I’ve been pleasantly surprised.”

When working with the fifth graders, Brown teaches them vocabulary words. He plays a dice game with them in which the students roll a die and then they have to define that number of words from a list. If they get the definition correct, they get a point. If they don’t, Brown gets a point. When they played on Monday, Aug. 1, Brown recalled losing with a score of 22-2.

### ***Brown’s mission and Carver Center’s align***

When it came to choosing an organization to work with, Carver Center was an easy and quick choice for Brown. He contacted a number of organizations beforehand, but he felt the center’s mission aligned so well with his firm’s. His office works with school placement, helping kids with academics and coaching them.

“We’re here to help kids reach a full life and strengthen academic skills,” Brown said.

His clients were all for this new partnership and many of them donated to Brown’s GoFundMe page, which he started as a way to pay his team of teachers. Brown raised \$6,300 to subsidize the costs of this program, providing materials and books to the children, and about 20 donor families help keep literacy a strong emphasis in the Carver Center’s summer program.

Brown hopes to continue the partnership in the future but is worried about finding a sustainable way of financing it. He might put aside some of his firm’s profits for the partnership to continue with full transparency of where part of his clients’ money is going.

“I love the kids I am helping and working with in my Greenwich office,” Brown said. “It’s nice to come here and be able to do the same thing. It’s been great for me to see kids being kids. For me, that’s just gratifying.”