

Lewis And Clark Elementary School Receives \$5,000 Grant From YWCA

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
June 20 2022 2:24 PM



GODFREY - Last Thursday, June 16, Lewis and Clark Elementary School received a \$5,000 grant from the YWCA. The money was used to buy new children's books depicting people with black and brown skin as well as lesson plans that go along with some of the books.

The idea came from YWCA Racial Justice committee member Becky Cowart.

"I created *Diverse Story* which is a story time where you read books that feature children with black and brown skin so that the people listening and enjoying the stories can see themselves and have positive images of black and brown people," Cowart said. "And then you have discussions about what you read about to get more people comfortable talking about things like racism."

This was part of one of YWCA's yearly events called "Stand Against Racism."

"Nana got in touch with me and asked if I'd come up with three or four lesson plans that revolve around some of the books. I did just that using a site called Learning For Justice, a site that helps teachers to create lesson plans that help bring more diversity into the classroom with their students.

Beacoat is the YWCA Racial Justice Committee Chairperson and it was her and Cowart's collaboration that got this idea off the ground.

The books were purchased from a black-owned bookstore in St. Louis called Eye See Me. The store is located at 6951 Olive Blvd, University City, MO 63130.

Beacoat mentioned that they sell bundles of kids books and that they bought two bundles for different grade levels. Each book that was donated is authored and/or illustrated by people of color as well, she added.

The school was selected because Beacoat had seen Lewis and Clark Principal Latasha LeFlore-Porter reading to her students on Facebook. Beacoat said that she was the first person that came to her mind.

"Everybody loves her, she's outstanding, she's dynamic, she just got the Woman of Distinction award this year. I felt like she was the perfect school to start this program with," Beacoat said about the principal.

The YWCA hopes that they can spread this mission throughout the school district.

YWCA Executive Director Dorothy Hummel explained what the Woman of Distinction award is all about.

"We have currently recognized 310 women to date since 1991. And this past year when Latasha was honored, the criteria was number one, and this is probably most important to us, supporting our YWCA mission," Hummel said.

"The YWCA mission is eliminating racism, empowering women, and promoting peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all persons," she added.

"Latasha was a perfect candidate and we expect to keep seeing great things out of her," Hummel said.

LeFlore-Porter was excited to be part of the first school to receive this grant.

"Oh my gosh! I was so excited when Nana reached out to me," she said. "I called my sister and she asked 'How did you guys get chosen?' and I said I don't know, but we're getting all books that are really going to help my teachers."

"You can't blame a person for not understanding another culture, all you can do is educate everyone to the best you can. We've all had different life experiences. The more we share those experiences with each other, the more we can understand other cultures."

"I was just really excited, LeFlore-Porter said. "I felt so grateful because these books are so expensive and our budget doesn't always account for things like this because a lot of times in education if it doesn't fall right within your curriculum then it is hard to get your hands on it sometimes. I feel like I can't even say thank you enough."

It's up to LeFlore-Porter to integrate those lesson plans into the curriculum, but she says that it's expected to happen as soon as this fall.

Through the help of the YWCA, elementary school kids will be able to learn how to be more inclusive and be educated on a wide variety of cultures. Without this grant, none of it would be possible.