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## Georgia Library Spotlight - Gwinnett County Public Library Social Saturday

Don Giacomini

*Gwinnett County Public Library*, [dgiacomini@gwinnettpl.org](mailto:dgiacomini@gwinnettpl.org)

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# GLA SPOTLIGHT

## Gwinnett County Public Library Social Saturday

The most innovative projects begin with an open mind, and the Gwinnett County Public Library's Social Saturday program is no different. The program serves individuals with severe and profound disabilities and began as an effort to provide a monthly social opportunity to a specific group of individuals who had aged out of the public school system and lost access to all of the state-funded resources that come along with enrollment. Since its inception in February 2018, Social Saturday has attracted a steady attendance of 15 to 30 individuals every month.



Each session, attendees engage with an adapted story created and led by special educators along with the help of speech language pathologists. Stories such as *The Odyssey*, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, and *Romeo and Juliet* are brought to life through an audio- and video-enhanced presentation, tactile characters, props, and a creative usage of assistive communication technology. Attendees are also given a take-home kit of related manipulatives and a CD copy of the presentation so that they can recreate the experience at home. Library staff prepares a simple craft to go along with the month's story and strives to ensure that the materials are tactilely engaging. Patrons have made masquerade masks for *Romeo and Juliet*,

personalized doubloons for *Treasure Island*, and sea creature-filled portholes for *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*.

The Gwinnett County Public Library has made real strides in its service to the special needs community over the past several years. Several branches offer regular Sensory Story Times designed for children with sensory integration disorders; the Dacula Branch opens its doors

early one Sunday a month for a Sensory Friendly Browsing Hour; and the Youth Services Department regularly engages with local advocacy and support groups such as SPECTRUM Autism and FOCUS. These efforts led to a partnership with Oakland Meadow School, a Gwinnett County public school that serves students

with severe and profound needs. Not only do librarians visit the school to sign up teachers and students for library cards and to lead story times, a small group of Oakland Meadow students also visit their local library branch every week to volunteer.

Oakland Meadow's commitment to their students extends well beyond graduation with their Alumni Association. Given the Gwinnett County Public Library's determination to reach traditionally underserved communities, the creation of Social Saturday as a way to offer these graduates a monthly social event was a natural extension of the library's ongoing outreach efforts. Judging from the sustained success of Social Saturday, the program—and

the library's ongoing dedication to individuals with special needs—is here to stay. If you would like more information on how this program

came about, don't hesitate to contact Don Giacomini (youth services specialist) or Patty Reeber (youth services manager).