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# Inspired by her son, this NJ mom built a 3,000-book library in Paramus

Stephanie Meda
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Take a tour of New Concepts for Living's Paramus library
Volunteer and former teacher Kim Catalfamo spent almost two years assembling a 3,000-book library from the ground up for New Concepts for Living, an adult day care for those with disabilities in Paramus.

PARAMUS — Almost two years ago, Kim Catalfamo was touring the new home of New Concepts for Living, an adult day care for clients with disabilities.

While viewing all the classes and amenities the building had for her son, Joey, who has cerebral palsy, there was one space in particular that caught her eye: an empty room with a simple placard saying "library."

Quickly, the lifelong book lover imagined what the room could become.

Then, she made it a reality.

Catalfamo, a former adapted physical education teacher from Belleville, has been working since June 2024 to assemble a 3,000-book library for the center on Route 17. In early March, she joined clients and staff at New Concepts for Living to celebrate the grand opening of her creation and its adjacent media room.

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After her tour of the site two years ago, Catalfamo asked a day program director about the vacant library. She learned that plans were on hold as the center, which serves nearly 200 participants, was getting up and running.

Kim Catalfamo, a former teacher and volunteer at New Concepts for Living in Paramus, spent two and a half years organizing a library with 3,000 books for adults disabled for Hinkie with disabilities. Catalfamo helps her 27-year-old son Joey, who has cerebral palsy, get a book from the shelves during the library's opening on March 6. Stephanie Meda/North Jersey.com

"I said, 'Let me stay out of trouble since I'm retired. I need a project now," she recalled with a laugh at the March 6 ribbon-cutting. "I asked her if she minded if I spearheaded a book drive to get books coming in here."

Joey Catalfamo, 27, has attended New Concepts for Living classes for six years, starting when the center was in Rochelle Park. His mother threw herself into her new mission.

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The first book drive, in summer 2024, was a success thanks to Elks chapters in Nutley, Kearny, Belleville and South Orange. The effort didn't stop there, however. Catalfamo spent the next year hunting down reading materials from across New Jersey. Once they arrived, she and fellow New Concepts parent Jude Prunès took on the time-consuming task of organizing everything into categories.

Prunès, who also has a 27-year-old son in the program, had also wanted a retirement project. At the library's opening, she recalled when it was nothing but piles and piles of books in an empty room. Catalfamo would sit on the floor and explain how she planned to organize them.

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"She amazed me. She did all the planning," Prunès said. "There's no computer system. It's an old-fashioned library. We handwrote every card and every book."

Making the library accessible for the New Concepts program members, who have a variety of mental and physical disabilities, was important for Catalfamo. She amassed a large collection of audiobooks for those who prefer that format. There are also books designed for those with dyslexia and materials with symbols that make it easier for readers to understand.

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"A library is a staple in every community, and learning how to navigate and utilize it is an important life skill," said Caitlin Lee, an assistant day program director at the center. "Books create an inclusive space where ability does not limit access — whether someone engages through reading, listening or viewing images. The library opens the door to new worlds, ideas and perspectives, fostering imagination, communication and a sense of belonging for all program members."

The bookshelves include pictures to help readers understand what's available in each section. Stuffed animals are also strategically placed throughout the room to reflect different parts of the collection.

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In addition to filling the library through book drives, Catalfamo contacted Bookmiles, a Pennsauken-based nonprofit that collects and distributes used children's books.

"I called them and said we're starting a library for a special needs achievement center, and they said 'come on down,'" Catalfamo said. "I went home with a wagon of 500 books."

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Catalfamo and her son returned to the group in spring 2025 for another 500 books.

"They were able to get me books that were written in Spanish," she said. "They had books that were part of series where we were missing certain ones. They had big, giant books you use in preschool classes. They were books that weren't easy to find, and they were so gracious to keep donating."

Creating the library was also a bonding experience for Catalfamo and her son. They searched and traded for books at little libraries around their community.

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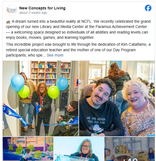
The family worked on the project even while dealing with personal tragedy. As the library was being assembled, Kim Catalfamo's father, Mel Eggers, was on his deathbed after experiencing a heart attack and stroke. He died in March of last year.

Eggers had been as invested in the effort as his daughter, telling her to take all the books off his shelves. Most of the collection's adult mystery and crime books came from her father's house, she said.

Eggers wanted to support his daughter's passion project even after he was gone. In lieu of flowers for his funeral, he asked for donations to the new library.

Behind the library is the media room, where New Concepts for Living members can socialize, listen to audiobooks, play board games, work on puzzles, view movies and watch puppet shows that match the stories they read. At the ribbon-cutting, program officials dedicated the room to Eggers, a surprise that brought Catalfamo to tears.




She has also been making books easier to read for those who struggle with smaller print. The library already had 50 books with big print, but recently one of the program members told Catalfamo there was a "Dora the Explorer" book she liked but couldn't read because of its small letters.

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Catalfamo took it upon herself to print out and replace all the sentences on the pages with a bigger font, a project she hopes to replicate with more books.

"I've been seeing how excited they are and how they can't wait to come in," she said. "They've been telling me what they want on the shelves and what characters they like."

"This is just the beginning," Catalfamo added. "We're going to keep making it bigger, and it's going to be a great thing for our program."

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