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## Brief History of SFPL Bookmobiles



The first known bookmobile to travel the streets of San Francisco began in 1944. Books were provided by SFPL while the vehicle was staffed by the American Women's Voluntary Services. During World War II, the bookmobile brought the library to shipyard workers and their children in Hunter's Point.

In 1957, SFPL established its own bookmobile service, called the **Traveling Branch**, to serve Hunter's Point, in a second hand bookmobile. The **March 1957 Daly City Earthquake**, the strongest since the 1906 earthquake, damaged branches, including the McCreey Branch Library in Eureka Valley. In response, the Traveling Branch added service for branches closed due to the quake. Following the earthquake recovery, the bookmobile addressed the needs of children by bringing books and films to schools throughout the City. In the 1960s the service emphasis shifted from schools to community stops in an attempt to serve all ages; busing may have made school stops less effective. The evolution toward senior service began in 1970 when bookmobile staff established book deposit stops at 20 senior sites.

In 1971, SFPL purchased a second bookmobile and initiated a second traveling library called **The Whole World Media Center**. The two bookmobiles operated concurrently until 1975 when the first retired after 17 years of service. At some point, the second bookmobile was renamed the **Library on Wheels**, devoted solely to serving seniors.

In 1989, the Library on Wheels maintained its regular schedule in the days after the **Loma Prieta Earthquake**. This vehicle operated for 20 years until it stopped running in 1991.

Luckily, in 1992, the Friends of the Library fundraised over \$120,000 and purchased a new bookmobile for the **Library on Wheels** program.

A few years later in 1995, the **Children's Bookmobile** hit the streets providing library services and literacy support to children in group care situations where there were practical and societal challenges to visiting a local public library. Funded by SF Department of Children, Youth and Their Families, service emphasis was on centers receiving subsidies for lower income families. Over the years service included preschools, family day care, child care centers, elementary after school programs, Boys & Girls Clubhouses, and public housing developments. In 2011 the Children's Bookmobile evolved into the **Early Literacy Mobile** focusing service solely on children 0-5 years, and continues the same strong service emphasis on early literacy support for low income children.

From 2004 to 2011, the **Branch Library Improvement Program (BLIP) Bookmobile** operated under the BLIP program and brought the library to neighborhoods when the branch library was closed for renovation. The Excelsior Branch closed for renovations in November 2003 and a bookmobile was purchased and opened for library service in early 2004. Golden Gate Valley was the last branch to be replaced by a bookmobile until it re-opened in October 2011. Over 7 years, the BLIP Bookmobile provided service to 16 neighborhoods (Anza, Bernal Heights, Eureka Valley, Excelsior, Golden Gate Valley, Marina, Merced, Noe Valley, Park, Parkside, Potrero, Presidio, Richmond, Sunset, West Portal, and Western Addition). Three bookmobiles were purchased with BLIP funds; one used and two new Bluebirds, model years 2004 and 2006. The Bluebirds are now in service as the Library on Wheels and the Youth Mobile Pilot.

In July 2010, SFPL consolidated all bookmobile programs (BLIP, Library on Wheels, Children's, and Treasure Island) under new **Mobile Outreach Services (MOS)**. The goals of consolidation included staff and vehicle pooling in order to minimize cancelled service and to provide a strong organizational platform to transform bookmobile service as the BLIP Program ended.

### **SFPL Bookmobile Programs Today**

#### **Library on Wheels**

The Library on Wheels (LOW) is the longest running bookmobile program at SFPL. With its origins in the 1970s, the LOW has served countless seniors and others with mobility limitations. Many of its patrons are lifelong readers and their only access to a library is the LOW. Currently the LOW visits 35 senior care facilities, adult day care, hospitals, and other adult care facilities. The vehicle purchased in 1992, while still running, was replaced in 2011 for a 2006 Bluebird originally purchased for BLIP Bookmobile service. The LOW is set to serve for many years to come.

#### **The Early Literacy Mobile**

The Early Literacy Mobile evolved out of the former Children's Bookmobile in 2011. The ELM is specially designed for children ages 0-5 and their parents and caregivers. Its collection is tailored to support early literacy development, and the librarian on board provides expert literacy advice, support, and storytimes. The ELM visits 35+ subsidized child care facilities each month and opens its doors to the public at 4 San Francisco Parks in its Swing Into Stories partnership with SF Recreation and Parks Department.

#### **The Treasure Island Bookmobile**

In 2008, as an adjunct to the BLIP Bookmobile Program, SFPL established service on Treasure Island. Currently, Treasure Island has a resident population of approximately 2,500 and is the only neighborhood in the City without a branch library. Many residents are low income or formally homeless. The bookmobile allows them to enjoy the free materials and resources the library offers.

#### **The Green Bookmobile**

Green Bookmobile hit the road in the August 2011 at Tricycle Music Fest West. What makes it green? This bookmobile runs on 20 percent biodiesel and is specially equipped with 4 solar panels, Fantastic Vents for green AC, skylights for natural light, sustainably forested wood, recycled content in carpet, and a hybrid generator (turning off when fully charged and back on when charge gets low). It has a special Green Stacks collection as well as a variety of juvenile, teen and adult materials available for check out with an SFPL library card.

The Green Bookmobile provides service at Treasure Island and partners with the Exploratorium, SFMOMA, and California Academy of Sciences to bring a mobile library to these museums on FREE admission days.

#### **The Youth Mobile Pilot**

This year, SFPL is piloting a Youth Mobile to serve elementary, middle, and high school students who need additional academic support. The collection is specifically tailored to pique the reading and information interests of youth. With this pilot, MOS is connecting youth to brick and mortar libraries by having branch librarians on board. The Youth Mobile operates from a 2004 Bluebird originally purchased for BLIP Bookmobile service.

#### **Bookmobiles @ Special Events**

Throughout the history of mobile libraries at SFPL, bookmobiles have been attending special events to get the library out in the community and show everyone the materials and resources offered. Special events have included SF Pride Parade, LitCrawl, Juneteenth, Carnaval Parade, Asian Heritage Street Fair, Vietnamese Tet Festival, and SF Recreation and Parks Eggstravaganza. Check out the events page to find a bookmobile at an event.

#### **SFPL Bookmobiles, Future Plans**

Digital Outreach is the next step for MOS / Bookmobiles at SFPL. **Computers** for circulation were introduced on bookmobiles in the **late 1990s**. Sturdy laptops were loaded with the Library's catalog. SFPL received wireless service through **Ricochet**, a radio repeater wireless technology available before the prevalence of cellular phones. Now bookmobiles connect to the internet and the SFPL catalog in real time using mobile wireless service (MiFis).

Today, SFPL is exploring the launch of a **TechMobile**, a mobile digital computing lab, making each bookmobile a wireless **Hotspot** with free wifi access for all, and providing on-board **computers for the public** to use and enjoy. Stay connected for updates!

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You are at: ALA.org » **ADVOCACY** » Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion » Outreach to Underserved Populations » Outreach Resources for Services to Bookmobile Communities

## Outreach Resources for Services to Bookmobile Communities

The ALA [Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services](#), in partnership with the [Association of Bookmobile and Outreach Services](#), has assembled the following key resources to assist library and information workers in the provision of quality bookmobile and outreach services. Bookmobiles and direct-delivery outreach services are, and continue to be an integral, vital part of libraries around the country. For over 100 years bookmobiles have served rural, urban, suburban and tribal areas, bringing access to information and life-long learning resources to all classes and communities. Bookmobiles are a central part of library service, and the ALA, through its Subcommittee on Bookmobiles, is firmly committed to recognizing their contribution to public life with the goal to highlight their value and extend their reach.

### Stories from the Field

Visit the ODLOS [Outreach Columns blog](#) for tips and tales from from the field. The goal of the Bookmobiles Column is to provide information, answers, successful program reviews, interviews with interesting Bookmobile staff like yourself, and any other exciting ideas or news that comes our way about Bookmobile Service.

### Contacts and Groups

- [Association of Bookmobile and Outreach Services \(ABOS\)](#)

### Events

#### National Bookmobile Day @ your library

[National Bookmobile Day](#) (Wednesday, April 12, 2017) celebrates our nation's bookmobiles and the dedicated library professionals who provide this valuable and essential service to their communities every day. This special, nationwide event is an opportunity for bookmobiles fans to make their support known—through thanking bookmobile staff, writing a letter or e-mail to their libraries, or voicing their support to community leaders.

National Bookmobile Day is coordinated by the [ALA Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services](#) (ODLOS), the [Association of Bookmobile and Outreach Services](#) (ABOS), and the [Association for Rural & Small Libraries](#) (ARSL).

#### Bookmobile Saturday

Held on the Saturday during ALA's Annual Conference, Bookmobile Saturday gives attendees the opportunity to learn, gain inspiration and network. Learn about the trends, model practices and opportunities for professional involvement during two morning programs.