

# Look inside the new children's library at Georgia King Village in Newark

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Updated on June 25, 2017 at 8:08 AM Posted on June 25, 2017 at 8:00 AM

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For NJ.com

**NEWARK** -- In an effort to rehabilitate a Newark housing complex, a new children's library opened its doors to dozens of children eager to see the stacks of books lining the walls. The library is in the community room of Georgia King Village, an affordable housing community in Newark's West Ward.

Prior to Thursday's unveiling of the library, bookworms and occasional readers alike walked a mile to the nearest library.

"No one's walking from here to there," Debbie Kenyon, vice chair and senior partner at L+M Development Partners, said. "This is for children to have a warm and secure place to come."

L+M Development Partners, which [took over renovations for Georgia King Village last year](#), surveyed the community to understand their needs beyond just housing, Kenyon said. Surveys found families had no easy access to children's books, and L+M decided to step in. The company, working with the Newark YMCA, PSE&G and Newark Public Library, renovated an unused room in the basement to a kid-friendly library.

Within six months, the once dusty, smelly basement room ridden with bugs and leaks became a safe space for children, residents said. The walls were painted blue and white, and neon chairs and posters with motivational quotes were added.

The 2,800 books in the library were donated by L+M and PSE&G employees, Kenyon said. The books range from classic novels like "Little Woman" to the latest Frozen pop-up storybook.

"It takes a village," Kenyon said. "This is the first step in community engagement."

Roughly 500 kids live in the complex, West Ward Councilman Joe McCallum said. He said the project was an important promise for him to keep for the community.

"It's positive, it's enhancing the quality of life," he said. "I'm happy for the residents and the kids. This was depressing last year, so this makes me emotional."

Georgia King Village tenant Naimah Bridges, 28, said she's excited for her kids to have a library so accessible to them.

"They wake up in the morning asking for the library," she said. "It's good for summertime. It gives the kid something extra to do."

McCallum said he was amazed by the end result, and looks forward to working with residents on future projects to continue to improve life in Newark.

The Newark YMCA provides the staff, including interns from Rutgers University, as well as programming that will take place three times a week. Programs include performing arts, STEM and fitness.

"The transformation of Georgia King Village is underway," Kenyon said.

Prudential Impact Investments and L+M Development Partners collaborated to fix the financial, operation and reputation challenges that have been plaguing Georgia King Village for decades, according to officials.

So far, \$9 million has been invested into the first phase of work. However, the reading room project was L+M's philanthropy project.

The second phase of construction will begin early next year, developers said.