



RELEASE DATE: November 30, 2012

CONTACTS: Christine Perkins

BPL - Assistant Director 360-778-7206

cperkins@cob.org

Lizz Roberts

WCLS - Community Relations Coordinator

360-384-3150 x220 Lizz.Roberts@wcls.org

NO FINES FOR CHILDREN AT LOCAL LIBRARIES

Children will soon have one more reason to head to the nearest public library and get a library card--effective January 1, 2013, neither Bellingham Public Library nor Whatcom County Library System will charge overdue fines for children's materials checked out on children's library cards. All cardholders age 17 and under will benefit from the change.

"As part of Whatcom County Library System's strategic planning process, we looked at ways to support children's reading. We heard from parents who said that fear of incurring library fines was one barrier keeping them from getting library cards for their children. This policy change eliminates that barrier," said Joan Airoldi, WCLS Director.

Pamela Kiesner, Director of the Bellingham Public Library, concurs. "One of our primary focuses is on early learning, and we want to get library cards into as many children's hands as possible, to start them on the path to lifelong learning." Studies show that children who have access to large numbers of books in the home achieve higher levels of education than those who do not.

Children (and their caregivers) will still be responsible for returning library materials, and will still receive overdue notices to remind them to return materials in a timely manner. Similarly, they will be charged the replacement cost if an item is lost or damaged. The main difference is they will not be charged any overdue fines.

Bellingham Public Library and Whatcom County Library System are partner libraries, although BPL is a department within the City of Bellingham and WCLS is an independent library district. These changes will bring each library's policies closer into alignment, which is important because many library users visit more than one library and any differences can be confusing. In addition to eliminating children's fines, WCLS will align adult fines as well, increasing fines on adult materials to \$.25 per item per day to match Bellingham. Adult fines at WCLS have not increased since they were first instituted in the early 1990s. Grace periods for all materials will also be aligned -- to two days.

"The two-day grace period allows for the 'oops, I forgot to return my library books today' scenario," explains Kiesner. "It gives people a little breathing room."

With numerous ways to renew materials, in person, online, or on the phone, patrons of all ages can check out items all year long without ever incurring any fines. Library fines are intended to modify people's behavior -- they're a financial disincentive to encourage people to return borrowed items so that others may borrow them. In a perfect world, no one would have any fines because they always returned their materials within the time allowed.

"Working on this issue has brought out the best in the BPL and WCLS staffs – focusing on a solution that works for both libraries and, even more importantly, finding the best solution for all the children of Whatcom County," said Airoldi.