Episode 2: PAWS to Read and Memory Kits
A: Hello and welcome to We LOVE the Library, a twice-monthly podcast brought to you by the San Luis Obispo County Library Foundation. I'm your host, Rachel Duchak.

Before we get started, I wanted to tell you about the name of this podcast. When I volunteer as a representative of the Library Foundation at local chamber events or the Back-to-School Extravaganza, people regularly declare their feelings for the public library, saying something like, “Oh, I love the library! We're there all the time!” I have heard this so much over the past few months. It seemed the right message and title for this pro-social and pro-library podcast. Our public libraries are the people's champion because they are for everyone.

In this second episode, we meet Berkeley the Therapy Dog and her friend and partner, Kathy Baker, with the PAWS to Read program. They've been helping kids develop reading confidence at the library for more than a decade. Then Los Osos Library branch manager Bonnie Richan shares her librarian insights of this popular activity for children. Next, we learn about the concept of and contents within Memory Kits from Adult Services Coordinating Librarian, Monique Matta. Finally, we're joined by Laura DeLoye of the Alzheimer's Association. She tells us how local caregivers use these memory kits they've checked out from the library with patients and loved ones who have memory issues. Thanks for supporting your public library!

I'm here with Kathy Baker at the Los Osos Library and we're also here with Berkeley the Dog, who is a mix of a blonde Labrador retriever and a golden retriever.
B: Correct. Yes.
A: How are you doing, Kathy?
B: I’m good, and you?
A: I’m good, thank you. Berkeley's here laying down, getting ready to work with listening to the children read. Can you tell us about this program?
B: It’s a wonderful program that more and more libraries are beginning to incorporate. It's very stressless for the children. I bring Berkeley in. She's a registered therapy dog, so she's well behaved.
She lays down. The kids sit down next to her with a book. They read out loud to her. If they stumble, that's fine. No one corrects them, which is, of course, you know, Berkeley doesn't correct because she's a dog, but it's not my role either. If the parents want to, you know, intervene, that's up to them, and it's mostly to build confidence in reading out loud and to learn that books are good, whether they're in Spanish or English.
A: Awesome. That's great, and what's the difference between a therapy dog and a service dog?
B: Big difference. A service dog performs a service for whoever they are owned by, whether it's retrieving keys that a person has dropped or opening a door or a refrigerator because of the person, their owner's inability physically to do these tasks.
Therapy dogs, on the other hand, go through extensive training, and they have to be just be a mild mannered dog that can withstand a lot of different environments. Besides the library, she's also gone to UCSB and to Cal Poly during finals week, where many kids are coming up to her and petting her because they're stressed.
A: Super stressed out.
B: Especially first-time freshmen, and she has to be able to endure a lot of different people touching her. Very different from a service dog. Most service dogs you don't touch.
A: Right. Yes, and how long have you been doing this with Berkeley?
B: 11 years.
A: 11 years, and she is about to retire. Yes. In January.
B: Oh my gosh. She's going to be 13.
A: And that's just, you know, she's getting to become an older dog, and so it is time for a younger dog to move into position. I hear that Bonnie, the branch manager, mentioned that there's already another dog in training.

B: Yes, yes. I unfortunately don't have another. I do have two other dogs at home, but they are not even to the level that a therapy dog is.
A: And you've been doing this for 12 years, so you're ready for a change.
B: I'm kind of ready for a change, although I am going to miss the kiddos. Yeah. They're a lot of fun.
A: Tell us about a standard PAWS to Read session. Like, what is it normally like?
B: Well, I come in and she sits down on the floor. In the beginning, when my knees were cooperative, I sat down with on the floor too. So it's not like an adult hovering over them, you know, looking at every word that they're saying. If they are only sight readers and no sight words, that's fine. Then they just read at their own level or capacity.If they go slow, so be it. That's not a big deal. It's just embracing the child, speaking out loud. Most of the time, they're sitting next to her. They're touching her. They're engaging with her, actually. And moms just sit there. And I just sit there. And then they get a candy and they're great. And they come back every week. It's wonderful.
A: Yes. You told me that sometimes you'll have just one child.
B: Yes.
A: And sometimes you'll have a dozen.
B: Yes.
A: What is that like? What are the differences in those two situations?
B: Well, I'm here for an hour. So one child does get a lot of attention from Berkeley, obviously. But it's also very slow. And so she tends to fall asleep and want to go wander around. With 12 kids, I have to monitor how long the child reads for them because there's others waiting. And it's actually more fun for me because I love all the noise of the children's voices and the reading and the parents. So that part is fun for me.
A: That's great. And can you tell us about the effect on the children that you've maybe seen over a few months? Does it give them confidence with reading or does it help them calm down?
B: Yes, it does. And it also, they just run in, they go right for the books. Some of them read the same book over and over. We don't care. I see how they're reading changes each year as they go from preschool to TK or to, not TK, yeah, preschool, right? TK. And then to second grade, their reading changes a lot. Sometimes it doesn't. And that's okay. Nothing is ever said. And it's just all about that coming to the library and picking out a book is a good thing.
A: Yes. And the library is a non-judgy space.
B: Very much so.
A: Full of librarians who want to help answer questions and help you have a good experience with finding something on the shelves or online.
B: And then every now and then, they'll come back in and they'll be in fourth or fifth grade and they sit down with a chapter book, as they call it, and their reading has just excelled. It's just wonderful to see.
A: Way to go, Berkeley! You're so great! Maybe you can hear her little toenails as she's walking around here.
B: What makes her a really good therapy dog is she was raised to be a guide dog for the blind. And her puppy raiser had her for the first 11 months, took her everywhere, movies, church, from the time she was eight weeks old. And so nothing, there's no situation that she feels anxious in. So she flunked out of the program. And I was fortunate enough to get her right that day. And I knew what I was going to be able to do with her. And we passed the therapy dog test, which was strenuous. And it just opened up a whole new world for me that I didn't even know existed before.
A: That's so great.
B: It is.
A: And you've been volunteering and doing this for 11 years.
B: Yes.
A: Great. What a wonderful service you've brought to families and people who visit the library.

B: Thank you. There was a young man, he works at Miners. And a couple months ago, I was, the Miners here in Los Osos, I was picking up some soil. And she was in the back of my van. And he goes, “Oh, what's your dog's name?” I said, “Berkeley.” He goes, “No way. I read to her when I was seven.” And he's 17 now. And that just made my day. You know, he goes, “I looked forward to every Wednesday because of her.” And that's what it's about.
A: That’s great. Thank you for all your great years of service, Berkeley. You did a great job. You can't really hear the breathing or the little toenails. Thank you so much, Kathy, for telling us about the PAWS to Read program, which not only happens here in Los Osos. I saw on the schedule that I think there's three other dogs in the system that read at other libraries. The dogs are not reading, but they are assisting with the reading.
B: It’s a great program. And I know we were doing it down in Ventura County, which is where I first started with her before I came up here. So more and more libraries are starting to incorporate it.
A: Awesome. Good. Well, it looks like your time is about to start here. And we got a pile of kids over there in the children's section. And thank you very much, Kathy. I appreciate it.
B: You’re welcome.

A: I’m here with Bonnie Richan, the Branch Manager of the Los Osos Library. Hi, Bonnie.
C: Hi there. How are you today, Rachel?
A: I'm good. Thank you. We were just talking with Kathy Baker of the PAWS to Read program, and I wanted to get your insight as the librarian, as someone who's been seeing her process with Berkeley the Dog for the PAWS to Read program.
C: Sure, sure. Yeah. Well, I've been here just about four years, so I've seen progress. I've seen the way kids will gain confidence. That's the biggest thing I've seen. So they'll come in first and might be a little shy and kind of looking, well, I'm not sure I even want to touch the dog. And they might touch the dog. And then later a parent might read to them, and then they're trying to read, and then they're just reading and reading and reading, and then they can't wait to get here to read. So I think it's seeing that progression from the first time they've come in to a few years later when they're just, they're reading. They're fine with it. The kids don't really have to read that out loud if they don't need to, if they don't want to. If they're really uncomfortable, they'll just be talking very quietly and whispering or saying, and we're okay. But what we try to do is keep everybody around quiet so that it's not just this kind of free-for-all going on with one kid reading at a time. So I think that if they feel confident enough to read out loud, and I think, again, that comes with time as they build the confidence to sit there and read a book out loud, they start to get more and more confident.
A: That’s wonderful hearing how excited they are to come back in.
C: Yeah, for sure.
A: Once they get more used to Berkeley. She's getting ready to retire.
C: She is.
A: And we're going to have another one.
C: We do. We have another therapy dog all set up. A woman with, she has two dogs. It won't be quite as often. It's going to be twice a month instead of four times a month as Kathy has done. But she's got two different dogs, and I've met them, and they're very sweet, and they're well-trained. So I think the program will just, the idea is that the program continues seamlessly.
A: That’s great.
C: Yeah.
A: And we have a, there's a children's section here at the Los Osos Library.
A: Yes. That's where this occurs.
C: Yes. We put a few things away, kind of clear the floor a little bit so that kids can sit on the floor with the dog and read to the dog.

A: It’s nice how the library is not such a silent space. Like perhaps it might have been in the movies or in the past. And here in this library, when I come in, I'll see people doing puzzles. I'll see people coloring. There's a stitching, knitting group that gets together.
C: Yeah. A fiber group.
A: Fiber group.
C: They work on all types of stitching, and that's once a month.
A: So you have this in the middle of the library.
C: Yeah. So one of the issues we have here is we have, it's an open floor plan, and we have no private space to do something. Like book group meets after hours. So we have, we do it that way. Other programs that meet after hours. Something that involves just kind of this more casual, just sitting and chatting, the table in the middle of the floor is fine. So we've had some of the programs during library hours. This one in particular, it gets pretty chaotic here sometimes. Even if we only have like a few kids read, a lot of people come in on Wednesday afternoon after school and just come to watch other kids read or just, I just want to be part of the action, you know? So it can get noisy. So if somebody's looking for a quiet place, I'll say, don't come in Wednesday afternoons. Don't come in Thursday morning when we have story time because it's another “wild west.” So yeah.
A: And that way you're meeting everybody's needs.
C: Yes. And I think also back to that, since you said you see people doing a jigsaw puzzle and other things like that, I think of the library is not this quiet place to go just sit and quiet and read and that's it. It really is this community hub. We have programming for all different ages. We have different types of programming. We have people with all different kinds of questions. We certainly have more connection to the unhoused population. So we're having to help refer people to other places sometimes. Sometimes you have someone come in who just has a hearing problem. And so we have to talk louder. It's just part of what we do here. And for the most part, people love it. Every once in a while, we've had a concern. And one woman in particular, she was very concerned. The library just is not a quiet place and was very concerned. And I explained it to her. I said, “You know, it isn't the way it used to be. It is a community hub. People come in for all different kinds of things.” And I showed her some of the programming. She loved it. She bought it and loved it.
A: That’s awesome. Well, that's what we're hoping to do with this podcast is to inform people who might not have been to the library in quite some time that they have changed.
C: Yes.
A: That there are lots of options online. There's lots of different kinds of things on the shelves. There’s this whole internet of things.
C: The library of things.
A: The library of things.
C: Yes. Lots of things, an induction stovetop, a sewing machine, all kinds of stuff.
A: Super great. And so we are hoping that this podcast inspires people to come back and check out the library. There's all kinds of really interesting programming. And if you wanted to learn more about when the next PAWS to Read session is at this library or at the other ones, I think there's three other dogs in the system. And then you can check out the events calendar through the SLOLibrary.org website.
C: Yep.
A: Yep. Thank you, Bonnie. Appreciate you speaking with me. I love this library. It's our, this is our local library.
C: Thank you, Rachel. It's my favorite one too.

A: Coming up next on We LOVE the Library: we learn about how and why the SLO County library system started to offer Memory Kits for library cardholders to check out from the library. Adult services coordinating librarian Monique Matta explains the library side of things, while Laura DeLoye of the Alzheimer's Association explains how caregivers have been using these

kits to help people with memory issues. We're here with Monique Matta, who is the Adult Services Coordinating Librarian for the San Luis Obispo County public library system. How are you Monique?
D: I'm very well. Thank you so much for having me.
A: We want to hear more about some of these unique items that are in the library collections. We're going to talk about the Memory Kits. And can you tell us what these are and how they were assembled and how they work for the public?
D: The Memory Kits are something that was put together by our Adult Services department a few years ago in 2020, I believe. We had feedback from some of our branch staff that family members were coming in and asking for resources that could help, that could help with their family members that were struggling with, you know, memory loss or, you know, brain health in general. And so our staff put together these kits, which are designed to help facilitate brain health. And we have actually kits that are designed for three different stages. There's early stage and middle stage and late stage dementia kits.
A: Awesome. Can you tell us about the differences between those three?
D: Well, I think that they are designed as far, they have slightly different components based on what stage they are designed for. I think the ones that are designed for, say, early stage dementia are probably a little bit more challenging as far as their content. Whereas I think the late stage dementia kits are more focused on sort of tactile experience, like, you know, things that you can touch and play with and just sort of stimulate your brain that way.
A: And there's note cards in these kits. Is that something that's in more of that early stage, where you can have, spending time with someone who has memory issues can sometimes be challenging for the person who is the caregiver. And these cards are a nice way of giving the caregiver an entry point into how to have a conversation with someone with memory issues.
D: I believe so. Yes, I think you're right about that. Okay. I think the one that we have here is the late stage one, if you wanted to.
A: Oh, please, let's look into that. Tell us what's in it.
D: Let's see. We have what I was, oh, looks like we have a really cute little, we have a cute little stuffed animal or some, or mitt that you could put your hands in.
A: Looks like some type of muff that's in the shape of a dog.
D: And then there's something for developing your grip. They're called grip ball mitts. And then I think there are also tactile fabric. These are kind of equivalent to what some people use as, I think they're called stim tools. Yeah. That looks like what this is. It's something that you can play with, with your hands. I know that my sister's mother-in-law is very fond of things like this, where she always likes to have something in her hands that she can play with.
A: So it's tactile fabric. It almost looks like rosary beads, if you will, that you can touch and rub in between your fingers and something that almost feels like it could be part of an animal fur or something.
D: And it, I would imagine it's designed to help, it's designed to reduce anxiety, which is a, which as we know is a, is a predominant feature of someone who's, who's struggling with brain health.
A: Yes. Wow. That's really cool. So these are, this is the later stage.
D: Yes. This is a later stage kit that we have here and you can see the focus on the tactile activities.
A: Awesome. Now this earlier stage kit has a CD player and a CD that says Number One Hits of the Fifties.
D: Yes. This is more of a memory/nostalgia kit. So there's a little bit more of, there's more of a focus on remembering things from their past. And, and I guess there's a certain comfort that comes with that as well. So there's an emotional benefit to that, but it also helps them to think about their history and maybe access parts of their brain that they don't access on a daily basis. And, but yes, we have, we even have a CD player in there. We have a music that they can listen to. There's some classic movies included.
A: Cool.

D: So it's kind of an audio visual kit and then, oh my goodness, this looks like a picture album and yes, cards with pictures on them that can, that can be used to spark conversation.
A: So these are all like writing prompts, but it's for spending time with your elderly or your, your person who has memory issues that you're, that you're, that you're spending time with. And that's, that's such a great thing for a caregiver. It gives them extra tools for like, what am I going to do for this hour that we're here together? And what a great idea.
D: I also wanted to point out really quick that we actually have Spanish language versions of these now that are new. Just, we had some popular demand for those. And so earlier this year, I worked with our Bilingual Committee to get some tips for what they thought might be popular. And I also, I attend the Adult Services Policy Council meetings and I talked to some of the people there that were in attendance. It was someone from Public Health and she had some really great tips for what she thought might be a good addition to those kits.
A: Awesome. So people can check these out for three weeks at a time?
D: Yes, they can.
A: Awesome. And are they in every library or, I know that they have them in Morro Bay and you have them here in San Luis Obispo.
D: They should be in virtually every branch. I think a couple, a couple of the kits might be currently in Mending because they're missing items right now. By the way, we don't, we don't charge for replacement items with these kits because we know that that's—
A: It's wear and tear.
D: Exactly. It's natural wear and tear. But, but yeah, we should have these at virtually all of our branch locations.
A: That's great. Thank you for explaining these items.
D: My pleasure. Thank you so much.

A: I'm here with Laura DeLoye, the Program and Education Manager for the Alzheimer's Association. Hi, Laura.
E: Hi.
A: How are you?
E: I am doing well. Thank you.
A: Thank you for meeting with us today. And we're to talk about Memory Kits. We just got the background from Monique Matta about how they've put them all together. And now we want to hear from you about how people have been using them.
E: Yes, absolutely. This is, I'm really excited that the SLO County library system has been using these. It's just such a great collaboration. I know we had spoken probably over a year ago about just updating some of these kits and how they're getting used out in the community by caregivers and families and those who are dealing with dementia or other cognitive losses. And they're just so well thought out. They're set up for people in different stages of the disease process. So whether that's the earlier, middle or late stages and, and people within having any disease with dementia is every day is different. And there's a fluctuation between good days, bad days, morning, night. And so being able to utilize these kits, bring them home with the caregiver and the person who has dementia. And you have these prompts that are in for, you know, how to engage with these different, you know, whether it's the music in the CD, or if it's a game of some sort or some other types of word, mind bender kinds of things like that.
A: Old pictures from the 20th century.
E: Yeah. And, and things that can just spark some of those engagement pieces because those memories, they're not able to really just know what they have forgotten and they're not able to choose what is remembered. So it's really neat to be able to have those physical prompts that are there. And especially as the diseases progress in the later stages, just having more of that tactile hands-on visual concepts versus just saying words and "Oh, do you remember this?" Or "Oh, do you remember that?" Because usually the answer is going to be "No."

A: And that's kind of a stressful question for someone who might not know that they have memory issues, right? But they know they have memory issues.
E: Yeah, exactly.
A: Might not be honest with themselves like my dad. Yep.
E: Yeah, a lot of denial happens. And just also, there's an amnesia for some people that they have no idea that they have memory issues. And then it can be the like, “Well, you're the one who's forgetting, I didn't forget this.” And “I know that I put it there.” So these are ways to be able to help connect and engage as well as distract too. So I think these Memory Kits that the library is offering can just be so helpful to fill some of the day and bring back some of those connections and laughter and smiles and just being able to have some of the conversations that are different. But, you know, we can at least work together to think about some new possibilities or get some of the hands-on interactions that are happening.
A: I love how it's helpful for the caregiver. Because it can be really challenging as a caregiver to figure out how to get through that hour or the afternoon.
E: Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely.
A: You were telling me about a retreat that you were involved with, with some caregivers and the kind of response that they had to these Memory Kits. Can you tell us about that?
E: Yeah, we as the Alzheimer's Association, we collaborate really well with a lot of different organizations in our community. We all seem to play well together with others. But with CapSLO Adult Day Center in Paso Robles, they've been the hosts for respite care. And then we have a caregiver retreat right next door at the church. And along with Coast Caregiver Resource Center and Guided Aging Geriatric Care Management, we had a caregiver retreat where we were talking about these different opportunities for how to engage. Like, what are the things that we can do? What are the conversations that we can start? How can we set up a room or a home to have a safe space for people with dementia to to be in? As well as having some possibilities for the caregivers to set up a person for success who has dementia and allow them to engage on their own for at least a short amount of time. So this was a caregiver retreat where we were talking about all of these things. And one of our colleagues with the Coast Caregiver Resource Center brought in the Memory Kits to share. And the response from the caregivers were just so positive. So you may have a run on them at the different libraries, but it was just so wonderful for them to see, oh, somebody thought through these things and we can just go and get it. And then we can implement it and we can have it for a couple of weeks and return it and get something else. Or in another few months, maybe we get the same kit back again because it's going to be different for that person and how they interact with it at that next stage as well.
A: Right. And Monique said that they also are, they have some kits that are in Spanish.
E: Yes.
A: That’s great because Alzheimer's does not discriminate.
E: It does not.
A: Dementia does not discriminate.
E: No, it does not. And so I love that, you know, really looking out into the community as to what are some of those cultural needs that are happening and having the Spanish kits are just, I think going to be invaluable for our community. I know we've talked about the movie Coco and how that is something that you could rent or not, not even rent, but check it out from the library and how that brings together the whole intergenerational of everybody coming together. So of course, Coco and other movies and music that's out there and whether that's through the app of Libby, which I have used frequently, but it's a great place to say, oh, I'm looking for, I don't know, Frank Sinatra or ABBA and while I don't have that necessarily in my collection, but we can go on to that app and download some of that music and put it on and dance around the house or have it be something that's different than what's happening on the television.
A: Something I appreciate you saying before we started to record is how the library has these resources that if you're able to customize your own Memory Kit experience with your person who's suffering from memory issues and so you can contact the library and the wonderful librarians throughout the system will be able to direct you or make a request for you through

circulation so that you can get those materials and continue to spend quality time with your person who has memory issues.
E: Yeah, it's a fantastic system and you can reserve, whether it's movies or books or even thinking about poems or audio books and whether that's even, you know, phrases from the Bible, if that's something of interest or all of those poems that maybe they learned or knew in earlier days that those can come back in a wonderful audio book. Or again, the music, my background is as a music therapist. And so I'm always encouraging the music because it's really an easy connector for folks with dementia most often.
A: And that movie Coco was highlighting the fact that your memories of music are one of the last to go.
E: Yeah, yeah.
A: Your short term memory might be gone. But those music cues can pull you back to spending time with people who are in the room with you as opposed to you're in your own isolated space.
E: Yeah, absolutely.
A: Which is what dementia can be.
E: Yeah. And what's just so fabulous with music too is that it encompasses many different parts of our brain. And so even if there's a spot that maybe not as many words are being able to be used by the person with dementia, sometimes they'll listen to a song and sing every single word along with it. And then you have a conversation in an hour and they can't keep the two words together. And it's an amazing phenomenon, I guess. But there is something with listening to music as a person with dementia that there is following that time of engagement, whether that's even just some arm raises or leg raises or getting up and dancing to the music or singing to it, that the time following that they are in a bit more of an awareness, of a state of awareness that maybe it's a better time then to have a doctor's appointment. Maybe it's a better time then to have somebody who's coming over to visit to be able to engage more, whatever those kinds of things may be.
A: That’s great. We really appreciate you speaking to us about how to use these Memory Kits that you can check out from the library. Thank you, Laura.

E: Yeah, absolutely. Thanks so much for reaching out.

A: We hope you're learning more about your public library and enjoying our We LOVE the Library podcast.

Next time, we sit down with Festival MOZAIC Executive Director Lloyd Tanner and Juliane McAdam, who is a board member with Festival MOZAIC. Actually, we’ll all be climbing into a Time Machine that takes us back to summer 2025. Lloyd and Juliane will discuss the Young Musicians performances that took place in several libraries in SLO County during this annual summer festival, as well as plans for more collaboration between Festival MOZAIC and the public library system.

Still in our time machine, we'll drop off our Festival MOZAIC friends and then pick up Susanna Lewis, the Coordinating Librarian for youth services. She'll tell us more about the 2025 summer reading program and how to keep kids and families engaged in reading throughout the year. For more information about the San Luis Obispo County Library Foundation and how to donate to support the library, visit our website at SLOLibraryFoundation.org. The next episode drops in two weeks.

Thank you for listening and for helping support the public library, the people's champion.