

CREATING A DISTRICT-WIDE “SECURITY BLANKET” SO KIDS FEEL LESS ALONE

Cameron’s Collection on Gale eBooks: Learn how this librarian’s determination helped her secure funding for much-needed online SEL resources for students across the district.

“I had a great relationship with my parents, but we didn’t talk about things like depression. I would’ve been the kid who went to Cameron’s Collection to look up information. I know there are a lot of students who are like that. They can get these resources day or night . . . It’s right there for them all the time.”



Laurie Nordahl
Librarian
North Bend High School
North Bend, OR

BACKGROUND

Laurie Nordahl has been a librarian at North Bend High School for more than 20 years. She was voted 2017 District Librarian of the Year for the state of Oregon and also served as president of the Oregon Association of School Libraries in 2019. Nordahl began advocating to make Cameron’s Collection available across the district shortly after it was introduced at the high school level. This collection has more than 100 eBooks curated by Gale in partnership with the Cameron K. Gallagher Foundation.

Cameron Gallagher was a bright and talented young girl who suffered from depression and anxiety. Her dream was to raise awareness about teenage depression and anxiety—and to erase the stigmas associated with them. At the tender age of 16, Cameron suddenly passed away from an undiagnosed heart condition. Her legacy and efforts live on through the foundation.

■ ABOUT THE CHALLENGE FOCUSING ON MENTAL WELLNESS

Nationally, one out of five teens suffer from mental health challenges and more than 75 percent don’t seek help.¹ With COVID-19 and social issues changing life as we know it, it’s even more important that students learn how to deal with their emotions in a healthy way. While Cameron’s Collection isn’t a substitute for a professional, it’s a great first step for kids who aren’t ready to seek in-person help or want privacy while they explore.

“When I first heard about Cameron’s Collection, it resonated with me because I was that teenager who wouldn’t have sought out a counselor,” said Nordahl. “I wouldn’t have opened up to a staff member or wouldn’t have taken a book with a mental illness topic to the library desk to check out. I know there are students just like me, and I wanted resources for them.”

Nordahl began by planting seeds about how useful the resources would be. She talked about it with school leaders, counselors, and teachers every chance she got. But the timing became more urgent for her after a student death.

“The real ‘gotta-have-it-right-now’ moment came when we lost a student to suicide,” she said. “It devastated our school community, and after the initial surge of support, some students were still processing. If a student was up in the middle of the night thinking about these things, I wanted them to have access to these quality, vetted resources.”

Through her persistence, funding for Cameron’s Collection at the high school level eventually came through the normal channels. However, when she attempted to gain funding to add K–8 collections, it got tougher. She knew other schools in the district didn’t have the budget, plus the library’s budget was frozen when COVID-19 hit. While she was aware that the district had some COVID-19 funds, they were designated for other purposes. That’s when she applied for competitive COVID-19 grants offered by the State Library of Oregon with funds from the Library Services and Technology Act.

1. [Cameron K. Gallagher Foundation website](#), accessed December 1, 2020, ckgfoundation.org.

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Nordahl uses an “invisible backpack” to acknowledge the emotions that students carry around, even if they can’t be seen on the outside. It reminds students that Cameron’s Collection is there to help.

“There are a lot of kids who aren’t seeking help, but this is a way they can start that process privately. To me, this resource is worth every penny if I help even one student.”

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■ BRIDGING THE GAP

HAVING RESOURCES AT THE READY

During the summer of 2020, Nordahl was awarded the grants and received the funds needed to offer the K–8 collections, which included Cameron’s Camp for Wellness for elementary students. She was even able to update some of the titles at the high school level. When she received the grants, Nordahl made sure to let administrators know that she had gotten them so they understood how important it was to her and their school community.

“When I introduce Cameron’s Collection to classes, I want them to know Cameron was a real person—a teenager who struggled—and that Cameron wanted people to be able to talk about these things and get help,” Nordahl said. “So that story makes it real. It resonates with them.”

Equally important, Nordahl emphasizes to students that these eBooks are not just about stress, anxiety, and bullying. She said, “If you want to improve yourself, you want to try yoga, you want to do some mindfulness exercises, there are resources on there for that.” And for teachers, Cameron’s Collection is a simple way to incorporate authentic social and emotional learning (SEL) into instruction.

Along with in-person discussions, Nordahl uses ready-made marketing materials from the [Gale support site](#) to promote the resources to school staff, students, and even parents. Whether it’s articles in the school newsletters, flyers in bathroom stalls, or reminders on the library’s website, she takes advantage of every possible avenue to keep Cameron’s Collection visible to those who may need it.

She even created an “invisible backpack”—a see-through bag that represents the physical toll of invisible burdens, like bullying, stress, anxiety, and grief. Nordahl uses this visual to remind students that their struggles are real and that Cameron’s Collection is one place they can turn.

When distance learning disrupted some of her normal communication channels, she got creative once again. When students pick up lunches curbside or stop by the school to get supplies, they’ll receive a flyer with information about accessing the collection.

■ THE RESULT

TAKING BABY STEPS

“I have always tried to make the library not only a warm, welcoming place but the place students can get answers and help for anything. I feel like Cameron’s Collection fits right into this philosophy,” Nordahl said.

But with the prevalence of blended and online learning, students may not have in-person access to supportive environments like this. That’s where the power of the *Gale eBooks* platform comes in. With unlimited online access, students don’t have to wait for someone to return a title before they can read it. With private, online reading, they don’t have to worry about what people will think. With age-appropriate content, they can explore challenging topics in a safe space. Plus, the eBooks can be translated into dozens of languages, providing access for more students and families.

“The big thing for me is letting kids know that they’re not alone,” said Nordahl. “By privately accessing information, students can realize others have experienced the same thing, and it may lead them to talking with a trusted adult.”

Nordahl is proud of her library for providing this essential content, but she knows her job isn’t done. She hopes other schools find creative ways to overcome roadblocks as well. “You can start small and build a collection while you’re seeking funding. You don’t have to purchase the entire collection at once,” she said. “It’s about taking baby steps.”