

He does what he can....

By Gayle VanVooren, Mascot Editor

April 7 2010



Sixteen-year-old Robert VanWatermeulen-Fales has cerebral palsy and his mode of transportation is a wheelchair.

But that did not stop him from doing a community service project that will help many young readers.



Working with Eriann Faris, Youth Program Coordinator of the Southwest MN Private Industry Council, Fales spent a great deal of time at the Minneota Public Library leveling books in the juvenile collection.

“It was easy to do,” said Fales, “but it took time.” He estimated he worked at the library for about three months before the project was completed.

This included the easy, intermediate, junior high and teen books in the library’s collection. All of the information was fed into the computer for reference.

“I worked three days a week,” said Fales. And it took a few months for him to get all the work done.

Leveling means that each book in the Accelerated Reader program was given a grade point plus the years and months so that kids can accumulate points on them in their schools.

Kids take a reading comprehension test on the books after they are read, and work toward a goal in their reading program.

The books that Fales has now leveled will make it easier for the kids to check out, as they will know if the books are appropriate for their grade and reading level.

With Fales in a wheelchair, it was very important that the library is handicapped accessible. Fales said, “It’s sometimes hard for me to go through doors, and to even get the doors open.” He was appreciative of the assistance he got so he could work at the library this past summer.

Eriann Faris added, “I work with students who are at-risk,” said Faris, and “Fales is because of his disability. So we set up experiences that allow these kids to work.”

She contacted Mary Buysse at the Minneota Public Library and they quickly came up with a plan.

“He did a really great job,” added Faris. “We are now trying to find additional opportunities over the summer for Robert, because he did such a fantastic job. We work with the employers and help the students become successful.”

Library Board member Nancy Dilley, who also appreciated Fales work, said, "The kids are reading at their level of comfort and difficulty, but this is helping them to be better readers. The library is there for all readers and to encourage better reading."

"Robert's work will help all who are in the Accelerated Reading program," she added. The books at both St. Edward's and the Public School are also leveled, so this service at the Public Library makes it easy for kids to keep right on reading selections on the Accelerated Reader list.

Kids are encouraged to check out books at the Minneota Public Library. Library cards are free although children under 16 do need a parent's signature to get a card.

The check-out period for books is three weeks and library accounts can be managed on-line, if necessary. A book return bin makes it easy to return books when the library is not open.

The Minneota Public Library hours have also become more flexible, so that students and adults can use the facility to the maximum.

The library is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 2 - 8 p.m. on Wednesdays, from 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. on Fridays and from 9 a.m. to noon on Saturdays.

Come and visit your Minneota Public Library, and help your children find the books on the Accelerated Reading Program list. And thank Robert VanWatermeulen-Fales for his work in getting them all leveled for the students.