

CASE STUDY: STORY CIRCLES, COFFEE & CONVERSATIONS, AND RESPONSE BOARDS IN GLENWOOD SPRINGS



Overview

Glenwood Springs Public Library serves a small, rural community in western Colorado with a wide range of ages, life experiences, and viewpoints. Librarian Trary LaMee coordinated several One Small Step–inspired programs between April and August 2025, including Voices Story Circles, Coffee and Conversations in English and Spanish, and a Community Response Board. Together, these programs reached hundreds of community members through a mix of facilitated gatherings and low-pressure, self-directed participation.

Across all three formats, Trary used approaches that allowed people to engage briefly or more fully, depending on interest and comfort level.

Approach

The first program Trary implemented was Voices Story Circles, developed in partnership with Voices, a nearby nonprofit that creates projects centered on lived experience. These story circles took place between April and August 2025 and reached approximately 135 participants. Rather than recruiting a specific audience, the library opened the circles broadly, which resulted in participation across ages and backgrounds. Trary described the experience as beginning with strangers sitting together and gradually shifting into something much more relational. The circles used One Small Step Great Questions and postcards to guide conversation.



The second format was Coffee and Conversations, offered twice in both English and Spanish. These programs were designed as brief, informal exchanges rather than extended facilitated sessions. For the program for English-speakers, Trary set up a table near the library entrance during a busy children’s splashpad program outside, engaging adults as they supervised children or passed in and out of the building.



Adults throughout the community are invited to join us on the library's plaza for coffee and conversations. We'll provide the coffee, and you can meet friends and neighbors for a unique opportunity to chat.

THURSDAYS: JULY 17 & 31
10 - 11:30 AM
GLENWOOD SPRINGS BRANCH LIBRARY

For more information call the library at 970-945-5958.



Los adultos de toda la comunidad están invitados a reunirse con nosotros junto a la chimenea de la biblioteca para tomar un café y conversar. Nosotros proporcionaremos el café y podrán reunirse con amigos y vecinos para una oportunidad única de charlar.

VIERNES: 25 DE JULIO Y 8 DE AGOSTO
12:30 - 1:30 PM
BIBLIOTECA DE RIFLE

Para obtener más información, llame a la biblioteca al 970-625-3471.



Participants could stop, talk, and listen using toolkit lanyards with One Small Step Great Questions. Trary observed that this format supported friendly, civil exchanges between people with different viewpoints without requiring sustained participation.

The third format was a Community Response Board, a passive program that remained up and generated approximately

140 written responses. Prompts were intentionally gentle and open-ended. Responses came from children, adults, elders, and at least one person who wrote first in another language and then translated their response into English. Trary later compiled the responses into a scrapbook that remained available for patrons to browse.

What Participants Experienced

Across formats, Trary noticed that people engaged in different ways. Some stopped only long enough to read what others had written on the response board. Others stayed to contribute. In the story circles, participants who had not met before shared personal experiences and listened closely to one another. In Coffee and Conversations, people with differing perspectives spoke candidly while maintaining a friendly tone.

One participant attended a Coffee and Conversations event simply because he wanted to meet people in town. He brought his own cup of coffee on a break from his work-from-home job. During the same program, an older woman and a young man from Mexico connected over shared experiences and were embracing by the end of the gathering.



Considering Community Conditions in Spanish-Language Programming



As Trary reflected on her bilingual Coffee and Conversations program, she described how changing conditions around ICE activity shaped both attendance and design. The surrounding community is 40% Spanish-speaking. She emphasized the importance of awareness and care when planning programming intended for Spanish-speaking residents.

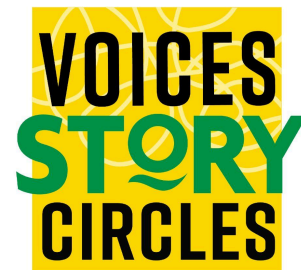
In her day-to-day work at the library, Trary and her colleagues noticed an increase in requests for practical assistance. Patrons were coming in and using tools like Google Translate to ask for help with tasks such as making copies of important documents for their families. These interactions offered staff a clearer view into what community members were navigating beyond library programming.

Trary also noted that participation in Spanish-language programs was affected during this period. Rather than interpreting that as disinterest, she understood it as a signal that timing, format, and perceived relevance matter deeply. Some forms of programming that might have felt approachable at another moment required more consideration given the safety issues people were dealing with in their daily lives.

Key Insights & Lessons Learned

Across all three activity types, Trary observed how strongly format shapes participation. Story circles supported longer listening and relationship-building skills, while Coffee and Conversations allowed for more brief, informal exchanges. The Community Response Board reached people who were not ready to speak aloud but were willing to read or reflect.

She also observed that flexibility mattered. When people were not required to stay, perform, or agree,



VOICES, in partnership with One Small Step & StoryCorps, as well as Garfield County Libraries, invites people of all ages to a safe and welcoming space to cultivate story sharing and deep listening. We share stories to learn about one another and understand the intricacies of life. Snacks and a skilled facilitator will be provided.

Thursday, May 15
4 - 6 pm
Glenwood Springs Branch Library

Free!
For more information
call the library at
970-945-5958.



Find Your
STORY 

conversations tended to remain calm and grounded in personal experience. This was especially visible in Coffee and Conversations, where participants could pause, listen, speak, or move on.

Trary noted that the Community Response Board continued to draw attention over time. Some people engaged silently, others returned multiple times.



Notable Outcomes and Key Takeaways

Trary's One Small Step programming reached hundreds of people through a combination of facilitated gatherings and low-pressure entry points. In several instances, participants who did not know one another shared personal stories and learned something new about someone else in their community.

The library became a setting where conversation occurred both intentionally and incidentally, shaped by format, timing, and the everyday rhythms of community life. Trary saw her library functioning as a place where people could practice noticing one another.

This case study highlights programs adapted from One Small Step toolkits. Visit diy.takeonesmallstep.org to explore the tools.