

Tough math problem? Grammar question? Find help through the Baker County Library

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Stella Bowers studies the computer screen, quiet in her concentration on the multiplication problem of 75 times 25 that is drawn on a virtual chalkboard.

With a sudden “ping,” this question pops up: “Do you know where to start?”

Stella, 11, uses a pencil tool to complete the first step by drawing with the mouse.

Ping: “Good.”

Unsure of what to do next, Stella types “I’m stuck.”

On the chalkboard appears a similar problem, which is solved with arrows showing the sequential steps.

Now Stella returns to her own problem, using the practice one as reference. As she works, each “ping!” brings encouragement and coaching.

This is a demonstration of Live Homework Help, a free service provided through the Baker County Public Library.

“The major guideline is they aren’t doing the homework for the kid,” said Perry Stokes, library director.

This is the second year the library has offered this program to all its patrons — students of all ages — and the service is available daily from 2 p.m. to 9 p.m.

To access it from home, all you need is a library card. First, log on to the library’s Web site, www.bakerlib.org, and click on “Live Homework Help.”

In 2008, the service was funded by a grant from the Chalkboard Project, a nonprofit dedicated to improving Oregon’s K-12 public school system, and was available to the Libraries of Eastern Oregon, a consortium of 22 rural libraries.

This year, each of those libraries contributed matching funds to keep the service.

The situation now is “use it or lose it.”

“We’ll definitely lose it if there’s continued non-use,” Stokes said.

Stokes plans to explain the service at the school district’s inservice workshops, and he hopes teachers will encourage students to utilize the program.

“And we’ll be plastering the schools with fliers,” he said.

Live Homework Help is available to three categories of students: K-12, College and Adult.

Once you log in, you choose your education level, and then click on the subject you need: math, science, English, social studies or “Proof Point,” which allows you to upload a completed document that will be reviewed by an English tutor.

To begin, you fill out several fields to narrow down your need, and then the service connects you with a tutor who has been certified as an expert in his or her field.

The session is interactive with a virtual chalkboard where the tutor can draw diagrams to explain concepts. Then, when the main problem is solved, the tutor can provide practice problems.



Stella Bowers, 11, poses a math problem for Dorren, who helps students from the other end of a computer tutor connection at the Baker County Library.

To show the value of this service, Stokes said the program's for-profit site, www.tutor.com, costs \$35 for an hour.

"We've got it, for free, for an unlimited time," he said.

Library card numbers are only needed if students access the service from home. Computers at the library are automatically connected.

More online services

The Baker County Library Web site allows patrons to reserve and renew books online, but that's just a small slice of the world you can access with your library card.

On the library's homepage, www.bakerlib.org, click on the pull-down menu for "Online Research Archives."

Most simply require the library number found on the back of your card, and a PIN you set the first time you register.

After that, research is at your fingertips, and everything is from reliable sources (sometimes a simple search on the Internet turns up sketchy information, especially for a school report).

The EBSCO database, for instance, allows you to search topics in thousands of newspapers and magazines.

The Gale Virtual Reference Library is "basically our reference books in a digital format," Stokes said.

And the Web site is available all the time.

"It's really helpful for us to be able to serve customers at all hours," Stokes said.

Another link is to "Novelist," which offers easy ways to search for authors, or to find other writers who are similar to your favorites.

"This is pretty helpful for us when someone is trying to find a book and can't remember the author or title, only a few characters or the plot," Stokes said.

Another database he's excited to share is the Auto Repair Reference Center where you can search by make and model to find repair manuals with with step-by-step instructions and diagrams.

Stokes said this might be especially helpful to local mechanics.

"It might save them some money if they're buying manuals," he said.

On the shelves

The library may offer a bunch of services online, but the real collection — the books you can hold in your hand — is always changing at the main branch and the satellite branches in Haines, Halfway, Richland, Huntington and Sumpter.

"There are always things moving in and out," said Diana Pearson, reference librarian.

The Baker library belongs to the Sage system, which includes 70 libraries — public, private and school.

Chances are, that book you really want to read is available somewhere on all those shelves.

And, if you're traveling across Oregon and realize your library book is due, you can turn it in at any of the Sage libraries (that list is available on the library Web site).

But back to the Baker library, where shelf after shelf in the back is full of books and movies waiting to be processed for circulation.

And another section holds, from floor to ceiling, brand new Spanish and bilingual children's books thanks to the "Amo Leer" grant (Spanish for "I love to read) from the Oregon Library Association.

The grant included \$9,000 for the books and \$1,000 for processing, housing and outreach for the collection.

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