

“Dream Mats”

Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Service Project

The Alfred H. Baumann Free Public Library, in partnership with Mayor Keith Kazmark, Passaic County Senior Services, and Passaic Valley High School, are looking for additional partners to help with a community service project to provide persons experiencing homelessness in Passaic County, with “Dream Mats” (portable sleeping mats) to help protect them from the elements in harsh weather and serve as a cushion on hard surfaces. “Dream Mats” are portable sleeping mats crocheted using plarn; yarn made from recyclable plastic bags.

Each “Dream Mat” is made using approximately 500 to 700 plastic bags (the size of a standard grocery bag). The bags are cut into strips, looped together, and then crocheted into a 3’x6’ (may vary) mat with a carrying handle.

There are many ways your organization can help with this worthwhile project. Please watch the You Tube videos and then read the following options and let us know how you would like to be involved:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yr_WHW_tGSE&t=606s Instructional Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSD3l1mqZik> Instructional Video (shorter version)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5JNe-hce0sY> Video featuring seniors making mats

There are many other videos on You Tube with instructions and videos showing how these portable sleeping mats make a difference for those who are fortunate to get them.

We are announcing the start of this project on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, and although, an on-going project, we are hoping to have all participants working on some part of this project on Thursday, February 14, 2019. We are requesting that you take pictures or short video clips, boomerangs, etc.

of your participants working on this project for our media coverage. Pictures and small video clips can be sent to hoffman@abwplibrary.org. We will also provide a dropbox link closer to the date. Please save your files using your organization's name in the file name.

All the information for participating in this project is listed on the following pages. Please contact me as soon as possible if you are interested and how you will participate. We are creating a flyer that will list your organization as a participant. Additionally, please send your organization's logo to hoffman@abwplibrary.org.

The "Dream Mats" will be distributed through local organizations that serve the homeless.

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact Linda Hoffman at the Alfred H. Baumann Free Public Library, 973-345-8120 or email Hoffman@abwplibrary.org .

A. Collecting the Bags

We will be happy to drop off a container to collect plastic grocery bags or if your organization has a surplus of bags please consider donating them. The ideal size is plastic grocery bags that are (12" x 14"). These are most suitable for this process. (Larger and/or stiffer plastic department store bags, produce bags, dry cleaning bags, and newspaper bags are not appropriate.)

B. Volunteers to Sort/separate bags by store/color (optional)

It is easier to cut bags from the same store more precisely. Also, keeping the cut strips sorted by color allows the person making the mats to design a color pattern for the mat.

C. Volunteers to Flatten Bags & Cut Bags

Flatten bags as flat as possible, following steps 1-4 below:

- 1.** Make sure that the bag is right-side out. (Otherwise it is impossible to flatten the bag properly with the gusset folded in.)
- 2.** Using the bag handles, shake the bag to open, straighten and remove air. (Most frequently the bags we receive are crumpled.)
- 3.** Place bag on the table and flatten from the bottom seam out, straightening the handle as needed.
- 4.** Straighten the bottom seam, fold the gussets in, and holding on to the bottom seam and the straightened handle, completely flatten each side of the bag.

Repeat steps 1-4 (above) for multiple bags of same color/type, creating stacks of ten (10) identical, flattened bags.

Cut the Bags

You will need the following:

--rotary cutter and self-healing cutting mat or scissors (young children should use scissors for this project).

1. Take stack of 10 flattened identical bags and ensure that they are lined up at the bottom.*
2. Using the rotary cutter and guide remove bottom , about $\frac{1}{4}$ " , making sure that you remove all 10 bottom seams. Cut the top off just below the handles. Scissors can be used instead of rotary cutter.
3. Discard bottoms and handle scraps. ***(These pieces can be recycled)***
4. Fold the bag in half, length-wise, and then in half again.
5. Cut in half and then cut each half again, making quarters (each piece will be about 3").
6. Keep cut strips sorted by color and place them in a bag of the same type to be used by those who will crochet the mats.

***Bags can be cut one at a time.**

D. Volunteers to Loop the Strips Together

1. To attach the strips together to create the plarn (***plastic yarn***) for crocheting, take two strips and loop one around the end of the other, loop and pull. ***(This is difficult to describe in words. Please watch the video).***

Note: After the strips are looped together DO NOT roll into balls, but fold them into bundles of 20-30 connected strips. ***(Rolling into balls crushes the strips and the finished mat will be less thick and fluffy and thus, less comfortable to sleep on.)***

E. Volunteers to Crochet the Mats

Note: It is very important to understand that not all of the volunteers need to know how to crochet or need to construct the mats. However, this is a great opportunity to learn how to crochet. (These instructions assume you already know how to single crochet.)

1. Open a bundle of the plarn created in Step D above and make a knot at the end of the plarn.
2. To create the first row, using the Size Q crochet hook* create a 3-foot-long chain (approximately 40 stitches.)
3. To create the next and all subsequent rows, single crochet the EXACT same number of stitches as in your original 3-foot chain.
4. Continue to single crochet the same number of stitches in each row until the mat is 6 feet long. (Stitches which are loose rather than tight will create a thicker, softer mat for sleeping.)

*Size N through Q can be used. (Tighter/small stitch can be made with smaller crochet hook – adjust the size accordingly). Use the size which is most comfortable for you.

Making the Carrying Straps for Each Mat/Attaching a Carrying Strap to Each Mat

Note: A rolled mat with a carrying strap makes the mat much more user-friendly for those carrying them.

1. Using 30 to 50 circular strips, loop each together (***as above***) into one long piece of plarn.
2. Using this one long piece of plarn, make a chain, using the Size Q crochet hook, and then do one row of single crochet. The finished chain should be approximately 3-4 yards long. This is the strap.
3. Roll the finished 3' foot x 6' mat.

4. Attach the strap to outside left corner of the mat, about 6 inches in from the left edge, catching it through the top 2 rows. Double knot that end of the strap.
5. Thread the strap through the remaining loop at the end of the double knot.
6. Wrap the strap around the rolled mat 6" past the double knot and pull tight. Then create a loop by sliding a piece of the remaining strap under the strap you have just wrapped around the mat.
7. Take the remaining strap and pull it completely through the loop and pull tight.
8. Lay the remaining strap across the mat to the right side of the mat, stopping about 6" in from the right edge.
9. Holding the strap in place 6" in from the right edge of the mat, wrap the remaining strap all the way around the mat, catching the strap you are holding in place. Secure with a knot.

Note: This process is difficult to put into words, but actually very simple to do. The video will make the steps above very clear!