

Itsy Bitsy Franchise Continues to Expand at Holyoke Community College

HOLYOKE - The Itsy Bitsy franchise continues to expand at Holyoke Community College.

For the second year in a row, students in Professor Sheryl Civjan's Psychology of Women class have taken up the college's "Itsy Bitsy" theme for a campus-based community service project. Last fall, Civjan's students created the Itsy Bitsy Closet, transforming a storage room next to the college's Itsy Bitsy Child Watch Center into a family-friendly resource room full of donated books, clothes, and other children's items – all free to HCC student-parents.

This semester, they put together five Itsy Bitsy Stations – containers of children's books, games, small toys, art supplies, and other items – that student-parents can access to occupy their kids when visiting certain campus offices, in particular: Financial Aid, Admissions, Advising, English as a Second Language, and the HCC Library.

"Some college offices can be difficult to go to for appointments when you have kids," said Civjan. "These boxes will give kids something to do while they're parents are waiting."

Civjan said the idea came from staff at the Itsy Bitsy Child Watch.



Lauren Williams, of Goshen; Elle Platanitis, of Holyoke; Sarah Schrijn, of Belchertown; and Victoria Guilmette, of Chicopee, hold a few of the items selected for an Itsy Bitsy Station in the HCC Advising office.

"Students have shared that they are sometimes self-conscious when they are bringing their kids into campus offices," said Emily Webber, director of the itsy Bitsy Child Watch, a free drop-in service for HCC student-parents. "This is an effort to make the campus feel more inclusive to student-parents and families. Having little play stations helps people feel more welcome. I talked to Sheryl about that, and her students took the idea and ran with it."

The idea for using "Itsy Bitsy" as the title for early childhood programs

at HCC started in 2020 when, during the pandemic, HCC educators created a series of video interviews for early education students and professionals (the Itsy Bitsy Zoomcast). The theme grew into a title for a new suite of early education classrooms modeled after pre-school and kindergarten facilities (the Itsy Bitsy Learning Lab). The Itsy Bitsy Child Watch opened in 2022, followed last year by the Itsy Bitsy Closet, and this year by the Itsy Bitsy Stations.

Civjan's students put together three containers for the HCC Library,

each targeting different age groups.

"We found that students who have children don't always have a safe, comfortable place where they can sit and feel like they're not intruding on another person's space," said Rebecca Hardy, administrative assistant for the HCC Library. "So, we wanted to make sure that the students who do have children feel welcome and that their children have things to do to keep them quietly engaged."

Student Olivia Jolley of South Hadley, whose team prepared boxes for the Admissions Office, said the project ties in directly to the themes of the class, and although she does not have children herself, Jolley said some of her classmates do.

"One had a baby a couple of weeks ago," she said, "and she's a single parent."

Webber said she appreciates the hard work Civjan's students put into their projects.

"I think it's an ongoing partnership," she said. "I don't know what will come next, but they do amazing things. The Itsy Bitsy Closet has been a great success. Students come by every day. Hopefully this will have a similar impact." ■