



For Immediate Release  
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Contact: [Russell Blair](#)  
(860) 559-4873

## HARTFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY SELECTS JULIA CONVERSANO AS RECIPIENT OF CAROLINE M. HEWINS SCHOLARSHIP



(Hartford, CT) – Hartford Public Library is pleased to announce that Julia Conversano of Tarzana, California, is the 2021 recipient of the Caroline M. Hewins Scholarship, given to promising library school students who intend to become children’s librarians.

Julia, who has volunteered and interned with the Los Angeles Public Library, is pursuing her Master of Library and Information Science degree at the University of California, Los Angeles, and expects to graduate in 2022. She was enrolled in medical school and planning to become a neurosurgeon before switching her career focus to libraries.

“I am impressed by Julia’s commitment to her community and particularly her work with children with disabilities and her goal to create more inclusive library programming for that population,” **said HPL president and CEO Bridget E. Quinn.**

“As a former children’s librarian I know how rewarding the work can be and wish her well as she embarks on her new career.”

At UCLA, Julia is vice chair of the Young Adult & Children Services organization for MLIS students. She is also a member of both the American Library Association, the California Library Association and a longtime volunteer at The Painted Turtle camp for children and teens with chronic lifelong disabilities.

“I really look forward to working in a public library and being part of a positive, altruistic, inquisitive community eager to improve knowledge accessibility,” Julia said. “It truly takes a team and a village to be able to serve all your patrons equitably regardless of socioeconomic status.”

Julia will receive a \$4,000 scholarship award.

## An interview with Julia Conversano

### **You were in medical school before enrolling in the MLIS program at UCLA. What made you decide to switch careers?**

My career trajectory did not align with my personality, how I really wanted to interact with the people I'm helping. And so I realized that about three weeks into medical school, but I kept pushing through, and did very well. But it was a life lesson that you can be very good at something and not enjoy doing it in the way you can fully give it a piece of your heart, your soul, to truly connect with the people you are helping.

### **So what drew you to librarianship?**

It really was a children's librarian who brought it all full circle. After medical school I had my first child and have been very open about my postpartum anxiety. The library really was a safe haven for me breaking out of that isolation. I went to every storytime, it gave me something to look forward to, not just for me, but it was beneficial for my relationship with my child. People are very open and honest in a library setting. I felt like part of a community.

I spoke to a children's librarian about how I was thinking about getting my MLIS degree, thinking about being a librarian, I felt very at home and it seemed like a niche for me. I was concerned about going back to school for a third time, with a very young child. It was the children's librarian who convinced me that I could do it, convinced me that it was doable, that I was capable enough and that it wouldn't be a wrong move for me.

### **What goals do you have for your career as a librarian?**

I'm very interested in trying to expand the public library's role in serving the disability community. In medical school I did clinical research with teens and young adults with autism spectrum disorder. I feel libraries have a lot of room to grow in terms of programming that is accessible for those with physical and cognitive disabilities.

I'd also like to incorporate music into my library career. Music can be a very therapeutic way to break barriers between different populations and is accessible for children of all abilities. They might be shy or feel reserved, but maybe they are willing to sing a song with you. Music can be a great icebreaker and a great way of forming a bridge between you and your patrons.

### **Have any book suggestions for us?**

I'm a full-time master's student and a full-time mom, so I read a lot of children's books to my kids. I love reading children's books, I think that we all have something that we can learn from children's books. Here are a few of my favorites:

*The Friend Ship* by Kat Yeh

I really love this book, and my children absolutely love this book. It's a book about making friends, and how if you're looking for a friend, there's probably a friend out there looking for you.

*The Snail and the Whale* by Julia Donaldson

This book is wonderful for all kids, it's about how this tiny snail whose being told you're just supposed to stay put accomplishes big things and saves the life of a big humpback whale. So I

think it's a wonderful book for kids showing them that they are not limited by how others view them.

*Not so Different* by Shane Burcaw

This is a wonderful book for children who do not have disabilities but have a lot of questions they are curious about of those who do. It features photography of the author (Burcaw has spinal muscular atrophy and has been in a wheelchair since age 2) and teaches kids to use humor, kindness and respect to connect with others who are different.

**About the Caroline M. Hewins Scholarship**

The Caroline M. Hewins Scholarship Fund was established in 1926 as a tribute to one of the great pioneers in American librarianship in special recognition of her creative work for children throughout the country.

The fund originated by the Hartford Librarian's Club as a personal gift to Miss Hewins on the occasion of her fiftieth anniversary as Librarian of the Hartford Public Library. When Miss Hewins chose to use this gift as a basis for a scholarship award, generous contributions were received from family and friends and professional associates throughout Connecticut and the United States, thus assuring to the Scholarship a national character in keeping with the memory of the Librarian it honors.

The fund is administered by the Hartford Public Library as trustee, and current income permits an annual scholarship award of \$4,000.

The scholarship is open to those who plan to specialize in library work with children: who have received, or are about to receive a four year undergraduate degree; and who have applied for admission to a library school or are already attending a library school accredited by the American Library Association. Preference will be given to applicants who plan to pursue a career in public library service.

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**About Hartford Public Library**

Now celebrating its 127th year, Hartford Public Library remains at the forefront of redefining the urban library experience in the 21st century. With locations throughout the city, the library provides education, intellectual enrichment and cultural development for thousands of children, youth and adults every year. Hartford Public Library has also gained local and national recognition for its wide range of new initiatives and partnerships designed to meet the needs of a diverse and dynamic city and region, including immigration services, employment assistance and youth leadership training. [www.hplct.org](http://www.hplct.org).