

Integrating Newcomers: Library as a Site for Civic Engagement

Presenter Profile: Manisha Khetarpal received her MLIS degree in Library and Information Studies from Dalhousie University in 2004. She is employed by the Chinook Regional Library as City Librarian at the Swift Current Branch Library since May 2005. Manisha has is very active in community programming and literacy in various creative forms for all ages and cultures has been her priority.

Manisha Khetarpal has partnered with learning institutions, local businesses, community, and government organizations to promote and deliver literacy programs successfully in our community.

Session Summary: It is important in our democratic society citizens, should interact with each other, learn from each other, grow with each other, and together make their communities more than the sum of their parts @ the COMMUNITY HALL-the public library.

Rural areas need skilled workers. After recruiting and training, organizations have to retain their employees and one way is to integrate them in the community. This develops roots and helps them anchor and bloom in the communities they are planted. **“Weave a web to stay connected in rural Saskatchewan”** created a friendship web in the community. A symbiosis of the business community in rural southwest Saskatchewan using the “prairie homestead spirit” relationship network was the essence of the project-“stay here and grow with skills.”

The stakeholders or the learners involved were: Newcomers-Filipino skilled immigrant workers, REM Enterprises Inc employees, Filipino community in Swift Current and Saskatchewan, Chinook Regional Library and all the residents of Swift Current. The project deliverables were: hiring a workplace literacy coach, Spanish language conversation circles/online, Global gatherings (mini folk festival for children and parents): Cultural literacy exchange community event, 'Welcome to the Community: Supper and Social,' Workplace skills traveling trunk/corporate library on wheels and a networking database “Living Library” for the Filipino community.

Aboriginal Cultural literacy sessions targeted at businesses, students, and adults. Aboriginal awareness seminar series, Aboriginal Storytelling Week, and celebrations engaged citizens to come together @ the library and learn.

June 11, 2007 Aboriginal Celebration engaged over 750 people in our community. The daylong celebrations included Pow-wow dance performance by Lisa Ewack, The Justice System and a Healing Journey by LaVera, Aboriginal Tools and Technology by Southwest Sask. Archaeological Society, Talina Cyr-Steenkamp, Executive Director, Sask. Archaeological Society’s “Images of Archaeology at Wanuskewin” and Storytelling by Joseph Naytowhow.

Other Community Projects @ the library

- **Literacy Benchmarks**-Circle of Learning for **computer training** programs targeted at seven to seventy year old. One on one training sessions about internet, email basics, budget planning using Excel, PowerPoint presentations, Photoshop, and Publisher software were very popular.
- **Literacy capacity** and skills for the library **staff** by involving them with the Storysacks, Come read with me, online databases, and customer service training sessions.
- **Cooking up Culture-collective intelligence project:** The result was a community cookbook. The project linked culture with cooking. The learners wrote recipes and stories related to them and learned to use computers by typing those recipes. The book was launched with a potluck and this brought together different members of our community. The revenue generated from the sale of the cookbooks helped in funding other literacy programs such as “Comic Book” creation workshop at the library and in local schools. Manisha is currently working on a similar project with the Semi Arid Research Station on celebrating “World Wheat Day” on November 5, 2007. Wheat stations ranging from pasta (Italian) to cultural stations having recipes from across the world using wheat as the main ingredient. Such public participation project creates learning opportunities and civic engagement continues the learning circle.
- **Saskatchewan Willow Awards:** The Chinook Regional Library and the Chinook School Division cooperated in promoting a literacy program through the Saskatchewan Willow Awards program. The Swift Current library sponsored numerous programs for the local schools. The library also coordinated the provincial Willow Awards Gala at the library on May 25th, 2007 in which various schools were involved in the evening of programs and ceremony.
- **Culture and Heritage Image Bank of Southwest Saskatchewan** is a resource tool for local community literacy created with Manisha’s enthusiasm for civic engagement. As we move into the 21st century, the digital photo database- a community portfolio will grow and commemorate the events, prairie lifestyle, and people of our area. The vision of the project is to provide public access to heritage and cultural images of southwest Saskatchewan.

The key goals of Image Bank are: 1. To work together to create an informational, historical, and educational resource which is freely accessible. 2. To make the collection of photographic images available to the public in a digital format so that we can connect with our family and friends by sending these pictures as electronic postcards. 3. To develop awareness of visual art practices in southwest Saskatchewan. 4. To create an opportunity for other educational, historical, cultural, genealogical sites and portals to link to the images of southwest Saskatchewan.

- **Roots Sprout Grass/Ideas:** The project base was gardening literacy, pass on the knowledge and expertise of the seniors to other community members. Grandparents Grow kids at the library, Seedy Saturdays, flower pounding workshops, PLANT EXCHANGES, public information sessions by the Horticultural Society. Currently with community support, the library is creating an “Herbs: cosmetic and consumption book.”

Manisha Khetarpal is involved in literacy because literacy develops the social capacity and capital in our community. Change is constant and learning is a lifelong process and a journey with literacy at the heart of it all.