

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
2020 MIDWINTER MEETING
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

FRIDAY, JANUARY 24, 2020
11:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.
DEAF CULTURE FORUM

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**Libraries: Inclusion of the Deaf Community: Public Libraries
Deaf Literacy Center, Pinellas Public Library Cooperative**

>> MOLLY RAPHAEL: Thank you, Pat, very much. The next two are Public Library presentations, and both presenters were unable to attend but we knew that in advance. So we got videos of them, and I think first is Rosa Rodriguez from the Deaf Literacy Center as you can see, Pinellas Public Library Cooperative in Florida and that will be followed by Janice Rosen who is in inclusive services for the District of Columbia Public Library. Janice is deaf, and kind of moved into Alice's position when Alice left DC Public Library. Janice is doing some very different things, but she is the person who has kept the focus on services to the deaf community for DC Public Library.

>> JEANNETTE SMITHEE: I'm going to give a technical thing. The first presentation from the Pinellas Public Library cooperative has quite a number of slides, but there is a lot of repetition. She has done text slides talking about some part of the program, and then she does a video which covers the same material, not verbatim, but the same material, and so I am going to not linger on the text slides, but I will give more time to the video part of it. She has also included photographs of some

of the programs. So just, that's why I'm going to scoot through the first part of this program.

>> MOLLY RAPHAEL: The whole thing will be available on the website afterward, right, Jeannette?

>> JEANNETTE SMITHEE: Yes.

>> Hello, my name is Rosa Rodriguez. I'm a hearing person. I have worked here at the Deaf Literacy Center for the last 21 years. The program here was established through the Library Service Technology Act Grant, and that occurred in 1998. The program was established because of the growing deaf community in a small town called Safety Harbor.

The small town had 18,000 residents, most of whom were senior citizens or upper class folks, and then there were about 35 to 50 deaf people who moved into group homes into Safety Harbor. And those folks started going to the Public Libraries.

The deaf people that were coming to the library had issues with miscommunication, they weren't familiar with the library world, rules and process of the library, so a need was identified. The deaf residents were often experiencing miscommunication and causing them to become upset or frustrated, and it was decided that there needed to be services provided for this specific community, and they needed good quality services and that's how the Deaf Literacy Center was born.

The reason that we believe libraries are important for the deaf community is that we realized once this program was established that libraries do contain all of the information that deaf people are often missing. We have become a hub of the deaf community here in the Tampa Bay area. We are always hosting events and often people will make requests, why don't we host a deaf art show, why don't we host a presenter? Could we bring in deaf performers? Could we have a panel discussion? And so, the deaf community really owns this program.

I believe that's the reason why this program is as successful as it is. The services that we provide here mainly include literacy, whether that's one to one or group settings, teaching about vocabulary English and increasing literacy. We also offer American Sign Language classes for babies, children and adults. We provide English for speakers of other languages. We also tutor people who are studying for their citizenship tests or trying for their driver's license or G.E.D.

We have a summer camp for STEM which includes music and performances. It also includes interview skills and job readiness skills as well as financial skills reviews. Every year we do host local deaf battle of the books for middle school and high school, and we collaborate with what is called the optimist club. There is a competition hosted by the optimist club by the

person who gives the best speech and the winner receives \$2,500 in a scholarship with the help of the library.

The library provides story time as well as ASL performers, panel discussions and holiday events. We typically sign Halloween and Christmas stories during the holidays or winter stories during the wintertime. There are also poetry and talent shows. So, people ask me what the factors are for a successful program, and I would say there are three things. Number one, volunteers, number two, community member involvement, and, of course, number three, partnerships. Yes, the library does support us, and it is critical that they continue to support us, but the truth is that community involvement, volunteerism, manpower, without those things we could not afford to keep the program running.

We keep the financial load low by having lots of volunteers. Two of our biggest challenges here at the DLC include funding and space. We are very fortunate and grateful that we do not pay to rent our space in the library.

We are considered a part of the library, a library program, but we are non-profit, and we borrow the space from the library. Fortunately, because the program was established by the library, they do not charge us for utilizing that space for rent or for electric or any other utilities.

The space here is very limited, and because our programs reach beyond our current city limits to the larger county, we serve between 150 to 300 people, so we find space to be a big challenge. Previously the biggest challenges we face are the community not truly understanding or the staff not understanding deaf people's perspectives, providing services for deaf people was not something that had happened in the past and so the library had to adapt and change, change scheduling and timing for borrowing materials, and also the deaf people in the community became more used to how libraries run.

We do depend on state aid and support for funding for our staff and materials and special programs and events come from donations and fundraising for our program.

Our biggest success has been seeing the change in the community, seeing people growing their knowledge and ability to use the library and the services here, also taking advantage of what their culture has to offer.

DLC has changed the lives here not only of the deaf community, but of the hearing population as well. Many of the children who we have been working with for more than 20 years now are part of the program, and may be in college and have the opportunity to look back at their involvement with DLC over the years and their composure to the deaf community and how rich that experience has been. The talent, the history and the

culture that has been shared with them. The fact that we can incorporate such talented deaf individuals in our local community has made a huge impact. So, we definitely want to thank the library and the community for helping us here at the DLC. They always support us and help us to achieve our goals. So, thank you very much to them. If anyone has any questions, please feel free to reach out to me. I would be happy to share my experiences with you, any connections I have and to create partnerships as well. I wish you success with your programs as well. Thank you.

(Applause).
