



Bilingual Clerk Sandi Plesha brings “La Placita” to Gresham Library

When Bilingual Clerk Sandi Plesha first observed groups of Latina women coming to the library and quietly observing while their children read books in English, she thought of her own experience.

“I know how isolating it can be when you’re in a new place and can’t speak the language,” says Sandi. “I am an immigrant and have empathy for that experience. Like many of the patrons that I serve, I’ve had to jump many hurdles.”

A native Ecuadorian, Sandi worked as a teacher before moving to the United States after meeting her husband.

"When I first moved here, I didn't understand English. I was afraid to ask questions. When you feel like you can't talk to others to get the information you need, it's hard to connect. You become isolated."

Wanting to help the Latina women feel at home in the library, Sandi asked if they wanted to converse in Spanish; when they smiled, she began talking about what brought them to the library. Sandi asked if they wanted to come back to the library and meet as a group while their children read and play and was encouraged by their enthusiastic reaction.

Sandi created a program at Gresham Library called La Placita ("the little plaza"). The group is held in Spanish and is aimed at helping Latina women come together, discuss their interests, learn new skills and build community.

"Having the program in Spanish was critical not only to removing the feeling of isolation, but was also a way to help participants feel part of the community and welcome to use community resources," she says.

Sandi, whose love of reading was cultivated by her father from an early age, creates lesson plans and selects books in Spanish to help spark discussion. She designed the program to accommodate multiple interests.

"The women are really driving this program! When I meet with them, and we pick the books, we study. It's not just a book club. The readings are a point to start a discussion, a window to connecting with each other."

The class is structured so participants can also bring their kids and a section of the room, along with another staff member, is focused on the children's learning and play.

"For some, La Placita is like dipping their toes into the ocean of the library and then once they get comfortable, they keep coming back, exploring and finding more," says Sandi.

During one program, they used a Gabriel García Márquez book to discuss what it means to be a beautiful woman; during others, they've exchanged recipes and brought in guest teachers to learn about online privacy. After several classes, participants are feeling more at home at the library, and many are now checking out their own books.

After receiving participant requests, Gresham Library is updating the youth and adult Spanish collections, re-organizing materials and adding new signage to improve access.

"It's the little things we do that can make a big difference. When you give to the community, the community gives back to you."

In addition to running La Placita and helping library patrons with various information and account needs, Sandi enjoys improving the Spanish collection and utilizing her creativity to create engaging library displays. A lifelong learner, she is also teaching herself to speak Russian!

La Placita is on a temporary break. To see other programming at Gresham Library, please visit multcolib.org/events.



A Book is a Bridge

Multnomah County Library has expanded its family literacy efforts at two local correctional facilities, Multnomah County Inverness Jail and Columbia River Correctional Institution. The library's "A Book is a Bridge" program helps adults in custody more fully participate in their child's literacy development, while also building the skills they need to succeed after incarceration.

In developing a stronger partnership with both facilities, the library was able to employ a multi-tiered approach to help adults in custody (specifically parents in custody) achieve literacy success for themselves and their children. At both facilities, the library offers

monthly classes for parents in custody to learn strategies to support their child's literacy development through reading and other activities. Upon completion of the class, participants receive a free book to keep that they can give to their child.

In addition to the literacy classes for parents in custody, the library helped improve lobby and family-visit areas by incorporating age-appropriate, linguistically and culturally diverse reading materials and play activities for visiting children. For adults in custody who are working toward improving their own literacy skills, library staff provide one-on-one tutoring. And to help adults in custody who are preparing to transition out of a facility, the library provides workshops about using the neighborhood library and finding online resources and classes. Library staff can also help them get a library card or resolve any outstanding account issues to ensure the adults feel comfortable and welcome visiting libraries when they leave the facility.

So far, the partnership has been a great success. According to one Book is a Bridge participant, "This was one of the most productive 1.5 hours that I have spent learning to be a better parent."

In 2018, 110 adults in custody attended early childhood literacy classes, and 96% reported learning new information about helping their children get ready to learn. Families of adults in custody also reported their children are more comfortable and engaged during visits. Both facilities hope that efforts to help the adults in custody strengthen their family relationships and improve their access to information and job resources will lead to lower recidivism rates.

Book is a Bridge is provided by Multnomah County Library and made possible, in part, by gifts to The Library Foundation.



Connecting elders to library services

Multnomah County Library and its Library Outreach Services (LOS) team are helping to reduce the social isolation of seniors in the community and connecting them with good books.

Social isolation is a huge issue for elders in our community. Many seniors do not have internet access, making it difficult for them to place books on hold or search for materials. To help address this issue, the library operates mobile library services for homebound adults and seniors and offers book groups in Spanish and English at senior living facilities. Library outreach specialists also talk with patrons on the phone, helping them find their next book and maintaining their extensive reading histories.

A need to connect to the community is an issue for Latino seniors as well. Many feel comfortable gathering at community centers but can't get transportation to library branches. Library outreach staff Laura Bradshaw and Adriana Martinez provide special outreach to these seniors in NE Portland at Bienestar de la Familia and in Gresham at El Programa Hispano.

"I love working with this age group!" says Laura Bradshaw, who runs a book group and sets up a pop-up library at El Programa Hispano. "Latino elders have so much to offer and have so many needs. I feel lucky to be able to let them open their hearts to me and serve them as much as possible."

Adriana Martinez facilitates a book group in Spanish at the Baltazar Ortiz Community Center in the Cully neighborhood and maintains a "mini biblioteca" on site. "I definitely feel that being present at this community on a regular basis and bringing library services nurtures a group of people that otherwise may be missing out on the great resources that the library has to offer," she says.

Library Outreach Services also provides outreach to inmates, immigrants, adult learners, and houseless patrons, but its largest operation is running a library on wheels. For homebound patrons, the library provides free delivery of library materials by mail or van and sets up pop-up library service at retirement homes.

Patron comments

"I would love for your security guard Eric, to receive special recognition for his sincere compassion and support for guests. From the first time we had an encounter with him a few months ago -- until now, he has always been so genuinely helpful and caring, going WAY above & beyond what was expected of him -- without being prompted or asked -- to make sure guests are satisfied and feeling safe. He is a ONE of a KIND employee and in a world full of negativity and unwillingness to do even the smallest gesture for a stranger, Eric is in a category of his own. You can't go many places anymore without fear of confrontation or judgement. But as long as Eric is working as an employee for the Midland

Library, I without a doubt know myself and anyone else that visits will be in good hands. Thank you Eric & Midland for A+ service & compassion." — Mikaela & Shane, June 10

In the news

[Summer Reading blasts off at libraries](#) (Gresham Outlook, June 16)

Upcoming events

[Lucky Diaz Family Jam Band](#)

Thursday, July 11
11am
Rockwood Library

[Mr. Lizard's Mobile Zoo](#)

Saturday, July 13
10:30 am
Hillsdale Library

[Autodefensa/Self-defense](#)

Saturday, July 13, 20 and 27
3 pm
Rockwood Library

[The Orchid Trio presents String Trio](#)

Tuesday, July 16
6:30 pm
Holgate Library

[Healthier Living for Your Brain and Body](#)

Friday, July 19
11 am
Troutdale Library

[Lead Poisoning Prevention Workshop](#)

Sunday, July 21
2 pm
Northwest Library

[The Green Bird: A Mexican Story](#)

Friday, August 2
10:30 am
Central Library

[Blogging with WordPress](#)

Friday, August 2
12 pm
Central Library

[中国手工艺及舞蹈夏令营 / Chinese Arts & Dance Summer Camp](#)

Aug 2, 3, 10 and 17
2 pm
Midland Library

[Protecting Yourself Online Basics](#)

Sunday, August 18
1 pm
Northwest Library

[A Will is Not Enough in Oregon](#)

Wednesday, August 21
12 pm
Midland Library

[Free Criminal Record Expungement Clinic](#)

Thursday, August 22
2pm
Gresham Library