

Amy Thorna

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning and put a personal face on state library funding. I am the Literacy Coordinator for Onondaga County Public Library in Syracuse; my position is supported with state outreach funding. I wrote and was fortunate to receive a state library grant for our Meet Me @ the Library project. This was a two-year project with a goal of reaching out to the large refugee community in Syracuse by providing internships at the library. We know that libraries are most successful at reaching a diverse patron population when our staff and volunteers reflect the face of our community. With this grant we were hoping to address that important issue, as well as provide professional job experience for some of the many refugees who are coming to Syracuse with advanced education, but no opportunities for jobs that make use of their skills. We also believed this was the truest way to develop the most valuable service we could to the refugee community.

The Syracuse area is the second largest settler of refugees in NYS. We have several great schools that provide English language learning services, but they all have waiting lists. When I wrote this grant our refugee resettlement agencies were experiencing, for the first time ever, clients returning to them after being laid off from businesses that were downsizing or moving out of the area. The resettlement agencies and schools wanted a way to work with the library because they know that their clients who know how to access library services, and do so, are more successful in job seeking, learning English, and more likely to become active, involved residents in their communities.

We see people every day that have been in this country, sometimes, for only 48 hours. They come to the libraries looking for help with understanding paperwork, learning English, learning how to use the computers, finding their way around our bus system, or discovering something to read or watch in their native languages. We have many wonderful agencies in our community who provide high-quality services, but no one can do all that we do at the library.

Participants in the Meet Me @ the Library project worked for us in volunteer internships for eight weeks. The interns learned about the American workplace, took part in computer and English language classes, performed library page duties, and created resumes that would leverage their diverse experiences. The participants led tours for local ELL classes and demonstrated our materials.

At the same time the interns helped us develop our literacy collection and provided the library staff with a unique opportunity to learn about the refugee experience and the interns' native countries. Our staff is now knowledgeable about the distinction between refugees and other immigrants and aware of the histories of the countries of the people being settled in our area. I believe we provide better service for this.

Fifteen people took part as interns in this grant and I am proud to report that twelve of the participants are now employed. Among them, one has become a Certified Nursing Assistant, another an oncology nurse, and one now works for us at our Central Library. He is here to speak with you today.

State funds support my position as Literacy Coordinator and make these grant funds available to enhance our library services. When cuts in local funding for libraries force cuts in staff and reduction of

service hours, leaving libraries struggling to provide the very basic services, state funding for projects and outreach allow us to provide vital services to our most vulnerable patrons.

Yam Bhattarai

My name is Yam Bhattarai. I am from Bhutan, but I came here from Nepal as a Bhutanese refugee. I came to the US on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February 2011. In the beginning I faced some environmental and communication problems because I was new to a new world. Slowly, with the help of my caseworker from Catholic Charities I got enrolled in ESL classes and studied for two months with other of my friends from Bhutan also. In the meantime, I got an opportunity to join the Meet Me @ the Library project. During the project I learned about the American workplace, practiced English skills, computer skills and so on.

Now I am working at the library as a part-time staff. And all of my friends who took part in the Meet Me @ the Library project are happy to working in jobs.

And now still I continue to use the library resources to improve my job prospects by taking advantage of training and other programs. I had an opportunity to take part in a free seminar at the library about the civil service system. This helped me to gain more knowledge about the different job opportunities in the county and especially the library. Many youths like me are getting knowledge and techniques to find a job in library classes.

I am very happy to work in the library. It has become an important part of my life.