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NEW JERSEY STATE LIBRARY | 2015 EDITION

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# *New Jersey State Library* MULTICULTURAL PROGRAM AWARD



NEW JERSEY STATE LIBRARY

*Connecting people with information through libraries*



**NEW JERSEY IS A MULTICULTURAL STATE**

The long-lasting influx of international immigrants has shaped the state's racial and ethnic composition. Every neighborhood has a different mix of nationalities and languages. Today's libraries are constantly challenged by their diverse communities.

The Multicultural Program Award was established in 2014 to recognize library programs that increase understanding and promote diversity and multiculturalism in New Jersey's libraries. Libraries are encouraged to develop long-term partnerships with community organizations that result in sustainable cultural programming. The ultimate goal of the program is to share the library's program as a model for inspiration and adaptation by other libraries.



## HAIR FOR ALL *for the Elizabeth Public Library*

As the 4th largest city in New Jersey, Elizabeth has a diverse population where more than 21 percent of its population is African-American. The library wanted to reach out to this population through a new perspective: “Hair.”

Hair has cultural significance and is intensified especially in the African-American community. Once upon a time in Africa, hair dress indicated status and prestige. Through the trials of slavery and the Middle Passage, black hair came to be seen as “bad,” while hair that more closely resembled white hair was seen as “good.” These prejudices were passed down from mother to daughter, and remain with us still. The project title “*Hair for All*” was chosen, since everyone has hair and because a library, as an institution, is here for everyone, regardless of ethnicity, gender or socio-economic status.

The project had three elements:

### 1) The Exhibition: 400 years without a comb

One of the goals had been depictions of African-American hairstyles in the ‘50s and ‘60s when conformity to “white” tastes was definitely the norm. It was also intended to demonstrate that “beauty” is not just a surface issue, but part of an identity that establishes self-worth and self-esteem. This staff-generated and curated exhibit explored the history and implications of “natural” African hair. The librarians researched books, magazines and websites, drawing upon photography, and social and political history for images, quotes and anecdotes that would tell the story of the African diaspora through hair. Staff members offered hair pieces, hot combs, ideas and suggestions. Old issues of *Ebony* and *Essence* magazines were displayed through collaboration with one of the storytelling presenters. Some of the images included in the exhibit were Beyoncé with her permed and tinted hair, and President Barak Obama offering his Afro for inspection by a young African-American boy.

### 2) Storytelling and Panel Discussion

The library connected with speakers to instigate a storytelling session in which the presenters would talk about their encounters with bad hair and how they came

to love it, and to draw similar anecdotes from the audience. One of the speaker’s connections to the city of Elizabeth became the library’s connection to a fresh part of the community. The Elizabeth Historical Society co-hosted a panel discussion drawing upon the significance of Stephen Samson and his barbershop in the fight for civil rights, while exploring the evolving concept of beauty and the concomitant search for justice and equality.

### 3) Film Screening

Although not part of the original scope of the project, it was decided to screen Chris Rock’s *Good Hair*. One of the questions asked both before and after: “What is good hair?” “Do you have it?”

### Partnerships

This project was made possible by a grant from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities. Staff approval and cooperation was both a motivator and a guide. Using the RefUSA database, the library targeted local hair salons with postcards announcing the project. The library worked with the school district to distribute the postcards in the high school, and tried a similar distribution through the community college. One of the storyteller presenters lent the library framed issues of *Ebony* from the time period.

Mary Faith Chmiel, library director, summed up the success of the project:

“We believe our project had a significant impact upon our community, as visitors continue to ask us when we will do it again. Many in our audience commented that they had never experienced a project like this, and found it rewarding and informative. Staff buy-in and enthusiasm were essential. Had our staff rebuffed the idea, suggested that this conversation had no place in a public library, or implied that we could not give the concept a fair hearing, we would have had difficulty moving forward. We do feel that we began a conversation. Many of our visitors to the library – for any part of this project – indicated that they had never visited us before. The high interest in this program created a common ground that opened a valuable discussion.”



## LIBRARIES AT THE HEART OF OUR COMMUNITIES

We live in an increasingly multicultural world. The U.S. Census Bureau recently released an analysis of population trends. At the time of the 2020 Census, it is estimated that more than half of the nation’s children will be part of a current minority race or ethnic group. By 2060 the minority population is projected to rise from today’s 38 percent to 56 percent of the total population, and the nation’s foreign-born population would rise from 13 percent to nearly 19 percent of the total population. This increasing diversity brings additional vibrancy and richness of both experience and cultural heritage to our communities.

Libraries welcome everyone regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or income. Public libraries increasingly serve as anchor institutions in their communities and as magnets for new immigrants.

The winners of our second annual Multicultural Program Award present their greatest success stories by demonstrating efforts in service development and improvement for diverse members of their communities. Creative programming and partnerships foster environments of inclusiveness, respect, empowerment and empathy.

This year’s winning programs, *DIA* by the Clifton Public Library, *Multicultural Celebration Series* by the Livingston Public Library and *Hair for All* by the Elizabeth Public Library demonstrate that by working with community members and partners, and involving their own staff members at the library, libraries become even more central to their neighborhoods and connected to new audiences. These award winning programs showcase numerous tips and techniques, and provide models for the improvement of service levels for multicultural groups.

I deeply appreciate New Jersey libraries in their endeavors to promote cultural and community programming as an essential part of their library service. The New Jersey State Library continues to support libraries as they fulfill roles as centers of cultural and civic engagement.

Please join me in congratulating our winning libraries.



MARY L. CHUTE  
State Librarian of New Jersey

# 2015 WINNING LIBRARIES

of the New Jersey State Library

## MULTICULTURAL PROGRAM AWARD

### DIA! MANY CHILDREN, MANY CULTURES, MANY BOOKS *for the Clifton Public Library*

The city of Clifton is the most diverse community in New Jersey with a population of 85,000. According to the census of 2010, over 50 percent of the population speaks a language other than English at home and there are over 60 languages spoken in Clifton public schools.

The library, as a cultural center open to everyone, is the most suitable place to bring a huge cultural diversity event together, and help the children and their families coexist, opening communication paths among them, while learning and understanding each other's cultural values.

With that goal in mind, the library celebrated DIA (day in Spanish) for the first time in 2012. It was a full day of activities, including multicultural crafts; multi-language story times (where community representatives such as police officers read in their native language); a bilingual puppet show; a world map for children to mark their country of origin; and an African clay mask workshop.

In 2013, the library broadened the cultural spectrum and, in collaboration with local restaurants, added ethnic food tasting. More than 600 people attended.

The more the community was involved, the more the interest in the program grew, and in 2014, a month-long multicultural art display was added. It grew as the month went on, because once people saw it, they wanted to have their own culture represented through costumes, art, crafts, utensils, etc. By the end of the month, the display had doubled in size.

During the day of the DIA event itself, more community leaders got involved in the multi-language story time, with new cultures performing, and proudly showcased at different booths, such as Koreans teaching children how



to write their name in the Korean alphabet; a Mendhi station from India; Spanish painters sharing their roots through their artistic creations; and many others. There was a huge ethnic food tasting with delicious bites from nearby restaurants. In 2014, more than 850 people attended the Saturday-only event.

Gloria Abero, project coordinator, told the secret to making this program successful: "We believe success came because the library acknowledged and celebrated the community's cultural diversity and made people feel part of the library. The staff's enthusiasm and involvement played an important role, as well. Collaboration with the community has helped people feel welcomed and more involved with the library, and encouraged us to develop new bilingual programs in different languages."

## MULTICULTURAL CELEBRATION SERIES *for the Livingston Public Library*

*Multicultural Celebration Series* is a yearlong program that includes major holidays from cultures represented at Livingston Public Library. Each celebration was meant to stand alone and had two objectives: 1) to welcome people of all backgrounds into the library, and 2) to raise awareness in the whole community about different cultures.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Livingston is 76.17 percent (22,367) white, 2.26 percent (663) black or African-American, 0.07 percent (20) Native American, 19.21 percent (5,642) Asian, 0.02 percent (5) Pacific Islander, 0.86 percent (254) from other races, and 1.41 percent (415) from two or more races. Hispanics or Latinos of any race were 4.06 percent (1,192) of the population. According to the 2002 results of the National Jewish Population Survey, 46 percent (12,600) of Livingston is Jewish, one of the highest percentages of Jews in any American municipality.

So far, eleven multicultural celebrations have been offered: Eid al-Fitr (Muslim); Mid-Autumn Festival (Chinese); Sukkot (Jewish); Rosh Hashanah (Jewish); Eid al-Adha (Muslim); Diwali (Hindu); Halloween (American); Thanksgiving (American); Christmas (Catholic/Christian); Kwanzaa (African-American); Hanukkah (Jewish).

American holidays are included for two reasons: 1) recent immigrants enjoy these celebrations as a way to learn about American culture, and 2) all community groups needed to be represented in the *Multicultural Celebration Series* for the entire community to embrace and celebrate with their neighbors.

Celebrations still to come in the series are: Chinese New Year (Chinese); Purim (Jewish); Holi (Hindu); Easter (Catholic/Christian); St. Patrick's Day (Irish American); Passover (Jewish); 4th of July (American).

The planning process of the multicultural celebrations followed similar tracks: the library reached out to community organizations and members, sought input and feedback, and planned individualized celebrations based on community response. Working with community members and parents was a great way to create collaborative relationships and build community impact. Anna Coats, project coordinator, shared five key components essential to the program's success: 1) planning authentic programs that



resonated with people who actually celebrate the holidays, 2) excluding activities with explicit religious elements, so as to invite all members of the community, 3) mindfulness of diversity within sub-communities, 4) drop-in style programs where patrons can come in at any time during a designated one hour period and do activities at their own pace, and 5) approximately three to four different crafts or activities to occupy participants.

The *Multicultural Celebration Series* has achieved its goals of welcoming people of all backgrounds into the library, and raising awareness about different cultures. It has taken the Livingston Library to the next level in terms of community collaboration and programming. The most rewarding part of offering this program can best be described by one of the library members who participated in the celebration:

"Thank you so much for having this program. My children now feel comfortable here. We came to Eid al-Fitr Celebration. My children don't have an opportunity to talk about our religion in school so they don't, but now with these library programs they feel comfortable," said Sonia Ahlawat, a Livingston mother of five.