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# Impacting Rural Hispanic Communities by Reaching Out, Connecting and Providing Services at Different Levels

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PATTY LARA

Patty Lara has been the Outreach Specialist with the Hood River County Library District for over five years now. She graduated from Portland Community College in 2010 with an Associate of Applied Science Degree in Criminal Justice. Yes, that's right Criminal Justice. She loves her job as an Outreach Specialist and can't imagine doing anything else. Patty is excited to share her experiences and is open to corresponding with you.

In my role as an outreach specialist, I have created community events, partnered with various organizations, and participated in nontraditional programs in order to attract the vast Hispanic populations in the area to the various Hood River County libraries.

Hood River County is a rural community, and an estimated 31 percent of the population is Hispanic. The great thing about this community is that it has invested its efforts in honoring and accepting the Hispanic culture and bringing the community together as a whole. There is a little town named Odell, about eight miles south of Hood River, where I have focused my outreach efforts. Odell currently has an estimated Hispanic population of 65 percent.

When I think about my position at the library, my first thought has always been, "How would I get my parents to come to my events?" A huge influence on my creative thinking process was attending my first OLA conference. During the conference, I attended a session that focused on outreach to Hispanic communities. The two things that stuck with me were: always provide food, and try to focus on two or three big programs per year. That is exactly what I have done. I took the time to ask my parents what they thought of that advice, and they agreed. If they didn't have to cook and it was an event they could relate to culturally, they would participate.

I have been working for the Hood River County Library District since December 2011. After two years of working at the library, we were approved for an LSTA grant. That increased my hours from part time to full time. The grant help fund my position, and the focus would be to promote library services to the Odell Hispanic population. My first thought was to meet people where they currently were instead of expecting them to come to us. The ideas started flowing, and I dedicated my time and efforts to two big events: Día de los Niños and Día de los Muertos.

The Hood River County Library District has been celebrating Día de los Muertos and Día de los Niños in Odell for about four years now. Both celebrations are filled with Mexican culture.





Taking a picture at the photo booth (Me).



Group of kids at the photo booth.

Día de los Muertos is celebrated on November 1 and 2. It is a day to remember passed loved ones. I have been able to bring such a big event to this small town because of great community partners and community volunteers. This past November local sponsors helped provide a full dinner including dessert and coffee, live music, and crafts for kids. The feedback from the community was positive, and over 300 people attended.

In April 2016, I focused my efforts on Día de los Niños. I wanted to develop a fun and friendly celebration for kids and their families that would also serve as a resource fair. Over 20 organizations participated in the event. Each organization had their own booth. They were asked to bring a carnival themed game, and provide giveaways for the kids. Resources ranged from eye care, dental care, to immigration law services. We also had an organization give out and do trades on bicycles and helmets. This event attracted over 350 guests, and I was able to give out over 150 books. While planning these two events, I was also thinking of other creative ways of getting to know the public and how to offer my services on their time and level.

One of my creative and continuing efforts to provide outreach to the Odell community has been to offer library services at a Zumba class. I have been visiting the class for over two years. This opportunity came to be because of my little sister. She took me to a free community Zumba class offered in Odell. As I quickly discovered, this was a perfect opportunity to promote library services. I attended the next Zumba class where I presented my ideas to promote the library



Día de los Muertos celebration.





Kids lining up to get their free book.

to the instructors, and they were excited to partner with me. I now carry with me a crate of books, laptop and scanner. I have the ability to register new patrons and provide library services once a week.

Participating in the classes has been a humbling experience. Just last year, I had an older woman ask me for a library card. She was a little quiet and reserved, and she told me she was specifically looking for a certain book. I told her I didn't have it at that moment, but I would bring it to the next class. She came up to me during the following class, and I showed her the book. She was so happy and told me she would

have never been able to get a hold of a book like that because she didn't have the resources to get to the library. I knew then that my outreach efforts were truly making a difference.

Recently, I have also been representing the library as a DJ on our local radio station, Radio Tierra on 95.1 FM. With the encouragement of the radio director, I now have two shows. One is called *La Hora Infantil*, which focuses on children. For an hour I play *Rondas Infantiles* (Spanish children's songs), provide a story, and talk about the things the library is doing. I recently started a new thirty-minute segment called *Recursos Informativos*. During this time I have a special guest who talks about the services they provide to the Spanish speaking community. I have had over 15 organizations participate and have made connections with great people. I also give other libraries within broadcast range the opportunity to come on my show to talk about the services and programs they offer. It is a great way to stay connected and show the surrounding areas that our focus is all the same. Since I started appearing on the radio, the attendance at my programs has increased. Many people call in during my show to voice their thoughts and opinions, and so far, everything has been positive.



St. Francis Zumba class teaching kids some Zumba moves.





Taking a little time off air to take a picture with the Directors of the Migrant Summer School.

Finally, I would like to mention a program that the library has been involved in for a year now. With Ready to Read funds, the support of Wy'east Middle School in Odell and our Children's Services staff, the library has set forward another great project. We now provide bus transportation from Odell to Hood River and back; we call this the Odell Express Bus. With the support of the school, they send out an auto-call the night before the bus to families. When children and families arrive at the library, they get the opportunity to watch a movie, have a snack, and participate in story time. Each child leaves with a free book. The service is intended to provide transportation services to families that don't have the resources to make it to town.

For the past four years, I have used nontraditional outreach services to target my intended public. Through these efforts, I have reached out to a large population of non-library users. I have been able to measure my success by the number of people who participate in my events and by their positive feedback. I am truly grateful for the opportunity I have had to reach this great community, and I will continue to go out and be a voice for the library.

I cannot finish this article without giving credit to the support of REFORMA Oregon. I'm currently the Co-Chair of the group and have been involved with them since it became its own chapter. With the help of this group, I have gone outside my comfort zone and participated in things I would have never been a part of. This group has been guided me to further my success with my targeted population. Also, in attending the previously mentioned OLA conference session on outreach to Hispanic communities, I had the opportunity to meet some great people that led me in the right direction. I don't think I would be where I am today without their support and guidance. 