

Appleton Ready to Read
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July, 2013

It was pure serendipity in the summer of 2012, when Yee Vue, a graduate student in Library and Information Science from UW-Madison wanted an internship with the Appleton Public Library. Yee was looking for a library summer project that would involve working with the local Hmong community. She accepted our challenge to bring the ALA initiative of Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR 2) to our local Hmong community. This journey which began in the small office area of Children's Services was incredibly timely and completely unexpected.

Before Yee came into our lives, I had been struggling with how Children's Services should respond to a 2011 Fox Cities Life Study showing a need to support education in light of declining third grade reading scores. Appleton Area School District WKCE scores indicated that our Asian, Hispanic, limited English speaking and economically disadvantaged children were more likely to score below proficient in reading than their peers. We knew that scientific research was pointing to the importance of early childhood brain development and the ALA was heavily promoting ECRR 2. We also knew that the children who were most likely to struggle with reading were also the children of parents who our library profession has tagged "the elusive non-user". My mind was swimming with more questions than answers. It was with this backdrop that serendipity happened. Yee came to us with the energy, commitment, education, language, cultural experience and local connections to make a difference in our community and she has been making a difference here ever since.

During the summer of 2012, Yee began making home visits to Hmong families who lived in the city of Appleton and who had children from birth to 5 years-old. She was armed with a PowerPoint presentation about ECRR2 and gift bags of books, crayons and more that had been donated from Friends of the Appleton Public Library. Since Yee was from an established local Hmong family, she did not have trouble making connections. When the summer was over, we knew that we had just witnessed something extraordinary and we didn't want to see it end. We needed something more than serendipity. We needed a plan.

In the early months of 2013, screams of excitement could be heard outside my office when I got the call that we had been awarded a \$15,000 LSTA grant to continue to develop this initiative. Yee, having just finished her MLIS, was able to return to us to continue her work. We named this initiative *Appleton Ready to Read* and Yee was given the title of *Hmong Family Outreach Specialist*. Yee's job is to introduce Appleton's Hmong parents of children birth to five years-old, to the Appleton Public Library and ECRR2 by scheduling three visits per family.

Visit #1

This is a home visit where Yee introduces parents to ECRR2, concentrating on the practice of reading and writing. Children are given books, crayons and coloring books, donated by the LSTA grant and Friends of the Appleton Public Library. Many of our library staff have benefited from the experience of joining Yee on home visits.



Visit #2

This visit is to the library. Parents and children are given a tour of Children's Services, directed to our different collections and shown how to select age appropriate material. Families who do not have a library card and would like one are assisted with obtaining one. Parents and children are instructed in the use of our self-checkout system. During this visit parents also learn about the important practice of singing and talking with their children. Children are given a nursery rhyme music CD, donated by the UW-Oshkosh Hmong Student's Group.



Visit #3

This visit is actually to a library program, presented by Yee, called *Play and Learn – Hmong Edition*. This is a one hour program involving a short storytime, singing and nursery rhymes and then the parents and children enjoy playing at different stations. During this visit parents learn about the important practice of play. The other 4 practices are reinforced and skills are developed. Parents are instructed on different ways to play at home without expensive toys. Children also enjoy playing with toys at the library that they may not have access to at home. Parents are welcome to continue to attend this regularly scheduled program and/or attend other programs at our library. Yee offers to go with families to other programs to help them meet other staff and join in other activities.



Community Partners

Hmong families with children from birth to age five are referred to Yee Vue by the Appleton Area School District (AASD), Outagamie County Birth – 3 Early Childhood Early Intervention Program and the Fox Cities Literacy Council. Yee is asked to help with AASD 3-5 year-old developmental screening of children whose primary language at home is Hmong. Yee also refers families to take advantage of this screening opportunity. Through this referral network and community trust, Yee has been able to help children get placed in Title 1 programs, Head Start and Even Start.

What we have learned?

The Hmong language has only been a written language since the 1950's. Many Hmong people do not read Hmong. Although providing signage and flyers in Hmong is a nice gesture, it is often not a reliable tool for communication. The multi-generational experience of reading books to our children while they sit on our lap is not the multi-generational experience of the Hmong people. Also, I am told that there is no history of Hmong nursery rhymes and little if any history of children's music in the Hmong language. We have met with Hmong parents who are illiterate. Some young Hmong parents, who attended high school in our area, are not confident readers. Many of the families that we have worked with have few to no children's books in their home. Board books, wordless picture books, picture books with companion CDs and beginner readers with companion CDs in our collections have been very helpful for these parents.

Some young Hmong parents do not speak English or lack confidence in speaking English. Some Hmong children who speak both Hmong and English at home, lack the depth of one language that helps them be prepared for kindergarten. Several experts tell me that it is more important that children entering kindergarten have depth of language in their primary language than lack depth of language in two languages.

What's next?

While we are completing our LSTA grant year, we are also looking for funding to sustain this program and build a Hispanic Outreach Program with a half-time Hispanic Family Outreach Specialist. We also seek to add a strong university backed research component to our work. These are big ideas, but with the strong support of our Library Director, Library Board, Friends of the Appleton Public Library and many others, I believe that we can make a difference in our community.

Link [here](#) to our marketing flyers and poster.

This program was funded in part with a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) which administers the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA).