

IFLI: Connecting Care

Many Victories

Fall 2008 brings much to be thankful for



The past 4 months have been eventful for the IFLI project. In September, Site Coordinators from Rwanda, India and North America had an opportunity to gather in Chicago with other members of the IFLI team to meet, strategize and learn without the complications brought about by distance. In early October, team members had an opportunity to network with friends and allies

of the project by traveling to Colquitt, Georgia; Washington, DC; Columbus, Ohio and Ontario, Canada. Great strides have been taken in integrating the IFLI approach in the strategies and operation of ProLiteracy, the host organization. The efforts of our team have resulted in a project that is being effectively implemented while positioning for expansion.

Project Initiation Coach Training

From September 22-25 a team of 12 people were trained as "Project Initiation Coaches". Elise Packard, Helen Heal and Ann Avery created an intensive experiential training to enable people who have worked with IFLI materials to replicate and enhance the work that is happening in the field.

This training created an international team of coaches who can be called on to set up future IFLI projects. Participants were introduced to the many different tools and methods used to initiate projects:

FAMA - a model used by ProLiteracy international to engage people in critical thinking.

Social Process Triangle - a tool for social analysis used to plan an approach to site visitation.

Gridding - a way to become aware of the geographic area that is the focus of the work.

Image Theory - the foundation of the Transformational Learning Approach.

Parents as Teachers workbook - a tool that engages parents in meaningful conversation while teaching literacy skills.

The 6 Practices That Make Us Strong - exercises developed by Capacitar and used to help with the healing process.

Evaluation Process - an introduction to the dynamics, processes, tools and values embedded in the IFLI Evaluation System.

During this 3 and a half day workshop IFLI team members deepened their understanding of these tools and had an opportunity to use them. As a result, the work of the IFLI has been deepened and the potential to expand has been strengthened.

IFLI WORK IN RWANDA HIGHLIGHTED ON PUBLIC RADIO

The visit of the IFLI Site Coordinators of Rwanda to Chicago offered the possibility of putting a broad spotlight on the work of IFLI through an interview on National Public Radio. Didacienne Mukahabeshimana, Site Coordinator and Tina Spencer, co-founder of the International Family Literacy Initiative, were interviewed by Jerome McDonald on the Worldview Program.

The interview aired on November 13; during the week of intense news coverage on disturbances in the Congo, a nation which borders Rwanda. Preceding the focus on IFLI, there was an in-depth conversation with a representative from

Human Rights Watch who talked about the very complex history that is behind the conflict in the region - focusing in on what is happening in the Congo. In contrast to this, Didacienne spoke about the work that has been happening in Ngororero, the reasons Umuhuza decided to begin the work, and the positive results she sees with families. Tina then spoke about the history of IFLI, its research base and her own involvement in the work. It is an interview that effectively encapsulates the depth and intention of the IFLI approach and the hope and stability that can result.

http://www.wbez.org/Program_WV.aspx?episode=30171

WORK IN INDIA

The International Family Literacy Initiative in India is called the Potali Project. A Potali in the Marathi language means “grandmother’s purse.” Family outreach Practitioners working through agencies in Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur, carry “Potalis”, which have been designed to carry learning objects useful in nurturing the development of infants.

Since the Potali Project’s initiation in November 2006 an emphasis has been put on implementing the IFLI approach through agencies doing work with families and children in densely populated urban communities. To date, IFLI has partnered with 6 different organizations in Maharashtra each paying for 50% of the cost of running a Potali project. IFLI’s main partner organization is Bahujan Hitay Trust, which is based in Pune. There are five other organizations also involved in this work; SWADHAR IDWC, Pune; Trailokya Baudha Mahasangh Sahayak Gan, Pune; Tara Mobile Crèches, Pune; Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation, Pune; and Samata Mahila Society, Nagpur. These six organizations are working in the cities of Pune, Mumbai, Thane, Nagpur and Dapoli.

Each of these six organizations have been experimenting with what they have learned through the Potali project and are now implementing their own models of parent/child education and play. To date, the project has been able to reach over approximately 1400 children and their parents through surveys, daily child developmental activities, home visits, demonstrations activities, neighbourhood meetings and

parent meetings. The truly exciting thing about the project so far is that it focuses equally on child development and parent education. By the end of 2008, 5000 children are expected to have been affected.

Work in India is now focused on gathering sound data, replicating the work and the continued creation and sustaining of partnerships. IFLI is committed to being a resource to these agencies as they engage in the very important work of caring for families in India.



REPORT FROM NORTH AMERICA: NEW MEXICO AND ONTARIO

The work in North America is in its development phase. Maryanna Doan, IFLI Consultant to Indigenous Communities, has been working in New Mexico, USA and Ontario, Canada to find communities that are interested in partnering with IFLI. Because each individual tribe is a sovereign nation within a political boundary that is called Canada or the United State, the work will be unique within each tribe or First Nation as each has its indigenous language and cultural lifeway. The commonalities of these tribes and First Nations with the nations of India and Rwanda lie in their shared history of colonialism and the effect that has had on their evolution as a nation. IFLI’s approach in North America has been tempered by this awareness of history and is responding to the concerns for cultural recovery through language acquisition.

New Mexico

IFLI began its search by meeting and talking with Head Start Programs. It

soon became evident that the real concern among tribes in New Mexico is that their languages could become extinct. The language of tribes is passing away along with the elder generation. As language is connected to culture, these rich cultures are also in jeopardy. As the dialogue continued, a commonality among tribes is the interest in “Language Nests” similar to those that New Zealand has developed. In this approach, babies spend time with parents and caregivers in an environment of total language immersion.

With this in mind, Maryanna has visited with those who share the concern for language preservation to explore ways that the IFLI learning approach can be a resource. Navajo Technical College has expressed interest in the IFLI approach, and conversations are taking place about the potential of the program to contribute to the mission of the college.

Canada

Very preliminary conversations have happened with First Nations groups and people involved in education in Southern Ontario. Two focus group conversations were held: one in Haliburton, Ontario and the second at Trent University. In both groups, people talked about First Nations wanting to preserve their languages. The IFLI team visited day care centers, First Nations Friendship Centres and advocacy organizations as well as a Technical Institute that has just begun a Language Nest with the Mohawk language.

To date a partnership community has not been identified, but several communities have expressed interest in having further conversations.



RWANDA WORK CONTINUES

The IFLI project in Rwanda is called “A Child, I Care”. The work of reaching out to parents in the very rural district of Ngororero (Western Province) is being carried out by a core of 19 Family Outreach Practitioners. They began work in April by systematically meeting with parents. Working in teams of two, each team of Family Outreach Practitioners is visiting 20 families in their homes twice a week and convened learning sessions involving these families two times each week. All adult members of each family are required to attend the learning sessions and home visits in order to participate in the program. These sessions were conducted over a 4-month period.

The focus in Rwanda these past several months continues to be on getting information to families, deepening their literacy skills, and nurturing their ability to creatively interact with their babies. Curriculum materials for this phase of the project grew out of the information gathered during the Learning Lab. These materials: a Practitioners’ Training course to train Family Outreach Practitioners, an Adult Literacy Manual, and sets of Activity Cards to be used in teaching parents, were all developed in Kinyarwanda (the national language of Rwanda) and they include culturally informed images.

Umuhuza worked with the Ngororero District

Government and local leaders to select high school graduates to be trained to be Family Outreach Practitioners. This Core Group also selected Rwandan trainers to be oriented by ProLiteracy/IFLI consultants to teach the Practitioners’ Course and college graduates to collect baseline data for the project evaluation process.

To date the project has been initiated in 18 villages, involving 20 families in each village. It is anticipated that a total of 360 families (720 adults) will have been engaged in learning sessions by the end of 2008.



GOOD NEWS GATHERINGS



Over the past several months, supporters of the International Family Literacy Initiative have hosted “Good News Gatherings” for friends, colleagues, business associates and

family members. In Chicago, Raymond and Tina Spencer and their neighbor, Eileen Quinn joined IFLI intern Neena Nambiar in hosting a garden party to introduce IFLI Site Coordinators and project consultants. In the Twin Cities, Don and Mary Hopkins hosted a gathering of colleagues who are interested in the IFLI application of methods of Transformative Learning for a presentation by Project Manager, Elise Packard. In Haliburton, Canada, John and Thea Patterson hosted a circle of colleagues to share context and

contacts with Maryanna Doan, IFLI Consultant to Indigenous Communities. In all of these gatherings, it has been a delight to share information on the progress of this project, which is engaging local trainers, and Family Outreach Practitioners to share vital information with families who are eager to learn. This information provides a hopeful contrast to the daily news and the gatherings provide a way for people to become involved in the work of the project in a variety of ways.

NEENA NAMBIAR SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETES TWO YEAR INTERNSHIP



Neena Nambiar, a seasoned educator with experience in Montessori and International Schools in India, completed a two-year residential internship with IFLI in Chicago. Her experience included regular involvement in the Learning Basket program, which is a “sister project” to IFLI, and which is implemented within several schools within the Chicago Public School System. As part of this involvement, Neena co-facilitated parent groups, and co-conducted home visits with parents who represent a variety of cultural, linguistic and ethnic groups. As part of her internship, Neena engaged in literature reviews and wrote reflective papers on a variety of subjects related to engaging marginalized parents in learning. Neena also visited schools that represent a variety of educational approaches, and wrote reflective reviews of her experiences. As part of her internship Neena returned to India to engage in the IFLI Capacity Building Practicum, and she joined the team which conducted the Practitioners’ Course in Pune. In the United States her formal training included completing the Group Facilitation Training Course as well as the Project Initiation Coach Training Course. Another dimension of her internship experience included living with the Raymond and Tina Spencer family in a cultural exchange which included mentoring their children in cultural tradition and practices from India. As a result of her two-year mentored internship experience, Neena returns to India prepared to join the IFLI Potali Project, and to lend expertise that will be critical to its depth and potential for expansion.