

Canadian Library initiative, APL partner on Indigenous Teachings program



Last month, Aurora's latest micro-branch of The Canadian Library Project opened at the Royal Rose Gallery to educate people on and pay tribute to Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women and Girls and Two-Spirited (MMIWG2S) Individuals.

Now, in the month ahead, the community will have the chance to help the project get to the next level as the Aurora Public Library (APL) joins forces with The Canadian Library Project (TCL) for a series of events that will see residents take a hands-on approach to moving the needle forward on Truth & Reconciliation.

TCL is a community-driven art installation that uses Indigenous-inspired and sourced fabrics to cover books honouring lives lost. Names of the missing and murdered are etched on the spines of each volume of book, serving not only as a powerful memorial to those who have lost their lives in a nation-wide problem, but as a catalyst to learn more online on just who was behind each and every name in the library.

TCL has been brought to APL by Nelia Pacheco, APL's Acting Coordinator of Community-Led Initiatives who was struck by the display installed at Royal Rose.

"I was just overwhelmed," says Pacheco. "I made a decision I was going to build a program around it with APL and really wanted to immerse our community in it."

What particularly struck her about the TCL was its focus on MMIWG2S and the opportunity to build awareness.

"We all know it exists, but no one wants to talk about it. It's a headline in the paper and then you move on," she says, adding that since the National Commission for Truth & Reconciliation published its 96 Calls to Action, very little has been done since. "It hasn't been looked at since 2019 when it was finalized and the Federal Government said it was due to COVID, but that excuse can't be used any longer."

"I'm extremely passionate about education and awareness when it comes to our First Nations people and it was an opportunity. From my perspective, I am very privileged and fortunate to have a platform and I want to use my platform for good, and it's all about education."

Starting on Tuesday, September 10 from 7 ? 8.30 p.m. in the APL's Creative Studio, and again on Tuesday, September 17 and Tuesday, September 24, at the same time, and on Sunday, September 15, from 10.30 a.m. to 12 noon, members of the public are invited to register, come out and take part in the wrapping of books.

?It's an opportunity to discuss the issue, educate themselves and also be a part of that process,? she notes. ?To me, I look at it in the very symbolic sense of death. Death is uncomfortable as it is, but there is a great amount of peace that someone could get. I look at the wrapping of the books as almost the cleansing of a body, of putting someone to peace. I would like to generate that kind of connection through the wrapping of books.

?I'm hoping it triggers a curiosity so they will go off and do their own research, ask questions, go to their Councillors and people who have power? and demand more. I am hoping they will take away and educate themselves and for us settlers to stop asking the Indigenous community what we can do. Here's an opportunity where you can do something.?

As she listened to Pacheco's words in a sit-down interview in APL's Living Room space on Friday morning, TCL founder Shanta Sundarason said she was about to cry.

Sundarason, who came to Canada 14 years ago from Singapore, founded TCL after realising Canadians born in this country know so little about their own history.

The Library has grown by leaps and bounds since its foundations and her ultimate goal with TCL is for all the books that have been created at these micro-branches to be acquired by a national or high profile museum or gallery as a permanent testament to these victims.

?When we started this project, it was with myself and six friends and we each donated a little bit of money into the pot to buy our first batch of fabric, and we got our first bookcase donated by a residential school survivor, which really set the tone,? said Sundarason. ?To see how it has grown over the last two years, sometimes we can't find the words, but we're just so grateful there are so many more people who want to learn, want to hear stories, want to listen.

?We just want the conversation to continue, for education to continue, awareness to continue, and then hopefully, as we all grow, that's when true reconciliation will happen. It's not going to happen through politics or the government; it's going to happen when every single Canadian, newcomer and visitor, to be honest, understands what the true history of this country is, accepts it, and moves on to ensure it is never going to happen again.?

For more information on The Canadian Library Initiative at the Aurora Public Library, including how to register for the book-wrapping sessions, and other initiatives that are part of APL's year-long Indigenous Teachings program, visit indigenousteachings.ca.

By Brock Weir