

Feminists come from all walks of life, say Book Club founders



By Brock Weir

Despite the term being in our popular lexicon for the better part of a century, but some people still shy away from calling themselves a feminist.

The whys and wherefores might be different for each individual, but it's a term and a mindset that should be fully embraced, according to Jodi Marr and Hannah Dugas, and they hope to spark a discussion about just that beginning this Thursday, February 7, with the very first Feminist Book Club at the Aurora Public Library.

The Feminist Book Club is the brainchild of Ms. Marr and Ms. Dugas and has been an idea long-simmering on the backburner. They have always been interested in women's studies and these topics often come up in the Aurora Public Library (APL) workplace, which they say is a 'female-dominated workforce.'

'We wanted to try something with a different kind of book club,' explains Ms. Dugas, who is an adult librarian at APL. 'I would love to dispel the myth that feminists are older women who grew up in the 1970s, breaking barriers. Feminists exist everywhere and I don't think it is limited to any particular group, gender or demographic. We want this group to be open to everybody. There is no rhyme or reason, just a discussion for people who think alike.'

This is the very idea that will be discussed with their first selection, the book 'We Should All Be Feminists' by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, says Ms. Marr, APL's Manager of Customer Opportunity.

'We thought Ngozi Adichie summed it up really well: 'Feminists come from every shape, size, form and background. What unites feminists is the belief that every person, regardless of gender, class, education, race, sexuality or ability, deserves equality,' and I think that is what I want to promote and discuss through this group.'

While history has shown us that feminism comes in waves, the time is just right to bring a discussion group like this to APL, they say.

Ms. Marr cites Women's Marches, which have become a bold, colourful movement over the last two years. Although she has not attended a Women's March herself, she has many friends and colleagues who have. She's conscious that not everyone can show their support for a moment in that way, or feel comfortable doing so, but this book club is a step in the right direction.

'I think it is a great way to allow a broader audience to come into a safe space, to have and participate in a discourse,' she says.

'You hear a lot about this in the news and in politics and there are lots of questions going through everyone's minds with the #metoo movement and more and more things like that out in public. It is an important time to talk about it and be able to safely discuss your thoughts or feelings.'

Adds Ms. Dugas: 'Pay gaps, redefining sexual assault and what it means, and taking away the myths about things like only women can be sexually assaulted and harassed, that it only comes from men, that it only comes from white men [have been prominent issues recently] and they are ideas ingrained in our heads and how everyone grew up. But that is starting to change and I think it is an important discussion to sort of go over not only dispelling these myths, but looking forward to a future of how do we teach our kids to not have the first thing that pops into their heads [being] doubting women? That only boys can be pilots? It is an important time to

start this dialogue and keep it going.?

These conversations have been going on for a long time, Ms. Marr notes, and people "sometimes forget there are still places in the world" where these conversations need to be had.

"We'll measure [the success of the book club] by the quality conversations coming out of the group and how it is helping people in the community to grow, understand and engage civically in our democratic society," says Ms. Marr. "It is hard to capture those things in success measures, but you really only capture it through things like this where having a conversation with another person and thinking, 'I never thought about it that way before and this is a really important thing to know.'"

"You don't have to come to every meeting. It is not going to be an academic tackle of this subject, it is more of your thoughts or feelings, a little bit of discourse guiding the readings we're going through. We're not teachers or experts in the field, we're just like you: we want to come together, talk about it, explore things and we're going to create a safe space where that can happen. Why not come out? If these thoughts are going through your head and you want to explore it further, I think this is going to be a great place to do that."

The Feminist Book Club's inaugural meeting is this Thursday, February 7, from 7 - 8.30 p.m. at the Aurora Public Library. Registration is required, but admission is free. For more information, contact the Adult Information Desk at 905-727-9494x275. Additional dates include March 7 (Men Explain Things to Me by Rebecca Solnit), April 16 (Dietland by Sarai Walker), May 14 (Shrill by Lindy West) and June 19 (The Power by Naomi Alderman).