

**2013 Medals - Pierce County**  
Speakers: Neel Parikh, Jo Cruz

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>> FEMALE SPEAKER: The National Medal for Museum and Library Services is the nation's highest honor for libraries and museums that are serving their communities in exceptional ways.

Pierce County Library System Executive Director Neel Parikh and community member Jo Cruz travel to Washington, D.C. from Tacoma, Washington to receive the National Media and spoke to IMLS about how the library impacts the community.

>> NEEL PARIKH: Well, I think of the Pierce County as wanting to be making a difference in our community and where one of the things in our overall vision statement is to create a community where knowledge grows but to also make a difference one person at a time.

What we want to be able to do also is to focus on the needs of the particular community and what is it that they value and they care about, and also for particular populations in the community.

We pay attention to who is out there and what the needs are. So for instance, when the economy turned down we suddenly had droves of people coming into the library looking for jobs. And so we paid attention and we figured out what it was that they needed and then we work to provide it.

When we were noticing that there were a large number of people who spoke Spanish and Korean in the community and that the population was growing, we actually got a grant and we researched working with the community, what was their - what were their needs?

One of the things that I am most passionate about is early learning. I was a children's librarian and I always say to everybody that the library is the only free place in the

community for children under the age of five. I think that this is a place where we have the opportunity to make a difference.

>> JO CRUZ: I have a home daycare business so there is an amazing amount of resources for when I am trying to build curriculum for my little ones, lots of books that I have every week to read and for them to ask me questions about so that we can study it further.

Also there are classes there that you can take as a child care provider that are free from the library and they help you understand early literacy. They help you - they help you teach children and a kid friendly way.

>> NEEL PARIKH: Now we know that the first five years of life are the most important years in the development of a child's brain and we knew that that was a time to make an impact.

If you want to help young children develop their brains and their parents, get them pre-ready, you've got to go where the child is and you've got to help the people that are actually working with the child.

So we work with schools at the older level but it is extremely important for childcare providers because most of them have not gone to college and they actually need certification on a regular basis. So teaching them classes and giving them that certification, that credit is really, really important.

So it really was a way of saying if we want to help get children school ready, the only way we're going to be able to do that is through a child care provider.

>> JO CRUZ: The Pierce County Library has this toolbox that they had given to I believe it was - I want to say ten daycare providers and in this toolbox it was a big tub full of things like musical instruments and white boards and puppets and blocks and all of these things were put out in the playroom along with books and along with the games that they provide you and the newsletters.

And this is how we teach the children how to read and how to write, by fishing for letters.

>> NEEL PARIKH: The kind - I mean, what Jo is telling you is really what is - what the situation is for many family childcare

providers. Jo is at home alone with these children and can't get out and so it's really, really important to be able to support them.

>> JO CRUZ: The Early Achievers Program is a program that encourages daycare providers, teaches daycare providers, mentors daycare providers in a way that will help us to better prepare children for school, and me only being a daycare provider for two and a half years, it was very overwhelming.

Had it not been for my technical assistant - the Early Achievers Program gives you a technical assistant - and she walks with you through all of the different components to help you really get ready - get these kids ready for school.

>> NEEL PARIKH: We're about books and reading and about the community and I think that serving in early learning and serving children is really a core service that we provide.

Winning the IMLS Medal is totally amazing. It says to us that we are making a difference in our community. What I like about the award is that it is focused on the community and service to the community and it talks about innovation and going sort of the extra mile and talks about how we make a difference in the community with individuals and with families.

And this just tells us that we've been doing a good job and everybody in the library feels that way too and I also - also I think it brings together the partners that we've worked with over the years, tells us about the strength of the relationships that we have worked - made and developed in order to be able to reach those communities more effectively.