

Literary Arts Partnership Proposal

Imagination for Communication and Memory Among Seniors

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Summary

The Literary Arts Partnership is a project of the University of Central Florida's English Department that enriches lives by providing creative writing opportunities to persons in our community who may not have the resources or access to literary arts programming.

We provide creative writing workshops at inner-city public schools, halfway houses, foster homes, drug treatment facilities, and homeless and domestic violence shelters across Central Florida. The project has recently expanded its workshops to a new group of creative voices that often go unheard: senior adults who face age-related and dementia-related memory loss.

Health experts predict that dementia and age-related memory loss diseases among seniors will double in the next 40 years. While researchers continue to seek the medical causes and develop new therapies to understand and prevent these health issues, seniors dealing with memory loss diseases still have limited therapeutic options as the diseases progress into later stages. However, caregivers can help improve the quality of life for these individuals.

The mission of the Literary Arts Partnership is to train and to support University of Central Florida students as they provide poetry and storytelling workshops and mentoring to children, youth, and adults throughout central Florida. We believe poetry and storytelling are powerful tools that enhance literacy, learning attitude, self-confidence, character, and self-awareness.

This project is primarily funded through internal University of Central Florida competitive grants and through the generosity of community and student volunteers. We continue to seek financial support from outside the university and have recently created an advisory board to help identify additional, alternative sources to maintain the partnership's work. A grant from [insert organization here] will assist in the survival of this project. We are requesting \$75,954 for a two-year period. The funds would be used for costs related to personnel, book production, and to allow the program to expand to serve additional senior adults.

Introduction

The partnership was founded and is directed by Terry Ann Thaxton, an award-winning poet and an assistant professor of English at UCF. Thaxton's innovations in classroom and community teaching have earned her recognition from the academic community, as

well as the local media, and at national conferences. She regularly presents her research on the link between literacy and creative writing at national conferences. Since 2003, the partnership has connected more than 400 UCF student volunteers with over a thousand of children, youth, and adults in the Greater Orlando region through its creative writing workshops. To view more about the program on the Web, visit

<http://english.ucf.edu/outreach>.

University of Central Florida students participate in the program and gain valuable experience working with and helping give voice to populations that traditionally go unheard. In 2008 alone, the partnership provided creative writing workshops, tutoring and mentoring at 15 different facilities – from public schools to homeless shelters to assisted living centers. Since its founding, the partnership has provided its services at more than 50 facilities.

For the past year, UCF students and faculty also have expanded the partnership's work to elder populations by conducting poetry and storytelling workshops at Emeritus Assisted Living Facility in Oviedo. Emeritus at Oviedo is a welcoming partner and we would like to expand the public-private relationship we have begun to establish.

At the facility, students and faculty work with residents in the assisted living and memory loss units. Rather than pushing the residents in the memory loss unit to "remember" their lives, we use imagination and work with the residents to create a weekly collaborative story based on a thought-provoking picture that we bring in. UCF students and faculty ask open-ended questions that lead the group to writing an imaginative story.

Problem Statement (Assessment of Need)

Dementia and age-related memory loss diseases, such as Alzheimer's, are among the fastest growing diseases in the United States. An estimated 5 million people in the United States suffer from Alzheimer's, the most common form of dementia, and health experts predict that this population will grow to approximately 7 million in the next five years¹. That number is expected to double by 2050.² Alzheimer's is a disease of the brain, which causes large numbers of nerve cells to die.³ This loss of nerve cells affects a person's ability to remember things and think clearly. Medical scientists do not know what causes the disease.

Quality of Life

For those suffering from memory loss, their families, and their caregivers, these debilitating diseases can be humiliating, frustrating, and depressing. While some drugs

¹ Label, M.D., Lorne. "Dementia Facts and Statistics." *Disabled World*. 5 Jan. 2009. Web. 23 Nov. 2009.

² Miller, Bruce L. and Bradley F. Boeve, eds. "Alzheimer's disease." *The Behavioral Neurology of Dementia*. New York: Cambridge University P, 2009. Print.

³ Understanding Alzheimer's Disease. Brochure. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. June 2007. Web. 23 Nov. 2009.

are available to treat the symptoms in the early and middle stages of dementia, no cure exists for these memory-loss diseases. However, “active medical management can improve the quality of life for those living with memory loss and their caregivers,” according to the Centers for Disease Control. As Anne Davis Basting, Ph.D., writes in *Forget Memory*, “Dementia is hard, but it needn’t be this hard.”⁴

Furthermore, as Alzheimer’s Disease and related dementia progresses in patients and pharmaceutical therapy becomes less effective, quality of care becomes critical. Because memory loss can make it difficult for individuals with dementia to form relationships, they can become isolated. In addition, memory loss can contribute to problems with traditional interpersonal communication. Communication issues continue to be areas of intense interest in dementia research. Researcher Malcolm Goldsmith writes, “We need to find ways of encouraging and assisting [individuals with dementia] in their attempts to communicate with us and we need to ensure that we are doing everything possible to facilitate our own attempts to communicate.”⁵ The Literary Arts Partnership program at Emeritus provides an opportunity to improve quality of life for seniors and help build evidence for the value of the arts for human wellbeing.

Based on a simple concept called TimeSlips, developed by Anne Davis Basting, Ph.D., these storytelling exercises give residents a chance to “express themselves without relying on failing memories and deteriorating language skills.”⁶ Research of several facilities utilizing this intervention has shown that it appears “to improve relationships between nursing home residents and caregivers.”⁷ Recent research also showed that residents with Alzheimer’s in facilities using this method “were more engaged and alert” and there “were more frequent staff-resident interactions, social interactions, and social engagement.”⁸

Changing misconceptions

Alzheimer’s Disease and related dementia continue to carry a stigma and fear of the disease can form stereotypes of aging and adults with memory loss. Basting writes in *Forget Memory*, “From the fodder of popular culture, we can form stereotypes of older people, which includes stereotypes of people with dementia.” By bringing more complex images of memory loss into the public and exposing college students to older adults, we

⁴ Basting, Anne Davis. *Forget Memory: Creating Better Lives for People with Dementia*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP, 2009. Print.

⁵ Goldsmith, Malcolm. *Hearing the Voice of People with Dementia*. London and Bristol, Pennsylvania: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1996. Print.

⁶ “TimeSlips: Group Storytelling Helps Nursing Home Residents with Alzheimer’s.” 3 Oct. 2005. Commonwealth Fund. Web. 23 Nov. 2009.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Fristch, Thomas, Jung Kwak, Stacey Grant, Josh Lang, Rhonda R. Montgomery, and Ann D. Basting. “Impact of TimesSlips, a Creative Expression Intervention Program, on Nursing Home Residents with Dementia and their Caregivers.” *The Gerontologist*. 2009 49.1: 117-127. *Oxford Journals*. Web. 30 Nov. 2009.

can help counter those stereotypes.

For example, an undergraduate assistant wrote in her field research notebook about her observations of residents of the memory loss unit: “They are still people, if not quite as they once were. Age has changed them, but not erased them.” By involving college students we also expose these young writers to a deeper understanding of memory loss and can help remove the stigma and fear associated with dementia and related memory loss diseases.

Program Objectives

The primary objective is to increase social engagement, alertness, and quality of life for the more than two-dozen senior residents at Emeritus who participate in the Literary Arts Partnership’s by continuing to conduct creative writing and storytelling workshops each week. Social engagement is crucial for seniors who deal with dementia or face age-related memory loss issues. Moreover, creative exercises offer an alternative for interaction for Alzheimer’s residents who have trouble with traditional communications.

The second objective is to develop more engaged community members by introducing college students to working with senior adults with and without memory loss, who traditionally lack voice in the community, through weekly participation in workshops and reflection on their experience during the semester.

The third objective is to present a more complex view of older populations and those with dementia to the public, residents’ families, caregivers and students through publications and public readings of seniors’ writings once a year.

Methods

Support from this grant would be used to hire a “writer in the community” (WIC) and a graduate assistant to conduct a storytelling workshop with residents of the memory loss unit for an hour each week at Emeritus Senior Living Facility in Oviedo. Support through this grant would also allow this writer and graduate assistant to conduct a poetry workshop with assisted living residents who do not have memory loss for one hour each week.

In the second year, the grantees propose to expand to a second senior living facility to work with new groups of memory loss and non-memory loss seniors.

Currently, the Literary Arts Partnership runs two workshops at Emeritus. Our Wednesday afternoon workshop is structured, teaching assisted living residents the elements of poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction. The residents began by writing collaborative poetry, but are now able to compose poems individually by using the techniques we’ve taught them.

Our Monday morning workshop is a storytelling workshop with the residents in the memory-loss unit. Rather than pushing the residents to “remember” their lives, we use imagination and work with the residents to create a weekly collaborative story based on a picture that we bring in. UCF students and faculty ask open-ended questions about the picture that leads the group to writing an imaginative story.

For example, residents were recently given copies of an Edward Hopper painting “Chop Suey” during a workshop. A typical exchange follows this pattern:

Writer: What do you want their names to be?

Resident 1: You never know, do you? Are these three men?

Resident 2: I think they have something to say to somebody.

Writer: What are they saying?

Resident 1: They’re saying “yeah.”

Writer: What have they been doing?

Resident 1: Which one is it? Is that the one that’s living there?

Resident 2: The thing on the table looks like a birthday cake. She looks pretty well, doesn’t she? She does. I don’t know why they’d throw a birthday party with only two people.⁹

Each week, after each workshop (both the Monday and Wednesday groups), we type the poems and stories and post them on a blog (www.writingfancy.blogspot.com and www.thelovesociety.blogspot.com) so that the residents, family members, and staff can read them. At the end of this semester, we plan to hold a public reading—inviting staff, family, and community—to hear the poems and stories.

The workshops are open to any residents of the facility, though there has been a stable of regular participants.

With this grant, we would be able to compile the writings into an anthology (a professional-looking book) that we would print and give to each resident and their family members. We would also be able to print chapbooks for each resident with her poems in it. This keepsake is intended to build self-confidence and pride among the residents, their families and caregivers.

Evaluation

In the past, the director of the Literary Arts Partnership has measured the effectiveness of the partnership by verbally surveying participants, resident’s families, facility staff, and students. Currently, graduate and undergraduate students volunteering for the program are required to keep a weekly field journal of their observations and experiences for reflection, which the director reviews.

⁹ Edna, Miss Peach, Vivian, Patricia, and Betty. “A Secret Affair.” Writing Fancy. Literary Arts Partnership. 26 Oct. 2009. Web. 3 Dec. 2009. <http://writingfancy.blogspot.com/2009_10_01_archive.html>.

The director plans in the next fiscal year to institute a formal beginning-of-year and end-of-year attitudinal survey of facility managers, caregivers, students and seniors participating in the program. The director would also survey members of the public and family who attended the public reading to gauge their perceptions of seniors. Since surveying memory loss patients in a traditional way presents challenges, the partnership would conduct a survey of caregivers to evaluate social engagement and alertness of participants.

The partnership would monitor Web traffic on its Web sites to establish a baseline measurement and track growth in readership of participants' writings among family members, students and caregivers.

The grant funds would also allow the director to build relationships with medical, psychological, or social science researchers within the University of Central Florida and elsewhere to determine the scientific basis for measuring the psychological and social benefits of the program to residents, caregivers, family members and students. The instructor and a research partner would present the results of these findings at a professional conference.

Future and Other Necessary Funding

The Literary Arts Partnership continues to seek other funding sources from a variety of granting organizations, including corporate foundations, government grants and private foundations. The Literary Arts Partnership's overhead costs are relatively low as we rely primarily on students who participate in the program through service-learning projects, volunteering or required community service. The majority of the partnership's activities take place in host facilities such as schools, shelters and nursing homes further reducing our organization's overhead costs.

In addition, the director has recently established an advisory board to assist with identifying additional grant and funding sources. The advisory board includes a former mayor of Orlando and a retired Disney executive. The Literary Arts Partnership has received funding in the past from State Farm Companies Foundation and The Golden Rule Foundation. The Literary Arts Partnership also has identified the Florida Division of Cultural Affairs and the Community Foundation of Central Florida as potential funding sources.

Budget

The Literary Arts Partnership requests a total of \$75,954 to support the organization's salaries for staff (this includes a writer in the community, a graduate assistant, summer salary for director) for time conducting creative writing workshops, production of professionally produced anthology and chapbooks to provide to senior residents who participate in the program, their families, caregivers, and students. The partnership has

budgeted for 29 percent in indirect costs as well as a travel stipend for the director to present on the impact of the project at a professional conference. Because of a strong volunteer and service-learning ethic at the university, substantial in-kind match comes from volunteer hours and from the university salary of the director, who receives strong backing from the English department and administration for her work with this program. For the full line-item budget, see attachment A.

Attachment A – Line Item Budget

PI	Terry Thaxton							
Agency								
Date	12/1/09							
Start Date		End						
			Year 1	Year 1 Match	In Kind Match	Year 2	Year 2 Match	In Kind Match
SALARY, WAGES AND BENEFITS	Salaries escalated 3% annually in August; based on historical data							
Faculty & Staff								
Professor Terry Thaxton - summer salary	\$	3,000				\$	3,000	
Professor Terry Thaxton - academic year			\$	22,314			\$	22,314
TOTAL FACULTY & STAFF	\$	3,000	\$	22,314	\$	-	\$	3,000
OPS								
Volunteers - 12 @ 30 hrs ea * \$8.00/hr (90 hours)					\$	8,640		\$
Writer 90 hours	\$	4,500				\$	9,000	
Total OPS	\$	4,500	\$	-	\$	8,640	\$	9,000
Post-Doctoral Researchers								
Total Post Docs	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-
Students								
Graduate student(s) - 1 GRA @ \$10/hr 90 hours	\$	900						
Graduate student(s) - 1 GRA @ \$10/hr 180 hours						\$	1,800	
Subtotal Students	\$	900	\$	-		\$	1,800	\$
Subtotal Salaries	\$	8,400	\$	22,314	\$	8,640	\$	13,800
Fringe Benefits								
Faculty	28.15%	\$	845	\$	6,281	28.15%	\$	0
OPS	1.45%	\$	65	\$	-	1.45%	\$	131
Post Doctoral Researchers	11.90%	\$	-	\$	-	11.90%	\$	-
Students	0.00%	\$	-	\$	-		\$	-
SUBTOTAL FRINGE BENEFITS	\$	910	\$	6,281	\$	0	\$	131
Subtotal Faculty & Staff Salaries & Benefits	\$	3,845	\$	28,596	\$	0	\$	3,000
Subtotal OPS + Benefits	\$	5,465	\$	-	\$	8,640	\$	10,931
SUBTOTAL ALL SALARIES & BENEFITS	\$	9,310	\$	28,596	\$	8,640	\$	13,931
Equipment								
Video camera								
Subtotal Equipment	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-
Travel								
Conference to Present the Impact of work						\$	1,500	
Total Travel	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-	\$	1,500
Partner Contributions								
Supervision/consultation of UCF students (2 hr/wk*20/hr)				\$	3,840			\$
Travel								
Subsistence								
Other								
Subtotal Participant Support Costs	\$	-	\$	-	\$	3,840	\$	-
Expenses								
Anthology production	\$	3,000				\$	3,000	
Video recording				\$	500			\$
Typeset, layout, design of anthology				\$	500			\$
Advertising								
Office supplies, software								
Total Materials & Supplies, etc.	\$	3,000	\$	-	\$	1,000	\$	3,000
Tuition								
Tuition waiver-match								
Total Tuition	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-
Subcontracts								
Total Subcontracts	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-
Consultants								
Visiting Published Writer	\$	5,000				\$	5,000	
Total Consultants	\$	5,000	\$	-	\$	-	\$	5,000
Total expenses	\$	8,000	\$	-	\$	4,840	\$	8,000
Subtotal Expense and Travel	\$	8,000	\$	-	\$	4,840	\$	9,500