

Corvallis Multicultural Literacy Center

A Short History

Corvallis Multicultural Literacy Center was created with conversations, and creativity.

At its heart are connections, relationships, and stories. And the involvement of many, many volunteers who contributed to the dream.

It began with listening to our immigrant and international community and continues to make sure that these voices are heard.

It began because programs and places for immigrants and international non-immigrant residents were often created without their input, and sometimes with little knowledge of what was needed or wanted. In conversations with immigrants, the themes of "isolation" and loneliness were recurring, as well as the longing to take part in the community despite language and cultural differences. People wanted a "home", a place where someone knew them, where they could be themselves, where they could make a contribution.

There was an overlooked community within the broader community that wanted to create something unique. A place, not a program. A home, not a social service agency. People as valued participants, not creditors and debtors. A nonhierarchical organization that welcomed all contributions equally. Immigrant and international families didn't mind being cultural informants, but they also wanted to be members of a community. U.S. friends asked how they could make connections, lacking a format and location.

The initial idea-gathering period (2000-2002) engaged many people who dreamed of such a multicultural community place. It was clear that what was envisioned was indeed unique...not only in Corvallis, as we discovered, but anywhere.

A public non-profit was formalized between 2002-2004. The new organization was named Corvallis Multicultural Literacy Center with *Literacy* referring to both *language* and *knowledge of something*. For many people, it became just "the center."

The philosophy was set out in the Vision Statement: *Corvallis Multicultural Literacy Center is envisioned as a place where people of all cultures can come together in a living room for learning; where all people can be teachers and learners; and where sharing cultures enables everyone to take part in the community.*

From the beginning, the center inspired and thrived on "convergences." Something appeared at the right moment, projects came together, people showed up with skills at the exact perfect time. "Magic" happened at the center. Even finding a space was a convergence as OSU accepted CMLC's proposal to take over the unoccupied Sunflower House.

Beginning in May 2005, many volunteers transformed the derelict building and created a welcoming space. In October 2005, CMLC opened the doors and invited the public into the new center. The

community had a true multicultural home, the actualization of a dream, the result of the planning, work and efforts of a world of volunteers.

The equity of teaching and learning was reflected in the organizational structure which was flexible and organic, responsive to incorporating new ideas or finding resources to meet needs. “ Everyone is a teacher. Everyone is a learner.” Participants felt ownership through participation and participation was actively encouraged and welcomed.

What made CMLC unique was this participation, the authentic involvement by everyone. It wasn't only about “programs” although programs were a part, usually initiated by immigrant/international participants. At the core were relationships through connecting people. *Engage, Listen, Make No Assumptions.*

For the first five years, the center was run entirely with volunteers. Gradually, over the years, paid staff was hired with funding from individual donations as investments in the center's work, and from grants for programming and projects.

Corvallis Multicultural Literacy Center lived in the “Yellow House” for 12 years. Throughout those years, CMLC could offer space for meetings of community groups as well as to house costumes for the 4-H Folkloric Dance group and Casa Latinos Unidos. When the Yellow House was demolished in 2018, Corvallis Multicultural Literacy Center moved to the current location to carry on the ideas and philosophy that formed the organization.

The stories of welcoming the world and engaging the community continue.

Connections. Relationships. Stories.