



Olga Cardenas
Modesto Library
Modesto, California

Nominator: Anne Britton, Jonaca Driscoll, Amanda Hughes, Michael Leamy, Cathie Peck and Friends of the Modesto Library

1. Please tell us in 2-3 sentences why your nominee should win this award. What sets them apart?

Olga Cardenas puts forward the best “face of the library”. She lives her mission to bring literacy programs wherever she works; initiating new programs and building relationships with individuals, colleagues and the community. She has the ability and passion to talk about what is important and the power to communicate in English and Spanish with all different types of people. In Stanislaus County, many families live within the confines of extreme poverty and face structural, attitudinal, and cultural barriers as they attempt to get more involved in their child’s education. The library has the potential to open doors for families, but they first need to know about the services and feel safe when accessing them. As the Youth Services Outreach Librarian, Olga works tirelessly to bridge these barriers for families by engaging with parents where they naturally live, work, and pray. This innovative approach to family engagement is highly effective and leads to new partnerships between the library and businesses, service organizations, and schools.

2. Please list a few ways in which the nominee has helped you and made your experience of the library a positive one. For instance, did the nominee inspire in you a love for literature; assist you in a project or finding other information?

In October 2015, Olga helped pilot a family engagement strategy at Frantz Nursery as a way to promote early literacy in the field. Olga presented to Frantz Nursery employees on the importance of reading to children and offered tips for how to incorporate more reading in the home. The measurable results were that 20 employees obtained their first library card, over a 100 employees received a free new book and also a brochure to revisit at home reinforcing the key messaging about the importance of talking, singing, and reading. After the event employees started to activate their library card and experienced the library services for the first time. When Olga later presented at Moon Elementary’s Kindergarten registration, a parent glowingly said “ I already have a library card and I use it. You came to my work - I work at Frantz Nursery.”

Olga has greatly helped me and Deni Rapp, Champions for Imagination Library, at Burbank School. We did an inservice for parents with Olga in May. She organized the event with summer bags for the students filled with materials to continue literacy learning. She assisted us in mailing individual invitations to our IL families and navigated the workshop from start to finish. Her manner is so kind and welcoming, the families who came that day left with happy smiles and new strategies/books/materials to explore over the summer. We are setting up future workshops for parents/students and I am so happy to participate with Olga's support, knowledge of the community, boundless energy, creativity and understanding of how children learn.

In 2005 Olga asked Friends of the Modesto Library to find funding for Dia de los Ninos / Libros at Modesto Library; the first time for participation by the Stanislaus County Free Library system. The program celebrated its 10th anniversary in April 2016 in a much loved and anticipated annual event for the Modesto community. In her transfer through assignments to other branches the program expanded until this year, in Olga's new position as outreach librarian, she inspired and cajoled using her usual discretion to assure that each of the 13 library branches chose to hold Dia events.

3. How has the librarian made a difference in the community? Please be specific.

Olga is a strategic partner of Stanislaus READS! and works with pilot school principals on ways to increase family engagement at the school. At Burbank School in South Modesto, for example, Olga coordinated a Dia de los niños celebration to coincide with the school's Open House and brought together multiple community partners to provide unique services:

- Modesto City Schools sent out a phone invitation alerting families of the event
- Cost Less, on Paradise Road, donated hot dogs and buns
- Modesto fire Department barbecued and served meals to families
- Burbank Paradise Fire Protection brought a fire engine for children to explore
- Over 500 gently used books were give to Burbank children that Boy Scouts had collected during the April 23rd LOVE Modesto event
- Casa Guanajuato hosted a professional story teller
- The library provided a science activity and information about upcoming workshops and events
- Congregations Building Community engaged trusted parent promoters to encourage families to attend and participate in the Open House event.

The result? According to the school principal, historical parent participation at Open House is 25%. This year over 85% of parents participated in Open House.

A 27-year veteran Burbank teacher stated that "this was the best attended Open House I can ever remember. I was so happy families came out to see their children's work and classroom!" A Burbank parent also said that " Open House was great this year. There were so many things to do and such little time. My family had a blast!"

Since the initial family engagement pilot , Olga and library partners, including Congregations Building Community, have organized over 40 events to approximately 3,000

parents and children throughout Stanislaus County.

Through Olga's initiation of Dia at the Modesto Library, an average of 200 - 300 books a year were gifted as permanent possessions to Modesto area children in each of the last ten years. Given the unfortunately low literacy rate in the community, this is a significant effort not only to put books into the hands and homes of low-income families, but Dia has acted as a clarion call that highlighted the need for attention to early literacy deficiencies in the community.

Through Olga's innovative family engagement approach, the library is literally building community through books, empathy, and compassion.

4. How has the library, and the nominee, improved the quality of your life?

I'm an officer of the Friends of the Library, which has me involved with several library projects. We also help support some of Olga's community projects. Last year Olga started a book club at our Juvenile Hall and our Juvenile Commitment Center. This focused on the younger and older male population. It wasn't long before word started to leak out about how popular and successful these book clubs were, how thrilled the boys were to have their ideas and opinions considered. I'm a retired teacher, who misses teaching to some extent, so last spring I asked Olga if she needed some help at juvenile hall. She very graciously said yes and after an extensive background check, which took quite a bit of time, I have the opportunity to share the joys and learning that reading and books can bring. The juvenile has requested that we introduce two books a month now, rather than the one, we were doing. So I will be doing one book on my own and Olga will do the other. It is very exciting and rewarding to be back in the "teaching game", thanks to Olga! (Jonaca Driscoll)

Olga exemplifies the institutional attitude that consistently treats me as a full member of the team, even though I'm a volunteer and not a paid full time employee. Her inclusion of me in discussions, celebrations, disappointments and triumphs that come with the ups and downs of library financing has, quite simply, held my purpose in life steady -- getting children and books together. (Anne Britton)

5. How does the nominee make the library a better place? Please be specific.

Olga makes the library a better place by redefining the concept of library altogether. Traditionally, with a few notable exceptions, the services the library provides take place on library property. Whether it was Story Time, reference services, book clubs, or early literacy instruction, we expected our customers to come to us. Olga, in her position as the Youth Services Outreach Coordinator has worked to bring the library to the customer, often working very flexible hours to do it.

She has done Story Time in parks, at doctor's offices and in homes for children who have no home. She provides book clubs to teens who are currently incarcerated. She has checked out books and issued library cards at the local

Women, Infant and Children office. She talks about the importance of early literacy instruction with agricultural workers, the Board of Supervisors, and everyone in between. Wherever she goes, Olga brings the library's message of inclusion, community and open access to information with her.

Her effectiveness goes far beyond the fact that she is bilingual. When Olga visits an agricultural employer and speaks to their staff about the ways that they can help their children in school by talking, singing, and reading with them, she is able to engage with each member of the audience. They see her as their personal connection to the library, someone who understands their fears and concerns about using the library's services. That connection has allowed us to receive honest feedback about our outreach efforts so that we can most effectively use our limited resources to reach as many people as possible.

Olga's demeanor is always inviting: never yells, always smiles, never complains, always encourages, never blames, and most importantly always inspires a return visit.

Olga reminds everyone that libraries are truly unique in that they really are available to everyone. This is easy to say, but sometimes difficult to put into action. Olga has the passion, dedication, and conviction necessary to put action to those words. Instead of thinking of the library as a physical space, Olga sees the library as groups of services that can be provided. By doing so in such an effective manner, she makes the Stanislaus County Libraries better places.

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