

The Public Library As A Community Programming Resource

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Lee County (Florida) Library System

In 1976 when Kathryn Leide and Lynne Martin Erickson developed Bi-Folkal Productions, they made a major contribution to programming for older adults. Their Bi-Folkal kits are a staple in libraries, senior centers, and residential facilities around the country. As a grateful librarian who has used the kits since the late 1970s, I am still amazed at how effective they are in generating memories and discussions with their audiences.

For the uninitiated, a Bi-Folkal kit is a thematic, multi-sensory kit for use with a group of older adults or an intergenerational audience. Designed for a reminiscence experience, the kits provide all the elements that you need to conduct one program or a month's worth of programs. They contain an audiovisual presentation in slide/tape and video format; audiocassettes with music accompaniment for sing-along songs; large print audience booklets filled with poems, songs, and discussion starters; jokes or skits with the props to carry them out; and things to touch and sniff. The leader manuals walk you through the program and offer different ideas for using the kits and adapting them to local needs.

The Bi-Folkal people describe their kits this way: "Remembering any time or topic is easier when you can see pictures of your memories, or touch or hear or smell them. When memories are shared in a group, each person's experiences can add to a deeper understanding of our past—and perhaps our future." For complete information on the kits and to view their outstanding newsletters that are filled with program ideas, check out www.bifolkal.org.

The Lee County Library System started purchasing kits in 1993 as part of an outreach project for older adults in residential facilities and day care programs. We bought two copies of each kit and one copy of each mini-kit—and ordered replacement pieces annually. They were an immediate hit with activity directors who saw their potential and



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grabbed them up. We limited circulation to residential facilities and day care programs. In addition, the library purchased several slide projectors that can be loaned.

*using the library
for programming
materials*

To introduce activity directors to the concept of using the library for programming materials, we started offering training where they could share ideas and learn from experienced programmers. Generally, training included sample Bi-Folkal kit presentations, tips for maximizing kit themes and adapting them to local situations, an overview of the range of programming materials available from the library, and a sharing of ideas and experiences. We offered CEUs through the local community college.

The coordinator for Senior Outreach works closely with Activity Directors and is an active member of their multi-county organization. When introducing new directors to library services, he demonstrates the kits with a group of their older adults and helps them to plan a series of programs. In addition to the kits, the library provides deposit collections of large print materials, Books-by-Mail service, and a Talking Books subregional program.

*expanded our kit
circulation to the
general public*

In a community like southwest Florida with 25% of the population over 65, we knew there were plenty of groups and individuals who would enjoy using the kits. So, in 2003, we expanded our kit circulation to the general public. We customized the sample flyer on the Bi-Folkal web site and printed thousands for use in libraries and community presentations. A mailing to 400+ faith-based organizations ignited a new interest in the kits. Circulating kits filled with different pieces is not fool-proof, so we wrote new procedures and trained library staff to adapt.

*Bi-Folkal kits have
been wonderful for
our community*

Our ten-year experience with Bi-Folkal kits has been wonderful for our community. Even the nicest residential facilities can't afford to purchase their own kits, so the library is providing a valuable resource for older adults in residential facilities, day care programs, and the general public.

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