



NEXT LEVEL EDUCATORS

The 2018 International Nelson Mandela Day

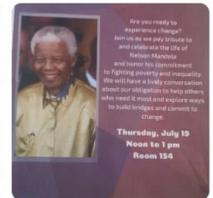
Next Level Educators' involvement in the 2018 centennial celebration of the International Nelson Mandela Day was an absolute delight.

During preliminary discussions with the Broward County Library Programming Manager about the range of services we offer as an educational consulting firm, we were asked if we would be willing to take on the immediate task of putting together a presentation to honor the life and legacy of Nelson Mandela for the 2018 centennial celebration. As veteran sociologists that we both are, and having used Mandela's life and work as a shining example of how to impact the world, we welcomed the project with open arms but at the same time with some degree of anxiety. We had a rather short period of time to put the program together.

After deciding on the basic outline of the presentation, the library decided to make the program available to four branches and so during July 16 – 19 we made presentations at the Miramar branch, South Regional branch, the Fort Lauderdale branch, and the North Regional branch. The program included an explanation of the theme of the Mandela Day recognition, highlights of significant events in Mandela's life, statistics on the extent and impact of poverty internationally and locally, and finally, a call to service. As a culminating event, we organized a Habitat for Humanity work day and invited participants from the four locations to volunteer.

It is rather difficult to fully assess the overall impact of the program but there were indeed some notable immediate heart-warming moments including:

- The spontaneous brilliant response by a participant who was explaining why Princess Diana deserves her own place among world leaders for having left a significant impact on human history. When he finished his piece, punctuated by specific examples, the entire audience erupted in applause;
- The willingness of participants to share personal experiences of random acts of kindness in which they have been involved. For example, a graduate student, who attends college in a different state, revealed that he attended the presentation because he was at the library as an act of support for his girlfriend who was writing a physics exam that evening;
- The senior participant, a clear winner in the jeopardy game we played using questions drawn from Mandela's life, who at the end of the presentation said he would be signing up for a college class in the fall semester;
- The high school student who related how motivated she and her classmates are now to get involved in social issues following the recent tragic shooting at Stoneman Douglas high school;



- A long-time friend who gave up her coveted gym session just so she could participate in the discussion at one of the locations;
- Two participants who got to the presentation late, but were nonetheless quite excited about the message of giving back to the community;
- The college student who wrote: “Dear Professor, I wanted to reach out and say how much I loved your presentation about Nelson Mandela. Walking in I knew almost nothing about him but after your presentation was over I felt very enlightened. I am now inspired to help more in the community thanks to you. Hope you have a great weekend”



- The alliance created between Next Level Educators and Gaia Calcaterra, a South African who now lives in Ft. Lauderdale and who started a Gratitude project that provides a range of educational, health, and social services for residents in the Nkomazi region in South Africa;

- The productive Habitat for Humanity work day on July 26, during which the 12-member group of volunteers representing Next Level Educators teamed up with another group from Broward Health to work on three houses in Roosevelt Gardens. The volunteers were not only diligent about the assigned tasks of measuring, cutting and nailing strips of lumber to the walls and cleaning up the work site, but showed noticeable care and concern for fellow volunteers who they were meeting for the first time. It was an unusually hot day and everyone was particularly attentive to the need to stay hydrated as individuals would take turn making water runs for their individual work group.



A note of thanks

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Library’s management team that commissioned the project, and the library staff at the four branches who created eye catching flyers for the event, provided audio/visual equipment and set up the venue for the presentations. For us it was truly a gratifying experience.

Sincerely,

Dr. Mirella Baker Bommel and Prof. Howard Housen