LOVE ALL

Storytelling event promotes understanding

By R.A. Schuetz

NORWALK -- There were tales of being misunderstood, like Indi, the monster who was only playing at being frightening. Other stories involved things that felt ignored, like the color green, the saddest color in the rainbow. Each of the stories ended when a conversation helped the characters understand one another.

During the Love ALL Project's storytelling sessions at the Norwalk Public Library, elementary students are encouraged to understand others. Families come in and share a meal with people they do not know, participate in an interactive story, then write short stories of their own -- the tales of Indi and the color green were written by past participants.

The second storytelling event will take place from 1 to 2:30 p.m. Nov. 5. Interactive storyteller Karen Hall will facilitate a performance of "Ferdinand the Bull," the tale of a tender-hearted bull wrestling with fearsome expectations that is set to become a movie by 20th Century Fox Animation in December.

"We thought it would be such a great tie-in to Love ALL because it's about a bull that doesn't really like being fiercely," said Vicki Oatis, the director of the children's library. "The way Karen does it, she really emphasizes those qualities of the story -- making sure that you accept those that are different than."

The Love ALL Project was founded in the wake of white supremacist flyerns left in driveways and mailbox around Norwalk. Founder Sharon Baamante formed the project to foster understanding between cultures.

"We're in a post-Charlotteville world, and I think it's very important for all of the institutions in the city to think about what they can do so that this kind of thing doesn't happen," she said. "This is very relevant in the world. How to prevent hate from happening, period."

Baamante has aimed to make the storytelling sessions a community-based event that can be replicated in other cities. So for each session, Love ALL has partnered with two other community groups. The first time, it partnered with the Al-Madany Islamic Center and the Norwalk Public Library. For this session, it partnered with the library and the Family and Children's Agency. Baamante said benefits of partnering with different community groups included attracting different parts of Norwalk's diverse population.

June's event, which drew roughly 35 children and their families, was such a success it has attracted the attention of Jennifer Koerner, who is writing a book about diversity of libraries.

"The book isn't out yet, but she wanted to include the Love ALL Project," Oatis said. The book includes how libraries are diversifying their staffs and reaching out to their communities.

Families can register for the Love ALL storytelling family event over the phone at 203-899-2780, ext. 1531. The event is free and includes pizza and drinks. rachaelots@gmail.com; rachaelots