

THE LIBRARY FRIENDS



Project Title:	“Children of Our Homeland” Social/Cultural/Family Preservation Center
Award Amount:	\$962,500
Type of Grant:	Social and Economic Development Strategies
Project Period:	9/1/2004 - 12/31/2007
Grantee Type:	Native Nonprofit

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 52 Native American consultants hired
- 20 elders involved
- \$332,000 in resources leveraged
- 137 people trained
- 31 partnerships formed
- 42 products developed

BACKGROUND

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) is located in the western Pacific Ocean, and consists of fifteen islands approximately three quarters of the way from Hawaii to the Philippines. CNMI has a population of approximately 80,000, including the native Chamorro and Carolinian peoples.

There are currently only 25,000 Chamorros in the world, and fewer Carolinians. The indigenous culture, customs, traditional family preservation systems, indigenous languages and knowledge of native history are all features of the native community that are in serious decline. The long-term and continued loss of these cultural aspects is the most serious of all problems currently facing the native community. Social problems that

were once rare, such as divorce, drug and alcohol abuse, and spousal and child abuse, are now common in CNMI.

The Joeten-Kiyu Library facility, located on the main island of Saipan, was built in 1990, and serves as a public library for the native and non-native community. Almost one-third of the facility was originally intended as a conference center, but due to the construction of a similar facility nearby, the space was rarely used.

PROJECT PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

This Project’s purpose was to establish a Social/Cultural/Family Preservation Center and children’s library in the unused portion of the Joeten-Kiyu Library and utilize the new space for cultural activities. Prior to the Project, the Center collected Chamorro and Carolinian cultural, familial, social, language, and historical material and information that was scattered throughout the Northern Mariana Islands. Collection of indigenous materials was designed to reconnect the native community to traditional history, language, customs and culture.

The first year objectives were to renovate the designated area into a children’s library

and cultural center, and to collect and plan for the use of all available materials dealing with the Chamorro and Carolinian cultures. Despite some initial delays involving the hiring of staff and a renovation contractor, the grantee completed all of the activities except the cataloguing of all the collected materials, which was hindered by a shortage of library staff. The grand opening for the Center occurred in September 2006, one year behind schedule.

The second year objectives were designed to implement a pilot activity plan to utilize collected materials during first year activities, as well as develop and implement a project evaluation and improvement system. Outreach materials for the community were produced, including brochures and pamphlets. Project staff participated in local cultural events to garner community support and promote the Project. Staff also launched a bookmobile stocked with a variety of resources and operated by trained staff. A suitable evaluation model could not be found, so Project staff drafted a plan which the Board adopted. However, staff did not implement the plan due to excessive changes from the Board.

The third year objectives were to sustain the Project through implementation of an activity plan and development of a marketing plan to create revenue. The cultural center hosts activities such as reading groups and traditional art demonstrations. The grantee did not complete the marketing plan as anticipated. Initially, the plan focused on the island's tourism industry, which mainly consists of package tours from Japan. However, due to the nature of these tours there was no possibility of including the library as a tourist attraction. In order to overcome this obstacle, the Project staff collaborated with the Marianas Visitors Bureau and the Department of Commerce to develop a business plan. It is unknown if staff

completed the business plan by the conclusion of the Project timeframe.

Some minor challenges were encountered during implementation. The late hiring of the Project Director coupled with typhoon season and problems finding a contractor to complete the renovation work caused a delay in completing many of the first year's activities. The geographic isolation of Saipan also impeded the purchase of materials, which often cost up to three times the US mainland price and require additional shipping time. Project staff overcame this challenge by purchasing materials from Asia.

PROJECT OUTCOMES AND IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

This Project advanced the indigenous population's ability to preserve, protect and promote its history, culture, language and customs, while at the same time improving the literacy of the community.

The resources in the library are available to all youth on the island, and Project staff reported a significant increase in youth participation in library activities. Youth are more respectful of the library because it provides them with an opportunity to have ownership of a supportive place to learn, read and complete homework. Parents are appreciative of the library as a good resource for books and activities for children and families.

In addition to the activities outlined in the Project, the staff also recorded three oral histories from local elders, translated six books and eighteen other local language materials and developed fifteen cultural DVDs. Many of these materials are available for sale, the proceeds of which are used to sustain the Project.