



Connecting Community Through the Power of Stories

Monica Koller

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FOR MONICA KOLLER, STORIES ARE EVERYTHING.

A child of immigrant parents, Koller grew up in San Leandro, California, a place whose culture shaped her life.

“I think living in that culture informed my curiosity for connecting with different cultures and races and ethnicities and backgrounds and foods,” she says.

Koller has a background in counseling, but she spends most of her time with her two children, whom she loves dearly. When she isn’t home nurturing her young ones, she is making an impact on the greater Bellingham area through Connecting Community, a non-profit that aims to bring people together.

“I saw the need in the community to have conversations about diversity and race with families,” she says. “I started informal meeting groups for multicultural families to connect.”

The connections she built turned into a sort of side project for Koller, and she’s expanded to work with local community organizations, including the R.E.A.C.H. (Respecting Ethnic And Cultural Heritage) workshop and Generations Forward.

“I just really enjoyed going out and gathering stories from families about what their needs are. And that was kind of a game changer for me, because I realized the power of story,” she says.

With the help of a scholarship, Koller attended a digital storytelling workshop at StoryCenter in Berkeley, California. Digital storytelling combines video, photo, and audio components, allowing for a layered storytelling experience. The workshop was invaluable to her, and opened up a new realm of possibilities.



“I really knew after [StoryCenter] that [digital storytelling] was something that I wanted to offer more within the community,” she says.

Most recently, Connecting Community and the Bellingham Public Library came together to create “The Unrooted Experience,” a collection of digital stories from local Black community members.

“I think that there’s such power in gathering in a specific group of people who look like you and who share lived experiences,” she says. “I truly was taken back by the vulnerability and bravery of people wanting to share a piece of themselves.”

Looking ahead, Koller has a laundry list of groups in the community she’d like to connect with, including the BIPOC, LGBTQ, and health care communities.

“I would love to see some conversation and collaboration with artists and organizations...just folks who are invested in building community in creative and imaginative ways,” she says.

Other new projects include a collaboration with Generations Forward on dealing with family grief and resilience during COVID-19.

“There’s just so much healing that comes from telling your story and the healing that comes from people listening to it,” she says. PO Box 782, Bellingham, 510.828.6553, connectingcommunitybellingham.com ◀