

November Indigenous Peoples App

SPEAKERS

Announcer, Nicholas Brown, Maribel Rodriguez, Ashley Biggs

Announcer 00:01

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Ashley Biggs 00:19

Hi, everyone. Welcome back to another LBPD Guest hour. We are so excited because we have two guests today. And they're going to be talking about an amazing project that is kind of taken over the state. Our first guest is Nicholas Alexander Brown. He is the current and correct me if I'm wrong, the current co CEO of the Prince George's County Memorial Library System, and he is someone to know. He is the recipient of the 2021 Library Journal marketer of the Year Award and the 2019 Libraries movers and shakers award. Brown is also an adjunct faculty member of the department of Library and Information Science at Catholic University and is the music director slash founder of the Irvine fine society. And then of course, we have Maribel Rodriguez who grew up in New York City. And she's the daughter of immigrant parents from Columbia, and an American parent from Puerto Rico. She studied photography as an undergraduate at the Rochester Institute of Technology, and went on to study social enterprise at American University for her master's degree. So welcome both of you.

Nicholas Brown 01:24

Thank you so much happy to be here.

Ashley Biggs 01:27

You know, if I convey anything, Maribel sent me a lot of great information on this indigenous app that was created by Prince Georgia. And I've got to say, it's a lot of very valuable information. So first and foremost, how do people find out about this app?

Nicholas Brown 01:45

Well, super easy, you can just go to Google and write indigenous Maryland and it'll find us or you could go to indigenous Md dot info. And if you have an Apple device, you can go into your app store and search Google indigenous Maryland. Or if you have an Android device, you can go into the Google Play Store and search indigenous Maryland and you'll find the content there. So it's available as a mobile app, for both of the main platforms, and then also as a website, which has some additional resources around it.

Ashley Biggs 02:13

Right. And that's the most important thing is telling people where to go to find this. So I'm gonna have you repeat all that at the end?

Nicholas Brown 02:20

Definitely.

Ashley Biggs 02:22

So just to kind of kick off a little bit, how did this app come to fruition? What sparked it, what, what's its history?

Nicholas Brown 02:29

Well, typical to libraries, we see cool things happening around and we decide that we want to adapt them for our local communities. And this all started as conversation with Dr. Elizabeth rule, who ended up being our project curator, she's a faculty member at American University and a member of the Chickasaw Nation. She had appeared with us in the first year of the pandemic for a virtual program for Native American indigenous heritage month, where she was joined by one of our local tribal elders, Rico Newman, just to talk about the cool things happening around native indigenous cultural or cultural interpretation. And at that time, she had very recently released an app called guide to indigenous DC. And for anyone who's listening from outside the area, we are adjacent to DC in Prince George's County. And I thought that it was really cool for DC to have an app like this, but that we deserve one two in Prince George's County and also in Maryland. Because that, you know, we live in one big metro area, but there are the state boundaries, which are interesting. And of course, those boundaries had nothing to do with the indigenous tribal nations. So they're a bit retroactively applied. So we started our conversation with Dr. rule about what it would look like to do something similar for either our county or the state of Maryland as a whole. And at the same time, there was a statewide joint programming task force that had been formed, that I'm a part of through the Maryland State Library Agency, to help library share resources and ideas around programming during the pandemic. This has since evolved and to be a really cool huge thing where we have a speaker series called Marilyn libraries together, and there's some overlap with indigenous project that we'll get to in a bit. But I thought this idea that Dr. Roll and I were talking about would be really worth bringing up to that statewide task force. So I had some conversations with the task force to see if folks thought there would be interested in even exploring having this type of statewide resource to look at our native and indigenous heritage. Folks are really interested. So then the next step was we invited Dr. Willing to talk a little bit more to shape a grant proposal, folks are still jazzed and we found some ways to refine the project so that it would really make sense for the way that we wanted to engage with our community in Maryland through public libraries. We were successful in our grant application, and were awarded an IMLS LSTA grant, which was super awesome. And that's administered through MSLA and Prince George's County Memorial Library System was designated as the project lead for this grant. And there were two parts to the grant and the initial year of the project, one to develop the guide to indigenous Maryland and its multiple forms. And then the second part was to do a speaker series of distinguished native and indigenous leaders, creators, civic leaders, to really shed light on the fact that we need to do a much better job as a statewide community in terms of honoring and respecting the native edge of indigenous heritage that

surrounds us every day, despite our relative ignorance to that, and also to acknowledge and realize that indigenous and Native Heritage is part of contemporary life, too. This is not just a historical thing. We have neighbors who are members of tribal nations, we have neighbors who have indigenous heritage, even if they're not actively engaged in a tribal nation. We have libraries and rivers and natural features named after tribal communities are significant things in indigenous heritage. The other thing that's really cool too, is as our population is shifting in the state of Maryland, we actually have a lot of folks who have indigenous background from other parts of the world, in our local community. So this is, at least for us here in Prince George's County sparked a really interesting conversation about how do we honor the traditional indigenous and native nations that call this area home? And then how do we recognize the fact that now the indigenous communities are intermingling in this home area. So for example, we have a lot of folks in our immigrant population in Prince George's County who come from Central American indigenous communities where they may not even speak Spanish, they'll speak Maya or other indigenous languages. So there's a whole intermingling going on among folks with different indigenous backgrounds, which is really cool. So just to also preface at this point of our conversation, this project was never intended to become a comprehensive resource. We know that there's a lot of challenges in terms of primary source evidence around native and indigenous heritage, partly because of the systemic issues with acknowledging diverse cultures and stuff in our history as a country, but also, you know, that there was a lot of eraser, and that was intentional on the part of people in power. And that continues to this day. So this was intended to be a project that would spark interest in the general public in a very curated way, in a very limited scope in order to get folks to want to learn and discover more on their own. And there's a lot of resources that we point folks to, but the app and the website are very much a first baby step where people can start to get excited. And for example, in our county sites that are represented in this app, there's 21 different sites represented. Folks can learn that the National Museum of American of the American Indians, one of their main research and archival facilities is actually in Prince George's County in Suitland. So the work of preserving and interpreting this history is actually happening in our county, at a national scale, which is really significant. And that's something that a lot of people might not know about them. On the flip side, we have places like Piscataway Park and the accokeek Park as part of the national park system that is very important. Ground that was part of the tribal community. So that was a very long opening monologue. But I am a publicist. So thank you for letting me go on and on.

Ashley Biggs 08:27

Well, it's one marketing person to another right and PR person to another I do understand. So something as you were talking, of course, I immediately went and opened up the, the website. And, you know, how did you choose these amazing places to showcase I'm sure that you had a wealth to choose from, and again, not meaning for this to be all encompassing, but rather as a conversational starter conversation starter, how do you choose the pieces?

Nicholas Brown 09:04

Well, I'll just give you a bit from from mine, and then I'll invite Maribel to kind of chime in to the the idea with the way that we did this app, which was different from the previous two that Dr. Weil did was that we wanted there to be a crowd sourced component to this. As public libraries, we want our communities to get engaged in a meaningful way and interact in the development process. So we

wanted to put out this call for submissions, which was kind of intended to do two things, get the local communities throughout the state engaged. But we also wanted to do a lot of outreach to the tribal nations and different cultural heritage organizations doing work in this area already, to give them a seat at the table through a taskforce or also just through the public submissions. So what ended up happening was we got over 100 submissions from community members and task force members. I think we were around 114 Total submissions, and then those submissions were reviewed by our task force included public library representatives, Maryland State Archives, representatives, representatives of archaeological organizations doing work in this area, as well as some leaders from tribal nations who were very generous in volunteering their time for this project. So there was taskforce review. And then there was also a curatorial review that Dr. Weil did. And we've had some really interesting conversations around, what are the types of sites we want represented? And also what is the balance of of types of sites that should be represented? And I think Maribel can give some some really cool insights onto how those conversations went since she was an integral part of them.

Maribel Rodriguez 10:35

Yeah, I think I can't emphasize enough how beautiful it was to have the sites be something that the communities played a big role in sharing their experiences and their knowledge. In addition, of course, side by side with our task force members, and their knowledge, as well. So this was this was a wonderful opportunity. Dr. Rule, did a fabulous job. I think curating because there were a lot of sites and to dwindled them down to just a few was a huge, huge endeavor. And one really, really beautiful. Another interesting thing was it wasn't just locations, we were very mindful in trying to be as open as possible to the diversity of various kinds of, like, artistic kinds of sites. And having a little bit more of contemporary, I think Nick mentioned as well, examples to show and we could say that every piece of land basically is part of the the history and the important indigenous and native parts. And so this is just the beginning to starting that conversation about acknowledgments and looking at the history, but we did select just significant ones, that were very, very important to the community. So I think I have nothing more to say when it comes to that in terms of the locations that we chose, as much as just the great community opportunity there.

Nicholas Brown 12:14

Yeah, one of the things that I would throw out is that we were all collectively very sensitive to the fact that Dr. Rule does not belong to one of the local indigenous nations, for the Mid Atlantic region. That was a really interesting thing to tackle as a group, which we did with her and with the task force, because one of the questions that comes out of this type of project that, you know, I would say that we don't necessarily have a good answer to was, who has the right to tell these stories, who should be telling these stories. And that's a very significant, important conversation that we had to have as a group at all the different stages of this project. And the you know, as a group, we came to the kind of consensus with a lot of different perspectives at the table of you know, there's value in our doing this work, and we want to contribute in a way that is respectful and informed by the the native communities. However, with the fact that we were not trying to be comprehensive this was really intended to drive public libraries role and providing access to this, this information, not about our creating the information, but it's about us curating information that exists from trustworthy sources, and making them more accessible to more audiences. So with the conversation that we had around Dr. rule's background and

her scholarly expertise, she has in fact worked with a lot of folks who are from local indigenous tribal nations, Ashley Minar, who is at UMBC, for example, or Troy Madison Newman, who was our project artists who is a member of the Piscataway nation and from Prince George's County, folks that were involved. We also had two tribal elders on the task force. And what Dr. Wolf brought, which was her expertise as a scholar, which is really important, but she is the expert nationally in creating these types of guides that are for a general public audience that synthesizes primary source material, secondary source material, and is about curating access to existing resources. It's not about putting a perspective out there, aside from our very intentional perspective of all of us in Maryland need to advance our understanding and respect for the indigenous heritage.

Maribel Rodriguez 14:31

Yet, to your point, Nick, I think Rico Newman and Norris Howard played a really big role in sort of bridging that gap in community because whenever we wanted to figure out, okay, how do we reach our communities, they were really crucial in making those connections.

Nicholas Brown 14:48

And there were some specific things where there was language in certain submissions, that was problematic language that tribal nations have had to address and other areas, when the language has been misused, around naming or nomenclature or spellings and that kind of thing. And we were so grateful to have that expertise from the the tribal elders who could tell us and tell Dr. Rule. You know, this is the issue with this thing. Here's another, here's the way that the indigenous nation would ask for you to put this out there. So that kind of filtering and perspective was essential for facilitating Dr. rules work. Because none of us on the public library side ident identified as as indigenous, at least publicly, and to my knowledge, we didn't have anyone from our side. So we were really viewing this. The Public Library staff were viewing the work as we were facilitators, we're not the experts in this. But we, we weren't sure that the values of public libraries and open access and diversity, equity, inclusion and anti racism are at the table at all times. So we were able to ask some pointed questions to make sure that the local elders perspectives, were going to be very much guiding some of Dr. Rules, curation.

Ashley Biggs 16:09

I would ask if the task force still in place, so somebody wanted to submit something now, you know, is it as simple as you guys send out emails? Or do you all get together and discuss, you know, what, how does the task force work?

Nicholas Brown 16:23

Yeah, so the task force was initially formed for the first year of the project, which is just wrapping up now. And we have as a taskforce agreed to continue to meet on a quarterly basis to discuss revisions to the guide, and also to discuss additional resources that we would like to develop or contribute to the guide website in particular. So we have through the Prince George's County Memorial Library System in agreement with Dr rule, where we are engaging her for four more years to do annual updates to the app. And then the website, which we manage in perpetuity at the library, we're going to be making ongoing updates periodically in perpetuity. So we've made some updates this week, we added a new resource that was shared with us recently. And the task force has a lot of great ideas of things we'd like

to see. And when we actually started this project, we had this grand vision of all the different things that we wanted to do. But then we had a one year timeframe in which we could use our grant funds. So we had to really narrow our focus for year one, which was the content development basically, for the beta versions of these these resources. And going forward, there are things that we would love to do around K through 12. Education, for example, how do we create some lesson plans that we can then share with public schools, teachers throughout the state, where, you know, we're helping them make the app and the guide website relevant to their own instruction around native and indigenous heritage, because right now, the resources that we developed exist, and anyone can use them. But sometimes the the library's role in this type of work or the museum's are all in this type of work is giving some extra supplemental resources to the folks who might be able to use this resource in a different way.

Ashley Biggs 18:11

Now, the grant that you're talking about, just to throw out a plug here, is coming from the Institute of Museum and Library Services through the Library Services and Technology Act, is that correct? Yes. Cool. For those who are not in the know, that is a really cool, Alyssa is a really cool act, and you should learn more about it. And what it all the cool things it does for libraries just so you know, I, as you're talking, I'm going through the website because I'm perpetually curious. And I know it's I know it's accessible, built accessibly. And with inclusivity in mind, and one of the really cool things is that you featured event videos on here, you know, not just from Brandon Hopson who came and spoke on his book *The removed* but also you know, craft and create knights and Crafternoon and virtual read alouds geared towards young, younger audiences. Is this something it needs additional resources, that is part of the plan to continue to grow?

Nicholas Brown 19:21

100% And one of the ideas with with this project, and one of the reasons why MSLA was the right partner for it was that Public Library's need to do more programming and community engagement in this cultural area. We've not been doing enough, I think in Maryland, in the mid Atlantic, indigenous native and indigenous heritage is not as front of mind as it might be in other parts of the country, like in the southwest or in certain places in the northeast, for example. But we have a responsibility as public libraries to provide the programming that is going to reflect our community for one. And we do have indigenous residents of our county, but also to provide the programming that is going to allow everyone who is not a member of that community, to find ways to understand each other better and to have empathy and to have a deeper understanding of so that we can better respect each other as neighbors, you know, we might not look the same, we might not speak the same language, we might have different family traditions, but we're all part of a family of the moment where we live in in our local jurisdictions or in our state of Maryland. And, to your point, the educational programs that we've been offering through our library, and that many other library systems are offering throughout the state are not just author events for for adults, but teaching people, for example, in our Crafternoon programs around traditional Native topics, you know, when you see certain iconography in Maryland, the turtle is a big deal, right? Because of University of Maryland and the mascot. Well guess what that actually came from indigenous culture locally. And it's why the turtle and the Maryland flag is reflected in our indigenous guide to indigenous Maryland artwork. So there's a lot of things that we see in our daily life that we think are just informed by our current society. But there is in fact, a lot of connection back to indigenous

heritage. So it's important for us to educate folks of every age level around these things, so that we can kind of exist as a more harmonious community.

Ashley Biggs 21:35

Well, and that brings in the indigenous peoples coming from other countries us and that their culture has actually, their cultures and their backgrounds have actually enhanced our community as well. And what I'm what I'm very intrigued by is the idea in this expansion, that indigenous and native, that the app is going to continue to grow to encompass those other cultures.

Nicholas Brown 22:05

Yeah, so we're hopeful that the task force will be able to tackle that challenge, because it's something that we want to incorporate. But we have to do it in similar to the way that we did the first round of development, we have to figure out a way that is going to be appropriate for us to address that. And we also need to think about a way to address it in a sustainable manner. So for example, one of the big challenges that we have in this area is we don't have staff who speak these indigenous languages, it's not just adding Spanish speaking staff for the for our Central American indigenous folks who live here, we're limited in what content we can develop right now with in house expertise. So how do we imagine you know, incorporating Central American indigenous heritage into the guide website, for example, before we've identified the appropriate curatorial, or or contributed from that community group? So I think it's a it's a really interesting challenge. On on the the flip side, we're already doing a lot of programming around those indigenous heritage is from other parts of the world. And we're going to continue to expand that Maribel, can you talk a little bit about your work with the immigrant community and how that connects in and how it because part of this is all like, understanding our community, which is a daily process for all of our staff and libraries. And Maribel can talk a bit about that.

Maribel Rodriguez 23:25

Yes, absolutely. So I have a side project called Love for immigrants. And here at the library now with my new role, I'll be able to more fully connect with with our communities. There's a refugee project here at the library, where we're trying to better understand the needs of our library staff in order to better help them support refugees, asylees, and TPS holders. And so language access, I mean, it's just the number one. And I think it's just mentioned, a really important point, which is, the languages are very diverse, especially when it comes to our immigrant populations. It's, like you said, it's not just Spanish. And, you know, I know people who are born here, who speak Spanish and are trying to learn their parents. indigenous language, is particularly a person I'm thinking about is from Bolivia. And so there are cases there are cases like this. So language access, but also basic needs, having information and resources around that. And that's something job opportunities and resources. And that's something I think across the board we can all connect on, is how do we find resources navigate our system? And how do we make that system accessible to all of the people in our communities? And the first step is visibility and understanding and awakening to to who exists around us and even who exists within us, right. There's a lot that's lost within our histories, and I would say particularly with with immigrants, especially, I would say People come from very mixed countries, it becomes even more important to even start this conversation about indigeneity. Because there was so much erasure with colonization, that people might just have be completely disconnected to a part of who they are. And now with that,

say, with the guides, and to just Marilyn, having programming around indigenous cultures of people who were born somewhere else outside of the US, allows the opportunity to have that wider conversation about migration. Because I mean, if we look at the way indigenous people thought about land, it was not possessive it was, migration was a big central piece. And there weren't dis borders that we have. Now, when it comes to looking at culture. And, you know, indigeneity was a lot about respect for the land. And I think if you look at the book braiding grass, is that there's so much that we can learn there about that connection to the earth and how it's about worldview, almost how we can look at our relationship with the land of with and with one another, differently. And that just cuts across all the groups of people that we're working with. And hopefully, that's the learning people will take from this is that we can all learn that way of life, the indigenous way of thinking, and add that to our toolkit of, of beautiful philosophy that will help us be a more respectful kind and hold the stick person in the world. So that that's what I have to say about that one. I mean, there's so much we can learn. It's just a, like Nick said in the beginning about sparking that curiosity, even if it's oh, let me read one book. And okay, in the book, they talked about a soup three sister soup, and let me make that soup. And there's so much there that we can learn, even if it's a baby step to take, in order to make this part of our daily routine and our daily reflection.

Nicholas Brown 26:58

One of the topics that we were able to get into a bit on the programming series around a guide to indigenous Maryland was the the way that indigenous communities have mixed with other cultural and ethnic backgrounds. So one of the speakers that we had in our speaker series, and you can see the program on the indigenous website, on demand. I was Kyle Mays, who is a professor at UCLA, and his book is called an afro indigenous history of the United States. And in Maryland, we have a really significant and thriving and awesome African American and black community in Prince George's County where majority black community about 65%, and then about 20%, Latin Hispanic. And these connection points are really important because it helps develop a greater understanding of the fact that groups that have been subjected to systemic oppression over time. There's different ways that that plays out with different communities. But there's also a lot of similarities there too. So, you know, if we think about the enslavement of, of African Americans are folks who came here from Africa or other parts of country? Well, there were Hispanic, and indigenous people who were also enslaved in parts of what is now the United States. Some of that was by the Spanish colonialists. Some of that was by the Catholic church, the Catholic Church, for example, enslaved hundreds and hundreds and 1000s of people in Prince George's County, over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries. And on the flip side, the Catholic Church was responsible for a lot of similar things in other parts of the country and in parts of the Caribbean, with different ethnic groups, including the indigenous people, and there's still a lot of strife and a lot of parts of Central and South America, for indigenous populations, that folks would be really horrified. But if you go out and do some research, you you would see that there have been basically genocides of indigenous people in different parts of Central and South America within the last 30 years. And there's a lot of racism that that exists around anti indigenous people and colorism and this is a huge issue, even just in the Hispanic community of colorism, like the narrative that we see in American media that is very white centric. There's not a lot of nuance to the discussions of other community groups. And if you read Dr. Kennedy's work there, you know, within the Hispanic and Latin diaspora, there is a lot of racism, there is a lot of systemic oppression because of, you know, differences in skin tones differences in where you live differences in socio economic status, if you're

indigenous versus someone of Spanish origin, as in Spain origin, huge class differences, huge kind of systemic barriers to advancement. And the things that we see play out daily in this country around conflict between the majority groups and minority groups. It is faced by a lot of different people in a lot of different places. And one of the things that we see as a whole heavily immigrant community in our county is that people might be experiencing totally different forms of racism or oppression here than they did in their home country, which is just shocking and sad in many ways and complicated, but it's part of what we need to do as library workers in terms of seeing what our community members are dealing with, so that we can better serve them. And it's a huge topic. And we're grateful to be able to express this work a bit through the guide to indigenous Maryland.

30:28

And to your point, Nick, about really, what's the connection there with what you're saying, and the immigrant community. There's a really great book, we were just talking about this in a meeting yesterday called the nomination of immigrants. And this, this book was really just eye opening, and how, if there's a community or group of people that come, let's say, to Prince George's County, and it as they're learning with their kids through through textbooks, that in their textbooks, the information they have is that indigenous and native people were and no longer are in existence, then there, it becomes really problematic when they're trying to understand the world around them. And having a more complete and thorough understanding and full story of indigenous people here, including some of the understanding of the oppression that exist and how their ideologies can play a role in either making life a little bit easier for the people around them who are already dealing with oppression in a different way that they are, or it plays it can play into if they immigrants don't learn about the history and the oppression, they could play into continue systemic oppression. And so that that's one of the things I think that plays a role is like, being mindful of the stories we tell one another, and each other and ourselves. And conversations like these, and projects like these help inform people so that we're just overall more conscious, better actors in society.

Ashley Biggs 32:02

You guys mentioned a few books that I double checked, and they're available on Maryland's overdrive connection. Or Libby, depending on which app you prefer. I prefer Liddy personally. Does the Maryland does the this project have a book list that goes with it? So for someone who is interested in maybe reading that perspective, and learning a little bit more from another culture? Is there? Is there a set book lists? Or did the task force put together something that people can kind of point to and say, I want that book in that book in that book, to expand my horizon?

Nicholas Brown 32:47

Yeah, the booklets that exist are probably more buried than they should be on this website. But hence the beta farm and the our constant eye towards user experience. Within the indigenous website, if you go to indigenous Md dot info. In the top right, you'll see the three bars, that is the menu, go to additional resources, and there's a huge amount of links there that will take you to different resources. If you go through to the Prince George's County Memorial Library systems native and indigenous heritage website, which is linked on there. We have some book lists targeted to different age groups. So we have a preschool book list, elementary school book list, tween and teen book lists and adult book lists.

We also have streaming suggestions for both hoopla Academy canopy. So depending on what what your library might subscribe to, there's some suggested resources there. But I think this is a great thing that you brought up, actually, because it would certainly behoove the project to have a curated shortlist of these books that are more directly relevant to the development of the guide to direct some of the reading. Because, you know, there is no one perspective on this topic. That is the right perspective, there are many different perspectives and many different authoritative voices, and many voices who are not authoritative. And there's also as as with any historical or social call the scholarship or writing, what is deemed appropriate by society at large evolves over time. So the way that native and indigenous heritage was talked about 10 years ago versus now is very different. So there might be if you're reading old works, that might be on a book list, there could be problematic terminology that we would never use now. That's not acceptable now. So I think there's definitely some some good work that we can continue to do on on curated reading lists. But there's definitely some great material to start with. And, you know, I would also encourage everyone to contact their their local public library, because any of our libraries in the state or if you're in a different different community, you're going to be able to get really good recommendations from your your local library workers and we'll get these calls all the time. Like what what is the resource where I can find out what in what Native I land my houses on that was a question we got very recently. And we were able to point them towards something, which was really cool. But you know, someone might say to us, I just learned that my family has this indigenous heritage, where can I learn about that community. And we've got really awesome library workers throughout the state who are prepared to do readers advisory for you, depending on your interests and your questions. And we also have a lot of interesting genealogy research resources, both the State Library Resource Center has some LBPD. And Prince George's County has some and we also have our Prince George's room where you can research local local history. Unfortunately, I would say though, a lot of those mainstream resources like ancestry.com library edition, don't have a very good representation of Native American communities, in part because you have to think of who has developed the resource, right? So there's bias there. And then you also have to realize that, you know, our country really tried to erase the native and indigenous people for a very long time. And there's a lot of people are still doing that, intentionally, which is really awful. But we just don't have as much primary resources available for all of the people that we should be learning about whether they're indigenous, black, Hispanic, or anything else. So talk to your local library worker, and if they don't know the answer, they will find you some resources where you can find the answer that you've got.

Ashley Biggs 36:22

Well, and one of my favorite resources is interlibrary loan, yes, through Marina, Marina Marina. So for those who do not know, you can actually visit your local library and request a book from another library system that your system does not have. And they they have an agreement with each other, and they will lend the book to the library, and the library will lend the book to you. For those here in the light. For those who are patrons of the library for the blind and print disabled, we also have an interlibrary loan program that allows us to borrow physical Braille books from other libraries across the country, since that does come up on occasion, something that you said, or maybe it's how you say, say it, this sounds like a very personal project for you too, as well. It and I don't mean that in a way of going, Oh, my gosh, I'm working on it hands on. But it sounds like you guys are very invested in this. And you've talked about in perpetuity, that this is something that you're going to keep up what are some things that you're planning on doing in the future, if you don't mind sharing?

Nicholas Brown 37:35

Yeah, I would say we probably don't have all the answers to that question. But I think, at least for the two of us, and I won't speak for mayor, but I'll speak from my perspective on this. I am really driven by trying to right or wrong. And that's something that I have done a lot in my career. I've been involved in LGBTQ plus work in libraries for a long time, I used to be a library Congress and I was leading a lot of the programming there in that area, for example, and I'm half Hispanic, individual, Hungarian American. And on my mom's ancestry side, there's Central American indigenous heritage, which is not that has nothing to do with my driving, being involved in this project. But I think we've as a as a community started to realize that we have so much more work to do in respecting the people whose lands were taken from them by the settlers and the colonists colonizers, that we need to do better. And, you know, in some of the conversations that we had around this, we thought that people would say, oh, there's such a small native and indigenous population in Maryland. Why are we prioritizing this? Well, we have to honor all of our Marylanders. We need to respect each other. You know, in a time where there's such racial discord and ethnic discord in our country that is dragged into politics inappropriately, oftentimes, we're just coming together to learn more about each other, that oftentimes fixes many of our issues, at least in the short term capacity. And the more that we can learn how to be better neighbors, how to be better friends, be better colleagues, I think the happier our lives will be and I think with with our native and indigenous neighbors, there's so much more that we need to discover about them, and that we should learn from them in the ways that they are teaching us because these are living traditions. This isn't this is not something of the past, like in the 90s That's how we learned about this. This was like these things happened in the 1900s. And that's where the discussion of indigenous and Native American people ends and no, like, I'm from Massachusetts, originally and just the word of the the name of the state is an indigenous name. The you know, half of life on Cape Cod is about indigenous heritage, whether people know it or not like clambakes and stuff that's not that's not something that some random white person started though there's a lot of things like that that are problematic. Plymouth Rock, the Mayflower, etc. But unpacking the ways that we have learned history incorrectly, so that we can make steps forward as a society is really important. I think that's what we do in libraries all the time. And we have different people who focus on different topics to collectively advance things. But that's that's my soapbox, and I know Maribel She's got her own thoughts, too. So I'll toss it to her.

Maribel Rodriguez 40:35

Absolutely. So I'll speak from my personal experience here. I think in the future, I'd like to look at what Prince George's County on that site we were talking about, we have a list of notable Native American biographies. And so I want to start there and learn more, but also continue to be part of these conversations, because for me, it's very personal. Although I was invited more on the administrative end to just help with with note taking and scheduling and I but it was, for me a very big learning opportunity, because I realized I know very little about the indigenous peoples in Prince George's County, Maryland, or for that sake in New York, from where I'm from. And I know very little about my own indigenous history. Because from my Puerto Rican side, there's a discovery that most Puerto Ricans have at least 30% in Taino ancestry. And this was something we weren't taught. So we were taught that we were, you know, the indigenous people were, and no longer are in existence, and so reawakening to our ancestry is, I think, something most people in our in my community have to start

doing something I'm very interested in starting to do in one way, because I'm so far away from, well, not so far away, but I'm far away from Puerto Rico, is to connect with the communities that are around me, learn from them, and just understand what it means to be part of a community to even take that step. And so I haven't done a DNA tests, but I'm pretty sure, just based on some some of the ways of talking, even looking at like different kinds of Spanish dialects in the country. The mixture with Dinah words, and Spanish is something that's real. And so for some people, they might say, Oh, it's a, you know, it's broken Spanish. And the reality is like, no, it is dying, no language that survived through Spanish. And so that, to me, is just at the heart is continuing to connect. And so that's why I talk a lot about existence, and that ability to exist, and for indigenous people, because we hope that this is something their lives are centered around is disability to be seen, and the resources that we have in the programming that we have, and in the books that we have to see themselves, just like I want to be seen at least my Dinopark, I want to understand that. I'm sure that people who are from indigenous communities want to be seen and, and heard and also learn from other people like them.

Ashley Biggs 43:12

Thank you. I want to say that there's been over 1000 downloads since this launched in June of 2022. And that is amazing. And there's been even more website visits, I'm sure.

Nicholas Brown 43:27

So we had a little bit of a glitch with our website metrics. But just in the last three months, we had over 3000 visits. So we probably had at least 5000 visits total to the website, which is really awesome. And that there's some really great press coverage that's happened around this Library Journal did a really cool feature. Another thing that was really awesome was we got contacted by the State Department. And the State Department has a publication called Share America, which is basically a website and blog where good stories of things happening in the United States are shared through our diplomatic community, in other countries, and our project was featured in this this website with a feature article. And then we've seen that some of our US embassies around the world as far away as New Zealand have been sharing out guide to indigenous Maryland as an example of the important work happening the United States and that I just got chills like that's crazy that like our work here at public libraries in Maryland being showcased at the highest levels of diplomacy, especially in other countries who are doing a lot of work in this area to like in New Zealand, and Australia who have had hugely complicated histories with their indigenous communities, but who have done a lot of work on this ahead of the United States. That's a big deal. And I think what's happened with this project is that this should really be an inflection point in the way that Maryland Libraries respect, reflect and support the The Native American indigenous people who we serve, because we do serve indigenous and Native people, whether we realize it or not, we can't operate as if we serve a homogenous population. And in libraries, we don't think that way. However, we have a lot of subconscious biases just in the way that we've grown up, or whatever our background is, we all have subconscious and unconscious biases. And as a community, we can start to unpack some of those so that we can can serve our customers in a better way. And this is about representation. Right? You know, it's something on the language exercise that we've tackled in our library is what is the difference in feeling welcomed at a public library, when the language you speak, is visible. And this is as simple as building signage, right? When we have 20% of our population are Hispanic or Latin, some who speak Spanish, some who speak indigenous

languages, some who only speak English, for example, there is such a different sense of being welcomed and included, if there's a visual indicator as a first step of oh, this place is for me, that's a huge deal. And, and we do a lot in public libraries to try and proactively create that sense of safety and welcoming. And we, we oftentimes will make progress for one community group, but whenever we do make progress for one community group in terms of inclusion and being welcomed, that often highlights some of the the inequities that exist for other groups. So whenever we have progress, we've got to recognize that there are other areas that we're going to need to focus on too.

Ashley Biggs 46:41

Well, I think that, you know, the Marilyn library community, I work for the Maryland State Library for the Blind and Print Disabled underneath the Maryland State Library Agency. And I get to see all these cool projects, as they come to fruition, I get to hear about them, and I get to see them. And you're right, the idea of the library is the incubator, the library as the as the catalyst for many of these communities to be seen, to be heard, be reflected, um, you know, in their in their libraries, not just the collection. You know, that's the big thing, not just the collection. But for projects like this. Now, you know, it is closing, I do want to close out the hour with a with a call to action, I would love for you to rescate how people can find out about this app, and how if they are the website, and and how they can engage with it one more time, because I think it's so important for this information to be shared.

Nicholas Brown 47:51

Awesome. Well, thank you so much for the opportunity, Ashley and MSLA, we really appreciate the support and the continued amplification of this project. So the project is called guide to indigenous Maryland, type it in your favorite search box, and you will find it. We have an app that's available for Apple and Android devices. And then we have a website, the app can be used for a driving tour or for a virtual tour. And the website gives you map and a lot of additional resources as well as some programs that you can enjoy on demand for all all different age groups. So check us out, let us know your feedback. There's a way to submit feedback on the app, there's a way to submit feedback on the website. And if you are, are connected to an organization or community member, who you think needs to contribute in some way to this project, please connect us with them. Because as we said, we're going to be doing ongoing work around revising the resources, and doing more programming, and making sure that this is as widely accessible as possible. So we want as many community members as possible involved in shaping the future of the guide to indigenous Maryland because Maryland is a growing, thriving, evolving community. That involves a lot of different people from a lot of different backgrounds. And everyone's perspective is really valued in terms of the way that we can be a better and stronger community together going forward. So guide to indigenous Maryland, Google s, if you forgot all of that call your local library and said I heard about this thing that was an app and it had to do with Native American indigenous heritage, that person will be able to find you the resource and get you connected to it.

Maribel Rodriguez 49:33

And just one last thing if there's any educators listening to this podcast, or librarians who work with youth and children or even adults, and you create a learning lesson plan or some kind of project for people to learn more, feel free to send it to us because this is we see it as a learning tool. And so we

don't have the lesson plan to go along with it yet. But if you develop something really interesting you want to Share it, please go to our website, indigenous Maryland dot info and that's indigenous Md dot info and we have a contact form and submit what you did. If you did a, a lesson on that and we would be interested in hearing from you.

Ashley Biggs 50:18

Thank you guys so much. This has been incredibly enlightening and I cannot wait for this to come out. And it comes out in November is gonna listen to this. It's November, which is indigenous native American History Month and appreciation month. This is the perfect time to go and explore this wonderful service. Well, thank you guys once again for being part of our MSLA podcast. This has been LBPD Guest hour. Thank you guys again. Thanks, Ashley. Thank you.

Announcer 51:04

This has been a presentation of the Maryland State Library Agency. For links to additional resources provided by today's presenter, please visit the show notes. For more information on MSLA or the Maryland State Library for the Blind and Print Disabled, visit [Maryland libraries.org](http://Marylandlibraries.org)