



A ROUND TABLE OF THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

Success Stories Sister Libraries

Liverpool Public Library, New York, U.S.A. / Lantarang Kunda Starfish International Library, Gambia

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This partnership was founded in July 2011.

The Gambian library is the only second children's library in the country, and the only one that lets children take the books home. It was founded several years ago by Starfish International, a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation registered in New York.

Starfish International was founded in 2006 by Mam-Yassin Sarr (a Gambian) and her husband David D. Fox (an American). Sarr is a Syracuse University doctoral student in educational leadership. Polly met Sarr earlier this year and they shared ideas about



how the two libraries could work together. Sarr needed advice on library management and Polly had been looking for a way to bring the Summer Reading Program's theme "One World, Many Stories" to life by partnering with a sister library in another country.

What sister libraries do:

They exchange ideas and library techniques, and share their cultures with each other and their communities. Liverpool Library users can expect a forthcoming library display with news from the Starfish International Library, plus announcements of opportunities for public interaction and collaboration.

Besides operation of the community's library, Starfish International's mission is "to empower Gambian girls by providing them with an advanced education that focuses on service to humanity, while at the same time providing international service-learning opportunities for our volunteers." Every year, Syracuse residents join Sarr and her husband in teaching various skills to the Starfish Academy students. This summer, volunteers will be teaching photography, CPR, and martial arts self-defense, among other things.

What they said about their partnership "We've never had a sister library before but we're very excited about the possibilities," Polly said, adding, "As we've heard, 'Sisterhood is powerful!'"

"We imagine pen pal exchanges at first, and once their library gets its Internet connection, we envision student Skype exchanges so teens can both see and talk to their counterparts in Africa," said Jean Armour Polly, Director of the Liverpool Library. Skype is a free Internet service. Polly notes that besides practice in English and exchanges on academic subjects, the Gambian kids are especially eager to see snow via the Liverpool Library webcam!