



COOKING

WITH CONFIDENCE

PARTNERING TO SUPPORT TEENAGERS AND
YOUNG ADULTS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

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The Free Library of Philadelphia is a hub where education and communities intersect. In Philadelphia, where residents are dealing with disparities across income and opportunities, the Free Library represents a space that neutralizes the resource inequity. Individuals come as they are, knowing that they too have the ability to enjoy rich programming, extensive services, and life-changing resources available to them. Under this platform, a successful partnership was formed between the Free Library's Culinary Literacy Center and the Philadelphia Autism Project to provide a program for individuals on the spectrum to learn independent life skills through cooking classes. The Philadelphia Autism Project acts as a conduit to which autism-related resources, community needs, and innovative projects meet. It is a citywide initiative operating under the Policy and Analytics Center (PAC) at the A.J. Drexel Autism Institute. The Philadelphia Autism Project is funded by Philadelphia City Council, the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services (DBHIDS), and Drexel Dornsife School of Public Health Urban Health Collaborative. Combining the core mission of the Culinary Literacy Center to educate about and through cooking and the deep knowledge and resources of the Philadelphia Autism Project on supporting individuals on the spectrum, the Cooking with Confidence program was born. We hope this article inspires and guides you to pilot a similar program in your library or classroom!

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Autism Spectrum Disorder (or autism) is a developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication, and behavioral challenges.¹ Just like you and I, people on the spectrum are diverse,

with strengths, challenges, and individual preferences. While the characteristics of autism can be expressed in a variety of unique ways, all people on the spectrum share certain traits that include social-communication differences, restrictive and repetitive behaviors, and sensory differences. It is important for all staff to learn about autism and other developmental differences when preparing programming for this population, and to keep an open mind to learning throughout the process. To learn more about autism, please visit www.phillyautismproject.org, or the Autism Services, Education, Resources, and Training Collaborative (ASERT) at www.paaautism.org.

COOKING WITH CONFIDENCE

Started in 2014, the Free Library of Philadelphia's Culinary Literacy Center was created with the aim to advance literacy in Philadelphia in a unique and innovative way—with a fork and spoon.² The Culinary Literacy Center provides educational opportunities about cooking, and through cooking. Our staff recognizes that there are many different ways to learn and have found that an interactive cooking program can teach math via measuring, reading via recipes, and science via seeing a transformative cooking process. Chefs of all ages can experiment with new foods, new tools, and new ideas. Through the cooking classes offered, the Culinary Literacy Center (CLC) helps strengthen the Library's commitment to providing accessible and inclusive learning opportunities throughout Philadelphia.

Cooking with Confidence is one such inclusive program targeted for teens and young adults on the spectrum or who may have learning differences. Together with the Philadelphia Autism Project, this program was created with specific adaptations for

the needs of individuals on the spectrum. Through hands-on classes, participants learn how to read recipes, how to use basic cooking skills, and how to stay safe in the kitchen. Participants prepare a plant-based meal and share it together at a communal table—often trying and discussing unfamiliar foods in a new social setting.

While learning basic cooking and safety skills in the kitchen is an integral part of this cooking class, what has resulted organically is so much more. Participants who attended the cooking classes had a diverse range of experiences and took a chance to try something new. They took a chance to be in the same space as others, knowing the vulnerabilities that accompany new social situations. Participants not only discussed nutrition and food, but also pushed their limits to try something new, with the urging of their peers. While these moments may seem small, they are not to be taken for granted. In the lives of individuals who require consistency and routine in their schedule, environments, and even the foods that they consume, trying new things can change what they, and their circle of support, perceive as possible.

This program offers the dignity of risk to individuals. The dignity of risk is the concept that inherent in building self-esteem and self-determination, is the right to take reasonable risks that come with life experiences. As professionals, family members, and as a community, we must support people with experiencing the successes and failures that come with living. You will see that this concept has implications throughout these cooking classes.

LITERATURE

We consulted current literature and data to learn about social opportunities, and the availability of nutrition and culinary curriculums for individuals on the spectrum. According to the Pennsylvania Autism Needs Assessment, over one third of adults on the spectrum reported peer mentorship and social supports as an unmet service need.³ While communication difficulties can be a barrier to building peer mentorship and social support, social



Cooking equipment (Photo Credit: Free Library of Philadelphia Culinary Literacy Center)

opportunities that are facilitated for positive experiences are also limited.

Although data and literature provides a more global perspective on how many individuals are faring when it comes to social opportunities, you need not go far to learn about these limited opportunities from individuals, families, and providers. Through the practice of community engagement and providing resources to families, you can hear the concerns that they face trying to find social opportunities and educational outlets for their loved ones. You can also hear the worry from providers who search for a social outlet that their clients may be interested in, in the hopes of alleviating the isolation.

In addition to the social aspect of this program, participants have the opportunity to discuss and apply healthy eating and nutrition. Research indicates higher rates of obesity, gastrointestinal issues, and eating disorders among individuals with developmental disabilities, including autism.⁴ This pilot program creates an introductory discussion on the role of food and access to food in people's lives.

A dive into culinary curricula and interventions for individuals on the spectrum and other developmental differences yielded some interesting findings. In one study, video modeling and prompting were used to teach cooking skills to students with

disabilities.⁵ Another study looked at whether custom-made videos were more effective for teaching independent cooking skills compared to commercially available videos.⁶ And yet another study explored Active Engagement, a systematic and step-wise program designed to promote generalized skills in the kitchen environment for adults on the spectrum.⁷ Behind Active Engagement is the concept that when psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met, the learning environment is optimized to promote the teaching of life skills.

While initial goals were to address health promotion, independent living skills, and social opportunities for adults on the spectrum, the project has also brought forward a place to explore how people relate to each other, and to food.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Partnership between the Philadelphia Autism Project and the Free Library of Philadelphia began prior to work with the Culinary Literacy Center. The two organizations previously collaborated on creating sensory storytimes, where libraries remained open for additional hours, exclusively for families of children on the spectrum, to provide them with an inclusive and judgment-free storytime experience. When the Philadelphia Autism Project learned about the mission and programming of the Free Library's Culinary Literacy Center, an opportunity was identified to create a similar, inclusive experience using cooking as a platform.

The mission of the Free Library's Culinary Literacy Center is to advance literacy through food and cooking around a communal table. Culinary literacy is really a twofold concept, as it emphasizes learning about cooking as well as learning about a host of *other* subjects *through* cooking. For individuals on the spectrum, learning to cook not only emphasizes practical, independent living skills, it also helps to reinforce the importance of critical reading and paying attention to a multi-step process. The Philadelphia Autism Project was also drawn to the Culinary Literacy Center's goal to bring classroom par-



Ingredients (Photo Credit: Free Library of Philadelphia Culinary Literacy Center)

ticipants together to share a meal around a communal table. In *Cooking with Confidence*, students have fun cooking and socializing while learning skills that can support living healthy, independent lives, like how to measure ingredients and prepare simple plant-based meals.

Drexel's ExCITe Center's seed funding project provided the perfect opportunity for the Philadelphia Autism Project and the Culinary Literacy Center to launch the *Cooking with Confidence* pilot for individuals on the spectrum. Initial funding supported piloting two free cohorts of classes, consisting of two classes each, in November/December 2017 and February 2018. In planning for the classes, we discussed who the target audience was, recruitment and outreach strategies, measuring outcome, registration process, staff to participant ratio, and sensory needs we should consider.

It was a conscious decision to offer the pilot program during evening and daytime hours to assess which time slots would work best for participants. The first cohort was offered during the daytime and participants were recruited directly from provider agencies that support adults on the spectrum. The participants needed a fair amount of support and accommodation to participate. The second cohort was open to the public and offered in the evening. It was interesting and surprising to see the contrast

between cohorts. For the publicly offered classes, participants functioned more independently, and many did not need additional staff support. We witnessed a fair amount of bonding in the second class with lively conversation around superheroes, and speculation around who would win in a fight between Superman and Black Panther!

After the initial program pilot, staff realized that the Cooking with Confidence program was a great platform for helping teenagers and young adults on the spectrum to learn independent living skills in a supportive environment. The program shifted focus from an adult-only audience, to primarily partnering with the School District and local high schools who have active programs for students on the spectrum. The program remains primarily funded by an annual grant from the Philadelphia Autism Project.

A LOOK AT OUR PILOT PROJECT

STAFF

It took a dedicated behind the scenes team to plan and implement this multi-agency, transdisciplinary project. Cooking with Confidence has truly been a collaborative effort between the Free Library and the Philadelphia Autism Project. For groups seeking to create similar programming, we highly recommend building partnerships with organizations experienced working with individuals on the spectrum. The resources and knowledge provided by the Philadelphia Autism Project have been invaluable in helping to make this program a success.

In this effort, the Culinary Literacy Center has one primary staff member assigned to the program who helps reserve the space, set up the kitchen equipment, and assist with program scheduling and logistics. The Philadelphia Autism Project provides two staff members who spearhead marketing and scheduling of groups, collect and analyze program data, and provide insight and recommendations on how to best make a positive impact on this community.

Another absolutely critical piece of the staffing puzzle is finding an enthusiastic, empathetic chef instructor. Cooking with Confidence has been exceedingly lucky to have worked with a passionate

and professional chef instructor who has been a driving force of our program. The instructor was an extremely valuable addition, as she is not only an experienced food educator, but also the parent of a teenager on the spectrum. She balances providing a welcoming and reassuring space for participants and their family members, while also pushing them to try something new. It is crucial to find an instructor who is flexible and caring, as this is important to the interactions they have with participants. For example, one participant had transportation issues and arrived to the class late. He was frustrated and agitated. He asked if he could hug the instructor, which she allowed, and it helped to calm him down. He felt better afterwards and was able to join the rest of the class in the cooking activity. While this example is not isolated, it highlights the importance of quality of interactions over quantity of interactions. You do not need a lot of staff and support, but if you have the right staff, it can make a difference.

Though we did not actively recruit for volunteers, quite a few people reached out offering their assistance. When sharing information about your pilot project and seeking volunteer support, consider reaching out to local universities, colleges, and partners. It can be the next step toward building stronger relationships with departments and agencies.

Since we capped each class at ten participants with the option for each participant to bring someone to support them (if needed), sustainability of the project only requires a cooking instructor, assistant instructor, and a staff member to handle outreach and program registration. Often times, support workers that accompany individuals also provide a helping hand throughout the class process. Sometimes, however, too many observers on site can interfere with the hands-on efforts of students, as we are trying to build their confidence and raise their self-determination in the kitchen. Volunteers and caregivers can become overeager in trying to help facilitate these experiences, so we recommend preparing them in advance to allow for maximum independence of the students.

RECIPES AND TOOLS

For our pilot program, the tools and ingredients for each class varied based on the selected recipes. Recipes were chosen based on affordability (all recipes consisted of ingredients costing less than \$4 per item),⁸ accessibility (such as ability to open packages), and level of simplicity (one pot meals versus more complex ones). All recipes used were plant-based, with the intention of being a slightly new culinary experience for participants to help broaden their palates. Recipes were adapted to fit the needs of the audience and were strategically broken down into sequential, manageable tasks. Staff were also conscientious of the sensory needs of participants and provided gloves and goggles as needed.

To optimize participant interactions, it was essential to prepare and organize the tools, stations, and recipes before each class and to break each recipe into tasks that could be completed either individually or in small groups. All students were given an opportunity to directly participate in the creation of the meal. Breaking down the tasks allowed individuals to work on activities at their own pace and their own ability level. For example, individuals that required more support and needed more time, worked on tasks such as grating cheese while other individuals helped with measuring ingredients and cutting vegetables.

One of the most popular recipes used was for pierogi. Pierogi are a great option as they can easily be made in bulk, with a total grocery cost of approximately \$25 for a class of fifteen participants. Many of our students had not had pierogi before, but they were similar to other foods they had experienced (dumplings, empanadas, mashed potatoes) which made them more willing to try something new. Pierogi are a very messy, hands-on experience so we provided gloves for students who were hesitant to handle the dough due to sensory concerns. We also provided a variety of dips and sides for the pierogi, such as apple sauce and plain Greek yogurt, so students could experiment with different flavors to see which was their favorite.

SPACE

Classes took place in the Culinary Literacy Center's kitchen classroom, the first space of its kind in a public library. Located at the Free Library of Philadelphia's Parkway Central Library, the space combines commercial-grade kitchen equipment with classroom-style seating for up to 36 students. Conscious planning of the space was important to facilitate social interactions. While most cooking programs were set up in a simple classroom style, this program arranged the format so that there was room for a communal table in the center of the room. During the lessons, the students were arranged in pairs throughout the room which encouraged collaboration and socialization. For specialized tasks which required close supervision, students were called to the front of the classroom to complete the recipe component alongside the chef instructor. Once the cooking was completed, the students arranged place settings at the central table and enjoyed the meal together.

While it certainly was helpful to have the use of a professional kitchen, such a location is not necessary to present this program. The Culinary Literacy Center's programming expands beyond their main location classroom and into the many neighborhood libraries of the system through the use of mobile kitchen carts and self-created "kitchen kits" which are shippable totes of basic kitchen equipment. If your location has a sink with running water and a conference table, then it's possible to host this or similar cooking programs. (Make sure to check local regulations!) For more information about hosting cooking programs in your library or classroom, please visit www.freelibrary.org/cook for a free copy of our Culinary Literacy Toolkit.

ACCOMMODATIONS

In order to provide the best possible experience for students, special accommodations often needed to be made to address the unique needs of participants. Dietary concerns were communicated to all staff ahead of time to ensure that all students were able to participate and enjoy the meal. For visual learners, volunteers added pictures of the ingredients to the

recipes to help identify different tools and ingredients. Tools were safe and protective in nature. For example, lettuce knives were used whenever possible as they do not pose a serious cutting hazard. All participants wore aprons and were informed that gloves were available if they were sensitive to touching certain food textures. Certain ingredients, such as onions, were frozen beforehand and goggles were made available to limit the impact of tearing eyes while cutting. Tables with lower heights were brought in if an individual required the use of a wheelchair.

Additionally, staff were conscientious that trying new things and being in new spaces can sometimes cause individuals on the spectrum to feel anxious or overwhelmed. Staff ensured all participants had access to a quiet space, if needed. For any programming geared towards the autistic community, it is essential to provide a quiet space and ensure that all participants know where they can go if they need to take a break.

REGISTRATION

Flyers with a description of the program, dates, qualifications, and contact information to register were provided. Interested participants were asked to register with the Philadelphia Autism Project by phone or email. Upon registration, they were asked the following questions:

- Contact Person
- Participant Name
- Participant Age
- Support Agency (if applicable):
- Contact Information (Phone):
- Contact Information (Email):
- Support staff or family members attending?
- Any relevant communication needs we should be aware of?
- Any adaptations we should be aware of?
- Any dietary concerns?



Instructor addressing the class (Photo Credit: Free Library of Philadelphia Culinary Literacy Center)

Once session capacity was filled, additional registrants were informed they would be placed on a waiting list until more classes were made available or participants canceled. The Philadelphia Autism Project then provided the Culinary Literacy Center staff with information on registered participants, so that they would be prepared and informed on what to expect.

The registration process is an important initial interaction with individuals and their supporters. Therefore, it is important that the staff members handling this portion are understanding, flexible, and helpful to registrants. For example, if registrants were waitlisted or did not meet the qualifications, they were provided with the Culinary Literacy Center's other programs that were available, as well as available culinary programs outside the Free Library. We had one registrant who was nervous about attending and called back multiple times to ask if staff and other participants would be nice. It was important for staff to validate the person's concern, assure them that everyone would be nice, and that the other participants may be just as anxious since it was their first time as well. The communication with registrants, and some of the concerns or fears they may be coming with, is important for staff members to know so that they can check in with participants

to see how they are doing during the class and after.

FLOW OF COOKING CLASS

PREPARE THE SPACE

Prior to participants arriving, the stations were prepared with tools, recipes, and ingredients. The chef instructor completed any preparatory tasks for the ingredients. Water was set to boil, ovens were preheated, and ingredients were arranged. As students arrived, they were welcomed and given a space to place any personal items. With the exception of assistance devices, no mobile phones or electronic devices were permitted. All participants were given aprons, instructed on how to put on and tie them, as well as why the aprons are needed. It is important to note that for students on the spectrum, walking into a new space with unfamiliar rules and people can be overwhelming. Staff ensured the classes had ample time to settle in, were mentally prepared and felt comfortable prior to moving forward.

HYGIENE RULES

Food safety and personal hygiene are of the utmost importance for any culinary program. The chef instructor began each class with a lesson on hand-washing and set out classroom rules which stressed the importance of personal hygiene. For example, participants were asked to take off their aprons before heading to the bathroom. If they forgot, she reassured participants it was okay and that they just needed to use a new apron. Participants were also directed to clean their hands before touching the food, and after they have touched their face or any other body parts. While this may be considered standard procedure, it proved to require more time for some individuals who often touched their ears and had to wash their hands repeatedly. Staff gently, but firmly, ensured that these rules were followed to help model good personal hygiene in the kitchen space.

SHOW THEN TRY

During the class, the chef instructor followed a “show then try” curriculum plan which had participants closely watch an instructional demonstration

before trying an activity themselves. For example, she would carefully demonstrate how to slice an onion with appropriate knife safety skills before students were permitted to pick up their knives. To reiterate proper technique, varied methodologies were used to accommodate different learning styles. Some students required repeated demonstrations before they felt comfortable completing an activity, while other students worked best in tandem with a staff member or volunteer. Other individuals did not need as much support and followed directions independently. Staff in the classroom maintained constant communication with participants to ensure their needs were being met and they were clearly understanding the instructions. It’s important to be adaptable so that students can get the most out of the class, as a hands-on experience was a primary driver for the program.

Occasionally, provider staff brought by the students were too hands-on. This meant that their students were mostly watching and did not get as much of a chance to practice themselves. In cases where provider staff were too hands on, program staff gently intervened so that participants could try completing the activities themselves.

One concept repeatedly emphasized throughout the Cooking with Confidence program is effort is better than perfection when it comes to trying new things. When students became frustrated that their outcome wasn’t perfect or didn’t look exactly like the instructor’s, staff reiterated that “practice makes perfect.” Trying things and doing it your own way can still bring you to the same result, if not better. Creating a space that allowed for imperfection and individual style goes hand in hand with creating a safe environment.

ENJOYING THE MEAL

While the meals were being finalized (either in the oven or on the stovetop), participants were tasked with cleaning their work spaces and setting up the table with utensils, plates, and water for everyone. This was a good opportunity for students to practice additional independent living skills in terms of meal preparation. While likely not the highlight of

the program, staff encouraged the students to work together to ensure the space was properly cleaned, hands were washed, and there were enough place settings. Once everything was set and the meal was ready, all participants gathered around a communal table to enjoy the fruits of their labor together.

Under varying levels of staff direction, the students engaged in a discussion about their experience and what they enjoyed most about the meal. To maximize social interactions, staff gently coaxed the conversation and asked question prompts to help get the discussions started and keep it flowing. Staff encouraged honest feedback about whether the students liked the recipe (without using discouraging terms such as “gross” or “yuck”) and what they found challenging about the experience. The discussions also touched on what participants enjoyed eating, and the importance of trying something new instead of shutting the idea down immediately. This often led to larger, more organic conversations amongst the students about other foods they enjoyed and other interactions they have had with the library, such as favorite books or television shows.

Some of the most memorable discussions were prompted by questions from participants. One participant asked why all of the recipes were plant-based. This started a discussion on why the recipes were selected, as well as about vegetables in general, peeling carrots, and learning more about mushrooms. The mother of one participant expressed how happy she was, and that she never thought she would see her son make a friend.

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

Through the use of surveys, we sought feedback on outcomes of participants’ goals for the program, their cooking and eating habits, and their general confidence navigating a kitchen. For all programs to date, participants reported higher confidence levels in cooking skills, preparing a healthy meal, following a recipe, and practicing food safety. Participants also enjoyed the chef instructor very much, consistently rating her with high marks. Analysis of



Participant grating cheese (Photo Credit: Free Library of Philadelphia Culinary Literacy Center)

responses from the Spring 2019 classes showed that 94% of students met their predetermined goal for the outcome of the class, while 100% of students reported they were happy with the assistance they received during the class.

Open ended questions included what they enjoyed about the class, areas for improvement, and what would make cooking easier for them. We received many positive comments on the most recent survey, with a favorite being, “I love making new things and I had fun and now I can go home and show this to my grandma.” Many students noted this had spawned an interest in taking additional cooking classes and they were enthusiastic about practicing cooking at home in the future.

LESSONS LEARNED

Since the initiation of the program in 2017, staff from the Culinary Literacy Center and the Philadelphia Autism Project have prioritized collaborative communication about Cooking with Confidence and have kept track of lessons learned to ensure not only that the program is sustainable, but also that it is continually improving. In addition to frequent email check-ins, staff meet to debrief and analyze the program’s effectiveness at least twice per year.

One of the things we learned from the onset was

that there was an overwhelming interest in the program. Each session has had a lengthy waitlist with frequent inquiries about additional classes. Initial pilot programs focused on multi-class sessions geared towards adult participants. We found that while there was great interest in the program, it was difficult for adult learners to consistently attend classes and we did not have the high turnout we anticipated. By shifting gears towards the teen and young adult population, we were able to partner with local schools to expand our program as a classroom activity geared towards helping this age group develop autonomous living skills and increase their social interactions in a new environment. This adjustment greatly increased attendance numbers.

The survey format was updated after feedback from cohorts, to make it more accessible and shorter. This was especially important given feedback from high school teachers about the time required for their students to understand and comprehend the questions.

In terms of the actual class experience, we learned that classroom setup, including ingredients and tools, needed to be well thought out and intentional to encourage social interactions, and that it is essential to make the cooking process as hands-on as possible for participants. It is especially important to emphasize that the class is for *participants* to



Participant measuring ingredient (Photo Credit: Free Library of Philadelphia Culinary Literacy Center)

build skills, with staff and caregivers providing space to enable this. Thinking about jobs ahead of time, such as setting up the table for the communal meal, can encourage more participation. We also realized that we could simplify our recipe choices and maintain student engagement and practical impact. The goal was to teach students how to prepare a healthy meal on their own, so the less complicated the recipes were, the better. Additionally, by narrowing down our recipe options to one or two choices it allowed us to streamline grocery ordering by purchasing items in bulk which also helped us cut down on programming costs.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

INTEGRATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Cooking with Confidence has many opportunities for replication and expansion. Cooking with Confidence capitalizes on publicly available space and the programming expertise of librarians, connected to a partnership with resource experts at the Philadelphia Autism Project to build opportunities for providers and school districts. Strong interest from high school autism support classrooms has shown that this can be a great opportunity to partner with local school districts, where students can also apply opportunities to use public transportation to participate in the program. Partnerships with culinary schools can offer the opportunity for culinary students to volunteer at the Culinary Literacy Center and interact with neurodiverse peers. It can be mutually beneficial, as participants can foster their vocational interest by visiting the culinary schools and meeting experts and culinary students in the field.

Similarly, partnerships with nutrition programs (e.g., academic institutions or supermarkets) can build upon the knowledge base about healthy eating. Naturally, this program can also serve as an opportunity for past participants to volunteer if they would like to continue to be involved. Occupational therapists and physical therapists can also be optimal candidates for volunteers.

Cooking with Confidence is primed to expand in Philadelphia by moving into the Free Library of Phil-

adelphia’s neighborhood library locations. Staff are currently testing a pilot location in South Philadelphia which will focus on outreach to nearby high schools and teaching students how to make and pack a sandwich lunch. By pairing local schools with a need for programming for students on the spectrum with a simplified, no-cook recipe, we hope to be able to add more location options in the future.

The relatively low cost and staffing structure of Cooking with Confidence supports sustainability and capacity-building for libraries and other learning institutions of all sizes. Funding opportunities are available via public funds, nonprofit grants, and corporate sponsorships at all levels. Cooking with Confidence is a program which is truly adaptable to your institution and your community. In replicating this program, it is important to recognize that its philosophy is about more than the act of cooking. For people who may have a difficult time forming relationships or interacting with others, the kitchen classroom can be a space where they can feel safe to do so. We encourage you to find ways to partner and host this type of program at your institution. 

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“Tiffany D. Cross on her Journey from the Control Room to the Green Room” by Brendan Dowling POSTED AUGUST 13, 2020

Tiffany D. Cross has been a major player in the news media for nearly two decades, from working as an Associate Producer for CNN, to co-founding the influential newsletter *The Beat DC*, to her current appearances as an on-air political analyst on MSNBC. In her new book, *Say It Louder: Black Voters, White Narratives, and Saving Our Democracy*, Cross digs into the current landscape of the news media, exploring how a lack of diversity in newsrooms shapes not only what stories are covered but also how they are reported. **Read the entire interview at <http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2020/08/cross>.**