

PROVINCIAL LIBRARY GRANTS REPORT 2014

SMITHERS PUBLIC LIBRARY



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INTRODUCTION

Smithers is a small northern town with a 2011 population of 5,404, up slightly from the 2006 census figure of 5,217. The Smithers Public Library draws patrons from the larger area of the Bulkley Valley to serve 10,610 residents. The town is built on the traditional territory of the Wet'suwet'en First Nation, reflected in the local demographics with an Aboriginal population of approximately 25%. Smithers has a markedly young population with a high percentage of children, teens, and adults aged 45-54. Seniors comprise 13% of the town, and many people of Dutch or Swiss descent have settled here. Local industry includes mining, forestry, a sawmill, and the railroad. Outdoor recreational activities such as fly-fishing and skiing are popular with residents and tourists alike.

In 2014 the Smithers Public Library Board, staff, Friends of the Smithers Library, and the Mayor of Smithers participated in a strategic planning session for 2015-2017. Areas of focus were the need for a new, larger library to replace our cramped, deteriorating building, and a community needs assessment. The Board anticipated the Town of Smithers conducting a wide-scale assessment and requested library involvement. No Town-led assessment occurred, however, necessitating adjustments to our strategic plan. The library has made ongoing one-on-one needs assessments and relationship-building with community groups a priority in order to effectively tailor our services and collection.

The Board and staff recognize the necessity of communicating the value of a new library to our community. Many non-users are still unaware that the library offers more than print materials and few are familiar with the range of services that would be possible in a larger, modern library. Until we show non-users what today's libraries are capable of providing, they are unlikely to support a major building project.

Other strategic priorities for 2015-2017 are digital literacy and access, reflected in the extension of our popular Computer Tutor position to offer year-round service in 2015. Bulkley Valley schools place a strong emphasis on skills needed to work in the trades; through needs assessments with local educators, the library has selected books and technology to support our local students.

The Smithers Public Library provides an essential service -- to parents introducing their children to a world of learning and stories while connecting with others in their community; to teens needing a safe environment to

express themselves in; to the many rural dwellers and low-income residents without high-speed Internet; to the seniors visiting daily to spend time in the company of others; and to all of our patrons in need of accurate information or the delightful escape of losing oneself in a good book. In a small town such as Smithers, the public library is both a place to experience a sense of belonging, and a window to the wider world.

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES, GOALS, PROGRAMS AND SERVICES, PARTNERSHIPS

GOVERNMENT PRIORITY – EQUITABLE ACCESS/SERVING UNDER-REPRESENTED POPULATIONS

- **LIBRARY GOAL: TO HELP CREATE AND SUPPORT YOUNG READERS**
- **PROGRAM/SERVICE: Moricetown Literacy Tent**

The library partnered with **MOST (MOricetown, Smithers, & Telkwa) for Children** in summer 2014 by sending a staff member to help in MOST's Moricetown Literacy Tent for four afternoons. Moricetown is a Wet'suwet'en First Nation community approximately half an hour beyond Smithers. Our staff took crafts and activities from the library's Summer Reading Club to share with Moricetown children; read stories; and offered support to beginning readers.

- **PARTNERSHIPS: MOST (MOricetown, Smithers, & Telkwa) for Children**
- **OUTCOMES:**

Lack of safe transportation is a major barrier for Moricetown families who might otherwise attend library programs. Despite the popularity of our Summer Reading Club, First Nations children are noticeably under-represented. Bringing the Summer Reading Club to Moricetown meant that those children could more easily participate in the program. Our staff reported that the children enjoyed the activities and being read to, growing excited when they saw the familiar tent being set up each week. Through reaching out to this group and forging a connection with the children over the duration of the program, we have created positive connections with the library and nurtured a love of books and reading.

GOVERNMENT PRIORITY – COLLABORATION & COOPERATION

- **LIBRARY GOAL*:** INCREASED OFF-SITE STORY TIMES AND PARTNERSHIP EVENTS
*(*A task under our strategic goal of helping create and support young readers.)*
- **PROGRAM/SERVICE: Farmers' Market Storytime & Literacy Tent**

The library partnered with Smithers Community Services Association's (SCSA) Community Literacy Coordinator in a Literacy Tent at the Bulkley Valley Farmer's Market, providing Storytime entertainment, a literacy-based craft, information about library programs, and Summer Reading Club registration. SCSA distributed free books and information about learning opportunities in the Valley. We received many positive comments about the library being out in the wider community; one onlooker, watching us teach children to identify letters and sound out their names, spontaneously donated \$20 to the library. 20 people attended the Storytime, and 67 kids and adults decorated bookmarks with their names at the craft table.

- **PARTNERSHIPS: Bulkley Valley Farmers' Market, Smithers Community Services Association**
- **OUTCOMES:**
Children received early literacy support, learning letter recognition and phonics while engaged in a creative craft activity. Storytime provided onlookers with free, literacy-based entertainment and introduced them to our library programs. By leaving the library building we were able to reach families

who were not already library users, and discovered that many people had assumed there was a registration fee for children's programs. The Farmers' Market waived the usual booth fee because "it was felt by the executive that [the Literacy Tent and storytime presentation] had *added something to the market that [was] valued by the customers rather than just promoting [ourselves]*". This reflects the library's desire to add value to community events.

GOVERNMENT PRIORITY – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & PLANNING

- **LIBRARY GOAL*: TO ENCOURAGE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT BY INCREASING CIVIC PARTNERSHIPS AND EMPOWERING PEOPLE TO ENGAGE WITH THEIR COMMUNITY**

*(*Related strategic tasks: Make the library a clearinghouse of community information; Hold events and host speakers that connect people with others in their community.)*

- **PROGRAM/SERVICE: Community Needs Assessments**

Throughout 2014, the library met with community organizations to learn of existing needs or service gaps, build partnerships, gather suggestions for programs, identify opportunities for the library as a community forum, and become more knowledgeable about local services. These Community Needs Assessments have influenced the library's collection, services, promotional materials, and technology while increasing our community presence and forging event and promotional partnerships. Through these meetings we have strengthened our community's support network and discovered speakers on diverse topics to draw together individuals with similar interests. These assessments have formed an essential base for the library to build upon, and will continue through 2015.

- **PARTNERSHIPS: Work BC, School District 54, Broadway Place Emergency Shelter, Northwest Community College, Smithers Community Services Association (umbrella organization for many programs and services), Bulkley Valley Literacy Coalition, Christian Homeschooling Group, Early Childhood Development Centre, Northern Health, MOST (Moricetown, Smithers, Telkwa) for Children**

- **Smithers Secondary School** -- Toured the school library with the Teacher-Librarian and Library Assistant, learning about upcoming changes to their collection and space based upon the changing reading and study habits of local teens. This information has helped shape our collection, primarily the strong trend away from non-fiction books in favour of online resources. The staff passed along feedback from the teens on what would encourage them to use the public library, notably proximity to the high school, pool, or arena. We also learned about major areas of study in the curriculum (medieval history, comparative religion) and have planned a library event for 2015 intended to bring their learning to life (a recreation of medieval times by a local chapter of the Society for Creative Anachronism). The teachers are excited about this event and will promote it to their students.

- **School District #54 Trades Coordinator/Trades and Technology Teacher at Smithers Secondary School** – The Trades Coordinator demonstrated some of the skills, equipment, and computer programs used with local students, naming others that were up-and-coming. She expressed a need for elementary student trades program space, and hopes that one day the library might expand to include a Makerspace for student and public use. As a result of this needs assessment, the library applied for a grant to purchase technology kits that support the skills identified by the school district Trades Coordinator. The grant has been awarded, and the kits will become available for circulation to the public in spring 2015.

- **Broadway House Emergency Shelter** – Met with the manager to develop a system for issuing library cards to homeless patrons staying at the shelter. The manager offered valuable suggestions on how to effectively communicate with shelter residents.

- **School District #54 Director of Technology Service** – The library attended an “iPads in the Classroom” Education Forum to learn how extensively this technology is being used with local students and in what way. We discovered that the school district is enthusiastically adopting iPads in increasing numbers, for use with selected classrooms from Kindergarten through high school. The library recognizes that children entering school with no knowledge of computers will be at a disadvantage, and is aware of the power of quality apps to engage children in developing early literacy skills such as letter recognition and phonics. With a grant, the library purchased three iPads for our children’s section and loaded them with librarian-selected early literacy apps, as well as a few educational apps for older children and some recommended at the school district forum. The school district has been informed of this opportunity for informal learning and access to technology for children outside of school hours.
- **Northwest Community College (NWCC) Librarian** -- Toured NWCC to learn about their needs and programs, and to discuss partnerships. We heard that community members don’t realize that they can borrow materials, use public access computers or Wi-Fi without being a student of the college. The librarian asked us to display posters and inform patrons, especially in summer when the public library’s computers are all in use with waitlists. NWCC will tell us when they offer basic computer classes so we can inform our patrons. The college library links to our website, and their building has an industrial multipurpose room that we may book for makerspace-type programs.
- **Smithers Community Services Association** – We met with the Community Literacy Coordinator, who distributed our 2014 Summer Reading Club flyers and promotes our literacy events. We post literacy-related events that she sends us, and collaborate on creating and cross-promoting Family Literacy Week events.
- **Lake Kathlyn Elementary School:** The school Librarian and Learning Assistant highlighted gaps in the school’s collection that the public library could fill for students’ personal interest (for example, medieval history). The Smithers Public Library discovered which authors, genres, and subjects will be popular with Lake Kathlyn students for summer reading, and learned that transportation is a major barrier preventing participation in library programs since many students live far from town. Before our meeting, school staff and students were unaware that students outside the town of Smithers’ boundaries are eligible for a free library membership. School staff offered to spread the word about memberships, and to promote library programs through posters and word-of-mouth.
- **Literacy Outreach Coordinator (LOC)** – Identified a need for "a welcoming space for programming" in the community, and a need for the public to understand that today literacy means more than just being able to read print. The library and the LOC plan to partner in educating our community about the multifaceted modern definition of literacy, and to collaborate on a family early literacy event in summer 2015.
- **Christian Homeschooling Group:** A representative of a group of Christian homeschooling families (10 families, 30 children) met to share feedback and requests for specific materials (books on ancient history and educational DVDs for children) and programs (multi-age, so no siblings in large families are excluded). Some of the items they suggested were purchased for the collection, and the representative was notified when all-ages children’s programs were offered so these families could fully participate.
- **English Language and Multicultural Services (ELMS) Program** -- ELMS approached the library about hosting a Games Night for program participants because their organization has no space for informal gatherings. As the library learned more about the ELMS program, we developed Games Night into an opportunity for new Canadians to socialise with other families while familiarizing themselves with the library. Many attendees had not been to the library before, and showed an interest in Adult Literacy materials, Hi-Lo novels, and Junior Graphic Novels when introduced to our services and resources.
- **Work BC** – Through a needs assessment discussion we learned that this office teaches computer skills and résumé creation, two much-needed skill sets, but only to people under case management. They offered to

advertise library job postings on their website, and we have since received applicants through this arrangement that benefits job-seekers and employers.

- **Northern Health** – During our meeting, we identified the library as a way to disseminate information about community health services and issues without referrals or commitment. As a result, Northern Health will present a program at the library in 2015 on post-partum depression (PPD). The library's open, neutral location reduces the stigma attached to the topic and allows public health nurses to reach a wide audience including the friends and family of PPD sufferers. As well, Northern Health will set up a table and pamphlets in the library one afternoon with a Public Health Protection (Environmental Health and Safety) nurse to promote local services and chat. We also partner with Northern Health to distribute our Books for Babies materials, and worked with Public Health nurses and **Smithers Pregnancy Outreach** in a 2014 Breastfeeding Challenge event to raise awareness of the health benefits of breastfeeding.
- **Bulkley Valley Child Development Centre** – The Centre asked for pamphlets about library programs to include in packages for the families they serve, and a library presentation next September to describe our programs to their staff.
- **MOST (Moricetown, Smithers, Telkwa) for Children** – MOST asked the library for a staff member to assist with their extensive free Kids' Play Space at the annual Bulkley Valley Exhibition in August. They also invited the library to participate in Family Play Day 2015 with an activity table for children 0-6 and their families. MOST awarded the library a grant to hire an assistant Mother Goose on the Loose facilitator for 2014-2015, increasing support to parents during the program.
- **Bulkley Valley Genealogical Society** -- The Society expressed the need for a regular meeting space for their 50 members, many of whom have trouble with the stairs at their present location. They also want to house their collection of genealogical reference materials in an accessible, central location. Unfortunately, the library's present location does not have enough room to house the Genealogical Society's extensive collection. We agreed to revisit their needs when we acquire a larger building.
- **Bulkley Valley Literacy Coalition** – The Coalition is comprised of representatives from approximately half a dozen local organizations involved with literacy, education, and community services. Members meet approximately four times per year to share news of projects and challenges, identify community needs, and develop partnership opportunities. At a recent Coalition meeting members identified the need for public education about modern literacy requirements. Two events were planned (detailed under Literacy Outreach Coordinator, above) and one partnership possibility for a building project was generated.

The library also attends public meetings and discussion forums to better understand the needs of our community. The following 2014 meetings were particularly valuable, lending insight that shaped our direction and services; leading to future partnerships and programs; building a more cohesive network of support for residents; and increasing the library's presence in the wider community.

- **Bulkley Valley Social Services All-Candidates Meeting** -- Representatives of approximately one dozen local organizations delivered 5-minute summaries of their mission, range of services, clientele, accomplishments, and challenges to potential Town Councillors. This information is essential for the library as a hub of community information and for the purpose of referrals.
- **Ignite the North Community Forum on Innovation** – The library attended this discussion to hear community members' ideas on how Smithers can foster a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation among our young people. Local teens identified a need to connect with a wide range of possible employers to understand the options available to them in the workforce. To meet this need, the library will approach Work BC in 2015 to explore the possibility of partnering in a Career Fair or Student Summer Jobs showcase to connect youth with local businesses. A young adult at the forum described his idea to support innovation, which was essentially a community Makerspace equipped with traditional wood- and

metal-working tools. Although the library does not have the space for this project at present, we were able to refer him to the Trades Coordinator at the School District based on knowledge from an earlier needs assessment.

- **Smithers Community Services Association Annual General Meeting** -- The library learned of service gaps in the community such as a youth program that had been cut due to lack of funding, as well as new projects underway. Connecting with other local organizations at this meeting resulted in new programming partnerships and increased promotion of our existing children's programs.
- **SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES:**

Strengthening community service networks; developing collections, services, and events specific to our community's needs; deepening our knowledge and our patrons' knowledge of the community; and identifying opportunities to more effectively serve our patrons through partnerships. The knowledge gained through these community needs assessments enables targeted referrals and facilitates connections between community members, improving service to individuals and encouraging civic involvement.

SUMMARY

In 2014 the Smithers Public Library laid the groundwork for stellar library service by deepening our understanding of the community's needs and strengthening relationships. Moving forward with our strategic priorities in 2015, we will continue to increase our off-site community presence supporting literacy, creating informal learning opportunities, offering digital access, and facilitating community connections.

A key task for 2015 will be inspiring the public with the potential inherent in a new library and capturing our community's vision. Strong advocacy to a wide audience will be necessary to win for our patrons the library they deserve – a comfortable meeting place with dedicated areas for quiet study, programs, tutoring, group discussions, entertainment and culture. The Smithers Public Library has a great deal of work ahead of us, and will become an ever more valuable community resource in the process.



Wendy Wright
Library Director
March 23, 2015