

SMITHERS PUBLIC LIBRARY

INTRODUCTION

The town of Smithers (population 5,400) lies approximately halfway between Prince George and Prince Rupert in northern British Columbia's Bulkley Valley. Smithers acts as a hub to a large surrounding rural population, bringing the library's service area to up 10,600 and supporting an exceptional array of services, leisure opportunities and entertainment for a town of its size. The Wet'suwet'en First Nation community of Moricetown lies 30 minutes to the north of Smithers, with many residents commuting to Smithers for services and schooling. Approximately one-quarter of Smithers' population is Aboriginal, with large Dutch and Swiss populations as well. Although a slight but steady drop in school enrollment across all ages has been a pattern in recent years, Smithers' primary demographic of young families is not expected to change.

In 2015 the region saw a decline in mining, its primary industry, when a local mine laid off workers and announced their upcoming 2016 closure. Despite this news, other mining projects in the area are still being planned. Tourism, largely catering to outdoor recreation enthusiasts, is on the upswing with the 2015 National Ski-Cross Championships held on Hudson Bay Mountain.

The library's current strategic plan spans 2015-2017. Many of the action items have been completed, with concrete evidence of significant progress towards the library's larger goals. 2015 was a year of enormous change for the library as we modernized our collection and services, moving from VHS cassettes to robots through a quick succession of leaps into the twenty-first century. We then focused on raising the library's profile to communicate the expanded range of services and materials available to the public.

For many years the library board and staff have advocated for a new, larger building in order to better serve our community. At the time of our October 2014 strategic planning retreat it appeared there was insufficient support for a new library; however, in April 2015, Smithers' Town Council announced its 2015-2018 strategic priorities, including a multi-purpose cultural centre which would house the library and other undetermined arts and culture organizations. The Town's community consultation process commences in spring of 2016 to determine the community's appetite for the building project, location, partnering organizations, and funding. It is now the library's task to demonstrate the project's value, inspire our community, communicate their vision, and seek funding for their new library.

PROVINCIAL PRIORITY: EQUITABLE ACCESS TO LIBRARY SERVICES FOR ALL BRITISH COLUMBIANS

LIBRARY PRIORITY: INCLUSIVITY

Library Goal that supports the priority: *MISSION STATEMENT* – The Smithers Public Library is an ***inclusive*** community gathering place dedicated to literacy, lifelong learning, inspiration, and discovery.

First Nations comprise approximately one quarter of Smithers' population, yet are underrepresented among borrowers and library program attendees. Reaching out to discover First Nations residents' needs and welcome them to the library is an ongoing priority, inherent to our commitment to inclusivity as described in the library's mission statement.

Programs and/or Services that aligns with the priority: The library met with a representative of the Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre to learn what the library could offer of value to their clients and how we could tailor our services to meet their needs. Through this conversation we discovered that a safe, comfortable place to use free Wi-Fi for extended periods would be appreciated, but that the Centre's staff and clients were unaware that this library service already exists. Also helpful was the information that many of the Centre's clients have low literacy levels and would be unable to read a library pamphlet or poster listing our services. As a result, the library designed flyers using symbols and minimal text inviting Friendship Centre clients to use the library's free Wi-Fi. The Centre displays these flyers in their social area.

Additionally, the Centre communicated that many of their teens are reluctant to participate in organized activities but need a safe place to socialise with friends and access Wi-Fi. Accordingly, the library changed the format of our teen and 'tween programming to offer a choice of participating in that week's activity or simply enjoying the library space and services with other youth.

Partnerships that support the priority: Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre – sharing information on local First Nations' needs and preferences; dissemination of library information (pamphlets, posters, and verbal promotion of programs and services for adults and teens); United Way of Northern BC – funding for Teen Night

Outcomes that were identified: Unfortunately, these steps have been unsuccessful in drawing First Nations teens to the library's weekly Teen Night program, although some teens have occasionally gathered to socialise and access the library's Wi-Fi after school. Library staff have not noticed a significant increase in First Nations visitors since the Wi-Fi flyers were distributed. We will continue to liaise with the Centre and create a wider selection of posters specifically for their clients promoting library services and events, encouraging them to visit the library for community-building, literacy, and leisure opportunities.

PROVINCIAL PRIORITY: INCREASED SUPPORTS FOR EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION

LIBRARY PRIORITY: FULFILLMENT

- **Library Goal that supports the priority:** ***To ensure the community finds materials and programs that support imagination, curiosity, creativity,*** and a sense of place by increasing the number of participants, measured through circulation statistics, program attendees, and satisfaction surveys.

- **Programs and/or Services that aligns with the priority:** Over the course of 2015 the library received grants and personal donations which enabled us to make cutting-edge technology available to our community for learning and experimentation.

Motivated by the growing use of iPads in School District 54 classrooms and the power of high-quality children's apps as engaging educational tools, the library successfully applied for a Spectra Energy Community Connector grant to purchase three iPads. The iPads were then loaded with apps that support early literacy (such as Letter School and Endless Alphabet); develop narrative and storytelling skills (such as Felt Board and Sock Puppets); encourage creativity (such as the National Film Board's stop-motion animation tool); and even introduce children to game-based coding tutorials (such as Kodable and Daisy the Dino). The iPads were installed in the children's area in January 2015, at which time the director led a public presentation on using educational apps with young children. The library now offers an App Advisory service whereby the director meets with parents to recommend educational apps specific to their child's developmental stage. Although some parents have complained that libraries should be safe havens from technology for children or resented their child's attraction to the educational games, overall the iPads have seen steady use, with patrons taking home approximately 60-80 handouts listing the library-selected apps.

The library recognizes the value of Makerspaces in providing the space and technology for individuals to learn new skills, experiment, create, and share their creations and knowledge. Our building is too small to accommodate a Makerspace, but when a staff member suggested that we lend out technology rather than offer it in-house, the Bulkley Valley Community Foundation generously donated funds to purchase five circulating Technology Kits. The kits were selected for their relevance to the programs and curriculum offered through the local school district and community college, with an eye to the trades occupations that are so popular in our region. Any individual or organization with a Smithers Public Library card may borrow a kit for one week. The chosen kits are as follows:

- Snap Circuits Jr. – beginner's electrical kit
- Finch Robot – designed to teach computer programming to high school students
- Raspberry Pi microcomputer
- Squishy Circuits – hands-on learning about electrical circuits using conductive and insulating dough
- MaKey MaKey – an invention kit that turns any object into a computer touchpad

A local elementary school librarian borrowed all five kits for use with grade 7 students and reported a high level of engagement among the youth. One boy experimented with the Raspberry Pi, teaching himself the programming language Python in order to control the microcomputer. After an hour he turned excitedly to the librarian and exclaimed, "I just learned another language!"

In October 2015 a community member donated a mini 3-D printer for public use. The printer was incredibly popular with the community and often booked up 10 days in advance. Some adults used the printer, but the largest group of enthusiasts were 10-year-old girls, and soon their siblings as were booking appointments to learn how to print objects as well. It has been particularly gratifying to watch children who had been taught by library staff teaching other children to use the equipment. One youth booked an appointment with our Computer Tutor to learn 3-D design software, while others have brought in designs that they have modified on websites such as TinkerCad and wish to print out.

A mobile 3-D scanner for patron use was purchased with a grant from KSM Seabridge Gold in late fall 2015 and debuted at the library's first Innovation Open House. Staff and community volunteers demonstrated the Tech Kits, 3-D printer and scanner, iPads, and SketchUp 3-D design software and encouraged community members to try them out. Only a few patrons used the scanner in 2015 due to the time of year it was acquired (shortly before Christmas holidays).

- **Partnerships that support the priority:** Spectra Energy – iPad purchase; Bulkley Valley Community Foundation – Technology Kit purchases; KSM Seabridge Gold – 3-D scanner purchase; Pretium Resources – laptop donation; Private donor – mini 3-D printer; School District 54 and Northwest Community College– information on current programs, skills and equipment
- **Outcomes that were identified:** Many local children have become more comfortable and confident with computers as a result of accessing the library's iPads and 3-D printer. The early literacy apps on the iPads support children in learning their letters and numbers, and we have had one parent of a preschooler tell us that the whole reason he brings his daughter to the library is to use the educational apps. Other parents have said that their child uses the iPads when they are at the library as they do not have one at home, then read the stack of books that the parent has borrowed when they return from their library visit.

Children from grade 1 on up and special needs adults have been taught to use the 3-D printer by library staff. Their excitement and pride at mastering this technology builds their confidence and sparks creativity; during printer sessions they often share ideas of different things they would like to design. Several children thought of the library when they wanted to give friends or family members a present, visiting to print out objects for them. The local high school offers lessons in 3-D printing through one of their courses, and now many youngsters will already be comfortable with this technology before they enter secondary school.

PROVINCIAL PRIORITY: SUPPORT FOR THE BC JOBS PLAN BY IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR JOB SEEKERS IN BC

LIBRARY PRIORITY: DIGITAL LITERACY AND ACCESS

- **Library Goal that supports the priority:** To reach out to the community with computer literacy training opportunities (a task under the goal).
- **Programs and/or Services that aligns with the priority:** Year-round Computer Tutoring service. (Prior to 2015 the library only offered this service for half of each year, funded by the federal government.) The library promoted this valued service widely in 2015 through flyers and taking our Computer Tutor to the Northwest Trade Expo for two days to meet potential patrons.
- **Partnerships that support the priority:** Federal government funding; Town of Smithers / Regional District of Bulkley Nechako funding
- **Outcomes that were identified:** The direct relation between computer literacy and the ability to earn a livelihood in today's world can be seen in one story of a patron who utilized our Computer Tutoring service in 2015. The man was a miner who had worked gold claims all of his adult life with no need of a computer. Now the government utilizes an electronic system for filing claims which includes drawing an electronic map of the claim. The man had a wealth of mining experience but no computer skills, and as such could not continue to file claims and earn a living. He visited our Computer Tutor

several times until he was comfortable delineating and filing his claim through the computer. It is difficult to imagine a job today that does not require basic computer skills.

PROVINCIAL PRIORITY: COLLABORATION BETWEEN LIBRARIES AND OTHER PARTNERS

LIBRARY PRIORITY: TO INCREASE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT BY INCREASING CIVIC PARTNERSHIPS AND EMPOWERING PEOPLE TO ENGAGE WITH THEIR COMMUNITY

- **Library Goal that supports the priority:** Hold events and host speakers that connect people with others in their community.
- **Programs and/or Services that aligns with the priority:** The library has a small and out-of-date selection of books in French. The majority of the books have never circulated in the decade they have been in the collection, and refreshing the selection would be a costly undertaking with no evidence of patron demand. A nearby elementary school offers French Immersion with an extensive library for their students. In 2015 the Smithers Public Library was approached by a northern BC group called AFFNO who travels the region promoting French culture. AFFNO owns popular books in French for all ages and brings this lending library with them when they visit northern towns. AFFNO and the library agreed to partner in bringing a wide selection of current French books to Smithers French-speakers without the library investing in a new collection that might not be used by the community.

AFFNO and the library held two joint events in 2015. The first was a publicized visit from AFFNO who set up their lending library and membership information outside the library. The second event was extremely successful; a bilingual storytime in the library followed by a bilingual performer who told stories using string and audience participation. AFFNO paid the performer's fee, which was beyond the library's budget, and both organizations provided refreshments.

- **Partnerships that support the priority:** Association des francophones et francophiles du Nord-Ouest (AFFNO) – The library promotes AFFNO's visits and hosts them on the library's patio. The library accepts patron returns of AFFNO materials and holds them until AFFNO's next visit.
- **Outcomes that were identified:** AFFNO's first visit was welcomed by library patrons who were able to chat in their mother tongue with AFFNO staff and volunteers. Many people were unfamiliar with this local source of French books. The second, larger event was attended by over 40 people, and was even more popular than the library's Christmas Pyjama Storytime. As AFFNO's director said, "[We] beat Santa Claus!" It was successful on many levels: bringing together community members with a shared interest or background; connecting them with cultural and educational resources; providing them with free entertainment; and extending the library's range of offerings to the public. We will continue our partnership in 2016.

SUMMARY

2015 saw many changes in the Smithers Public Library as we focused on incorporating community feedback; updating the collection and services; raising the library's profile; and advocating for the new library that our community deserves. The community and their elected representatives responded enthusiastically to those changes with the possibility of a new, larger building. In order to be able to offer our community the meeting rooms, tutoring spaces, quiet study area, teen space and improved layout that are impossible in our current building, our challenge for 2016 is to keep up the momentum that we have gathered over the past year.