INTRODUCTION

Elkford, BC, is a small industrial town that sits high in the picturesque Rocky Mountains in the south-eastern corner of the province. Currently, the population of Elkford is around 2500 people. The community supports four large coal mines, all within a 45-minute drive of the town.

The population is always changing, with young families moving into the community to replace retirees who move away to warmer climates. Elkford is known for its pristine wilderness and the opportunities for outdoor adventure like camping, hiking, biking and hunting abound.

Over the years, the Elkford Public Library has become a community hub by providing community workshops, computer training and access to print, fax and scanning services. The library also produces the local monthly newspaper, the Focus. Although we provide many of non-book related services to the community, another great thing about our library is that the waiting list for new books is non-existent.

Currently, we are in the middle years of our strategic plan, which is due to be updated in 2022. Some challenges to our community and the library are the winter weather and the quality of the roads during those months. It is hard for staff to attend out of town functions at other libraries when the roads are too dangerous to drive on. During the winter months, the roads are treacherous, so taking classes at the College of the Rockies is not always feasible. Travelling to workshops and meetings can also be cost prohibitive as Elkford is close to the BC/Alberta border, far from the big urban libraries on the coast.

PRIORITY 1 - IMPROVING ACCESS

In the fall, the Elkford Public Library subscribed to RB Digital unlimited, adding over 20,000 eBooks and audiobooks to our digital collection.

We are also seeing increased usage with Gale Courses, with 29 total enrollments, 782 total course logins and 68,432 total minutes in class. In 2019, Pronunciator usage jumped from 10 total logins to 56 total logins. We are a remote community, with the College of the Rockies two hours away in Cranbrook. Having the opportunity to participate in online courses allows our patrons to upgrade skills and achieve success in learning even though we are far from a post-secondary institution.

We continue to provide access to the Teck Contractor Safety portal. Without these courses, contractor employees cannot gain access to the local mine sites. Our staff have become experts in figuring out how to get this specialized software to work.

Staff also help patrons with other technology needs like their phones and laptops, which they bring into the library when they need help. We also provide printing, faxing, and scanning services. We have even taught patrons how to set up an email account or download software or explore the internet on their new computers.

In 2019, thanks to the Community Initiatives Grant from the Columbia Basin Trust, the library upgraded our aged public computers as well as our circulation desk, providing faster and more secure access to the internet and to the Evergreen ILS. We also upgraded Wi-Fi access to all members of the community who need to use the internet, even if we are closed.

PRIORITY 2 - DEVELOPING SKILLS

Since Elkford only has 2500 residents, the community does not have facilities that would be useful to those who are job seeking, filling out government forms or other services that are readily available in a larger centre.

Every month, the public library hosts Kootenay Employment Services to aid residents in job search and resume writing. At other times of the month, it is library staff who help community members work on their resumes, fill out government forms, and provide printing, faxing and scanning.

Library staff also help trouble-shoot technical problems that residents might have. We started Tech Thursday, a program that has a library volunteer providing technical assistance every Thursday afternoon. She has reported that she averages 2 or 3 patrons every session, with each session usually lasting an hour or more. This program is very popular.

We used our Columbia Basin Technology Grant to create a Digitization Station that will provide photo printing and digitization of old photos, film and slides. We are still in the process of setting up this station.

Not only do we show people how to do things, we also help them write tests for online programs. We generally invigilate 3 or 4 exams every month, with many repeat patrons who are working on distance courses.

We started a Lego Club on non-instructional Fridays, and Game Day on the last Saturday of every month. Lego Club is popular, with 10 or 12 children coming to the library to build with Lego. Game Day is more popular in the winter, with 2 or 3 families using the games on the Saturday. Both the games and the Lego are available at all times, so we generally have 4 or 5 children a week come in to play with the Lego, then switch to a game or two.

In January, we partnered with the Kootenay Library Federation and Science World to bring a coding and robotics workshop to the elementary school. Over 4 days, we had 120 children attend the workshops. It was crazy.

Finally, staff are expected to take one professional development course every year. Last year, our two new staff members enrolled in a cataloging course.

PRIORITY 3 - COLLABORATING ON SHARED GOALS

In the fall of 2019, the library became involved with the local paramedic and formed a group called "Elkford Helping Seniors" that has a mandate of providing services to the elderly members of our community.

For a small town, Elkford is quite spread out, and during the winter months the snow and ice prevent seniors from leaving their homes. If they unable to drive, they have no way to go to the grocery store or the medical clinic. The "Elkford Helping Seniors" volunteers have come forward to help with yard work and shovelling, driving people to appointments or to the grocery store and even stopping in to visit with lonely seniors to check on them and make sure they are okay. The library has become the local hub for this volunteer group, and we bring in speakers and presentations for this group and for the Elkford Housing Society. Currently we have many more volunteers (26) than seniors in need.

We also work with the local preschool and other early years programs to support literacy for school-aged children and those who are still too young for school. We also have our own program, Tales for Tots, a program for toddlers and babies. Generally, we see between 4 and 12 children per session.

Finally, the library creates and prints the "Elkford Focus", a monthly community newspaper that provides news and information for Elkford. Our circulation is currently over 500 copies, and many are passed on or saved by community residents.

PRIORITY 4 - ENHANCING GOVERNANCE

We are in the middle years of our 2018-2022 strategic plan, having met many of our goals such as updating the public computers, updating old and worn out book displays and providing an organized space for community information.

Since the beginning of the year, we have installed counters and the door to measure library visits and installed new Wi-Fi to measure virtual hits.

SUMMARY

Over the last year, staff and board members at the Elkford Public Library have worked hard to make the community aware of what we can offer them. Patrons

are taking advantage of children's programming, online courses, invigilation services and technology help.

We have found ways to engage both adults and children, but we need to work harder on engaging teens. We look forward to continuing our hard work and making an impact on our community, with a focus on the teenagers in our community.