

## 2021 PROVINCIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY GRANT REPORT (PLGR)

### LIBRARY NAME

Smithers Public Library

### 1. INTRODUCTION - LIBRARY AND COMMUNITY PROFILE

The Smithers Public Library is located on the unceded traditional territory of the Gidimt'en Bear Wolf Clan, home of the Witsuwit'en First Nation. The Town of Smithers (population approximately 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 up to 13,200 and supporting an exceptional array of services, leisure opportunities and entertainment for a town of its size. Mining, forestry, and tourism are the main economic drivers for the region. The Witsuwit'en community of Witset lies 30 minutes to the north of Smithers, with many residents commuting to Smithers for services and schooling. A substantial percentage of the library's service area population is Indigenous, including people from the Witsuwit'en, Gitxsan and Lake Babine Nations, with Dutch and Swiss heritage also widely represented among our patrons.

The population level of Smithers has not significantly changed in the last several years, but other changes brought about by the pandemic have affected the community. Many businesses closed or severely restricted their hours due to staffing issues, both illness and a lack of workers. Heated differences of opinion over the use of masks and vaccines to mitigate the spread of COVID erupted in frequent protests and deep schisms within the community. Public disagreements over natural resource extraction and Indigenous consultation brought widespread racism in the community to light. The absence of opportunities to bring people physically together over common interests and shared connections has doubtless exacerbated these divisions.

### 2. MAJOR PROJECTS/PROGRAMS

Please describe any new or major ongoing projects/programs the library has delivered in the past year.

#### Project/Program Name: Multiculturalism Kits

#### Provide a brief description of the activities involved in this project/program.

The library created 15 Literacy Kits using a Province of BC Multiculturalism grant. Each kit consists of a selection of children's books to support cross-cultural education and an appreciation of diverse cultures. Some of the kits include a music CD, DVD, puppet or game to accompany the written materials. The kits are available for 3-week loans and introduce the following subjects:

WITSUWIT'EN CULTURE  
AFRICAN CULTURE  
REFUGEES & IMMIGRATION  
GITXSAN CULTURE  
INDIGENOUS & METIS CULTURE  
DIVERSITY & RACISM  
HAIDA CULTURE  
RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

AROUND THE WORLD  
 NORTHWEST COAST INDIGENOUS CULTURE  
 SOUTH ASIAN & MIDDLE EASTERN CULTURE  
 BABIES EVERYWHERE! (Diverse board books for ages 0-3)  
 INUIT CULTURE  
 EAST ASIAN CULTURE  
 RELIGIONS & CELEBRATIONS

**How does this project/program support the library's strategic goals and/or community?**

The kits address the library's strategic priority of supporting Truth and Reconciliation in our community and help mitigate the racism and xenophobia that have become more apparent during the pandemic.

**How does this project/program support the B.C.'s strategic goal(s) for public library service?**

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| <p>1. <b>Advancing Citizen Engagement</b> (e.g., helping people access government services/resources, fostering community knowledge-sharing, and supporting reconciliation)</p> | <p>This project supports reconciliation through providing engaging educational resources for children and their caregivers about racism, diverse cultures and Indian residential schools.</p> |
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**What are the key outcomes of this project/program?**

The kits provide a professionally selected array of high-quality materials on a specific topic, making it convenient for patrons to find age-appropriate items. The materials are housed in transparent bins to pique people's curiosity with a glimpse of their contents and are prominently displayed in a custom-built cabinet at the entrance to the Children's Section of the library. The kits are excellent resources for families, teachers, daycares or homeschooling groups, containing anywhere from 12-15 items in each bin.

The items inside the kits serve as information, discussion starters, windows to the wider world and bridges to empathy. Borrowers will learn about the rich diversity of various cultures and come to better understand our fellow community members, new Canadians, and the Indigenous people of this land.

One caregiver reported that they have borrowed three of the kits to share with the foster children in their household. The children were wholly engrossed in the books and movie and enjoyed playing with the puppets at length. The caregivers noticed that one book in the kit was by a relative of one of the children and were able to point out the connection between the stories in the kit, her culture, and her family.

**Did the project/program involve any partnerships? If so, what was the partner's role (e.g., funding, outreach, service delivery)?**

Province of British Columbia: Multiculturalism grant  
 Kyah Wiget Education Society: Witsuwit'en children's books  
 School District 54 Indigenous Education: Map of Witsuwit'en territory, language resources  
 Office of the Wet'suwet'en: List of clans, chiefs, and houses

**Project/Program Name: Day of Reflection**

**Provide a brief description of the activities involved in this project/program.**

The July 1 Day of Reflection was organized by the Smithers Bridging Committee (a local anti-racism group including the Chamber of Commerce, Library and others) as an alternative to the usual Canada Day celebration mounted by the Town and the Chamber of Commerce. The Town agreed to transfer their celebration funding from Heritage Canada via a local non-profit to create a learning opportunity about Canada's history: specifically, acknowledging the unmarked graves which had recently been discovered; holding space for mourning; and reflecting on what this means for us as Canadians. The Committee's vision for the day was to make educational materials available, create an opportunity for people to show their support for residential school victims and survivors, and hear from our community leaders as settlers reconcile our image of Canada with Indigenous peoples' experience of Canada.

The Day of Reflection was a drop-in from 11-2. It opened with speeches from community leaders including a hereditary chief, the Witsuwit'en drum group, the Mayor, statements read on behalf of our MP and MLA, and the local Catholic school's principal. Afterwards the mic was left open and occasionally people would step forward to tell their story of residential school impact.

The Chamber of Commerce had orange shirts available by donation as a fundraiser for the Witsuwit'en Child and Family Centre in Witset. The Library MC'd the event and staffed a tent housing relevant materials available for borrowing.

The Chamber also set up a mural station where people could contribute a drawing, their handprint, or a message of support for residential school survivors. The mural was then given to the Friendship Centre.

Approximately 225-250 people attended over the 3 hours. By all accounts this was a meaningful event that was appreciated by many. Community members, including local schoolteachers, had an enormous desire to learn and looked to the Library for materials and recommendations.

**How does this project/program support the library's strategic goals and/or community?**

This event supported the Library's strategic goal of Truth and Reconciliation. It brought together settlers and Indigenous community members to express their sorrow over the unmarked graves and dismay at Canada's role in the residential schools. Indigenous participants shared their stories to educate community members. Settlers expressed their regret and their support for the victims, survivors and their families.

**How does this project/program support the B.C.'s strategic goal(s) for public library service?**



<p>2. <b>Advancing Citizen Engagement</b> (e.g., helping people access government services/resources, fostering community knowledge-sharing, and supporting reconciliation)</p>	<p>This event fostered community knowledge-sharing and supported reconciliation. (See previous point)</p>
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**What are the key outcomes of this project/program?**

Members of the local settler community were able to access information resources about Indian residential schools and hear how their Indigenous neighbours have been impacted. Indigenous people were able to share their truth with settlers and were shown that people cared. This has increased community members' knowledge and understanding of the ongoing legacy of Indian residential schools.

**Did the project/program involve any partnerships? If so, what was the partner's role (e.g., funding, outreach, service delivery)?**

Smithers Bridging Committee: Funding, volunteers

Town of Smithers: Funding, venue

Proton Foundation: Funding, volunteers

**Project/Program Name: National Day for Truth and Reconciliation**

**Provide a brief description of the activities involved in this project/program.**

The Library invited community members of all ages to drop by on the morning of Canada's first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and choose a free book about Indian residential schools take home and keep.

**How does this project/program support the library's strategic goals and/or community?**

This project supports the Library's strategic goal of advancing Truth and Reconciliation in our community by providing information on Indian residential schools. People could choose from a variety of books for ages 3 years through adult.

**How does this project/program support the B.C.'s strategic goal(s) for public library service?**

<p>3. <b>Advancing Citizen Engagement</b> (e.g., helping people access government services/resources, fostering community knowledge-sharing, and supporting reconciliation)</p>	<p>This event supported reconciliation through public education. (See previous point)</p>
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**What are the key outcomes of this project/program?**

Thanks to funding from the LawMatters program of Courthouse Libraries BC, the Library was able to give away 103 books for all ages about residential schools on September 30. People arrived early to ensure they would receive a book, and many visitors were families with small children.

One Indigenous man said he came to find books to teach his children about residential schools so that he can tell them what he went through. Everyone was appreciative and many people indicated to staff that they would spend part of the new national holiday reading their books.

**Did the project/program involve any partnerships? If so, what was the partner's role (e.g., funding, outreach, service delivery)?**

LawMatters Program of Courthouse Libraries BC: Funding to purchase books

### 3. KEY CHALLENGES

The following topics have been identified as recurring themes in previous years' PLGRs. The intent of this section is to collect detailed information in a structured, consistent format.

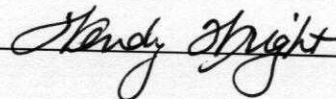
Please select the most significant challenges that the library has faced in the past year that you wish to comment on.

Challenge	Briefly describe how this challenge has impacted the library/community, and what steps the library took to address it in 2021. Please specify if any provincial funding was used, e.g., annual library funding, the technology grant, other non-PLB provincial grants (up to 250 words per topic).
Staffing (e.g., recruitment and retention, mental health and wellness)	<p>The Library experienced an unusually high level of staff turnover in the final months of 2021 which cost a great deal in training wages. We were also frequently short-staffed due to illness. Everyone worked extra shifts to cover as best we could but by the end of the year most staff were exhausted.</p> <p>Our janitor of 28 years retired at the end of 2021. Provincial funding to libraries has not kept pace with inflation and our new janitorial service costs three times as much as our previous provider. The Library cannot afford this important ongoing expense and an increase in provincial funding for basic everyday operations is urgently needed.</p>
Aging/damaged facilities (e.g., need for repairs, renovations, upgrades/expansions)	<p>The Library's building is undersized, out of date, and inadequate for our community. Fundraising and grant applications for a new building to be shared with the Smithers Art Gallery have been ongoing for some years, although most fundraising was paused during the pandemic. Unfortunately, the Town of Smithers was unsuccessful in their second attempt at a major federal-provincial grant application for the new Library-Gallery Project.</p>
Vulnerable communities (e.g., people experiencing homelessness, addiction, mental health crisis)	<p>The Library received frequent complaints from staff and patrons regarding disruptive and unsafe behaviours by homeless community members using our patio. In the summer of 2021, the Town of Smithers invited these community members to camp in in the park beside the Library and a tent city was established. After an initial brief adjustment period, this arrangement proved to be positive for all involved. Disruptive problem behaviour at the</p>

	<p>Library decreased dramatically, and Library staff developed a neighbourly relationship with the tenters, creating memberships for them so they could borrow materials. Staff were also able to change the minds of some patrons who were hostile to the idea of people living in the park.</p> <p>In the winter, local service providers and the Town of Smithers partnered with BC Housing to temporarily install a heated trailer beside the Library for these community members during the coldest months. We do not know what the future holds for our neighbours but are supportive of the initiatives in the park over this past year and are glad of the opportunity to get to know them better through our close proximity.</p>
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#### 4. SUBMISSION AND APPROVAL

*Electronic signatures are acceptable where physical signatures are not feasible.*

Library Director Signature: 

Date: March 18, 2022

Board Chair Signature: 

Date: March 18, 2022