SMITHERS PUBLIC LIBRARY
2020 PROVINCIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY GRANT REPORT (PLGR)

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

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 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 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 Gitxsan and Lake Babine Nations, with Dutch and Swiss heritage also widely represented among our patrons.

The library's current strategic plan spans 2018-2021. In response to the environmental crisis, the Board has added a Global Warming priority. Fundraising for a new building was put on hold during the uncertainty of the pandemic and will be resumed when a measure of equilibrium has been restored. Although in-person programs and events were halted, materials representing other Strategic Goals continued to be purchased for the collection.

<u>2020 OVERVIEW: COVID-19</u>

Due to COVID-19, the library closed to the public on March 16. During the closure, staff worked from home or in the library with a maximum of 1 or 2 other staff and social distancing. At the beginning of the closure we thought it might only last a couple of weeks, then a month, etc., so we worked on tasks that had fallen by the wayside over the years as our library had become busier and busier. We cleaned and sanitized the library top to bottom; went through decades worth of old documents and shredded those we could get rid of; purged old supplies, outdated bits of technology and staff manuals; attended training webinars; catalogued, processed, and repaired books; and weeded over 4,000 items from the entire collection. During this time staff were available by phone to create memberships and answer questions. We also curated and promoted reliable information about COVID-19 and free online educational and cultural opportunities. Our Children's & Youth Programmer began teaching herself the

technology required to create online Storytimes, which have been very well-received ever since. Our Computer Tutor switched to virtual appointments, helping people by email, phone or Zoom, an arrangement which continued for the rest of the year.

At first, the risk of contagion via surfaces was assumed to be high so, like most other BC libraries, we locked our book return and automatically renewed all items until the summer. Borrowing of eBooks, eAudiobooks and eMagazines soared and many people joined the library to download and read eItems from the safety of their own home.

In the next stage, we realized the closure was likely to last longer than we had first expected and began planning different service delivery methods while continuing our online programming and information services. We purchased equipment such as rolling book bins and carts, set up dated tables throughout the library, and began accepting returns through the book drop. All items were quarantined for 72 hrs. prior to being handled by staff and checked in.

On June 1, we launched our Library Takeout service. Provincial Interlibrary Loans (ILLs) and Interlibrary Connect (ILCs) orders were suspended province-wide but Smithers Library patrons could place holds on items in our own collection through the website, by email or phone. Staff would gather and check them out, bag them up, and patrons picked them up at the front door.

We also began offering Grab Bags. These were tremendously popular but by far the most time-consuming model of service delivery we have offered. Grab Bags were conceived of in order to serve two main groups: those who do not have or use computers (mainly seniors) and families with small children who select books not by title or author but by sight within the section that best matches their reading level. Patrons filled out Grab Bag forms with information to help staff choose books, audiobooks and movies for their families, and then picked up their bags at the front door. A Grab Bag for a family with several children could take an hour to select and process but the children loved having a surprise pack chosen just for them and with schools closed, the library was the only source of fresh reading material.

This year we diverted wages normally spent on hiring a summer student to our resident Children & Youth Programmer to provide virtual programs during the summer holidays (Summer Reading Club and Munchkin Time), including free bags of craft supplies so families could follow along with the weekly craft at home. These activities were promoted via Facebook, Twitter, and our website, with pre-recorded programs regularly posted on our YouTube channel. To our surprise, these online programs garnered many more views than expected as people could watch them at their convenience later in the week. We learned to revisit the videos after some time had passed to capture a more accurate count of patron usage.

In preparation for reopening we installed Plexiglas, rented a storage unit for the furniture to discourage lingering, shifted shelving and collections around to encourage social distancing, developed messaging and signage for the public and coordinated new procedures. On August 4 we reopened the building to the public with limited services and occupancy. The public missed the library so much that when they first returned this summer some of them teared up. At first we kept limited hours since we were still

fulfilling numerous Library Takeout and Grab Bag requests. At the end of August ILLs and ILCs were resumed, and in mid-September we expanded to our full public hours, taking advantage of the general upheaval to change our schedule and add a long-requested weekday morning opening.

We deferred our 2020 program and event grant funds to 2021 in hopes that we would be able to hold in-person events by then, but at present we are expecting to still be limited to virtual programs by next summer. We moved our monthly teen sessions and Book Lovers' Night Out evening sessions for adults to Zoom, providing rare and highly valued opportunities for safe socializing at a time when many people were isolated from their peers.

2020 HIGHLIGHTS

1. Improving Access for British Columbians – Building a Seniors' Collection:

In the summer of 2020 the library successfully applied for a $4,000grant to purchase items for seniors, specifically Large Print books and Books on CD. Circulation of Large Print and Books on CD rose by 69% that fall, keeping people entertained at a time when staying at home is encouraged.

2. Building Capacity -- Providing Computer Tutoring and eItems for Home Downloading:

Realizing that demand for digital materials would rise during lockdown and beyond, the library shifted our Computer Tutoring service from in-person to phone, email and Zoom. A portion of our one-time provincial technology grant was spent on purchasing additional copies of popular eBooks and eAudiobooks with long waitlists, many over 6 months long. The ability to download items from home rather than needing to visit the library to pick up physical materials helped keep community members safe during the pandemic and many people tried these formats for the first time. One senior patron commented: "I can't live without those [e-audiobooks]. They're my company!" The sound of another voice is a comfort during prolonged isolation, and remote Computer Tutoring combined with a wide range of available eItems has made this difficult time more bearable for many community members.

3. Enhancing Citizen Engagement -- Providing Access to Reliable Information:

Library staff assisted with virtual all-candidates forums for the municipal and provincial elections. This was yet another way of providing trusted, non-partisan access to information, thereby enabling people to make their own informed decisions.

4. Enhancing Governance -- Providing Access to Government Services:

While the library and Service Canada were closed to the public, we connected with our local Member of Parliament's office, bringing this local service gap to their attention and successfully urging them to provide computer access and assistance to community members seeking to apply for emergency benefits.

TECHNOLOGY GRANTS

The provincial technology grant enabled us to significantly extend and expand services to our community. In addition to point 2 above (purchasing extra copies of popular eItems), we bought a second WiFi access point and license to boost public Internet access throughout our parking lot and patio. People parked or sat outside the library accessing the Internet every day during the closure. We supplemented this service by installing outdoor electrical outlets on our patio so patrons could recharge their devices.

Grant funding was used to purchase equipment for transitioning programs to a virtual format and staff training on how to use technology to create professional videos and engaging online discussions. The library purchased "Square" point-of-sale technology, enabling patrons outside our service area to pay for annual library memberships without needing to visit in person. Finally, with videoconferencing fast becoming the preferred method of gathering people together, we purchased webcams, headphones and microphones and replaced our old public desktop computers with new laptops (still in progress). The library thanks the Province for this timely and essential funding that has brought high-demand programs, collections, equipment and Internet access to our community members.

SUMMARY

Looking ahead to 2021, we anticipate providing service year-round, reverting to Library Takeout in the event of another lockdown (as we did at the end of December 2020 due to rapidly rising cases of COVID-19 in our Local Health Area). None of us at the library can imagine a lockdown without books or movies, and we will work to make sure that our community members can access these comforts even if the pandemic forces us to limit in-person browsing again.

Winner of the 2017 BCLA Building Better Communities Award

Date: October 15, 2020

To: Libraries Branch

From: Smithers Public Library

Re: Library Technology Grant Interim Report

Dear Libraries Branch,

Thank you for enabling us to better serve our community through the Technology Grant. We have applied these funds towards addressing the challenges of online programming, inadequate quantities of high-demand eBooks and eAudiobooks, onsite Wifi limitations and outdated technology. By investing in these areas, we will be building capacity in our community members and staff and improving access to information, skills, leisure materials and the Internet for British Columbians.

Grant funds have already been spent except for the purchase of new laptops and accompanying software. We are currently researching less expensive laptop models capable of graphics and movie-editing and will order the laptops and software once we find products that fit the grant budget.

The initiatives funded by this grant which are already in progress have been well-received by the public. The number of views of our online programs for children and teens have surpassed our expectations, garnered positive comments from many patrons and reached new audiences. We look forward to reporting on the success of other projects made possible through the Library Technology Grant in our 2020 annual report.

Sincerely,

Wendy Wright
Director, Smithers Public Library

2020 LIBRARY TECHNOLOGY GRANT REPORTING FORM: SMITHERS PUBLIC LIBRARY

Total Technology Grant Amount: $11,828.00

Area of Need	Outcome	Metrics	Strategic Links	Actions	Collaborative Links	Timeframe	Project Budget	In-Kind/Leveraged funds	Comments
Electronic collections (licensing)	Reduce wait times for popular eBooks and eAudiobooks (waitlists can be 6+ months)	Circulation of eBooks and eAudiobooks should increase	Improving access for British Columbians	Purchased extra copies of titles with the most holds on them	Explored purchasing through our library federation but creating a federation collection would not create a seamless experience for our patrons or meet the federation libraries' individual areas of focus.	Purchased titles in October 2020 for 12 months, 24 months or 26 circulations (varies by publisher).	$2951.84	Library pays for patron access to consortial collection; technology Grant pays for additional copies of most popular titles	
Connectivity (internet speed, connection capacity, etc.)	Community can access free WiFi even when the library is closed	Wifi usage should increase	Improving access for British Columbians	Purchased an additional WiFi Access point and 5-year license to boost the library's Internet so it can be accessed from the parking lot and street	N/A	Purchased summer 2020. Licence expires 2025.	$757.67	N/A	
Connectivity (internet speed, connection capacity, etc.)	Community can access free WiFi even when the library is closed	Wifi usage should increase	Improving access for British Columbians	Installed four electrical outlets on the library's outdoor patio so people can charge their laptops and phones while accessing the library's WiFi	N/A	Installed summer 2020.	$665.00	Library pays ongoing hydro costs	
Digital programming	Children and caregivers receive early literacy programming even during the COVID-19 pandemic,	Number of views are recorded to measure demand for pre-recorded programs.	Building Capacity Improving access for British Columbians	Purchased iPad/case/keyboard and wireless headset with mic for online	N/A	Purchased summer 2020.	$861.66	Library pays staff wages to deliver programming	

	learning new skills and being entertained.

Youth are able to socialise in a safe online environment facilitated by library staff. | Number of attendees are recorded to measure demand for real-time online programs (videoconferencing, Facebook Livestreamed Storytimes).

Anecdotes are recorded demonstrating the positive impact of youth isolated by the pandemic being able to safely socialise with peers. | | Children's & Youth Programs | | | | | |
| **Digital programming** | Trained staff produce high-quality programs for British Columbians | See Digital Programming metrics above | Improving access for British Columbians | Paid staff to attend training webinars on digital programming | N/A | April-July 2020 | $257.46 | N/A | |
| **Staff hardware upgrades** | Reduce contact during COVID-19 and make library transactions more convenient for patrons | Record number of credit and debit transactions for first year of use | Improving access for British Columbians

Building capacity | Purchased "Square" point-of-sale technology; enabling patrons to use credit and debit cards (previously accepted cash or cheque only; strong public demand for debit/credit capability) | N/A | Fall 2020 | $421.34 | Library pays staff member to set up/program Square technology | |
| **Connectivity (internet speed, connection capacity, etc.)** | People can access training, work, and social opportunities regardless of their location or pandemic restrictions | Usage statistics | Improving access for British Columbians | Purchased webcams and headsets with microphones for patron and staff use in videoconferencing | N/A | Fall 2020 | $252.56 | N/A | |

Patron hardware upgrades (public computers, printers, etc.)	Patrons have greater flexibility in where they access the Internet	Usage statistics and verbal feedback	Improving access for British Columbians	Replace Public Access Computers with 10 newer laptops. Laptops can be used throughout the library, on the library's patio or lent out for home use.	School district technician recommended which laptops and software to purchase and will set them up for use.	Fall 2020	$2300.00 (Laptops and technician's labour)	District will purchase laptops for reduced rate	
Patron software upgrades	"	"	"	Software for 10 newer laptops described above (Office 2019 Standard)	"	"	$1180.00 (bundle of 20)	Reduced rate through Friends of the Smithers Library's TechSoup account	
Staff hardware upgrades	Promotions and Programming staff can produce high-quality graphics and videos while working from the library or from home.

The library's public Computer Tutor can assist patrons with learning more advanced programs. | Appraise promotional products and programs, request verbal feedback on new laptops and software from staff.

The Computer Tutor reports on the nature of the public's requests for assistance. | Building Capacity | Replace old Computer Tutor laptop with a new model capable of running graphics and movie-editing software.

Purchase an additional laptop and software package for Promotions and Programming staff to use when working from home. | " | Not yet ordered, seeking less expensive models. Will order in Fall 2020. | Current est. $1716.83 each. Will find less expensive models. | N/A | |
| **Staff software upgrades** | " | " | " | Office 2019 standard (cost included in bundle of 20 licenses above) and 2 Photoshop Elements licenses for two new staff laptops | | | $78.00 (2 Photoshop Elements licenses) | Reduced rate through Friends of the Smithers Library's TechSoup account | |