



SMITHERS PUBLIC LIBRARY 2019 PROVINCIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY GRANT REPORT (PLGR)

INTRODUCTION

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

Mining, forestry, and tourism are the main economic drivers for the region. Fly-fishers from around the world travel to Smithers in the fall to catch steelhead and the Hudson Bay Mountain ski hill, a 20-minute drive from downtown Smithers, is popular with recreation enthusiasts throughout northwest British Columbia. Two music festivals are held each summer, and 1,000-2,000 ranch and farm families from the surrounding rural area annually converge to take part in the fall fair and rodeo.

The library's current strategic plan spans 2018-2021. In the fall of 2019 two additional strategic priorities were identified: Global Warming and Truth & Reconciliation. A committee was struck to draft these strategic priorities for Board approval.

The library Board and staff have long advocated for a new, larger building to better serve our community. In 2019 the Town of Smithers applied for a joint federal-provincial grant towards the construction of a dual-purpose building with shared spaces to house the Smithers Public Library and the Smithers Art Gallery. The community was galvanized by the possibility of the grant and inspired by a local family's pledge to match up to \$1M in community fundraising. At the end of 2019 the Fundraising Committee was still awaiting news of the application's outcome.

PROVINCIAL PRIORITY 1 – IMPROVING ACCESS

"Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls" (MMIWG) was released online in .PDF format in June 2019. The Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre works with families of MMIWG and approached the library to inquire whether we would be offering the report in print format for some of their clients who do not have Internet access. The library printed out both volumes, totaling 1080 pages, and displayed them in binders with handouts from the Friendship Centre connecting families of MMIWG with local support and counselling information. Friendship Centre staff posted photos of the display on their Facebook page and library staff observed Indigenous community members visiting the library to access the binders.



PROVINCIAL PRIORITY 2 – DEVELOPING SKILLS

The library experienced an overwhelming increase in exam invigilation requests throughout the year – up from 29 in 2018 to 89 in 2019 -- as college campuses in Smithers and neighbouring communities ceased offering this service. Invigilation services for distance students are essential in this age of online learners, particularly for those living and studying in small, remote communities such as Smithers. Online courses enable learners of all ages to pursue formal education without needing to move away from their home community. This broadens their educational and career options, reduces expense (especially for young adults able to live with their families), retains access to their local support systems, and allows working adults to fit online education and continuing skill development into their existing schedules. Despite the limitations of staff hours and no separate rooms for exams, meetings or quiet study, the library will continue the important work of supporting online learners. We look forward to one day having a new facility with separate rooms which will expand the hours in which we can offer this service.

PROVINCIAL PRIORITY 3 – COLLABORATING ON SHARED GOALS

Months of planning and fundraising with numerous partners culminated in June 2019 when approximately 160 community members came together to hear author Bob Joseph speak about his award-winning book, *21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act*. The intention of this event was to educate community members about the Indian Act, both past and present, and how the policies therein continue to impact Indigenous communities across Canada, such as the divisive issues of consultation around pipelines on Witsuwit'en territory and the racism sadly evident within the community our library serves.


Joseph spoke and interacted with the audience for over an hour, followed by a robust question and answer period that could have continued on much longer due to the high level of engagement. Everyone was invited to stay after the formal presentation for complimentary refreshments—including locally made bannock—and a book signing with Joseph. A local bookseller sold over 40 copies of his book(s) and the conversation continued well into the evening.

Approximately one quarter of attendees submitted thoughtful feedback on the event, which included indications of specific knowledge gained, the value of Joseph's presentation format, and a commitment to ongoing self-education. One respondent wrote: "[The presentation] built a strong case for seeing where we have come from and how much work needs to be done... It felt like a respectful conversation and [a] call to

action." Many attendees appreciated how Joseph interacted with the audience, which elicited stories from community members that brought the realities of the Indian Act to life and made it relevant. According to one respondent, "Bob is an amazing speaker who can make a complex and emotionally charged topic comfortable and easy to understand."

There were many requests for more events of this nature, which indicates a community-wide desire for ongoing learning. One respondent expressed: "Not only did I personally learn a lot, but I also started conversations with relatives, friends, and colleagues that were really important." The local president of the Bulkley Valley Teachers' Union was inspired to write a letter to the library staff and Board, describing Joseph's presentation as "helpful in orienting many of us toward a greater understanding of the historical and political challenges affecting Indigenous/non-Indigenous relationships."

This valuable opportunity for cross-cultural education was made possible by not only the provincial operating grants, but also through the generous donations and sponsorship of many community partners. Major sponsors included the Smithers Bridging Committee, a local anti-racism organization of which the library is a member; Organizing Against Racism & Hate (OARH); and Courthouse Libraries BC. The Town of Smithers, School District 54 Aboriginal Education and the Bulkley Valley Museum recognised the value of this learning opportunity and donated towards the event, as did many other organizations and individuals including library staff and Board members.



"An **invaluable** resource...
The time is right for this book."
Shelagh Rogers

"This pocket-size primer is
a **perfect introduction**
to a troubling legacy
with which Canadians
continue to wrestle."
Bookshelf Weekly

Join celebrated author Bob Joseph for an insightful presentation and Q&A about the Indian Act, past and present.

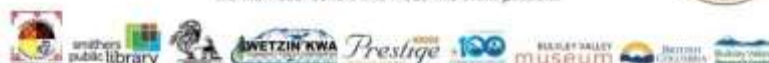
MONDAY, JUNE 17TH
DOORS AT 6:30 PM
STARTS AT 7:00 PM
DELLA HERMAN THEATRE

FREE ADMISSION
ARRIVE EARLY TO ENSURE SEATING

His **Canadian bestseller**,
*21 Things You May Not Know
About the Indian Act*, won
the **2019 Bill Duthie
Booksellers' Choice
Award**.



Thank you to the Bashrah family, the Wright family, and all the individual donors who made this event possible.



PROVINCIAL PRIORITY 4 – ENHANCING GOVERNANCE

In October the Board attended a customized governance training session in Smithers facilitated by the BC Library Trustees Association (BCLTA). This opportunity to access professional development in our remote community, made possible with targeted BCLTA funding from the Libraries Branch, enabled many of our trustees to participate, including newer members of the Board. The session also focused on current hot topics in BC libraries, such as Intellectual Freedom and Truth & Reconciliation. The trustees and library director left the all-day workshop with a heightened sense of their roles and responsibilities as well as professional values and developments within the wider BC library ecosystem.

SUMMARY

2019 was characterized by the intensification of long-standing divisions within our community over environmental issues, the ongoing effects of historical injustices and racism. Working proactively, the library was able to make topical information readily accessible in a variety of formats for all ages. In providing context for current events, the library enabled community members to better understand each other's points of view and develop their own informed opinions.