



PROVINCIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY GRANT REPORT 2019 (PLGR)

TUMBLER RIDGE PUBLIC LIBRARY 2019

INTRODUCTION

The Tumbler Ridge Public Library continues to be a multi-service community hub in Tumbler Ridge. In 2018 the population was estimated to be 2169¹. Although Conuma Coal has re-opened 3 of the mines that were idled in 2014, the regional unemployment rate (3.9%) still exceeds the national (3.1%) and Alberta (2.5%) averages, although it is lower than that of the rest of B.C. (4.4%)². Since most residents are employed in resource-based industries like mining, oil and gas, and Site C, the national uncertainty surrounding pipelines and other resource-based projects continues to impact our town. Site C's winter slowdown and resulting layoffs has also impacted our residents. Since housing prices are low here, social agencies refer clients to Tumbler Ridge without considering the high cost of groceries and limited retail available. They also disregard the fact that TR does not have the necessary social services and agencies that these clients need. Tumbler Ridge is also 1.5 hours from the nearest city and there is no public transportation available. Tumbler Ridge has no Federal or Provincial government offices. These factors mean that Tumbler Ridge Public Library continues to act as a social service agency by providing job search and social service application assistance, adult literacy and isolation support. In addition, other social issues like addiction, mental health and bored youth, continue to strain staff resources. Tumbler Ridge Public Library continues to provide a high level of more traditional library services including a large collection of books, DVDs and books on CD.

An ongoing challenge is retaining skilled, trained staff in a labour market that offers generous salaries and benefits to unskilled workers. Mines will hire graduates from the high school and train them to drive haul trucks at a rate of about \$33-\$38 per hour. Library clerks currently earn \$15-\$17 per hour. In addition, minimum wage has increased significantly over the past few years and will continue to do so, reducing the differential between adult clerks and student pages to \$0.70 from what used to be about a \$4 difference! Since the bulk of our budget is provided by the District of Tumbler Ridge, TRPL is currently trying to advocate for increased funding for personnel in order to retain trained employees. The DTR Council is not as supportive of this initiative as we would like. At this time, employees often leave TRPL to go work at the schools or other industries, where they are offered higher hourly rates. Very few employers in Tumbler Ridge offer minimum wage. Provincial grants have not been increased in order to assist with the minimum wage increase imposed at the Provincial level. The minimum wage

¹ <https://investtumbleridge.ca/get-to-know-us/community-profile/>

² *Economic analysis of British Columbia*, central1.com, v.39 #4, ISSN 0834-3980, September 2019

increase impacts businesses like libraries and small retail, where the regular staff wages are already close to minimum wage.

Another challenge is that our Provincial Grant was reduced because our census numbers dropped in 2016. Unfortunately, census figures and the current process do not accurately reflect that some of our workers are living in Tumbler Ridge but go to their more permanent home when they are off-shift for 7 or more days. They may be counted there but not in Tumbler Ridge, although they make use of our services and infrastructure when they are here. We are therefore feeling more pressure since our population and its demand for our services is, in fact, increasing. This is demonstrated by the elementary school being at full capacity and the increasing number of children and adults attending our programs.

Although we do not have a current strategic plan, we feel that the Tumbler Ridge Public Library is taking adequate measures to meet the mandate of the Ministry of Education, Libraries and Literacy Branch's strategic plan *"Inspiring Libraries, Connecting Communities"*. We are hosting the North East Library Federation Board and Directors' meetings in May of 2020 and the TRPL will spend the prior Friday creating our strategic plan with the assistance of the Federation Manager. As noted in the Ministry's strategic plan, as a Public Library, we are mandated to "provide British Columbians with access to the information and tools they need to learn, create and thrive in today's changing world"³. Libraries need to be a place where "life-long learning, recreation, literacy, innovation and knowledge creation"⁴ can occur and we feel that our current program offerings, mixed in with our partnerships, innovations and traditional Library services and programs, meet this mandate. We continue to be responsive to our clients' needs and requests.

In 2019, TRPL obtained capital funds to develop Virtual Reality hardware and software. This was purchased in late 2019 and will be implemented early in 2020. We look forward to using this exciting innovation with clients of all ages and will be the first Library in the north to incorporate VR into our programming!

PROVINCIAL PRIORITIES

PRIORITY 1 – IMPROVING ACCESS

In 2019, Tumbler Ridge Public Library separated two collections for young children in response to requests from clients. Some of the parents' first language is not English, but they want to be able to read with their children and encourage them to read. They were looking for books that had CDs included, so that they could follow along in the book, while listening to the story. In response, we separated those items and created a new Read-along collection, in a new location, so that they were easier for families to locate. While weeding picture books, we realized that many of those with more text were not being used by our clients. Again, we pulled those items into a separate collection of Experienced Picture Books (XP). This is a collection towards which we direct clients who want a longer, illustrated story to

³ *Inspiring Libraries, Connecting Communities*, p.4

⁴ Ibid.

read with their children. As part of this project we also re-named our picture books. They were always called 'easy' but now they are just 'picture books'!

A new company won the WorkBC contract for the area and are committed to being on location in Tumbler Ridge 2 days per week. As the Library has been advocating for this service for the past few years, we are incredibly excited to welcome them to Tumbler Ridge. Initial discussions included possibly being housed in the Library, instead, they are using a room in the Community Centre, across from the Library, making it easy for us to refer people to them and for them to send people to us for resume assistance. They are also right inside the front doors, meaning that people see them and know they are available in Tumbler Ridge.

Shortage of childcare is a problem in Tumbler Ridge. Often both parents work 12 hour shifts at the mine, meaning that children are often fending for themselves after school and into the evening. These children often come to the Library. Our After School Snack Program continues to be popular and is still needed, as there are lower income families coming to town for the lower housing costs and the cost of groceries in a remote town can be cost prohibitive.

In 2019, we subscribed to Grant Advance, a foundations database that we are hoping will be able to help us secure additional funding, especially for some capital initiatives that we are planning.

PRIORITY 2 – DEVELOPING SKILLS

Let's Play Together is a free program developed with our Community Kitchen coordinator. It encourages children and their caregivers to experiment with play-based learning activities. It is a fun, food-centric hour in which themed stories are connected to simple food creations and sometimes easy science experiments using food. A very social event for all, and participants get to eat their creations too!

Tumbler Ridge Public Library has many online resources that our clients can use to improve and upgrade existing skills at no charge. One of those is Learning Express Library, a versatile database that includes job search training like creating resumes, practicing interviews, in addition to basic math, English and other topics. It also teaches computer skills and has training in basic software programs. Practice citizenship tests are included for Canada and the US. Students can write tests in all modules, save them in a confidential file and keep trying to improve their scores.

Tumbler Ridge Public Library continues to offer drop-in technical assistance for residents and visitors to Tumbler Ridge. This includes connecting phones to WiFi; accessing email on phones, tablets, laptops or Library computers; printing resumes, applications, employment forms; general troubleshooting of phones and other gadgets. This also includes setting up web browsers and other programs on the start menus, helping with social media like Facebook; first time device set-up and file transfer. On the Library PCs we help with printing, creating invitations, business flyers and even creating music CDs for seniors attending line dancing.

This past year, we changed the way the children count their reading to get incentives and earn ballots for prize draws for our Summer Reading Club program. Previously, they counted pages or chapters.

This resulted in very uneven entries with strong readers dominating the prize draws. Now they count duration of reading, with ten minutes as the minimum. This effort-based system gave the children who struggle an equal chance at incentives and eliminated many feelings of frustration from struggling or slower readers. Feedback from parents was all positive. They liked that their child would persevere, even if they could only read a page in half an hour. They still earned three entries, just like the stronger readers. We saw a significant increase in reading over the summer and are sure that more children retained or improved their literacy skills for school's start in September.

Two of Tumbler Ridge Public Library's staff continue to work on their Library and Information Technology Diplomas online.

PRIORITY 3 – COLLABORATING ON SHARED GOALS

Tumbler Ridge Public Library has increased the number of class visits we host, as well as in-school visits. This has resulted in more children with library cards and more children attending our programs. During our Summer Reading Club we have seen a significant increase in children asking for books and then reading all parts of a particular series or by a certain author.

We estimate that there are up to 50 children who are home-schooled, some for religious reasons, but others seem to be pulling children from the elementary and high schools due to bullying. We have been impacted by these homeschooling numbers at the Library. Initially, homeschoolers seemed to think that we could run programs and activities that they needed, almost wanting to set up a classroom at the Library. We held firm and told them that they were welcome at our regular programs but that we had materials they could use to access resources and of course they could use our collections! They do and some of the tutors are often using our space throughout the day.

Social issues are increasingly affecting the Library. Opioid crisis, substance abuse, poverty, mental health issues, bullying, unemployment, etc. In response, Tumbler Ridge Public Library has completed Narcan training for all staff and has emergency kits on hand. We have also registered all staff, through NELF, in the online course *Homelessness in Libraries*. The Library has been working with partners to bring in speakers on mental health issues and has created displays and a related bibliography. Our staff continues to offer job search and resume help, all while establishing rules and expected behaviors for children and other clients in the Library. Unfortunately, we have seen a definite increase in bullying in the past couple of years, some of it has escalated to actual harassment of staff including name calling, physical intimidation and basic disrespect of staff and rules. We have evicted children and teens, but this rarely has a lasting impact.

Tumbler Ridge Public Library partners with more than 30 groups in town. For the past few years, we have partnered with the District of Tumbler Ridge's summer 'camp', Play Escape. They bring their participants to our daily Summer Reading Club on Monday, Wednesday and Friday when we offer stories, crafts and activities for children of all ages. Tuesdays and Thursdays are somewhat quieter as they are geared for younger children, although all are welcome. When Play Escape attends, they come with their own staff who assist with supervision, which we gratefully accept, for the 60+ children who attend our program. Tumbler Ridge Public Library also participates in many community events including

the Winter Carnival, Welcome Baby Party, Spring Fling and a Health Fair. These partnerships include the District of Tumbler Ridge, Tumbler Ridge Society for Children's Needs, and Northern Health. All are family events that help to showcase the Library and in turn, other agencies in Tumbler Ridge.

Joan Zimmer, Unit Chief and Community Paramedic with the Provincial Community Paramedicine program has two service dogs in training. She brought them in to our Lapsit and Storytime programs. 'Hug-a-Pup' was very popular for the children and the puppies alike, and we hope that they will visit on a fairly regular basis.

PRIORITY 4 – ENHANCING GOVERNANCE

Attendance at conferences is our strongest form of networking and staying in touch with other libraries, staff and boards. 2019 seemed to be the year of the conference. In April, two staff and our Board Chair attended BCLA/BCLTA in Surrey; then in May, one staff attended Beyond Hope in Prince George. In July, the Head Librarian and a staff member attended the Third International Public Library Fundraising Conference in Calgary, Alberta and presented a session *Escape the Box: Strategies for Raising Interest and Revenue in a Small Community*. This discussed our Escape Room fundraising initiative in 2019 as described below.

Recruiting trustees continues to be a challenge. It appears that volunteers in Tumbler Ridge are burning out and younger residents don't seem to be committing to Boards. In Tumbler Ridge this is affecting all Boards, not just the Library. Our Library and its Board embrace collaboration, openness, transparency and encourage and support excellence.

NEW – LIBRARIES IN ACTION – SUCCESS STORIES FROM B.C.'S PUBLIC LIBRARIES

In early 2019, the Tumbler Ridge Public Library hosted its first Escape Room event. We charged \$10 per person up to a week before, then \$15 each on the day of the event. Children under 13 had to be accompanied by an adult and teams were limited to 4 players. We used 2 adjoining rooms in the Community Centre and installed a locked door between the rooms. Participants came to a table outside the room and signed waivers. They were given their detective badges and a case file and had to watch a 45 second video of their 'supervisor' giving them their assignment. They were then taken into the first room, given minor instructions and rules and the timer was set.

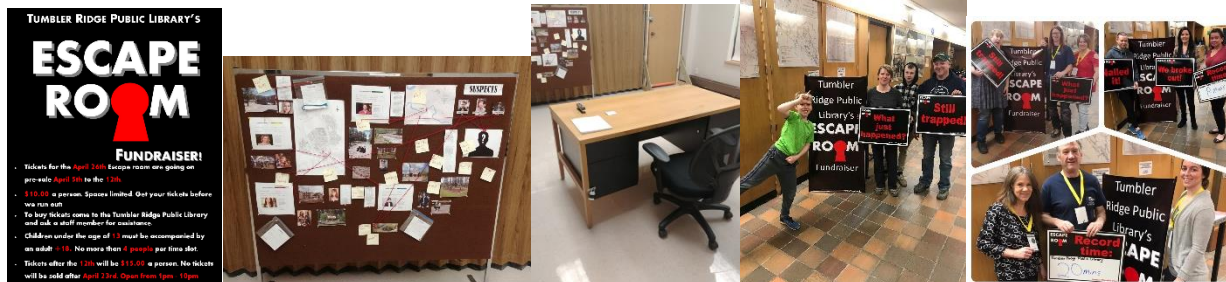
How did we do it?

- **Who:** Tumbler Ridge Public Library Staff, led by our Library Assistant
- **What:** Escape Room, we used 2 adjoining rooms in the Community Centre and installed a locked door between the rooms. Participants came to a table outside the room and signed waivers. They were given their detective badges and a case file and had to watch a 45 second video of their 'supervisor' giving them their assignment. They were then taken into the first room, given minor instructions and rules and the timer was set.
- **Why:** A popular activity that wasn't offered in the Tumbler Ridge area was turned into a fundraiser

- **When:** End of April and early May on 2 consecutive Fridays in order to ensure that people working either shift at the mine would be able to play if they wanted to.
- **How:**
- **Planning & Visualizing:** The theme we decided on was old detective/true crime. A 'murder board' was created and was a key planning element. It provided an easy, visual template of what was going to happen and how, that allowed other staff members to clearly follow along at various design and planning levels
- **Storytelling:** There didn't seem to be anything pre-packaged that was budget friendly for our Library, so our very creative Library Assistant had to write something. Her go-to is 'always do what you know', so, as libraries do best, we created and presented a story. It had to be simple, but it also had to be full of distractions and red herrings so that participants had to follow the storyline and pay close attention
- **Writing and filming:** A 45 second video for background information that the participants could watch before entering the room, was written and filmed by staff
- **Building:** A free-standing door frame had to be created. As there was only an accordion wall with no door between the rooms, our Library Assistant had to use her library search skills to hunt down a 'how to' to build a free-standing door frame
- **Creating Content:** Our Library Assistant had to create puzzles that were tough but not impossible. Since she herself had a lack of escape room experience, she used a lot of Pinterest ideas!

Outcome:

Although it was our first time creating and running an Escape Room, it was a huge success! Out of 28 time slots over the two days, we managed to fill 21 of them. Compared to the expenses of the Escape Room, we tripled our cost in profits. The feedback we received from the community was all positive and once again raised the Library's profile and brought something new and different to Tumbler Ridge.



SUMMARY

We are grateful for the Provincial Library Grant. Although it is only about 6% of our total budget, if it is cut or reduced, we would have to cut or severely reduce our Interlibrary Loan service. Since we are a net lender, the current grants for Resource Sharing and BC One Card just cover our postage/shipping/packaging costs, not staff time. We send out 20-30 books per day and receive about 5 daily items for our clients. This means that we are sharing about 7000 items per year. We like to think that it is due to our 'excellent' collection.

As previously noted, bullying has become a rising concern in Tumbler Ridge. There are persistent, unresolved and severe bullying issues, even with parental intervention, at both schools. There appears to be minimal support for bullied children by the Administration at the schools. This issue is now spilling over into the Library and Community Centre. Over the past couple of years, we have noticed a rise in children (some as young as 9!), pre-teens and teens who seem to see challenging staff as a game. Some of it has escalated to actual harassment of staff including name calling, and basic disrespect of staff and rules. They are especially hard on our younger, female staff who sometimes feel physically intimidated. We have a 2-way radio for communication with the building's maintenance staff and have also advised staff to call our local RCMP detachment since they are familiar with most of the culprits. We have evicted children and teens, both short term and long term but this rarely has a lasting impact.

Another issue we face in Tumbler Ridge, is very slow Internet service. Minimum standard is 50 mBit down, 10 mBit up, but home Internet in Tumbler Ridge averages 30 mBit down, 6 mBit up and there are some places where even this service is unavailable. Many people don't subscribe at home but use the Library's computers/Internet and WiFi. The Library is fortunate to have 110 mBit down and 86 mBit up, but we pay commercial rates for that service.

Tumbler Ridge Public Library is a welcoming place; a bustling community hub where individuals are not judged, and respect is expected. Tumbler Ridge Public Library staff and Board will continue to work with our partners, the community and our clients to ensure that it remains this way. Our Library is and should remain a safe space for our clients.

Respectfully submitted,

Paula Coutts

Head Librarian

Tumbler Ridge Public Library