INTRODUCTION

The Cariboo Regional District Library offers public library services to residents of the Cariboo Regional District, a predominantly rural area of more than 80,000 square kilometers located in north-central British Columbia. Approximately 41,000 of the Region’s 64,000 residents live in or near rural communities. The remaining 24,000 residents live in the three urban municipalities of 100 Mile House, Williams Lake and Quesnel.

Industry in the area is primarily ranching, logging, businesses related to the forest industry, and small farming enterprises. Small scale tourist enterprises are spread throughout the region.

Library services are offered in twelve rural and three urban communities spread throughout the Region.

The twelve rural ‘Community Branches’ are open 2-3 days per week. One branch is co-located with a school library in an elementary school. Three others are located on School District property. Five branches rent space from local Community Associations in community halls. And three branches are in CRD-owned buildings. Rural branches offer a wide variety of library services including access to computers and wi-fi.

The three urban Branches are in the larger municipalities of Quesnel, Williams Lake and 100 Mile House and are open 5 days per week; including evenings and Saturdays. Staffing includes a professional librarian, a library technician, a variety of library clerks who may be full-time or part-time, and a part-time student Page. Urban branches are in CRD-owned premises. They offer a full slate of library services to their local urban populations but also are regional hubs for the surrounding rural (or ‘fringe) areas which, due to their proximity to a larger town or city, may not have a library branch of their own. In addition, people from outlying rural areas visit their closest urban area for essential services not offered in their local communities and take advantage of these visits ‘to town’ to visit a larger library. Even so, rural residents remain fiercely loyal to their own small community library branch and use it for most of their information and recreational reading needs.

An administrative office located at the center of the region (Williams Lake) offers centralized support services to the Branches including cataloguing, acquisitions, interlibrary loan, shipping, purchasing and administration. Staffing includes a variety of full-time and part-time positions including a professional librarian, a library technician and various levels of clerical staff.

Governance:

Library Services is a function (or department) of the Cariboo Regional District. As such, it is one of only two integrated library systems in the province of British Columbia.
Strategic Plan

The Library system is currently developing a strategic plan to guide library services over the next few years. Information gathering, including staff and public engagement surveys took place in the latter half of 2018. Data analysis and goal setting will take place in 2019.

For now, goals for 2019 are outlined in the annual Library Services Business Plan. They include completing the Strategic Plan for Library Services, providing facility/equipment improvements to Area and Community Library Branches, providing residents with improved access to digital content, improving staff access to training in multiple formats, and updating the job description of the Cataloguer pending an expected retirement.

Challenges

The challenges of providing library services in the region are typical of rural communities in a vast, sparsely populated geographic area. Cell service is generally only available along the Highway 97 corridor and is completely unavailable in most parts of the region. Similarly, high speed internet often is available only in urban areas and along certain transportation corridors. Many rural homes, even those close to transportation corridors, have limited or no internet options. In many rural communities, the library offers the only easily accessible high-speed internet connection, and even that is a challenge in some communities. Even in urban centers where internet is readily available, free internet and wi-fi connections available at the library are vital to low-income and disadvantaged individuals.

In an age when society considers internet to be a basic necessity, the CRD Library’s internet services are now being used beyond their maximum purchase agreements and are beginning to experience extra monthly usage charges as people use the library’s internet/wi-fi accounts for all the things that society requires internet access for (accessing government services, staying in touch with friends and family, downloading music and video, writing exams, conducting research, doing homework assignments, paying bills, doing banking, accessing digital library services, and much more). The Library will soon need to consider pursuing more expensive service agreements to meet these demands – especially in rural areas.

Travel in rural areas, especially between November and May, can be unpredictable and precarious, making in-person training a challenge, while technological difficulties (poor cell and internet service) make online training just as challenging.

The long distances between communities means that annual shipping costs to transport goods are high, making participation in resource sharing expensive, even with Canada Post discounts. An emphasis on increased resource sharing between libraries, while an admirable goal and a service that has become incredibly popular with library users, continually challenges the budget. The provincial Resource Sharing Grant is very gratefully received to cover part of the cost of this very popular service.

Continually rising costs of digital resources are challenging the Materials budget and reduce the amount of funding left to spend on physical/print materials (ie. Print books, DVDs, and audio), even though print books and DVDs are still very popular. Provincial funding helps the Library to provide both digital and print materials to an appreciative public.

Public libraries want their facilities to be the ‘living room’ of the community. The public has embraced this concept with enthusiasm, but it also has presented challenges, especially to library branches located in downtown ‘inner city’ areas. Inner city areas are not specific to large cities. They also exist in small towns. The social issues and challenges that tend to be concentrated in inner city areas tend to migrate
into public library spaces located in those areas. Drug paraphernalia left in library bathrooms, surreptitious alcohol consumption in the library, patrons carrying concealed weapons (usually knives) into the library, constant damage to walls, doors, etc. in library bathrooms, cannabis/alcohol consumption in library outdoor areas, gang tagging and endless graffiti on outside walls are all real issues facing public library staff. An increase in these activities in recent years is becoming more and more challenging to deal with in our urban branches. Janitors, front-line public service staff, building maintenance staff and managers are all affected. The amount of library funding that needs to be redirected to building maintenance as a direct result of this trend is increasing every year. And the emotional toll on staff is also increasing. It sometimes seems that all the good things staff are trying to accomplish are overshadowed by this very challenging issue.

Progress on 2018 Business Plan Goals:

Another active fire season in the District, and unexpected staff replacement issues delayed some projects in 2018. The expansion of the Outcome Based Evaluation project was delayed and will continue into 2019. A major landscaping project at the site of the new Interlakes Branch was substantially completed, but only by extending work as far into the early winter as was practical. This was made possible by an unusually delayed onset of winter weather. The project included stabilizing the parking lot and planting trees and shrubs around the building site.

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<th>LIBRARY PRIORITY 1</th>
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<td>Fostering equitable access to information and services (Fostering Connected Communities)</td>
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The Cariboo Regional District Library uses the Provincial Annual Operating Grant to offer library services in rural areas of the region. The Library maintains a presence in 12 rural communities. Branches offer the same services available in the Region’s urban areas, including use of computers, free wifi, access to digital and print resources, and access to the same resource sharing opportunities offered to urban library users.

Comments by rural library users on a recent survey are ample evidence that the investment in keeping these branches open is definitely worthwhile. These small rural library branches are highly valued by rural residents. Some of those comments are:

“During the past four or five years I have found the Tatla Lake Library playing a crucial part of my life out in this remote rural community. The current CRD Library system makes me proud to be a taxpayer.”

“In our scattered and isolated community our very friendly little library is vital.”

“I think besides the traditional uses of libraries they serve communities as a safe, quiet, social, clean space to spend time alone or together with people. They provide materials that encourage growth and learning as well as entertainment. We need to support our library services in rural areas and in our towns. Libraries enrich our communities.”

“Wonderful new library at McLeese Lake”

“I like the library because it is part of the community. It brings people together.”

“We are tight knit out here. If [the librarian] doesn’t know something, chances are a customer does; and we help each other find information.”
“Please keep our libraries. Very important in rural communities.”

“Nice to have a local staff member who understands rural lifestyles, concerns, and preferences.”

“Wonderful atmosphere. I value this library.”

“Rural communities are very much linked to their library as a meeting place, a resource for study, internet use, etc. Ours (Horsefly) is a home away from home.”

“I really appreciate having a library in Horsefly. It’s always busy. Thank goodness for libraries!! Thank you!”

“I cannot access wifi where I live in the bush. I travel to the [Interlakes] Library (15 km away) to access my emails, connect with family, pay bills, etc.

“Big Lake Library is an essential part of our community.”

“Our family has a considerable and well-used personal library, but I use the Big Lake Library regularly. I value immensely the Cariboo Library system’s willingness to gather my reading choices from other branches, sometimes from far afield. I greatly enjoy the atmosphere of our small rural branch: in a scattered community, it’s nice to chance on acquaintances at the library, or have the librarian introduce a new one. Or one may coincide with the school’s visit, and see children sprawled on the rug or old armchair, immersed in books, not phones. This library is an efficient and welcoming place.”

“Big Lake Library is very important for our family because we don’t have internet or phone.”

| LIBRARY PRIORITY 2 |

*Developing skills and knowledge (Building capacity: professional development for staff, improving digital literacy skills of staff and users so they can participate in an increasingly digital world)*

One of the goals of the 2018 Cariboo Regional District Library Business Plan was “to improve library staff access to training in multiple formats”.

The Library used provincial funding to add an online training resource to its complement of digital resources in 2018. Gale Courses offers instructor-led online courses on a wide variety of topics; many of them relevant to the workplace. Staff were encouraged to make use of this resource. So far, nine staff have completed or are in the process of completing 17 difference courses of their own choosing. The Library partnered with member libraries of the North Central Library Federation to negotiate a lower subscription price for this resource than would have been possible if each library were negotiating on its own.

In addition, several staff took advantage of the cost savings negotiated by Libraries Branch and the North Central Library Federation to take online courses offered by Royal Roads University. Courses completed by CRDL staff in 2018 were “How to Improve your Writing: email, blogs, social media, and more” and “Introduction to Project Management”.
Professional and para-professional staff took advantage of available funding to travel to and attend the 2018 BC Library Association conference held in Richmond, BC. Staff attended sessions on a wide variety of topics and brought that learning back to the staff in their respective branches.

Outcome: The Cariboo Regional District Library is trying to develop a ‘culture of learning’ amongst its staff. Offering these learning opportunities to staff is an important step in realizing that goal. Staff who participate in lifelong learning and are eager to develop new skills and sharpen previously learned skills are more enthusiastic and transfer their enthusiasm to other staff, which encourages them to participate in new learning opportunities as well. The anticipated long-term outcome is a more knowledgeable staff offering higher level library service to library customers.

LIBRARY PRIORITY 3

Working together (with library partners to share best practices and realize cost-savings)

The Cariboo Regional District Library regularly partners with a long list of local community groups. In 2018, the Library partnered with 48 community groups located throughout the Cariboo Region. Some of these local groups use library-owned facilities to offer public programming either alone or in direct partnership with library staff, some groups invite library staff to participate in their events held at other locations, some groups invite the Library to have a presence in their group and attend regular meetings because they share a common cause with the Library (eg. Children), local businesses contribute prizes and food to Summer Reading Club events, and some community groups in rural areas rent space in their facilities so a library branch can exist in their community.

Outcome: By working with local community groups and contributing to their work the Library becomes a visible and valued presence in the community.

The Library regularly partners with other libraries on both a regional and provincial level. The Cariboo Regional District Library is an active member of the North Central Library Federation, the Association of BC Public Library Directors (ABCPLD) and the BC Libraries Cooperative.

Results from successful Library partnerships in 2018 included:

- Savings of $2700 through a partnership with the North Central Library Federation (NCLF) to have the Shooting Stars Theatre Workshop visit three Cariboo libraries as part of a tour of public libraries in Northern BC.
- Savings of $1600 through a membership with the NCLF to have two Cariboo libraries included in the McMillan Space Centre tour of Northern BC.
- A $3000 in-kind donation of books and CDs for the Books for Babies project from the NCLF.
- A $1000 grant from the NCLF to offset travel expenses for library staff to attend a library conference in 2018.
- Significant price reductions in the cost of library cards and processing supplies negotiated on behalf of libraries by the NCLF and the BC Libraries Cooperative.
- Significant price reductions in the cost of digital resources (e-books, etc.) negotiated on behalf of libraries by the BC Libraries Cooperative.
- Reimbursements from the NCLF to offset the cost to travel to their Spring and Fall meetings.
- Price reductions in the cost of online courses offered to library staff by Royal Roads University negotiated by Libraries Branch and the NCLF

Outcomes: Although the individual amounts appear small, every dollar is valuable because it extends the local library budget so funds can be spent on other initiatives. Sponsored programs offer valuable experiences to children they might not otherwise have the chance to experience. Partnerships with other libraries and library agencies strengthen the bonds between the staff involved in the partnership – which often leads to other partnership opportunities, which leads to stronger bonds, and so on. Regardless of the type of partnership and whether it benefits staff development or directly benefits the public, the final result is better and more equitable service to library customers at a local level.

LIBRARY PRIORITY 4

Enhancing governance (Sustaining our success: development of a strategic plan, evidence-based decision making and ongoing accountability.)

Staff are in the process of developing a strategic plan for the Cariboo Regional District Library.

In the fall and early winter of 2018, staff concentrated on gathering the information that will help them set meaningful goals that will form the base of the strategic plan. They studied library and societal trends (both generalized and local). They held presentations for library staff from across the Region to explain the process and gathered information from staff through a staff survey. They studied the Strategic Plans of local governments and other library partners to ensure that the goals of those organizations would be reflected in the plan they will eventually write for the library system. And finally, they consulted the public across the Region through a series of surveys delivered in four different ways – digital, paper, face to face discussions, and Question of the Week white boards.

Staff are currently analysing the results of this information gathering process to ensure that the goals they set for the library system are evidence-based and relevant to the communities they serve.

Because of the size of the region, it is costly both in direct travel costs and time to reach people across the entire region for this kind of endeavour. The Library used funds from the Provincial Equity Grant to help defray the costs of this project.

SUMMARY

The CRDL uses provincial funding in a myriad of ways: to ensure that rural residents have access to the same high quality of library services as their urban counterparts, to work with other libraries and agencies to take advantage of efficiencies of funding to provide as many high-quality services as are
available and to provide its staff with the professional development opportunities that are necessary to ensure that they are informed about and able to offer high quality library services.

Provincial library funding continues to play an important role in the variety of library services CRDL staff offer to residents of and visitors to the Cariboo Region.

Respectfully submitted,

Wanda Davis, Manager of Library Services

Cariboo Regional District Library