The Fort St. John Public Library Association is a mid-sized library serving a community of approximately 34,000. The city of Fort St John is a unique place where we celebrate the abundant natural wildlife, aurora borealis, and friendly community members. Fort St John attracts young families and has one of the highest birthrates per capita in Canada. The community continues to prepare for an influx in population due to BC Hydro's Site C project.

FSJPLA is a public library association, as identified in Part 4 of the Library Act, and relies on grants, fundraising, and donations. FSJPLA faces the continual challenge of being the third lowest local-government funded library, per capita, of all 71 public library systems in the province of BC. Other challenges include its location in a rented facility which is approximately one third the projected size recommended by a 2008 needs assessment. Due to budget constraints, FSJPLA operates with half the number of full time employees of public libraries with comparable service area populations in the province.

The Fort St John Public Library Association’s most recent Strategic Plan is ready to roll out for 2019-2021.

Over the past seven years, FSJPLA’s focus has been on increasing its profile and usage, and despite the challenges listed above, efforts to do so have resulted in marked increases in through-the-door traffic, active card holders, and program attendance. In addition, FSJPLA remains focused on developing and delivering programming that meets the diverse needs of its community, and supporting staff in maintaining the skills and capacity to deliver great services and programming.
PRIORITIES IN 2018

FOSTERING CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

One of FSJPLA’s ongoing goals for 2018 was to continue to reduce barriers and increase programs to underserved demographics, as outlined in the 2019-2021 Strategic Plan. We were successful in meeting this goal, and the work in this area is ongoing.

Priority Aligned Programming | Bridge Membership
FSJPLA continued its Bridge Membership program in 2018, which eliminates the barrier of required identification or address to obtain library membership. This program was originally developed to serve those in our community who are transient, staying in local shelters, or homeless.

Program Partnerships
FSJPLA has maintained a partnership with the local Salvation Army Centre for Hope in support of our Bridge Membership Program. The Centre continues to assist us in identifying the ongoing needs of our homeless and transient populations.

Outputs and Outcomes
Ninety-seven new Bridge Memberships were created in 2018, reflecting a 67% increase from the prior year, and 197% increase from its inception year of 2015.

While the purpose of the Bridge Membership was originally designed for homeless individuals, FSJPLA continues to see a wider audience scope than was anticipated at the start: the new family who just moved into town but cannot yet provide documentation to verify their address; the student who is temporarily staying with a friend with no membership to any other BC library; the patron enrolled in the Salvation Army’s addiction recovery program and is staying at the local shelter. They all qualify for a Bridge Membership.

This program has positively impacted patrons as well as staff; no one gets turned away. We found that participants of this program share their experience with others which results in people coming in to inquire about it, which leads to them signing up and then using the library. When we explain this option to people who otherwise would not qualify for a regular membership, we are met with relief and smiles and the patron is usually grateful for the good news in their day.

I came in prepared that you wouldn’t let me get a library card today. It’s nice to have something go right for a change.

Bridge Member
FOSTERING CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Priority Aligned Programming | QSA@FSJPL

Launched in 2016, the QSA@FSJPL program continued through 2018. This program was developed specifically for LGBTQ+ teens and their supporters after our research found this demographic to be vastly underserved in our community. QSA@FSJPL is an activities-based program, allowing youths of the LGBTQ+ community to gather in a safe space with others who may share similar life experiences.

Program Partnerships

Partnering with the newly incorporated North Peace Pride Society has allowed FSJPL to raise awareness of the program throughout the LGBTQ+ community and those who work to support it.

Outputs and Outcomes

FSJPL’s aim in creating the QSA program is to ensure the LGBTQ+ youths within our community are aware that there is a safe space for them to gather. As the program continued through 2018, youths who attended spread knowledge of the program to their friends and LGBTQ+ peers. We are seeing evidence that this word-of-mouth method is proving successful in spreading awareness to youths who can benefit from this library program. Many youths indicated they heard about the QSA program from a friend and attended because someone they knew had spoken of their experience. We hope to see this impact continue in 2019 and reach further into the community. QSA@FSJPL saw 52 attendees in 2018 an increase of 3% from 2017. Once again, most of the attendees participated in Fort St John’s Third Annual Pride Walk, where FSJPL’s outreach team was on site to hand out information on the program as well as showcase our LGBTQ+ collection.

There’s nowhere else I can go right now to feel like myself. So, I came here. Thank you.

QSA@FSJPL Attendee
BUILDING CAPACITY

Priority Aligned Programming | Creative Kids Suite
Developed in 2016, our Creative Kids: Thursdays at the Library is a bundle of STEAM related programs which provide children and families the opportunity to engage in fun, creative and educational play. Included in the suite are the Afterschool Lego Club, Everyone is Awesome (open Lego play for young adults with exceptionalities), Weird Science, Comic Creating Club. FSJPL offers many more STEAM based programs, but this particular suite was conceived through a partnership with a local community organization.

The Afterschool Lego Club and Weird Science programs offer robotics challenges designed to stimulate programming, coding and circuitry skills as well as targeted projects to encourage problem-solving and three-dimensional thinking. Everyone is Awesome provides young adults with disabilities or exceptionalities an opportunity to strengthen their motor and problem-solving skills; Comic Creating Club allows for young artists to learn the principles of art and comic design; Totally Untidy Tots provides pre-school aged children with the opportunity to explore creating with various media.

Program Partnerships
This suite is supported through FSJPL’s partnership with the United Way of Northern BC and was designed to provide more after-school programming within the community, in addition to offering day programs to pre-school children or those enrolled in alternative schooling programs.

Outputs and Outcomes
In creating this program suite, our aim is to develop opportunities that encourage children of all ages to explore their creativity through targeted activities focused on science, technology, engineering, art and math. 988 children, young adults, and adult caregivers participated in the programs within the Creative Kids suite in 2018—a 9% increase in participation from the previous year.

FSJPL has received many requests from parents, caregivers and children for even more science programs. With every program, we hear children remarking at discovering something new, or aspiring to make something that doesn’t yet exist today. Programs like these continue to impact our community by providing an additional forum for children to learn STEAM skills for real-world application and to stimulate entrepreneurial passions.

“I’m going to use this to invent something the world has never seen!”

Weird Science Attendee
Priority Aligned Partnerships | School District 60 & SWIS

In 2018, FSJPLA partnered with School District 60 and its Settlement Workers in Schools division to offer the Library and Beyond program (LAB) for the eighth consecutive year. The LAB program consists of two seasonal day-camp experiences which provide meaningful opportunities for immigrant students to engage in a variety of extracurricular, recreational, educational and cultural activities within our community, alongside Canadian children. During Spring Break, 3 sessions of LAB program is offered, while eight sessions are offered during July and August.

Over the years, FSJPLA has been able to develop and sustain partnerships with other local organizations and businesses in support of the LAB program; the Northern Environmental Action Team (NEAT), Urban Systems, North Peace Savings & Credit Union are just a few.

Outputs and Outcomes

One of the main goals of this program and partnership is to ensure newcomer children and their families have the opportunity to be introduced to our local culture and all that our city has to offer. As a benefit, pairing non-English speaking children with those fluent in English assists with the settlement process. Since its inception in 2012, this popular program has generated an increase in newcomer families’ awareness and use of our library. Many of the families of the participating children have gone on to become active participants in FSJPLA’s other programs and events. Arising from this partnership, FSJPLA has gained several young adult volunteers who were part of the SWIS program as children themselves – one of whom was hired as part of our LAB/Summer Reading Club team. In this capacity, this student provided greater communication between library staff and participating children whose first language is Filipino.
Priority Aligned Partnerships | CLICK

What is CLICK? It stands for Computer Literacy in Computer Knowledge

In partnership with the Northern Development Institute, the library was able to hire an energetic and qualified computer instructor who provided basic computer use instruction to hundreds of vulnerable patrons. Our instructor provided personalized lesson plans for each of our patrons’ varying needs. The FSJPLA’s CLICK instructor was able to assist unemployed individuals learn how to access job boards, apply for jobs using online applications processes and create resumes. Vulnerable individuals were also instructed in basic orientations with computer terminology (mouse, click, double click) and other participants used the training to set up their first email and social media accounts in order to keep in touch with friends and family.

Outputs and Outcomes

One of the main outcomes of this program was to provide computer access to vulnerable patrons. These patrons were able to access computer instruction/printers/internet hosting at no cost to them and no prior training or assessment of skills. Patrons from the City of Fort St. John, the District of Taylor and the outlying areas of the Peace River Regional District all participated in this program. This partnership served seniors, people with literacy barriers, low income individuals and local First Nations members. It served patrons seeking assistance with their legal and government related forms and seeking assistance in learning how to take online ticketing and exams. Patrons were also able to input their employee information using their employers’ online system. Our CLICK program was very popular in the FSJPLA and we always received more requests than we could fill. There is currently no other organization in our community who offers one-one-one instruction in this capacity (and for free!).
SUSTAINING OUR SUCCESS

Priority Aligned Initiatives | Stakeholder Involvement
In late 2018, the FSJPL Association Board of Trustees rolled out their new Strategic Plan. This plan aligns the needs of our community as guided by a stakeholder survey which was launched in 2017 and appeared as an optional popup on the library’s website, FSJPL.ca, and throughout social media. In addition, the survey was available in paper form for both users and nonusers and was also distributed directly to community partners and funders. The Board analyzed the data and created a 3 year plan.

Outputs and Outcomes
The 3 year plan is already guiding best practices for the FSJPLA Team. It is reflective of the strategies developed by both our municipality and provincial Libraries Branch. The Board anticipates reviewing this plan bi-monthly to ensure that the Outcomes, Responsibilities and Deadlines are serving the community in the best possible way.

CONCLUSION
The inspiration, support and funding FSJPLA receives from the Ministry of Education’s Libraries Branch provides us the means to continue serving the needs of our community. By supporting FSJPLA in our endeavours to offer innovative programs and services including resource sharing across BC, it has also provided us the opportunity to continually impact the daily lives of those we serve.