PROVINCIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY GRANTS REPORT (PLGR) 2018
MACKENZIE PUBLIC LIBRARY

INTRODUCTION

Mackenzie Public Library is located in the heart of Mackenzie, in the newly renovated Recreation Centre. The Recreation Centre houses many services including an ice rink, fitness centre, play gym, pool, community hall, and a year round concession. The library is a stop for many people as they visit the Recreation Centre to enjoy all it has to offer.

MPL attracts many demographics on a regular basis, making it a distinct hub for the community. Parents with young children enjoy the six programs for children under nine that we have on a weekly basis. Tweens and teens rush into the library after school to play computer games on our laptops or board games from our extensive collection. Young adults come to the library to access print, scan, and photocopy services. Older adults are loyal patrons, borrowing books of all kinds, but DVDs are what they truly love. Many patrons check-out over twenty DVDs at once! And they never fail to bring them back. Mackenzie does not have a movie theatre or video rental store, and with only slow Internet connection speeds available for streaming, the library’s extensive collection of over 2700 DVDs fills a palpable need. Further, in the summers Mackenzie sees an influx of transient populations including tree planters and contract workers. The library is important to these groups for Internet and printing access, as well as for materials to bring to camp. The Mackenzie Public Library something for everyone, which is what makes it such a successful community hub.

Mackenzie, British Columbia is home to 3,714 people according to 2016 Census data. 71% of those people are of an age eligible to work. Mackenzie is filled with hardworking people, many with children. The main industries here are forestry and pulp. In addition, gold/copper and coal mines are located an hour away from town and employ a few hundred people. The resources are carted to town and exported from the industrial site. Mackenzie as a township faces a few challenges, including the decline in housing prices. While this is a good thing for potential homebuyers, many homeowners close to retirement feel as if they are stuck here, as they cannot cash out from the price of their home. The low prices however, are attractive to young families. An ongoing issue for the community is connectivity to the outside world, both physically and electronically. It is very difficult for residents who don’t have access to a car to leave the town. There is the BC BusNorth service, however, it is not very effective. If one wanted to travel to Prince George, their best option is to leave on a Thursday and return the following Monday. Being away from town for 4 days just to run errands is not feasible for most people, especially when costs for accommodations need to be considered. Further, this schedule is not at all accommodating to those who need to work weekends. A same day return trip could be very useful to Mackenzie residents. In terms of Internet connectivity, there are no fiber optics running to Mackenzie so internet speeds are very slow. Additionally, the networks get bogged down by many people using them at once.
The library struggles with Internet connectivity as well. Often our Internet is incredibly slow, forcing patrons to wait while we check-out books and access their accounts. The slow speeds are very noticeable when many people are using the Internet. Sometimes, Evergreen does not even function properly because of the slow speed. Additionally, staff and public computers are rather antiquated. Fortunately, fundraising money from 2019 is expected to go towards new machines. Finally, another big challenge for us has been that our door counter has been broken for around six months. This device counts how many people come through our doors. Since it stopped functioning, we have been using a hand counter. Of course, during times when staff are busy, it is difficult to notice people coming in. Inaccuracies in our statistics have surely occurred. However, the new door counter is expected to be installed in the summer of 2019.

The library also faces challenges in receiving ongoing support from the District of Mackenzie and the Recreation Centre. Since the library is inside the Recreation Centre, we rely on their staff for maintenance and work orders. However, there is little formality and accountability in place to ensure requests are fulfilled in a timely manner. As a result, things we need doing like paint jobs, wall mounts, and other small jobs fall by the wayside. In terms of funding from the District itself for our operating grant, they have supported us with 4-6% increases over the last three years. However, with a new collective agreement being negotiated in 2019, the library requested a substantial increase to allow for wage parity between library staff and the rest of District staff. However, this request was not approved in full. The library is struggling to retain talented employees, and experiences high turnover because of the low wages. Those who do choose to stay are dissatisfied with the wages but still love their jobs. Town Council has talked about instituting user agreements starting in 2020, which would be three year funding agreement contracts to allow the library to better plan spending knowing what funding is coming in advance.

The library met many of its goals in 2018. For example, new signage was installed to highlight our different sections of the collection and the space. The adult area was upgraded with new furniture. We were able to implement Square payments so we now take debit and credit, reducing the number of people we have to turn away if they have an excess of fines. We also worked with local schools to host library card drives, to realize our “Every Child a Card” initiative.

The only significant change from 2017 is that our Library Director, Anna Babluck, is on maternity leave as of November 2018 and Camille Ginnever is replacing her for the duration of 12-16 months beginning in January 2019.

**LIBRARY PRIORITY 1**

Fostering equitable access to information and services

In the library’s strategic plan, we have a goal to commit ourselves to improving accessibility to our services. This is why we have increased the number of online resources available over the last couple of years. To recap, we have Overdrive, RBdigital, Zinio, IndieFlix, Gale Courses, and Pronunciator. The library also identified in the strategic plan that lack of awareness of resources was a barrier to equitable access. That is why, in 2018, the library tried out a tri-annual newsletter! We also implemented the “Every Child a Care” initiative to encourage children to become lifelong library patrons. Having access to
online resources is important for equitable access because our service area includes the McLeod Lake Indian Band, located about 45 minutes outside of Mackenzie. It can be difficult for people living in this area to come to the physical library to access resources. The more online resources they have available, the more people who cannot come to the library can enjoy our services.

**LIBRARY PRIORITY 2**

*Developing skills and knowledge*

At MPL, we believe in developing skills and knowledge from a young age. Our Assistant Librarian is very dedicated to children’s programs, from baby-time to storytimes for older kids. She also participates in community programs for children under five, representing the library and contributing to children’s lives.

The inclusion of our two online course modules, Gale and Pronunciator also contribute to developing skills and knowledge for adults. Gale offers courses and certificates on countless subjects, from improving skillsets in areas such as accounting and finance to writing and publishing. Pronunciator is an interactive tool for learning new languages that has been very helpful for our patrons who have gone travelling.

**LIBRARY PRIORITY 3**

*Working together*

In 2018, we hosted our second annual incredibly successful fundraiser called A Novel Evening. The main event for the night is a book slam, where eight community members review six of their favourite books in three lightning rounds. The library liaises with these community members to ensure the library has these books on hand, either in our collection or through inter-library loan. This event is where the community really comes together to support the library. Donation letters are distributed to all the local businesses, and they are encouraged to donate items for our silent auction at the event. We received a swell of support from local businesses, as well as cash donations to go directly to our cause, which was new furniture and signage for our space. Further, Mackenzie citizens were very excited to attend our event, and we sold out! They supported us by buying drinks and participating in the silent auction. We really feel how much the people love the library from this event.

We also hosted our fourth annual Touch a Truck event. The community also comes together to support the library for this event, donating trucks to display and operators to show the kids how they work. This is a great opportunity for attendees to experience the different machines that contribute to the industry in Mackenzie.

**LIBRARY PRIORITY 4**

*Enhancing governance*

In 2018, the Mackenzie Public Library’s Board underwent another self-evaluation. The Board evaluated its knowledge in the areas of Operations, Advocacy, Strategic Planning, Decision Making, Policy Making,
Finance, Fundraising, and Professional Development. They did this through a survey, with a handful of questions in each category to which each Board member responded with their competence on the issue. Results showed that Board members were more informed in 2018 than they were in 2017. The Board also set some goals for 2018 including separating the BCLTA and NCLF representative positions, requiring a “Provincial & National” issues section in the monthly Librarian’s Report, aiming to meet with our MLA once per year, as well as developing a Capital Plan that is aligned to strategic goals.

**SUMMARY**

At MPL we have found that we have key successful events and programs that are essential to continue offering. These include weekly storytimes, and the annual Novel Evening and Touch a Truck events. They are incredibly popular and the community has come to rely on them for their and their kids’ enjoyment.

The Mackenzie Public Library has a few opportunities to look forward to. The new Library Director in 2019 is a chance to refresh the library with new ideas. Camille is planning on starting a conversational French club for adults in 2019. Additionally, in future years, the library wants to expand to bigger venues for fundraisers. This expansion will allow more guests to come to our fundraisers, helping us to raise even more money library assets that our patrons use.

Challenges that the library face include receiving monetary and in-kind support from the District of Mackenzie and the Recreation Centre that the library is housed in. The library is hopeful that collective agreement negotiations in 2019 will push the District to increase funding for 2020 and beyond to allow for wage parity.

Mackenzie Public Library is a small library with big dreams! We are always thankful for the funding provided by the provincial government to support our programs and initiatives.