

INTRODUCTION

The McBride & District Public Library serves 1650 people in the Robson Valley, a region nestled between the Rocky and Cariboo mountain ranges in North-Central British Columbia. Most residents are involved in forestry, farming, public service, and the service industry. Outdoor recreation opportunities are abundant and developing, and our arts community is vibrant.

We continue to face a number of challenges common for rural areas, including:

- a small population and the resulting impact on business, school class size, and volunteer services;
- distance from essential services coupled with a lack of public transportation;
- lack of seniors' long-term care and affordable housing;
- challenges for rural education based on the current funding model;
- a decline in the tourist industry last summer due to smoke from the forest fires;
- lack of tourism infrastructure and services; and
- lack of reliable, affordable internet access.

Despite our challenges, new residents continue to settle in the Valley because of its affordable housing and the rural lifestyle.

In 2018, a number of positive initiatives took place, including:

- Our library's move to its new location at the Robson Valley Exploration and Learning Centre on Main Street.
- McBride was named the Gateway to the Ancient Forest, and our community helped celebrate its grand opening in September. Our partners in Dome Creek, where the Lena Schultz Reading Room is located, provided food for the 800+ visitors that came out for the special day. We are well situated between two spectacular Provincial parks; Chun T'oh Whudujut and Mount Robson. Development of our Mountain Bike trail system continues to grow and to draw attention to our outdoor opportunities.
- The newly named Robson Valley Community Services opened a preschool, offering services for young families twice a week.
- The local high school launched an innovative approach to its service delivery in response to changes to the BC curriculum and dwindling enrollment numbers.

- Our Village, together with community partners, developed key planning tools that will shape our community's future, including McBride's Economic Development Action Plan.
- BC Bus North stepped in when Greyhound stopped its services to offer once/week transportation to Prince George.

Our library's strategic plan expired in the summer of 2017, but its three main goals continued to shape our direction in 2018.

1. **Secure and occupy new premises for an expanded Library/Museum facility.** 2018 was a full year of growth, but the highlight was undoubtedly our move to Main Street and the fruition of a long, hard-sought dream. After 20 years of research and debate, planning and patience, and thousands of hours from hundreds of board, staff, and volunteers, we're thrilled to be settling into our new home. The Robson Valley Exploration and Learning Centre, home to the library and the Valley Museum & Archives Society, expanded our joint 2,200 sq ft facility to 7,000 sq ft at the entrance to town.

The move itself was not a simple process, but the saying "many hands make light work" rang true. Volunteers cleaned our Annex building when it sold in spring, built bookshelves for our children's section, took home ten (often heavy) books to make moving day easier, and filled their backpacks, bikes, and wheelbarrows for our children's book parade. On May moving day an incredible 90 volunteers hauled 16,000 books and their shelves and had them in order within three hours. Indeed, our move to Main Street reinforced that 521 Main is a community building, building community. The ways that residents pitched in continues to be a source of pride. We celebrated our extraordinary volunteers, and the long, challenging process of securing new space, with a community appreciation BBQ in July that brought 300 in pouring rain and wild winds to celebrate together.

Since our move, our circulation numbers have increased by 20-30% and our computer and internet usage have doubled.



A parade of bikes, wagons, wheelbarrows and backbacks moved picture books to our new library!



The view of our lounge space



The children's corner

We are grateful to Libraries Branch and the Ministry of Education for your support throughout the process. We also acknowledge the significant effort of the Board and staff of the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George, the Village of McBride, the Valley Museum & Archives Society, as well as local artists through the Robson Valley Arts and Culture Council and Whistle Stop Gallery in developing our new space.

2. **Continue to grow the Library as a “People Place” or a community hub.** Our work here continues. This goal speaks to the Province’s priorities of fostering equitable access to information and services, building capacity by developing skills and knowledge, and working together.

Within the first few weeks of our opening day, we’d hosted our community’s Two Year Old Developmental Fair, Hands-Only CPR training, and every class at the Elementary School and Robson Valley Junior Academy. The latter took advantage of our spacious entryway to race their homemade robotic cars. Already our multipurpose room has been used for tutoring, parenting programs, employment workshops, free legal advice, quiet study space, a birthday party, Dungeons and Dragons, and community meetings.

If our library is a community hub, it is because our residents are engaged, generous in sharing their skills, and keen to connect and collaborate. We look forward to what the future will bring.

3. **To support the Library’s effective management through evaluation, professional development and succession planning, and the continual review of our policies and procedures.** This goal reflects the Province’s priority of enhancing governance and demonstrating impact, as described below.

LIBRARY PRIORITY 1

Fostering equitable access to information and services

Our goals of securing new space and continuing to grow the library as a “people place” both reflect this priority. In 2018 our focus on infrastructure worked to improve access to library services in several ways, including:

- Celebrating our move with an amnesty on all accounts, welcoming back some patrons and interesting others. In 2018 we registered 97 new patrons, nearly double the 55 that we registered in 2017. Our goal was to highlight that this new building belongs to all residents, and to break down perceived barriers to coming through our doors.
- By providing a fully accessible building we’ve seen community members access the library who didn’t previously. Whereas in our old space stairs and distance to washroom facilities meant that some residents could not attend programs and one very skilled volunteer was no longer able to work with us. Our first weeks of Tuesday Night Music Jam had three people with wheelchairs roll through our doors to sing along, who previously hadn’t come. Parents with strollers come

regularly to meet up in our children's corner. Circulation of children's material has increased now that all materials are at an accessible height, and more easily discovered by its intended audience.

- Our proximity to Main Street also means more frequent access from our seniors living at the nearby BC Housing facility, and tourists coming off the highway on their way through town.
- 654 residents, or 38% of our population served, are active library cardholders. This number does not fully reflect our library's usage, however, as still others borrow on a family card, attend our programs, use our internet, or relax in our space. Not requiring a card to use the computers or join a program has meant that some of our more vulnerable community members may use our facilities for those purposes.

LIBRARY PRIORITY 2

Developing skills and knowledge

Our goals of securing new space and continuing to grow the library as a "people place" also both reflect this priority. With more room we have more opportunities to learn simultaneously, and room to experiment with new tools (like a green screen or a piano). At the same time we can now sing songs at Mother Goose, study quietly in a corner, host the monthly bee-keepers' meeting, or be connecting online in the lab.

Through a partnership with the University of Northern British Columbia's Environmental Sciences Department and Professor Peter Jackson, our library is hosting a weather station that records temperature, wind, and humidity (<http://weather.unbc.ca/weather/cmos-mcbride/>). Residents are happy to have access to accurate local data, but the station is also one of eight across the north which can be used to monitor and record trends in weather over time. Given its success, we're working with community partners to install an air quality monitor at the library as well and look forward to organizing a speaker series around the information gathered.

We're working to increase the types of local data available, and also to build learning around them, while enjoying our neighbours. In our small branch in Dome Creek – a community of 50 - the Lena Schultz Reading Room enjoyed borscht together, held painting classes, and tried their hand at virtual reality in a workshop run by a local youth. Eleven residents (22% of their population) learned about this exciting technology, enjoyed some laughs together, and supported a youth in his presentation.

In McBride, this fall an enthusiastic and talented volunteer began organizing weekly ukulele jams, at which students aged 9 – 95 take part. Over eleven weeks we had 115 participants. Several members have since purchased their own ukulele, and our library will add three to its collection this month with monies fundraised together with the high school from a community slideshow presentation.

There are endless skills to learn, and a deep pool of experts to draw from in our community.



Friday afternoon ukulele jam in our lounge.

LIBRARY PRIORITY 3

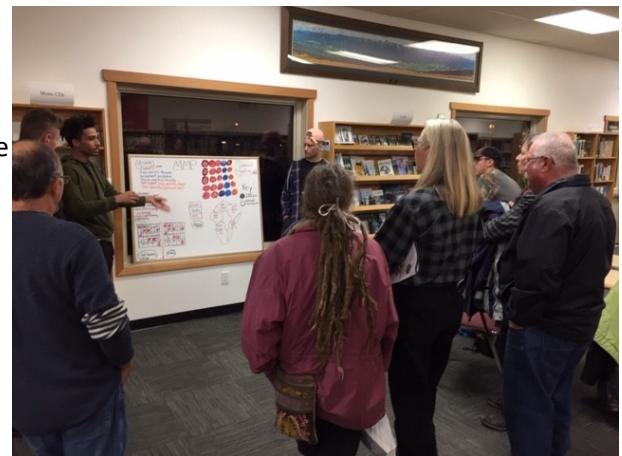
Working together

Our goals of securing new space and continuing to grow the library as a “people place” again both reflect this priority. In 2018, we worked with our partners to offer 299 programs or events, with 3325 people taking part. We are honoured to work with many enthusiastic volunteers and dedicated community partners in diverse ways. Through our relationship with the Robson Valley Community Services, for example, in 2018 we served soup at Beaverview, met first responders on Pro D Days, sang songs at Mother Goose, brought books to their first Men’s Fair, snowshoed through the park for Sno-Fest, and offered tech tutoring for seniors in the fall.

Indeed, everything that we do in our small community, we do with others. Without sharing resources, expertise, and volunteer labour, we are too small to make things work. Working together ensures that our programs and services make sense for our community, and it expands our connections as we reach a broader audience. I am grateful for the invaluable collaboration that happens at the Federation level as well, in terms of important shared services, professional development, and cost-savings opportunities.

One example of a successful partnership took place in November. The library hosts our Community Literacy Outreach contract, and we were keen to offer an information session about BC’s fall referendum. Outreach Coordinator Nancy Taylor reached out to several experts in the neighbouring larger centres without success. At the same time, the grade

11 and 12 math classes were researching the various voting systems using a math perspective. Community Literacy, the library, and our high school worked together to organize a community presentation “Are You Referendum Ready?”. More than 50 community members came out to learn from our students, and gathered afterward for questions. Many spoke highly of the students’ success in breaking down complex systems in accessible terms and reported an increased understanding on what we were voting on. They were also thrilled to hear from our students. The students themselves gained valuable experience presenting to the public, and a deeper understanding of their learning. Community Literacy is looking to build further opportunities for youth and adults to get together to learn from each other.



Grade 12 math students explain Mixed Member Proportional voting to the public

LIBRARY PRIORITY 4

Enhancing governance

In the fall of 2018 our board began the strategic planning process, reviewing the information gathered during previous years of community consultation, seeking new input, and considering it from the

vantage of our new space, with its new challenges and new opportunities. As of March we are working to refine our draft, outlined with support from local consultants Rashmi Narayan and Nancy Taylor. After five years of concerted effort to secure new space for our library and museum, we look forward to a period of digging in to establish strong roots of governance, evaluation, and communication so that we can better sustain our growth for the future.

Our former Mayor, Loranne Martin, presented “From Controversy to Construction” - the story of our library and museum project - at the Union of BC Municipalities gathering in 2018. Certainly we have grown as an organization and as a community throughout this process, and we will apply lessons learned as we move forward, enhancing governance at an organizational level and beyond.

SUMMARY

We are thrilled to be settling into our new library, working with our partners to meet the evolving needs of our community, and learning as we go. Our staff and board are stretching to meet new challenges. During our Typical Week survey this October we saw a 72% increase of in-library use of materials, adult reference transactions increased by 26%, and in-person visits had increased by 83% over 2017. We look forward to facing these challenges together with a team of staff and trustees who are caring, committed and passionate about both our library and our community, and who are supported by a strong network of regional and provincial partners that make a big impact in our small library.

Thank you to Libraries Branch and the Ministry of Education for your support of our community. Our annual grants are an integral part of providing both traditional and evolving library services, and our work – guided by your strategic direction – would not be possible without your support.