

INTRODUCTION

The Smithers Public Library is located on the unceded traditional territory of the Gidimt'en Bear Wolf Clan, home of the Witsuwit'en First Nation. The town of Smithers (population 5,400) lies approximately halfway between Prince George and Prince Rupert in northern British Columbia's Bulkley Valley. Smithers acts as a hub to a large surrounding rural population, bringing the library's service area to up 13,200 and supporting an exceptional array of services, leisure opportunities and entertainment for a town of its size. The Witsuwit'en community of Witsset lies 30 minutes to the north of Smithers, with many residents commuting to Smithers for services and schooling. A substantial percentage of the library's service area population is Indigenous, including people from the Gitksan and Lake Babine Nations, with Dutch and Swiss heritage also widely represented among our patrons.

Mining, forestry, and tourism are the main economic drivers for the region. Fly-fishers from around the world travel to Smithers in the fall to catch steelhead and the Hudson Bay Mountain ski hill, a 20-minute drive from downtown Smithers, is popular with recreation enthusiasts throughout northwest British Columbia. Two music festivals are held each summer, and 1,000-2,000 ranch and farm families from the surrounding rural area annually converge to take part in the fall fair and rodeo.

The library has completed the first year of our current strategic plan (2018-2021). The plan identifies five goals:

- Continuing to advocate and lay the ground work for a new library
- Increasing the diversity of our board, staff and patrons
- Optimizing staff capacities
- Increasing service delivery to underserved groups
- Increasing efficiencies with technology

The plan includes 13 actions to move us towards our goals. At the time of writing, we have made significant progress on 8 of our action items.

Our undersized, aging library continues to hamper service through a lack of dedicated spaces to accommodate the varied and occasionally conflicting needs of our patrons. The Town of Smithers is in favour of constructing a new building to house both the library and art gallery within a revitalized park at the library's current location. A fundraising campaign for the project was begun in late 2018 and will continue in 2019.

Selected activities from 2018 are detailed below:

LIBRARIES BRANCH PRIORITY 1

- **2019 Fostering Connected Communities: advancing access to information and resources.**

PROVINCIAL PRIORITY: Building a strong, sustainable economy that works for everyone

Each year the Smithers Public Library partners with Smithers Community Services Association (SCSA) in a Literacy Tent at the Bulkley Valley Farmers' Market, where we provide a Storytime performance, literacy-based craft, and information about our free programs. Many families first discover the provincial Summer Reading Club through the Market, going on to receive library cards and become regular borrowers. The organizers have requested more visits from the library, commenting that the library's presence adds value to the Market.

In the summertime our staff visit local playgrounds to read stories to children and distribute free books collected in partnership with SCSA's community literacy program. By moving beyond the library's walls, we connect with families who are not yet library users and raise awareness of the range of free services available to them. Children who visit the library as a result of these encounters are delighted to recognise library staff from the playground and are put at ease by their familiar faces.

LIBRARIES BRANCH PRIORITY 2

2019 Building Capacity: enabling inspiration and innovation/developing skills and knowledge

The library provides personalized, one-on-one computer tutoring for community members of all ages. This popular service teaches people to use the library's eCollections, public technology such as 3-D printing and design software, and their own devices. The service is largely utilized by seniors who need assistance getting started with computers or a new device; with email, Facebook or Skype to stay in contact with distant relatives; or to download books in accessible formats such as eBooks with adjustable font size or eAudio.

While the library's computer tutoring service is always helpful and enriches the lives of our patrons, it can be crucial for people who have no-one else to help them with urgent matters, such as in this 2018 anecdote from our computer tutor:

"The other day I assisted an older patron with submitting her application for continued residency in Canada. Recently the government has required that all payments for permanent residency renewal be paid online. Unfortunately for this patron, as she didn't have an email account or know how to access the website, much less register for the online payment. Over the course of half an hour, I helped her sign up for an email account, register with the government website, pay her bill and print off the receipt. At the end the patron was enormously grateful, as paying this bill was a necessity for her being able to continue to stay in Canada."

LIBRARIES BRANCH PRIORITY 3

Working Together: creating lasting and sustainable partnerships

The library partnered in the fledgling **Smithers Pride Committee**, a grassroots group of organizations and individuals formed in 2018 to create a community Pride celebration. Within the library and offsite we participated by displaying LGBTQA+2S materials, collection lists and “Libraries Are for Everyone” bookmarks. Over 160 people attended the one-hour community celebration, far exceeding the organizers’ expectations. More organizations and individuals have asked to join the planning committee for the 2019 event.



The library also held its first **Pride Storytime**, advertised at the community Pride event. Attendance was comparable to regularly scheduled storytimes and participating children and parents commented positively on the program. The Smithers Pride Committee hopes to repeat both events next year and partner in coordinating additional educational, informational, social and entertainment opportunities in our community for LGBTQA+2S people and allies of all ages.

LIBRARIES BRANCH PRIORITY 4

- **Sustaining Our Success: enhancing governance and demonstrating impact**

PROVINCIAL PRIORITY: A commitment to true, lasting reconciliation with First Nations in British Columbia through the adoption and implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The Smithers Public Library Board won the 2018 British Columbia Library Trustee Association (BCLTA) Super Trustees Award. The Super Trustee award recognizes trustees who have made a major contribution to their own libraries. The Smithers Board was recognized for their collective impact on reconciliation through library governance.

Through strategic governance decisions, the Smithers Public Library Board empowers the library to advance reconciliation in their community. Over the past two years they have developed an employment equity policy; created a Summer Reading Club position for Indigenous students and supported it through fundraising; and approved the use of resources towards partnerships, events, and collections that facilitate cross-cultural education. One trustee donated local Indigenous art to ensure all library patrons feel recognised and welcome. By working together through collective debate and decision-making, the Board has given the library the tools to lead change within their institution and their community.

The award was presented at the British Columbia Library Association Conference Awards Luncheon in Richmond on May 11, 2018.

SUMMARY

In 2018 the library made progress in supporting inclusivity, diversity and reconciliation in our community and our own organization. Looking ahead, we will build upon this work while addressing our other strategic goals, notably the advocacy and fundraising necessary for a larger, modern library to better accommodate our patrons' needs.