INTRODUCTION

The Squamish Public Library serves a community of approximately 20,000 residents in our municipality and surrounding district. Squamish is a vibrant, young community; almost 60% of its residents are under the age of 40. We are on the traditional territory of the Squamish Nation, Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw, and many of our residents have chosen to move here from outside of the province and country to make Squamish their home.

Squamish is a dynamic community undergoing rapid socio-economic transformation and growth. In our highly active, multicultural, and family oriented community, opportunities are emerging in tourism, knowledge-based industries, education services, manufacturing, and forestry and wood products. We are fast becoming one of British Columbia’s most talked about tourist destinations.

In addition to our seven public elementary schools (including French immersion and Francophone options, as well as a Cultural Journeys elementary school program with an emphasis on outdoor education), three public secondary schools (including Learning Expeditions, a fully project-based, technology infused middle and secondary program), a Montessori school, a Waldorf school, and Coast Mountain Academy high school, Squamish is also home to Quest University Canada.

Our library is an important community hub to the residents of Squamish. It is a gathering place for many community groups and partners, and it is central to a variety of local initiatives, including those that promote early literacy, and welcoming new families to our community. We aspire to provide the collection, services and programs best suited to the needs and interests of our community. In 2018 we held our annual Open House, with a focus on inviting all municipal council and mayoral candidates so they could connect with our library during their campaign period. We also designed and installed an inclusive welcome sign at the library’s front entrance.

As with any community, Squamish and our library face challenges. Our neighbourhoods are spread out and public transit is limited, making our library’s downtown location a barrier to access for some. Housing is expensive, and the vacancy rate in the rental market is close to zero. We are a diverse community with a range of needs and expectations; it can be a challenge to maintain a welcoming environment for all while being faced with safety and security concerns, including mental health and addiction issues.

We have completed the fourth year of our 2015-2019 strategic plan. The plan contains four strategic priorities: inspiring new and current patrons, reaching everyone, creating a culture of assessment, and providing access to reliable information in a neutral and confidential setting. We have established measurable goals for each priority and can point to many 2018 accomplishments that directly support our strategic priorities. The priorities drive our planning, assessment and reporting structure. With the results of our community input survey along with staff and board participation, we undertook a strategic planning process in 2018 to set our library’s future direction for 2019 and beyond.
DISCUSSION AND EXAMPLES OF SQUAMISH PUBLIC LIBRARY’S SERVICES AND PROGRAMS
AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO PROVINCIAL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

PROVINCIAL STRATEGIC PLAN PRIORITY #1

FOSTERING CONNECTED COMMUNITIES: ADVANCING ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Squamish Public Library Goal that supports the priority:

As the provincial strategic plan describes within the priority of Fostering Connected Communities, “libraries bridge the physical and digital worlds, connecting people with each other, and with the knowledge, ideas and resources they need to be successful.” The Squamish Public Library’s strategic plan touches on this provincial priority in more than one place in our plan, including our goal of “Access to reliable information in a neutral and confidential setting.”

Programs and/or Services that align with the priority:

In December 2018, the Squamish Public Library launched a weekly Drop-In Tech Help program on Fridays from 1-3pm. This idea came from our Book-A-Librarian service, through which we saw the great need for basic computer support throughout the community. This is especially true of seniors, who often come to the library frustrated with technology, unsure of where to start their digital learning. We also noticed that only a handful of patrons were aware of the Book-A-Librarian appointments. We developed our once-a-week drop-in time as an “invitation” to the community, as a way of promoting the library as a resource for gaining basic tech skills and help learning how to use devices. As one patron said in a survey, “this service is very needed.” The patrons who come in for drop-in are almost always very enthusiastic, and usually show huge relief at learning that the library offers such help. Since the start of the program, we have served 28 community members, with new faces each week. The most common questions we help answer regarding technology are a) how to access the library’s digital books and audiobooks through Libby, b) how to use email to share photos, and c) basic device functions for tablets, smartphones, and laptops. Participants report that their favourite parts of the program are the librarian’s availability to help with technology and the “ease of talking and explaining problems” to the librarian. We are sure to explain the Book-A-Librarian service to each person who drops in, so that they know they can get support at other times throughout the week, as needed. We are continuing this well-received service in the new year and continue to gather data and feedback to plan future programming that can best support our community members in their basic technology skills!

We took advantage of the opportunity to expand our collection of unique and unusual items to borrow, thanks to a program spearheaded by North Vancouver City Library and Simon Fraser University, and now lend out three radon test kits. This program has been very popular in the short time since it started, with over 25 people on the waitlist. We hope to increase the number of kits we own soon, to keep up with our community’s interest and demand. We also lend out kits to learn about pollination, bats, and exploring our local estuary.

We were overwhelmed with the turnout to our Quest University lecture on electoral reform, ahead of the fall referendum in the fall. Over 100 people attended, and a local broadcaster live streamed it for his podcast series.
Drop-in Technology Help

Radon Test kits available to borrow

Over-capacity at our “Buyer’s Guide to Electoral Systems”

PROVINCIAL STRATEGIC PLAN PRIORITY #2

BUILDING CAPACITY: ENABLING INSPIRATION AND INNOVATION

Squamish Public Library Goal that supports the priority:

The provincial plan states that the actions within this priority will “support libraries as they focus on helping their communities by inspiring creativity, innovation and knowledge creation. It will also help libraries service their communities better through professional development and information sharing.” The Squamish Public Library’s plan has a goal of “Inspiring new and current patrons: The Squamish Public Library is about more than just books; we also offer innovative, inspiring programming and services that strengthen our roles as a community hub and place of creative learning. Our staff are encouraged and empowered to learn and to try new technologies and work processes.” Within this priority, one of our goals is that by 2019, 30 new inspiring programs and services will have been implemented. 2018 saw several new and inspiring initiatives to bring us closer to our goal.
Programs and/or Services that align with the priority:

We had the opportunity to host several innovative programs in 2018, many specifically designed for children. We brought in an animator, Jody Kramer, to offer stop-motion animation workshops to children ages 12-14. Jody is an award winning animator whose films have been screened at festivals worldwide. The children learned the basics of stop motion animation and they all created their own short film. We also had the Codemobile visit our library and run a series of workshops for students in grades 3-6. This is a program offered free to schools and libraries through Canada Learning Code.

We began a new reading buddies program in the fall, recruiting teenage volunteers and then registering children in grades 2-4. The buddies meet once a week for an hour. The teens help the children read, taking turns reading to each other or they read together. We always have a variety of books for the children to choose from or they can bring their own books. We also have colouring sheets, word puzzles, and board games available. The children don’t read for the entire hour; they play games or colour too. Everyone seems to enjoy the program, and we’ve been sent many thank you e-mails from parents, letting us know that it’s made an impact on their kids.
Library Goal that supports the priority:

*Reaching everyone: We proactively recruit new memberships through outreach, by pursuing new partnerships, and by nurturing those which already exist.*

Programs and/or Services that align with the priority:

The Squamish Public Library and WorkBC have forged a cooperative partnership that has served both organizations and has greatly enhanced service to our community members. WorkBC in Squamish hosted a pilot job fair in the early fall of 2018, which had very high interest and a big turnout, both employers and job-seekers! Because of the overwhelming interest in the event, WorkBC wanted to create a series of job fairs targeting more specific industries, in order to focus the theme of each fair and help Squamish residents find jobs that specifically interest them. This idea spawned a more in-depth partnership between WorkBC, the Library, the District of Squamish’s Economic Development team, and the Squamish Chamber of Commerce. The events, hosted at and promoted by the library, have been very successful with lots of job seekers in attendance. The cross promotion by all of the involved organizations has helped to spread the word about the events, and has resulted in big turnout at each job fair. This event series will continue into 2019, and has solidified a robust partnership (plus a few more!) in our community.

In partnership with the Squamish Food Bank, we ran a successful “Food for Fines” program, whereby we forgave outstanding library fines in exchange for donations to the food bank. It was well received by patrons who benefited from this fine forgiveness, but we also had many food donations from patrons who didn’t have any fines to be waived.
PROVINCIAL STRATEGIC PLAN PRIORITY #4

SUSTAINING OUR SUCCESS: ENHANCING GOVERNANCE AND DEMONSTRATING IMPACT

Library Goal that supports the priority:

Creating a culture of assessment: We will ask people how we’re doing and how we can do better. We will learn, and act on what we learn. In so doing, we will gain people’s trust.

Programs and/or Services that align with the priority:

We hosted our annual open house in the fall for our community, and timed it to coincide with the municipal election campaign period. We invited all council and mayoral candidates, and were pleased that nearly all attended the event. Giving them the opportunity to tour around our stations to learn about the library’s services and programs, and interact with staff and board trustees in a fun, relaxed setting was an effective first engagement with our new local council.

The library completed our large-scale community input survey in late 2017, with over 570 responses. We received very valuable feedback from the community on a variety of topics, including wishes for extended open hours and expanded work and study space, as well as additional programming and tech support. This rich information fed directly into the strategic planning process we undertook in 2018. We were able to accomplish several of our community’s requests in the year that followed, including extending our open hours by an additional five hours a week and installing additional seating and tables to increase the number of workstations we provide to the public.

Annual open house invitation and our new “Defenders of Imagination” slogan (which arose from our strategic planning process)
Our new welcome sign at our front entrance

Library staff members at Halloween, dressed as characters from picture books!

Feedback form comments received in 2018 that demonstrate the impact of our programs and services:

“The library is, as it should ideally be, a place where everyone is welcome and able to participate. The library is a cornerstone of the community, a hub of connection and information. I feel a sense of ownership and belonging, comfort and opportunity at the library. The staff are tremendously kind, caring, approachable and helpful.”

Squamish resident survey response
SUMMARY

2018 was a year to create a newly invigorated strategic plan for our library’s future, based on our engagement with the community. We continued to forge new partnerships, offer new and exciting programming, and extend our reach to new members.

We look forward to new opportunities in the year ahead, including adding a technology librarian to our team to support community digital literacy needs, and undertaking a future needs study to develop a robust library facilities and services plan to keep pace with our community as Squamish grows and changes at an accelerated pace.