

Tumbler Ridge Public Library Provincial Library Grants Report 2018



INTRODUCTION

The Tumbler Ridge Public Library is a multi-service community hub in Tumbler Ridge. Tumbler Ridge is a town of about 1987¹ residents, which is largely dependent on the coal mining industry although some residents are also employed in the oil and gas industry. In 2014, several of the mines idled, laying off the majority of their workforce. Much of our population faced hardship. In 2016, a new mining company, Conuma Coal, announced that it was taking over the bankrupt mine's holdings and that they would be re-opening three mines, one at a time. This has resulted in employment for many of our residents although people are still struggling to recover from their period of unemployment. The mine continues to hire, bringing in many new families and resulting in an increased number of children. Our elementary school is at full capacity! In response to the community's needs, the Tumbler Ridge Public Library (TRPL) continues to adopt several initiatives in order to meet the increasing demand in town for employment services assistance, adult literacy programs, social assistance outreach and more. TRPL also provides a high level of more traditional library services including a large collection of books, DVDs and books on CD.

Our primary challenge is retaining skilled, trained staff in a labour market that offers generous salaries and benefits to unskilled workers. Mines will hire graduates from the high school and train them to drive haul trucks at a rate of about \$33-\$38 per hour. Library clerks currently earn \$15 per hour. In addition, minimum wage has increased significantly over the past few years and will continue to do so, reducing the differential between adult clerks and student pages to just about \$1.15 from what used to be about a \$4 difference! Since the bulk of our budget is provided by the District of Tumbler Ridge, TRPL is trying to advocate for increased personnel funding in order to retain trained employees. Currently they go to work at the schools or other industries where they can earn more. Very few employers in Tumbler Ridge offer minimum wage. Provincial grants have not increased to assist with the minimum wage increase.

One of our secondary challenges is that our Provincial Grant was reduced because our census numbers dropped in 2016. Census figures do not take into account that some of our workers also have homes elsewhere. They may be counted there but not in Tumbler Ridge. We are therefore feeling more pressure since our population and its demands for our services is, in fact, increasing.

While we do not have a current strategic plan, we feel that the Tumbler Ridge Public Library is taking adequate measures to meet the mandate of the Ministry of Education, Libraries and Literacy Branch's recently-released strategic plan "Inspiring Libraries, Connecting Communities". We have shifted from being a traditional Library to becoming a full service community hub. As noted in the Ministry's strategic plan, as a Public Library, we are mandated to "provide British Columbians with access to the information and tools they need to learn, create and thrive in today's changing world"². Libraries need to be a place where "life-long learning, recreation, literacy, innovation and knowledge creation"³ can occur and we feel that our current program offerings, mixed in with our partnerships and traditional Library services and programs, meet this mandate.

LIBRARY PRIORITY 1

Fostering equitable access to information and services

¹ According to a 2016 Statistics Canada Survey

<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=5955003&Geo2=PR&Code2=59&Data=Count&SearchText=Tumbler%20Ridge&SearchType=Begin&SearchPR=01&B1=All&GeoLevel=PR&GeoCode=5955003&TABID=1>

² Page 25, "Inspiring Libraries, Connecting Communities" <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/community-partnerships/libraries/libraries-strategic-plan.pdf>

³ Page 10, *ibid*

Tumbler Ridge Public Library serves clients of all ages, beginning with our Lapsit program that encourages expecting and new parents to read to their child, to Itchy Feet, a travelogue program that attracts mainly our older residents.

Users are rich and poor, illiterate and well-educated, seeking assistance with life's challenges or looking for something fun to watch. They are all treated the same way by our amazing staff who often go out of their way to get more information or to find just the right book.

The Library staff ensures that clients are aware of our limitations in some of the areas where we provide assistance and confirm that clients know where else to go and who to contact. Many agencies now interact with people online only, making it difficult for those with minimal computer skills to access and interact with providers. Library staff helps to facilitate these interactions and guide clients through the use of email, Internet searching and other services.

Since social and health services have been severely limited in Tumbler Ridge we find that the Library is the 'go-to' place for families who are in crisis or for children who have limited supervision at home and who want to use our computers. Unfortunately, their behavior is often disruptive for staff and for other clients resulting in staff acting more as enforcers than librarians. Staff often finds themselves teaching basic social interactions to children who seem to be 'at risk'. Counselling services for children and youth are not available locally and mental health services are almost non-existent meaning that staff is acting as sounding boards more often than usual. This can take significant staff time.

LIBRARY PRIORITY 2

Developing skills and knowledge

Tumbler Ridge Public Library provides opportunities for our wide-ranging clientele to develop skills and knowledge relevant to their needs. TRPL promotes literacy in all of its forms from reading, to computer, to financial, to skills in the kitchen! Libraries are ubiquitous. Say the word 'library' and everyone has a similar picture. Books, books and more books, an older lady with little glasses, a bit of a musty smell and quiet, intimidated users afraid to make a sound. Then, you walk into the Tumbler Ridge Public Library. Yes, there are books, books and more books, an older lady with little glasses, but...our Library is bright and spacious and happy and vibrant and our clients range from infants to seniors. They come to borrow books, DVDs, magazines, ebooks, audiobooks, books on CD, picture books; they come to print, email, access the internet, use WiFi, fax items out or receive faxes, get help with a resume, help with a job search, help with a social assistance application, help with a disability application; they come to have a snack after school, watch and listen to an adventure about someone's holiday in an exotic land; they come to create with Lego; they come to play and learn and listen to stories and sing and rhyme and learn how to interact with their children at play and while reading books; they come to get help with their laptop. They come because they need a service. They need a service at all times of the day. They need a service to help them make an insurance claim, to help them find a book for those cold days when it's better to cuddle up with a book than to venture outside. They need a service provided by staff who are helpful, who don't make judgements, who will go out of their way to make sure your phone WILL connect to our WiFi. They need a service where they know their kids will be safe while exploring books, building with Lego, creating artworks or playing Roblox on a computer. Our Library provides education in a non-threatening environment.

Our Library is a large contributor and supporter of the digital revolution. By embracing technology we give our clients an opportunity to explore technology they own but may not be comfortable using; to explore technology they may have heard of, but not had a chance to use themselves. In Tumbler Ridge, Internet access is uneven and expensive, resulting in many of our clients cancelling it in their homes. Although our Internet is slower than in larger cities and expensive to us; they come to the Library to access email and use the Internet, some daily. Literacy does not refer only to reading books, technological literacy is a key for individual success now and in the future. Libraries refer to digital citizenship to encompass the wide variety of services available.

The District of Tumbler Ridge had a consultant survey our residents in December 2018 in order to develop a Recreation Master Plan. Tumbler Ridge Public Library occupies about 5000 square feet in the Community Centre. The report *Community Engagement Summary Report* (December 2018) says in its Executive Summary under Major Themes: “Residents had many positive comments about the library”. It goes on to indicate that 84% of respondents visit the Public Library. Since most respondents were 30 to 44 years of age, it’s easy to extrapolate that a much higher percentage actually comes into the Library.

More than 200 people come through our Library daily (remember that our census figure is 1987). We are easily the busiest service in Tumbler Ridge year round. We are often the first stop for newcomers to Tumbler Ridge.

LIBRARY PRIORITY 3

Working together

Tumbler Ridge Public Library cannot do it alone. In addition to financial support, we partner with many organizations in the community and appear at many events. We have more than 30 partners/supporters, including from the District of Tumbler Ridge, Tumbler Ridge Community Forest, Conuma Coal, Home Hardware, United Way of Northern BC, Ridge Rotors, Meikle Wind, North East Library Federation (NELF), Libraries and Literacy Branch, Tumbler Ridge Lions Club, Tumbler Ridge Secondary School, Service Canada/Canada Revenue Agency, First Nations Community, Northern Lights College, Tumbler Ridge Global Geopark, Tumbler Ridge Museum Foundation, Success by 6 (now Tumbler Ridge Children’s Needs Society), Tumbler Ridge Childcare Centre, TR Days Society, Wolverine Nordic and Mountain Society (WNMS), Acton Play Café, StrongStart, Love TR, Shop Easy, Tumbler Ridge Community Arts Council, Community Paramedic, Royal BC Museum, KCs Dollar Store, RidgeLines (our new newspaper), British Columbia Library Association (BCLA), British Columbia Library Trustees Association (BCLTA), Tumbler Ridge Chamber of Commerce, Tumbler Ridge Fall Fair...and more.

We participate in the Winter Carnival, Welcome Baby Party, Mommy Medic, Grizfest Parade, Fall Fair and Holly Jolly (which includes hosting Santa, who had pictures taken with about 240 children), and many more local activities. When the Fall Fair was having trouble getting volunteers, Library staff stepped in to host the pie competition...in the Library!

Our Summer Reading Club continues to be a favourite. In 2018 staff prepared crafts for the first week for the anticipated 20-30 children who usually attend the daily session. They were caught off guard when 50-60 children attended many days, especially Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays which are designated for children over 6, although all may attend.

A Pre-Teen Summer Reading Club was tried again. Attendance was better than in previous years and all enjoyed the modified ‘Amazing Race’ activity in August.

In 2018 the Library added a new program called ‘Mommy Medic’. It is run by our Community Paramedic in the Library, where she offers first aid tips, answers questions from new parents and does a lot of reassuring by teaching parents what to do in an emergency and also what actually IS an emergency.

Recently, a client called from another city to arrange to pay a bill for an item she lost (using her BC One Card). She was effusive in her praise of Tumbler Ridge Public Library’s collections, commenting that she had heard about a book on a TV show and walked into our Library a few days later and there it was on our shelves! It’s nice to have this kind of validation from our users.

LIBRARY PRIORITY 4

Enhancing governance

Tumbler Ridge Public Library has a committed Library Board although it can be hard to get volunteers as our population ages. We have recently had some younger residents join and look forward to exciting new fundraising events!

Our Board Chair, Jerrilyn Schembri, is also the Chair of the BCLTA although she has reached her 8 years of service so had to step down locally at the end of 2018. She has worked tirelessly to encourage partnerships and dialogue between a wide variety of library groups. It has been nice to see a change in the way trustees take on their role and we are proud of her involvement and hope it will continue, especially at the Provincial level.

We have an active NELF representative and a couple of trustees have expressed interest in attending BCLA/BCLTA. Staff and trustees attend every year.

Following the Municipal Election we have a new Council Liaison who has been very supportive.

NEW---OPTIONAL SECTION: LIBRARIES IN ACTION – SUCCESS STORIES FROM BC’S PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Some of our success stories have been outlined briefly in the rest of the report.

SUMMARY

As one of our Trustees remarked during his budget presentation to the District of Tumbler Ridge Council, “It has been my privilege to sit on the Board for about 2 years now, and I am also the representative to NELF. I am still regularly amazed by the broad scope of activities and services offered by our local Library, and it is to the credit our Head Librarian and her staff that we are seen by many other libraries around the Province as a model of what Libraries should be and do. [Head Librarian] and her staff are highly respected for their talents and innovations. But we have a problem. It’s a form of ‘revolving door’ syndrome. We hire staff, and spend time and effort training them...and then we lose them because they can make more money doing almost anything else in town. This is not a good business plan. When you have people who are enthusiastic and capable, you need to compensate them accordingly. It may result in a little more cost in the beginning, but it pays dividends in retaining good employees who feel appreciated.”

This statement illustrates Tumbler Ridge Public Library’s major challenge as money from the Province is reduced or frozen, minimum wage is increased and the Town questions the value of a very busy, well-used service.

Fortunately, our staff is very committed...and we were successful in obtaining a small increase to our salary line for 2019.

Tumbler Ridge Public Library continues to offer, as mandated, free loans and access to our collections and services. Taxes support our Library and, as with everything, taxpayers expect bang for their buck! In Tumbler Ridge, your Public Library delivers!